

Drivers and barriers to raising achievement

A focus on school and classroom level influences

Research paper for Ofsted's 'Access and achievement in education 2013 review'

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Introduction

This research summary is offered to support the OFSTED review panel in their deliberations on *Access and Achievement in Urban Education – 20 Years On*. This marks the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the report, *Access and Achievement in Urban Education* (1993). OFSTED is concerned to review and learn from action taken to narrow the gap in educational achievement between disadvantaged pupils and others. The aims include the opportunity to better understand the reasons behind the gap in educational achievement in areas of deprivation; to learn the lessons from recent national projects and other initiatives, national and international and to inform a range of possible further actions to support sustained improvement in the areas of poorest performance.

This review of research is focused on the particular dimension of school and classroom level efforts to support disadvantaged children and young people in schools and colleges. The summary is presented in a style accessible to an audience of practising professional educators who will form the core of the OFSTED review panel, *Access and Achievement in Urban Education – 20 Years On*.

This review of research explores studies and projects of a significant kind, published in book or peer-reviewed journals form in the past ten years; studies and projects carried out in England and, where relevant, other countries in the OECD group; and presents conclusions about impact on the attainment of socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people.

Key questions for the research summary are:

- What key drivers, influences and practices are making a difference to raising attainment amongst disadvantaged children and young people?
- What are the key recommendations for practice, school leaders, policy makers and influencers?

These key questions will be addressed in the conclusion and recommendation section of the report. In order to inform these two questions, the review is divided

into the following relevant key themes that continue to form a central part of the narrative of achievement and attainment:

- In school variation
- Leading learning
- Developing learner outcomes across the curriculum
- Learner engagement - orientation and aspirations
- Closing the gap

The review draws on a range of sources to gain a comprehensive view of both the scale of persistent differences as well as an overview of the nature and nuance of projects, interventions and ameliorative strategies. Key sources include:

- Meta-analyses
- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Books
- Policy statements
- Government funded research (Ofsted, DfE, National College for School Leadership (NCSL))
- Quantitative outcomes data
- International comparative evidence (PISA, TIMMS)

For clarity, this review is organised into key sections of, In-school variation; Leading learning; Developing learner outcomes across the curriculum; Learner engagement - orientation and aspirations, and Closing the gap. These major themes are necessarily over-lapping and inter-related concerns. The final section of the review consists of a recommendation and conclusions section that draws together key strands, implications for improvement and recommendations for heightening access and achievement in urban education.

School Variation

Variation in outcomes for children and young people in the UK is particularly high; it is especially marked along lines of socio-economic status (OECD, 2009). Young people living in high poverty neighbourhoods and in our cities are also the least likely to gain education success (Sutton Trust, 2012; OECD, 2009).

Variation is particularly stark not merely between schools, but also within schools (OECD, 2006 and 2009; Creemers, 1994; Fitzgibbon, 1996; Reynolds, 2005). As much as 80 per cent of variation in achievement among UK pupils is present *within* schools; this is up to four times more than that which occurs *between* different schools (OECD, 2006). This level of variation suggests that were schools to achieve a greater level of internal consistency, great strides would be made in terms of national outcomes overall:

National and international evidence shows that if in each school in England, the least effective teachers and departments were as effective as the best in that school, not even the best in the area, region or nation, just the best in that school, then outcomes for students overall would be transformed.

Mongon and Chapman, 2011

Exploration of within school variation in the UK and elsewhere, suggests that the most significant determinant of variation is wrought by differences between teachers. This largest single variable (30 per cent) is focused on teaching strategies, teacher quality and the learning climate that teachers foster within classrooms (Hay/McBer, 2000). This includes factors such as behaviour management and pupil engagement in learning (OECD, 2006; Tarleton and Reynolds, 2005).

Within school variation also appears to increase as children and young people move through their school careers. For example, in-school variation is estimated to be up to five times greater than between-school variation at key stage two. However, by the time pupils reach key stage four, this gap extends further, and within school variation is estimated at up to fourteen times greater than between school differences (Hopkins et al, 2005).

