School cultures and practices: supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils

A qualitative comparison of London and non-London schools

Research Report

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Executive summary

In recent years considerable attention has been directed to how the attainment of disadvantaged pupils can be improved. There has been particular interest in the improved performance of disadvantaged pupils in London schools since the mid-1990s, which has resulted in a relatively small gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in the capital compared to the more sizeable gap within other regions of England. Research has examined the 'London Effect' from a number of different angles, from the effects of policy initiatives, accountability and governance, to demographics, pupil characteristics and workforce factors.

This new research report adds another piece to a growing jigsaw. The research is based on two-day, in-depth, qualitative case studies of 16 primary and 7 secondary schools across England, conducted between September 2016 and July 2017. Our analysis builds on an established body of literature on school cultures and practices, considering a range of factors spanning the intangible assumptions and values that teachers hold through to the observable, concrete behaviours that emerge from them. We understand school practices as emerging from a school's culture; they are the most concrete, visible aspect of that culture and allow insights into its constituent underlying assumptions and values.

The research provides an in-depth analysis of a set of school cultures and practices that existing research has linked to positive outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. These cultures and practices range from how schools support parents' and pupils' aspirations and expectations, to the way in which they use data and evidence to monitor outcomes and how they respond to the latest developments in research. Through interviews with teachers, senior leaders and governors; focus groups with parents and pupils; and observations of lessons, assemblies, meetings, corridors and playgrounds in each school, we have been able to build-up an in-depth picture of variation and consistency in cultures between schools, and the ways in which cultures influence practice. Further details of the methodology are provided in the Introduction and in Annex 2.

The report categorises the cultures and practices in schools according to 11 themes. These are:

1. Aspirations and expectations

2. Positivity, energy and purpose

3. Collaboration and competition

4. Data and evidence

5. Behaviour and attendance

6. Staffing

7. Leadership

8. Targeting resources

9. Partnerships and activities

10. Learning environment

11. Parental engagement

Across these themes, the research compares how cultures and practices operate in schools inside and outside the capital, and in schools where disadvantaged pupils perform at different levels relative to their peers. We compare 'high-performing' schools in which disadvantaged pupils attain well in absolute terms, and which have consistently maintained a small attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, with 'lower-performing' schools in which the attainment of disadvantaged pupils has not been consistently strong in absolute or relative terms. In constructing our sample, we aimed to compare schools with wide disparities in their results for disadvantaged pupils but with similar levels of per-pupil funding and similar pupil populations in terms of the proportion eligible for free school meals and minority ethnic composition. This was done in order to minimise the influence of these factors in interpreting differences in disadvantaged pupils' attainment, relative to the effect of schools' cultures and practices.

By comparing cultures and practices in high-performing and lower-performing schools inside and outside London, we ultimately aim to identify whether there are cultures and practices that appear to be unique to, or more deeply ingrained in, high-performing London schools, with the aim of making recommendations for approaches to develop with lower-performing schools.

While we identify some distinctive cultures and practices in high-performing schools in the capital, we are nonetheless cautious about claiming that these are necessary or sufficient conditions for the 'London Effect'. Firstly, the design of the research focuses on providing a rich description and comparison of different cultures and practices, rather than looking to provide a full causal account of how these cultures and practices shape pupil outcomes. Secondly, our approach focuses on depth rather than breadth, and our relatively small sample of schools, particularly secondaries, is insufficient to support general claims of causality between particular cultures and practices and pupil outcomes.

Our comparative design does however suggest areas in which particular cultures and practices appear to be associated with positive outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The particular strength of this research is its ability to provide a detailed description of these cultures and practices and the ways in which they, often subtly, differed from those we found in other schools. We are also able to suggest potential avenues for further research, and draw implications for policy where the existing literature supports our findings.

Five key, cross-cutting findings emerged from our analysis:

1. School cultures and practices varied more by a school's performance than by location

Some features of school culture were recognisable across all the schools involved in the research. For instance, leaders and staff shared common motivations across all schools, and believed that they were able to have a positive impact on disadvantaged pupils' outcomes. Many common practices were also recognisable, such as the way data were collected and analysed and the day-to-day systems used for managing behaviour and attendance. However, other cultures and practices did appear to vary with school performance. In general, high-performing schools inside and outside London resembled each other closely. Sometimes these common cultures and practices spanned high-performing primaries and secondaries, while in other cases they appeared to be more phase specific.

In relation to cultures:

High-performing primaries appeared to be particularly attentive to raising disadvantaged pupils' attainment, and displayed particularly high levels of shared staff purpose, compared to lower-performing primaries. Meanwhile, high-performing schools across both phases tended to:

- hold particularly high expectations that tended to have a more tangible influence on teacher practice,

- engender particularly positive relationships between staff, parents and pupils,

- have greater conviction that their practices were enough to 'make a difference' with disadvantaged pupils, and

- respond positively to pupils' aspirational goals and clearly structure their practice around them.

While some lower-performing schools exhibited these cultures, they did so less frequently than high-peforming schools, and tended not to state their culture in the specific terms that high-performing schools used. Moreover, cultures were less often linked explicitly to practice in lower-performing schools.

In relation to practices:

Some distinctive practices were evident in both high-performing primary and secondary schools. For instance, high-performing schools in both phases appeared to make more use of very early support for pupils falling behind in key curriculum areas. Other practices of high-performing schools appeared to be distinctive to primary schools. High-performing primary schools appeared to be more likely than lower-performing primary

schools to tailor teaching to individual pupils such as by setting more challenging work for pupils who were progressing well. They also made more extensive use of extra-curricular opportunities for philosophy, oracy and debating.

Often, where lower-performing schools demonstrated similar practices to high-performing schools, they nonetheless used a narrower range of strategies or were in earlier stages of implementing their approaches. This was particularly evident in lower-performing primary schools' efforts to engage parents, and the confidence with which teachers and governors in lower-performing primary schools handled data.

2. Lower-performing primary schools outside London were most different from other schools

Lower-performing primary schools outside London were often furthest from the rest of the field in terms of their cultures and practices.

In relation to cultures:

Certain cultures in lower-performing primary schools outside the capital appeared to differ considerably from those in other schools. These schools:

- were less likely to believe that disadvantaged pupils could achieve in line with, or above national average attainment for all pupils, and

- were less likely to believe that data could be used for the benefit of individual pupils, rather than serving a wider system of accountability.

In relation to practices:

In some cases, lower-performing primary schools outside the capital appeared not to share some of the practices that were evident in other schools. For example, they:

- appeared to be less likely to provide early and rapid support for pupils who were falling behind in key curriculum areas,

- reported weaker teaching more often than other primary schools,

- were less likely to use peer-to-peer support amongst pupils in lessons; made fewer references to instilling a love of learning amongst pupils (such as making lessons enjoyable so that pupils looked forward to coming to school); and, placed less emphasis on support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) than was the case in other primary schools,

- had less developed strategies for engaging and helping parents support disadvantaged pupils at home, and

- were less likely than other schools to extend high expectations for pupil behaviour to the 'small things' such as behaviour in corridors and at mealtimes.

Some of the differences in the cultures and practices of lower-performing primary schools outside the capital appeared to be due, at least in part, to contextual factors. In these schools:

- Recruitment, retention and staff turnover appeared to be more challenging, and there were more frequent issues with staff performance. Lower-performing secondary schools outside London also reported recruitment difficulties

- Teachers and governors cited funding cuts[1] and lack of take-up as reasons why they had in some cases reduced their offer of extra-curricular opportunities

- Parents appeared to have lower expectations for their children than those in other schools

3. High-performing schools, regardless of location, adopted a wide range of approaches to supporting disadvantaged pupils

High-performing schools, both inside and outside London, demonstrated a wider range of strategies to support disadvantaged pupils than lower-performing schools. In many cases the difference between high- and lower-performing schools lay in the extent to which strategies were used consistently within each school, how frequently and regularly strategies were employed, and how embedded they had become.

Amongst high-performing primary schools these strategies included:

- subsidising trips and extra-curricular activities for disadvantaged pupils;

- directing resources towards the Early Years Foundation Stage;

- evaluating the value for money of interventions to support disadvantaged pupils;

- placing emphasis on the quality of support staff;

- recruiting staff that shared the school's ethos, and

- working with local secondary schools to address the potentially negative impact of poorly-managed transitions.

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[1] Given the broad focus of the research, when teachers and senior leaders mentioned school funding in their interviews we were unable to clarify if they were referring to specific funding streams such as the Pupil Premium, or the school's General Annual Grant or Dedicated Schools Grant, unless this was stated up front.

Meanwhile high-performing schools across both phases tended to:

- engage in a variety of community partnerships to deliver extra-curricular activities (and work experience opportunities in the case of secondary schools);

- evaluate the impact (but not necessarily value for money) of interventions to support disadvantaged pupils, and

- ensure all staff are confident in handling data and using data to inform their practice.

4. High-performing schools, regardless of location, were positive and solutions-focused

The culture in high-performing schools was notably positive, both inside and outside the capital. Although high-performing schools recognised barriers to disadvantaged pupils' achievement, they generally focused on strategies for overcoming them rather than treating barriers as immutable. While lower-performing secondary schools appeared to share the broadly positive culture of high-performing schools, the culture in lower-performing primary schools tended to be notably less positive.

Amongst high-performing primaries, positivity was evident in the way schools:

- appeared to use pupils' more idealistic aspirations (such as to become footballers or astronauts) as a 'hook' for other aspirations rather than seeing them as problematic,

- used 'aspirational' comparisons, such as comparing the attainment of a school's disadvantaged pupils with the national average for all pupils, to drive improvement (particularly evident in schools outside London), and

- celebrated pupil success and achievements at every opportunity, building such celebrations into their weekly timetable and actively including parents.

Across both phases, high-performing schools:

- saw hiring newly-qualified teachers (NQTs) as a positive opportunity, whereas lower-performing schools sometimes felt they were unable to provide the support that inexperienced teachers needed;

- believed unanimously that their behaviour management systems worked effectively, or that the school had the capacity to resolve persistent behaviour problems;

- emphasised the importance of supporting teachers' career development, regardless of any potential impact on retention;

- reported high morale amongst staff, driven by team relationships and positive relationships with pupils, and

- believed that they were able to shift parents' aspirations and expectations of their children.

5. A subtle but discernible 'London culture'

To the extent to which we found distinctive features of high-performing London schools, these tended to relate specifically to primary rather than secondary schools:

- High-performing primary schools in London went further than other primary schools in developing partnerships between staff and parents and to build parental expectations of their children's future academic and career pathways.

- High-performing primary schools in London were more likely to report intervening when staff did not share their high expectations than other schools.

- High-performing primary schools in London seemed to involve pupils in behaviour management to a greater degree than other schools.

- High-performing schools in London, both primary and secondary, reported a number of ways in which their location in the capital helped build a sense of purpose, for example through a shared vision with other schools and drawing their teachers from the local community.

- High-performing primary and secondary schools in London appeared to go further than other schools in their attempts to engage parents with their ethos and vision.

Furthermore, we found evidence of a subtle but distinctive set of cultures and practices amongst both high- and lower-performing London schools. Again, these tended to be more evident amongst the primary schools we visited.

- In London we found a greater depth and strength to schools' networks, both in terms of the opportunities for 'horizon broadening' trips and visits that schools were able to offer pupils, and in relation to teachers' own professional networks.

- London primary schools appeared to place more emphasis on parental engagement than primary schools outside the capital, although this was a subtle difference; some high-performing primary schools outside London also made use of a wide variety of strategies to engage parents.

- Leaders of London primary schools appeared to prioritise parental engagement in their own roles in a way that was not always the case in primary schools outside the capital.

- Primary schools in the capital appeared to focus more attention on developing pupils' non-cognitive skills such as confidence and resilience than those outside the capital. While primary schools outside London also recognised the importance of developing the 'whole child', high-performing primary schools outside the capital appeared to place a slightly greater emphasis on academic achievement.

In general, we found more stark variation between the cultures and practices of high- and lower-performing primary schools, compared to secondary schools. We also tended to find clearer or more widespread evidence of distinctive practice amongst high-performing primaries compared to high-performing secondaries. However, this may be due in part to the larger sample of primary schools we visited, and our findings are not a sufficient basis either for concluding that there is more variation in primary schools' cultures and practices, or that high-performing primary schools are distinctive in the extent to which they exhibit cultures and practices that support the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

Implications and recommendations

This report does not set out to make causal claims about the relationship between schools' cultures and practices and their outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Accordingly, our recommendations stop short of directing schools to implement a particular culture or set of practices. Instead, we identify a number of areas in which the findings from our case studies relate to the wider literature on the ways in which school culture and practices influence outcomes, in particular for disadvantaged pupils.

Shared sense of purpose

The high-performing schools in our sample demonstrated greater cohesiveness, sense of shared purpose and values that were shared amongst all staff, pupils and parents, as well as high staff morale. This observation corroborates the existing literature, which suggests that these aspects of school culture can influence school effectiveness (Sammons et al., 1995; Stewart, 2008; Yu and Yeung, 2003).

Recommendations

- The Department for Education could consider commissioning research on causal pathways linking shared staff purpose and school performance: what are more or less successful strategies? How does a shared sense of purpose impact on teacher performance? Is there a link to pupil outcomes?

- Future research should collate and disseminate approaches to building a shared sense of purpose in schools, drawing on the concrete examples we have drawn on in our research.

Using data

High-performing primary schools appeared to be more consistent in their engagement with data, and were more likely to use evidence-informed support strategies than lower-performing primary schools. Meanwhile, some staff and governors in lower-performing primary schools reported difficulties understanding and using data. Our findings in this area align with existing research which suggests that effective use of data can underpin school performance (Sharples, 2011; Ofsted, 2013; Macleod et al., 2015; Demie and Maclean, 2015).

Recommendations

- Teacher training providers, especially in the primary phase, should ensure that initial teacher training (ITT) programmes introduce new teachers to how they can use a combination of data sources to inform classroom practice, for example by informing planning and monitoring pupils' individual support needs.

- Schools should ensure that NQTs and recently-qualified-teachers (RQTs) have access to training that builds their data literacy.
- The Department for Education should consider how to improve governors' data literacy, ensuring that its governance training and development providers provide sufficient data literacy training as part of their programmes.
- Schools and local authorities should encourage their governors to attend training and development programmes linked to data literacy.
- Schools should set up and provide login details for governors to the Department's Analysing School Performance service.

Engaging parents

London schools went further than other schools to work with parents to develop their expectations for their children. High-performing primary schools, in particular, employed a dedicated member of staff to provide outreach and support for parents and families, rather than assigning this function to existing teaching staff. This aligns with existing research which suggests an association between schools' engagement with parents and their performance (Sharples et al., 2011).

Recommendation

- The Department for Education should collate examples of effective practice in engaging parents to share with schools. This could include insights into the ways in which schools have made use of dedicated members of staff to engage with and support parents and families.

High quality teaching

The high-performing schools we visited prioritised individualised staff training, and paid particular attention to the deployment and training of support staff. Lower-performing primary schools appeared to be less likely to target continuous professional development (CPD) at individual staff and respond to their individual training and development needs. Meanwhile, lower-performing schools outside London were particularly constrained by recruitment and retention difficulties. These findings corroborate existing literature which draws strong links between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their access to high quality teaching (Ofsted, 2013; Macleod et al., 2015; Demie and Maclean, 2015).

Recommendations

- Any moves to support recruitment and retention across the country should pay particular attention to the needs of lower-performing schools in disadvantaged areas outside London. In accordance with DfE's plan for improving social mobility (DfE, 2017), the Department should ensure that factors affecting teacher supply and retention, such as the availability of affordable housing, good transport links and quality of life are addressed across government.

- The Department for Education should build on the 2016 Standards for Teachers' Professional Development and continue to work with bodies such as the Chartered College of Teaching and high-quality CPD providers, to ensure that lower-performing schools in areas that have fallen behind have access to good quality CPD.

Strong and visionary leadership

Our research identified a number of cultures and practices relating to school leadership, corroborating existing literature linking school effectiveness to strong and visionary leadership (Ofsted, 2013; Demie and Maclean, 2015).

Recommendation

- The Department for Education should share examples of strong and visionary leadership practices revealed in this research, in order to provide tangible examples of practice for leaders in schools across the country.

- Schools should prioritise development of middle leaders, in order to enhance the quality of teaching in classrooms, as well as to nuture the next generation of senior leaders (Baars et al., 2016; Small et al., 2017). To do so, schools should:
  - Provide clear development pathways and mentorship opportunities for staff.
  - Provide opportunities for aspiring middle leaders to engage with research and policy and use this as a basis to drive innovation within their departments.

- To support schools' development of middle leaders, the Department for Education should issue guidance to schools on the factors that shape effective middle leadership, as well as signposting to existing organisations that support and train middle leaders.

- To support schools' efforts in recruiting high-quality governors/trustees, particularly in areas outside London where recruitment may be more difficult, the Department for Education should work with organisations such as the National Governors Association and Governors for Schools (SGOSS) in order to promote the range of existing programmes to recruit and support governors, such as National Leaders of Governance.

Further research

This research has sought depth of insight and comparison rather than seeking to draw generalisable or causal conclusions befitting of a larger-scale study. We recommend, therefore, that our conclusions be tested using a large-scale national survey of schools.

Recommendation

- The Department for Education should consider commissioning a large-scale national survey of schools, or including questions in an existing survey, such as DfE's School Snapshot Survey, to test the generalisability of the conclusions of this research, alongside additional analysis of any relevant data already held by the Department.

Introduction

Background to the research

Until the mid-1990s disadvantaged pupils in London performed at the same level as, or worse than, disadvantaged pupils in the rest of England at the end of compulsory education. By the turn of the millennium disadvantaged pupils in London had moved ahead of their peers outside the capital, and this gap has continued to widen (Blanden et al., 2015; Baars et al., 2014). Results for disadvantaged pupils at the end of primary school have broadly followed suit. The most recent data show that, at the end of both phases of compulsory education, disadvantaged pupils now do best in the capital's schools (Andrews et al., 2017)

This trend in the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is perhaps the most striking feature of the wider 'London Effect', which has seen the overall performance of the capital's schools accelerate past those in the rest of the country during the past 15 years. Not only do disadvantaged pupils do best in London, but the gap between their attainment and that of their more advantaged peers is also smallest in the capital (Greaves et al., 2014).

Research aims and scope

The research base into the causes of the London Effect has grown in recent years, with a series of landmark reports in 2014 identifying a range of potential causes, from policies such as the London Challenge to the ethnic composition of the capital's pupil population (Baars et al., 2014; Burgess, 2014; Greaves et al., 2014). Below these macro-level studies, however, there has been little in the way of detailed, comparative work to identify specific features of the day-to-day working of high-performing London schools and investigate whether their cultures and practices are systematically different from other schools. In addition, there is an increasing desire amongst policymakers to explore whether there are 'lessons from London' that might be transferable to schools in the rest of the country: if there are tangible features of good practice specific to London schools, can we define them precisely enough to make concrete recommendations for schools in other parts of the country? The area-based focus of this research complements the Government's *Plan for improving social mobility through education* (DfE, 2017), which foregrounds the role that local areas play in shaping young people's outcomes, and the 2016 Opportunity Areas programme which adopts a place-based approach to tackling low levels of social mobility.

This research sets out to address these research questions and, in doing so, add a new dimension to our understanding of the 'London Effect'. Through a set of 23 detailed, comparative case studies, we investigate whether there are cultures and practices that

appear to be unique to, or more deeply ingrained in, high-performing London schools, with the aim of making recommendations for approaches to develop with lower-performing schools.

Summary of existing literature

There is a wealth of existing research into school cultures and practices and their links to both school performance broadly, and the attainment of disadvantaged pupils more narrowly. Our research draws heavily on this existing literature both in defining what we mean by school 'cultures and practices' and in establishing the hypotheses that guided our enquiry.

Existing literature refers to two perspectives through which which cultures and practices can be interpreted. The first perspective places school cultures and practices on a continuum, from the directly observable, concrete features of daily life within a school to the fundamental values and assumptions that underpin these practices. The second perspective identifies that school cultures and practices can be examined in relation to their content (observable features), homogeneity (how widely they are shared within a school) and strength (the extent to which they influence individual teachers' practice). We designed our study of school cultures and practices to capture both of these perspectives as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The dimensions of school culture, adapted from Schein (1985), Kilmann et al. (1986) and Maslowski (2001)
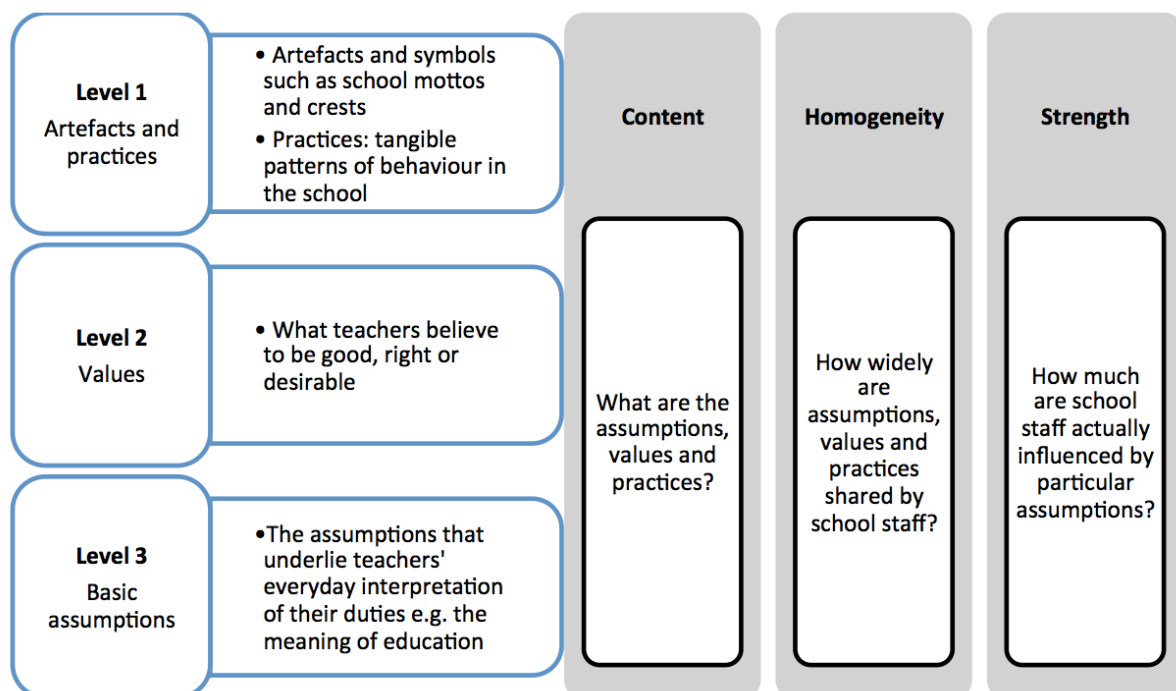
Our review of the literature also provided a steer on the most appropriate methods for studying school cultures and practices, with Schoen and Teddlie suggesting that qualitative tools such as observations and interviews are best placed to examine both concrete 'practices' and the values and assumptions that underpin them (2008: 138).

Finally, we drew on the existing literature to identify a set of themes and hypotheses linking specific school cultures and practices with the educational attainment of disadvantaged pupils. Cultures and practices identified in the literature ranged from the quality of teaching and assessment to extra-curricular provision and the establishment of school-level vision.

The full literature review is provided in Annex 1.

