



House of Commons
Committee of Public Accounts

Improving poorly performing schools in England

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Session 2005–06**

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oral and written evidence*

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The Committee of Public Accounts

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Summary

All children and young people deserve a good education that helps them to develop their skills, knowledge and personal qualities. In 2004–05, schools received around £25 billion and the Department for Education and Skills (the Department) spent around £837 million on a range of national programmes to help improve school performance. In addition, Ofsted inspections of all schools in England cost around £60 million a year. Most schools in England do provide a good standard of education. However, though the number of poorly performing schools has been reducing, there are still around 1,500 that fall within the definitions that the Department and Ofsted use for poorly performing schools.

Improvements in data on secondary school performance are making it easier to identify school decline early, and to give support at a time when the school is relatively capable to respond. Similar improvements need to be made to the data on primary schools, so that they can be identified and helped in the same way.

Shorter inspections by Ofsted, involving smaller inspection teams, were introduced in September 2005. Though the shorter inspections may be right for the majority of schools that provide a good standard of education, Ofsted needs to develop proportionate inspection to apply more of its resources to under-performing schools. The shorter inspections are predicated on schools evaluating themselves effectively. Some schools are not doing so, and these are also likely to be the schools that need the most support. Ofsted and the Department need to create incentives for schools to evaluate themselves honestly and effectively.

Leadership in schools, especially by the headteacher, is essential to achieving and maintaining school improvement. Honest and effective self-evaluation is especially important but also difficult to achieve in this area. In poorly performing schools, most self-evaluations of leadership and management are over-generous. It is important to diagnose clearly the nature of the leadership problem in these schools, and Ofsted reports should do so explicitly.

An increasing proportion of schools are finding it difficult to make suitable headteacher appointments. Headteachers face big challenges that are unlikely to be reduced in the medium term, but they could be better supported to deal with them. Recent improvements in the training of school leaders should be supplemented by more innovative approaches to recruiting into difficult posts and more support to individual headteachers at local level, which will attract talented teachers into becoming headteachers and help them do a good job once appointed.

Local authorities and other schools are important sources of support for struggling schools. Local authority practices vary widely, and there is substantial scope for disseminating good practice. School-to-school collaboration can bring good results but could be used more routinely if there were better incentives on schools to collaborate.

School funding has been simplified and schools will be given more certainty about their future funding. For schools to gain maximum benefit from these changes, they will need access to financial management expertise.

On the basis of a Report¹ by the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Committee examined the Department and Ofsted on trends in poorly performing schools, developing simpler relationships with schools, strengthening school leadership, and dealing with deep rooted failure.

1 C&AG's Report, *Improving poorly performing schools in England* (HC 679, Session 2005–06)

Conclusions and recommendations

- 1. Around 1,500 schools in England are performing poorly, including 649 that have been identified in Ofsted inspections.** Improving standards in poorly performing schools is a considerable challenge that will require sustained effort and collaboration by the Department, Ofsted, local authorities and the school community.
- 2. Limited comparative data about primary school performance restricts the scope for early identification and intervention.** Experience with secondary schools has demonstrated the value of using attainment and other (e.g. pupil attendance) data to identify declining performance at an early stage. The Department should develop primary school performance data for comparisons between schools and to help identify under-performing primary schools that need support to prevent their failure.
- 3. Shorter, more frequent Ofsted inspections are intended to help identify poorly performing schools sooner, but could result in less robust judgements.** The lighter inspections are predicated on schools producing reliable self-evaluations that the inspectors can use in their assessment, together with the improving data on school performance. Ofsted should not lose sight of the need for enough observation and inspection to validate these self assessments. It should evaluate the effectiveness of its shorter inspections after the first year, including by drawing together the experience of different inspection teams and by measuring trends in the differences between Ofsted's and schools' evaluation judgements.
- 4. Schools that are under-performing but not seriously enough to be placed in 'Special Measures' (the weakest) or given a 'Notice to Improve' may get insufficient attention from Ofsted, while high performing schools can receive too much inspection coverage.** Such schools are currently getting similar attention to higher performing schools, but are likely to benefit from more support, particularly in implementing improvements following an inspection. From September 2006, Ofsted will start to introduce lighter touch inspections for high performing schools and will trial additional visits to some schools that have pockets of underachievement. In implementing these arrangements, Ofsted should redeploy the inspector time saved on to deeper inspections and support for under-performing schools.
- 5. Inspection reports contain an assessment of school leadership and management overall, but not a distinct assessment of the headteacher.** A statement in inspection reports about which elements of the leadership need to be strengthened would make clearer the changes required for a school to improve. Very few schools with inadequate leadership acknowledge their problem, so Ofsted should give guidance on the characteristics of inadequate leadership and publicise examples of leadership teams that improved by recognising their shortcomings and addressing them.
- 6. It is increasingly difficult for schools needing a new headteacher to attract suitable candidates.** Progress is being made in increasing the professionalism of school leaders and improving the training and support they receive, but much more is needed to make headteacher posts attractive to good candidates and to develop

potential leaders, for example by increasing the emphasis of initial teacher training on opportunities for developing a career in school leadership.

7. **There are substantial variations between regions in the incidence of schools in Special Measures, with schools in Outer London nearly four times as likely to be in Special Measures as schools in the North East.** The Department and Ofsted should examine the reasons for the variations, and drawing on the C&AG's Report explore the extent to which local authorities are intervening early enough to prevent schools requiring Special Measures. Ofsted should identify examples of authorities providing effective support to struggling schools and using their powers of intervention well. The Department should draw on Ofsted's work to set out the good practices that it expects all authorities to adopt.
8. **Poorly performing schools would benefit from increased collaboration with successful schools.** Ofsted should expect schools to respond to critical inspection judgements in part by seeking to collaborate with other better performing schools and, in assessing subsequent progress, Ofsted should consider the schools' efforts to collaborate with others. Schools providing support to other schools, for example through the sharing of staff resources or facilities, should also receive due recognition as part of their own inspection by Ofsted.
9. **Without good financial management skills, schools will not derive maximum benefit from three-year budgets.** As part of the simpler funding arrangement for schools from 2006–07, the Department requires secondary schools to comply with its Financial Management Standard by March 2007, and local authority Chief Financial Officers to certify schools' compliance. The Department should review the application of the Standard at the end of the first compulsory year, and draw lessons for its eventual application by primary and special schools.

1 Trends in poorly performing schools

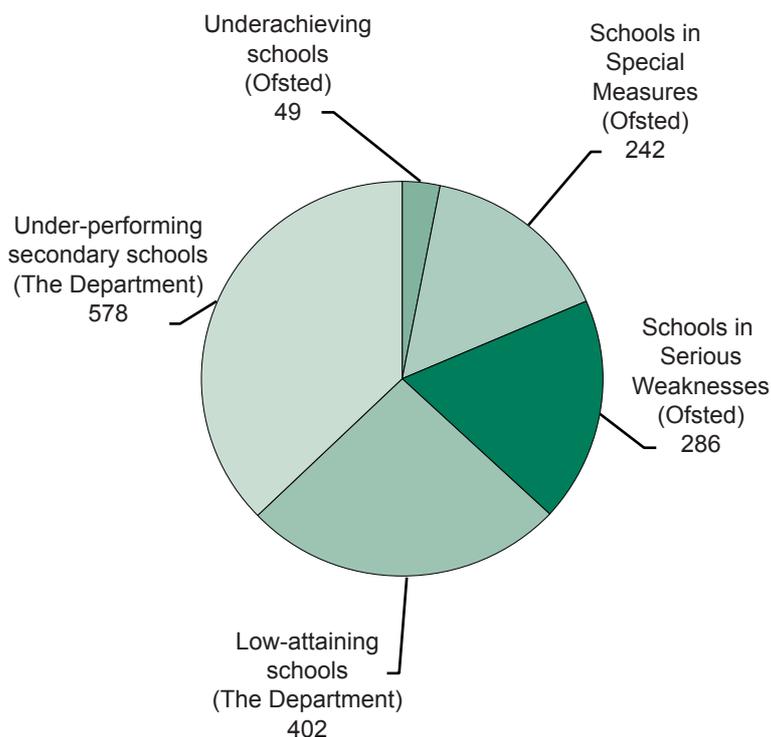
1. All children and young people deserve a good education that helps them to develop their skills, knowledge and personal qualities. Most schools in England do provide a good standard of education, but there are still too many poorly performing schools. A poor education affects young people's prospects of further or higher education and of employment, and can have a wider adverse impact on local communities. In 2004–05, schools in England received around £25 billion to spend on education and related activities. The Department spent around £837 million on a range of national programmes to help improve schools that were failing or at risk of failing.²

2. At July 2005, 1,557 schools fell within the definitions that the Department and Ofsted use for poorly performing schools (**Figure 1**). They educated around 980,000 pupils and represented 4% of primary and 23% of secondary schools. The total includes 578 under-performing secondary schools that the Department identified as requiring extra support because they were not achieving adequate levels of attainment once their circumstances had been taken into account. Because of difficulties in measuring the prior attainment of primary school pupils, the Department has not yet identified under-performing primary schools in the same way. However, primary schools prepare pupils for secondary education and it is therefore important to know which are under-performing. The Department is therefore aiming to have better primary school data available by September 2006.³

2 C&AG's Report, paras 2–3, 5, 1.1 and Figure 1

3 *ibid*, paras 11, 1.5, 1.11 and Figures 5, 10; Qq 124–132

Figure 1: Poorly performing schools, as at July 2005



Note: The Ofsted 'Serious Weaknesses' and 'Underachieving' categories were replaced by a 'Notice to Improve' in September 2005. Schools in Ofsted categories contain both primary and secondary, as do low-attaining schools. Under-performing schools are secondary only. The Department identified low-attaining schools in 2004 and 2005 and under-performing schools in 2003 and 2004. Some of these schools may have improved in 2005, while other schools may have become low-attaining or under-performing.

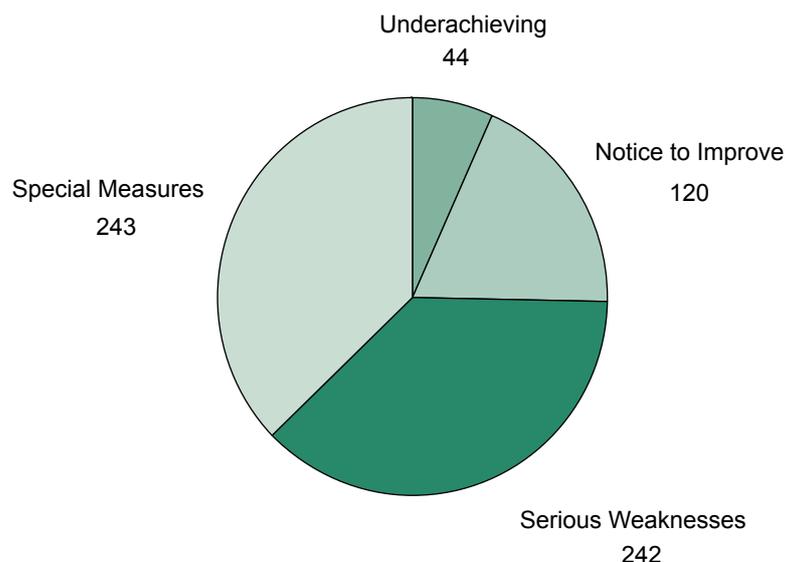
Source: Department for Education and Skills; Ofsted

3. Where Ofsted, which carries out independent inspections of schools, finds serious problems in a school it puts the schools into one of two categories. Schools placed in 'Special Measures' are failing to provide an acceptable standard of education and have leaders who have not demonstrated the capacity to make improvements. There were 242 such schools at July 2005. Schools in 'Serious Weaknesses' were performing to a similarly poor standard but Ofsted has assessed the school to have leaders with demonstrated capacity to make improvements. There were 286 such schools at July 2005. Where problems that Ofsted identifies are part of a wider problem in the school, the school will be placed in one of these two categories. For other schools with weaknesses, Ofsted makes specific recommendations for improvements, for example in the quality of teaching in a particular department in the school.⁴

4. The number of schools in Ofsted categories has been on a downward trend since 2000. However, a higher percentage (9.3%) of schools inspected during the autumn term 2005 were placed in an Ofsted category, compared with the average of 8% of schools inspected in the three years to July 2005. The Department considers that the increase may result from its request that Ofsted raise its expectations of school performance. Ofsted considers that

the proportionate increase of schools in categories does not reflect a worsening in school standards. **Figure 2** shows the breakdown of the 649 schools in Ofsted categories at December 2005 (from 577 at July 2005). As anticipated in the C&AG's Report, an increase in the frequency of inspections (every three to four years, from every six) is currently leading to a rise in the number of schools in an Ofsted category (currently showing predominantly in the 'Notice to Improve' category), as poorly performing schools are identified sooner.⁵

Figure 2: Schools in Ofsted categories, December 2005



Note: Schools in 'Serious Weaknesses' and 'Underachieving' were inspected before September 2005, and schools with a 'Notice to Improve' were inspected from September 2005. 'Special Measures' was the only category used throughout and so includes schools inspected before and after September 2005.

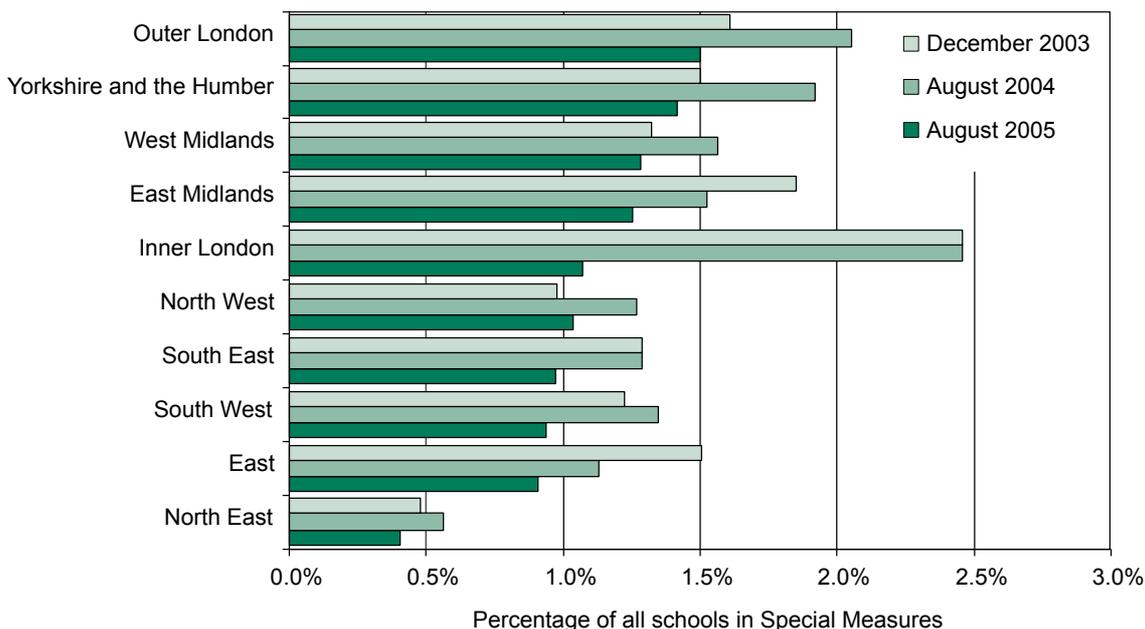
Source: Ofsted

5. There are variations between regions in the proportion of schools in Special Measures. Since December 2003 the North East region has consistently had the lowest percentage of schools in Special Measures. Part of the explanation may lie in the performance of local authorities in the region, which Ofsted has generally graded as good in relation to intervention in schools that are in difficulty. Inner London has also seen a recent substantial reduction in the percentage of schools in Special Measures, from a previously very high level.⁶

⁵ C&AG's Report, para 1.8 and Figure 7; Qq 41–52; Ofsted website (www.ofsted.gov.uk)

⁶ C&AG's Report, para 12 and Figure 6; Q 34; *Education Statistics Digest 2004*; Ofsted website (www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Figure 3: Regional variations in the percentage of schools in Special Measures



Source: Analysis of Ofsted and Departmental data

6. 402 schools, primary and secondary, are categorised as poorly performing because most of their pupils have very low attainment (**Figure 1**). GCSE results in low attaining secondary schools fall below the Department's 2004 target of a minimum of 20% of pupils achieving at least 5 GCSEs grades A*–C (or equivalent). The number of schools below the target has been falling, but in 2004, 72 schools were still below the target, reducing to 40 schools in 2005.⁷ The Department is raising the GCSE floor target from 20% to 25% in 2006 and again to 30% in 2008. **Figure 4** shows the numbers of secondary schools that currently fall below these future targets, highlighting the challenge if the targets are to be met.

