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for Education

A compendium of evidence on ethnic minority resilience to the effects of deprivation on attainment

Research report

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Executive Summary

Overview

The lower educational achievement of White working class pupils in comparison with children from other ethnic backgrounds with similar socio-economic status continues to attract attention. This compendium explores this issue in two parts. The first part reviews the existing research evidence, while the second part provides a detailed analysis of current patterns and trends in attainment by ethnicity and deprivation.

The report of the Education Select Committee on underachievement among White working class pupils provided a thorough and broad-ranging insight into contributing factors and potential approaches to improving attainment among this group (House of Commons, 2014). Nevertheless, it identified a need to better understand the reasons behind these differences in attainment, and to review existing evidence on strategies that have been undertaken to boost attainment of ethnic minority groups, to identify interventions and approaches that might also be effective for White working class children.

In response, this part of the report has been commissioned by the Department for Education to provide a review of the evidence. It explores why pupils in some ethnic groups appear to be more resilient to the pressures of poverty on educational attainment, compared with White British pupils. The review also considers what can be learned from steps taken to boost attainment among pupils from ethnic minority groups, and the extent to which such strategies may be applicable to White working class pupils.

In this report the term “White British” is used to refer to all pupils in this ethnic category, while “White working class” refers to White British pupils who are eligible for free school meals, following the approach used in the Education Select Committee report.

Educational attainment by ethnicity

- A complementary analysis published as part of this compendium of evidence provides an up-to-date picture of current patterns and trends in attainment by ethnicity and deprivation (Strand, 2015).
- Overall, gaps in educational achievement by ethnic group have narrowed considerably over the last 20 years. Since the early 2000s, most broad ethnic groups have, on average, seen a greater improvement in attainment at age 16,

compared with White British pupils.¹ The exception is White Other pupils, where average attainment has declined relative to that of White British pupils. This is likely to reflect the changing demographic composition of this group over time.

Educational attainment by ethnicity and deprivation

- In 2013, among pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM), all ethnic minority groups were outperforming White working class pupils in terms of attainment at age 16, based on the percentage attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and mathematics.
- Furthermore, among FSM pupils, the gap between ethnic minority pupils and White working class pupils has increased over time. While the proportion of FSM pupils reaching this level of attainment increased for all ethnic groups (including for White working class pupils) between 2004 and 2013, most ethnic minority groups saw a greater increase in attainment.
- Ethnic gaps in attainment among FSM pupils are already evident at an early age. At age 5, and age 11, White working class pupils are amongst the lowest achieving groups.

Factors associated with ethnic minority resilience

- Existing studies have pointed to the importance of parental, student and school factors in explaining why ethnic minority pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds have shown higher levels of educational attainment, and made greater progress, than their White working class counterparts.
- Both the qualitative and quantitative research literature points to an important role for parental factors, including aspirations, in explaining the higher educational attainment and progress of pupils from ethnic minority groups.
- There is limited evidence on the mechanisms through which parental aspirations may affect attainment. Existing research has proposed potential reasons for low aspirations among White working class parents, including the young age of many parents, a lack of belief in the value of education, as well as high rates of unemployment, but these explanations have not been rigorously tested. Other evidence has suggested aspirations are not low, rather that parents do not have access to the necessary information or knowledge to support learning.

¹ Measured in terms of attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and Mathematics, although similar trends are observed based on attaining five or more A*-C GCSE grades, or using the capped (Best 8) points score.

- Students' own aspirations and expectations have also been identified as significant factors in explaining attainment. Higher levels of aspirations can encourage students to engage with schooling and may also be reflected in practical behaviours that raise attainment, such as spending time completing homework. A lower prevalence of risk factors, such as being less likely to be absent from school or to have been excluded, have also been shown to explain part of the ethnic variation in attainment.
- Schools also have an important role in raising attainment, although the evidence suggests the relative contribution of schools is smaller than that of parental, family and student factors.

Strategies for raising attainment of ethnic minority groups

- An extensive literature explores the factors associated with the different educational performance of various ethnic groups. There is much less evidence that allows robust conclusions to be drawn about the impact of specific strategies on raising attainment of ethnic minority pupils.
- Studies point to a range of school practices associated with more effective use of funding for raising ethnic minority attainment, and practices aimed at raising attainment of disadvantaged pupils from all ethnic groups. These include the importance of high quality school leadership, a school ethos that embraces diversity and has high expectations of all pupils, monitoring and tracking of pupils, a flexible and inclusive curriculum, and engagement with parents and the wider community.
- Improvements in language skills have been identified as a key factor enabling ethnic minority pupils to catch up with White British children over time. Studies indicate that while White working class pupils do not have English as a specific barrier, language and literacy skills are an area of concern.
- Given the differences in parental and student factors across ethnic groups, such as differences in aspirations, it cannot be assumed that interventions will have the same effects on all ethnic groups. However, improving school practices is likely to have benefits for pupils from all ethnic groups, and similarly, where classroom strategies have been identified as effective, these are typically effective for all ethnic groups.

Conclusions

Understanding differences in attainment

- As ethnic gaps in attainment are already evident on entry to school, efforts to raise attainment of White working class pupils need to consider what works for even the youngest pupils.
- While much concern has focused on the underachievement of White working class boys, girls also show low levels of attainment. Therefore, resources targeted at White working class pupils should include both groups.
- The use of FSM as a proxy for working class is often adopted for practical reasons. There is likely to be considerable variation in the circumstances of pupils within this group and this may vary systematically across different ethnic groups.

Evidence of effective practice

- There is no conclusive evidence about what works to address the relative under-attainment of White working class pupils but existing research and evaluation points to the role of addressing the range of contributing factors through an assortment of interventions.
- As parents, students and schools all contribute to raising attainment, initiatives should address all these factors.
- Strategies that are effective for low attaining groups may also raise attainment of high achieving groups. In this sense, while such strategies may raise attainment of all children, they will not necessarily act to close the gap.

Gaps in the evidence

- There are a number of areas in which more evidence is needed to inform the direction and content of future interventions aimed at addressing attainment differences between pupils by social class and ethnicity. These include understanding more about the differences in attainment within as well as between ethnic minority groups and White working class pupils. They also include understanding more about the mechanisms through which attainment is increased at school and at home.
- The evidence suggests that the relative contribution of schools is smaller than that of parental, family and student factors. However, school interventions may be easier to deliver than those which are targeted at the home. Further

investigation is needed into what aspects of school quality drive differential educational performance among ethnic minority pupils.

- There is reasonably strong evidence that parents from some ethnic minority groups are more likely than White working class parents to have certain attitudes and behaviours which may raise their children's attainment, including greater involvement with their child's school and use of private tutors. These findings suggest that certain steps may be effective in addressing White working class underachievement but that they need to be better understood.
- Since there is some evidence that parental engagement can improve pupil performance, the features of interventions which have successfully engaged White working class parents need to be identified.
- Further research is needed on whether it is simply low aspirations which lead to underachievement of White working class pupils or other barriers, such as knowledge of opportunities or lack of resources to support learning.
- There is a considerable body of evidence exploring factors associated with lower attainment for disadvantaged pupils on entry to school; less evidence is available on how this may differ by ethnicity. Further investigation is needed in order to understand more about the reasons for ethnic gaps in attainment among disadvantaged pupils at this age.
- The decline in the performance of 'White other' pupils needs further investigation to establish which groups this category includes and how this area of underachievement might be addressed.

1. Introduction

The lower achievement of White working class pupils in comparison with children from other ethnic backgrounds with similar socio-economic status continues to attract attention. This report reviews the existing evidence on educational attainment among disadvantaged pupils from different ethnic groups. It explores why pupils in some ethnic groups appear to be more resilient to the pressures of poverty on educational attainment, as well as why disadvantaged pupils from some ethnic groups have seen a greater improvement in attainment compared with White working class pupils. The review also considers what can be learned from steps taken to boost attainment among pupils from ethnic minority groups, and the extent to which such strategies may be applicable to White working class pupils.

