



BRIEFING PAPER

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Support for Disadvantaged Children in Education in England

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Summary

A variety of measures are in place that aim to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children. During the last Parliament, this area formed a significant focus in Coalition Government policy and the Commons Education Select Committee adopted 'closing the gap' between disadvantaged children and young people and their peers as the focus of its work during the latter part of the Parliament. Improving the attainment of disadvantaged children has also been a significant area of interest for other governmental, academic, and non-governmental bodies.

This briefing draws together information on relevant measures as they have developed since 2010. It uses eligibility for the Pupil Premium as a guiding measure of 'disadvantage': children who have been eligible for free school meals during the past six years, children who are in care, and children who were previously in care but left in particular circumstances such as adoption.

The note includes information on:

- The Pupil Premium
- Free School Meals
- Education of children looked after by local authorities
- Other recent initiatives and reports

General information on government measures aimed at raising the achievement of disadvantaged children is available on the [gov.uk website](http://gov.uk).

Several of the measures included in this note are linked to the [Child Poverty Strategy 2014-17](#), launched by the previous Government in June 2014. A Library note on the *Child Poverty Act 2010*, [SN/SP/5585](#), provides further background.

The Library also has standard notes on *School Funding: Pupil Premium*, [SN/SP/6700](#), and note *School meals and nutritional standards*, [SN/SP/4195](#), which provide more detail on these areas.

1. Who are disadvantaged children?

1.1 Scope of this note

There is no one definition of who constitutes a 'disadvantaged' child. This note discusses measures for children who are disadvantaged either economically or because they have, for example, been in care.

When Ofsted assesses schools, and reports on how they are improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, it refers to 'disadvantaged pupils' as those pupils for whom the pupil premium provides support. That is (as set out in more detail in section 3.2 of this note), it refers to children who have been eligible for free school meals during the past six years, or who are or have been in care (children who were in care but have since been adopted, for example, are included in the measure).¹

This note takes its cue from the Ofsted definition. It does not include information on, for example, children with special educational needs (SEN), information on support for whom is provided in a [separate note](#).²

Information on measures of disadvantage that may be used is contained in the following section.

1.2 Measures of disadvantage

There are several different potential measures of disadvantage of school pupils. The most common and longest standing is eligibility for free school meals (FSM). This is used for the deprivation element of the Pupil Premium, by most local authorities to distribute some of school funding and widely throughout the education sector as a relatively simple and well-understood measure of disadvantage. It has been criticised on a number of grounds including:

- It is a black and white measure that does not always distinguish well between levels of disadvantage. For instance there is scope for substantially different levels of poverty within the eligible and not-eligible groups. There is potentially very little difference in disadvantage between those on either side of the threshold. The measure has no shades of grey.
- The qualifying benefits for FSM are mainly out of work benefits, so it does not cover the 'working poor' that well.
- Not all families eligible for FSM actually claim them. The DfE has estimated that around 14% of pupils who should be entitled do not claim them. This rate is thought to be higher among older pupils and in less deprived areas.³

However, despite the criticisms and concerns about the impact of universal free school meals for infants and Universal Credit on the measurement of FSM, its advantages –simplicity, longevity, the fact it is

¹ Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), September 2014, fn7 on p5

² See Library standard note [SN/SP/7020](#)

³ [Pupils not claiming free school meals](#), DfE Research Report DFE-RR 235

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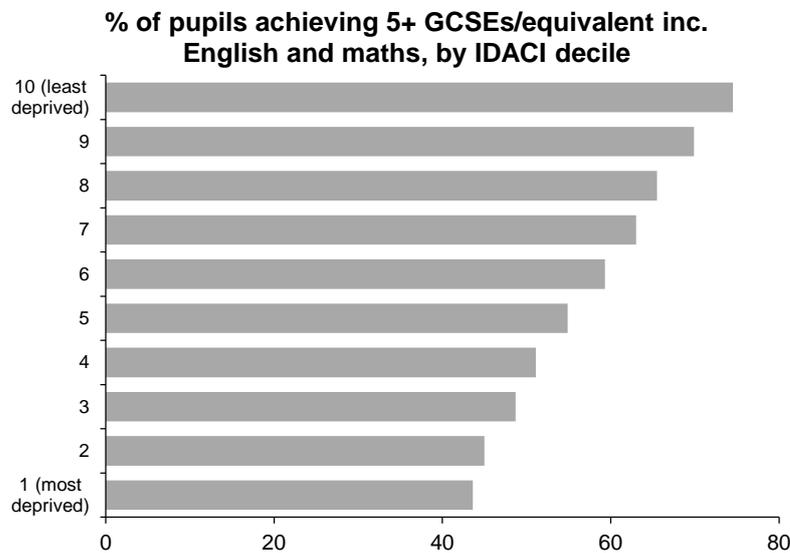
already collected and the focus on individual pupils understand- mean it is still the major indicator of disadvantage.

The DfE also publishes performance data broken down by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). This assigns a score to each small geography in the country based on the proportion of children living in families who are in receipt of low income benefits/Tax Credits. The standard output for education outcomes is to break this down by decile of IDACI deprivation.