Figure 4: The Department's GCSE minimum target for secondary schools

| Minimum percentage of pupils achieving less than five GCSEs at grade A* to C | Number of schools below this target in 2005 |
|--|---|
| 20% by 2004 | 40 |
| 25% by 2006 | 110 |
| 30% by 2008 | 230 |

Source: Department for Education and Skills Statistical Release SFR 26/2006, Table 7 – Number of maintained mainstream schools by percentage of 15-year old pupils achieving 5+ A*–C and equivalent

7. The GCSE floor targets are based on GCSEs and equivalent qualifications, and do not require the core subjects, English and mathematics, be included in the five GCSEs. In 2005, 56% of all pupils achieved the equivalent of 5 GCSEs A*–C. However, when pupils who did not achieve GCSE A*–C in English and mathematics are excluded, the level of achievement falls to only 44% of pupils. More pupils need to be helped to achieve this level. Some with

special educational needs might not be able to achieve it, but all pupils should be supported to work towards an appropriate level of attainment that challenges their abilities and matches their needs.⁸

2 Developing simpler relationships with schools

8. By reducing bureaucracy, schools have more freedom to manage and teachers can spend more time in the classroom and less on administrative tasks. Through changes set out in *A new relationship with schools* (2004), the Department is aiming to change the relationship between government, local authorities and schools. The changes include improved data collection systems, lighter touch regulation, a greater role for school self-evaluation, simplified funding streams, and a ‘unified’ dialogue between schools and the wider education system. They are intended to simplify relationships and secure prompt support for schools when they need it. The Department has set up an Implementation Review Unit of headteachers to help monitor reducing bureaucracy in schools.⁹

Improving school and pupil data

9. Schools need good data to measure their performance and to monitor the progress of individual pupils. Increasingly good quality data is available at pupil level. The Department considers that one of the most important improvements in recent years has been the availability of good performance data, particularly in secondary schools, allowing the schools to identify any weak areas themselves and plan improvement actions. At school and area level, schools, local authorities and the Department can identify under-performance, for example by monitoring trends in different parts of the curriculum. An individual school’s performance can be compared with all schools nationally and with other schools in similar circumstances.¹⁰

10. Schools use internally produced data on pupils’ attainment in addition to data from a range of external sources. Headteachers find ‘contextual value added’ data, which is pupil attainment data adjusted for contextual social factors and prior attainment, the most useful externally produced data. Most headteachers do not find the Department’s achievement and attainment tables useful. However, most parents are likely to use the performance and attainment tables, and these now include ‘value added’ data alongside the raw attainment data, to help give a more rounded picture of the school’s performance. The Department’s aim is for parents to be well informed by having a range of data, and schools are increasingly helping by publishing explanations of the data for parents.¹¹

9 C&AG’s Report, para 3.25; Qq 10, 81, 158

10 C&AG’s Report, para 1.13; Qq 27, 40

11 C&AG’s Report, paras 1.23–1.25 and Figure 17; Qq 154–155

School self-evaluation and shorter, more frequent inspections

11. Ofsted introduced a new inspection regime in September 2005, incorporating the biggest changes since Ofsted was formed in 1992. Schools are to be inspected more frequently – every three to four years instead of every six years – which is intended to result in poorly performing schools being identified earlier. Early identification, combined with swifter monitoring visits to schools in Special Measures, is expected to lead to poorly performing schools improving more quickly.¹²

12. Inspectors now visit schools only for about 2 days, compared with a larger team that previously visited for a week. However, they now have access to better background and performance data and spend proportionately more time with the headteacher and rest of the management team. Inspections are carried out at very short notice. Elements such as the pre-inspection survey of parents are therefore no longer possible, but schools are expected to maintain an honest and up-to-date self-evaluation form, since it forms the basis of evidence for the inspection. The self-evaluation indicates the school's understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, and a weak understanding is a key indicator of a poorly performing school. Most schools have completed their self-evaluation – 96% of schools that were inspected in autumn 2005, the first term of the new regime, had completed their self-evaluation form.¹³

13. The changes reduce the weight of inspection on schools, but also raise the risk that much reduced direct observation and much smaller teams could lead to less rigour. Ofsted is, however, confident that inspectors have the appropriate materials and information, are engaging in greater dialogue than before with the schools' management teams, and are making proper judgements of leadership and management. Ofsted's self-evaluation form invites school leaders to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of their own leadership and management, using four grades from 'outstanding' to 'inadequate'. Of the schools inspected during the autumn term 2005, three judged their leadership and management to be inadequate. In two cases, the inspectors confirmed the judgement, and in the third case inspectors decided that leadership and management was satisfactory.¹⁴

14. Ofsted has a statutory duty to inspect all schools, but the weight of inspection is a matter for Ofsted. It has not previously adopted a proportionate, risk-based approach to inspection for all schools, largely because of a previous lack of data to target schools effectively. From September 2006, Ofsted will use the improved data to help make better use of public money spent on inspection, by making its inspection regime more proportionate, with less involvement in those schools that are doing a good job and more effort focused on weaker schools.¹⁵ It will draw on the approach it has already developed for inspections of providers of Initial Teacher Training, which cover colleges and universities. Providers consistently judged as 'good' in previous inspections have short inspections while other providers have inspections taking around a week.¹⁶ Other bodies in

12 C&AG's Report, Figure 11; Q 8

13 C&AG's Report, Figure 11; Qq 7, 26, 62–69

14 Qq 60–61, 64–67; Ev 9, Footnote 1

15 Qq 9–10, 74–76, 95–103, 111; www.ofsted.gov.uk/news/index.cfm?fuseaction=story&id=43

16 *Framework for the inspection of initial teacher training for inspections from September 2005*, Ofsted, 2005

the education sector are developing in a similar direction. For example, the Higher Education Funding Council has introduced a risk-based approach that promotes 'lighter touch' in the Council's oversight of those institutions that are regulating themselves effectively.¹⁷

Simplified funding

15. In April 2006, the Department introduced three-year budgets for schools to give them more certainty about their funding. The Department is simplifying funding by combining the large number of grants programmes relating to different activities into one amalgamated grant. In order to benefit fully from the greater certainty of funding, schools will require financial management expertise and access to financial advice, for example from their local authority.¹⁸

16. To help schools with their financial management, the Department provides financial benchmarking information so schools can compare their income and expenditure profile with that of similar schools. It also provides a tool, the Financial Management Standard, designed to enable schools to evaluate their performance in financial management against a nationally recognised statement of good practice, and to identify areas for development. The Standard covers the following elements as they relate to financial management: leadership and governance, financial management skills among governors and staff, policy and strategy (e.g. whether the school's budget reflects its development plan), respective responsibilities of the school and the local authority, procurement, and the robustness of financial management processes. Compliance with the Standard will be compulsory for all secondary schools by the end of March 2007, and the Department plans to consult on a timetable for primary and special schools. Local authority Chief Financial Officers will be required to certify the degree of secondary schools' compliance with the Standard from 2006-07.¹⁹

17 *Accountability and Audit: Higher Education Funding Council Code of Practice*, 2005

18 C&AG's Report, paras 3.22-23; Qq 82-86

19 Qq 82-84; Dedicated Schools Grant, Guidance for local authorities on the operation of the grant 2006-07 and 2007-08, circulated to Chief Finance Officers on 17 March 2006; www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/schoolfunding/2006-07_funding_arrangements/financeofficernews/

3 Strengthening school leadership

17. The quality of a school's leadership is hugely important in the performance of the school. Responsibility for leadership comes primarily, but not exclusively, from the headteacher, who has a particularly demanding role as the figurehead of the school and the person with management responsibility for the school's performance. The role requires a high degree of commitment, with primary headteachers working on average 53 hours per week and secondary headteachers averaging 62 hours according to a report by the School Teachers' Review Body in 2005.²⁰

18. A positive ethos is crucial to a school's success, and can help overcome the disadvantages of pupils coming from a very deprived background. School leaders and governors can determine a school's ethos, for example by valuing hard work, setting high expectations of pupils and staff, and communicating the ethos clearly, including to parents. School leaders need to be capable of dealing with difficult pupils – and on occasions their parents – so that teachers feel properly supported. Serious difficulties in a school with pupil behaviour can distract the management team from the basics – i.e. effective teaching that encourages pupils to learn. There is no single solution to school improvement, but schools that have recovered have found it most important to improve pupil learning, and to increase or make changes to teaching staff and the management team.²¹

19. The strong ethos is that often found in faith schools contributes to the achievements of these schools. Many of the primary and secondary schools with the best examination results in England are faith-based, and faith schools tend to have lower absence rates than other schools.²² When the performance of all schools is adjusted for external factors, much of the good performance of faith schools is found to be associated with factors such as their location, and the prior attainment of pupils and the types of household that they live in.²³ Faith schools are also as likely as other schools be put into an Ofsted category. Faith-based secondary schools are, however, more likely than other secondary schools to be among the small minority assessed as “outstanding” by Ofsted.²⁴ Such factors, together with their examination results, contribute to the popularity among parents of faith-based schools.²⁵

20. About 11% of schools each year will typically need to find a new headteacher, as part of normal headteacher turnover. According to Education Data Surveys,²⁶ many schools are finding recruiting a headteacher difficult, and there are indications that the difficulty is increasing, since in the last ten years it has become more common for secondary schools to have to re-advertise for a headteacher. Some schools could find it increasingly hard to

20 C&AG's Report, para 2.5, Figure 26; Qq 54, 77–79

21 C&AG's Report, paras 2.5–2.6, 2.10–2.13, Figures 25 and 26; Qq 5, 6, 14, 17, 21, 146–147, 160

22 National Audit Office analysis of 2005 school attainment data; 18th Report from the Committee of Public Accounts, *Department for Education and Skills: Improving school attendance in England* (HC 789, Session 2005–06)

23 C&AG's Report, *Making a difference: Performance of maintained secondary schools in England* (HC 1332, Session 2002–03), Figure 9

24 C&AG's Report, Figure 16; National Audit Office analysis of 2004–05 inspection results

25 National Audit Office analysis of 2005 applications and admissions in 7 authorities

26 21st Annual Survey of Senior Staff Appointments in Schools in England and Wales, Education Data Surveys, January 2006

replace the large numbers of headteachers who will be retiring over the next five to ten years. Although headteacher salaries are linked to school size, school governors can choose to pay more to attract a suitable candidate. Some schools are raising salaries in order to attract candidates, with packages exceeding £100,000 in some large secondary schools.²⁷

21. A recent MORI survey of school leaders, governors and local authorities found that the most challenging issues relating to filling headteacher posts were applicant quality, filling posts in challenging schools, heavy workloads, stress, increased accountability and bureaucracy. Around half of the headteachers surveyed were most demotivated by administrative demands and by inspection and other measures of accountability. About one third of deputy headteachers and half of department/year heads did not want to become a headteacher because it meant less involvement in teaching.²⁸

22. The National College of School Leadership, created in 2001, is one element of a more professional approach to training school leaders, and the College is a key partner to help transform the quality of leadership in schools. Previously, headteachers were often appointed without training, and the National Professional Qualification for Headship was made mandatory from April 2004 for all applicants for headteacher posts. The qualification is aimed at improving the skills of potential headteachers and around 14,000 leaders or future leaders now hold it. There is also a training programme for existing headteachers. Some local authorities have appointed executive headteachers to lead more than one school. The National College estimates that at present around 100 headteachers are working in other schools as well as their own, and the College and the Department are thinking about new ways of delivering headships, utilising the experience of the most successful headteachers in the country.²⁹

23. Ofsted is statutorily required to report on the quality of school leadership. In its 2004-05 Annual Report, Ofsted reported that it had found around three-quarters of the leadership and management of inspected schools were excellent, very good or good, with around a fifth rated as satisfactory.³⁰

24. Inspection reports published under the new inspection regime do not show a distinct score for headteacher performance. Ofsted has a statutory responsibility to report on the quality of leadership, but it now makes an assessment leadership and management overall. As with other aspects of the inspections, Ofsted relies much more than previously on the school leaders' self-evaluations, and it is not unreasonable to expect that school leaders may be reluctant to assess their leadership and management as 'inadequate'. Of the schools inspected during the autumn 2005 term, only three judged their leadership and management to be 'inadequate'. However, 85 schools were placed in Special Measures, indicating that Ofsted judged leadership and management to be weak in a much higher

27 C&AG's Report, para 3.27; Qq 18, 121–122, 156–157

28 Qq 18, 158; *Follow up research into the state of school leadership in England*, Jane Stevens et al, MORI Social Research Institute, Department for Education and Skills, 2005

29 C&AG's Report, paras 3.28, 3.31; Qq 3, 18, 159

30 Qq 53; *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2004–05*, Ofsted 2005

number of schools than the two of the three whose self-assessment as ‘inadequate’ was confirmed.³¹

25. The Department’s Primary Leadership Programme aimed to improve leadership in primary schools, through consultancy support. However, an Ofsted evaluation of the first year of the programme concluded that it was not well targeted, because many of the 4,000 schools involved either did not need additional support or were unable to make full use of it. The Department considers that the programme was, at first, not as well targeted as it should have been, owing to lack of good quality data at the time. However, a lot of the schools originally in the programme, where schools were performing below the 65% target (of pupils achieving level 4 or above in English and mathematics), are now performing above the target, indicating that the programme has improved.³²

31 Qq 53–61; Ofsted statistics
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.displayfile&id=4144&type=pdf

32 C&AG’s Report, para 2.53 and Footnote 19 on p23; Qq 109–111

4 Dealing with deep rooted failure

26. School leaders and governors should be aiming to achieve continuous improvement in their schools. The Department, Ofsted and local authorities have a responsibility to support and challenge all schools to drive continuous improvement, and local authorities have a particular responsibility towards schools that are in difficulty, including supporting schools that go into Special Measures.³³

27. The most difficult schools to turn around are those that have struggled with poor performance over a long period and may have been in Ofsted categories for over two years. These schools often have difficulty recruiting and retaining good staff and have high rates of pupil absence and poor standards of behaviour. It is nevertheless essential that schools in Special Measures recover as quickly as possible to avoid further disruption to pupils' education and to remove the stigma for staff, pupils and parents that comes from having a poorly performing school. The Department proposes that schools must be showing significant signs of improvement within twelve months, otherwise they should be considered for closure. Ofsted considers that if a school does not demonstrate significant improvement within a year, for example based on more effective leadership, improved pupil attendance and better attitudes to behaviour, it is likely, based on Ofsted's experience, to take a long time to recover.³⁴

28. Primary schools currently take an average of 20 months to recover from Special Measures and secondary schools take an average of 22 months. Some schools placed in Special Measures are 'in denial' and do not immediately accept the Ofsted judgment, which can make recovery much slower. School improvement has to be driven from within the school, so where a school does accept the judgement, plans for improvement can be put in place more quickly. Ofsted considers that the new inspection regime, with faster reporting and more frequent monitoring, will help schools to improve more quickly.³⁵

29. Schools can draw support from a variety of sources, including the Department, local authorities, governors, parents, local businesses and other schools. Some local authorities are better than others at preventing school decline – a large minority (56 out of 150) had no schools in Special Measures at July 2005. Local authorities have powers to intervene, but they are rarely used. The Department expects local authorities to intervene where necessary, using their powers sensitively and sensibly, and to identify external support, for example from businesses or universities, to help the school to improve. The Department is providing additional funding to support local authorities in using their powers to intervene in schools that are in difficulty.³⁶

30. Collaboration between schools can help improve poor performance through sharing good practice and sometimes facilities and resources. Local authorities can help by facilitating links between schools. The Department encourages schools to join federations

33 C&AG's Report, para 5 and Figure 2; Q 4

34 C&AG's Report, paras 16–17, 2.16–2.17 and Figure 29; Qq 5, 16, 22, 26, 36–37

35 C&AG's Report, para 1.30; Qq 8, 15, 22–24

36 C&AG's Report, paras 1.27–1.30 and Figure 18; Qq 24–25, 33

and its Leadership Incentive Grant promotes the creation of school networks. Though current arrangements tend to be ad hoc, the Department considers that the vast majority of successful schools do take their responsibilities to other schools seriously, and there are opportunities to sustain strong collaboration.³⁷

31. For schools in challenging areas, the teaching needs to be very good to enable pupils to make good progress. The Department has a number of programmes in place for schools with the most intractable problems and those in the most challenging areas. Poorly performing schools can exhibit different problems depending on their circumstances, so it is important to have a range of options for improving performance.³⁸

32. The Department's Excellence in Cities programme aims to raise educational standards and promote social inclusion in major cities and areas that face similar problems. A 2003 Ofsted evaluation of the Excellence in Cities programme found it was making an important difference to schools in disadvantaged areas, though it had been more successful in improving the results of primary schools than secondary schools, where pupils often have accumulated years of low attainment, and the social factors that contribute to low attainment are more complex. Nevertheless, the proportion of pupils achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs or more in Excellence in Cities schools increased by around 4 percentage points in 2005, compared with a national increase of 2.6 percentage points.³⁹

33. The Leadership Incentive Grant is intended to help leadership teams in secondary schools in challenging circumstances to improve the delivery of education so that pupils are not disadvantaged. It is available to schools in an Excellence in Cities area; to schools with less than 30% of pupils achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs; and to schools with more than 35% of pupils receiving free school meals. The grant focuses on collaboration between schools as a means of achieving improvement. The percentage of pupils achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs in Leadership Incentive Grant collaborative schools increased by around 4 percentage points in 2005.⁴⁰