In order to tackle variation in the UK, a number of local level as well as national level strategies and interventions have arisen. Given the role of teacher influence on variation, many of these strategies have focused on teacher effectiveness and classroom level practice (TDA in-school variation project, within school variation

innovations by the National College, DfES national strategies). Ostensibly, these interventions have aimed to standardize teaching practice in efforts to offer a more consistent teaching quality and improve learner outcomes for all (Hopkins and Reynolds, 2001).

Leading Learning

Given the great differences within schools, several recent studies have sought to refine what we know about teacher effects on learning as well as how leadership effects student learning. Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) argue there is a 'critical connection' between the headteacher and other formal leaders, radiating outwards across the organisation to classroom teachers – who have the most direct form of instructional (*focus on teaching and learning*) leadership in their immediate contact with pupil learners. This connection between leadership and pupil outcomes is thus, they argue, not direct. It is mediated by both home, school and classroom influences. It includes creating the conditions for learning and supporting instructional practices that effect pupil outcomes. This confirms a range of other studies that find a strong but indirect effect of school leadership on pupil outcomes (Day et al, 2010; Creemers and Reetzig, 1996; Marzano, Waters and McNulty, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008; Robinson and Hattie, 2011).

Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012, p.3) summarise the consistency of these findings in arguing that:

To date, we have not found a single documented case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership.

Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012)

Day et al (2010) reconfirm Leithwood et al (2007) finding that effective school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as a school influence on pupil learning. The headteacher's leadership, in particular, can directly create and influence improvement in the school's organisation and in the teaching and learning environment, which in turn improves pupil outcomes.

Improvement strategies include encouraging the use of data and research, designing teaching policies and practices, improving assessment procedures, strategically allocating resources and promoting professional development. Leaders also share a common set of values (e.g. a commitment to equal opportunities), characteristics (e.g. resilience, optimism) and approaches (transformational and instructional leadership). However, reiterating Earley et al, (2002) there was no single best fit approach: effective headteachers were found to be sensitive and responsive to the school's development phase, the confidence of staff, the behaviour and attainment of students and wider contextual constraints.

A consistent message emerges in terms of the leadership premium in moving towards effective outcomes for children and young people. Firstly, leadership is an intermediate variable; its impact on teaching is less direct than instructional practice, however, effective leadership aids in laying the foundations and ethos of a high quality teaching and learning environment, thus providing a positive though indirect effect on learning outcomes. Instructional leadership/classroom leadership is of the most direct and influential form of leadership in relation to learning. However, effective leaders that foster the conditions for developing teacher quality and learning have a powerful influence on learning outcomes across even the most challenging of contexts. No single form of leadership style or approach emerges as applicable; the importance of contextual sensitivity and flexibility, is however given a high premium (Harris, 2009; Hopkins, 2007; Levin, 2009). The role of external challenge and support through critical friendship for schools in challenging circumstances also emerges as an especially powerful form of support and an especially effective route to capacity building; this is also proven to be impactful on attainment outcomes (Hill and Matthews, 2008 and 2010). A critical factor in the partnership is the deliberate focus on teaching and learning (National Audit Office, 2009). Where high performing partner schools are engaged in such activity, there is no proven deleterious effect on their outcomes (Hill and Matthews, 2008 and 2010; Levin, 2007). For schools in urban and other challenging circumstances, contextual intelligence is also considered vital in terms of addressing barriers to learning appropriately and engaging with wider constituencies beyond the school to

address deep levels of learner needs (Mongon and Leadbetter, 2012; Mongon and Chapman, 2012; Slavin, 2007; Levin, 2009 and C4EO, 2011).

