



House of Commons
Education Committee

Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2014–15

Second Special Report of Session 2014–15

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The Education Committee

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Chris Skidmore MP (*Conservative, Kingswood*) was also a Member of the Committee for this inquiry.

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The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/education-committee.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Dr Lynn Gardner (Clerk), Katy Stout (Second Clerk), Martin Smith (Committee Specialist), Claudia Sumner (Committee Specialist), Ameet Chudasama (Senior Committee Assistant) and Michael Everett (Committee Assistant).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Education Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 1333; the Committee's email address is educom@parliament.uk

Second Special Report

On 18 June 2014 we published our First Report of Session 2014–15, *Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children*.¹ The Government response was received on 2 September 2014 and is published as an Appendix to this Special Report.

Government response

The government is very grateful to the Committee for undertaking this Inquiry, and for the thorough manner in which it has conducted its work.

The Committee's report highlights many of the complex and interwoven factors that influence the educational attainment of poorer White British children, including socio-economic, cultural, linguistic, geographical, and inter-generational aspects. That complexity should never be an excuse for apathy or inaction, and we agree entirely with the Committee's conclusion that, despite the wider societal influences, schools can, and often do, have a transformative effect on children's lives. Equally, we are addressing the wider issues through cross-governmental programmes such as the child poverty strategy, which is helping to support families into work and improve living standards, and the troubled families' initiative, which is supporting children to re-engage with school and adults to secure employment.

It is unacceptable for any group of children to underachieve in education. Every child, whatever their background or circumstances, deserves the opportunity to progress and succeed in school, and beyond. That ambition requires a high-quality early education system, to give all children, and in particular those from disadvantaged families, a good start in life. It also requires policies from the centre that help to create and foster a school-led, self-improving system — a system characterised by high expectation and aspiration, innovation, autonomy and freedom — so that school leaders and teachers can respond directly to the needs of their pupil cohort, and can work together with other schools and professionals to provide the very best education they can for all their pupils.

Our education reforms — including the academies and free schools programme, the English Baccalaureate, the new robust examination system, and a range of initiatives drawn from the most effective elements of the London Challenge, such as Teach First, and Local and National Leaders of Education — are all designed to support a system that places schools in the driving seat of school improvement.

We acknowledge also that addressing the underachievement of disadvantaged children, including disadvantaged White British children, requires recognition within the funding

¹ Education Committee, First Report of Session 2014-15, *Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children*, HC 142

arrangements of the challenge this presents. As the Committee notes, this means a fairer national funding system as well as targeted programmes such as the pupil premium and the new early years pupil premium (EYPP).

Strong accountability is a vital component of a school-led system. We welcome the Committee's recognition of Ofsted's role in focusing on differential attainment for disadvantaged pupils. We are grateful also for the Committee's acknowledgement of the new accountability measures, which will encourage schools to focus on the attainment of all their pupils rather than just those working at the threshold of particular grade boundaries.

Increasing the knowledge base of evidence on the achievement of different groups of disadvantaged children is an important theme within the Committee's report, and one which we acknowledge. Our response sets out a range of evaluations that are currently being undertaken, including a number by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), aimed at identifying practice that works and disseminating this across the system.

The government's response to the Committee's specific conclusions and recommendations is set out below. The responses have been brigaded together where appropriate to reflect common themes.

Response to recommendations

Defining and targeting disadvantage

Rec. 1. Statements relating to the underachievement in education of white working class pupils often use eligibility for free school meals as a proxy for working class. Entitlement to FSM is not synonymous with working class, but it is a useful proxy for poverty which itself has an association with educational underachievement. (Paragraph 15)

Rec. 7. The Government should consider how data from a range of Departments can be combined in future to develop a more rounded indicator of a child's socio-economic status than FSM eligibility alone can provide for the purposes of targeting intervention. (Paragraph 41)

Rec. 14. We welcome the Minister's willingness to investigate whether other measures of disadvantage may be more appropriate for allocating disadvantage funding and tracking the performance of disadvantaged groups. The Government should move quickly to do this. (Paragraph 90)

The government agrees that defining terms such as working class, deprivation and disadvantage are complex matters, and acknowledges the pragmatic approach adopted by the Committee in conducting its Inquiry.

