Department for Education

Research Report DFE-RR215

Evaluation of the City Challenge programme

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This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DfE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Contents

Acronyms (with notes)

AST	Advanced Skills Teacher
BCCSIP	Black Country Children Services Improvement Partnership
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council – BTEC qualifications are vocational awards run by BTEC
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CtG	Closing the Gap – *a City Challenge intervention designed to support schools to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the attainment gap between them and their peers*
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EAL	English as an additional language
EiC	Excellence in Cities
FoS	Families of Schools – *annual school data provided by City Challenge to each of the three Challenge areas which enabled schools to benchmark themselves against schools with similar intakes*
FSM	Free School Meals
G2	Good to Outstanding / Good to Great / Good to Bostin / Going for Great – *a set of City Challenge interventions aimed to increase the number of Ofsted-graded Outstanding schools and to help those already Outstanding to maintain their grade*
GCSE	General Certificate of Education
HLTA	Higher Level Teaching Assistant
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectors
ICT	Information and communications technology
IEB	Interim Executive Board
ISP	Improving Schools Programme – *a National Strategies programme pre-dating City Challenge*
ISP Leadership Programme	– *a City Challenge intervention for Satisfactory primary schools based on the National Strategies ISP*
IT	Information Technology
ITP	Improving Teacher Programme – *a professional development course offered to some teachers as part of City Challenge*
KS	Key Stage – *KS2 national tests are taken by 10-11 year-olds. KS4 pupils (aged 15-16) take GCSEs.*
KTS	Keys to Success – *an intervention within City Challenge targeting the weakest schools*
LA	Local Authority
LDV	Lagged Dependent Variable
LLE	Local Leader of Education
NDC	New Deal for Communities
NPD	National Pupil Database
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NLE	National Leader of Education

NtG	Narrowing the Gap – *the original name given to the City Challenge intervention CtG*
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
OTP	Outstanding Teacher Programme – *a professional development course offered to some teachers as part of City Challenge*
PCG	Primary Challenge *Groups – a London Challenge intervention for Satisfactory or Good primary schools*
PTA	Pathways to Achievement – *a Black Country Challenge intervention equivalent to Keys to Success in other areas*
SEF	Self Evaluation Form
SIP	School Improvement Partner
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science

Acknowledgements

The research team are extremely grateful to the very large number of people who have contributed to this evaluation, giving their time to fill in questionnaires and take part in interviews. We have tried to represent adequately the wide range of experiences and views presented to us.

We would like to thank the administration team in IPSE who have supported the evaluation.

We are also grateful to all the members of the steering group, and others at the DfE who have helpfully provided data and information.

Executive summary

Introduction

This report sets out the findings of a mixed methods evaluation of the City Challenge programme in London, Greater Manchester and the Black Country, and a retrospective review of the London Challenge 2003-8. The evaluation was led by the Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University with funding from the Department for Education (DfE)[1] between August 2010 and February 2012.

The aims of the evaluation were:

- to assess the City Challenge programme in relation to its key objectives;
- to establish the efficacy of different approaches to the improvement of school performance and schools systems in urban conurbations.

The intention was to evaluate City Challenge as a whole; the particular forms it took in each of the three areas; and a number of specified key interventions which were common to all the areas. It is important to recognise, however, that these key interventions formed only a part of the overall activity of the Challenge. A major strand of City Challenge activity, the Leadership Strategies, was led by the National College and has been separately evaluated by the NFER (Rudd et al. 2011).

City Challenge

City Challenge was launched in April 2008 by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) building on the success of the London Challenge 2003-8. It was designed to improve educational outcomes for young people and 'to crack the associated cycle of disadvantage and underachievement' in the Black Country, Greater Manchester and London' (DfES, 2007: 1). Its objectives were:

- to reduce the number of underperforming schools, especially in relation to English and maths;
- to increase the number of Good and Outstanding schools;
- to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children.

City Challenge was distinctive in a number of ways. It was underpinned by a belief that the educational problems facing urban areas should be addressed at area level, and that Local Authorities (LAs) and schools need to work together to do this. Thus it aimed to improve educational provision and school performance across broad geographical areas, not simply in a specific group of participating schools. City Challenge focused on all aspects of the education system: working strategically at area level and with LAs, community organisations, parents and pupils and developing a range of specific school interventions which were closely focused on the intended outcomes of City Challenge. There was no single view of what schools needed to do to improve; all the interventions involved local solutions with key stakeholders (including headteachers and LAs) centrally involved in the decisions. The various activities and interventions were characterised by a belief that school-to-school collaboration has a central role to play in

[1] The government department responsible for education has changed its name during the period covered by this report. Before June 2007 it was the Department for Education and Skills (DfES); it then became the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), and in May 2010 was renamed as the Department for Education (DfE).

school improvement; a recognition of the importance of school leadership; and a data-rich approach to tackling issues and sharing learning.

City Challenge built on a substantial body of research about school improvement which emphasised the importance of effective leadership, networking and collaboration, system leadership roles and sustainability. It also built on the experiences of previous strategies and initiatives intended to improve schools, such as Excellence in Cities, Education Action Zones, the introduction of leadership training for headteachers; National Strategies and the London Challenge 2003-8.

Evaluation design

The mixed methods evaluation included four main strands of work:

a literature review;

analyses of documents and attainment data;

a survey sent to schools receiving support through the City Challenge programme;

qualitative research including:

- interviews with 69 key stakeholder across the City Challenge areas;
- in-depth case studies of 21 schools, one school cluster and four LAs/LA clusters receiving support through the programme;
- additional interviews with 34 headteachers.

Attainment and Ofsted outcomes in City Challenge areas

City Challenge areas achieved the majority of their initial targets:

- The fall in number of schools below the floor target was greater in City Challenge areas than elsewhere, and the percentage of primary and secondary pupils reaching the expected level also improved more than elsewhere.
- In London, schools in each quintile of 2008 attainment improved significantly more between 2008 and 2011 than in areas outside City Challenge (with the exception of the highest quintile of secondary schools). In Greater Manchester and the Black Country, the picture was more patchy; schools in the lowest quintiles of attainment (and in some other quintiles) improved by significantly more than those outside City Challenge areas.
- The attainment of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) increased by more than the national figure in all areas (with the exception of Greater Manchester primary pupils).
- The attainment gap between pupils eligible for FSM narrowed for London primary and secondary pupils, and Greater Manchester primary pupils.
- The proportion of Good and Outstanding schools increased in all three areas, despite the introduction of a more challenging Ofsted inspection framework. The number of schools in Ofsted categories decreased in London and Greater Manchester.

Clearly a great many factors contributed to this improvement, including national policies and strategies and the considerable efforts of headteachers and staff. However, these factors apply everywhere in the country. The most plausible explanation for the greater improvement in Challenge areas is that the City Challenge programme was responsible. The vast majority of stakeholders at all levels who contributed to this evaluation attributed the additional improvements that have been made in these areas to the work of City Challenge.

Key interventions: Reducing the number of underperforming schools

The programme to support underperforming schools was known as Keys to Success (KTS) in London and Greater Manchester, and Pathways to Achievement (PTA) in the Black Country.

There is evidence both that attainment in KTS/PTA schools improved more rapidly than in comparable schools, and that the KTS/PTA intervention was associated with a positive change in KTS/PTA schools' ability to improve results year-on-year. A comparison of schools in the same initial quintiles of attainment shows that KTS/PTA schools improved more than schools with comparable initial attainment, and that this improvement continued after schools ceased to be supported by the programme. In addition, regression-based analysis provides evidence of positive impact of the programme for KTS/PTA schools relative to their own previous performance. Before the intervention, the KTS/PTA schools were not as effective at improving poor results as other schools. After joining KTS/PTA, schools were achieving positive year-on-year change that was more like a typical school with equivalent prior results. This impact is broadly consistent with analysis of change elsewhere in the report. The improvement in year-on-year change relative to schools with equivalent results was approximately two per cent for GCSE target attainment and approximately five per cent over a shorter measurement period for KS2 target attainment.

The evidence of positive change, both in results relative to similar schools, and in the ability to improve results relative to previous performance, was supported by evidence from education practitioners; the vast majority of survey respondents and interviewees in KTS/PTA schools considered that involvement in the programme had contributed significantly to the improvement schools made. There was an overall improvement in Ofsted grades for KTS/PTA schools, though a small number of schools were in Ofsted categories at the end of the period.

Key factors that were identified as contributing to the success of KTS/PTA were:

- The provision of expert support through Challenge advisors and National and Local Leaders of Education (NLE/LLEs). Individuals in these roles were valued for their expertise and for being encouraging and supportive. KTS/PTA worked best when the Challenge advisors and other key stakeholders including NLE/LLEs, School Improvement Partners (SIPs) and LA officers worked effectively together.
- Bespoke packages of support that were effective in addressing the specific needs of each school. Key elements generally included support with effective use of data, teaching and learning and leadership, and often funding for additional staff or resources.
- Support for leadership, often through an NLE/LLE or National College programmes. However, particular problems arose when heads were unable to improve. This delayed improvement – and if they then left after 'difficult conversations', the school often experienced a series of interim arrangements which also delayed improvement.
- Support for teaching and learning included the Outstanding Teacher Programme and Improving Teacher Programme, which took place in teaching schools, and coaching which took place in the supported schools. The coaching was provided by staff from an NLE or LLE's school or by Advanced Skills Teachers or consultants. In London secondary schools, consultants from Education London were viewed as particularly effective.
- Structural solutions. For primary schools, federation was reported to be an effective strategy. KTS/PTA schools which became sponsored academies continued to improve their attainment in line with other KTS/PTA schools, but did not improve significantly more than others.

Overall, the most effective aspect of KTS/PTA seemed to be that it was a highly supportive and encouraging intervention in which headteachers and teachers came to feel more valued, more confident and more effective. Pupils in KTS schools also talked positively about the changes in the schools they attended.

Key interventions: Raising standards in coasting and satisfactory schools

Interventions to raise standards in Satisfactory primary schools were developed in London and Black Country primary schools though this was not one of the original Challenge objectives. [2] The evidence relating to this strand shows that London schools in the Improving Schools Programme (ISP) Leadership Programme and in Primary Challenge Groups substantially improved their attainment levels and narrowed the attainment gap relating to FSM to a much greater degree than non-participating schools. However, in the Black Country, attainment in ISP Leadership Schools did not improve.

Headteachers and other school staff in ISP Leadership schools claimed that the intervention had had a positive impact on attainment, and in some cases, improved Ofsted grades. It was also said to have impacted positively on middle leadership. The key factors in the intervention that contributed to this were:

- working with other schools (and in particular, schools with similar intakes);
- opportunities for middle leaders to work with their counterparts in other schools;
- clearly agreed plans, targets and time frame;
- a small amount of funding for cover to enable teachers to visit other schools;
- a lead headteacher who drove the agenda, and who received appropriate training.

The lead schools benefited from the lead headteacher training; the reflection involved in explaining their practice to others; and the boost to staff morale from being identified as a lead school. Similar findings in relation to Primary Challenge Groups were reported in a separate evaluation (Street, 2011).

Key interventions: Improving Good and Outstanding schools

Each area had interventions designed to support Good schools in becoming Outstanding. The aim was to increase the number of Outstanding schools, and this was achieved in all three areas. However, the changed Ofsted framework meant that only just over half the schools were inspected between 2008 and 2011, and Outstanding grades become harder to achieve.

The interventions varied in character. In London the focus was strongly on motivating and inspiring school leaders, and sharing outstanding practice. This was done through conferences, schools working together in small groups, and the setting up of knowledge centres or hubs in schools that had specific areas of outstanding practice that others could visit and learn from. The feedback on all these aspects of the intervention was overwhelmingly positive. Interviewees valued the inspiring ethos of the intervention, and the opportunities to network with heads of Outstanding schools, and reported a direct impact on practice in their own schools and the quality of education they were providing for pupils.

In the Black Country and Greater Manchester, the programmes were far more closely focused on the Ofsted framework and self-evaluation. They did not provide structured ways of learning about wider practice in Outstanding schools. Some heads reported that these had been useful in preparing for inspection. In the final year of the programme, Greater Manchester developed new strategies including schools working together and hub schools which others could visit to find out about different aspects of Outstanding practice, but none of the interviewees had experienced this.

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[2] Some coasting or satisfactory secondary schools were involved in a national programme, Gaining Ground. In City Challenge areas, the support was brokered through the Leadership strategies.

Key interventions: Improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils

The main emphasis of interventions in this strand was on narrowing attainment gaps between those eligible for FSM and their peers. However, smaller interventions also focused on Looked After Children and Travellers.

Data shows that in London and the Black Country attainment gaps among pupils in primary schools funded through this intervention narrowed more than in other schools. However, this was not the case in Greater Manchester primary schools, or in secondary schools. The majority of schools involved in this evaluation reported that their strategies to tackle attainment gaps were successful. The intervention was successful through its reach in terms of raising awareness of FSM gaps and the systematic disadvantage that some students are facing.

Some schools worked individually, others in clusters. Both groups appreciated having the autonomy to decide what strategies to put in place. Funding was regarded as essential both for raising awareness and for being able to make schools accountable. Working in clusters motivated schools and allowed them to share effective practice; this was highly rated. The extent to which plans or outcomes were monitored varied. Interviewees emphasised the importance of structure and leadership at area and cluster level both in ensuring that schools and school clusters operated effectively, and in providing a channel of communication through which school leaders could be informed about existing materials and good practice guides.

The strategies schools used to support pupils eligible for FSM varied enormously. Only a small minority of schools drew on existing materials and best practice guides such as the *Extra Mile*. Some strategies, like buying in external support for tuition for exam classes, had a positive, but short term impact. Other strategies such as working with parents or involving pupils in leadership programmes were more likely to build capacity and raise awareness among the school staff, children and parents and to embed practice which is more likely to be effective and sustainable in the long term.

Key interventions: Families of Schools

Families of Schools data was published annually for each area to enable schools to benchmark themselves against schools with similar intakes, which were placed in the same 'Family'. Across all City Challenge areas, most headteachers and school staff (particularly in primary schools) made limited or no use of this resource. Most who did look at it did so mainly out of interest; smaller numbers used it with a view to contacting other schools or informing school improvement planning. It appeared that many were unaware of the data, or did not understand its purpose.

In both Greater Manchester and the Black Country, funding was made available to support collaborative activity between schools in Families; such activities did not necessarily involve making any use of the data. Respondents felt that the main benefits were the opportunities to share good practice and learn from other schools, particularly those in different LAs. A key factor in successful Family collaboration was leadership both at area level and within each Family. Families were usually led by a headteacher who had expressed interest, but some reported that the role was very time-consuming, and some who were not leaders expressed concern that some of those leading Families pushed their own agendas at the expense of those of others. Funding was appreciated; relatively small sums could be used very effectively to support activity.

A number of issues were identified which seriously impacted on the reach and effectiveness of the intervention. These included headteachers' lack of understanding of the rationale for the way schools are grouped into Families, and a complicated funding process with delays in processing bids.

Key interventions: Working with Local Authorities

The three Challenge areas worked with LAs in different ways, and this partly reflected the size of the area and number of LAs involved. The most frequent communication between Challenge advisors and LA officers concerned Keys to Success (Pathways to Achievement) schools. They were identified with the LA, and as we have shown in Chapter 4, LA officers and advisors often worked together in the initial assessment, and met regularly to monitor progress. At best, these activities contributed to the capacity of individual officers, and contributed to improvements in practice, with LAs drawing on advisors' expertise. However, when communication was not maintained effectively, the impact was negative.

In addition to this, City Challenge undertook a range of specific capacity building activities, including working with LAs that had been identified as having particular weaknesses, a process of supported self-review, and supporting the process of developing school-to-school support systems. At best, these were extremely effective. The key factor in this was the expertise and the communication skills of the advisors involved.

In London, the Challenge encouraged LA cluster working, by offering funding to LA clusters to work on narrowing or closing attainment gaps. The case study conducted in one cluster showed that the cluster working resulted in a strong programme of work focused on narrowing attainment gaps, but did not strengthen the LA cluster because it was already well-established.

Learning from City Challenge

This evaluation has identified a wide range of learning points that arise from the experiences of City Challenge.

- It is important for area and school level strategies to have clear and achievable objectives, and also to recognise that targets can have perverse effects;
- Tackling school improvement at area level has considerable benefits.
- It takes time to bring about sustainable improvement across an area, and three years was perhaps too short.
- Different forms of support are effective in schools at different stages on their improvement journey.
- There is a role for a team of school improvement experts, based on the challenge advisors, both in working in the weakest schools, and in working with LAs and at strategic level. Expertise can also be found in LA officers, NLEs and LLEs and other headteachers, and consultants.
- The system leadership role of NLEs and LLEs is an effective one, and benefits both the schools that they support and their own schools and staff.
- Bespoke solutions are important both in tackling the specific issues faced in each school, and in giving school leaders and staff a sense of ownership rather than 'being done to'.
- Arrangements that enable school leaders and teachers to share effective practice are extremely beneficial. These include conferences; a stronger school supporting a weaker one (which may also include soft Federations); groups of three, led by the headteacher of a more successful school; Families of Schools which had similar intakes; hub schools or knowledge centres; and the Improving Teacher Programme and the Outstanding Teacher Programme.
- The most effective strategies to improve teaching and learning take place in schools, and involve observing excellent teaching; opportunities to reflect with colleagues; and coaching in the teacher's own classroom.

- Weak leaders can be supported through coaching, mentoring and other development opportunities. However, in cases where the leader does not develop sufficiently, there is a need for a transparent and structured process to decide a way forward. Should the head leave, it is important that permanent arrangements for school leadership are put in place rapidly, as interim arrangements tend to delay school improvement.
- Perhaps the most effective aspect of City Challenge was that it recognised that people, and schools, tend to thrive when they feel trusted, supported and encouraged. The ethos of the programme, in which successes were celebrated and it was recognised that if teachers are to inspire pupils they themselves need to be motivated and inspired, was a key factor in its success.

1 Introduction

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The aims of the evaluation were:

- to assess the City Challenge programme in relation to its key objectives:
    - to reduce the number of underperforming schools, especially in relation to English and maths;
    - to increase the number of Good and Outstanding schools;
    - to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children;
- to establish the efficacy of different approaches to the improvement of school performance and schools systems in urban conurbations.

The intention was to evaluate City Challenge as a whole; the particular forms it took in each of the three areas; and a number of specified key interventions which were common to all the areas. It is important to recognise, however, that these key interventions formed only a part of the overall activity of the Challenge. A major strand of activity, the Leadership Strategies, was led by the National College and has been separately evaluated by the NFER (Rudd et al. 2011). There were also a number of other interventions in each area which we were not asked to evaluate in depth.

This chapter introduces City Challenge, focusing on the origins and development of the programme and its predecessor the London Challenge; its aims and characteristics; and differences across the three City Challenge areas. It also presents a brief overview of previous research about school improvement. The next chapter explains the approach to evaluation and describes the methods used. Chapter 3 then sets out the attainment and Ofsted outcomes in City Challenge areas in relation to the targets set in 2008, and discusses the extent to which City Challenge may be responsible for these, drawing on survey data.

Each of the six chapters that follow focuses on one of the key interventions that we were asked to evaluate. Finally, Chapter 10 discusses what can be learned from City Challenge about strategies for school improvement.

1.1 The origins and development of City Challenge

City Challenge 2008-11 built on the success of the London Challenge and adopted many of the same approaches. This section therefore briefly outlines the development and nature of London Challenge. Launched in May 2003, this was a five year strategy which aimed to improve results in London secondary schools[3], and also to bring about a cultural change, raising aspirations and expectations, improving teacher morale, and increasing parental confidence in London schools. The ambition was to make London a world-class leader in education.

The London Challenge was a partnership between central government, local government, schools and other key players in London. Tim Brighouse was appointed as the first Commissioner for London Schools, and played a key role in shaping the Challenge. It differed from previous school

[3] The London Challenge also started to work with some primary schools from 2006.

improvement initiatives in that it was in many ways flexible and experimental; a wide range of new approaches were tried, and those that did not work were changed or abandoned.

A key element was the appointment of Challenge advisors employed directly by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)[4]. Their role was to:

> ... work directly with a small number of schools and their boroughs, bringing together all those already working with schools into a single team, and supporting all aspects of school improvement. The team will then help schools to diagnose their weaknesses, draw up plans for improvement and to implement those plans. (DfES, 2003: 49)

The weakest schools, which the advisors worked with, were labelled 'Keys to Success' schools. Tim Brighouse explained in interview that this label was chosen as a vital way of keeping these 'failing' schools on board; the emphasis was deliberately on '*support and challenge'* rather than schools being identified as failing. Jon Coles, the lead civil servant, stated that the programme was about breaking the link between deprivation and low educational standards. In relation to this aim, the weakest schools were the keys to the success of the London Challenge, as well as being key to the success of their own pupils.

Brighouse (2007) argued that a central characteristic of the London Challenge was that schools and their staff should feel supported; this was seen as essential both to inspire teachers already in post who had the potential to improve, and to attract new staff to work in London (which suffered from a teacher shortage at that time). He commented that the emphasis on support was at variance with earlier government emphasis on 'zero-tolerance of failure', and stemmed from his belief that:

> … a much more successful approach would be to express support for ever higher expectations which would find a resonance with the best teachers, and to talk as if these were widespread and inevitable, while simultaneously dealing with deficiencies, shortcomings and failures expeditiously and, as far as possible, in private and where deserved, with dignity. (Brighouse, 2007: 78)

Another element of the London Challenge was a strong emphasis on the use of data. Comparative data was published in which schools were grouped into Families with similar intakes. Tim Brighouse explained in interview that the aim was that '*at the very least they would look at the schools that were in comparable circumstances, not necessarily close to them, and wonder why are some schools doing better than we are.'*

Keys to Success and Families of Schools are aspects of the original London Challenge that have continued; some other initiatives were shorter-lived: for example, the London Student Pledge, which aimed to ensure that all London students would experience a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Other initiatives were very much related to wider developments taking place at that time, such as an initiative to equip all secondary classrooms with interactive whiteboards.

As well as intervening directly in schools, London Challenge worked to strengthen Local Authorities (LAs), and tackled issues of teacher supply and retention by harnessing existing government initiatives and programmes, including Key Worker housing schemes and Teach First. Thus London Challenge saw its concern as everything that affected education in London.

In 2006, Ofsted reported that attainment had risen faster in London than it had elsewhere in the country, and that a higher percentage of schools were judged Good or better for their overall effectiveness than elsewhere. They identified the model used as one which 'may merit consideration in other vulnerable areas where performance is a concern' (2006: 22).

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[4] The government department with responsibility for education has been known successively as Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (before 2007), Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2007-10), and Department for Education (DfE) (since 2010).

1.2 The aims and characteristics of City Challenge

City Challenge was launched in April 2008 by the DCSF building on the success of the London Challenge 2003-8. It was designed to improve educational outcomes for young people and 'to crack the associated cycle of disadvantage and underachievement' in the Black Country, Greater Manchester and London' (DfES, 2007: 1).

In London the programme was a continuation of the London Challenge 2003-8, while in the Black Country and Greater Manchester, new programmes were designed which followed some of the key principles of the London Challenge but also focused on meeting local needs (DCSF, 2008a, 2008b). City Challenge included primary schools in all three areas, in contrast to London Challenge which had focused almost entirely on secondary schools. Total funding was approximately £160m: £28m for the Black Country, £50m for Manchester and £80m for London.

The key objectives across all three areas were:

- a sharp drop in underperforming schools;
- more outstanding schools, and
- significant improvements in educational outcomes for disadvantaged children.

In order to tailor the programme to meet local needs, each area developed these objectives into a specific list of intended outcomes for that area. These intended outcomes are set out in Appendix A. Like the London Challenge, a key ambition of the programme in each area was to raise the aspirations of all those involved education 'so that they genuinely believe that success is achievable' (Black Country Challenge website). One stakeholder explained: '*We tried to unite people behind the idea of the Challenge to excite them, to try and raise aspirations*.' This was more salient in Greater Manchester and the Black Country where the Challenge was new. Both areas involved a wide range of community partners. In Greater Manchester these included local businesses, universities and colleges, faith groups, academy sponsors and the media (Ainscow, 2010).

Each area had slightly different arrangements for managing the programme. Like the original London Challenge, a key element in this was that civil servants worked closely with the team of Advisors in each area, and with the Chief Advisors: Professor David Woods, who had played a key role in the London Challenge, was appointed Chief Advisor for London; Professor Mel Ainscow for Greater Manchester; and Professor Sir Geoff Hampton for the Black Country. In turn, the advisors worked closely with LAs. The strategies for achieving the intended outcomes, and the precise activities undertaken, also varied across areas.

City Challenge was distinctive in a number of ways. Firstly, it was underpinned by a belief that the educational problems facing urban areas should be addressed at area level, and that LAs and schools needed to work together to do this. Thus it aimed to improve educational provision and school performance across broad geographical areas, not simply in a specific group of participating schools.

Secondly, it focused on all aspects of the education system: working with LAs; developing links between schools and higher education; working with parents and with pupils; strengthening system leadership through an area-wide strategy led by school leaders for school leaders; providing data which schools could use to benchmark themselves against other schools; and developing a range of specific interventions in schools closely focused on the intended outcomes of City Challenge.

Building on the London Challenge experience, a third characteristic of City Challenge was its flexibility. When civil servants, steering groups or Advisors saw a need, they were able to respond by creating a new activity or intervention. This meant that activities in each of the Challenge areas have changed over the three years. In particular, changes in the final year were related to ensuring an effective legacy.

However, a core of activities has consistently addressed the three key objectives. The various activities and interventions were characterised by a belief that school-to-school collaboration has a central role to play in school improvement; a recognition of the importance of school leadership, and the need to develop leaders; and a data-rich approach to tackling issues and sharing learning. A fourth characteristic of City Challenge was that there was no single view of what schools needed to do to improve. In the weakest schools, the Challenge advisors worked with headteachers to develop an action plan specific to that school, and a bespoke package of support. Similarly, all the other interventions involved local solutions, and the schools and LAs were centrally involved in the decisions. In evaluating City Challenge, then, we are concerned with how effective the support structures it provided were in bringing about the aims and key objectives, rather than evaluating a set of specific activities that took place in schools.

The key interventions that are specifically included in this evaluation are as follows:

- Keys to Success (KTS) provided bespoke support and practical assistance to improve underperforming schools. In the Black Country it was known as Pathways to Achievement (PTA). This was the largest intervention in terms of both cost and intensity. It took up some 30-40 per cent of the City Challenge budget in each area.
- Challenge advisors were a team of highly skilled and experienced practitioners who were employed by the DfE. They played a central role in Keys to Success schools, conducting an initial assessment of the schools' needs, drawing up an action plan and monitoring its implementation, and providing ongoing support and challenge. They also worked with LAs and some were involved in other City Challenge programmes.
- Improving Schools Programme (Leadership Programme) developed from the National Strategies Improving Schools Programme. It involved satisfactory schools working with schools that had been more successful through the National Strategies programme.
- Good to Great interventions aimed to increase the number of Outstanding schools, and to help those that were already Outstanding to maintain their grade.
- Narrowing the Gap interventions were designed to support schools to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and narrow or close attainment gaps. In some cases this involved schools working together, but in others it simply involved provision of funding to support this work.
- Families of Schools provided data which enabled school leaders to benchmark their school against others with similar intakes (which were placed in the same 'Family'). In two of the Challenge areas, schools in the same Families could apply for funding to work together.
- LA support and capacity building: as part of their work in KTS/PTA schools, Challenge advisors worked in schools in specific LAs and worked collaboratively with the school improvement service in each LA. Additionally, some Challenge advisors worked with selected authorities at a strategic level to develop their school improvement capacity, both where there were perceived weaknesses, and to support some authorities to develop school-based school improvement structures for the future.
- LA cluster working involved a range of strategies to encourage LAs to work collaboratively.

More detail about the characteristics and working of each of these interventions is provided in Chapters 4 - 9 which present the findings from evaluation of each of the key interventions.

In addition to these key interventions, the Leadership Strategies (e.g. NCSL, 2008) were a central and important part of City Challenge. Rudd et al. (2011), in their evaluation of the Leadership Strategies, state that they aimed to promote a systematic approach to the sharing of expertise and knowledge among school leaders, and between the most successful schools and those aspiring to improve. The emphasis was on collaboration rather than competition, and the Strategies involved

building supportive networks between schools and across LA boundaries. Defining elements of the Leadership Strategies were:

- National Teaching and Facilitation Schools: these offered quality assured professional development courses such as the Improving Teacher Programme and the Outstanding Teacher Programme (ITP and OTP);
- National and Local Leaders of Education (NLEs and LLEs): outstanding school leaders who provided support to other school leaders;
- Local projects in each area: these included the VIP Sixth Form Programme and Moving to New Headship in London, and Middle Leaders of Education in Greater Manchester.

The Leadership Strategies were extensively used in the various key interventions in schools listed above. Keys to Success (Pathways to Achievement) schools were often supported by NLEs and LLEs and sent teachers on the ITP and OTP. In some areas specific key interventions were run through the Leadership Strategies; for example, the Good to Great secondary programmes in London, and the equivalent Good to Bostin programme in the Black Country were part of the Leadership Strategies, while the primary London programme and the Greater Manchester programmes were not. This meant that there was potential for overlap between this evaluation and the Leadership Strategies evaluation conducted by the NFER. We liaised with them in order to avoid duplicating demands on research participants. Some topics are addressed in both evaluations, but from different perspectives. Where relevant, we refer to findings from the Leadership Strategies evaluation in this report.[5]

In addition to the key interventions outlined above and the leadership strategies, there was a considerable range of other activities in each area, and these changed over the three years. All three areas initially had Student Awards which were intended to help raise aspirations. Work with local Higher Education Institutions also contributed to this. Some interventions involved working with parents. Both Greater Manchester and the Black Country developed offer booklets which included a range of activities open to all schools (e.g. DCSF, 2009a, 2009b; Black Country Challenge 2010). In the Black Country there was a particular emphasis on widening students' horizons; part of this involved working with the Royal Shakespeare Company and Creative Partnerships. These activities were all an important part of the overall programme.

1.3 The three City Challenge areas

In evaluating City Challenge 2008-11, it is important to recognise the differences between the three areas. They vary considerably in size. Table 1.1 illustrates this by showing the number of LAs, schools and pupils in each area.

Table 1.1: Number of LAs, schools and pupils in each City Challenge area, January 2010

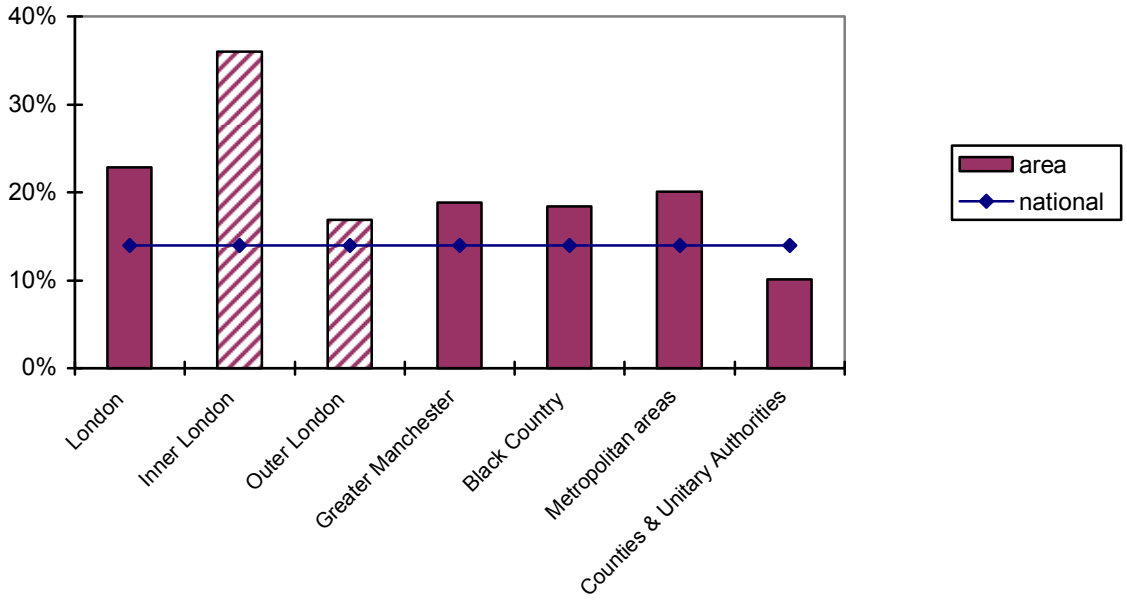
	LAs	Schools	Pupils
London	32	2,502	1,142,265
Greater Manchester	10	1,129	400,052
Black Country	4	462	185,104

Source: DfE (2011a) *Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics*, January 2011

[5] The Leadership Strategies evaluation produced a main report (Rudd et al., 2011) and reports focusing on London (Poet and Kettlewell, 2011); Greater Manchester (Lamont and Bramley, 2011); and the Black Country (Featherstone and Bergeron, 2011). As well as the NFER evaluation of the Leadership Strategies, there have been a number of evaluations of other aspects of City Challenge: for example, Primary Challenge Groups (Street, 2011) and Good to Great (Matthews and McLaughlin, 2010). We have referred to key findings from these reports throughout this evaluation.

They also vary in pupil characteristics. Like other urban areas, they have a high percentage of disadvantaged pupils, but this was significantly higher in London, and particularly Inner London, than in the other two areas. Figure 1.1 illustrates this by showing the 2011 percentage of Key Stage 4(KS4) secondary pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), a measure often used as a proxy for poverty. In all areas, there was a slight increase in the percentage of pupils eligible for FSM between 2008 and 2011 (from 12.6 per cent to 14 per cent, nationally).

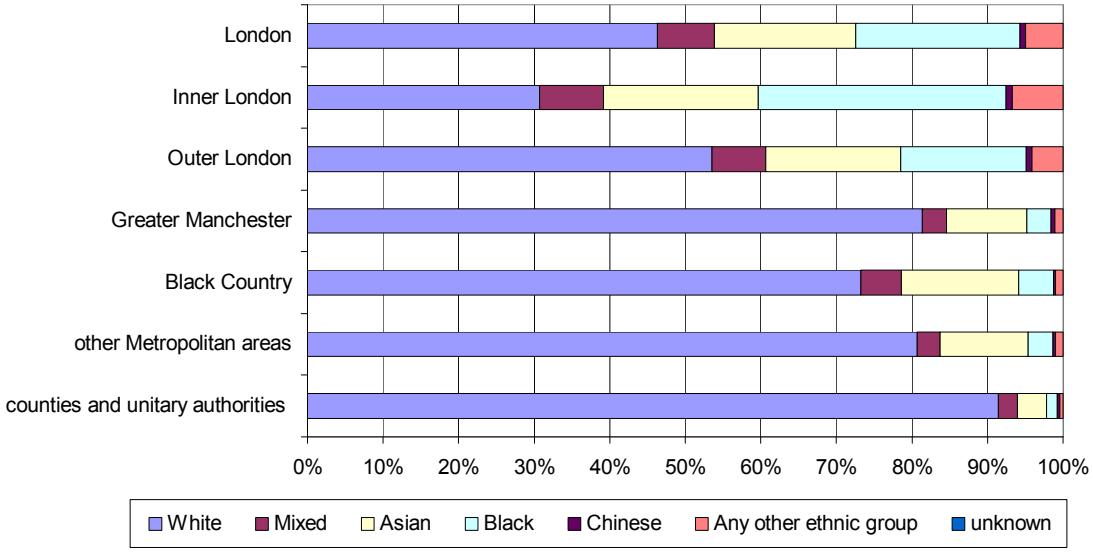
Figure 1.1: Pupil characteristics: percentage of secondary pupils at the end of KS4 eligible for Free School Meals, 2011 by area



Source: National Pupil Database

Like most urban areas, each City Challenge area has a substantial proportion of minority ethnic pupils. London, and particularly Inner London, stands out for the high level of diversity. Figure 1.2 illustrates this using data from secondary schools in 2011. Between 2008 and 2011, the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups had increased of about four per cent.

Figure 1.2: Pupil characteristics: percentage of secondary pupils at the end of KS4 in broad ethnic groups, 2011 by area



Source: National Pupil Database

Both these characteristics are related to pupil attainment patterns. Nationally, pupils eligible for FSM achieve far less well than their more affluent peers. In 2011, 35 per cent of Key Stage 4 pupils (i.e. those aged 15-16) who were eligible for FSM achieved the expected level (five A*-C grades including English and mathematics at GCSE or equivalent), compared with 62 per cent of those not eligible (DfE, 2012a, Table 1). Ethnicity is also related to achievement. While certain ethnic groups (Chinese, Indian) attain above the national average; others (particularly Black Caribbean) have significantly lower attainment.[6]

There were also differences in the starting points for City Challenge in each of the three areas. In summary:

- In London, City Challenge was essentially a continuation of the London Challenge 2003-8, with some new developments.
- In Greater Manchester, LAs already worked together on the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities, but this had no education dimension, and so City Challenge could be seen as filling a gap.
- In the Black Country, LAs worked together in the Black Country Consortium, and in a school improvement partnership. Ideas for a Black Country Challenge had already been developed locally, but the proposed activities had a rather different emphasis from the DCSF model, and this resulted in some tensions.

As we have indicated above, the Challenge was developed in each area to meet local needs. In addition, a stakeholder explained that *'it was very evident early on that the other two Challenges wanted to distance themselves from London, they didn't want the London model'.* Thus there has been only limited collaboration across the three areas. The Chief Advisors met together regularly, and some of the London Advisors also worked in Greater Manchester.

The title City Challenge was rarely used; stakeholders referred to the London Challenge, the Greater Manchester Challenge and the Black Country Challenge. There were differences in the ways the programmes were managed and the range of activities undertaken. Even where interventions had the same name and aim in each area, the approach often differed.

A key difference across the areas was in the proportion of schools directly involved in the key interventions.

Table 1.2: Percentage of schools involved in the key interventions in each Challenge area

	London %	Greater Manchester %	Black Country %
primary	28	71	59
secondary	61	89	84

Source: calculated from data provided by the DfE

Table 1.2 shows that the highest level of involvement in key interventions was in Greater Manchester. This was also confirmed in interviews with key stakeholders, who explained that they aimed to involve the vast majority of schools as part of the aspiration to raise the ambitions of all those involved in education in Greater Manchester. One consequence of this was that some

[6] While 58 per cent of white pupils achieved the expected level at GCSE in 2011, 79 per cent of Chinese pupils, 62 per cent of Asian pupils, 59 per cent of pupils of Mixed heritage, and 54 per cent of Black pupils did so (DfE, 2012a Table 1).

schools in Greater Manchester had a very limited engagement with the interventions they were involved in.

The number of schools involved in key interventions shown in Table 1.2 is less than the total number involved in key and local interventions. Moreover, it is important to recognise that the Challenge also worked at LA level, and concerned itself with strategic issues across each area as a whole. Therefore the intention was that every school, including those not directly involved in key or local interventions, would benefit.

1.4 Literature review

The full literature review is included as Appendix B. The key areas and findings are summarised here.

1.4.1 Research

Since its inception in the 1960s in the USA, the school effectiveness movement has claimed that schools can and do make a difference to educational outcomes. An effective school is defined as one that 'adds extra value to its students' outcomes, in comparison with other schools serving similar intakes' (Sammons, 2008: 13). This variance has been quantified as being between 5 to 15 per cent (Macbeath and Mortimore, 2001: 6). Many researchers have identified key factors which characterise effective schools. But for this evaluation, the more relevant research area is school improvement, because the concern is with the factors that can bring about change. Researchers have suggested that these include leadership, teacher development; involvement of parents and the community; an emphasis on teaching, learning and assessment; processes of review and self-evaluation; external support, networking and partnership; and the creation of a supportive ethos and positive culture in which success is celebrated (e.g. Brighouse and Woods, 1999; Harris, 2002; Sammons, 2008). Researchers have identified the particular challenges involved in improving schools in deprived areas. Where improvement has taken place it is often linked to changes in external conditions such as increased employment (e.g. Harris et al., 2006). There is evidence from the US showing that sustained improvement over time in high poverty schools is highly unusual (Bracey, 2004). It has also been suggested that efforts to improve educational outcomes in high-poverty communities should be targeted at issues such as nutrition, housing, education for parents, etc. (e.g. Rothstein, 2002; Levin, 2006; Earl et al., 2003). However, the research evidence clearly indicates that the factors which facilitate school improvement for schools in general are equally relevant for schools in challenging circumstances. Where there is a difference, it is mainly in the emphasis on discipline, safety and order, and a concern that strategies of improvement are designed to be responsive to the contexts of the school and its students (Ainscow et al., 2005).