Developing Learner Outcomes Across the Curriculum

The importance of teaching and learning emerges as fundamental to improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people (Creemers, 1994; FitzGibbon, 1996; Mortimer, 1998; Schereens and Bosker, 1997; Sammons, 1999). Levin for example, in his focus on raising attainment in 5,000 schools, refers to the relentless focus required on attainment in order to raise outcomes for all children and in particular, raising attainment amongst disadvantaged children and young people (Levin, 2009). The need to recognize barriers to learning and appropriate welfare responses is not underestimated. However, a deliberative and highly focused approach is widely accepted as essential to effective teaching and learning and efforts to raise attainment (Chapman, 2012; Hattie, 2007; Hopkins, 2007; Harris, 2011; Thoonen et al, 2011).

In the UK, the large-scale national strategies attempted to systematically raise standards with a deliberative and focused approach to the organization and practice of instructional actions.

Prior to 1998, there was no systematic attempt at a national level to drive improvements in standards through a focused programme of managing changes in the way that core subjects are taught in classrooms. The first attempts to do that were the National Literacy Strategy followed by the National Numeracy Strategy. Then came the Key Stage 3 Strategy (for 11 to 14 year olds) and the Early Years Foundation Stage. These developments culminated in the remit of the National Strategies extending to all core subjects, to Key Stage 4 as well as Key Stage 3, and to Early Years, Behaviour and Attendance, the School Improvement Partner programme and Special Educational Needs.

The National Strategies were delivered by a national team of experts and a regional field force that worked with and supported local authorities in providing training and support to

schools and settings. Local authorities (LAs) in turn were funded to employ some 2000 consultants to help to deliver the National Strategies' training locally.

(DfE, 2011)

This large-scale undertaking yielded early successes in areas of numeracy and literacy. However, it also became evident from early evaluation that the effects of the strategies began to plateau from 2002. The necessity for an ongoing dynamic in both teaching and learning instructional practices, as well as recognizing how to move pupils on from their learning were identified by the evaluation team (Earl et al, 2003). Further research exploring the impact of large-scale reform also confirmed the need for understandings of pedagogy that extended beyond a prescriptive or nationalised core; this would enable practitioners to respond and develop contextualised teaching and learning approaches to meet the needs of local children and young people, and therefore support sustained change (Joliffe, 2006).

In the most recent overview of the full breadth of the national strategies, key improvements are identified across all dimensions of the strategies and at all phases. For example, at the early years phase, the national strategies was important in bringing consistency across the system, with developments such as an integrated early years framework. This replaced multiple, localised frameworks with a more standardised attainment framework and curriculum offer. Additionally, early years consultants were also deployed at a strategic level across all local authorities to gain an overview of needs for early years professionals to further develop quality at the early years level. Following these developments in the early years foundation stage, outcomes improved on an annual basis from inception in 2007 to 2010. At other levels, the national strategies yielded an increase in young people achieving grade A*-C in English, Maths and Science every year from 2007 to 2010 (DfE, 2011). The strategies have also sought to respond to differential attainment outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people through approaches such as the National Challenge that set a challenge for all secondary schools in England to achieve at least five GCSEs at grade A*-C (including Maths and English) within a period of three years. National Challenge began in 2008 and initially, 638 schools were identified as not meeting floor targets. All of these schools became part of the

National Challenge (NC) strategy. This involved assignment of a National Challenge Adviser who replaced the School Improvement Partner and worked alongside the school, local authority and national government to tailor a package of support. Central to this package of support was partnership with another school that had a history of meeting the floor targets, with a view to sharing their strengths in teaching and senior leadership. Most, but not all, of the NC schools were located in high deprivation areas and involved pupils who transferred to secondary school with low prior attainment. Attention and resource was given to ameliorating barriers to learning and progression for these pupils, with focus on issues such as raising aspirations, improving parental engagement where there was a history of lower parental qualifications, engaging extended services across the local authority and providing young people with opportunities to broaden their exposure to wider cultural experiences (National College, 2008). In '2006 there were over 900 schools below the 30% 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics floor target [...] The number of schools below the 30% 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics floor target dropped to 82 in 2010 from 631 in 2007' (DfE, 2011; p22). Similar to earlier reviews of the strategies, the conclusion of the DfE's (2011) comprehensive report on the strategies highlighted that the core aims of the national strategies, to develop teacher confidence and efficacy on a national scale, have largely been met. There is a strong case towards the notion that large-scale system reform has had success and this would best be extended and sustained through professional ownership and local direction in teaching, learning and attainment strategies (DfE, 2011; McCormick and Burn, 2011).

