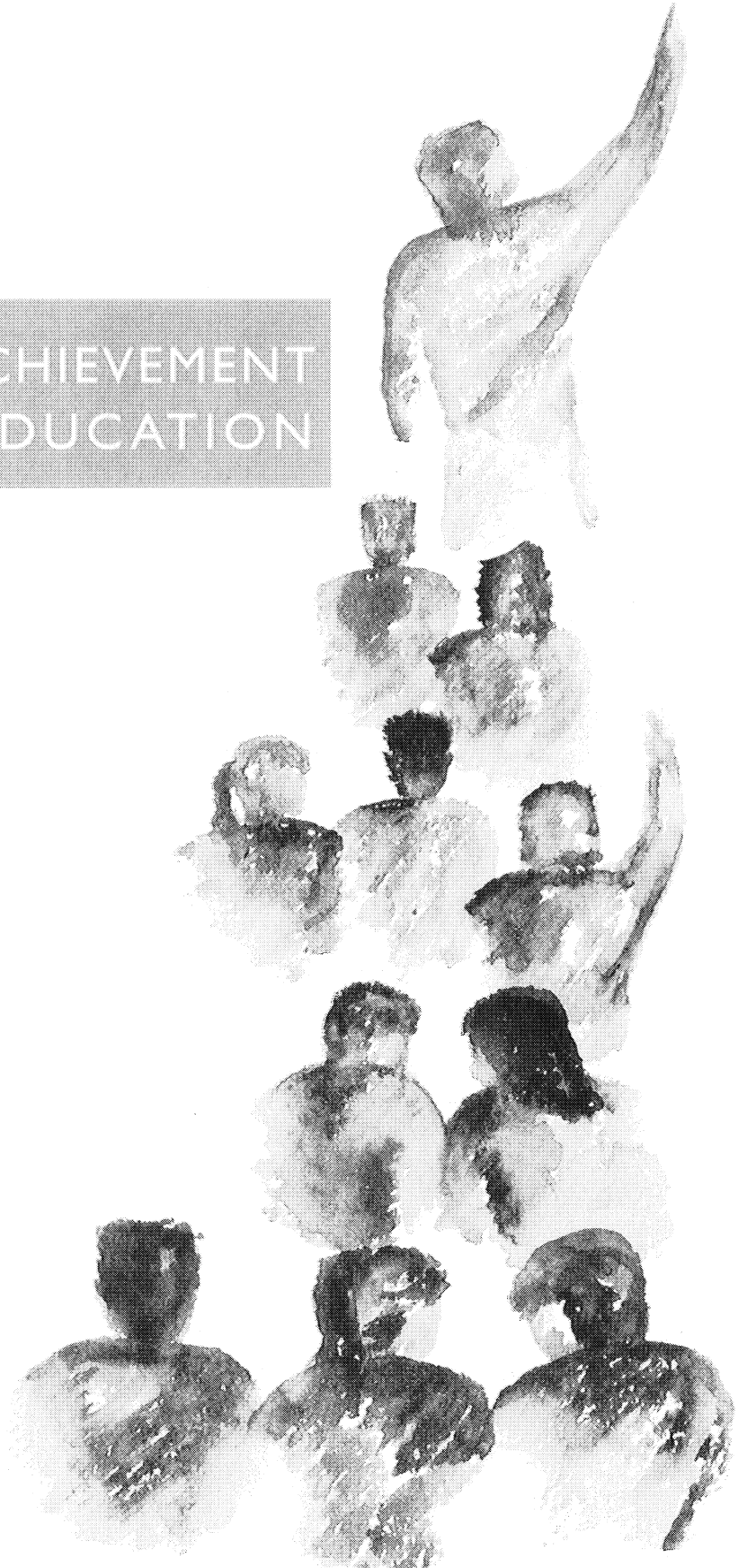




OFFICE FOR STANDARDS  
IN EDUCATION

ACCESS & ACHIEVEMENT  
IN URBAN EDUCATION



A report from the  
Office of Her Majesty's  
Chief Inspector of Schools

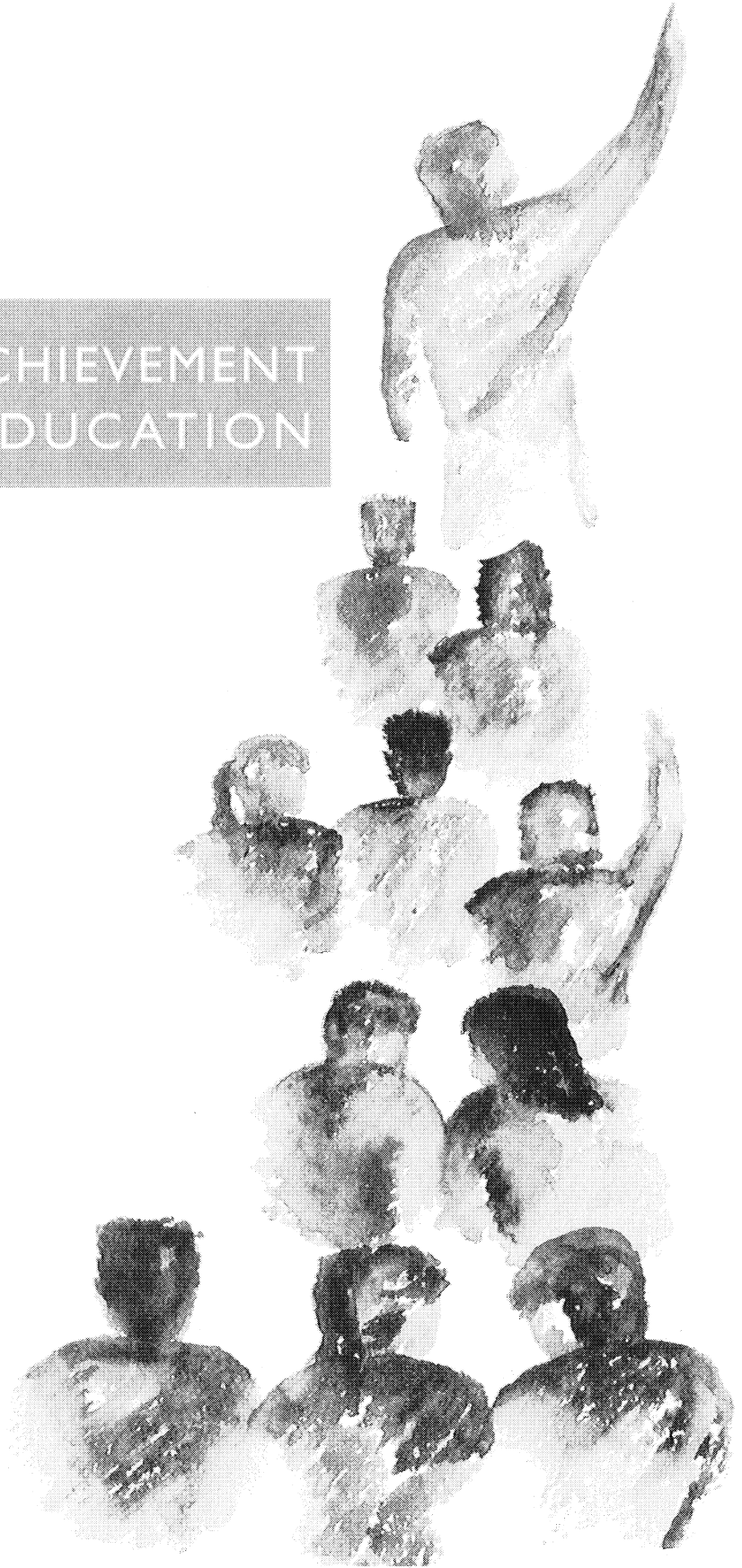
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# Introduction

This report summarises the evidence from a survey conducted by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) in seven urban areas of England characterised by high levels of social and economic disadvantage. In each of these districts Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) examined the standards achieved and the sufficiency and quality of the educational opportunities available in all sectors of the education service. A total of 8 nursery schools or units, 3 infant or first schools, 41 primary or middle schools, 12 secondary schools, 7 special schools, 11 special or off-site units and support services, 32 youth clubs or projects, 5 colleges of further education and 15 centres for adult education were visited during the survey. Appendix A provides a list of inspection visits.

In each area there was a general inspection of the secondary school whose catchment defined the district of the study and also of one of its associated primary schools. These inspections led to 14 published reports which provide the core of the evidence summarised here. HMI made supplementary inspection visits to other institutions serving the designated areas in the pre-school, primary, secondary, special, post-16, youth and adult education sectors. Discussions were held with local education authority (LEA) officers and advisers, careers officers, educational psychologists and education welfare officers as well as with pupils, students and parents and with teachers, lecturers, youth workers and senior managers of institutions and services. Where possible, the local offices of other agencies such as the police, social services and employment departments and town or district councils were consulted. In this way an overview was gained of standards and quality in all phases of education, from pre-school to adult, in the areas concerned and of their match to the educational needs of residents of all ages. With the exception of one secondary school inspected in autumn 1991 all inspections were carried out during the autumn term of 1992.