Other measures that have been considered in the past include using tax credit data or commercial socio-demographic classifications of local areas such as [ACORN](#) and [Mosaic](#). All these measures are based on the area where a pupil lives rather than their actual family circumstances, so were ruled for use as the deprivation for the Pupil Premium which aims to target funding towards individual pupils.

2. The attainment gap

The table below summarises gaps in headline assessment/attainment measures in England between pupils eligible for FSM and others. The chart opposite shows a breakdown of



the headline GCSE indicator by IDACI decile. Here the gap between the top and bottom decile groups is smaller than the eligible/not eligible for FSM gap, but the chart makes clear the consistent link between these measures of performance and deprivation across the whole range.

Summary of headline performance at different ages by FSM eligibility

England 2013/14

	Eligible	Not eligible
<i>Early Years Foundation Stage Profile</i>		
'Good level of development'	44.8%	63.7%
<i>Key Stage 2</i>		
Level 4+ in reading, witting and maths	63.6%	81.6%
<i>GCSE</i>		
5+ GCSEs/equivalent inc. English and math:	33.5%	60.5%
A*-C in English and maths GCSE	36.3%	62.7%
<i>Attainment at age 19</i>		
Achieved level 3 qualifications	35.6%	60.4%

Source: DfE input and impact indicators

2.1 Reporting

Both the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills have performance indicators covering attainment/progress of disadvantaged children and young adults. These are set out below:

Department for Education

- [Attainment gap between FSM pupils and the rest](#) (at ages 11, 16 and 19)
- [Percentage of FSM children progressing to university](#)

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- [Gap between the least and most deprived schools](#)
- School readiness at age 5 - [Attainment of children eligible for free school meals](#)

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

- The proportion of 15 year olds from low income backgrounds in English maintained schools progressing to higher education by the age of 19
- The gap between the proportion of young graduates from professional and non-professional backgrounds who go on to a 'graduate job' 6 months after graduating
- Proportion of 18 to 24 year olds participating in full or part-time education or training activity, with a gap measure for participation in full-time education by social background using father's occupational group
- Participation in employment - % of 18-24 year olds not in full-time education who are inactive or unemployed, by social background using father's occupational group
- Access to the professions: % of 16 to 65 year olds in paid employment who are in managerial or professional positions by social background using fathers occupational group⁴

Both departments regularly publish more detailed data on outcomes for disadvantaged groups. Department for Education statistics which include a breakdown by free school meal eligibility (along with other characteristics) are listed [here](#). They also produce a range of statistics on [looked-after children](#). The [performance tables](#) include school-level data on the performance gap between disadvantaged pupils⁵ and others at both primary and secondary level. [Widening participation in higher education](#) from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is a compilation of data on access to higher education and post-graduation outcomes by different indicators of disadvantage.

⁴ Department for Business, [Innovation and Skills, BIS Performance Indicators](#), May 2014

⁵ Defined for the performance tables as eligible for FSM or looked after.

3. Pupil Premium

3.1 What the Premium is

The previous Government introduced the Pupil Premium in 2011 to provide additional school funding for those children classed as having deprived background, and also those who have been looked after (by a local authority) for more than six months. The Service Premium has also been introduced for children whose parent(s) are, or have since 2011, served in the armed forces.

- General information about the Premium and school accountability for how the money is spent, is available on the [gov.uk website](#), and more detail can be found in the Library standard note [School Funding: Pupil Premium](#), SN/SP/6700.

3.2 Eligibility and amounts received

The [gov.uk website](#) sets out that in the 2014/15 financial year, schools will receive the following funding for each child registered as eligible for free school meals at any point in the previous 6 years:

- £1,300 for primary-aged pupils
- £935 for secondary-aged pupils

Schools will also receive £1,900 for each looked-after pupil who:

- has been looked after for 1 day or more
- was adopted from care on or after 30 December 2005, or left care under:
 - a special guardianship order
 - a residence order

In 2014/15, schools will receive £300 for each pupil eligible for the Service Premium, for children where:

- one of their parents is serving in the regular armed forces
- one of their parents served in the regular armed forces in the last 3 years
- one of their parents died while serving in the armed forces and the pupil is in receipt of a pension under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) and the War Pensions Scheme (WPS)

In 2014-15 the Pupil Premium was worth a total of £2.5 billion; 1.9 million pupils attracted the deprivation element, 64,000 the service child and 86,000 the looked after children/care leavers element.⁶

2015-16 funding

- In November 2014, the then Government announced that total pupil premium funding for 2015-16 would total £2.545 billion.

Primary schools would receive £1,320 for every pupil who has been registered for free school meals at any time in the last 6 years (known as 'Ever 6 FSM' pupils) with secondary schools continuing to receive £935

⁶ *Pupil premium 2014 to 2015 final allocations*, DfE

for 'Ever 6 FSM' pupils. All schools will continue to receive £1,900 for those who are looked after or have left care through adoption or under a residence or special guardianship order.⁷

In March 2015, the previous Government published [provisional allocations for 2015 to 2016](#) based on 2014 pupil numbers. More information on pupil premium allocations for the 2015 to 2016 financial year is available in the [conditions of grant document](#).⁸

The previous Government also published a list that allows schools to see how many of their pupils have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years on the [Key to Success website](#). Schools can use this list to estimate how much pupil premium funding they will get.⁹

- More detailed information on the Pupil Premium is available in the Library standard note [School Funding: Pupil Premium](#), SN/SP/6700.