As the Committee notes, free school meals (FSM) eligibility is a useful proxy for poverty, with data being readily available and consistently collected over time, which is

evidence of lower engagement by White British parents entitled to FSM. For example, *Identifying components of attainment gaps*³, published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2010, reported that White British disadvantaged parents were over three times as likely as other White British parents not to have discussed year 10 subject choices with their child, and twice as likely not to attend parents evenings. These, and other differences, were associated with lower progress during secondary school. The difference between the highest and lowest levels of parental engagement had an impact of around eight GCSE grades, or one grade in each of eight subjects.

The government agrees that it is important to test out approaches to increasing parental engagement that make a difference to children's progress and attainment. The EEF is doing just that, and is funding a number of research projects in this area.

This includes, 'Texting Parents', which will test whether this channel of communication could be used more extensively and creatively to enhance parental engagement and which types of messages have the greatest impact on engagement and pupil attainment. An evaluation report of this project is expected early in 2016.

Another, EEF funded project, 'Parenting Academy', involving primary schools in Middlesbrough and Camden, will test the impact of a parenting academy that aims to equip parents with the skills to support their children's progress in numeracy, literacy and science. Reporting on this project is also expected early in 2016.

In addition, the 'SPOKES' (Supporting Parents on Kids' Education) project, delivered by the Plymouth Parent Partnership, sees educational psychologists give parents the skills they need to help their children learn to read. An evaluation report is due in autumn 2015.

Finally, the 'Mind the Gap' project includes approaches to develop in parents, particular attitudes and dispositions (meta-cognitive skills) that support engagement and achievement. An evaluation report on this work is due in autumn 2014.

³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/identifying-components-of-attainment-gaps

why FSM eligibility is currently used by the government as a basis to target additional funding to disadvantaged pupils through the pupil premium.

We are constantly reviewing and updating the evidence base on differential attainment by groups of pupils in order to review policies for addressing disadvantage and improving pupils' attainment and progress. The Department for Education has recently commissioned Cambridge University and Rand Europe to conduct a detailed analysis of survey data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England and the National Pupil Database, to shed further light on this matter. It is anticipated that the outcome of this work will be available early in 2015.

Linked to this, we will consider a range of options for allocating funding according to economic disadvantage, including the potential for greater data sharing across different government departments. The introduction of Universal Credit will present new opportunities of this kind but we are mindful that conducting new data linkage is often legally complex, sometimes requires primary legislation and also the informed consent of large numbers of individuals. To assess what is feasible in future, the Small Business, Employment and Enterprise Bill, which is currently before Parliament, contains clauses that will enable the Department for Education to undertake research on matching of income and benefits data with pupil records.

Economic disadvantage, ethnicity and attainment

Rec. 2. Overall, the evidence from analysing free school meals (FSM) data is that: white British children eligible for FSM are consistently the lowest performing ethnic group of children from low income households, at all ages (other than small subgroups of white children); the attainment "gap" between those children eligible for free school meals and the remainder is wider for white British and Irish children than for other ethnic groups; and this gap widens as children get older. (Paragraph 30)

Rec. 3. Measures of economic deprivation and socio-economic status both suggest that white "working class" children are underachieving and that the performance of some other ethnic groups is improving faster. But they also show that similar problems persist in a number of other minority groups. (Paragraph 34)

Rec. 4. Some other ethnic groups appear to be more resilient than white British children to the effects of poverty, deprivation and low-socio-economic status on educational achievement. Further work is needed to understand why this is the case. The Government should commission a project to assess why some ethnic groups are improving faster than white British children, and what can be learned from steps taken specifically to improve the achievement of ethnic minorities. This research should include, but not be limited to, the effects of historic funding and strategies, parental expectations, community resilience and access to good schools. (Paragraph 35)

Rec. 5. The problem of white "working class" underachievement is not specific to boys; attention to both sexes is needed. (Paragraph 37)

The Committee sets out in its report a range of data illustrating the variation in educational attainment that exists between pupils from different ethnic backgrounds who are entitled to FSM, as well as differences between groups of FSM and non-FSM eligible pupils from the same ethnic backgrounds. This data shows that White British FSM eligible pupils perform poorly against many other groups as well as their non-FSM eligible peers. The government agrees that this underachievement affects both boys and girls.