1.1 Background

In June 2014, the Education Select Committee published a report on underachievement in education among White working class pupils (House of Commons, 2014). That report provides a thorough and broad-ranging insight into contributing factors and potential approaches to improving attainment among this group. Nevertheless, it identified a need to better understand the reasons behind these differences in attainment, and to review existing evidence on strategies that have been undertaken to boost attainment of ethnic minority groups. In response, this report has been commissioned by the Department for Education to provide a review of the evidence.

A complementary analysis is published alongside this review providing an up-to-date picture of current patterns and trends in attainment by ethnicity and deprivation (Strand, 2015).

1.2 Approach to the review

The review was conducted using a structured literature and evidence search, focusing on evidence published in academic journals, as well as additional evidence produced by other relevant stakeholders.

A set of key search terms were identified at the outset of the project and used to conduct structured searches using electronic research databases, primarily the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS). Reference lists of key articles found through the structured search were also reviewed to obtain any additional material not originally identified. Websites of relevant stakeholder organisations were also searched in order to identify publications outside of traditional academic sources. Further details regarding the search process and the list of search terms used are provided in the appendix.

The review focuses primarily on UK-based evidence, although some international studies are included where these are highly relevant. Only English language sources from the period 1999-present are included.

In reviewing the evidence, we have followed a standard approach to assess the quality of the evidence (see, for example, Farrington, 2003), including appraisal of:

- the approach used including whether: the sample size was adequate for the nature of the analysis; appropriate statistical methods have been applied; the study gives an explicit account of the research process;
- the quality of data including factors such as reliability and representativeness;
- the definitions and measures used, including how the study measures disadvantage and the consequences of this for interpretation of the evidence;
- the extent to which the evidence can be considered to identify a causal relationship between an intervention and the outcome; and
- the extent to which the evidence is applicable to other contexts, particularly relevant where a study is based on a specific region, or on a specific subgroup of children.

The robustness of the evidence is commented upon in our discussion of the findings.

Defining socio-economic status

Different studies use various ways of identifying socio-economic status. The Education Select Committee report focused specifically on White working class pupils, and contains a useful discussion of the difficulties in defining what is meant by the term "working class". Following the approach used in the Education Select Committee report, in this review we use entitlement to free school meals as a proxy for "working class", although we recognise that this has limitations. Thus in this report the term "White British" is used to refer to all pupils in this ethnic category, while "White working class" refers to White British pupils who are eligible for free school meals.

However, in order to provide a comprehensive review of the evidence, we include studies that use a range of definitions of socio-economic deprivation, whether this be eligibility for free school meals or other measures, such as the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index. In many studies, the choice of deprivation measure is in practice determined by data availability. Sometimes it is based on one particular criterion, while other studies combine various indicators of disadvantage to provide a more rounded measure. The use of different measures of disadvantage is potentially important for interpretation; in our discussion of the evidence, we therefore identify the particular definitions of disadvantage on which the study is based.

1.3 Structure of the report

This report is structured as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of recent empirical evidence on educational attainment by ethnicity and socio-economic deprivation, in order to place the remainder of the report in context. This focuses on the analysis produced as part of this report (Strand, 2015). In Section 3, we review the evidence on the reasons why pupils in some ethnic groups appear to be more resilient to the pressures of poverty on educational attainment. Section 4 explores the evidence on strategies that have been used to boost attainment of ethnic minority groups, and considers how applicable these strategies may be to White working class pupils. Section 5 concludes, discusses the limitations of the existing evidence and highlights particular areas where more evidence would be valuable.

2. Educational attainment by ethnic group and socioeconomic deprivation

Educational attainment is affected by a range of factors, but this report focuses specifically on the role of ethnicity and deprivation. There has been longstanding interest in equity gaps in educational attainment by ethnicity and social class, both in the UK and beyond. The Youth Cohort Study was the first data source for England and Wales that allowed examination of national trends in attainment by ethnicity, social class and gender, and analyses using this source highlighted attainment gaps along all these dimensions (Rothon, 2007; Connolly, 2006; Demack et al., 2000). Nevertheless, when looking at subgroups of ethnicity and social class, there were limited sample sizes on which to conduct the analysis. The National Pupil Database has allowed detailed breakdowns of ethnicity to be examined since the early 2000s, and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), which began in 2004, has also allowed examination of attainment by ethnicity and socio-economic status; with ethnic boosts to the sample designed to ensure sufficient sample sizes for subgroup analysis.

Alongside this review, a separate report was commissioned by the Department for Education to provide an up-to-date account of trends over time in educational attainment by ethnicity and deprivation (Strand, 2015). We summarise the key findings from this analysis in the remainder of this section.

2.1 Attainment at secondary school by ethnic group

Strand (2015) shows that, overall, gaps in educational achievement by ethnic group have narrowed considerably over the last 20 years. Using the Youth Cohort Study (YCS), the only nationally representative source of information on educational attainment by ethnicity prior to the 2000s, the report finds that between 1991 and 2006, significant progress was made by all ethnic minority groups distinguished in the YCS (namely Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Other Asian and Black).

Since the early 2000s, comprehensive and detailed data on attainment by ethnicity (and other pupil characteristics) have been made available through the National Pupil Database. Measuring achievement in terms of attaining 5 or more GCSE A*-C grades or equivalent including English and mathematics over the period from 2004 to 2013², Strand shows that:

- In 2013, the odds of **Indian** and **Chinese** students reaching this level of attainment were more than double those of White British students.

² Data for 2014 are not included because of the significant changes to the way in which GCSE performance measures were calculated in 2014 (see DfE, 2015, for further details).

- There were substantial improvements for **Bangladeshi** pupils, who on average performed less well than White British pupils in 2004, but were above the average for White British pupils in 2013.
- There were also considerable improvements for **Black African** pupils, such that there was no longer an attainment gap with White British pupils by 2013.
- Pupils from **Pakistani, Black Caribbean** and **Mixed White and Black Caribbean** continued to be less likely to reach this level of attainment than White British pupils in 2013. But the gap had narrowed considerably over the period since 2004.
- There is only one ethnic group, **White Other**, which has seen a decline in attainment relative to White British pupils. The average attainment of White Other pupils was above that for White British pupils between 2004 and 2006, but has moved below since 2008. In 2013, this group was around four-fifths as likely as White British pupils to reach the specified level of attainment. Strand notes that this may well be a result of changes in the demographic composition of the White Other group over time.

The report also explores using alternative attainment measures, namely the achievement of 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C or equivalent (in any subject) and the capped (Best 8) points score. Some slight differences are found when using these alternative measures of attainment, but the broad trends reported above remain unchanged.³

2.2 Attainment at secondary school by ethnic group and deprivation

The primary focus of this report is on differences in attainment by ethnic groups among pupils from lower socio-economic groups. The differences in attainment by ethnic group reported above do not account for the different levels of socio-economic disadvantage by ethnicity. In most ethnic minority groups, the proportion of pupils from lower socio-economic groups is higher than for White British pupils.

The analysis in Strand (2015) explores differences in attainment for ethnic groups according to eligibility for free school meals (FSM). Table 1 summarises some of the key results by ethnic group, showing the percentage of FSM pupils attaining 5 or more GCSE grades at A*-C, including English and mathematics.

³ See Strand (2015) for further discussion of the consequences of using these alternative measures of attainment.

