



Social Mobility &
Child Poverty
Commission

Cracking the code: how schools can improve social mobility

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About the Commission

The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission is an advisory non-departmental public body established under the Child Poverty Act 2010 (as amended by the Welfare Reform Act 2012) with a remit to monitor the progress of the Government and others on child poverty and social mobility. It is made up of 10 commissioners and is supported by a small secretariat.

The Commission board comprises:

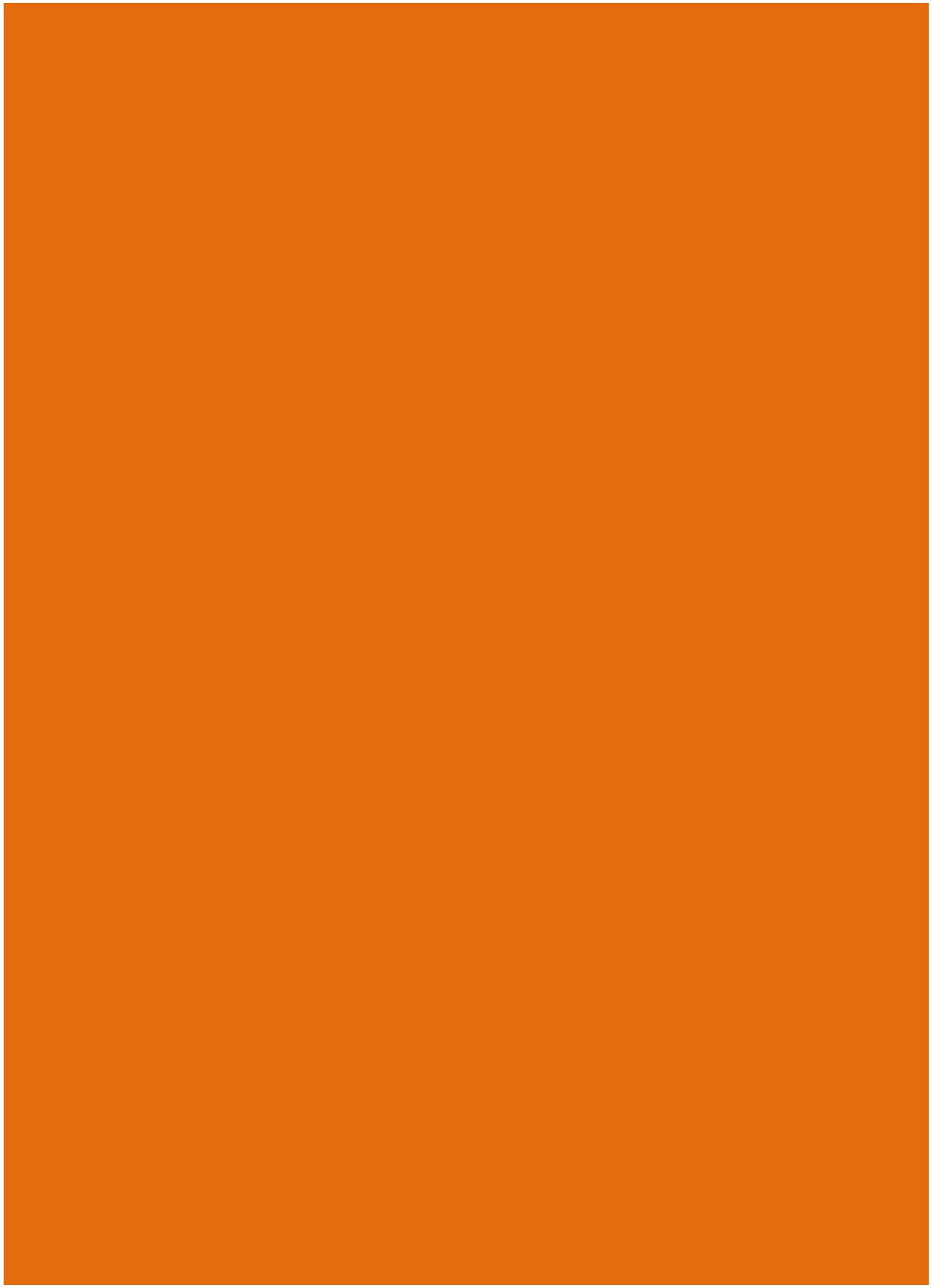
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- Douglas Hamilton, Director of the RS Macdonald Charitable Trust.
- David Johnston, Chief Executive of the Social Mobility Foundation.
- Catriona Williams OBE, Chief Executive of Children in Wales.

The functions of the Commission include:

- Monitoring progress on tackling child poverty and improving social mobility, including implementation of the UK's child poverty strategy and the 2020 child poverty targets, and describing implementation of the Scottish and Welsh strategies.
- Providing published advice to ministers on matters relating to social mobility and child poverty.
- Undertaking social mobility advocacy.

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Executive Summary

In the UK, demography too often shapes destiny. Being born poor too often leads to a lifetime of poverty. Both advantage and disadvantage cascade down the generations. Social mobility in Britain is low and is stalling.

Nowhere has this been more apparent than in education. Gaps in cognitive development between better-off and disadvantaged children open up early on, with those from the poorest fifth of families on average more than eleven months behind children from middle income families in vocabulary tests when they start school. Over the years that follow, these gaps widen rather than narrow. The overall result is that nearly six out of ten disadvantaged children¹ in England do not achieve a basic set of qualifications² compared to only one in three children from more advantaged backgrounds. The story is broadly similar in Scotland and Wales. The consequence for these children is a lifelong struggle to gain basic skills, avoid unemployment and to find and hold down a good job.

Though qualifications are the most important dimension of educational disadvantage, the challenge goes beyond exams. The chances of doing well in a job are not determined solely by academic success – the possession of character skills like persistence and ‘grit’ also matter. So too do wider opportunities including work experience, extra-curricular activities and careers advice. But, from the earliest ages, social background strongly influences who has these other predictors of later success, meaning that the better-off are multiply advantaged when it comes to winning the race for good jobs.

These inequalities matter – and not just to the individual children whose futures are scarred by low attainment and poor skills. They exact a high economic price for the country in lost growth as well as in wasted talent.

There is nothing pre-ordained to make the UK a low social mobility society where children’s starting point in life determines where they end up. International evidence has long suggested that the link between social background and outcomes is stronger in the UK than in many other countries. Now there is growing evidence from the English schools system that deprivation need not be destiny. There is an emerging wealth of data, stories and individual experiences demonstrating that some schools are bucking the trend, enabling their disadvantaged students to far exceed what would have been predicted for them based on experience nationally.

For example, in the last decade or so London schools have leapt ahead of schools elsewhere in the country when it comes to raising the attainment levels of their poorest pupils. But in every part of the country there are schools where children from

¹ Unless otherwise stated we have used “disadvantaged” to refer to pupils who have been eligible for free school meals in the last six years. Data derive from Commission analysis of the 2012-2013 National Pupil Database, removing selective, independent, special schools and schools where there are fewer than six Ever6FSM or fewer than ten total pupils within a school. Schools were also removed where no data was available on the proportion of pupils achieving five good GCSEs including English and maths.

² Five A*-Cs including English and maths at GCSE

disadvantaged backgrounds outperform the national average for all children. In fact this is the case in around one in nine secondary schools and in many primaries.³ Some schools seem to have learnt the secret of how to alleviate the impact of background on life chances. They have found a way of overcoming the barriers that impede social mobility. At a time when social mobility is stalling and child poverty is rising, there is an urgent need to share the lessons so that every school can crack that code.

Of course schools cannot do it alone. As the UK's official monitor of these issues, the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission has consistently argued that improved social mobility is not in the gift of any one part of society. Instead it needs a collective effort from government, parents, employers and educators among others. It would not be reasonable to expect schools to be able to wholly compensate for failures on the part of the other players on the pitch. Equally, schools have a key role to play and can make a difference. In this report we examine what they are currently doing and what they could be doing. The focus here is different from our previous work on schools, which has mainly examined the impact of central government education policy on social mobility. In this report, we focus on a much less scrutinised question: given the policy context, what can schools themselves do to address social mobility?

This report is one of a series of reports we are publishing that seeks to define what different parts of society can do to improve social mobility (previously we have looked at the role of universities and of employers). It is informed by a literature review, new analysis, consultation with experts, a large survey of teachers, two focus groups with high achieving disadvantaged young people and a programme of visits to some of England's schools that are achieving great outcomes for disadvantaged students.

Although our data analysis exploring schools' potential to make a difference is largely based on GCSE results, the steps towards social mobility that we set out in this report are aimed at both primary and secondary schools. Both have a key role to play in unlocking more social mobility.

The report:

- Sets out the case that schools can make a difference, presenting evidence which is beginning to challenge the decades-old assumption that wealthier children will naturally excel while poorer children lag behind.
- Quantifies the scale of the gap between those schools that seem to have learned how to weaken the link between background and attainment and the rest.
- Sheds new light on the barriers to schools adopting these steps, including new polling results on teacher attitudes and incentives to teach in the most challenging schools.
- Proposes five key steps that all schools can take to close the gap in attainment and in life chances and boost social mobility.

³ The figure for primaries is one in three. However, some of this outperformance will be explained by random variation given small cohort sizes and the higher proportions of disadvantaged children reaching the expected level at the end of primary compared to at GCSE

KEY FINDING: The wide variation in results between schools with similar intakes shows that there is a lot of scope to raise performance

Previous research has found that differences in school quality can explain on average around a fifth of the variation in children's educational attainment: most of the attainment gap is ultimately determined by differences in the home environment, including family background and parenting. But new analysis of variations in outcomes for students in schools with similar intakes suggests that schools can make a big difference if more step up to the standards of the best.

London's schools stand out, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds 38 per cent more likely to get five A*-C grades at GCSE including English and maths than those elsewhere and three times more likely to get eight A-B grades at GCSE than those in other regions. But it is not only in London that schools are achieving good results for disadvantaged children. Our new analysis shows that, in every part of the country, there are schools where a higher proportion of disadvantaged children get good results than the national average for all children. Nearly 60 per cent of such secondary schools are outside the capital.

The reasons why some schools get better results than others are complex. For example, it is pretty obvious that the challenges facing schools with 80 per cent of students officially classified as disadvantaged are very different from those facing a school with just 10 per cent. Nonetheless, there is growing evidence that *similar* schools (in terms of how disadvantaged the children who attend them are) perform very differently. Our analysis shows that:

- The best performers are helping three times as many disadvantaged children to achieve five good GCSEs including English and maths as schools with similar levels of disadvantage. In the best performing schools,⁴ 60 per cent of disadvantaged children achieve five good GCSEs including English and maths compared to only 25 per cent in the lowest performing.⁵
- If schools closed half the gap in performance to the top 20 per cent of schools with similar concentrations of disadvantage, over 14,000 more disadvantaged students would get 5 good GCSEs each year. To put that in perspective, in 2012-3, around 61,000 disadvantaged children got five good GCSEs, so this would mean that almost 25 per cent more disadvantaged children would be achieving at this level if the gap was closed.

Of course, schools which look comparable on how disadvantaged their intakes are may be different in other ways. The single biggest factor predicting results at age 16 is the prior attainment of students whilst at primary school so our analysis also looked at variations in outcomes between schools for all students at 16 (not just those who are disadvantaged) compared to the highest performing similar school (defined by attainment at age 11 of pupils entering the school). This analysis shows

⁴ The top 20 per cent of performers compared to schools with a similar level of disadvantage

⁵ The bottom 20 per cent of performers compared to schools with a similar level of disadvantage

that there is wide variation in the proportions of students getting five good GCSEs between schools where pupils have similar levels of prior attainment. Low attainment as a young person is a key risk factor for poverty as an adult, so this tells us something important about schools' effectiveness in preventing children from having low living standards as adults.

- If all secondary schools did as well as the best performing school with a similar intake (based on attainment at age 11 of pupils entering the school), the number of pupils achieving five good GCSEs including English and maths would be 37 percent higher.
- This average disguises big variations, with the gap in performance being especially big in local authority areas like Knowsley, Blackpool, Barnsley, Middlesbrough and Torbay. In Knowsley, for example, 80 per cent of GCSE students would have attained five good GCSEs in 2012-13 including English and maths if every local school did as well as the highest performing school in England which had an intake with similar prior attainment at age 11 compared to the actual figure of 44 per cent, meaning 82 per cent more children would have achieved at this level.
- If every school in England went just half way to the achievements of the highest performing English school with a similar intake (based on prior attainment), 60,000 more children would have gained five good GCSEs including English and maths in 2012-3. To put that in perspective, in 2012-3 around 320,000 children got 5 good GCSEs, so this would mean 19 per cent more children achieving at this level than at present.

KEY FINDING: Some schools will need to shift their focus towards core academic subjects and raising attainment across the whole ability range to avoid falling in national league tables and - most importantly - to improve social mobility for their pupils

From 2016 the Government is introducing a new way of measuring school performance to address deficiencies in the current accountability system which will affect children who are starting their GCSE courses in autumn 2014. The intention is to remove incentives for secondary schools to "game" performance league tables by overly focussing on pupils at the C/D borderline or by encouraging children to take "equivalent" qualifications that have not always carried the same value as GCSEs when it comes to continuing in education or getting a job. The new framework for secondary schools will introduce two new measures of performance based on the progress ("Progress 8") and absolute attainment ("Attainment 8") of students across a set of eight subjects, with a tougher test of which subjects and qualifications count towards the measure.

What has not been clear until now is the extent to which measured performance of schools will change in this new system. In order to better understand this, we have taken schools' national rankings based on their performance against the current headline accountability measure (five good GCSEs or equivalent qualifications, including English and maths), and compared it to how they would have done under

the absolute attainment measure in the new system (“Attainment 8”), using GCSE results from 2012-13.

Our analysis shows that most schools do not change position dramatically. However, a significant minority of schools do far worse in the new accountability framework. In particular, eight per cent of secondary schools see their performance ranking fall three deciles or more on the new framework, including a fifth of schools in the North East, one in eight schools in the West Midlands and more than a quarter of schools in Sandwell, Croydon, Halton and Tower Hamlets.

On average the schools experiencing the greatest falls are those with the greatest proportion of disadvantaged children. For example, 40 per cent of pupils within schools which fall by at least three deciles are disadvantaged compared to just 20 per cent of pupils within schools whose measured performance increases by at least three deciles.⁶ Furthermore, 112 schools which fall by at least three deciles taught pupils living in the most deprived areas⁷ (29 in London, 28 in the West Midlands and 17 in the North East) - this compared to just 33 schools which saw an increase of at least three deciles (19 in London, four in the West Midlands and three in the East Midlands).

This analysis presents a profound challenge to such schools and requires urgent remedial action. The fact that these schools’ relative performance falls sharply on a system that places double weighting on the value of English and maths attainment levels may highlight weaknesses in their current performance – with children either taking too few subjects, not having access to an academic curriculum, performing far better around the C/D grade boundary than elsewhere in the ability distribution, or simply performing a lot worse in core academic subjects than children in other schools.

Teachers in the schools that the Commission visited to inform this report were passionately committed to social mobility, arguing that they aimed high for their students because it is the ‘right thing to do’. The new accountability system has the potential to add a hard ‘business case’ edge to these moral arguments for doing more on social mobility.

Now is the right time for schools, governors and teachers to rethink their approaches and assess whether their practices and culture are really driving the best results for all students, because doing so will help schools perform well under the new accountability system. The new system also makes the case for schools to rethink how they focus resources on students – because it removes the focus on the C/D threshold, improvements in attainment will be reflected in measured performance no matter where in the attainment distribution improvements happen. Improvement strategies based on intensively focusing on those just around the C/D borderline which would be effective under the current system will no longer be sufficient under the new accountability system.

⁶ Caution should be given when interpreting these statistics as the number of schools within these extreme deciles is small.

