

Narrowing the Achievement Gap for Disadvantaged Pupils

Good Practice in Schools

Feyisa Demie
Christabel McLean

About the Authors

Feyisa Demie is Head of Research and Adviser for School Self-evaluation at Lambeth LA. Prior to this, he was Head of Research and Statistics at Southwark LA and a university lecturer in Kenya and London. Feyisa is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA) and a school governor. He has worked extensively for the last 25 years with Local Authorities, government departments, schools and governors on the use of data and sharing good practice to raise achievement. He was responsible for pioneering work on developing school profiles: making figures speak for themselves, contextual and value added analyses that are widely used for monitoring, challenging and supporting schools. He is a passionate champion of school self-evaluation and an advocate of using data and research as a tool for supporting school improvement. With longstanding research interests on what works in raising achievement in schools and equity issues in education, he has written a number of research reports and articles on school improvement, school effectiveness and ethnic background and educational achievement.

Christabel Mclean has worked with HMI/Ofsted at national level and has worked extensively on the inspection, improvement and management of educational establishments. Christabel started her teaching career in Camden and Westminster in inner London and went on to become headteacher of Sacred Heart School in Hammersmith. Christabel's unshakeable belief that all children can achieve their best, no matter what their background, language or circumstance, also led to a successful period as a full time Ofsted inspector. From this she was specifically recruited as a key member of a school improvement team of Advisers by a new Director of Education, to deal with a large number of schools in special measures in Lambeth. Then as an Adviser in Lambeth she took part in an extensive range of school improvement activities linked to schools facing very challenging circumstances and led a number of very successful school improvement projects. More recently she has been involved in a number of research projects and contributed to books advising parents on education.

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Executive Summary

Narrowing the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and their peers is the highest challenge faced by policy makers in England and yet there is little research carried out to study good practice in schools. This study examines the success factors behind narrowing the achievement gap of disadvantaged pupils who are entitled to free school meals. A complementary methodological approach including a case study and focus group were used to explore performance and the views of teachers, parents and pupils. The findings of the research show that the case study schools defy the association of poverty and low attainment and they enable all young people to succeed against the odds. The case study schools' data shows that from their generally low starting points, pupils reach exceptionally high standards at Key Stage 2 (KS2) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), narrowing the gap. The research identifies a number of factors that are proving successful in closing the gap. These include:

- Strong leadership
- High quality teaching and learning
- An inclusive curriculum
- Parental engagement
- The effective use of data to identify underachieving groups
- Effective use of best teachers to teach intervention groups
- Re-deploying support teachers who have a good track record in raising achievement
- Effective use of pupil premium funding to challenge poverty
- Effective use of pupil voice and feedback

What is particularly significant is that these schools use highly effective strategies, including outstanding teachers to teach English and maths, they provide tailored support for individuals in the classroom, one to one support and booster classes delivered by the pupils' class teacher. School leaders ensure that support staff, particularly teaching assistants, are highly trained and understand their role in helping pupils to achieve. More importantly in the case study schools there is a systematic focus on clear pupil feedback and advice for improving their work. Disadvantaged pupils were given high quality feedback to support and involve them properly in their learning. These good practices are explored in detail to reveal exactly what works in narrowing the achievement gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers.

The overall conclusion of this study is that the case study schools have bucked the national trend through the use of a range of highly effective strategies to narrow the attainment gap. The study argues that the improvement made by disadvantaged pupils on free school meals in the case study schools is an exceptional achievement and offers a useful example of a success story that is worth learning from by schools, central government and local authorities.

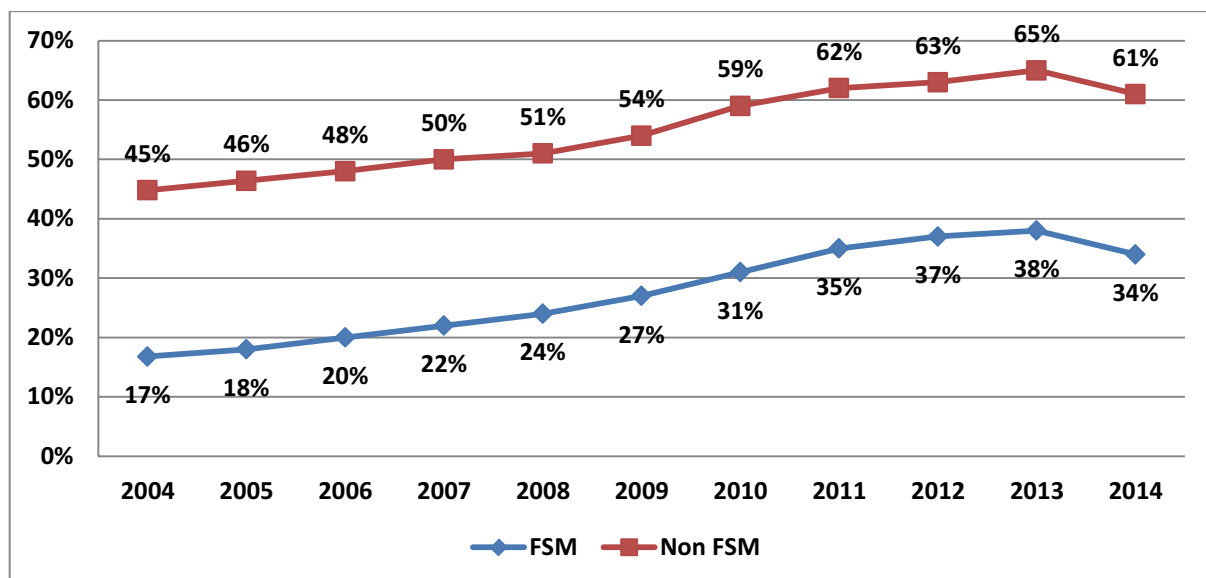
1 Introduction

Why does the achievement gap matter?

Narrowing the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and their peers is the highest challenge faced by policy makers in England. There are long-standing achievement gaps in England associated with socio-economic status (Cassen and Kingdon 2007, DCSF 2009 and Strand 2014). It is unarguable from the research evidence available in this area that poverty is the biggest single indicator of low educational achievement (House of Commons Education Committee 2014, Ofsted 2013, Strand 2014, DCSF 2008 and 2009; Demie and Mclean 2015). Gorard's (2000) research also suggests that children start school with different levels of resources and begin to display strong patterning by family origin in their school attainment. This pattern continues at every subsequent age and stage throughout children's schooling. Of particular concern is that children from poorer homes do worse educationally than their classmates, with 34% of pupils eligible for free school meals achieving 5+A*-C GCSEs including English and maths, compared to 61% of better-off pupils (DfE 2014). There remains a significant gap between FSM pupils and non-FSM pupils. (See Figure 1)

The attainment gap between children eligible and not eligible for free school meals is also apparent at the age of seven (62% and 80% respectively reached the 'expected level' in the national tests in reading, writing and maths average) and at the age of eleven (75% and 89% respectively reached the 'expected level' in the national tests in reading, writing and maths average). It is not just achievement that is affected in general, pupils eligible for free school meals also have lower rates of progress (see DfE, 2014).

Figure 1. The Achievement gap between pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) and non-FSM pupils in England, % 5+A*-C including English and maths, 2004-2014



A similar large gap was also reported from USA studies. The evidence of the achievement gap in USA is based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that is used nationwide and focused on the causes of gaps in student achievement between low-income minority students and middle-income white students. This research suggested that both in-school factors and

home/community factors impact the academic achievement of students and contribute to the gap. The data show the achievement gap between black and white students and between Hispanic and white students in the U.S. have generally narrowed in recent years although, there are clearly still large disparities between groups. (Berliner 2009). Williams (2003) further argued educational inequality between white students and minority students continues to perpetuate social and economic inequality in USA. International studies also show that the most disadvantaged pupils tend to perform the worst (see Duncan and Magnuson 2005, Behnke et al 2010, Mensah and Kirernan 2010).

What role can schools play in narrowing the achievement gap?

There is also a long standing debate about the role of the school in narrowing the achievement gap in England. Although schools are continually expected to 'raise standards', such evidence would appear to replicate Bernstein's (1970) concerns to some degree, that education cannot compensate for society. School effectiveness research has consistently shown that only about 8-15% of the attainment difference between schools is accounted for by what they actually do and the rest is attributed to intake variations including home background (Reynolds et al. 1996, Sammons 1999, Strand 2015). A study by Rasbash et al (2010) also explored the role that schools can play in tackling the general link between educational achievement and family income and noted that academic studies generally had found that about 20 percent of variability in pupils' achievement is attributed to school factors, with around 80 percent attributed to pupil-level factors such as the wider family environment, the neighbourhood where they live and the school attended. Ofsted also pointed out that *'these factors are beyond the school gates and the communities where pupils live can have a detrimental impact on their achievement. Schools can do much to improve the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils but only so much'* (Ofsted 2014:32). ASCL (2014:32) also suggested that *'the problem was not of schools making...they cannot solve it by themselves.'* They pointed out that the factors influencing low attainment are beyond the control of individual schools and it is impossible for them to overcome the wider problem of poverty and disadvantage. Clifton and Cook (2012:5) also argued that *'While many of the factors driving low achievement lie beyond the direct control of schools, it is a mistake to assume that schools cannot be part of a solution.'* The reasons for underachievement of disadvantaged pupils are indeed complex, but a body of research is beginning to show that schools can make a difference, albeit within certain limits (see Demie and Mclean 2014; Demie and Lewis 2010; Mongon and Chapman 2010; Ofsted 2009; Cassen and Kingdon 2007).

There are now a number of schools serving disadvantaged communities that can demonstrate poverty should not be an excuse for low attainment (Demie and Mclean 2014, Demie and Lewis 2010, Mongon and Chapman 2010, Ofsted 2009). These studies show that high quality education can transform lives and compensate for shortcomings in society. Recent national research and data (See Ofsted 2014 and Sutton Trust 2014) has also revealed how the pupil premium¹ is helping to close the gaps through targeted support and interventions. The key challenge then is to find out what strategies schools can use to make a difference to the achievement of groups, such as disadvantaged pupils with low income backgrounds. In recent years, a need for detailed case studies of schools that are successful in raising the achievement of underachieving groups of pupils has become apparent, as a means of increasing our understanding of the ways in which schools can

¹ The pupil premium is additional funding given to publically funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers. In 2014/15 financial year, schools received £1320 for each eligible primary-aged pupil and £935 for secondary-aged pupil. This covers 1.83 million pupils in England with ring-fenced targeted funding of £2.5 billion (DfE 2014).

enhance pupils' academic achievement. For example, Mongon and Chapman's (2008) study records encouraging signs of improvement in the way schools are addressing the underachievement of disadvantaged pupils. Key findings in this study show that these are schools with strong leadership and strong systems where headteachers do not accept poverty as a reason for failure.

Sharples et al (2011) review of international evidence also reported classroom strategies that are effective for raising achievement and narrowing the gap of pupils from disadvantaged background including school leadership, quality of teaching, effective use of data to identify underperforming groups, imitative to raise aspirations and parental engagement. In addition they argued that the quality of teaching as one of the factors with most potential to make a difference.