Classroom instruction

Sammons (2007) and Sammons et al (2005) provide a comprehensive overview of school effectiveness in the UK, focused on equity and differential outcomes. In relation to teaching and learning, Sammons summarises a range of factors especially important in raising attainment for students from low-income environments including,

clear expectations and supportive structures and services.

There is a need for schools to tackle areas over which they have most control (culture, leadership & classroom practices).

The importance of the role and person of the principal is greater in schools with low-income environments. The schools focus on three defining elements of climate: security, examinations and personal relationships.

In their general approach to teaching and learning these schools appear to be fairly traditional, they do not have radically innovative approaches to teaching or the curriculum."

(Sammons, 2007; p32-33)

The Sutton Trust provide a further reminder of the significance of teaching, particularly for disadvantaged children and young people as they journey through the school system:

The effects of high-quality teaching are especially significant for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds: over a school year, these pupils gain 1.5 years' worth of learning with very effective teachers, compared with 0.5 years with poorly performing teachers. In other words, for poor pupils the difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher is a whole year's learning.

Sutton Trust (2011)

Hattie's meta-analysis of effective teaching and learning provides a landmark synthesis that draws together international evidence of effective teaching and learning. At the heart of this extensive collection is a focus on classroom level factors that support learning. Hattie's meta-analysis essentially supports a notion of *visible* teaching and *visible* learning, with very deliberate acts within teaching to engage and enliven whilst encouraging and supporting creative and open learning; Hattie is committed to a notion of teaching that is attuned to learning needs of the students in the classroom with teachers 'seeing' learning through the eyes of the learner. He makes further reference to the role of students as engaged learners who interact and shape the learning environment, establish a very active role in the learning dialogue and also regard themselves as their own teachers. Key to Hattie's thesis is a commitment to ambitious and challenging learning activity to both

motivate and extend what pupils already know towards learning increasingly higher order conceptualizations and abstractions. Hattie also identified the home as also key to supporting and sustaining learning for children and young people, and as a form of naturalizing and extending learning journeys between home and school contexts (Hattie, 2009).

The role of teacher effectiveness is also underscored by the influential Hay/McBer report (2000) that intended to provide a framework for effective teaching based on cumulative research evidence. In summary, the report recommended teaching skills, professional characteristics and classroom climate as a trinity of key factors impacting significantly on pupil outcomes.

Within their classrooms, effective teachers create learning environments which foster pupil progress by deploying their teaching skills [*high expectations, planning, methods and strategy, pupil management/discipline, time and resource management, assessment, homework*] as well as a wide range of professional characteristics [*professionalism, thinking, planning and setting expectations, leading and relating to others*].

Outstanding teachers create an excellent classroom climate and achieve superior pupil progress largely by displaying more professional characteristics at higher levels of sophistication within a very structured learning environment.

(Hay/McBer, 2000; p9)

Ainscow et al reflect on school effectiveness approaches and call for a return to a focus on high quality classroom instruction to provide a sound education for all (Ainscow et al, 2011; Ainscow et al, 2012). Essentially, to develop a school that is well-connected internally as well as attend to external links with other local schools and with community. Ainscow et al argue that the school should be steeped in local context to better understand local needs but to also join up localized efforts for improvement and wider national efforts to foster a more equitable society (Ainscow et al, 2012).

We have seen encouraging experiences of what can happen when what schools do is aligned in a coherent

strategy with the efforts of other local players - employers, community groups, universities and public services (Ainscow 2012; Cummings, Dyson, and Todd 2011). This does not necessarily mean schools doing more, but it does imply partnerships beyond the school, where partners multiply the impacts of each other's efforts. [...]

Specifically, school improvement processes need to be nested within locally led efforts to make school systems more equitable and to link the work of schools with area strategies for tackling wider inequities and, ultimately, with national policies aimed at creating a fairer society.