Some groups of pupils eligible for FSM attain at comparatively high levels. For example, in 2012/13, 61.5% of Indian pupils and 76.8% of Chinese pupils eligible for FSM attained five GCSEs at A*-C, including English and maths, meaning that those disadvantaged pupils attained at a higher rate than the national average for all (FSM and non-FSM eligible) pupils (60.6%). In contrast, only 32.3% of White British FSM eligible pupils achieved this measure in 2012/13.

The key stage 4 attainment of FSM eligible White British pupils has risen in recent years by 6.7 percentage points, up from 25.6% in 2009/10 to 32.3% in 2012/13, which is encouraging. At the same time however, some other FSM eligible groups of pupils have made even greater progress, from a higher baseline. For example, the attainment rate for Black Caribbean FSM eligible pupils has risen 8.7 percentage points from 33.5% in 2009/10 to 42.2% in 2012/13, and for Black African pupils the rise has been even greater, up 8.8 percentage points from 42.6% to 51.4%.

We agree that there is more to learn about the differential attainment of groups of disadvantaged pupils, and why some groups are doing particularly well. To this end, the Department for Education will publish a research compendium bringing together the range of evidence in this area. The compendium, which should be available early in 2015, will include research evidence covering the themes highlighted by the Committee in its recommendation.

Data availability

Rec. 6. Data relating to combinations of ethnicity and free school meals status is not always readily available in Government statistical releases. The Government should ensure that data relating to white FSM children is included in its statistical reports. (Paragraph 40)

As the Committee notes, Statistical First Releases from the Department for Education covering attainment in early years, key stage 2 and key stage 4 include analysis by ethnicity combined with FSM eligibility, but this is not the case in the Statistical First Releases covering key stage 5, attendance and school exclusion.

The Department for Education does, from time to time, publish detailed analysis reports examining the data underlying its statistical releases. For example, in 2012, the Department published a profile of pupil exclusions in England, which included breakdowns of exclusions data by ethnicity and FSM combinations. Nevertheless, the

that the most challenging schools can attract the best teachers and leaders. (Paragraph 120)

The government's recent teacher pay reforms, and the school leader pay reforms that take effect from September 2014, will give schools the freedom to reward exceptional leaders and attract strong leadership teams to work in the most challenging schools. These reforms sit alongside targeted programmes such as Talented Leaders, Teach First, School Direct, Teaching Leaders and Future Leaders.

In considering the Committee's recommendation for a published analysis of incentives that influence where teachers choose to work, we are mindful that it is extremely difficult to isolate the drivers for this. There are a very wide range of factors that may have an influence on a teacher's decision to take up a particular post. This could include a specific moral commitment to making a difference to the lives of children from disadvantaged backgrounds; opportunities for professional development and career progression; the reputation and culture of a particular school; the salary and cost of living; the proximity of friends or relatives; and the location of a spouse or partner's employment. Clearly pay will have a bearing on such choices, which is why we have made a number of changes to the pay framework to enable schools to ensure salaries are appropriate to the challenge of the post.

While we are always interested in new research in this area, including from other comparable countries, on balance, and in light of the complexity of the school system, we believe that an approach of targeting additional money to disadvantaged schools alongside the freedom to use their knowledge of local labour markets to attract and retain the teachers they need, constitutes the best way forward at this time.

Rec. 22. We welcome the Government's plans to enable the analysis of data on teacher mobility, and where newly qualified teachers choose to work; this will allow for better monitoring of the effects of incentives in the system. (Paragraph 122)

Matching together the School Workforce Census is part of a programme of work to bring together a range of school workforce data which will enhance what we already know about teacher deployment, movement and retention. This new development will enable the Department for Education to extend its statistical publications and develop new insights to inform future policy development.

Parental engagement

Rec. 23. We recommend once again that the Government commission research into what kind of engagement with parents in their children's learning makes the difference in narrowing the gap between the most economically disadvantaged children and their better-off peers, and in particular, identify from specific schools and local authorities examples of best practice that could be shared more widely. (Paragraph 129)

Parental involvement in education makes a positive difference to children's engagement and achievement. This is a consistent message in the research evidence. There is also

and supportive environment can make a big difference to pupils; increasing confidence and engagement in schoolwork.