Ofsted research into what works in outstanding schools also identified similar effective strategies in raising achievement and narrowing the gaps in schools. They included: *'rigorous monitoring of data, effective use of feedback, planning, support and interventions, ensuring access to high quality teaching, providing a strong and visionary headteacher and working with parents to increase engagement and raise aspirations.'* (Ofsted 2013:31)

Ofsted commented that these *'schools prove constantly that disadvantage need not be a barrier to achievement .They put students first, invest in their staff and nurture their communities, they have strong values and high expectations that are applied consistently and they are highly inclusive, having complete regard for the educational progress, personal development and well-being of every student.'* (Ofsted 2009:6)

Yet a recent report published by Ofsted, *'Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on'* (2013) suggests that although the English education system has undoubtedly improved in the past 20 years, there still remains a large minority of children who do not succeed at school or college and become increasingly less visible as they progress through the system. A disproportionate number of these children are from disadvantaged backgrounds. It argues that *'until this issue has been addressed in England, we cannot have a world-class education system'* (Ofsted 2013:4).

Although a review of the literature shows there is a recent growth in case study research into successful strategies to raise the achievement of disadvantaged children, there is little research carried out to study good practice to narrow the achievement gaps in schools.

Research Aims and Methods

This research is a qualitative study of schools in an inner London Local Authority (LA), and examines the success factors behind narrowing the achievement gap of disadvantaged pupils who are entitled to free school meals. It is similar to other studies that have looked at examples of schools who provide an environment in which underachieving groups flourish, but reflects the perspective of the disadvantaged pupils, using detailed case studies to illustrate how policy and practice help to narrow the achievement of disadvantaged pupils with a strong emphasis on what works (Demie and Mclean 2007, 2014; Demie and Lewis 2010; Mongon and Chapman 2008, Ofsted 2009). Three overarching research questions guided this research:

- What does the data tell us about narrowing the achievement gap?
- What are the success factors?
- What are the implications for policy and practice?

The case study Local Authority is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse boroughs in Britain. African pupils form the largest ethnic group with 24%, followed by Black Caribbean 17%,

White British 15%, White Other 8%, Mixed Race 13% and Portuguese 6%. Overall, 85% of pupils in the Local Authority schools belong to Black and other ethnic minority communities. Across the authority over 150 languages are spoken, reflecting the different cultures, experiences and identities of the members of the community. The latest disadvantage data also shows that 34% of the pupils are also eligible for free school meals.

The methodological approach comprised case studies of selected schools and focus group interviews. The case studies were supported by a qualitative study of the school strategies used to narrow the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Details of the methodological framework are summarised below:

Focus groups: Parent, pupil, governor and headteacher focus groups were carried out to ascertain their views on strategies that worked to narrow the achievement gap and to identify whether their views mirrored those of the participants in the case study interviews.

Case studies: A detailed case study research was carried out to study the strategies used to raise achievement and narrow the gap. A structured questionnaire was used to interview headteachers, teachers, parents and pupils to gather evidence on what worked in raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. The aim was to triangulate the voices of the various stakeholders in their education. Four primary and two secondary schools were selected for case studies to study strategies to narrow the achievement gap.

The schools were chosen to reflect schools of different types in the Local Authority which have relatively high numbers of pupils on free school meals. The key criteria for the selection of schools were those with a very high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and good KS2 and GCSE results, or improving schools and Ofsted positive inspection reports .

As part of the research a variety of members of school staff and parents were interviewed in order to get a range of perspectives on the main practices in schools over a two-year period. These included headteachers and deputy headteachers; class teachers; EAL (English as an additional language) teachers and special educational needs co-ordinators; teaching assistants and learning support teachers; family support workers', governors and pupils. Each of the case study schools were visited between February and April in 2015.

Finally, by triangulating case study and focus group data and linking to outcomes, we were able to identify examples of good practice.

Terminology

For the purpose of this research the term 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils from low income backgrounds who are eligible for free school meals. The merit of free school meals is that it provides a clear and comprehensive means of differentiating between two broad groups of FSM pupils and non FSM pupils.

2 Achievement of Disadvantaged Pupils

This section explores the achievement gap in the case studies schools and key strategies used to narrow the gaps for disadvantaged pupils. Research shows the link between poverty and achievement (See Demie 2002 and Cassen and Kingdon 2007). As noted by Mortimore and Whitty (1997:6):

‘Probably the single most significant factor that currently distinguishes the low achieving schools in urban areas from that of the more academically successful schools is that only a small proportion of pupils in academically successful schools come from disadvantaged homes.’

Cassen and Kingdon (2007) research also suggests that eligibility for free school meals is strongly associated with low achievement. Local Authority research into disadvantage and educational achievement has also highlighted that schools in the authority experience extreme levels of social disadvantage relative to national norms (Demie 2002 and Demie et al 2014). In the Local Authority, school level data demonstrates a clear relationship between the concentration of poverty levels in schools and tests and examination results. For schools, the indicator most often used to compare the contexts in which they operate and disadvantage is eligibility for free school meals. The proportion of pupils taking KS2 statutory tests in 2013 that were eligible for free school meals (FSM) was 51%, and for the GCSE cohort it was 45% (see Table 2.1 and 2.2). The number of pupils entitled to a free school meal in the Local Authority primary and secondary schools is double the national average (DfE 2013). Despite this challenge, the case study schools studied in this research defy the association of poverty and low outcomes and they enable pupils to succeed against the odds.

Table 2.1 shows that the attainment of all pupils has been exceptionally high. About 95% of the disadvantaged pupils in the case study schools achieved level 4 or above at KS2 compared to the Local Authority average 78% and national average of 67%. The improvement rate of pupils in the case study schools is also impressive compared to the national and Local Authority average.

The empirical evidence from the case study schools also shows that pupil premium pupils buck the trend. For example in one school, despite challenging circumstances and low attainment at entry, 100% of pupil premium pupils with a low income background attained level 4 and above at KS2. In another two primary schools, 95% achieved level 4+ and above.

Table 2.1: KS2 attainment in the case study schools, 2014

Case Study Schools	Background		KS2 Level 4+ (Reading, Writing, and maths combined)				2 levels progress		
	School Pupil Premium	KS2 PP	All Pupils	PP Pupils	Non PP Pupils	GAP	Reading	Writing	Maths
Sudbourne	40%	48%	95%	95%	95%	0	100%	100%	100%
St. Andrew’s	48%	68%	89%	89%	89%	0	100%	100%	100%
Woodmansterne	25%	35%	96%	95%	97%	-2	98%	100%	100%
Vauxhall	68%	78%	100%	100%	100%	0	100%	100%	100%
Case Study	36%	51%	96%	95%	96%	-1	99%	100%	100%
Local Authority	41%	57%	82%	78%	88%	-10	93%	96%	94%
National	26%	31%	78%	67%	83%	-16	91%	93%	90%

Table 2.2: GCSE attainment in the case study schools, 2014

Case Study Schools	Background		GCSE 5 A* to C including English and maths				3 levels of Progress		
	School Pupil Premium	KS4 PP	All Pupils	PP Pupils	Non PP Pupils	GAP	English	Maths	VA
Dunraven	49%	47%	60%	51%	70%	-19	75%	69%	1004.7
La Retraite	48%	43%	80%	80%	80%	0	85%	83%	1031.0
Case Study- All	49%	45%	68%	61%	74%	-13	79%	75%	n/a
Local Authority	35%	55%	57%	51%	65%	-14	78%	69%	1011.7
National	29%	27%	53%	37%	64%	-28	72%	66%	1000

Similarly in the two case study secondary schools, GCSE results have shown significant improvement and the percentage of pupils achieving 5+A*-C including English and maths was 51% and 80% respectively.

Table 2.1 also indicates that there is a marked difference in KS2 performance between pupils eligible for the pupil premium and those not in schools. At the end of primary education in 2014, 67% of eligible pupils achieved level 4+, whereas 83% of pupils who were not eligible achieved at this level. The GCSE data in Table 2.2 also shows a significant gap, with pupil premium pupils gaining only 37% 5+ A*-C including English and maths in 2014, compared to 64% for those not eligible. Overall, the findings from the Local Authority data confirm that disadvantaged pupils did considerably less well than their more affluent peers in the Local Authority. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 also show a compelling picture of the educational success of disadvantaged pupils when compared to the national average at GCSE. It confirms that pupils in the Local Authority do better at GCSE than they do in England. For example in 2014, 78% of disadvantaged pupils in the Local Authority pupils at the end of KS2 attained level 4 or above compared to 67% in England. Similarly at GCSE, 51% of disadvantaged pupils gained 5+A*-C including English and mathematics compared with 37% in England. What is particularly remarkable about Local Authority’s performance is that the Local Authority pupils achieved 11 and 14 percentage points better than the national average at KS2 and GCSE. (See Table 2.1 and 2.2)

3 Good Practice to Narrow the Achievement Gap

The above section covered the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in the context of their overall performance in the Local Authority and England and suggests that the case study schools not only narrowed the gap but some have closed the gap between FSM pupils and their peers. There are a number of reasons for the vast improvement in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils in the case study schools compared to the Local Authority and nationally in England. Therefore the key question for research is, *‘what is the reason for such successful achievement in the case study schools?’* As part of the interviews headteachers and teachers were asked, *‘what strategies does your school use to raise the achievement of pupil premium pupils?’* The research identified the following success factors in raising achievement and narrowing the gap including ; outstanding visionary school leadership, effective teaching and learning, effective use of data, an inclusive curriculum, targeted support and interventions by using pupil premium funds to challenge poverty. These good practices are discussed below:-

A strong leadership team

A feature of the outstanding leadership in the case study schools is the ability to create an impetus within the school that encourages and enables people to play an active part in raising the achievement of all pupils. This style of leadership empowers staff and supports them in fulfilling the aims and goals of the school. These school leaders use a range of actions to take account of the particular context in which their schools are working and they understand the importance of culture and building behavioural norms that exemplify the best that a school can stand for. They have built institutions in which people believe strongly and with which they can personally identify and to which they are loyal. All of this gives significance to what they do and gives it meaning, which is highly motivating. During our visits to the case study schools we heard examples of headteachers referring to the culture of their schools, as places where *'all pupils can achieve'* where there is *'achievement for all'* and how they induct new staff, for example into the *'Woodmansterne way'*, the *'Sudbourne way'* or the *'Vauxhall family'*.

The successful leaders of the case study schools employ many of the strategies described in literature on leadership as 'inspirational' or 'transformational' leadership and, by these methods unite staff in their vision for themselves and their pupils. There is an unshakeable belief that poverty is no excuse for underachievement. They have an 'invitational' style of leadership and it is based on a clear set of principles which include an optimistic stance, respect for and trust of others and commitment to the vision. This style of leadership is inclusive and based on listening to the concerns of all members of a school community. Stoll and Fink (1996) describe these leaders as very 'centred' people, grounded in the four areas of optimism, trust, respect and intentionality (commitment). Invitational leaders such as these have a strong sense of purpose or vision and invite others to sign up to it. This promotes shared visions and wise decisions.

At Dunraven, the development of a clear vision that every 'individual' student can achieve is central to the leadership's transformational approach – that is, shared vision, rather than supervision, which provides for the coordination of individual efforts. The building of a school culture in which individuals at all levels enjoy a degree of autonomy in relation to their own work, and the possibility of bringing their own knowledge, skills and creativity to bear in resolving problems and pursuing opportunities, is extended to students as well as staff.

The Principal is passionate about every child's sense of 'being known' by the school and of being valued as an individual, he asserted:

'Overwhelmingly our children know that they are known and their needs are secure. That's the basis that liberates them to be good learners, more confident and optimistic. Outcomes follow from getting those things right. Increasingly it's about the whole child. If we can give this to our children regardless of their background, then we are doing a good job.'