34. The Department has two school renewal programmes that involve the most radical and expensive option of closing a school and replacing it with a new school with a new name. Both are intended to improve schools where all other efforts at recovery have failed. Under the Fresh Start programme, the school is closed then re-opened with refurbished facilities and major changes or additions to staff. Establishing a Fresh Start school costs on average around £2.2 million in a mixture of capital and revenue costs. Under the Academies Programme, academies usually open in new buildings, and therefore involve substantially more expenditure. The Department estimates that the capital cost of a new-build 1,300 pupil academy is around £27 million, and that academies cost around £4 million more than similar-sized secondary schools to be built under the Building Schools for the Future programme. Pupil attainment in schools on these programmes usually starts from a very

37 C&AG's Report, paras 2.37–2.40; Qq 38–39

38 Qq 5, 20

39 C&AG's Report, para 1.37 and Appendix 2; Qq 116–117; Department for Education and Skills press release www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2006_0003

40 C&AG's Report, Appendix 2; Department for Education and Skills press release www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2006_0003

low point, so while attainment is improving in most cases, most are still achieving well below national average attainment.⁴¹

35. As of September 2006 there will be 51 Fresh Start schools (27 secondary, 23 primary and one special school).⁴² The programme has not been formally evaluated. On average, the 27 secondary schools are performing better than their predecessor schools in terms of GCSE results. Based on GCSE results in 2004, pupils in the nine Fresh Start secondary schools that had reached their fifth year performed, on average, twice as well as pupils in the predecessor schools in terms of the proportion of pupils achieving 5 A*–C GCSEs or more.⁴³

36. The first three academies opened in September 2002, and 27 were open by September 2005. The Department plans to have 200 academies open or in development by 2010. Of the 14 academies whose pupils took GCSEs in 2005, ten achieved a higher percentage of pupils achieving 5 A*–C GCSEs or more than in 2004, and 12 achieved better results than the predecessor schools. Two academies have received poor inspection results; Unity City Academy and the Business Academy in Bexley. Unity City Academy was inspected in 2005. Findings that included unsatisfactory leadership, a poor quality of teaching, low pupil attendance and a substantial financial deficit led Ofsted to place the academy in Special Measures. Ofsted gave the Business Academy, Bexley a Notice to Improve in 2005, when inspectors concluded that significant improvements were needed in the quality of teaching and learning and the effectiveness of the sixth form.⁴⁴

37. The Department has commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers to carry out a five-year evaluation of the Academies Programme. The second annual evaluation report was broadly positive about early progress, such as innovative approaches to teaching the curriculum and the role of academy principals. The evaluation also highlighted that some schools faced challenges, such as tackling bullying and the need to make sure that new academy buildings were able to meet the practical requirements of teaching and learning.⁴⁵

41 C&AG's Report, paras 19–20, 21, 23 and Figure 8; Qq 112–113

42 This number includes five 'Collaborative Restart' schools, which are Fresh Start schools with an emphasis on collaboration with successful neighbouring schools.

43 C&AG's Report, paras 2.45–2.46 and Figure 30

44 C&AG's Report, paras 20, 2.47 and Case Study 7 on p47; Qq 87, 112–113; Ofsted inspection reports, 2005, www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/manreports/2661.pdf, www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/133/s5_133769_20051123.htm

45 C&AG's Report, para 2.50 and Figure 32; *Second Annual Report of the Evaluation of the Academies Programme*, PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2005

Formal minutes

Wednesday 12 July 2006

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon
Annette Brooke
Mr Greg Clark
Mr Ian Davidson

Helen Goodman
Sarah McCarthy-Fry
Mr Austin Mitchell
Mr Don Touhig

A draft Report (Improving poorly performing schools in England), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 37 read and agreed to.

Summary read and agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fifty-ninth Report of the Committee to the House.

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

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

[Adjourned until Wednesday 11 October at 3.30 pm.]

Witnesses

Monday 27 February 2006

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Mr David Bell, Department for Education and Skills, **Mr Maurice Smith**, HM Chief Inspector of Schools, and **Ms Miriam Rosen**, Ofsted

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| Third Report | Ministry of Defence: Major Projects Report 2004 | HC 410 (<i>Cm 6712</i>) |
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| Fifth Report | Inland Revenue: Tax Credits and deleted tax cases | HC 412 (<i>Cm 6689</i>) |
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Oral evidence

Taken before the Committee of Public Accounts

on Monday 27 February 2006

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon
Greg Clark
Mr Ian Davidson
Helen Goodman

Mr Sadiq Khan
Sarah McCarthy-Fry
Mr Alan Williams

Sir John Bourn KCB, Comptroller and Auditor General, **Mr Tim Burr**, Deputy Comptroller and Auditor General, **Ms Angela Hands**, National Audit Office, were in attendance and gave evidence.

Ms Paula Diggle, Treasury Officer of Accounts, HM Treasury, gave evidence.

REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

IMPROVING POORLY PERFORMING SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND (HC 679)

Witnesses: **Mr David Bell**, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education and Skills, **Mr Maurice Smith**, HM Chief Inspector of Schools, and **Ms Miriam Rosen**, Director of Education, Ofsted, gave evidence.

Q1 Chairman: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Committee of Public Accounts where today we are considering the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report on *Improving Poorly Performing Schools in England*. We welcome back David Bell, who is the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education and Skills, Maurice Smith, who is Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools and Miriam Rosen, who is Ofsted's Director of Education. You are very welcome. Mr Bell, can I ask you a few general questions to start with. If you look at figure one of the executive summary, which you can find on page two, you will see there is a whole series of events there amounting to £837 million spent on poorly performing schools. Why is it we are spending so much money but there are still 1,500 poorly performing schools?

Mr Bell: Chairman, the first thing to say is that £837 million and the programmes you refer to are not specifically related exclusively to poorly performing schools, these initiatives are designed to raise standards in all schools. In fact, when you try to find the appropriate amount it is quite hard to find it because you could then say that the £30 billion or so that is spent on schools is designed to improve all schools, including those that are the poorest performing. It would be fair to say that the total expenditure on schools' education is designed to improve standards.

Q2 Chairman: I can ask the question a different way. Instead of asking why is it that we are spending £837 million on specific measures and we still have 1,500 poorly performing schools, why are we spending £30 billion a year and still having 1,500 poorly performing schools? You can ask the question any way you want, but you have got an hour to tell this Committee why you think there is still this number of poorly performing schools.

Mr Bell: We know from the data, even within the NAO Report, that the breakdown of those 1,500 schools includes those that are poorly performing in absolute senses, those that are identified by Ofsted as requiring Special Measures or improvement. We also know those that are absolutely poorly attaining in attainment terms as well as those that are underperforming. You can break that down in a number of ways. Clearly we want to ensure that all schools are good schools. I think it is important to see this in an historical sense: there has been a range of initiatives over a number of years and we have brought down the number of schools that are failing. We have seen that in terms of the data, and we are continuing to work hard to improve schools that are underperforming. I do not think the Department would be at all complacent about what needs to be done, but I think over the last few years we have seen a whole range of improvements from pupil attainment in schools through to a reduction in the number of failing schools.

Q3 Chairman: Obviously there are certain aspects which lead to the problems. For instance, if we look at page 9, "Certain problems are common to many poorly performing schools", obviously we see there that ineffective leadership is marked up. How successful has the Department been in developing strong leadership in potential head teacher candidates or, indeed, in people who are already heads?

Mr Bell: I think it is fair to say that there is a much more professional approach to training school leaders than there has ever been. The creation of a National College for School Leadership was evidence of the fact that we had to take it much more seriously than we had done previously. We know, for example, that 14,000 people have now been trained through the National Professional

 Department for Education and Skills and Ofsted

Qualification for Headship, which is about improving the skills of those who are about to become headteachers. There is a significant training programme of training for those who are currently in headship, and also the National College will be looking at new ways of headship. For example, as the Report points out, we have got some examples of headteachers who are leading more than one school. I think we are investing in the training of those who are about to become heads, those who currently are heads and also thinking about new ways of delivering headships so that the most successful heads in this country can take responsibility not just for their own school but for other schools as well.

Q4 Chairman: If you look at page 29, figure 20, “Effect of poor inspection results on local authority support for schools”, what that figure seems to tell us is that the support we are putting in does seem to be making a difference. Of course, that leads to the next question, if this support is making so much difference why do these schools have to be failing before they get the kind of support they obviously so clearly need?

Mr Bell: Local authorities have a particular responsibility towards schools that are in difficulty including supporting schools that go into Special Measures. One of the proposals which was in the White Paper recently was to give local authorities an earlier intervention power with schools that are causing concern. I think that is very important because it is more efficient in every sense, not least in respect of the education of pupils, if you can intervene before a school goes into an Ofsted category. If local authorities support schools that have gone into Special Measures or are underperforming in some way, I think it is also important we get new responsibilities to be able to intervene at an earlier stage to prevent the failure from coming about.

Q5 Chairman: That leads me directly to my next question. If you look at the section of the Report, “Turning a school around takes time and can be expensive”, which starts on page 7, it goes on particularly to paragraphs 19 and 20 which talk about the very expensive options of academies and Fresh Start. How do you think, with your great experience in the education world, schools can avoid failure in the first place so we can avoid these extremely expensive options of academies and Fresh Start?

Mr Bell: Chairman, one of your earlier questions highlighted the key factor and that is the quality of leadership. Undoubtedly, if you have the right leadership, a strong focus on high standards, intolerance of poor performance, high expectations of behaviour and so on, that is the most likely way in which you are going to reduce school failure. Frankly, as we know, that does not always happen, so after that I think you have to have a flexible set of responses. Some schools now are coming out of Special Measures very quickly, the average time is around 20 months. However, in some schools the failure is so deep-seated, if I can put it that way, that

you do require a more radical option. For example, under the Fresh Start scheme 44 schools have been fresh started, if I can put it that way, since 1998 and that is a more radical notion. On the secondary side you have got to look at the Academies Programme as a means of tackling even more deep-rooted failure. It is quite important not to have a single prescription but to have at your disposal a range of options in relation to bringing about better performance in a school.

Q6 Chairman: If we look at page 37 we read, “A positive ethos and improvements in teaching and learning contribute most to better pupil behaviour”, obviously. There is a case study 3 on faith schools which have turned around. Faith schools generally seem to have a strong ethos. Do you think that other schools can learn from the ethos that is often present in faith schools?

Mr Bell: I think all good schools have a strong ethos. Certainly faith schools will have an ethos which is primarily based on the faith foundation, but very good schools will have an ethos of hard work, achievement and high expectation on the part of the pupils. I do not think there is any doubt about that but, again, I would argue that ethos often comes down to the quality of leadership in an institution. A head teacher in a school cannot be a superwoman or a superman, but you need somebody at the top to set the standard that drives the expectations and the behaviours not just of the staff but of the students. If you have got high quality leadership that in turn will generate a positive ethos towards learning and I am sure that is crucially important in a school’s success.

Q7 Chairman: Mr Smith, let us look please at how schools are evaluating their own performance. If you look at page 13, “More targeted effort is needed to sustain recovered schools”. If you look at paragraph 35 in that first bullet point, it seems that some schools are not evaluating their performance effectively, why is that do you think?

Mr Smith: Because some schools do not have a history of self-evaluation. In the new Section 5 Inspection Regime begun in September 2005, Ofsted now requests self-evaluation forms from schools and indeed provides the form in the first place for schools to complete it. This has been popular, although demanding, and we are delighted that in the first term of this inspection programme 96% of schools completed their self-evaluation.

Q8 Chairman: As the Report goes on to say on page 7, “Turning a school around takes time and can be expensive”. We read in paragraph 17 of the Executive Summary that “A third of schools are not making reasonable progress over the first 12 months of failing an inspection”. Why is that the case, Mr Smith?

Mr Smith: Because up until now schools have taken longer to do so. As my colleague has mentioned, the average time to come out of Special Measures has been longer than a year. I think with our new inspection programme, with our faster turnaround

Department for Education and Skills and Ofsted

of Reports and with our swifter monitoring visits to schools in Special Measures, you will see a swifter turnaround in schools improving.

Q9 Chairman: As an educational professional do you think that one of the messages of this Report is that there should be more of a hands-off approach in good schools or more of a hands-on approach in the failing schools?

Mr Smith: Yes.

Q10 Chairman: Do you think that a lot of head people are dissuaded from applying for headship because of the amount of bureaucracy they have to undergo, even in good schools, and that you should give them more freedom to get on with the job? Do you think that is a message of this Report?

Mr Smith: I think the first message that you set out is the message of the Report, that from Ofsted's point of view we should be more proportionate in our inspection regime and we have proposals that will be the case. In relation to bureaucracy, my colleagues in the Department have a group which has been working for two years now to try to reduce the bureaucracy of schools, and the new relationship with schools is trying to give teachers more opportunity to spend time in the classroom and not on administrative tasks.

Q11 Helen Goodman: Mr Bell, I wonder if we could look again at table 4 on page 4. My understanding is that the DfES have agreed this Report with the NAO. Table 4 sets out 10 indicators of a poorly performing school. Of these, do you think any of them are particularly significant?

Mr Bell: It is very hard just to select one because I think our evidence about poorly performing schools over many years would suggest that it is a combination of these factors that makes a school a poor school. I think it would be perhaps invidious to pull out any one in particular. Equally, not all poor schools will necessarily exhibit all of those characteristics.

Q12 Helen Goodman: I understand that.

Mr Bell: I think it is quite difficult just to identify one fact alone that would suggest why a school has poorly performed.

Q13 Helen Goodman: You would not say that weak governance and lack of parental engagement are more important than the other eight?

Mr Bell: I do not think I would. I would say that you could have a school where it is more difficult to engage the parents but find with very strong leadership, with very high quality teaching, the students actually attain well. We do know if parents are engaged and interested in their children's education the school is more likely to do well but without that it does not mean to say that the school is bound to do badly. I am sorry I am being a bit cagey on this but I do think it is important to keep that sense of a rounded picture.

Q14 Helen Goodman: That is fine. Turning to the factors affecting improvement, there is quite a lot in the Report on that. If you turn to page 35, table 25, again we see "initiatives to improve pupil learning, increases or changes to teaching staff, initiatives to improve performance monitoring, changes to management team" and so on, much more highly ranked than the other factors. Do you accept the ranking in table 25?

Mr Bell: It is interesting that that table was generated from those schools that in a sense have gone through the recovery journey and that is their analysis of what they saw as the significant factors. To some extent we have to draw on their experience because they have gone through this process. I think intuitively that looks like a very sensible and understandable list. For example, the top item there, "initiatives to improve pupil learning", it seems to me if you do not get the pupils to learn better and more it is hard to understand how the school could improve sufficiently. I think it is quite interesting that leadership, again, is quite high up. I think you can see why all those are important in terms of contribution. The only other comment I would make about the list is if you look at the top it talks about "major contribution" and "minor contribution". I think you can see this sense of a whole range of factors coming together to bring about improvement and I do not think there ever is a single magic solution to bring about improvement, you have to get all of these things coming together led by a good headteacher.

Q15 Helen Goodman: Absolutely. This is also borne out by table 18 on page 28, "Sources and types of support for schools". Seven sources of support are listed and none is given any particular priority.

Mr Bell: Yes. I think it is important to stress the point that whilst schools that improve do receive good support from outside, you cannot impose improvement from outside. The school has to have in place the highest quality of leadership, they have to be improving teaching, they have to be improving learning, the behaviour must be better. I do not think you can impose those from outside. Our experience, however, in improving poorly performing schools is that those school-based efforts can be well supported from outside and, therefore, can help to drive improvement more quickly.

Q16 Helen Goodman: Just turning to the effect of the existing programmes, particularly focused on this. For example, table 8 on page 9 sets out the change in GCSE performance of turned around secondary schools. Would you say that this indicated good value for money and a good record in the particular measures that are being used at the moment?

Mr Bell: If, for example, you take the Excellence in Cities programme, which was one of the programmes cited earlier, we know that the improvement rate there is significantly greater in terms of the percentage of students achieving five-plus A to Cs. Albeit, that is from a much lower base but I think it has demonstrated that there are those improvements. The other point, and I think the

evidence from Ofsted would support this, is if you look at schools that are in difficulty, the impact of those programmes is not just about attainment, vital though it is, it is about changing attitudes to behaviour. School attendance is a crucial factor if you are going to bring about improvement. Whilst you can measure these programmes in some performance measures in relation to GCSEs and Key Stage 3 results and the like, you also have to look at better conditions for learning along the lines that I have suggested.

Q17 Helen Goodman: On page 15, paragraph 38b: “To recover quickly, poorly performing schools need to give priority to . . .” and then a number of things are listed, “Schools should: put teaching at the heart of the school’s self-evaluation”. That is commonsense really, is it not?

Mr Bell: It is. We might ask, if it is commonsense why is it not followed everywhere? I think sometimes schools get themselves into a spiral of decline and that is a good reason for intervening early, but often you will find schools that have gone into Special Measures almost have to start again, they have to go back to basics in that sense and think about the core purpose of the school: how do you improve learning; how do you improve teaching; how do you set high aspirations for students. It might seem quite obvious in schools that are already performing well but I think it is certainly the case in relation to the Special Measures schools that they have got to a point where the obvious is not happening and sometimes you have to start doing the obvious so the school can improve.