Although no specific survey on the impact of the length of the school day is planned, Ofsted will look to identify successful practice in this area as part of its inspection and wider good practice work, and will publish these examples as case studies within the good practice section of its website.

Rec. 20. Good leadership and school cooperation are critical to school improvement. We warmly welcome the Minister's commitment to encouraging system leadership and look forward to examining the Government's proposals in due course. (Paragraph 112)

Good leadership and collaboration between schools are key elements of school improvement, and the government is grateful to the Committee for highlighting this important area.

As set out earlier in this response, we have created a network of teaching schools; encouraged outstanding academies to sponsor others; and invested in growing the number of National Leaders of Education and National Leaders of Governance. The system continues to lead its own development and partnerships and alliances between schools are growing ever stronger.

More than a fifth of all schools in England are now involved with a teaching school through an alliance. These Ofsted-rated 'Outstanding' schools are working with their alliance partners to improve the quality of teaching and leadership, as well as raising standards through school-to-school support. Some strong chains of academies are developing their own leaders and implementing extensive programmes of development. Some are also moving leaders from one school to another to broaden their experiences and help to drive up standards. National Leaders of Education are actively supporting weaker schools, and research shows that these schools feel the support improves their leadership skills and knowledge, and the quality of their teaching and learning.

As academy chains grow and new ones appear, as the national network of Teaching School Alliances expands, and as more National Leaders of Education and Governance are designated and support other school leaders, we expect to see more schools in all areas of the country benefitting from these arrangements. Ahead of partnerships reaching across the country, there is a role for government intervention to support schools that struggle to attract and retain staff through targeted initiatives such as the Talented Leaders Programme, which will seek to attract some of the most able school leaders to work in some of the most challenging schools.

Deployment of teachers

Rec. 21. It is essential that the best teachers and leaders work in the areas that need them the most. The Government should publish an analysis of the incentives that influence where teachers choose to work, and use this to design a system that ensures

government sees the merit in providing combined ethnicity and FSM data on a more regular basis through its statistical releases. We will therefore ensure that analysis combining ethnicity and FSM data is included within the next statistical releases covering level 2 and 3 attainment by young people aged 19, attendance, and exclusion.

Rec. 8. The Government should act to ensure that FSM data (and any future revised indicator) is made available to post-16 institutions to allow effective monitoring of the progress of this group of young people. (Paragraph 43)

The government agrees that post-16 institutions should have access to information on the FSM status of their students. From September 2014, further education institutions will be required to provide free meals to their disadvantaged students. Institutions will need to ask their students to provide evidence of eligibility in order to confirm their entitlement to free meals. Therefore, from September, institutions will be able to determine for themselves which of their students are currently disadvantaged. It is unlikely, however, that this data will match exactly those students who were eligible for FSM at school. We are therefore investigating ways of implementing the transfer of school-level FSM data to colleges.

The importance of schools

Rec. 9. Twice the proportion of poor children attending an outstanding school will leave with five good GCSEs when compared with the lowest rated schools, whereas the proportion of non-FSM children achieving this benchmark in outstanding schools is only 1.5 times greater than in those rated as inadequate. (Paragraph 47)

Rec. 24. We agree that there is much that schools can do to address white working class underachievement. Broader societal factors also have an enormous role to play, but this should not deflect attention from the central importance of improving school and teaching quality. (Paragraph 141)

The government agrees that a focus on school improvement is an essential element in increasing pupil attainment and addressing attainment gaps between groups of pupils. This recognition sits at the heart of our education reform programme.

Ofsted's recent update report on the pupil premium², published in July 2014, notes that good and outstanding schools are likely to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to closing the attainment gap. It is encouraging, therefore, that around 80% of all schools were judged good or outstanding at their latest Ofsted inspection, the highest proportion since Ofsted was established in 1992.

We have taken robust action to intervene in poorly-performing schools. In the last four years, more than 800 of the worst-performing schools in the country have been taken over and reopened by experienced academy sponsors with a proven track record of

² www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/pupil-premium-update

success, including more than 500 of the worst-performing primary schools. The number of pupils taught in failing secondary schools has fallen by almost 250,000.