There is also a shared vision for excellence at La Retraite School, as noted by Ofsted:

'Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher and senior leaders lead by example, creating a positive climate where staff and students work closely together with shared aims and expectations. The headteacher's vision for the school is shared at all levels.' (Ofsted 2013)

However, the leadership has identified an ongoing challenge for the school's pupils eligible for pupil premium funding, and their families:

'The key challenge we face is one of aspiration. The school deprivation indicator is in the highest percentile, as is our FSM eligibility. 48% of the pupil population is eligible for pupil premium funding. Few pupils have been exposed to higher education and career opportunities outside their immediate environment. Many pupils also face the difficulty of living in the inner city, with limited opportunity for extracurricular activities. Our EAL and ethnic minority percentage is in the highest quintile. Many parents do not have a tradition in, or understanding of, the UK school and higher education systems, creating a sense of 'inaccessibility' to both pupils and their families.'

Nevertheless, the leaders of the case study schools constantly seek ways of reaching out to parents and the community and go out of their way to recruit teaching assistants and support staff that live locally. They represent a wider age range than the teachers and speak various community languages which are a great help in communicating with parents. Discussions with these staff members reveal that they believe they have an in-depth knowledge of the children they support as they see them in the playground, at lunchtime and in after-school clubs, as well as the classroom.

One of the key features of leadership which is common to all the case study schools, is the facilitation of personal and professional growth of staff. The commitment to enable staff members to participate in the leadership process has encouraged the motivation and involvement of staff as noted in the following comments:

'She trusts us, all her faith and confidence she has in us.. She lets us get on.'
Another commented: *'I have never been to her with an idea for a job and she has said it wouldn't work. She always lets you try it out.'* (Teaching Assistant, St. Andrew's School)

The roles and responsibilities of staff have been reviewed to bring them in line with the various intervention strategies designed to meet the needs of pupil premium pupils with new posts emerging e.g. parent partnership leader and pupil guidance and support leader. (These two leaders have now become members of the senior leadership team at St. Andrew's). Their understanding of the local context in which children and families live, provides a level of empathy which is a great source of support to the school community:

'Parents may have had a very difficult experience themselves with school and we have to let them know that we are there for them as well as for the kids. We are a small school and this helps. We look at the social and emotional aspects, and how this impacts on their children's academic progress. We focus on how they are getting on with life and their next steps. Pastoral care is very important – the mixed backgrounds of staff all helps- we all work together and bounce ideas off each other.' (Pupil Guidance & Support Leader, St. Andrew's School)

At Woodmansterne, similar changes to job descriptions have been made:

'Our role has changed; it used to be just pastoral. We look at things from an emotional stance and things that inhibit their learning. If we can sort it out we remove those barriers to learning. I am now in class more supporting children with behavioural difficulties keeping them on task, helping them with their learning. I use the 'skills ladder to help me develop the planning'; I have to make sure my input

is up to scratch. I am monitored by the headteacher. In the afternoon I mentor children on a 1:1 basis mostly - but sometimes in a friendship group.’ (Learning Mentor, Woodmansterne)

‘I learned Art Therapy from a colleague, we share ideas. I did a course and qualified. I have done bereavement counselling for children. During the FAST (Families and Schools Together) programme I saw the development between the child and their parent.’ (Learning Mentor, Woodmansterne School)

At Vauxhall, every member of staff (including administrative and premises officer) has been trained in teaching Phonics, the rationale being that there will always be someone available to lead a small group of pupils for the daily phonics lessons, if required.

Hours have been extended to cover breakfast clubs and early morning teaching sessions in these schools. At Vauxhall in Years 5 and 6 an extended school day has been implemented in the spring and summer terms when the school day begins with breakfast at 7.30 am and additional English and maths lessons begin at 7.45 am. Attendance is almost 100%. Pupil premium pupils have small group lessons in grammar, writing and mental maths.

Vauxhall was congratulated by the Education Minister for the effective strategies it has employed to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and in closing the gap in 2015. It was also nominated for the Pupil Premium Awards and has received £25,000 by winning the High Aspiration award from the DfE. The school has recently been shortlisted in the 2015 Times Education Supplement (TES) Schools Awards for three categories- Primary School of the Year, Healthy Schools Award and Mathematics Team of the Year award. This is the first time that a school has been shortlisted in three categories!

Vauxhall is at the forefront of leading edge practice through researched based learning and development as part of ‘The Oval Learning Cluster’ of schools. There is an ongoing commitment by the leadership to the dissemination of practice locally, nationally and internationally and this now extends to making commercially available some of its latest ‘masters’ curriculum and assessment programmes. Vauxhall was the only primary school asked by the OECD to present its experiences on successful implementation of educational policies, attended by delegates from 30 countries. The head of school explained:

‘Our needs made us innovate – we see something in it for us. I don’t wait; I have the autonomy to just do it. As soon as we received autonomy from the national government to decide on our school-based assessment system, we developed our own web-based database, driven by the concept of mastery learning, eventually funded by the National College of Teaching and Learning. Now other schools in our cluster are using it and some schools in the Norfolk Local Authority have expressed interest in it, and so are some schools in Jersey.’

The case study headteachers are also attentive to their own learning: *‘Shaping one’s own professional vision and providing the leadership necessary to enrol others in the pursuit of a shared educational vision requires informed thought’ (Stoll & Fink 1996)*. Leaders need to stay current in order to have credibility with their staff and to build up networks. In these case studies we see examples of the headteachers of St. Andrew’s and Woodmansterne studying for MA’s and/or involved in action research projects. The Woodmansterne cluster arrangements offer many opportunities for school leaders at all levels to further their leadership roles. Recognising the benefits of ‘Clusters’ of schools, the headteacher of St. Andrew’s, a National Leader of Education, has initiated the development of a Cluster of Church of England Schools within the borough.

Innovatory leadership is an outstanding feature of School A Primary where the headteacher has adopted a bold strategy for closing achievement gaps. He explained his strategy as follows:

'I took my strongest teachers out of class in each of the phase teams EYFS, Year 1 and 2, Year 3 and 4, Year 5 and 6 and each is picking up intervention groups. I have spent quite a lot of money upgrading small rooms, making them enticing for children by decorating, putting in spotlights, whiteboards – these rooms are even more enticing than the classrooms. Our pupil premium grant children are not seen as second class citizens being shunted off. They also have some of the most popular teachers and therefore are envied rather than looked down on. Despite our best intentions most children know why the pupil premium grant children are taken out of class but now they are with a special teacher who is universally loved and they are going into an attractive environment.'

The result of the leadership's courageous decision to give the most deprived pupils the best teachers has paid dividends in the remarkable progress that they have made, whilst not detracting from the progress made by pupils of all abilities.

What these outstanding case study school leaders have in common, is an unshakeable belief that all children can achieve their best, no matter what their background, language or circumstance. They have created a climate of excellence that is conducive to growth and where an emphasis is laid on innovation, consultation, teamwork and participation.

Effective teaching and learning

In just over a decade, London schools have been transformed from being the worst place for children from low-income communities to go to school, to being a leading example across the world of improving outcomes for pupils from low-income backgrounds. At the heart of London's many educational problems was its inability to attract and retain high-quality teachers, one of the most important factors in improving a child's educational outcomes. The Local Authority schools moved from being amongst the lowest performing in the country to some of the highest performing, and now have one of the greatest proportions of schools rated outstanding by Ofsted. The Local Authority's school leaders have played a significant role in the successful transformation of schools and in the recruitment and development of the most talented and gifted teachers.

All the case study schools are located in the Local Authority, a challenging, inner city borough, with many pupils coming from families which suffer multiple deprivations. One aspect of deprivation in the local population is the level of skills and training which in some parts of the borough are among the lowest in the UK. Attainment on entry to schools is below typical national average. The level of home support that the schools can expect is low, not because of lack of parental aspiration, but because many parents do not have the ability to help. Therefore the schools put a focus on the development of basic skills and in providing an enriched curriculum to enhance pupils' social and cultural capital.

Knowing the challenge of raising standards in inner city schools, headteachers are rigorous in the appointment of their teaching staff and they ensure that their staff receives, high quality continuing professional development. As a consequence, Ofsted inspectors have commented on the outstanding teaching observed in the case study schools.

For example, at Dunraven School they observed:

Excellent teaching and tailored support for pupils enable them to learn exceptionally well in all subjects.

'School leaders have placed a strong emphasis on raising the quality of teaching in all areas of the school and are passionate about involving the pupils in their learning. This is one of the main reasons why the quality of teaching has improved and is now outstanding.'

'Teachers plan and adapt their lessons to incorporate a sharp match of tasks and interesting activities for all groups of pupils and are adept at stimulating interest about their subjects through the use of varied and different resources.'(Ofsted 2014)

At La Retraite, Ofsted observed outstanding teaching:

'Teachers know their students and their abilities very well because their progress is tracked and monitored regularly. They use this information to plan work which challenges students and is matched closely to their earlier achievements, so that all groups of students make rapid progress. Students who speak English as an additional language make particularly strong progress in English and their other subjects. This is because of the closely matched individual support they are given beyond lessons and teachers' understanding of how to build steadily on their existing knowledge to take learning forward quickly.' (Ofsted 2013)

The school also makes sure that appropriate provision is made for pupils who belong to vulnerable groups, ensuring that the needs of disadvantaged pupils are met through additional support and provision to enable them to make even greater progress and to narrow attainment gaps. The school recognizes the difference that quality first teaching and appropriate interventions can make. They appreciate the uniqueness of every student and they understand that some students need more support to ensure that the school community is inclusive and equal.

At School A the headteacher follows the model preferred by many secondary schools in using pupil premium funding to release his strongest teachers to work with targeted pupils. We observed an excellent lesson where a group of Year 6 pupils eligible for pupil premium funding made remarkable progress because of the outstanding teaching they received from an experienced teacher. Their understanding was assessed by the teacher who displayed their finished work on the whiteboard via a camera and invited individual pupils to explain how they had arrived at their answers, marking any errors or misunderstandings which she then used as teaching points. The school is using 'Learning Lines' which facilitates pupil's evaluation of their own learning, as they place themselves at some point on a line and identify any difficulties or 'pit experiences'. The teacher encouraged pupils to reflect on what strategies they could use to help them get out of the pit. What was noteworthy was the level of trust that had been built up between the teacher and the group and between pupils. Pupils in the group risked revealing the true depth of their misunderstandings, (although peer relationships appeared to be good enough for all members to be comfortable in revealing this). Perhaps more importantly though was for pupils to acknowledge their own difficulties, without fear or shame. At the end of the lesson the teacher encouraged the group with the following summary: *'Our aim is to try and get you to Level 4. We are all roughly at about the same level. The questions you are working on were Level 4. If I came last September and asked you this question you never could have done it so you are making great progress!'*

This exceptional teacher's stance echoes that of the headteacher, in that these vulnerable pupils need the strongest teachers because of the complexities of the challenges they face i.e. deprivation, behavioural issues, SEN and low self-esteem. In her view:

'It just doesn't work with a Teaching Assistant. It's the experience of teachers and their knowledge of how to motivate a wide range of pupils with a wide range of needs that makes a difference. The Teaching Assistants are extremely strong but they are not trained teachers. Teachers know how to break things down and how to change tack if it's not working, having a host of strategies and experience of what works. These children need to feel they are on a par with their friends. I make them know they are doing hard stuff – as hard as what is going on in the classes. It makes them feel equal which is what we want.' (Phase Leader, Sudbourne School)

Woodmansterne's skilled teachers also use a range of imaginative strategies to inspire and motivate pupils. There is a strong emphasis in the Early Years Foundation Stage on helping children to develop key skills and the concentration and stamina needed to get the most out of the excellent range of planned activities.