Q18 Helen Goodman: You have emphasised the importance of leadership and one of the points that comes out is that of those schools which advertise for a new headteacher, 20% of primary schools do not manage to appoint one and 28% of secondary schools do not manage to appoint one. What are you doing to deal with that particular problem?

Mr Bell: Each year you would expect to find routinely about 11% of all schools advertising for a head, that is just the normal turnover of headship. We know there is a small percentage of schools that do not appoint first time round. There are both negative reasons and positive reasons. Quite a lot of teachers will cite a reason for not applying for a headship because they want to stay closer to the day-to-day work of teaching, and that is an entirely understandable and noble justification. Equally, though, there are others who cite negative reasons. They might consider there is a lot of stress associated with the job, they might be concerned about the high level of personal accountability and so on that falls on them. What has happened? I think the National College is preparing aspirant heads through the national professional qualification, that is one thing. Secondly, headteachers are now paid very high salaries in some schools, indeed in London that can go up to £100,000-plus for a large secondary school. We have also been keen to encourage the National College to look at other ways of doing headship, as I mentioned earlier. It may be in the future we would

have more headteachers looking to work in other schools. The National College of School Leadership says that around 100 headteachers are working in more than just their own school, so there is obviously the beginnings of something. I think if you can put all those factors together you make headship more attractive. If we say that leadership is vital, we want to attract the best people to become heads.

Helen Goodman: Thank you very much, Mr Bell.

Q19 Sarah McCarthy-Fry: Could I ask Ms Rosen, because I noticed from your biography that you did spend 18 years teaching, a question from that perspective. If you look at page 20, paragraph 1.5, it says: “A small number of the secondary schools defined as low-attaining have been found to be good by Ofsted . . . This apparent anomaly can arise in a very deprived area because a high proportion of pupils may find it hard to attain good levels of examination success even if teaching is good”. From your point of view, can I ask you if every child, if the teaching was of the top quality in every school, is capable of achieving five A to C GCSEs?

Ms Rosen: I think that is a very difficult question to answer. Certainly there are some who will not be able to because of the nature of the special needs that they have. However, we are pretty certain that more can achieve that than do at the moment. From the point of view of this paragraph, it is true that in low-attaining secondary schools if you are starting from a very low basis the school may have done well and made a certain amount of progress which is not as much in schools where children are starting from a higher basis.

Q20 Sarah McCarthy-Fry: Would you say that if the teaching is good over time those levels of attainment would increase?

Ms Rosen: In schools which have difficulties the teaching needs to be very good to enable the pupils to make good progress. If that is provided over time, yes, I think the children will make the sort of progress that we want them to.

Q21 Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The ethos of a school, the teaching of a school, the leadership of a school, can help to overcome the disadvantages of coming from a very deprived background.

Ms Rosen: These are all vital components, yes.

Q22 Sarah McCarthy-Fry: If I could go on to Mr Bell. On pages 38 and 39, it says in the new 2005 White Paper, “new legislation will require local authorities to consider all options for a school when it goes into Special Measures . . .” We have heard that schools have to come out of Special Measures within a year, and I can see the point of that because you would not expect children and their education to suffer, however at the moment many schools are taking two years or more. Why do you think that is?

Mr Bell: For the sake of clarification, the proposal is that schools must be making significant progress after 12 months rather than actually be out of Special Measures in 12 months, but I think the essence of the point is the same, you have to be

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demonstrating that significant progress is being made. Again, advised by colleagues from Ofsted, it would seem from their evidence that if a school is not demonstrating significant improvement, for example in the leadership, in the attitude of the students, in the behaviour, in the discipline, the quality of the teaching and the like, within 12 months then you are quite unlikely to see it and those schools that spend a long time in Special Measures are often those schools where they have made virtually no progress in the first 12 months. It is very important to see that progress. If you assume that progress has been made in 12 months then the actual out of Special Measure times we have talked about of 22 months for secondary and about 20 months for primary, suggests that it is realistic in the vast majority of cases. Where it is not happening I think it is right that more radical choices are considered because if it is happening in the vast majority of schools, why should the children and young people in a school where it is not happening be left to languish in Special Measures for a longer period.

Q23 Sarah McCarthy-Fry: I have a school in my constituency which I think is the second fastest school where it has come out of Special Measures. It is a primary school. Talking to the headteacher there, he cannot understand why other schools have not been able to come out as quickly because from the headteacher's point of view it was recognising the problem and putting the measures in place. Would you say that the schools that do not come out quicker do not want to recognise there is a problem?
Mr Bell: Perhaps I should defer to the Chief Inspector on this one. It does make the point in the Report that some schools are in a state of self-denial and that is a characteristic of some schools that find it difficult to get going. They have argued over the judgment in the first place, they do not accept the judgment. If a school accepts the judgment and then focuses on improvement it is more likely to improve rapidly.

Q24 Sarah McCarthy-Fry: We have said local authorities at the moment have a power to intervene but in the Report it says they rarely use it. Do you think that is because they are not aware there is a problem or they do not want to interfere?

Mr Bell: I do not think it would be a good excuse to say they are not aware there is a problem because the local authority, frankly, should know there is a problem in a school. I think in some cases, particularly of under-performance interestingly, there has been a degree of reluctance because a school might by some measures appear to be doing quite well but the local authority might consider it to be under-performing against the intake of the students and what they could achieve. That is something that hopefully will be changed in the future to give local authorities the power even with those schools. I do not think it really stacks up as a particularly good excuse to say, "We are somehow reluctant to intervene". Local authorities have a range of measures that they can adopt and as a

Department we would expect them to intervene actively if they are there to ensure that standards in all schools are rising.

Q25 Sarah McCarthy-Fry: Yet it does say in the Report that at the moment they are rarely using those powers.

Mr Bell: Indeed. Although I hope the proposition that they will have, not a more extensive power, I do not want to give the impression we are using this in a fashion without thinking, but the power to act where they think it is necessary, will encourage them to do that sensitively and sensibly. There has been an announcement that there will be additional funding to support local authorities in their intervention powers in schools in difficulties. I do not think there will be any excuse for a local authority to stand back if it is manifestly obvious that the children and young people in a school are not getting the education that they deserve.

Q26 Sarah McCarthy-Fry: One of the things that came out very clearly in the Report was early intervention is really important and self-intervention with schools regulating themselves and checking whether they are going down that route. There is a good deal in the Report I notice about the stigma felt by headteachers and parents, but one of the things I noticed when I went to visit the school that I was talking about in my constituency that was pointed out to me was that it was the pupils who felt it. They were not immune to the fact that their school was splashed all over the pages of newspapers. Yet over three-quarters of headteachers considered that being placed in a category had a beneficial effect on the governance. How do you know you are going to get that balance that says, "If we are put into a category that is going to be beneficial because that makes us work but, on the other hand, surely it would be much better if we did not get to that stage where we had to do that in the first place"?

Mr Bell: I wonder if the Chairman would mind if I defer to Mr Smith on that one.

Mr Smith: Schools know thyself is the message that you are putting across to me and, indeed, self-evaluation, common not just in schools but across business and any organisation, is a key component of ensuring the quality of whatever it is you are providing. If you are providing education you need to know yourself and know how good you are at that. One of the key indicators of failure in school is the school not knowing it and not seeing it. David said earlier that is also a key factor in recovery because in order for a school to recover quickly, as the school in your constituency did, it needs to accept the judgment and get on with its new life, in a sense. I think you make a very powerful point about the stigma and the attachment to the children in the school. Is it not a very difficult position we find ourselves in? I think one of the Ofsted's wonderful strengths is that everything is out there in the public domain. All our Reporting is in the public domain, it is all on the website, everybody can see it, but with that comes the downside that it can be all over the newspapers. I have to say that on balance I would

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much prefer us to be in that position than pre-1992 when reports were made available only to governors and education was the secret garden that your colleague referred to earlier. I think that is hard and difficult not just for the pupils, the staff, the head and the governors, but it is the first step on the road to recovery.

Q27 Sarah McCarthy-Fry: I have not got time to go down the route of why your inspectors are not allowed to give advice, but if I could maybe come back, whether it be Ofsted or whether it be the Department, do you have any plans for key performance indicators for benchmarks for schools to measure themselves against so that it would help them to self-evaluate?

Mr Bell: There is a lot of data already available to that purpose. Schools receive information from Ofsted about their performance and that information is set against information of all schools nationally and information of schools that are similar to that school. There is quite a lot of that around. Also, on financial management we are putting more information out to schools to do exactly as you have suggested, to benchmark their performance. It is very important that if you are self-evaluating you do not do it in isolation, you do not guess where you are, you have hard data. I think it is one of the significant improvements over the past few years that no school can say, "We do not have the data to tell us how well we are doing" because there is a huge amount of data out there and I think the self-assessing school, the self-evaluating school, uses that to diagnose where it is strong, where it is not so strong, and then to plan actions to improve.

Q28 Mr Khan: Obviously one school that is failing is one too many. I could see how surprised you were by the fact that 4% of our primary schools are poorly performing and 23% of our secondary schools are poorly performing.

Mr Bell: Again, I would just enter the caveat I entered earlier that there are different definitions because a school where some students are under-performing may not be poorly performing.

Q29 Mr Khan: We have all read the paperwork.

Mr Bell: Not surprised insofar as that data was available.

Q30 Mr Khan: Primary and secondary, you were not surprised?

Mr Bell: Not surprised because we know from the data I have just referred to where those schools that are not performing well need to improve. What you do then is what matters. It is not your reaction to the data, it is—

Q31 Mr Khan: The question is what do we do about it. Presumably you welcome the proposals in the White Paper as summarised on page four of the Report as dealing with the concerns that have been raised.

Mr Bell: I think the White Paper offers a whole range of policies that are designed to bring about greater improvement in schools.

Q32 Mr Khan: Which you welcome?

Mr Bell: Yes, I do, everything from ensuring that schools have the opportunity to work with other schools to improving pupil discipline and the like. The White Paper was entirely focused on bringing about improvement in our schools, because this Report suggests that despite all the improvements we have seen in recent years we cannot afford to be complacent.

Q33 Mr Khan: One of the things it touches upon is something highlighted by the Report which is some local authorities give insufficient support to schools which are at risk, some local authorities do not prevent school decline. You will be aware from paragraph 1.29 on page 27 and figure 20 of the effects of poor inspection results on local authority support for schools. How does the White Paper address those concerns?

Mr Bell: Certainly there is a very clear expectation that local authorities are going to become even more the champions of standards to ensure that the right range of schools is available, the diversity of schools is available, right down to the very practical intervention powers that I described earlier, that where a local authority is concerned that a school is not performing as well as it might, it can then intervene. We would also expect local authorities to find ways of identifying external support for a school. That might be the local authority's own staff coming in to support a school, it might be using school improvement partners, which is a recent initiative, and it might be by identifying other bodies and organisations, universities, businesses and the like, that can support the school to improve.

Q34 Mr Khan: That brings me on to my next point which is on page 5, paragraph 12, you will see that there are 242 schools in Special Measures and of those schools Outer London has the highest proportion of schools in Special Measures and the North-East of England has the lowest. Is it speculation or is it the case—you can tell me—that one of the reasons why the North-East has such a large proportion of schools which are strongly performing is because of them having very good local authorities as opposed to the situation in Outer London? What do you think about that?

Mr Bell: When you look at the regional break down of the data it changes slightly over time, so I think it is quite hard to take a snapshot that says this tells you definitively that you have a particular set of circumstances in one area as opposed to another. Certainly we know, for example, in the North-East that the local authorities there have generally been graded by Ofsted as doing a good job in relation to intervention in schools that are in difficulty. Equally, there are local authorities in the Outer London ring that you have described that have done likewise. I am pretty cautious about drawing conclusions.

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Q35 Mr Khan: So you dismiss that paragraph?

Mr Bell: No, I do not dismiss it, but what I am saying is I think it is very difficult to draw a conclusion from a particular moment in time and say that tells you, "All the local authorities in this area are providing good support and those authorities are not". What I would say is both the Ofsted arrangements previously for inspection of local authorities as well as the new style arrangements for inspecting local authorities does continue to put an emphasis on the quality of support being given, so we will continue to focus on this both at the Department and through the Ofsted inspection.

Q36 Mr Khan: One of the things that both the Chairman and Ms McCarthy-Fry touched upon was the change in the White Paper where if a school does not make significant progress within 12 months it will lead to it being closed down. The Report tells us that two-thirds of schools made at least reasonable progress over the first 12 months and 85% of schools in Special Measures emerged successfully, which would lead me to believe there might be 19% of schools after 12 months who might not have been able to show a significant improvement who were then able to emerge successfully who may be caught by the new provisions. Can you allay the concerns of the Committee that those will not be caught?

Mr Bell: We would say very strongly that if a school is not making sufficient progress within 12 months we need to consider what possible action could be taken because the evidence would suggest very strongly that if a school is not improving sufficiently in 12 months, and that does not necessarily mean its academic results because a year is a very short time in terms of the conditions for learning in the school, the school is likely to be in Special Measures for longer. Those are the average times.

Q37 Mr Khan: I will give you some stats. The stats are 66% have made "at least reasonable progress" in the first 12 months and 85% eventually emerged successfully. Are you saying that there is a percentage above 66 which would show—What are you saying?

Mr Bell: I would say that all schools should be showing significant progress in 12 months. As we are setting a higher standard in every sense for our education system, including what we have asked Ofsted to do through the inspection arrangements, I think it is right that schools should start to improve more rapidly because if they do not for that period of time when they are not making significant progress the students are not getting a good education. I think it is right to say it might have been the case that schools took longer to come out of Special Measures but now we should be saying if they are not showing significant progress the option is at least available to consider more radical action.

Q38 Mr Khan: Thank you. Figure 25 of the Report shows that around half of the recovered schools benefited from strengthened links with other, I assume, good schools.

Mr Bell: Yes.

Q39 Mr Khan: How can we persuade more good schools to help schools that need their help? How can we incentivise them?

Mr Bell: There is a lot of activity emerging where schools are supported in all sorts of different ways: federations that are hard federations in the sense there is a formal link with another school through to softer federations where you have got particular teachers and departments helping. I think the vast majority of schools that are in a strong position do take their responsibilities to other schools seriously and the local authority can often play a very helpful role here in introducing, if I can use that word, a successful school to a less successful school. I think there is quite a lot of strong goodwill to sharing expertise and helping poor schools to improve. We are starting from a strong baseline there. The arrangements at the moment do tend to be rather *ad hoc* and what is proposed in the future is the opportunity for those relationships to be firmer, stronger and more long-term.

Q40 Mr Khan: My final question is this: the spin of the Report is there are 980,000 pupils in failing schools. Bearing in mind we have seen an improvement, although it is not fast enough, would you say that is the least number of pupils that have ever been in poorly performing schools?

Mr Bell: Certainly as far as schools in Special Measures are concerned, we know there are fewer pupils in Special Measures schools because of the decline in Special Measures. In relation to the under-achievement of poorly performing schools, the frank answer is we have not had the data at our disposal until recent years and that in itself is an improvement. By giving schools access to data that tells them how well their pupils are doing against other schools they are going to be in an even better position in the future to target improvement on the basis of that data.

Q41 Greg Clark: Mr Bell, can you confirm that since the NAO conducted this analysis the percentage of poorly performing schools has risen?

Mr Bell: In relation to Special Measures there has been a slight increase under the new inspection arrangements that started in September 2005.

Q42 Greg Clark: The answer is yes?

Mr Bell: Mr Smith may wish to confirm the overall percentage.

Q43 Greg Clark: We had a letter from Mr Smith to MPs in which he said: "At the other end of the scale the proportion of inspections resulting in schools being placed in categories of concern was 9.3% compared with an average of 8% during the last three years of the old inspection framework".

Mr Smith: The number of schools in Special Measures as at 31 December 2005, the difference in the numbers was only two. The proportion is different in terms of the numbers of schools that have entered Special Measures.

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Q44 Greg Clark: We are not playing with statistics, the proportion is clearly what counts. You can confirm the proportion has increased.

Mr Smith: The proportion of schools going into categories has increased from 8% to 9.3%.

Q45 Greg Clark: So our schools are getting worse?

Mr Smith: No.

Q46 Greg Clark: The proportion of the ones that are poorly performed has increased, that sounds to me as if they are getting worse.

Mr Smith: I think I would take the data over a longer period.

Q47 Greg Clark: Part of the point that you make is that you have done a lot more inspections in one term—

Mr Smith: We have.

Q48 Greg Clark:—than was previously the case.

Mr Smith: Yes.

Q49 Greg Clark: This is quite a significant sample size and there is a very significant increase in the proportion that are causing concern, so surely you must agree they are getting worse.

Mr Smith: The proportion has increased from 8% to 9.3%.

Q50 Greg Clark: Correct.

Mr Smith: I would bow to a statistician to say whether that is quite significant; I am not a statistician.

Q51 Greg Clark: Mr Bell, are our schools getting worse?

Mr Bell: No, because what we asked Ofsted to do was to raise the bar. We actually said that the inspection standard has to get tougher. I think it was absolutely right that we asked Ofsted to do so because we cannot—

Q52 Greg Clark: On that point, Mr Smith, you made no mention of the comparator having changed here. You wrote a letter to MPs making a direct comparison between these figures, you did not say that these are non-comparable, which is the point Mr Bell has just made.