Parenting skills and language in the home

Rec. 10. The evidence we heard related to how the amount of language and breadth of vocabulary used in the home in the early years varies by socio-economic status. It is not clear whether this is a particular issue in white working class homes as opposed to other ethnic groups. We believe that this issue is critical. Further research in this area is needed, given the importance of oracy to child development. (Paragraph 63)

The government agrees that a sound foundation of language and vocabulary in the early years is a vital component in children's longer-term progress and attainment. For this reason, the Department for Education is currently funding the Early Language Development Programme, which aims to boost the language skills of all children aged 0–5, particularly the under-threes and those at risk of language delay. Through the programme, 485 'hubs' of early learning expertise will be created in areas serving some of the most disadvantaged children and families. The programme aims to reach up to 12,000 practitioners in almost 4,000 Children's Centres and early years settings, and will benefit over 96,000 families.

In addition, the Department for Education has commissioned a large-scale longitudinal study of early education and development (SEED), which will follow the progress of over 5,000 children from the age of two, and will assess the impact of providing funded early years education to children from lower-income families. The study will evaluate children's pre-school experiences and how these impact on later attainment. Data on the ethnicity of children participating in the study will be collected, enabling assessment of any significant differences between groups of children. The study will conclude in 2020, with interim reports available in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is also working to build a stronger evidence base around the impact of oracy and vocabulary on attainment, and is funding a number of projects in this area. This includes the 'Vocabulary Enrichment Intervention Programme', which is being delivered by Bolton Council and involves 400 children selected to participate on the basis of their predicted Key Stage 2 English results and their eligibility for FSM. The project aims to teach children new words and to encourage them to use these words in speaking and writing. An evaluation report on this intervention is expected in autumn 2014.

The EEF funded 'Talk of the Town' project, focuses on speech, language and communication and involves teachers being trained to identify and support their pupils' needs. An evaluation of the project is expected in spring 2016.

In addition, through the 'Language for Learning' project children with weak oral language who are about to begin primary school are being targeted for extra support. The intervention is being delivered by teaching assistants to small groups, and focuses

schools, at least £5,820 in key stage 3, and at least £6,372 at key stage 4. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds will continue to attract additional funding through the pupil premium.

These changes represent a significant step in addressing historic disparities in funding, but we remain committed to taking further steps towards fully fair funding arrangements once long-term spending plans are in place after the next spending review.

Best practice in schools

Rec. 18. We welcome Ofsted's recent focus on the issue of economically deprived white children underachieving in education, and its 2008 report on good practice in this area. We recommend that this continues to be a focus for Ofsted, and that an updated good practice report is produced. (Paragraph 105)

The government understands that Ofsted's Annual Report for 2013/14 will include commentary on outcomes for poorer White British pupils, and that this will, where appropriate, make reference to good practice in raising attainment for this particular group of pupils. Improving the outcomes for White British pupils from low income backgrounds will continue to be a priority for Ofsted in future years.

Rec. 19. The current trend towards longer school days presents an opportunity for schools to provide space and time for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to complete homework, which may particularly benefit white working class children. We recommend that Ofsted publish a best practice report on this subject to provide guidance for schools. (Paragraph 109)

The government is grateful to the Committee for highlighting the potential benefits of longer school days. The Committee's conclusion concurs with evidence cited in the EEF Toolkit, which suggests that disadvantaged pupils may benefit more than their peers from such innovative reforms.

It is our view that all schools should plan the structure, content and duration of their school day based on what works in the best interests of their pupils' education, and not simply on tradition. In 2011, we removed the prescriptive process that schools had to go through when changing their school day. All schools in England can now set their school day as they see fit.

Longer days can mean schools have more time to work with pupils who need additional help, and can open up opportunities for pupils to access purposeful, character building activities that help them build the confidence to succeed when they leave school.

Some schools, including some in disadvantaged areas, are already recognising the benefits of longer days and are re-organising their timetables to ensure a good balance of teaching, extracurricular activities and supervised self-directed work. Those schools report that just having a dedicated time of the school day to complete work in a calm

school-to-school comparisons, highlighting good practice and encouraging underperforming schools to seek peer support to improve results. Last year, we introduced a new Similar Schools tool within the performance tables' website, which shows each school's attainment alongside a unique group of similar schools. By including comparisons across the whole country, as well as the local area, schools can obtain a clearer picture of how their pupils are performing and benchmark themselves against the best.