The Year 1 teacher (who previously taught the same children when they were in a Reception class) explains the importance of laying a solid foundation in the children's speech and language development in the Early Years, and how this is now paying off in Year 1. She explained how the school's approach supports pupil premium children:

'It comes down to nurturing. I also taught these children in Reception. Our Forest Schools approach has been key. We take them to the allotments, to the growing garden and they learn how to grow carrots, potatoes etc. We bring them back to school and cook them. To begin with the children are very shy but very soon become experts. They learn how to share equipment – and to distribute aprons among themselves. It develops their social skills and builds confidence as well as extending their language when we come back and talk about what they have found out. In Reception this has the biggest impact but it is very resource heavy e.g. the Early Years Educator (EYE) and a teaching assistant are also needed to enable these interventions to take place, but the outcomes are huge in terms of literacy, speaking and listening and friendships.' (Woodmansterne School)

This early focus on the development of basic skills through exciting, real life practical activities pays dividends as Ofsted noted in Woodmansterne:

'The teaching of writing elicits outstanding outcomes for pupils because teachers root writing in relevant experiences so pupils have a deep understanding of what they are being asked to write about.' (Ofsted 2014)

Teachers at St. Andrew's also speak confidently about the types of interventions their pupil premium grant pupils' need. A Year 2 teacher explained:

'Our interventions take place inside and outside class. We have a large number of high quality support staff. Staff are trained in using toe-by-toe, phonics based, reading catch up. They have ten minutes every day. Each member of support staff works with individual children each day. We squeeze it in wherever we can but the children never miss any whole class direct teaching. I have a 'School Direct' student in my class and this helps give pupils additional support.'

The Year 2 teacher gave an example of the progress pupil premium grant pupils have made as a result of the right intervention:

'Last year, pupils came into Year 2 at Level 1 and came out at 2c and 2b. Their confidence and learning attitude developed – they progress when this is overcome. Their self-confidence increases with all the enrichment activities, school assemblies and trips they take part in. It all makes a difference.' (St. Andrew's School)

Teachers also appreciate the input they have received from the SENCo/inclusion manager who has been taken out of class this year, using pupil premium funding, to support the development of colleagues:

'This year we have had input from our SENCO, different teaching strategies, analysing learning barriers, how we can support pupils who are underperforming, and emphasis on IEP targets which are incorporated into our planning. The SLT have got us to look at the structure of our lessons, going about it in an inventive way.' (St. Andrew's School)

Pupils with EAL receive pre-teaching to work through specific vocabulary in humanities subjects before the lesson begins. An example was provided of a child with EAL who came into a Year 5 class working at 2b: (the child left in Year 6 last year): *'The child had SEN and had two writing lessons a week with the HLTA (EAL). In that year he made one whole level of progress!*

Outstanding teaching at Vauxhall, the daily phonics teaching and reading in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2 provide a firm foundation for children in basic skills. The involvement of teaching assistants in teaching phonics and mathematics enables children in Years 1 and 2 to make excellent progress as they are taught in small groups, where activities and resources match their needs. Children in EYFS are excited about the games/activities they are engaged in which they see as fun but nevertheless have significant mathematical content, such as the identification and ordering of numbers.

The well qualified teaching assistants (TA) and additional adults play a vital role in teaching and learning and over the last few years this has led to significant improvements in pupils' reading skills, which they are then able to apply in other subjects. They are enthusiastic about their work with small phonics and mathematics groups:

'I had training in Jolly Phonics in another school, but not as intensive as the training I had here. Here it is a two day course and we have constant catch ups and updates.' (Teaching Assistant, Vauxhall School)

Opportunities for CPD are valued by the teaching assistants:

'We have peer-to-peer observations, which are co-ordinated by the literacy co-ordinator. We have been doing it long enough now to know who to observe. We talk about what we are doing and if you think you can learn something from the way someone else is doing it, you ask if you can observe them.' (Teaching Assistant Vauxhall School)

Another TA commented on inset days which are shared with other schools in the cluster:

'There's a selection of workshops in the afternoon. Individual CPD needs are taken into account. The federation with Wyvil is a benefit in that respect.' (Vauxhall School)

Teachers are constantly trying to make lessons exciting and relevant to the children at all stages of their development, drawing on a wide range of resources and materials to support learning. They assess pupils every half term and have pupil progress review meetings. The Year 5 teacher appreciates the clarity and simplicity of planning and assessment arrangements in the school. He comments:

'There is no pressure about planning. The head of school looks at children's work in their books and monitors teaching. There is a level of trust because the teaching is high quality.' With regard to assessment he adds: *'The assessment masters lay out all the objectives, I go around with my iPad (a resource the school provided) and check on progress in learning objectives from the new national curriculum. We also use our teacher assessment to ensure there is no mismatch. We are getting familiar with the 'assessment masters' but it works. We can also use the assessment materials at home.'* (Vauxhall School)

Excellent targeted support and use of pupil premium funding

There is no doubt that carefully targeted spending of the pupil premium funding has had a significant impact in raising achievement and closing attainment gaps for eligible pupils in the case study schools. There is a strong commitment in these schools, shared by staff and governors, to do everything possible to remove any barriers that might hinder a pupil's development. Governing bodies are well informed and hold school leaders to account for raising standards. They use data to measure how pupils are achieving in relation to their peers in similar schools. They effectively monitor pupil premium funds to make sure they are having an impact on raising standards. These outstanding schools are highly ambitious, respond to what they know to be good practice and ensure that their vision for improvement is clear.

The most frequent use of the funding is to pay for additional staff, including teachers and teaching assistants, who deliver one-to-one and small group support, typically focused on English and mathematics.

The funding is also commonly used to enable eligible pupils to participate fully in after-school clubs and activities and to provide financial support for educational visits.

One of the reasons our case study schools are so successful in narrowing the achievement gap is because the leadership identify their pupils' specific needs accurately and promptly so that low attainment can be tackled at the very earliest stage. They then track the progress of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium grant meticulously and adjust the support provided as a result of their monitoring and evaluation.

At La Retraite School there is good and well-coordinated targeted support to all groups of student through extensive use of best teachers, learning mentors, EAL teachers, teaching assistants and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) etc. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make the same outstanding progress as other pupils at the school. The school uses highly effective strategies, including best teachers for English and maths, tailored support for individuals in the classroom, 1:1 support for individual pupils, booster classes delivered by the pupil's class teacher, providing small groups with expert teachers focused on overcoming gaps in learning and funding trips to enrich the pupils education. This enabled disadvantaged students to make faster progress and to catch up on their peers. The empirical data shows that by the time students leave the school, gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and others pupils have narrowed and the gap at La Retraite was zero in 2013-2014 academic year. This is a remarkable achievement in narrowing the gap and as a result the school was selected for the national pupil premium award. There is also frequent use of

achievement data to check the effectiveness of interventions. Careful monitoring of pupil premium pupil performance and spending also involves a wide range of data and evidence. This includes achievement data, pupils' work, observations, the views of pupils and staff. Effective monitoring means that interventions and approaches can be changed and adapted quickly if they are not working. The school report of La Retraite on the use of pupil premium and the school's strategies for supporting disadvantaged students confirmed that:

'The staff are aware that the key success for all pupils is ensuring that all the day to day teaching meets the needs of each learner rather than simply relying on interventions to compensate for teaching that is less good. Where more support is needed the school allocates the best teachers to teach intervention groups (For example, all assistant headteachers support GCSE English). All teaching staff are aware of who is eligible for the pupil premium and this informs their planning. The school makes sure that support and the use of regular robust assessments which allow teachers to give students effective and timely feedback.' (La Retraite School)

The school is rightly proud of the achievements of pupil premium eligible pupils, as the Headteacher confirmed:

'We have successfully closed the gaps in achievement between pupils eligible for support through pupil premium and other pupils at the school as well as all pupils nationally. Our strategies have also increased aspiration towards higher education; Our sixth form has approximately 35% pupil premium eligible students; 96% of our Year 13 pupil premium eligible sixth formers gained university places in both 2013 and 2014, of which 13% went to Russell Group universities (including Oxbridge).' (La Retraite School)

Likewise, at Dunraven, the overall package of support for eligible pupils is comprehensive, well-integrated and responsive to their changing needs. The school uses specialist literacy programmes, small group support work in both English and mathematics, and one-to-one tuition help students who speak English as an additional language, Pupil Premium and SEN students all to make excellent progress in both English and mathematics. The school also uses best teachers where possible to teach intervention groups to improve mathematics and English. They made sure that support staff, particularly teaching assistants, were highly trained and understood their role in helping pupils to achieve using pupil premium funding. The school provide a balanced programme of whole-school, targeted and specialist support which takes into account the needs of pupils, for example:

Child A: *Child A is in Year 11 and a looked After Child with special educational need (SEN) support and had a highly difficult journey through school due to LAC status. He was with the same carer since the age of 6 but the relationship became strained throughout secondary education and both Child A and carer requested an end to the foster placement. Child A was placed in the care of first time carers with a therapeutic background. Child A was medicated in Year 8 this was a high point behaviourally. Year 9 poor behaviour, missing from home and substance misuse. Attendance & on-going behavioural difficulties led to a referral to a Learning Mentor. Small improvements in behaviour and attendance but Child A struggled in a mainstream setting. An alternative provision placement at Educational Excellence was brokered by the Student Engagement Department, attendance, behaviour and attainment was closely monitored by the team and were instrumental in ensuring Child A left Year 11 with an A*-G qualification. This also resulted in an*

apprenticeship being gained at EE which Child A is attending and developing key employment skills.’ (Dunraven School)

In Year 11 pupils are involved in the ‘Going for Gold’ intervention programme. Diamond is for students targeted to achieve a minimum of 5+GCSEs at A*-C (everyone at the bottom end of the cohort), gold is for the key marginals and platinum is for students on track to achieve a minimum of 5 GCSEs at A*- C including English and Maths, pushing the A/A* percentage with gifted and talented pupils.

Systematic, thorough monitoring of pupils’ progress underpins the school’s continued success in raising achievement, through the quality of teaching and pupils’ involvement in their learning, to outstanding.

The Principal of Dunraven sums up his thoughts on the future of pupil premium grant funding:

‘If there are changes to the funding there would be unfavourable consequences. We will be finding it difficult to do what we have been doing. We will try our best around that but it’s inevitable that it will be difficult. Data doesn’t tell the whole story, race, language, SEND needs to be taken into account in raising achievement.’

He reflected:

‘I do not think you can have a successful, high achieving school unless it’s an inclusive school. In selective areas the success rates between those who just managed to pass the 11+ to get into Grammar School and then failed to thrive and those that passed easily, varied widely. Inclusion costs; without pupil premium funding it would be disastrous. Whether we can sustain this in the future depends on the pupil premium funding. Without it the most vulnerable pupils will suffer.’

At School A the pupil premium fund is used to deploy a good classroom teacher. The pupil premium pupils were taught in focused teaching groups by well qualified and experienced teacher which effectively met pupils’ needs. This strategy made a real difference to the achievement of pupils who attracted pupil premium funding in the school. In addition, as the first priority at Sudbourne is quality first teaching, the headteacher explains that all teachers know which pupils are eligible for pupil premium grant and have their own in-class tracking systems which include looked after children, EAL, SEN pupils. Pupils’ progress is closely monitored termly at pupil progress meetings, led by the Deputy head, with the SENCo and the class teacher. Within these meetings the views of phase leaders about how children are progressing are also considered and an evaluation is made of what has worked and what hasn’t. Data on the impact of interventions is recorded and is shared with parents, staff and the governing body.