⁷ We have defined “high deprivation” as “an IDACI ranking of less than or equal to 30”

KEY FINDING: Some teachers' expectations of students from disadvantaged backgrounds are too low and getting the best teachers to teach in the worst schools requires stronger incentives, including higher pay

There is a strong relationship between quality of teaching and the attainment levels achieved by students. Expectations also matter. But children in schools in disadvantaged areas and the most disadvantaged children within each school are least likely to benefit from the best teaching and there has also been debate about the extent to which teacher expectations about pupil potential are influenced by children's social backgrounds.

A new survey of teachers commissioned for this report helps to shed light on this question. We asked more than a thousand teachers a range of questions, including about what influenced their expectations for the children they teach. We found that teachers generally have high expectations of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and believe that, as teachers, they have a crucial role in shaping their students' hopes and aspirations for the future. However, we also found evidence that some teachers' attitudes towards disadvantaged students could act as a barrier to success. While it is clear that most teachers did not think social background had any influence on expectations at their school, over one in five (21 per cent) overall – and one in four (25 per cent) in secondary schools - agreed that some of their colleagues had lower expectations of students from disadvantaged backgrounds relative to those of other students.

In the best performing schools, there is a culture of teachers expecting the best from every child, regardless of their background. Expectations of success help to breed success. Our polling suggests some schools and some teachers are some way from adopting such a culture. It sends a very clear message to heads and governing bodies: making progress on social mobility means ensuring that every teacher displays a high expectation attitude towards all their pupils.

Our polling also revealed another concerning issue: limited appetite among teachers to seek out roles in the most challenging schools. As we have previously argued, one of the key steps in unlocking social mobility is ensuring that good teachers are deployed in weaker schools and disadvantaged areas. But just 15 per cent of teachers in our poll agreed that they would actively seek out a future role at a school that was more challenging than the one they already taught at, either because it had poorer results or a more diverse or disadvantaged intake.

More than half (53 per cent) of respondents agreed that the pressure of working in a weaker school would be a significant deterrent, unless there were mitigating factors like salary, position and travelling time. Strikingly, when asked to pick from a list of factors that might make them more interested in securing a role in a weaker school, a majority of respondents (63 per cent) identified a salary increase - compared to 39 per cent who focussed on specific development or training and 38 per cent who opted for clear opportunities for career progression.

These findings are a wake-up call to government, local authorities, headteachers and governors: if they want to get more good teachers into more challenging schools then they will need to pay them more and find other ways to incentivise them.

KEY FINDING: Schools should do more to learn from the ‘code breakers’, following five key steps to improve students’ life chances

Our engagement with schools suggests that those performing well for disadvantaged students do not apply a single magic formula. Success is incremental and based on a series of small changes rather than a single ‘big bang’ – compared by one headteacher to *‘being like the success of British cycling team: the aggregation of marginal gains’*. What the schools that we visited did reflect, however, is a common mindset – one in which leaders use evidence carefully, look beyond their local context, seek to compare themselves to the best and be ambitious in how they define success. This report sets out five key strategies that the schools that we visited told us that they deploy to enable children from less advantaged backgrounds to fulfil their potential. The key steps that the schools commonly identified include:

- 1. Using the Pupil Premium strategically to improve social mobility** – this means primary and secondary schools using the dedicated funding they receive through the Pupil Premium to narrow attainment gaps between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and others. The most effective schools inform their use of their Pupil Premium funding with data-driven analysis of why, how and where poor children are falling behind. They then seek to deploy that funding to address those barriers, using the school’s freedom to innovate and informed by the evidence on what works, including from sources like the Education Endowment Foundation toolkit.⁸ They also carefully examine the potential impact of income poverty on students’ learning – considering and taking steps to alleviate the impact of hunger, lack of a place to do homework and the financial cost of wider engagement in school life (e.g. affordability of school trips, access to study materials, IT availability, transport costs and so on).
- 2. Building a high expectations, inclusive culture** – this means being ambitious and “sharp-elbowed” for all children, with the school leadership team and governors sending a clear message from the top that they have high expectations of all staff and all students. It includes implementation of a firm and consistent behaviour policy and a ‘whatever it takes’ attitude to improving standards and results among all students: not tolerating lower standards because of a mindset that disadvantaged children cannot do any better.
- 3. Incessant focus on the quality of teaching** – this means placing the provision of highly effective teaching, perhaps the single most important way schools can influence social mobility, at the centre of the school’s approach. It includes prioritising recruitment and development of staff, partnering with other schools to help teachers develop, and ensuring disadvantaged students have at least their

⁸ The Education Endowment Toolkit <http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/>

fair share of the best teachers' time – not just (as in some secondary schools) focusing the best teachers on the C/D borderline, or on top sets where disadvantaged students tend to be under-represented.

4. **Tailored strategies to engage parents** – this means having high expectations of parents and building engagement (and – where necessary – the confidence of parents in dealing with teachers) by, for example, considering meeting parents on neutral ground outside of the school, finding creative ways of getting those who did not have a good experience at school themselves to engage and helping parents to be effective in supporting their children's learning – not passively accepting lack of involvement.
5. **Preparing students for all aspects of life not just for exams** – this means supporting children's social and emotional development and the character skills that underpin learning. It also means working with students to identify career goals early and providing excellent careers advice, treating extracurricular activities as key to the school experience and – particularly in secondary schools - encouraging a strong focus on working with business and universities, not - as in some schools - treating these things as optional extras.

There is one final strategy that some schools mentioned that need to be considered if prospects for a level playing field of educational opportunity are to be realised.

Walking the walk on fair admissions - not, as in some schools, covertly enabling disadvantaged students to be selected out. This means governors and heads recognising that securing a socially diverse student body can enhance the education experience of all students. It includes complying with the law in avoiding discriminatory decisions and, for Academies and free schools, using their freedom to give priority to children who receive the Pupil Premium in oversubscription criteria. The Government is currently consulting on extending this freedom to other schools, which should follow suit in due course.

Introduction: Social mobility and education

1. It is in Britain's DNA that everyone should have a fair chance in life. But in too much of the country, where children start out determines where they end up as adults. Gaps in cognitive development between better off and disadvantaged children open up before the age of three and get wider as children progress through school. Those from the poorest fifth of families are on average more than eleven months behind children from middle income families in vocabulary tests when they start school at five.⁹ Disadvantaged children are 20 per cent less likely to achieve Level Four in reading writing and maths in Key Stage Two tests at age 11 compared to other children and 37 per cent less likely to achieve five good GCSEs including English and maths.
2. Overall, six out of ten disadvantaged young people do not gain five good GCSEs including English and Maths at 16, compared to only a third of other children. The origins of this lie in the early years and primary schools – for example, fewer than one in six children from low-income families not achieving the expected level by the age of seven currently go on to get five good GCSEs or equivalent¹⁰: literacy and numeracy are critical. Mastering basic skills and achieving good GCSEs both matter profoundly to how well children do in the labour market as adults.
3. More than nine out of ten students who achieve five good GCSEs including English and maths move onto full time education, compared to only half of those who do not.¹¹ Young people who end up not in employment, education or training (NEET) are also predominantly those who did not do well at school– eight out of ten 16-24 year olds who are NEET left school without five good GCSEs. Differences in attainment are the key explanation for why pupils from the lowest social groups are three times less likely to enter university than those from the highest social groups.¹²
4. Of course, it is not just basic skills and exam results that shape life chances. A range of other things affect an individual's chances of getting a good job or being unemployed – whether competing for entry level employment, an apprenticeship or a highly competitive graduate job. There is evidence that non-cognitive or character skills are associated both with academic achievement and with getting a degree and a good job with decent earnings - but they exhibit a marked 'social gradient'.¹³ There are also marked socio-economic differences in the ability of young people to access wider opportunities that can help secure good jobs – in the networks and family contacts that can be used to gain valuable work experience, in access to extra-curricular activities and cultural opportunities that help develop a

⁹ Washbrook, E., and Waldfogel, J., *Cognitive gaps in the early years*, February 2010

¹⁰ Save the Children, *Too Young to Fail: Giving All Children a Fair Start in Life*, 2013

¹¹ Meschi, E, Crawford, C and Vignoles, A, *Post 16 Educational Choices and Institutional Value Added at Key Stage 5*, 2010

¹² Acevo, *Youth Unemployment: The Crisis We Cannot Afford*, 2012

¹³ Carneiro, E, Crawford, C and Goodman, A, *The Impact of Early Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills on Later Outcomes*, 2007.

rounded set of skills, and in the knowledge of the system, information and advice young people need to make good choices at key transition points in their lives. The consequence for many disadvantaged young people is a triple disadvantage in the labour market: worse qualifications; less developed 'character' skills; and fewer of the other things that help people get ahead.

5. This is, of course, a story of averages. Not every child from a disadvantaged background faces all of these problems and many who do are able to overcome them and succeed regardless. Overall, however, the inequalities reflected in educational outcomes and in wider knowledge, opportunities and skills really matter. The cost of this for individuals is wasted potential and lower financial security as low qualifications make it harder to find a decent job. There is evidence that these labour market penalties for low attainment are growing. In the past, children who did not do well at school could look to industrial skilled manual jobs that paid a decent wage. But changes in the economy and the labour market have squeezed the well-paid jobs 'in the middle' which previously offered real opportunities to those leaving school with few qualifications to gain solid employment with realistic prospects for progression.¹⁴ The consequences of not doing well at school today are often that people are trapped in low pay or cycling in-and-out of employment and struggling to make ends meet. The cost for the taxpayer, business and society is also significant: lost growth, wasted talent, lower demand, lower tax revenues, and higher costs for the state in social security and public services. For example, the bill for in-work tax credits, which help bridge the gap between low earnings and the income families need to meet the cost of living, was £21 billion in 2013.¹⁵
6. In our State of the Nation 2013 report, we argued that making progress on social mobility needed everyone to play their part.¹⁶ Families have a critical role in providing warm, authoritative parenting and a language-rich environment. Local authorities have a role in supporting parents to parent, and providing the high quality childcare necessary to close gaps in children's development and to enable parents to work. Employers need to engage with schools, provide work experience, apprenticeships, and recruit fairly. Universities need to commit to fair access and help schools and potential students get the results necessary to gain access. And Government needs to ensure those delivering public services have the information, incentives and tools to level the playing field, as well as taking wider action to address income and wealth inequalities.
7. We also identified a big role for schools and the school system. We called on schools to prioritise narrowing the attainment gap alongside raising attainment, to consider carefully how they use resources across the school (ensuring that it is not just the most advantaged students in top sets or those on the C/D borderline benefiting from the highest quality teaching) and to build the wider skills in their students that enable them to fulfil their potential in

¹⁴ Clifton, C., Thompson, S., and Thorley, C., *Winning the Global Race: Jobs, Skills and the Importance of Vocational Education*, 2014

¹⁵ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/personal-tax-credits-statistics>

¹⁶ Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013*, 2013

higher education or the workplace.

8. This report considers the steps that schools can take to improve their students' life chances, given the current national policy framework. It is split into three parts:
 - The first part considers variations in the attainment of disadvantaged children between different schools and different geographical areas in order to understand and quantify what scope there is for improvement if low performers could replicate the results seen elsewhere.
 - The second part considers some of the most important barriers to schools doing more to tackle social mobility – teaching quality, accountability and incentives.
 - The third part describes some of the steps that highly effective schools for disadvantaged children have taken that can potentially be adopted elsewhere. It is based on a series of visits to schools - including schools that achieve excellent results for disadvantaged children.¹⁷ Figure 1 sets out what we mean by social mobility and the case for schools to focus on this issue.

9. The Commission believes that progress on social mobility depends on every part of society taking responsibility. We want to help end the blame game in social mobility where - confronted by the overwhelming evidence that disadvantaged groups do not have fair access to top jobs and the income and power they bring - businesses blame Universities who blame schools who blame parents; with everyone blaming government.

¹⁷ We visited schools including Greenwood Academy, Castle Vale, Birmingham; RSA Arrow Vale Academy, Redditch; King Solomon Academy, Westminster; Pakeman Primary School, Islington; Castle View Primary, Runcorn; Burlington Danes Academy, Hammersmith and Fulham, Wade Deacon High School, Widnes and Havelock Academy, Grimsby. The views expressed here are the Commission's synthesis of our visits, informed by a literature review, internal National Pupil Database analysis and other evidence.

Figure 1 Why social mobility?

By social mobility in this report, we mean two things. First, children doing well as adults ('absolute' social mobility) – that is having a job that raises their income relative to their parents. Second, children having a fair roll of the dice ('relative social mobility') – that is, for a given level of talent and effort, being as likely as children from more advantaged backgrounds to get a good job that raises their income.

Ensuring that children fulfil their potential as adults obviously depends on lots of things beyond the school gates – including families and the labour market. Equally it is not schools' only goal: the education system is seeking to produce autonomous, free, well-rounded citizens and adults, not just individuals who can make a good living.

But social mobility is nonetheless a central purpose and responsibility of the schools system. It is an economic goal because young people's skills and qualifications shape employment, taxes, innovation and growth. It is a social justice goal because it is unfair if young people are unable to realise their potential just because of their background; equally, the economic security that comes from a good job is a critical enabler of schools' other citizenship and wellbeing objectives. It is a responsibility because no other part of the state has the same opportunity, time and tools to change lives for the better.

If a key role for schools is preparing children to get good jobs as adults and helping them to fulfil their potential, it follows that the outcomes schools are seeking also need to be broad – much broader than those covered in performance tables. In the Commission's view across primary and secondary school they cover at least four closely interlinked goals:

- Building cognitive skills and converting those into literacy, numeracy at primary school, and then qualifications at secondary school.
- Building social and emotional skills and character.
- Broadening horizons, raising aspirations and sharing cultural capital.
- Enabling opportunity and providing information and advice to ensure that young people can fulfil their potential in higher education or the workplace.

Part one: Variation in the exam results of disadvantaged children

10. As the Commission has previously argued, the defining feature of UK educational outcomes is the strong influence of social background. We assessed the landscape in our 2013 State of the Nation report on the key measure for which data is readily available - attainment.¹⁸ We found a system that – while improving overall – works badly for many disadvantaged children.
11. Although the exam results of disadvantaged children in England have been rising sharply in recent years, they remain relatively low compared to other children – with just 42 per cent of disadvantaged students getting five good GCSEs including English and maths, compared to 67 per cent of other children.¹⁹
12. The attainment gap between disadvantaged students and the rest remains stubbornly resistant to improvement. While some progress has been made, the gap has been closing far too slowly as better performance for disadvantaged children has been matched by improvements for other children.
13. Particularly striking is the fact that social background can explain more of the variation in attainment in the UK than in most other countries. Evidence from PISA suggests that in the UK, 14 per cent of the variance in pupil performance is explained by social background, compared with just eight per cent in Finland and nine per cent in Canada.²⁰
14. Clearly much of this is driven by factors beyond schools' direct control – most variation in outcomes is explained by the home environment.²¹ But schools still have a big influence and a good school can make a real difference to a child's life chances.
15. In England, disadvantaged children are less likely to go to a good or outstanding school than their better-off peers. Secondary schools in the most advantaged areas are 28 per cent more likely to good or outstanding than those in the most deprived areas (83 per cent of schools in the most advantaged areas versus 65 per cent in deprived areas). Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are also less likely to attend an outstanding school, even where there is one locally.²²
16. Equally troubling is that, even where disadvantaged children do go to good schools, their outcomes are – in the main – significantly worse than their

¹⁸ Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013*, 2013

¹⁹ These figures are from internal Commission analysis, using 2012-2013 National Pupil Database data

²⁰ OECD, *PISA 2009 Results: Executive Summary*, 2010

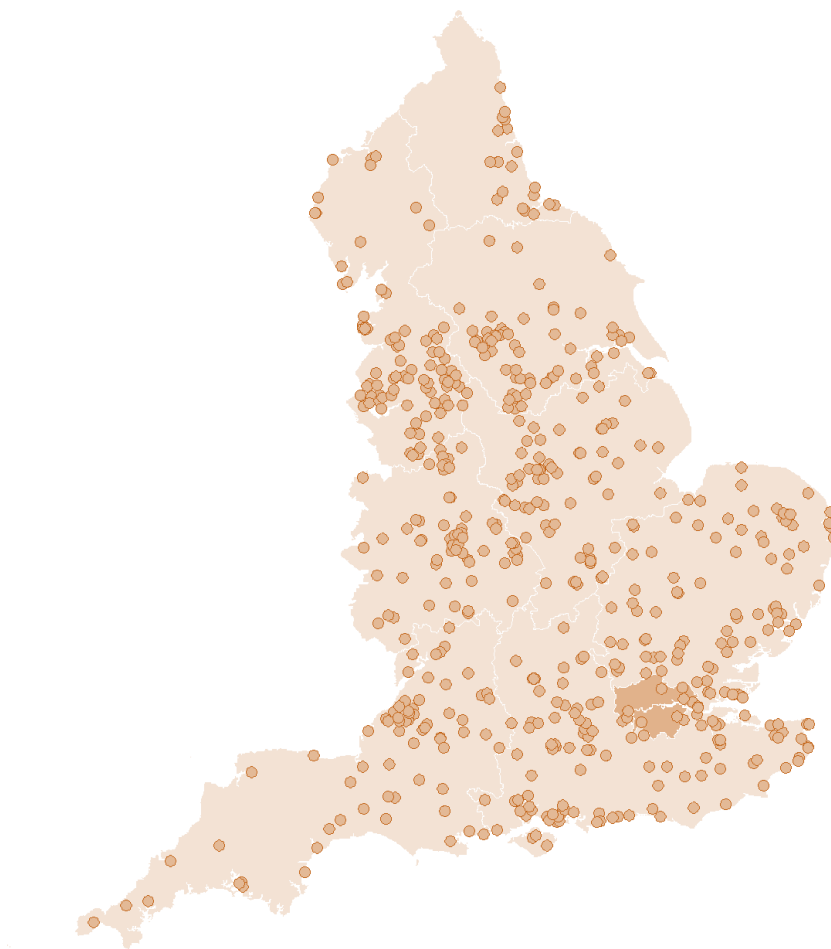
²¹ Rasbash, J., Leckie, G., Pillinger, R. and Jenkins, J., *Children's Educational Progress: Partitioning Family, Schools and Areas Effects*, Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, 2010

²² Ofsted, *Unseen Children: Access and Achievement 20 Years On*, June 2013

better off peers.²³ There are, in fact, bigger variations in the performance of pupils within schools than there are between schools which is, again, something which afflicts the UK more than elsewhere.