On this basis, in 2013, White working class pupils were the lowest attaining group. Chinese pupils were the highest achieving ethnic group among FSM pupils, with 77 per cent reaching this level of attainment, followed by Indian and Bangladeshi pupils (62 per cent and 59 per cent respectively). This compared with 32 per cent of White working class pupils, that is, White British FSM pupils. Even among the lowest attaining minority group, Mixed White and Black Caribbean pupils, 38 per cent of FSM pupils achieved this level of qualifications.⁴

Table 1: Attainment of 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C including English and mathematics for FSM pupils, by ethnic group, 2004 and 2013

5 or more GCSE grades A*-C including English and Maths (%)		
	2004	2013
White British	14.1	32.3
White Other	20.1	43.8
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	13.7	37.5
Indian	35.3	61.5
Pakistani	22.5	46.8
Bangladeshi	29.3	59.2
Black African	19.1	51.4
Black Caribbean	13.9	42.2
Chinese	55.4	76.8

Source: Adapted from Table 9 in Strand (2015).

Furthermore, among FSM pupils, the gap between ethnic minority pupils and White working class pupils has increased over time. While the proportion of FSM pupils reaching this level of attainment increased for all ethnic groups (including for White working class pupils) between 2004 and 2013, most ethnic minority groups saw a greater increase in attainment. When measuring attainment in terms of the capped (Best 8) points score, Strand (2015) finds that FSM pupils from ethnic minority groups

⁴ See Strand (2015) for further details.

again showed higher attainment than White working class pupils. However, the widening ethnic gap over time is less apparent.

Concern over attainment of White working class pupils has often focused on attainment of White working class boys (King and Welch, 2012). The report of the Education Select Committee noted that underachievement of White working class pupils was not limited to boys; with girls also showing low levels of attainment. Strand (2015) also finds little differences between ethnic groups by gender among FSM pupils.

2.3 Attainment at primary school

Strand (2015) also explores attainment gaps at earlier ages. Even at age 11, White working class pupils are the second lowest achieving group, with 58 per cent reaching the expected level of attainment at the end of key stage 2 in 2013. The only lower achieving group are FSM pupils from White Other backgrounds, with 56 per cent of these pupils achieving this level.

At age 5, White working class pupils are among the three lowest attaining groups, with 35 per cent achieving a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile in 2013. Among both White Other and Pakistani FSM pupils, this stood at 34 per cent.

Differences in attainment on entry to school by ethnicity and socio-economic status have long been apparent. Strand (1999a) explored factors associated with differences in attainment at age 4 in one London LA in the 1990s (based on over 11,000 children in 55 schools). Achievement at age 4 was higher among pupils not entitled to FSM, and there were important interaction effects for ethnicity, such that these differed by socio-economic status. Similar relationships were apparent when considering pupil progress between ages 4 and 7 (Strand, 1999b). More recently, Dearden and Sibieta (2010), using the Millennium Cohort Study, find significant differences in children's outcomes by ethnic group at age 3 and age 5. Once family background and other characteristics are taken into account, the extent of these ethnic differences is much reduced. However, while they control for socio-economic status, they do not explicitly explore the interactions between ethnicity and socio-economic status.

3. Why are pupils in some ethnic groups more resilient to the pressures of poverty on educational attainment?

Section 2 has shown that among pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, White working class pupils continue to fare worse in terms of educational attainment than other ethnic groups. Furthermore, the evidence suggests many ethnic minority groups have seen greater improvements in attainment over the past decade than that observed for White working class pupils.

In this section, we review existing evidence on the key factors that have been identified as contributing to this ethnic gap in attainment among pupils from lower socio-economic groups. We organise our discussion of the evidence around the key influences suggested in the evidence, namely, parental and family factors; students' own characteristics; and school effects.

3.1 Parental and family factors

Parental expectations and aspirations have been identified by several studies as one explanation for the higher attainment of ethnic minority groups, including those from lower social classes. In some studies, parental aspirations are suggested as one reason why differences in attainment remain after observable pupil and family characteristics, and school effects have been accounted for (e.g. Wilson et al., 2011). Where differences in aspirations are apparent by ethnicity, research proposes two reasons why this may be the case. First, there may simply be cultural differences across different ethnicities, for example, in the value they place on education. Secondly, as in some cases ethnic minority pupils will be from families which have recently moved to the UK, this may be the result of the immigrant paradigm (Strand, 2014a); the idea that recent immigrants will put greater emphasis on education because they have less financial capital. Burgess (2014) notes the difficulty in disentangling the relative contributions of ethnicity and being a recent immigrant on attainment.

Some authors have pointed to the fact that it is in the final years of compulsory schooling when minority ethnic groups make particular progress compared to White British pupils as a reflection of the importance of aspirations. The underlying idea here is that because the exams taken at this point are particularly important for future study and work opportunities, this results in greater motivation to work hard at this crucial time in their academic career (e.g. Kingdon and Cassen, 2010; Wilson et al., 2011).

Other research has explored the role of parental aspirations directly. Strand (2014a), using data from the first cohort of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), found parental attitudes and behaviours were significantly related to their children's educational attainment at age 16. An important feature of this study is that it

explores the interactions between ethnicity and socio-economic status, rather than simply controlling for socio-economic status. That is, it allows consideration of why the effect of socio-economic status⁵ varies across ethnic groups. On average, parents from Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian and mixed heritage backgrounds were more likely than White British parents to have: higher educational aspirations; to have paid for private tuition; to know where their children were when they were out; to have greater involvement with their child's school; were less likely to quarrel with their child; and less likely to be single. These factors accounted for a substantial part of their children's higher educational attainment and contributed to explaining the attainment gap between White working class pupils and ethnic minority pupils of similar socio-economic status. However, Strand notes that Black Caribbean parents also shared many of the same characteristics but this was not reflected in the comparative levels of attainment of their children. While potential explanations for the relative underachievement of Black Caribbean children, not only among those from lower socio-economic groups, but also from higher socio-economic groups, are proposed, such as lower teacher expectations, racism within the education system, or peer group effects, Strand identifies a need for these to be further explored.

In qualitative analysis, Demie and Lewis (2011) identify lower parental aspirations as one of the key reasons for lower rates of educational achievement among White working class pupils.⁶ They conducted qualitative case study research with 14 schools within one LA in London, using interviews and focus groups with school leaders, class teachers, teaching assistants, governors, parents and pupils. The qualitative nature of this study means it cannot robustly identify causal impacts, but it allows exploration of some of the pathways through which aspirations, and other factors, act as barriers to achievement for White working class pupils. As it is conducted within one area, it also makes it potentially difficult to generalise the findings to other locations, although the findings are likely to be highly relevant in similar contexts (e.g. inner city areas).

Head teachers and teachers in the study perceived parents of White working class pupils to have low educational aspirations for their children. Reasons suggested for these low aspirations included the young age of many parents, who themselves had little belief in the value of schooling, as well as high rates of unemployment, resulting in a culture where pupils felt it was not necessary to worry about doing well at school. This lack of aspiration sometimes manifested itself in practical difficulties, such as children being absent or late for school, and meant parents were accepting of poor behaviour. This was contrasted with higher parental aspirations among other ethnic groups, who

⁵ Strand constructs a composite measure of socio-economic status based on eligibility for FSM, socio-economic classification of the home, parental education, home ownership and neighbourhood deprivation.

⁶ Demie and Lewis define "White working class" as "pupils whose parents are skilled and in semi-routine occupations or others who depend on the welfare state for their income and all pupils who are eligible for free school meals."

were considered to possess the 'immigrant mentality'. It was also suggested that aspirations were lower among White working class pupils in this context as a result of having less awareness of a wider world beyond their immediate neighbourhood.

Teachers also reported a lack of parental engagement with school. For example, schools would offer opportunities for parental involvement, and programmes for family improvement and parenting skills, but White working class parents seemed reluctant to participate, in contrast with parents from minority ethnic groups. This applied similarly for after-school clubs. Some parents also had low literacy levels which prevented them from engaging as much as they may have liked to.