Summary of method

Hypotheses and themes

The literature review generated a number of hypotheses linking school cultures and practices to the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. We cross-referenced these hypotheses with a thematic analysis of an existing set of interviews with system leaders in education from an earlier LKMco/CfBT report on London schools' success (Baars et al., 2014) and also drew on a set of hypotheses compiled by the Department for Education, based on a review of existing studies in this area.

Hypotheses were grouped under nine overarching themes, described below. These themes served two functions in the research. Firstly, as sets of hypotheses, they describe the cultures and practices we expected to be more prevalent in high-performing London schools, based on our existing knowledge. Secondly, they provided broad areas for further exploratory analysis during the case studies, in order to identify cultures and practices whose effects had not been identified in existing research.

1) Aspirations and expectations

Teachers, pupils and parents hold high aspirations and expectations for disadvantaged pupils; they believe they can succeed whatever the odds. Teachers who do not share these aspirations and expectations are challenged.

2) Positivity, energy and purpose

Teachers and pupils have a clear sense of shared vision and purpose which underpins their collective identity, positivity and sense of pride. This might be apparent from the presence of the school's motto, pupils' treatment of the school uniform, and evidence that staff have a clear sense of moral purpose.

3) Collaboration and competition

Teaching staff see themselves as part of a wider effort to support disadvantaged pupils and work with other schools to share knowledge and best practice. They also compare themselves critically against other schools.

4) Data and evidence

The school uses a range of granular, comparative and contextualised data to guide practice and address teachers' and pupils' underperformance. This might be evident through the use of research evidence to shape practice, and the use of data to set clear targets for pupil attainment.

5) The learning environment

The school learning environment is characterised by skilled pedagogy and well managed pupil behaviour and attendance. Behaviour policies are applied consistently across the school and disadvantaged pupils receive targeted support with social and emotional skills, literacy and numeracy.

6) Staffing

The school invests in good teachers and leaders through recruitment, retention and development. This might be evident through effective use of teaching assistants (TAs), deploying the best staff to teach pupils who need the most support, and high quality CPD. Underperformance is actively identified and challenged.

7) Leadership

The school has strong, clear and efficient leadership within and beyond the school. This might be evident through consistently-applied structures for managing behaviour and attendance, the Head's promotion of innovative approaches to teaching and fundraising, and the presence of the governing body within the school. It is reflected in a clear sense of shared vision and purpose amongst teachers and pupils.

8) Targeting resources

The school makes careful decisions about funding in order to target resources where they will have maximum impact. This might be apparent in the use of evidence to direct Pupil Premium spend and robust accountability measures to assess its impact.

9) Partnerships and activities

The school works with different partners to build wider relationships and provide a range of activities and opportunities for pupils. This might be evident through close working with parents, links with businesses, higher education institutions (HEIs) and community

groups, extra curricular activities and forms of student leadership which engage them with decision making.

Case study design

We explored the operation of each of these nine hypotheses through a set of 16 comparative case studies of 4 equally-sized groups of primary schools, and an additional set of 7 secondary school case studies.[2] Our sampling strategy was designed to test our hypotheses in schools that had consistently achieved either stronger or weaker results for their disadvantaged pupils, and which were situated both inside and outside the capital. The sample was skewed towards primary schools as existing research into the London Effect has tended to focus on secondary schools, despite some studies suggesting improvements in primary schools have played a significant role in the capital's success. The four-group case study design is summarised in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Sample design
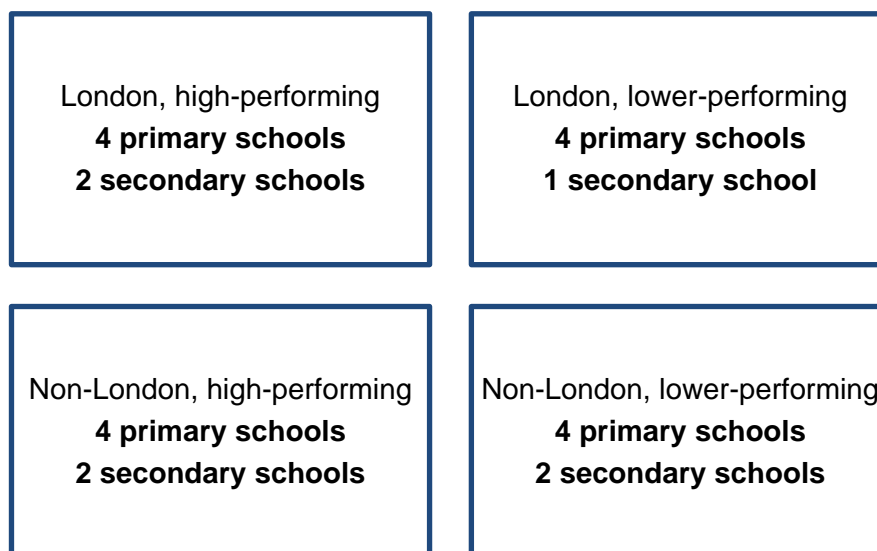
London, high-performing **4 primary schools** **2 secondary schools**	London, lower-performing **4 primary schools** **1 secondary school**
Non-London, high-performing **4 primary schools** **2 secondary schools**	Non-London, lower-performing **4 primary schools** **2 secondary schools**

The sampling process aimed to achieve 'matches' between high- and lower-performing schools, to enable us to compare schools with wide disparities in their results for disadvantaged pupils but with similar levels of per-pupil funding and similar pupil populations in terms of the proportion eligible for free school meals and minority ethnic composition. The aim of 'matching' the samples in this way was to minimise the influence of these factors in interpreting differences in disadvantaged pupils' attainment, relative to the effect of schools' cultures and practices.

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[2] Recruitment challenges led to only one lower-performing London secondary school being included in the study.

Of the twelve non-London schools, nine were located in major urban conurbations, two in smaller urban conurbations and one in a rural town. Five schools were located in Yorkshire and the Humber, five in the West Midlands, one in the North West and one in the South West of England.

Further details of the case study design, including our sampling strategy, are outlined in Annex 2.

Data collection and analysis

Each school case study commenced with a desk-based background review of school performance data, inspection reports, history, values and ethos, and local area characteristics. Two days of fieldwork followed, consisting of: interviews with teachers, senior leaders and governors; focus groups with pupils and parents; a pupil self-completion diary task; and observations of lessons, senior leadership team (SLT) meetings, playgrounds and corridors.

All of the data gathered from the case studies was analysed line-by-line and tagged with themes, based on the hypotheses outlined above. We then analysed all of the data relating to individual themes and produced 'maps' of the sub-themes within each theme. These maps also identified how many times, and in how many schools, a particular sub-theme had occurred in the data. This allowed us to firstly identify the extent to which particular sub-themes were observed amongst our case study schools (in order to identify if particular cultures or practices appeared to be more prevalent in particular types of school), and then to conduct an in-depth analysis of these sub-themes by returning to the sections of data in which they had occurred.

Given that primary schools accounted for more than two-thirds of our total sample, we have given priority to the findings from the primary phase of the fieldwork in our analysis. The secondary school analysis was led by the themes and sub-themes identified in the primary phase of the research, and we draw attention to cultures and practices within secondary schools which appeared to diverge notably from those we identified in primary schools. We extended the thematic framework where necessary to capture the detail of cultures and practices that appeared to be distinct to secondary schools.

Further details of our approach to data collection and analysis are provided in Annex 2.

Limitations

Although we endeavoured to 'match' high- and lower-performing schools with similar contextual conditions, as described above, it was not possible to fully match all schools between groups, due to the relatively small population of schools that met our matching conditions, coupled with the practicalities of recruiting schools to the study. As a result,

there is some divergence within and between the four groups of schools in terms of their contextual conditions, and we do not claim to have fully controlled for these conditions when drawing our comparisons of cultures and practices. Attempting to 'match' schools as far as possible in our sample has also required a 'trade off' against maximising disparities in schools' performance in relation to their disadvantaged pupils. Likewise, some schools with historically weaker results for their disadvantaged pupils are currently on steep improvement journeys. Therefore, the disparity between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in the 'lower' and 'high' performing schools, at the point we studied them, is variable in size between different schools. We therefore caution against interpreting our findings as resting on categorical distinctions in school performance.

Due to the in-depth nature of this qualitative work and the limited number of case studies that this approach allowed for, this report does not set out to make causal claims about the relationship between schools' cultures and practices and their outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, beyond any claims made by the staff, pupils and parents we spoke to. Instead, the strength of the report lies in its descriptive richness and its capacity to provide a detailed account of the cultures and practices in different schools, where these cultures and practices vary and where they appear to be more uniform. We acknowledge that some of the differences we observe will be symptoms or consequences of schools' current performance, while others will be causes of schools' performance. We cannot assume that the presence of a particular culture or practice in a high performing school necessarily contributes to its performance.

Report structure

The report is structured around the nine themes identified above, with the addition of two further sections for ease of presentation: we present findings relating to *behaviour and attendance* in a separate section to findings relating to *the learning environment*; and we draw together findings relating to *parental engagement* from across the other themes and present these findings in a separate section.

In our discussion of each theme, we aim to identify:

1. Cultures and practices that appeared to be common to all or most schools
2. Cultures and practices that appeared to vary by:

    - Geography, i.e. cultures and practice that were concentrated in, or unique to, London or non-London schools

    - Performance, i.e. cultures and practices that were concentrated in, or unique to, high- or lower-performing schools

- Both geography and performance, i.e. cultures and practices that appeared to be concentrated in, or unique to, high- or lower-performing schools in or outside the capital

3. The extent to which any variation in the cultures and practices of secondary schools by geography and performance matched, or differed from, the patterns we observed amongst primary schools

1   Aspirations and expectations

This section of the report examines the extent to which teachers, pupils and parents hold high aspirations and expectations for disadvantaged pupils, and the extent to which these aspirations and expectations shape practice. The section considers:

- The nature of pupils' aspirations and the ways in which teachers respond to and support them

- Pupils' and parents' expectations of academic progress at school

- Schools' expectations of disadvantaged pupils relative to other pupils

Summary of main findings

- High-performing primary schools in London appeared to establish high expectations for pupil progress and attainment as early as nursery.

- Teachers in lower-performing secondary schools inside and outside London, and lower-performing primary schools outside London, appeared to be less convinced that disadvantaged pupils were able to achieve in line with, or above national average attainment for all pupils. Teachers in these schools sometimes downplayed their expectations of pupils and instead highlighted barriers to their academic attainment.

- While all high-performing schools sought teachers who shared their high expectations for disadvantaged pupils, high-performing London primary schools extended this focus to staff development and retention. They intervened when staff did not share their high expectations, and let staff go when necessary. We did not find evidence of this in the high-performing secondary schools.

- High-performing primary schools appeared to use more idealistic aspirations, such as becoming astronauts and footballers, as a 'hook' for other aspirations rather than seeing them as problematic, as was sometimes the case in lower-performing primary schools. Most secondary schools focused on encouraging pupils to have a broad range of aspirations, although high-performing secondaries in London appeared to place more emphasis on progression to Russell Group universities.

- Most secondary schools, and primary schools in London, appeared to use a broad mix of trips and visitors to support pupils' aspirations. Primary schools outside the capital tended to focus their attention on visitors rather than experiences beyond the school gates.

- Aspirational goals for disadvantaged pupils' attainment were at the heart of most schools' values and mission statements. In high-performing primary and

secondary schools it was particularly clear that teachers internalised these goals and structured their practice around them. Lower-performing schools, both primary and secondary, were less clear about the structured support disadvantaged pupils would need to realise these aspirations.

- Most secondary schools (high- and lower-performing; inside and outside the capital) employed careers advisers. Meanwhile, although primary schools (particularly high performers in London) made widespread use of parental workshops to support aspirations, these workshops were not evident in any of the secondary schools we visited, where parental aspirations were generally not seen as a barrier to disadvantaged pupils' attainment.

1.1 High, specific expectations and aspirations of academic achievement

High-performing primary schools inside and outside the capital and lower-performing primary schools in London shared a belief that disadvantaged pupils could achieve well. This was not shared to the same extent by lower-performing primary schools outside of London. High aspirations, or a desire to see disadvantaged pupils achieve, were backed up by high and specific expectations. For instance, many schools expected their disadvantaged pupils to not only meet national average levels of attainment for disadvantaged pupils, but to meet or even exceed national average levels of attainment for all pupils. As one governor explained:

"When they come into nursery, they are way below the national expectations… By the time they leave us our expectation is for them to be way above the national expectation. So once we get them to the levels we don't stop there, we actually pile in and go and actually increase their achievements."

Governor, high-performing non-London primary

Like in high-performing primary schools, teachers in lower-performing London primaries generally expected disadvantaged pupils to meet or exceed national average levels of attainment. However, expectations were lower in lower-performing primary schools outside the capital. In many instances teachers did not feel their disadvantaged pupils would achieve in line with the national averages for all pupils and, where they did voice this expectation, they often did so with less conviction. For instance, one teacher in a lower-performing non-London primary stated that "we will do everything that we can to make sure the next time the data comes out that that gap's been narrowed" – referring to 'narrowing' rather than 'closing' the gap. Meanwhile, a teacher in another lower-performing non-London primary argued "I don't think that we will sort of hit national standards with quite a lot of the children." In general, teachers in lower-performing primaries outside the capital were more likely to downplay their expectations of

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disadvantaged pupils' attainment and emphasise the barriers that might result in them falling short of their peers (such as their low prior attainment) rather than the school's ability to overcome them.

Expectations and aspirations for disadvantaged pupils' attainment followed a broadly similar pattern in the secondary schools we visited, although lower and less specific aspirations and expectations appeared to be common to all lower-performing secondaries, including those in London.

1.2   Establishing high expectations early

High-performing primary schools in London differed from other schools in their focus on establishing high aspirations and expectations as early as possible. In three high-performing London primaries, teachers made explicit reference to establishing high aspirations, such as for university or high-status careers, "from the very start" of school, including one primary which uses a 'graduation' at the end of Reception to reinforce this message to pupils and parents:

"The simple graduations that we do in Reception when they leave us… the message is quite clear there to the parents, that standing before them is not just their little ones going off to Reception, it could be the next Prime Minister, the lawyer, a doctor, you know, but unless you believe and you say, then that shared vision is a vision for all of us."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

High-performing primary schools outside London placed emphasis on 'starting early' with support and interventions to enable disadvantaged pupils to overcome their low baselines from entry at nursery, and this commitment to intervening early was clearly driven by aspirational target setting. However, only in London primaries did we see teachers explicitly working in Reception to establish high aspirations amongst pupils and parents through practices such as: explicitly telling nursery pupils that they will go on to achieve well; telling pupils and parents in the early years that Nursery is the start of their journey to university; running skills-based workshops for parents in the early years, and inviting visitors into Nursery to act as positive role models for future achievement.

Evidence of early intervention was far less widespread in lower-performing primaries: teachers and leaders in these schools often remarked that pupils started school with 'low' aspirations but did not refer to specific work to support aspirations in the early years. Meanwhile, the secondary schools we visited tended not to emphasise the need for early support for aspirations and expectations, although one high-performing London secondary did cite the need to begin careers discussions in Year 7.

1.3   Consistency of belief

High expectations appeared to be held with a strong degree of consistency amongst teachers, leaders and governors in high-performing primary schools. One senior leader in a London primary argued that this consistency in the school's expectations for its disadvantaged pupils was the key to their success:

"I don't think you would work here unless you also had those exact same high expectations. I think right through from support staff to teachers to senior managers, I think that's one of the strongest things, what a united team we are… I think the fact that that is in all of us is what makes us strong."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

The importance of this consistency of belief was reflected in high-performing primaries' recruitment and training policies. High-performing primary schools inside and outside the capital actively recruited teachers who held the same high aspirations and expectations for disadvantaged pupils, and also focused on aspiration and expectation setting as part of new teachers' training. High-performing primaries in the capital appeared to extend this focus to staff development and retention: three of these schools reported intervening when staff did not share their high expectations of disadvantaged pupils, and this included letting staff go when necessary.

There was markedly less consistency in teachers' expectations for disadvantaged pupils' attainment in lower-performing primary schools. While we found widespread evidence of staff holding high expectations for disadvantaged pupils' attainment, these expectations were often not shared across the entire team. In some cases, governors and senior leaders themselves identified inconsistency in teaching staff's expectations. As one Head admitted:

"All our teachers generally want the best for their children and they come in here wanting to do the best, but in terms of that level of pitch and striving for that continual high expectation and outcomes of children, that's something we still need to do work on, it is variable."

Head teacher, lower-performing non-London primary

These findings were broadly mirrored in the secondary schools we visited, with staff in lower-performing secondaries (inside and outside the capital) sometimes not sharing a belief that disadvantaged pupils could achieve specific and ambitious targets. However, none of the high-performing secondaries in our study reported letting staff go when they did not share the school's aspirations for disadvantaged pupils.

1.4   Supporting aspirations

For high-performing primary schools, holding high aspirations and expectations for disadvantaged pupils was not a hollow commitment. These schools recognised that pupils would need specific, often intensive support in order to achieve their goals. Half of the high-performing primaries we visited (two in the capital and two outside) felt their high aspirations for disadvantaged pupils were only realistic because they were backed up by targeted interventions, CPD and granular analysis of data to enable accelerated progress. In lower-performing primaries we found less evidence of teachers underpinning high expectations of disadvantaged pupils' attainment with specific interventions and support. The 'ambition' was often voiced without the 'means'.

This finding was broadly mirrored in the secondary schools we visited. In high-performing secondaries, aspirational targets for disadvantaged pupils were backed up by a range of practical support such as: bursaries for higher education; conversations about pupils' futures with careers advisors, teaching staff and tutors; and one-to-one coaching for individual Pupil Premium pupils falling furthest behind. Pupils and parents also noted these practical interventions: pupils in two high-performing secondary schools saw their teachers as laying the foundations of their future success, by encouraging them to see the link between their attainment at school and their ability to access higher education. While there was evidence that lower-performing secondaries supported pupils' aspirations with a variety of careers-focused work, it was less clear in these schools that a broader 'aspirational ethos' was channelled into structured support for disadvantaged pupils.

The forms of support that primary and secondary schools provided to back up their aspirations for disadvantaged pupils differed in two main ways. Most secondaries employed careers advisors – a practice that was not present in the primary schools we studied. Meanwhile, although primaries (particularly high performers in London) made widespread use of parental workshops to support aspirations, these workshops were not evident in any of the secondaries we visited. High-performing secondaries tended to report that parents already held high aspirations for their children, and although some teachers in lower-performing secondaries cited lower/narrower aspirations among parents of disadvantaged pupils, this did not appear to be a widespread concern.

1.5   Broadening aspirations

High-performing primary schools had a distinctive approach to pupils' more 'idealistic' aspirations such as being astronauts or footballers: rather than trying to close down these aspirations, half of the high-performing primaries described using them as a 'hook' to begin conversations about backup options, or about how these occupations might require skills that also transfer to other jobs. As one teacher explained:

"A lot of the boys in Year 6 say they want to become footballers, but obviously we try and make them have a balance, like you could be, there is no reason why you couldn't, but also focus on your education as well, because you need a back-up plan just in case."

Teacher, high-performing London primary

Only one of the lower-performing primary schools appeared to use idealistic aspirations as a 'hook' to support pupils' thoughts about wider possibilities. Meanwhile three simply saw these aspirations as 'unrealistic'. One teacher in a lower-performing primary outside the capital described "guiding pupils away" from idealistic aspirations in favour of more mainstream occupations.

We found little evidence of managing 'idealistic' pupil aspirations in the secondary case studies. In contrast to the primary schools we visited, most secondaries (high- and lower-performing; inside and outside the capital) seemed to encourage their pupils to hold broader aspirations, rather than being concerned about their 'level' or trying to narrow pupils' aims down to something more 'realistic'. Most secondaries emphasised university but also provided advice on other pathways after finishing school, such as further education and apprenticeships. High-performing London secondaries appeared to place more emphasis on Russell Group universities, with one secondary setting a target to double the proportion of their pupils going to Oxbridge.

Some secondaries (high- and lower-performing; inside and outside London) noted concerns that pupils' aspirations were sometimes narrower than they would want them to be, even if they were focused on further and higher education. For example, secondaries reported that pupils from certain ethnic backgrounds tended to aspire to a narrow range of courses such as law and medicine, and that some groups of pupils (predominantly disadvantaged pupils and Muslim girls) tended to aspire to a narrow pool of local universities.

1.6 Experiences and role models

London primary schools – both high- and lower-performing – made frequent use of trips to broaden and raise pupil aspirations. This appeared to be a specific hallmark of primary schools in the capital. A senior leader from a London primary explained that this was part of a constant effort to support aspirations by impressing on pupils that "this is their London and they can be a part of it and make something of themselves." In two of the primary schools we visited in the capital, there were almost daily trips to local and citywide attractions, and as one senior leader explained, "we're an inner city London school, there's so much on our doorstep, so much to learn from."

Lower-performing London primary schools in particular saw it as their responsibility to broaden pupils' horizons and support their aspirations in this way. As a governor in one London primary argued:

"I think it's important that the school can lift children's, sort of, aspirations, so their sights are not just set on what they see locally, but, you know, they see the broader picture, they can achieve, become teachers, doctors, business people whatever, you know, all of that is possible."

Governor, lower-performing London primary

Primary schools outside the capital also made use of trips to broaden horizons, but appeared to place more emphasis on inviting visitors into school to act as role models for a variety of jobs. One teacher described how these visits can broaden pupils' horizons:

"We did a project where the children have to design a pop-up theatre… and as part of that project they brought in an architect and the children have to interview the architect, have to question him. He had to kind of present his designs, and the children had never come across an architect before, they didn't know that job existed before. But it was interesting because once they'd met him and they saw what he did and he was discussing how he achieved what he had done in is life, how he became an architect, you know, going to university, what he studied, it was interesting because the kids went 'I want to be an architect. I want to do that.'"

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

Secondary schools exhibited less variation in their use of trips and visitors, with high- and lower-performing schools, inside and outside the capital, using both experiences and role models to broaden pupils' horizons.

Overall, a distinctive London culture was discernible in relation to aspirations and expectations, particularly amongst primary schools. London primaries tended to start work on pupils' aspirations earlier than outside the capital, used a wider range of trips and visits to broaden horizons, and engaged more with parents to influence parents' expectations for their children. Lower-performing primaries outside London seemed more distinct from other primary schools in our sample in the way that they emphasised barriers to pupils meeting expectations. Secondary schools exhibited less variation in their cultures and practices relating to aspirations and expectations. However, lower-performing secondaries (like lower-performing primaries outside London) appeared to hold less consistently high expectations of how their disadvantaged pupils could attain, and these lower-performing secondaries were also less likely to back up broad aspirations for disadvantaged pupils with a range of specific forms of structured support.

2   Positivity, energy and purpose

This section examines schools' shared vision and purpose and how this underpins their collective identity, positivity and sense of pride. The section considers the consistency of positivity and morale within schools as well as the nature of different schools' ethos and aims.

Summary of main findings

- High-performing primary schools were notably more positive than lower-performing primary schools, although no difference was found between high- and lower-performing secondary schools. This positivity was evident in a range of cultures and practices, from relationships between staff and pupils to the presence of a shared mission. There were no clear differences between schools in London and those outside the capital, either at primary or secondary level. Negative feelings were exclusively reported by staff in lower-performing primary schools.

- High-performing schools in London (both primary and secondary) reported a number of ways in which their location in the capital helped build a sense of purpose, through a shared vision with other schools, proximity to the Department for Education, and on occasion, a common minority ethnic background between teachers and pupils.