Ainscow et al, (2012) p210-211

In exploring longitudinal and targeted innovations that have made a difference, clear associations emerge between home and school factors. For children from low SES backgrounds, the issue of parental support is key, with approaches of 'active cultivation' (i.e. reading, engaging in education games, cooking together, talking about learning and school) serving as a key form of parental support and seemingly providing an effective approach in lifting outcomes (Blatchford, 2011 and Blatchford et al, 2010). Essential to strong family support is ongoing communication between children and parents characterized by dialogue rather than directive exchanges, homework space, resourcing extra-curricular activity and parental encouragement and interest in school work (Blatchford, 2010 and Blatchford et al, 2010; Chowdry, et al, 2009; Desforges and Abouchar, 2003; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011; Peters, 2007). Elsewhere, such as in the Finnish system, success across the system has derived from a long-term, relatively low cost investment in contextualized instructional practice and local level teacher development. The focus on equity is also addressed at local level. Teacher professionalism is also high in relation to its status as a graduate profession and high levels of professional autonomy; school and home links are also reportedly embedded throughout the compulsory schooling phase; Sahlberg argues that this provides an effective and highly sustainable alternative to large-scale and

costly national strategies or high stakes accountability approaches such as national inspection and categorisation (Sahlberg, 2007).

Learner Engagement; orientation and aspirations

Recent meta-research underscores the need for consistently effective teaching and learning environments alongside opportunities for positive learner engagement:

Better schools are needed: with better teachers and other educational resources, and a better classroom environment, including better behaved pupils and better interactions among pupils and between pupils and teachers.

ESRC (2012)

Alongside teacher effectiveness, there is an emergent literature that suggests that pupils and parents are also important agents in influencing attainment outcomes. For example, Durlak's (2012) recent meta-analysis of homework in the US, asserts that home is a powerful locus for building capital. Strong echoes are also found in Blatchford (2010) and Blatchford et al (2010) longitudinal studies and other reviews of homework in the UK context (Sharp et al, 2001). The role of student voice is also regarded as key to students developing a participatory compact in learning that is likely to foster stronger teacher : pupil relationships as well as enhance the learning experience; both of which are seen as key to effective learning and teaching environments (Fielding, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Hay/McBer, 2000; Leithwood and Seashore-Louis, 2011; Levin, 2007; Sammons, 1995 and Timperley, 2011)

The imprint of generational low educational achievement and the corollary of poorer life chances is noted as a strong influencer on the aspirations and orientations of children and young people from poorer backgrounds in particular (Blatchford et al, 2010; Cuthbert and Hatch, 2008; DCSF, 2008a; Goodman and Gregg, 2010; Strand and Winston, 2008).

Given that patterns of attainment tend to be transmitted from one generation to the next, the importance of the school as an engaging and inclusive learning environment becomes all the more important in attempts to break this cycle

(Duckworth, 2008; Feinstein, 2004; Flouri, 2006; Flouri and Buchanan, 2004). Therefore, creating the conditions within school for effective learner engagement is regarded as an essential and powerful ingredient in raising achievement outcomes both in the UK and elsewhere (Ainscow et al, 2012; Glaze et al, 2011; Hattie, 2007; Leithwood and Seashore-Louis, 2011; Levin, 2007; Robertson, 2007; Sullivan, 2008).

Closing the Gap

The UK has one of the highest levels of variation in pupil outcomes and its education system is also one of the most socially segregated education systems amongst industrialised economies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2009); UNICEF, 2010; Wilson et al, 2006).