Research in school improvement identifies the key importance of effective leadership (Hargreaves, 2010; Higham et al., 2009; Rudd et al., 2011). However, quantifying the direct impact of school leaders on students' achievement has proved difficult (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008). A wide ranging study by Day et al. (2009), examined the impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes. It demonstrated that heads in more effective schools are successful in improving pupil outcomes through their values, dispositions, attributes and competences, and through the strategies they use and the management of these in the unique contexts in which they work

Recent research has focused particularly on networking and collaboration between schools, which can offer opportunities for learning that are perhaps more relevant and accessible to teachers than externally imposed programmes (e.g. Muijs et al., 2010; West, 2010; National Audit Office, 2009). Effective collaboration involves teachers having a sense of ownership of the change agenda, and is often supported by individuals who take on 'system leadership' roles (Chapman et al., 2010; Katz and Earl, 2010). 'System leadership' is an increasingly influential approach to school improvement across the globe. The system leadership roles of National and Local Leader in Education were developed in the leadership strategy strand of the London Challenge. Rudd et al.,

evaluating the leadership strand of City Challenge, confirmed the value of system leaders in developing leadership capacity and raising standards in weaker schools, and reported that schools valued their breadth of expertise and commitment.

Whilst schools often make initially impressive gains in terms of student attainment, sustainable improvement is a relatively slow developmental process (Elmore, 2008; Macbeath and Mortimore, 2001). Elmore suggested that it necessitates involves changes to the structure, processes and normative dimensions around which the work of staff and students are organised. Gray (2001) emphasised that it involves changing the way learners and staff think about their roles in teaching and learning; and increasing internal accountability.

More radical approaches to school improvement that attempt to change the whole system or implement structural solutions are increasingly used. These include the free schools movement in Sweden; Charter schools in the US; and the academies programme in England. The underlying rationale of these approaches is that introducing new types of schools that are more autonomous, free of local authority or direct government control, will enable greater parental choice. This, it is argued, will inject market competition into the education system, promoting educational innovation, and thus drive up standards/school performance for all pupils, including those attending other schools. Evidence about Swedish free schools and US charter schools is mixed (CREDO, 2009; Allen, 2010; Bunar, 2010; Zimmer et al., 2009). Evaluations of the academies programme in England (e.g. PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2008; the National Audit Office, 2010; Machin and Vernoit, 2011) all report improvements in pupil attainment, but have not been able to disentangle the factors have led to the improvement. The more complex the initiative, the more difficult it becomes to disentangle what aspects of it have brought about change.

1.4.2 Policy

Over the years, successive governments have aimed to raise standards by influencing what goes on in schools. Every aspect of the work of schools has been targeted: school leaders (e.g. through the creation of the National College for School Leadership and the establishment of the National Professional Qualification for Headship), teachers (e.g. through the introduction of Professional Standards for Teachers), support staff (e.g. workforce remodelling, establishment of the HLTA role), curriculum (e.g. the National Curriculum), teaching methods (e.g. National Strategies), use of data, and so on. Other broad approaches to school improvement have included Ofsted inspections, league tables and floor targets. Changing the inspection framework or the floor targets tends to change what goes on in schools, as each school aims to maximise its own performance.

The 2010 White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010a), signalled a rather different approach, aiming to create a school system which is self-improving, and schools are responsible for their own improvement, echoing the latest thinking on system leadership (Hargreaves, 2010).

As well as strategies to improve all schools, governments have focused a number of initiatives and strategies on improving schools in areas of poverty: for example, Excellence in Cities, Education Action Zones, the Extra Mile Project, London Challenge, and subsequently City Challenge. While many initiatives have been clearly focused in schools, others have been designed to address educational disadvantage as part of a wider programme tackling other aspects of disadvantage (e.g. New Deal for Communities).

Governments have also tried to bring about improvement by closing and replacing failing schools. Fresh start schools were schools that were underachieving or in Ofsted categories and were closed and then reopened on the same site. In 2000, the academies programme was announced introducing a new type of school to replace seriously failing schools (Blunkett, 2000).

It is clear that, over the last fifteen years, school standards, as measured by national key stage tests and GCSE results, have improved. IT has been argued that the London Challenge has contributed to this; Ofsted (2006, 2010) attributed the improvement of secondary schools in

London to London Challenge. Similarly, Higham et al. (2009), report that the deployment of NLEs has impacted positively on school performance.

A number of evaluations have attempted to identify the impact of specific innovations, but have often reported that this is limited. For example, the evaluation of Excellence in Cities (EiC) (Kendall et al. 2005) reported that there was no substantial evidence to show that EiC had impacted on secondary school attainment. More recently, the analysis of the impact of the New Deal for Communities (NDC) on educational attainment concluded that there was little evidence of a programme-wide improvement (Wilkinson and McLennan, 2010). The authors note that 'although rigorous statistical analysis gives reliable and accurate information about change, it does not inform us about causality' (p.5) and stress the need to have sufficient information about interventions to be able to attribute changed outcomes to the interventions.

1.4.3 Key issues

This review of research and policy raises a number of issues for the evaluation of City Challenge which we outline below:

- the extent to which it has resulted in sustainable school improvement rather than simply raising attainment in the short term;
- factors that enable system leadership and school to school working to be effective;
- the role that perceived accountability pressures, either external or internal, play in school improvement;
- the roles advisers, other headteachers and LA officers can most helpfully play.

We return to these issues in our findings and conclusions.

2 Evaluation design

2.1 Introduction

Evaluation is generally concerned with the effectiveness of particular programmes or interventions. Thus any evaluation has to focus on

- whether the aims were achieved (in this case, improved attainment, fewer under-performing schools, better outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, more good and outstanding schools);
- the extent to which the programme or intervention was responsible for changes.

It is also important to consider which aspects of the programme or intervention were most effective, and what could be changed or improved in future programmes.

Educational evaluations often use matched samples of schools or pupils in order to try and establish causality, comparing the 'treatment' schools or pupils with a control group. It was clearly not possible to do this for all schools in City Challenge areas. In particular, London schools and pupils have characteristics not found elsewhere in the country such as the proportion of pupils eligible for Free School Meals and level of ethnic diversity. A second difficulty is that all schools that were under-attaining, whether in Challenge areas or elsewhere, had additional support from their LA to bring about improvement. Schools below the floor target also had support through the National Challenge. Thus rather than comparing a treatment group with a control group that had no treatment, such comparisons would be between one form of treatment and another.

However, when discussing the overall outcomes, we have compared patterns in City Challenge areas with outcomes nationally, and in particular, have made comparisons with the outcomes for schools in similar contexts i.e. other Metropolitan areas (which tend to be large conurbations). We have also made comparisons between specific groups of pupils in Challenge areas and their counterparts elsewhere (most often, those eligible for Free School Meals and their peers). We have also compared school performance with that of other schools with similar performance in 2008 when the Challenge started (discussed later in this chapter).

While it was not possible to create a matched sample for the Challenge areas as a whole, this was more feasible in relation to specific interventions. In that Keys to Success (KTS) was the most intensive intervention, taking up some 30 to 40 per cent of the budget in each area, we have undertaken an analysis in which we have matched KTS schools to comparable schools; this is described in more detail later in the chapter.

The other interventions were all on a smaller scale, typically involving annual funding to each schools of £3k. Moreover, schools were often involved in more than one intervention. Generally discrete groups of schools were involved in the interventions for underperforming schools, Satisfactory schools and Good schools, but these schools were also likely to be involved in interventions to narrow or close attainment gaps, and to encourage schools in the same Families to work together. Thus there is no possibility of demonstrating relationships between attainment outcomes and specific smaller interventions. Nevertheless, we have reviewed the relevant outcomes for schools in each intervention as a matter of interest.

A second way of addressing the question of causality is by asking those involved to what extent the programme was responsible for any changed outcomes. We have done this through a survey and qualitative research. These methods can give some indication of whether the intervention was responsible for the change in outcomes, but also offer greater insights into what aspects of the interventions were considered to be the most and least effective, and why, and thus are particularly valuable in informing future school improvement interventions.

2.2 Overview

Attainment data and Ofsted judgements were analysed to explore changes taking place between the start and end of City Challenge. Survey and interview data were used to review the perceptions of stakeholders, headteachers and other school staff about the extent to which City Challenge was responsible for changes in attainment or Ofsted judgements, and to explore how effective the various interventions were perceived to be.

Thus the evaluation design included four main strands of work, each of which is described in detail in the section that follows:

a literature review: focusing on school improvement and effectiveness research;

analyses of documents and data;

a survey sent to all the schools receiving support through the City Challenge programme;

qualitative research including:

- interviews with 69 key stakeholder across the City Challenge areas including central managers, staff leading and working on specific interventions (e.g. civil servants, Challenge Advisors, LA Advisors, Consultants);
- in-depth case studies of 21 schools, one school cluster and four LAs/LA clusters receiving support through the programme;
- additional interviews with 34 headteachers.

In addition, the research team liaised with the team at the NFER who were conducting a separate evaluation of the Leadership Strategies within City Challenge, sharing findings, and avoiding duplicating demands on participants.

Table 2.1 overleaf shows how the strands of the evaluation addressed the specific research questions set by the DCSF.

2.3 Methods used

2.3.1 Literature review

We reviewed school improvement and effectiveness research about what works and in what contexts. We also reviewed the range of policies that have been introduced with the aim of raising standards, and any relevant evaluations. Literature for inclusion was identified through on-line searches, using Google and specific databases and portals such as the British Education Index, EBSCOhost, Education-line, Athens, and so on. Research reports commissioned by the DFE and Ofsted reports were also included. Search terms included school effectiveness and school improvement, and various terms that emerged from a preliminary review of items identified (e.g. system leadership, capacity). We also reviewed the topics covered by papers in the journal *School Effectiveness and School Improvement.* Policies designed to impact on attainment and school improvement were identified through government White papers and other similar documents setting out plans for education, as well as from our own knowledge of policy.

Table 2.1: How the strands of the evaluation addressed the specific research questions set by the DCSF[7]

	City Challenge documents and data	Attainment data	Survey	Stakeholder interviews	Case studies and additional headteacher interviews	Liaison with other evaluators
1 Delivery and Implementation						
a) How has the entire City Challenge programme developed (at school, LA and system level) since its inception to the present day – in terms of focus and content?	✓			✓		
b) How were each of the City Challenge programmes implemented?	✓			✓	✓	
c) How were each of the key interventions implemented?	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
d) How efficient were the monitoring processes for the key interventions and how can they be improved?	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
e) What can be said about the effectiveness of key interventions?	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
2 Assessing Impact						
a) What impact has each of the key interventions had in relation to their aims and the overall aims of the programme?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
b) What impact has each of the City Challenge programmes had at school and system level in the short, medium and long term?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
c) Have the City Challenge programmes / key interventions resulted in cultural changes at practitioner, school and system level?	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
4 Future Policy Recommendations						
a) What issues are relevant to the sustainability of successful interventions / approaches?			✓	✓	✓	✓
b) How transferable are successful interventions / approaches to other parts of the country?				✓	✓	✓
c) What are key stakeholders' (e.g. teachers, heads, SIPs, LA officers, advisors, parents and pupils etc.) perceptions of the programme / key interventions?			✓	✓	✓	✓

2.3.2 Analysis of documents and data

Documents

Throughout the evaluation we reviewed policy, academic and other published literature and unpublished material made available by the DfE and Challenge advisors on each of the Challenges, and the Challenge as a whole. Some monitoring and evaluation data were also made available to the research team. This included progress reports on various programmes and outcome data from evaluation forms. These provided contextualisation and supplementary data for our main analysis.

[7] The initial specification included a cost effectiveness and value for money analysis. This was cancelled following discussion with the steering group about its its feasibility in the light of the financial data available.

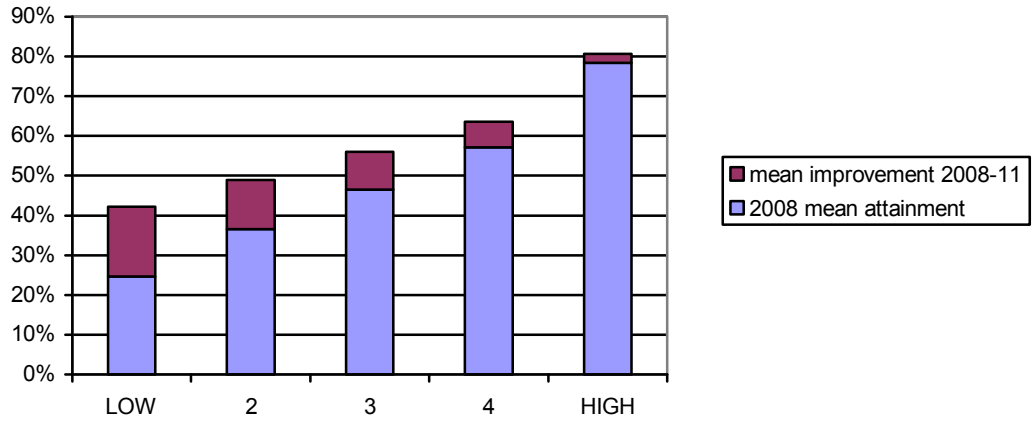
Attainment data

School data

School level data is used to assess the extent to which the number of underperforming schools was reduced, and the changes in school attainment outcomes and Ofsted judgements in schools involved in specific interventions. We have compared changes in attainment in City Challenge schools over the period 2008-2011 with the national average change.

We have also compared attainment outcomes for City Challenge schools with groups of schools which had similar attainment at the start of the period. The rationale for this is that on average, attainment increases most in the lowest attaining schools, and least in the highest attaining schools. Figure 2.1 illustrates this. All secondary schools nationally have been divided into five groups (quintiles) based on their 2008 attainment (percentage of pupils reaching the expected level, that is, 5 A*-C including English and mathematics). Figure 2.1 shows the mean school percentage of pupils reaching the expected level in 2008, and the mean improvement between 2008 and 2011, by quintile. It shows that while the schools in the lowest attaining quintile improved by an average of 13.4 percentage points, those in the highest attaining quintile improved by only 1.4 percentage points. City Challenge areas were selected on the basis of having low attainment; therefore improvement greater than the national average might simply reflect a higher percentage of low attaining schools at the start of the period. Thus it is more useful to make comparisons between schools in the same quintiles of initial attainment.

Figure 2.1: Mean school percentage of secondary pupils achieving the expected level by quintile of school performance 2008, and mean improvement 2008- 2011



Source: Calculated from DfE 2011 School Performance Tables (DfE, 2012b), and DCSF 2008 Achievement and Attainment Tables (DCSF, 2009c)

A similar effect is found in primary schools. However, as the national percentage of pupils reaching the expected level (Level 4 in both English and mathematics) improved by only 1.5 percentage points over this period, the schools in the highest attaining two quintiles had, on average, a smaller percentage of pupils reaching the expected level in 2011. Thus primary schools in the lowest quintile of 2008 attainment showed mean improvement of 13 per cent by 2011, while for those schools in the highest quintile of attainment in 2008, 2011 attainment was on average, seven percentage points lower than 2008 attainment.

In comparing attainment over time, a particular challenge is created by the creation of sponsored academies[8], because on DfE school performance tables, data from predecessor schools is not

[8] The majority of sponsored academies were created in areas of educational disadvantage, and were intended to raise standards. The majority of them had one or more predecessor schools which were closed.

automatically linked to the academy attainment. However, for the purposes of this evaluation, it was important to be able to review the progress made when a school became a sponsored academy. Where an academy had one or more identified predecessor schools, we have linked the data so that we can review the extent to which attainment improved as a result of the creation of the academy[9]. Similarly, where amalgamations of infant and junior schools took place, we have linked the data.

Regression-based analysis using school data

We have also conducted a more detailed analysis of changes in attainment in Keys to Success (Pathways to Achievement) schools, including those that received support during the London Challenge 2003-8, and those supported through City Challenge 2008-11. Since this was a school level intervention, we consider secondary schools' performance on the percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSES at A*-C, and primary schools on the percentage of pupils attaining Level 4 at KS2 in both English and mathematics.

We considered and rejected a standard difference-in-difference approach (Card and Krueger, 1994; Wooldridge, 2010) due to the fact that expected levels of change in results may not be uniform across the distribution of prior results. Matching was tested as an approach to identifying comparable untreated schools, but neither simple nor propensity score matching yields comparator schools with the equivalent prior trajectories required to support difference-in-difference analysis. This is due to the random fluctuation in scores year to year at the school level, and the resultant regression to the mean which distorts matching approaches and invalidates difference in difference estimators.

For these reasons we adopted an approach based on a Lagged Dependent Variable (LDV) model, specified as

$$Y_t = B_0X_0 + B_1Y_{t-1} + B_2X_2 + B_3X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where
X_0 = the intercept.
Y_{t-1} = the value of Y at the preceding time point.
X_2 = membership of the treatment group (capturing pre-treatment differential between treated and untreated).
X_3 = the effect of treatment being "on" for the treated group.

Models with LDVs can be estimated for dynamic models of change when relevant criteria are fulfilled (Keele and Kelly, 2006; Davidson and MacKinnon, 1993). Appendix C provides further details.

Scores are standardised within each year so that the annual scores are de-trended, thus modelling change in the location of a school in the distribution. The predicted value given by the lagged dependent variable forms the basis for expectations across the distribution of prior results, accounting for regression to the mean. It also controls for some of the effects of other contextual variables, such as deprivation, since the effect of these factors will also be manifested in previous years' results.

Using this approach as our basis for expectations of a given year's scores, we first identify difference attributable to being a member of the treatment group (which is constant across all

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and the pupils then joined the academy. Outstanding schools are now able to convert to academy status. In this report, all references to academies are to sponsored academies rather than convertor academies.

[9] Where a single academy was formed from two predecessor schools we used the National Pupil Database to calculate the percentage of pupils reaching the expected level.

years). Secondly, using information about the date of onset of treatment we identify the effect of the treatment occurring. We thus model the effects of treatment across the multiple annual observations for each school, rather than a single before and after measurement. The coefficient for treatment captures the effect relative to the counterfactual expected score for a KTS school given the school's location in the distribution of results.

After identifying a treatment effect relative to prior performance we apply tests of the robustness of the results, namely of autocorrelations, functional form misspecification and sensitivity to omitted variable bias, by addition of controls and re-estimation of treatment effects within different subgroups for three potential confounders of the effect of treatment: local area deprivation, school type, and whether a school has experienced a change in identity. Appendix C provides further details.

Pupil attainment data

We have used the National Pupil Database (NPD) and School Census data to assess the outcomes for pupils eligible for disadvantaged pupils, using Free School Meals (FSM) as an indicator of economic disadvantage. We have also used pupil data to assess changes in attainment in each City Challenge area as a whole, and in schools involved in each intervention.

Percentages of pupils achieving the expected level have been compared across City Challenge areas, and with national figures. They have also been compared with figures for other Metropolitan areas, and Counties and Unitary Authorities[10]. Metropolitan areas were used because they are large conurbations which face urban challenges similar to those faced in the City Challenge areas, such as high proportions of disadvantaged pupils. Counties and Unitary Authorities are a more mixed group, including all rural areas, and many smaller urban areas.

Reporting

We have identified differences as statistically significant when $p < 0.05$.

2.3.3 School survey

A postal survey of schools was conducted to provide a broad overview of schools' involvement in City Challenge interventions and of headteachers' perceptions of the impact of these. The survey collected data about:

- overall school improvement activity, and perceptions of impact;
- the various City Challenge programmes
- general views about City Challenge and its impact, and suggestions for the future development of school improvement programmes.

Table 2.2 below shows the number of returned questionnaires in each area and by school phase.

Table 2.2: The number of returned questionnaires in each area

	London	Greater Manchester	Black Country	Total
Primary	161	115	47	323
Secondary	60	49	23	132
Special		2		2
Total	221	166	70	457

[10] These terms refer to types of local government in England.

A total of 462 completed questionnaires were returned: a response rate of 33 per cent. Five of these had had the identification number torn off, so these five responses cannot be matched to other data about the schools (area, phase, FSM, attainment, etc.). A further two were only very partially completed, and have been excluded from the analysis. Response rates are generally low on school surveys, and 33 per cent is in line with other surveys undertaken in the last few years. The qualitative research we conducted in schools that did and did not complete the survey did not suggest any bias relating to non-response.

The main limitation of the survey data is that some headteachers did not know the names of the specific interventions that their schools had taken part in. This partly relates to changes of personnel and the creation of academies, but we also found in both the qualitative and survey data that many headteachers referred to specific interventions as London (or other area) Challenge or National Challenge, rather than by titles such as Keys to Success. Where respondents indicated their uncertainty on the questionnaire, we have checked the DfE databases, and have attributed their responses to the appropriate heading. We have noted differences between the DfE database information and school responses where relevant in this report.

Survey results were integrated with school level attainment data, Edubase, Ofsted and DfE data, and analysed in IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), using descriptive statistics. We have identified differences as statistically significant when $p < 0.05$.

2.3.4 Qualitative research

Stakeholder interviews

We interviewed two sets of key stakeholders (in addition to school staff and pupils):

- Face to face interviews were conducted with the central team who led City Challenge at the DfE and the teams leading and managing each of the three City Challenges. They were interviewed at the start of the evaluation to inform our understanding of the programme, and the design of research instruments. Some of these stakeholders were re-interviewed towards the end of the evaluation to review developments and perceived impact in the final year of the programme, and to explore views about sustainability and transferability.
- Individuals who led and managed specific interventions, or who worked with schools and school staff on such interventions were interviewed in relation to the implementation and impact of the interventions they were involved with. They were identified both from lists provided by the DfE, and from information provided by other interviewees. The majority of these were undertaken by telephone.

In total, 69 stakeholder interviews were conducted.

Case studies

We conducted 26 case studies to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the operation and perceived impact of specific interventions. The majority of case studies were in schools receiving support through City Challenge, four were in LAs or LA clusters, and one focused on a school cluster.

Table 2.2: Number of case studies by City Challenge area

	London	Greater Manchester	Black Country	total
Primary	5	3	3	11
Secondary	4	3	3	10
Other (LA, LA cluster, school cluster)	2	2	1	5
Total	11	8	7	26

The schools and LAs were selected to access a variety of different and illustrative experiences. We continually revisited the sampling criteria to ensure the sample represented a range of involvement in the key interventions, a spread of LAs, varying attainment and a range of Ofsted ratings. Schools were selected from the DfE databases. The first two case studies conducted were pilots and took place in schools identified by the DfE.

In total 43 schools were approached; 22 of these did not agree to take part. Of these, eight gave no response (even after repeated phone calls); five said they had had no involvement in City Challenge (two of these were academies where the predecessor school had been in Keys to Success); and ten declined, in some cases because they were too busy, and in other cases because they felt their involvement with City Challenge had been very limited and so they had little to contribute. Heads of schools that were only involved in interventions receiving smaller amounts of funding (e.g. £3k) showed less enthusiasm to participate, consequently the case study sample was more heavily weighted towards schools involved in Keys to Success / Pathways to Achievement.

Each case study school was visited by a researcher for a day to conduct interviews. In addition, some interviews were conducted by telephone following the visit. In each case study school face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with four or five key members of staff, for example:

- the headteacher or deputy head;
- internal staff responsible for, or heavily engaged in, specific City Challenge interventions within the school, such as subject leaders for English, Maths and or Science, or those who had attended the Outstanding or Improving Teacher Programmes;
- support staff, for example teaching assistants, data managers;
- governors.

The interview schedules focused on the research questions set out in Table 2.1. They took into account the role of the target interviewee, and were tailored to the particular school context. In addition, in most schools a focus group discussion was carried out with a group of pupils who had attended the school throughout its involvement in City Challenge to collect data on students' experiences of changes/ continuities in school improvement, school culture and teaching and learning.

In total, the school case studies involved interviews with 98 members of school staff, nine governors and 20 groups of pupils. Relevant documentary data was also collected, such as advisor progress reports and action plans. As part of the case studies we also interviewed 45 key individuals external to the school such as City Challenge Advisors, LA officers, SIPs, consultants, NLEs or LLEs. These interviews were generally conducted by telephone.

The LA and school cluster case studies were identified in discussion with the DfE and key stakeholders in each area. They involved 18 interviews, and observation at two conferences and a school cluster meeting.

Additional interviews with headteachers

We conducted 34 additional interviews with headteachers. Some of these were selected to 'fill gaps' where data was relatively thin; others related to the case study schools (e.g. other members of the same Family of Schools or triad). We included some headteachers of schools which have had only a limited involvement in City Challenge.

Analysis of qualitative data

All interviews were fully transcribed. Qualitative analysis was carried out in two main ways. Holistic case studies were written up analytically for each school incorporating interview data, attainment data and Ofsted reports. Transcripts were then coded using NVivo and analysed across schools. The first two school case studies were conducted by pairs of researchers working together, who were then able to compare coding and interpretation. Subsequently the research team met on a regular basis to discuss emerging themes.

The analysis was focused on the overall aims of the evaluation and specifically on the research questions set by the DfE (presented on Table 2.1). The majority of the interviews related to specific interventions, so both the interview schedules and the analysis focused on the various aspects of those interventions (for example, conferences, considering whether and why they were effective in achieving the intervention aims.) Interviewees were also asked to comment more broadly on what factors they considered had made the interventions effective (or not effective); while many of their responses related to specific activities within the intervention, codes were developed to represent other themes which emerged from the data (e.g. ethos, time scale).

2.4 Structure of the findings

The next chapter reports on the overall attainment and Ofsted outcomes for City Challenge areas and the extent to which the targets set for City Challenge were achieved. It then discusses how far any achievements can be attributed to City Challenge.

Chapters 4-9 focus on the key interventions that we were asked to evaluate. Each of the chapters relating to school interventions follows a similar pattern:

- outlining the aims and nature of the intervention, and how it varied across City Challenge areas;
- reviewing the attainment and/or Ofsted data for schools in that intervention (depending on the specific aims of the intervention);
- setting out survey and interview data about stakeholders' perceptions of the overall effectiveness of the intervention; and finally
- reviewing what elements of the intervention were considered to be effective (or not effective), and why.

One of the key interventions was the work of City Challenge advisors; rather than discussing this in a specific chapter, it is addressed in other chapters where relevant, particularly in Chapter 4 which focuses on Keys to Success (Pathways to Achievement) and Chapter 9 on working with Local Authorities.

The final chapter of the report summarises the findings, and discusses the lessons that are offered about school improvement by City Challenge.

3 Attainment and Ofsted outcomes in City Challenge areas

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews attainment and Ofsted outcomes in City Challenge areas. City Challenge aimed to improve educational outcomes across the areas, and specifically to reduce numbers of underperforming schools; raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils; and increase the number of schools judged Outstanding by Ofsted. The pledges set in Greater Manchester and the Black Country also included a reduction in schools in Ofsted categories. The main part of the chapter reviews the extent to which these aims and pledges were achieved. The first section considers educational outcomes in London secondary schools between 2003 and 2011, as this is where the Challenge has been in operation the longest. Subsequent sections review primary and secondary attainment across the three areas between 2008 and 2011 and Ofsted judgements.

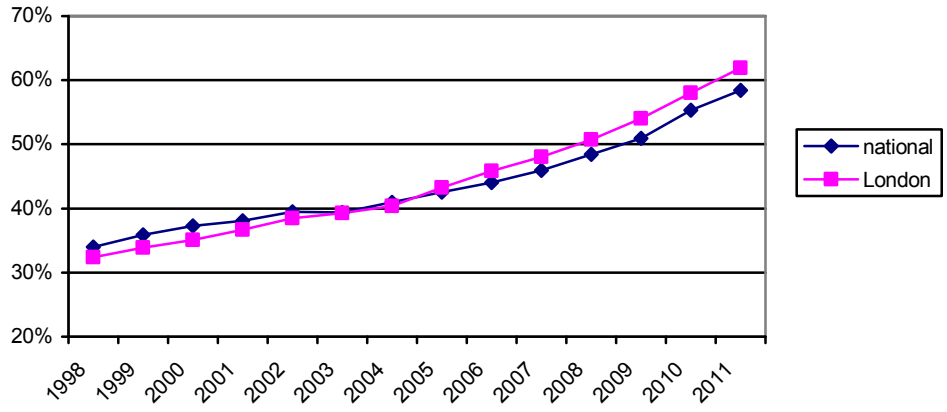
However, it cannot be assumed that changes to attainment or Ofsted outcomes were a direct result of City Challenge activity. The final part of the chapter therefore discusses the extent to which these outcomes can be attributed to the Challenge.

3.2 London secondary schools 2003 - 2011

The London Challenge launched in 2003 worked only with secondary schools. It provides a valuable opportunity to assess the impact of a programme over a longer time period than is often the case. However, despite the excellent bank of data that exists in England, it is not easy to review changes in school attainment and quality over long time periods because of changes to floor targets set; the attainment data collected and published; and the Ofsted inspection framework.

While it is possible to create time series of attainment data, they inevitably cannot represent the targets that schools were aiming for throughout the whole period. For example, Figure 3.1 shows the percentage of pupils achieving 5A*-C GCSE or equivalent including English and mathematics nationally and in London over the period 1998 to 2011. However, this became a floor target only in 2007, and so before that time, schools were aiming at 5A*-Cs, without any particular focus on English and mathematics.

Figure 3.1: Percentage of pupils achieving 5A*-C GCSE or equivalent including English and mathematics: London and national figures for maintained schools, 1998-2011



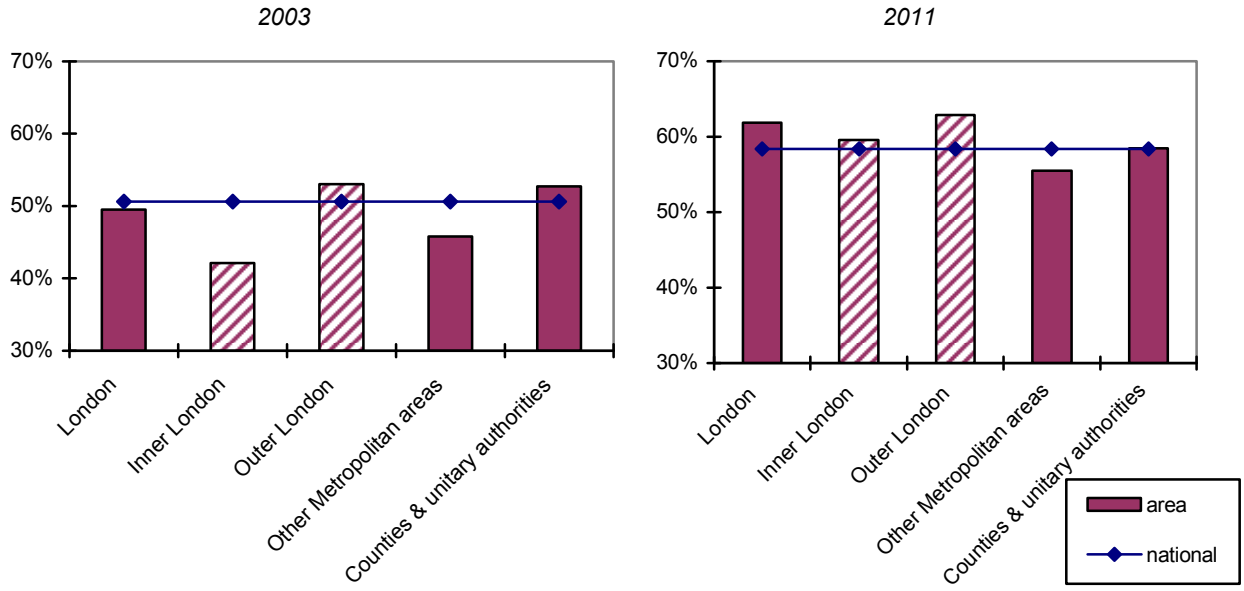
Source: London Challenge, 2010, and DfE, 2012c, Table 17

Note that before 2005, the figures represent the percentage of 15 year olds, whereas from 2005 onwards, they represent the percentage of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 (KS4). End of KS4 attainment has consistently been 0.2 per cent above the equivalent figures for 15 year olds.

While time series have limitations, it is clear that between 2003 and 2011, secondary pupil attainment in London improved more rapidly than that in other parts of the country. Figure 3.1 demonstrates that the percentage of London secondary pupils achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and mathematics was below the national figure until 2004, but from 2005 on, was above the national figure.

When the London Challenge was launched in 2003, the percentage of secondary school pupils in London achieving the (then) target of 5 A-C* GCSEs (or equivalent) was slightly below the national figure. Figure 3.2 shows that this was mainly an issue for Inner London, which was well below both the national figure and that for other Metropolitan areas, while Outer London was above. By 2011, the expectation was more demanding (5 A*-C including English and mathematics). Both Inner and Outer London were above the national figure, and London had a higher proportion of pupils achieving the expected level than any other Government Office Region.

Figure 3.2: Percentage of pupils achieving the expected level*, London compared with other areas, 2003 and 2011



Source: National Pupil Database

Note that the expected level in 2003 was 5 A-C GCSEs, whereas in 2011 it was 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and mathematics

However, as Figure 1.1 showed, London has a significantly higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils than other areas; in addition it has higher pupil mobility. When pupil characteristics are taken into account, we find that even in 2003, both Outer and Inner London pupils in all ethnic groups were achieving as well as or better than, pupils in the rest of the country, and by 2011, this advantage had increased.

Figure 3.3 shows that in 2003, the percentage of London pupils who were *not* eligible for FSM achieving the expected level was the same as or marginally above the figure for pupils outside London, and that this was the case in each broad ethnic group. For pupils eligible for FSM, Figure 3.3 shows that in 2003, a higher percentage in London achieved the expected level than was the case nationally. This pattern was found among all ethnic groups, and for both boys and girls. Inner London FSM pupils performed better than those in Outer London (though the pattern was reversed for non-FSM pupils, where Inner London performed below the national level). Thus the below average overall level of attainment in London in 2003 very clearly related to the high numbers of disadvantaged pupils. When poverty is taken into account, London performed as well as (for non-FSM) or better than (for FSM pupils) the rest of the country

Figure 3.3: Percentage of secondary pupils achieving the expected* level in London and in other areas, by broad ethnic group and FSM eligibility, 2003 and 2011

Source: National Pupil Database

Note that the expected level in 2003 was 5 A-C GCSEs, whereas in 2011 it was 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and mathematics

By 2011, London attainment had improved in comparison to attainment in other areas for both FSM and non-FSM pupils. The 2011 target is used (i.e. 5 A*-C including mathematics and English) whereas the 2003 figures reflected the target at that time (5 A*-C) – so the overall percentages are not comparable with 2003; however, the aim here is to review London attainment in comparison with other areas at each date. We can see that in 2011, a higher percentage of non-FSM pupils in London than of the same groups elsewhere achieved the expected level. This represents an improvement since 2003. And for pupils eligible for FSM, the 'London advantage' over other areas had increased for every ethnic group.

The 'London advantage' has been extensively analysed by Wyness (2011). She used Income Deprivation Affected Children Index (IDACI) figures as well as FSM, and analysed the 2010 data for different Key Stages. She showed that the effect is small at KS1, but increases with age. From this she concluded that this effect related to what happens in London schools, rather than to pupil factors.

A second way of assessing school improvement is on the basis of Ofsted judgements. However, the Ofsted framework has changed twice since the London Challenge started, and so judgements from 2003 are not comparable with those from 2011. Ofsted have produced two reports on the London Challenge. The 2006 report showed that while in 2002/3, fewer secondary schools in London than elsewhere were judged Good or better for overall effectiveness or quality of teaching, during the period 2003 to 2006, a higher proportion of London secondary schools than of those elsewhere achieved Good or better grades. In 2010, Ofsted produced a second report on the London Challenge. This showed that in comparison to the national profile, a higher proportion of London secondary schools were judged to be Good or Outstanding for the quality of their teaching in every year from 2005/6 to 2009/10.

3.3 City Challenge 2008-11

This section reviews the educational outcomes in City Challenge areas in relation to the objectives for the programme (primary and secondary school attainment, pupil absence and Ofsted judgements between 2008 and 2011).

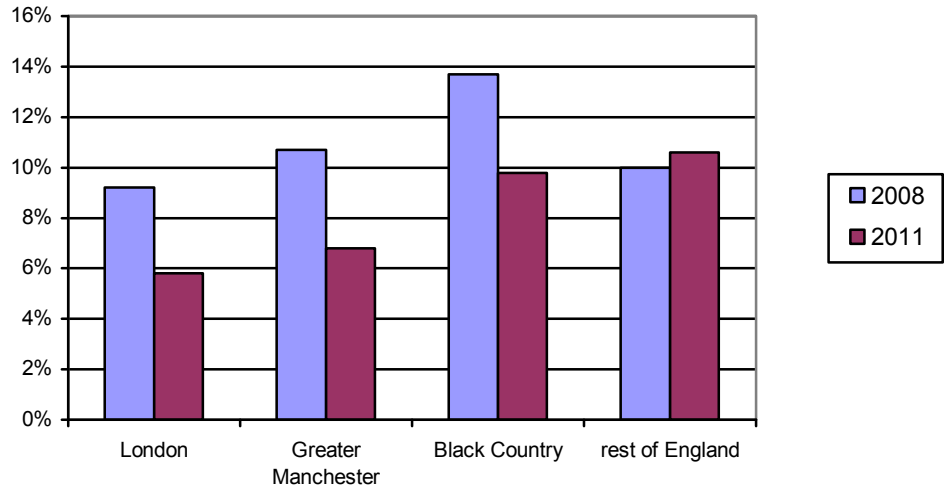
3.3.1 Floor targets

City Challenge aimed to reduce the number of under-performing schools, and all three City Challenge areas had specific pledges that by 2011, no schools would fall below the floor targets.

In 2008, a primary school was below the floor target if fewer than 55 per cent of pupils achieved Level 4 in both English and mathematics. At that time, 277 primary schools in City Challenge areas were below the floor target. In 2011, just half this number achieved less than 55 per cent. However, the floor target in 2011 was more demanding; a school was below the floor target if fewer than 60 per cent of pupils achieved Level 4 or above in both English and mathematics, and less than the median percentage make expected progress in both English and mathematics. Despite this more demanding target, Figure 3.4 shows that the percentage of primary schools falling below the floor target reduced by more than a third in London and Greater Manchester, and more than a quarter in the Black Country. In contrast, across the rest of England, it showed a slight increase.

For primary schools, then, the target that no school should fall below the floor target was not achieved by 2011, but the reduction in such schools was considerably greater than it was in the rest of the country, and the percentage below floor target was significantly smaller in London and Greater Manchester than in non-City Challenge areas.

Figure 3.4: Percentage of primary schools below the floor target in 2008 and 2011

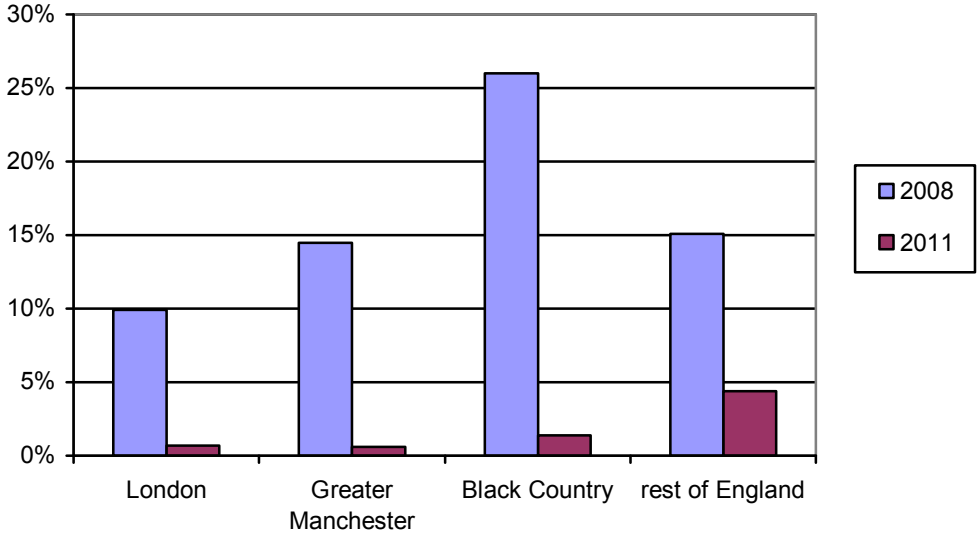


Source: DCSF, 2009d, National Indicator 76; DfE 2011b, Table 19. For definitions of floor targets at each date, see text above.