With regard to subject specific interventions, the headteacher commented:

‘What we know from our own experience of the Sudbourne context, we take into account. The Sutton Trust tool kit is used to identify key approaches that come within our resources and what would work for us. Marking of children’s books is a priority. Our marking is manageable and teachers mark extremely well. Formative assessment is outstanding. Our TAs are actively involved in making observations of pupils’ learning and recording them on post-its, which gives teachers feedback within the lesson.’ (Sudbourne School)

The headteacher described the governing body as 'bright and sharp' and they take an active interest in pupils' progress. They ask for detailed evaluations of the impact of the interventions put in place to support pupils of all abilities.

In the knowledge that children's grasp of language and literacy skills during early years is fundamental to accessing the curriculum and making good progress, the school uses a plethora of literacy and mathematics interventions targeted mainly at pupils in Reception classes and Years 1 and 2. Key Stage 1 is a particularly difficult phase for children in receipt of FSM and consequently there is a strong emphasis on the development of social skills and communication skills in the Reception Class. Structured phonics teaching by a specialist read-write teacher, supported by two well-trained TAs is very effective in improving literacy outcomes at Key Stage 1 and is eliminating risk factors for those children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The school has implemented other innovative and successful interventions, for example the 'Learning Line' which enables children to express themselves when struggling and to articulate how best they might find a way to move forward with their learning, as well as to recognise how much progress they have made within the lesson. Peer-tutoring, where older children in Years 5 & 6 teach younger pupils has been introduced. This builds greater self-esteem and is a great confidence booster for both the 'pupil-teacher' and the 'learner'.

The headteacher reflected on why there is a need for interventions for pupil premium grant pupils higher up the school:

'Every time there is a gap in Years 5 and 6 we are picking up children who need pupil premium grant support. Parents tend to move out in Year 5 into the private school sector, or families move out of London and we take in pupils from other schools into these year groups and very often they are working at below average levels. We have Year 6 booster classes and Easter boosters with two members of staff taking children who are borderline level 4. After the summer half term I place all my resources in Year 5. I will put all my strongest teachers to do intensive work in key areas for next year. I start early with smaller groups.' (Sudbourne School)

The deputy headteacher is fostering a growth 'mind-set' in children who are achieving a secure level 4 or Level 5 in mathematics. Any child falling into this level of attainment is invited to attend after-school booster classes in Level 6 mathematics which she runs. Research on the growth mind-set shows that pupils who believe they can grow their basic abilities have greater motivation, and higher achievement, than do pupils who believe their abilities are fixed and that teachers can influence pupils' mind-sets. In a growth mind-set, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work – brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. As a result of the above high quality teaching and learning and effective targeted support and effective use of pupil premium funding, 100% of pupils achieved level 4 and above in reading and maths in 2014 and the school has closed the attainment gap. The school uses the pupil premium funding extremely well utilising the best teachers and employing extra staff to implement specific interventions, leading to an immediate and positive impact on standards for those pupils. Pupils who are supported by the pupil premium do exceptionally well. There is no difference in the school between the achievement of those in receipt of the pupil premium and those who are not, ensuring any gaps in learning are closed. (see Table 2, Sudbourne School)

Vauxhall pupil premium grant has enabled the school to offer a range of curriculum enrichment activities which have proven successful in developing children's confidence, and boosting self-esteem whilst also improving standards in mathematics and Year 1 phonics and KS2 outcomes.

There is 1:1 reading support, additional L5 mathematics, small group springboard mathematics support, English, mathematics and revision materials for Years 5 and 6, 1:1 phonics support and reading intervention, staff training on outstanding teaching, the release of teachers for pupil progress reviews sessions three times per year, extended services including a wide range of after-school clubs. As a result of such support and outstanding provision *'progress by FSM pupils in all subjects exceeded expectations and attainment is within age-related expectations. In particular the percentage of FSM children classed as 'more able', is growing each year. By the end of Key Stage 2, the % children achieving the higher level 5 in all core subjects are significantly higher than the national average.'* (Head of School)

Pupil premium funding has been used to subscribe to 'Mathletics' and this has contributed to the consistently improving standards in mathematics. In Years 5 and 6 an extended school day has been implemented in the Spring and Summer terms when the school begins with breakfast at 7.30 am and additional English and maths lessons begin at 7.45 am. Attendance is almost 100%. Pupils have small group lessons in grammar, writing, mental maths, and it is also a time for *'plugging the gaps'* and *'going back to basics'* (Year 5 teacher). From 9 am Years 5 and 6 revert to the curriculum as usual.

Further investment in reading has resulted in the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check outcomes to be above national average. This has also been true for the end of Key Stage 2 outcomes where FSM pupils outperformed their peers nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.

In Vauxhall Teaching Assistants play a vital role in supporting children in small groups, individually in EYFS and in both key stages. Roles are flexible with some TAs teaching phonics, number masters, taking story time with a whole class and administrative tasks. Others run breakfast and after school clubs. They know the children and families well and gave examples of successful outcomes for individual children on FSM which they had worked with:

'Child A: I worked with him from Year 1, he had slight cerebral palsy but that didn't impact on his general learning. He started off making huge letters when writing but his writing is now smaller and he's a top speller and his literacy is quite strong. He's now in Year 3 and attends after school clubs.'

'Child B: He came into EYFS from Colombia and didn't speak a word in English, or Spanish. He made noises and couldn't say any vowel sounds. His mother took him to visit a special school but he showed them his Vauxhall badge and his mum bought him back here. He was very timid. He is now in Year 2 and you can have a conversation with him, he is reading and he approaches adults. He never did that before. His mother is very happy, very involved in his homework.'

The schools talented, flexible and mature teaching assistants (many live locally) represent a wider age range than many of the teachers and speak various community languages which is a great help in communicating with parents. They also feel that they have an in-depth knowledge of the children they support as they see them in the playground, at lunchtime and in after-school clubs, as well as the classroom.

Overall at Vauxhall pupil premium funding was used to deliver a wide range of intervention strategies to raise attainment in reading, writing, communication and mathematics. The school intervention and targeted support strategies were effective because they were driven by pupil's academic, emotional and social needs. The classes we observed get lots of support from the class teacher, Teaching Assistant and learning mentors. As a result of high quality teaching and learning, effective tailored individual support and effective use of pupil premium funding, the school closed

the attainment gap with both pupil premium and non-pupil premium achieving 100% level 4+ in each of reading, maths and writing. Both groups also outperformed the national non-pupil premium average in each subject. Ofsted also commented:

'The school is highly successful in closing any gaps in the attainment and progress of pupils. Those who are eligible for the pupil premium, for example, achieve at least as well as all other pupils in the school and better than similar pupils nationally.' (Ofsted 2012)

Woodmansterne's strategies for success in narrowing achievement gaps include the engagement of a diverse community of parents/carers in partnership with the school, in providing support for children's learning. The Deputy Head explains the school's approach:

'We work hard at building relationships for example in engaging our Somali parents in the Family and Schools Together (FAST) programme. The difference it has made is amazing, now they say 'good morning' and are smiling at us, whereas they used to group together in the playground and not talk to us. During the ten week programme they really got to know us and we worked together. Parents have time together and they also have time to talk with the headteacher and myself so they could ask us questions. It has really helped break down barriers. In the FAST programme you also get parents to run future sessions – parents are currently organising this and are keeping it going. This has been down to our HLTAs who ran it the second time and organised it. She has a great relationship with parents.' (Woodmansterne School)

Parent workshops on phonics, reading and writing and mathematics are a regular feature of the school's approach and parent volunteers are invited to train as volunteer readers. The school currently has twenty parents as reading volunteers. Training in phonics is provided for all parents of children in the reception class and the school talks to them about the articulation of sounds and invites them to come into the school and observe a phonics lesson. They also offer this opportunity to see a mathematics lesson. The Deputy Head explained why this is important:

'We have done a lot with parents with the new mathematics curriculum, especially the calculation policy. We have put it on our website and parents come in and observe us teaching – they can help their children at home. Parents come from a wide range of backgrounds and experience and things keep changing so we need to give them the support they need to help their children. We use our Home/School Agreement to talk with parents who are not supporting their child with their school work.' (Woodmansterne School)

Ofsted also commented that:

'Pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium make even more progress than the outstanding progress made by their classmates because additional support paid for by the funding, such as specialist small groups for English and mathematics, is highly effective in accelerating progress. Consequently, the gap between their attainment and that of other groups in school is narrowing rapidly. For example, in the latest published figures available, the gap in mathematics had closed, and the gap in reading was half that of the national gap, at just over the equivalent of one term.' (St. Andrew's School)

This was also confirmed by recent data which shows that both pupil premium and non-pupil premium both did very well in 2014 with both groups outperforming the national non-pupil premium average in each subject (see Table 2). In addition the gap in attainment in the school between pupil premium and non-pupil premium children was narrower than nationally. St. Andrew's has used some of their pupil premium funding to enable the school's teaching assistants to take part in the Institute of Education's 'Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants' programme. The headteacher explained why:

'We are changing the hours our Teaching Assistant's work. At 8.30am they will meet with each class teacher and plan the way they are working, although my objective is tied to my aim to extend their hours to 5.30pm. It's about raising the Teaching Assistants' profile. There is no way they can turn up at 9 am and be prepared for the day ahead. We have to have them working more effectively. They will have new job descriptions which will focus on learning.' (St. Andrew's School)

The roles and responsibilities of the former Learning Mentors has also changed to reflect the significant roles they play in removing barriers to learning. They are now members of the Senior Leadership Team: The Inclusion Manager explained these changes:

'The roles have changed, they have evolved. We now have a Parent-Partnership leader. We have written her a new job description. She has amazing relationships with parents and they feel they can say more to her than to me.' There is now a Pupil Guidance and Support Leader, rather than a learning mentor: *'He works with children with behavioural and emotional difficulties. He trains the Teaching Assistants and works with staff, modelling and supporting staff to implement the behaviour policy.'* (St. Andrew's School)

At St. Andrew's pupil premium funding has contributed significantly to staff development, deployment and training as illustrated above. Quality first teaching is the first priority and therefore there is an ongoing need to support teaching and learning through staff training. Two teachers and one member of support staff are undertaking MA level study. All support staff have achieved National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 and a Teaching Assistant recently qualified as a Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA).