During London Challenge, as part of a programme called 'Keys to Success', key stage data and local reports were used to identify under-performing schools and assign them dedicated education advisers, who agreed suitable interventions and monitored progress. These principles of school-to-school support are at the heart of our expanded academies programme and, in particular, the national sponsored academies programme.

London Challenge also saw the development of two new programmes to help teachers improve their skills: the Improving Teacher Professional Development Programme (ITP) and Outstanding Teacher Professional Development Programme (OTP). Under this government, the National College for School Leadership (NCTL) funded 360 facilitators to be trained on how to deliver ITP and OTP to the first cohort of teaching schools across the country in 2011–12. The NCTL is working with schools to improve their capacity for workforce development in the priority areas of science, primary English and maths, and special educational needs. We are also providing £11 million over the next two years to fund 30 maths hubs to drive up the quality of maths teaching by enabling all schools to access high-quality guidance, support and professional development.

Finally, the EEF is funding a project called Challenge the Gap, which takes a similar approach to the London Challenge. The project will set up 'Learning Threes', whereby 15 outstanding 'Challenge Partners schools' with expertise at narrowing the gap each work with two others seeking to improve the attainment of their disadvantaged children. The evaluation of this programme is scheduled for publication in spring 2016.

Rec. 17. Given the changing distribution of educational underachievement across the country, the Government must develop a new funding formula for schools which better matches allocation with need. (Paragraph 103)

The government agrees that funding allocations for schools are not sufficiently aligned with need, and is committed to ensuring that, across the country, schools have a fairer allocation that equips them to provide a world-class education. On 17 July this year, we announced the allocation of £390 million of additional funding to the least fairly funded local areas in England, benefiting sixty-nine local areas. As a result of this, every local area's allocation of funding will in future reflect a minimum basic per-pupil amount and minimum amounts based on other pupil and school characteristics. This will mean that in every local area, the most disadvantaged pupils will attract at least £4,454 in primary

on developing listening skills, comprehension and vocabulary. The evaluation report on this project is due in spring 2015.

Finally, in a pilot project based at a free school, School21, academics from Cambridge University are working with the school to foster improved attainment by giving oracy the same place in the curriculum as reading and writing, and embedding quality talk in every lesson. The project aims to develop diagnostic tests to measure a child's 'oracy age' and to create a suite of interventions to boost children's oracy skills.

Absence from school

Rec. 11. We welcome the reduction of the school absence rate in recent years. The Government must continue to focus on encouraging reduced absence from school. (Paragraph 68)

Reducing absence from school has been, and will continue to be, an important priority. The government's ambition is that every child attends school regularly and absence occurs only where it is absolutely unavoidable.

Good attendance is strongly associated with higher attainment, both at primary and secondary levels. Pupils who miss school are at increased risk of falling behind and becoming disengaged, leading in some cases to further absence and resulting all too often in poor progress and unfulfilled potential.

It is for this reason that we have raised the bar in terms of expectations on school attendance by changing the law on leave of absence and giving weight to those expectations by strengthening the sanctions for poor attendance. There are encouraging signs that these measures are having an impact. In 2012/13 the number of pupils persistently absent from school dropped by almost a third compared to 2009/10, down from 433,130 to 300,895, and with overall absence down from 6% of sessions to 5.2%, 7.7 million fewer school days were lost. We will continue to monitor absence trends to ensure they are on a downward trajectory and the number of pupils who are persistently absent falls significantly.

Pupil premium

Rec. 12. We welcome the introduction of the pupil premium and the recent announcement of its extension to early years. The Government should continue to monitor the impact of this policy. (Paragraph 85)

Rec. 13. We welcome Ofsted's 2013 report on the use of the pupil premium and recommend that a similar report be produced annually to highlight how effective schools are in using this money, focusing on the impact and highlighting case studies of schools where the greatest progress is being achieved. (Paragraph 87)

The government believes there is a clear moral imperative to tackle head-on the unacceptable link between the circumstances of a child's birth and their future education outcomes. In that context, we are pleased that the Committee has recognised the key role the pupil premium plays in raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. The pupil premium is designed to accelerate the achievement of disadvantaged pupils in order to close the gap nationally between them and their peers. Ofsted's latest assessment of schools' use of the pupil premium, published in July 2014, reports encouraging signs that good and outstanding schools are using the pupil premium effectively to close those attainment gaps.