In 2008, secondary schools were below the floor target when less than 30 per cent of pupils achieved 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics. The 2008 figures show that this was the case for 40 secondary schools in London, 24 in Greater Manchester and 19 in the Black Country. In 2011 just two schools in City Challenge areas were below 30 per cent (one in London and one in Greater Manchester).

However, as in primary schools, the secondary floor target used in 2011 was more demanding; schools were below the floor target when less than 35% of pupils achieved 5+A*-C including English and mathematics, and the expected progress between KS2 and KS4 was less than the median of 74% in English and less than the median of 66% in mathematics. Five secondary schools in City Challenge areas fell below the 2011 floor target, three in London and one in each of the other areas. Two of these were sponsored academies. Thus the target of having no secondary schools below the floor target was only narrowly missed. Figure 3.5 shows that the reduction in schools below the floor target was greater in each of the City Challenge areas than it was in the rest of England – a decrease of 92 per cent compared with 71 per cent elsewhere.

Figure 3.5: Percentage of secondary schools below the floor target in 2008 and 2011



Sources: DCSF 2009e, National Indicator 78, DfE 2012c, Table 21. For definitions of floor targets at each date, see text above.

3.3.2 Overall attainment

City Challenge was not only concerned to improve attainment in underperforming schools; it also aimed to improve attainment overall. The Black Country Challenge, for example, aimed to 'boost educational performance in Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton', and to 'cut by half the achievement gaps which exist between Black Country children and their peers at ages 11, 14 and 16' (DCSF, 2008b). The London Challenge pledged that 'the proportion of London pupils achieving five or more A*–C GCSE grades including English and maths will continue to be above the national average' (DCSF, 2008c: 6). In this section, therefore, we consider the attainment of all pupils in City Challenge areas.

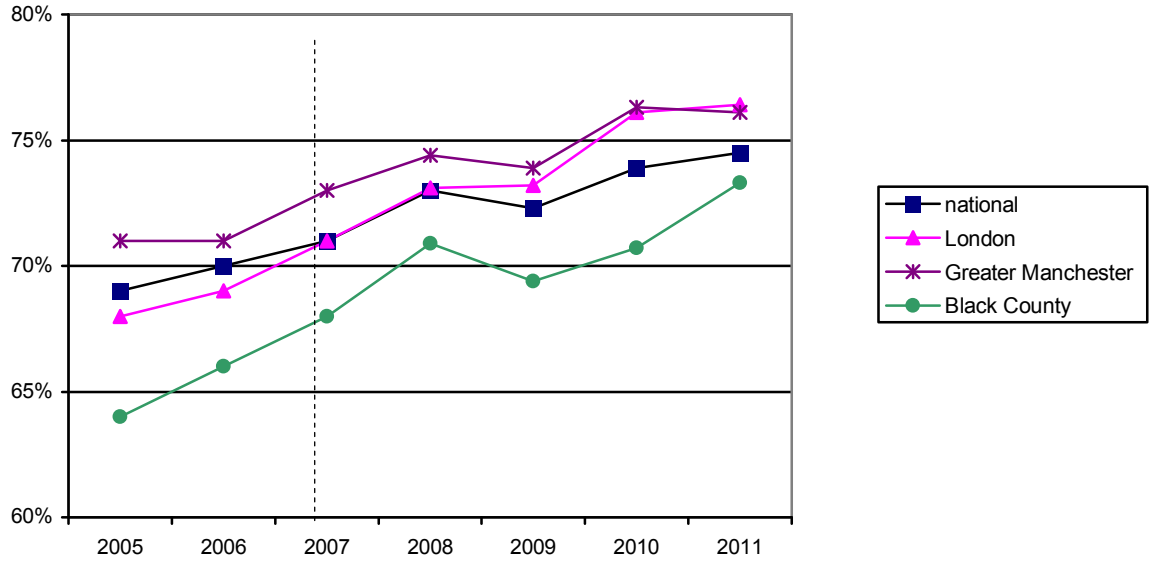
Primary

For primary schools, we have focused on the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level (Level 4) in both English and mathematics. Nationally, improvements in KS2 attainment have been relatively slow; the increase since 2005 in the percentage reaching the expected level, for all

maintained schools nationally, has been only five percentage points. (In contrast, the equivalent secondary level increase has been over 15 percentage points.)

Figure 3.6 shows the percentage of pupils reaching the expected level in English and mathematics in City Challenge areas and nationally. Improvement has been slow in all areas, and there was a dip in 2009. The broken line indicates the date of the start of City Challenge. Greater Manchester has been slightly above national figures throughout this period; London started below, but from 2009 has exceeded the national figure, and the Black Country has now almost reached the national figure.

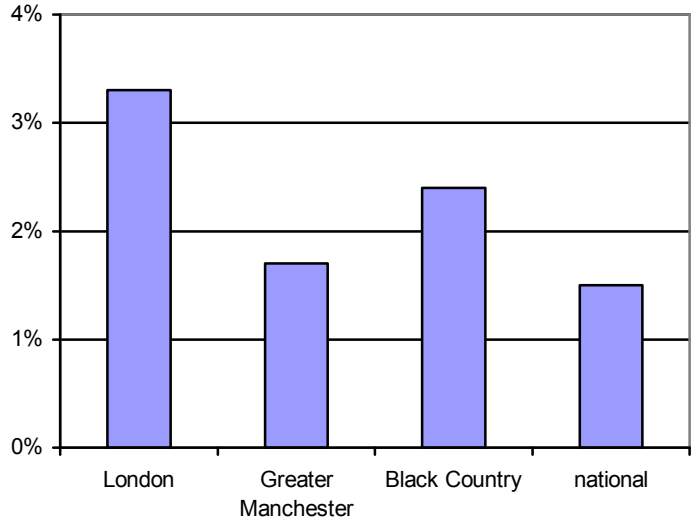
Figure 3.6: Percentage of primary pupils achieving the expected level: City Challenge areas compared with national figures



Source: National Pupil Database

Figure 3.7 summarises the percentage points improvement made over the three years 2008-11 in the City Challenge areas. In each area, improvement was more than the national figure, but in Greater Manchester, it was only marginally more (1.7 per cent compared with 1.5 per cent).

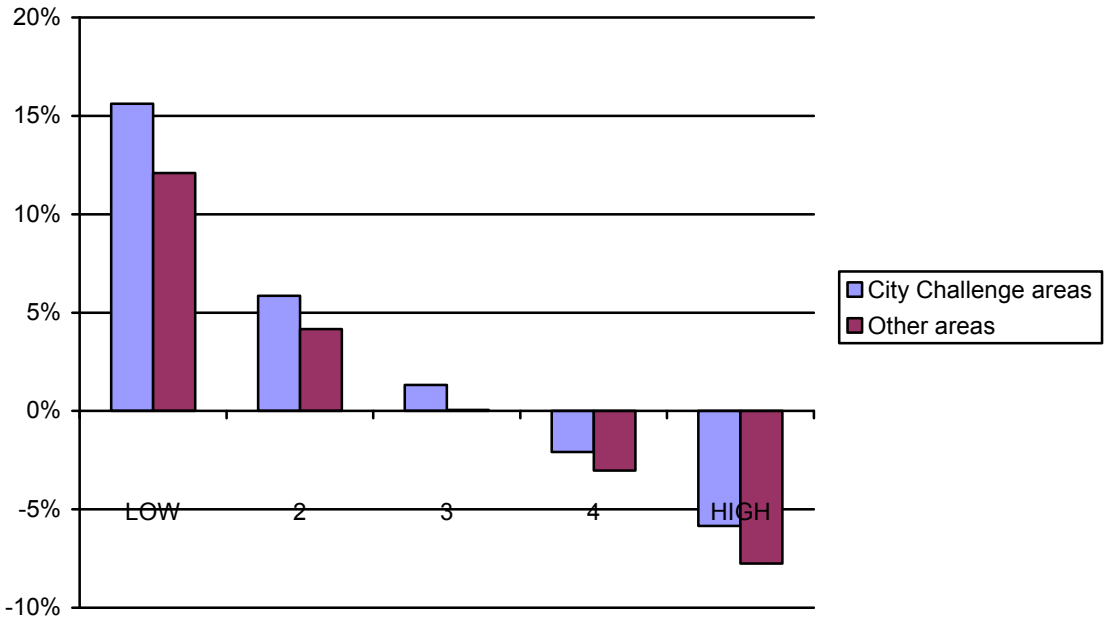
Figure 3.7: Percentage points improvement between 2008 and 2011 in primary pupils achieving the expected level



Source: National Pupil Database

As shown in Chapter 2, nationally, attainment increases most in the lowest attaining schools, and least in the highest attaining schools. Thus the greater improvement in City Challenge areas might simply reflect a higher percentage of low attaining schools at the start of the period. Using quintiles of primary school attainment, we have compared the change in attainment 2008-11 in City Challenge areas and the rest of the country (Figure 3.8). In City Challenge areas, the mean improvement for schools in quintiles 1-3 is significantly more than for non-City Challenge areas, and in the highest attaining two quintiles, the mean worsening in attainment is less than for schools elsewhere. Thus the fact that City Challenge areas have shown greater improvement than other areas does not simply reflect having a higher proportion of schools in low attaining quintiles.

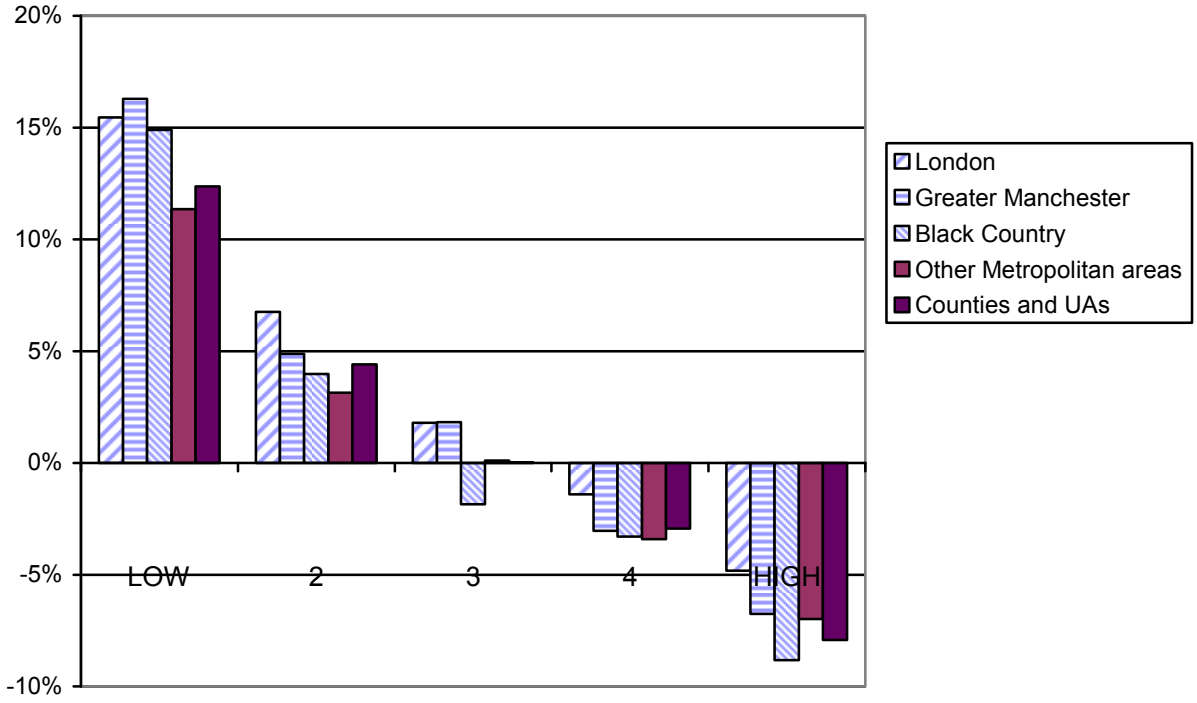
Figure 3.8: Mean change 2008-11 in school percentage of primary pupils achieving the expected level by performance quintile 2008: City Challenge areas and the rest of England



Source: Calculated from DfE 2011 School Performance Tables (DfE, 2012b), and DCSF 2008 Achievement and Attainment Tables (DCSF, 2009c)

However, the pattern was different in each City Challenge area. London primary schools performed significantly better than those not in City Challenge areas in every quintile; Greater Manchester in quintiles 1 (the lowest performing schools) and 3; and the Black Country only in quintile 1 (Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9: Mean change 2008-11 in school percentage of primary pupils achieving the expected level by performance quintile 2008: City Challenge areas compared with other Metropolitan areas, and Counties and Unitary Authorities

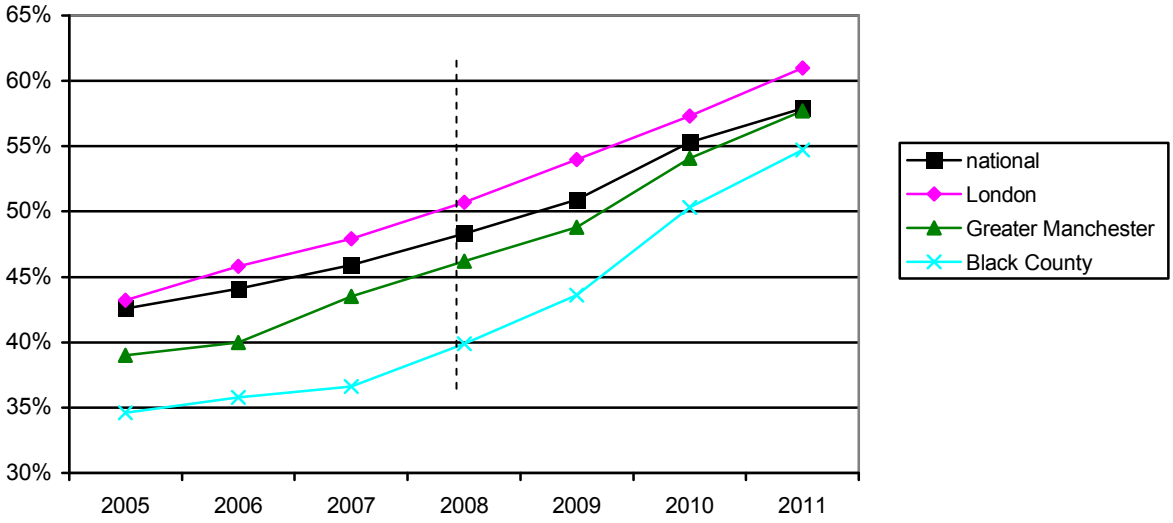


Source: Calculated from DfE 2011 School Performance Tables (DfE, 2012b), and DCSF 2008 Achievement and Attainment Tables (DCSF, 2009c)

Secondary

In contrast to the pattern in primary schools, secondary attainment has improved markedly between 2008 and 2011; nationally there was an increase of 9.3 percentage points in percentage of pupils achieving the expected level (5 A*-C GCSEs including English and mathematics). When City Challenge started in 2008, the percentage of London pupils reaching the expected level was already above the national figure. Figure 3.10 shows the steady increase in percentages achieving the expected level. The broken vertical line shows the start of City Challenge in April 2008.

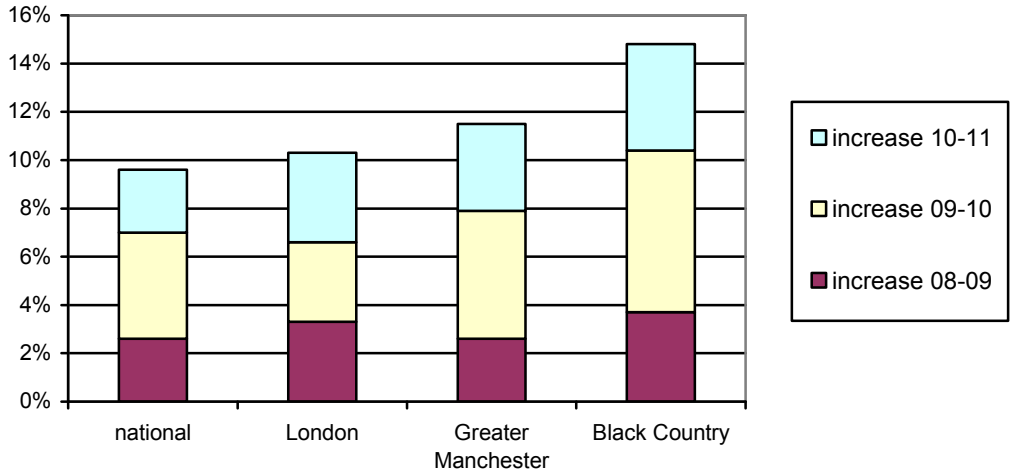
Figure 3.10: Percentage of pupils in maintained schools in City Challenge areas achieving the expected level, 2005-11



Source: National Pupil Database

In each Challenge area, improvement during this period has been greater than the national average, with the Black Country showing the largest increase in attainment (see Figure 3.11). The area showing the lowest increase is London – but as Figure 3.11 shows, London already had a higher percentage reaching the expected levels than the other areas.

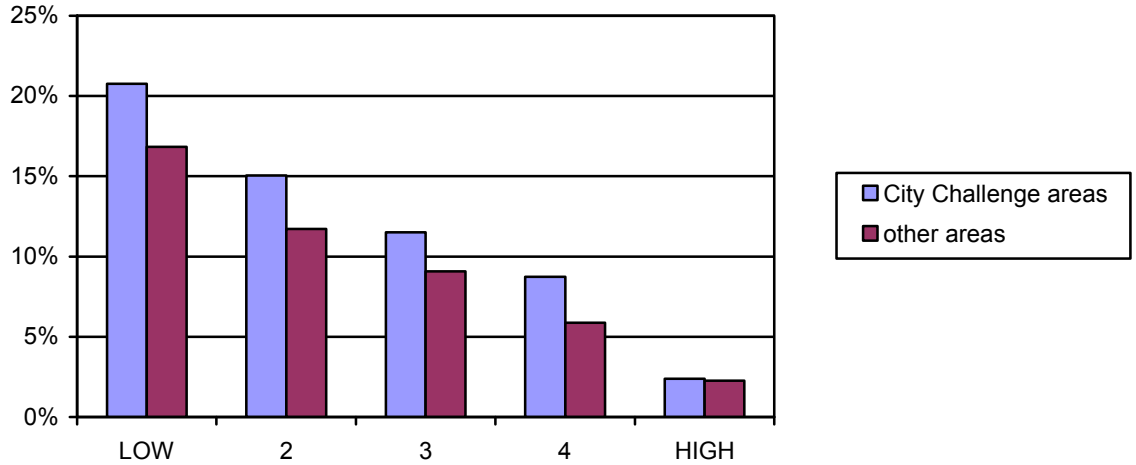
Figure 3.11: Increase in percentage of secondary pupils achieving the expected level, 2008-11, City Challenge areas and national figures



Source: National Pupil Database

We have conducted an analysis by quintile of secondary school performance in 2008 similar to that described in the previous section in relation to primary schools. Mean improvement in City Challenge areas was significantly greater than that in other areas in every quintile except quintile 5, the highest attaining schools (Figure 3.12).

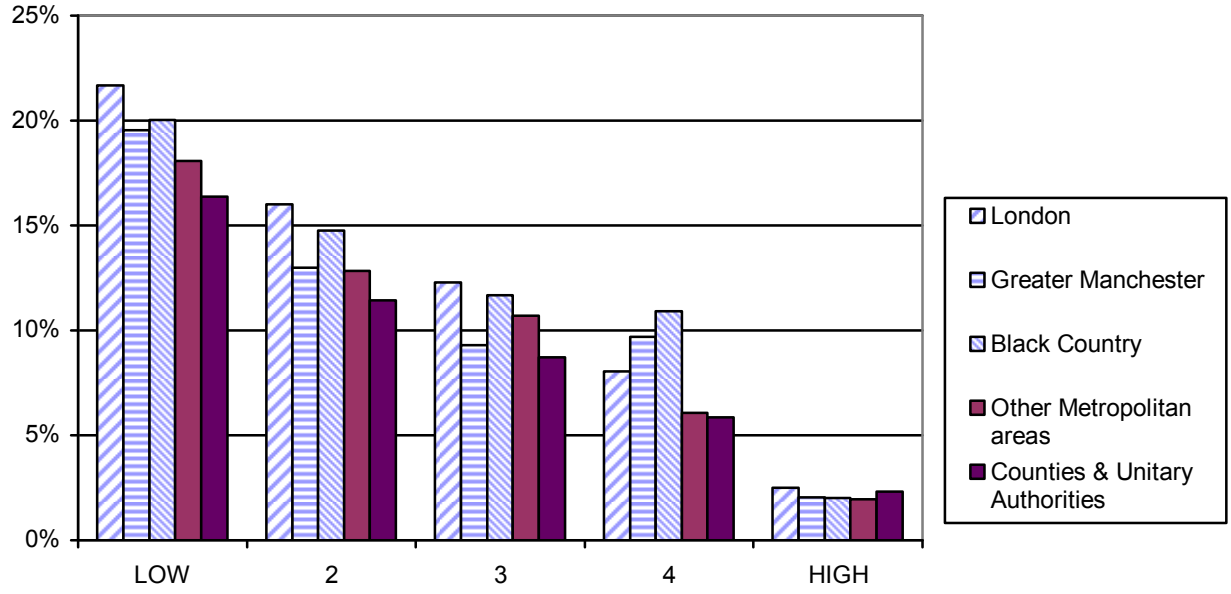
Figure 3.12: Mean change 2008-11 in school percentage of secondary pupils achieving the expected level by performance quintile 2008: City Challenge and the rest of England



Source: Calculated from DfE 2011 School Performance Tables (DfE, 2012b), and DCSF 2008 Achievement and Attainment Tables (DCSF, 2009c)

Figure 3.13 then shows the amount of improvement made in each City Challenge area and in other areas by quintile. While the improvement in schools in London and the Black Country was significantly more than that in other areas in quintiles 1-4, this was the case for Greater Manchester schools only in quintiles 1 and 4.

Figure 3.13: Mean change 2008-11 in school percentage of secondary pupils achieving the expected level by performance quintile 2008: City Challenge areas and the rest of England



Source: Calculated from DfE 2011 School Performance Tables (DfE, 2012b), and DCSF 2008 Achievement and Attainment Tables (DCSF, 2009c)

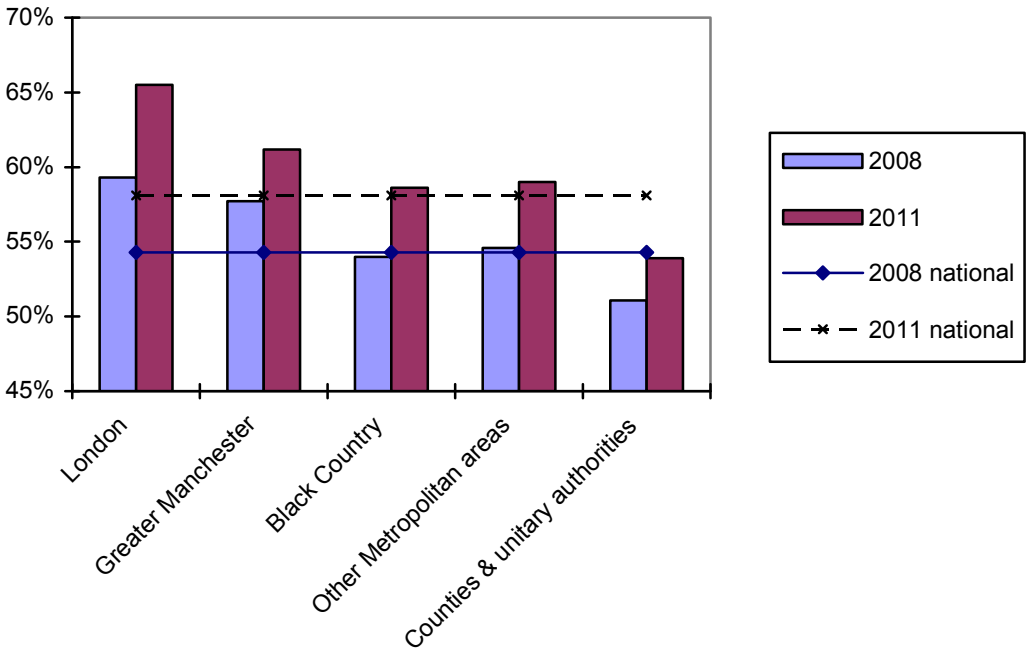
3.3.3 Attainment of disadvantaged pupils

City Challenge aimed to bring about significant improvements in educational outcomes for disadvantaged children. Both London and Greater Manchester pledged to reduce the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, and all three areas introduced specific interventions to bring this about. Here we focus on pupils eligible for FSM because this was the aspect of disadvantage that the most effort was devoted to.

Primary attainment gaps

Figure 3.14 compares attainment in each area in 2008 and 2011. The solid line across the chart shows the average national figure in 2008, and the broken one, in 2011. There is considerable variation across the country in the performance of primary FSM pupils. In 2008, in London and Greater Manchester a higher percentage of FSM pupils were reaching the expected level than was the case nationally, and in London this continued to improve more rapidly than in other areas (showing an increase of 7.7 per cent). The lowest percentage reaching the expected level, and the lowest improvement between 2008 and 2011, was in the Counties and Unitary Authorities, and the improvement between 2008 and 2011 was also below the national level.

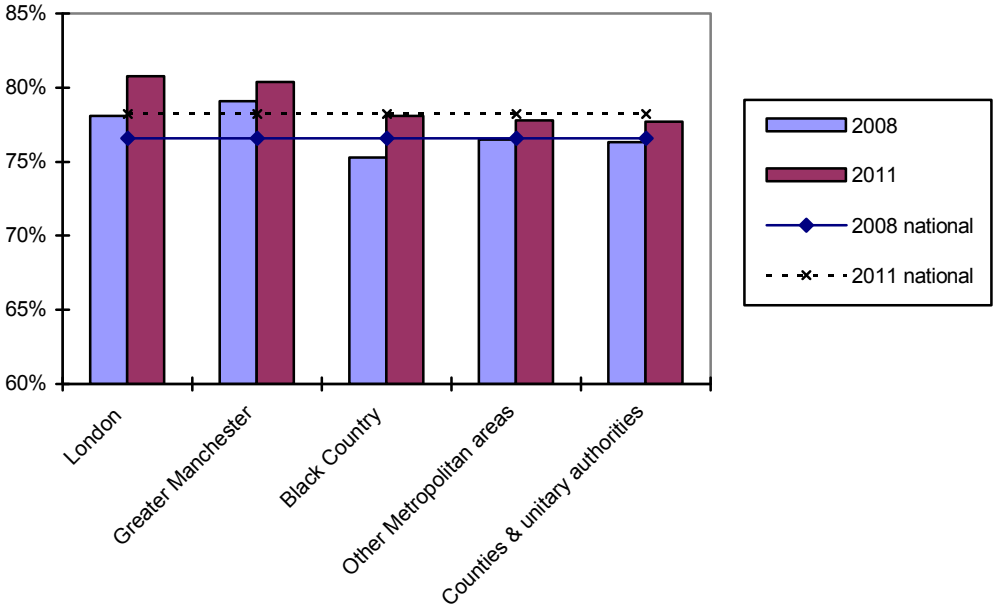
Figure 3.14: Percentage of FSM primary pupils achieving the expected level, 2008 and 2011, by area, compared with the national figures



Source: National Pupil Database

There was rather less regional variation in attainment of non-FSM primary pupils (Figure 3.15). In 2008, London and Greater Manchester a higher percentage of non-FSM pupils achieved the expected level than in other areas. The Black Country and London showed the most improvement.

Figure 3.15: Percentage of non FSM primary pupils achieving Level 4 in both English and mathematics, 2008 and 2011, by area, compared with the national figure



Source: National Pupil Database

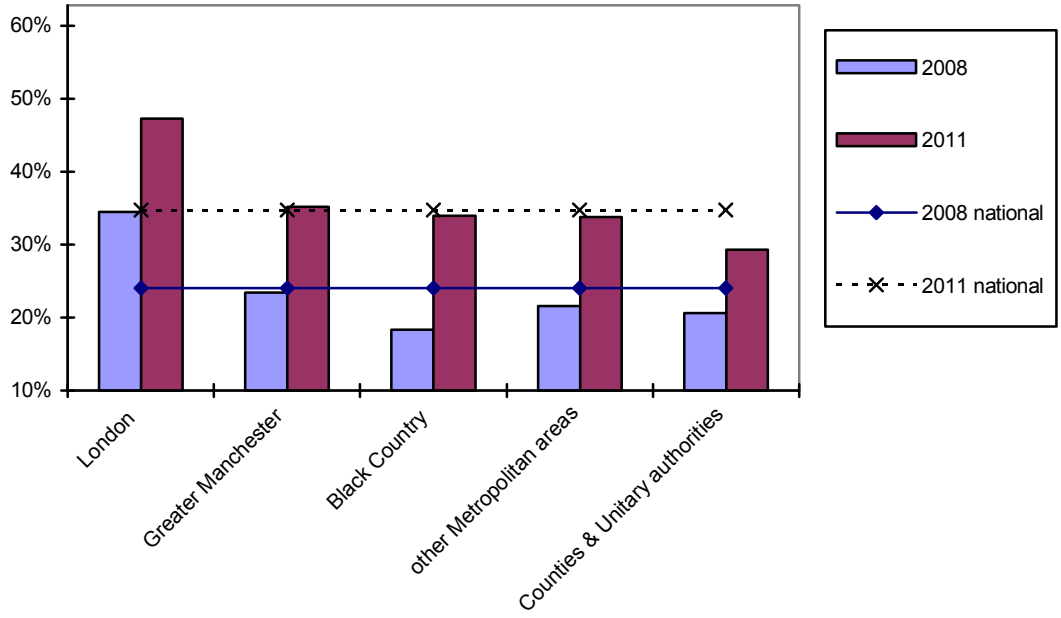
Thus while the attainment gap between those eligible for FSM and their peers was smallest and narrowed the most (by 3.5 per cent) in London, the gaps in Greater Manchester and the Black Country narrowed by less than the national figure (2.2 per cent).

Secondary attainment gaps

Figure 3.16 shows that in 2008, a higher percentage of London secondary FSM pupils reached the expected level than was the case in other areas. FSM attainment in all three City Challenge areas increased by more than the national figure between 2008 and 2011, with the Black Country making the greatest improvement (15.6 per cent) followed by Inner London (14.6 per cent). By 2011, the lowest attainment for FSM pupils was now in the Counties and Unitary Authorities.

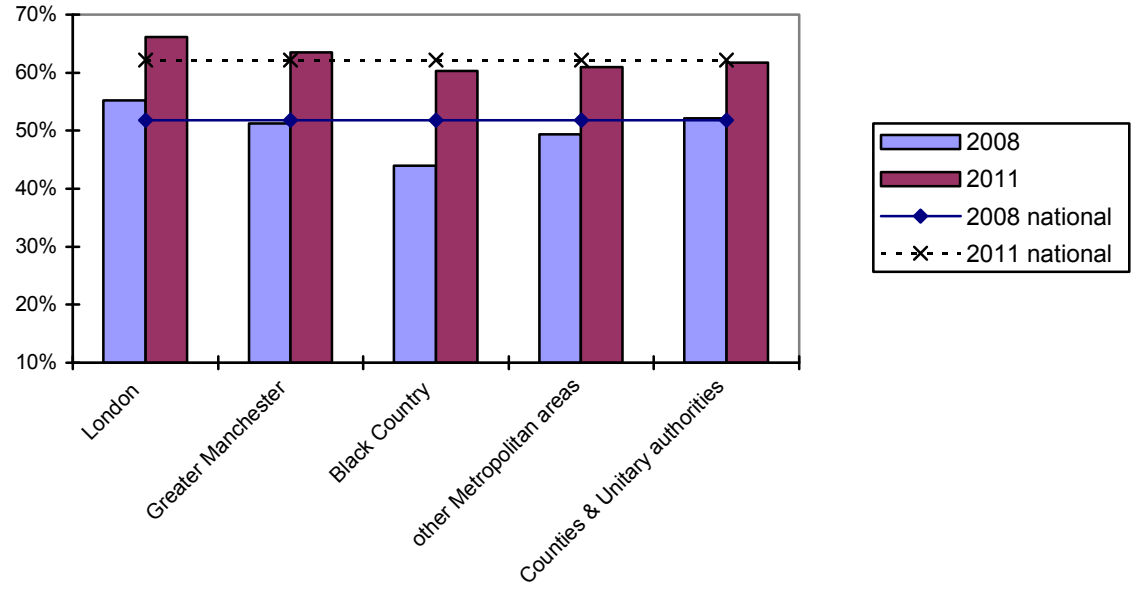
For non-FSM pupils, London again had the highest percentage reaching the expected level in 2008. The Black Country again showed the greatest improvement between 2008 and 2011 (16.4 per cent) though was still below the national figure (Figure 3.17).

Figure 3.16: Percentage of FSM secondary pupils achieving the expected level, 2008 and 2011, by area, compared with the national figure



Source: National Pupil Database

Figure 3.17: Percentage of non-FSM secondary pupils achieving the expected level, 2008 and 2011, by area, compared with the national e figure



Source: National Pupil Database

In 2008 the gap between FSM and non-FSM secondary pupils was narrowest in London (just over 20 per cent), and further narrowed by two per cent between 2008 and 2011 in London. This compares with a national narrowing of 0.3 per cent. The initial gap was wider in Greater Manchester and the Black Country (over 25 per cent), and did not narrow between 2008 and 2011. The largest gap was in Counties and Unitary Authorities (over 30 per cent) and further widened between 2008 and 2011. Thus the target of narrowing the gap between secondary pupils eligible for Free School Meals and those who were not eligible was achieved only in London.

3.3.4 Pupil absence

Pupil absence was a target only in Greater Manchester (which pledged to reduce it by at least five per cent). This target was achieved. It is worth noting that in all three areas, the secondary absence rate reduced by more than was the case in other parts of the country; in London and Greater Manchester, it was also lower than in areas not involved in City Challenge. Similarly, primary absence rates both London and Greater Manchester fell by more than other areas, and in 2011-12.

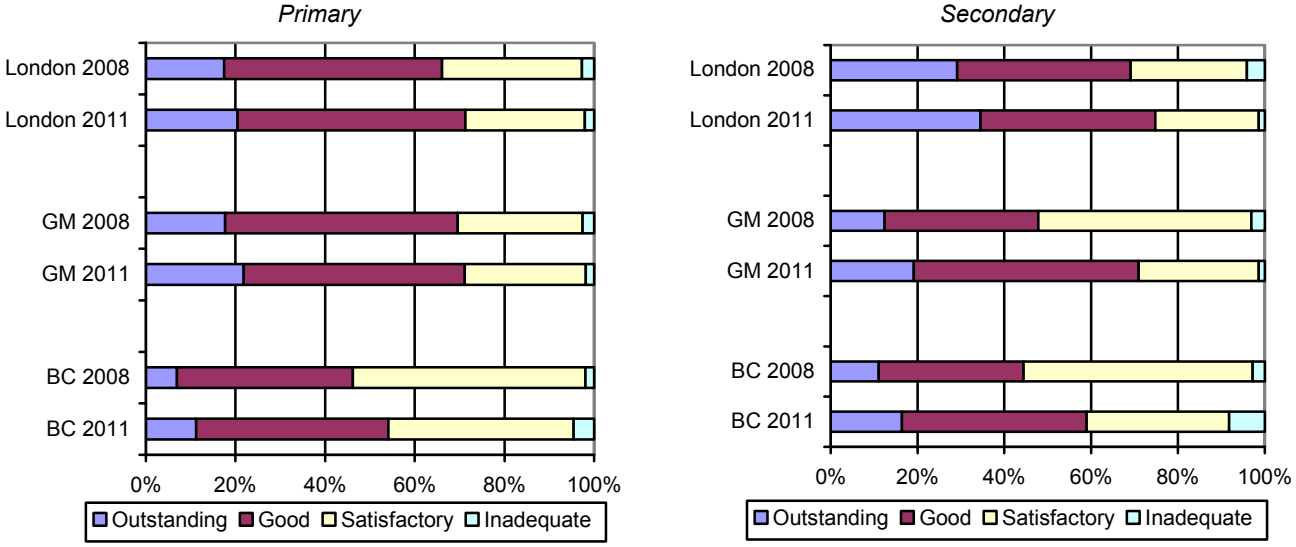
3.3.5 Ofsted judgements

City Challenge aimed to increase the number of Outstanding schools. Both London and Greater Manchester specified that each borough should have Outstanding secondary schools (two per borough in London and three per borough in Greater Manchester). Greater Manchester aimed to have no schools in Ofsted categories, and the Black Country to have none in special measures. In 2009 the Ofsted framework changed, raising the level required for each grade. Thus it became unlikely that the target could be met.

In all three areas, and in primary and secondary schools, the percentage of Good and Outstanding schools increased between 2008 and 2011. By April 2011 when City Challenge ended, in London, 26 out of 32 boroughs had two outstanding secondary schools, as did all four Black Country boroughs and six of the ten Greater Manchester boroughs.

In London and Greater Manchester the percentage of Inadequate schools decreased, but in the Black Country, it increased in both sectors (Figure 3.18).

Figure 3.18: Most recent Ofsted judgments for schools in CC areas, April 2008 and April 2011



Source: Ofsted *Inspection judgements for maintained schools*, 2005/6 – 2010/11

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3.3.6 Summary of Ofsted and attainment outcomes in City Challenge areas 2008-11

In this section we summarise the data above for each City Challenge area, reviewing whether the City Challenge targets were achieved (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Educational outcomes in London, Greater Manchester and the Black Country in relation to City Challenge objectives

	LONDON		*GREATER MANCHESTER*		*BLACK COUNTRY*	
	primary	*secondary*	primary	secondary	primary	secondary
Reduction in number of schools below the floor target greater than the national decrease	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Improvement in attainment greater than the national improvement	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Improvement of schools in each quintile of 2008 attainment greater in than in non-City Challenge areas	yes	yes, all except highest attaining quintile	only schools in lowest and middle quintiles	only schools in lowest quintile and quintile 4	only for schools in lowest quintile	yes, all except highest attaining quintile
Improvement in attainment of FSM pupils by more than the national figure	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes
Narrowed attainment gaps by more than the national reduction	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no
Increased percentage of Good and Outstanding schools	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Reduced proportion in Ofsted categories	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no

In London, all the overall targets were achieved.

In Greater Manchester, attainment increased considerably in the weakest schools, and the reduction in schools below the floor target was more than the national reduction. Ofsted outcomes also improved. As Table 3.1 shows, the improvement in attainment for higher performing schools were not significantly above that for schools outside City Challenge areas, and achievements in attainment for FSM pupils and attainment gaps were varied.

At the start of City Challenge, educational outcomes in the Black Country were considerably below those in the other two areas. The reduction in schools below floor target and overall improvement in attainment were well above the national figures. Secondary attainment for schools in all but the highest attaining quintile improved more than the national figures. However, only the primary schools in the lowest quintile of 2008 attainment improved more than the national average. Attainment of pupils eligible for FSM improved (in secondary schools, by considerably more than was the case in other areas) – but because attainment of those not eligible for FSM also improved, attainment gaps did not narrow. While the proportion of Good and Outstanding schools increased, so, unfortunately, did the proportion graded Inadequate.