St. Andrew's aspires to support families in overcoming the multiplicity of challenges some face, so that children can thrive and reach their full potential. The Parent-Partnership Leader plays a key role in this respect; arranging parent workshops on, for example, 'understanding tax credits', 'eating on a budget' and 'back to work' strategies. She monitors attendance and punctuality and explained the process:

'We have panels where we go through the report and see anyone with attendance falling below 95%. I chat with parents about it and if it gets worse I'll arrange a more formal meeting with the Chair of the Governing Body, the headteacher and the Pupil Guidance and Support Leader. As a small school we know families very well. Sometimes the Family Support Worker (FSW) is involved if we know there are family problems. I grew up with the same background as our parents on the same multi-cultural estate. They see teachers as formal, they might feel they do not want to cross the line, I help them get their foot in the door.... bridging the gap. The next generation of parents coming up, some are very scared of school. I had to take one young parent by the hand and lead her into the school to deal with her issues she was in such a state.' (St. Andrew's School)

Overcoming the emotional and social barriers that both children and sometimes parents experience is one of the reasons why the school have invested pupil premium funding in developing the roles of support staff. The Pupil Guidance and Support leader commented:

'Parents may have had a very difficult experience themselves with school and we have to let them know that we are there for them as well as for the kids. We are a small school and this helps. We look at the social and emotional aspects, and how this impacts on their children's academic progress. We focus on how they are getting on with life and their next steps. Pastoral care is very important – the mixed backgrounds of staff all helps- we all work together and bounce ideas off each other.' (St. Andrew's School)

The Pupil Guidance and Support leader gave an example of the impact his work has had on a particular pupil:

'In Year 4 a FSM pupil had serious anger issues. He was in danger of not achieving his targets. He was one of seven children living in overcrowded conditions and his mother had cancer. He was so angry he used to smack himself... he was always in trouble and his older brothers gave him a hard time. He came to one of my behaviour groups. We identified situations that would get him into trouble, explored what anger is, like a bomb. I tried to get him to the point of choosing to make a change in his behaviour. I spoke to teachers about positive praise and how they could respond to him. I spoke to the Teaching Assistants about this boy and what we were doing for him. We started to build his self-confidence and in Year 6 he achieved Level 4 or above in all subject areas. He came back to visit us from his secondary school the other day. He is doing well but his older brother is in trouble with the Police.' (St. Andrew's School)

The HLTA who speaks French, Spanish and Portuguese offers EAL support to pupils and families, observe: *'We are very strong, we are a family as a whole school. Everyone can depend on each other.* She gave the example of successful interventions with EAL pupils:

'The child arrived at the end of Year 5 with no English although he was fluent in Spanish which he spoke at home. I met with the parents and supported the family who wanted him to succeed. We provided 1:1 support and Spanish translation with a peer-buddy. By Year 6 he achieved Level 5 in maths and Level 4 in English.' (St. Andrew's School)

'Another child came from Brazil into Year 5. He had supportive parents and was excellent in Portuguese. The family situation was positive. He achieved Level 4 in maths and English. We are a very inclusive school so the child would not have any hindrances.' (St. Andrew's School)

'A child came into Year 2 straight from Colombia. He could speak no English at all, but he is working at Level 6 in maths and Level 5 in English. Working with his parents was very helpful.' (St. Andrew's School)

The school also offers Adult Literacy classes for parents and Stages 1 and 2 ESOL classes, and Crèche facilities are available for young children. The Parent-Partnership Leader encourages parents to attend all meetings and there is now a very good turnout for parents meeting because of her

friendly approach. Coffee mornings for parents of SEN pupils are also well attended and offer a supportive environment where they can share experiences.

When asked whether the school could do without the pupil premium funding which has enabled them to develop the skills of support staff to enable them to address the social and emotional needs of children and families, they responded:

'Come and live in our world – a term or a year'! Children would not have a successful future because we all make a difference.' (St. Andrew's School)
'If you don't look at the whole family but just at the child, you are going to have a seriously dysfunctional society.' (St. Andrew's School)

The support staff appreciate the opportunities that have been opened to them by the leadership and one remarked:

'She trusts us, all her faith and confidence she has in us. She lets us get on.' Another commented: *'I have never been to her with an idea for a job and she has said it wouldn't work. She always lets you try it out.'* (St. Andrew's School)

Ofsted noted that one reason for good progress of pupil eligible for the pupil premium funding in the school is because they receive effective support from teaching assistants:

'The school have highly trained teaching assistants and they provide good support to pupil premium, English as additional language and SEN pupils. They deliver small groups of lessons as well as one-to-one support in class to help pupils to understand what they are expected to do. Consequently, these pupils make good progress at similar rates to their classmates.' (St. Andrew's School)

We agree with Ofsted. Teaching assistants provide valuable support to all groups needing an extra boost in the classroom and this helps all pupils to make progress at a similar rate.

An inclusive curriculum

Inclusive curriculum refers to all the learning that is designed, planned and delivered regardless of children's educational, dispositional, circumstantial or cultural background. The case study schools have become centres of curricular innovation by responding to changing policies, engaging with research evidence, and participating in emerging and developing programmes of study. An inclusive curriculum is what happens in schools when policy, research and practice are seen as a triangular framework for reconsidering and renewing curriculum design and related classroom practices. Schools use their broad knowledge of pupils and families to consider how they can broaden horizons and ensure that talented pupils are able to fulfil their potential in a particular subject or skill when they might otherwise be unable to do so, because of a lack of opportunities outside of school, or a lack of family finances.

Sudbourne's curriculum exemplifies the above description. It is rich and exciting and offers all its pupils an equal opportunity to experience outdoor lessons, take part in educational visits, theatre trips, dress-up days, hands-on 'explorer' lessons, 'expert into school days' and show days. The new National Curriculum has been used to enhance and update all the topic based units of work with new themes, resources and learning outcomes. The school uses an enquiry led approach to ensure subjects are taught within a unifying theme. Pupils are provided with a more meaningful, rich and exciting array of classroom experiences, that relate, inspire and enthuse the youngest learners' imagination. This allows the flexibility to respond to pupils' interests within a topic and to incorporate current events and local community projects that provide relevance and real life contexts.

The headteacher commented:

'Topics begin with an emotional hook. I was walking past Year 3 and saw children wrapped up in toilet paper – they were getting the feel of what it was like to be mummified! It ends with a celebration for parents to come and see. We do not assume that every single child has seen, for example, the river Thames – many of our children will have had all kinds of opportunities but some haven't. We have affluent middle-class children who are rich in language at home but we have others where language is quite limited. We are trying to come up with a way of becoming a talking school where we are all modelling high quality language. We use speaking/talking frames for English and maths and have a 'talking day' to develop mathematical vocabulary.' (Sudbourne School)

La Retraite's curriculum is also exciting, innovative and meets students' learning needs extremely well. The curriculum responds effectively to the context from which students come - widely dispersed inner city areas of mixed heritage backgrounds, Black and ethnic minorities' heritage, and many with English as an additional language. It is designed to meet the needs and interests of the different groups of students as they move through the school, and offers a creative and extensive range of choices at GCSE and in the sixth form, underpinned by outstanding careers guidance, which is appreciated by students. They are well informed about what courses and qualifications are available to them and make effective choices that ensure that many obtain a place at a leading British university. The curriculum is enriched by a superb programme of extra-curricular activities, including an extensive range of sporting, music, drama and academic groups and a rich programme of visits. A huge range of extra-curricular opportunities are enjoyed by most students. The curriculum and these extra opportunities all contribute to outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development which prepares students extremely well for life in modern British society. The curriculum includes a number of pathways at Key Stage 4, and the careful use of setting and streaming in different subjects ensures closely matched challenge for all groups in lessons. More students are now following the English Baccalaureate range of subjects than has been the case in the past, which ensures that they have a strong academic basis for further study. As the number of schools in the South London Cluster collaboration increases, sixth-form students have an exceptionally broad range of courses from which to choose so that their interests and needs are met.

Dunraven also believes in the importance of a broad and balanced curriculum which enables children and young people to develop a breadth of knowledge and skills to prepare them for a full and rich adult life. The All Through school will, over time, enable the foundations to be laid for life from Reception age onwards. The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum is rich and varied. Reception class children have Forest School sessions, weekly gardening, and Key Stage 1 classes have a wide variety of visits to theatre, farms and museums as part of their topic work.

The secondary phase curriculum has been praised for its breadth and balance ensuring that all students develop an understanding and appreciation of the Creative and Physical Arts, Technology, Humanities and Modern Foreign Language alongside the core subjects throughout Key Stage 3. Their aim is that students maintain such balance into Key Stage 4 before specialising their field of study in Key Stage 5.

'The range of subjects studied, enhanced by a vast array of enrichment and extra-curricular activities and events, and is outstanding. In addition, varied assemblies, such as using dance to illustrate overcoming fears and obstacles in life in modern Britain, and creative tutor time activities to boost self-esteem promote common

values. Few opportunities are missed to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is a true strength of the school.' (Ofsted 2014)

As a fully inclusive school, Vauxhall is wholly committed to providing equal opportunities for all pupils. It is committed to overcoming barriers to learning and meeting any special educational need to ensure that all pupils make good progress. A relentless pursuit of excellence for all pupils underpins the work of the school. The school's proactive approach to change led to the adoption of the new National Curriculum a year before most schools. A focus on early consultation and training of all staff has supported familiarisation and understanding of all aspects of the curriculum at a very detailed level.

Vauxhall has over 70% EAL pupils; it sees fluency in English as vital to pupils' future success. Therefore through the teaching of English, all children learn important skills which will enable them to communicate with others and will help them to understand and access the rest of the school curriculum. By Year 2 every child is able to read, write independently and have a mastery of number appropriate to their age, with a significant proportion exceeding this. Over the past two years this has been achieved through carefully targeted teaching of phonics, and 100% of pupils are reading by the end of Key Stage 1. The Phonics Screening Check results by the end of year 1 are higher than the national average. Reading by the end of key stage two is significantly above both local and national averages.

The innovative mathematics curriculum is aimed at developing pupils' computational fluency by achieving mastery in numbers and calculations. To achieve this, the school has pioneered the development of Number Masters, which is being used at Key Stage 1 (KS1). Number Masters is a comprehensive mathematics programme, delivered in small groups for 15-20 minutes daily to enable young pupils to develop strong mastery of numbers and calculations, a key to mathematical success. A love of mathematics is developed from the Early Years/Foundation Stage by ensuring that pupils engage in enjoyable, practical activities. This exciting mathematics curriculum ensures that by the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2), pupils outperform their peers nationally. Exceptionally able mathematicians successfully attain Level 6 in mathematics by the end of Year 6. The school develops teachers' subject knowledge consistently so that it is continually refreshed and enhanced by a robust professional development programme.

The school regularly seeks high quality partnerships with public and private organisations to extend the breadth and reach of pupils' curricular and co-curricular opportunities. This includes annual performances at The Royal Opera House with the Royal Ballet, mathematics master classes with the Royal Institution, staging of Shakespeare plays at the Peacock Theatre, or pupil exhibitions at the Tate Modern. The school choir has sung at the Royal Albert Hall, and Year 5 has been engaged in writing and performing a play at the Polka Theatre.

Apart from a broad, balanced curriculum at St. Andrew's, which includes a wide range of enriching activities, throughout the year there are many trips and visits as well as an annual school journey in Year 4 and Year 6. Music and art are particularly strong and the school has been awarded the Arts Mark Gold and Inclusion Quality Mark. There are a number of after school clubs that give pupils the opportunity to try something new including Spanish, French, various sports, drama, art, ICT and martial arts.

Ofsted judged the curriculum at Woodmansterne to be: 'rich and engaging and offers pupils many opportunities to deepen their understanding and appreciation of art and music. Physical well-being is another priority and leaders make sure that all pupils have access to a wide range of sporting activities.' (Ofsted 2014)

Key skills in English, communication and mathematics are taught through topics at Woodmansterne. The school plans an impressive range of trips and experiences for pupils. Each topic begins with a 'wow' entry experience (exploration, dressing up, Theatre Company, a visit, or a visitor in). Each topic also ends with a 'wow' exit (a Tudor ball, museum, film show, assembly, or a feast) and parents are invited to share their children's learning. In Key Stage 1, children recently visited London Zoo, had a London boat trip, visited a Safari Park, had visiting authors, and drumming workshops. They also visited the London Transport Museum, the Monument and St. Paul's, travelled on cable cars over the river and visited the Polka Theatre. KS2 visits and experiences include day trips to France, Cadbury World, overnight stays on the Golden Hinde, as well as a plethora of museum and gallery visits. Understandably there is no shortage of parent volunteers to accompany their children on these visits as many have never visited these places themselves.

In all these schools, staff did not make assumptions about the children's life experiences, whether they were born in the UK or not. Recognising that many families do not venture very far from their estates, schools have adopted an experiential approach to the curriculum to give children a practical experience of what they would be learning about and a chance to be immersed in the vocabulary before they begin to write, thus giving all children equal access to the curriculum.