Gendered and racialised attainment gaps also run alongside socio-economic attainment gaps (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Strand, 2011; Sullivan et al, 2011). Overall, girls' attainment has been consistently higher than boys at each key stage (Strand, 2011, Cassen and Kingdon, 2007). The prevailing evidence supports the view that economic disadvantage has a stronger effect on students from a white ethnic group than it does on those from minority ethnic groups; for example, black Caribbean boys of all social classes tend to emerge with similar results. However, the achievement gap between white boys from the highest and lowest socio-economic groups is by far the greatest gap of all ethnic groups. As students continue through their school career, the relationship between ethnicity and low achievement becomes ever more manifest, with entry into secondary education serving as a key marker in widening of outcomes between ethnic groups. Factors such as speaking English as an additional language do not seem to have a long-term effect on African and Asian students who tend to recover any language and literacy gaps prior to secondary schooling. However, prior attainment at primary school provides a strong predictor of outcomes at the secondary phase for all groups (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Kingdon and Cassen, 2010; Modood, 2005; Strand, 2011; Wilson et al., 2005).

The interaction of gender and ethnicity varies across minority and majority ethnic groups with a larger gap between girls and boys from black and minority ethnic groups than between girls and boys from white ethnic backgrounds.

For all ethnic groups with significant pupil numbers, girls outperform boys in the proportion achieving 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent *including* English and mathematics GCSEs. There is however some variability in the extent of the attainment gaps between girls and boys. The gender gap for Black Caribbean pupils is 12.5 percentage points, compared with a national gender gap of 7.3 percentage points. Irish pupils have the lowest variation in attainment by gender, with a gap of 2.1 percentage points.

DfE (2012), p4-5

A further dimension of attainment differences can be explained by the greater likelihood of attendance at a poorly performing school by children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from a black and minority ethnic background (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Kingdon and Cassen, 2010; Modood, 2005; Strand, 2011; Wilson et al., 2005)

Socio-economic disadvantage appears to be the most consistent predictor of attainment, particularly for children and young people from white ethnic groups (Kingdon and Cassen, 2010; Strand, 2011). In essence, socio-economic background continues to present the strongest risk of low attainment for the majority of pupils:

Pupils known to be eligible for FSM performed less well as a group at all the main indicators at Key Stage 4, than all other pupils (pupils known not to be eligible for FSM and pupils with unknown eligibility grouped together).

The attainment gap between the proportion achieving 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent *including*

English and mathematics GCSEs is 27.4 percentage points – 34.6 per cent of pupils known to be eligible for FSM achieved this indicator compared with 62.0 per cent of all other pupils. There has been a very gradual narrowing of the attainment gap from 27.9 percentage points in 2006/07.

DfE (2012), p5

There is also emergent evidence to suggest that low teacher expectations might also come into play and compound poorer outcomes, for example, there is some evidence that poor socio-economic background is perceived as a predictor of ability with poorer students assigned to lower sets regardless of ability (Dunne, et al, 2007; Dunne and Gazely, 2008).

Making a difference

Within the UK context, a range of national strategies has been enacted in the last two decades in recognition of social attainment gaps. Most notably, although not exclusively, amongst these are Excellence in Cities (1999-2006), Federations pilots (2003-2007), the Extra Mile project (2008-2010), City Challenge (London, Manchester, Black Country) (2008-2011), Narrowing the gap (2008-2010), National Leaders of Education/National Support Schools and latterly, the new Academies programme (from 2010) and pupil premium (from 2011). Evaluation of these and similar aims to close the gap at local and national level, have begun to provide a consistent body of evidence in relation to what makes a difference to closing the gap (DCSF, 2008b; Chapman, 2011; Hill and Matthews, 2008 and 2010, Hutchings, 2012; OFSTED, 2012; Lindsay et al, 2007; Strand, 2010).

Overall, where individual schools have been successful in narrowing the gap, a number of core processes have come into play:

- Understanding overall trends and localised nuances in performance data. Developing an awareness of where variation is present and who is affected is key to understanding and addressing the locus of variation within schools and between schools (Chapman, 2011; DCSF, 2008; NCSL, 2006; Strand, 2010; TDA, 2009).