3.4 To what extent was City Challenge responsible for any improvements?

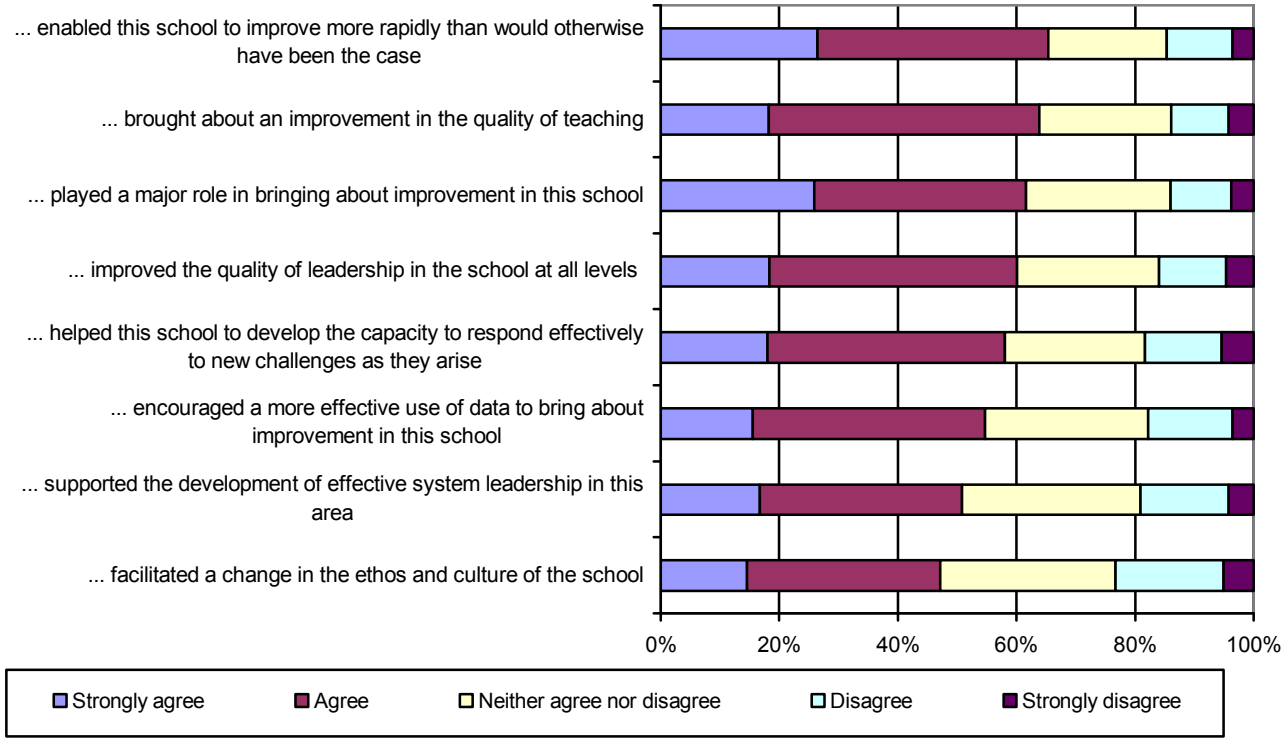
This section addresses the issue of causality through reviewing headteachers' perceptions of the impact City Challenge had in their own schools, and through considering alternative explanations for the greater improvement in some educational outcomes in City Challenges compared to the rest of the country.

3.4.1 Headteachers' perceptions

While headteachers' perceptions are important, they clearly only reflect the interventions that took place in their own schools. Thus they may not have been aware of all the ways in which City Challenge contributed to educational improvement; they do not reflect the input of City Challenge at a strategic level across each area, or at LA level.

The survey and interview data we have collected show the extent to which school staff and other stakeholders consider that City Challenge was responsible for improvement. Survey respondents were asked a number of general questions about the impact of City Challenge in their schools (Figure 3.19).

Figure 3.19: Extent to which headteachers agreed with general statements about the impact of school involvement in City Challenge (N = 426)



Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

Figure 3.19 omits not applicable, don't know and missing responses. There were about ten per cent of these for each statement. Most of the heads who gave such responses or did not respond were new to the school and had not been in post long enough to know.

For all but the last statement, over half the headteachers who responded agreed or strongly agreed. While it may seem disappointing that these figures were not higher, it is important to remember that some of the intervention were relatively small scale, and funded at low level. Where, for example, £3k was allocated for narrowing attainment gaps, and was used to fund individual tuition for Year 6 pupils, this may well have improves attainment outcomes, but was not expected to transform the school. Similarly, the funding for Families of Schools collaborative

activity was intended to increase school-to-school working, which has the potential to contribute to school improvement, but was certainly not expected to bring about dramatic change.

The highest level of agreement was for the statement 'City Challenge has enabled this school to improve more rapidly than would otherwise have been the case'. This was also strongly emphasised in additional comments written on the questionnaire, such as '*The improvement would not have been as rapid and sustained.'*

For every statement, significantly more London respondents indicated that they agreed, and a significantly higher percentage of headteachers from Greater Manchester indicated that they disagreed (for most questions, twice as many as from either London or the Black Country) (Table 3.2). Two factors may have contributed to this: first, the Challenge had worked for longer in London, and secondly, the programme in Greater Manchester, which achieved the least positive responses, had a large footprint, but some of the schools had very limited involvement. This was evidenced in written comments from some Greater Manchester headteachers:

> *I think the entire initiative has passed us by – a major opportunity lost.*
>
> *Little information. Lack of involvement. Feel it was a missed opportunity.*
>
> *We have had very limited involvement with City Challenge.*

The only significant difference between primary and secondary responses was that secondary headteachers were more likely to agree that City Challenge had 'encouraged a more effective use of data to bring about improvement in this school' (63% v 45%).

Table 3.2: Percentage of headteachers who agreed or strongly agreed with general statements about the impact of school involvement in City Challenge, by area and school phase

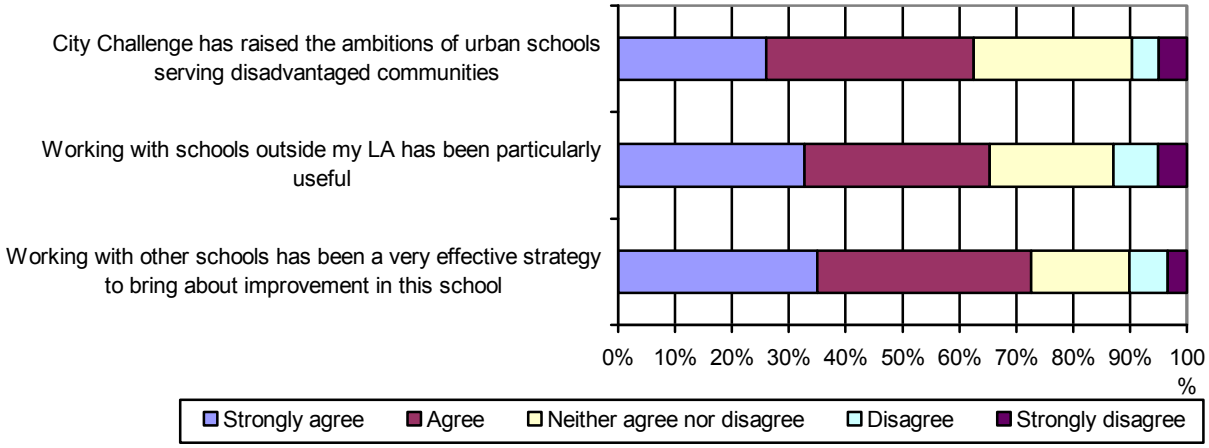
Involvement in City Challenge programmes has:	London %	Greater Manchester %	Black Country %	Primary %	Secondary %
... enabled this school to improve more rapidly than would otherwise have been the case	68	49	58	58	65
... brought about an improvement in the quality of teaching	66	50	60	62	53
... improved the quality of leadership in the school at all levels	63	46	51	54	56
... played a major role in bringing about improvement in this school	63	48	54	56	58
... helped this school to develop the capacity to respond effectively to new challenges	60	44	46	49	61
... encouraged a more effective use of data to bring about improvement in this school	57	41	51	45	63
... supported the development of effective system leadership in this area	52	38	40	42	54
... facilitated a change in the ethos and culture of the school	49	38	35	44	40
N	*208*	*153*	*65*	*304*	*120*

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

The survey also asked respondents how far they agreed with statements about working with other schools, and the general impact in urban schools. Responses are shown on Figure 3.20. This shows only those who did respond. However, for two of these statements, there was a high level of non-response; about a quarter of heads did not respond in relation to working with schools outside their own LA (presumably because they had not done so), and about a fifth did not respond to the

statement 'City Challenge has raised the ambition of urban schools serving disadvantaged communities'; many of these wrote comments arguing that their school already had high ambitions.

Figure 3.20: Extent to which headteachers agreed with general statements about working with other schools, and the impact of City Challenge in urban schools (N = 426)



Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

London headteachers were significantly more likely than those in other areas to agree with the first and third of these statements (Table 3.3). Primary heads were more likely than secondary to give no response to the last two statements; possibly primary schools were less likely to work with schools in other LAs, and because of their smaller size, there are more primary schools that do not serve disadvantaged communities.

Table 3.3: Percentage of headteachers who agreed or strongly agreed with general statements about working with other schools and general impact across schools

	London %	Greater Manchester %	Black Country %	Primary %	Secondary %
Working with other schools has been a very effective strategy to bring about improvement in this school	72	60	54	65	65
Working with schools outside my LA has been particularly useful	52	48	35	44	57
City Challenge has raised the ambitions of urban schools serving disadvantaged communities	60	41	38	43	68
N	*208*	*153*	*65*	*304*	*120*

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

Headteachers were invited to add general comments about City Challenge on the questionnaire, and some interviewees also commented on the Challenge as a whole. The vast majority spoke positively of their experiences, and saw City Challenge as very effective:

> *City Challenge needs to be held up as a world class solution to raising standards in urban school systems. Using strong, well matched parts of the system to work in appropriate contexts has not been achieved to this extent else where. (Greater Manchester secondary)*

The key characteristics of City Challenge of supporting schools and sharing practice were highlighted by a number of respondents:

> *City Challenge (through Black Country Challenge) has supported the school in focusing on priorities and has enabled the sharing of best practice with other schools. (Black Country secondary)*

Both those who received support and those who provided it indicated that this had been beneficial for their own schools:

> *I found working with City Challenge very inspirational because it gave me the opportunity to talk to headteachers from both Outstanding schools and schools in difficulty across London. This gave a fresh perspective on my own leadership skills and ensured I remained focused on raising standards. (London primary NLE)*

In particular, respondents highlighted the change in ethos and ambition which had taken place. This change was most often identified by respondents in London secondary schools, suggesting that the length of time the Challenge had been operating in London was a key factor in bringing about such a change in ethos:

> *I think it gave an identity and pride to London schools which gave us energy and confidence for improvement, especially once the improvements could be seen. Thank you Tim Brighouse! (London secondary)*

Thus more than half the headteachers responding to the survey indicated that City Challenge had contributed to a variety of aspects of improvement in their schools, and many also indicated that it had impacted on the ethos and ambition of schools across the areas.

3.4.2 Alternative explanations of the improvement in educational outcomes

In this section, we consider alternative explanations for the striking improvement in attainment in City Challenge areas. There are a number of reasons why educational outcomes might be better or improve more rapidly in one part of the country than another. Wyness (2011), discussing the 'London advantage', suggested a number of possible reasons, including:

- the characteristics of the pupils;
- the quality of teachers;
- the effect of school improvement initiatives or other policies designed to bring about school improvement.

We have shown that in City Challenge areas, in comparison to other parts of the country, a higher percentage of the pupils had characteristics associated with poor attainment. Since these numbers have increased, there is no reason to assume that changed pupil characteristics might be responsible for the improvement in attainment.

While teacher quality is undoubtedly a factor in school improvement, it is interesting to note that as far back as 2003, London FSM pupils performed better than their counterparts in other parts of England. Yet, at that time, London was just emerging from a period of teacher shortage, and very high numbers of supply teachers were used. It seems unlikely that this offered particular educational benefits to pupils. However, improved teacher quality is probably a factor in the improved attainment in Challenge areas by 2011. Prior to 2008, the London Challenge worked to retain experienced teachers in London, and attract better teachers, through initiatives such as the development of Key Worker home schemes for teachers, and the recruitment of teachers with good degrees and outstanding potential through Teach First. Since 2008, City Challenge has undoubtedly worked to improve the quality of teachers in all areas through the Improving and Outstanding Teacher Programmes, and use of coaching and consultants. Thus improved teacher quality should be seen as an outcome of the London Challenge and City Challenge rather than an alterative explanation for improved attainment.

Finally we consider the effect of school improvement initiatives or other policies designed to bring about school improvement. Many national policies, such as workforce remodelling, have aimed to improve standards, and National Strategies for school improvement were also developed. While these may be responsible for improved attainment, there is no reason why they would have

impacted more in the City Challenge areas than elsewhere. Within City Challenge areas, local initiatives to improve schools were brought together under the umbrella of the Challenge, which also worked to improve LA capacity and at a strategic level. We have been unable to identify any other initiatives specific to these areas outside City Challenge.

The balance of probability, therefore, is that City Challenge was responsible for the improved outcomes. The fact that London showed the most consistent improvements may be attributed to its longer involvement with the Challenge.

3.5 Summary: attainment and Ofsted outcomes in City Challenge areas

City Challenge areas have achieved the majority of their initial targets:

- The fall in number of schools below the floor target was greater in City Challenge areas than elsewhere, and the percentage of primary and secondary pupils reaching the expected level also improved more than elsewhere.
- In London, schools in each quintile of 2008 attainment improved significantly more between 2008 and 2011 than in areas outside City Challenge (with the exception of the highest quintile of secondary schools. In Greater Manchester and the Black Country, the picture was more patchy; schools in the lowest quintiles of attainment (and in some other quintiles) improved by significantly more than the those outside City Challenge areas.
- The attainment of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) increased by more than the national figure in all areas (with the exception of Greater Manchester primary pupils).
- The attainment gap between pupils eligible for FSM narrowed for London primary and secondary pupils, and Greater Manchester primary pupils.
- The proportion of Good and Outstanding schools increased in all three areas, despite the introduction of a more challenging Ofsted inspection framework. The number of schools in Ofsted categories decreased in London and Greater Manchester.

Clearly a great many factors contributed to this improvement, including national policies and strategies and the considerable efforts of headteachers and staff. However, these factors apply everywhere in the country. The most plausible explanation for the greater improvement in Challenge areas is that the City Challenge programme was responsible. The vast majority of stakeholders at all levels who contributed to this evaluation attributed the additional improvements that have been made in these areas to the work of City Challenge.

4 Reducing the number of underperforming schools: Keys to Success and Pathways to Achievement

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the intervention designed to provide bespoke support and practical assistance to improve underperforming schools. In London and Greater Manchester, this was called Keys to Success (KTS) (the original title devised by Tim Brighouse), while in the Black Country it was Pathways to Achievement (PTA). Stakeholders estimated that KTS/PTA used some 30 to 40 per cent of the total City Challenge budget in each area; we have therefore analysed this intervention in greater depth than the other key interventions. This intervention was based on the same principles across all three City Challenge areas, but in each area there were some differences between approaches in primary and secondary schools.

In London, KTS secondary schools had been a major part of the London Challenge since 2003. From 2008, London primary schools were also included together with primary and secondary schools in Greater Manchester and the Black Country, and a small number of special schools in Greater Manchester.

The specific objectives of the programme for underperforming schools were similar in all three areas. The list below is taken from *Lessons Learned from London: Secondary school improvement programmes* (London Challenge, 2010: 9). It shows that the emphasis was not simply on raising standards but on changing school cultures and embedding sustainable improvement:

- to break the link between deprivation and underachievement by narrowing the attainment gaps between groups of pupils and schools;
- to build a culture of achievement;
- to raise standards;
- to embed best practice in teaching and learning at all levels, aligning with the National Strategies;
- to strengthen schools' ethos and improve parents' and pupils' perceptions;
- to enhance leadership and the capacity of schools to sustain their own improvements.

A key characteristic of the programme was that it focused on support and challenge rather than blaming or shaming. The process of identifying schools for the programme was broadly similar for each area. Each year in September, schools causing concern were discussed at a triage meeting held between civil servants, the LA and City Challenge Advisors to decide which schools would receive support. The list was then reviewed on a regular basis. Schools that were below the floor target were generally included; for secondary schools this was automatic in that City Challenge took on the role of National Challenge in each City Challenge area. Those in Ofsted categories were also generally included (though this was not necessarily the case where failure related only to safeguarding). Some other schools were included because they were considered to need additional support. The meeting decided which category each school should fall into: intensive or improving. In all areas, schools were generally supported by KTS/PTA for two or three years; however, six London secondary schools were involved for all nine years of the London Challenge, while a few schools only had one year of support.

A Challenge Advisor was allocated to each KTS/PTA school. Their first task was to scope the issues and devise a bespoke programme of support to help the school improve both in terms of pupil outcomes and leadership and management. This process was carried out in consultation with the headteacher, and generally an LA officer or the School Improvement Partner (SIP). The

programme of support had to be agreed with the DfE before it was funded. All proposals submitted were reviewed against set criteria including value for money and sustainability.

The improvement package put into place varied across schools, in that it was bespoke. However, there were some common elements that were used in many schools:

- ongoing support and advice from the City Challenge advisor;
- support from an LLE or NLE, and in some cases from other staff in the NLE or LLE's school; in London primary schools the NLE/LLE played a larger role, and the advisor was less involved;
- support for teaching and learning, including professional development for staff which took place in Teaching Schools through the ITP and OTP, and support from consultants, particularly with mathematics and English;
- leadership training for middle and/or senior leaders;
- funding for additional staff or resources, or in some cases, for building work.

Structural solutions, including replacing the governors with an Interim Executive Board, forming a soft or hard Federation with a more successful school, or turning the school into a sponsored academy, were also used in a minority of cases.

The amount of funding going directly to the school varied with the specific needs; some schools were supported mainly through advisor time and the Leadership Strategies (e.g. through NLEs and LLEs, and the Improving and Outstanding Teacher Programmes), so received very little additional funding through the Standards Fund, whereas others received substantial sums. Stakeholders estimated that a London KTS primary might have a maximum allocation of about £30k, an 'intensive' secondary school about £55k-£60k, and an 'improving' secondary school about £35k-£40k per year.

Table 4.1 shows the number of schools in KTS/PTA in each area.

Table 4.1: Number of schools involved in Keys to Success / Pathways to Achievement 2008-11

	2003-8	2008-11			TOTAL
	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Special &PRU	
London	119	150	75		277
Greater Manchester		138	57	4	199
Black Country		73	42		115
	119	261	174	4	591

Source: Lists provided by DfE

Note: In London 119 secondary schools had been in KTS at some point between 2003 and 2008. Of these, 67 were also involved in KTS in 2008-11.

4.2 Attainment outcomes in KTS/PTA schools

4.2.1 Primary attainment in KTS/PTA schools

The percentage of pupils achieving the expected level (Level 4 in both English and mathematics) improved substantially more over the period 2008-11 in KTS/PTA schools than the national improvement (9.9 per cent compared with 1.5 per cent). The level of improvement was similar in each Challenge area (London, 10.9 per cent; Greater Manchester, 8.9 per cent; Black Country, 8.2 per cent).

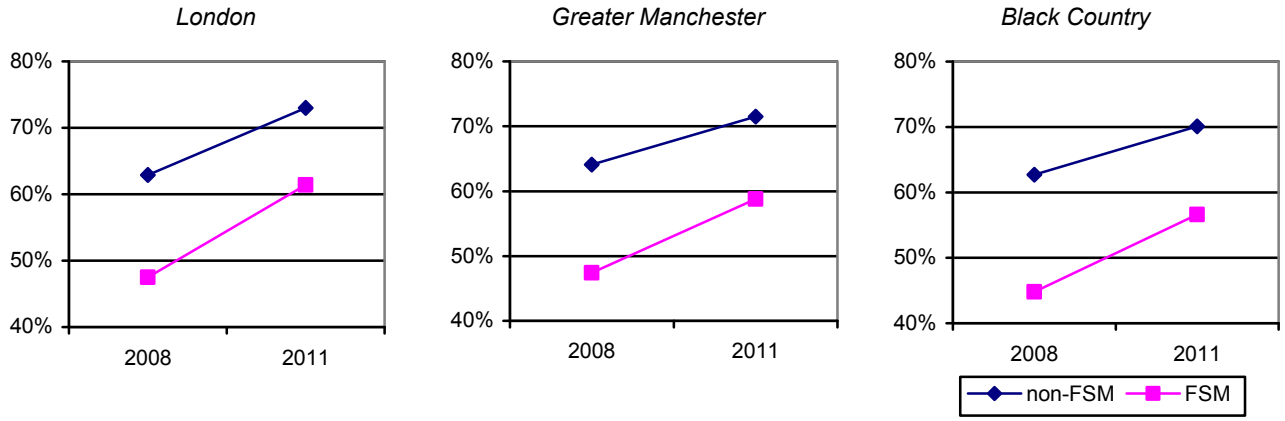
However, as Chapter 3 showed, schools with low initial attainment tend to improve more than those with higher attainment. The majority of the KTS/PTA schools were in the lowest quintile of attainment nationally in 2008. They showed significantly more improvement in attainment over the

three years than other schools in that quintile (an average of 16.3 percentage points compared to 12.1 percentage points for schools in the same quintile outside City Challenge areas).[11] This pattern was the same in each City Challenge area, though London KTS schools showed the greatest improvement.

We have also divided all primary schools into five groups depending on the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM. The majority of KTS/PTA schools were in the highest quintile of FSM eligibility. KTS/PTA schools in this quintile improved significantly more than other schools in the same quintile (16.8 per cent compared with 13.0 per cent in other schools).

The percentage of pupils eligible for FSM reaching the expected level in KTS/PTA schools improved more between 2008 and 2011 than in other schools in the same quintiles. It also improved more than the equivalent figure for non-FSM; consequently in all three Challenge areas, the attainment gap in KTS/PTA primary schools narrowed by around four per cent (Figure 4.1). This compares with a national 2.2 per cent decrease in the FSM attainment gap.

Figure 4.1: FSM attainment gaps: Percentage of primary pupils in KTS/PTA schools achieving the expected level, 2008 and 2011, by area and FSM eligibility



Source: National Pupil Database

4.2.2 Secondary attainment in KTS/PTA schools

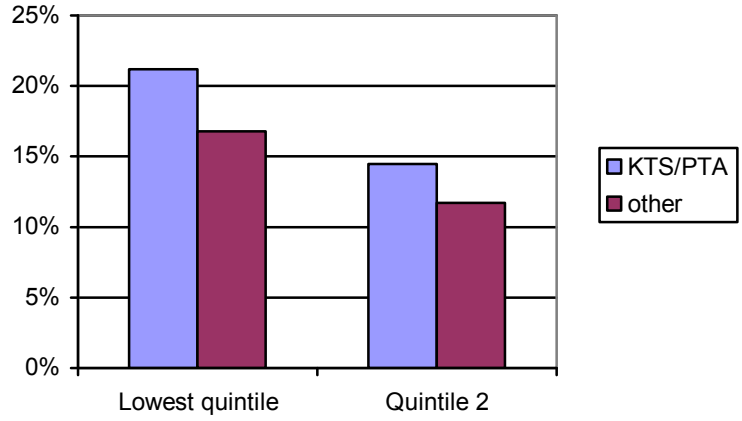
The increase in the percentage of secondary pupils reaching the expected level (five A*-C GCSEs including English and mathematics) was higher in KTS/PTA schools than the national figure (17.2 per cent compared with 10.1 per cent). Improvement was greater in London and the Black Country than it was in Greater Manchester (both around 18 per cent compared with 15.3 per cent).

The vast majority of KTS/PTA schools were in the lowest two quintiles of attainment in 2008. Between 2008 and 2011, the KTS/PTA schools in the lowest quintile improved by 21.2 per cent, while the other schools improved by 16.8 per cent (Figure 4.2). In the next lowest quintile, the patterns were similar. This is despite the fact that most secondary schools with low attainment would have been receiving extra support as National Challenge schools or from their LAs. The level of improvement in each quintile was very similar in each City Challenge area.[12]

[11] Differences in 2008 mean attainment might have been a factor in this (since loser attaining schools show greater improvement). However, there was less than one percentage point difference between the two groups. Moreover, the KTS/PTA schools had a very much higher proportion of pupils eligible for FSM, which is normally associated with lower attainment.

[12] The KTS/PTA schools' 2008 attainment was two per cent higher than that of other schools in the lowest quintile; hence one might have expected them to improve slightly less than other schools. KTS/PTA schools also had a higher proportion of pupils eligible for FSM.

Figure 4.2: Mean improvement 2008-11 in percentage of pupils achieving the expected level: KTS/PTA schools compared with schools in the same quintiles not in City Challenge areas



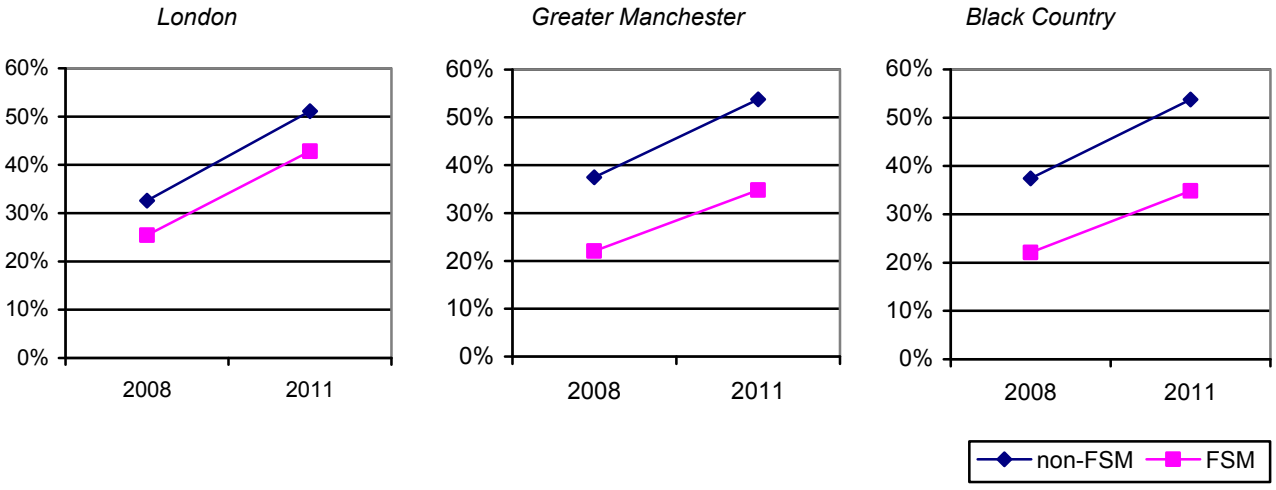
Source: Calculated from DfE 2011 School Performance Tables (DfE, 2012b), and DCSF 2008 Achievement and Attainment Tables (DCSF, 2009c)

Thus far we have only included the London schools that were supported by KTS during the years 2008-2011. The pattern of improvement was very similar for the secondary schools that had been in KTS during the London Challenge 2003-8 but that were no longer supported during City Challenge 2008-11; they continued to improve at a significantly faster rate than other schools in the same quintiles even when they were no longer supported.

As we did with primary schools, we have divided secondary schools into five groups by the percentage of pupils eligible for FSM, and have therefore compared the improvement made between 2008 and 2011 in KTS/PTA schools in the highest quintile of FSM (i.e. the vast majority of KTS/PTA schools) with other schools in that quintile. The KTS/PTA schools improved significantly more (16.8 per cent compared with 13.0 per cent in other schools).

In contrast to the primary schools, the increase in attainment in KTS/PTA schools in each area was slightly greater for non-FSM than for FSM pupils; thus FSM attainment gaps for pupils in KTS/PTA secondary schools widened (Figure 4.3). London had the smallest gap at the outset (7.2 per cent) and it widened by 1.1 per cent; in Greater Manchester the gap was 15.4 per cent, and widened by 3.6 per cent. The Black Country had the widest gap (18.2 per cent), and this widened by 2.6 per cent.

Figure 4.3: Percentage of secondary pupils in KTS/PTA schools achieving the expected level, 2008 and 2011, by area and FSM eligibility



Source: National Pupil Database

4.2.3 Regression based analysis of KTS impacts

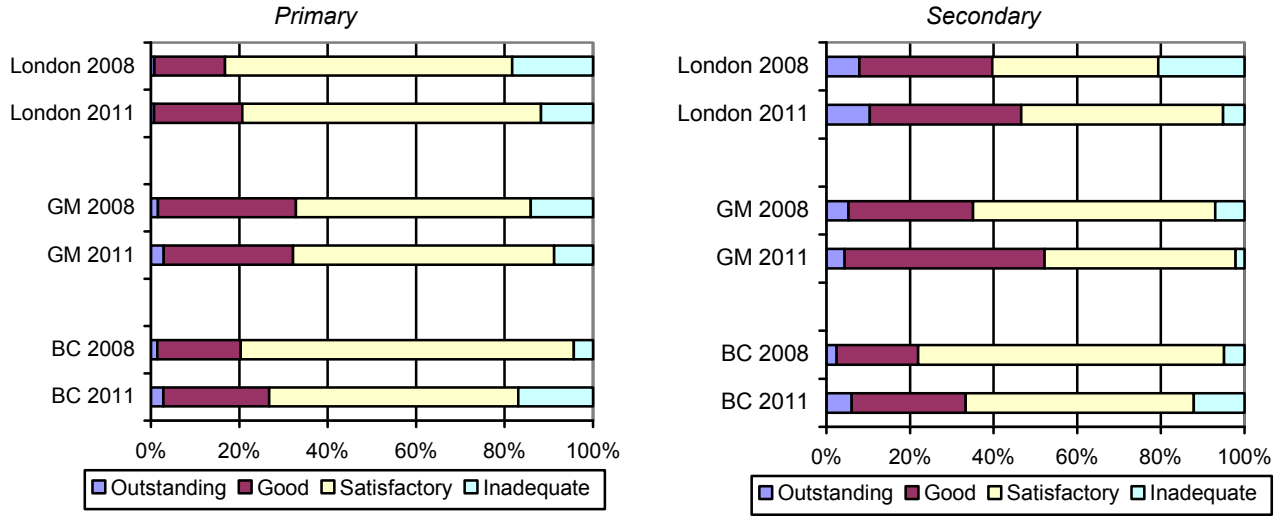
This analysis can be found in full in Appendix C. A summary is presented here. The intention of the analysis was to identify an overall indication of impact for KTS/PTA to complement the detailed analysis of change associated with KTS/PTA in the previous section. The analysis aimed to identify the impact of KTS/PTA interventions on secondary schools during the period 2003-2011 (i.e. including schools in the London Challenge 2003-8), and on primary schools during the period 2008-2011. As outcomes of interest for secondary schools, we used the percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSEs at KS4, and for primary schools, the average percentage of pupils (across Maths and English) attaining Level 4 at KS2.

After appraisal of other potential approaches and testing their appropriateness to the data, we use a Lagged Dependent Variable model of within-year treatment effects, using observations across all relevant years. The treatment effects for all schools are estimated relative to the results a KTS school would be expected to have, given their preceding year's results. This accounts for differential levels of regression to the mean across the distribution of results and also captures some of the effects of other factors affecting performance such as local deprivation. The treatment effects are expressed relative to the equivalent pre-treatment expectations for KTS/PTA schools.

Applying this approach, we find a positive effect for KTS/PTA intervention in both primary and secondary contexts. Broadly speaking, before schools entered KTS/PTA, they were making less headway year-on-year than other schools in equivalent parts of the results distribution. However, once the intervention starts this disparity in year-on-year progress is reduced or removed and the KTS/PTA schools then tend to do as well in terms of improving year on year, as other schools with similar prior results. The estimates of impacts relative to previous performance are broadly consistent with analysis of change elsewhere in the report, at approximately a two per cent improvement in year-on-year change relative to typical progress for schools with equivalent prior results on targets for GCSE attainment and approximately five per cent (per year) in relation to KS2 targets (over the shorter time measurement period). For an intervention designed to help struggling schools, this is a finding which is of direction and scale consistent with the idea that the intervention has had a positive effect.

4.3 Ofsted judgements in KTS/PTA schools

Figure 4.4: Most recent Ofsted grades in 2008 and 2011 for schools in KTS/PTA 2008-11



Source: Ofsted *Inspection judgements for maintained schools*, 2005/6 – 2010/11

Ofsted grades are another way of assessing the degree of improvement in KTS/PTA schools – though as the Ofsted framework has changed, judgements made before September 2009 are not strictly comparable with later judgements. Figure 4.4 compares the grades from the most recent inspection before the start of City Challenge with the latest grades in April 2011 when the Challenge ended. In London and Greater Manchester, the percentage of schools graded Inadequate decreased, but in the Black Country it increased. In all three areas the percentage of Good and Outstanding secondary schools increased, and this was also the case for primary schools in London and the Black Country.

4.4 Impact of involvement KTS/PTA reported in the survey

In this section we turn to the data collected during the evaluation to review the extent to which headteachers of schools involved in KTS/PTA considered that their schools had improved, and to what extent they indicated that their involvement in KTS/PTA had had a positive impact.

All survey respondents were asked to indicate whether there had been a considerable improvement, a slight improvement, no change or a slight worsening in pupil attainment, attendance, behaviour and quality of teaching in the last three years. Over 92 per cent of respondents indicated that quality of teaching and of attainment had improved (slightly or considerably), and more than three-quarters that attendance and behaviour had improved. The main differences between groups of respondents were in whether they indicated a 'considerable' or a 'slight' improvement.

Those from KTS/PTA schools were significantly more likely than those in other City Challenge schools to report a considerable improvement in quality of teaching and in pupil attainment (Table 4.2). Table 4.2 also shows that secondary KTS/PTA respondents were significantly more likely than primary to report a considerable improvement in attainment (which is unsurprising, in that secondary attainment has generally improved far more than primary). They were also significantly more likely to report a considerable improvement in attendance. Primary respondents were significantly more likely to report no change in pupil behaviour.

Table 4.2: Percentage of survey respondents indicating that there had been a considerable improvement in specified aspects of the school, KTS/PTA compared with others

To what extent has your school improved in the following areas?	KTS/PTA[13] schools %	other schools %	KTS/PTA primary %	KTS/PTA secondary %
Quality of teaching	72	58	72	72
Pupil attainment	68	44	58	90
Pupil behaviour	57	46	58	56
Pupil attendance	40	33	37	48
N	*163*	*262*	*113*	*50*

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

Those from KTS/PTA schools were significantly more likely than those from other schools to agree that involvement in City Challenge programmes had brought about a range of improvement in their schools (see Table 4.3). (In each case, a higher percentage of those in KTS strongly agreed and a higher percentage agreed.) There were no significant differences between primary and secondary

[13] KTS/PTA schools included here are those which both appeared on DfE lists *and* indicated on the survey that they had taken part in the programme. In some schools where the leadership had changed, headteachers were unaware that the school had been part of the programme.

responses among the KTS/PTA schools. Nor were there any significant differences by area (though in every case, a higher proportion of London headteachers indicated that they agreed).

Table 4.3: Percentage of survey respondents indicating that they strongly agreed or agreed that involvement in City Challenge had brought about a range of improvements in their schools, KTS/PTA compared with other schools

Involvement in City Challenge programmes has:	KTS/PTA schools %	other schools %
... enabled the school to improve more rapidly than would otherwise have been the case	75	50
... brought about an improvement in the quality of teaching	70	52
... played a major role in bringing about improvement in this school	67	50
... improved the quality of leadership at all levels in the school	65	48
... helped this school to develop the capacity to respond effectively to new challenges as they arise	60	47
... encouraged a more effective use of data to bring about improvement in this school	59	44
... facilitated a change in the ethos and culture of the school	51	38
N	*166*	*265*

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

Many headteachers commented in the survey and in interview that KTS/PTA had had a positive impact on their schools. For example, one Greater Manchester primary headteacher said, *'City Challenge has ensured we served our school community rather than failed it.*'

4.5 What aspects of KTS/PTA were effective, and why?

This section reviews the aspects of KTS/PTA that were identified as effective by interviewees and in the survey, and considers what made them effective (or less effective).

4.5.1 Expert support and advice

A key innovation was the creation of specific groups whose role was to support KTS/PTA schools: City Challenge Advisors and National and Local Leaders of Education. Challenge advisors were directly employed by the DfE; they worked in specific schools and LAs, and met regularly as a group to discuss strategies. In total 38 advisors were employed on a part-time basis across the three Challenge areas (though this number reduced in the final year).

The role of National Leader of Education (NLE) was created by the National College; the intention was that very effective headteachers would take on a role in supporting a school that was in challenging circumstances. As part of City Challenge, the role of Local Leader of Education (LLE) was also created. There were over 300 NLEs and LLEs across the three areas. Many of them worked with KTS/PTA schools, but they also worked on a number of other programmes.

All the KTS / PTA schools had Challenge advisors who assessed the school and brokered a bespoke programme of support. Many were also supported by an NLE or LLE[14]. Additionally, all the schools had support from their LA, and all had School Improvement Partners (SIP)[15].

[14] In London KTS primary schools, advisor visits were less frequent than in secondary, and the NLE/LLE played a more significant role.

[15] In the Black Country, SIPs were funded to take on a larger role in the improving PTA schools; Challenge advisors only worked in intensive schools.

On the survey, headteachers were asked to indicate to what extent various external people had contributed to school improvement, using a scale of major contribution, minor contribution, minimal contribution or not applicable. Table 4.4 shows the percentage of those who had received support from each source who considered that the support had made a major contribution to the school's improvement.

Table 4.4: Percentage indicating that listed people have made a major contribution to their school's improvement: KTS/PTA schools only (N = 168)

	London %	GM %	BC %
Headteacher(s) and/or staff from other schools	51	37	39
Your School Improvement Partner	36	48	49
A City Challenge advisor	55	35	8
LA officers	34	29	35
Other consultants	28	24	19

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

Note that the percentages given are of those who had received some support from that source. Not applicable responses have been excluded from the analysis.

While the percentages of KTS/PTA headteachers indicating that support from each of the people listed had made a major contribution to the school's improvement are relatively low, this is because each KTS/PTA school had a different pattern of support; in some schools the Challenge advisor was the main person involved but in others it was the NLE/LLE or the SIP. In particular, the very low rating for Challenge advisors in the Black Country partly reflects their more limited role there, and the greater use of SIPs. However, it also seems to reflect a wider perception that City Challenge was a London programme imposed on the Black Country, rather than an initiative with strong local ownership and support. In relation to the Challenge advisors, this was evident, for example, in a headteacher interview in which the '*DfE background'* of the advisor was negatively compared with the Black Country school background of the SIP.

Some 92 per cent of the London KTS respondents indicated that at least one of the people listed on Table 4.4 had made a major contribution to their school's improvement, as did 82 per cent in Greater Manchester, but only 65 per cent in the Black Country.

The case study data gave clear indications of factors that headteachers considered made advisors, NLEs/LLEs, SIPs and other LA officers effective:

- having relevant experience and expertise in schools with the same characteristics as the supported school;
- bringing wider perspectives, and not having preconceptions about the school;
- being approachable and responsive;
- being a person that the head could 'get on' with;
- visiting the school frequently;
- getting to know the school and staff.

It was also considered important that the various experts working with a school had distinctive and complementary roles, and that they liaised effectively with each other. Each expert role is discussed in turn.

City Challenge advisors

Headteachers argued that effective advisors had relevant experience and expertise, understood the context, and could work '*from a real position of knowledge'*. Conversely, in the minority of case

study schools where advisors were *not* perceived as effective, this tended to be explained in terms of their lack of relevant experience or understanding (for example, having limited or no experience in urban deprived schools. Personal characteristics of advisors such as being supportive, clear-thinking and honest were highly regarded by headteachers.

The case study data showed assessments of the effectiveness of the advisors related partly to their lack of previous involvement with the school, and their wider perspectives. An effective advisor was able to '*reflect on the bigger picture'* or to view the school with fresh eyes, because in comparison to the SIP, they were '*a step further away*'*.* This distancing, together with the reputation of City Challenge, was often seen as useful in representing the school's needs to the LA.

Headteachers valued advisors who were approachable and responsive and who came into the school frequently; a London primary headteacher commented that her advisor was '*always at the end of the phone, end of the email'* and that he would '*pop down'* if she needed him. Heads also talked very positively about advisors who got to know the school and staff, and were able to offer an informed view of strengths and weaknesses. They commented on the value of, for example, conducting joint lesson observations, which gave a '*professional validation'* to their own assessments. This had proved particularly useful in convincing teachers and governors, and in some cases LA staff, that there were real problems that needed to be addressed. A London primary head explained that the advisor went round the whole school and then fed back to the teachers; this was a helpful reinforcement of the head's own feedback to teachers: '*It's not just me saying it, he is saying it as well.'* In contrast, where advisors did not get to know the school and staff, headteachers noted that this had made them less effective: '*He hasn't gone to see the classrooms, he hasn't seen the school in action and I think that's a bit of a gap really.*'

National and Local Leaders of Education

The evaluation of the Leadership Strategies (Rudd et al., 2011) found that NLE/LLE support was seen as effective:

- when the supported schools and the NLE/LLE's schools faced similar challenges;
- when the NLE/LLE came from a different LA and therefore had no preconceptions about the supported school;
- when the NLE/LLE gave advice and coaching but did not undermine the supported head or tell them what to do;
- when the advice was tailored to the needs of the supported school.

Rudd et al. noted that NLE/LLE support was identified as particularly useful because it came from serving headteachers who were dealing with similar challenges to the head of the supported school on a daily basis. This had the added advantage that they could also draw on their school staff to provide support.

The data collected in the City Challenge evaluation supported all these points. However, in two of the case study schools, the NLE/LLE was retired, rather than being a current headteacher. In each case, this was identified as very useful because they were able to spend very much more time in the school and to offer hands-on support in classrooms as well as working with the headteacher, but it obviously had the disadvantage that they were not able to involve their staff in offering support.