17. Figure 2 shows the location of the lowest performing 20 per cent of secondary schools for disadvantaged students, measured by absolute attainment.²⁴ What is apparent here is that educational disadvantage is widespread. It is found across market towns, Northern cities and depressed coastal areas. What is also striking is the disproportionate number - a fifth of the total of these low schools that perform relatively poorly for disadvantaged students are found in the South East.

Figure 2 Lowest performing 20 per cent of secondary schools for disadvantaged students at GCSE (five good GCSEs including English and maths)



²³ Cook, C., *Failing Schools and Top Schools*, 24 January 2013, Financial Times Data Blog, accessed 12 August 2013 at <http://blogs.ft.com/ftdata/2013/01/24/failing-schools-and-top-schools/>

²⁴ That is, those with the lowest proportions of FSM students reaching the benchmark of five good GCSEs including English and maths.

Region	Number of low-performing schools	Percentage of low-performing schools
South East	110	19.5
East of England	91	16.1
North West	83	14.7
South West	69	12.2
East Midlands	63	11.2
West Midlands	62	11
Yorkshire & Humber	61	10.8
North East	19	3.2
London	7	1.2

18. But amongst this depressing evidence on the impact that social background has on educational outcomes in England is also growing evidence suggesting that deprivation does not need to be destiny. Schools can make a decisive difference.
19. The best evidence for this comes from the experience of London. Just one in a hundred of the bottom fifth of schools for poor children in Figure 2 is found in the capital. Commission-sponsored work has previously looked at evidence on the dramatic changes in educational outcomes for children in the capital.²⁵ In 2002, London was the lowest performing region in the entire country but now performs better than any other for disadvantaged children, with these children 38% more likely to get five good GCSEs including English and maths than children elsewhere. The advantage is even higher at higher grades, with disadvantaged children in London three times more likely to get eight A*-B grades at GCSE than those elsewhere.²⁶ Part of the London effect is likely to be down to demographics – for example, the concentration of children from ethnic minorities. However, research suggests that this explains only about a fifth of the London advantage.²⁷

²⁵ Greaves, E., Macmillan, L. and Sibieta, L., *Lessons from London schools for attainment gaps and social mobility*, 2014

²⁶ Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013*, 2013

²⁷ Greaves, E., Macmillan, L. and Sibieta, L., *Lessons from London schools for attainment gaps and social mobility*, 2014

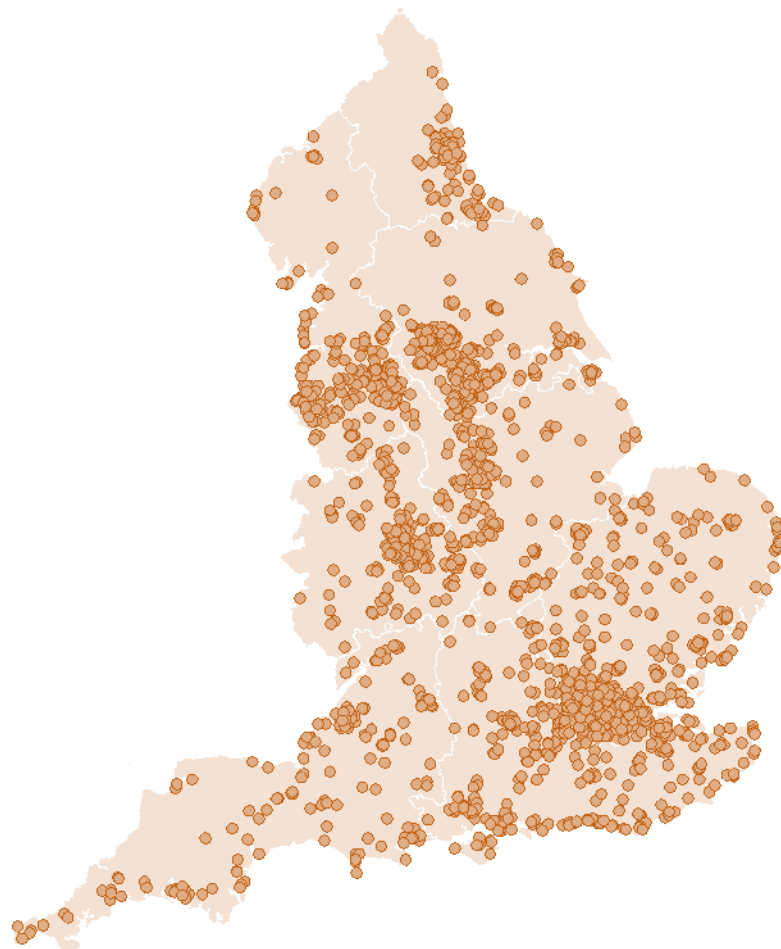
20. The good news is that there are schools who defy the odds for poor children outside of London too. Big cities like Manchester and Birmingham are also showing that deprivation need not be destiny. For example, in Birmingham nearly half of disadvantaged children achieved five good GCSE including English and maths, giving it a similar performance to outer London.²⁸ And further examples of schools which perform well for disadvantaged children can be found across the country. Analysis by the Commission finds that disadvantaged children outperform the national average for all children in one in nine secondary schools and many primaries²⁹ across England. Figure 3 breaks this down by region and shows it in two maps. Crucially, 60 per cent of these secondary schools and 75 per cent of these primary schools are outside the capital.

²⁸ This is based on internal analysis using 2012-2013 NPD data. Independent, selective and special schools have been removed, as have schools with less than 6 Ever6 pupils, less than 11 total pupils have been removed and those with no recorded GCSE data for their pupils have been removed.

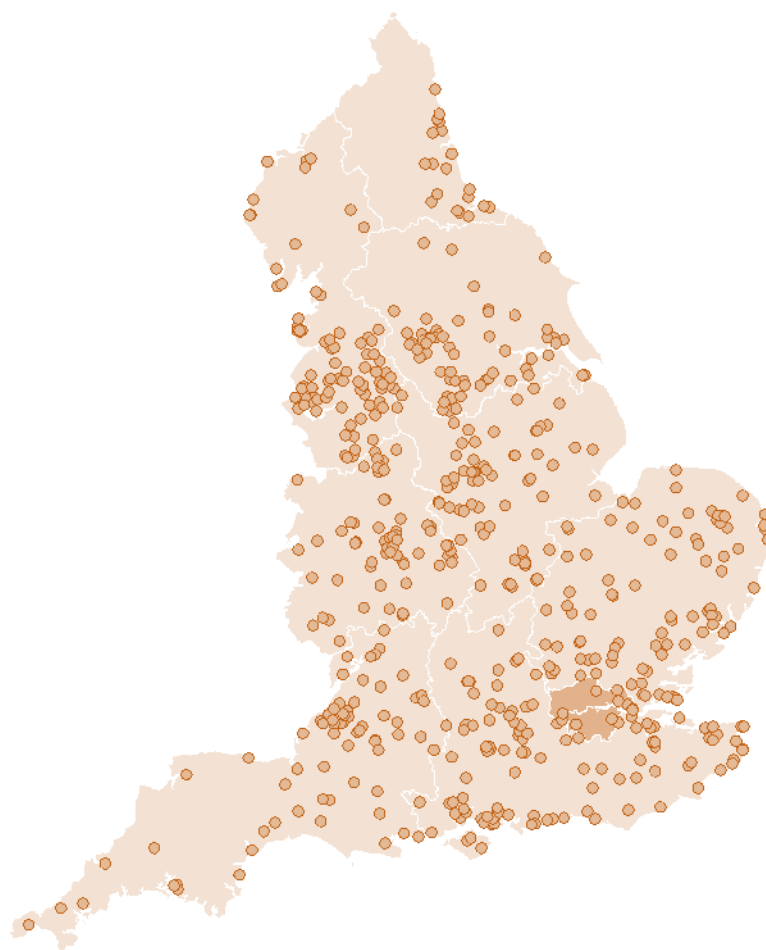
²⁹ The figure for primaries is one in three. However, some of this outperformance will be explained by random variation given small cohort sizes and the higher proportions of disadvantaged children reaching the expected level at the end of primary compared to at GCSE

Figure 3 Primary and Secondary schools doing well for disadvantaged children

Primary schools where disadvantaged students exceed the national average for all students (Level Four in reading, writing and maths in Key Stage 2 tests)



Secondary schools where disadvantaged students exceed the national average for all students (five good GCSEs including English and maths)



Schools getting above the national average for all students for disadvantaged (Ever6 FSM) students				
Region	Primary		Secondary	
	Number of schools	Percentage of schools in region	Number of schools	Percentage of schools in region
London	711	48.9	126	32.1
North East	212	38.6	15	10.2
West Midlands	315	30.1	33	9.6
Yorkshire and the Humber	237	23.6	27	9.3
North West	510	35.5	38	9.2
East of England	195	23	26	8.2
South East	267	23.8	24	5.8
East Midlands	183	25.9	14	5.9
South West	196	27.1	9	3.3

21. How much scope is there for schools not doing well for disadvantaged children to improve their performance? It is clear that:
- Many schools which have good results overall against headline measures perform much worse for disadvantaged students.
 - Attainment of disadvantaged children is much less consistent across the country than attainment of children from better-off backgrounds.³⁰
 - There are wide gaps within regions.³¹
22. What is less clear is how much of these differences in outcomes can be influenced by the school. To help understand this, the Commission has compared differences in exam results for secondary schools with similar intakes.³²
23. First, we compared the results for disadvantaged children against the headline ‘five good GCSEs including English and maths’ benchmark, for schools with similar proportions of disadvantaged children. This seeks to address the fact that improving the outcomes of disadvantaged students is a very different task in a school in an urban area where the vast majority of their intake is disadvantaged compared to a school serving a more rural area where there are relatively few disadvantaged students in each year group. Analysing the results in this way enables us to look at how much variation there is between schools which have similar proportions of disadvantaged students.
24. Second, we compared the results of secondary schools for all students (not just disadvantaged students) against the highest performing similar secondary school (defining a group of similar schools based on the prior Key Stage Two performance at age 11 of children in the school). Prior attainment explains much of how well children do in their GCSEs and so comparing the performance of schools with similar ability intakes give a better indication of differences in how well different schools are doing. The rationale for capturing

³⁰ Whilst the gap on the five A*-C measure including English and Maths at GCSE between London and the lowest performing regions for disadvantaged students is 17 percentage points (54 per cent of disadvantaged students reach this level of attainment in London versus just 37 per cent in the South West, South East, East Midlands and the East of England), the gap for other students is just 8 percentage points (72 per cent of non-disadvantaged students reach the threshold in London compared with 64 per cent in the South West). These figures derive from internal analysis using 2012-2013 NPD data.

³¹ In the North East, for example, just 29 per cent of disadvantaged children in Northumberland get five good GCSEs including English and Maths, compared to 50 per cent in North Tyneside. In the East of England, just 29 per cent of disadvantaged children in Southend-on-Sea reached the GCSE benchmark in 2012-3, compared with 49 per cent in Luton; and in the South West, 33 per cent of disadvantaged children in South Gloucestershire reached the GCSE benchmark compared with 41 per cent in Bournemouth. These figures derive from internal analysis using 2012-2013 NPD data.

³² The Commission used the performance of secondary schools to explore variations not because we think that secondary school is most important – far from it given clear evidence that early years and primary play a crucial role in establishing inequalities reflected in later outcomes - but because it is a guide to what has gone before, and a key gateway to later opportunities. We focus on exam results rather than other outcomes because they are formally assessed and the data quality is higher. We use the current accountability measures here because it is how schools have been measuring their effectiveness to date. In addition, albeit binary, the five good GCSE including English and maths measure also gives some indication of the students achieving a set of qualifications likely to grant them access to further education

a broader group, not just disadvantaged students, is that low attainment is a key risk factor for poverty in adulthood. As the Commission argued in its annual report, a school system that is effective in addressing poverty and social mobility for the long-term would reduce low attainment among those on middle incomes as well as those who are currently poor.³³

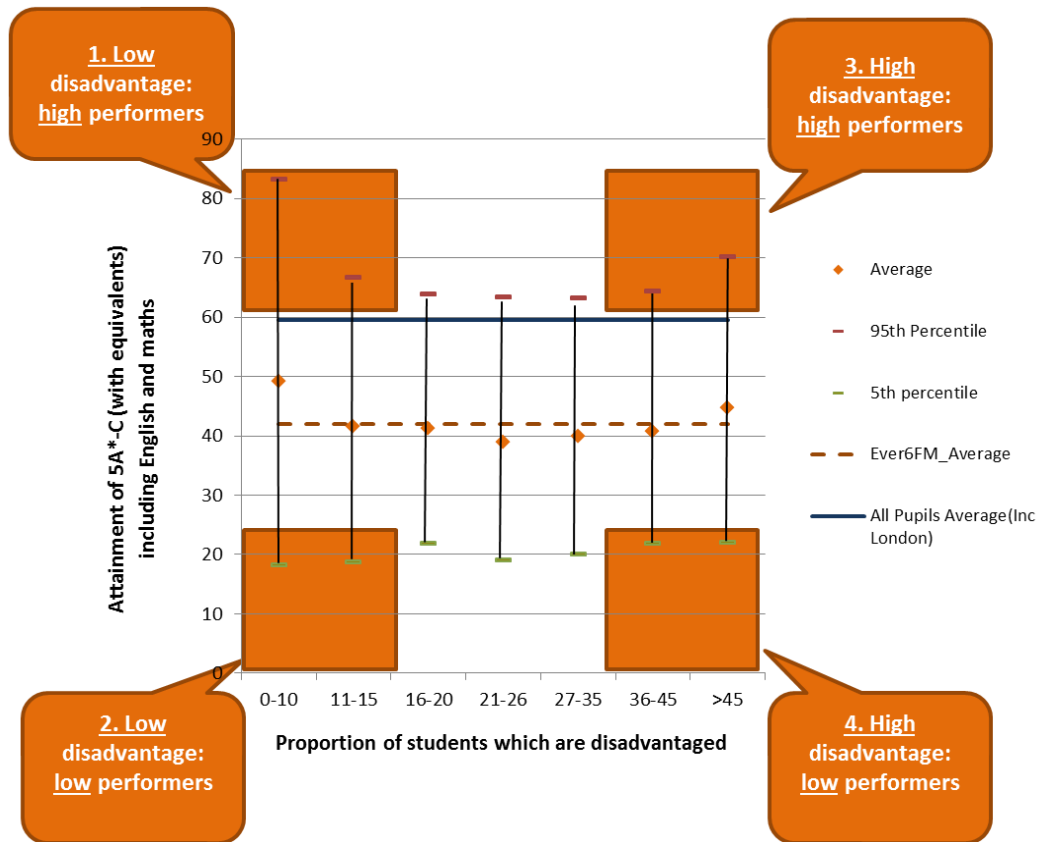
The absolute attainment of disadvantaged students – comparing schools with similarly disadvantaged students