3.3 School Admissions Code changes: priority for Pupil Premium recipients

In July 2014, the then Government launched a [consultation](#) on proposed changes to the *School Admissions Code*.¹⁰ The consultation, which was open for ten weeks, included a proposal to allow all schools to have the freedom to give admission priority for all children attracting the pupil premium, the early years pupil premium and the service premium. Academies and Free Schools already had this option, through their funding arrangements.

This change was subsequently included in the revised [Schools Admissions Code](#) that was published in December 2014. It is important to note that all state-funded schools now have the *option* to give Pupil Premium pupils priority in admissions, rather than being required to do so.¹¹

3.4 Summer schools programme

In September 2011, the then Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, announced £50million of funding for the pupil premium summer school programme, which aimed to help disadvantaged pupils make the transition from primary to secondary school.¹² The funding was designed to help schools to pick the pupils in danger of falling back at that stage and provide them with two weeks of support to prepare them for secondary education. Schools could also offer places to other children if they did not need to spend the full amount of their funding on disadvantaged pupils, or if a disadvantaged pupil turned down a planned place.

⁷ Department for Education, [Disadvantaged primary pupils to benefit from extra £22.5 million](#), 11 November 2014

⁸ Gov.uk, [Pupil premium: funding and accountability for schools](#) [accessed 20 April 2015]

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Department for Education, [Changes to the School Admissions Code](#), July 2014

¹¹ Department for Education, [School Admissions Code](#), December 2014, para 1.39A

¹² Department for Education, [£50 million to help pupils get ready for secondary school](#), 21 September 2011

In June 2013, the Department for Education published an [evaluation](#) of the summer schools programme. The [research brief](#) notes that the findings were “broadly supportive of the Summer School programme and are consistent with a small positive effect on transition to secondary school, especially for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.”¹³

In January 2015, the then Government released [details of the funding](#) for the summer schools programme in 2015. It stated that participating schools would receive £250 (if running a one-week summer school) or £500 (if running a two-week summer school) for every eligible pupil who confirms they want to attend the summer school. Applications for funding remain open until 29 May 2015.¹⁴

3.5 Effectiveness of the Pupil Premium

Ofsted report (July 2014)

In July 2014, Ofsted published an [update](#) on the progress schools have made in using their pupil premium funding to raise achievement for eligible pupils. The report stated that:

There are encouraging signs from inspection that the concerted efforts of good leaders and teachers are helping to increase outcomes for pupils eligible for the pupil premium. However, it will take time to establish whether this increased focus will lead to a narrowing in the attainment gap between those eligible for the pupil premium and other pupils.

In 151 reports analysed between January and December 2013, there was an association noted between the overall effectiveness of the school and the impact of the pupil premium.¹⁵

A PQ response from the then schools Minister, David Laws, set out some further information:

24. Mrs Glendon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what progress her Department has made on closing the attainment gap between pupils receiving free school meals and others; and if she will make a statement. [904972]

Mr Laws: The gap between free school meals (FSM) pupils and others achieving Level 4 or above in key stage 2 reading and mathematics has narrowed from 19.3 to 16.2 percentage points between 2011 and 2013. The gap in FSM pupils and others achieving at least five A*-C grade GCSEs including English and mathematics has narrowed from 27.4 to 26.7 percentage points over the same period.

The most recent Ofsted assessment is that school leaders are spending the pupil premium more effectively than at any time since the funding was introduced in 2011. Of 151 schools in the assessment, the attainment gap between free school meal pupils and their peers was closing, sometimes quite quickly, in all 86 schools judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding. Gaps are

¹³ Department for Education, [The Impact of the Summer School Programme on Pupils: Research Brief](#), May 2013, p5; the [full report](#) is available on the gov.uk website.

¹⁴ Department for Education, [The pupil premium summer schools programme 2015](#), January 2015

¹⁵ Ofsted, [The Pupil Premium: an update](#), July 2014, p4

also closing, albeit more slowly, in two thirds of the 50 sampled schools rated 'requires improvement'.¹⁶

National Audit Office report (June 2015)

In June 2015, the National Audit Office published an [evaluation](#) of the implementation of the Pupil Premium policy to date and of how well schools use the funding.¹⁷ The report emphasised that while the Premium had the potential to bring about a significant improvement in outcomes, it will take time for the full impact of the Premium to become clear. It noted that:

The attainment gap between disadvantaged and other pupils narrowed by 4.7 percentage points in primary schools and 1.6 percentage points in secondary schools between 2011 and 2014, but no clear trend has been established and the gap remains wide. Success in some schools indicates that the Pupil Premium has promise, but the Department does not expect the full impact of funding to be felt until 2023.¹⁸

The report highlighted some concerns with the programme, in particular that the NAO's survey had found 75% of school leaders reporting that some pupils with parents in low-income employment were ineligible for funding, and introduction of Universal Infant Free School Meals and Universal Credit may also make it difficult to identify disadvantaged pupils consistently.¹⁹