- Consistency and development of high quality teaching and learning within a school setting is key to reducing variation. Given that teacher quality and classroom environment accounts for significant levels of variation (Hay/McBer, 2007); developing baseline standard operating procedures as a platform for consistent and effective teaching practice is seen to be key (NCSL, 2005; OECD, 2009; TDA, 2009).
- Sharing effective, contextually relevant teaching strategies across and between schools in ways that generate professional dialogue as well as professional accountability; these approaches appear to strengthen teacher quality effectively and have had some level of success in improving pupil attainment outcomes (Chapman, 2011; City, 2009; Hopkins, 2007; Hargreaves, 2011, Hutchings, 2011).
- There is some evidence that the role of student voice is important in developing a positive learning community and supporting learning engagement and orientation (Siraj-Blatchford, 2011; Fielding, 2007 and Timperley, 2011).
- A strong school leadership focus on teaching, professional learning and learning outcomes has also been noted in a number of meta-analyses as a key strand in developing a high quality teaching and learning environment as well as providing the conditions to support effective learning outcomes (Leithwood, 2011; Levin, 2007; Robertson, 2011; Reynolds, 2005; MacBeath, 2009)
- An awareness of local level strategies and partnership with other schools and local constituencies emerges as a core element in both building internal capacity and sharing local wide expertise and resource (DCSF, 2009a and 2009b; Levin, 2007; Kerr and Ainscow, 2011; Hutchings, et al, 2012). In the case of the City Challenge, this is cited as a core influence in developing relatively quicker gains in effectiveness than that in smaller or more isolated units such as academies (Hutchings et al, 2012).
- Instructional leadership (*focus on teaching and learning*) and strategic leadership (*overall vision and direction setting*) that is focused on the core business of teaching and learning also presents as intrinsic to developing effective and consistent quality and improved attainment outcomes in the

UK and elsewhere (Chapman et al, 2011; DCSF, 2009; Leithwood and Seashore-Louis, 2011; Southworth, 2011).

- It is argued that the focus for closing the gap is most effectively begun during the early educational phases for children and young people given that the socio-economic gap in outcomes is apparent early on and extends as children and young people move through education phases (House of Commons work and pensions committee, 2008; Allen, 2011; Field, 2010; Marmot, 2010). The case for early intervention appears self-evident, however, there is a need for robust and clear evidence of the particular effects of early intervention approaches and there is also little analysis of cost-effectiveness:

In spite of its merits, which have achieved increasing recognition by national and local government and the voluntary sector, the provision of successful evidence-based Early Intervention programmes remains persistently patchy and dogged by institutional and financial obstacles. In consequence, there remains an overwhelming bias in favour of existing policies of late intervention at a time when social problems are well-entrenched – even though these policies are known to be expensive and of limited success.

Allen (2011), piv

- Evidence suggests that the critical factor in making a difference through financial and other resourcing is through targeted application rather than a general increase in schooling budgets or resources (OECD, 2009; Blatchford et al, 2011). There is very early evidence of the impact of pupil premium in helping to target and resource increased attainment for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The evidence is necessarily limited, given that the strategy is currently only in its second year. However, emergent evidence suggests that the funding is poorly targeted to the needs of the most disadvantaged and to date is not making a difference (Ofsted, 2012).

Conclusions and Recommendations

At the core of this review is a concern to demonstrate the current landscape of differential attainment and those practices and strategies that have made a difference to disrupting the loop of unequal outcomes:

Educational performance appears to be one of the main barriers which stop people moving out of poverty. Yet studies indicate that poorer children are still failing to achieve their educational potential. How should these continuing inequalities be addressed? Policies that focus on early years, greater 'school readiness' and support for parents are clearly important but research also points to the multiple structural problems that prevent poor children from achieving their potential, including the pressing need for more 'good' schools.

ESRC (2012)

This review has focused on school level practices and potential for making a difference. There is however an inescapable narrative running alongside, that calls for both school level and coordinated system level actions to significantly close the gap. To conclude this research summary, key themes of the review have been set out and are accompanied by recommendations for making a difference.