Interviewees also emphasised the importance of 'getting on with' the NLE or LLE. A London primary headteacher commented:

> *Personality-wise we got on very well ... there's nothing that I wouldn't discuss with him, and I feel very comfortable just ringing up and saying, mate, I've got an issue with this. I don't worry and think I will look stupid or anything ... I just ring him up and say, 'I know you're going to laugh, but can you help?'*

Some reported that NLE/LLE initially allocated had been changed because of a personality clash.

There seemed to be a considerable variation in what the NLEs and LLEs actually did, and how this related to the Challenge advisor and SIP roles. Where the role of the NLE/LLE was not clearly defined and distinct from the roles of others, supported heads commented that they had experienced little benefit.

School Improvement Partners and other LA officers

School Improvement Partners (SIPs) were individuals employed in all LAs nationally to challenge and support school leaders as they assess how well their schools are performing, plan for the future and identify the support their school needs. Thus every school had a SIP. SIPs normally visited once a term to review the school's self-evaluation, targets and improvement priorities and actions. They were generally either experienced headteachers or LA officers.

City Challenge advisors generally liaised with the SIP and/or a school improvement officer from the LA, in drawing up action plans for KTS schools. In the Black Country, SIPs (rather than advisors) led the work in 'improving' PTA schools; this additional time was funded by City Challenge.

In the majority of the case study KTS/PTA schools, the role of SIP was taken by an LA officer because the school had been identified as needing support, and they had the flexibility to make more frequent visits. Thus the extent to which headteachers considered their SIPs to have contributed to school improvement varied enormously. In a small minority of case study schools, the LA, through the SIP, was working effectively to improve the school, and so the Challenge advisor played a more low-key role, because there was no point in duplicating support. However, City Challenge funding and the additional back-up of the advisor was identified as very useful by both SIPs and headteachers in such cases. In contrast, where the SIP was external to the LA and was employed on the basis of making termly visits to the school, they tended to have limited involvement with City Challenge.

Involvement of different stakeholders

Where schools had multiple individuals supporting them, they appreciated it when the various roles were clearly defined, with individuals playing the roles of inspector, coach, mentor, supporter, depending on the composition of the team and the needs of the school. This resulted in different ways of relating to each:

> *With a SIP, they are a critical friend, but you always have to be professional. With [the NLE] it was, get the kettle on, right, how are you feeling, what's going on, and off the record chat about everything, and that was a different support mechanism entirely, very useful. (London secondary school)*

With so many different stakeholders involved, there was clearly potential for misunderstandings arising from lack of communication. In a number of the case study schools it was reported that the LA had, at least initially, been somewhat suspicious or concerned about the City Challenge intervention. It was therefore important that effective communication channels were developed and maintained. This was one of the roles of the Challenge advisors. Key stakeholders reported that the aim was for the advisors to bring together all relevant parties, in order to ensure '*joined up thinking'* between advisor, local authority, governors, diocesan officers (where relevant) and other stakeholders. The School Improvement Partnership Board or equivalent regular monitoring meeting, which usually took place termly, was designed to be a forum for doing this. The survey suggests that less than a quarter of the KTS/PTA schools responding had Partnership Boards, and of these, only a fifth found them effective. Clearly this may be partly a matter of terminology; equivalent meetings may have been held but not identified by this title.

Of the case study KTS/PTA schools, only about half reported having Partnership Boards. In many cases they were said to be helpful, because they brought together all the relevant stakeholders, and ensured that all were informed about the ongoing school improvement activities. They also

acted as a forum for formal monitoring of progress against the action plan. However, interviews showed that the Partnership Boards in themselves were not necessarily effective in producing '*joined up thinking'*. In one case study school, the regular meetings of the Partnership Board did little to ease the tensions that existed between the City Challenge and the LA or to ensure that they worked effectively together. The LA argued that they were *'not consulted or negotiated with'* from the outset, and asserted that the advisor worked in the school with '*very little communication or cooperation whatsoever*'.

In some of the schools where all parties did work effectively together, they met more frequently than the termly meeting described above; in one school, meetings were held every four or five weeks *'just to make sure that everyone was on track and that the additional support that was required from the local authority was streamlined and focused on the right things.'*

In some other KTS/PTA schools where the relationship with the LA worked well, Partnership Boards were not set up, but the advisor found other ways of ensuring that regular reviews were held with LA officers, for example, by attending the LA's own regular review meetings. One advisor explained, *'it's all about marking out ways of working with people which keep the doors open.'*

In a number of case study schools, interviewees talked about occasions when the advisor had conducted joint observations in the school with the SIP or other key LA officers. This practice seemed to be particularly helpful in ensuring that there was a shared view of the school's needs.

In cases where all the key stakeholders were in regular communication, and developed a shared view of the school and the steps to be taken to improve it, there were a number of benefits. For example, LA resources and expertise formed a coherent part of the overall improvement plan; issues about the capability or appropriateness of specific members of staff were more rapidly resolved, and LA officers said that they had learned from working with the CC advisors. However, in a small minority of the case study schools the LA and the advisor appeared to work entirely separately, sometimes offering contradictory advice. In some instances, there were delays in resolving staffing issues because the LA had not been involved in discussions about the needs for action.

Governors were often involved in Partnership Board meetings. In some schools other meetings were used to ensure governors involvement; for example, in a Black Country secondary school, a regular governors' sub-committee meeting focused in raising attainment, and the NLE who worked with the school attended these, seeing them as a key way of getting the governors fully involved. However, in several case study schools, it appeared that governors had not been fully involved in all the discussions, and/or that they did not accept that the school needed urgent improvement. In one London primary school, the advisor and LLE had made sustained efforts to work with the Chair of the governing body, and created opportunities for governors to visit an Outstanding school and to meet governors there.

4.5.2 A bespoke programme of support

The programmes of support drawn up by advisors were considered to be effective when:

- the headteacher was fully involved in designing it;
- it was closely tailored to meet the needs of the school.

A central characteristic of KTS/PTA was that the advisor conducted an initial audit, drew up an action plan, and brokered and commissioned support based on the school's needs, performance and priorities. This meant that the support was tailored to the needs of the school, and varied considerably between schools. In that the action plan and programme of support were determined in discussion with the head, many schools reported that they felt a sense of ownership and control. Headteachers commented on the survey:

City Challenge responded to issues that we had already identified as a school and additional funding enabled us to action some for our plans. In this way it supported our improvement but did not give us new focus/drive as this was already present. (Black Country Primary)

A secondary head said, '*You felt you were in control all the way through the process with them working alongside you, rather than doing it to you*.' She explained that the Challenge advisor had made it clear that she should tell him if she felt that the support package was not appropriate or was not working well: *'if it's too much, or it's not right, just don't have it, you don't have to have all of this.'*

While many heads said that their own ideas had been incorporated into the plan, some noted that at least some of the actions proposed were ones that they had not thought of doing, and initially they had not fully understood how they would be beneficial. However, they had trusted the advisor and gone along with the plans and said that they had learned as a result of this.

Several heads commented that they had been relieved to be treated as partners in creating the action plan, because they had anticipated that it would be '*non-negotiable'* and *'imposed'*. They were pleasantly surprised by the relationship of trust established with the advisor, and the encouragement to put their own ideas into operation, and to be '*more radical than we had been'.*

The specific activities within the programme of support varied enormously, as would be expected with a bespoke programme. However, some common themes occurred; support with core subjects and teaching and learning in general; support with use of data; and support with leadership; these are discussed separately below.

While there did seem to be some common patterns in the bespoke packages, there were also considerable differences across schools. In some there was a greater emphasis on raising aspirations and stimulating pupils through creative activities. Others had a strong element of working with parents.

The main focus of KTS/PTA was *'to ensure that progress is made in key subjects and to ensure that that can be sustained.'* Overall, the emphasis was on building capacity. However, the imperative of achieving floor targets meant that some elements of the bespoke package were activities designed to have an immediate impact on attainment (for example, one to one tuition, Easter schools, etc. targeted at the pupils who were on the borderline of achieving the expected level). Such activities did not contribute to capacity building and sustainable improvement. However, they benefited the individual pupils, and reaching the floor target undoubtedly improved morale and helped teachers to see that their pupils could achieve more than they had previously thought. The headteacher of a secondary school that had used City Challenge funding to run an Easter school for Year 11 pupils explained, '*I was being given a sort of ultimatum which was, you need to keep this coming Year 11 out of 30%*.' However, his preferred priority was to improve the lower end of the school, because this was where he perceived the greatest weaknesses to be, and this strategy would result in sustainable improvement.

4.5.3 Supporting teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in KTS/PTA schools was supported in a variety of ways:

- the Teaching and Learning programmes (Outstanding Teacher Programme – OTP, and Improving Teacher Programme – ITP) run by Facilitation and Teaching Schools;
- coaching from members of staff from the NLE/LLE's school, ASTs or consultants; and
- specialist advisors.

Key factors in the success of any of these strategies were:

- opportunities to observe outstanding teaching and share practice;

- coaching taking place in the teacher's own school with the pupils they regularly taught;
- time for reflection; and
- the expertise, communication skills and attitudes of those facilitating courses or providing coaching.

Table 4.5 shows the survey responses relating to some of these areas.

Table 4.5: KTS and PTA schools' responses to 'How effective has each of the following been in contributing to your school's improvement?'

	very effective %	fairly effective %	not very effective or not effective at all %	*N*
Staff attending the Improving Teacher Programme	28	51	22	*103*
Staff attending the Outstanding Teacher Programme	44	39	17	*61*
Support from other members of staff in the NLE/LLE's school	39	43	19	*96*
Support in developing teaching in maths and English	51	43	6	*83*

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

The OTP and ITP combined structured input and discussion with observation of teaching in the Teaching School. Some 60 per cent of the KTS/PTA schools responding to the survey reported that staff had attended these programmes. Table 4.5 shows that headteachers rated the OTP as the more effective programme. This appeared to reflect the greater challenge involved in improving the weakest teachers through the ITP. Some heads used the ITP to help assess whether, with support, weak teachers could improve. This use of the ITP may also partly account for its lower ratings, because if the teacher did not improve they were then encouraged to leave the school. In contrast, the OTP was used by some heads as a way of showing teachers that they were valued.

Interviews showed that factors that contributed to the effectiveness of these programmes were:

- the systematic review of different aspects of teaching and learning;
- opportunities to observe outstanding teaching, behaviour management, etc. and to discuss what they had observed; and
- attending the programme with a colleague and therefore being able to reflect together on what had been learned and how it could be applied.

In some schools, a main mechanism for improving teaching and learning was coaching by staff from NLE/LLE's school or other Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs). This was generally described as extremely effective. A key factor seemed to be that the AST actually taught the class of the teacher being coached, and so teachers could see that the strategies suggested would work in their own classes. A result of such input, a London primary teacher commented that she now had much higher expectations of the children she taught, and that the children were meeting these. This had clearly increased her own level of enthusiasm for teaching. As part of such coaching, ASTs and other staff from supporting schools also worked with teachers on lesson planning; this seemed to be effective because they had become familiar with the class they were planning for, and they used the teacher's own ideas as a starting point, demonstrating skilfully how they could be developed.

A third way of working to improve teaching and learning was to use specialist education consultancies. Education London was awarded the first Challenge Service contract in 2007 to support the London Challenge, and from 2008 Tribal and BCCSIP supported the Manchester and Black Country Challenges. Comments on the questionnaire, and the case study data in several schools showed that support from Education London was seen as the main factor leading to school

improvement. They developed strategies for supporting secondary school improvement, including a standards-driven audit and a maths and English project. They worked with headteachers, subject leaders and teachers, and they developed handbooks for subject leaders which were distributed across all three Challenge areas, and received very positive feedback. A key element in the effectiveness of Education London was the experience and expertise of its staff. A testimony to their effectiveness is that many of the KTS schools have continued to use Education London after they have left the Keys to Success programme. One headteacher explained that when she was told she was no longer in KTS she said, *'Look, I'm not going to pull out of support from Education London, I'm actually going to continue to purchase that.'* Advisors emphasised the strength of Education London's work in maths and English, and said that this was an effective element of the total improvement package.

A small minority of heads across the three areas reported that the consultants they had been allocated had not been effective; this seemed largely to relate to the lack of relevant experience and expertise of specific individuals.

A further form of support for teaching and learning was provided by specialist advisors. London and Greater Manchester shared specialist Advisors who could be called in to give specific advice, two for EAL and one for behaviour management. The EAL advisors also set up the Pan London EAL Strategy, which funded LAs that had effective teams to support EAL to spread their expertise across London. A website enabled schools that needed training to bid for and access it. This had overwhelmingly positive feedback indicating that participants had changed the way they taught as a result of what they had learned. The Pan London EAL Strategy was a particularly important structure in a city with such a high proportion of EAL learners (some 36 per cent of those in secondary schools).

4.5.4 Supporting effective use of data

Another area frequently addressed was improving use of data. Advisors and NLE/LLEs pointed out that in many of the KTS/PTA schools, analysis of data had been somewhat superficial: one explained that analysis tended to be at school level, and individual teachers were not using the data relating to their pupils to set targets and plan lessons. Others explained that teachers were not accurate in their assessment of levels. These issues were tackled in various ways: e.g. employing a data manager using City Challenge funding; middle leaders working on use of data with leaders from the NLE/LLE's school; and the advisor or NLE/LLE working through the data with the headteacher asking questions.

As well as improving the way data was analysed, shared and used, some stakeholders talked about specific strategies to identify and target those pupils who were borderline in terms of reaching the expected level. This was most common in secondary schools. For example, one stakeholder explained that consultants encouraged schools to identify the pupils who were likely to achieve a GCSE grade C in English and not in mathematics (or vice versa), and to provide additional support in their weaker subject.

4.5.5 Supporting leadership of KTS/PTA schools

In many of the case study schools, advisors commented on perceived weaknesses in the leadership team. Two main strategies were used in such cases: providing leadership training and support, and encouraging specific individuals to leave the school. When an advisor conducted the initial audit of a school, one aspect of this was to assess the headteacher and leadership team. One advisor explained:

> *That's the biggest challenge for us, going in, that's the judgement you have to make, is this is a good head? is it a good head that's going under? or is it a good head but in the wrong school … and then*

the next stage on, this isn't a person that is a good head … and that's where we go for the structural solution.

In several case study schools, there had been changes of leadership, which it was reported had been brought about partly as a result of the Challenge advisor's assessment. In other schools, it had taken a long time to come to the view that the headteacher would not be able to improve the school, and to put an appropriate solution in place. For example, one school was in KTS/PTA for over two years before '*difficult conversations'* took place, and in that time the school had not improved at all; in 2011 it was still considerably below the floor target. Another had been in KTS/PTA for a similar period before the decision was taken to put a structural solution in place. A number of factors were noted that contributed to the delays in taking any action in such situations; these included:

- the very genuine challenges faced by the school, including high pupil mobility, EAL, unsuitable premises, etc.;
- the school showing some early signs of improvement;
- the chair of governors being supportive of the head;
- the advisor not having developed a strong relationship with the LA;
- the LA being somewhat suspicious about the Challenge in general;
- the additional complication of having a diocesan authority involved.

The difficulty in evaluating such situations is that if the school improves after a change of leadership, it is not possible to say whether this improvement would have taken place had the headteacher remained in post. In some case study schools where the headteacher had left, a number of interim appointments were made before a suitable permanent headteacher was identified and appointed. In such schools, it appeared that the number of changes of leadership (and often of school policies and improvement strategies) adversely affected the pace of improvement, regardless of the quality of the individuals involved.

While changes of headteacher were the most dramatic change, we found that in many other case study schools, some specific individuals had been 'encouraged' to leave, and in many cases they were members of the leadership team who appeared to be blocking the efforts to bring about change.

In all the case study schools there were also strategies in place to develop leadership. Just over half the KTS/PTS heads responding to the questionnaire indicated that they had had some form of leadership training, and the ratings given made this the third highest ranked strategy in terms of its effectiveness for school improvement. Rather fewer heads indicated that training for middle leaders had been part of their bespoke package, but again the vast majority of them indicated that it was effective. The nature of the leadership training varied; in some cases it involved specific programmes run by the National College, attended by an individual or a group. In other schools it involved support from an NLE/ LLE or members of their senior leadership team. In some cases this involved working with the whole leadership team, and resulted in changing structures or roles as well as supporting individual development.

Stakeholders had mixed views about whether the best balance was being struck between working to improve leadership, and changing it. One stakeholder suggested that Challenge advisors could be too hurried in making such judgements, arguing that '*on the job coaching of headteachers produced phenomenal results',* and also arguing that in secondary schools, so long as the leadership of the core subjects is strong, the school can provide a good education for its pupils whatever the quality of the head. In most cases there seemed to be a combination of encouraging the head or other members of the senior leadership team to leave, while at the same time working

to support and strengthen the current arrangements for leadership. The strategies used were bespoke to each specific situation.

4.5.6 Structural solutions

One of the options available to the Challenge team was to propose a structural solution. These included:

- the school becoming an academy;
- forming a soft or hard Federation;
- the school having Trust status; and
- replacing the governing body with an Interim Executive Board (IEB); this focused on changing governance rather than leadership.

All these solutions were represented in the case study sample.

A number of stakeholders argued that the most appropriate structural solution for primary schools was Federation. This has the key benefit of reducing the number of headteachers needed in the primary sector, and ensuring that other schools benefit from the skills of those who are effective. One case study focused on a primary Federation. Those involved in the supported school reported that the arrangement had proved extremely effective; the executive headteacher of the Federation had put a clear improvement plan in place, and progress was being made. The Ofsted report corroborated this. However, those in the supporting school expressed some concern that the focus on the weaker school might impact negatively on the stronger school.

We also conducted case studies in one secondary school that had recently become an academy and another which was scheduled to become one. In both schools the process had been very long-drawn out, and staff had had little information about the decision or the timescale. This had lowered morale, and thus rather negated the positive impact of many of the measures that had been put in place through KTS/PTA, which had generally been seen as a success.

The Principal of an academy which had formerly been a KTS school explained that a key issue in preventing the predecessor school from improving had been its reputation. Parents of current pupils had themselves attended the school, and were of the opinion that it could never improve. Thus, efforts to improve the school could not overcome the fact that the community had no faith in it. The academy Principal was tackling this by creating a completely different ethos in terms of expectations of dress, behaviour etc. Thus for him, the benefits of replacing the predecessor school with the academy were those that would have brought about in any fresh start model; he did not refer to the sponsor or the form of governance as posing any particular advantages.

Stakeholders pointed out that one of the concerns about academies is that not all academy sponsors have effective school improvement strategies. Thus if an academy is not successful, there is not necessarily any clear structure for supporting it.

We have compared the percentage point improvement between 2008 and 2011 in KS4 results of KTS/PTA schools that subsequently became academies and those that did not. Schools in the lowest quintile of 2008 attainment[16] were used for this comparison because, as shown earlier, school with different levels of initial attainment show different mean improvement (Table 4.5).

[16] Schools in which less that 32 per cent of pupils achieved 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and mathematics in 2008

Table 4.5: Schools[17] in lowest quintile of 2008 attainment: percentage points improvement 2008-11 in pupils reaching the expected level, by involvement in KTS/PTA and academy status

	academy	not an academy	*N*
Keys to Success	22.5%	20.7%	*101*
not Keys to Success	16.8%	16.9%	*432*
N	*151*	*382*	*533*

Source: Calculated from DfE School Performance Tables

On average, KTS/PTA schools that became academies improved slightly more than those that did not, but this difference is not statistically significant (22.5 per cent v 20.7 per cent)[18]. However, academies that had previously been KTS/PTA schools improved significantly more than those that had not (22.5 per cent compared with 16.8 per cent). Table 4.5 also shows that, among the schools in the lowest quintile of 2008 attainment that were never part of KTS/PTA, those that became academies improved by the same amount as those that did not. The pattern is similar for schools in the second quintile of attainment[19], though there were far fewer KTS schools and academies in this quintile. The greatest improvement was in schools that had benefited from both KTS and academy status, but this was not significantly more than attainment for other KTS/PTA schools. Academies that had been in KTS/PTA improved significantly more than those that had not (18.5 per cent v 11.2 per cent).

4.5.7 Funding

Many interviewees emphasised the key role of funding:

> *Out of everything that happened through the Greater Manchester Challenge I would say that was the key to the success, the ability to have that funding to make it match into our already planned out school improvement priorities, because we knew what we were doing and knew what we needed to achieve. (Greater Manchester primary head)*

The funding did not necessarily all come from the City Challenge budget; where feasible, schools and LAs were asked to fund or match-fund specific initiatives. On the questionnaire, respondents were asked to write in what they considered to be the most effective aspect of the support their school had received through KTS/PTA. Almost a quarter of the comments specified funding:

> *Funding for twelve months in order to release the deputy from her class commitments. During this time, she was able to carry out a programme of coaching and support for targeted members of staff, the quality of teaching has improved, especially in English and Maths.*
>
> *Funding to use for in school development with new leadership team; to facilitate coaching by school staff; for development of effective data analysis, monitoring and intervention.*

A range of data (including DfE records and case study interviews) indicated that the main areas of spending were:

- staff development activity (e.g. costs and/or cover relating to NLE/LLE's time, teachers attending courses. consultants to provide professional development for staff, time spent in partner school); and

[17] This table includes only schools which had pupils taking GCSEs in both 2008 and 2011. In cases where schools became academies between 2008 and 2011, improvement has been calculated using the results from the academy and its predecessor school(s).

[18] $t(99) = 0.87$, $p = 0.388$

[19] Schools in which 32-41 per cent of pupils achieved 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and mathematics

- appointment of additional teaching and/or support staff, or additional hours for existing staff. staff.

Of those heads who employed additional staff, 72 per cent indicated on the survey that this was very effective and a further 24 per cent, fairly effective. This was therefore the most highly rated of the forms of support listed. Additional staff were used in a wide range of ways. For example, in a Black Country primary school, an AST had been appointed who focused on personalised learning and literacy, working with all classes. She was also developing the creative curriculum, with the aim of enthusing children about learning. In this school, City Challenge funding was also used to create a post for a Higher Level Teaching Assistant whose role as Learning Link worker involved working with parents and children who were new to the school, which had very high pupil mobility. This post was also seen as very effective.

Funding was used in some schools for resources (for example, new IT equipment) and for buildings or refurbishment. While only a minority of schools were funded for building work, those who were rated this highly; on the survey 63 per cent indicated that it was very effective and 34 per cent fairly effective; thus it was the second most highly rated item of those listed. The head of a secondary which was allocated about £60k for a new library explained that it had enabled the school to establish a more active curriculum at Key Stage 3, it was *'an area where students feel valued',* and it was used for work with parents, which the school had not previously been able to accommodate.

Funding was particularly welcomed by schools with deficit budgets, because being in deficit had severely limited the improvement activities they could undertake; the key point about the City Challenge funding was that it had to be used to support improvement. An interviewee explained that when he took up the headship of a London secondary school it had a budget deficit of over £400k. But as pupil numbers had fallen dramatically, there was no way that this could be repaid. To add to his difficulties, the school went into Special Measures almost immediately. When it became a Keys to Success school, funding was made available to appoint new staff, including heads of department paid at a higher level then pupil numbers at that time would justify. The headteacher said:

> *[London Challenge] got us extra money to put on intervention classes for Years 10s and 11s. We couldn't have done that without them. And ... being able to put on courses that we didn't have to pay for and we couldn't have afforded, finding extra funds, ... providing a mentor who could work with our middle leaders. It was actually quite a powerful statement [that] there was interest and investment in this school.*

The targeted funding meant that school improvement activities had been able to take place even where schools remained in deficit on their main budget.

4.5.8 Being supportive and celebrating success

In addition to the specific elements of City Challenge, the majority of survey respondents and interviewees emphasised the supportive ethos of KTS/PTA.

> *City Challenge has been very supportive and extremely skilled in providing the right amount of support that is of a good quality. It would be lovely if such support continues. It is a programme that is well thought out; well managed and effective. (London primary)*

Interviewees argued that the way that they had been supported and encouraged was a key factor in their schools' improvement, and that the improvement was sustainable because the advisors had given them both the skills and the confidence to lead effectively.

The supportive nature of the programme was particularly welcomed by schools in LAs that had very few weak schools. A primary headteacher in Greater Manchester said: *'As a headteacher in a local authority where similar schools are in the vast minority, the City Challenge has been a*

Godsend and a lifeline.' Other heads also emphasised that headship can be very isolated, and that they had welcomed the wider networks that the programme had introduced them to; many referred in particular to the pan-London networks and ethos. In comparison to the other areas, London had had much longer to build effective networks.

When the London Challenge started in 2003, a key aspect of it was to raise the morale of London schools. The emphasis was on support and challenge rather than identifying schools as failing. This ethos was extended to the Greater Manchester and the Black Country. We have already shown that KTS/PTA headteachers were often pleasantly surprised to be treated as partners, and that they developed strong and positive relationships with advisors and NLEs/LLEs. They also highlighted the way in which advisors had encouraged them, and celebrated their progress. A London secondary head said:

> *I think City Challenge was incredibly important actually it was often about helping us to celebrate the sort of small steps we took through, which I know sounds a bit odd. ... they brought in David Woods and people like that was a real boost for the school, particularly because it had been so bunkerised that it was incredibly important that we began very quickly to share what was good and celebrate what was good.*

The positive ethos of KTS/PTA was crucial to its success.

4.6 Summary: reducing the number of underperforming schools

There is evidence that attainment KTS/PTA schools improved more rapidly than that in comparable schools; this comes both from a regression-based analysis and from a comparison of schools in the same initial quintiles of attainment. The vast majority of survey respondents and interviewees in KTS/PTA schools considered that the schools' involvement in the programme had contributed significantly to the improvement made. There was an overall improvement in Ofsted grades, though a few schools were in Ofsted categories at the end of the period.

Key factors that were identified as contributing to the success of KTS/PTA were:

- The provision of expert support through Challenge advisors and National and Local Leaders of Education (NLE/LLE). Individuals in these roles were valued for their expertise and for being encouraging and supportive. KTS/PTA worked best when the Challenge advisors and other key stakeholders including NLE/LLE, School Improvement Partners and LA officers worked effectively together.
- Bespoke packages of support that were effective in addressing the specific needs of each school. Key elements generally included support with effective use of data, teaching and learning and leadership, and often funding for additional staff or resources.
- Support for leadership, often through an NLE/LLE or National College programmes. However, particular problems arose when heads were unable to improve. This delayed improvement – and if they then left after 'difficult conversations', the school often experienced a series of interim arrangements which again delayed improvement.
- Support for teaching and learning included the Outstanding Teacher Programme and Improving Teacher Programme, which took place in teaching schools, and coaching which took place in the supported schools. The coaching was provided by staff from an NLE or LLE's school or by ASTs or consultants. In London secondary schools, consultants from Education London were viewed as particularly effective.
- Structural solutions. Federation of primary schools was reported to be an effective strategy. KTS/PTA schools which became sponsored academies continued to improve their attainment in line with other KTS/PTA schools, but did not improve significantly more than others.

Overall, the most effective aspect of KTS/PTA seemed to be that it was a highly supportive and encouraging programme in which headteachers and teachers came to feel more valued, more confident and more effective. Pupils in KTS schools also talked positively about the changes in the schools they attended.

5 Programmes to raise standards in coasting and satisfactory schools

5.1 Introduction

The initial aims for City Challenge did not specifically include raising standards in satisfactory or coasting schools, and this has not generally been a major strand of the work. However, in London primary schools, it assumed considerable importance, and two interventions targeted such schools. The Improving Schools Programme (ISP) Leadership Programme involved about 75 primary schools in London and a further 35 in the Black Country; this is one of the key interventions that we were asked to evaluate; qualitative data was collected in London schools. In this chapter we also discuss Primary Challenge Groups (PCG), which involved almost 100 London primary schools. To do this we refer to attainment data and to evaluations of this programme (conducted by Poet and Kettlewell, 2011 and Street, 2011).

ISP Leadership was developed for primary schools in which the earlier Improving Schools Programme, developed and led by National Strategies, had had a limited impact. Headteachers who had successfully used the National Strategies programme to raise standards in their own schools worked with another school, or more often, two other schools. In the first year of City Challenge some National Strategies personnel were involved with this programme.

PCG had a similar structure; each group involved two schools (which could be either Satisfactory or Good) working with an NLE or LLE; the three schools identified common areas for improvement and worked together to devise an action plan and bring about improvement in attainment and a narrowing of the attainment gap between pupils eligible for FSM and their peers. Its aims were both to raise attainment generally, and to narrow the attainment gap between those eligible for FSM and those who were not. PCG was funded through the National College.

Towards the end of City Challenge, a programme with a similar structure was developed in Manchester, Learning Threes.

The key activities in ISP Leadership and PCG are shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Activities in ISP Leadership and Primary Challenge Groups

Activities	ISP Leadership	PCG
School-to-school working in threes	✓	✓
Termly meetings for lead headteachers	✓	✓
Primary Strategy Managers	✓	
NLEs and LLEs		✓

The only programme aimed at coasting secondary schools in City Challenge areas was Gaining Ground (DCSF, 2008d). This was a national programme. LAs were asked to identify schools that they considered would benefit from the programme. The programme offered funding and support from a partner school. In London and Greater Manchester, City Challenge brokered the provision of school-to-school support through their leadership strategies, and NLE/LLEs provided the support. However, the programme was not funded by City Challenge; it is not included in this evaluation, but a separate evaluation has been commissioned by the DfE.

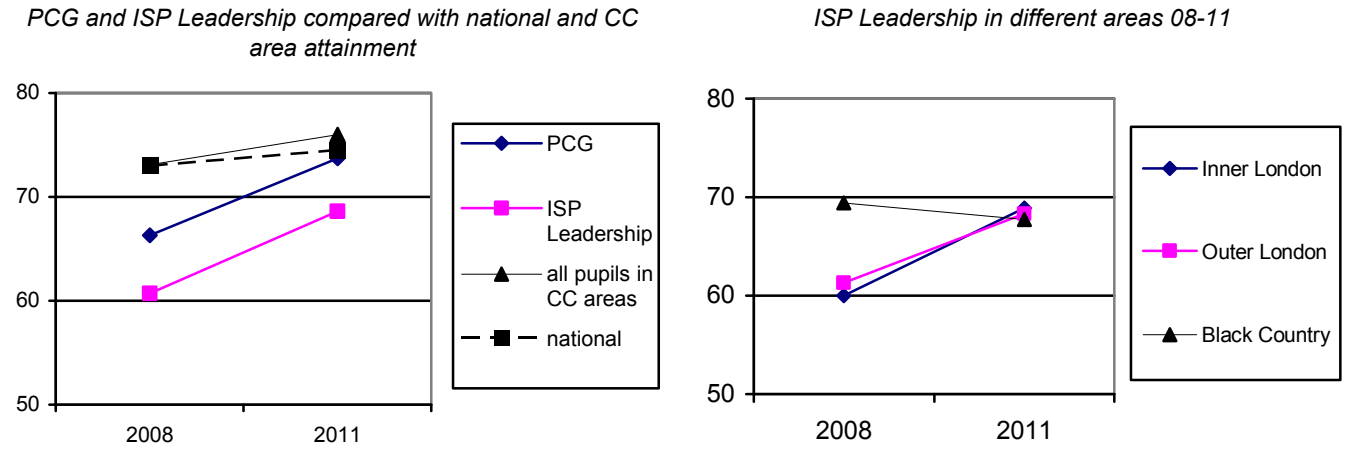
5.2 Attainment outcomes in ISP Leadership and Primary Challenge Group schools

5.2.1 Attainment

Figure 5.1 shows the change in pupil attainment in ISP Leadership and PCG schools between 2008 and 2011. It shows that pupils in schools in each programme had lower attainment in 2008 than all pupils in CC areas or nationally, but that the improvement in attainment was much greater. For ISP Leadership, improvement in attainment took place only in London schools in the programme; ISP Leadership schools in the Black Country showed no improvement.

Schools in both ISP Leadership and PCG were distributed across the quintiles of school attainment level in 2008, and the numbers in any quintile are too small to be able to report on statistical significance. However, in the lowest attaining two quintiles (where the majority of schools in each programme were found), improvement between 2008 and 2011 was around two per cent more than in schools not in these programmes.

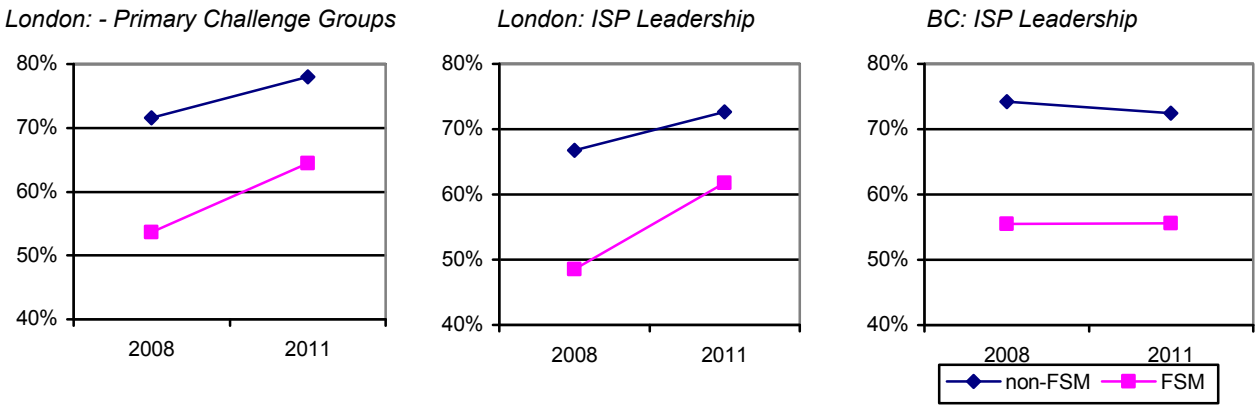
Figure 5.1: Percentage of primary pupils in ISP Leadership and Primary Challenge Groups schools achieving the expected level, 2008 and 2011



Source: National Pupil Database

There was a narrowing of the FSM attainment gap between 2008 and 2011 among pupils in both programmes. This was largest for ISP Leadership in London (7.5 per cent) (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2: FSM attainment gaps: Percentage of primary pupils achieving the expected level, 2008 and 2011, in schools involved in ISP Leadership and Primary Challenge Groups, by area and FSM eligibility



Source: National Pupil Database

5.2.2 Ofsted outcomes for ISP Leadership and PCG

We have also reviewed Ofsted grades. In London, there was a net movement from Satisfactory to Good of about ten per cent of the schools in the programme. The grades of schools in ISP Leadership in the Black Country showed little net change.

5.3 Survey and qualitative data on impact of ISP Leadership and PCG

Unfortunately the number of survey respondents indicating that they took part in any of these programmes was too small to draw any statistically robust conclusions. One factor in this may have been that some headteachers did not know the 'official' names of the programmes their schools were engaged in; the headteacher of the school in which we conducted a case study of ISP Leadership referred to the programme simply as '*London Challenge',* and was unaware of any other title.

Overall, ISP Leadership was seen as successful by those we interviewed and some interviewees presented evidence of its success, including improved Ofsted grades, attainment and/or quality of teaching. The headteacher of a school in ISP leadership which had improved from Satisfactory to Good commented that the programme had been *'absolutely brilliant'.* Another school had doubled the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 in both English and mathematics between 2008 and 2010; this improvement was attributed at least in part to ISP involvement. A third head in the programme said it had been '*pretty successful'* and had been used as an *'engine for change'* within the school. Headteachers commented that middle leaders had benefited from working with their counterparts in other schools.

The NFER evaluation of PCG reported that supported headteachers said their results had improved. One commented that their school leadership team was now *'singing from the same song sheet'* (Poet and Kettlewell, 2011). All the schools in the sample taking part in Street's (2011) evaluation of the same programme were able to provide evidence of impact on teaching.

5.4 What aspects of ISP Leadership and PCG were effective, and why?

5.4.1 Working with other schools

The main feature of both ISP Leadership and PCG was school-to-school working. Interviewees all agreed that this had helped to improve their schools. Headteachers argued that the opportunity for teachers to visit other schools to see, discuss and experience good practice had been a key factor in improving attainment. Curriculum leaders also talked of the benefits of sharing practice and discussing common issues.

There were a number of factors that were identified as important in the success of school-to-school working: the size of the group, the characteristics of the partners' schools; proximity; and the attitude of the headteachers in the group.

Interviewees were divided about whether it was more effective to work as a group of three (which was the intention of both programmes) or in pairs. Some headteachers leading groups of three schools in fact worked with each of them separately. A lead headteacher who had done this explained that this decision was based on the logistics of getting three headteachers together at any one time, and the differing needs of the two supported schools. Supporting two schools was also said to be very time-consuming. Stakeholders reported that towards the end of the programme more and more schools were working with only one other school.

In contrast, all headteachers and LLEs contributing to the evaluation were clear that three schools in a Primary Challenge Group was the optimum number (Street, 2011) (though some groups consisted of more or less than three schools). They argued that two did not offer sufficient variety,

while more than three resulted in too much difficulty coordinating diaries and did not offer all participants sufficient time to contribute in meetings.

A second key issue concerned the matching of schools and headteachers. ISP Leadership interviewees argued that, for effective working, schools should have similar intakes. When this was the case, they were able to work more effectively together because they were tackling the same issues (e.g. of attendance or mobility). Where intakes were *not* similar, this was constructed as a problem because they were facing different issues. However, some dissatisfaction was also expressed at placing church schools together, because they wanted opportunities to work with other schools.

Geographical proximity was identified as another important factor for effective working. The three schools in the ISP Leadership case study were very close together, and were in the same LA, and this was identified as a key factor in their success. Where schools were further apart, distance had resulted in one headteacher seeking a change of group. This was also identified as a key factor in the PCG evaluation; Street (2011) reported that schools that were far apart or were in different LAs found it more difficult to undertake joint activities.

Heads involved in ISP Leadership emphasised the importance of the attitude and personalities of the headteachers involved in the triad. Trust between the headteachers was cited as a key factor in the partnership's success. Similarly, the PCG evaluation concluded that triads worked best when the partnership was built on respect and when everyone felt equal (Street, 2011).

5.4.2 Aims and direction

Interviewees argued having an agreed action plan was a key factor in the success of the programmes. Clear and focused targets were seen as essential, and were also a way of monitoring progress.

The lead headteacher of an ISP Leadership triad argued that having specific agreed aims, and an agreed time frame prevented the school-to-school working from becoming *'too broad and too vague'.* He contrasted this structure with his previous experience of working with other heads in a less structured context, in which: *'you can end up just talking all the time and not achieving very much.'*

The focus of activity for each triad was decided upon by the headteachers at their initial meeting. While the programme had developed from the National Strategies ISP, the aims of ISP Leadership were not tightly tied to its predecessor. The lead headteacher of one triad explained that initially '*it was quite a broad brief about improving leadership and governance'* and that each triad could devise a bespoke programme that was '*what was most appropriate and needed for the schools you were working with.*' The precise foci were agreed in discussion between heads, taking into account both the supported school's key aims in their school improvement plan, and the strengths of the supporting school. (Similarly, Poet and Kettlewell (2011) reported that each Challenge Group had considerable autonomy in relation to aims and use of funding.)

Headteachers in ISP Leadership schools reported a wide range of activities including developing the maths and literacy curricula; joint lesson observations; joint lesson delivery across subject areas, particularly English and mathematics; joint assessment of groups and individual pupils; and senior and middle leaders having opportunities to work together and learn from each other.

During the second year of the programme it was reported that those directing the programme encouraged a stronger focus on attainment outcomes. At the termly meetings lead heads were given input about booster strategies that could be used to maximise the KS2 attainment outcomes. Headteachers expressed some concerns about the feasibility of having an impact on attainment in the time available.

5.4.3 Funding

Funding was regarded as essential to cover time spent working on the programmes. Under ISP Leadership, £10k per year was allocated to each triad. The lead school received £7k and each supported school £1.5k. This was intended to pay for the lead head's time and for cover for staff who were visiting the other schools. Headteachers commented that while very limited funding, it was adequate for that purpose.

PCG funding was substantially higher; £30k in the first year for use across the three schools and £15k in the second year. The PCG evaluation report argued that the funding was an important factor in the intervention's success (Street, 2011). This level of funding allowed Challenge Groups to pay for supply cover when staff attended courses; buy pupil resources; pay for external trainers of high quality; and pay overtime to enable teaching assistants to attend meetings.