The report also stated that Pupil Premium's impact was being reduced as some schools were not spending the funding effectively:

Ofsted expressed concern about provision for disadvantaged pupils in 8% of primary schools and 21% of secondary schools it inspected between September and December 2014. There are particular risks around some of the approaches schools most commonly use. The NAO estimates that schools have spent an extra £430 million on teaching assistants since the introduction of the Pupil Premium; a high-cost approach which, research indicates, will only improve results if schools learn to deploy these staff more effectively. Other low-cost interventions are used too infrequently, with just 25% using peer-to-peer learning. The current accountability and intervention mechanisms, which work in some cases, nonetheless could allow schools to waste money on ineffective activities for many years without challenge.²⁰

¹⁶ [HC Deb 21 July 2014 c918-919W](#)

¹⁷ National Audit Office, [Funding for Disadvantaged Pupils](#), June 2015

¹⁸ National Audit Office, [Funding for Disadvantaged Pupils: press release](#), 30 June 2015

¹⁹ The [full report](#) states that as from 2016 Universal Credit is due to replace the legacy system used to determine free school meal eligibility, this will make it impossible to identify disadvantaged pupils consistently with previous years; it notes that the DfE is looking into this problem. It also notes that local authorities and schools the NAO visited told them that the risk of under-registration had been exacerbated by introducing Universal Infant Free School Meals in 2014 (see [Full Report](#), para 1.11 and 1.14).

²⁰ National Audit Office, [Funding for Disadvantaged Pupils: press release](#), 30 June 2015

4. Deprivation funding outside of the Pupil Premium

While deprivation is not an explicit element of school funding paid by the Department for Education to local authorities,²¹ it has to be included in the formula used by local authorities to distribute funding to schools. In 2014-15 they can use FSM and/or IDACI as indicators for the deprivation element of their formulas. A total of £2.4 billion was allocated to maintained schools and academies out of the overall schools block allocations of £30 billion. The proportion of funding allocated through deprivation indicators varied by local authority from 1% to 20%. Looked-after children is an optional element in the formula and those authorities that used it allocated just over £20 million through this element.²²

²¹ Dedicated Schools Grant. Funding for academies is recouped from the local authority totals and their funding is calculated to be equivalent to what they would have received if they were still maintained by their local authority.

²² Department for Education, [Schools block funding formulae 2014 to 2015 Analysis of local authorities' schools block funding formulae](#)

5. Free school meals

5.1 Eligibility

The [gov.uk website](#) sets out that parents do not have to pay for school lunches if they receive any of the following:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the *Immigration and Asylum Act 1999*
- the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided they are not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after a person stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit

Children who get any of the above benefits in their own right (i.e. they get benefits payments directly, instead of through a parent or guardian) can also get free school meals.

Children under the compulsory school age who are in full time education may also be able to get free school meals.

Local authorities are responsible for providing free school lunches and applications must be made through the relevant local body.²³

Free school meals in academies and free schools

An answer to a Parliamentary Question on 27 June 2011 set out the position on the provision of free school meals in academies and free schools:

Nic Dakin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether (a) free schools and (b) academies will be required to provide free meals to eligible post-16 students. [59974]

Mr Gibb: Free schools and academies are governed by a funding agreement with the Secretary of State. The funding agreement provides the framework within which these schools operate and requires free schools and academies to provide free school meals to eligible pupils aged up to 18 years. This requirement also applies to pupils in these institutions who are aged 19 or over, if their course of study began before they attained the age of 18.²⁴

²³ The gov.uk website publishes [up to date information on eligibility for free school meals](#).

²⁴ HC Deb 27 June 2011 c571W

5.2 Free school meals for all Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 pupils

Section 106 of the [Children and Families Act 2014](#) makes provision for free school meals to be provided for all pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2. This duty took effect from September 2014 and is applicable for maintained schools, academies and free schools. [Departmental advice](#) for schools on fulfilling the new duty was published in March 2014.²⁵

5.3 Further information on free school meals and funding

The previous Government initially made £150 million in capital funding available in 2014-15 to provide additional facilities where needed. A further £20 million has since been added to this.²⁶ Revenue funding for this policy is £450 million in 2014-15 and £635 million in 2015-16 (which covers a full academic year of the policy).²⁷

More information on free school meals, including funding, is available in the Library standard note [School meals and nutritional standards](#), SN/SP/4195

5.4 Impact of free school meals on pupil attainment

Between 2009 and 2011, the government ran a series of pilots where free school meals were made universally available to primary school pupils, or made available to greater numbers of primary and secondary school pupils through extended eligibility criteria. The [evaluation report](#) on these pilots noted that:

The universal entitlement pilot led to a significant increase in attainment for primary school pupils... The estimates are larger in magnitude and more consistently significant at Key Stage 2 than at Key Stage 1, with pupils in both areas found to make around two months' more progress, on average, than similar pupils in comparison areas.