VARIATION	
Key messages	Recommendations
Variation is particularly stark not merely between schools, but also within schools.	Understanding overall trends and localized nuances in performance data. Developing an awareness of where variation is present and who is affected is key to understanding and addressing the locus of variation within schools and between schools.
Exploration of within school variation in the UK and elsewhere, suggests that the most significant determinant of variation is within school rather than between schools, and is largely produced by differences between teachers.	Given the role of teacher influence on variation, it's essential that strategies explore and develop teacher effectiveness and classroom level practice with opportunities for the most effective to share practice.

Table 1 Variation: Key messages and recommendations

Leading Learning	
Key messages	Recommendations
To date, there is no evidence of school improvement occurring in the absence of talented leadership, but there is no single best-fit approach to effective leadership. However, leadership that is highly focused on fostering the conditions for developing teacher quality and learning outcomes has demonstrably stronger impacts on attainment outcomes even in the most challenging of circumstances.	Leadership must reclaim and sustain a core interest in the quality of instruction and learning outcomes for children and young people. This demands leadership that is aware of and responsive to teacher development needs, confidence levels of instructional staff, the behaviour and attainment of students and wider contextual influences on learning and the organisation's landscape.
The role of external challenge and critical friendship emerges as an especially powerful form of support and capacity building for schools in disadvantaged contexts.	For schools in urban and other challenging circumstances, external engagement, partnership and collaboration with wider constituencies should form a recognisable part of their school improvement passage.

Table 2 Leading Learning: Key messages and recommendations

Developing Learner Outcomes	
Key messages	Recommendations
The effects of high-quality teaching are especially significant for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds: over a school year, such pupils gain 1.5 years' worth of learning with very effective teachers, compared with 0.5 years with poorly performing teachers ... For poor pupils the difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher can result in a deficit of a whole year's learning.	A committed and unequivocal focus is required on learning and attainment in order to raise outcomes for all children and in particular, raising attainment amongst disadvantaged children and young people. A commitment to ambitious and challenging learning activity is required that both motivates and offers opportunity to extend on what individual pupils already know.
Large-scale national strategies and initiatives have yielded early successes. However, it is also evident that short-term significant gains often plateau.	This also requires that at organisational and local level, schools are able to enact national level strategies and interventions that make sense at an organisational and localised level to meet the particular needs of children and young people within the locality.

Table 3 Developing Learning Outcomes: Key messages and recommendations

Learner Engagement	
Key messages	Recommendations
An engaging and inclusive learning environment, takes on a greater importance in attempts to break differential and unequal attainment patterns.	Visible and creative learning environments and adaptive instructional practice form the centrepiece in fostering the conditions for effective learner engagement.
An emergent literature suggests that pupils and parents are key agents in influencing attainment outcomes.	Fostering opportunities for pupil voice has potential to encourage ownership of learning as well as enhancing learner engagement. Developing links between the home and the school offers powerful leverage for developing important levels of support and motivation, and continuity of the learning journey between home and school.

Table 4 Learner Engagement: Key messages and recommendations

Closing the Gap	
Key messages	Recommendations
<p>The UK has one of the highest levels of variation in pupil outcomes and its education system is also one of the most socially segregated education systems amongst industrialised economies.</p>	<p>Understanding overall trends and localised nuances in performance data is essential in order to understand and respond to gaps within school, between schools and between particular groups of students.</p> <p>Exercising effective strategic and instructional leadership that is focused on the core business of teaching and learning is necessary to develop consistent teacher quality and improved attainment outcomes. Financial and other resourcing to support learning must also be targeted at specific learning and development needs rather than applied broadly.</p>
<p>Within the complex landscape of differential attainment, socio-economic disadvantage appears to be the most consistent predictor of attainment, particularly for children and young people from white ethnic groups.</p>	<p>Sharing effective, contextualized teaching strategies within and between schools in ways that generate professional dialogue as well as professional accountability; these approaches appear to strengthen teacher quality effectively and have had some level of success in improving pupil attainment outcomes.</p>
<p>Overall, attainment gaps are present from the early stages of education and progressively worsen during transition through each phase.</p>	<p>The focus for closing the gap should pertain throughout all education phases to both prevent and ameliorate its swelling effects.</p>

Table 5 Closing the Gap: Key messages and recommendations

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