Effective use of data

Use of performance data for school improvement is strength of all case study schools. One of the most important aspects of monitoring the performance of different groups of pupils is recognising which groups are the most significant within any school. Analysis of performance data by gender, age, ethnicity, language and SEN is just the starting point. Case study schools look closely at the area in which they operate and identify key characteristics to use for measuring performance. They closely examine each part of pupils' experience to identify where improvements can be made. Once changes have been made they frequently and rigorously monitor progress to ensure that actions have been effective.

An example of this is at Vauxhall which has a well-developed pupil tracking system and detailed FSP, KS1, KS2 and non-statutory assessment data followed by background data such as ethnic background, country of origin, language spoken, level of fluency in English, date of admission, attendance rate, eligibility for free school meals, EAL stage of fluency, SEN stage, mobility rate, years in school, which teacher's classes have been attended, attendance rate, types of support, postcode data and experience of pre-school. In addition the school identifies and monitors the progress of 'joiners', who are the children who have joined the school as non-routine arrivals.

At Vauxhall the consistent use and analysis of school data has promoted effective self-evaluation and high standards of teaching and learning by informing professional discussions with key partners including governors, parents and staff; identifying pupils' achievement and informing target setting; monitoring the effectiveness of targeted support and interventions; supporting the allocation of staffing and resources and challenging the aspirations of staff, pupils and parents. Staff have developed a good understanding of the range of data available and this understanding has given them the confidence to plan for continuous school improvement.

The successful use of data owes much to the capable, determined head of school who is responsible for developing innovative school assessment and tracking systems which are extremely useful for monitoring trends, results and analysis of how the school performed in relation to similar schools and schools nationally. Comparisons are made between subjects and teachers are held accountable for their results and this has helped to sharpen the focus to raise achievement. Teachers are expected to identify and target specific areas of improvement and to identify and monitor progress of individual pupils who are underachieving. The headteacher and leadership team monitor progress

against targets. The school uses data effectively and staff knows their pupils' performance and the school's strengths and areas for development very well. Teachers closely monitor work in the classrooms and pupil progress is tracked rigorously so that any child at risk of underachievement is identified and given the support they need. Regular, targeted training for staff, in partnership with the North Lambeth school clusters, has secured a significant improvement to many key aspects of the school's performance, including the quality of teaching and learning, and pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. Through very regular monitoring of teaching against Ofsted's teaching standards, and systematic checks on the impact teaching has on pupils' progress and attainment, leaders and managers secure and maintain excellent teaching quality and high achievement at all levels.

The school is particularly proud of its approach to pupil premium pupil monitoring. It uses pupil premium data to identify individual strengths and weaknesses in school provision to make target setting more responsive to the needs of the pupils. This monitoring is done by all teachers. It was clearly noted during the interview with the headteacher and in the classroom observations that teachers are using data in a number of ways to motivate their class pupils:

'Teachers are confident in the use of data and assessment information. The data is shared widely within the school.' (Teacher)

'The school has been good in using data that we have to identify pupils who are particularly underachieving. The school looks very early on at the students who are underachieving against the FSP, KS1, KS2 results and this has led to a number of interventions or strategies where data analysis highlighted issues to be addressed in the school.' (Head of school)

All staff interviewed are aware of what the data tells them about the school's standards and achievement and the key priorities under the outstanding leadership of the head of the school. Staff share a common purpose and are well supported by senior staff through well-resourced pupil premium money to help raise achievement of specific groups. More importantly teachers we observed and interviewed, make effective use of data to evaluate the quality of provision and to identify and provide support for differentiated groups of pupils.

The evidence from our research confirms that data tracking is used rigorously across the whole school and identifies all underachieving pupils. There is a strong focus on learning to ensure that no one is left behind, through detailed monitoring and tracking; those pupils below the expected level or at risk of falling behind are quickly identified and individual needs are targeted. The effective use of school data has contributed towards the school's capacity to improve and key members of staff have a good understanding of how data can be used to evaluate and improve the performance of a school. A comment from the headteacher captures the climate and the views in the school about effective use of data which supports some of the conclusions reached in this paper:

'Data is used as a driving force for raising standards and is central for the school self-evaluation process and target setting'. The use of data at all levels by teachers, also means that areas of weakness are picked up and can become a priority for early interventions.'

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expected to identify and target specific areas of improvement and to identify and monitor progress of individual pupils who are underachieving.

Sudbourne's tracking and monitoring systems are also exemplary so that all staff are extremely well informed as to their pupils' progress and needs. The school tracks the progress of every pupil in all subjects meticulously and targets any underachievement immediately.

The rigour with which assessment data and evidence on the quality of teaching and leadership are monitored and evaluated is impressive and is a major factor in the school's outstanding achievement in all subject areas. Sudbourne's achievement has been recognised by the Department for Education in a recent letter detailing the school's position as a top performing school nationally in narrowing the achievement gap of FSM pupils. As a result of this recognition the school qualified for the Pupil Premium awards by the DfE and was awarded a cash prize.

The effective use of data has a major effect on teaching and learning in the school. The quality of teaching is well informed by effective assessment and data. At the classroom or pupil level, specific weaknesses of individual pupils are highlighted or weaknesses in topics for the class as a whole, which then inform accurate curricular targets for individual pupils and provide evidence to support decisions as to where to focus resources and teaching. The staff very carefully plan strategies for targeted support. Classroom lesson observations confirm that teachers skilfully target questions, using data and their knowledge of individual pupils to very good effect.

At Dunraven the use of data is also a particular strength. One common feature of strategies for raising achievement in the School is intelligent use of assessment data, progress-tracking, target setting and support for students slipping behind with targeted interventions. Every pupil is expected and encouraged to achieve their full potential by teachers in Dunraven secondary school. These high expectations are underpinned by the effective use of data to pinpoint underachievement and target additional support. There a number of good practices in the use of data in the school (see Demie and Lewis 2010; Demie and Gay 2013; Demie and Lewis 2008):

- The school is rigorous in the way that they use target-setting, assessment and tracking to raise achievement. National assessment and test data are used alongside assessment data generated in the school to predict the target grades for each student at GCSE. Periodically, the data are updated and progress towards the target estimated. Targets are set in discussion with students.
- The school also use a range of other comprehensive contextual and value added data including Fisher Family Trust and RAISEonline data. Data is made available across the school and used to help review the pupils' progress and set targets. The principal, the ST and teachers have an accurate assessment of the school and individual pupil progress. As a result the school is effective in tracking and identifying any individuals or groups of all abilities who are not achieving as well as they could.
- Teachers make effective use of data to evaluate the quality of provision and to identify and provide targeted support for differentiated groups of pupils.
- The most common type of interventions employed in the school, where data analysis had highlighted issues to be addressed, were providing additional support including one-to-one support, and making changes to the teaching programme or curriculum, such as, more personalised or differentiated teaching to meet the needs of Pupil Premium pupils, EAL pupils or SEN or pupils in targeted initiatives to improve performance.

- Teachers used achievement data frequently to check whether interventions or techniques were working and made adjustments accordingly, rather than just using the data retrospectively to see if something had worked.
- The school ensured through effective use of data that class and subject teachers knew which pupils were eligible for the Pupil Premium so that they could take responsibility for accelerating their progress.

The above good practice is well articulated by deputy principals, teachers, inclusion team and data manager. We would argue that the use of data in the school is forensic and is used to track pupil progress, set targets, identify underachieving pupils for further support, and inform teaching and learning and strategic planning. The school understands how well their pupils are doing. Data has helped the school to pose and answer questions about current standards, trends over time, progress made by individual pupils, to track pupil progress and to set high expectations. Overall, the Dunraven is thorough and rigorous in the use of target setting, assessment and tracking individual pupils performance to raise achievement.

The use of data is also a key part of the process of school improvement at Woodmansterne. In this school the use of data involves all interested parties: staff, governors and parents. The school sees data as an important tool in raising achievement. Data is incredibly useful and used in the school for a number of purposes including to track pupil performance, to assess the individual needs of pupils, to identify individuals and groups of pupils who might be underachieving, to evaluate the quality and impact of the school interventions to support teaching and learning, to inform the deployment of staff, inform teachers planning, challenging expectations of staff and identify priorities for school improvement. In the words of the deputy headteacher:

'The school holds at least 6 in depth pupil progress meetings where we look at the data. We have to account for what we do for pupil premium grant, EAL, SEN all other groups and individual pupils. This forms one of the areas of discussion in the pupil progress meetings. This is also used to see the progress made and to formulate intervention groups.' (Deputy Headteacher)

Good practice in the use of data and evidence provided during the school visit confirmed that the school has a well-developed pupil tracking system and it has detailed Foundation, KS1, and KS2 data at all year groups followed by background data such as ethnic background, language spoken, level of fluency in English, SEN stage, date of admission, attendance rate, eligibility for free school meals, mobility rate, years in school and types of support. Data are widely shared with classroom teachers, senior leaders and inclusion staff. There is evidence that individual teacher within the classroom use data for lesson planning, to track the progress of pupils, to inform targets for individual pupils and ethnic groups, to identify weaknesses in topics or aspects of class teaching as a whole. The school uses data for targeted support and staffs spend a good deal of time during the year 'drilling down' to individual needs.

'All of the teaching staff have an understanding of how well the pupils of the school achieve and how this compares with similar schools and national averages. All teachers are involved in individual and group target setting and in the regular assessment of pupil groups. Teaching assistants, the SENCO, inclusion manager also look at the data carefully and are aware of their target intervention groups and they play a key role in helping individual pupils achieve significant improvement.'
(Deputy Headteacher)

Overall, interviews at Woodmansterne with the headteacher, deputy heads, teacher, learning mentors and teaching assistants further suggested that there are excellent systems for monitoring the work of the pupils, identifying those who need additional help or extra challenge and then providing them with appropriate additional support. The school bases its improvement and support strategy on thorough monitoring of and evaluation including the identification of what most needs to be done and decisions about actions to be taken. The school uses data to identify pupils who are at risk of underachieving and this has led to a number of interventions or strategies where data analysis highlighted issues to be addressed. The most commonly reported interventions as a result of looking at the data is providing additional support, including one to one, personalised teaching, booster class and English language support. As a result pupil premium pupils make rapid progress and achieve outstanding results as they are monitored and supported closely.

In La Retraite, data are also used as a baseline to monitor and review individual pupil progress, especially to identify signs of underachievement or unusual potential and to help set targets for pupils and subject departments. Subject teachers and tutors use data and other assessment information to review the performance and expectations of pupils. The school and teacher uses a sophisticated on-line data analysis software which takes the whole-school data and gives easy access to their class' data. It presents analytical reports with the click of a button: analysis of exams, assessments and mocks, detailed analysis of performance by subject, class, gender, ethnic group, SEN code, Key Stage 2 levels, gifted and talented, and pupil premium. Teachers can now quickly identify areas for improvement and facilitate the development of effective intervention strategies. They can also compare a pupil's levels against the levels they are achieving in other subject areas, giving a really useful analytical perspective. With a much sharper focus on data, performance trends and groups achievement are easily identified and to set up appropriate interventions and staff training to get pupils on and above target. Subject leaders present half termly self-evaluation reports of their department's progress and report to senior staff on the groups of students who might have fallen below target and agree intervention strategies for these groups during pupils progress meeting. Using red, amber and green to indicate actual against expected levels of progress, attainment is clear and easy to grasp, which is useful for discussions with class teachers and parents.