The universal entitlement pilot appeared to improve attainment by more amongst pupils from less affluent families than amongst pupils from more affluent families. It also appeared to improve attainment by more for pupils with lower prior attainment than for those with higher prior attainment. It should be noted that the effects for different types of pupils are not always significantly different from one another.

By contrast, there was little evidence of any significant effect of the extended entitlement pilot on the attainment of pupils... even

²⁵ Department for Education, [Universal infant free school meals](#), 6 March 2014

²⁶ [Universal infant free school meals: letter from David Laws](#) (October 2014)

²⁷ [Universal infant free school meals Departmental advice for local authorities, maintained schools, academies and free schools](#), DfE March 2014.

amongst those who were predicted to be newly entitled to free school meals.²⁸

²⁸ Department for Education, [*Evaluation of the free school meals pilot: impact report*](#), January 2013, p86

6. Education of children looked after by local authorities

Section 22(3A) of the *Children Act 1989*, as amended, places a duty on local authorities in England to promote the educational achievement of children looked after by them. [Statutory Guidance on the Duty of Local Authorities to Promote the Educational Achievement of Looked-after Children](#) describes the actions that local authorities are expected to take to comply with that duty.

The *Children and Families Act 2014* amended the *Children Act 1989* to require local authorities in England to appoint at least one person for the purpose of discharging that duty for looked after children, wherever they live or are educated. Such staff are often referred to as Virtual School Headteachers (VSHs). Many local authorities had VSHs in place previously, but they are now a statutory requirement.²⁹

The statutory guidance provides an overview of the duties on local authorities:

As leaders responsible for ensuring that the local authority discharges its duty to promote the educational achievement of their looked after children, Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children's Services should ensure that:

- closing the attainment and progress gap between looked after children and their peers and creating a culture of high aspirations for them is a top priority
- looked after children have access to a suitable range of high quality education placement options and that commissioning services for them takes account of the duty to promote their educational achievement
- VSHs are in place and that they have the resources, time, training and support they need to discharge the duty effectively
- VSHs have robust procedures in place to monitor the attendance and educational progress of the children their authority looks after
- the authority's Children in Care Council (CiCC) regularly addresses the educational experiences raised by looked after children and is able to respond effectively to such issues.³⁰

The [guidance](#) then sets out how these principles should be implemented.

²⁹ For information on the reasons for this change, see section 2.4 of the Library Research paper on the *Children and Families Bill*, [RP 13/11](#)

³⁰ Department for Education, [Promoting the education of looked after children: statutory guidance for local authorities](#), July 2014

7. Other recent initiatives and reports

7.1 Ofsted annual report 2013/14: varying success in narrowing the attainment gap

In December 2014, Ofsted published its [annual report for 2013/14](#). The Chief Inspector's commentary noted that primary schools were closing the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, but that similar progress was not being made in secondary schools:

Our inspectors report that good primary school leaders know which pupils need help, track them effectively and use the pupil premium to support appropriate interventions. As a result, the gap in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and those from better off backgrounds has narrowed steadily. In 2007, the gap in the proportion achieving Level 4 or above in English and mathematics was 24 percentage points. In 2013, the gap in the proportion achieving Level 4 or above in reading, writing and mathematics was 19 percentage points.³¹

[...]

One of the greatest challenges that schools face is ensuring that their most disadvantaged pupils reach their full potential. Worryingly, pupils from poor socio-economic backgrounds are still lagging far behind their better-off peers at secondary school. In 2007, the gap in GCSE attainment was 28 percentage points. In 2013, it had barely closed, at 27 percentage points.

Following on from my report 'Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on', published in June 2013, we have changed our inspection arrangements to put a greater focus in every inspection on the attainment of children supported by the pupil premium. As a result, schools are highly unlikely to be judged outstanding if their most disadvantaged pupils are not making good progress.

The pupil premium is making a difference in schools that are using it effectively. However, the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals still varies widely. The impact of this can be seen in local and regional variations. Between 2007 and 2013, schools in 10 local authority areas managed to increase the proportion of their poorest pupils achieving five good GCSEs by 25 percentage points or more. Yet in five local authority areas, that proportion was only three percentage points or fewer.³²

7.2 Education Committee report on the educational underachievement of white working class children

In June 2014, the previous Commons Education Select Committee published the report of its inquiry into [Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children](#). The Committee's Chair, Graham

³¹ Ofsted, The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2013/14, December 2014, p10

³² *Ibid.*, p13

Stuart, noted that “Poor white British children now come out of our schools with worse qualifications than equally poor children in any other major ethnic group. They do less homework and are more likely to miss school than other groups.”³³ The publication announcement also stated that:

- Good schools greatly benefit disadvantaged children: Twice the proportion of poor children attending an “outstanding” school will achieve five good GCSEs when compared with what the same group will achieve in “inadequate” schools. In contrast, the proportion of non-free school meal children achieving this benchmark in “outstanding” schools is only 1.5 times greater than for equivalent peers attending schools that are rated as “inadequate”.
- The problem of white “working class” underachievement is not specific to boys; while girls generally do better than boys poor, white, British girls are the lowest performing major ethnic group.
- Just 32% of poor white British children achieve five good GCSEs including English and mathematics, compared with 42% of black Caribbean children eligible for free school meals and 61% of disadvantaged Indian children.
- The attainment of poor children from other ethnic backgrounds is improving faster than the attainment of poor white children.
- The achievement gap between white British children eligible for free school meals and their better-off white British peers has barely changed over the last 7 years, and this gap is larger for white British children than in any other ethnic group.
- White British students with lower socio-economic status spend fewer evenings per week completing homework than peers from other ethnic backgrounds.
- White British students who are eligible for free school meals have a higher rate of absence from school than other major ethnic groups.^{34 35}