Accountability procedures involved lead heads sending in action plans, and reporting back at training days about what was happening in the group. The intention seemed to be more to ensure that each group of schools had a plan and was working on it, than to assess what was happening.

5.4.4 Lead headteachers and their training

Having a lead headteacher was seen as essential to '*drive things along'*. The quality of the headteacher leading the triad was argued to be a key to the success of both programmes.

A key difference between PCG and ISP Leadership related to the lead heads. ISP Leadership triads were led by heads who had improved their schools through National Strategies ISP. The advisor leading the programme explained that, while a minority of these heads came from Good or Outstanding schools, the majority were *'just strong Satisfactory, [and] not necessarily eligible to become LLEs.'* The heads of supported schools that we interviewed all indicated that they had found the triad leaders to be very effective, and that there were benefits in learning from schools that were only slightly ahead of their own in their school improvement journey. In contrast, PCG used NLEs and LLEs to lead triads. The PCG evaluation argued that LLEs played a pivotal role in the success of the programme, and reported that *'*everyone who responded in the sample agreed that the role of the LLE was central to the successful development and impact of the PCG' (Street, 2011: 10). Clearly both arrangements were found to be beneficial. In both interventions, it was argued that a key factor was that the lead headteachers had previously undertaken similar improvement in their own schools.

Street reported that the role of the LLE in PCG was to facilitate collaborative working and professional learning in all the schools in the group (including their own). It was not intended to be a one-to-one consultancy model. However, she found that the precise dynamics and relationships varied in different groups. In the case study ISP Leadership triad, the lead head had a coaching role, as well as facilitating collaborative working between staff at different levels in the schools.

Both programmes offered training to the lead headteachers. Termly meetings were held for the ISP Leadership lead heads; the City Challenge advisor who led the programme explained that these were to provide training in how to *'hasten a school's progress using ISP'* as well as a means of checking school progress. Headteachers who attended the training reported that it included input on expectations and overarching principles, as well as feedback from other lead heads about what they had been doing and what had been effective. Thus it was both interesting and useful. Other senior leadership team members from the lead schools were able to attend, and for them it was both valuable training for the leadership team, and a useful networking opportunity.

LLEs leading PCG also undertook training. However, Street (2011) reported that some LLEs and Challenge advisors felt that there was a 'disconnect' between the role of the LLE in the groups and the focus of the training, suggesting that the training focused too much on coaching skills rather than on supporting school improvement.

5.4.5 Benefits for the lead schools

The process of supporting a weaker school was seen as beneficial, both for headteachers and other staff in the lead schools, especially middle leaders. A lead headteacher said his school had benefited in a number of ways. The termly training was a valuable development opportunity for himself and his senior leadership team. Being identified as a lead school having staff from the supported schools coming in to observe good practice had boosted his staff's '*sense of worth and morale'*. Staff also benefited because the process of sharing practice involves thinking about '*why it works and how you're going to share it',* and thus reflecting on one's own practice.

For the lead headteacher a number of new pathways opened up: his relationship with the LA developed and he had been asked to work as a consultant headteacher supporting a school where the headteacher had been absent for a considerable period. He also took up a strategic role within ISP Leadership, visiting other lead heads.

5.5 Summary: raising standards in coasting and satisfactory schools

The evidence relating to this strand shows that ISP and PCG schools in London substantially improved their attainment levels and narrowed their FSM attainment gap to a much greater degree than non participating schools. However, in the Black Country, attainment in ISP Leadership Schools did not improve.

Headteachers and other school staff in ISP Leadership schools claimed that the programme had had a positive impact on attainment, and in one case, an improved Ofsted grade. It was also said to have impacted positively on middle leadership. The key factors in the programme that contributed to this were:

- working with other schools (and in particular, schools with similar intakes);
- opportunities for middle leaders to work with their counterparts in other schools;
- having clearly agreed plans, targets and time frame;
- having a small amount of funding for cover to enable teachers to visit other schools;
- having a lead headteacher who drove the agenda, and who received appropriate training.

The lead schools benefited from the lead headteacher training; the reflection involved in explaining their practice to others; and the boost to staff morale from being identified as a lead school.

6 Improving Good and Outstanding schools

6.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this strand was for Good schools to become Outstanding, and for already Outstanding schools to maintain their Ofsted grade and improve further. In order to make this happen, each City Challenge area had specific programmes with this focus. These had a variety of titles: Good to Outstanding, Good to Great, Good to Bostin, Going for Great. We refer to them collectively as G2 programmes. Some of these (in the Black Country, and the secondary programme in London) were funded through the National College and included in the NFER Leadership Strategies evaluation (Featherstone and Bergeron, 2011). In this evaluation, attainment data and survey data relates to all G2 programmes, but qualitative data was collected only in London primary schools and in Greater Manchester.

G2 programmes operated differently in each area. The London primary programme was coordinated by the headteacher of an Outstanding primary school. Selected schools were invited to take part on the basis that they were schools graded Good by Ofsted, and had the capacity to improve; LAs were consulted about which schools would benefit[20]. Those approaching their next Ofsted inspection were particularly targeted. The main London secondary programme (Good to Great) formed part of the London Leadership Strategy, and was run by London secondary headteachers. Good schools that could demonstrate their determination to improve further were accepted onto the programme. An additional London secondary programme, Going for Great was a more recent innovation, designed to support Outstanding schools both in maintaining that designation and in becoming even more effective. Funding in London was £3k per school.

Initially the Greater Manchester programme was led by one of the LAs. It included a large number of Good and Outstanding schools. Depending on their initial Ofsted grade and the likely date of their next inspection, schools were entitled to have access to various elements of the programme (funding of £2.5k, master classes, baseline reviews). The activities to support Good schools in moving to Outstanding changed in the final year of the Challenge; it ceased to be a programme and became a school-led activity, and a number of 'hub' schools were established with an expertise in a particular area of practice, such as leadership and management or mathematics; heads and teachers from other G2 schools could visit to observe good practice.

Pathways Plus was a Black Country programme in the first year of City Challenge. Good schools had action plans reviewed by advisors, and substantial funding (£15-20k) to support their improvement. In the subsequent two years, Good to Bostin was run by the National College. It provided conferences, workshops and bespoke consultancy to inform and strengthen school self-evaluation (Featherstone and Bergeron, 2011).

A key difference between the areas was in the number of schools involved. While the London programmes involved just under 200 schools in total, and the Black Country programmes under 100, the Greater Manchester programme aimed to open opportunities for a much larger number of schools, around 500. This meant that the programme was spread very thinly, and each of the Greater Manchester schools we contacted had had very limited involvement.

The main activities in each area are shown in Table 6.1.

[20] Stakeholders reported that some of the headteachers approached declined the invitation because of they limited capacity, or lack of ambition to become Outstanding.

Table 6.1: Key activities in G2 programmes

	London primary Good to Outstanding	London secondary Good to Great	London secondary: Going for Great	BC Pathways Plus	BC Good to Bostin	GM first two years	GM final year
Conferences, seminars, master classes	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Working with heads of Outstanding schools	✓	✓	✓				✓
Knowledge centres or 'hubs'	✓						✓
Access to staff development		✓				✓	
Baseline reviews / HMI advice		✓			✓	✓	
Advice from a Challenge advisor				✓			

6.2 Ofsted and attainment outcomes in G2 schools

Since the aim of the G2 programmes was to improve or maintain Ofsted grades, the main focus here is on Ofsted outcomes. However, it is also of interest to review the overall attainment and the outcomes for FSM pupils in these schools in the light of the overall aims of City Challenge.

6.2.1 Ofsted outcomes in G2 schools

The changes to the Ofsted inspection regime in 2009 meant that Good and Outstanding schools were inspected less frequently; thus 45 per cent of G2 schools were not inspected during the three years of City Challenge. In addition, the changed inspection framework made it harder for schools to gain an Outstanding grade. Figure 6.1 represents the most recent inspection grades in the G2 schools in April 2008 and April 2011.

Figure 6.1: Most recent Ofsted grades in 2008 and 2011 for schools in G2 schools

Source: Ofsted *Inspection judgements for maintained schools*, 2005/6 – 2010/11

It should be noted that normally, Good and Outstanding schools were included in the programme; those schools that appear on Figure 6.1 as Satisfactory in April 2008 had generally increased their grade to Good before they joined the programme, and were then not re-inspected. The proportion of Outstanding schools included in the programmes varied across the three areas.

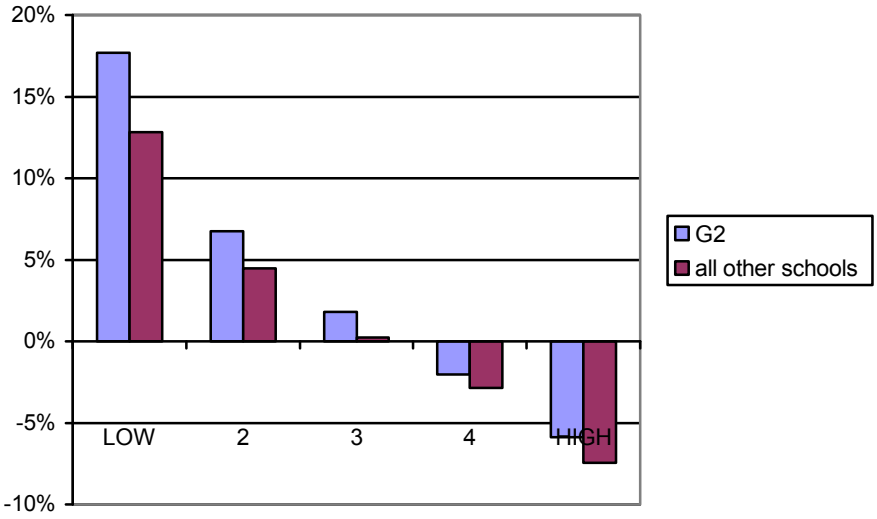
All three areas were successful in increasing the number of Outstanding grades in both primary and secondary schools. The London secondary programme had aimed for at least 25 per cent of London secondary schools to be Outstanding by 2011, and this aim was surpassed. Greater Manchester had aimed to increase the number of Outstanding schools in each phase by 20 per cent, and again this was achieved. Each area had also set targets relating to the number of Outstanding secondary schools in each LA; these were not quite reached, but the distribution in 2011 was wider than in 2008.

However, while in April 2008 none of the schools were Inadequate, three schools were in this category by April 2008[21]. (It should be noted that there were only 14 Black Country secondary schools in the programme, and so the one school that was graded Inadequate represents a larger proportion than in other areas.)

6.2.2 Primary attainment in G2 schools

At the start of the City Challenge, 81 per cent of primary pupils in G2 schools achieved the expected level. This did not change over the three years. However, as we have shown earlier, the schools with the highest initial attainment show the least average improvement. Since the mean attainment of G2 schools was above the average for City Challenge areas and the national average, we have reviewed the G2 schools' attainment by quintile of 2008 attainment. Figure 6.2 shows that in each quintile, the G2 schools either improved more than other schools in the same quintile nationally, or experienced less fall in attainment. These differences are significant for the highest quintile (which includes the largest number of G2 schools) and for the lowest quintile.

Figure 6.2: Mean change 2008-11 in percentage of primary pupils achieving the expected level by performance quintile: schools in G2 programmes compared with all other schools in the same quintiles



Source: Calculated from DfE 2011 School Performance Tables (DfE, 2012b), and DCSF 2008 Achievement and Attainment Tables (DCSF, 2009c)

When these figures are broken down by City Challenge area, G2 primary schools in London in each quintile improved performance better than those in Greater Manchester, which in turn generally did better than those in the Black Country. However, within the Black Country, schools

[21] One of the Inadequate grades was explicitly related to safeguarding, and in other respects the school was reported to be performing well.

that had been part of Pathways Plus showed a greater improvement in attainment than those on Good to Bostin.

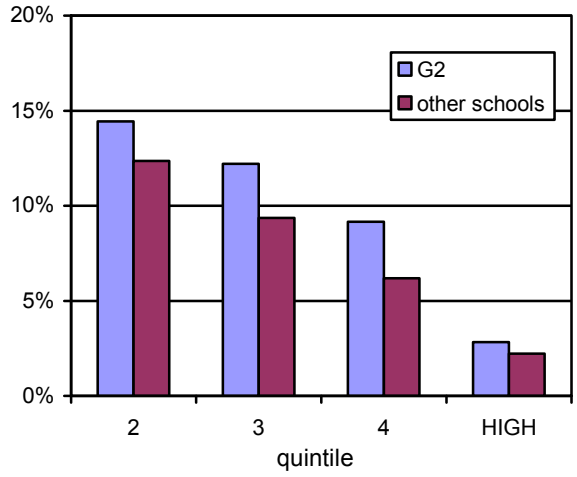
We have also reviewed any changes to the FSM attainment gap in primary schools. In London, the overall increase in attainment in G2 primary schools has largely been achieved by improving the attainment of pupils eligible for FSM, and the attainment gap narrowed by two per cent. However, in Greater Manchester G2 primary schools the attainment gap narrowed only slightly. In the Black Country G2 primary schools, the percentage of FSM pupils reaching the expected level decreased and the gap widened by 4.4 per cent[22].

6.2.3 Secondary attainment in G2 schools

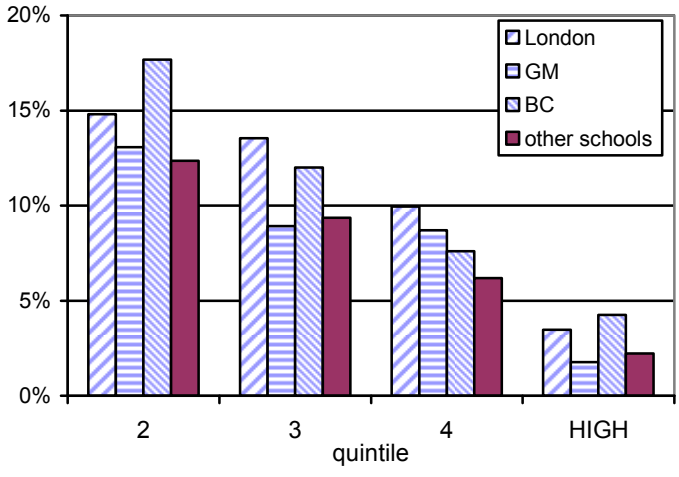
In G2 secondary schools, the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level was above the national figure in 2008, and continued to increase in line with the national rate of improvement. This pattern was similar in all three areas. Analysis of performance by quintile of initial attainment, shows that in each quintile, G2 schools improved more than schools nationally that were not involved in this programme (Figure 6.3; note that the lowest quintile is not shown because very few secondary G2 schools were in it). Figure 6.3b shows that this was the case in London and the Black Country, but that in Greater Manchester, only those G2 schools in quintile 4 improved more than non-G2 schools.

Figure 6.3: Mean improvement 2008-2011 in percentage of secondary pupils achieving the expected level by performance quintile: schools in G2 programmes compared with all other schools

a. All G2 compared to all other schools



b. G2 by area compared to all other schools



Source: Calculated from DfE 2011 School Performance Tables (DfE, 2012b), and DCSF 2008 Achievement and Attainment Tables (DCSF, 2009c)

The free school meals attainment gap did not change in London and Greater Manchester, but narrowed by 4.3 per cent in the Black Country.

6.3 Survey and qualitative data relating to impact of G2 programmes

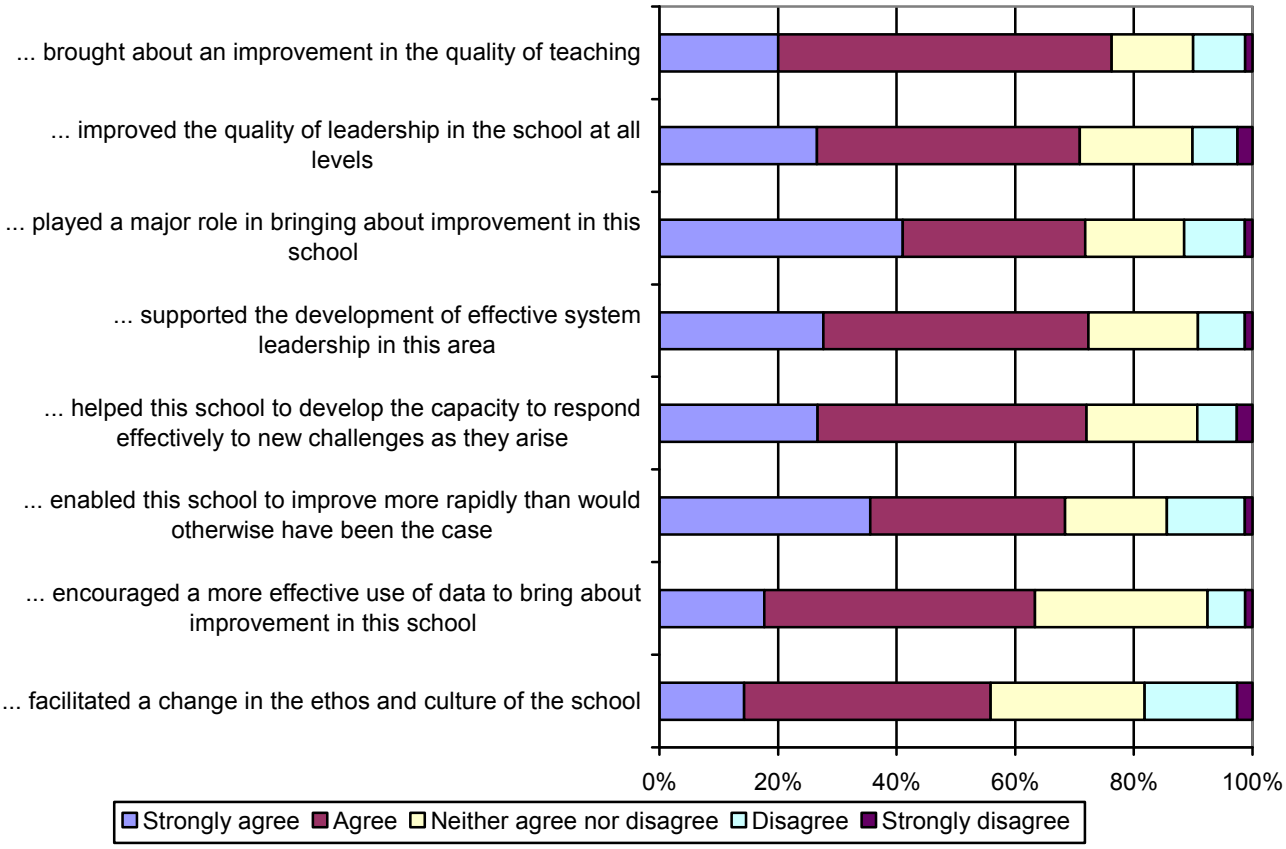
The survey attracted 147 responses from schools that DfE lists indicated were part of G2 programmes. However, of these, only 88 headteachers indicated that their schools had engaged in G2 programmes. The greatest discrepancy was in Greater Manchester, where only one-third of

[22] There was a difference between the two programmes in the Black Country in this. The gap in Pathways Plus schools widened by 1.6 per cent, and in G2 schools by 4.9 per cent.

those listed by the DfE as being in Good to Great indicated this on the survey, reflecting the fact that many schools in that area had very limited involvement. There was unsurprisingly a considerable difference between responses for those heads who identified their school as part of a G2 programme and those who did not. Those headteachers who indicated their schools had been involved in the programme were much more likely to attribute improvement to City Challenge. We have reported the responses only of those who indicated that their schools were in G2 programmes.

Figure 6.4 shows G2 headteachers' responses to general statements about the impact of their schools' involvement in the City Challenge programme. There were no significant differences relating to phase or area.

Figure 6.4: G2 headteachers' responses to general statements about the impact of their school's involvement in the City Challenge programme (N = 83)



Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

The statement that attracted the most combined 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses was that involvement in City Challenge had brought about an improvement in the quality of teaching. However, the statement that attracted the highest level of 'strongly agree' responses was that City Challenge had played a major role in bringing about improvement in the school (39 per cent). The statement that attracted the highest level of disagreement was that City Challenge had facilitated a change to the ethos and culture of the school. Those disagreeing were mainly NLEs and LLEs whose schools were already Outstanding. Comments showed that those who disagreed did so because they considered that the ethos and culture of their schools was already excellent.

Headteachers were also asked to indicate how far they agreed that 'City Challenge has raised the ambitions of urban schools serving disadvantaged communities.' Overall, 63 per cent of G2 heads agreed. However, NLE/LLEs were significantly more likely to agree with this statement than other

G2 heads (87 per cent versus 48 per cent). A number of respondents wrote comments to the effect that their schools already had high ambitions, and City Challenge had not further raised them.

London interviewees were clear that G2 had been beneficial. One primary headteacher argued that the Good to Outstanding programme (G2O) had had a very positive impact on the pupils' education. He said:

> *Where we've got a problem is that our results can't go much higher in terms of hitting that ceiling, but, do I think my kids get a better education because I've been involved in the G2O? Yes. Are my kids making more progress because of some of the things we've done as a result of G2O? Yes. Will my results go up comparatively to what they were three or four years ago? I don't know, but I do know that for those kids, especially in Key Stage 2, I would say as a consequence of some of the things they do, they get a richer curriculum.*

Similarly, headteachers of two Black Country Pathways Plus schools both stated that the programme had played a major part in their school improvement.

The headteachers who were the most positive about the G2 programmes were the NLEs and LLEs who were supporting other schools to become Outstanding. They recognised that the programme benefited them as much as it did the schools they were supporting. A London headteacher said:

> *As the Outstanding school, it does make you reflect on what makes you Outstanding and what you need to do to stay there. So supporting the other schools and helping them develop is brilliant, but it is equally valuable to us to reflect and review and improve our own practice the whole time, picking up ideas from them, developing things that we've done together.*

6.4 What aspects of G2 programmes were effective, and why?

6.4.1 Overview

Headteachers were asked on the survey how effective the various elements of G2 programmes had been in bring about school improvement. Their responses are shown on Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: How effective were the following elements of G2 programmes in bringing about school improvement? Responses from schools in G2 programmes

	Very effective %	Fairly effective %	Not very effective OR Not effective at all %	*Number responding*
Attending a conference, seminar or master class	48	45	7	*75*
Support in drawing up an action plan	35	52	13	*54*
Specific advice on preparing for Ofsted inspection	37	59	4	*46*
Staff attending the OTP	66	32	2	*44*
Leadership training for senior leaders	51	44	5	*41*
Leadership training for middle leaders	30	40	30	*41*
Working with the head of an Outstanding school or an NLE or LLE	50	38	13	*40*
Working with other members of staff from that school	44	49	8	*39*
Staff attending the ITP	56	41	3	*32*
N				*88*

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

The activities are listed in order of the number of headteachers who indicated that they had experienced each activity, and the percentages are of all those who *had* engaged in the activity. There were inevitably differences across areas in the number responding to each statement as a

result of the differences in design of the programmes. Thus while the majority of London respondents, particularly in primary schools, indicated that they had received support from the headteacher and staff of an Outstanding school, this was the case for only two headteachers outside London. There were no statistically significant differences in the ratings for effectiveness between the responses of primary and secondary schools or by area; this reflects the small number of respondents. However, generally London heads and those from primary schools were more positive in their responses.

6.4.2 Conferences, seminars and master classes

As Table 6.2 shows more headteachers indicated that they had participated in conferences, seminars or master classes than any other G2 activity. There was a considerable contrast between the termly conferences held in London and those in the other two areas; the former were designed to inspire headteachers and share good practice, while the latter focused closely on specifics relating to Ofsted inspections. In London, 60 per cent of respondents rated them as very effective, but ratings were much lower in each of the other areas (Black Country 39 per cent; Greater Manchester 25 per cent).

The key points that made the London conferences effective were the ethos; the use of speakers from other fields; talks from heads of Outstanding schools about practice in their schools; and more generally, the opportunities for networking. London primary headteachers and deputy heads who had attended the conferences said they found the ethos very refreshing in that other heads spoke about what their schools did well; they said this contrasted with the self-deprecating attitude of many headteachers; one head commented that at the conferences '*There's a definite culture in these schools about not being backward about saying what they're good at, and that's quite refreshing I think.'*

Headteachers also welcomed the inclusion of external speakers from fields other than education. The speakers included were very varied, including, for example, an Olympic gold medallist, a successful business person, and a professor speaking about the psychology of leadership. Interviewees commented that the talks were 'inspiring' and 'motivational' and that the underlying principles could be applied to school leadership.

Interviewees also said that they valued both the inputs from heads of Outstanding schools and the informal opportunities for networking with them. Deputy heads and headteachers who had attended reported that they always came away with renewed motivation and new ideas. The input from Outstanding heads at the conferences had directly led to changed practices in their school. In some cases this was direct implementation of a strategy talked about at the conference, but more often, the conference stimulated reflection which resulted in the implementation of change. The evaluation of London secondary Good to Great (Matthews and McLaughlin, 2010) similarly reported that the presentations from heads of Outstanding schools had been very valuable.

In Greater Manchester and the Black Country, the conferences and master classes had a very different character. The Greater Manchester master classes run by Serco covered topics such as the new Ofsted inspection framework, safeguarding, how to move from Good to Outstanding and improving the Self Evaluation Form (SEF). Whilst they were well attended, few of the headteachers interviewed had attended more than one event, and all stated that the impact on their schools was negligible, though they had enjoyed the opportunity to meet colleagues and discuss issues with them. Similarly, in the Black Country, the NFER evaluation of the Leadership Strategies reports that the Good to Bostin conferences focused on preparation for Ofsted inspections, completion of the SEF, and developing capacity and knowledge around measuring, recording and analysing pupils' progress. The impact reported by headteachers directly related to these topics; impact on pupil level was not reported (Featherstone and Bergeron, 2011).

Featherstone and Bergeron reported that the Good to Bostin conferences were not seen as useful for networking; this is in direct contrast to the London conferences. One Black Country headteacher that we interviewed commented that Black Country conferences would have been more useful if more heads of Outstanding schools had attended, and explained that after her school had been graded Outstanding by Ofsted, she had been told, '*you're not invited [to the conference] because you're now Outstanding'.*

6.4.3 Working with the headteachers of Outstanding schools

In London, a key element of the programme was for heads of Outstanding schools (generally NLEs or LLEs) to work with heads aiming to become Outstanding; many respondents reported that this was a key element in bringing about improvement. London primary schools were organised in groups of three, while London secondary heads were offered coaching from heads of Outstanding schools. This meant that a higher proportion of London heads responded to this item on the survey than of those from other areas, and 60 per cent of them indicated that this strategy was very effective.

The London primary G2 programme identified a lead school for each group of three (selecting either an Outstanding school or a Good school led by an LLE), and suggested a pattern of regular meetings. Headteachers we interviewed explained that this had not taken place; meetings had been less regular, and most often took place at the conferences. Nevertheless, they found the links valuable. Those who had worked as a three reported high levels of satisfaction, and argued that the enthusiasm and active involvement of all the headteachers was a key factor. A key aspect of the triangle working was that in addition to the head and deputy, it involved staff, particularly middle leaders, in sharing practice and learning from each other. This had enabled schools to move forward much more rapidly in new initiatives they were developing and in which other schools had expertise.

Some groups consisted of schools within the same LA, but most crossed LA boundaries, and most interviewees welcomed this, because it offered insights into different ways of doing things. However, in some cases, the distances between schools limited the feasibility of visiting.

The survey asked heads about working with other schools (Table 6.3). The vast majority agreed that this had been an effective strategy to bring about improvement (with 47 per cent strongly agreeing). Three-quarters of those responding also agreed that working with schools outside their own LA was particularly useful. However, 13 per cent indicated 'don't know' or 'not applicable', suggesting they had not experienced working with a school outside their LA.

Table 6.3: Extent to which G2 heads agreed with statements about working with other schools (N =83)

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Disagree or strongly disagree %	N/A, don't know or no response to this sub-question %
Working with other schools has been a very effective strategy to bring about improvement in this school	47	35	7	5	6
Working with schools outside my LA has been particularly useful	45	29	8	5	13

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

The evaluation of the London secondary G2 programme (Matthews and McLaughlin, 2010) similarly reported that the element most often cited by participants as the best part of the programme was the support of their coach, who was an experienced headteacher from an Outstanding school.

None of those we interviewed in Greater Manchester said they had been directly involved with school-to-school working as part of the G2 programme, though some had done so as a result of meeting like-minded colleagues at master classes, and finding areas of common interest that they could work on together. However, stakeholders explained that the emphasis of the Greater Manchester G2 activity in the final year of the Challenge shifted from master classes and baseline reviews to arranging partnerships with NLE/LLEs. This was part of a wider move to transfer the ownership and leadership of the various strands of the Challenge to headteachers, and in so doing, to grow the NLE/LLE leadership model so that headteachers would own and run the deployment of all local support. However, none of the G2 heads interviewed had had experience of this phase of the programme. In the final year, schools in Greater Manchester were also encouraged to work together on the G2 strand through their Family of Schools. This was reported to have had limited success; interviewees attributed this to lack of clarity about leadership of Families (see Chapter 8).

6.4.4 The Outstanding Teacher Programme and Improving Teacher Programme

Schools in the G2 programmes were able to send teachers on the Outstanding Teacher Programme (OTP) and Improving Teacher Programme (ITP) as one of the benefits of the programme. In the survey, the OTP was the most highly rated element of the G2 programmes, identified as 'very effective' by two-thirds of the G2 heads who responded to this question. However, only half the G2 survey respondents had experience of the OTP, and a smaller percentage of the ITP.

Headteachers reported that the OTP had impacted both on the teachers who had attended and on the school as a whole. The teachers interviewed also said they had benefited greatly from attending. One commented, '*it has definitely stepped my teaching up a notch. It's given me confidence. It makes you think about things you wouldn't necessarily have time to reflect on in school.'* In addition, it had changed this teacher's aspirations. She had always seen herself as a classroom teacher, but as a result of the OTP, she said that she was now aiming to move into leadership and possibly to do a Masters course.

An important aspect of the programme was that two or more teachers from each school attended together. They were then able to discuss what they had learned and how it applied in their own school. Teachers explained that this was the most beneficial part of the programme because it enabled them to focus on how to apply their learning in their own school. In the case study school, those who had been on the OTP were expected to lead a staff meeting at which they shared key learning and how it might be used in their school.

Matthews and McLaughlin reported that only a minority of London secondary G2 schools had used the OTP programme at the time of their evaluation, but that those who had done so reported it to be 'a very powerful way of consolidating skills and endorsing the quality of their outstanding practitioners' (2010: 15).

The ITP was less often used by G2 schools, presumably because the majority of their teachers did not need it. As in the KTS/PTA schools, one rationale for sending teachers on it was that, if it could be demonstrated that they did not improve with appropriate professional development activity, they could be encouraged to leave.

6.4.5 Knowledge centres or hubs

Knowledge centres or hub schools were set up in both London and Greater Manchester. They were established as centres of excellence and a resource for other schools in the G2 programme. Eight operated in London primary schools and six in Greater Manchester secondary schools. Those who had used the hubs found them very beneficial. Interviewees in London said they had found the hubs useful because they had been able to visit and find out about those schools'

excellent practices in areas they wanted to develop for example, maths and ICT. They reported that staff in schools they visited had been extremely helpful, taking time to answer their questions, and in one case even offering to come and speak to their governors.

In Greater Manchester the hub schools or knowledge centres were established towards the end of City Challenge, after autumn 2010, with funding that was left in the strand. Most of the headteachers interviewed had not heard of them, and even where they had, had not used them.

6.4.6 Baseline reviews

In Greater Manchester, baseline reviews were reported to be useful in preparing for Ofsted inspections. They were offered free to Good schools that were aspiring to be Outstanding; 24 schools took part. They aimed to help schools to identify their strengths and weaknesses prior to inspection, and involved a two-day structured and supported review of practice carried out by a Serco team of ex-HMIs, with a third visit a term later to assess the impact and sustainability of suggested measures. Interviewees described the review as *'in depth'* and '*thorough'*, and indicated that it had contributed to becoming Outstanding.

6.4.7 Funding

Respondents agreed that the funding they received was critical in allowing schools to release staff to attend courses and conferences, or visit hub or partner schools. This was at a relatively low level (up to £3k a year). In London, headteachers said the funding was sufficient to provide for cover for senior and middle leaders meeting their counterparts in the group of three or visiting hub schools. But headteachers pointed out that it was not simply the direct funding that was effective, but also the benefits in kind: the conferences, and the OTP and ITP, all of which were beneficial.

The only exception to the pattern of relatively low funding was the Pathways Plus programme in the Black Country that took place only in the first year of the Challenge; this offered £15-20k per school, depending on the action plan agreed with a City Challenge advisor. This higher level of funding obviously impacted on the activities that were possible; one school had bought laptops for pupils, engaged a theatre company to help the school with creative writing and used sport to teach maths. Progress was monitored by the local authorities and schools were accountable to BCCSIP for their progress. It is likely that this level of funding and consequent activity contributed to the considerable improvement in attainment for schools in this programme.

6.5 Summary: Improving Good and Outstanding schools

Each area had programmes designed to support Good schools in becoming Outstanding. The aim was to increase the number of Outstanding schools, and this was achieved in all three areas. However, the changed Ofsted framework meant that only just over half the schools were inspected between 2008 and 2011, and Outstanding grades become harder to achieve.

These programmes varied in character. In London the focus was strongly on motivating and inspiring school leaders, and sharing outstanding practice. This was done through conferences, schools working together in small groups, and the setting up of knowledge centres in schools that had specific areas of outstanding practice that others could visit and learn from. The feedback on all these aspects of the programme was overwhelmingly positive. Interviewees valued the ethos of the programme, and the opportunities to network with heads of Outstanding schools, and reported a direct impact on practice in their own schools and the quality of education they were providing for pupils.

In the Black Country and Greater Manchester, the programmes were far more closely focused on the Ofsted framework and self-evaluation. Some heads reported that these had been useful in preparing for inspection. However, they did not involve opportunities to meet and network with

outstanding headteachers. In the final year of the programme, Greater Manchester developed new strategies including schools working together and hub schools which others could visit to find out about different aspects of Outstanding practice, but none of the interviewees had experienced this.

7 Improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged groups

7.1 Introduction

One of the aims of City Challenge was to improve the educational outcomes for disadvantaged children. This aspiration became a particular priority in the final two years of the Challenge. There were focused programmes to narrow or close attainment gaps in all three areas, and additionally, every City Challenge programme included this in its aims. This chapter focuses on the specific interventions in each area which were entirely focused on narrowing attainment gaps. The main focus has been attainment gaps between those pupils who are eligible for Free School Meals and those who are not; however, gaps relating to other disadvantaged groups were also addressed in some schools. The emphasis of the interventions, and the title, changed in the final year of the Challenge from Narrowing the Gap (NtG) to Closing the Gap (CtG); we refer to CtG throughout this chapter rather than trying to make a distinction.

Reducing attainment gaps was not the only aim. Interviews with stakeholders suggested there were a number of implicit agendas:

- to raise awareness of the FSM gaps;
- to provide a focus and goal for school-to-school collaboration as a mechanism for school improvement;
- to give schools a 'taste' of what they could do with their pupil premium funding.

The interventions were organised and funded differently in each Challenge area. In London, following an initial conference, NLEs and LLEs were encouraged to apply for funding (£3k per school) to tackle this issue in their own schools and in the schools they were supporting. In subsequent waves, this invitation was extended to other schools in the London Challenge, and schools with particularly large attainment gaps were targeted. Schools were encouraged to work in groups, some led by an NLE or LLE, but many schools worked on their own. Another strand involved LAs working in clusters (with funding of £100k per cluster, which in one cluster translated to just £1k per school). The final year saw legacy work funding NLEs to set up partnerships working with other schools to close the gap.

In Greater Manchester, the CtG strand was led by one of the LAs and a Challenge Advisor. Initially closely based on the *Extra Mile* (DCSF, 2008e), schools worked individually or as collaborative groups, with funding of approximately £5k per school. Work to narrow or close gaps assumed a higher priority in the final year of the programme; specific schools were targeted; exemplary work being done by existing collaborations was given further funding; and Families of Schools were encouraged to submit proposals for closing the gap work (£30-60k per Family).

In the Black Country, there were some early programmes relating to Travellers and Looked After Children; stakeholders reported that these had been very successful. A wider programme was initiated in 2009/10, through which schools could apply for £3k to work on attainment gaps. Take-up was limited, so in the final year of the Challenge, a different approach was taken. Schools with large FSM gaps were targeted using the existing National College structure of clusters led by LLEs. There was no prescription about how these clusters would operate, however there was an expectation that there would be rigorous action planning led by the LLE, and schools would be expected to demonstrate impact. The funding for a primary cluster was approximately £3k per school and for secondary approximately £10k per school. Overall, a total of at least 654 schools were funded for CtG work. This is about one fifth of all primary and secondary schools in the Challenge areas.

The programmes were thus very varied, and the schools' decisions about which gaps to address also varied. Four out of five CtG funded schools indicated on the survey that they had developed specific strategies to tackle gaps relating to pupils eligible for FSM, but they also tackled a range of other gaps (Table 7.1). In addition, many schools that did not receive CtG funding also tackled attainment gaps relating to specific groups. However, the responses showed that CtG-funded schools were significantly more likely than others to focus on gaps relating to FSM.

Table 7.1: Percentage of schools in CC areas indicating that they have developed specific strategies to tackle under-attainment in specific groups of pupils

	CtG funded schools %	Other schools[23] %
Pupils eligible for free school meals	81	58
Pupils with special educational needs	76	73
Pupils with English as an additional language	68	55
Cared for children	54	47
Specific minority ethnic groups	52	41
White boys	50	47
Another group	18	16
N	*195*	*247*

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

Primary schools were significantly more likely than secondary to indicate that they had developed strategies to tackle gaps relating to pupils with EAL and specific minority ethnic groups. There were also a number of differences across City Challenge areas. Schools in London (whether CtG-funded or not) were significantly more likely to focus on gaps relating to EAL and ethnicity, reflecting the greater ethnic diversity in London. Among the CtG-funded schools, those in Greater Manchester were significantly less likely to indicate that they focused on the FSM gap (Greater Manchester 57 per cent, London 87 per cent, and the Black Country 95 per cent).

7.2 To what extent did FSM attainment gaps narrow in schools funded for Closing the Gap?

The analysis presented here is limited in that, while the DfE has supplied lists of schools that received specific funding for CtG, we are aware that these do not include all the schools that received such funding. For example, in London, LA clusters distributed CtG funding to schools, and we do not have lists of those schools. Moreover, many of the schools that received CtG funding were also involved in other Challenge programmes, and it is not possible to say how each input impacted on attainment. Nevertheless, out of interest, we have reviewed the changes in the attainment gap in the schools that we know had funding for this purpose (Table 7.2).

[23] It should be noted that over half of the schools recorded on Table 7.1 as 'other schools' indicated that they received funding for narrowing the gap through other City Challenge programmes. But it is also worth noting that 15 per cent of the schools that we refer to as CtG-funded (because they appear on DfE lists) indicated that they had not received funding from any source for narrowing gaps.

Table 7.2: Percentage points by which FSM attainment gap narrowed 2008-11 among pupils in schools that were funded for this and those that were not known to have funding

	Primary			*Secondary*		
	London	GM	BC	London	GM	BC
funded	7.2	2.0	3.4	-1.2%	-1.1%	-0.9%
not funded	2.5	2.1	1.5	2.8%	-1.0%	-1.2%
total	3.5	2.2	1.9	1.9%	-0.4%	-0.8%

Negative figures indicate that the attainment gap widened.
Source: National Pupil Database

Table 7.2 shows that among pupils in London and the Black Country primary schools with CtG funding, the FSM attainment gap narrowed more than it did among pupils in schools not known to have funding. However, this was not the case in Greater Manchester, where there was little difference between funded and unfunded schools.

However, in secondary schools, the FSM attainment gap widened among pupils in CtG-funded schools in each area. In London, this contrasted with a narrowing of the gap among pupils in schools that were not funded. One possible explanation for this could be that in each area, the 2008 attainment gap was smaller in CtG-funded schools than in those that were not funded. (Thus schools with large gaps were not effectively targeted.) Possibly the schools with larger gaps found it easier to reduce them.

In the survey and interviews, schools funded for CtG reported a considerable level of success. In the survey, respondents were asked how successful their strategies to narrow or close attainment gaps had been in terms of attainment as evidenced by national tests and GCSE results. A majority of both CtG-funded and other schools indicated that they had been very or fairly successful, but the percentage of the CtG-funded group was significantly higher (84 versus 71 per cent) (Table 7.3).