Archer and Francis (2006) explore the educational attainment of British Chinese pupils, who are typically high achievers, even among Chinese FSM pupils. This qualitative study, based on semi-structured interviews with 80 British Chinese pupils (aged 14-16), 30 parents and 30 teachers in London, focuses particularly on the role of different forms of capital, both economic and social. Their study points to a strong role for parental aspirations, noting one important factor in explaining the high attainment of this group as competition between parents and families, driving a desire to do well among pupils. Aspirations were high regardless of socio-economic status⁷; with working class families also having high aspirations for their children's futures. It was common for parents, even from more disadvantaged backgrounds, to have paid for private tuition or some form of additional schooling, with resources prioritised to afford the cost. However, Archer and Francis note that in some cases this competition and focus on education led to undesirable effects, with lower self-esteem among relatively high-achieving pupils who felt they were not doing well enough.

It has been noted above that some ethnic groups are more likely to make use of additional or private tuition for their children, which may contribute to explaining differences in attainment. Other studies have shown parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to employ private tutors than more disadvantaged families (Ireson and Rushforth, 2011), as are parents with higher levels of education (Ireson and Rushforth, 2014). The expense of private tuition is likely to be one of the important factors in deterring less advantaged families from using this. Siraj-Blatchford (2010), in a study of working class children who achieved better than expected in terms of educational attainment at age 11, found several of these families, where they had been able to do so, had made use of private tuition. Evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit⁸ indicates that one-to-one tuition can have a significant positive effect on pupil attainment, although tutoring must be of adequate quality in order to be effective (Ireson, 2011).

⁷ Measured in terms of parental occupation.

⁸ The Education Endowment Fund Toolkit, <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/toolkit-a-z/>, accessed 13 April 2015 (Education Endowment Foundation, 2015).

Jerrim (2014), in a study of educational achievement of East Asian pupils in Australia, also suggests parental factors may be one reason for the high performance of this ethnic group. This study, based on scores from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), finds that no one factor can explain why pupils from this group do better than pupils of Australian heritage⁹, and that school selection, a high value placed on education, out-of-school tuition, a strong work ethic and high aspirations all contribute to their greater academic attainment. The study focuses specifically on second-generation East Asian pupils, so that these pupils have experienced the same schooling as pupils of Australian heritage. Jerrim also compares their performance with second-generation immigrants from other countries, but finds little difference in the performance of these groups relative to the native Australian population, after accounting for differences in various observable background characteristics, such as age, gender, parental education, occupation, region and household wealth.

Both the qualitative and quantitative research literature have pointed to an important role for parental factors, such as aspirations, in explaining the poorer levels of attainment among White working class pupils. Much of this evidence focuses on pupils of secondary school age. However, the analysis presented in Section 2 showed differences in attainment by ethnicity and socio-economic status are apparent even at age 5.

Johnson and Kosykh (2008) review the factors that impact on children's development in the early years and identify the key influences as including socio-economic status, parental education, the home learning environment and quality of pre-school education. There is a substantial body of evidence showing children from more deprived backgrounds have poorer outcomes even at pre-school ages. Kiernan and Mensah (2009), for example, in an analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), find that experiencing poverty, especially persistent poverty, is strongly associated with poorer child development at age three, in terms of both cognitive and behavioural outcomes.¹⁰ Their study finds that on average, most ethnic groups did less well than White children at age 3 in terms of cognitive outcomes, that is, they were more likely to show delays in cognitive development, although differences in terms of behavioural development were less evident. However, differences by socio-economic status within ethnic group are not explored. More broadly, while a number of studies explore the role of disadvantage in early years, they typically do not consider how this may interact with ethnicity.¹¹

⁹ Identified as those pupils where both they and both their parents were born in Australia.

¹⁰ More specifically, the authors assess cognitive development by using the Bracken Basic Concept Scale to identify learning delays, and behavioural development through an indicator of behavioural difficulties constructed from responses to the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (see Kiernan and Mensah, 2009, for further details).

¹¹ This has been explored in some studies outside of the UK, although the differing cultural and institutional contexts limits the applicability of findings to the UK.

A number of studies have indicated that the home learning environment is a key factor in explaining differences in attainment. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project has shown that the quality of the home learning environment is a key factor in determining children's outcomes (Sylva et al., 2004). While the EPPE project pointed to some potential variation in the quality of home learning environments by ethnicity among disadvantaged families, the sample sizes did not allow this to be tested statistically. The home learning environment was also a key factor for those children who 'succeeded against the odds' despite their more disadvantaged backgrounds (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). Further support for the importance of the home learning environment on children's development has also been demonstrated in analysis of other data sources, including the MCS (Parsons et al., 2013), and the Growing Up in Scotland Study (Melhuish, 2010).

3.2 Student factors

The importance of parental aspirations was discussed earlier, but research has also pointed to a role for students' own aspirations and expectations in explaining attainment.¹² Khattab (2015) suggests both high aspirations and high expectations among pupils are associated with higher rates of achievement at GCSE, as well as a greater likelihood of later applying to university.

Strand (2014a) finds that pupils' educational aspirations are one of the key factors in explaining why ethnic minorities from lower socio-economic groups have higher attainment than White working class pupils at age 16. The study considers both a set of 'risk' factors (special educational needs, truancy, exclusion, absence, and problems leading to involvement of police, welfare or social services) as well as a set of 'resilience' factors (educational aspirations, planning for the future, attitudes to school, academic self-concept, and time spent completing homework). Ethnic minority students were more likely than White British pupils, on average, to have a higher level of resilience factors, being more likely to aspire to progress to further education, to have positive academic self-concept, possess a positive attitude towards school and plan for the future. At the same time, risk factors were generally less prevalent among minority ethnic groups, with these pupils typically less likely to have been excluded (with the exception of Black Caribbean pupils) or to have had an extended period of absence (except for Pakistani pupils). Together with the parental factors discussed in Section 3.1, these student characteristics were able to account for much of the attainment gap between ethnic minority pupils and White British pupils from lower socio-economic groups. Overall, pupils' educational aspirations, academic self-concept, completion of homework, truancy and exclusion (together with gender) accounted for 60 per cent of

¹² Of course, aspirations of students are not unrelated to those of their parents.

the variance in educational progress between age 11 and 16. This points to a role for both resilience and risk factors in explaining differences in attainment.

Language has been identified as one of the factors explaining early differences in attainment among ethnic groups, and as one of the key reasons why ethnic minority groups catch up with White British pupils as they move through the school system (Dustmann et al., 2010). Strand et al. (2015) note that having English as an Additional Language (EAL) is closely related to ethnicity, but that there is considerable variation in English language fluency among EAL pupils, and it is this level of fluency that is most important in explaining variation in attainment.

While language skills have typically been a concern for some ethnic minority pupils, EAL cannot explain the lower achievement of White working class pupils. However, studies have raised concerns about language skills and literacy among White working class pupils. Demie and Lewis (2011) point to lower literacy levels among White working class pupils on beginning secondary school as one explanation for their poorer educational attainment. They argue that while pupils from other ethnic groups may receive EAL support, some support is also needed to support literacy skills among White working class pupils. Language and literacy skills during early years and primary school have been shown to be crucial for engaging with the curriculum and making educational progress, and poor literacy at primary school has been highlighted as a risk factor for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. (Coghlan et al., 2009; Sharples et al., 2011).

Pupil attainment may also be affected by a pupil's peer group, both within school, and beyond (Webber and Butler, 2007). Kingdon and Cassen (2010) found that pupils eligible for FSM fared better in schools where there was a higher proportion of other FSM students, and suggested pupils may feel less stigmatised when they are with other similar pupils. However, this relationship did not differ for pupils of different ethnicities. Pupils may be influenced not only by the socioeconomic background of their peer group, but also by its academic performance. Hamnett et al (2007), in a study of seven boroughs in East London, found that a pupil attending a school with high average academic performance is more likely to do better than would be predicted given their social, ethnic and gender background. However, Burgess (2014) notes that there are considerable difficulties in identifying a causal relationship between a pupil's peer group and educational attainment.