Mr Bell: We were very clear to Ofsted that the inspection system had changed from September 2005. That was made very, very clear to all the schools and those who took part. As a Department we were also very clear that there had been a raising of the bar, that the expectation to be at least satisfactory, to be good or to be outstanding had changed over time. I think that is absolutely appropriate because I do not think we can be in the position of saying what was acceptable as a standard ten years ago is acceptable now.

Q53 Greg Clark: We are not talking about 10 years ago, we are talking about the last three years. It says that schools placed in categories of concern has increased. Let us move on, we could spend 10

minutes talking about that. On the inspection regime, the NAO Report on page 9, paragraph 24, makes a very clear link between the quality of the leadership and management of the school and its performance, and I think that has come out in some of the earlier questions. Why does the new Ofsted inspection regime no longer evaluate the quality of leadership provided by a headteacher? Mr Bell, you are a former Chief Inspector of Schools.

Mr Bell: I will answer the question if you wish. It does describe the quality of leadership because in statute Ofsted is required to Report on the quality of leadership. In actual fact, it could be argued with a stronger emphasis on school self-evaluation and the leadership knowing what needs to be done to improve a school it is more strongly focused on the quality of leadership.

Q54 Greg Clark: Can I give you an example of what I mean by this. I have got an Ofsted inspection report of 2004 before the changes took effect from a High School in Hereford and in the summary of the main inspection there is “judgments of the leadership of the headteacher”, in this case it was classed as three, which is good. The same school was looked at in 2005 under the new arrangements and the equivalent current question on leadership of the headteacher is “Leadership and management. How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvements and promote high quality of care and education”. Do you think that is as clear a focus on the quality of the head as it was before?

Mr Bell: I think I would argue that leadership in a school is not exclusively to do with the headteacher.

Q55 Greg Clark: Indeed, but the report emphasises that the head can have a very significant role. My point is that specifically the head is no longer identifiable in your reports. That is correct, is it not? You have gone to a definition which is about the leadership process: “leaders and managers at all levels”, the head no longer appears in the report.

Mr Bell: I do not know if Mr Smith or Ms Rosen want to comment on that detail. What I would say is by focusing on the leadership of the school, which of course includes the headteacher, as a Department we are continuing to say that it is vital that Ofsted reports on the quality of leadership and in actual fact that is what Ofsted does. I think strong emphasis—

Q56 Greg Clark: Mr Bell, we do not have much time. I quite agree with you about the importance of leadership in the round but there is a specific contribution that a headteacher makes. On page 13, paragraph 37, the NAO’s Report says: “The headteacher is key to sustaining performance and improvement in any school.” The system that we have now in place to monitor this has left out the headteacher in favour of a leadership team and that seems to be a step backwards, not forwards.

Mr Bell: The guidance that Ofsted gives its inspectors to come to the judgment about leadership that you have described does include an emphasis on the role of the headteacher. I accept that is not quite the same as saying the headteacher, but I do not

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think any inspection team could make a rounded judgment about the quality of leadership in a school without considering the contribution of the headteacher.

Q57 Greg Clark: It would have been helpful to have some report on the headteacher. Just on the inspection, the inspection regime is about to change again, or is changing, to rely more on self-assessment rather than the inspector's judgment which you have indicated might be a guarantor of standards. Indeed, schools now have a self-evaluation form, self-assessment form, and there is a section on leadership and management in which headteachers, presumably leadership teams, themselves are invited to say how good they are. The particular item is "Effectiveness and efficiency of leadership and management" and they are invited to rate themselves as "outstanding, good, satisfactory or inadequate". Do you think it is reasonable for a headteacher to be expected to tick the "inadequate" box?

Mr Bell: We have already had some discussion this afternoon about the quality of self-evaluation. As I understand it, there have been schools where the internal judgment has been made that the leadership and management is inadequate, so looking internally—

Q58 Greg Clark: How many cases have there been, Mr Smith?

Mr Smith: 87.

Q59 Greg Clark: 87 schools around the country have described themselves as being inadequate?

Mr Smith: No, 87 schools from September to December have been judged as requiring Special Measures.

Q60 Greg Clark: No, the particular point is on quality of leadership and management. How many heads have rated themselves as inadequate?

Mr Smith: I do not know.¹

Q61 Greg Clark: Will you write to the Committee with that figure?

Mr Smith: I will write to the Committee. May I just say that we do still make a judgment, and a graded judgment, including a numeric judgment on the leadership and management of the school.

Q62 Greg Clark: We talked about the leadership and management but the new system is based on self-assessment which means that your inspectors, who typically used to go in for a week to make an assessment, now go in for two days, is that correct?

¹ *Note by witness:* Three schools judged their leadership and management to be inadequate in their self evaluation forms in the autumn term 2005 inspections. Two of the schools were subsequently placed in special measures. One other school, which was going through a period of management change after sickness and retirement of the headteacher, had judged its leadership and management to be inadequate. However, inspectors judged the leadership and management to be satisfactory.

Mr Smith: That is correct.

Q63 Greg Clark: Assuming that a headteacher has been loath to describe himself as inadequate but might be, and as we see there are an increasing number of schools that might fall into that category, it is all down to your inspectors to overturn that self-evaluation.

Mr Smith: Yes.

Q64 Greg Clark: They used to have five days as quite a large team to observe that school, to observe lessons, observe the ethos of the school, now they have a self-evaluation form and up to two days with a smaller team to assess that. How can that be rigorous?

Mr Smith: They also have a far better background to the school and performance data set, *et cetera, et cetera*.

Q65 Greg Clark: Do you think these things are reducible to figures and statistics?

Mr Smith: No, I do not.

Q66 Greg Clark: Surely there is some value in observation and inspection?

Mr Smith: Of course there is value in observation and, indeed, the dialogue with the headteacher and leadership and management team is now even greater than it was in the previous regime. I am confident that my inspectors are making proper judgments on leadership and management. You said yourself that the proportion has increased slightly, and indeed it has.

Q67 Greg Clark: Spending two days in a school does not impair the quality of judgment compared with five days in a school, you can make the same assessment of a head's leadership quality during that time?

Mr Smith: Yes, along with the other materials that we have available to us.

Q68 Greg Clark: There is no parent survey any more in Ofsted reports. There used to be a statistical survey of parents that was reported.

Mr Smith: We do conduct the survey of parents but it is not reported in the same way. One of the other things we have changed, which has been welcomed widely, is giving little or no notice to schools.

Q69 Greg Clark: Who has welcomed it?

Mr Smith: I think it is widely welcomed that we give little or no notice.

Q70 Greg Clark: Has anyone welcomed the lack of a parent survey?

Mr Smith: If we give little or no notice we cannot send a parental questionnaire six weeks in advance, can we, that would tip them off I think.

Q71 Greg Clark: You could do it afterwards.

Mr Smith: Then we cannot produce the report in 15 days.

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Q72 Greg Clark: It could be a supplementary report.

Mr Smith: We do conduct it on the day that we are there, so we do have that data available to us.

Q73 Greg Clark: But you do not publish it. I think Ofsted has a hugely important role to play in raising standards and my question is just when we have a situation in which far too many schools are causing concern, and it causes me concern that that proportion seems to be increasing, the rigour and the usefulness of the information seems to be declining. My attention was drawn to a statement that a trade union, the NASUWT, put out, that says: "Headteachers increasingly are setting less and less store by Ofsted's pronouncements. Ofsted is becoming a growing irrelevance in terms of its ability to make a meaningful contribution to raising standards". That strikes me as alarming.

Mr Smith: You would not expect me to agree with my trade union colleague on that particular issue.

Q74 Greg Clark: They are teachers, members of the profession.

Mr Smith: I do not think the 87 schools or the parents of the pupils in those 87 schools that went into Special Measures last term would agree that Ofsted is an irrelevance. I think that Ofsted's role in providing external scrutiny of schools is crucially important. What this Report recommends is that we take a more proportionate approach and try to be less invasive to those schools that are doing a good job and concentrate more of our efforts on those that are weaker.

Q75 Chairman: That really sums up our new approach, does it, this is what we are talking in the White Paper, what we are talking about this afternoon, you are going to set headteachers in good schools, Ofsted will be a much lighter touch, two days rather than five days, the less bureaucracy and less form-filling the better and you set them free, is that right?

Mr Smith: There is a broader position in terms of regulation and inspection as a whole, not just in schools and not just in Ofsted but more broadly altogether and we are constantly encouraged by the Better Regulation Executive to be more proportionate in our activity. In our Early Years work we were praised in the document *Better Regulation for a Civil Society* because of that very proportionate approach. We are trying to get that model absolutely right so that we are making good use of public money in terms of analysing those schools that are the weakest and do not spend lots of time in schools that are self-evidently very good and getting on with a good job.

Q76 Chairman: So the answer to my question is yes?

Mr Smith: The answer is yes.

Q77 Mr Bacon: Mr Bell, can I draw your attention back to the chart on page 4 which identified the 10 indicators of a poorly performing school. You were very reluctant to single out any one of them, you said that they were all important. I was quite surprised by

that because it strikes me that weak leadership is that from which all else flows, is it not? If you have strong leadership you would not have unfilled places because of a failing reputation, you would have a growing reputation, because people would say, "That school has got a strong leader and good headteacher", would they not? You would have better governance because the headteacher would make sure that there was good governance. If there was a poor standard of teaching a strong leader would sort it out. If there were unfilled staff vacancies a strong leader, a strong head, would sort that out. I am speaking only from the experience of my own constituency in visiting other schools. A strong headteacher does not permit poor behaviour and so on, high rates of pupil absence, something else we have looked at on this Committee. Why is weak leadership not the single most important indicator?

Mr Bell: I think in the way that you have described it I can only but agree with you. Our evidence would suggest that in a school that is poor it is not just the leadership, it is all of those other factors to a greater or lesser extent. In my response to Ms Goodman I was trying to avoid the sense there is only one thing that really matters. I think the way you have described it, however, is right, that if you have got strong leadership those other things should follow.

Q78 Mr Bacon: Surely you do not have to quite describe it as a silver bullet but nonetheless agree that a strong headteacher is the single biggest component.

Mr Bell: Hugely important, and I think Ofsted's evidence over the years would support that.

Q79 Mr Bacon: Is leadership primarily the responsibility of the headteacher?

Mr Bell: Primarily but not exclusively.

Q80 Mr Bacon: Mr Smith, you said that colleagues in your Department have been working for two years on an initiative to reduce bureaucracy—

Mr Smith: Colleagues in my colleague's Department.

Q81 Mr Bacon: Yes, I am sorry, the DfES. In that case, Mr Bell, it is probably a question for you. How many of them and how much has been spent on this initiative?

Mr Bell: This is not made up of staff from the Department, this is a group of headteachers called the Implementation Review Unit who have been looking at all aspects of the Department's work. In relation to your specific questions, I do not know the answers but I will certainly write to you.² Can I just say that the Implementation Review Unit published a report reflecting on the progress that has been made and have said they do think the Department is doing much to try to reduce the unnecessary bureaucracy on schools.

² Ev 19

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Q82 Mr Bacon: May I ask you about page 53. There is a reference in paragraph 3.22 to three-year budgets: “The Department is to introduce three-year budgets for schools from the 2006–07 financial year to give them more certainty about their funding. To take advantage of the new arrangements, schools will need to develop their capacity for financial management and planning. Those schools that fail to do so may face new risks and are very likely to miss opportunities.” What is the Department doing to ensure that schools have the skills they need to take advantage of those opportunities and not to miss opportunities?

Mr Bell: I mentioned earlier that we are putting out information to schools on financial benchmarking, in other words to be able to look at how well a school is doing in terms of expenditure compared to other schools, so you give them basic information in relation to benchmarking. We are also encouraging schools to consider getting effective procurement arrangements in place because if you procure sensibly you free up funding. We are encouraging schools to make use of ICT and so on. We are trying to give schools an efficiency consciousness, if I can put it that way, so they are able to make better use of the financial stability that longer term budgeting provides.

The Committee suspended from 5.37pm to 5.46pm for a division in the House.

Q83 Mr Bacon: Mr Bell, we were talking about three-year budgets. You said you were doing benchmarking to help schools. What are you doing to help LEAs in terms of providing effective advice? Are you confident that all LEAs are capable of providing effective advice?

Mr Bell: This is providing effective advice to schools?

Q84 Mr Bacon: Yes. Financial advice in particular. When it says in paragraph 3.22: “. . . may face new risks and are very likely to miss opportunities”, the idea surely would be if they have effective advice, particularly from LEAs, they will not miss those opportunities?

Mr Bell: That is true. Historically, since the beginning of local management of schools, LEAs have had a range of roles in financial terms to particular schools and that has included the provision of advice. You have got to get the balance right, have you not, because on the one hand we want schools to be autonomous and to make all of those decisions for themselves and, on the other hand, they need to have access to good advice, for example on procurement, so that schools have got access to information to get the best buy. We know that local authorities generally provide that kind of advice but one of the bits of what the Department is doing with local authorities is looking at collective procurement arrangements to help the schools.

Q85 Mr Bacon: It is not really procurement I am interested in, it is the quality of the advice by LEAs more specifically and the missing of opportunities.

This is what I want to talk about. I am not sure if you are aware of what happened in Norfolk last summer but in July many headteachers filling in their forms—in relation to school balances—were given very specific advice by the local education authority which turned out to be completely duff advice and in September suddenly, having planned ahead and having taken the advice of the finance officers in the local education authority, were told, “By the way, we are clawing back”, in one case, “£120,000”, which was more than the entire effect of that school having specialist status. In the case of primary schools they were still large amounts of £10,000 or £20,000. In the end the thing caused such a scandal they had to re-run the entire exercise which was an effective way of undoing it and the notional transfers were tiny afterwards. It was all because the LEA was not competent to give effective advice.

Mr Bell: There are two ways of looking at it. Firstly, in relation to the division of responsibilities, we would suggest that the financial advice and the quality of that advice and the quality of the local authority’s financial systems is subject to audit by the Audit Commission or its party, so in a sense there is a local responsibility to do that. However, there is the national dimension to this through inspection and accountability, for example, of how well does the local authority discharge its financial responsibilities to ensure that services are provided appropriately.

Mr Bacon: In paragraph 1.34 on page 30 it talks about: “. . . over-complex arrangements run the risk of undue bureaucracy and there is a lack of transparency of funding because it is so complex”. Several years ago in the last school finance crisis but three, I think it was—it was when my neighbour, Charles Clarke, was Secretary of State—there was a big row and, in fact, I remember writing to Sir John about this, about whether the schools had passported through all of the money the DfES had given them and it took a long time to come up with anything like a sensible answer. The LEAs were saying, “We have done more than we should have done” and the DfES were saying, “No, we have done the right thing”. The money went from DfES to ODPM and then as part of the block grant to schools at which point it was outside Sir John’s purview and became part of the responsibility of the Audit Commission, as you said earlier. I remember talking to an NAO officer at the time—I think I can mention this because he is retired—I was trying to get clear answers and he was unable to give them and one of the things he said about your Department—this was several years ago, I hope it has changed—was, “The truth is they cannot give me clear answers. The truth is they are in meltdown”. What are you doing about this complexity, because essentially the problem we faced in Norfolk last summer was a direct result of the hideous complexity in these different pots of money that they have to apply for? I can tell you, Mr Bell, that two headteachers in my constituency have resigned early as a direct consequence, one of them in one of the best infant schools in the country.

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Mr Bell: One of the immediate responses to the situation a couple of years ago was the creation of the dedicated schools grant from this April, which is a sum of money that comes under my responsibility as the Accounting Officer rather than that of the ODPM, and that is to ensure that that money goes directly to schools. We have been talking to the NAO and the Audit Commission about how we properly account for that and the arrangements that we have put in place, and we will have to see how all that goes but we are confident that those will work. That is one answer. The second answer is that there has been historically a multiplicity of funding streams outside the money that goes directly to schools in relation to the grants that have been funded from the DfES. Under what has been called the new relationship with schools the idea is to simplify those grants so that you do not have schools having to bid for and account for a much smaller package of funding.³

Q86 Mr Bacon: Would you agree that the best way to improve the quality of advice that LEAs give to schools on these matters is to make the whole subject that much simpler?

Mr Bell: Yes.

Q87 Mr Bacon: Good; I am glad for that. I would like to ask about city academies. The Unity City Academy in Middlesbrough and the Bexley City Academy are both failing, are they not?

Mr Bell: The Unity City Academy, and again the Chief Inspector will confirm this, is subject to Special Measures. I understand that the Business Academy at Bexley is subject to a Notice to Improve.

Q88 Mr Bacon: How much money have they had spent on them?

Mr Bell: Those individual schools?

Q89 Mr Bacon: What I would like to know is two things: how much money, since the inception of the notion that they were going to become city academies, have they had spent on them, over the last however long it is, two or three years, and how many pupils do they have?

Mr Bell: I do not have that information at my fingertips, Mr Bacon, but I am happy to write to you about that.⁴

Mr Bacon: I would be very grateful; thanks.