The leadership at St. Andrew's believes in keeping the data simple and developing the data management system to ensure it is used by everyone. As a result the school has developed a simple system of tracking data from the moment the child enters the school. The head commented that she *'kept it simple and as a result teachers, governors, all staff use the data effectively to drive improvement'*. We would argue that this is a robust strategy in the effective use of data. Teaching assistants use it effectively and they do not get 'bogged down' with too much information. It is also important to recognise that it does not really matter what systems a school uses for data collection and analysis, as long as it is not over-complicated and does not overburden the staff with information. Staff at St. Andrew's know what school data reveals about the attainment and standards in the school. They know where they fit into the bigger picture for the school, what their contribution needs to be, which subjects the school excels in, and which require more work in comparison to similar schools, Local Authority schools, and national averages.

All of the case study schools use a range of data to inform discussions at pupil progress review meetings held by senior leaders with class teachers, either termly or half termly. Data is incredibly useful and used for a number of purposes including to track pupil performance, to assess the individual needs of pupils, to identify individuals and groups of pupils who might be underachieving, to evaluate the quality and impact of the school interventions to support teaching and learning, to inform the deployment of staff, inform teachers planning, challenging expectations of staff and identify priorities for school improvement.

Effective use of pupil voice

The case study schools have established a culture where all children and young people have a voice and have the opportunity to play an active role in decisions that affect their learning and well-being. Research has shown that children and young people who participate in decision-making enjoy enhanced self-esteem and motivation, gain important personal, social and organisational skills, and become familiar with group and democratic processes. At the organisational level, pupil involvement in decision-making leads to better relationships, more relevant and effective policies and better learning. At Sudbourne School it is clear from a pupil's comment below, that children's views are listened to and taken on board:

'The headmaster and teachers listen to the kids ideas – not only the adults in the school are special but the kids are. We got AstroTurf and new computers – they listen to your ideas'

Overwhelmingly pupils in all the case study schools enjoy coming to school, they like their teachers and appreciate their kindness, the exciting activities they take part in and how teachers are helping them with their work, as expressed in the following quotes:

'We have kind teachers, good teachers that teach us the right things to do and don't let us do what we want.'

'The teachers they teach what we want to know and they help us do maths and English. They are kind'.

'School is great. I love music and PE. Today we are making our own boom whackers and drums'

'Teachers are strict when they need to be strict but they are really kind'.

'I look forward to coming to school because the teachers are very kind and help us achieve our targets. When you do something wrong they are strict about it and it teaches you a lesson. If you need help you get support'.

'Yes, I get a good education, we have kind teachers, good teachers that teach us the right things to do and don't let us do what we want.'

It is clear from their comments, that they feel safe and well supported in their schools
'There is no bullying here. We have an anti-bullying week'.

'If you are new here it wouldn't take long to make friends'.

'If you are in a lower key stage you are taken care of by older children'.

'If you are having difficulties and if your speech is rough you can see a speech and language therapist – I had a stammer'!

We asked them what was special about their schools?

'When I came here I knew no English and my teacher who knows three languages, she helped me understand and now I am really good. I am aiming for Level 6 maths and reading and 5a in writing. I had extra support from other teachers. Booster classes helped me'.

'I think it is special because some primaries are big but here they pay attention to everybody. They know everything that is happening. Everyone is really close we are like a big family in a way. Everyone helps us. Small schools are better because you get more help and more safety. If it is a big school there wouldn't be a lot of teachers in one place, you can see each other here and play with other children.'

'We have a lot of talented, smart people'

'We are sporty we came 2nd out of 20 schools'

'We get to go on trips which help us learn'

'There's always something to do and the activities of learning are fun'

'You never know what's going to happen, nice surprises, its science week and our teacher was doing some magic with objects'

'I like seeing my friends; we have science on Friday we are going to make our own ice cream'

Older pupils talked about how teachers had gone the extra mile to help them. They reflected on the impact of the 'Going for Gold' Programme:

'In Year 10/11 in the 'Going for Gold' programme teachers talked to us about how to write a CV, fill out application forms and gave us resources. On top of that teachers gave us specific material and general information about revision techniques, timetables etc. They would introduce us to universities and advise us on options. They talked about what is outside Dunraven and what's next.'

They would tell us about Open Days of Colleges and Universities, tailored to our needs. Although you are in different groups, they are always trying to move you up a grade rather than maintaining it, e.g. if you are on Gold you need to move on to Platinum. They help us organise ourselves, they gave us techniques and websites to help us. They gave us all the options and how to revise. They gave us University information about how to apply etc.'

These pupils were asked: *Are you aiming to go to University?*

'Yes, but I don't know which one yet. I would like to study genetics'

'I was planning to go to Oxbridge or Imperial College to do Chemical Engineering. Teachers do lots of workshops around life after sixth form. Not just about University, they give us other ideas. I am a FSM student but it doesn't mean if you don't have money you cannot succeed'

'In Year 10 the school was very supportive of that'

'I try to be independent but if I need help my mum helps me'

At La Retraite the pupils were asked about homework *'Do you get any support or help with your school work at home?'*

The majority commented they get much help and targeted support in school *but not* at home. One commented that *'I do myself. I am quite independent.'* The remaining two pupils were helped by parents and commented: *'My dad helps me and he is good in physics'; 'My mum helps me in biology and chemistry. She is good in the subject'*

The pupils interviewed want to go to top universities such as Cambridge, Oxford, Exeter and SOAS to study medicine, physics, law, chemistry, biology and English. They were proud of the school and the staff, and were happy and enthusiastic and felt secure at school. They are confident, articulate and accomplished learners. There is a buzz of learning in the school and pupils take a genuine delight in mastering new skills.

4 Conclusions and Implications for Policy

Conclusions

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are far less likely to get good GCSE results in England. Of particular concern is that only 34% of pupils eligible for free school meals achieving 5+A*-C GCSEs including English and maths, compared to 61% of better-off pupils (DfE 2014). We would argue that it is unacceptable for children's success to be determined by their social circumstances. The government is committed to raise levels of achievement for all disadvantaged pupils and to narrow the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. One key government strategy is to use pupil premium funding for targeted interventions to narrow the achievement gap. The pupil premium is designed specifically to tackle such disadvantage at root and to address inequality by giving every school and teacher the resources they need to help their most disadvantaged pupils, allowing them the freedom to respond appropriately to individual circumstances (DfE 2010). However, a review of the literature shows that there remains a significant gap between FSM pupils and non-FSM pupils and there is little good practice to use to narrow the achievement gaps in schools and to support policy and practice.

Building on past research, which suggested a significant difference in performance between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, this study extends the current literature by exploring the remarkable story of how schools in an inner London Local Authority defy the association between poverty and low achievement, by narrowing the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and their peers through targeted interventions and the effective use of pupil premium funding. The main purpose of the research was to examine the success factors behind narrowing the achievement gap of disadvantaged pupils who are entitled to free school meals.

A complementary methodological approach including case studies and focus groups were used to explore performance and gather the views of teachers, parents and pupils. Firstly, detailed trend KS2 and GCSE data were collected and analysed by free school meals. Secondly, case studies were carried out in four primary and two secondary schools, to observe lessons and to hold discussions with headteachers, staff, governors and pupils. Evidence was gathered on how well disadvantaged pupils were achieving and the factors contributing to this. Thirdly, focus groups were undertaken to ascertain the views of teachers, parents and pupils regarding what works in schools and the impact of the pupil premium grant.

The main findings of the research show that pupils reach exceptionally high standards at KS2 and GCSE. There is little difference in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and pupils not eligible for free school meals. The research identifies a number of factors that are proving successful in narrowing the gap in the case study schools. These include:

- Strong leadership
- High quality teaching and learning
- An inclusive curriculum
- Parental engagement

- The effective use of data to identify underachieving groups
- Effective use of best teachers to teach intervention groups
- Re-deploying support teachers who have a good track record in raising achievement
- Effective use of pupil premium funding to challenge poverty
- Effective use of pupil voice and feedback

What is particularly significant is that these schools use highly effective strategies, including outstanding teachers to teach English and maths, they provide tailored support for individuals in the classroom, one to one support, booster classes delivered by the pupils' class teacher, provide small groups with expert teachers focused on overcoming gaps in learning. Enrichment activities and the funding of school trips to enhance pupil's experiences are used well to support learning. School leaders ensure that support staff, particularly teaching assistants, are highly trained and understand their role in helping pupils to achieve. This enables disadvantaged students to make faster progress, to catch up with their peers and to close the gap. Parental engagement is encouraged and welcomed in these schools. Furthermore in the case study schools the funding available from pupil premium was well targeted on disadvantaged pupils. The staff had access to assessment and tracking systems which helped to identify underachievement in each subject, and researchers found that this approach worked because the teachers 'knew the pupils best' and took responsibility for meeting their needs. A wide range of data was looked at as a whole in the case study schools to monitor and analyse why pupils are underachieving and what can be done to support them through targeted intervention. This included achievement data, pupils' work, observations, case studies and the views of pupils and staff. More importantly in the case study schools disadvantaged pupils were given high quality feedback, as part of pupil voice, to support and involve them properly in their learning.

Overall, the case study schools demonstrate outstanding practice in all areas and some have succeeded in not merely narrowing the gap but closing it. Many are not new or different approaches but they require leadership teams and staff across schools to ensure that there is a sharp focus on disadvantage. The first step is to make every member of staff in every classroom aware of which pupils are disadvantaged and ensure that they take clear and accountable action to accelerate pupils' progress to narrow achievement gaps.

The conclusion of this study is that the case study schools have bucked the national trend through the use of a range of highly effective strategies to narrow the attainment gap. The study argues that the improvement made by disadvantaged pupils on free school meals in the case study schools is an exceptional achievement and offers a useful example of a success story that is worth learning from by schools, central government and local authorities.

Implications for policy and practice

The research findings in this paper also contain a number of important messages for schools and policy makers with implications for replication and sharing good practice with other schools. The lessons from the successful schools suggest that it is possible to tackle the link between poverty and underachievement. Some of the approaches used in the successful schools can be applied elsewhere. The key strategies are ensuring access to high quality teaching for disadvantaged pupils, a strong and visionary headteacher, providing an inclusive curriculum that meets the needs of disadvantaged pupils, the deployment of the best teachers to teach intervention groups and targeted support for disadvantaged pupils through an extensive use of highly skilled and well trained teaching assistants. As argued else:

'There is no 'pick' and 'mix' option to narrow the achievement gap. An effective school will seek to develop all of these strategies, underpinned by the practical use of data to monitor the achievement of particular groups, to pinpoint and tackle underachievement. It is important that researchers recognise that policy makers and schools need more evidence on 'what works'. However, there is little research into good practice to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils in schools. After decades of negative findings about the state of disadvantaged pupils' achievement it is time to shift the focus and redress the balance to research that focuses on the growing number of success stories. Therefore it is time to look more closely at why in a number of British schools disadvantaged pupils do well against the odds. An increase in research of this type, which challenges preconceived notions of disadvantaged pupils' underachievement, will encourage schools and policy makers to strive for greater success.' (see Demie and Lewis 2015, p.30)

There are also some limitations to this study that need to be noted. A research approach such as this is will not meet academic ideals in terms of sampling and conventional research methodology. (Demie and Lewis 2014). This one is no exception as it is based on a small number of case study schools in order to explore in detail what successful schools do differently, additional or more intensively to achieve the best outcomes for disadvantaged pupils from a low income background. The practical nature of case studies and the application of their findings to future practice is a strength in this particular context. Whilst we do not aim to make generalisations as a result of the case studies, learning from this practice can make a difference to schools. Case study research is presented in a more accessible way than other forms of research. It is important that it can serve multiple audiences. In this particular instance, the audience is likely to be policy makers and schools. Judith Bell makes a further point about case studies: *'a successful study will provide the reader with a three-dimensional picture and will illustrate relationships, micro political issues and patterns of influences in a particular context.'* (Bell 1993:9)

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