The introduction of an Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) will support early years providers in eliminating the inequality that currently sees disadvantaged pupils starting school with performance levels 19 months behind their peers. We will continue to monitor both schools' and, shortly, early years providers' use of the funding, and the results of disadvantaged pupils, to determine the impact that the funding and accountability measures of the pupil premium are having on these pupils.

We agree that the use and impact of the pupil premium should continue to be an area of interest for Ofsted. To date, the inspectorate has produced pupil premium reports on an annual basis, the latest of which was published in July 2014, as noted above. We understand that Ofsted will continue to publish regular updates on schools' use of the pupil premium. The next report, which will be published in 2015, will identify good practice and focus on the impact of external reviews of the pupil premium.

Rec. 15. We see the EEF Toolkit as a positive development which will help schools to make informed decisions about how to make best use of pupil premium funding. This will be particularly important to support the roll-out of the pupil premium to early years settings. (Paragraph 92)

The government is grateful to the Committee for highlighting the work of the EEF, and welcomes the Committee's acknowledgement of the value of the EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit.

The Toolkit is an important resource and we strongly encourage schools to make use of it as part of the discussions that inform their decisions on how to use their pupil premium allocation. Evidence from a recent NFER survey shows a significant year-on-year increase in the number of school leaders using the EEF Toolkit, with 45% of senior leaders reporting that they use the Toolkit compared to 36% in 2013 and 11% in 2012. The proportion rises to 54% among secondary school leaders.

It is equally important that the sector continues to build the evidence base. The EEF now funds 78 projects, and is working with over 560,000 pupils in over 2,900 schools in England. In the long-term, the results of these EEF-funded projects will provide further information for schools on what works to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, and therefore what schools may wish to spend the premium funding on. This

information will be shared with all schools through the Toolkit and individual project evaluation reports published on the EEF website.

We also agree that the EEF has a crucial role in the early years, especially in the context of the Early Years Pupil Premium from 2015–16. We recently extended the remit of the EEF to 3–4 year olds, and the EEF is now working towards funding projects in this area and developing its toolkit further.

Tackling regional variation

Rec. 16. The improvements in London's educational performance suggest that the problem of white working class underachievement in education can be tackled. In determining future policy in this area the Government must carefully assess what positive impact the London Challenge may have had and what its key features were. (Paragraph 99)

The government agrees that the London Challenge programme offers valuable insights and lessons about how best to secure school improvement and higher pupil attainment. The Department for Education published an evaluation of the city challenge programmes in London, Greater Manchester and the Black Country in 2012, and our policies and reforms draw from the most effective elements of the programmes. It is our intention that schools across England have the opportunity to benefit from approaches that have helped to improve education in London, within the context of a school-led, self-improving system. The influence of London Challenge is evident in a number of current policies, as set out below.

Teach First, which developed into an integral part of London Challenge's success, has been significantly expanded by the government, tripling in size and extending its scope to encompass primary schools and early years. From September this year, Teach First will, for the first time send top graduates to schools in every region of the country, so that more children than ever will benefit.

Teaching schools, which are centres of excellence in teaching, were piloted in 16 schools across the London and City Challenges. There are now 548 teaching schools operating in 146 local authorities, with more than a fifth of all schools in England involved with teaching schools alliances, working together to improve the quality of teaching, leadership and pupil attainment.

The London Challenge saw the National College identify Local Leaders of Education (LLEs), mentoring newly appointed headteachers in other schools, and in 2006, the first 68 National Leaders of Education (NLEs) followed, with a remit focused on helping struggling schools to improve. Today, across the whole country, there are almost 1,900 LLEs and over 1,000 NLEs.

Another important feature of the London Challenge was the publication of data about groups of similar schools within the region, known as 'Families of Schools'. This enabled