25. Figure 4 shows how schools' results vary by the concentration of disadvantaged students in the school. It suggests that there are wide variations in outcomes for disadvantaged children between schools serving similarly disadvantaged intakes
26. The first thing to note on the graph is that the orange diamonds that highlight the average performance for schools at each level of disadvantage. They follow a 'smile' shape, higher at each end than in the middle. What this shows is that, on average, the schools where disadvantaged children get the best results either have lots or a few disadvantaged children; those where average results are weakest tend to have middling proportions.
27. The second thing to note is that the vertical lines, which mark the variation between the best- and worst-performers for each disadvantage band of schools. They show significant differences between schools which – based on the profile of their students on this measure – are nominally facing a similar 'intake disadvantage' challenge. Moreover, they are wider at the extremes. Overall it appears that schools with lots or few disadvantaged children get the best average results for pupils but also have the most volatility and widest range.
28. For the schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantaged students,³⁴ the difference between the best (above the 95th percentile) and the worst (below the 5th percentile) performing schools is more than 45 percentage points. In the best performing schools, more than two thirds of their poorest students (67 per cent) gained 5 A*-C grades including English and maths in their GCSEs in 2013; but in the schools with the lowest results, it was as few as one in five (21 per cent). In other words, three times as many disadvantaged pupils get five good GCSEs including English and maths in the best schools than in the schools with the weakest results

³³ Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013*, 2013

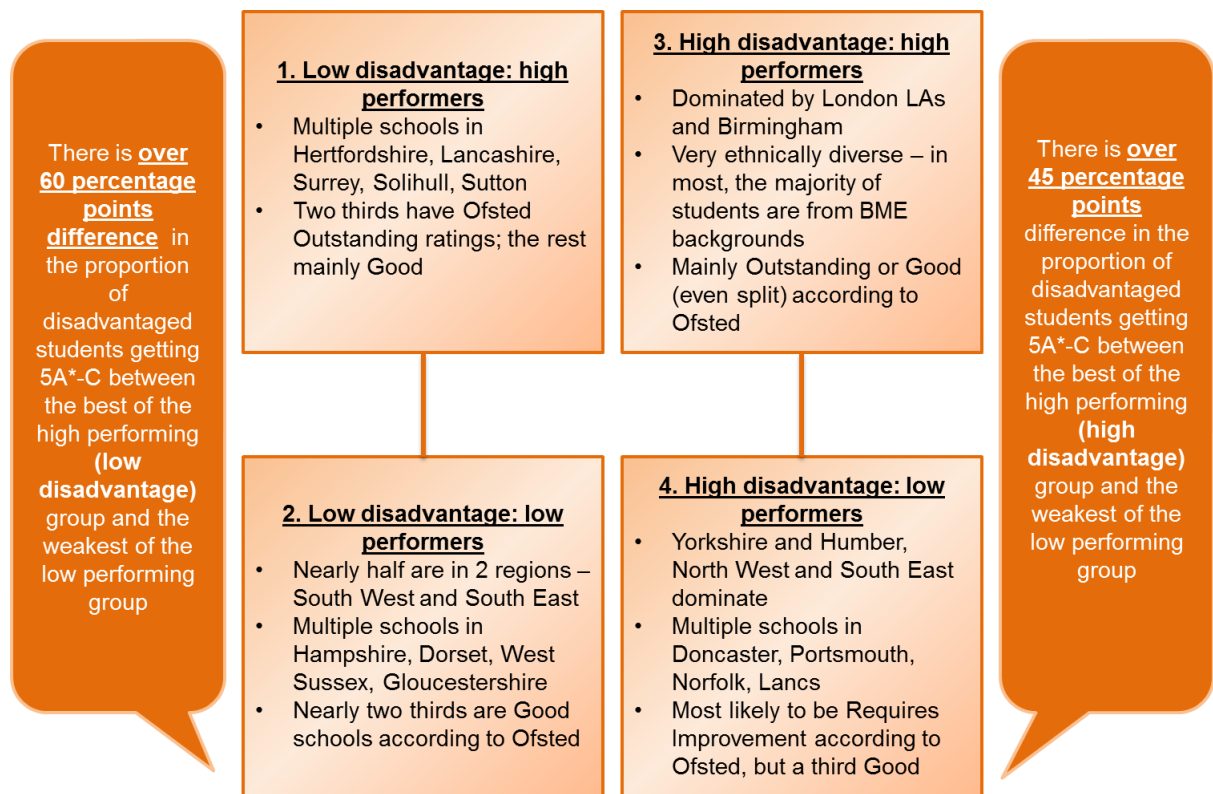
³⁴ Where 36 per cent or more of the students are disadvantaged/have been eligible for free school meals in the last six years.

Figure 4 Performance of schools with similar proportion of disadvantaged students – proportion of disadvantaged students achieving five good GCSEs including English and Maths



29. This variation in school performance raises a question: why are some schools achieving so much better outcomes for disadvantaged children than others? Figure 5 offers some tentative analysis of the different characteristics of the schools in the four corners of the chart – tentative because it is necessarily based on small numbers of schools (and, in low disadvantage areas, low numbers of students).

Figure 5 Analysis of ‘extreme’ performing schools for disadvantaged children

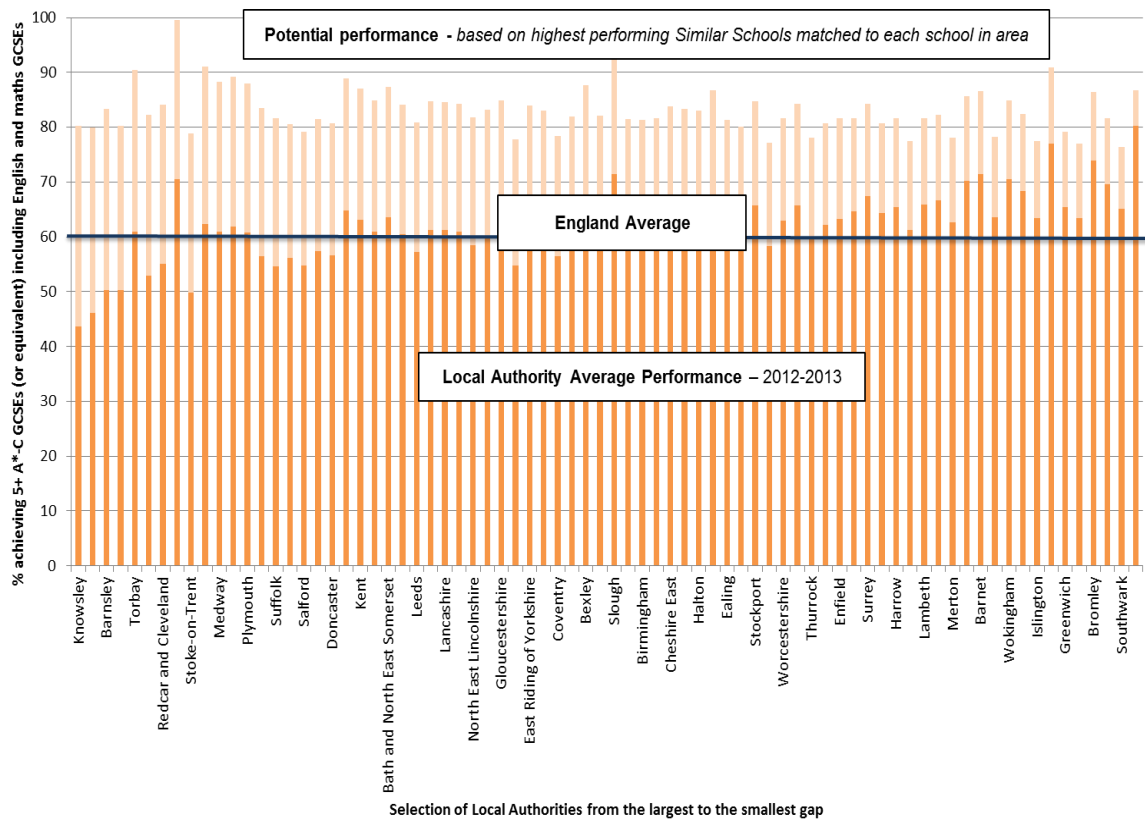


30. This analysis suggests that high disadvantage schools tend to be getting the best results for disadvantaged students in large urban areas with lots of students from ethnic minorities; schools with fewer disadvantaged pupils tend to be getting the best results in a broader range of places – for example Hertfordshire, Lancashire, Solihull and Surrey. High disadvantage, low attainment schools are more likely to be found in the South East, North West and Yorkshire and the Humber. Low disadvantage, low attainment schools are concentrated in the South West and South East including areas like Hampshire, Dorset, West Sussex and Gloucestershire.
31. What would happen if we could close some of the gap between these schools so that for a given level of disadvantage bottom performers got nearer to the outcomes of the top? The Commission calculates that if schools across different levels of disadvantage went just half way to closing the gap with the top 20 per cent of schools with similar concentrations of disadvantage, Over 14,000 more disadvantaged students would get five good GCSEs including English and maths each year. To put that in perspective, in 2012-13, around 61,000 disadvantaged children got five good GCSEs, so that would mean nearly 25 per cent more disadvantaged children achieving at this level.

The progress of all students – comparing schools with cohorts of similar prior attainment

32. The approach we have taken above does not take into account prior ability, which is a key driver of variation in GCSE results. It also only looks at part of schools' effectiveness in addressing disadvantage: a focus on children who have claimed free school meals at some point in the previous six years. This may miss out children from working class families who have never claimed free school meals as well as low attaining children middle income who – even though not disadvantaged today – are likely to be at higher risk of poverty as adults.
33. To explore these issues further, we looked at a different measure of school success that controls for the prior attainment at the end of primary school of each school's intake, which should give a better indication of secondary schools' effectiveness in transforming outcomes. Using the Department for Education's similar schools methodology, we matched each secondary school in England to the best performing school in its 'similar' group (that is, a school which is similar in terms of the prior attainment of its GCSE pupils when they entered the school at age 11).
34. This analysis is presented in Figure 6. It suggests that there is a lot of variation in the results achieved by secondary schools with similar ability intakes. We looked at the gap between actual performance (the average performance across all schools in the area) and the potential performance (the average of the best performing similar schools that we matched to each school) in each local authority area and found that 37 percent more children would be achieving five good GCSEs including English and maths if all secondary schools in England made as much progress as the best performing school with a similar intake (with the proportion of students achieving at this level increasing from 60 per cent to 82 per cent).

Figure 6 Variation by local authority between actual performance and potential performance based on the best similar school



35. As Figure 6 illustrates, the areas with the smallest gap between the proportion of students getting five good GCSEs including English and maths and the potential performance if they achieved the results of the highest performing similar schools are: Kensington and Chelsea (a seven percentage point gap), Southwark (11), Westminster (12), Bromley (12), Haringey (14), Greenwich (14), Sutton (14), Islington (14), Windsor and Maidenhead (14), Wokingham (14), Rotherham (14)* and Barnet (15). (*The only area in the top 20 outside of London and the South).
36. The areas with the largest gap between the proportion of students getting five good GCSEs including English and maths and the potential performance if they achieved the results of the highest performing similar schools are: Knowsley (almost twice as many would achieve the GCSE threshold - 80 per cent versus 44 per cent - meaning there is a 37 percentage points gap), Blackpool (34 percentage point gap), Barnsley (33), Middlesbrough (30), Torbay (30), Bradford (29), Redcar and Cleveland (29), Trafford (29), Stoke on Trent (29), Poole (29), Northumberland (29) and Portsmouth (29). The gap in outcomes at age 16 between schools in these areas and best performing schools with similar attaining students at age 11 amounts to about around a third of students in the lagging schools. In Knowsley, for example, 82 per cent more GCSE students could have gained five good GCSEs including English and maths if every local secondary school did as well as the highest performing school in England which had an intake with similar prior attainment at age 11.
37. This analysis demonstrates that there is an opportunity for the England

schools system to do far better for children if schools could close the gap with best performers. We estimate that if each school in England went just half way towards matching the achievements of the highest performing school with a similar ability intake, **60,000 more students would get five good GCSEs each year. In 2013, 320,000 Year 11 students achieved five A*-C grades, including English and maths, so this would mean 19 per cent more children achieving at this level.**

What do better results mean?

38. Our analysis above demonstrates that if every secondary school went half way towards matching the performance of the best schools facing a similar context, this would mean thousands more disadvantaged and low attaining students leaving school with better results:
- Lifting the tail for disadvantaged children in schools across disadvantage levels would mean over 14,000 more children from low-income backgrounds getting five good GCSEs including English and maths.
 - Raising the bar on low attainment in schools with similar intakes at 11 would mean 60,000 more students getting five 5 good GCSEs including English and maths.
39. What difference would this make to social mobility? The short answer is a significant one: higher earnings and employment levels and improvements in health and wellbeing, as well as significant savings to the taxpayer through higher tax revenues, lower expenditure on benefits and less pressure on public services.
40. On earnings:
- People with five good GCSEs earn around 10 per cent more than similar people who hold lower level or no qualifications
 - The lifetime productivity gain of attaining qualifications at this level compared to similar people who hold lower level or no qualifications is worth £100,000 for men and around £85,000 for women³⁵
41. On employment:
- People with five good GCSEs are more likely to be in employment than individuals who hold lower level or no qualifications.³⁶ A spell of unemployment at the age of 18 can lower an individual's wages by 12-15 per cent by the age of 42 compared to a comparable person who did not experience unemployment.³⁷
42. On health and wellbeing:

³⁵ Greenwood, C. Jenkins, A. and Vignoles, A., *The Returns to Qualifications in England: Updating the Evidence Base on Level 2 and Level 3 Vocational Qualifications*, 2007

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Gregg and Tominey, "The wage scar from youth unemployment", *CMPO Working Paper*, 2004

- Achieving five good GCSEs is associated with a lower risk of depression, smoking and obesity in later life.³⁸
 - A third (32 per cent) of young women who do not achieve at least five GCSEs at grade G or above have a child by the age of 19, meaning that they are ten times more likely to do so than those who achieve five GCSEs at grade C or above.³⁹
43. The prize then is a big one and one worth fighting for. But the challenge is working out how we can get there. What are the barriers to unlocking the potential of more disadvantaged and low attaining children to ensure that demography does not become destiny? This question is what we now address.