The Committee suspended from 5.53 pm to 6.02 pm for a division in the House.

Q90 Mr Bacon: If you could write to the Committee about the academies and how much money was spent on them in those two cases, Mr Bell, that would be very interesting.

Mr Bell: Sure.

Q91 Mr Bacon: Sir John, there was some discussion around the time we were setting up the city academies that the NAO might not have full access rights for auditing purposes because the academies involved

high risk companies. Are you now satisfied that that has been dealt with satisfactorily and that you have all the access rights you need?

Sir John Bourn: Yes, I do have access rights.

Q92 Mr Bacon: Ms Rosen, I would like to go back to the question of pupils getting five GCSE passes because you gave what was to me a surprising answer to the question about whether we could expect all pupils to get five GCSE passes when you said it was a very difficult question to answer. Plainly, in the case of children who have some form of mental handicap, for example, it is not necessarily going to be possible. I have a school in my constituency which is a comprehensive school which is non-selective; it is just a normal comprehensive school, a very good one indeed, and they have 100%. I noticed in one of the academies that were doing much better, the Greig City Academy, it was only 25% a year ago and now it is 52%. Are you not being rather unambitious about this? Ought it not to be the norm that all the students are expected to get this benchmark of five GCSEs at pass level?

Ms Rosen: Sorry; I was referring to pupils with particular special needs. I agree that all pupils without particular needs should be able to get there and that is what we are aiming for.

Q93 Mr Bacon: And we are still a long way off that?

Ms Rosen: There is still a way to go but we have seen gradual improvement. Of course. These things do not turn round overnight.

Q94 Mr Bacon: No, of course they do not. What target do you have for when you would expect all schools to be achieving five GCSE passes?

Ms Rosen: I really could not answer that. I do not think we have got a target for that. We want to make incremental improvements and it needs steady effort.

Q95 Mr Davidson: Can I ask about inspections? As I understand it there is a rolling programme. Why not target your inspections according to risk?

Mr Smith: We do to a degree but I do not think that we do enough.

Q96 Mr Davidson: Why do you not do enough?

Mr Smith: Because in the past and up until very recently we have not had the data available to us to make those early decisions as to how much to do that.

Q97 Mr Davidson: So you do not target according to risk because you do not have the data to tell you which schools are at risk? Is that what you are saying to me?

Mr Smith: We have improving data all the time.

Q98 Mr Davidson: A yes or no would suffice.

Mr Smith: I am sorry; would you repeat that?

Q99 Mr Davidson: You are saying to me, I think, that you are not targeting schools according to risk because you do not have the data to identify which schools might be at risk. Is that correct?

³ Ev 19

⁴ Ev 19–20

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Mr Smith: We have to inspect all schools as it stands at present. That external scrutiny is demanded in statute. The weight of inspection is a matter for Ofsted. To determine that weight of inspection requires good quality data. That data is improving all the time and as it has become more improved we are better able to adjust the weight.

Q100 Mr Davidson: I do not understand that answer. Are you targeting according to risk?

Mr Smith: To a degree.

Q101 Mr Davidson: Have you always been targeting according to risk?

Mr Smith: To a lesser degree.

Q102 Mr Davidson: Are you in principle in favour of targeting according to risk?

Mr Smith: Yes.

Q103 Mr Davidson: Is it not a pretty damning indictment of the Department that you are only now moving forward on this idea of targeting according to risk?

Mr Smith: We are not only now just moving forward. As I said, it is a matter of degree.

Q104 Mr Davidson: How long has the Department been established?

Mr Smith: Since 1992.

Q105 Mr Davidson: That is a fair time ago, is it not?

Mr Smith: Yes.

Q106 Mr Davidson: It implies that you have not given it much attention; okay. Can I ask about the question of moving schools into Special Measures and whether or not there is any mechanism within that inspection procedure that identifies under-performing departments or sections of the school as distinct from the whole school? It certainly was always my experience, coming as I do from the west of Scotland, that there were some schools there that were exceedingly complacent. They were producing good results but they were not producing as good results as they ought given the nature of the pupil intake and there were some sections of the schools that were really quite shocking. Does your Reporting mechanism and the equivalent of Special Measures apply only to whole schools or does it apply to bits?

Mr Smith: It applies to whole schools and there are two categories: Special Measures, which means that the whole school is failing, and a Notice to Improve, which is a less serious category. Within both inspection judgments, but particularly within Notice to Improve, we would identify individual areas where that improvement was required, but it is a generic judgment, you are correct.

Q107 Mr Davidson: So it is entirely possible that schools with under-performing departments would not have a Notice to Improve?

Mr Smith: But they would have recommendations in their report that identified that.

Q108 Mr Davidson: So it would all be covered in that way, would it?

Mr Smith: Yes.

Q109 Mr Davidson: Thank you. I am particularly interested in paragraphs 2.52 and 2.53 which deal with improvement in primaries. What perplexed me here about the Primary Leadership Programme was this, if I can quote from the Report: "... many of the first 4,000 schools involved either did not require additional support or else were not capable of making full use of it". Why in that case did they get it?

Mr Bell: The programme in its earliest iteration was not as well targeted as it might have been and, exactly as the Report describes, it did not have the impact that it should have had.

Q110 Mr Davidson: Why was it not as well targeted as it might have been?

Mr Bell: It is partly related to the point that Mr Smith made about data at that time enabling us to target exactly those schools where most improvement was needed.

Q111 Mr Davidson: Mr Smith mentioned that the Department had been there since 1992, so presumably there was something there before that. All that time you have been in existence and you still do not have the data that would enable you to target?

Mr Bell: The reality is that if you look over the last 10 years the data has improved. When Ofsted was created in 1992, and when the Department was doing what it was doing in 1992, there was much less information available on the progress of pupils. Now we have that information. The other thing I have to say about the intensive support programme is that the way it was organised was not, I think, designed to bring about the kinds of improvements required. Now, however, we are seeing significant improvement and a lot of the schools that were originally in that programme, where the performance of the pupils was below the 65% threshold that we use, have now improved well beyond that, so I think we have got that programme better as time has gone on.

Q112 Mr Davidson: Can I ask about academies, and I am a little perplexed along the same lines as Mr Bacon about academies? What evidence is there that the academy model as such has been successful, as distinct from, has the same amount of resource and attention been given to schools that were in difficulties outwith the academy model?

Mr Bell: We know that the academies were set up and are being set up in areas where there has been a long history of under-performance, poor performance, and in many cases a variety of efforts has been made over the years to bring about those improvements and they have not happened. It is early days, but certainly in 2005 we know that of the 14 academies where the students took GCSEs, 10 saw rises on 2004 and 12 of the 14 achieved better at GCSE than the predecessor schools.

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Q113 Mr Davidson: Are there any other schools in equivalent poor circumstances which received equivalent amounts of cash and attention, and how well did they do as compared to the academies, because it is my impression from the Report that generally the giving of more money and more attention results in an improvement; you would certainly hope so?

Mr Bell: You would hope so, but, of course, as reference was made to earlier, in a couple of academies we have not seen immediately that kind of return. However, I think it is important to make the point that the academies are serving communities where—

Q114 Mr Davidson: Yes, I understand all that. We have a limited amount of time and I recognise a diversion when I see one. I am asking you whether or not any comparisons have been made between the result coming from the amount of money and attention lavished on academies and from equivalent spending and attention lavished on other schools, of which there are a large number. It is a fairly straightforward question. Can you tell me?

Mr Bell: There has not been that detailed analysis that you ask about.

Q115 Mr Davidson: So there is no proof that the academy model works in comparison to any alternative?

Mr Bell: I do not think that is the same question. We know that the academies are bringing about improvements greater than in the schools they replaced. As I suggested, in 2005—

Q116 Mr Davidson: That is an argument that says doing something is better than doing nothing, and I think we all accept that. Can I ask about paragraph 1.37 where there is something about the areas of deprivation. I am interested in where it says, “. . . the Excellence in Cities initiative found that it was making an important difference to schools in disadvantaged areas. The greatest impact has been in primary schools . . .”. Why has that not been the case in secondaries?

Mr Bell: I think there are a number of reasons. One reason I can give you right away is that by the time students get to the age of 16 they have accumulated years of under-performance.

Q117 Mr Davidson: I understand that.

Mr Bell: Secondly, our evidence would suggest that the wider social factors become more complicated and complex by the time students get to 14, 15 and 16, whereas in primary schools, for a variety of reasons, obviously, children are not necessarily quite as disaffected. It would bear out what we know, that turning round and bringing about improvements in secondary school performance does just take longer than it does usually in primary schools.

Q118 Mr Davidson: Could I follow that up by pursuing the question of social disadvantage? To what extent does the existing system recognise the difficulties that are placed on teachers and

headteachers in schools in disadvantaged areas through the salary mechanism or support or anything else? I remember that there is something in here that indicates that the financial mechanisms are opaque or are not transparent. To what extent are these issues being seriously tackled by the allocation of money?

Mr Bell: If you think of the direct schools grant that I referred to in my answer to Mr Bacon, 10% of that is allocated according to social deprivation factors, so there are substantial sums of money driven by trying to address those particular difficulties.

Q119 Mr Davidson: Only 10%?

Mr Bell: 10%, although obviously—

Q120 Mr Davidson: So 90% is not there?

Mr Bell: The majority of funding is related to pupil numbers and that is what you would expect. You would expect schools to be funded by the number of pupils on the roll.

Q121 Mr Davidson: No, I would not, actually. I would expect money to be allocated according to need, of which pupil numbers would be one factor, but background and so on and the school meals argument would be others. I am quite surprised to find that it is only 10%.

Mr Bell: But, of course, individual schools are free to allocate that funding according to the needs that they have. Those schools in those circumstances would also receive some of the additional funding support identified in the early pages of this Report, Excellence in Cities and the like, so there is a variety of means of supporting schools that will have particular social and economic problems to deal with. On your point about teachers and so on, schools do have flexibility to pay more. For example, we know that in attracting headship applicants in schools serving deprived communities that will often be used as a mechanism to try to attract the best.

Q122 Mr Davidson: Is it still the case that teacher and headteacher salary scales are tied mainly to the school numbers?

Mr Bell: Largely to school size, but they are not an absolute barrier to the school governors if they chose to pay more than that to attract someone.

Q123 Mr Davidson: Is it still the case that there tends to be a pattern of progression of headteachers and senior staff where they work for a time in small schools in areas of deprivation and they aspire to move outwards to better schools with better-off pupils in the leafy suburbs?

Mr Bell: I do not have evidence on that, Mr Davidson, so I could not comment. My sense would be, from what I know, that rather than that happening you do tend to get people who work in a smaller school and then move to a larger school. I am not sure about the patterns of travel that you have described, but certainly people travel to smaller schools and then move to bigger schools.

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Q124 Mr Williams: I will start where Mr Davidson did, back in primary schools, and table 10. We see in table 10 that 375 of them are under Special Measures, have serious weaknesses or are under-achieving, and another 349 are low attaining. You have not been able to calculate the number that are under-performing. Why not?

Mr Bell: That is also related to the issue of having the appropriate data to decide—

Q125 Mr Williams: Well, of course, it is.

Mr Bell: The focus on providing the data that will tell you whether they are under-performing has largely been secondary-related up till now and that is why we have been able to give you the data in relation to secondary schools.

Q126 Mr Williams: But why has it been primarily in secondary schools? That seems to stand commonsense on its head, does it not?

Mr Bell: I should say that we are talking there about the data. There has been a very strong focus on improvement programmes in primary schools, so we have known where there are absolute levels of under-achievement. For example, taking the benchmark that 65% of students in a primary school will achieve less than level 4, the expected level for an 11-year old, there has been a range of programmes there from the Primary National Strategy to the intervention programmes and so on. The data generally has been better in secondary schools because we have had data from the achievement of pupils at the age of 11, then they do their test at the age of 14, and then they do their GCSEs at the age of 16, so we have been able to get that data more robustly in place in secondary schools than in primary schools.

Q127 Mr Williams: I am surprised you find it so hard. I was talking to a teacher the other day in a very good comprehensive school in south London and he was saying that he does not need to look at the records to know if certain of the children come from a particular primary school because consistently, persistently, the children come there utterly unprepared for secondary education. If you have not got the primary sector right you are never going to get the secondary sector right, are you?

Mr Bell: I absolutely agree with you and I think that is why there is and continues to be such a focus on improving standards in primary schools.

Q128 Mr Williams: But how soon is it going to be before you get that gap in your information filled?

Mr Bell: In terms of the information that is now provided to schools in advance of inspection, which essentially is the data that is available, we hope to have that secured by next September so that all schools will have at their disposal the sort of data that they require. If I could just develop the point—

Q129 Mr Williams: I will not go on too long because we are time limited. I will come back to it if I need to because I want to ask Mr Smith something. When you are now assessing the secondary school, Mr Smith, do you have available to you the quality of

input that they are getting from the primary school? In other words, are the secondary schools carrying the can for inadequate primary schools?

Mr Smith: If I understand your question correctly, the data—

Q130 Mr Williams: If you get poorly prepared youngsters, which is different from youngsters who do not have the ability; if you get youngsters who have the ability coming from the same schools year in, year out who are behind those coming from other primary schools, would you take that into account in assessing the school in its early stage of performance?

Mr Smith: The answer is yes.

Q131 Mr Williams: You do?

Mr Smith: Yes.

Q132 Mr Williams: If you can identify them because you have that information, why do you not pass it on to Mr Bell and save him a lot of worry and grief?

Mr Smith: We have the same information. It is just that we cannot have it until this summer in order to analyse a primary school's performance. What we can analyse is those children at age 11 through their secondary school with something called contextually value-added data.

Q133 Mr Williams: What can you do where the problem in a school is not with the head but with bad teachers? What can you do about bad teachers?

Mr Smith: We can do a great deal. As an inspection regime we can identify them and, as in my answer to Mr Clark, leadership and management is a band of inspection judgment with a grade and so is quality of teaching. It always has been in Ofsted inspections. We can identify poor quality teaching and we either can make recommendations for that to improve or, if it is part of a wider picture of poor quality within a school, then the school will fall into one of the categories of concern we have just described. If that were the case, obviously, measures would then be put in place to improve the quality of teaching.

Q134 Mr Williams: If I can come back to you, Mr Bell, going to the comprehensive level, there is a philosophy that a good school should be allowed to expand. Do you believe there is such a thing as a managerial optimum in a school, or do you think expansion can be infinite?

Mr Bell: I think that is for schools to decide because I do not think it is for the Department to say a school has got to a particular size, and I think if you are going to give schools the opportunity to expand.⁵

Q135 Mr Williams: But it will not be for schools to decide because the parents will have the choice. The schools cannot decide at all. They have to take who decides to come to them.

Mr Bell: Schools obviously have the opportunity to expand should they wish. They are not required to expand to meet demand.

⁵ Ev 20–21

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Q136 Mr Williams: But under choice they are. Under choice it is implicit. In the discussion we had with the Prime Minister in the Liaison Committee we were made to understand this very well. It is implicit that in some magical way expansion can go on and on as long as parents want it to.

Mr Bell: Some schools have chosen to expand because they have decided that they are able to do so and they can meet parental demand and it is absolutely right that they should do so.

Q137 Mr Williams: Excuse me a second: I do not quite understand. How can the school decide to expand? Where would the local authority be in this? Who makes the decision? A school can only expand once it has reached a certain distal limit if someone makes financial decisions to cope with that, so it is not the school that decides, is it?

Mr Bell: There is capacity for schools to apply to the Department for additional funding to help to support expansion.

Q138 Mr Williams: So it is the Department that would decide whether they could expand or not?

Mr Bell: No. The decision is—

Q139 Mr Williams: So it is not you either?

Mr Bell: The decision is made locally by the schools which put forward proposals to expand their numbers, which would be determined locally, currently by the school organisation committee.

Q140 Mr Williams: So you automatically fund it?

Mr Bell: Only if that decision is made locally.

Q141 Mr Williams: There we are—only?

Mr Bell: If that decision is made locally. I think it would be quite wrong for the Department to require schools to expand if that was not their local choice, and equally it would be wrong, if schools wanted to expand to meet parental demand, not to assist them to do so. I think it is important that we keep the decision-making about school expansion where it should be and where I think it has always been: at the local level.

Q142 Mr Williams: So, despite the fact that we will soon be moving into an era of a slower rate of increase in finances, there will still be this local decision-making power on expansion?

Mr Bell: I think it is absolutely right there should be.

Q143 Mr Williams: And they will have the final word?

Mr Bell: I think those decisions have to be made locally, yes.

Q144 Mr Williams: But they cannot have the final word if you will not give them the money.

Mr Bell: A school can put forward proposals to expand. Those decisions would be made locally and then it would be for those who are charged locally to do so.

Q145 Mr Williams: And then for you to decide centrally whether the authority is going to get the money.

Mr Bell: Clearly, again, going back to an earlier question, the funding formula for schools through the direct grant is made up of a number of components, but if you are going to expand the choice of schools that parents wish to send their children to, you have to accept that some schools may wish to expand to meet that demand. It is very important, just to reiterate the point, that that is not something that will be forced on schools which choose not to do so.