3.3 The role of schools

The results of school inspections reported by Ofsted (2013) suggest school quality is associated with differences in attainment according to pupils' eligibility for FSM. While half of pupils eligible for FSM achieved five or more GCSE grades A*-C including English and mathematics in schools judged as "outstanding", this applied for only a quarter of pupils eligible for FSM in schools deemed "inadequate". However, while the

overall percentage of pupils achieving this threshold was greater in schools judged as higher quality, it is notable that the attainment gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils is just as large among schools judged as “good” or “outstanding” as among schools judged “satisfactory” or “inadequate”.¹³

While much of the literature points to a role for schools in explaining differences in attainment, it is generally agreed that the relative contribution of school factors is smaller than parental factors and background characteristics (Demack et al., 2000). In Strand's (2014a) analysis of attainment at age 16, school level factors explained much less of the variance in attainment of different ethnic groups compared with parent and student factors. While the relative contribution of school factors may be smaller, this does not mean they are not important, and should still be investigated. They may also be some of the factors which are more easily amenable to policy intervention.

Wilson et al. (2011) suggest school related factors can affect differences in attainment by ethnicity through: systemic school factors, such as education policies on curriculum content that apply to all students which may vary in their impact on different ethnicities, if the content is biased towards particular ethnic groups; between-school factors, such as differences in school quality; and within-school factors, such as differences in teacher quality.

There is some debate over whether ethnic minority pupils attend different schools, and in particular, different quality schools, to White British pupils. For example, if pupils from ethnic minorities attended higher quality schools than White British pupils, this could contribute to the observed difference in attainment. The evidence however, is not conclusive. Kingdon and Cassen (2010), find ethnic minority pupils are more likely to attend lower quality schools than White British pupils, while in contrast, Burgess and Briggs (2006) and Dustmann et al. (2010) find ethnic minority pupils are more likely to attend higher quality schools. Furthermore, little evidence appears to be available on whether, among disadvantaged pupils, ethnic minority pupils attend different quality schools to White British pupils.

Wilson et al. (2011), based on London schools only, find that for most ethnic groups, school quality¹⁴ has little effect on attainment gaps, except in the case of Black

¹³ In schools judged as “good” or “outstanding” the gap between the percentage of FSM and non-FSM pupils achieving this threshold stood at 25 percentage points, compared with 22 percentage points for “satisfactory” and “inadequate” schools, based on inspection results at end 2012 (Ofsted, 2013).

¹⁴ In common with many studies exploring the relationship between school quality and attainment, this study uses the “fixed effects” approach to capture school quality. This is a statistical technique which allows different schools to have different effects, even though their characteristics cannot be comprehensively measured. The advantage of this approach is that it enables analysts to control for fixed differences between schools. The disadvantage, is that it does not further understanding of the role of different aspects of school quality.

Caribbean and Black Other groups. Furthermore, they report that most ethnic groups make greater progress during secondary school compared with White British pupils in almost all schools. Because of the widespread nature of this improvement, they argue that school quality is unlikely to be responsible for their greater educational progress. The exception is for Black Caribbean pupils, where this greater progress is observed in around half of schools. The authors suggest therefore that different school practices may have an important effect on outcomes for Black Caribbean or Black Other students, but not for the other ethnic groups considered in the analysis.

There is generally less evidence on whether schools are more effective at promoting attainment of some ethnicities more than others. Strand (2010) explores the role of schools in explaining differential progress for pupils between ages 7 and 11 from different ethnic groups, focusing particularly on the gap between White British and Black Caribbean pupils. He finds that Black Caribbean pupils are not attending lower quality schools (measured by their effectiveness in terms of pupil progress between age 7 and 11), and there was no evidence to support the notion that schools may be more effective for some groups of pupils than others; schools that were good at promoting the progress of White British pupils also did so for Black Caribbean pupils. In research based on a London borough, Strand (2014b) found substantial school effects on progress between age 7 and 11, but no evidence that schools were more effective at promoting progress for different groups in terms of socio-economic status, ethnicity or gender. Similarly, Strand (1999b) found considerable variation across schools in their effectiveness in terms of pupil progress between ages 4 and 7, but again no evidence that schools differed in their effectiveness for different groups of pupils.

Existing evidence points to a potential role for schools in narrowing attainment gaps. However, there is a need to better understand the determinants of school quality, as well as how schools may vary in their effectiveness for different pupil groups. Again, school factors cannot explain why gaps are already present on entry to school. Schools will play an important role in determining the evolution of gaps in attainment as pupils progress through the school system, but they cannot account for the gap in achievement at a very young age. Ofsted (2013) reports lower quality in early years provision in more deprived areas. Research has demonstrated the importance of high quality early years education for children's educational outcomes, with particularly notable effects for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. Sylva et al., 2004). The importance of early education was recognised in the introduction of the free entitlement to early education and its later extension to disadvantaged two year olds. However, little recent evidence appears to be available on whether pupils from different ethnic groups are experiencing different quality early years provision.

3.4 Other influences

While parental, student and school factors can explain much of the variation in attainment, other factors are also likely to contribute.

Some have pointed to the role of social capital in explaining the greater attainment of particular groups. The term social capital refers to "the pattern and intensity of networks among people and the shared values which arise from those networks" (Office for National Statistics, 2003). Access to social capital has the potential to influence attainment as more advantaged families may be more able to draw on the experiences and advice of others within their network. It has been argued, for example, that parents from more disadvantaged backgrounds do not have lower aspirations for their children's education, but rather lack access to social capital (Carter-Wall and Whitfield, 2012). That is, they require better information and guidance in order to convert those aspirations into the actions that help to raise their children's attainment.

Social capital is typically very difficult to measure (ONS, 2001). This limits quantitative analysis of its relationship with attainment and instead, the role of social capital has tended to be explored through a qualitative approach. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) note that more advantaged families were more likely to be able to make use of social capital where their children required extra help at school, although they do not explore differences by ethnic group. Demie and Lewis (2011) suggested White working class families may have less access to social capital than ethnic minority pupils, based on a study in one London LA, where the ethnic minority population was high and considered, by school staff, as having a greater sense of community. White working class pupils often formed the minority group in these schools, with school staff suggesting this led to a sense of marginalisation for White working class pupils. Archer and Francis (2006), suggest social capital is one of the important factors in explaining the typically high achievement of Chinese pupils, facilitated in part through attendance at Chinese supplementary schools, as well as through family and community networks.

4. What has worked to improve attainment of pupils in ethnic minority groups?

In this section we discuss existing evidence on specific strategies that have aimed at raising attainment of ethnic minority groups. Our focus is on strategies relating to ethnic minority achievement, although in places we also draw on broader evidence relating to strategies that have been used to raise attainment among disadvantaged groups. We consider the applicability of strategies aimed at ethnic minority groups for White working class pupils, and also include discussion of work that has explored how the attainment of White working class pupils may be improved.

Overall, there is a lack of robust causal evidence on what strategies or interventions are effective in raising attainment of ethnic minority groups. There is, however, a broader range of evidence that discusses the successes and limitations of such interventions and draws useful attention to the practices and initiatives that may prove valuable for raising attainment. There are even fewer studies of strategies aimed specifically at improving attainment of ethnic minority pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁵ There are therefore considerable difficulties in understanding whether strategies for raising ethnic minority attainment can be successfully applied to White working class pupils.

4.1 Funding and targeted strategies

The funding given to schools is designed to provide greater resources for schools with a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils. This has been the case for many years, with for example, a considerable element of funding for deprivation inherent within the Dedicated Schools Grant (see e.g. West, 2009; Sibieta, 2015). The introduction of the Pupil Premium in 2011 has further extended the funding targeted at the most disadvantaged pupils (Jarrett and Long, 2014). Some of these pupils will come from ethnic minority groups. However, the focus of this report is on funding strategies that have been specifically aimed at raising attainment of ethnic minority groups, although there is little robust evidence available to enable quantification of their impact.

The Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) was introduced by the government in 1999, as a means of supporting attainment of pupils from ethnic minority groups.¹⁶ Funds were provided to LAs, who then distributed funding to schools.