³⁸ Feinstein, L. Budge, D. Vorhaus, J and Duckworth, K., *The social and personal benefits and of learning: a summary of key research findings*. Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, 2008

³⁹ Longitudinal Study of Young People in England:
<http://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/series/?sn=2000030>

Part two: Accountability, teaching quality and expectations

44. As the Commission has previously argued, two major obstacles schools face in improving social mobility are:
- At a **system level**, the accountability framework has for many years driven a focus on those at the C/D grade borderline and encouraged the use of GCSE-equivalent qualifications that have not always carried the same value as GCSEs when it comes to getting a job as they have done in making schools look good in league tables. The consequence has been that students well below or well above the C/D borderline have sometimes been given less attention than they merit and there is also evidence that some disadvantaged students have been encouraged to take equivalent qualifications that are not always in their best interests rather than GCSEs.⁴⁰
 - At a **school level**, the key barrier has been teaching quality which, despite being perhaps the most important school-level factor influencing student attainment, varies widely between different schools and different local areas.⁴¹
45. On the first of these obstacles, the government is introducing a new accountability framework that will measure performance across the best eight subjects with a tougher test of which subjects count and give greater weighting to English and Maths.⁴² We have previously argued that this could be a positive move, with the potential to correct the worst unintended consequences of the existing system, though much depends on its implementation and in particular how parents react. Its strengths include that it looks at the progress of all students rather than just those at the C/D borderline by looking at attainment across the ability distribution rather than only at the number of children who achieve a certain threshold and that it will encourage greater focus on English, maths and on qualifications that are often given more weight by further and higher education providers and employers.
46. What has not been clear until now is the extent to which the measured performance of schools will change in this new system. This will be the new measure of school performance from 2016 so – though not yet widely recognised by parents - affects the cohort starting their GCSE courses in autumn 2014.

⁴⁰ See Centre Forum, *The Tail: how England's schools fail one child in five – and what can be done*, 2013 and Wolf, A., *Review of Vocational Education – the Wolf Report*, 2011

⁴¹ Sutton Trust, *Improving the impact of teachers on pupil achievement in the UK – interim findings*, 2011

⁴² The new measure will include a double weighted English and Maths element, three other academic subjects within the English Baccalaureate (sciences, computer science, languages and humanities) and three other subjects. It will include an element based on absolute attainment (“Attainment 8”) and an element based on pupil progress from age 11 (“Progress 8”)

The absolute attainment of all students based on performance across their Best eight subjects – comparing schools’ rankings based on their performance on the current GCSE accountability measure to their ranking based on the “Attainment 8” measure that will be in place in 2016

47. We have carried out analysis of the likely impact of “Attainment 8” in order to look at the effects it will have on schools and social mobility. Using 2012-13 GCSE results, we have:
- Ranked every secondary school in England, based on the proportion of all students achieving five good GCSEs including English and maths.
 - Re-ranked the same schools, based on the new ‘Attainment 8’ accountability measure (a score of absolute attainment i.e. not the progress measure).
 - Compared each school’s rankings under the two different measures.
48. This analysis helps to understand how far schools will have to go to ensure that their curriculum, use of equivalent qualifications and attainment across the ability spectrum is in line with new expectations. We looked at the extent to which schools experience dramatic rises or falls in the new rankings to identify where there might be implications for schools in particular areas of England.

Figure 7 The impact of the new accountability framework on performance rankings of schools in 2012-13

Ranking shifted markedly- moving up 3 deciles or more
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7 per cent of schools fall into this category, including:• Only 3 per cent of schools in the North East and Yorkshire and the Humber• A quarter of schools in Waltham Forest and South Gloucestershire (where no schools moved down)• Over a quarter of schools in Cumbria (two schools moved down by at least 3 deciles) and Herefordshire (where one school went down by three deciles).
Stayed the same/no drastic movement - moving -2 to + 2 deciles
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 86 per cent of schools fall into this category (30 per cent didn’t move decile, 36 per cent moved one decile, 19 per cent moved two deciles)
Ranking shifted markedly- moving down 3 deciles or more
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8 per cent of schools fall into this category, including:• 20 per cent of schools in the North East, 13 per cent of schools in the West Midlands and 12 per cent of schools in Yorkshire and Humber• Over half of schools in Rotherham (where no school moved up)• A third of schools in Bournemouth, Durham and Wakefield and over a third in Wolverhampton, North Tyneside, and Sunderland (with the exception of Wolverhampton no schools in these areas moved up)• Over a quarter of schools in Sandwell, Croydon, Halton and Tower Hamlets (with the exception of Croydon, no schools in these areas moved up)

49. As Figure 7 shows, most schools do not change position dramatically. However, a minority fall significantly in performance rankings against the new measure and some regions have far higher proportions of their schools affected than others. While overall less than one in 12 schools (eight per cent) fall three deciles or more on the new framework, this is the case for one in five schools in the North East and one in eight (13 per cent) schools in both the West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humber, as well as over a quarter of schools in Sandwell, Croydon, Halton and Tower Hamlets.
50. On average the schools which experience the greatest falls are those with the greatest proportion of disadvantaged children. For example, 40 per cent of children in schools which fall by at least three deciles are disadvantaged compared to just 20 per cent of pupils within schools whose measured performance increases by at least three deciles.⁴³ Furthermore, 112 schools which fell by at least three deciles taught pupils living in the most deprived areas⁴⁴ - this compared to just 33 schools in the most deprived areas which saw an increase of at least three deciles.
51. The fact that these schools' relative performance falls sharply on a system that assesses performance across a set of high value subjects, double weighting the value of English and maths may expose potential weaknesses in their current offer for disadvantaged children – either children taking too few subjects, taking few of the subjects within the English Baccalaureate, performing relatively poorly in the English Baccalaureate subjects or performing far better around the C/D grade boundary than elsewhere in the ability distribution. These institutions are potentially those most in need of a renewed focus on social mobility; including high expectations for all students reflected in a knowledge-rich curriculum.
52. Teachers in the schools that the Commission visited to inform this report were passionately committed to social mobility, arguing that they aimed high for their students because it is the 'right thing to do' – indeed, changing the lives of those from disadvantaged backgrounds is the reason many entered the profession. A belief in social justice and fairness was a powerful motivator encouraging teachers to work in some of the UK's most challenging areas. The schools that we visited felt that an inclusive, values-driven culture which has high expectations of teachers and students improved staff engagement, motivation, retention and performance. In addition, a number of governors and teachers described to us their strong sense of responsibility to the local community to turn out employable individuals whose futures were not determined by the circumstances of their birth or the history of the area.
53. The new accountability system has the potential to free teachers from the perverse incentives of the threshold accountability measure. It also adds a hard edge to these moral arguments for doing more on social mobility. Now is

⁴³ Caution should be given when interpreting these statistics as the number of schools within these extreme deciles is small.

⁴⁴ High deprivation has been defined here as an Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) ranking of less than or equal to 30

the right time for heads, governors and schools to rethink their approach, assessing whether their practices and culture really are driving the best results for all students.

54. The new system also makes the case for schools to rethink how they focus resources on students – it weakens the incentives to focus only on children around the C/D threshold because improvements in attainment anywhere in the spectrum of results will be reflected in how performance is measured. A key lesson for schools is that if they have deployed improvement strategies focusing on students around the C/D threshold in the last decade to enhance their league table performance, these will no longer be enough under the new accountability system.

Teacher attitudes and ambitions: a key to social mobility

55. What else needs to be in place to drive this improvement? The Commission – and many others - has long argued that the key school-level driver of attainment and opportunity (and therefore social mobility) is teaching quality. But in the current school system, the most disadvantaged areas and the most disadvantaged students within schools are least likely to benefit from the best teaching overall.⁴⁵
56. To improve our understanding of teachers' career choices and their impact on students, the Commission included 11 questions in the NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey,⁴⁶ with the aim of examining teachers' views on a range of factors related to social mobility. Over 1,100 teachers were polled - split roughly evenly between primary schools and secondary schools.
57. A key area examined by our polling was teacher expectations of students – which has long been part of social mobility debates.⁴⁷ The survey sought to add to previous research which has considered both how important teachers are in shaping children's hopes and dreams, and offered differing views of how consistently teachers engage with children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
58. The first key finding of our polling is that respondents agreed on the importance that teacher expectations have of students. 97 per cent agreed that they were important or very important to students' hopes for the future. Strikingly, more teachers cited expectations than other factors that might influence their students' aspirations including the local economy (74 per cent) or students' ability (83 per cent).
59. The second key finding was about the nature of teacher expectations, which the polling sought to explore by asking respondents about colleagues in their school. Encouragingly, most teachers were sanguine about their attitudes towards the potential of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Over

⁴⁵ Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013*, October 2013

⁴⁶ White, R., Sims, D. and Walkey, S., *NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus, Research report for the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission*, The National Foundation for Educational Research, 2014

⁴⁷ See for example Rosenthal, R. and Jacobson, L., *Pygmalion in the classroom*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968

three quarters disagreed or strongly disagreed that colleagues had lower expectations for less well-off children. Nonetheless, this still left a significant minority - just over one in five (21 per cent) – who agreed that their colleagues had lower expectations of disadvantaged students. A larger proportion of secondary school respondents (25 per cent) than primary schools respondents and a larger proportion of senior leaders than classroom teachers agreed that this was the case.

60. The Commission's survey also asked what type of jobs teachers envisaged Year 11 bottom set students doing in ten years' time. Two fifths (40 per cent) thought semi-skilled or unskilled manual work. Nearly one in ten (nine per cent) predicted that the majority of bottom-set students would be neither in employment or training in ten years' time.
61. It is difficult to interpret these figures as the respondents may of course be wrong about their colleagues, or right about the prospects of their bottom sets. The teachers the Commission met during research for this report were overwhelmingly ambitious for all their students, and actively strove to ensure that they kept aspirations high, regardless of background.
62. It is worth, however, noting previous evidence of challenges in relation to expectations from a minority of teachers. There are, for example, periodic complaints from those working in university access about teachers 'gatekeeping', sometimes from the best of intention such as protecting students from possible rejection: "*We found, generally, that a lot of colleges, and even parents, are gatekeepers, with regard to widening access. That they can actively discourage some students, so I believe that the colleges themselves really need to be targeted - to let them know what type of students, and what requirements there are for applications to widening access. Because I do not think that a lot of them know. We still get students coming in saying, oh, our teachers told us not to bother, we would not get in as we're not the right type of student.*" (Widening Participation interviewee).⁴⁸ Previous polling for the Sutton Trust has found that less than half of secondary state school teachers say they would advise their brightest pupils to apply to Oxford and Cambridge universities, and substantially underestimate the proportion of state school children in those institutions.⁴⁹
63. There is also strong quantitative evidence showing that there are real risks of unconscious bias and stereotyping based on a child's background including their family income, ethnicity and SEN status. This used results from the Millennium Cohort Study to compare performance on reading and maths tests at age seven to teacher assessment of children's ability. Students in families on low incomes were 11 per cent less likely to be judged above average at

⁴⁸ Cleland, J. and Nicholson, S. *A review of current practice to support Widening Participation in Medicine*, Medical Schools Council, 2013.

⁴⁹ Sutton Trust, *Less than half of state teachers would advise their most able pupils to apply to Oxbridge*, 2012 <http://www.suttontrust.com/news/news/less-than-half-of-state-teachers-oxbridge/>

reading compared to similarly attaining children in better off households.⁵⁰

64. As we argue below, in the best performing schools there is a culture of teachers expecting the best from every pupil, regardless of background. Expectation of success helps to breed success. Taken together, these results suggest that a minority of teachers may be a long way from adopting such a culture.
65. If schools that are performing less well for disadvantaged children are to improve their results and catch-up, they need to ensure teaching quality is as good as it can possibly be. Part of this will be about continuous professional development. Part will be about recruitment, so our polling also explored teachers' incentives to seek out roles in more challenging schools.
66. The key finding here is evidence of limited appetite among teachers to seek out such opportunities. In fact, just 15 per cent agreed they would actively seek out a role at a school more challenging than their current one – with poorer results or a more diverse or disadvantaged intake.
67. Why do so few teachers want to work in schools with a more disadvantaged intake and what would incentivise them to do so? Our polling provides evidence that it may be the current accountability system itself, with more than half (53 per cent) of respondents agreeing that the pressure of working in a weaker school would be a significant deterrent, unless there were mitigating factors like salary, position and travelling time from their house.
68. The polling sought to explore these mitigating factors in more detail, prompted in part by the commonly expressed view that the most productive levers for getting teachers into challenging areas and schools are career development and support. In our polling however, a majority of respondents (63 per cent) identified a salary increase from a list of factors that might make them more interested in securing a role in a weaker school. This compared to 39 per cent who focussed on specific development or training and 38 per cent who opted for clear opportunities for career progression.
69. It was also notable that 96 per cent of teachers indicated they would rely on a visit to the school when deciding whether or not to apply for a job there and 83 per cent the recommendations of personal contacts, compared to just 71 per cent who said they would rely on Ofsted inspection reports and 69 per cent school prospectuses. In other words, recruitment is relationship based, but visits to other schools are not central to how people management is organised within the profession.
70. Over time, changes to the accountability system may help to address this challenge. Some have argued that the Progress 8 measure has the potential to reduce reputational barriers to teaching in schools with disadvantaged intakes because it focuses on value-added rather than raw attainment. Teachers, like other professionals, want to work in institutions that have good

⁵⁰ Campbell, T., *Stereotyped at seven: biases in teacher judgements of pupils' ability and attainment*, September 2013 <http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/shared/get-file.ashx?itemtype=document&id=1715>. Family income was the fifth strongest factor after Black African, Pakistani, EAL and SEN.

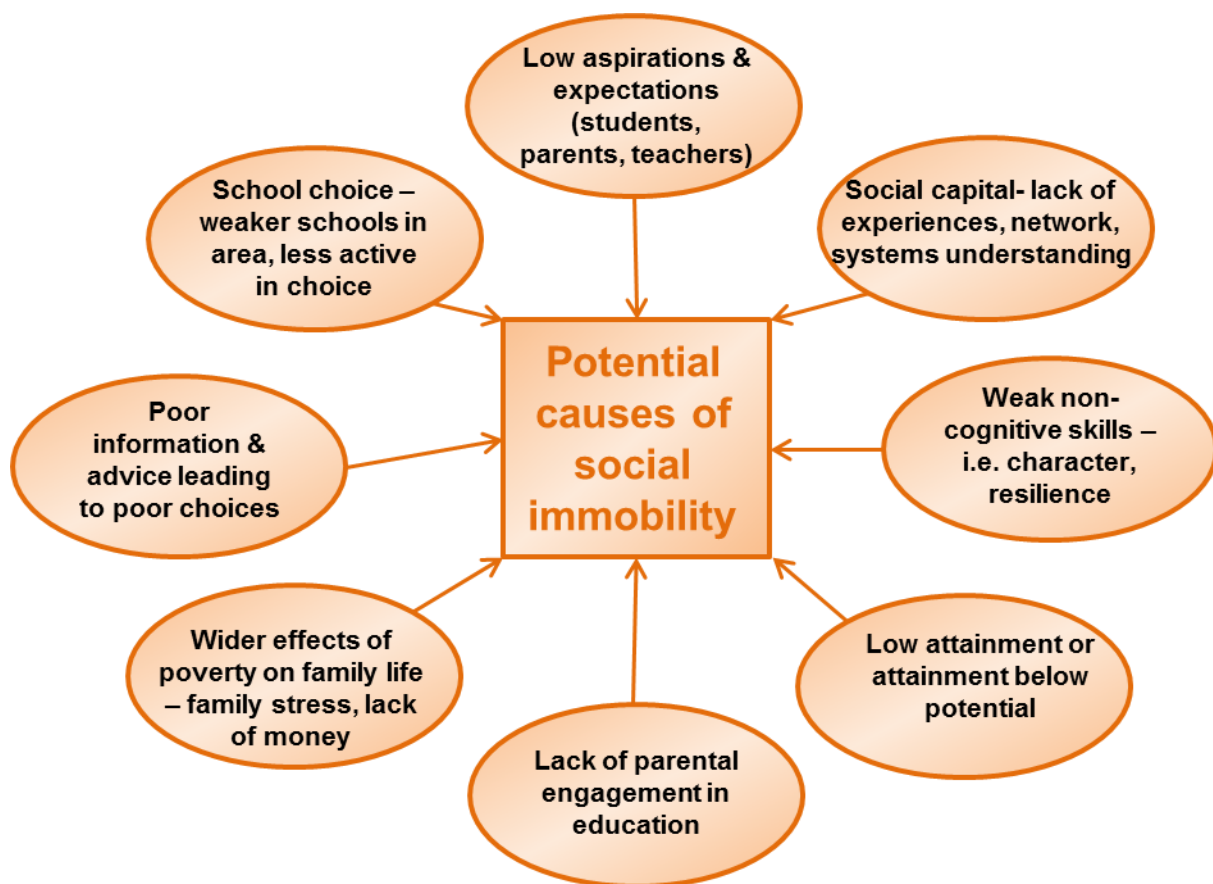
reputations. Those who argue this believe that, implemented correctly, the shift to the new accountability system could enable fairer comparisons and thus reduce the extent to which schools are judged on the basis of their intakes.