- High-performing schools' reported purposes included academic success as well as building wellbeing and confidence. The balance between the two was weighted slightly more towards academic success in primary schools outside of London. Lower-performing primary schools were less clear about what their purpose was, although this did not appear to be the case amongst secondary schools.

- Articulating a sense of moral purpose and a feeling of community was a key mechanism by which high-performing schools embedded a positive ethos throughout the school. High-performing primary schools in particular took active steps to build and promote a common vision, although other schools also took these steps to a lesser extent. London primary schools made particular efforts to promote their ethos amongst parents.

- High-performing primary schools celebrated pupils' successes and achievements at every opportunity and built such celebrations into their weekly timetable. Parents were actively involved in these celebrations. Secondary schools did not appear to place the same emphasis on frequent celebrations of pupil success.

2.1 Enjoyment and positivity amongst staff

2.1.1 Factors leading to high staff morale

Whilst one might expect high morale to be a consequence of high performance, staff in all high-performing primary schools in fact reported a range of factors, other than their school's performance, that led to a sense of enjoyment or positivity. The main reported causes of staff positivity were:

- Positive relationships with other staff

- Senior leaders' efforts to build morale, for example by organising staff socials

- Positive relationships with pupils

- Pride in the school

- Working towards a goal

The most important factor contributing to a sense of enjoyment and positivity was relationships with other staff and the feeling of being part of a team. A sense of belonging to a cohesive team was reported by a large number of staff in all high-performing primary schools, whereas only a few staff in lower-performing primary schools reported feeling this sense of collective purpose. One teacher in a high-performing primary school typified the positive feelings staff held for their colleagues:

"I love the people here, I love working with the people here, it's not just ... it's the people you work with, we sit, we have coffee together, we chat, lots of people spend time outside school, it's not just a job it's like this is our life, we work together on a daily basis."

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

In lower-performing primary schools, staff tended to gain job satisfaction either through the progress or achievement of pupils, or from enjoying the challenge of working in challenging circumstances, as this Senior Leader exemplified:

"I came from a school in [another city] that was three form entry split site just out of "Requires Improvement" , so kind of out of the frying pan into the fire maybe. But I was very clear that I wanted to work in schools like these schools that are challenging with challenging children and challenging families… it's the kind of person you are, I think, and in what way you want to give back"

Senior leader, lower-performing non-London primary

Staff in secondary schools reported a similar range of influences on their morale to those in primary schools, but we observed less variation between the motivations of teachers in high- and lower-performing secondary schools.

2.1.2 Differing levels of enjoyment and positivity amongst staff

Whilst staff in lower-performing primary schools also often reported enjoyment and positivity in their roles, they were more likely to express dissatisfaction than teachers in high-performing primary schools. While negative feelings about working in lower-performing primary schools were not widespread, where demotivation was reported, this was exclusively in lower-performing schools. In some lower-performing primary schools, interviewees both in and outside of the capital talked about their school or their job in negative terms. For example, teachers in one non-London primary school in particular spoke about feeling stressed, reported 'lots of tears' saying that working in the school was:

"…quite hard, it's really, really stressful. The amount of pressure … When I joined, [there was] loads of pressure, loads of new stuff coming in all the time, so that was loads of book scrutinies, loads of observations and that's the same as if you're not making enough progress. So yeah, loads of pressure, lots of tears."

Teacher, lower-performing non-London primary

In another non-London lower-performing primary school a number of staff members and governors felt demoralised. In this school, high levels of staff turnover seemed to be an important factor that led to, and resulted from low morale. As senior leaders struggled to build a sense of collective purpose, teachers found it difficult to continually adjust to new team members, and demotivated teachers left to find jobs in other schools.

In secondary schools there were less obvious differences between high-performing and lower-performing schools in terms of staff morale, and there were no reported instances of low morale, either in high- or lower-performing schools.

2.1.3 London-specific factors influencing morale

There was some evidence of London-specific factors contributing to staff positivity and enjoyment in high-performing primary schools. Teachers in London high-performing primary schools reported that being in the capital was exciting, and helped build a sense of purpose. For one governor London's multiculturalism and the presence of the Department for Education were important factors:

"Because it is that very, that closeness to almost the Department and what goes on, there is a real buzz in London, it's very multicultural in London and this is just like a little bit of the cosmos here in [the borough]."

Governor, high-performing London primary

Teachers in both high-performing London secondary schools also reported London-specific motivating factors, linked to their school's location within ethnically diverse communities. As one teacher explained:

"I chose London very deliberately, being Bangladeshi myself, I wanted to try and invest in a community that I identified with."

Teacher, high-performing London secondary

2.2   Clear vision and purpose

2.2.1 Greater emphasis on academic purpose in non-London high performing schools

The type of vision or purpose that schools reported varied, with most schools, both high- and lower-performing, stating aims that combined academic achievement with developing confidence and wellbeing. There were subtle variations in the emphasis that high-performing primary schools outside London placed on non-academic aims compared to other schools. Staff and governors in all high-performing London primary schools spoke about their school's purpose as building confidence, wellbeing and softer skills. Lower-performing primary schools both inside and outside the capital also reported an equal emphasis on academic and non-academic aims. However, high-performing primary schools outside the capital appeared to place more emphasis on academic results. 'Softer' aspects of pupils' development were prioritised by staff in only one high-performing primary school outside London.

Amongst lower-performing primary schools, in two non-London schools and one London school, staff reported that before they could push pupils academically, teachers had to ensure that pupils' emotional needs were met. One teacher reported that:

"It depends as well emotionally whether children come in and it's a day-to-day thing as well, so some children need a lot of emotional support and it's almost like TLC to get to a point where they can be educated and we don't lack on effort on those and also we don't lack on effort on extending those children who are, come in and are emotionally ready to work and those children who want to better themselves academically as well, we push those as well..."

Teacher, lower-performing non-London primary

Secondary schools differed from primary schools in that they also focused on workplace-specific skills alongside the academic and "soft" skills that primary schools emphasised. For example, high-performing secondary schools in London were especially clear that part of their purpose was preparing pupils for success in interviews:

"We try and build our students' social capital, so in those face-to-face interactions with people when they're doing interviews for example, they can present that sort of social capital that would impress an interviewer, alongside the kind of academic stuff that's written on their piece of paper."

Teacher, high-performing London secondary

2.2.2 Shared ethos within high-performing schools

Staff in high-performing primary schools were strikingly consistent in the way their ethos, aim, vision or purpose was articulated. This was not the case in lower-performing primary schools where schools' vision or purpose was often vaguely expressed, or differed between staff members. This difference was also evident, but much less markedly, in high- and lower-performing secondary schools. In high-performing primary and secondary schools, parents, governors, staff and sometimes pupils talked about the ethos of the school in the same terms and often gave examples of how that ethos drove behaviours or practice. One example from a high-performing non-London primary showed how the school's mission statement resonated with one parent and the actions they took outside of school:

"[The school's mission statement] says about going the extra mile which is the kind of strong mantra if you like of the school but it [has] become second nature to a lot of people you know behaving in that way… It's not magic, it's like I was saying before there is consistent messages in what we want."

Senior leader, high-performing non-London primary

"There is an instance where there was a park in [the city] and a child who attends [the school] was a bit unfriendly to my son ... I'm going the extra mile and you know, it doesn't just stop in school, it extends beyond so I went up to the child and I said 'You're in [school] aren't you?' and he said, 'Yes.' 'What does your ethos say in school?' you know, 'Why do you have to bully somebody else who is from your same school instead of rallying behind him'... I came to school, spoke to the Headteacher about it, about the behaviour and they acted… So, I'm just telling you that when they're proud of their school and they want it to extend beyond the school gates, you know, it's a good thing."

Parent, high-performing non-London primary

For all London and two non-London high-performing primary schools, the strength and homogeneity of their ethos was not accidental, but rather something that leaders worked towards and saw as a priority. One non-London head teacher described how their school's ethos was:

"…constantly spoken about. Sometimes people call that the hidden curriculum don't they? Everything that is not about the concrete, it is more of an abstract concept, but it is definitely not hidden here, and it is something that is very clearly on the agenda. And something that we would look at in support staff meetings, we would look at it in teachers' staff meetings … it's too important I think to leave, to be too subtle… It is there all the time, and it is subliminal, and it is pervasive, but it is also spoken about and clearly understood, and a lot of effort and time and energy and resources goes into establishing that, and then maintaining that."

Senior leader, high-performing non-London primary

Similarly, leaders in high-performing secondary schools in the capital placed more emphasis on building a sense of common purpose than those in other secondary schools, although the differences between schools were less stark than at primary level.

Parents in all high-performing primary schools felt included in their school's vision and part of its community. In lower-performing primary schools, especially those outside London, parents did not always state that they bought into the school's ethos. London primary schools appeared to place more emphasis than those outside London on including parents in the school ethos. Amongst high-performing primary schools, four London schools and two non-London schools reported taking steps to help parents buy into the school's vision. These included holding assemblies and having informal conversations, as well as running parent meetings and parent workshops not just to discuss pupils' progress, but also to explain the school's vision:

"We have regular parent meetings. Forging relationships with parents where they feel like they can believe and trust in you is really, really important … really getting them to understand it is a two-way partnership; education doesn't begin and end at school, it really requires them to be on board as well, and I think doing it in ways that not forcing them to do but really getting them to understand the benefits for their child, it then become an easy sell for them as well."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

Secondary schools did not buck this trend, but exhibited fewer differences in the extent to which parents bought into their school's ethos.

High-performing primary schools often explicitly looked for a good fit with the school's ethos when recruiting new staff. Only two lower-performing primary schools reported

using recruitment to build ethos whereas six high-performing primary schools (three inside and three outside the capital) reported recruiting staff that leaders felt would fit the ethos of the school, as this senior leader explained:

"You know, that's really important when anybody new joins the team, it's great if you've got what we need on paper, but we need to know that you've got the heart for it as well, because it's a tough job, this is a tough gig this school. … we want a team around us that have that heart and love the children as much we do, and take pride in them as much as we do."

Senior leader, high-performing non-London primary

2.2.3 Lower-performing schools moving towards a shared sense of purpose

In contrast to those in high-performing primary schools, staff in lower-performing primary schools, both inside and outside the capital, were less consistent in the way they described their school's ethos, and they themselves recognised the need to develop this aspect of their school culture. Rather than having very specific examples of practices that embodied the school's ethos, lower-performing primary schools in particular described ethos in more vague terms, referring for example to "wanting the best for the children" or "helping every child meet their potential". In half of lower-performing primary schools (both in London and outside), leaders spoke about recognising the need to build collective purpose and improve the way their vision was communicated. One senior leader explained this in terms of ethos:

"I don't feel like we've had a really clear vision, you know, sort of, list of values and now we do. So, we're, kind of, moving towards that, and it's courage, love and excellence, which I think is really nice and we, sort of, ummed and ahhed over the idea of using the word 'love'. It might be a bit misunderstood and I think we just decided that was really important to us."

Senior leader, lower-performing London primary

Meanwhile, another leader outside London explained that achieving a more consistent vision required developments in practice across the school, to the extent that the school was working to produce a "handbook" outlining actions that staff should be undertaking across a number of areas, including behaviour management, displays, corridor routines and communicating with parents:

"And also in terms of consistency of approach across school and bringing staff on board, with the changes of staff it's that consistency of the [school name] way, "This is how it happens," and that's been something that we continue to work on."

These differences in the consistency and clarity of schools' vision and purpose were less marked at secondary level. Overall, leaders in secondary schools appeared to place less emphasis on the importance of collective practices compared to shared values.

2.3   Celebrating achievement

Celebrating a wide range of pupils' achievements was a common feature across all high-performing primary schools, and was also a prominent feature of lower-performing primary schools in the capital. Notably less of this practice was reported in lower-performing primary schools outside London. High-performing primary schools actively celebrated pupils' school achievement through assemblies, letters home, trophies and prizes. These celebrations were regular and actively planned for, with observations in one non-London primary school revealing two individual awards per week, for "pride of [school]" and "always children" (pupils who consistently demonstrate effort and behaviour in lessons) as well as certificates for demonstrating school values, weekly attendance rewards and classroom displays praising homework and effort in class. In high-performing schools, staff believed that celebrating pupil achievement led to a more positive attitude towards school from parents as well as pupils:

"For parents it's that changing their idea of school that actually school is enjoyable, school is somewhere that is a positive environment for their child and for them."

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

Secondary schools appeared to place less emphasis on celebrating pupil achievements than primary schools, and there were no marked differences in high- and lower-performing secondaries' propensity to do so.

Overall, positivity, energy and purpose differed most between high- and lower-performing primary schools. There was less contrast between different secondary schools. Staff, pupils, governors and parents in high-performing primary schools were noticeably more positive, while high-performing primary schools took care to build a positive atmosphere through regular and frequent celebrations of pupil achievements. Lower-performing primary schools were not always successful in articulating a shared sense of purpose, and were less likely to focus on recruiting teachers who they saw as 'fitting' with the school's ethos.

3   Collaboration and competition

This section examines the ways in which schools work with other schools to share knowledge and best practice. The section also explores how schools compare themselves to other schools, and the extent to which they see themselves as part of a wider effort to support disadvantaged pupils.

Summary of main findings

- Networks between schools appeared more fragile outside London than in the capital. Primary schools outside London reported that there were too few local outstanding schools for them to learn from, or that local schools did not respond to their offers to visit and learn from them. Lower-performing London primary schools shared these concerns, but high-performing London schools, both primary and secondary, appeared to have access to stronger, more resilient networks. Networks between secondary schools outside London also appeared more fragile than those in the capital.

- Teachers' own professional networks appeared to be more expansive in London primary schools, although the same distinction was not clear between London and non-London secondary schools.

- A commitment to supporting pupils in other schools was present in most of the schools we visited – primary and secondary; high- and lower-performing; inside and outside the capital. However, it was more common to find teachers who dismissed this wider moral purpose, or were unclear about translating this into practice in lower-performing primary and secondary schools as well as schools outside the capital.

- Teachers in primary schools, both London and non-London; high- and lower-performing, spoke of attending conferences and using social media to develop their practice. Teachers in secondary schools appeared to make more use of visits to other schools rather than conferences and social media to improve their practice.

- All schools, both primary and secondary, used headline performance data to compare their performance with other schools. High- and lower-performing primary schools used comparisons to confirm the effectiveness of their approach, but whereas these 'confirmatory' comparisons tended to be based on performance data in high-performing primary schools, lower-performing primary schools made more use of teachers' subjective appraisals, feedback from parents and references to the school's reputation. Lower-performing primary schools also appeared to be more likely to refer to progress measures rather than attainment measures when benchmarking their performance. Such distinctions were not apparent amongst the secondary schools we visited.

- Unlike high-performing primary schools, lower-performing primary schools used comparisons to highlight their shortcomings. In some cases, these comparisons were based on performance data. This distinction was not apparent amongst secondary schools.

- 'Aspirational' comparisons, such as comparing the attainment of a school's disadvantaged pupils with the national average for all pupils, or choosing to compare against national headline indicators rather than weaker local averages, appeared to be more widespread in non-London primary schools than those in the capital, and also appeared to be more widespread in high-performing primary schools than in lower-performing primary schools. Secondary schools did not report using 'aspirational' comparisons.

- High-performing London primaries appeared to make less widespread use of collaborative relationships with secondary schools to provide sport, art, music and science opportunities for their pupils, than high-performing primaries outside London.

3.1 Collaborative networks between schools

In general we found similarities in the engagement of all schools with a variety of networks such as partnerships, trusts, clusters, federations and local authorities. Schools made use of networks for:

- Moderating marking

- Lesson observations

- Shared CPD

- Developing pedagogy

- Exchanging best practice, for instance on literacy and SEND provision.

- Primary (but not secondary) schools appeared to make particular use of social media and conferences to keep abreast of practice in other schools.

3.1.1 Strength and resilience of networks

While most schools – primary and secondary; high- and lower-performing; inside and outside the capital – appeared to be embedded in wider networks, high-performing schools (primary and secondary) in London were the only schools not to voice concerns about the availability of collaborative opportunities, or the resilience of the existing networks they were part of. High-performing secondary schools outside London also appeared less concerned about the availability or resilience of such networks, compared

to lower-performing schools and high-performing primaries outside the capital. In at least half of the latter two sets of schools, teachers and leaders voiced concerns that:

- They were unable to learn from local schools, because none of them were outstanding

- They were unable to attract local schools to visit and learn from them

- More strategic links with other schools were either unavailable or had atrophied as a result of system change, such as academisation and the weakening role of local authorities.

One senior leader argued that system change had sometimes worked against existing networks:

"We used to meet for foundation stage within the pyramid, deputies used to meet and we used to have agendas for all of these. We used to meet for maths, we used to meet for English, but as more schools have joined an academy chain, and a couple have joined up together within the pyramid, they are now meeting separately, so it's kind of, so the support is still there if we ring people up, who we've already got connections with, but that's very different than how it used to be."

Senior leader, lower-performing non-London primary

Two of the lower-performing primary schools we visited explained that they had sought opportunities to link with other schools, for example by joining an academy chain, but that these attempts had faltered. One London head explained that they had been prevented from joining their preferred chain because it was not situated in the same borough:

"We got a warning notice last May, I got told before the Easter holidays it was coming, from the Regional Schools Commissioner. It didn't come until May, but in the meantime I sought out an academy for us to join and we went all the way until October, we were on the verge of ratification of us moving into this academy and the Regional Schools Commissioner changed [their] mind at the last minute. So I feel very much that part of that wasted six months was pulling away from the Borough, in a way, because they couldn't support us any more than they had already. I certainly wouldn't have gone with any of the academies in [the borough], because their ethos just doesn't fit with us at all. But this one did… Gutted: It would have been really, really good for us."

Head teacher, lower-performing London primary

Lower-performing secondary schools also raised concerns about the atrophy of collaborative relationships with other schools that were previously local authority led. One

teacher described this in terms of their relationships with teachers of the same subject in other schools:

"There's no network for communication with other schools. I think there has in the past, obviously I think when schools were more LEA led there would be networks, so if you were a Head of Business, there was a Business Studies network, and every, I don't know, once or twice a year you'd meet up because there'd be an LEA adviser for that particular subject, but now that's all gone"

Teacher, lower-performing non-London secondary

3.1.2 Distinctive professional networks amongst London teachers

Teachers' networks seemed particularly strong in London primary schools. Teachers in these schools described close and ongoing links with other teachers in different schools; these might be teachers they had trained with or who held the same role in another school. As one literacy lead explained:

"I've got a few sort of friends from other schools who I've met in my role as literacy lead. So yeah, I will email them about something or send an email saying, 'Have you got such and such?' and they might… so there's communication, definitely."

Teacher, high-performing London primary

Teachers reported these links in the majority (seven out of eight) London primary schools, both high- and lower-performing. In contrast, professional networks between teachers were less prevalent in primary schools outside the capital (both high- and lower-performing). Such networks were only evident in two out of eight of these schools.

No clear distinction was apparent between high- and lower-performing; or London and non-London secondary schools in terms of teachers' professional networks.

In short, schools across the board appeared to be engaged in broad collaborative structures, but teachers' own professional networks seemed more established in primary schools in the capital.

3.1.3 Wider sense of responsibility for pupils' outcomes

Interviewees were asked whether they felt any responsibility for the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils outside of their own school. Teachers in high-performing primary schools in London felt the most tangible sense of responsibility, and were able to describe practices to support this responsibility. Meanwhile lower-performing primary schools in London appeared to feel the least responsibility for pupils in other schools.

In three of the four high-performing primary schools in the capital, teachers and governors voiced a strong sense of responsibility for pupils outside their school. In some cases this was manifested in a desire to affect system change by helping other local schools that were struggling, as one governor illustrated:

"Our executive head is very, very keen on trying to help failing schools make progress… we don't say 'oh because [our schools] are good schools let's not help other schools.' So we actively seek other schools that require improvement or are in special measures to say 'how can they use their expertise in both schools to try and help them make progress?' because if we do that it helps the students in the community as well. You know it has a ripple effect and impact and so it's more or less like a question now to say 'how can we systematically try and start helping schools to make progress?' I mean it is one school at a time but we are on our way to doing that."

Governor, high-performing London primary

In other cases, this wider sense of responsibility was reflected in primary schools' desire to support their pupils' transitions to secondary school by working closely with secondary colleagues. This work could extend to establishing pupils' specific needs and monitoring their progress in the early days of Key Stage 3.

A wider sense of responsibility was also present in high-performing primary schools outside London, but appeared to be tempered by an apparent despondency at other schools' lack of response to invitations to come and learn from their practice, or a desire to focus attention on the quality of teaching and learning within their own school. Some heads were of the firm belief that their ultimate responsibility was to the pupils in their care and that they could not afford to be distracted from that responsibility. As one head emphasised:

"Our main issue is the amount of time it would take me to be part of [the cluster] out of school. So the amount of meetings that I would have to attend, I find takes me away from this primary aim, which is being in this school, to sort out what this school is doing. I feel like there is too much outward looking, and I think if head teachers just get back in and sort out their own kids, we would have better results in schools."

Head, high-performing non-London primary

In three of the lower-performing primary schools we visited (all in the capital) we spoke to teachers and governors who did not place priority on pupil outcomes outside of their school, or were unclear about how to translate a wider sense of responsibility into practice. For instance, one governor at a London primary told us "first and foremost it's the children that attend my school [that are] the priority." Meanwhile, a teacher from

another London primary explained that although they felt a degree of responsibility for their pupils when they moved on to secondary school "we don't have a lot of contact with them afterwards."

Teachers', leaders' and governors' sense of responsibility for pupils outside their own school followed broadly similar patterns in the secondary schools we visited. However, those in secondary schools appeared to feel more responsibility for other pupils of secondary age, and to a lesser extent ex-pupils that had moved onto further or higher education. They made few references to a responsibility for younger pupils outside of their school.

3.1.4 Collaboration between senior leaders in different primary schools

In primary schools outside the capital, senior leaders appeared particularly instrumental in setting up collaborative partnerships. In some cases they used their own networks, such as schools in which they had previously worked to link teachers with 'models' of good practice. In other cases they acted as a motivator, encouraging their staff to build and develop their own professional networks, as one teacher described:

"Because of time and other commitment you have, it comes kind of bottom of your priority list, so it's nice when you've got an SLT who are constantly 'look and see what else is out there.'… and [our Head] has said to me, as part of my role now, he's said, 'Look, you know other schools, you know the teachers, if you want to go and spend an afternoon to go and visit another school and just see what they do, in terms of you know their practice, their organisation, just anything at all, you can do that.'"

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

3.1.5 Creating opportunities for pupils

Many primary schools used collaborative partnerships – particularly with their local secondary schools – to create opportunities for pupils in their school. This approach was particularly notable in lower-performing primary schools both inside and outside London and high-performing primary schools outside the capital. All high-performing primary schools outside London and around half of the lower-performing primary schools we visited (two in London and three outside the capital) used collaborative relationships with other schools to provide sport, art, music and science opportunities for their pupils, as one senior leader illustrated:

"We're linked to the secondary school… where they bring people in for enterprise, so their businesses will go to them. That is something we would be looking into.

We did do a science week last week so we were linked with one of the STEM technicians came in and worked with the [pupils]."

High-performing primary schools in London did not appear to make use of collaborative partnerships like these to create additional opportunities for their pupils, although it was not clear why this was the case.

Likewise, secondary schools did not seem to make use of other schools to provide opportunities for their pupils, although two (non-London, high- and lower-performing) reported that pupils from other schools made use of facilities in their school.