Table 7.3: How successful have your strategies to narrow or close attainment gaps been, as evidenced by national assessment tests and GCSEs? Comparison of responses from schools funded for CtG and those that were not

	CtG-funded %	Other schools %	Total %
Very successful	37	27	32
Fairly successful	47	45	46
Limited success	6	15	11
Too early to expect outcomes	9	13	11
N	*158*	*154*	*312*

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

Those in London were more likely than those in either of the other two areas to indicate that their strategies had been 'very successful' (London 39 per cent, Greater Manchester 25 per cent, Black Country 20 per cent), while those in the Black Country were the most likely to indicate that it was too early to expect outcomes (25 per cent – this was unsurprising in that the main programme in the Black Country had been running for less than six months when the survey was conducted). There were no differences relating to school phase.

Interviews and comments written on the survey also revealed positive perceptions of the success of the programme, because it had focused staff on the need to narrow attainment gaps, and had

contributed to the cost of putting appropriate strategies in place. Documentary data relating to this strand[24] (which often included views from staff, students and/or parents), together with interview data, suggested that there were also 'softer gains' in breaking down barriers with parents and in increasing students' confidence.

7.3 What aspects of Closing the Gap programmes were effective, and why?

The data does not enable us to make links between the various strategies used to narrow gaps and success in closing attainment gaps. However, there are a number of key aspects of this intervention that were reported to be particularly effective in generating activity to raise awareness, and focus attention on strategies to narrow or close FSM attainment gaps. We detail these below, while also outlining lessons learnt and what might have been done differently. This section focuses firstly on the strategies used to support schools in CtG work, and then discusses the different strategies that schools put in place to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

The survey asked about the effectiveness of various forms of support for CtG (Table 7.4). The most frequently experienced form of support was working with other headteachers and/or their staff; this was rated very or fairly effective by 91 per cent of those who had experienced it.

Table 7.4: How effective were the following elements of CtG support in your school? Percentage of those who had experienced different types of support who indicated that it was very or fairly effective (N = 298)

	Very effective %	Fairly effective %	Number who had experienced this support
Working with other headteachers (including an LLE or NLE) and/or with staff in their schools	50	41	*230*
Support in identifying attainment gaps and under-performance in individuals or groups	42	47	*201*
Support in drawing up action plan to tackle under-performance	32	54	*196*
Attending a conference or workshop	30	54	*201*
The Extra Mile materials	30	51	*63*

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

7.3.1 Structure, leadership and accountability

Interviewees strongly suggested that structure, leadership and accountability were key factors in both the initial take-up of the CtG programmes and subsequent activities. They argued that the low number of schools applying for funding in London and the Black Country in the first year of funding (2009-10) reflected the lack of programme leadership at that time. Subsequently, in both areas strategic leads were employed to encourage schools to apply for funding and to coordinate the work.

A number of interviewees argued that structure and leadership was necessary to get schools to take full advantage of opportunities available. In particular, these interviewees spoke positively of having an overarching structure that operated across the Challenge area and a layer of coordinating roles such as LA or cluster leads, with regular meetings and clear accountability structures. Stakeholders felt this prevented tasks from '*drifting'*. An LA interviewee from a London

[24] This included a sample of school proposals; monitoring reports; school and cluster internal evaluation reports or 'showcase' documents.

LA cluster which created a post to lead its CtG work argued that this had been a key factor in its success:

> *She was very passionate about what she was doing and as a consequence it kept it on the agenda, very much so. It was a consistent drive in the fact that we used to meet termly and the way that we set it up with our process and our procedures of accountability.*

However, some interviewees argued that paying someone to coordinate is expensive, and eats into what is already a small budget, and the money could be used more effectively in schools.

In the Black Country, initially, schools were awarded CtG funds but there was no mechanism to check how this was spent; one advisor explained that this was a purposeful move to cultivate a '*high trust*' culture. Then in the last year of the Challenge in the Black Country, all schools with persistent FSM gaps of seven per cent or more were targeted and encouraged to participate in a Challenge-wide programme. Interviewees argued that working with the existing National College structure of LLE-led clusters within LAs produced a well organised programme coordinated by LLEs. Funding of £10k per school was available; this was administered by the LLEs who were then able to hold schools in their clusters to account. Interviewees felt that this approach was preferable to, and more productive than, the previous '*give out a grant and get on with it'* approach. Following an initial conference, an action plan within clusters was agreed, and regular cluster meetings took place with monitoring and sharing of data. The cluster meeting we observed was attended by the advisor leading this work strand in secondary schools, as well as the LLE responsible for the cluster, and senior leaders (generally deputy heads) from the majority of the schools involved.

While structure was seen as necessary to encourage schools to engage in the programme, and to ensure accountability, this programme, like many City Challenge programmes, offered a huge amount of autonomy to schools; they had the freedom to decide (individually, or with advice within their cluster) what strategies they would use. This gave them a feeling of ownership and commitment which was very evident in teachers' presentations at the LA cluster CtG conference which we attended.

Unsurprisingly, a very wide range of different activities resulted. Some of these are outlined in Section 7.3.6. The degree to which plans were monitored varied. In the Black Country, it was possible for cluster coordinators to withhold funding if they were not happy with the plans proposed. An LLE leading a cluster explained that all the funding for schools in the cluster was held in her school, and said that she was '*really strict about having it spent against the action plan ... so it doesn't end up in the bottomless hole of school budgets.'* In London, schools submitted plans when they applied for funding, and subsequently submitted reports. However, stakeholders acknowledged that the level of monitoring was limited. Within the London LA cluster that appointed a full-time leader for its CtG work, interviewees stressed that this was an important in terms of accountability. An LA officer explained, '*you've got an individual who is accountable not only to the individual local authorities but to the board and also is accountable for the outcome for those particular projects.'*

7.3.2 Working with other schools

In the survey, working with other headteachers and other school staff was rated as the most effective form of support for closing attainment gaps. In most cases, the cluster working that took place appeared to involve discussing and sharing practice rather than collaboration. The most effective cluster groups:

- raised awareness of attainment gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers;
- through discussion, enabled participants to come up with more imaginative and innovative ways of addressing gaps than might otherwise have been the case;
- provided accountability (schools had to report progress to access funding).

A cluster leader reported those schools whose staff regularly attended the cluster meetings made more progress than those who did not attend. However, it appeared that the messages about addressing attainment gaps did not necessarily get passed back to all staff in each of the cluster schools.

In a few cases, school clusters used their funding to buy training for their staff, having identified a common need. For example, one agreed on the need for better training for teaching assistants, following Blatchford's (2009) research which showed how often the most vulnerable children work with support staff. The cluster meeting agreed what was needed in the training, (e.g. assessment for learning, questioning skills) and the coordinator of CtG within the wider LA cluster created and delivered a programme. This was possibly a more effective strategy for spreading the message to a wider range of staff in each school.

Another strategy for sharing practice was holding conferences at which teachers or school leaders presented the work they had been doing. A London LA cluster held two conferences at which schools made short presentations about the CtG work that they had been doing. These received very positive feedback from those who attended. The conferences involved both primary and secondary schools, and the organiser had been uncertain about whether this would work, but the feedback suggested that both primary and secondary teachers who attended felt they had benefited from hearing about work in the other phase.

7.3.3 Raising awareness of attainment gaps relating to poverty

The work strand's implicit aim of raising awareness about FSM gaps was generally achieved. Via the sheer reach of the initiative, this aspect has been successful in 'sharpening' schools' focus on inequalities, especially for those schools and LAs where gaps were large. Headteachers attending one of the conferences reported a previous naivety about just how stark and systematic the gap is. When staff interrogated their data, exploring which children were eligible FSM, they often found an invisible population of marginalised students. One advisor commented, '*I don't think the heads had realised that the group of free school meal children in their school felt the way they did about not being part of the ethos and the culture [of the school].'*

Consequently, some of the work had the primary focus of raising awareness of the issue. For example, one London LA used the funding to run a training course for maths and English subject leaders, assessment coordinators and headteachers in ten primary schools with large attainment gaps, drawing on the seven key actions in the DCSF *Pockets of Poverty* report (2010a) and previous work. They described this as primarily a '*raising awareness'* exercise. They reported that subsequently the gap narrowed for primary schools in the LA, but not in secondary schools, which did not have gaps brought to their attention in this way. (However, as we have seen, gaps among primary pupils are more likely to narrow than those among secondary pupils.)

Despite efforts to raise awareness, analysis of case studies, telephone interviews and a sample of funding proposals and interim reports shows that more than half the schools sampled (15/33) did not focus on FSM gaps, but on other significant 'gaps' in their school, or on raising the attainment of *all* their lowest attaining pupils; some used the funding for general school improvement. Those who used the funding for all low attaining pupils, or for general school improvement entirely missed the message that some groups of children are systematically disadvantaged. In some cases it appeared that they had used the funding for something that was a school priority (in one case a Virtual Learning Environment) without thinking through whether this would contribute to closing attainment gaps. It is clearly useful that the published school performance data now draws attention to gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, and may mean that in future that possibly less effort will need to be made to raise awareness.

While some interviewees, having realised the extent to which those eligible for FSM lagged behind their peers, were very positive about the programme, others expressed concern about the focus on

'gaps', pointing out that gaps may actually be at their smallest when overall attainment is low, and that interpreting school-level FSM gaps as significant is problematic when there are only a few students eligible for FSM in a year group. It was also argued that FSM gaps are more pronounced in more affluent areas, so a focus on gaps may not be particularly useful for schools in disadvantaged areas. Some interviewees suggested that it would be better to focus on the actual level of attainment of the FSM pupils, rather than focusing on the gap between them and their non-FSM peers.

7.3.4 Funding

The funding available to each school, as explained above, varied enormously, with some schools receiving less than £1k while others received £10k. The lack of take-up in the initial period suggests that possibly £3k was not enough of an incentive to encourage schools to apply. However, all the school interviewees argued that the funding was put to good use. Much of it was used for cover, to enable staff to attend meetings or conferences. Some schools used it to pay for individual tuition for pupils, or to create posts for staff to focus on this issue. It was also common for schools to spend the money directly on activities for the students such as extra curricular projects and trips or intensive away-days or residential study time. A small number of schools spent the funds on ICT resources such as laptops for FSM pupils.

We do not have enough information to be able to say how successful each of these strategies was, but the funding undoubtedly helped to raise awareness of attainment gaps, and provided an incentive to find ways to address them.

7.3.5 Use of materials such as the Extra Mile, Pockets of Poverty, etc.

While there is plenty of material available reporting effective ways of supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, relatively few schools made use of this; Table 7.4 showed that only just over a fifth of headteachers indicated that they had used the Extra Mile materials. The Challenge CtG programme was preceded by the *Extra Mile* (DCSF 2008e; DfE, 2010b, 2010c), an evidence-based and fully evaluated programme with good practice guides for schools. Indeed a host of material was available for schools to learn from, including *Pockets of Poverty* (DSCF 2010a), the DCSF booklet *The Golden Thread* (DCSF, 2009f) and *Breaking the link between disadvantage and low attainment* (DCSF 2009g). While some schools were aware of this material, others were not, and were therefore starting from scratch.

Schools became aware of these materials only when there were organised communication channels to inform them of what was available and was useful. Written communication did not appear to be effective in this respect; where schools did use these materials this had resulted from face to face communication. For example, the lead schools in Black Country CtG clusters were told about these materials by the programme coordinator, and some cluster groups leaders then passed this information on to schools in the cluster at their meetings. We referred above to the training a London cluster group arranged which was based on Pockets of Poverty. The London CtG programme began with a conference for NLE/LLEs which involved presentations about the Extra Mile. However, when other London schools subsequently joined the programme, they were not necessarily made aware of the material, though one London coordinator talked about providing some schools with a pack containing documents from the Extra Mile.

The case studies showed that where school leaders were aware of the materials available, they tended to use them; for example, in a Black Country case study cluster, the Extra Mile materials

provided the initial ideas for the agreed action plan. It seemed a lost opportunity that many schools were not using such a strong body of material[25].

7.3.6 School strategies for raising the attainment of pupils in disadvantaged groups

It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to review the whole range of strategies used to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. In this section we describe two common approaches: some schools focused mainly on those pupils approaching national tests or GCSEs, while others focused mainly on trying to bring about sustainable change.

Many schools chose to support FSM pupils (or their specified 'vulnerable' group) by providing one-to-one or small group tuition. For example, one London primary school, guided by their Challenge advisor, put in a proposal to the DfE to use the CtG funding to employ consultants in English and maths to run extra tuition for Year 6 pupils eligible for FSM at a ten-week Saturday school. They selected FSM pupils who were underachieving, but had the potential to achieve Level 4 with additional support. Both the advisor and the headteacher claimed this to be an outstanding success, and in that year, the FSM and non-FSM pupils did equally well in KS2 national tests. Similar approaches involved running breakfast clubs or after-schools revision clubs for disadvantaged students approaching national tests or GCSEs, one-to-one tuition, or even, in one case, paying for private tuition.

Opinions were divided as to the merits of such strategies. Some argued that it was beneficial '*particularly for your vulnerable children who are lacking self esteem [and] don't speak up very often*'. Others were critical. It was claimed that the attention of one-to-one tuition does not suit all children; it is expensive; and the remedial focus on those underachieving is pejorative. In the context of this programme, a more serious concern is that while individual tuition may benefit the pupils who receive it, and the school's position in the league tables, it does nothing to build the school's capacity to raise standards among its FSM pupils more generally; it improves results but does not contribute to school improvement. Moreover, it can only be sustained while the extra funding is in place.

Other schools used the funding to test strategies, to experiment and then to embed good practice. A Black Country secondary school cluster illustrates this approach. Working collaboratively, and drawing on the Extra Mile material, the schools in the cluster developed a 'Widening Horizons' project. They collected data from the schools and pupils, and examined it at cluster meetings. They found that students in receipt of FSM were less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities; that there was a '*really strong link between free school meal children and virtually zero parental engagement';* and that those in receipt of FSM were less likely to apply to further study. The cluster initiated a number of measures:

- They arranged extra-curricular activities for pupils who had not previously participated;
- Strategies to increase parental engagement included sending personalised invitations to parents' evening to parents of students in receipt of FSM, texting them, and arranging transport where needed. As a result of this approach, attendance of parents of students eligible for FSM rose dramatically in each schools (for example, from 18 to 74 per cent in one school).
- A Student Leadership training programme targeted Year 9 students in receipt of FSM who were less engaged. This resulted in a Chartered Management Institute certificate which contributed to their GCSE point score.

[25] At the time of the research, all these materials were easily accessible on line, However, more recent web searches have shown that the Extra Mile materials are not now easily accessible.

- In collaboration with another school in their cluster, the lead school bought into a Connexions *Careers Passport* programme of intensive careers support for targeted students. Subsequently all but one of the students who took part achieved places in Further Education colleges.

Both the approaches described here (quick fix and longer term) resulted in improved attainment for pupils eligible for FSM, but the second had the potential to create a sustained change in approach throughout the school.

7.4 Summary: improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils

The main emphasis of interventions in this strand was on narrowing attainment gaps between those eligible for Free School meals (FSM) and their peers. However, smaller interventions also focused on Looked After Children and Travellers.

Data shows that in London and the Black Country, attainment gaps among pupils in primary schools funded through this intervention narrowed more than in other schools. However, this was not the case in Greater Manchester primary schools or in secondary schools. The majority of schools involved in this evaluation reported that their strategies to tackle attainment gaps were successful. The programme was successful through its reach in terms of raising awareness of FSM gaps and the systematic disadvantage that some students are facing.

Schools and school clusters appreciated having the autonomy to decide what strategies to put in place. Funding was regarded as essential both for raising awareness and for being able to make schools accountable. Working in clusters motivated schools and allowed them to share effective practice; this was highly rated. The extent to which plans or outcomes were monitored varied. Interviewees emphasised the importance of structure and leadership at area and cluster level both in ensuring that schools and school clusters operated effectively, and in providing a channel of communication through which school leaders could be informed about existing materials and good practice guides.

The strategies schools used to support pupils eligible for FSM varied enormously. Only a small minority of schools drew on existing materials and best practice guides such as the *Extra Mile*. Some strategies, like buying in external support for tuition for exam classes, had a positive, but short term impact. Other strategies such as working with parents were more likely to build capacity and raise awareness among the school staff, children and parents and to embed practice which is more likely to be effective and sustainable in the long term.

8 Families of Schools

8.1 Introduction

This intervention initially involved annual provision of data (in books and online) that would enable schools to benchmark against a group of schools with similar intakes based on prior attainment and socio-economic factors (e.g. DfE, 2010b, 2010c). The groups were known as Families of Schools (FoS), and varied in size from six to 22 schools. The rationale was that benchmarking would potentially challenge school leaders to explore why others were doing better in certain respects, and so to identify new strategies for raising attainment in their own schools. Thus it was anticipated that the provision of FoS data would encourage schools to communicate and share effective practice, and consequently improve. This approach drew inspiration from research evidence (see literature review, Appendix B) which had identified collaboration between schools and the use of data as important drivers of school improvement. Subsequently, in Greater Manchester and the Black Country, funding was provided to encourage and support schools to collaborate in Families. This chapter evaluates both the use of FoS data in all areas, and the funded collaborative activity.

In Greater Manchester, funding was offered to support Families to network, share practice and work together on projects to address common issues. Each primary phase Family could apply for up to £25k and each secondary phase Family £35k. In the final year of the Challenge, Families were encouraged to bid for a one-off sum of £60k. The use of the funding was not prescribed; the onus was on the Family to come up with a proposal and submit a request for funding. However, the final block of funding was more closely aligned with DfE priorities around closing gaps.

In the Black Country FoS activities were coordinated by the National College, which offered grants to support events (e.g. conferences) and dialogue across schools; each school could access £3k on submission of an action plan. The programme was not compulsory and relied on the enthusiasm of schools and the commitment and drive of the LAs involved. This programme was evaluated by the NFER (Featherstone and Bergeron, 2011).

In London, there was no funded programme. Schools had access to FoS books and online resources to use as they saw fit. We were told that secondary advisors encouraged schools to make use of this resource for benchmarking, but the primary advisors did not see FoS as a particularly helpful resource; they preferred to support schools to work in a range of other groups and programmes outlined in this report.

The next two sections consider the outcomes and impact of the provision of FoS data and of funding collaborative activity.

8.2 How effective was the provision of Families of Schools data?

The aspiration behind the provision of FoS data was that schools should use it for benchmarking and as a basis for communication with other schools, which would then inform school improvement. Overall, this evaluation suggests that this was largely unsuccessful in terms of schools' awareness, use and understanding of FoS data.

The survey asked headteachers to indicate who used FoS data and to what extent. Table 8.1 shows that heads indicated that they made more use of the data than the other groups listed. This lack of engagement amongst other categories of staff was reflected in low levels of awareness and use reported in interviews.

Table 8.1: Headteachers' responses about the use made of FoS data by different groups in their schools (N = 377)

	Headteacher %	Other leadership team members %	Middle managers, HoDs %	All teachers %	Governors %	Support staff responsible for data management %
Use it a great deal	13	5	-	0	1	1
Use it a little	45	37	16	7	14	11
Do not make use of it	24	33	52	62	55	52
N/A, don't know or missing	18	24	32	31	30	36

Note: 78 heads (17 per cent of the sample) did not respond to any part of the question and have been omitted on this table. Thus the percentage actually using the data may be lower than these figures suggest.
Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

There were significant differences between survey responses from primary and secondary schools; secondary heads were much more likely to indicate that FoS resources were used (Table 8.2). In some cases, this may have reflected the limited number of roles in primary schools (some schools have no middle managers, heads of department, or support staff responsible for data management); however, the overwhelming pattern is that primary schools made less use of the books.

Table 8.2: Percentage of respondents indicating that various groups use FoS data 'a great deal' or 'a little', by school phase

	Primary %	Secondary %
Headteacher	35	87
Other leadership team members	28	75
Middle managers, HoDs	7	36
All teachers	63	80
Governors	11	25
Support staff responsible for data management	4	30
N	*254*	*117*

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

Respondents in London were significantly less likely to say that any staff group made use of the books, and more likely to indicate 'Not applicable / Don't know'. Thus only eight per cent of those in London who answered this question indicated that they themselves used the FoS resources 'a great deal', compared with 21 per cent in the Black Country and 16 per cent in Greater Manchester, and less then half in London indicated that they *ever* used the resources, compared with two-thirds in the Black Country and over three-quarters in Greater Manchester.

Those who used the FoS data were asked how often they used it for specific purposes. Only 186 respondents (two out of five of the whole sample) responded. Table 8.3 shows the total percentage that indicated that they ever used the data for the specified purposes; it combines those who responded 'regularly' and those who responded 'occasionally'. For each option twice as many respondents indicated 'occasionally' as 'regularly'.

The most frequent use overall was 'for interest to see how the school compares to others'. Those from Greater Manchester were significantly the most likely (and London the least likely) to report that they used the FoS resource as a basis for contacting other schools, and for discussion between schools in the Family. However, they were significantly the least likely to say that they used the data to inform their school improvement planning. There were no significant differences by school phase.

Table 8.3: Percentage of headteachers in each area indicating that Families of Schools resources are ever used for various purposes (N = 185)

	London %	GM %	BC %	Total %
For interest to see how the school compares to others	97	94	97	95
To identify your school's strengths and weaknesses	81	75	89	80
As a basis for identifying other similar schools to contact	62	86	76	75
As a basis for your school improvement planning	64	49	78	61
As a basis for discussion between schools in the Family	35	72	43	53

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools
This table combines those that responded 'occasionally' and 'regularly'.

Interviews showed that awareness of the FoS books varied across the Challenge areas. It also varied with the date the school had first been involved in the Challenge. Headteachers who had been involved in the London Challenge in its early days spoke much more positively about the FoS books than those whose involvement was more recent, suggesting that, when they were first introduced, there had been a greater effort to make headteachers aware of their potential. The headteacher of a secondary school that had been in Keys to Success in 2003-5 explained:

> *In the first year we were in I would say the bottom Family, and there were 27 in those days. And so, without accepting low standards, it allowed us to plot other schools alongside us with similar intakes on what they were doing. ... And also it allowed you to contact other schools. ... We sometimes saw schools where they'd suddenly been doing better in science or maths, and it allowed us to contact them and say, what are you doing?*

However, among schools in London and the Black Country that had a more recent involvement, many of the headteachers said they had never heard of or seen the books, though when interviewers showed them the material relating to their schools, they were interested, and said they would now look at the resource.

Amongst interviewees in Greater Manchester, where collaborative activity was funded, there appeared to be some awareness, but few knew that the material was available online, and fewer still made any use of it. Several headteachers suggested that it would be useful to have some training to show people how the data could be used effectively.

Those who did not use the FoS materials were asked in the survey to indicate their reasons (Table 8.4). The most frequently cited reason was that the LA provides data which enables schools to compare themselves with others in the LA. This was significantly more common among primary headteachers than secondary (68 versus 49 per cent). This suggests that primary schools in particular may not recognise the merits of looking outside the LA.

Table 8.4: Major reasons given for not using FoS books or online information (N = 270)

	London %	GM %	BC %	Total %
The LA provides data which enables our school to compare its performance to that of other schools in the LA	71	58	49	62
Some staff do not know about Families of Schools	36	7	27	23
We have been partnered with an LLE or NLE's school and therefore we do not need to work with schools in the Family	22	14	10	17
The other schools in the Family are too far away to be useful collaborators	11	14	20	14

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

8.3 How effective was the provision of funding to support Family collaboration

The funded FoS programme in Greater Manchester was successful in activating participation amongst the majority of Families in both primary and secondary phases (Table 8.5).

Table 8.5: Greater Manchester Challenge Families of Schools Footprint 2010-11

	Number of active Families	Number of schools that received funding
Primary	40 (n=60)	153 (n=725)
Secondary	9 (n=13)	67 (n=168)

Source: DfE data

Similarly, in the Black Country, the NFER evaluation reported that 100 schools in 22 Families (out of the total of 32) took part in collaborative activity (Featherstone and Bergeron, 2011).

Schools in Family collaborations had a similar pattern of attainment to other schools in the same Challenge areas. The majority of these schools were in other funded City Challenge programmes, therefore it is not possible to distinguish the impact of FoS collaboration on attainment. Further, the impacts of collaboration are likely to be indirect and diffuse, since collaboration itself is dynamic, and varied in terms of the activities and topics schools work on. Interviewees and survey respondents identified a number of benefits of successful collaboration through FoS, but did not claim that it had impacted on attainment. Similarly, in the Black Country, Featherstone and Bergeron state that FoS schools did not generally identify impact at the level of pupil attainment.

A key benefit of FoS collaborations were that they afforded opportunities to work with schools that would not otherwise have been encountered, and particularly those in other LAs. Heads saw this as a rare opportunity presented by the programme. They saw such groupings as less threatening than working with schools in their own LA because they were not competing with each other, and so there was '*a real honest dialogue*'. This finding was confirmed by the survey data, which showed that in Greater Manchester, respondents from FoS-funded schools were significantly more likely than other heads to say that working with other schools in general, and across LAs in particular, played a major role in their school improvement (Table 8.6).

Table 8.6: Percentage of respondents in Greater Manchester that strongly agreed or agreed with statements about working with other schools: comparison of FoS-funded schools with others

	FoS funded %	Others %
Working with other schools has been a very effective strategy to bring about improvement in this school	72	46
Working with schools outside my LA has been particularly useful	56	38
N	*82*	*71*

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

Survey respondents who had communicated with other schools indicated that the most effective outcome of discussions within their Families was sharing of good practice (Table 8.7). This was the case in all areas, including London where Family collaborations were not funded. However, those in Greater Manchester, where many Families were funded to collaborate, were significantly more likely to indicate that Family discussions were effective in identifying areas in which the school could improve, or deciding on strategies to address underachievement. There were no significant differences in these responses relating to school phase.

Table 8.7: Percentage of respondents indicating that discussion with other schools in their Family has been very effective or fairly effective in different ways, by area

	London %	GM %	BC %	Total
… sharing good practice	67	86	78	80
… identifying specific areas in which your school could improve	52	81	52	69
… deciding strategies to address underachievement	50	73	41	62
… identifying specific groups of pupils who are underachieving	42	57	43	51
N	*27*	*69*	*23*	*119*

Source: City Challenge evaluation survey of schools

It is notable that Black Country respondents did not emphasise the potential for school improvement in the way that those in Greater Manchester did. This reflects the findings of the NFER evaluation, which suggested that the main focus was on increasing collaboration between schools, rather than impacting on pupil attainment (Featherstone and Bergeron, 2011).

Other benefits identified by interviewees were:

- FoS created stimulating opportunities for learning. One teacher said: '*Well, I think that's what keeps it exciting because you need something to stimulate you, especially if you've been teaching a long time*.' There were several examples of teachers taking the lead on developing and sharing practice with other schools.
- It offered space outside school to reflect, discuss issues and share practice and ideas.
- FoS developed middle leaders by providing professional and personal development opportunities for teachers and support staff.
- It helped maintain a focus on particular areas of concern, such as EAL and parental engagement.
- It encouraged an ethos of collaboration which meant that schools developed the habits/willingness to collaborate. A secondary headteacher said: '*I think once you've got into the habit of it, you just don't stop it then and we've got so many different partners now.'* Collaboration, once established, led to more joint ventures or 'spin-offs' between schools in a Family.

8.4 What promoted or inhibited effective Family collaboration and why?

In this section, we detail the factors that contributed to effective Family collaboration, and those that perhaps limited it. The qualitative data relating to collaborative activity in Families was collected in Greater Manchester; we also refer to the NFER evaluation of Black Country FoS.

8.4.1 Leadership at area level

Effective management and organisation of FoS, both at the school and area level were vital. In Greater Manchester, Family leadership was orchestrated and supported differently in the primary and secondary phase. In the primary phase, there was a dedicated co-ordinator, employed in September 2009, who supported Family activity and collaboration across the whole area. She played a key role; liaising with the DfE; supporting headteachers or deputies who were 'lead facilitators' to broker partnerships; providing accountability by monitoring and evaluating outcomes; and generating and maintaining enthusiasm for the programme through conferences, workshops, and other activities. She also enabled the programme to be responsive to the needs of schools and helped to identify and tackle problems with implementation. Interviewees emphasised the importance of this role in making the programme work.

The support mechanisms were different in the secondary phase. There was an operational lead who was also a headteacher, and Challenge Advisors were given responsibility for supporting groups of Families to enable them to develop proposals and access the funding. This approach appeared to be more *ad hoc* than that in the primary phase, and reliant on Advisors who had other responsibilities and roles in relation to some of the schools within their Families.

8.4.2 Leadership within each Family

Leadership of each Family by a headteacher, deputy or assistant head, who acted as a facilitator, was important in driving forward collaboration on the ground, maintaining enthusiasm and encouraging participation. This role was sometimes shared. Where a Family lacked a facilitator, collaboration stalled. Within the primary phase, where this role appeared to be most established, the facilitators identified by Greater Manchester Challenge staff were those headteachers or deputies who had expressed initial interest in FoS and attended the relevant conferences organised by Challenge. We found that although headteachers were the main target staff group for FoS, it was often deputy or assistant heads who assumed responsibility both within their schools and as lead facilitators for the Family.

The lead facilitator role underpinned and drove successful collaboration, and involved maintaining email contact with Family members, organising regular meetings, taking minutes; liaising with the Greater Manchester Challenge team; and keeping a watchful eye on projects/activities. Due to the burden and additional work of this role, it was not uncommon for lead facilitators to share the role, or allocate some of their responsibilities to other colleagues within the Family. There was a range of materials available on the Greater Manchester Challenge website to help and support primary Family facilitators.

There were, however, some issues which meant that this system leadership role did not always work smoothly. Some interviewees reported confusion about how facilitator roles within Families were decided, and therefore what would happen when there were any changes of key personnel. We found examples of facilitators who spent a significant amount of time organising meetings, writing bids, and monitoring collaboration, whereas others simply chaired meetings. A primary deputy head, who was also a lead facilitator, said that it was '*really time consuming*' and that it involved a lot more work than she expected. In contrast, the facilitator of a secondary Family did not have the same responsibilities: '*All I did was facilitate, I didn't write any of the bids.*' One deputy head commented that, ideally, leadership of Families should be a recognised role and responsibility, appearing on people's job descriptions.

The leadership style of the facilitator was an important factor in the effectiveness of collaborative activity. Some characterised effective facilitators as those who were inclusive and: '*acknowledged within the group that everybody has got something to celebrate, wherever you are on the journey … [and that] not every school has got all the answers to everything*.' However, one headteacher said that the way her Family was led had made her disengage because certain headteachers were pushing their own agendas, and ensuring that their schools achieved a substantial share of the funding. An external consultant who supported meetings in two secondary Families similarly noted that in the absence of a strong external mediator, the more powerful headteachers:

> *... just end up forcing their agenda … at which point the less powerful ones say, I am not being heard in here and so there is nothing here for my school, and so they don't turn up at the next meeting. And then the headteachers wring their hands and say, 'why is nobody turning up?' And they can't see it in themselves, of course, because in school they are used to being deferred to.*

This suggests that in order to make Families inclusive, leadership roles may need additional external support and oversight.

The NFER evaluation of Black Country FoS similarly reported that there were issues around leadership. For example, one headteacher argued that 'self-led change' was not strategic enough,

and called for further measures taken to ensure that all schools in a Family benefited. Another headteacher suggested the pace of the programme was slow because it was school-driven (Featherstone and Bergeron, 2011).

8.4.3 Membership of Families

Interviews indicated that most active Families had about five or six active members. This appeared to be the maximum number that could work together effectively; in several cases where more schools expressed an interest, they divided into sub-groups to work on projects.

A key factor that mediated schools' participation and engagement in the programme was their understanding of the basis of their inclusion in a Family. This in part could be seen to reflect the poor communication of the programme's aims and rationale and schools' lack of awareness and understanding. Many headteachers/deputies said that they did not understand how Family groups were decided. Several struggled to understand what the schools in their Family were supposed to have in common:

> *The only thing I can see is similar is in terms of social deprivation really. … I would be very interested to know how they've actually grouped us in the same Family, because the results are different.*

Some felt features such as the size of the school and current school attainment would be a better basis for grouping. The annual changes to the composition of some Families in the FoS publications – reflecting changed intake characteristics – generated further confusion for schools.

In contrast to this perception of difference, several comments suggested that the schools within a Family could be perceived as being too similar, particularly amongst those where the prior attainment was particularly high (e.g. a Family composed of Grammar schools). One interviewee observed that in such groups there was '*not much to offer to one another.'*

For some, the sense that Families did not have much in common was linked to the notion that it was an 'imposed' grouping, and not always meaningful:

> *The Family may on paper have similar interests, needs, aspirations … but in reality not be a natural and productive grouping. Forming a collaborative or network of schools is a much more complex process than grouping schools together using data. … The communal interest was therefore forced rather than grown heuristically. It was another top down rather than bottom up process.*

One of the consequences of this lack of understanding of the rationale for the Families (or lack of sympathy with this 'imposed' grouping) was that the majority of active Families in Greater Manchester actually included schools from more than one Family, because some headteachers had introduced their local colleagues. The NFER evaluation of FoS in the Black Country reports very similar concerns about the composition of Families, and suggestions that it would be better to work with one's friends (Featherstone and Bergeron, 2011).

These comments all suggest that the rationale for grouping schools together as Families needs to be more clearly explained and regularly reinforced. We found that many interviewees in active Families did not in fact make any use of the FoS data, and again, this suggests a lack of understanding of the underlying rationale for the composition of each Family.

8.4.4 Reasons for non-participation

There were, of course, a variety of reasons for non-participation. Some schools did not have the capacity to get involved at that time because of staffing issues, Ofsted inspections or involvement in other initiatives and groups. Some small schools did not have the timetabling flexibility to release staff for FoS collaboration. Perhaps more worryingly, some interviewees suggested that staff in struggling schools might not have the openness and confidence needed in a collaborative group.

One secondary headteacher said, '*I think that some people may have felt that if they went for the meeting [of FoS] they would have been found wanting.'*

At the opposite end of the scale, it was reported by stakeholders that perceptions that FoS was for 'underperforming' or 'failing schools' were prevalent in some LAs, and this discouraged some schools from participating. This was based on a wider perception that City Challenge was about improving weak schools. One stakeholder argued that this might explain some of the disparities between LAs in the number of active Families.

Another issue relating to schools' involvement (or lack of involvement) in Families is that there was ample evidence from interviews and survey comments that many schools were involved in other collaborations and networks. This meant that some respondents argued that the FoS programme was an additional burden which they did not have the time or capacity to engage with. These other networks tended to be localised groups that pre-dated FoS networks; we found that school interviewees did not always distinguish in their language use between 'Family' collaborations and other networks, referring to both as 'clusters' or 'Families'. Some schools suggested that the local groups were more 'organic' and meaningful groupings, based on friendships and professional relationships built over time with schools that were often in close proximity. Some argued that it is not feasible to have an active commitment in two distinct groups of headteachers because it is too time-consuming. In contrast, a primary headteacher explained that she relayed the activities that the school had undertaken through FoS to the local cluster group; thus they also benefited to some degree from the school's networking: Overall it appeared that highly engaged schools within Families were also more likely to be in other non-FoS networks and collaborating with other non-Family schools.

A key issue, then, is to consider how one might identify schools that do not participate in any networks, and encourage them to become involved.

8.4.5 Funding

Interviewees argued that funding was very important, especially in the initial stages of collaboration, in that it provided an incentive for engagement. Most schools also saw funding as an enabling factor which paid for staff time to participate. Some headteachers expressed concern about the future and whether the level of collaboration established would continue in the absence of funding. A few reported that since the end of funding, all activities had stopped in their Family.

Interviews showed that schools perceived the amount of funding that they received (approximately £2k-£4k) to be useful. As one headteacher said: '*We realised that a little bit of money in school can make a huge impact on what we did*.' However, this figure was dependent on the fact that the total sum available was generally distributed amongst less than half the schools in a Family.

Schools used FoS funding in different ways and appreciated this flexibility. It was used to support the projects around which schools collaborated (e.g. narrowing gaps, focusing on EAL learners, boys' achievement, curriculum development, parental engagement, coaching, etc.) by releasing staff and purchasing additional resources, training, or consultant time. This was done in a variety of ways. For some, collaboration meant sharing their existing practice, and facilitating its adoption in another school within the Family. For others, it was simply having the time to have the dialogue about practice/or theme of the project. We found that Families tended to focus their collaboration either on a single project or split into smaller groups working on different projects. The first approach could alienate those who were not interested in the focus that was agreed.

Some interviewees raised issues relating to funding: some said there was a lack of accountability, particularly in the earlier stages. Schools were not made accountable for the funding that they received in terms of evidence/data on the impact of their collaborative activities. (Similarly, the NFER evaluation reported a perception that the Black Country FoS programme lacked an element of monitoring and evaluation, Featherstone and Bergeron, 2011.) Other interviewees wanted

greater clarity about how the funding could be used. We also found that the length/complexity of the funding application forms and the long turnaround time for applications and receipt of funding (some schools waited at least a year) were cited as reasons for non-participation.

8.4.6 Other activities

In December 2010, the Greater Manchester Challenge team introduced 'hub schools' to develop some of the more successful Family collaborations by designating a school within a Family as a 'hub' of good practice. The intention was that the hub schools would showcase their good practice to others, and would also engage a new group of schools to replicate and develop the work that had been done in the original Family. The first part of this agenda was reported to have worked more successfully than the second. The hubs successfully raised awareness of the programme.

In addition, a conference was held to showcase work in the existing Family groups, and to try and engage new schools and Families. Stakeholders described the conference as very successful. Teachers and children were involved, and attendance was good.

8.5 Summary: Families of Schools

Across all City Challenge areas, most schools (and particularly primary schools) made limited or no use of FoS data. Most who did look at it did so mainly out of interest; smaller numbers used it with a view to contacting other schools or informing school improvement planning. It appeared that many were unaware of the data, or did not understand its purpose.

In both Greater Manchester and the Black Country, funding was made available to support collaborative activity between schools in Families; such activities did not necessarily involve making any use of the data. Respondents felt that the main benefits were the opportunities to share good practice and learn from other schools, particularly those in different LAs. A key factor in successful Family collaboration was leadership both at area level and within each Family. Families were usually led by a headteacher who had expressed interest, but some reported that the role was very time-consuming, and some who were not leaders expressed concern that some of those leading Families pushed their own agendas at the expense of those of others. Funding was appreciated; relatively small sums could be used very effectively to support activity.

A number of issues were identified which seriously impacted on the reach and effectiveness of the programme. These included headteachers' lack of understanding of the rationale for the way schools are grouped into Families, and a complicated funding process with delays in processing bids.

9 Working with Local Authorities

9.1 Introduction

Part of the aspiration of City Challenge was to strengthen the work that LAs did in relation to school improvement. Two main strategies were used in this: capacity building and cluster working.

Capacity building activity took place both through the regular work of advisors in relation to KTS/PTA schools; and through specific capacity building exercises in a limited number of LAs. The latter was a strong feature of the London Challenge 2003-8, which focused on five key LAs. This strategy was continued; in the first two years of the Challenge some specific LA capacity building took place in London and Greater Manchester. The DfE team viewed it as essential for LAs to be working effectively in the area of school improvement for Keys to Success (Pathways to Achievement) schools to succeed.

In London the local DfE team were pro-active in supporting LAs by approaching boroughs and offering them the opportunity for 'supported self-review'; a confidential structured process of LA self evaluation that aims to identify good practice and agree priorities for action. Advisors facilitated workshops using the self-review for borough representatives and schools, thus bringing together the key people concerned with school improvement. The DfE team also worked intensively and individually with some LAs that had a greater level of perceived need on school improvement matters. Support was offered in a variety of formats including: workshops and action planning; facilitating reviews; additional advisor support; and generally the DfE being a 'critical friend' to the LA in need. A civil servant outlined the type and level of support one LA received under City Challenge:

> *[Named LA] have had support from us to help rethink their school improvement strategy, the structure that they need, rethink roles and responsibilities, how they have their consultants and their senior school improvement people working with their schools. And they've been using [Challenge] advisors to help model that.*

Much of the work in Greater Manchester focused on the LAs, as one civil servant commented:

> *We knew there was no point in doing lots of work in Key to Success schools if we weren't also going to change what local authorities do and how they work with their more vulnerable schools*

Therefore, Greater Manchester developed a strategy for working with all ten LAs which was structured and involved a high level of advisor intervention. The Greater Manchester DfE team held termly meetings with individual LAs. The appropriate City Challenge advisor – primary or secondary phase – was also present. Meetings were an opportunity for the LA to reflect on practice, for the DfE to question the direction the LA was taking and to raise any concerns they had: '*It's where we play back some of our reflections, some of our questions, some of our concerns and things we've noticed to the local authority'* (Civil Servant). In addition, specific structured work was undertaken with some LAs that were perceived to be weaker, or that asked for support.