71. Nonetheless, these are only likely to deal with only part of the problem. The findings are a wake-up call to government, local authorities, headteachers and governors: if they want to get more good teachers into more challenging schools they will need to pay them more and find other non-monetary ways of incentivising them to work in these schools.

Part three: What great schools are doing to improve the attainment and opportunities of disadvantaged children

72. There are a wide range of factors driving low social mobility and schools can only influence some of the key drivers of the key life chances outcomes for which they are responsible. Whilst schools have no or little bearing on the global economy or on family life, Figure 8 sets out some of factors that we think schools should consider as they seek to address the possible drivers of their disadvantaged students' poorer outcomes.

Figure 8 Potential causes of social immobility



73. The Commission is clear that the UK will only be able to make real progress in improving social mobility if the government addresses the full range of regional, gender and ethnic inequalities that underpin low social mobility, including through:⁵¹
- Renewing its efforts to tackle child poverty, the levels of which are set to rise sharply in the coming years.
 - Prioritising closing the gap (in progress and absolute attainment) between disadvantaged and other students alongside raising standards for all.
 - A targeted and nationally co-ordinated approach to address the serious problems with quality of teaching in some areas of the country – including more of a focus on development of the current workforce as well as continued focus on recruitment.
 - A concerted effort to stop the geographical and socio-economic divide (in particular at higher levels of attainment) from widening further; which should include clear, localised failure and improvement regimes for schools.
 - A research programme to build our knowledge of how best to measure teacher quality in English schools.
 - A new approach to school performance tables which enables easier comparison between similar schools on their performance for disadvantaged students.
 - Funding high quality careers advice.
74. Progress will be harder if these steps are not taken. But even if they are not, there is scope for schools to do more. In particular, there is a wealth of practical experience, stories and data to be found in many of the schools in England that are getting good results for disadvantaged children. There is also an emerging evidence base on the specific ways that schools can improve attainment and tackle disadvantage drawn together by the Education Endowment Foundation⁵² that suggests that schools can make a difference, and which schools should use to guide their spending decisions.
75. To help us understand what schools achieving the best outcomes are doing that allows them to achieve excellent results, the Commission:
- Went on a programme of visits to schools across England, including many schools that get great results for disadvantaged children. The schools included: Greenwood Academy, Castle Vale, Birmingham; RSA Arrow Vale Academy, Redditch; King Solomon Academy, Westminster; Pakeman Primary School, Islington; Castle View Primary, Runcorn; Burlington Danes Academy, Hammersmith and Fulham, Wade Deacon High School, Widnes and Havelock Academy, Grimsby.
 - Carried out a literature review.
 - Carried out new analysis of the National Pupil Database (detailed above).
 - Commissioned a survey of teachers (see previous section).

⁵¹ Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013*, 2013

⁵² See the Education Endowment Teaching and Learning Toolkit:

<http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/>

- Held focus groups with high attaining disadvantaged students, organised on our behalf by the Social Mobility Foundation.
76. Our engagement with schools, supported by the evidence, suggests that those performing well for disadvantaged students do not apply a single magic formula– there is no one size fits all approach. Moreover, success for disadvantaged students is incremental, that is it is based on a series of small changes rather than single ‘big bang’ – compared by one Head to ‘*being like the success of British cycling team: the aggregation of marginal gains*’.
77. What the schools that we visited did reflect, however, is a common mindset – one in which leaders use evidence, are highly reflective, look beyond their local context; seek to compare themselves to the best and apply ambitious measures of success. It is the common messages that we heard from these schools which we have used to establish the five points set out below, drawing on research evidence where possible to supplement this ‘practical wisdom’.

#1: Using the Pupil Premium strategically to improve social mobility

What does it mean?

78. This means schools using the dedicated funding they receive through the Pupil Premium - £1,300 per year per disadvantaged student for primary schools and £935 per year per disadvantaged student for secondary schools in 2014/15 - to narrow attainment gaps amongst their pupils. The most effective schools start with a data-driven analysis of where poor children are falling behind. They then seek to deploy the Pupil Premium to address those barriers, using the school’s freedom to innovate and informed by evidence of what works, including from sources like the Education Endowment Foundation toolkit.⁵³ The key is seeking to start from first principles in understanding the barriers to learning - whether they are about the school environment (for example, teaching, behaviour and so on) or the home environment (for example, the impact of income poverty on diet, transport to school, a place to do homework, access to school trips and resources, or parental involvement in education and discipline among other things).

⁵³ The Education Endowment Teaching and Learning Toolkit:
<http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/>

“We absolutely have to look at which interventions are actually working. We found out very quickly what was effective through regular monitoring against the objectives of the intervention. Our key learning has been ‘It’s not just what you do, it’s the way that you do it’ – we absolutely have to measure impact – and if it’s not working, we have to try to understand why and refine it - or stop it altogether. Even down to things like which members of staff are most effective at delivering which approach, it’s taught us a lot.”

Headteacher, primary school

Why should schools do it?

79. Schools told us that it was a critical step towards ensuring that they were doing the right things: without an evidence-based analysis of underlying needs and barriers, they risked wasting time and money on trying to solve the wrong problems.
80. In our school visits, we heard evidence that, whilst many schools take a strategic approach to their drive to improve their students’ life chances, in some their approach is executed according to what feels right rather than the evidence. In directing Pupil Premium spending, too many schools are either just adding it to general funding, or starting with a list of interventions they are doing anyway. This misses out the start of the process – collecting and analysing the evidence on the problems facing disadvantaged students and ensuring that proposed interventions are effective in addressing those issues – as well as the end – collecting the data to assess the impact the interventions have had on attainment.
81. Other evidence supports the contention that some schools have struggled to get it right.⁵⁴ A third of school leaders did not consult research in deciding Pupil Premium priorities, though the proportion has been falling.⁵⁵ And around 300 schools have been required to undertake Pupil Premium reviews following Ofsted inspections finding significant issues regarding the attainment of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium.

What does it look like?

82. At the heart of the exercise is data. There are a number of tools and sources of advice available to support social mobility proofing, including from Ofsted.⁵⁶ The Education Endowment Foundation teaching and learning toolkit is based on rigorous and independent evidence. The Association for School and College Leaders has also identified a powerful set of metrics to enable

⁵⁴ Ofsted, *The Pupil Premium: How schools are spending the funding successfully to maximise achievement*, 2013: ‘70 visits showed that some schools are still not spending the Pupil Premium on interventions that are having any meaningful impact. These schools do not have good enough systems for tracking the spending of the additional funding or for evaluating the effectiveness of measures they have put in place in terms of improving outcomes.’

⁵⁵ Sutton Trust, *NFER Poll Results on Teachers Spending Pupil Premium*, 2013.

⁵⁶ Ofsted, *The Pupil Premium: Analysis and Challenge Tools for Schools*, 2013 -

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/pupil-premium-analysis-and-challenge-tools-for-schools>

schools to better understand where their poorest students might need extra attention or support, shown in Figure 9.⁵⁷

83. But it does not end with numbers. The senior leaders in the schools that we visited also told us about the importance of qualitative judgements in understanding student needs, which can reinforce a data driven approach.

“It’s about looking at every child as an individual – the ‘problem’ might appear to be the same, but it’s often not – data can help to identify a problem – but it’s also your knowledge which helps to address it in the right way - for some they won’t be progressing because they need emotional support, for some, it’s attendance – and that’s where knowing them so well and making the links to parents are so important.”

Headteacher, primary school

Figure 9 Possible areas to include in an audit of disadvantaged students

- Attendance rates.
- Mobility rates – that is, the extent to which FSM students are changing schools relative to other groups.
- Behaviour records, including detentions, other sanctions, and temporary and permanent exclusions.
- Profile of GCSE options (including the number and proportion of FSM students selecting academically rigorous subjects, including those counting towards the English Baccalaureate and A level subjects).
- Profile of subject sets, where setting by ability is used, as research indicates that social class and not just prior attainment tends to influence the sets in which pupils are placed.
- Profile of the quality of staff allocated to teach and support subject sets, where setting by ability is used.
- Pattern of participation in extracurricular and out-of-school activities.
- Identification of additional support because of special needs or language problems.
- Parental support, including attendance at parents’ evenings.
- Allocation of work experience and internship placements.
- Destinations at Year 11 and Year 13, including progression to further and higher education.
- Involvement in student leadership.

⁵⁷ Association of School and College Leaders, *Promoting social mobility: closing gaps in attainment – a practical framework for schools and colleges*, 2013

84. Some of the areas schools said needed to be monitored included:

- **Command of the basics.** High standards of literacy and numeracy are the foundations of learning - the central educational objective for primary schools and the key focus in the early years of secondary school. Few of the one in six children who are not reading at the expected level at age 11 go on to achieve good GCSEs⁵⁸ so it is essential that schools identify those at risk of poor literacy and numeracy early on to guide extra support and raise standards in primary schools. Secondary schools should identify and track weak readers on entry in order to guide intensive remedial help.
- **Life skills, not just attainment:** Heads told us that the key question for schools is not about good results, but ‘to what extent do disadvantaged students have the knowledge, information, skills and advice to thrive’ when they leave? Primary schools described consciously seeking to broaden horizons and build children’s range of experience. Secondary schools reported carefully monitoring factors like subject choice as well as participation in extra-curricular activities and work experience. Knowledge of students’ destinations after they have left school was used to inform success – for primary schools, feedback from secondary schools on how students do on entry; for secondary schools, data and feedback on employment and transition to apprenticeships, training or University. Destinations data shows that, for example, only 66 per cent of children eligible for free school meals in Reading in 2012 progressed to a positive destination after GCSE compared to 91 per cent in Slough.⁵⁹
- **Poverty and well-being: assessing students’ material, physical and well-being needs.** Child poverty levels are set to rise sharply over the next few years. Heads told us that they paid attention to the impact of low income on pupils’ lives at school and tried to alleviate its effects. Areas it could affect included arriving in school on time in the right uniform, health, diet, participation in extracurricular activities, parental engagement, homework, and risks of being bullied. Schools sought to mitigate some of these impacts through services like breakfast clubs and homework clubs, and through policies like having inexpensive uniforms and subsidising extra-curricular activities and trips. Schools also considered wider needs which might impact on students’ life chances – including attendance and health issues affecting children at school. RSA Arrow Vale Academy in Redditch told us about their use of a twice yearly well-being survey deployed across the RSA schools which informed their use of wider interventions.
- **Assessing ability across the spectrum:** Heads advised that they sought to be aware of high achievers from poor and working class backgrounds, where underachievement might be missed.

⁵⁸ Save the Children, *Too Young to Fail: Giving All Children a Fair Start in Life*, 2013

⁵⁹ Department for Education, *Destinations of key stage 4 and key stage 5 pupils: 2011 to 2012*, 2014
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/destinations-of-key-stage-4-and-key-stage-5-pupils-2011-to-2012>

“Our approach is not just for low ability pupils – it’s about identifying even high attainers who are not doing as well as they should (“we call them the – ‘even better if’ group”). This is where you need to go beyond data – more often than not, there’s a story behind the data that you have to know to understand how to improve things.”

Head, London primary school

- **Reviewing targets for disadvantaged students.** Schools described reviewing the targets they set for their students’ attainment. Many said that the key to improving results for disadvantaged students was to assess and increase the aspiration embodied in the goals they set.
- **Analysis of the deprivation of the entire student body.** As the Commission has previously argued, the Pupil Premium is imperfectly targeted. Even on an “Ever 6” basis, free school meal eligibility is an imperfect indicator of deprivation since most children claiming free school meals are in workless families whereas two thirds of children in poverty in the UK live in working families. Equally, so called ‘non-disadvantaged’ students come from very different backgrounds within and between schools. Some children living in working (but low paid) households may be experiencing a wide set of disadvantages but ineligible for free school meals because of the binary threshold. One school described seeking formally to try and assess this to understand how to allocate resources. A number did so less formally.
- **Using the Education Endowment Foundation toolkit.** Some of the high performing schools we visited cited the Education Endowment Foundation toolkit as a powerful resource that can help teachers understand the latest evidence on ‘what works’ in raising attainment.

“The Education Endowment Foundation toolkit is invaluable. Teachers should think very hard before spending money on interventions not supported by its evidence”

Headteacher, primary school

#2: A high expectation, inclusive culture

What does it mean?

85. This means being ambitious and “sharp elbowed” for all children, with high expectations of all staff and students that come clearly from the top. This includes stretching targets for results, implementation of a firm and consistent behaviour policy and a ‘whatever it takes’ attitude to addressing barriers to learning, not tolerating lower standards because of lower aspirations for disadvantaged pupils.
86. Many of the schools that we visited to inform this report described the challenge of overcoming low expectations, which are often shaped by a lack of local job opportunities. Strategies included working from the default assumption that students will be equipped with the skills and qualifications that will enable them to go to a top university. Others spoke of a relentless

focus on instilling attitudes, pride and belief and on establishing ambitious goals for the future as well as considering where each individual student needed additional help and experiences to achieve those goals.

“We’re an ‘optimistic school’ – we all believe that all children can. You might hear teachers - although not here - say ‘that child won’t achieve that’ or ‘that school won’t achieve that’. It’s about tackling that. If you hear it, you have to pull that teacher aside and ask how they’ll address it (so how they will get that child to achieve). Getting the culture right is the basis of it all. If everyone buys into it, there’s no end to what you’ll do. We need to stop failure becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

Head, London primary school

“The staff in this school go above and beyond. They buy into the culture and give up their weekends and holidays; but they see the rewards in their relationships with pupils. As a school, we see the barriers to achievement as outside, not here.”

Assistant Head, secondary school

Why should schools do it?

87. The key reason is that expectations make a difference to exam results, to careers and in allowing every child to realise their potential. Survey evidence shows that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds start out with high aspirations indistinguishable from those from better off backgrounds. But over time expectations shrink – particularly if children start to do badly at school, they have no role models or the practical steps needed to translate ambition into achievement are unfamiliar. Teachers have a responsibility here as guides to success and stewards of potential.
88. Evidence suggests that most teachers are living up to this responsibility. Young people in our focus groups, for example, spoke compellingly about the difference teachers had made to their lives, particularly in supporting them at key transition points. The polling previously highlighted in this report also shows that teachers believe that their role really matters in shaping their students’ hopes for the future. A higher proportion consider that their expectations matter in shaping students’ hopes for the future than consider that family income, the local economy or students’ ability matter.
89. But there is also some evidence that for a significant minority, lower expectations of teachers may be a barrier to disadvantaged students succeeding. As noted above:
 - One in five teachers in our survey agreed that colleagues at their school had lower expectations of students from disadvantaged backgrounds relative to those of other students, with the figure rising to a quarter of teachers in secondary schools.
 - Our survey also asked what type of jobs teachers envisaged Year 11 bottom set students doing in ten years’ time. 40 per cent thought semi-skilled or unskilled manual work and nearly one in ten predicted that the

majority of their bottom-set students would be neither in employment or training in ten years' time.

90. All this underlines the importance of teachers being alert to low expectations and consciously ensuring they support students to excel. The teachers and leaders in the schools that we visited strongly emphasised the importance of a high expectations culture in hiring and retaining teachers. The vast majority of teachers enter the profession because they believe that their skills and behaviours can make a difference to students – and we heard teachers who felt that despite the challenges of working in some of England's poorest areas, an 'anyone can' culture, can be highly motivating.

What does it look like?

91. Schools can embed high expectations in a number of ways:

- **Aspirational targets.** Schools described being more ambitious in the achievement targets teachers set for children through use of aspirational comparators – including by comparing progress and attainment of disadvantaged students to similar schools, and national figures for all students, not just local neighbours.

"It was not the soft bigotry of low expectations, here it was hard bigotry. It had to change."