¹⁵ Although as many ethnic minority groups have a higher proportion of pupils from lower socio-economic groups, in practice strategies aimed at raising ethnic minority attainment will to some extent have targeted pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

¹⁶ This followed on from Section 11 of the 1966 Local Government Act, originally aimed at pupils of Commonwealth origin, which evolved over time to support a broader range of pupils from ethnic minority groups and those with English as an Additional Language needs.

Early review of the use of the EMAG suggested this funding could be used more effectively, with evidence suggesting too much emphasis was placed on helping bilingual pupils, and not enough on other minority groups requiring support (DfES, 2003). The Aiming High consultation in 2003 proposed a range of measures to support ethnic minority pupils and the system of allocation of funds under the EMAG was changed to take greater account of differing needs (DfES, 2004). EMAG funding was ring-fenced until 2011/12, at which point it was mainstreamed within the Dedicated Schools Grant. There have been some indications that resources for ethnic minority achievement provision have been decreasing within LAs since the ring-fencing ended (NASUWT, 2012).¹⁷

There is a lack of evidence allowing the overall impact of EMAG funding on attainment to be assessed in quantitative terms. Tikly et al. (2005) explore the effectiveness of the EMAG in improving attainment among ethnic minority pupils in the late 1990s/2000. Using data from around 150 LAs, they report a narrowing of the attainment gap for some ethnic minority groups (Pakistani and Bangladeshi) following the introduction of the EMAG, although the authors note that their analysis cannot demonstrate a causal relationship. Furthermore, for Black Caribbean pupils, there was no reduction in the attainment gap. Based on LA action plans, LAs that were most successful¹⁸ in using the EMAG were more likely than others to apply certain strategies, namely: assisting schools in monitoring achievement; gathering and sharing good practice; having good data and monitoring systems; and using these to set effective targets. Staff training and development strategies, and parental and community engagement, were also important features of successful LAs. LAs that were successful in raising GCSE attainment of Black Caribbean pupils were found to have offered more support in terms of mentoring and supplementary schooling. It is also notable that the successful LAs all had above the median level of EMAG funding, comprising a combination of central government funding and funding from the LAs themselves. Studies of schools which were deemed to be making the most effective use of EMAG funding were found to achieve this through good monitoring systems, strong leadership, an ethos that embraced diversity, a flexible and inclusive curriculum and engagement with parents and the community. The importance of teacher-pupil relationships was also acknowledged (DfES, 2004; Ofsted 2004a, 2004b).

Cunningham et al. (2004) provide an evaluation of the Excellence in Cities (EiC)/Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) Pilot Project, which began in 2002. The project was implemented in 35 schools across 10 LAs, but schools were free to choose their

¹⁷ The expectation is that this funding is now part of the formula for allocating funds to schools, although maintained schools can de-delegate funding so that provision remains centrally funded and managed (which may be helpful in an area where incidence is low). The simplification of the funding formula at local level has **removed** the ability to target funding specifically for this purpose.

¹⁸ Defined as having improved attainment of the three minority ethnic groups most at risk of underachieving (Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani) by more than the national average.

own activities and received varying levels of funds. In practice, most schools chose to use the project to build on existing activities, which were generally aimed at boosting attainment, but often also self-esteem and confidence. The activities varied considerably by type, including in-class support, one-to-one mentoring, group discussions and workshops, as well as in the specific groups of pupils targeted. Partly as a result of the varied nature of the projects, the evaluation is not able to robustly identify its impact in quantitative terms, nor is it able to state which activities were most effective. However, through visits to local education authorities, head teacher surveys, case studies of participating schools and discussion groups, the evaluation found both students and teachers felt there were notable benefits for participating students, in terms of raising motivation, self-esteem and achievement.¹⁹ Benefits for staff were also highlighted, such as opportunities to share good practice, as well as positive effects for other pupils in the school who were not directly targeted by the project.

The National Strategies represented a systematic attempt to bring about improvements in schools and educational standards (DfE, 2011). They were wide-ranging in their aims, but included a focus on raising attainment among ethnic minority pupils, and from the early 2000s onwards, programmes were developed for various ethnic groups. These programmes provided focused support for targeted LAs and schools to raise attainment, guided by a network of consultants at LA and regional level. They also resulted in the development of guidance and training materials for school leaders and other school staff, based on the experiences of the programmes, which were made available to all schools in England (e.g. DCSF, 2007; DfES, 2007).

Some of the initiatives were aimed at raising the attainment of Black pupils. Tikly et al. (2006) provide an evaluation of the "Aiming high: African Caribbean Achievement Project", which provided additional funding and support to schools to raise the achievement of this ethnic group.²⁰ In practice, the evaluation focused principally on Black Caribbean pupils, and while some improvement in attainment was seen for this group, this depended on the measure used, and there was considerable variation across schools. However, the authors conclude that the project was effective in raising awareness of the issues faced by this ethnic group within schools. Practices identified for successful implementation of the project within schools included: the commitment of the headteacher, senior management and governors to address ethnic inequalities; a willingness to adopt strategies to raise African Caribbean achievement as part of

¹⁹ Cunningham et al. (2004) note that some schools involved in the pilot would have also been benefitting from other initiatives operating at the same time and so it is not possible to ascertain which initiatives were responsible for any observed improvements. Nevertheless, most schools were monitoring and evaluating the activities they provided in some form, most commonly through staff views and tracking pupil attainment.

²⁰ Specifically, schools were provided with funding for project leadership, support from a consultant, support from the National College for School Leadership, guidance on good practice and an additional annual grant of £10,000.

mainstream practice and the vision to do so; a system of accountability for raising achievement; effective use of data to monitor progress; effective and equitable approaches to behaviour management; and support from the LA. Barriers to successful implementation were identified as: a perception that all ethnic groups should be considered the same; ineffective management of change by senior leaders; and a lack of accountability, where staff responsibilities were unclear.

Building partly on the Aiming High: African Caribbean Achievement project, the Black Pupils Achievement Programme, launched in 2005, involved 100 secondary schools in 25 LAs, and the Black Children's Achievement (BCA) Programme, launched in 2006, operated in over 100 primary schools across 20 LAs, and aimed to raise attainment of this group. In an evaluation of the BCA programme, carried out in seven participating schools and four LAs, Maylor et al. (2009) note the relatively short time frame and small scale of the evaluation prevented identification of measurable effects on attainment. However, through qualitative analysis they report on the features of the programme which enabled successful implementation. These included: the allocation of funding; flexibility for schools in choosing which areas the programme would focus on; monitoring of pupil attainment; monitoring practice; external support from BCA consultants (where there was a good relationship with the school) and regional advisors; and having adequate time to develop the necessary systems and to develop and implement ways of delivering improvements. The commitment of both school leaders, and other school staff, were identified as critical for the sustainability of the programme, as well as ensuring sufficient staffing resources.

The National Strategies also targeted other ethnic groups. The Minority Ethnic Achievement Programme (MEAP) was specifically designed to boost educational attainment of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali and Turkish heritage pupils. The programme was piloted in 2004, involving 52 schools in 12 LAs, and then expanded in 2006. The MEAP provided schools with funding to run small-group support programmes, led by teachers or teaching assistants, with the aim of raising attainment at Key Stage 3. Strand et al. (2010) find that Somali pupils showed greater progress where they attended schools participating in the MEAP. Within MEAP schools, pupils from Bangladeshi and Turkish/Kurdish backgrounds did not make greater progress than White British pupils. However, the authors note that more extensive evaluation of the MEAP would be valuable. Other relevant initiatives as part of the National Strategies include the New Arrivals Excellence Programme, which aimed particularly at international migrants with EAL, and the Narrowing the Gaps programme, partly targeted at ethnic minority pupils but also pupils from deprived backgrounds.