Q146 Mr Williams: Turning to a completely different issue, discipline in schools, do you feel that adequate backup is given to the staff in schools when they have to deal with parents whose aggressiveness and whose aggressive children are disturbing classes and preventing the other youngsters from performing? Is adequate support given to the school and to the teachers to deal with parents like that?

Mr Bell: If you are talking about dealing with the parents rather than the children—

Q147 Mr Williams: That is right.

Mr Bell: Yes. At the most extreme end, of course, schools have the right to ban parents from the premises, although no school would want to go down that route because, obviously, you want to talk to the parents, but in the end, if a parent is going to be extremely aggressive and threatening to the staff or other parents or other students in the school, then you have to do so, but most schools would want to try to de-escalate those sorts of situations so that they could have a proper and decent conversation with the parent concerned.

Q148 Chairman: Mr Smith, what proportion of schools that interview parents is failing?

Mr Smith: I do not know the answer to your question and I can let you know in writing.⁶

Q149 Chairman: Could the answer be none?

Mr Smith: I am sure it could be.

Q150 Chairman: But you will let me know. Why are more than one in five schools without a permanent headteacher, do you think?

Mr Smith: I do not think more than one in five schools are without a permanent headteacher?

Q151 Chairman: What is the figure at the moment then?

⁶ *Note by witness:* Ofsted does not collect data on schools that interview parents as a means of selection. At present, Ofsted has no role to play on school admissions. As the Rt Hon Jacqui Smith MP recently stated (PQ 49944), “from a recent London survey we know that three schools have interviewing as part of their admission arrangements—the London Oratory school in Hammersmith and Fulham, and St. Joseph’s College and St. Coloma Convent School in Croydon. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, we will legislate to end that practice”. I can confirm that none of these schools has ever been placed in an Ofsted category of schools causing concern.

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Mr Smith: My position is that about 11% of schools per annum require a new headteacher.

Q152 Chairman: Why is that? Why are so many schools without a permanent headteacher, do you think?

Mr Smith: No, I do not think—

Mr Bell: Do you mind if I come in on this? As Mr Smith said and I mentioned earlier, there is a natural turnover of headship of around 11% just because headteachers move on, retire and the like. If you are talking about schools in any one year that are without a permanent headteacher, it is probably around 1%. Those are the schools that are acting with a temporary headteacher for an extended period of time. There is a larger percentage of schools where you have a shorter period of temporary headship and that is often those schools where you get re-adverts for headships. The other thing I would say about this—

Q153 Chairman: Can I interrupt you there because I am confused by the briefing that I had from the National Audit Office? Can I ask the National Audit Office, at the time you were briefing me, when this Report came out, you told me that more than one in five schools did not have a permanent headteacher. That seems to contradict what I have just heard. What is the truth of this?

Ms Hands: It is the ones that are advertising which are within that figure. We issued a correction slip shortly after the Report was published.

Chairman: I apologise. I misunderstood.

Q154 Mr Davidson: I wonder if I could pick up table 17 on page 26, which is about performance data available to schools and headteachers' views on its usefulness. Looking at the bottom, where the achievement and attainment tables published by the department are seen as either very useful or fairly useful by only 18% of heads, yet the contextual value-added scores are seen as very useful or fairly useful by 92%, it would be my impression—and maybe you can correct me if I have this wrong—that the vast majority of parents, when looking at schools would tend to use the achievement and attainment tables. Can I ask what you are doing to make sure that they understand the significance of the Fischer tables and that sort of material in order that they can make better-informed choices themselves and also have a better understanding of the service that is being provided by education? From this it seems to me that there is very little effort being made to educate parents.

Mr Bell: I think it is true to say that parents drop on a range of data, not just attainment data but also other information—Ofsted reports, what they see for themselves and the like, and over time further information has been given in the published tables so, as well as having the raw attainment data, if I can put it that way, that is now supplemented by value-added data so that parents do get exactly what you have described, a more rounded picture of what a school is doing. In terms of parental understanding of that, I think you will find that quite a lot of schools

will publish explanations in their own prospectus, because schools are required to publish this information by law. I think you will find if you look at a school prospectus that they will provide some of that explanation so that parents understand what the value-added data means alongside the raw data.

Q155 Mr Davidson: It strikes me from what I have seen of published materials about school results that it is always the raw data that appears in the paper, that appears to be released, but it never seems to be the contextually sorted-out data. Do you not believe that as a Department you have a responsibility to try and make sure that that other information is given not just equal prominence but, if anything, greater prominence?

Mr Bell: The first thing to say is that it is really important that we continue to give a very prominent role to the raw attainment data; that is absolutely vital information which parents need and it helps the accountability of schools. Alongside that is the information that I have suggested and, actually, the performance tables published by the department do provide a full range of information and increasingly, if you were to look at the way the newspapers report this, the newspapers now provide a wider set of information, so over time the data available to parents has improved and increased, and that is what we want. We want parents to be well informed, using a variety of data in order to come to a decision about a school for their child or how well their child's school is doing.

Q156 Greg Clark: Further to the Chairman's question about teacher vacancies, the figures may have been revised but the point of the Chairman's question remains. There is an expert, Professor John Howson, who I imagine you are familiar with, who for some time now has had a survey of senior staff appointments in schools, and he has a re-advertisement ratio of the extent to which schools are forced to re-advertise headships because they are unable to attract suitable candidates. 10 years ago that ratio for secondary headships was 15%. By last year it had doubled to 36%, and he said that the school year 2004–05 had proved to be one where re-advertisement ratios had reached record levels for almost all types of schools, so, whilst the figures may not be entirely accurate, the Chairman's point is correct, is it not?

Mr Bell: Yes, it is. I absolutely agree with that and I was not disputing the point that you see more schools re-advertising. Having said that, of course, schools that are without a permanent head for a long period of time remain a very small percentage. Although there are more re-advertisements I think schools eventually do get a permanent head to fill the vacancy.

Q157 Greg Clark: You would agree that it is worrying that that figure should be as high as it is?

Mr Bell: I think it is worrying and I think that is why the various strategies that I described earlier have to be in place. We have to make headship as attractive

 Department for Education and Skills and Ofsted

a proposition as possible because, to go back to the point about school leadership, we want the best people leading our schools.

Q158 Chairman: Do you not understand that when we go round our constituencies—and I am not an educationalist—what headteachers tell us is that the pressures are just appalling from the Department and they are fed up with it? That is why we have this problem with vacancies and with them taking early retirement and all the rest of it. You cannot just go on piling more and more pressure on headteachers from the department and not expect there to be more giving up and there to be more difficulties with getting new ones. They do not become headteachers, Mr Bell, just to be bombarded with memoranda and targets from your Department. They become headteachers because they are dedicated to education.

Mr Bell: I absolutely agree with you, Chairman, and that is why the Department has to look really carefully at the amount of information that it provides to schools. As I said, we have drawn in an expert panel of headteachers to give us a kind of reality check on the information that goes out. The data does cite, however, and this is a MORI survey of 2005, a variety of reasons for people not wanting to go for headship. The stress, or the perception of the stress of the job is a significant factor, but equally, as I said earlier, for over a third of those who were interviewed for that survey it was the prospect of less contact with pupils which put them off headship.

Q159 Chairman: But that has always been the case. By definition, if you were a headteacher, five, 10, 15, 20 years ago you had less contact with pupils.

Mr Bell: But I think if you combine that with those other factors, being a headteacher is a very accountable job these days, much more accountable than it has ever been, not least because of performance tables, the impact of inspection and so on. We have to try to prepare headteachers of the next generation properly and I think that is where the national qualification helps to prepare prospective headteachers for the challenge they will face when they take up their first appointment.

Q160 Mr Bacon: What about faith schools? When the national curriculum test results were published for 2005, out of the top 100 69 of those schools were faith schools. What do you attribute that to? It is a startling result.

Mr Bell: I think it goes back to something that was said earlier about a very strong ethos in the school, and the strong ethos contributing to high achievement on the part of pupils. Equally, as I said earlier in response to a question, there are lots of schools that have a very powerful ethos and I think it is about learning from those schools that do generate a strong and powerful ethos and being able to generate that in all schools. I am sure it is partly responsible for the academic achievement that you describe.

Q161 Mr Bacon: There was also in the headlines a Muslim girls' school in Bradford, which I am sure you are familiar with; I think it was referred to in that Radio 4 programme recently, which did exceptionally well; I think it came top in one or two categories. I cannot remember if that is state funded or private.

Mr Bell: That is a state funded secondary, I think, but I would have to confirm that, Mr Bacon.⁷

Q162 Mr Bacon: What then is your policy towards faith schools, given that they are plainly capable of producing outstanding results? Are you encouraging them? Is it the policy of the Department to encourage them?

Mr Bell: The Department, consistent with the Minister's policy, is to accept applications from those who wish to bring forward a proposal for a new faith school and to judge it on its merits, so there is encouragement of those faith groups who wish to bring forward a proposition to do so. At the moment the numbers are relatively small outside the Christian faith communities.

Chairman: Thank you very much. It has been a long hearing but a very interesting one. We are very grateful for your evidence.

⁷ *Note by witness:* The name of the Bradford school is Feversham College which is a voluntary-aided girls' school.

Supplementary memorandum submitted by the Department for Education and Skills

Question 81 (Mr Richard Bacon): The reduction of bureaucracy

Part of the National Agreement on Raising Standards and Reducing Workloads (which was an agreement reached in 2003 and agreed between DfES Ministers and a number of the professional associations; support staff unions and with employers) called for the creation of an independent body to cut red tape and reduce bureaucracy in schools. That independent body, the Implementation Review Unit (IRU) was subsequently launched in June 2003.

The IRU consists of a panel of 12 practitioners from across England—serving heads, senior teachers and a school bursar—who review existing and new policy initiatives, covering all organisations that impact on schools in England. This includes the Department for Education and Skills, national agencies such as Ofsted, the Qualifications and Curriculum Agency and the Teacher Training Agency, as well as local education authorities, Learning and Skills Councils and relevant bodies from outside education.

The work of the IRU is supported by a secretariat staffed by civil servants comprising 0.4 of a Grade 7, 0.5 of an SEO, one EO together with an SEO level secondee from a local authority. The annual salary costs are approximately £118,000.

In addition to the salary costs, the IRU incurred programme costs of £320,000 in 2005–06 which covered monthly meeting costs in London which includes room hire, overnight accommodation, travel and subsistence and reimbursement to cover salary costs for individual members of about 24 days a year.

The IRU publishes an Annual Report on progress. These reports can be viewed at www.dfes.gov.uk/iru

Question 85 (Mr Richard Bacon): Advice given to local authorities about funding

To help local authorities and Schools Forums to implement the new school funding arrangements the Department ran a series of regional conferences in autumn 2005. A wide range of information and practical guidance on the funding arrangements has also been made available on the TeacherNet website at www.teachernet.gov.uk/schoolfunding200608/.

Since then, the Department has run a series of events as part of the Supporting Schools' Financial Management (SSFM) programme for local authority finance and school improvement staff. SSFM is designed to provide a support network for authority staff to help make the best use of the new funding arrangements, particularly multi-year budgets, and encourage better management in schools. We have also provided awareness training to over 3,000 schools on the School's Financial Benchmarking website and Financial Management Standard, both of which can be found at www.teachernet.gov.uk/schoolfinance.

Question 90 (Mr Richard Bacon): The cost of Bexley and Unity City Academies since inception

The table below shows for each financial year since 2000–01 the amounts paid in respect of each academy.

“General Annual Grant” includes the school budget share and such grants (eg start-up grant and School Standards Grant) as are paid by the Department. Where grant is payable by the local authority (eg Standards Fund) the amounts paid are not known, but are the same as if the academy was a maintained school.

“Other recurrent” payments include feasibility and implementation stage costs, contributions to redundancy costs after opening and also, in the case of Unity, an additional grant to meet a deficit on running costs, and funding for an intervention package to address educational and administrative problems.

Capital costs represent amounts paid by the Department. Sponsor contributions are excluded.

The Business Academy, Bexley

| Financial Year | Number of pupils ⁽¹⁾ | General Annual Grant (GAG) (£m) | Other recurrent (£m) | Capital (£m) | Total (£m) |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|------------|
| 2000–01 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2001–02 | 0 | 0 | 0.330 | 2.169 | 2.499 |
| 2002–03 | 711 | 2.713 | 0.680 | 16.690 | 20.083 |
| 2003–04 | 836 | 4.182 | 0.385 | 11.035 | 15.602 |
| 2004–05 | 1,379 | 6.297 | 0.487 | 6.208 | 12.992 |
| 2005–06 ⁽²⁾ | 1,391 | 7.066 | 0 | 0.004 | 7.070 |
| Total | | 20.258 | 1.882 | 36.105 | 58.246 |

Unity City Academy, Middlesbrough

| <i>Financial Year</i> | <i>Number of pupils⁽¹⁾</i> | <i>General Annual Grant (GAG) (£m)</i> | <i>Other recurrent (£m)</i> | <i>Capital (£m)</i> | <i>Total (£m)</i> |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 2000–01 | 0 | 0 | 0.093 | 0 | 0.093 |
| 2001–02 | 0 | 0 | 0.508 | 0 | 0.508 |
| 2002–03 | 1,160 | 3.581 | 0.798 | 1.877 | 6.256 |
| 2003–04 | 1,126 | 5.502 | 0.023 | 10.801 | 16.326 |
| 2004–05 | 1,123 | 5.712 | 0.485 | 5.764 | 11.961 |
| 2005–06 ⁽²⁾ | 1,178 | 5.597 | 2.352 | 0.518 | 8.467 |
| Total | | 20.392 | 4.259 | 18.960 | 43.611 |

Notes:

⁽¹⁾ Number of pupils is taken from Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) for 2000–01 to 2004–05 and the September Pupil Count (SPC) for 2005–06. PLASC Data for 2005–06 is not yet available.

⁽²⁾ 2005–06 Data comprises actual expenditure up to end February and expected March 2006 payments of:

Bexley—£0.536 million (GAG),

Unity City—£0.471 million (GAG), £0.112 million (Capital).

Question 134 (Mr Alan Williams): Funding of successful and popular schools

I thought it might be helpful to provide a note to explain the current arrangements in more detail.

Where a maintained school wishes to expand either by adding a further 27 or more pupils to its intake, or by increasing its physical capacity by 25%, the governing body must publish statutory proposals. This involves four stages:

- consultation (with all interested parties),
- publication (in a local newspaper and at the entrance to the school and another public place),
- representation (enabling people to comment or object), and
- decision. The decision will be taken by local School Organisation Committee (SOC) or, if the SOC cannot agree a unanimous decision, by the schools adjudicator.

Both the SOC and adjudicator must be satisfied that funding is in place before they approve any statutory proposals. In August 2003, as part of the Government's commitment to enable popular schools to expand, we announced new additional incentive funding for secondary schools that wished to publish proposals to expand. Under this scheme secondary schools can apply for £400,000 (or £500,000 if they have a sixth form) to assist with the capital cost of expansion. The balance of any funding required would have to be met by the local authority or, in the case of voluntary aided (VA) schools, from the VA capital grant allocation to the authority.

Where a local authority refuses to provide the balance, we may provide 100% of the funding needed, subject to a value for money scrutiny, but we reserve the right to recover the balance (ie above the £400,000–500,000 amount) from the authority's future years' capital allocations. This funding was designed to ensure that SOCs and adjudicators were not prevented from approving secondary school expansion schemes by lack of capital. It is ministers' intentions to expand this funding programme to include primary schools.

We are currently considering options but it is anticipated that the arrangements for primary schools will operate on the same or similar lines to that for secondary schools.

On the question of who had the final word in such cases, it is for schools themselves to decide whether they wish to expand—there is no compulsion to do so. Secondary schools requiring capital funding can apply to the Department. We will normally approve such funding but stipulate that this is subject to the SOC or adjudicator approving the statutory proposals.

In all cases however it would be for the school to publish proposals and the final decision will be made by the local SOC or schools adjudicator. The statutory guidance to Decision Makers (ie SOCs and adjudicators) includes a presumption to approve proposals for the expansion of popular and successful schools (excluding grammar schools). It is for the SOC/adjudicator to decide whether the school is successful and popular and therefore whether the presumption applies. The guidance also requires the Decision Maker to confirm that the school's admission arrangements fully meet the Admissions Code of Practice before approving any expansion proposals.

Turning to recurrent funding, the School Financing Regulations make provision to recognise that rapidly expanding schools will need funding to meet any immediate costs pressures that they face.

In the case of schools who are known to be gaining a new class or year group part way through a financial year the regulations require local authorities to ensure funding is provided in the initial budget share of a school to reflect the fact that they will need to fund (for instance) at least 7/12ths of costs of a new class or classes that would otherwise not be recognised under the single pupil count arrangements.

There may also be circumstances where a school receives an influx of pupils mid-year that was neither planned for or known about at the start of a financial year. Where, as a result of this, a school faces immediate and significant cost pressures, local authorities are able to use their school specific contingency funding from their central expenditure to make an allocation to cover the cost pressures for the period until the additional pupils are incorporated in to the subsequent year's budget share. It will be for each local authority to consider, in consultation with their schools forum, the appropriate criteria for distribution and the amount of funding they need to retain against such circumstances.