Head, secondary school

- **Helping students to stand out from the start.** We heard examples from schools which had sought to encourage a particular skill in all students, such as learning a musical instrument. This approach helped to instil a sense of success and individuality in students separate to daily lessons.

"Schools should have a defining feature or activity that sets their students out and will drive aspirations forward. It can't be the same thing at every school. It's part of defining an ethos and culture."

Head, secondary school

- **Discipline.** A number of schools told us that consistent use of a strong behaviour policy had been vital to creating a high expectations culture especially 'recent turnaround' schools.

"It was necessary to shift the students and the staff from the previous way to something new, which is based on high expectations. We moved from a culture of 'it's ok to fail' and 'it's ok to make excuses' to a very robust consequences system for poor behaviour which every staff member has to buy into."

Head, secondary school

- **Uniform.** Some schools the Commission visited highlighted the importance of uniform to school culture – not as an end in itself but where it is tied to school ethos.

“Uniform is a big part of that [our high expectations culture]. We also have a strict dress code for staff and that helps us to encourage our young people to maintain high standards of uniform. Young people need to understand what’s going to happen in the world of work; and uniform is one way that we drive them to do that.”

Head, secondary school

- **Celebrating success.** A number of schools highlighted campaigns to increase student pride in themselves and in their school. This included celebrating the schools’ success publicly to students, praising great work and the successes of former students, and making a concerted effort (with very little spending) on the visual environment.

“The students must believe that they can achieve and that they are getting a great opportunity by going to your school. If you emphasise to them how well they’re doing and celebrate success, they generally continue to do you proud.”

- **Reinforcing ambition.** Several schools saw the development of ambition in their students as key to their culture; developing an ‘anyone can do it’ approach for higher education from an early age.

“All of our teachers have a sign on their door saying where they went to University and what they studied. This has had a great effect on students – they feel they know their teachers better and it makes them inquisitive about university, as well as about different places and subjects.”

Head, secondary school

#3: Incessant focus on the quality of teaching

What does it mean?

92. This means placing the provision of highly effective teaching, perhaps the single most important school-level factor for social mobility, at the centre of the school’s approach to narrowing the attainment gap and raising standards. This includes through properly resourcing teacher recruitment and development, partnering with other schools and ensuring disadvantaged students have (at least) their fair share of the best teachers’ time – not just subcontracting the teaching of low attainers to teaching assistants or focusing the best teachers on students at the C/D borderline.
93. The schools that the Commission visited were very clear that their success in transforming their students’ outcomes was down to their prioritisation of teaching and learning. Heads, backed by governors, had clear strategies which prioritised the development of their current staff – seeking to address underperformance and transform good teaching to great teaching – and to ensure that they got their approach to recruitment right:

“It’s hard to go wrong if you concentrate first and foremost on the quality of teaching – so that’s where I focus my Pupil Premium funding - on improving day-to-day teaching.”

Head, primary school

Why should schools do it?

94. First, because high quality teaching is a proven means of improving the outcomes of students. The difference between a very effective teacher and an ineffective one is large. For example, during one year with a very effective maths teacher, pupils gain 40 per cent more in their learning than they would with a poorly performing one.⁶⁰
95. Second, because high quality teaching has more impact on the most disadvantaged students so can be an effective means of narrowing gaps in progress and attainment. As the Commission argued in our State of the Nation 2013 report, previous approaches to helping disadvantaged students have often resulted in improved attainment for all, but made less progress in gap narrowing.⁶¹ However, ensuring that the poorest students have access to the best teaching can differentially raise attainment. The Sutton Trust has highlighted evidence showing that *‘over a school year, [disadvantaged] pupils can 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’* and that a good teacher makes a lot more difference to the progress made by disadvantaged children than by others,⁶²
96. The evidence suggests that the UK remains a long way from a sensible and fair allocation of teaching quality. In particular, there remain major gaps in leadership and teaching quality between schools and regions and that this may be one of the explanatory factors driving local differences in outcomes. As Figure 10 shows, in the North East, less than a third of secondary schools in the most deprived areas of the region had teaching rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding in 2013 compared with 79 per cent in the least deprived areas.⁶³

⁶⁰ Sutton Trust, *Improving the impact of teachers on pupil achievement in the UK – interim findings*, 2011

⁶¹ Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013*, 2013

⁶² The research finds that bringing the lowest-performing 10 per cent of teachers in the UK up to the average would greatly boost attainment and lead to a sharp improvement in the UK’s international rankings.

⁶³ Data taken from Ofsted Data View.

Figure 10 Schools with good or outstanding teaching by region and deprivation

Percentage of schools judged good or outstanding for the quality of the teaching, by region and deprivation, 31 December 2013						
	Primary			Secondary		
Region	Most deprived	Least deprived	Gap	Most deprived	Least deprived	Gap
England	75	88	13	68	85	17
North West	79	92	13	61	91	30
London	82	92	10	85	100	15
North East	83	95	12	30	79	49
South West	71	91	20	83	89	6
Yorkshire and the Humber	71	88	17	43	80	37
West Midlands	67	89	22	66	78	12
East Midlands	65	90	25	52	77	25
South East	62	87	25	57	91	34
East of England	57	86	29	47	82	35

97. The Commission's polling sheds new light on the barriers to getting teachers where they are needed.⁶⁴ As noted above, it finds that half of teachers (49 per cent) indicated they would not actively seek out a school which is more challenging than their current schools (with poorer results or a more diverse or disadvantaged intake). Only 15 per cent agreed they would. More than half (53 per cent) agreed that the pressure of working in a weaker school would be a significant deterrent unless there were mitigating factors such as salary, position and travelling time in place.
98. A recent research exercise conducted on behalf of Teach First analysed the difference between schools that it classified as 'strong' and 'exceptional' and found that a number of the key characteristics of the exceptional schools were

⁶⁴ White, R., Sims, D. and Walkey, S., *NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus, Research report for the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission*, The National Foundation for Educational Research, 2014

related to approaches to teaching and learning, including:⁶⁵

- Making use of group and peer learning, but this was seen as an area that could be further developed in strong schools.
- Investing more heavily in mentoring and coaching training cross-school.
- Having a clear focus on cross-school explicit pedagogical strategies linked to student achievement.
- Investing more systematically in professional learning and to secure a higher buy in to professional learning initiatives.
- Increasing the retention rates of beginning and trainee teachers.

What does it look like?

99. There are several ways the schools we visited seek to improve their quality of teaching and learning, including:

- **Strong focus on mentoring and coaching.** Good practice here included a peer coaching programme developed across a group of maintained primary schools, development of an in-house, formalised coaching programme, and extensive use of middle leaders to drive improvement.
- **Robust approach to curriculum basics.** The schools we visited had focused strongly on ensuring that their English and maths teaching was of the highest quality. Literacy is such a strong enabler of participation in the rest of the curriculum that schools prioritised it over everything else, particularly at the transition from primary to secondary. One secondary school that we visited told us about their provision of significant additional teaching hours in English and maths for students from Year 7 for those who enter secondary school below expected levels.

“If we don’t focus on literacy, literacy, literacy, students won’t have the skills and ability to participate in a broad curriculum when they start their GCSE courses at 14.”

Head, secondary school

- **Depth before breadth.** We heard in particular about ARK Academy schools’ practice of ‘depth before breadth’ ensuring that new students below reading and maths standards master these before they receive a broader academic curriculum.
- **Tackling recruitment.** The schools we visited all had individual approaches to recruitment, based on their previous experience. We heard praise for the potential of Schools Direct, with schools collaborating with others to develop high quality training programmes, some great examples of Teach First bringing in high potential new graduates who would not otherwise have considered teaching and schools designing new approaches to recruitment. Others emphasised the importance of exploring flexibility on pay.
- **Lesson observations as a key part of Continuous Professional Development.** We heard examples of schools increasingly using lesson

⁶⁵ Bell, M. and Cordingley, P, *Characteristics of High Performing Schools*, 2014

observations as part of their approach to professional learning – rather than just as a performance management tool. A number were using cameras in order to deliver this, where the video would be used as a coaching tool to agree actions for development.

“More lesson observation has started a real culture shift and we’ve helped some good and great teachers become really inspirational ones.”

Head, secondary school

- **Collaboration with other schools.** A number of schools reported developing strong partnerships with other schools to deliver coaching and training, to enable secondments, and to support Initial Teacher Training. Sometimes these were based on Academy Chain relationships; sometimes on heads’ interactions with other local schools. One school reported that it encouraged teachers to visit another outstanding school elsewhere in the country at least once a year.
- **Use of student feedback.** In line with the findings of a large scale US study, one school described their shift to a broader approach to teacher accountability – using observations, student outcomes and student feedback to measure the effectiveness of teaching.⁶⁶

“Having demanding students who have a way to provide feedback (as part of an evidence-based, formalised process) is all part of the culture shift.”

Head, secondary school

#4: Tailored strategies to engage parents

What does it mean?

100. This means having high expectations of parents and building their confidence and engagement with schools by, for example by supporting them to address wider family needs, meeting them on neutral ground (at home or outside of school), finding creative ways of getting those who did not have a good experience at school themselves to engage, and helping parents to be effective in supporting their children’s learning.

“I’ve never known a parent who does not want the best for their child – they often just do not know how to help.”

Head, primary school

“Aspirations around here are not low – they just need channelling in the right direction.”

Head, secondary school

⁶⁶ Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, *Ensuring Fair and Reliable Measures of Effective Teaching – Culminating the Findings from the Met’s Project’s Three Year Study*, 2013
http://metproject.org/downloads/MET_Ensuring_Fair_and_Reliable_Measures_Practitioner_Brief.pdf

Why should schools do it?

101. The schools we visited described engaging parents and understanding family lives outside of school as critical to their success in improving their disadvantaged students' outcomes. This practical wisdom is backed by strong academic evidence that parental engagement in learning matters to children and young people's attainment.⁶⁷
102. But there is a marked 'social gradient' in which parents get involved in schools. Polling of parents published by the Sutton Trust last year showed that more advantaged parents were not only more engaged but that they were also more likely to believe that schools listened to their concerns. They were more likely to contact their child's school to discuss the child's progress and did so more often than less advantaged parents.⁶⁸ Parental involvement that does not effectively reach all families has the potential to widen gaps between disadvantaged students and their better off peers.
103. Many of the teachers we spoke to highlighted the significant effects of income poverty on their students and felt a strong responsibility to do what they could to alleviate those effects – whether through supporting parents' directly or engaging with other services – in order to better enable their students learning. Others described how very high levels of disadvantage inhibit attainment-raising activity in schools that others take for granted – including struggles bringing in parental volunteers to read with students, lack of parental links to business to support work experience and careers advice and challenges in fundraising.

What does it look like?

104. Of all of the approaches to improving their students' life chances that schools discussed with us, parenting was the most context-specific – with headteachers and senior leaders describing diverse challenges and approaches. Some were more interventionist than others:

"I do not agree that schools do not have a role outside of the school gate. We have a role in helping to reduce parent's life stress; which in turn helps their children at school."

Head, primary school

105. Approaches included:
 - **Outreach.** Schools visited by the Commission often funded outreach workers to engage with families. We heard examples of staff employed to visit families to help to instil routines. This sometimes included very hands-on support such as going to family homes to ensure that students were up and ready to go to school. Outreach workers also provided lighter-touch support to families struggling with engagement with other agencies.

⁶⁷ Department for Children, Schools and Families, *The Impact of Parental Education on Children's Education*, 2008

⁶⁸ Francis, B. and Hutchings, M. for the Sutton Trust, *Parent Power? Using Money and Information to Boost Children's Chances of Educational Success*, 2013

A number of schools reported that the changing profile of local services (including increasing thresholds for social services and benefits changes) was placing more pressure on families and affecting students' engagement in learning.

- **Focus on transition from primary school.** A number of the secondary schools that we visited argued that engaging with families prior to the transition from primary school was very important: the shift to a bigger school with children taught by many teachers rather than only one was a key risk to parents staying involved.

"We try to understand each individual student before they reach us, so we can put together support packages for the students that need it before they enter Year 7 - parents really buy into the tailored support".

Assistant Head, secondary school

- **Visiting family homes, or neutral ground.** One school described visiting every family home in person before a child starts at the school, including agreeing a contract with parents setting out clear rights and responsibilities around their child's learning. Parents agreed to address behaviours which might act as a barrier to learning, to come in for meetings and to allow their children to go on school trips. The school committed to get the best results possible for the children. Another school told us that a number of parents who had negative experiences of school themselves had been hesitant about coming into school for meetings - so teachers would sometimes suggest to parents that meetings took place in more neutral territory like local coffee shops.
- **Engagement with other agencies.** Schools that we visited had very strong links with other agencies that they brought into school to support parents. These partnerships meant that in one school parents were offered sessions on managing money, English as a second language and maths skills (amongst others), and the school paid for a crèche whilst these sessions were on to reduce barriers to attendance.
- **Focused drive with parents to address underperformance.** One school described their use of targeted parents meetings for students identified as needing extra help – where they would work through their concerns with parents, with the intention of developing clear actions to drive improvement in outcomes which are formalised by a contract. The meetings include:
 - Discussion of parents' aspirations for their child.
 - Discussion of the impact of continued underperformance on their child's life (i.e. students gaining these levels are unlikely to achieve well at secondary and in the labour market).
 - Sharing research on parental engagement (i.e. research shows that where parents support their children in school, it can make a big difference to outcomes).
 - Discussing areas for improvement – comparing their child's work to their better performing peers (using examples of work to demonstrate to parents rather than using abstract concepts or levels).
 - Guidance and ideas on how parents could help to address underperformance.

#5: Preparing students for all aspects of life, not just for exams

What does it mean?

106. This means supporting children's social and emotional development and the character skills like 'grit' that underpin learning. It also means working with students to identify goals early and providing excellent careers advice, treating extracurricular activities as integral to the school experience and – particularly in secondary schools - encouraging a strong focus on working with business and universities to raise aspirations and improve careers advice, not - as in some schools - treating this as an optional extra. The schools that we visited overwhelmingly saw their role as securing a bright future for their students – which went far beyond producing as many students with good grades in their GCSEs as possible.

"It's just the right thing to do to address these issues. It's us being socially responsible – if we do not do it, we're setting them up to fail. We're measured in the same way as other schools – mainly on attainment – but we have to make sure that kids who leave here are ready to walk into great careers. I want local employers to come here to find their future employees and they absolutely won't if we do not look at the wider set of things stopping our students from succeeding."

Head, secondary school

Why should schools do it?

107. Because, as argued earlier in this report, children's chances of getting a good job depend on exam results, and a wider set of skills and experience. However, there are marked social differences not just in the grades that disadvantaged children get relative to better-off children but in terms of non-cognitive skills and 'performance virtues' like resilience to educational knock-backs, persistence and optimism. There are also big social differences in access to work experience and advice and extra-curricular activities that build these broader skills and help convert good exam results into good jobs. Recent polling shows that, whilst two thirds of the most advantaged parents paid for weekly classes for their child (like dance, drama, sports), just a third of the poorest parents did.⁶⁹ These inequalities may worsen over the next few years as locally-funded youth and leisure services contract in response to reductions in funding.
108. The challenge is that schools' direct incentives to look beyond exams are relatively weak. The accountability system remains strongly focused on academic performance. League tables require schools to deliver this broader set of outcomes to the extent that they improve attainment. While it is true that school level destinations data has been introduced, their current form provides

⁶⁹ Francis, B. and Hutchings, M. for the Sutton Trust, *Parent Power? Using Money and Information to Boost Children's Chances of Educational Success*, 2013

limited differentiation between schools which do a good job of developing a broader range of skills and those which do not and take no account of prior attainment (so do not look at the value-added by each school). Figure 11 shows the ten highest and lowest performing areas in terms of ensuring that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds progress to positive destinations post-GCSE.