## Main findings

- The residents of disadvantaged urban areas covered by this survey are poorly served by the education system. Weaknesses of provision within individual institutions are exacerbated by poor links between them. Better overall analysis of needs and a greater measure of co-ordination between sectors of the education service are required.
- Good pre-school provision increased the chances of young children benefiting from school. Access to pre-school education, however, is not assured in all areas. Where nursery education is available it enhances the ability of young children to benefit from school.
- Under-achievement by pupils is apparent at an early stage in the primary schools. Many pupils had not recovered from early failures in acquiring the basic skills.
- Communication skills within English and other subjects, particularly oral and written communication, require more skilled teaching in primary and secondary schools.
- Arrangements for learning support for pupils with particular learning needs are poor. Schools lack expertise in initial assessment, often use inappropriate teaching methods and spread resources too thinly.
- Curricular planning in the primary and secondary sectors particularly does not directly address the needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and does not focus sufficiently on raising their achievement.
- Much of the teaching is superficial and lacks pace. The atmosphere in many classrooms is good-natured but neither challenges pupils nor secures their participation.
- School managers rarely set standards for institution-wide practice in planning, teaching and assessment. Monitoring and evaluation of the learning of pupils and of the outcomes of teaching are weak features in many schools.
- Young people who do not perform well in GCSE examinations have few opportunities open to them for post-16 study. Many of them have not been convinced of the value of continuing their education and



provision for them to do so is uneven in range and quality across the country. Providers of post-16 education act separately and do not co-ordinate their range of courses with others. Many give no priority to programmes for low attainers at age 16.

- Youth and adult education vary markedly in their adequacy, range and quality. Youth services lack sufficient well-trained full-time staff to involve more young people and promote their achievement. Provision for adults is often inaccessible because of location, timing and cost and is poorly co-ordinated with other post-16 programmes. Adult education initiatives in some areas have helped to secure parental support for children now in school.
- The quality and standards of much of the work revealed by this survey are inadequate and disturbing. However, there is enough work of good quality in each sector to mean that the situation is not irredeemable. Long-term planning, improved dissemination of effective practice, carefully focused interventions and concerted efforts between services are required to bring about improvement.

## The areas and their residents

1 The schools and other centres inspected were in a specific part of Bristol (Hartcliffe), Derby (West Chaddesden), the London Borough of Greenwich (Thamesmead), Kingston-upon-Hull (Orchard Park), Manchester (Wythenshawe), Slough (Britwell and Northborough) and Thurrock (Tilbury). In each district a geographical area, usually of three or four electoral wards, was defined to reflect the likely catchment areas of the institutions inspected. In 1991 these areas had populations ranging from 30-50,000 people, a total of more than 250,000 for the seven areas. None of the areas is strictly in the geographical 'inner city' centre; several are estates constructed in the late 1950s or early 1960s to rehouse those displaced from the inner urban areas. Among these are peripheral estates, often bounded by major roads, a motorway or a river. All but one (Thurrock) of the districts in which the study took place are more disadvantaged than the national average - indeed these six districts fall into the lowest 25% of all local authority districts, and four into the lowest 10%. In addition, wards in which the schools are situated and those from which they draw most of their intake, often represent particular pockets of severe disadvantage. Even so, the areas selected do not represent the most disadvantaged parts of the country which include areas in inner London and the other major conurbations (see Appendix B).

2 Census data for 1991 indicates that the areas are characterised by much higher than average proportions of families from lower socio-economic groups. Twenty-one per cent of children aged under 16 in the study areas were in households where the head was classified as from partly-skilled or unskilled occupational backgrounds (compared with 15% for England). A further 26% of children were in households where the head of household was not in the labour market at all (that is, neither working nor unemployed), and as many as 44% in one of the Hull study area wards, compared with an equivalent national figure of 16%. Correspondingly, there were fewer from non-manual backgrounds; 14% were from the highest two groups in the Registrar General's classification (compared with 31% for England) and 26% were from skilled manual backgrounds (see Figure 1 on page 9).

3 The areas were marked by low levels of educational qualification. Some 6% of the study areas' adult population had qualifications at the level of a post-A level diploma or better (compared with a national figure of 13%). Some wards in the study areas had as few as 1% of adults with these qualifications. On the census definition, unemployment in study areas was