3.2 Comparisons with other schools

All schools – both primary and secondary – used data to compare themselves to other schools. However, all schools recognised the limitations of available data when drawing comparisons across schools in different contexts. In general, primary and secondary schools used data to make two kinds of comparisons: comparisons to confirm the validity of the ethos underpinning their practice, and comparisons to drive improvement, although secondary schools did not report using 'aspirational comparisons' to drive improvement. Instead they reported using national averages to benchmark their performance.

3.2.1 Comparisons to confirm ethos

Primary schools used comparisons with other schools to confirm the effectiveness of their ethos or approach. In high-performing primary schools these comparisons were often based on performance data, as this governor at a non-London primary school explained:

"I think it actually underlines that what we're doing works. We're always self-critical. You know, we always say, right well okay then, so has that worked? You know, that money we've spent, what are the outcomes? So we do actually evaluate what we do. But it does tend to come back to reaffirm that what we're actually doing is right, because the outcomes tell us it's right"

Governor, high-performing non-London primary

'Confirmatory' comparisons in lower-performing primary schools were less likely to be based on performance data, and more likely to be based on parental feedback, awareness of the school's reputation, or teachers' own appraisal of the validity of the cultures and practices in their school. As one governor explained:

"It's important to us that we have a reputation for being a very caring and inclusive school and we know that because of what parents say to us, parents coming from other schools or whatever, so that's a useful indication for us that we're going in the right direction. But that is something that we would prize highly along with, you know, academic attainment."

Governor, lower-performing London primary

It was unclear whether the secondary schools we visited differed between those in London or outside; high- or lower-performing, in their use of confirmatory comparisons.

3.2.2 Comparisons to drive improvement

'Aspirational' comparisons, such as comparing the attainment of a school's disadvantaged pupils with the national average for all pupils, or choosing to compare against national headline indicators rather than weaker local averages, appeared to be more widespread in non-London primary schools than those in the capital. They also appeared to be more widespread in high-performing primary schools compared to lower-performing schools (six, compared to three schools). A teacher in a non-London primary explained that their school tended not to compare itself against other local schools with large disadvantaged populations, because this went against their desire for their pupils to achieve good results regardless of their background:

"I don't know whether we would just compare ourselves to the local area because I think to do that is almost going against what I mentioned was the school ethos in the first place, you know. So if you can compare yourself to other disadvantaged schools you're not forging that path of 'we want our schoolchildren to achieve regardless of the fact that they come from disadvantaged backgrounds.'"

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

Lower-performing primary schools also used comparisons to highlight their shortcomings. In some cases, these comparisons were based on performance data. As one teacher in a non-London primary explained, "when we do tests within school we know that they are not hitting the higher scores that they should be doing."

None of the secondary schools we visited reported using 'aspirational' comparisons with other schools to drive their own performance.

Overall, high-performing London primary and secondary schools appeared to be part of particularly resilient networks, and primary teachers in the capital as a whole appeared to have stronger connections to their professional networks. The ways in which primary schools compared themselves with other schools appeared to vary more by performance than location, with lower-performing primary schools making less data-driven

comparisons. Approaches to comparison varied less amongst the secondary schools we visited. Meanwhile, teachers appeared to be most likely to choose 'aspirational' benchmarks for disadvantaged pupils in high-performing primary schools outside London.

4 Data and evidence

This section explores how schools collect and use data to guide practice, to support pupil progress and to address teachers' underperformance. We also consider the extent to which schools engage with research evidence to inform their practice.

Summary of main findings

- All schools in our sample, both primary and secondary, used data to track pupil progress systematically. High-performing primary schools described a sense of urgency in intervening with underperforming pupils. In all secondary schools, tracking data was collected at a school level half termly. However, subject-departments sometimes tracked data more frequently, especially with exam groups.

- The majority of schools – high- and lower-performing; inside and outside London; primary and secondary – reported using data to evaluate the impact of pupil interventions. However staff in lower-performing primary schools were sometimes less specific about the forms of data they used to assess impact.

- High-performing primary schools spoke about constantly monitoring and moving pupils in and out of intervention groups, in accordance with their needs, in a way that was different to the lower-performing primary schools or secondary schools we visited. High-performing primary schools were also more likely to highlight the link between using data and overall school effectiveness.

- Lower-performing primary schools were less likely than high-performing primary schools to use data with a high degree of consistency. Some reported that newer staff were less confident in handling and reacting to pupil data. Teachers in secondary schools all reported being confident using data.

- Lower-performing primary schools outside the capital sometimes reported feeling that data was used to meet external pressures, rather than for the benefit of individual pupils.

- High-performing primary schools were more aware of educational research than lower-performing primary schools. Staff were often given structured time to discuss the latest developments. These schools also explicitly acknowledged that research should inform, rather than dictate, their practice. Use of research appeared to be less well embedded in lower-performing primary schools, particularly those in London. Most secondary schools appeared to make use of research to inform leadership decisions and classroom practice, although research-based cultures and practices appeared to be less ingrained in lower-performing secondary schools in London.

4.1 Pupil attainment and progress data

Data collection and analysis processes were broadly similar in both high- and lower-performing schools, primary and secondary, inside and outside the capital. Data collection and analysis had the following common features across all schools:

- At least half-termly input of individual pupil progress data that was then analysed by senior leaders and governors

- Pupil data was broken down into sub-groups relating to a range of pupil characteristics. Most commonly these included eligibility for pupil premium, gender, SEND and year/key stage. Less frequently, pupils were grouped according to their strengths or weaknesses in particular subjects

- Pupil progress data was used to identify individual pupils who might need extra help

- Although important, data was generally seen as a supplement to teachers' in-depth knowledge of their pupils

- Senior leaders were described as 'data driven' and used pupil data to guide their decision making and help manage staff performance

- Governors used pupil data to hold senior leaders to account.

4.1.1 More urgent response to data in high performing schools

High-performing primary schools employed more frequent progress checks relative to lower-performing primary schools. All primary schools in our sample used pupil progress data to identify pupils in need of additional support in particular subjects. However, high-performing primary schools differed from lower-performing primary schools in terms of the speed with which findings from the data were acted upon. Almost all high-performing schools in our sample had a sense of urgency when identifying pupils who were not making progress. They then offered these pupils support as soon as possible, as one senior leader made clear:

"It's really trying to get qualitative and quantitative data on everything so that we when we have those meetings with class teachers, we know everything there is to know about that child and then we can just get the ball rolling straightaway because we don't want to miss a minute."

Senior leader, high-performing non-London primary

4.1.2 Using data to monitor interventions

The majority of schools – high- and lower-performing, inside and outside London, secondary and primary – reported using data to evaluate interventions' impact. Staff in lower-performing primary schools were sometimes less specific about the forms of data they used to assess impact, as described in more detail in section 8.4. However, in most primary and secondary schools teachers spoke about using data to interrogate whether, and why, interventions had achieved their intended outcome. As one senior leader explained:

"Once they've accelerated progress, we want to know why have they made it so… what did we do? Was it that we engaged parents with reading? Was it that we had 15 different interventions per week for that child? Did the class teacher work more with that child than other children?"

Senior leader, lower-performing non-London primary

These impact evaluations allowed teachers to assess whether individual pupils should continue receiving an intervention. One teacher described the process in a high-performing primary school:

"If it's not working then we change it and that's what the intervention grid is about. The interventions are short, they're not meant to happen with the whole year because if they are, then something's wrong and you need to change them. So we do them for a short time and then we have the Pupil Progress Meetings and then that feeds into our intervention grid… we keep reviewing it all the time."

Teacher, high-performing London primary

Senior leaders in high-performing primary schools emphasised the dynamic use of pupil intervention groups in a way that was not reported as frequently in lower-performing primary schools. Pupils were moved swiftly into and out of intervention groups as teachers assessed their progress to be dropping off, or catching up with expectations. As one senior leader explained:

"We know that when a child isn't learning within the reading, the writing and the maths we can pinpoint exactly where it is that they are not and so then we can intervene there. So we know that those interventions are immediate and effective because we can then, once we have worked with them we can then put the child back in and then they can carry on."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

Senior leaders in secondary schools placed less importance on the fluidity of pupil intervention groups than those in primary schools.

4.1.3 Collecting data for accountability purposes

Most schools reported collecting data in order to support pupils more effectively. However, there were a small number of instances in which teachers in lower-performing primary schools suggested that pupil-level data was designed to meet external pressures such as Ofsted, rather than benefit pupils who needed the most help:

"We all know it's, kind of, at the forefront of their mind, even when I feel like they want to say, 'No, no, it's all about the individual children' … I think it's about improved [performance measures] outcomes and I understand that, because of the place this school is in, in terms of being 'it requires improvement'. You know, we have to get a 'good'. So, there is a lot of pressure on."

Teacher, lower-performing London primary

Similarly, in another lower-performing primary school, parents believed that the school's focus on progress data was driven by "marking the school, not the child."

4.1.4 Strategic uses of data

Senior leaders and governors used data to identify areas for improvement at a whole-school level in all schools. There were differences, however, between high-and lower-performing primary schools in the extent to which they trusted pupil attainment and progress data in guiding decisions about overall school effectiveness. In high-performing primary schools trust in data was high and data therefore played an important role in strategic planning. For example, in one London primary a senior leader reported that:

"at the end of last year we scrutinised the data across the school and… [identified] a gap this year in reading between free school meals and non-free school meals at the end of Early Years and also at the end of Key Stage 1… one of the things we've put in place as a result is that now we have parent reading every week in Reception and Nursery… staff can actually model to parents… reading strategies that children might need."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

Senior leaders in high-performing primary schools also used data to examine how to build on pupils' good progress:

"What about the pupil premium pupils who are doing really well, who are not having extra provision? What are we missing, are we missing anything with those

children, and what would they be doing if they had had that provision, if they had had that extra provision, how much more would they be doing? So it is now about looking at not just about whether they are doing okay, but are they doing really, really well, and if they are doing okay, what can we put in there for them?"

Senior leader, high-performing non-London primary

A senior leader in one London primary drew an explicit link between improvements in how staff and leaders used data in their school and the overall improvement in the school's effectiveness:

"[Our Head Teacher's] work after Ofsted was really the journey of where we go from 'Outstanding'. It was again based upon data analysis … I think is the kind of ethos that we really try and encourage here, constant evaluation and re-evaluation. We've done this, now what are we going to do with it? How are we going to use that? So never sitting back and just collecting data for data's sake; looking at it, analysing it and seeing what it can tell us and what it can inform in the future, I think that's really one of our strengths in my belief."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

In contrast, lower-performing primary schools were less convinced that pupil data provided accurate insights into their effectiveness. In three lower-performing primaries outside the capital (and one lower-performing primary in London) staff felt that high levels of pupil mobility (and sometimes pupils with English as an additional language (EAL)) skewed data negatively. They therefore deemed it an unreliable indicator of pupils' progress or the effectiveness of teaching and learning. As one governor explained:

"I don't think this particular Year 6 is going to outperform particularly, they might slightly outperform last year's Year 6, and we ask them why. We need to understand why and you wouldn't be surprised at the answers because they are things to do with mobility, people arriving at the last minute and I've worked with primary schools like this before where if you take the data of the students who came in at the beginning of early years and finished in Year 6, they do fine and it's the ones that sort of bop in and out and in a smallish school the statistical relevance of one student of course is quite a large percentage."

Governor, lower-performing London primary

Teachers in some lower-performing primary schools (three outside London and one in the capital) also felt that transient pupil populations made it hard to use data to identify areas of weaker progress for individual pupils, and that this limited their ability to intervene:

"The difficulty is that there are, as I said, a lot of transient families. So, they'll come to [the city] and then they'll move out. So, you'll make the progress and then, all of a sudden, they've gone... So, that can sometimes be a bit of a downfall because, you know, for one example, I had a child in my class who turned up two days before we started the assessments. I had no information about them before because it hadn't come through. You know, that assessment was no good for him because I don't know what they've been learning before. That's the difficulty when it comes to having the formative assessment."

Teacher, lower-performing non-London primary

Concerns related to tracking and supporting mobile pupil populations were not raised in high-performing primary schools.

Amongst the secondary schools in our sample, there were fewer differences in both the type of data used to measure school performance, and the reporting of factors skewing data. Secondary schools in general reported using progress, rather than attainment data to measure their own performance, and that of teachers within the school. No secondary schools reported factors that they felt "skewed" their data.

4.1.5 Confidence in interpreting data

Across all high-performing primary and secondary schools governors, teachers and leaders spoke about data with similar levels of confidence. Teachers were articulate about both the process of collecting and analysing data, and its use in supporting pupil progress. One teacher exemplified a typical conversation about data in high-performing primary schools, demonstrating their understanding of how the school's use of data supported pupil progress:

"Every half term we make sure that we record where all children are at, so every half term each teacher has to record where they're at in each and every subject, in each part of each subject as well, and then that's all processed so it's all put into tables, analysed... and together with senior leadership team, we managed to come up with a way to put extra interventions into place of whoever's been highlighted as an issue, or whichever group's been highlighted as an issue and see if there's any way we can raise them up, and then next half term, those children are monitored and see if it's closed or if that didn't work let's try something different, you know? So we just stay on top of it, so the gap's either closed or we change our intervention and then try again until it is closed."

Teacher, high-performing London primary

Teachers in secondary schools appeared similarly confident in using data to inform their practice. One teacher explained the way data influenced their practice with pupils approaching their GCSEs, and the importance of:

"Identifying who's below target and then acting upon it. So I'm encouraging them to go to revision sessions. I would insist that they sign up to at least one a week. And then my five chosen students, I'll have them doing additional past papers as part of homework and I guess managing their revision a bit more than just giving them that independence"

Teacher, high-performing non-London secondary

In high-performing London primary schools, parents appeared to be more aware of the school's use of data to track their children's progress than primary school parents outside London. This did not appear to be the case amongst parents in secondary schools. Parents' fluency in reporting how data was used appeared to be a result of high-performing primary schools' broader success in engaging parents with their cultures and practices, as set out in Section 11. One parent described the way data helped support pupils:

"Very efficient in identifying kids that need that support, and they'll go off in a small group of three or four with an extra member of staff to do some catch up sessions… it's done in a really positive way of, "Oh, you're going to come and help me do some more reading together." Yes, a real sense of… keeping the kids on track".

Parent, high-performing London primary

In contrast to those in high-performing primary schools, teachers (particularly NQTs) in three lower-performing primary schools outside London and two in London did not always feel confident handling data. Sometimes the problem lay with planning assessments in order to gather useful information to identify pupils' areas of strengths and weakness and inform future planning:

"It turned out it was my, like, first time in Year 4, and we had completely different attainment goals, and a different way of assessing. We put in a whole new assessment plan. So my children were able to do things, but I hadn't planned specifically for those goals. So they could do it, and they were doing it, like, their spelling and grammar lessons, but I hadn't given any opportunity to actually put it into their writing."

Teacher, lower-performing London primary

In other cases, senior leaders in lower-performing primaries reported that teachers found it difficult to interpret pupil data:

"It's unpicking all that data and the reason[s] behind it … I think that's something that the leadership team understand very well and I think it's something that established teachers get a handle on but I think it can be quite intimidating for new teachers, inexperienced teachers, to have that amount of information and [understand] what… it mean[s]."

Senior leader, lower-performing London primary

"There are data sheets and score sheets and a lot of bar graphs and charts that you can access and that we look at. We can look at the reading results and look at the reading results of other schools etc. but sometimes I think they're just, I don't know, I'm a teacher and I just think that's more for senior leaders. Whereas, I just think 'are our children happy? When we're in the playground, are people smiling, do children want to come to school?'"

Teacher, lower-performing London primary

Governors in just over half of lower-performing primary schools, both inside and outside the capital, reported that they felt uncertain when using data. One lower-performing primary in London had organised online training and support from senior leaders to improve governors' competence with data. The chair of governors in this school believed that this had helped to "transform what we're learning from the data from prior performance to inform future priorities for the school."

Some governors in both high- and lower-performing non-London secondary schools reported a lack of confidence in using data, or did not consider that data analysis was part of their role. This was not the case amongst governors in secondary schools in London.

Staff in lower-performing primary schools were also less informed about how data influenced spending, with teachers and governors in three of the eight lower-performing schools reporting that they did not know or understand how data fed into decisions about spending:

"They talk about Pupil Premiums and things like that but again, they start talking about certain things and I think I'm looking at it over my head."

Teacher, non-London lower-performing primary

"I am not sure exactly how the Pupil Premium actually is distributed"

Governor, non-London lower-performing primary

We did not find evidence in secondary schools of teachers or governors being unsure of how data was used to influence spending decisions.

4.2 Evidence and research

4.2.1 Awareness of research

All schools, primary and secondary, used research to feed into classroom practice, with teachers and leaders sharing research findings in staff meetings and also directly conducting their own research on occasion. Teachers in high-performing primary schools frequently referenced educational research, both UK-based and international. When staff members reported being out of touch with research, this was exclusively in lower-performing primary schools, one of which was in the capital and two of which were outside London.

Teachers in all high-performing primary schools reported tangible ways in which their practice had been shaped by their exposure to educational research. As one teacher explained:

"I'm reading a book at the moment called Visible Learning. It's by John Hattie… [the head teacher] has asked me to read that book and she's actually given me some allocated time to read that book and feed back to the senior leadership team, basically pick out some elements that we think could apply to the school…. So just from reading that, it's reflecting back on my own teaching … I'm more or less trying ideas out with my class and then just being able to spread that amongst the senior leadership team."

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

Three high-performing primary schools in the capital and one high-performing primary school outside London talked about doing their own research into particular pedagogical models. Two of these London primary schools had taken part in exchange visits with maths teachers in Singapore, whilst one was part of a research hub in their local authority. Lower-performing primary schools were less likely than high-performing primary schools to report adapting research to their own context, or undertaking research themselves. This distinction between the practices of high- and lower-performing primary schools was particularly evident in London.

All high-performing primary schools reported that research informed - but did not dictate - their practice. Teachers and leaders reported that they took "the best bits" from research to incorporate into their practice. One teacher described this process:

"We follow a lot of blogs and we do a lot of reading around different ideas that come in and kind of look at how that will work for us and we try things. So we tried an early years [idea] … and we all fed back and said that we like this but that we're going to change this way…. we're always willing to have a go at it and say 'This bit will work but this bit won't,' and make it work for us and year on year, we do make different changes depending on the cohort of children."

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

A teacher in a high-performing primary school outside the capital reported the strength of their school's culture in relation to research:

"There's definitely a dialogue and a conversation between teachers about what's happening in the wider educational world. It's there, it's spoken about in the staff room."

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

We found less evidence of variation in engagement with and use of research between secondary schools, although research-based cultures and practices appeared to be less ingrained in lower-performing secondary schools in London. In general, leaders (and to a lesser extent teachers) in all secondary schools were aware of and actively sought out recent educational research developments, particularly those published by the Educational Endowment Foundation, and in one non-London lower-performing secondary, were actively involved in research partnerships with universities and other schools.

Overall, cultures and practices relating to data and evidence in primary schools mainly varied by school performance rather than by geography. High-performing primary schools tended to voice a greater sense of urgency when data flagged the need for pupil interventions, and had a more fluid approach to assigning pupils to interventions. Staff in high-performing primary schools were generally more confident handling data, and were more embedded in a culture of research-informed practice. Cultures and practices relating to data and evidence varied less between secondary schools.

5 Behaviour and attendance

This section of the report examines how schools manage pupil behaviour and attendance. It considers whether behaviour policies are applied consistently within schools and the approaches schools use to improve pupil attendance.

Summary of main findings

- While almost all schools felt they had an effective behaviour management system, many also identified ongoing behaviour problems. Staff in lower-performing schools, both primary and secondary, were less likely to believe unanimously that their behaviour management system worked effectively, or that the school had the capability to resolve persistent behaviour problems.

- All primary schools made use of positive behaviour management alongside sanctions, but lower-performing primary schools outside the capital relied relatively heavily on sanctions. In contrast, secondary schools' behaviour management systems relied primarily on sanctions and mentioned rewards and positive systems less frequently.

- Cultures of consistently high expectations for pupil behaviour were less prominent in lower-performing primary schools, particularly outside the capital. High expectations were also less apparent in lower-performing secondaries, where the staff we spoke to rarely mentioned high expectations of behaviour. Where high expectations of behaviour were held in lower-performing primaries, it was less clear that these expectations extended to the 'small things' such as behaviour in corridors and at mealtimes.

- Lower-performing primary schools inside and outside London, and lower-performing secondary schools outside the capital, appeared to face greater demand in relation to provision of social and emotional support to pupils. This support therefore tended to form a core part of their approach to behaviour management, particularly in the primary schools we visited.

- High-performing primary schools in the capital appeared to place particular emphasis on involving pupils in behaviour management.

- Behaviour management practices were not always homogenous within the schools we visited. In high-performing primary schools this was sometimes part of a deliberate strategy to allow teachers to maintain high overall standards of behaviour using different classroom techniques in a responsive way. In lower-performing schools, both primary and secondary, inconsistency in behaviour management appeared to be less strategic.

- High- and lower-performing schools identified attendance as a challenge, and tended to use a similar raft of techniques to tackle it. However, lower-

performing schools appeared to be less confident that they were succeeding. Overall, primary schools were more likely than secondary schools to highlight the importance of attendance and focus their attention on improving it.

5.1 Standards of behaviour

High standards of behaviour were apparent in all of the schools we visited. In most schools teachers, leaders, pupils and parents reported that, overall, behaviour was good in their school, as exemplified by these comments from a pupil and a teacher at two different schools:

"All the good children in my class, and I think they're really good children because mostly they always listen to instructions and whenever the teacher tells them to do something, they always just focus on what they're doing. They don't chat to other people."

Pupil, high-performing London primary

"99% of our children are very, very behaved and courteous - "please" and "thank you" - and we will get comments back from people about that."

Senior leader, lower-performing non-London primary

Nonetheless, we did observe and hear reports of behavioural problems in the majority of the schools we visited, both high- and lower-performing. In primary schools and high-performing secondary schools this most often took the form of low-level disruption in classes. Low-level disruption was frequently identified as a barrier to learning in the pupil focus groups we conducted, although it was rarely identified by teachers:

Pupil diary, high-performing non-London primary

"Sometimes let's say someone on your table is just acting really silly and then Miss just stops and tells them off… And then the teacher just forgets what she's talking about or something. That kind of distracts us when we're like, let's say the teacher is teaching and helping someone. One time she was helping me and

someone was just acting silly and she just had to go and sort them out… It happens a lot."

In some cases more severe behavioural issues were identified. While evidence of more severe behavioural issues appeared in all types of school in our sample, these issues appeared to be more significant in lower-performing secondary schools, both inside and outside the capital. For example, one parent described how there were "fights quite often" and staff suggested that a number of pupils "can't access the curriculum" or attend school for a full timetable due to their behaviour. In both primary and secondary schools teachers often linked these issues to pupils' turbulent home lives and difficulties faced by disadvantaged pupils when integrating with the school environment:

"We get a lot of children in nursery with really low personal social and emotional development, really low. They don't listen to adults; they don't listen to their peers; they don't know how to share, take turns; they don't know how to be gentle, so for the first half-term in nursery it is solely on making them being able to settle to build bonds with adults, to trust adults and just working around that."