Figure 11 Positive destinations of children eligible for free school meals after GCSE (those sitting GCSEs in 2010-11)

Proportion of children eligible for free school meals after GCSE (those sitting GCSEs in 2010-11) going on to an education or work destination in 2011-12⁷⁰			
Top ten areas (%)		Worst ten areas (%)	
Slough	91	Reading	66
Westminster	91	Windsor and Maidenhead	69
Haringey	90	West Berkshire	70
Lambeth	90	Wakefield	70
Newham	90	Torbay	71
Buckinghamshire	89	North Lincolnshire	71
Harrow	89	Walsall	73
Kingston Upon Thames	89	Stockport	73
Redbridge	89	Southend-on-Sea	73
Sutton	89	North East Lincolnshire	73

109. The evidence from most of the teachers the Commission spoke to was that activities ‘beyond exams’ and academic attainment are friends, not enemies: schools can only get children and young people to engage in learning by giving them broader experiences. For example, teachers talked compellingly of how work experience had encouraged students to see the relevance of their studies. Others, however, felt that the accountability regime and the associated pressure on schools have led to schools focusing on the academic at the expense of ‘the things that really matter’ in preparing students for work and life.

⁷⁰Department for Education, *Destinations of key stage 4 and key stage 5 pupils: 2011 to 2012*, 2014

“Some Heads are so tied up in academic achievement that they miss out on the rest – and for many of our students, it’s this wider preparation for their future that will make the difference to their lives.”

Head, secondary school

110. This ambivalence is reflected in evidence on careers advice. The Commission’s survey of teachers found that 82 per cent of secondary school respondents thought their school was doing ‘well’ or ‘fairly well’ in providing information, advice and guidance that students need to lead successful lives after school. But this is in clear tension with considerable evidence elsewhere on school performance in careers advice. This has been a previous topic of interest to the Commission following the devolution of responsibility to provide careers advice to schools without making available any additional funding⁷¹ Ofsted has found that three quarters of schools are not providing adequate advice and statistics from the National Careers Council show that less than one per cent of teenagers had used the National Careers Service phone line.⁷² There is weak coverage of vocational training and apprenticeship options. It is concerning then that only 13 per cent of teachers in the Commission’s survey thought their school was doing ‘not particularly well’.⁷³
111. It has also been reflected in recent years in curriculum choice, with disadvantaged children less likely to take the academic subjects that unlock pathways to the best universities than other children with similar prior attainment. One study shows a complex relationship between curriculum studied and future outcomes. It concluded that studying a set of higher status courses like languages, science, English and maths explains much of the difference in later outcomes between students at selective and non-selective schools. Studying ‘technical’ or ‘commercial’ courses had a mixed impact. While this decreased students’ chances of ending up in routine jobs with limited prospects as adults, controlling for ability, it also depressed students’ chances of them entering managerial and professional jobs.⁷⁴
112. Ambivalence is also reflected in patchy provision of work experience opportunities, with more than half of employers thinking that not enough young people leave school with sufficient experience of the working world and over a quarter of businesses citing lack of interest among schools or pupils as a key barrier to engagement.⁷⁵ The “Saturday job” has been in sharp decline, with the proportion of 16-17 year olds in full-time education who work having halved since 2000.⁷⁶ Limited work experience is a particular challenge in areas with weak economic performance, or which are geographically isolated

⁷¹ Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013*, 2013

⁷² Ofsted, *Going in the Right Direction? Careers Guidance in Schools from September 2012*, 2013, and National Careers Council, *An Aspiration Nation: Creating a Culture Change in Careers Provision*, 2013.

⁷³ White, R., Sims, D. and Walkey, S., *NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus, Research report for the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission*, The National Foundation for Educational Research, 2014

⁷⁴ Ianelli, C, *The Role of the School Curriculum in Social Mobility*, British Journal of Sociology of Education, 2013

⁷⁵ CBI, *Changing the Pace: CBI Pearson Education and Skills Survey*, 2013

⁷⁶ Office for National Statistics, *Young People in the Labour Market 2014*, 2014

http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_355123.pdf

– especially rural and coastal schools. Again, changes in the policy framework with the removal of the duty on schools to provide work experience may be contributing unhelpfully.

113. In the focus groups that we held with young people to inform this report, Year 12 and Year 13 students said they were concerned about their lack of preparation for what was to come and their dependence on schools to help them to compete for jobs. As they awaited offers from universities, disadvantaged students were worried about not being able to compete with the wider knowledge and experiences of better-off students, whose parents and schools may have steered them towards particular subjects, extra-curricular activities or experiences.

“For me it’s like a race... children from really good state schools or private schools or better off families who know what to do and have the contacts have a head start. We have that catching-up to do - particularly with work experience and other things. I’m on my own with that and for all of their efforts, my teachers struggle with it too.”

Year 13 student, secondary school

“Lower income families do not always have the means to encourage their children to do all these extra-curricular things. Middle and higher income families are more likely to know more about what it takes to build up the kind of skills and CV stuff that universities and employers want. If you come from a low income family it’s harder to help your child go off to do sport or play an instrument.”

Year 12 student, secondary school

What does it look like?

114. We heard a wide set of examples from schools about ways that they were seeking to prepare their students for life beyond school, including:
- **Goal-setting beyond academic results.** One school developed a form for all students in Year 8 with where they set out their career goals, why they want to achieve them, the subjects and grades that are likely to be necessary to achieve them (at GCSE and post 16) and university or training aspirations. The form was then updated as the student progressed through school and is used by teachers to ensure children get the right advice on how to fulfil their goals.
 - **Social and cultural capital building.** Schools we visited emphasised the importance of exposing their students to a set of experiences that they might not otherwise have access to, including through theatre, music, film, galleries and museums. These were critical in primary school, not just in secondary schools.
 - **Early engagement with universities.** Schools agreed on the importance of giving all of their students’ early exposure to universities, with most arranging trips for students from young ages to demystify higher education and raise aspirations. More than one school that we visited embedded an expectation from the primary stage that all students would go on to university.

- **A knowledge-based curriculum tailored to individual needs.** A number of secondary schools described incentives in the previous accountability framework to enter less academically able students for qualifications and subjects that performed better in league tables than in the labour market, even if this was not necessarily the best thing for their students' futures. Teachers were generally supportive of a move to the broader framework now being introduced – though also often confused and uncertain about how it would work in practice, and whether it would influence parental behaviour in how school choice was exercised given that the current headline measures will remain in place.
- **Early engagement with employers.** The schools we visited saw engaging employers as central to their educational mission, though many were also concerned about what was described as a work experience lottery. Through the luck of geography (especially in London) and parental contacts, some schools had a wealth of support and opportunities available to them. Successful engagement was long-term, not one-off, and focused on utilising employers' expertise about the workplace, not just on aspiration-raising. Schools activities begin in primary school. They included: bringing in a wide range of employers and speakers to make students aware of the range of possible careers; programmes of mock interviews for students conducted by employers who provide formal feedback to help support development; and high-quality structured support to arrange relevant work experience. Some schools employed a non-teaching member of staff specifically to manage and co-ordinate these relationships.
- **Tailored offers to prevent students from dropping out of study or work.** Some of the schools described their concern about students leaving the school and dropping out of education and either becoming unemployed or not joining the labour force (becoming NEET in the terminology used by policymakers), particularly where there was a family history of long-term unemployment. One school described how they targeted a small group of students from Year 9, with a more intensive programme of engagement with employers throughout years 9, 10 and 11, which had led to a number of students at risk of dropping out being offered apprenticeships when they left school.

A possible sixth area: walking the walk on admissions

What does it mean?

115. Each school's admissions are governed by that school's admissions authority, in compliance with the School Admissions Code. "Walking the walk" means, at a minimum, complying with the law in avoiding discriminatory decisions and – to truly "walk the walk" - ensuring that admissions procedures do not consciously or unconsciously prevent children from less advantaged backgrounds from entering the school: for examples, schools which have the

freedom to give priority to children who receive the Pupil Premium in oversubscription criteria – exercising this.⁷⁷ The Commission has not included this in the main five steps because our research focused mainly on what schools are doing to promote social mobility *given their intake* but it is undoubtedly very important.

Why should schools do it?

116. As noted earlier in this report, there are fewer good or outstanding schools in disadvantaged areas and disadvantaged students are underrepresented where there are high performing schools.⁷⁸ This matters to the results students get and the opportunities they receive. Ensuring disadvantaged children can access the UK's best schools is not a panacea - disadvantaged children still do relatively worse than others even if they attend good schools – but their performance is improved significantly relative to a weak school. There is considerable academic evidence that attending an outstanding school (and avoiding an inadequate school) matters much more for those from disadvantaged backgrounds than for other children.⁷⁹
117. In light of this, the scale of underrepresentation of children in some kinds of schools is troubling. Just 2.7 per cent of entrants to grammar schools are entitled to free school meals despite making up 16 per cent of students in English state secondary schools.⁸⁰ Disadvantaged children are also significantly underrepresented at top performing comprehensives.
118. There has long been anecdotal evidence of schools adopting admissions criteria or practices that may consciously or unconsciously affect intake. A recent investigation by the Children's Commissioner found that it was 'unlikely that large numbers of schools misuse the admissions system' but, on a small sample, cited evidence of parents, especially those of children with Special Educational Needs, who have been put off from applying to a school for a place as a result of negative messages they have received directly from school staff. It also cited evidence of state-funded secondary schools setting the price of uniform and other equipment extremely high in a way which has the potential to discourage poor parents from applying 'whether or not it was the school's intention to profile its intake on the basis of income'. And it found evidence of schools in similar circumstances less than a mile apart in the

⁷⁷ Academies and Free Schools can already do this and the government is considering extending this freedom to all schools

⁷⁸ Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013*, 2013

⁷⁹ Students who do well at the end of Key Stage 2 (age 11) are more likely to achieve eight Bs at GCSE regardless of which secondary school they go on to attend. By contrast, the GCSE results of students who do poorly at Key Stage 2 are more likely to vary widely – from lower than eight Es to as high as eight Cs depending on which school they attend. Allen, Rebecca, *Fair Access: Making School Choice and Admissions Work for All*, in Clifton, J., *Excellence and Equity: Tackling educational Disadvantage in England's Secondary Schools*, 2013.

⁸⁰ Of course grammars tend to be in more advantaged areas and take the top of the ability range, which will explain part of the discrepancy. <http://www.suttontrust.com/news/news/sutton-trust-prep-schools-provide-four-times-more-grammar/>

same boroughs with very different intakes.⁸¹

119. The Commission believes that schools should commit to creating a diverse student body as part of their educational mission; the best schools should not just be for those who can afford to live nearby. An increasing proportion of schools are their own admissions authorities. In the same way that universities recognise part of their role is diversity and this strengthens the education they offer, so too should schools – notwithstanding disincentives in the current accountability system.

What does it look like?

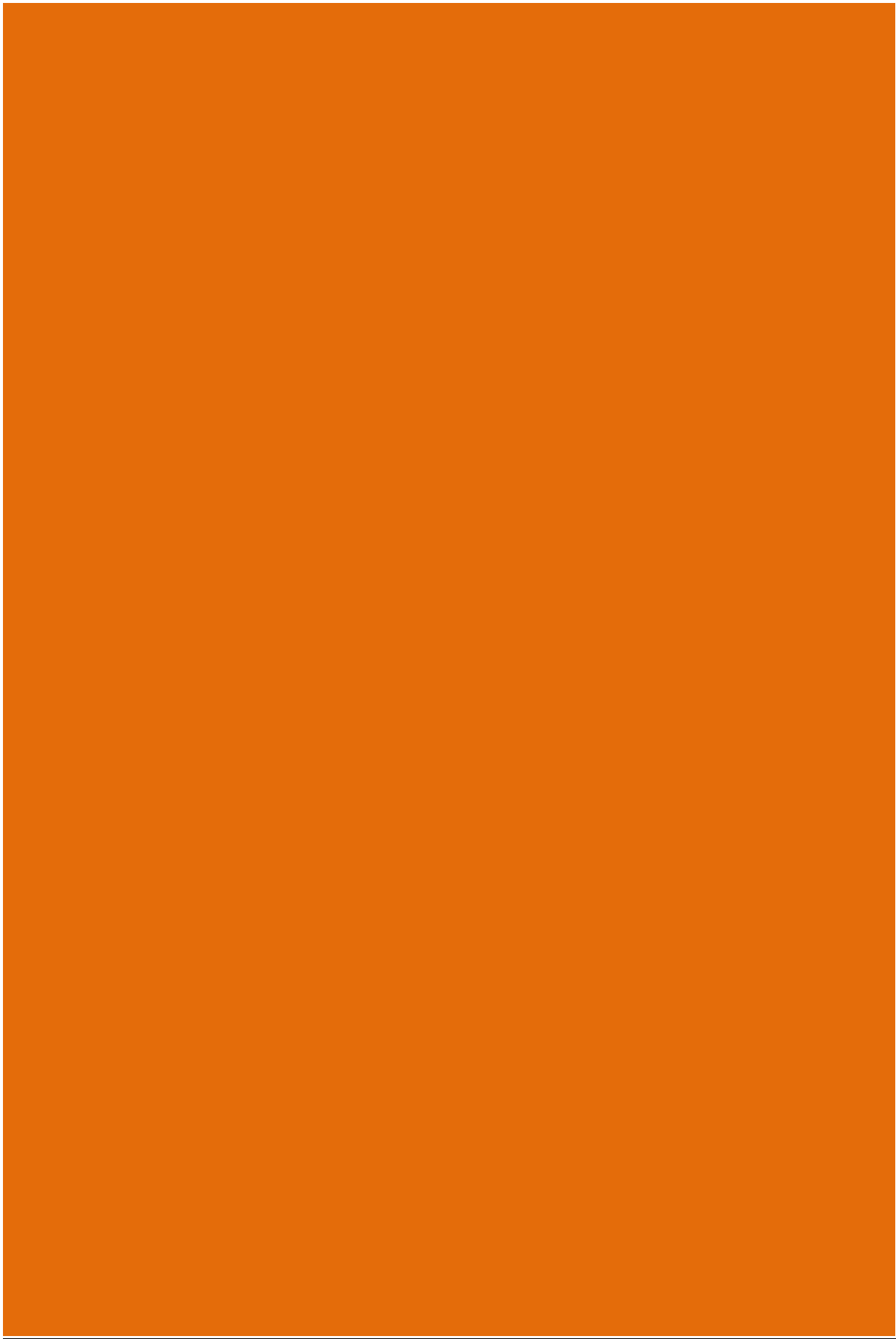
120. In our programme of visits the Commission did not discuss admissions widely because schools tended to be focused on the steps they were taking to improve social mobility given their intakes. However, some examples from other research include:

- **Putting disadvantage at the centre of admissions** - Giving priority to children who receive the Pupil Premium in oversubscription criteria represents a clear public commitment that a school is serious about tackling disadvantage and improving social mobility. It is also a potentially helpful response to the fact that other oversubscription criteria – for example, being a child of a staff member, or who live in a defined catchment area can be harmful to social mobility. 30 grammar schools have also been given permission by the Department for Education to change their admissions policies to give more priority to children from disadvantaged backgrounds – a welcome step.⁸² Schools and organisations responsible for education locally can also take steps to implement admissions systems less subject to bias at school level (for example, some kinds of ‘fair’ banding⁸³). These steps should be coupled with promotion of information on the availability of free transport for those families requiring this in order to access a school.
- **Reviewing admissions to ensure it is inclusive** – The Commission has heard anecdotal evidence of schools inadvertently excluding people, for example through application processes that are difficult or complicated. But for school choice to work, parents need to know that their child is welcome at a range of schools, including those not in their neighbourhood.
- **Collecting and publishing socio-economic data on who applies and who is admitted.** This would help reveal any trends in segregation and encourage inclusive practice.

⁸¹ Office of the Children’s Commissioner, *“It might be best if you looked elsewhere”*: an investigation into the school admission process, 2014

⁸² Barker, I. ‘Grammar schools opt to give priority to poor children’, 2014
<http://news.tes.co.uk/b/news/2014/05/01/half-of-grammar-schools-will-give-priority-to-poor-children.aspx>

⁸³ Though there is evidence too that some types of fair banding can operate to worsen fair access e.g. schools in disadvantaged areas with relatively low attainment at primary school level banding to the national ability distribution rather than the ability distribution of children in the local area





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