The Government published its [response](#) to the report in September 2014. The Government acknowledged the concerns the Committee raised and set out the various ways in which it intended to address those issues:

Our education reforms – including the academies and free schools programme, the English Baccalaureate, the new robust

³³ House of Commons Education Committee, [Poor white British boys and girls educationally underperforming](#), 18 June 2014

³⁴ House of Commons Education Committee, [Poor white British boys and girls educationally underperforming](#), 18 June 2014.

³⁵ Full report available at the Education Committee, [Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children](#), First Report of Session 2014-15, HC 142

examination system, and a range of initiatives drawn from the most effective elements of the London Challenge, such as Teach First, and Local and National Leaders of Education – are all designed to support a system that places schools in the driving seat of school improvement.

We acknowledge also that addressing the underachievement of disadvantaged children, including disadvantaged White British children, requires recognition within the funding arrangements of the challenge this presents. As the Committee notes, this means a fairer national funding system as well as targeted programmes such as the pupil premium and the new early years pupil premium (EYPP).

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

Increasing the knowledge base of evidence on the achievement of different groups of disadvantaged children is an important theme within the Committee's report, and one which we acknowledge. Our response sets out a range of evaluations that are currently being undertaken, including a number by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), aimed at identifying practice that works and disseminating this across the system.³⁶

7.3 Ofsted 'Unseen children' report

In June 2013, Ofsted published a research report [Unseen Children: access and achievement](#), which followed on from a 1993 report (which received an update in 2003) on educational attainment in deprived urban areas. The 2013 review aimed to understand the current pattern of disadvantage and educational success across England.

The report concluded:

The distribution of underachievement has shifted. Twenty or thirty years ago, the problems were in the big cities. Inner London schools were the best funded and worst achieving in the country. Now, schools in inner and outer London are the best performing, and performance in parts of Birmingham, Greater Manchester, Liverpool and Leicester has also improved.

The areas where the most disadvantaged children are being let down by the education system in 2013 are no longer deprived inner city areas, instead the focus has shifted to deprived coastal towns and rural, less populous regions of the country, particularly down the East and South-East of England. These are places that have felt little impact from national initiatives designed to drive up standards for the poorest children.

A significant number of poorer children are also being failed by schools in areas of relative affluence, such as Kettering, Wokingham, Norwich and Newbury. It is in these areas, in

³⁶ House of Commons Education Committee, [Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2014-15](#), Second Special Report of Session 2014-15, HC 647, p1-

coasting or sometimes sinking schools, that unseen disadvantaged children remain unsupported and unchallenged.³⁷

The report made the following recommendations:

Ofsted to be tougher in future with schools that are letting down their poor children. Schools previously judged outstanding, which are not doing well by their poorest children, will be re-inspected.

The development and roll-out of sub-regional challenges aimed particularly at raising the achievement of disadvantaged children.

A more strategic approach should be taken to the appointment of National Leaders of Education to ensure that they are matched with schools in need of support.

Government should ensure that teachers on funded schemes are directed to underperforming schools in less fashionable or more remote or challenging places. The concept of a 'National Service Teacher' should be an urgent consideration for government.

Government should review assessment in reception and Key Stage 1, with a view to publishing progress measures from the start of school to end of Key Stage 1.

Government should be prepared to dismantle inadequate colleges that have grown too large to assure quality across their different activities. Smaller specialist units, particularly University Technology Colleges, should be created with stronger links to business, commerce and industry.

All recommendations in the Richard Review of apprenticeships should be implemented in full.

All post-16 providers should report on the rate of progress and outcomes for all young people who had previously been eligible for free school meals.³⁸

7.4 Education Endowment Foundation

The [Education Endowment Foundation](#) (EEF) is an independent charity that was established in 2011 by the Sutton Trust and the Impetus Trust, with a £125million grant from the Department for Education. The EEF is part of the Government's '[what works](#)' network, which aims to promote evidence-based decision making in social policy. The EEF website provides information on the foundation's [current projects](#).

The Sutton Trust and the EEF have produced a [toolkit](#) which provides guidance for schools on how to use their resources to improve the educational attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

7.5 Children's Commission on Poverty report: the impact of poverty on school life

The Children's Commission on Poverty, a group of children and young people supported by the Children's Society, published a [report](#) in October 2014 on the impact of poverty on school life.³⁹ The report

³⁷ Ofsted, [Ofsted: Too many of England's poorest children continue to be let down by the education system](#), 20 June 2013

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Children's Commission on Poverty, [At What Cost? Exposing the impact of poverty on school life](#), October 2014

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dealt with three areas of particular concern: school uniforms; school meals; and materials and trips. It studied how poorer children are affected by the associated costs of those aspects of education. The report stated that:

For many families, the idea of a free education is very far from reality. School-related costs make up a large portion of family budgets and parents told us that, on average, they spend £800 a year on school costs.