Supplementary memorandum submitted by the National Audit Office

1. At the deliberative session held on 14 June on the Chairman's draft Report *Improving poorly performing schools in England*, the Committee raised some queries about the performance of faith schools. I agreed to provide further analysis, which is provided by this memorandum and covers:

- pupil attainment;
- pupil attendance;
- Ofsted inspection results;
- applications for places;
- admissions arrangements; and
- the Department for Education and Skills' position on faith schools.

A. PUPIL ATTAINMENT

i) *Absolute attainment*

2. Perhaps the most important measure of school performance comes from the levels of attainment of its pupils. The Department publishes attainment data, and the simplest datasets are for the absolute attainment of pupils: the National Curriculum test results (for primary school pupils at the end of Key Stage 2) and GCSEs.

3. We examined the religious character of the highest performing schools, in absolute terms, in 2005. Figure 1 shows that faith-based primary schools accounted for two-thirds of the top 229 schools, although faith schools represent only around 36% of all primary schools. Faith-based secondary schools accounted for nearly half of the top 100 schools, which is again much higher than the 18% of all secondary schools that are faith-based.

Figure 1

HIGHEST PERFORMING SCHOOLS (ABSOLUTE TERMS), 2005

| | <i>Faith schools</i> | <i>Non faith schools</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Highest performing primary schools | 66% | 34% | 100% |
| <i>All primary schools</i> | 36% | 64% | 100% |
| Highest performing secondary schools | 45% | 55% | 100% |
| <i>All secondary schools</i> | 18% | 82% | 100% |

Source: NAO analysis of DfES data

Notes:

1. The highest performing primary schools are the 229 schools that had the maximum possible score of 300 in the National Curriculum tests.

2. The highest performing secondary schools excludes selective schools, and are the 100 schools with the highest percentages of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grade GCSEs or equivalent.

ii) *Value added performance*

4. We next examined performance in terms of the value that schools added to the attainment of pupils on average in 2005—ie pupils' attainment as they leave the school compared with their attainment four years (primary schools) or five years (secondary schools) earlier. The value added measure is generally considered to be a more robust measure of a school's performance than absolute attainment, because it measures the progress made by pupils.

5. Figure 2 shows that faith-based primary schools accounted for nearly half of the top 100 schools, which is higher than the 36% of all primary schools that are faith schools. Faith-based secondary schools accounted for around one-third of the top 100 schools, which is much higher than the 18% of all schools that are faith schools. As with absolute attainment, faith schools are more likely to be among the top schools. However, the value added performance of faith schools is not as strong as for absolute attainment.

Figure 2

HIGHEST PERFORMING SCHOOLS (VALUE ADDED), 2005

| | <i>Faith schools</i> | <i>Non faith schools</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Highest performing primary schools | 45% | 55% | 100% |
| <i>All primary schools</i> | 36% | 64% | 100% |
| Highest performing secondary schools | 34% | 66% | 100% |
| <i>All secondary schools</i> | 18% | 82% | 100% |

Source: NAO analysis of DfES data

Notes:

1. The highest performing primary schools are the 100 schools with the highest “value added” measures, comparing the performance of Year 6 pupils in the National Curriculum tests with the middle performance of other pupils nationally who had similar attainment four years earlier.

2. The highest performing secondary schools are the 100 (non-selective) schools with the highest “value added” measures, comparing the performance of Year 11 pupils in GCSEs and equivalents with the middle performance of other pupils nationally who had similar attainment five years earlier.

iii) *Value added performance, adjusted for external factors*

6. The NAO's 2003 report *Making a difference: Performance of maintained secondary schools in England* included an analysis of school performance at Key Stage 3 (for 13-year olds) and GCSE, adjusted for pupils' prior attainment and external factors such as the percentage of pupils on free school meals.¹ This is a more sophisticated analysis of school performance, which the Department will be rolling out across all schools in 2006. Our analysis² showed that:

- at Key Stage 3, faith schools are associated with very slightly higher results than non faith schools; and
- at GCSE, there is no statistically significant difference between faith schools and non faith schools after taking account of prior attainment and external factors that influence attainment.

7. The NAO report commented that other research suggested that many faith schools, and the communities from which they draw their pupils, have a clear ethos and values that might lead to better than average performance overall.³ Research also suggests that many high performing schools have developed their own distinct identity. They have a positive, definable and recognisable ethos that permeates the entire school, and is evident in good pupil-teacher relations, shared vision, cooperative working and common goals.⁴

B. PUPIL ATTENDANCE

8. The NAO has reported on attendance in schools (*Improving school attendance in England*, (HC 212, Session 2004–05). The report included a statistical analysis of the variations in absence rates between different types of schools, after adjusting for all other measurable factors that were associated with absence (such as the incidence of free school meals).

¹ The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is an indicator of socio-economic deprivation.

² C&AG's Report, *Making a difference: Performance of maintained secondary schools in England* (HC 1332, Session 2002–03), Figure 9, p 20.

³ *The impact of specialist and faith schools*, National Foundation for Educational Research, 2002.

⁴ *High performing specialist schools: What makes the difference*, National Foundation for Educational Research, 2002.

9. Given that the great majority of voluntary aided and voluntary controlled primary schools are also faith schools, the analysis showed that faith-based primary schools are associated with slightly lower levels of total absence compared with other schools. Regarding secondary schools, the great majority of voluntary aided and the majority of voluntary controlled schools are faith schools. Faith-based secondary schools that are voluntary aided are associated with lower absence (nearly 1.5 days per pupil on average), but there is no relationship for voluntary controlled schools. The detailed statistics are shown in Annex 1.

10. In response to a request from Richard Bacon MP, we prepared a supplementary memorandum that compared faith schools' total absence rates with those of other schools, without adjustment for any other factors that are known to affect absence rates. The memorandum was published with the Committee's 18th Report of 2005–06. The comparison showed that, for secondary schools, a much higher proportion of faith schools than non faith schools performed better than average (Figure 3). The results of this analysis are broadly consistent with the more sophisticated analysis explained above (paragraphs 8 and 9).

Figure 3

PUPIL ATTENDANCE ANALYSIS (SECONDARY SCHOOLS), 2002–03

| <i>Attendance level</i> | <i>Faith schools</i> | <i>Non faith schools</i> |
|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Better than average | 63% | 39% |
| Average | 16% | 20% |
| Worse than average | 21% | 41% |
| Total | 100% | 100% |

Source: NAO; data unadjusted for factors known to affect absence rates.

11. In conclusion, faith schools tend to have better pupil attendance, particularly at secondary level. Their performance is likely to be related to ethos, parental support for the school and to the types of children who are pupils, although a number of other contextual factors are likely to be at play.

C. OFSTED INSPECTION RESULTS

12. The NAO's 2006 report (*Improving poorly performing schools in England*, HC 679, Session 2005–06) included a statistical analysis of the relationship between 8 key factors and whether a school was in an Ofsted category (Special Measures or Serious Weaknesses). We found that there was no statistically significant relationship between whether a school was a faith school and whether it was in a category.

13. We have now carried out an additional analysis of whether a relationship existed in London schools only between the religious character of a school and whether it was in an Ofsted category in July 2005. Again, we found that there was no statistically significant relationship. Although 3.3% of faith schools compared with 2.6% of non faith schools were in a category, this difference is not statistically significant.

14. Our survey of schools that had recovered from being in an Ofsted category found that of the 36 faith schools that responded, 21 (58%) considered that they were helped to improve by the guidance or support provided by a church or faith organisation.

15. We have carried out some additional research on primary and secondary schools that were assessed by Ofsted in the 2004–05 school year as “outstanding” overall. Our analysis shows that the proportion of outstanding primary schools that are faith-based is similar to the proportion of faith-based primary schools across all primary schools (Figure 4). Of the outstanding secondary schools, a higher than average percentage are faith-based.

Figure 4

OUTSTANDING SCHOOLS, 2005

| | <i>Faith schools</i> | <i>Non faith schools</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Outstanding primary schools | 37% | 63% | 100% |
| <i>All primary schools</i> | 36% | 64% | 100% |
| Outstanding secondary schools | 25% | 75% | 100% |
| <i>All secondary schools</i> | 18% | 82% | 100% |

Source: NAO analysis of list of 348 outstanding schools published by Ofsted, 2005.

16. In conclusion, there is no clear evidence that being a faith-school makes it easier to avoid poor performance. However, Ofsted inspection results indicate that faith-based secondary schools are more likely than non faith schools to be very effective overall.

D. APPLICATIONS FOR PLACES

17. Public awareness of the performance of schools, through published materials and word of mouth, is likely to result in schools perceived to be good schools being more popular among parents applying for places for their children and thus over-subscribed. Other factors exist that can cause a school to be over-subscribed: in particular where there are insufficient school places in the area, where a school markets itself well, and where other local schools are known to be in difficulty.

18. The Department does not collect national data on applications for individual schools. However, we expect that most, if not all, local authorities hold such data. Some of them publish it. We have analysed the published data for a sample of seven local authorities, covering 423 schools (Figure 5). Our sample indicates that faith-based primary schools are no more likely to be over-subscribed than non faith schools, while faith-based secondary schools are more likely to be over-subscribed than non faith schools.

Figure 5

OVER-SUBSCRIPTION OF SCHOOLS, 2005

| | <i>Faith schools over-subscribed</i> | | <i>Non faith schools over-subscribed</i> | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage of total faith schools</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage of total non faith schools</i> |
| Primary | 46 | 36% | 65 | 39% |
| Secondary | 21 | 62% | 46 | 49% |

Source: NAO analysis of applications data for 423 schools in seven local authorities, 2005.

19. In conclusion, at secondary level faith schools are more likely to be very popular than non faith schools, and there is little difference at primary level. This provides an indication that more parents prefer that their secondary school aged children be educated at a faith school. However, this is based on a small number of authorities and caution should be exercised because they may not be representative and other factors could be at play, such as there being fewer places at faith-based secondary schools than faith-based primary schools in England. It would require more time and work to prepare a robust analysis across the country.

E. ADMISSIONS

20. Some commentators of faith schools consider that they are able to improve their performance through exercising a degree of selection over the pupils that they take in. Where a school is voluntary aided (or foundation, academy or city technology college), the school's governing body acts as its admissions authority.⁵ Where a school is voluntary controlled or community, the local authority acts as the admissions authority. The commentators claim that some schools that are their own admissions authorities select pupils who are likely to be more able or to receive more parental support. Although some non faith schools control their own admissions, much higher proportions of faith schools are able to do so. Figure 6 gives our estimates of the percentages of schools that control their own admissions. It shows that most faith schools control their admissions, particularly in the secondary sector.

Figure 6

SCHOOLS THAT ARE ADMISSIONS AUTHORITIES

| | <i>Percentage of schools that are admissions authorities</i> | |
|-----------|--|--------------------------|
| | <i>Faith schools</i> | <i>Non faith schools</i> |
| Primary | 60% | 3% |
| Secondary | 88% | 19% |

Source: NAO analysis of DfES data, 2003.

21. We examined how many of the top secondary schools are admissions authorities, compared with the 88% of faith-based secondary schools overall:

- of the 45 faith schools in the top 100 schools for absolute GCSE performance, 44 (98%) controlled their own admissions;

⁵ Admissions authorities have responsibility for deciding arrangements for admitting pupils. All admissions authorities must have regard to the statutory guidance within the School Admissions Code of Practice and the School Admission Appeals Code of Practice. The admissions code of practice provides guidance on acceptable oversubscription criteria.

- of the 34 faith schools in the top 100 schools for value added, 32 (94%) controlled their own admissions; and
- of the 18 faith-based secondary schools assessed as outstanding by Ofsted in 2004–05, all 18 (100%) controlled their own admissions.

22. Therefore, top performing faith schools are more likely to be their own admissions authority than other faith schools. Although the numbers of schools included in these analyses are not high, the analysis indicates that being an admissions authority could contribute to the good academic performance of faith schools.

23. The Sutton Trust⁶ found that faith schools accounted for 42% of the top 200 comprehensives on the basis of the percentage of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at A*–C grade (a similar percentage to our analysis of the top 100). The Sutton Trust examined whether the pupil intake of the top secondary schools, faith and non faith, reflected the characteristics of their local neighbourhood (Figure 7). It found that, on average, the faith schools were located in more deprived neighbourhoods (based on the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals) than non faith schools. However, on average, the pupils at the faith schools and non faith schools came from similar backgrounds, because the faith-based secondary schools were less reflective of their neighbourhoods than non faith schools.

Figure 7

TOP SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND THEIR NEIGHBOURHOODS

| <i>Religious character of school</i> | <i>Average percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals</i> | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|------------------|---|
| | <i>In their neighbourhood</i> | <i>In school</i> | <i>Gap between school and neighbourhood</i> |
| Faith | 15.2% | 5.9% | 9.3% |
| Non faith | 8.6% | 5.3% | 3.3% |

Notes:

1. The Sutton Trust defined a school’s “neighbourhood” as the postcode sector in which the school is situated. It is not necessarily the same as the school’s catchment area, which may be larger, and a school may not be situated in the middle of its postcode sector.

2. The average percentage eligibility for free school meals at secondary schools is 17.9%.

24. In conclusion, many faith schools have scope to exercise a degree of selection of their pupils. We do not know the extent to which this occurs in practice.

F. THE DEPARTMENT’S POSITION ON FAITH SCHOOLS

25. The Committee’s 19th Report of 2003–04 concluded that the Department should identify and promote the strengths of faith schools across the school sector. (The conclusion and an extract of the response is at Annex 2). The Treasury Minute responded that the Government supported more faith schools as part of its policy to increase diversity and raise standards. It stated that the case of faith schools did not rest on superior performance, although many faith schools did perform well which may reflect the following factors:

- strong values and unique ethos;
- they draw from communities that value education; and
- parents that seek out faith schools may provide their children with more support.

26. The 2005 Schools White Paper reiterated the need for a diversity of providers, including faith-based groups.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

27. Faith schools are a very important part of the maintained schools sector in England, particularly well regarded for having strong ethos and values. High proportions of faith schools are among the best performing schools in the country according to measures of pupil attainment and Ofsted’s assessments. Faith-based secondary schools in particular are impressive performers, and they are often over-subscribed. At the other end of the scale, faith-based schools are just as likely non faith schools to get into difficulty.

⁶ The Sutton Trust is a charity, established in 1997 with the aim of challenging educational inequality. The evidence used in this memorandum comes from *The social composition of top comprehensive schools*, 2006.

28. There are indications that some faith-based secondary schools may owe their good performance at least in part to their intake. The top schools do not fully reflect their neighbourhoods, indicating that their ability to control their admissions could be a factor in their good performance. The Department will be publishing “contextually value added” performance information for all schools on the 2006 exam and test results. Analysis of this information would further inform the debate about whether faith schools owe their good performance to factors other than the overall effectiveness of the school.

Annex 1

EFFECT OF SCHOOL TYPE ON ABSENCE IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

| School type | <i>Effect on absence (days per pupil per year)</i> | | | |
|----------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | <i>Primary schools</i> | | <i>Secondary schools</i> | |
| | <i>Total absence</i> | <i>Unauthorised absence</i> | <i>Total absence</i> | <i>Unauthorised absence</i> |
| Foundation | -0.30 | | -0.65 | -0.40 |
| Voluntary aided | | -0.35 | -1.41 | -0.77 |
| Voluntary controlled | -0.15 | +0.10 | | |
| Faith (Christian) | | -0.16 | | |

Notes:

1. Figures are shown in comparison to all other schools.
2. No entry in this table means that the factor has no statistically significant relationship with absence.

Source: *Improving school attendance in England*, C&AG’s Report (HC 212, Session 2004–05), paras 2.20–2.21 and Appendix 2 (Figure 11).

3. Where faith (Christian) schools are voluntary aided, voluntary controlled or foundation, the two effects should be added.

Annex 2

EXTRACT FROM THE TREASURY MINUTE ON THE 19TH REPORT FROM THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS, SESSION 2003–04

PAC conclusion (vi): Adjusted performance measures also show that specialist schools, faith schools, beacon schools and single sex schools do better than average. The strengths of these schools, such as a strong set of values and ethos, should be identified by the Department and promoted across the school sector.

21. The Department accepts this recommendation...

25. ...The Government supports more faith schools in the maintained sector as part of its policy on increasing diversity and raising standards. While the case for faith schools has never rested on superior performance, many faith schools do perform well and the Department has identified some of the factors that may be relevant in explaining why this is so:

- they tend to have strong values and a unique ethos;
- many draw from communities that particularly value education—Jewish, Muslim and Sikh schools for example; and
- parents who seek out faith schools may provide their children with a high level of support.

26. Social background may also be a consideration. On average faith schools have fewer pupils with free school meals than other schools.

27. The Department is actively encouraging faith schools to work in partnership with others in the local family of schools and to share values, ethos and best practice. It is also planning to introduce parental involvement networks to promote and change the culture around parental involvement in their children’s education...

29. ...The Department has introduced new “competition” arrangements for providing additional secondary schools in order to encourage a range of school providers, including faith groups, to put forward proposals and increase the diversity of provision. The Secretary of State will decide such proposals and contribution to raising standards will be key consideration.