The available evidence on funding strategies aimed at raising attainment of ethnic minority groups points to some positive impacts on attainment, at least where funding was used effectively. It is also notable that many of these strategies operated at a time when a narrowing of the attainment gap for many ethnic minority groups has been observed, although this cannot be taken to imply an impact. Overall, there appears to

be a lack of evidence that allows accurate quantification of the benefits of these strategies, as well as the precise nature of their impact. There are, however, a number of common themes identified in the evaluations with regard to the characteristics of effective practice and use of funding, which include: strong leadership, good use of monitoring systems, a school ethos that valued diversity and had high expectations of pupils, a flexible and inclusive curriculum and engagement with parents and the wider community.

4.2 School practices

The discussion above highlighted school strategies associated with effective use of funding aimed at raising attainment of minority ethnic pupils, including the importance of strong leadership. Mongon and Chapman (2008) also identify the critical role of school leadership in raising attainment of White working class pupils.

Sharples et al. (2011) discuss evidence on which classroom strategies are effective for raising educational attainment of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. They state that while there is an extensive literature on the relationship between poverty and attainment, less evidence is available to show what works in terms of particular interventions or strategies, although they note a broader evidence base is available from the international literature.

In broad terms, Sharples et al. find that classroom strategies effective for one ethnic group are generally also effective for others. For this reason, while the initial aim of their review was to focus on effective strategies for White working class boys, they consider what works in raising attainment for all children in poverty. Their summary of UK evidence pointed to use of a number of strategies by schools to boost attainment of disadvantaged groups, including school leadership, developing pupils' social and emotional skills, and supporting pupils through school transitions, as well as:

- robust data and monitoring systems: identified as an effective practice in schools with high proportions of disadvantaged pupils, where it is used in order to identify underperforming groups, monitor progress and impact of interventions, decide on allocation of resources, inform target setting, and to challenge aspirations and assumptions of pupils, parents and staff.
- initiatives to raise pupil aspirations: although little causal evidence for the UK was available on the effectiveness of programmes that aimed to raise aspirations.
- initiatives to raise parental engagement and aspirations. Again, little causal evidence is available for the UK to date, though Sharples et al. highlight evidence from the Supporting Parents on Kids Education in Schools (SPOKES) programme, which aims to engage and support parents in helping their children with reading. Significant improvements in children's literacy skills and a decline in

emotional conduct problems were identified in a randomised controlled trial of the project, which was shown to be particularly effective in more deprived areas (Scott et al., 2010). While not focused on particular ethnic groups, recent studies have reviewed the evidence on interventions to raise parental engagement and its effectiveness in narrowing attainment gaps for disadvantaged children (see Goodall et al., 2011; Grayson, 2013).

Sharples et al.'s review of international evidence, which provides a more extensive evidence base on the success of different strategies in raising attainment, identified the quality of teaching as one of the factors with most potential to make a difference. However, the authors recognise the limitations in assuming that strategies shown to be successful in one country will also be effective in the UK. Furthermore, while a number of studies provided evidence on classroom strategies for raising attainment of all disadvantaged children, little evidence was available on strategies used for specific ethnic groups.

4.3 Regional initiatives

There have been a number of initiatives focused on raising attainment of particular regions. While the focus of these initiatives is at a regional level, often with an emphasis on disadvantaged children, the areas which they have targeted, such as London, are often those with a high ethnic minority population, although they have not specifically targeted minority ethnic pupils. Such initiatives have included the Excellence in Cities programme, introduced in 1999 and the London Challenge programme, introduced in 2003. While such programmes may be thought to have driven the improvements in attainment seen in London and other large cities in recent years, Greaves et al. (2014) suggest earlier strategies, such as the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies, are more likely to have done so, based on the timing of the piloting of these initiatives in London. Furthermore, Burgess (2014) finds that ethnic composition can statistically account for all of the greater progress observed in London's secondary schools compared with the rest of the country.²¹ Burgess argues that this greater attainment is likely to reflect greater aspirations and engagement with education among the ethnic minority population.

4.4 Language and literacy interventions

Some interventions aimed at raising ethnic minority attainment have focused on improving language skills. Ethnicity and EAL are closely related, although as noted earlier, there are substantial variations in English language fluency among EAL pupils

²¹ This result shows some variation with measure of attainment used, but even on other measures, can account for around half of the difference in progress.

(Strand et al., 2015). In a systematic review of interventions for improving language and literacy skills among EAL children, Murphy and Unthiah (2015) find little robust evidence currently exists for the UK.

While a better understanding of practices that raise language skills among EAL pupils is important, it is of less relevance for White British pupils for whom their first language is English. Nevertheless, while English may be their first language, studies have pointed to the importance of improving language and literacy skills among White British pupils. Language and literacy skills during early years and primary school have been shown to be crucial for engaging with the curriculum and educational achievement, with poor literacy skills at primary school identified as a particular issue for disadvantaged children. (Coghlan et al., 2009; Sharples et al., 2011). NFER (2009) identified tailored one-to-one support as an effective way of closing attainment gaps.

Sharples et al. (2011), in their review of effective classroom strategies for disadvantaged pupils, also include evidence on specific approaches to help improve pupils' reading ability. This includes Success for All, which provides tutoring to individual children not succeeding in reading, which has been shown to impact positively on schools in deprived areas (Slavin et al., 2005).

4.5 Early years interventions

We have seen earlier that substantial gaps in attainment are present even on entry to school, and so addressing differences at an early stage in children's lives is likely to be a crucial part of narrowing attainment gaps. This is further supported by evidence from Blanden (2006), who finds that children from disadvantaged backgrounds who do better than expected tend to do so from an early age.

The Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) project has demonstrated the importance of high quality pre-school for children from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular (Sylva et al., 2004). These effects are still apparent in educational attainment at age 16 (Sylva et al., 2014). Evidence from the MCS indicates differences in the use of formal childcare at age 3 by ethnicity, applying for 83 per cent of White children, 74 per cent of Black children, and 71 per cent of Indian children, but only around half (51 per cent) for Pakistani and Bangladeshi children (Hansen and Jones, 2011). Speight et al. (2010), using the Childcare and Early Years Parents Survey series, find children from Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi families were less likely to receive the free entitlement to early years education. However, there were no differences in ethnic take-up of the free early entitlement, once socio-demographic differences were taken into account. Overall, disadvantaged families were less likely to take up provision and were using different types of provision. While the vast majority of children do take up the free entitlement, reasons for not doing so included lack of awareness of the entitlement and a lack of places at local providers. Findings from the

Early Years Education pilot for two year old children suggested the pilot had helped increase take-up for children from ethnic minority backgrounds (Maisey et al., 2013).

4.6 How applicable are these strategies for White working class pupils?

There are important limitations in considering the applicability of strategies used with ethnic minority groups and deprived pupils for White working class pupils. Given the differences in parental and student factors across ethnic groups, such as differences in aspirations, highlighted earlier in this review, we cannot assume that practices will have the same effects for all groups.

Nevertheless, many of the factors identified in the studies discussed in this section are likely to benefit pupils of all ethnicities. Indeed, some have noted that strategies that work with a particular ethnic group are also successful for others. Evans (2010) cautions against attainment strategies targeted at particular ethnic groups, and in particular, strategies which focus on developing the identity of White British pupils, arguing that it is not the ethnic differences but social class differences that are important, and thus where strategies should focus.

Some studies have looked specifically at what strategies might be successful in raising attainment of White working class pupils, often with a focus on boys (although as we have seen in Section 2, underachievement is also an issue for White working class girls). King and Welch (2012) undertook a qualitative analysis of boys from White working class backgrounds who have succeeded at school, based on attaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. While their analysis cannot provide causal evidence of what works, it does allow identification of recurring themes. Many of these overlap with the factors associated with successful implementation of strategies for ethnic minority groups, including monitoring and tracking of students, school ethos, developing language skills, and positive teacher-pupil relationships. Other recommendations from their study include offering opportunities for early success and celebrating achievement, providing a space for pupils to complete work outside of school hours, appropriate parental involvement which respects student preferences and detailed information and guidance on how pupils can achieve their goals.