More than two-thirds (70%) of parents say they have struggled with the cost of school. This rises to 95% of parents who live in families that are 'not well off at all'.

At the same time, more than half (52%) of parents said they had cut back on either clothing, food or heating to afford the cost of school. Nearly half (47%) cut back on clothing, 28% on food and 29% on heating. A quarter (25%) of parents (and more than half of those in families which were 'not well off at all') said they had borrowed money in order to afford the cost of school.⁴⁰

The Commission made a number of recommendations, available in the report's [executive summary](#).

The then Education Minister, Lord Nash, commented on these issues in response to a PQ response in the House of Lords. In addition to highlighting the pupil premium, and the expansion of free school meals, he stated:

The Department for Education recognises that meeting the incidental costs of state education can be a challenge for some low-income families. We already have a range of policies in place to help ensure that all children benefit from a good education, regardless of their background, and to support low-income families with the non-core costs of education.

[...]

In addition, the Department has invested £340 million to support cultural education and announced an additional £18 million funding boost for music education, giving thousands more disadvantaged pupils access to instruments.

The Department issues very clear guidance to schools which seeks to minimise the impact of school uniform costs and emphasises the need for schools to consider the cost and availability of uniform when setting their policy. Individual local authorities and academies may choose to provide grants to help with the cost of school clothing in cases of financial hardship, and we would also encourage individual schools to consider running their own schemes.

The Department has also published advice on charging for school activities to support schools in fulfilling their statutory duties in relation to charging and remission for school activities and school visits. This guidance advises schools to make it clear to parents that there is no obligation to make any contribution. As ever, schools have the discretion to use their additional funds to help with the cost of visits and activities for pupils whose families cannot afford it.⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p8

⁴¹ [PQ HL2512, 29 October 2014](#)

7.6 Reports on the higher achievement of disadvantaged children in London

In June 2014, researchers at the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) and the Institute for Education (IoE) published [Lessons from London schools for attainment gaps and social mobility](#), a report on the achievement of disadvantaged children in London. The IFS/IoE report was commissioned by the [Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission](#) (SMCPC), which is an advisory non-departmental public body of the Department for Education. The [press notice](#) announcing the report's publication highlighted that disadvantaged pupils in London achieve significantly better exam results than those elsewhere in England. For example:

- In inner London in 2012, 54% of pupils eligible for free schools meals (FSM) achieved 5 or more GCSEs (or their equivalent) at A*-C (including English and Maths) , compared with 47% in outer London, 40% in the West Midlands and 30-35% in other regions outside of London.
- Disadvantaged pupils in inner London are also substantially more likely to achieve high results, with 13% of pupils eligible for FSM achieving 8 or more A*-Bs (including English and Maths), compared with 3-6% in regions outside of London.
- This higher level of attainment is then translated into higher levels of participation in post-compulsory education.

The full report drew three central policy implications:

- First, the power of early achievement in primary schools is evident, particularly in terms of English scores: one of the major reasons why disadvantaged pupils in London and other big cities perform better at Key Stage 4 is that they had higher levels of achievement at Key Stage 2. This is consistent with a case for early intervention. Equally, however, we should not completely discount the role of secondary schools in sustaining achievements into GCSE and post-16 outcomes. [...]
- Second, partly because of the power of early achievements, improvements will take a long time to become visible in national results. Improvements in primary schools in London from 1999 through to 2003 became visible at GCSE between 2004 and 2008 and have only recently become part of accepted wisdom.
- Third, given that achievements take a long time to become visible, we need to attribute recent improvements to policies much further back in time. Improvements in London seem more likely to have primarily resulted from changes occurring in the late 1990s and early 2000s, such as the National Strategies,

than from recent policy initiatives such as the London Challenge or the Academies Programme.⁴²

Also in June 2014, the Centre for London and the CfBT Educational Trust published a report on [Lessons from London Schools: Investigating the Success](#), which noted that London schools had the highest GCSE attainment for pupils from poorer backgrounds in England.⁴³ The report set out the following key findings:

1. London schools have improved dramatically since 2000.
2. The improvement cannot be explained in terms of the advantages that London has over the rest of England.
3. The improvement was assisted by a set of factors that we describe as 'enabling', these include issues relating to resourcing: finance, teacher recruitment and school building quality. Improvement in these areas enabled improvements to flourish but London's success was not fundamentally caused by these factors.
4. Four key school improvement interventions provided the impetus for improvement – London Challenge, Teach First, the academies programme and improved support from local authorities. Our research identifies common features that link together all of these interventions.
5. The improvement of London schools depended upon effective leadership at every level of the system.⁴⁴

7.7 ISER report on the use of resources to help poorer students

In November 2014, the study [Spending it Wisely: How can schools use their resources to help poorer pupils?](#) by the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex and the University of York, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, was published. It stated that "bright girls from poor backgrounds are not receiving support in school to enable them to keep up with peers that are as bright as them," and suggested that:

schools may have focussed too much on engaging boys from disadvantaged backgrounds and neglected the able girls from the same backgrounds. Boys in this group may have tendency towards truancy and bad behaviour, while girls may be present in class but quietly non-achieving.⁴⁵