In the Black Country, all four LAs were members of the Black Country Challenge Programme Board, which met fortnightly. Thus the LAs were partners with the DfE and advisors in the management of the Challenge. However, bespoke capacity building work in the Black Country with targeted LAs did not take place on the same scale here as in the other two City Challenge areas. There were a number of reasons for this, including local sensitivities on how such support would be perceived.

In the final year of the Challenge, the context changed as a result of considerable reductions in the public sector workforce and many LA staff facing redundancy. This meant that LA school improvement services were, in many cases, being dismantled rather than strengthened. In

response, the work with LAs in Greater Manchester focused more on supporting them in facing the future by developing school improvement strategies in which headteachers played key roles.

LA cluster working was supported in London by encouraging clusters of LAs to bid for funding for narrowing attainment gaps. While part of the aim of this programme was the focus on attainment gaps (described in Chapter 7), a second aim was to encourage cross-LA teams to work together in a way that was sustainable, and to use one another's strengths and share capacity to solve problems.

9.2 What worked and why: Local Authority capacity building work

To be effective, capacity building with LAs has to involve working as partners. A number of effective working practices were identified in this evaluation: for example, the LA officer and the advisor together making the initial assessment of the KTS/PTA school and its needs, or LA officers accompanying Challenge advisors on all their visits to schools.

> *We identified the schools that we would have considered Keys to Success jointly with [the Challenge advisor]. He had access to external data. We had all the local intelligence that helped us to make informed choices, and then we went along to the schools; everything was done jointly. One of the things that [the advisor] and I felt was particularly important was that this was a partnership arrangement. ... It was a genuine partnership and I have great respect for him as a colleague.*

Interviewees reported that this benefited the LA staff (allowing them to observe practice which may be different from their own) and schools (in that when the needs and support programme are jointly worked out they are more likely to be coherent and effective, and schools are not getting mixed messages). One LA officer explained that working with the Challenge advisor had resulted in some changes to the way that the LA conducted school reviews. They had become more focused on teaching and learning, whereas previously they had been '*slightly too involved'* in other aspects of the school including governance, work around attendance, behaviour and inclusion. An LA officer explained:

> *The focus on teaching and learning was the remit of London Challenge in terms of building capacity so we've adopted and adapted that to become a type of model we use much more regularly now.*

Advisors regularly worked with LA heads of school improvement in relation to KTS/PTA schools. As Chapter 4 showed, they met with the LA officers to discuss which schools should be in the programme, and generally held regular meetings (school improvement boards) to discuss progress. This meant that advisors regularly visited the LA offices, and were able to have informal conversations with LA officers. Stakeholders explained that in some cases the LA had involved their City Challenge Advisor on LA committees across a range of activities, drawing on their expertise. In other LAs the relationship was more limited. Several LA interviewees talked about the key role that City Challenge advisors had played, both in swelling the number of people working on school improvement in the borough, and in developing the expertise of the LA school improvement team. In some cases the relationship between advisors and LA officers was described as a mentoring relationship; this was reported in at least two cases where the LA officer was relatively new to their role; they spoke very positively of this:

> *There are very frequent discussions with my officers and with me about what we're going to do with particular schools … they're critical to what we do. [The Challenge adviser] on a personal level acted almost like a mentor to me.*

Some LA officers commented that where an effective partnership was established, they benefited from the City Challenge advisors' networks and wide knowledge of where specific types of support may be accessed.

A few LA officers talked in interview about problems in relationships with City Challenge. It was more difficult to create effective partnership working in cases where the starting point was the LA's perceived weaknesses. Some LA officers in each area identified instances of poor communication

on the part of City Challenge. Examples given included the LA not being told which headteachers had become LLEs, or which schools had become hub schools, and only hearing such things anecdotally from the schools. They found this frustrating and could not understand why information was not shared. For example, in one authority, LA officers noted that one of the City Challenge advisors had not communicated effectively with the authority about work in KTS/PTA schools:

> *We felt, because of the personalities, the individual almost operating on a separate tram line to what we were trying to do within the local authority. And clearly that's not helpful, and there needed to be that bringing together of Challenge support and existing local authority support.*

However, they reported that other advisors they had worked with had established effective communication.

Some LA officers also felt that City Challenge did not recognise the work that the LAs had been doing in their schools over an extended period, and were claiming credit for improved results which also related to previous groundwork undertaken by the LAs. One LA officer argued, '*they're very much airbrushing out the contribution made by local authorities to the success of the Challenge.'*

In two Greater Manchester LAs, Challenge advisors worked specifically to develop capacity in relation to the post-City Challenge period. This included holding workshops designed to help LA officers to consider the range of future options, and acting as a critical friend and sounding board as the plans evolved. As this process took place, the external policy environment was changing rapidly, and officers in both LAs felt satisfied that they have developed school-to-school support systems that will work well in their specific contexts. One LA officer spoke very highly of the advisor who had led this process:

> *He's been extremely useful in shaping our thinking as to what he future model might look like. He's been extremely useful in having other contacts that's enabled us to sort of access information and pick up whet might be coming in the future so that we're better prepared and can plan on that basis. And I think he's been, in the best sense of the word, a critical friend for us.*

9.3 Evidence about Local Authority cluster working

Advisors encouraged cross-border working, and there is evidence that this made LAs more aware of schools outside their LAs. Subsequently, some have set up cross-border school-to-school partnerships since the end of City Challenge.

In some cases, LAs had already developed cluster working, and City Challenge tapped into this. Thus an established cluster of London LAs received funding for narrowing/closing attainment gaps. They used part of the money to appoint a 'NTG Champion' to work with schools and school clusters across the LA cluster. While she was able to point schools and school clusters to examples of good practice in other LAs, and enabled schools to share practice at a conference for schools from all the LAs, interviewees all agreed this did not strengthen the way the LA cluster worked; it was already a strong collaboration.

Other LA clusters in London received similar funding for narrowing/closing attainment gaps; it is possible that in some of these clusters, the City Challenge funding may have played a role in developing an effective collaborative way of working as a cluster.

9.4 Summary: working with Local Authorities

The three Challenge areas worked with LAs in different ways, and this partly reflected the size of the area and number of LAs involved.

The most frequent communication between Challenge advisors and LA officers concerned Keys to Success (Pathways to Achievement) schools. They were identified with the LA, and as we have shown in Chapter 4, LA officers and advisors often worked together in the initial assessment, and

met regularly to monitor progress. At best, these activities contributed to the capacity of individual officers, and contributed to improvements in practice, with LAs drawing on advisors' expertise. However, when communication was not maintained effectively, the impact was negative.

In addition to this, City Challenge undertook a range of specific capacity building activities, including working with LAs that had been identified as having particular weaknesses, a process of supported self-review, and supporting the process of developing school-to-school support systems. At best, these were extremely effective. The key factor in this was the expertise and the communication skills of the advisors involved.

In London, the Challenge encouraged LA cluster working, by offering funding to LA clusters to work on narrowing or closing attainment gaps. The case study conducted in one cluster showed that the cluster working resulted in a strong programme of work on narrowing attainment gaps, but did not strengthen the LA cluster because it was already well-established.

10 Summary and implications for future school improvement initiatives

10.1 Introduction

This final chapter starts by summarising the extent to which City Challenge achieved its aims and objectives through the key interventions, and in each area. It then focuses on what can be learned about school improvement from City Challenge.

10.2 To what extent has City Challenge achieved its objectives?

Extent to which overall objectives were achieved

Chapter 3 showed that in terms of improving attainment, reducing the number of underperforming schools, improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and increasing the number of Good and Outstanding schools, the objectives of City Challenge at area level have generally been achieved. Schools which initially had low and average attainment improved significantly more than those schools with similar initial attainment outside Challenge areas. The attainment of pupils eligible for FSM improved by more than the national figure.

Clearly a great many factors contributed to this improvement, including national policies and strategies and the considerable efforts of LA officers, headteachers and school staff. However, these factors apply everywhere in the country. The most plausible explanation for the greater improvement in Challenge areas is that the City Challenge programme was responsible. The vast majority of stakeholders at all levels who contributed to this evaluation attributed the additional improvements that have been made in these areas to the work of City Challenge.

Differences across areas

Chapter 1 explained that each City Challenge area shared the three common objectives. Additionally each area created a local list of targets or pledges building on the common objectives; these are set out in Appendix A. In all three areas, Chapter 3 showed that the majority of the common objectives were achieved. This was clearly the case in London, where the Challenge was well-established, and built on the previous London Challenge work. In Greater Manchester and the Black Country, achievements were substantial, but a longer period of time would have been helpful in consolidating them. Greater Manchester secondary schools showed the greatest improvement in Ofsted grades, but were less successful than other areas in closing attainment gaps. The Black Country had some remarkable success in improving attainment, particularly in secondary schools, but ended the period with more schools in Ofsted categories than there were at the outset. Some locally set objectives (such as reducing pupil absence) were also achieved.

Raising the ambitions of urban schools

In addition to the measurable objectives, City Challenge had an aspiration to raise morale and ambitions among school staff, pupils and parents across each area. It is difficult to assess the extent to which this occurred. Survey and interview responses suggested that there has been a considerable change in the ethos of many London secondary schools, which have benefited from the longest period of the Challenge.

Greater Manchester's strategy to raise ambitions was to involve a wide range of schools and other organisations in the Challenge, and some stakeholders reported that this brought about a new sense of energy and creativity in schools. However, in this evaluation, some headteachers indicated that their involvement in the Challenge had been too limited to have any impact, and reported a sense of disappointment at this.

The designation in each area of NLEs and LLEs, and the opportunities for them to meet and network, has created a cadre of headteachers willing to take on system leadership roles and with a strong sense of moral purpose and vision in relation to other schools. This contributed to raising the ambitions of schools in each area.

How the key interventions contributed to achieving City Challenge objectives

Chapters 4-9 focused on the key interventions. The most substantial of these (in terms of financial and other input) was Keys to Success/Pathways to Achievement (KTS/PTA) which focused on improving schools that were underperforming or in Ofsted categories. Analysis of attainment data, including a regression-based analysis, indicates that this programme was successful in bringing about improvement. The estimates of impacts relative to previous performance are approximately a two per cent improvement in year-on-year change relative to typical progress for schools with equivalent prior results on targets for GCSE attainment, and approximately five per cent (per year) over a shorter period for KS2 targets. The data suggests that the improvement was sustainable; schools that had been in KTS/PTA in the London Challenge 2003-8 continued to improve more rapidly than other schools, even when they were no longer supported. However, at the end of the three-year period of City Challenge there were still a small number of schools that would have benefited from a further period of support.

The interventions designed for Satisfactory, Good and Outstanding schools also appear to have achieved some success. The changes in the Ofsted framework have made it more difficult to evaluate success in relation to Ofsted outcomes; however, in each programme there were more Good and Outstanding schools at the end of the three years than at the start. Analysis of attainment data shows that, in comparison to schools with similar initial attainment, the schools in these interventions improved more, and school staff reported a positive impact.

Similarly, schools involved in interventions aimed at closing attainment gaps reported that the work they had done as a result of their involvement in the intervention had been effective. A key factor in this was that the intervention had raised awareness of the systematic gaps relating to poverty and encouraged schools to address them. Attainment data showed that in London and the Black Country, the primary schools which took part in these interventions had narrowed the gaps more than those which did not; however, the gaps in secondary schools in the intervention had widened. This may reflect the fact that the intervention took place largely in the final year of City Challenge, and thus it may be too early to see an impact in terms of attainment.

The provision of Families of Schools data was perhaps the least successful of the key interventions. This was partly because many headteachers were unaware of the data, and others made very limited use of it. It was suggested that if such data continues to be produced, there should be more effective guidance on its purpose, and how it adds to the range of data already available to schools. In Greater Manchester and the Black Country, school Families (as identified in the data) were offered funding to work together. Some interviewees reported positive outcomes in terms of sharing practice and learning from each other; however, concerns were expressed about the composition and leadership of the Family groups.

The capacity-building work with LAs was generally successful, but the recent loss of jobs in most LAs has limited its impact. The greatest impact appeared to be in LAs where Challenge advisors worked to support the development of improvement strategies involving school-to-school working.

10.3 Learning from City Challenge

This section considers what future school improvement initiatives might learn from the experiences of City Challenge. It discusses what might be learned about setting objectives for school improvement initiatives; the strengths of area level programmes; appropriate time scales; strategies for school improvement; and the affective aspects of school improvement.

10.3.1 The objectives of school improvement

Number and flexibility of objectives

The objectives that are set for any school improvement programme will, to some extent, determine the strategies used and the outcomes. Thus in this section, we first review the objectives of City Challenge and the implications that these had for what was achieved.

City Challenge had three key objectives, which were the same across the three areas:

- reduce the number of underperforming schools, especially in relation to English and maths;
- increase the number of good and outstanding schools; and
- improve the educational outcomes for disadvantaged children.

The key interventions focused strongly on these objectives. Initially each area had some additional objectives (focusing on post-16 and Early Years), but these assumed less importance as the Challenge proceeded, simply because it became apparent that a more focused programme would be more effective. Possibly, then, one learning point is that school improvement programmes need to have clear and focused objectives, and that making the objectives too wide may be a mistake.

On the other hand, some areas developed additional objectives. The notion of flexibility was a key aspect of the London Challenge when it started in 2003, and has remained central. The additional objectives were very effectively tackled; for example, the London primary programme developed a strong focus on working to improve satisfactory and coasting schools. This direction was not explicit in the original objectives, but is an aspect of school improvement that is becoming increasingly prominent, and is the focus of a recent RSA report (Francis, 2011). Another aspect of the Challenge that assumed greater importance over the three years was the development of system leadership structures which could continue into the future and would constitute the legacy of City Challenge. A second lesson, then, might be that there should be a certain amount of flexibility in the objectives set, particularly in longer programmes.

Perverse outcomes

It is inevitable that in setting objectives or targets, there may be unintended or perverse effects, as well as positive outcomes. This applied to some of the Challenge objectives. The objective of improving attainment and reducing the number of underperforming schools relates specifically to the performance targets that have been set for schools and pupils. Nationally, these have impacted on what happens in schools, and have undoubtedly contributed to improved attainment, particularly in secondary schools.

In City Challenge areas, as elsewhere, there was considerable pressure on underperforming schools, and those who supported them, to increase the number of pupils achieving expected levels as rapidly as possible. This had a number of benefits. It improved performance and raised morale in the schools. It was a strategy to avoid more drastic actions (closing the school, or changing it into an academy). It was also clearly beneficial for the specific pupils involved that their achievement should be as high as possible.

However, it has been widely reported that one consequence of setting floor targets relating to percentage of pupils reaching a specified level is that, particularly in secondary schools, efforts may be particularly focused on borderline pupils while other pupils receive less attention (e.g. de Waal, 2008). The evaluation found that, at secondary level in particular, some schools in City Challenge areas had devised a meticulous, even forensic, level of micro-management focused on GCSE attainment and in particular, on C/D borderline pupils. This was the case in some of the schools funded to close attainment gaps, where the funding was entirely used to support Year 6 and Year 11 FSM pupils who were borderline in relation to the expected level. Strategies used included individual tuition, Saturday and Easter schools, and additional support in class. In many

cases, the teachers providing the extra tuition were not regular members of school staff. Thus, in such cases, the City Challenge funding was used to 'buy' better results in the current year, but did not contribute to sustainable improvement.[26] While similar approaches were reported in some KTS/PTA schools, we found that this was only one strategy among many, and was justified in terms of the urgent need to lift achievement above the floor target. The regression-based analysis of attainment in KTS/PTA schools shows that the improvement in attainment did not simply relate to a focus on borderline pupils.

A number of interviewees expressed concern about the tension between narrowly focusing on meeting attainment targets and bringing about sustainable improvement, and argued that funding should be used to focus on the latter, because the aim of City Challenge was to bring about school improvement. The recent introduction of a wider range of targets, including the percentage of pupils making expected progress, may reduce the tendency for schools to focus efforts on the C/D borderline.

Changes to government targets and the Ofsted framework

The objectives set by City Challenge related to government targets (such as the floor target for schools) and the Ofsted inspection framework. However, these are subject to change, and during the three years of City Challenge, the Ofsted framework did change. Consequently, it was not possible to measure the success of the programme in relation to Ofsted outcomes in the way that had been anticipated. This is an issue for the programme as a whole, and also for individual schools. In a culture where schools have been encouraged to measure their achievements against targets, many interviewees expressed concern that there was no way of recognising and celebrating the improvements that had taken place against the previous framework.

Attainment gaps or levels of attainment for disadvantaged children?

The objective to improve the educational outcomes for disadvantaged children is a particularly important one in urban areas where a high proportion of pupils are from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, a number of interviewees expressed concern that the overall objective of raising attainment for disadvantaged children was translated into a focus on narrowing/ closing attainment gaps, which do not necessarily reflect the level of attainment of the disadvantaged pupils. The merit of focusing on gaps is that it draws attention to the areas of the country where attainment gaps are larger. However, this could equally well be done by focusing on the outcomes for the disadvantaged pupils rather than on the gap.

Some interviewees also argued that programmes to address the attainment of disadvantaged pupils would be more appropriately targeted at the areas of the country where this group have the lowest achievement. Chapter 3 showed that FSM pupils achieve best in large urban areas and least well in counties and unitary authorities (e.g. in 2011, over half the secondary FSM pupils in Inner London achieved the expected level, but less than a quarter of those in Portsmouth and North East Lincolnshire did so).

Objectives for schools at different points on their school improvement journey

Within each City Challenge area, the aspiration was to improve all schools, not simply those that were underperforming; this was different from initiatives such as the National Challenge which were targeted at weak schools. Some headteachers undoubtedly found the notion that the Challenge was for *all* schools hard to grasp, because they saw involvement almost as a stigma – something for weak schools. A key achievement of City Challenge was to make school leaders at

[26] A factor contributing to schools' use of such strategies is that the Government has provided funding for individual tuition and for summer schools for disadvantaged pupils. This is intended to enable these pupils to make progress; it is not targeted at school improvement.

all levels more aware of the need to continue to improve their schools. Additionally, many became enthusiastic about the notion of working to improve other schools as well as their own. In this sense, City Challenge made school improvement a system priority and a collective responsibility.

10.3.2 Geographic and time scales for school improvement initiatives

Area level school improvement initiatives

One aspect of the rationale for City Challenge was that it was believed that underperformance is related to issues of urban areas which cut across LA boundaries, and are best addressed at area level. There were undoubtedly advantages to working in areas made of up a number of LAs. A key factor in City Challenge's success was in encouraging school staff and LA officers to think more widely and exchange ideas and practices across LA boundaries. A majority of schools that worked with partners outside their own LAs agreed that this was particularly useful, and opened their eyes to alternative ways of doing things.[27] While there are clear benefits to including a number of LAs in school improvement initiatives, this may not always be feasible outside large conurbations.

Working at area level also allowed schools to access a wider range of expertise than would otherwise have been the case (for example, through the hub schools). This was particularly important for Outstanding schools; at the outset some LAs did not have any Outstanding secondary schools, whereas across the whole area, a community of Outstanding schools could be created. Another example of successful area level work was the Pan London EAL strategy, described in Chapter 4. An area level focus also made it possible to take a more strategic view, for example, in considering issues of teacher supply.

It was important that each of the areas had a specific identity; they were not randomly chosen groups of LAs. This meant that it was possible to try to unite schools, parents, community organisations and other stakeholders behind the idea of the Challenge. However, selecting areas with a clear identity resulted in City Challenge areas being of very different sizes. Possibly the Black Country, with only four LAs, was disadvantaged by its small size; there were, for example, very few Outstanding secondary schools at the outset to contribute to system leadership.

There were, then, real benefits to the Challenge being based in areas rather than the whole country, or specific LAs or individual schools.

Local solutions for local problems

It was argued from the outset that the strategies needed to bring about school improvement would vary in each area, and that local solutions should be found to local problems. At the same time, right from the start, it was anticipated that the programme would use 'proven approaches' that had been used in the London Challenge 2003-8. There was obviously a tension between these two intentions.

This was most apparent in the Black Country, because, before City Challenge started, the Black Country Consortium (a strategic partnership between the four LAs set up to coordinate urban regeneration) had already developed a Black Country Education and Skills strategy (unpublished); this was described as the 'Black Country Challenge Campaign', and it was hoped to draw on both government funding streams and sponsorship from business and industry. Initially there were expectations that the City Challenge funding could be used to put this locally developed strategy into action; however, it bore little resemblance to the London Challenge. When it became clear that the funding had to be used for something more like the London model, some stakeholders argued

[27] This should not be seen as implying that it is less useful working with other schools within an LA; this can also be effective, and has the advantage of geographical proximity.

that London solutions were being imposed on them, and saw City Challenge as a top-down strategy rather than one that involved local ownership. This was unfortunate, and resulted in some resistance, and a programme that did not at first capture the imagination and loyalty of stakeholders in the way that the London Challenge 2003-8 had done. Despite some ongoing negativity about the programme, Black Country schools (particularly those that were weakest) have undoubtedly benefited from the support provided by City Challenge.

Greater Manchester did not experience these tensions between local solutions and proven approaches in the same way, because there was no pre-existing education strategy at area level. A great deal of time was initially devoted to meeting local stakeholders and trying to ensure that the programme successfully combined local solutions and proven approaches.

It is difficult to see how such tensions can be reduced in any similar programmes in the future. There clearly has to be a balance between using solutions that are tried and tested, and securing local buy-in.

Timescales for school improvement

It is important to recognise that it takes time to bring about sustainable improvement in a school or across an area. While the London Challenge lasted eight years in total, the Greater Manchester and Black Country Challenges lasted only three. This evaluation has shown that between 2008 and 2011, London achieved all the targets set. It also showed that London headteachers generally perceived all aspects of the Challenge to be more effective than did their counterparts in Greater Manchester and the Black Country. This seemed to relate to the expertise and relationships that had developed in London among advisors and headteachers. In contrast, the other two areas had to start from scratch. While the outcomes were impressive in all areas, it was argued that a further period of time would have been valuable in Greater Manchester and the Black Country It is worth noting that the London Challenge 2003 aimed to meet its targets in five years and show substantial progress in three. While Greater Manchester and the Black Country made substantial progress in the three years they had, a five year period would probably have enabled them to make even more progress, and to ensure that the improvement was sustainable.

Rudd et al. (2011), in the Leadership Strategies evaluation, reported that interviewees expressed similar sentiments, and while all areas were working on legacy planning to ensure that momentum was maintained, there were concerns that while headteachers would be able to take on system leadership roles, there was still a need for a centralised team to manage and deploy support, and for funding to release school staff to work in other schools.

10.3.3 Strategies for school improvement

Different forms of support for schools at different stages of improvement

A key point emerging from this evaluation is that the activities and forms of support that are effective for school improvement vary depending on the point the school has reached in its school improvement journey. The strategies that were effective for improving Inadequate/under-attaining, Satisfactory, Good and Outstanding schools differed:

- Inadequate and under-attaining schools benefited from support from expert individuals (e.g. Challenge advisors, National and Local Leaders of Education, consultants). Some, with the greatest problems, did not have the capacity to work with another school; others benefited from support from staff in a single carefully matched partner school.
- Satisfactory/coasting schools benefited particularly from working in groups of two or three with other schools which had similar intakes. It was important that the head leading the group had experience of leading school improvement, but it did not seem to matter whether their own school was Outstanding or simply a few steps ahead of the supported school.

- Good schools which were aspiring to become Outstanding benefited from a wide range of opportunities to share practice, including conferences and opportunities to visit other schools (e.g. hub schools) and observe outstanding practice. Heads of Outstanding schools were less likely than those in Satisfactory schools to say they had benefited from working in small groups; their preference was to locate and access the expertise they needed.
- Good and Outstanding schools also benefited from supporting weaker schools. Indeed, all the headteachers that supported other schools claimed that this was beneficial for their own schools. A number of factors were identified that brought about such improvement:
    - staff in their own school having the experience of stepping up when the headteacher was of out of school (and where appropriate, undertaking CPD related to that);
    - learning from seeing practice in other schools (where practice was poor, reviewing their own to ensure it was good; where it was good, drawing on ideas from the schools visited);
    - development resulting from staff who work with the partner school having to explain their practice and being challenged in their thinking;
    - a focus on the moral purpose of education;
    - the boost to morale that results from staff and pupils knowing their own school is so good that it can support others.

  However, we noted that a small number of headteachers expressed the view that because their schools had been judged Outstanding, there was no room for further improvement. Such complacency is clearly a potential danger of a system that labels success and failure.

Bespoke solutions

A key aspect of the City Challenge interventions was that school improvement was addressed through solutions bespoke to the school. This was the case both in the weakest schools, where the advisor worked with the headteacher and LA to devise an appropriate programme, and in schools in other interventions where strategies were devised by school staff (possibly working with another headteacher). This approach meant that school staff felt ownership of their improvement strategies, and City Challenge interventions were not seen as top-down impositions; this was beneficial in terms of morale and sustainability. Moreover, strategies could be chosen that were appropriate for that specific school.

While there were common areas of focus (improving teaching and learning, use of data, and improving leadership at all levels), in many schools the action plan also focused on specific areas such as timetabling, use of the building, and resources. A key advantage of bespoke solutions was that each school's needs were assessed and the action plan designed to meet these needs.

While bespoke solutions had many advantages, some stakeholders pointed out that there are common strategies which benefit a wide range of schools (such as the maths and English strategies devised by Education London). However, it was argued that while such strategies formed an important part of the solution, they were only one element, and other elements were also needed.

Funding, monitoring and accountability

The amounts of funding provided to schools varied considerably. KTS/PTA schools reported that this was a key element in bringing about improvement. However, the funding levels for many of the City Challenge interventions were low – around £3k per school, largely used for staff cover. This was generally perceived as adequate. It demonstrated to schools that they were valued, and it enabled them to provide cover for staff, or in some cases to buy additional resources.

The extent to which spending proposals were monitored varied. Larger proposals (e.g. relating to Keys to Success schools) were scrutinised carefully. The approach was more varied for smaller sums (e.g. £3k). In cases where school proposals for spending were rigorously monitored, this sometimes resulted in lengthy delays and a loss of momentum (e.g. in the funded Family collaborations). In contrast, when proposals were not subject to scrutiny, schools sometimes chose questionable strategies. However, overall it appeared that schools felt accountable when they received funding and were asked to report how they spent it, and that for small amounts it was inappropriate to spend much time scrutinising proposals. Possibly some clearer guidance about what sort of activity would be valuable to achieve the intervention aims might have been helpful in some cases.

The use of experts

As shown above, the schools that were underperforming or in Ofsted categories undoubtedly benefited from expert support. Schools that were Satisfactory or Good also benefited from expert support from other headteachers. Schools valued experts who had credibility as a result of their experience and expertise in urban schools.

Within the City Challenge programme, a variety of experts often worked with a single school. For this to be successful it was important that each expert had a clearly defined role, and related to the headteacher and staff in a different way. It was also important that there was a strategy for ensuring that there was a 'joined up' approach so that all those involved worked effectively together.

One of the key innovations of the London Challenge (and subsequently City Challenge) was the role of the **Challenge advisor** (described in Chapter 4). This evaluation has shown that Challenge advisors played a key role in the KTS/PTA schools. A number of factors contributed to their effectiveness.

- They had considerable expertise and experience, and a wealth of knowledge of individuals and organisations that could be mobilised.
- They were able to assess the school's needs with fresh eyes in that they were quite distinct from the LA and from Ofsted.
- They worked with LA officers, which ensured joined-up approaches and also offered the LA officers different perspectives, and strengthened their work.
- Their role was to support and encourage rather than to judge; this was different from the Ofsted role.
- They shared their experiences and strategies through regular meetings of the team of advisors in each area, and thus further developed their expertise in school improvement within the team.

The role of the **Chief Advisor** in each area was vital in leading and developing the team of advisors; having a strategic overview of the work; and holding regular discussions with civil servants.

Clearly it would be of value to have a nationwide team of advisors supporting school improvement. Thus we share the view of Francis (2011: 37) that there is a need for an 'organised supply of expert advisors to support improvement', and that this should be part of a nationwide system for supporting schools, including academies and free schools. She argues that this might be managed through Ofsted or the National College. The model provided by Challenge advisors suggests the roles of inspection and support should be separate, and thus that an improvement agency should be quite distinct from Ofsted. This issue is urgent, because it is critical that the expertise that the Challenge advisors have accumulated in the art of school improvement should not be lost.

Headteachers (including NLEs and LLEs) were another vital element of expertise in City Challenge. Many schools clearly benefited from a range of support, advice, coaching or mentoring from other headteachers. Their current practical experience of school leadership and their experience of bringing about improvement was seen as a key element in their effectiveness. It was also important that their experience was in a school with similar challenges to the school they were supporting. While NLEs and LLEs were the main groups used, the experience in the ISP Leadership intervention showed that headteachers who were not at the same level as NLEs and LLEs, but were one step ahead of the school they were supporting, were also very effective.

Just as important as the role of the NLEs, LLEs and other headteachers was the role of their staff, who engaged in practical activities working alongside heads of department, coaching teachers in their own classrooms, and so on. This is discussed in more detail below.

There is clearly a limit to the amount of time that it is appropriate for any headteacher or teacher to be away from their own school. This caused tensions in some schools where governors expressed concern about the frequent absence of headteachers, or headteachers were concerned about the amount of time some members of their staff were out of school. This was a particular issue in primary schools where the class teacher role is important.

Consultants also provided expertise in underperforming schools (particularly secondary schools). Like the advisors and NLE/LLEs, a key factor in a consultant's effectiveness was having appropriate expertise and extensive experience in challenging urban schools, and an ability to work alongside staff in a supportive and encouraging way.

In the past, LAs have been the main organisations charged with supporting school improvement; **LA officers** played an important role in supporting schools improvement during the three years of City Challenge. However, their potential contribution has been weakened both by public sector job cuts, and the creation of academies. Nevertheless, the evidence from this evaluation suggests that LAs can play an important role in school improvement, and that their local knowledge is valuable.

School-to-school working

We have already referred to the role of headteachers in supporting other schools. Here, we consider the broader range of activities through which schools became more outward looking, and staff at every level could benefit from the experiences of other schools.

Headteachers have long had cluster meetings which were opportunities to discuss their common concerns. City Challenge has moved things on in several ways:

- it initiated a range of structures for schools to work together to achieve agreed objectives;
- it created opportunities for many staff other than headteachers to observe practice in other schools and learn from each other; and
- it has shown that all schools can improve through sharing practice and school-to-school working; such strategies are not just for the weakest schools.

The structures and opportunities for learning from other schools (one school supporting another, schools working in pairs or small groups, the OTP and ITP, hub schools, conferences) have been described in detail in the previous chapters. These enabled learning about a wide range of issues such as teaching and learning; leadership at all levels; use of data and resources and home-school relations.

It was noticeable that both headteachers and teachers argued that they learned most effectively from seeing and hearing about good practice from those who had undertaken it. Interviewees reported that the most effective activities to improve teaching were:

- observing excellent teaching in schools with a pupil intake with similar characteristics to their own (e.g. through the ITP and OTP);

- opportunities to reflect with colleagues, both from their own schools and from other schools; and
- coaching by another teacher (for example, an AST) in the teacher's own classroom.

In particular, it was clear how much teachers benefited from observing in other schools, and we would suggest that every teacher should spend at least one day a year observing in another school, exploring different and/or better practice. Support staff working with pupils should also have the same opportunities. To make this happen, schools might need to spread Inset days through the term. They would also need clear information about the schools where excellent practice could be seen, which might be through a wider network of hub schools.

There were also clear benefits to sustained arrangements in which pairs or small groups of schools worked together. The evaluation has shown that a number of factors contributed to making such arrangements effective.

- The match between schools was important. Headteachers expressed a strong preference for working with schools with similar intakes. In view of this, it was perhaps surprising that they had not made better use of the FoS data to do this, but the evaluation suggests that many were not aware of this or had failed to understand the basis of the groupings.
- School-to-school working was most effective when it involved staff at all levels.
- Group size is important. In this evaluation, we found that the greatest success seemed to relate to two or three schools working together. When groups were larger than this, more difficulties arose in relation to membership and leadership.
- It was important that any arrangements had a clear focus, specific objectives and a limited time period.
- Clear and effective group leadership is needed to drive the agenda. The most effective interventions offered training to group leaders. Those leading interventions could also point schools to tried and tested strategies and materials such as the Extra Mile.
- Leadership is also needed at area level to broker the groupings, help set the objectives, allocate and monitor funding, and provide training for leaders. Area level leaders could also ensure that all schools are engaged and develop an outward looking perspective.
- Appropriate funding was needed to enable staff to engage.

Addressing weak leadership and teachers

The ethos of City Challenge was one of support, and the first strategies to support weaknesses in leadership and teaching were coaching and mentoring by advisors and NLEs/LLEs, the use of National College programmes, and for teachers, the ITP. These approaches were often highly successful. In the light of concerns about the future supply of both teachers and headteachers, it is imperative that the first approach should be to support the individual to work in their current setting.

However, Challenge advisors argued that there are also times when a supportive and developmental approach cannot succeed, and an individual therefore should be encouraged to leave. They pointed out that some individuals who were unsuccessful in schools in very challenging circumstances could be successful in a less challenging setting. However, there is currently no mechanism to transfer staff from one school to another, or to distinguish between those who it is considered will be successful in a less challenging setting and those who will not.

It has been pointed out that there is considerable variation across LAs in the way capability/competence procedures are used, and that only a small number of cases were ever referred to the GTC (NatCen, 2010; NASUWT, 2011). We found that in the majority of the case study KTS/PTA schools, one or more teachers and/or school leaders had been '*encouraged'* to

leave. Clearly, if individuals have been offered appropriate support and have failed to improve, and it is judged necessary for them to leave, this should involve a transparent and regulated process. The practice found in this evaluation, described as '*holding difficult conversations'*, did not fit with this aspiration. It was often messy and protracted, and created conflict and unhappiness among staff. This was true whether the individual was a teacher or a leader, but was most problematic when it was the headteacher. We found that such situations tended to delay school improvement, particularly when the individual concerned was the headteacher.

Another concern relates to what happens after a headteacher is 'moved on'. In several case study schools there had been a succession of interim leadership arrangements, and this had sometimes resulted in too many changes to the school's structures and strategies, and again, delayed sustainable improvement. The most effective solutions involved making permanent arrangements for leadership as quickly as possible in such cases. It seemed to be particularly difficult to achieve this. The most effective arrangements we found in such circumstances were federations led by executive headteachers. These seemed to have considerable success, particularly in the primary sector, and brought some sense of stability to the schools involved.

Structural solutions

Academies clearly provided a helpful way of giving a school a completely new image and new leadership. However, the prolonged delays before City Challenge schools were converted to academies were problematic in terms of staff morale and therefore of improvement activity. They also often involved periods of interim headship after the substantive headteacher left and before the academy was created. Chapter 4 showed that KTS/PTA schools in the lowest two quintiles of attainment which subsequently became academies did not then improve significantly more than those that did not become academies. Thus we have no evidence to suggest that the change to academy status was more effective than a continued period of support through KTS/PTA.

A minority of the KTS/PTA schools that became academies showed very little improvement over the three years. In the light of our finding that offering support through KTS/PTA was generally effective, it seems important that support should be available to academies as well as to other schools.

The federations we examined appeared to have been a very successful way of bringing about improvement in the weaker school, particularly in primary schools, though executive headteachers expressed some concerns about the potential impacts on their original schools.

10.3.4 The affective aspects of school improvement

A key aspect of City Challenge was the recognition that it matters how all those involved in education (LA officers, school leaders, teachers, support staff, parents and pupils) feel about what they do.

Support and trust

A strong message emerging from this evaluation has been that individuals and school communities tend to thrive when they feel trusted, supported and encouraged. This was particularly evident in the evaluation of KTS/PTA. The word trust was repeatedly used by headteachers in describing effective relationships with their Challenge advisors. Many headteachers talked of their initial anxiety that the programme would be a top-down strategy, and their concerns about the threats associated with failure, but said they had been reassured by the positive and collegiate approach of Challenge advisors, and the high level of support provided. Similarly advisors emphasised the importance of trusting the head and letting him/her manage the process of improvement.

This approach to school improvement derived from Tim Brighouse's original philosophy in setting up the London Challenge, and his strong emphasis on ensuring that headteachers and staff felt

supported, discussed in Chapter 1. This message clearly continued to inform the approach taken by City Challenge advisors and NLE/LLEs eight years after the Challenge started, and this evaluation has demonstrated that it has been a key factor in its success.

Morale, aspiration, ambition, excitement and inspiration

In addition to developing this positive ethos in focused work with individual schools, the Challenge aimed to develop higher morale and greater positivity in schools across the three areas. The evaluation showed that morale and ambition have improved in many London schools, where the Challenge has been in operation for the longest time[28]. Some interviewees in the Greater Manchester and the Black Country also referred to increased energy and enthusiasm, and this was evident in interviews with NLEs and LLEs in all three areas.

Other affective elements of school improvement were excitement and inspiration. These were mentioned by many of the heads involved in the London programmes designed to increase the numbers of Good and Outstanding schools. The conferences they had attended were described as inspiring, and clearly motivated them into action in their own schools. Teachers who had attended the ITP and OTP also talked of the excitement that they felt about the improvements that they had resulted in their own practice, and referred to the increased ambitions they had for the pupils they taught.

Celebrating success

As we have shown, headteachers and other school staff also talked about the importance of celebrating small and large successes. In particular, in KTS/PTA schools, advisors and NLE/LLEs recognised and celebrated successes, and this was important in motivating headteachers and teachers to continue.

It is unhelpful that the achievements of urban schools are not always given the recognition they deserve. It is perhaps understandable that when so many politicians and journalists are based in London, they focus on the problems there. But it seems perverse that London schools are so often given negative publicity, when they have been outstandingly successful with their disadvantaged pupils, and now have above average attainment for all pupils (see also Wyness, 2011).

All three City Challenge areas have made outstanding progress over the three years of the Challenge. The attainment of disadvantaged pupils in these areas has improved more in these areas than elsewhere. A smaller percentage of schools in the three Challenge areas are now below floor targets than is the case in the rest of the country. These are achievements worth celebrating.

10.4 Summary

This chapter has identified a wide range of learning points that arise from the experiences of City Challenge.

- It is important for area and school level strategies to have clear and achievable objectives, and also to recognise that targets can have perverse effects.
- Tackling school improvement at area level (rather than national level or individual school level) has considerable benefits.

[28] Chapter 3 showed that London headteachers were significantly more likely than those in the other two areas to agree that 'City Challenge has raised the ambitions of urban schools serving disadvantaged communities'.

- It takes time to bring about sustainable improvement across an area, and three years was perhaps too short.
- Different forms of support are effective in schools at different stages on their improvement journey.
- There is a role for a team of school improvement experts, based on the Challenge advisors, both in working in the weakest schools, and in working with LAs at strategic level. Expertise can also be found in NLEs and LLEs and other headteachers, LA officers and consultants. The system leadership role of NLEs and LLEs is an effective one, and benefits both the schools that they support and their own schools and staff.
- Bespoke solutions are important both in tackling the specific issues faced in each school, and in giving school leaders and staff a sense of ownership, rather than 'being done to'.
- Arrangements that enable school leaders and teachers to share effective practice are extremely beneficial. These include conferences; a stronger school supporting a weaker one (which may also include soft Federations); groups of three, led by the headteacher of a more successful school; Families of Schools which had similar intakes; hub schools or knowledge centres; and the Improving Teacher Programme and the Outstanding Teacher Programme.
- There is a need for leadership at area level to broker such partnerships and groupings, and ensure that all schools are outward looking.
- The most effective strategies to improve teaching and learning take place in schools, and involve observing excellent teaching; opportunities to reflect with colleagues; and coaching in the teacher's own classroom. All teachers should have regular opportunities to observe practice in other schools.
- Weak leaders can be supported through coaching, mentoring and other development opportunities. However, in cases where the leader does not develop sufficiently, there is a need for a transparent and structured process to decide a way forward, and it is vital that where a headteacher leaves as a result of such a process, permanent arrangements are quickly made for the leadership of that school.
- Perhaps the most effective aspect of City challenge was that it recognised that individuals and school communities tend to thrive when they feel trusted, supported and encouraged. The ethos of the programme, in which successes were celebrated and it was recognised that if teachers are to inspire pupils they themselves need to be motivated and inspired, was a key factor in its success.

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Ref: DFE-RR215

ISBN: 978-1-78105-110-8

June 2012