More severe behaviour issues could also result from poor relations between teachers and pupils, which in turn could result from poor behaviour management. For instance, in one lower-performing school pupils reported feeling frustrated when teachers sanctioned whole classes and some staff suggested that other teachers in the school did not hold high expectations for all pupils:

"The ones who are labelled as 'naughty', they're just on a hiding to nothing really, so many lessons they go to start badly… [the] dynamic of the teachers [is] not very positive, and then within the first five minutes they've already given up, and the teacher's threshold patience for them is low… if they don't get on with the teacher then they're just not going to do much… Some teachers, who think that a kid has

got no hope, if they saw that kid in another setting, they'd soon realise that actually the common denominator is them rather than the kid."

Teacher, lower-performing school

In many of the lower-performing primary and secondary schools that cited persistent behaviour issues, staff nonetheless felt that improvements were being made. One parent assessed behaviour management in their child's school in the following way:

"I think [behaviour] is quite good. I mean, obviously they're not all angels and certainly not perfect, but I think the ones who have issues or need the help are getting the support and the help that they need … I think generally if you've got this many children, there are going to be pockets where it's not perfect but as long as that's being dealt with, then that's fine."

Parent, lower-performing London primary

However, in some lower-performing schools with persistent behaviour problems, both primary and secondary, we found staff that did not appear to have faith in the school's capacity to resolve issues. This sentiment was absent from the high-performing schools we visited:

"We've done a lot of work and we've had to change a lot of things in terms of behaviour, I still think there's a couple of things we don't quite get right… I wouldn't say we will ever have fantastic behaviour. Although I think our children behave really, really well if you take them outside of school, I think they often play up in school because they know they're safe and they can play up here and a lot of our behaviour is stemmed more from their emotional needs than just disregard for rules. I think they feel very safe to play up here, this is the place where they can reflect 'I'm having issues and I can't voice that.'"

Governor, lower-performing London primary

5.2   Managing behaviour

Behaviour management tended to have a number of common features across the majority of the primary and secondary schools we visited:

- The majority of primary schools and half of secondary schools appeared to make use of dedicated staff to manage and support pupils' behaviour.

- Both high- and lower-performing schools in and outside London made use of additional resources to provide support for pupils' social and emotional needs. This was particularly valued by parents in primary schools. Fewer high-

performing schools reported providing this kind of support, but it was unclear whether this was a result of lower levels of need, or whether schools met pupils' social and emotional needs in other ways, without specifically-targeted support.

- Almost all primary and secondary schools made use of a graded system of warnings and consequences to manage behaviour. In secondary schools these consequences tended to take the form of sanctions, whereas in primary schools they tended to involve the loss of a reward.

In addition, the majority of primary schools consistently exhibited the following practices:

- Parents were kept informed about behavioural issues and were involved in resolving them. This practice was not frequently cited in the secondary schools we visited.

- All primary schools placed a strong emphasis on positive behaviour management, although there appeared to be differences in the use of sanctions (such as detentions) between lower-performing schools in London (where sanctions were mentioned in two schools) and those outside the capital (where sanctions were mentioned in all schools). This contrasted with most secondary schools, where sanctions and detentions were more frequently cited than positive behaviour management systems.

- Half of lower-performing primary schools (two in London; two outside London) and five out of eight high-performing primary schools cited using staff as role models for pupil behaviour.

Beyond this core set of common practices, we identified four main ways in which schools' behaviour management practices appeared to diverge.

5.2.1 Differences in expectations of behaviour

Teaching and non-teaching staff in high-performing primary and secondary schools tended to feel that high expectations of pupil behaviour were shared by all staff, and this was expressed explicitly in five of the primary schools (two in London and three outside the capital) and half of the secondary schools we visited. Some schools were uncompromising in their expectations of pupil behaviour and operated a 'zero tolerance' approach to poor behaviour rather than a graded system of warnings and consequences. As one senior leader in a high-performing London primary made clear:

"We don't have rewards or sanctions, we just have really high expectations, you know, and it's just a case of 'that behaviour is not acceptable, you're here to learn.' We leave that outside, 'you're here to learn right now, in here now', and just

straight to the head teacher. We don't do traffic light systems or anything like that, it's just a really high expectation. You're in the classroom, you're learning and that's that and the children respond to it, so… it seems to work, definitely."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

In some high-performing primary schools, high expectations were not just reinforced by teaching staff; non-teaching staff also played a key role in setting expectations for pupil behaviour:

"Even at dinners, the lunchtime organisers and the kitchen staff who are obviously serving the children, helping them, they are actually helping them and showing them, it may just be the basics of how to use a knife and fork or, sitting at a table."

Governor, high-performing non-London primary

It was less clear that lower-performing primary and secondary schools had an embedded culture of consistently high expectations of pupil behaviour. Staff in lower-performing secondary schools rarely mentioned high expectations of behaviour. Meanwhile, a sense of commonly-shared high expectations was only clear in two lower-performing primary schools in London and none of the lower-performing primaries outside the capital.

5.2.2 Variable focus on the 'little things'

In all of the high-performing primary schools we visited outside London, staff held high expectations for 'little things' such as manners at mealtimes and movement between lessons. One teacher explained that they saw details such as correct uniform and polite interactions as the foundations of good behaviour for learning:

"As an ethos it's a top-down behaviour expectation thing, you know, the uniform is always good, your manners are always good, you are always polite to everybody, kind to everyone and once you've got that in place I think the behaviour in the classroom then facilitates the learning."

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

This focus was less evident in the other primary schools we visited: it was cited in one high-performing primary school in the capital, one lower-performing primary school in the capital and one lower-performing primary school outside the capital. In general, the secondary schools we visited appeared to place little emphasis on high expectations for 'little things', with only one high-performing London secondary emphasising this area.

5.2.3 Variable pupil involvement in behaviour management

The high-performing primary schools we visited in London appeared to place particular focus on involving pupils in behaviour management, from helping to establish rules, to engaging in peer support to resolve issues. As one senior leader explained:

"A really high expectation of the children's behaviour is so imperative here and so setting up the classroom with the children, making them part of the process of deciding on what behaviours are acceptable and which are not…"

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

High-performing London primary schools tended to engage pupils in this way in order to increase understanding of, and allegiance to, the rules governing their behaviour. We found little evidence of pupils being involved in behaviour management in the other primary schools, or in any of the secondary schools.

5.2.4 Different approaches to 'consistent' behaviour management

On the whole, high-performing primary and secondary schools, both inside and outside the capital, tended to exhibit high levels of consistency in behaviour management. Most often this involved using the same behaviour management tools and techniques in every classroom, such as tiered systems of cards or 'traffic lights' with associated rewards, warnings and sanctions. In some high-performing primary schools we saw these systems extending beyond the classroom to include mealtimes and assemblies.

In two high-performing primary schools in the capital, teachers said behaviour management techniques could be flexed to suit differences in teachers' approaches. In these schools flexibility in practice was not considered to have a negative impact on the school's ability to manage behaviour: 'consistency of expectations' appeared to be regarded as more important than 'homogeneity of practice'. A common standard of 'good behaviour' could therefore be supported in different ways by different members of staff. Likewise, some high-performing primary and secondary schools also acknowledged that their behaviour management systems sometimes needed to be tailored to individual pupils' needs, as one teacher explained:

*"We know our children and we know there are some children in some classes who are more disadvantaged than others and their behaviour will reflect that…
Although we have a behaviour policy, within that there is leeway to think 'Actually do you know what? He's having a really bad day… it's not how he normally behaves.'"*

Teacher, high-performing London primary

Despite this deliberate or strategic rationale for flexibility in high-performing schools, some teachers and governors at high-performing schools considered inconsistencies in behaviour management negative and problematic:

"As a sort of member of staff, and this is something that has been an issue and staff find difficult, you know, there is an inconsistency with how the leadership deal with behavioural incidents."

Governor, high-performing London primary

While staff in lower-performing schools also tended to report a consistent approach to behaviour management, in the majority of lower-performing primary and secondary schools staff also reported that behaviour management practices were not consistent in their schools, and this was not always part of a deliberate, flexible strategy, as was the case in some high-performing schools. Rather, inconsistency in lower-performing schools appeared to be less strategic in nature, and take the opposite form to that found in high-performing schools. While teachers often used the same 'tools' in the classroom, they did not always adhere to a common set of 'fundamentals' relating to how misbehaviour was understood and how teachers should interact with pupils in order to encourage high standards of behaviour. As one teacher in a lower-performing school explained:

"Between teachers, no, it's quite inconsistent I think. We've done a lot of work on it and I don't know. I think there's still an awful lot of children being spoken to as if they're doing it on purpose or just trying to, like, ruin someone's day… I think in class, generally, it's pretty consistent. Quite calm. We, obviously, all use Dojo. The sanctions are, kind of, the same, but I think, in terms of the way that people actually speak to children and, therefore, build those relationships in the first place, I think is, yes, wildly inconsistent."

Teacher, lower-performing London primary

Staff in some lower-performing secondaries also reported that inconsistencies in behaviour management were due to differences in approach between new and more experienced teachers, suggesting weaknesses in these schools' systems to align the practices of new teachers with those of their existing staff.

5.3   Managing attendance

5.3.1 Problematic attendance

Half the high-performing primary and secondary schools we visited (within and outside London) identified attendance as an issue they were working to rectify. However, only half of these schools identified disadvantaged pupils' attendance as particularly

problematic. All of the high-performing schools that flagged attendance as an issue also felt they were taking effective steps to tackle it – and this view was often backed up by external inspectors' or local authority advisers' judgements.

The majority of the lower-performing primary and secondary schools we visited identified attendance as an on-going challenge, split evenly between schools inside and outside the capital. As with teachers in high-performing schools, they did not see this as an issue that specifically affected their disadvantaged pupils. However, they were less confident that attendance was improving or that problems were being resolved. Attendance issues therefore appeared to be more ingrained in lower-performing schools.

5.3.2 Supporting attendance

All high-performing primary schools and half of the high performing secondary schools made use of reward systems and incentives to support or improve attendance, including: positivity and praise for high levels of attendance such as weekly trophies, assembly and website announcements, as well as reward trips for classes with the highest attendance rates. Many primary schools also provided breakfast clubs to incentivise early attendance, often provided for free. Finally, teachers in high-performing primary schools referenced the need to ensure lessons were exciting and creative and that the school fostered a 'love of learning' in pupils so that they want to attend school. As one governor explained:

"They look forward to coming to school. Like all schools we had the problem with the absences, and that's improved dramatically. We're still slightly below but we're tackling it. Everybody wants to be here, and it's, it just gives a good vibe. So, because that feeling that goes round everybody wants to be here, you want to be here."

Governor, high-performing non-London primary

The majority of high-performing primary and secondary schools, inside and outside London, had dedicated members of staff to support families with low attendance. High-performing primary schools also provided intensive support for families such as home visits to pick up pupils and bring them to school, and help with transport costs. High-performing primary and secondary schools in London appeared to be more likely to work with parents to emphasise the importance of good attendance, and to make use of fines and sanctions.

As with high-performing schools, lower-performing schools made widespread use of reward systems when managing attendance. Lower-performing primary schools outside London appeared to use a similarly wide range of practical strategies to support attendance as those evidenced in high-performing schools, such as:

- Extra-curricular activities and homework clubs

- Home visits

- Dedicated members of staff to support families with low attendance

- Communicating with parents about the importance of attendance

However, lower-performing primary schools in the capital and lower-performing secondary schools (inside and outside the capital) appeared to focus their resources on dedicated staff support, and good communication with parents, rather than home visits or extra-curricular clubs.

More fundamentally, in contrast with those in high-performing schools, staff in lower-performing schools appeared to have mixed feelings about whether attendance was improving in response to measures their school was taking. Across all lower-performing schools, both primary and secondary, staff were less likely to link any improvements in attendance to specific policies or interventions their school had introduced, and in two primary schools outside the capital some staff stated in categorical terms that policies and interventions to improve attendance had not been effective. In some cases this appeared to be due to lower-performing schools relying heavily on individual strategies rather than implementing a range of approaches to raising attainment. As one teacher explained:

"Standing up in assembly and getting a certificate at the end of the term is a motivator for some children; getting the prize. But there seems to be these repeat offenders that we need to come up with a different strategy for I think."

Teacher, lower-performing non-London primary

Some of these interventions (e.g. prizes in assemblies) were common to the effective strategies used in high-performing schools. But In other cases, the strategies themselves just didn't seem to be well thought through.

Elsewhere, we found evidence that senior leaders in some lower-performing primary schools felt further improvements in attendance were beyond their control:

"We're talking about really tight margins, the difference between 93% and 96% is the difference between being a good school or not. But actually when you look at each of the codes in the attendance, illness is the main thing, and all the other bits, you know, 0.2% is because of religious observance. 0.2% is un-agreed holidays, you know, another 0.2% is something else and actually the sickness is the biggest part of it and that's the thing that we've got no control over!"

Senior leader, lower-performing non-London primary

Overall, cultures and practices relating to behaviour and attendance tended to vary more by performance rather than by geography. However, this was an area in which lower-performing schools outside the capital sometimes appeared to stand apart from the other schools we visited. Most schools used broadly similar strategies for managing behaviour and attendance, but staff in high-performing schools generally felt more confident that their strategies were effective. They also tended to allow flexibility in behaviour management in a more strategic way than lower-performing schools, and high-performing London primaries in particular appeared to focus on involving pupils in behaviour management. Meanwhile lower-performing schools appeared to face greater demand for provision of social and emotional support to pupils, and this often formed a core part of their approach to behaviour management. Lower-performing schools also tended to feel less confident that their strategies for managing behaviour and attendance were effective. Lower-performing schools outside the capital appeared to be relatively reliant on sanctions to manage behaviour, and also appeared to have somewhat lower expectations for pupil behaviour.

6 Staffing

This section reports on the approaches schools took to recruitment, retention, performance management and teacher development. The section also examines how schools managed and deployed teaching and support staff.

Summary of main findings

- Leaders in all high-performing schools – both primary and secondary – considered their staff to be of a high quality. High-performing primary schools reported low levels of staff turnover, which leaders attributed to high staff morale and good development and progression opportunities. High-performing secondary schools outside London also reported low turnover and made similar links to the availability of CPD. Teachers themselves in high-performing primary and secondary schools cited team relationships and positive relationships with pupils as reasons for high morale. Staff morale was not always high in lower-performing primary schools.

- When making judgements about staff quality as part of their recruitment process, high-performing primary schools appeared to place more emphasis on ensuring a good fit with the school's ethos than was the case in lower-performing primary schools. Secondary schools did not report using recruitment processes in this way.

- High-performing primary schools outside London placed a greater emphasis on the quality of their support staff than other schools. These schools paid particular attention to support staff development and career progression.

- Lower-performing schools, especially primary schools outside London, reported higher staff turnover due to difficulties with retention, and more frequent problems with staff performance. They believed this impacted on their school's effectiveness.

- Around half of the schools we visited – both high- and lower-performing – reported difficulties recruiting staff. Primary schools that reported recruitment difficulties tended to recruit NQTs to fill vacancies. Recruitment difficulties seemed greatest in non-London lower-performing primary schools. Where high-performing schools – both primary and secondary – faced recruitment difficulties, they tended to see hiring NQTs as a positive opportunity, whereas lower-performing schools sometimes felt they were unable to provide the support that inexperienced teachers needed.

6.1 Quality and 'fit' of staff

Senior leaders in high-performing schools – both in the primary and secondary schools we visited – considered their staff to be skilled and effective. Leaders believed teaching was high quality and that this partly explained disadvantaged pupils' positive outcomes.

"What we do is we employ really good teachers and that's our first port of call because that's the best intervention that there is."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

Staff development was prioritised in high-performing primary and secondary schools and seen as an effective tool for improving disadvantaged pupils' outcomes. Another senior leader, this time in a non-London primary school, suggested that developing the quality of teaching in their school was therefore an effective use of their Pupil Premium funding:

"I think we invest a lot of money not just from the Pupil Premium budget but generally in making sure we've got the best possible teaching in the school, making sure our teachers get all of the CPD that they need – even when we interview and take on new staff, we very much look for that high-calibre teacher as best we can, and our teaching assistants as well"

Senior leader, high-performing non-London primary

In contrast, school leaders in three lower-performing primary schools (two in London; one outside London) and two lower-performing secondary schools believed teaching quality and teacher performance were below the standard they should be. These schools partly attributed lower standards of teaching to high turnover and a lack of experienced teachers. Leaders in the same lower-performing primary schools also recognised that there was work to do in terms of setting clear expectations for teaching practice, and many felt they were in the early stages of implementing changes:

"Being totally honest, yes there [are areas of weakness] but that's because of the turnover of staff we've got, so it's part of our agenda and the training that we are putting into place at the minute with the non-negotiables to make it clearer to everybody so that we are all expecting the same."

Senior leader, lower-performing non-London primary

One element of staff quality that high-performing primary schools particularly prioritised relative to lower-performing primary schools was 'buy-in' to the school's ethos. Only two lower-performing primary schools reported using recruitment to build ethos, whereas almost all high-performing primary schools reported that they explicitly looked for a good fit with the school's ethos when recruiting new staff, as noted in section 2.2.2. It may be

that high-performing primary schools have greater flexibility in this area, if they are able to select from a larger pool of potential recruits. As one senior leader explained:

"It's great if you've got what we need on paper, but we need to know that you've got the heart for it as well, because it's a tough job, this is a tough gig this school. …we want a team around us that have that heart and love the children as much we do, and take pride in them as much as we do."

Senior leader, high-performing non-London primary

The secondary schools we visited did not appear to explicitly look for a complementary ethos when recruiting new staff.

6.2   Calibre of support staff

A particular feature of all non-London high-performing primary schools was their belief that support staff were integral to the school's overall effectiveness. This did not appear to be the case in other primary or secondary schools. In non-London high-performing primary schools support staff were considered an important asset and resource in addressing disadvantaged pupils' attainment. They were therefore given a range of opportunities to develop. One headteacher described the leadership opportunities support staff were given:

"One of the TAs is now going for his level four, he doesn't want to be a teacher at the moment, but he is very skilled…. he led on some of the EAL work in the school, and became a bit of an expert. There's another one that's a lead champion for autism, so people go to her and she comes into their classrooms and observes practice to give suggestions and practical advice."

Senior leader, high-performing non-London primary

Parents in three high-performing primary schools outside the capital highlighted the quality of the support staff who worked with their children. In one case a parent believed that "they're good enough to be teachers."

6.3   Staff development

6.3.1 Quality of Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

In all schools – both primary and secondary – staff reported being able to access CPD. In high-performing primary and secondary schools this was often carefully planned and targeted in response to individual staff members' needs. In turn, in many high-performing schools – both primary and secondary – teachers took a proactive attitude to their

development and requested CPD themselves. Staff felt that their development was prioritised and well planned and that they were given leadership and progression opportunities that helped them further their careers:

"[We are] supported in moving up with pay scales and things…. I feel like the opportunities are always there and you can just go and have a chat if there's something that we'd like to do and there's something we'd like to lead on then we can do."

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

"The CPD is exceptional here... What's really good about this school is that we've got lots of other schools and there's always opportunities to … move into the other schools. There's … probably more opportunity within our network than there are in a lot of others because there are so many schools that you could get other jobs in at higher levels."

Teacher, high-performing non-London secondary

Low staff turnover was reported in almost all high-performing primary and secondary schools and leaders felt this was due to high staff morale and good development and progression opportunities. This was not always the case in lower-performing schools – both primary and secondary – some of which reported significant difficulties retaining staff, particularly in primary schools outside the capital, as one teacher explained:

"We do have a high staff turnover, it can be hard sometimes because we start doing something and then a lot of people end up leaving, so then you have to start again because you've got new people."

Teacher, lower-performing non-London primary

6.3.2 School leaders providing CPD in primary schools

By continuing to teach in class, leaders in three high-performing primary schools in London and three outside provided "hands on" support to new or struggling teachers through team teaching, coaching and lesson demonstrations. This enabled them to more effectively model practice to support their staff, as this senior leader explained:

"As senior leader, as part of my role and why I've been freed up to work with different classes is not just necessarily working with children but working with staff as well and supporting the staff. Team teaching with them or sometimes teaching a lesson for them and letting them observe, it's really important I think because you don't often have a chance to do that when you're a teacher yourself, going and seeing other people teach."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

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Leaders in lower-performing primary schools also continued to teach in class but did so in order to fill gaps in recruitment, or to provide cover, rather than to provide CPD for less experienced members of staff, as described in Section 7.

6.4   Managing underperformance

Leaders in three London and three non-London high-performing primary schools and two London and one non-London high-performing secondary schools talked about how they dealt with underperformance. Non-London high-performing primary schools and London high-performing secondary schools in particular gave specific accounts of how they dealt with underperformance or inconsistency. They tended to respond quickly by implementing intensive support for struggling staff, using performance management reviews to hold back pay increases for underperforming staff and dismissing staff who were not improving despite support. Some lower-performing schools, especially non-London secondary schools used performance-related pay and support plans to deal with underperformance, but in general lower-performing primary schools were vaguer about their strategies in this area.

6.5   Recruitment and retention

6.5.1 Difficulties for lower-performing schools outside London

Lower-performing schools outside the capital – both primary and secondary – appeared to find it particularly difficult to recruit and retain staff, although almost all secondary schools reported some difficulties. When secondary schools reported recruitment difficulties, they tended to report difficulties in particular subjects (most often maths and science) rather than across the school as a whole, and often caveated their experience with reports of greater difficulties in other local schools. In many cases these secondary schools also recognised that teacher supply was a national issue. One senior leader in a lower-performing non-London secondary school described the dilemmas they faced when attempting to recruit maths specialists:

"I think the uptake of people doing maths degrees is a lot lower, so then you've got the dilemma of do we recruit somebody who hasn't specifically got a maths background, but could do a good job? So I think, as a profession as a whole, recruitment needs a massive emphasis."

Senior leader, high-performing non-London secondary

All non-London lower-performing primary schools (compared to just one lower-performing primary school in the capital) found it difficult to recruit teachers, especially high quality and experienced teachers, as one governor explained:

"We've found that they [applicants for teaching posts] don't turn up for the interview and sometimes [the Head will] say, 'We've done the interviews and we couldn't recruit.' We couldn't appoint because no one was good enough for the school."

Governor, lower-performing non-London primary

Senior leaders in lower-performing primary schools outside London also tended to feel that their school's poor reputation and the disadvantage in the area the school served dissuaded people from applying. Where recruitment was seen as easy, leaders believed that their school's positive reputation encouraged teachers to apply for jobs. One teacher described their school's selection process, highlighting the number of applicants for the post and the positive atmosphere they encountered:

"At the time I thought, 'Oh maybe there's just me applying.' But actually there was about 100 people… And as I walked around, when I look round the classrooms, I could see that there was all these children who had smiles on their faces, and as cheesy as that may sound, they were smiling, they were happy, they were engaged. Every classroom I walked into I was welcomed by the teacher. The teachers were proud to show me what they had done."

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

While recruitment difficulties were most commonly reported in lower-performing primary schools outside the capital, recruitment challenges were also highlighted in half of the high-performing schools we visited (two in London; two outside the capital). Recruitment difficulties were also reported in high-performing secondary schools – both in London and outside.

6.5.2 Reliance on newly-qualified teachers (NQTs) in primary schools

Both high- and lower-performing primary schools that experienced recruitment difficulties in relation to experienced staff drew significantly on NQTs. The majority of high-performing primary schools (three in London; four outside the capital) felt positive about hiring NQTs. This positive attitude was married with a comprehensive support package to help NQTs develop:

"We work our hardest to make sure that they are going to be successful…it's support, it's team teaching, it's team planning, it's joint marking, it's very much open door policy... Because great teachers are hard to come by, we invest so much to get them where we need them to get."