7.8 IFS research on the impact of school funding increases

In March 2015, the Institute for Fiscal Studies published [research](#) on increases in school funding in England during the period 1993-2013.⁴⁶

⁴² Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *Lessons from London schools for attainment gaps and social mobility*, June 2014, p8-9

⁴³ Centre for London and the CfBT Educational Trust, [Lessons from London Schools: Investigating the Success](#), June 2014, p8

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p7

⁴⁵ Institute for Social and Economic Research, [Poor bright girls left behind in class, school spending study shows](#), 23 November 2014

⁴⁶ Institute for Fiscal Studies, [The distribution of school funding and inputs in England: 1993-2013](#), 17 March 2015

In an observations [article](#) on the issue, the IFS drew attention to substantial rises in school funding since the turn of the century, and that while these increases were in part spent on hiring additional teachers, a much larger amount went on higher numbers of teaching assistants, other non-teaching and non-staff expenditures.⁴⁷

The IFS also highlighted the rise in relative funding for disadvantaged pupils within this broader increase:

At the end of the 1990s, average funding per pupil amongst the most deprived fifth of primary schools was around 17% higher than that in the least deprived fifth of primary schools. At 15% the difference between most and least deprived secondary schools was similar (based on dividing schools into quintiles in terms of the proportion of children eligible for free school meals). Between 1999–00 and 2012–13, funding per pupil rose much more strongly amongst the most deprived primary and secondary schools. As a result, funding per pupil in the most deprived primary and secondary schools was nearly 40% greater than in the least deprived ones in 2012–13, a substantial increase in the level of funds targeted at school deprivation.⁴⁸

The IFS suggested that the relatively rigid contracts teachers must be hired on relative to non-teaching staff, and the difficulty of removing teachers if funding were to decline, were behind this approach, as schools acted cautiously in light of uncertainty over future funding allocations.⁴⁹

7.9 University of Manchester report on schools policy under the Coalition Government

In February 2015, Professor Ruth Lupton and Dr Stephanie Thompson at the University of Manchester published [The Coalition's Record on Schools: Policy, Spending and Outcomes 2010-2015](#), an overview of the Coalition's record on schools policy that set out in its conclusion an indication of what it saw as the key challenges for government in raising the attainment of disadvantaged children, particularly in light of likely funding pressures after 2015.

The report noted that it was difficult to gain a strong impression of the impact the Coalition's reforms at such an early stage, but that early indications suggested potential problems for the lower-attaining and disadvantaged children whose attainment successive governments have sought to improve:

According to Ofsted there are more good and outstanding schools, but also more inadequate secondaries, with a particular increase in disadvantaged areas. Up until 2013, before the curriculum and assessment changes and with the implementation of the Pupil Premium, attainment continued to increase and socio-economic gaps to narrow, but with no break in the existing trend. The 2014 GCSE results give a clearer indicator of the likely

⁴⁷ Institute for Fiscal Studies, [School funding increases in England targeted at most deprived and led to particularly large increases in non-teaching staff](#), 17 March 2005

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

direction of change under the Coalition's curriculum and assessment reforms. In this latest year, there were small overall small declines in attainment, when changes to counting rules are accounted for, which the government might well defend with arguments that slightly fewer GCSE points is something worth trading for academic qualifications which will have higher value in the labour market. Overall results were still higher in 2014 than 2010 on comparable measures.

However, bigger declines after the assessment reforms were experienced by lower attaining students, especially those from poorer families. Some outcomes for looked-after children have also declined under the Coalition. Appropriate caution should be exercised about drawing conclusions from one year's data. Nevertheless, this development should some raise concerns for the Coalition and for the parties who seek to replace it in 2015. At a time of austerity, the [coalition] government has protected spending on schools in real terms. This meant that system resources have remained broadly stable, although with some additional pressures in the primary sector where spending did not quite keep pace with demographic change. Moreover, backed by widespread political consensus at the time of the 2010 General Election over the need to reduce educational inequalities, the Coalition has continued and extended the distributional shift in resources that Labour began. As overall system resources more or less flat-lined, schools with more disadvantaged intakes gained money in real terms, while schools with more privileged intakes have lost. There has also been an important change in the way in which these resources are targeted and used. Schools must now direct them specifically at disadvantaged students, rather than on school-wide improvements. These are policies with clear progressive intents. It may be too early to judge the effect of the Pupil Premium, and certainly too early to say that it has failed. However, the fact that, despite these efforts. outcomes seem to be getting worse for some of the most disadvantaged students at the end of secondary schooling, and remain very large throughout the system, should certainly raise questions about whether initiatives of this nature can deliver greater equality and/or social mobility in the context both of increasing family poverty and the broader suite of educational reforms which has been enacted.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Lupton, R., and Thompson, S., [The Coalition's Record on Schools: Policy, Spending and Outcomes 2010 – 2015](#), February 2015, pg 49-50

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