5. Conclusions

Understanding differences in attainment

The higher educational attainment of pupils from ethnic minority groups relative to White working class pupils is an important issue for policy makers and practitioners and one which should be fully understood:

- In 2013, among FSM pupils, all ethnic minority groups were outperforming White working class pupils in terms of attainment at age 16. The period since the early 2000s has seen the attainment of most ethnic groups improve at a faster rate than that of White working class pupils.
- Ethnic gaps in attainment are already evident on entry to school. Even at age 5, White working class pupils are one of the lowest achieving groups. **Efforts to raise attainment of White working class pupils therefore need to consider what works for even the youngest pupils.**
- While much concern has focused on the underachievement of White working class boys, girls also show low levels of attainment. **While gender may be a factor in underachievement, there is no justification for resources to be targeted at White working class boys rather than White working class girls.**
- The use of FSM as a proxy for working class is often adopted for practical reasons. It should not be forgotten however, that, there is likely to be considerable variation in the circumstances of pupils within this group. Moreover, this may vary systematically across different ethnic groups.

Evidence of effective practice

There is no conclusive evidence about what works to address the relative under-attainment of White working class pupils but existing research and evaluation points to the role of addressing the range of contributing factors through an assortment of interventions.

- Research evidence suggests that important influences include parents and family, students' own aspirations and expectations and schools. **Because the home, the school and the pupil all matter in improving attainment, initiatives should be targeted at all these areas rather than adopt a narrow focus.**
- Improved language skills have been identified as a key factor enabling ethnic minority pupils to catch up with White British children over time. Studies indicate that while White working class pupils do not have English as a specific barrier,

language and literacy skills are an area of concern. They might therefore benefit from targeted help. **Evidence suggests that language and literature interventions in the early years can be effective in ensuring children from disadvantaged backgrounds do not fall behind. Therefore additional resources to assist White working class children with language and literacy are likely to be best targeted at the youngest pupils.**

- A number of strategies have aimed to raise attainment of ethnic minority groups, although there is insufficient evidence on their impact. However, a number of common themes emerge with respect to the characteristics of effective practice in implementing such strategies. **Effective school-level strategies have been identified as high quality school leadership, school ethos, monitoring and tracking of pupils, a flexible and inclusive curriculum and engagement with parents and the wider community.**
- It should also be noted that **strategies that are effective for low attaining groups may also raise attainment of high attaining groups.** For example, classroom strategies found to be effective for one ethnic group have been found to be effective for all ethnic groups. In this sense, while such strategies may raise attainment of all children, they will not necessarily act to close the gap.

Gaps in evidence

This review has identified a number of areas in which more evidence is needed to inform the direction and content of future interventions aimed at addressing attainment differences between pupils by social class and ethnicity. These include understanding more about the differences in attainment within as well as between ethnic minority groups and White working class pupils. They also include understanding more about the mechanisms through which attainment is increased at school and at home.

- The evidence suggests that the relative contribution of schools is smaller than that of parental, family and student factors. However, school interventions may be easier to deliver than those which are targeted at the home. **Further investigation is needed into what aspects of school quality drive differential educational performance among different ethnic groups.**
- There is reasonably strong evidence that parents from some ethnic minority groups are more likely than White working class parents to have certain attitudes and behaviours which may raise their children's attainment. These include greater involvement with their child's school and use of private tutors. **These findings suggest that certain steps may be effective in addressing White working class underachievement but that they need to be better understood.**

- The lower levels of engagement of White working class parents with their child's school, compared with their ethnic minority counterparts, has been explored in a number of studies and interventions. **Since there is some evidence that parental engagement can improve pupil performance, the features of interventions which have successfully engaged White working class parents need to be identified and disseminated.**
- It is frequently asserted that ethnic minority parents have high aspirations for their children while White working class parents do not. Research evidence on the place of educational aspirations as a factor explaining differences in attainment is inconclusive. Potential mechanisms through which low aspirations may affect attainment have been proposed, but not robustly tested. Educational aspiration is difficult to measure and to disentangle from lack of awareness of opportunities to which pupils and their parents can aspire. **Further research is needed on whether it is low aspirations which lead to underachievement of White working class pupils or other barriers, such as knowledge of opportunities or lack of resources to support learning.**
- Much emphasis has been placed on differences in attainment at age 16, but gaps are apparent much earlier, on entry to school at age 5. While there is a considerable body of evidence exploring factors associated with lower attainment for this age group among disadvantaged children as a whole, less evidence is available on how this may differ by ethnicity. **Further investigation is needed in order to understand more about the reasons for ethnic gaps in attainment among disadvantaged pupils at this age, so that strategies can begin early.**
- While the lower attainment of White working class pupils is an important issue, it does not mean that the attainment of other ethnic groups is no longer of concern. It is not true to say that the attainment of *all* ethnic minority groups has increased relative to White British pupils. **The decline in the performance of 'White other' pupils needs further investigation to establish which groups this category includes and how this area of underachievement might be addressed.**

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Appendix: Search strategy and list of search terms

The review was conducted using a structured literature and evidence search. A set of key search terms were identified at the outset of the project, as listed in Table A.1 below, and used to conduct the searches.

The International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS) was the principal database used to conduct the structured searches. Searches using the specified keywords identified a total of 164 articles. The abstracts of these articles were reviewed and 20 articles were identified as particularly relevant and selected for further reading. A further 29 articles were considered relevant, but were not UK based, and were therefore not selected for in-depth reading. Additional searches were then conducted using Google Scholar.²² As to be expected this resulted in considerable overlap with the research results identified through IBSS but did produce a small number of additional articles.

The following websites of key stakeholder organisations were also searched for relevant material, which produced a further 33 relevant publications:

- Department for Education:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>
- Ofsted:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation:
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/>
- The Nuffield Foundation:
<http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org>
- The Sutton Trust:
<http://www.suttontrust.com/research/>
- National Foundation for Educational Research:
<http://www.nfer.ac.uk>
- Institute for Effective Education:
<http://www.york.ac.uk/iee/>
- Centre for Research in Race and Education:
<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/education/crre/index.aspx>

²² For practical reasons, the searches using Google Scholar were run separately for different combinations of the search terms (the number of keywords involved in the searches prevented these from being entered simultaneously when using this database). Full details of the number of results associated with each combination of search terms are available from the authors on request.

Reference lists of publications were reviewed for further relevant articles and resulted in a further 37 publications for consideration.

A separate set of searches were conducted in IBSS focusing specifically on early years attainment/attainment on entry to school, which resulted in the identification of a further 32 articles. However, most were not directly relevant to the remit of this review, or were not UK based. Four of these articles were selected for further reading based on their abstracts. Instead more relevant articles on attainment at this age were identified through searches of specific websites, namely those of the Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education Project²³; the Centre for Longitudinal Studies²⁴ and the Growing Up in Scotland Study²⁵.

²³ <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/research/153.html>

²⁴ <http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/>

²⁵ <http://growingupinscotland.org.uk/>

Table A.1 List of key search terms

Ethnicity	Educational attainment	Socio-economic status	Explanatory factors
Ethnic	educational attainment	free school meals	school improvement
White	educational achievement	working class	school strategies
White British	educational outcomes	deprivation	school effectiveness
Black	pupil performance	poverty	school engagement
Chinese	pupil progress	disadvantage	access to good schools
Asian	attainment gap	socio-economic status	school selection
Dual/mixed	underachievement	low income	funding
		social class	community resilience/support
		poor	parental expectations
		inequality	parental engagement
			parenting skills
			aspirations/educational aspirations
			social capital
			(good) teaching
			absence
			exclusions
			behaviour
			region

Note: Wildcards/truncation characters were used throughout to capture variations e.g. ethnic* to capture ethnic, ethnicity, ethnic minority, and so on.



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