Senior leader, high-performing non-London primary

In contrast, lower-performing primary schools' reliance on NQTs was not always viewed positively. Some schools reported that they were unable to provide the support that new teachers needed:

"People don't want to come here. So we really only get NQTs which is good because it means a) it's good for the budget; b) it's good because you can mould them into what we need for this school but it's hard work having a lot of NQTs and one year we have seven NQTs and that's a lot of NQTs. And it means then that you can't really have student [teachers] in school because every pair is a teacher supporting an NQT and then if you get a student in as well, it's just too much."

Senior leader, lower-performing non-London primary

Amongst the secondary schools we visited, only one (London lower-performing) school reported a problematic reliance on, or difficulties supporting, NQTs.

Overall, cultures and practices relating to staff tended to vary most by performance. High-performing primary and secondary schools tended to have more consistently high morale and reported lower staff turnover. They also appeared to have greater flexibility when recruiting staff. High-performing primary schools in particular were able to prioritise 'fit' with their ethos, and felt able to support NQTs to become valuable members of their team. High-performing primary schools outside the capital appeared to place particular emphasis on the quality of their support staff. Lower-performing schools, and lower-performing primary schools in particular outside London appeared to face the greatest challenges in relation to recruitment and retention.

7　Leadership

This section of the report examines a number of factors relating to school senior leadership teams and governing bodies. These factors include:

- Head teachers' attitudes to and involvement in teaching and learning

- The ways senior leaders interact with parents

- The extent to which leaders' vision and purpose is shared within the school

- The structures leaders use to manage teacher and pupil performance

- The nature of governors' involvement in schools

Summary of main findings

- Head teachers in both high- and lower-performing primary schools shared a focus on disadvantaged pupils, although head teachers in high-performing primary schools were more likely to also emphasise their responsibilities for all pupils. These distinctions were not apparent amongst the secondary schools we visited.

- Staff and parents in high-performing primary schools were more likely to feel that senior leaders shared their priorities than in lower-performing schools. This was also the case, although to a lesser extent, in secondary schools.

- Head teachers and senior leaders in all primary schools continued to teach. Head teachers in lower-performing primary schools reported teaching more frequently and regularly than those in high-performing primary schools, and often taught in order to fill gaps in teaching capacity. Head teachers and senior leaders in secondary schools were further removed from the classroom.

- Leaders in high-performing primary and secondary schools emphasised the importance of talent management. In these schools, leaders worked hard to ensure teachers could progress in their careers. High-performing secondary schools in particular emphasised development of middle leaders. Teachers in high-performing primary schools outside London felt they were given particular freedom to innovate and try new approaches.

- In lower-performing primary schools outside London, recruiting governors was challenging, especially when vacancies arose for parent or community governors . Some governors in lower-performing primary schools outside London reported low motivation, while those in primary schools in the capital sometimes expressed frustration with perceived barriers to their involvement in the school.

7.1 Senior leaders

7.1.1 Senior leaders' priorities

Senior leaders in both high- and lower-performing primary and secondary schools were clearly focused on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. In many schools, one member of the senior leadership team was specifically deployed to oversee disadvantaged pupils' progress, as described in Section 8. However, while senior leaders prioritised disadvantaged pupils, leaders in all high-performing primary schools also emphasised their responsibilities for all pupils. As one senior leader explained, this meant looking "beyond that [disadvantage]" and focusing on each individual pupil's strengths and areas for development:

"The success of all the children is the first priority… the teachers, the leadership team will know who pupil premium children are… but generally in what you do every day, the lessons that you teach, the assessments that you make it's individual: where are their strengths? Where are their areas for development?"

Senior leader, high-performing non-London primary

Such distinctions between high- and lower-performing schools were not apparent amongst the secondary schools we visited.

Leaders in high-performing primary schools, and most high-performing secondary schools were considered to be skilled in communicating their priorities to staff. In some, but not all lower-performing primary and secondary schools, it appeared that leaders were less skilled, or placed less emphasis on sharing their priorities with staff and parents. In two London lower-performing primary schools, staff felt that leaders could do more to communicate their priorities:

"[Outcomes and expectations for disadvantaged pupil are] not at the forefront of [leaders'] minds. I guess they're not in the staffroom as much, but they do little things to address it, but not enough I don't think"

Teacher, lower-performing non-London primary

7.1.2 Emphasis on talent management

Senior leaders in high-performing primary schools and both high- and lower-performing secondary schools prioritised talent management – supporting teachers into leadership positions. In lower-performing primary schools, especially outside London, this focus on talent management was less clear. Leaders in all high-performing primary and secondary schools encouraged teachers to access leadership courses to further their careers, even if this created a risk of staff leaving the school. In many cases leaders of high-performing

primary and secondary schools attempted to mitigate this risk by creating leadership roles for staff within the school:

"That's been one of our strategies: recruit staff who are keen and give them leadership within about two years."

Senior leader, high-performing non-London primary

Two lower-performing primary schools outside the capital also prioritised supporting staff to take on leadership roles while one lower-performing London primary reported constraints on their ability to offer middle leadership positions.

Amongst secondary schools, there seemed less variation in senior leaders' prioritisation of talent management. Additionally, greater weight was given to developing middle leaders in secondary schools compared to primary schools. Leaders in high-performing secondary schools, both in London and outside, were clear that developing effective middle leaders had contributed to the school's success. A head teacher in London explained their school's focus on developing middle leaders:

"We focus pretty much on middle leaders, because in one sense they're the engine room of the school. You know, senior leaders like to think that they run the school and they have the greatest impact but actually we don't, the impact is very diffused, you know, we influence rather than directly lead. The people that I line manage are probably three or four in total, directly, whereas the head of English can line manage up to ten, twelve, people, who are all frontline teachers. What we spent a lot of time doing is developing a middle leader program, and actually talking specifically about leadership and leadership qualities, and leadership skills."

Senior leader, high performing London secondary

Teachers in all the high-performing primary schools outside the capital reported that leaders gave them the freedom to innovate and take risks, although it was less clear that teachers in other high-performing primary and secondary schools felt this way. Freedom was seen as a way of allowing teachers to develop their practice and progress in their career:

"It's the freedom. I mean I've been allowed to do so many things since I've been here. I've been allowed to visit other schools, I've been allowed to publish books, I've been allowed to lead conferences…. within the classroom I've been allowed to use techniques that were never suggested to me, you know, they were my own ideas."

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

High-performing primary schools also planned for succession in their senior leadership teams. Succession planning involved offering middle leaders opportunities to shadow senior leaders, coupled with efforts to retain existing senior leaders. For example, governors in one high-performing primary school reported offering higher pay to talented leaders to boost retention:

"I'm confident in the quality of the senior leaders that that will be sustained and won't slip back. We, as a group of governors, have re-looked at the structure of the school in order to keep our senior leaders with us rather than lose them to other schools."

Governor, high-performing non-London primary

High-performing secondary schools appeared to place less emphasis on succession planning than high-performing primaries.

7.1.3 Common structures to manage staff

The structures senior leaders used to manage staff appeared to be largely uniform across the secondary and primary, and high- and lower-performing schools we visited. These structures included:

- Pupil progress meetings (set out in Section 4). These were used to collect information on pupil progress which fed into judgements of teacher quality. In secondary schools these meetings were held both between leaders and teaching staff (as they were in primary schools) as well as between groups of senior and middle leaders.

- Regular inputting of pupil progress data. This allowed leaders to analyse data for strategic and accountability purposes.

- Book scrutiny and lesson observations. These supplemented pupil and teacher performance data by providing opportunities to feed back and influence classroom practice.

- Using assemblies to disseminate messages to pupils and, occasionally, parents (reported in primary but not secondary schools).

- Regular staff meetings and INSET days. These allowed leaders to disseminate messages and priorities to teachers and support staff, as well as providing opportunities for whole-school CPD.

7.2 Governance

We identified common features in governance practice across high- and lower-performing schools, both primary and secondary. Across the majority of schools we visited, we saw evidence that governors used data to challenge the school leadership to improve outcomes, and trusted the school's senior leaders to manage the school effectively. In addition, in the primary schools we visited, governors also appeared to spend time in school on visits, assemblies and observations.

Lower-performing primary schools appeared to face particular difficulties in recruiting governors. Three lower-performing primary schools in London and all four outside London reported difficulties recruiting parent and locally-based governors in particular. As one governor reported:

"I do think our mix as governors unfortunately is not as localised as it should be. I don't live in this area, none of the governors do… we do invite parents and parent governors, and they don't seem to take it up and yet they would probably be the best ones."

Governor, lower-performing non-London primary

Governors in lower-performing primary schools outside London also appeared to be less positive about their roles, and felt they were more limited in their ability to contribute to the school. In three lower-performing primary schools outside London, and one in the capital, at least one of the two governors we interviewed reported finding the role too demanding, or that they were not as involved in the school as they would like to be:

"I wish I'd spent more time in here… I suppose I ought to do more but [the Head] seems to be happy with what I do offer her."

Governor, lower-performing non-London primary

Some lower-performing primary schools recognised a lack of relevant skills amongst their governors, and described the steps they were taking to improve the range of people and skills on their governing body:

"When we took the school on, the governors weren't strong and it was hard to recruit because, again, we wanted the right people with the right skills on the governing body… There's still room for improvement within the governors, I would say. But because we've got the strength with the Leader of Governance … and the fact that the Chair of Governors is an ex Ofsted inspector, it's much, much better than it was before."

Senior leader, lower-performing non-London primary

Governors appeared to play an integral part in day-to-day management in one lower-performing primary school outside London. This differed from the other schools we visited. Governors in this school intimated that the Head was unable to fully focus on leadership tasks due to gaps in staffing, and in response they had taken on some financial and administrative duties on a voluntary basis in order to free up the Head:

"The sort of thing governors can do is take a lot of the routine things out of the hands of the Head and the teaching staff by providing the support to do those jobs and I think that that was a very positive thing because we know that the Head ought to be the spearhead of developing education [in the school]."

Governor, lower-performing non-London primary

In contrast, governors in lower-performing primary schools in the capital appeared to feel that they could offer more to the school, but that they felt constrained by the limits of their role. One governor reported their frustration in the following terms:

"I think there is an issue there around the executive function and what we do as a school board… so I am motivated but it's about coming in and finding where you can channel that motivation within the context of the governance structure."

Governor, lower-performing London primary

All high-performing primary schools seemed happy with the contribution made by their governing bodies, and did not report difficulties recruiting governors, although one high-performing primary school outside London reported challenges recruiting a parent governor. On the other hand, one high-performing primary school in London reported that they were able to choose from a number of applications. One London governor reported attending events organised by the local authority for prospective governors, and turning away applications from potential governors that were considered to be applying for personal benefit, rather than because of a shared belief in the school's purpose:

"We have sessions – I think it is once a year or twice a year –we have people who want to be governors and they come and speak to you about what they are looking for. I tell them about the school and it is down to me to actually observe them and listen to them and try and think will this person fit into our governing body or not."

Governor, high-performing London primary

Governors in secondary schools appeared to be broadly positive about their role and impact. Like those in primary schools, when governors did report that their role was too demanding or that they were not as involved in the school as they would like to be, this occurred only in non-London lower-performing secondary schools. These secondary schools also reported difficulties in recruiting governors.

Overall, cultures and practices relating to leadership tended to be most distinct between high- and lower-performing primary schools. Leaders in high-performing primary and secondary schools appeared to be particularly effective at sharing their priorities with staff and parents, and also prioritised talent management to ensure their teachers' could develop their careers. Head teachers and senior leaders in high-performing primary schools tended to teach in order to coach and support other members of staff, whereas in lower-performing primary schools this teaching role was often a response to staffing gaps. Lower-performing schools, particularly primary schools outside the capital appeared to face the greatest difficulties recruiting good governors.

8   Targeting resources

This section of the report considers how schools made decisions about funding in order to target resources where they would have maximum impact. It explores cultures and practices such as:

- Investing in additional staff such as TAs, specialists in particular forms of SEND, and additional teachers

- Evaluating the impact of interventions designed to help pupils catch up with others

Summary of main findings

- High-performing primary schools targeted resources towards the Early Years Foundation Stage. Money was largely spent on staffing, but some high-performing primary schools also provided enrichment and equipment for their early years pupils.

- High- and lower-performing primary schools in London targeted resources towards EAL pupils. High-performing primary schools often employed specialists or brought in external professionals to support EAL pupils. Due to differences in their pupil demographics, primary schools outside London directed fewer resources towards EAL pupils. Secondary schools appeared to place less emphasis on targeting resources at EAL pupils, and the support that secondary schools provided for EAL pupils did not seem to vary between schools inside and outside of the capital.

- High-performing primary schools often had clear methods for evaluating interventions' impact and value for money, either by regularly analysing pupil progress data or obtaining feedback from teachers. Some lower-performing primary schools invested in external programmes without appearing to evaluate their impact effectively. Secondary schools rarely reported evaluating interventions for their value for money, although almost all secondary schools evaluated the impact of interventions on pupil progress.

- London schools in particular highlighted concerns that changes to funding were impacting on their ability to provide support (usually trips and activities) for disadvantaged pupils. Meanwhile high-performing secondary schools, both in London and outside the capital, reported that budget cuts impacted on staff and extra-curricular activities.

8.1   Investing in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

High-performing primary schools emphasised their investment in the EYFS. For non-London high-performing primary schools in particular this was a strategic response to disadvantaged pupils arriving in Key Stage One with delayed language and cognitive development. In contrast, only two of the eight lower-performing primary schools reported targeting resources at the EYFS. Most high-performing primary schools believed that early intervention was crucial for pupils' later academic achievement:

"In the Early Years, we've invested in speech and language specialists to come in and work with children. So we're trying to really address needs as early on as possible to give them obviously a good chance as they progress through school."

Senior leader, high-performing non-London primary

Other high-performing primary schools invested in enrichment activities such as art and sport that disadvantaged pupils may have less ready access to. Two high-performing London primary schools reported spending money on specialist equipment for the EYFS: one on an outdoor play area and the other on sensory bubbles, lights and strobes.

8.2   Supporting English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils

London primary schools, both high- and lower-performing, were more likely than non-London primary schools to reference targeting interventions at children with EAL, although this may have been primarily due to demographic factors rather than different school cultures: schools that reported targeting interventions in this area tended to serve higher proportions of pupils with EAL. High-performing primary schools also tended to be more specific about the support they offered EAL pupils compared to lower-performing primary schools. In some high-performing primary schools, resources were spent on professional support, often provided by external staff, for example employing speech and language specialists, translators or trained TAs to support EAL pupils:

"We ... have a speech and language unit attached to the school, and that's a specialist provision for children with speech and language difficulties. There's a high percentage of children with EAL for English and second language, there's also a high percentage of children with disadvantaged backgrounds, pupil premium as well."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

Only two secondary schools (both lower-performers, one in London and one outside) reported targeting interventions at EAL pupils.

8.3   Investing in teaching staff

All schools, apart from one high-performing London secondary school, reported spending money on extra teaching and support staff to support pupils, partly from Pupil Premium budgets. However, lower-performing primary schools were less likely to target additional staff at specific groups of pupils such as those eligible for the Pupil Premium. Instead, these primary schools tended to employ additional teachers to reduce pupil-to-staff ratios across the whole school:

"The majority of our money goes on additional teachers. Not support staff but additional teachers, so that all children are taught by teachers."

Senior leader, lower-performing non-London primary

Unlike in high-performing primary schools, only three of the eight lower-performing primary schools we visited (two in London and one outside) reported investing in specialists or external professionals. Again, many lower-performing primary schools outlined a need to improve their pupil-to-staff ratio, without specifying where or how extra staff, including specialists, would be deployed:

"We have a lot of children with needs, and we are currently at the moment working on getting in more funding to get more staff in, because more and more is being shown that there is a need. So we are keen to really improve that ratio."

Senior leader, lower-performing London primary

Amongst the secondary schools we visited, we found little evidence of variation in the way schools spent money on additional teaching, support or specialist staff.

8.4   Assessing the value of interventions

Most primary schools, both high- and lower-performing, reported evaluating the cost-effectiveness of pupil interventions. Secondary schools rarely reported evaluating the value for money of their interventions, although they did appear to evaluate their impact on pupil progress. High-performing primary schools appeared to have a particularly robust approach to evaluating the cost-effectiveness of interventions. As one senior leader explained:

"Once the cycle of that intervention is finished, we look at it and go, 'Right, has it worked?' We can look at both sides of the coin in terms of qualitative and quantitative data and say, 'Right, was that beneficial for that child? Was that worth the money that we spent on it?'"

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

Working alongside senior leaders, governors in high-performing primary schools took an active role in evaluating interventions' cost-effectiveness.

"[The head teacher] has put the report together about where we've spent the pupil premium and how we've spent the pupil premium... And he'll be brutally honest on things that have done really well, things that are doing okay but can improve and then things what aren't doing so well. And we may need to refocus on where that provision is, whether or not we need to put more in or whether or not we take it out for whatever reason because it clearly hasn't worked."

Governor, high-performing non-London primary

In lower-performing primary schools, some teachers and governors were unclear about how data was used to target interventions and ensure that expensive external interventions provided value for money. For example, two lower-performing primary schools outside London reported spending large sums of money on a particular mental wellbeing programme, but did not appear to have carried out a robust evaluation of its effectiveness.

8.5   The impact of funding changes

Amongst primary schools, London schools were more likely than non-London schools to report that budget cuts threatened their ability to target resources at disadvantaged pupils. In both high- and lower-performing primary schools that highlighted funding as a problem, leaders noted that lower levels of funding sometimes impacted their ability to employ additional teaching staff to support disadvantaged pupils:

"We've been receiving a reasonable chunk of Pupil Premium money and we have been able to support them with extra teaching staff. Unfortunately, cuts have meant quite a lot of that has gone."

Governor, high-performing London primary

Only one of the primary schools we visited (a lower-performing London school) blamed funding cuts for the need to reduce their subsidies for trips.

The impact of changes to funding on secondary schools differed from the impact at primary school level. High-performing secondary schools, both in London and outside, reported that budget cuts had reduced their extra-curricular offer. For some high-performing secondary schools, reduced funding was beginning to impact on their ability to provide specialist and pastoral support for pupils, as one senior leader explained:

"We also have dedicated literacy mentors, tutors, often they're teachers, but often they're also highly-skilled graduates. Our problem is that that's going to have to

end quite soon because the budget constraints mean that we're going to have to look again at how we kind of allocate resources."

Senior leader, high-performing London secondary

In contrast, lower-performing secondary schools did not report negative budgetary impacts of funding changes.

Overall, cultures and practices relating to schools' targeting of resources varied amongst primary schools in relation to both performance and geography. There was less variation amongst secondary schools. Some distinctions were clearer between high- and lower-performing primary schools, such as the focus that high-performing schools placed on the early years, and on robustly selecting and evaluating the impact of interventions. Other distinctions were clearer between primary schools inside and outside the capital, such as London primary schools' focus on supporting pupils with EAL (most likely due to the composition of their pupil populations). High-performing secondary schools, and primary schools in the capital, also reported concerns about cuts to their funding and their ability to sustain extra-curricular provision and additional staffing.

9   Partnerships and activities

This section of the report examines how schools build relationships with external partners and provide activities and opportunities for their pupils. Wider relationships include working with parents and links with businesses, HEIs and community groups. Activities and opportunities encompass before- and after-school clubs and trips.

Summary of main findings

- All schools, whether primary or secondary, saw educational trips and visits as a key component of their support for disadvantaged pupils, but lower-performing primary schools were less likely to subsidise these trips.

- Extra-curricular provision in high-performing primary schools, and most secondary schools, was broad and schools ensured disadvantaged pupils could access such opportunities. Lower-performing primary schools also provided extra-curricular activities but these tended to be less varied and less widely available. In lower-performing primary schools outside the capital in particular, cuts and lack of take up had in some cases led to schools offering fewer extra-curricular opportunities. Around half of the secondary schools we visited reported funding cuts leading to fewer extra-curricular opportunities.

- There were differences in the ways that high- and lower-performing primary and secondary schools engaged with other organisations in their community. High-performing primary and secondary schools engaged in a variety of community partnerships, and high-performing primary schools in particular worked closely to tailor activities to their pupils' needs. Some lower-performing primary schools also engaged in partnerships but they were less well established and schools expressed a desire to do more in this area. Lower-performing primary schools were more likely to voice concerns that opportunities to engage with their local community were scarce.

- Secondary schools appeared more focused on partnerships with local and national employers than primary schools, and worked hard to provide work experience and careers advice for their pupils.

- High-performing primary schools worked with their local secondaries to address the potentially negative impact of poorly-managed transitions, for instance by providing in-depth information and hands-on support for parents of Year 6 pupils, and by visiting local secondary schools to support pupils during their first weeks in Year 7. Support for transitions appeared to be less developed in lower-performing primary schools. Similarly, secondary schools appeared less focused on supporting transitions than primary schools.

9.1 Extra-curricular activities

All high-performing primary schools prioritised extra-curricular opportunities for pupils including trips, residentials, visitors to the school and after-school clubs. A wide range of activities was usually available on a regular basis and schools ensured that disadvantaged pupils had access to these opportunities by targeting invites, subsidising costs or providing free activities. Although all of the lower-performing primary schools we visited also arranged educational trips and visits, only one of these schools outside London and two in the capital subsidised a portion of the cost. Two of these three lower-performing primary schools reported finding it difficult to subsidise extra-curricular activities in this way.

Most schools, both primary and secondary, took pupils on trips outside school, usually with one of two aims: providing real-life experiences to link to curriculum learning, or providing cultural opportunities that pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, would not experience outside of school. As one senior leader explained:

"I mean many of our children wouldn't see London past [the local area] if we didn't take them to places. So…we are very good at taking part in educational visits and making sure that every time we do something new in the classroom it is matched outside the classroom as well. So, we enrich children's lives that way too."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

High-performing primary schools outside the capital were particularly likely to subsidise trips, partially or completely. These schools also put effort into reassuring parents when asking for contributions by making payments as low as possible, being open to discussing parents' financial difficulties, and in some cases allowing payment to be made over a number of weeks.

The secondary schools we visited also provided a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities and trips, although the extent to which these activities and trips were subsidised was unclear.

In addition to trips and visits, the majority of the schools we visited, both primary and secondary, also organised a variety of extra-curricular clubs. High-performing primary schools appeared to offer a wider range of options than lower-performing primary schools: most pupils in high-performing primary schools talked about attending multiple clubs and activities each week. In contrast, the extent and availability of extra-curricular clubs did not appear to vary significantly across the secondary schools in our study.

Both in primary and secondary schools, when teachers and leaders discussed extra-curricular clubs they often highlighted the need to provide a well-rounded education for pupils beyond the core curriculum. They saw clubs as an effective method of doing so.

As with trips and visits, both primary and secondary schools used extra-curricular clubs to provide pupils with opportunities and experiences which they may not otherwise be exposed to. Some high-performing primary schools used extra-curricular activities and after-school time to provide targeted interventions based on curriculum learning for disadvantaged pupils.

"We have arranged some specific target groups that are related explicitly to raising achievement, but again, in a fun way. So, [a teacher]… ran these after-school writing clubs for Pupil Premium boys, and they used to go up and down to the local library weekly. They were allowed to write about what they want, and you know, they could take books out of the library…for them, that was just really exciting…it was just 'Oh yes, great, we've been chosen to be part of the writing club' and it was very exciting."

Executive Principal, high-performing non-London primary

In contrast, some comments from parents and pupils in lower-performing primary schools, particularly outside London, reported a lack of extra-curricular opportunities. Some reported that there was 'nothing' or that anything that had been running had 'fizzled out'.

"No, you see that's what I think this school lacks. They haven't, they really could do with a football team or a netball team or something, you know, and get them out of bed playing with other schools, getting to meet other children of the same age… they used to have football tournaments and stuff but right now they don't. That's what this school does lack."

Parent, lower-performing non-London primary

Compared to most high-performing primary schools, lower-performing primary schools outside London were also less likely to invite a range of professionals such as doctors, lawyers and architects to visit the school and work with or talk to pupils. In lower-performing London primary schools, staff reported these visits were taking place, but visits seemed to be less frequent. Schools were often 'developing' their work in this area and staff were less specific than their peers in high-performing schools about the benefits these visits had for pupils' aspirations and attainment.

In contrast, secondary schools across the board appeared to make more use of external visitors to the school than was the case amongst the primary schools we visited. Visitors in secondary schools were mostly used to provide pupils with information and inspiration around future careers.

9.2   Breakfast and homework clubs

Half of the high-performing primary schools we visited, inside and outside London, ran breakfast clubs that provided free breakfasts for disadvantaged pupils. Only two lower-performing primary schools ran breakfast clubs for all disadvantaged pupils; a third school ran a club that was conditional on pupils arriving by scooter or bike. Breakfast clubs were not explicitly linked to achievement by high- or lower-performing primary schools; instead the teachers and leaders we interviewed suggested that providing breakfast was an important part of nurturing pupils with difficult home lives:

"They have breakfast at school ... a lot of the children we are targeting are the vulnerable children that ... have got problems at home. So we try and target them, and make school a nice nurturing place for them to come."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

Staff in both high- and lower-performing primary schools identified a need to provide space and time for pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, to work on their homework after school. Consequently, all but one of the high-performing primary schools spent money on staffing and resources for after-school tuition or homework clubs. These did not aim to provide enrichment; instead their explicit purpose was to give disadvantaged pupils a working space and access to technology that they may not have at home:

"We have homework clubs so that the disadvantaged children who might have to do their homework at the back of the bus, or never do it, they get the opportunity to do it in school with all the resources, access to the iPads and the computers."

Teacher, high-performing London primary

Only two of eight lower-performing primary schools, and three secondaries (a mix of high- and lower-performing) reported offering breakfast and homework clubs. Most lower-performing primary schools outside the capital and one school in London reported that they had offered more breakfast and homework clubs in the past, but had cut their offer recently. These cuts were sometimes due to limited funding but were more commonly due to a lack of uptake, as one senior leader described:

"We did a breakfast club at the school, so for two or three years we ran a breakfast club and we charged fifty pence per session, so it was an hour in the morning… We averaged ten children within that and we then targeted for some of our children that had an issue with attendance. We offered them funded places and we would pay your fifty pence for you to come. We had two children take it up out of everybody."

Senior leader, lower-performing London primary

9.3 Community partnerships

Most high-performing primary schools maintained a wide variety of community links and partnerships. These included links with the emergency services, local businesses and universities as well as many organisations set up specifically to run projects in schools. When teachers and leaders in high-performing primary schools discussed their community links and partners, the varied range and high number of links and projects was evident:

"So we do a lot of work, we go into the community, they do the dementia project in Year 5, go in to do carol services, they have the OAP lunch here. We do loads of things with [the local university] the music things that we do with them, they come in and do projects. We've got Cool to be Clever which is when children who are likely to go to university they go and work at [the local High School] and they go and do with other Gifted and Talented children from other schools, there's projects like that going on all the time."

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

Links appeared to be strong and well established, though a few high-performing primary schools, especially those outside London, mentioned that it was sometimes difficult to broker community links. Partners and projects that worked closely with the school to provide tailored support were particularly valued since schools believed pupils benefitted from these. One senior leader described how partnerships could be 'co-produced':

"We have a significant partnership with an Arts Council-funded theatre company… who've been highly influential, they've done lots and lots of projects in school… they come in, we discuss the pupil progress information directly with them, and then they look at, with the teachers what they could do to support or engage that."

Executive Principal, high-performing non-London primary

Amongst high-performing primary schools both in and outside London, both faith and non-faith schools had a number of multi-faith partnerships. Faith partnerships allowed the schools to embed learning about different faiths and cultures through trips and visits. Furthermore, these partnerships also provided opportunities such as after-school clubs for pupils.

The most common partnerships in lower-performing primary schools were with local emergency services and national organisations such as 'Into University', both of which were seen as beneficial. However, faith partnerships, links with local businesses and charity projects were largely absent. Lower-performing primary schools' community partnerships were often less varied than the partnerships for high-performing primary schools. Parents and governors in these schools often could not think of community

partnerships and commented that they 'need to do more' but that it was 'difficult to establish relationships' in the local area. Senior leaders in lower-performing primaries, meanwhile, sometimes reported that partnerships were hampered by financial challenges. When asked whether their school had any links with the wider community, one senior leader responded:

"No, not as such. I tried to do the bank… where they were doing enterprise and getting children with the money side of it, but I was a bit late to get us involved in that. We're always constantly looking. That would probably be where we need to go next with the pupils."

Senior leader, lower-performing London primary

In high-performing primary schools partnerships tended to be long term, ongoing and well established, whereas in lower-performing primary schools, especially in London, partnerships tended to be mentioned in the context of something recently set up or an activity that was a 'one off'. For example, in a high-performing primary school outside London, staff discussed the community police being 'always around' and 'coming to sit in assembly' so pupils became confident approaching them, whereas, in a lower-performing primary London school, staff discussed a single event in which police officers had visited and spoken to children about speeding. However, it was nonetheless clear that staff in lower-performing primary schools wanted to develop these partnerships further.

Some staff in lower-performing primary schools felt that their low level of partnership working was due to the lack of a clear 'community' beyond the school gates with which they could engage. In some lower-performing primary schools both inside and outside of London staff cited 'disparate local communities' and 'segregation' which meant the school had to work to form a community hub, rather than being able to take advantage of pre-established community activities. As one senior leader described:

"In terms of the community, I don't actually believe there is a community. I don't think there is a community out there. What I think is that we create a community when we do things in school. So for example when parents come for assemblies or Christmas concerts, then they're a community …but out there, there isn't a community. There's lots of different segregations out there…and a lot of racism…So I don't believe that there's a community for us to interact with."

Senior leader, lower-performing non-London primary

As we found amongst primary schools, high-performing secondary schools reported a greater variety and strength of community partnerships than lower-performing secondary schools. However, in contrast to the primary schools we visited, London and non-London secondary schools did not appear to differ in relation to the ease with which they formed links with community organisations. Secondary schools, both high- and lower-performing,

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also reported fewer partnerships with faith organisations than was the case amongst primary schools. Instead, secondary schools reported a greater focus on partnerships with employers geared around work experience and careers advice.

9.4   Support with transitions between school phases

The majority of primary schools, both high- and lower-performing, reported that the transition to secondary school could pose a risk to disadvantaged children's aspirations and attainment if the primary school, secondary school and parents did not work together to support pupils. As discussed in section 3.1.5, high-performing primary schools, particularly those outside the capital, tended to guard against this by fostering links with local secondary schools, visiting secondary schools with pupils to support their transitions, and providing information and guidance to parents in a way that was not replicated in lower-performing schools. High-performing primary schools outside the capital appeared to engage in the fullest range of work in this area; high-performing primary schools in London tended to focus solely on supporting parents with secondary school applications and providing information for parents. Some primary schools encouraged parents not to send their children to lower-performing secondary schools even if they were more local or familiar:

"They all will be going to [the local secondary], some parents have no interest in getting [them] into other secondary schools, it's just because 'I went to [this school], my dad went to [this school], grandparents went to [this school] so therefore he's going to [this school], and that's the end of the story', whereas [the Head has] actually got them in and said 'you need to look at secondary schools. This is what this school can offer, this is what that school can offer.' So [the Head has] really put it out there."

Teacher, high-performing London primary

High-performing primary schools outside London also tended to have partnerships with local grammar schools, often identifying pupils that had the potential to attend a grammar early and then supporting the pupil and their family with the application process.

All of the high-performing primary schools outside London took pupils on visits to local secondary schools in order to facilitate the transition to Year 7. In some cases, schools arranged for pupils to spend the last weeks of Year 6 in a secondary school to ensure they were prepared for Year 7. Some schools continued to provide support after the transition to Year 7, especially for those pupils with additional needs. They remained a point of contact for parents and the pupil and liaised with the secondary schools to provide information about any support required.

Secondary schools appeared less focused on support for transitions than high-performing primary schools. Where secondary schools reported working with primary schools on transitions, leaders and staff said that budget cuts had led to a weakening of those partnerships.

"We created a family [support] programme… it worked quite well, [but] primary schools wanted to be engaged less and less with it as money became tighter."

Senior leader, lower-performing non-London secondary

Nonetheless, some secondary schools did report well-developed transition programmes. One senior leader in a high-performing secondary outside London reported visiting 125 Year 6 pupils in their homes before they arrived at the school, and explained that the purpose of these visits was to set high expectations as early as possible:

"The principal and his team go out and see the families before they join the school in Year 6 and we go out to homes… we give them the Greek myths book which is used in English lessons in Year 7 but we also say 'you're signing up for us to take your daughter or son to university and that's what we want for your child."

Senior leader, high-performing non-London secondary

Overall, amongst primary schools there was a notable performance-based distinction in cultures and practices relating to schools' partnerships and extra-curricular provision. Such distinctions were sometimes also apparent amongst secondary schools. High-performing primary schools appeared to engage more readily with community partners, and tended to involve these partners in a more strategic way, for example by aligning provision with the curriculum and individual pupils' needs. Lower-performing primary schools appeared less likely to subsidise trips and offered a less varied menu of extra-curricular activities. These primary schools sometimes reported significant difficulty finding local community resources to engage with. Lower performing primary and secondary schools tended to be more likely to cite funding cuts as placing pressure on their ability to run breakfast clubs and extra-curricular activities. Lower-performing primary schools also appeared to work less closely with secondary schools to facilitate pupils' transitions. All secondary schools offered a range of trips, although high-performing secondary schools fostered a wider variety of community partnerships than lower-performing secondary schools. In contrast to primary schools, secondary schools appeared to focus less on transitions between school phases as well as breakfast and homework clubs. Instead, secondary schools appeared more focused on partnerships that offered support for pupils' future careers.

10 The learning environment

This section examines how schools manage their curricula, pedagogy and learning resources to support disadvantaged pupils. It explores a number of key aspects of teaching and learning, including:

- Approaches to pedagogy

- Pupil engagement in and enjoyment of lessons

- Interventions and tailored support for individual pupils, including support for SEND

- Enrichment activities

- The use of resources to aid teaching

Summary of main findings

- All schools appeared to place similar emphasis on support for language, literacy and, in primary schools, maths. However, primary schools outside London (both high- and lower-performing) and all secondary schools appeared to be less likely to use specialists to support literacy. Lower-performing secondary schools and lower-performing primary schools outside the capital also appeared to be far less likely to provide early and rapid support for pupils falling behind in key curriculum areas.

- High- and lower-performing primary schools appeared to place equal emphasis on 'developing the whole child', and this appeared to be a particularly strong focus in London primaries. Secondary schools focused on this less often. Most primary schools committed time and resources to non-core areas of the curriculum, and supported the development of non-cognitive skills such as confidence and resilience. Primary schools in London appeared to be more likely to place an emphasis on this area.

- All high-performing primary schools, and lower-performing primary schools in the capital, placed a similar level of emphasis on provision for pupils with SEND. They were also similarly likely to make use of specialists to provide support. However, we found little evidence of an emphasis on SEND and use of specialist support in lower-performing primary schools outside London and in most of the secondary schools.

- All schools placed a similar emphasis on ensuring that teaching was high quality with skilled pedagogy; making lessons creative, innovative, fun and enriching; and ensuring that marking and feedback supported pupils' learning. However, teachers in lower-performing primary schools, and secondary schools in London, appeared less likely to tailor their support to individual

pupils, for example through differentiation or by setting more challenging work for pupils who were progressing well.

- While all schools appeared to place priority on high quality teaching, we found evidence of poor pedagogy, such as poorly-facilitated group work and unclear lesson objectives, in three lower-performing schools outside London; two primary schools and one secondary.

- Opportunities for debating, oracy and philosophy were far less widespread in secondary schools and lower-performing primary schools.

- Pupils were frequently encouraged to engage in peer support in all schools apart from lower-performing primary schools outside the capital.

10.1 Supporting literacy and numeracy

All primary schools placed a similarly high emphasis on reading, writing and maths. While high-performing secondary schools appeared much more likely than lower-performing secondary schools to report a specific focus on literacy, in general, primary schools were more likely than secondary schools to describe a variety of ways they prioritised literacy. Practices to support literacy often focused on reading, and included:

- Using older pupils as 'reading buddies' for younger pupils

- One-to-one reading with a teacher, sometimes focused on pupils who do not read at home

- Small-group guided reading sessions

- 'Book Talk' discussion sessions

- Ensuring the school library is well resourced and actively used

- Additional timetabling for literacy for all pupils

- Use of specific schemes, programmes and interventions such as Box Clever

- Encouraging literacy as part of free play

While most primary schools appeared to prioritise support for maths, among secondary schools only high-performing schools in London frequently highlighted a maths focus. Again, even where secondary schools prioritised maths, staff were less specific about their support methods than those in primary schools, where practices to support maths included:

- Adopting specific school-wide approaches to teaching maths such as Maths Mastery and Singapore Maths

- Use of specific schemes, programmes and interventions such as Numicon

- Extra tuition after school for pupils falling behind, as one parent explained:

"My daughter struggled quite a lot with maths to the stage where she were coming home and getting very upset with her homework that she couldn't do it. I went in to see the teacher and instantly they started the after-school tuition and got her back up to where she should be… she's amazing with it now."

Parent, high-performing non-London primary

10.1.1   London schools' use of specialists to support literacy

Among the primary schools we visited, those in London differed from those outside the capital in their use of specialists to support literacy. All eight schools in London reported using specialists in this way, compared to only one school outside London. In high-performing schools in London, specialists were sometimes used to advise on literacy support, and to help develop strategies and techniques. In other cases, specialist practitioners were used in a more day-to-day capacity to support individual pupils, particularly those with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Pupils without SLCN, but who were struggling with literacy, tended to be catered for by a teacher or member of support staff. Only one secondary school, a high-performing school outside London, reported using specialists to support literacy and in this case, staff with expertise were recruited to deliver this support 'in house'.

10.1.2   Early and rapid interventions for pupils falling behind in key curriculum areas

As described in Section 4, early and rapid intervention was a key feature of most high-performing primary and secondary schools' efforts to support core curriculum areas such as maths and literacy: four primary schools and one secondary school in London and three primary and two secondary schools outside the capital demonstrated this approach. One primary teacher stated that pupils requiring early intervention tended to be from disadvantaged backgrounds:

"We do a lot of pupil progress meetings, so straightaway we're identifying the children that we know need that little bit of support and nine times out of ten they are usually our disadvantaged children."

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

Most primary schools were motivated by a desire to step in early before problems were compounded, as one senior leader explained:

"Early intervention here is a big factor. You know, right from nursery where data's quickly utilised, and highly effective support strategies are put in quickly. So we

try not to let things get to a point where, all of a sudden, this has been going on for a long time."

Senior leader, high-performing non-London primary

Most high performing secondary schools that described intervening 'early' assessed new Year 7 pupils, primarily in literacy, and put interventions in place to accelerate them to the necessary standard, as one governor explained:

"Because of the area it's in I think when we have them coming in Year 7, some of their reading ages are very low and there's always interventions here to help to bring them up to speed to their correct reading age and we've had children come in that have been on a very low par to another Year 7 child… but they've walked out in Year 11 with GCSEs the same as any other child."

Governor, high-performing non-London secondary

Lower-performing secondary schools also reported delivering interventions but these were more likely to be focused on pupils in Key Stage 4, while staff in most high-performing secondary schools described putting interventions in place by the end of Key Stage 3, if not in Year 7.

Around half of the high-performing primary schools we visited demonstrated a focus on language in the early years although this focus appeared to be concentrated in schools in the capital (we found an early years focus on language in three schools in London and one school outside London). In some schools, early language intervention was linked to disadvantaged pupils' specific needs:

"In early years, we do a lot of language skills and early language. So a lot of the children, particularly the children that are Pupil Premium and still have dummies, so they struggle with their speech sounds and a speech therapist won't work with them because they still have a dummy."

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

Lower-performing primary schools, particularly those outside the capital, and all lower-performing secondary schools, appeared less likely to provide early and rapid support for pupils falling behind in key areas. While these schools often put support in place for these pupils, it tended not to be delivered as early as in the other schools we visited.

10.2 Developing the whole child

Primary schools in London were more likely than those outside the capital to focus attention on what they described as 'developing the whole child' by committing time and

resources to non-core areas of the curriculum and developing non-cognitive skills such as confidence and resilience. All eight schools in London reported a focus on the 'whole child', compared to four outside the capital (two high-performing schools and two lower-performing schools).

In contrast, only two secondary schools mentioned the importance of developing non-academic skills, such as 'social skills' and citizenship. Both were lower-performing schools.

Some high-performing primary schools in London bought in existing programmes and materials to support pupils, such as Building Learning Power and Growth Mindset. Others used their budgets to ensure existing elements of their provision, such as opportunities to engage in art, music and drama, were extended as widely as possible. Senior leaders and governors tended to express a strong commitment to developing the 'whole child' and recognised that this needed to be backed up by resources. As one governor told us:

"Funding is tight and the governors really made sure that there was funding for both the artist in residence, the music teacher and the sports teacher because actually those aspects of the child are really, really important to develop."

Governor, high-performing London primary

Parents and pupils also seemed to be aware of schools' focus on wider development. For example, one pupil described how teachers supported their metacognition:

"When we finish our work and then we go onto the next day, and sometimes they give us our books to respond to marking, and some questions say 'What different strategies do you use to achieve this thing? What different ways, how many different ways can you think of to solve this problem?'"

Pupil, high-performing London primary

Meanwhile, a parent reported ways in which their child's school had identified, and then worked to support, their confidence:

"They try to build the self-confidence as well, because my daughter when she started, she was quite shy… we need[ed] to work a little bit more on expressing herself. Things have changed a bit now, she's starting to come out, she's more chatty with the teachers."

Parent, high-performing London primary

10.3 Supporting pupils with special educational needs

In the majority of high-performing primary schools (four in London; two outside London) staff spoke positively about their provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Provision ranged from allocating teaching assistants to pupils with dyslexia, to the presence of language units and 'nurture facilities' within the school, dedicated to pupils with SEND. One school had a large number of pupils with autism and had responded by converting unused spaces into sensory rooms.

In most of the primary schools we visited staff were committed to teaching pupils with SEND in a mainstream setting and felt this was practically achievable. As one governor explained:

"[We have] a nurture facility and I think that is exceptional, I think what we have got there is absolutely A1 and I think because we've got the right calibre of teachers in there, we've got a real focus on making sure that children who do struggle in mainstream education, that they have got a space to go to where they can learn in a comfortable environment."

Governor, high-performing non-London school

In five primary schools (three in London; two outside the capital) specialist staff such as speech and language therapists and play therapists were used to support pupils with SEND.

Lower-performing primary schools in the capital placed a similar level of emphasis to high-performing primary schools on supporting pupils with special educational needs, and using specialists to provide support. However, none of the lower-performing primary schools we visited outside London referred to either their provision for pupils with SEND, or their use of specialists.

Staff and leaders in most secondary schools appeared to place importance on supporting pupils with SEND, but were generally less likely than high-performing primaries to describe their provision for pupils with SEND in detail.

10.4 High quality teaching and learning

10.4.1   Skilled pedagogy

In six of the high-performing primary schools we visited (three in London; three outside the capital) we found clear evidence of one or more of the following indicators of high quality teaching:

- Leaders and governors reporting skilled pedagogy and high quality teaching

- Teachers demonstrating or describing skilled pedagogy

- Schools taking practical steps to ensure teaching was of a high standard

- High quality teaching forming a core part of the school's ethos or mission

For instance, one governor gave a positive appraisal of teaching standards in their school and emphasised specific elements of that success:

"The individual tutorship and leadership and teaching is second to none and you know, the one-to-one and individualised learning techniques are exemplary and it works really well with the kids."

Governor, high-performing non-London primary

Meanwhile a teacher at another school identified a clear focus on developing specific elements of pedagogy:

"We do a lot of marking and feedback at the moment, so we're giving them the opportunity to kind of take a bit more responsibility for their own learning… and we're also trying to look at… the challenge element in lessons at the moment, so we're trying to make sure that lessons are suitable, but also differentiated for challenge… if they grasp an aspect of a lesson, that they're moved on quite quickly and trying to make sure that… they have that kind of control over their learning, that they can actually stop and say 'I'm stuck, can you help me?' We can get involved then."

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

One pupil explained that teachers worked flexibly to ensure all pupils understood the lesson content, which they believed made a concrete contribution to their learning:

"What makes it easier to learn is when they teach it one way and they teach it a different way so if you don't understand it the first time, you can understand it the second time, which makes it a little bit easier to learn."

Pupil, high-performing London primary

One senior leader from a London primary explained that "we confidently can say all our lessons are good, and if they are not then we pick up on that." In a number of schools, close monitoring of teaching standards gave leaders and governors confidence in the quality of practice within the classroom.

Finally, in some schools it was clear that high quality teaching formed a core part of their mission or ethos, and was seen to be the key to the relative success of their disadvantaged pupils. As one senior leader made clear:

"At the forefront of everything that we do at [the school] it's about teaching and learning. So that's what we believe, that if the children have a teacher in front of them who is a good practitioner or outstanding… they provide good or better lessons every single day in every single lesson, then the children will be successful at [this school] and we have done that and we have proved that because that is what our children get and they are successful."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

We found little difference between high-performing primary schools and most secondary schools in this area, though secondary schools tended to be less explicit about how they ensured high quality teaching and learning. Most secondaries recognised the importance of high quality pedagogy and considered themselves to be improving in this area. However, only one secondary school, a high-performing school outside London, made explicit reference to skilled pedagogy as a focus and strength of the school.

While lower-performing primary and secondary schools outside London appeared to place priority on high quality teaching, we found evidence of poor pedagogy in three of these schools; two primaries and one secondary. These were the only schools we visited where low standards of teaching were reported or observed. In these schools we found evidence that:

- Pupils were left without a clear activity or objective for significant periods of time or did not understand how to complete an activity and were not supported, as exemplified by one pupil during a focus group discussion:

"They're either really, really strict and not let you do anything or make you just keep doing it and not show you anything. Or they don't give you anything at all, they tell you to do one thing… like in English, they'll give you a question but they won't give you an example of what to do with it. They'll tell you but they won't give you an example, they'll just tell you to do it… then you're just sat there doing nothing."

Pupil, lower-performing non-London secondary

- Teachers spent significant periods of time conversing with teaching assistants rather than engaging with pupils

- Group work was not always properly facilitated – for instance, teachers did not check to ensure pupils remained focused on the specified task

- Lessons were not always engaging and did not test pupils' understanding of the content, as identified by two pupils:
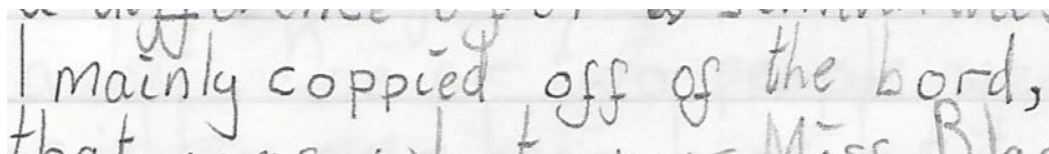
Pupil diary, lower-performing non-London primary

"Some teachers, they actually come over, just a routine check, and they check up on you and see if you're doing good. Some will just sit there on their computer or their phone."

Pupil, lower-performing non-London secondary

- Teachers were not sufficiently skilled to deliver content or interventions effectively, as identified by one senior leader:

"[An intervention] was brought into the school at a great cost... Reading about it, it has a lot of merit so we bought it in. Unfortunately, what we didn't realise was that the members of staff running it were not competent enough to continue with it. But until I took over the strategy of Pupil Premium champion there was no evaluation process or follow up."

Senior leader, lower-performing non-London secondary

10.4.2   Teaching tailored to support individual pupils

In seven of the high-performing primary schools (four in London; three outside London) and two of the high-performing secondary schools we visited (one in London; one outside London), we found evidence that teachers attempted to tailor teaching to support individual pupils' needs. This took various forms, including:

- Grouping within classes, with pupils completing homework gauged at their level

- Use of differentiation to aid pupils' understanding of new topics

- Use of teaching assistants to support pupils who are progressing more slowly

- Setting more challenging work for pupils who are progressing well

Teachers in lower-performing schools appeared less likely to tailor their support to individual pupils. We found evidence of teachers tailoring their support in less than half of

lower-performing primary schools (two in London; one outside London) and in one lower-performing secondary school (in London).

In seven of the high-performing schools we visited (both primary and secondary) we found evidence of teachers providing one-to-one support to struggling pupils, although this practice appeared to be more embedded in schools in the capital. As one senior leader outlined, one-to-one support sometimes took the form of additional time with a teacher outside timetabled lessons:

"Somebody in your class, if they're really struggling, on top of their maths sessions they will have an extra five minutes each day with a one-to-one adult, and target that child so they can improve on their maths."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

One senior leader explained that effectively tailoring teaching to individual pupils' needs required constant observation, appraisal and 'thinking on your feet' during lessons:

"You, a teacher, have just got to be on the move all the time. No fallow moments… you've got be on your feet and go around observing and assessing all the time. Does everyone get it? Does everyone understand it? Is everyone working? Are they making progress?"

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

10.4.3   Effective marking and feedback

Effective systems for marking and feedback were cited as a core component of teaching and learning in almost all of the schools we visited outside London, and around half of those in the capital (both high- and lower-performing). Effective marking and feedback in these schools was considered to have the following features:

- Introducing pupils to feedback in the early years so they develop an ability to learn from teachers' comments

- Seeing marking as an opportunity to progress pupils' learning rather than 'another job to be done'

- Feedback which focused on both positive elements of pupils' work and areas for improvement

- Acting on issues raised through marking as swiftly as possible

- Creating opportunities for two-way feedback, whereby pupils can provide written feedback to their teacher on areas of difficulty and confusion

One teacher explained how, in their school, marking was seen as a valuable tool for helping pupils progress and began in the early years:

"We're not just marking for the sake of it, and that's something that [the Head] has always been very proactive about, you know, so when she looks at our books, she makes sure that our marking is effective… Our marking is made to really move on the learners so that when I feel like I'm marking I'm not just sat there going, 'Oh I've got to mark this.' I'm going, 'Right, okay, you know, Bob's done this, I can move him on.' And again we've worked with the children so that they're reading the feedback even from the early years, you know, from the Reception and the Infants."

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

Pupils also identified feedback from teachers as something that made learning easier:

Pupil diary, non-London high-performing primary

"The way teachers mark our books, I find it quite helpful because a lot of the time they use a 'What Went Well' system and then 'Even Better If'…[and] I find it quite helpful because I know that a lot of the time they'll write "come to me if you need any help" or something, and I can come up to them and talk about it. Sometimes they'll give you sources of books that they've got or the internet even. Then I can look that up, do a bit of research myself, and I can just learn it at my own pace."

Pupil, lower-performing non-London secondary

10.5 Resources and enrichment activities

10.5.1   Resources to support learning

Teaching resources were identified as a way of supporting pupils' learning in most primary and secondary schools. The importance of high quality resources was cited more frequently in London primary schools than in primaries outside the capital. Meanwhile there was less clear variation amongst secondary schools. The role of resources tended to be identified by pupils, and specific resources they found useful included:

- Worksheets

- Books to take home

- Laptops and tablets

> I'm at home.
>
> I'm in the kitchen, I feel happy.
>
> What helps me to learn is that I
> I have resources to use and I get
> my own books to use.
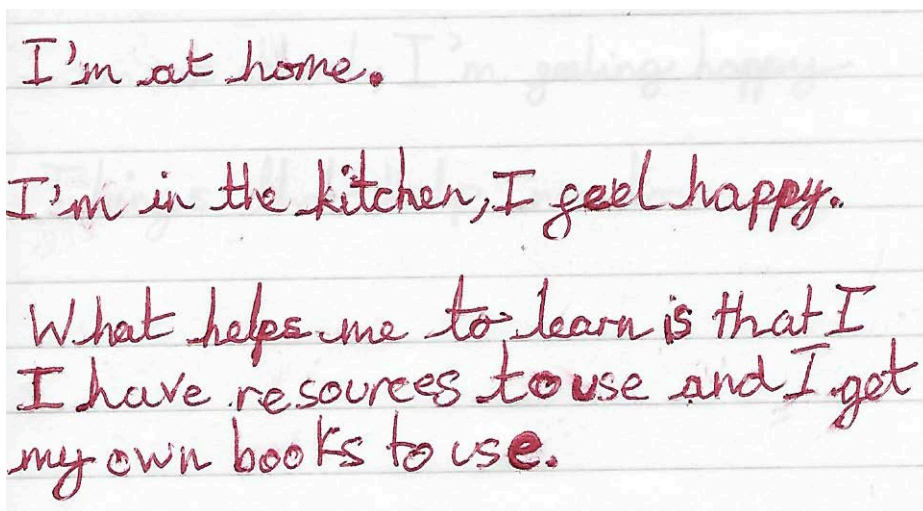
Pupil diary, London high-performing primary

> When we use the
> Chrome Books

Pupil diary, non-London high-performing primary

10.5.2   Enrichment activities

High-performing primary schools, particularly those in the capital, used practices involving oracy, philosophy and debating to support pupils' progress. These activities were present in all four schools in the capital, and one school outside London. Teachers tended to identify three main benefits of these types of activity:

1. Developing pupils' ability to think critically and ask well-formed questions;

2. Developing pupils' speaking skills; and

3. Introducing pupils to new topics and experiences.

Lower-performing primary schools appeared to be far less likely to provide opportunities for pupils to engage in oracy, philosophy and debating: only one lower-performing school (in the capital) described using these approaches.

The secondary schools we visited appeared to make broadly similar use of enrichment activities. These activities were most often geared towards developing skills to help pupils succeed in higher education or encouraging pupils to consider career options.

10.6 Peer support

Most secondary schools, alongside high-performing primary schools and lower-performing primary schools in the capital, encouraged pupils to support each other in lessons. In some primary schools, opportunities for peer support were clearly codified and firmly embedded in classroom policies:

"Within the classroom we have table leaders, and that is usually the children that are quite focused, we know they listen, and they will always know what is going on in the lesson, and they are able to get on with their work. So if any of the children are stuck, before they ask the teacher, they have got to either speak to their partner first and then they ask the table leader."

Senior leader, high-performing London primary

Teachers in these schools identified the following benefits of peer support:

- Creating a space for pupils to develop ideas
- Developing pupils' ability to explain difficult material
- Promoting social development
- Integrating pupils with SEND into the pupil population

One pupil explained how helping other pupils who were struggling presented an opportunity for stretch and challenge:

"I would say the good children in my class and me because we're always listening to the teacher and then we challenge ourselves a little bit more, we push ourselves higher and we help other children who don't understand what the teacher is saying."
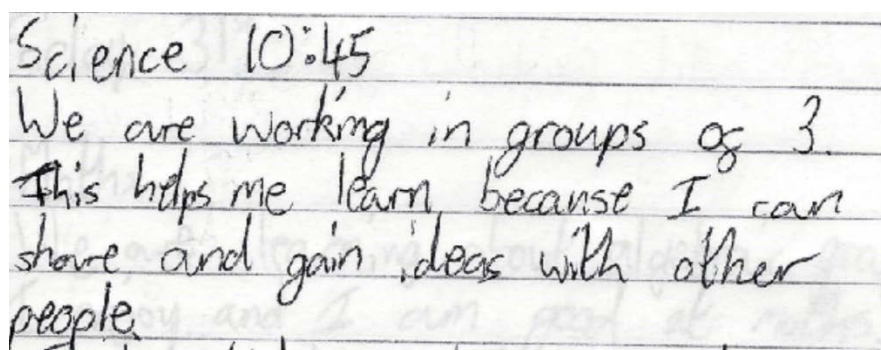
Pupil, high-performing London primary

Meanwhile another pupil described the benefits of receiving peer support:

Pupil, lower-performing non-London primary

Pupils in a range of secondary schools consistently reported that peer support and group work helped them learn, as exemplified in one pupil diary:

Science 10:45
We are working in groups of 3.
This helps me learn because I can
share and gain ideas with other
people

Pupil diary, high-performing non-London secondary

In contrast to most secondary schools, the majority of high-performing primaries and lower-performing London primaries, we found little evidence of the use of peer support in any of the lower-performing primary schools outside London.

Overall, lower-performing primary schools outside the capital appeared to be most distinctive in relation to cultures and practices linked to the learning environment, compared to other primary schools. These primary schools appeared far less likely to provide early and rapid intervention for pupils falling behind in key curriculum areas; placed less emphasis on pupils with SEND; created fewer opportunities for pupils to engage in peer support; and were the only primary schools in which there was some evidence of poor teaching. This group of schools shared common features with lower-performing secondary schools inside and outside the capital, where intervention and support was less likely to be early and responsive and there was some evidence of poor pedagogy and practice. Lower-performing primary schools in general made less use of opportunities for philosophy, oracy and debating to support pupils' learning. These enrichment activities were widespread amongst high-performing primaries and, to a lesser extent, secondary schools. Teachers in lower-performing primary and secondary schools appeared to place less emphasis on tailoring their teaching to support individual pupils' needs. Meanwhile London primary schools appeared to place more emphasis on developing the 'whole child' than primary schools outside the capital. A 'whole child' focus tended not to be emphasised in the secondary schools we visited.

11 Parental engagement

This section examines how schools build partnerships with parents. It describes:

- The ways in which schools work with parents to support their aspirations and expectations and help parents to support their children with schoolwork

- The quality of relationships between parents and staff

- The extent to which school leaders prioritise parental engagement

Summary of main findings

- All primary schools offered informal workshops to parents, alongside their children, to help them provide support with school work. Lower-performing primary schools outside London appeared to offer fewer of these workshops than other primary schools. High-performing secondary schools made less use of informal workshops but targeted particular parents for more formal classes, for example on literacy and numeracy.

- High-performing primary schools in London appeared to go further than others to develop partnerships between staff and parents – these schools ran regular targeted workshops with parents rather than merely 'bringing them into school'.

- Senior leaders in lower-performing primary schools outside London appeared to place less emphasis on parental engagement than those in other schools.

- All schools cited parental aspirations and expectations as a challenge, often due to parents' own negative educational experiences. High-performing schools, both primary and secondary, appeared to have greater belief in their capacity to shift parents' aspirations and expectations of their children's attainment.

- Pupils in lower-performing primary schools outside London appeared to face a 'double disadvantage': these schools cited lower levels of parental aspirations and expectations, but also appeared to offer less effective interventions.

11.1 Working with parents to support home learning

All primary schools held workshops to help parents support their children at home. These workshops tended to be informal, were more frequent in the early years, and involved parents and pupils working together on a project. One leader in a lower-performing primary school in London described their rationale for running these workshops, and the challenges they faced in getting parents to attend:

"We do workshops every Tuesday or fortnightly where we invite parents in here. Now you can send out as many letters as you like you won't get very many in that way so [say] … 'There's a free cup of coffee here if you come in and sit down and learn about this,' and we bring the children in as well. I think a lot of the parents… I think a lot of the disadvantaged children as well their parents are quite scared of it, they think 'I can't do maths so I'm not going to go to that.'"

Senior leader, lower-performing London primary

In most lower-performing primary schools these workshops seemed to be less frequent and were perceived as less impactful, compared to in high-performing primary schools. This was particularly the case in lower-performing primary schools outside London. In these schools workshops for parents tended to take the form of 'information sessions', and tended to take place when an initiative was first established or before important trips or residentials. A teacher in one lower-performing primary school explained that parental engagement dropped off when they attempted to move beyond these information-based sessions or school assemblies, to more collaborative workshops designed to change parents' practices at home:

"When I started, if we had a class assembly, we'd be lucky if we had two parents and now the hall is filled with parents…I think a lot of our parents have negative experiences of school, so there's almost a fear in terms of coming here themselves because it brings back their bad experiences… but we're very open door; parents do come. It's things that we're asking them to do at home where we struggle to get their engagement."

Teacher, lower-performing non-London primary

The secondary schools we visited did not appear to run the same kind of parent-pupil workshops that primary schools offered. Instead, around half of secondary schools (three high-performing, both inside and outside London, and one lower-performing secondary outside London) offered more formal classes for particular parents, without their children, often targeting parents with EAL. Similar to the workshops described by high-performing primary schools, this support appeared to serve two purposes: to build informal relationships between parents and staff, and to support parents' literacy and numeracy.

11.2 Working with parents to support aspirations

Staff in all schools, regardless of phase, geography and performance, acknowledged that parents of disadvantaged pupils had often had negative educational experiences which could lower their expectations of what their children could achieve at school. However, high-performing schools (both primary and secondary, inside and outside the capital) saw these as surmountable barriers and worked to engage parents with a range of

interventions and activities. Most common amongst primary schools was the use of parent workshops, as described in Section 11.1. Workshops to support aspirations were used in half of the high-performing primary schools we visited (two in the capital and two outside London). As one teacher explained, schools were careful to 'pitch' this support in a way that would not alienate parents:

"So those parents… perhaps didn't have their own positive experiences of school, we welcome them in… we take the work out to the parents and say, 'Look, look at this book. Look how amazing your child has done,' so that they get those aspirations, those parents from the disadvantaged backgrounds, they can look and see, go 'Wow, look my child is doing well. I'm going to ask about that.'"

Teacher, high-performing non-London primary

Lower-performing primary schools also emphasised parental aspirations and expectations as a barrier to disadvantaged pupils' attainment, but their interventions with parents were less outcome-focused than those in high-performing primary schools. For example, parental engagement in these schools set out primarily to 'engage' parents by physically bringing them into the school, rather than necessarily setting out specifically to address their aspirations and expectations. Meanwhile, while high-performing primary schools tended to feel that these measures were successful in shifting parents' aspirations and expectations (particularly if they focused positively on pupils' achievements), lower-performing primary schools tended to see their attempts to influence parental aspirations and expectations as less effective. Two of the lower-performing primary London schools we visited felt that parent workshops were helping to raise aspirations and expectations, but in the remaining lower-performing primaries, work in this area tended to be in its early stages or was not rated as being as effective as it could be:

"I wouldn't say we do enough, I think that's sort of part of the next stage of our journey… But I think that's where I want to go with the parents, it's trying to get the parents to engage with us first and that's where I'd like that to go and the harder to reach parents."

Head teacher, lower-performing London primary

Parents of children in high-performing primary schools inside and outside the capital tended to feel that their child's school helped 'push' them to achieve their aspirations. However, parents in London reported primary schools taking a particularly active approach, identifying pupils' strengths and encouraging them to aspire in related areas, as well as pushing them towards their existing aspirations, as discussed in section 1.5. As one parent explained, supporting pupils in this way sometimes involved the school building up a detailed understanding of children's passions and interests:

"My first child, she loves drawing. And I remember when she was in Year 4 she got this massive beautiful drawing book just to encourage her to… to carry on drawing. To carry on drawing and her drawing today is perfect. It was only because… they saw that in her and she's good ... and they encouraged her which I love so much about the school."

Parent, high-performing London primary

Parents of pupils in lower-performing London primary schools appeared more likely than those in lower-performing primary schools outside the capital to hold aspirations for their children to remain in further and higher education, or to progress into highly-skilled jobs.

Secondary schools held similar beliefs about parents' negative educational experiences acting as barriers to engagement. As was the case amongst primary schools, lower-performing secondary schools recognised that more could be done to address this. However, lower-performing secondary schools outside London appeared to differ from their primary counterparts in their belief that their interventions with parents were having a positive effect on parental engagement. As one governor explained:

"[our work on parental engagement] is an ongoing activity, because I think two years ago, maybe, I would say the parents were not that much involved with the kids…. now it's changing, the school is engaging the parents as much as they can and making them aware that there is so much that we can do as a school… and there's a bigger part that you [as parents] need to play in trying to understand that you need to augment what the school does."

Governor, lower-performing non-London secondary

High-performing secondary schools in general believed that, despite some parents having low levels of engagement with school, parents' aspirations and expectations for their children were often specific and focused on university. However, staff sometimes cited the challenges that these narrow, 'high' parental expectations posed. As one teacher described:

"If they are going to do anything it is medical, professional… doctors, dentists, that sort of thing and sometimes, because you have got to be incredibly bright obviously to pursue that career, [their] expectation of their daughter might not necessarily be a realistic expectation. So it is about trying to manage those expectations and give them something that is still seen as a prestigious career but not necessarily the one that they would have initially liked."

Teacher, high-performing non-London secondary

Workshops were a less common approach to supporting parental aspirations in secondary schools compared to primary schools. Instead, they appeared to use a combination of formal events, such as GCSE options choices and parents evenings, and informal conversations (especially in sixth forms), to inform and engage parents.

11.3 Building positive relationships with parents

Relationships between parents and staff were reported as being strong in almost all high-performing schools, both primary and secondary, and as a consequence parents enjoyed feeling part of the school community:

"All the teachers get along with the parents. They work hand in hand which is like continuity of care which they are really committed to what they want the children to achieve … which make parents easier to, you know, to be engaged in aftercare at home. They will make it much easier for parents to get involved"

Parent, high-performing non-London primary

High-performing primary schools, particularly in London, appeared to go further than other schools to develop partnerships between staff and parents. All high-performing primary schools in London and two high-performing primary schools outside of London reported specific efforts to build relationships with parents through: regular parents' meetings, bringing parents into pre-school, parent workshops, assemblies for parents, letters home, and parents associations. However as one head teacher put it, "all of those things are standard and usual and they work for those parents that want them to work." To reach all parents, ongoing and informal relationship building was required in order to maintain a positive sense of engagement with the school:

"I'm always finding those opportunities to create a community and for people to trust me and to be able to talk to me and if I don't and I just stand at the front of the line in the morning and then we all troop in, I'm just a cipher for them. They don't know that they can speak to me and I have to show that I am human too and they can approach me."

Head teacher, high-performing London primary

11.4 Targeting resources at parents

Most primary schools spent money on supporting parents and families. High-performing primary schools were more likely to provide targeted support for parents on low incomes such as financial aid with transport and uniform costs, pick-ups and drop-offs for low attenders and advice on behaviour support for parents who were struggling at home.

Some lower-performing primary schools also provided such support, but tended to use teaching staff to fulfil these functions. In contrast, some high-performing primary schools employed a member of staff specifically to engage with parents, as one governor explained:

"*We have... a parental support worker, we have somebody who talks about behaviour, and they engage those parents on a personal, individual level... If their kids aren't coming to school… the staff will go and get them. They will build up that personal relationship with these parents.*"

Governor, high-performing non-London primary

Around half of the secondary schools we visited targeted resources at parents, with no apparent differences in the actions of high- and lower-performing secondaries in this area.

11.5 Support for parents prioritised by school leaders

All primary school leaders appeared to have an open-door policy for parents. Leaders dedicated time at the beginning and end of the day to talking to parents. However, there was more divergence when it came to the role of the wider senior leadership team amongst primary schools. In many high-performing primary schools, especially those outside London, senior leaders played an active, everyday role in engaging parents, ensuring they were present in the playground and available on the phone or in their office. A policy of 'you don't need an appointment' was prevalent and parents felt that leaders were approachable. Senior leaders were also involved in parental engagement in lower-performing primary schools in the capital, but appeared to play a more minimal role in parental engagement in lower-performing primary schools outside London.

Like their colleagues in high-performing primary schools, leaders in secondary schools emphasised their responsiveness to parents. However, secondary school leaders did not appear to be as immediately available to parents before and after school.

Overall, lower-performing primary schools outside the capital appeared to be distinct in terms of their cultures and practices linked to parental engagement. These schools tended to run fewer parental workshops and senior leaders placed less emphasis on parental engagement. Teachers in lower-performing primary schools outside London also tended to cite lower levels of parental aspirations and expectations. Meanwhile high-performing primary and secondary schools reported more faith in their ability to shift parents' expectations for their children's attainment. High-performing primary schools in London in particular appeared to engage in the most focused and targeted work with parents and went well beyond merely 'bringing them into school'.

12 Conclusions and recommendations

These school case studies have revealed a considerable range of cultures and practices that were shared by schools with different characteristics. Both inside and outside London, many high- and lower-performing schools adopted similar systems and processes, were working towards similar goals, and expressed common beliefs about educational possibilities for disadvantaged pupils across both primary and secondary phases of education.

Beyond this common ground, however, we identified variation in cultures and practices between different schools. The clearest contrasts were apparent between high- and lower-performing schools, particularly at primary school level. We found fewer differences between London and non-London schools, and where London-specific features of school culture and practice did emerge, these were most clearly visible amongst primaries. Lower-performing primary schools outside London appeared to form a distinct group, with a number of cultures and practices that marked them apart from the other schools we visited. To the extent that we found evidence of a distinct set of cultures and practices in high-performing London schools which could be involved in supporting a 'London effect', this was relatively limited. For example, it was most evident in the extent to which high-performing London primary schools went further than other schools to develop partnerships with parents.

It is important to note that the lower-performing schools we visited, both primary and secondary, sat somewhere on a spectrum of school improvement. At one end were those that were struggling to raise standards, at the other were those that appeared to be on the cusp of consistent high performance. For this reason, lower-performing schools often to some extent exhibited the cultures and practices that we found in high-performing schools but sometimes these were less well embedded, or were not shared by all staff, pupils or parents.

12.1 Differences between high- and lower-performing schools

12.1.1 Poles of practice

The greatest differences in school practices were found when comparing high- and lower-performing schools. Differences were particularly marked at primary school level. We identified some practices that were distinctive to high-performing primaries, and were not evident in lower-performing primary schools or secondary schools. In contrast to other schools, high-performing primary schools reported that they:

- began to target specific resources (such as speech and language specialists) during the EYFS, and also set high and specific expectations for the progress pupils should make in EYFS;

- sought to recruit staff that shared the school or senior leadership team's ethos and vision for the school;

- provided CPD and progression opportunities for support staff;

- employed specific members of staff in full-time roles to support parents and families; and

- were led by head teachers that taught, but did so less frequently, with a view to providing CPD for other staff through team teaching and coaching, rather than head teachers that taught frequently and regularly to fill staffing gaps.

We also identified some practices that were characteristic of high-performing primary schools when compared to lower-performing primary schools, but were also evident in most secondary schools whether high- and lower-performing. In these schools:

- teachers and leaders worked deliberately to raise parental aspirations for their children, both in terms of their academic achievement and future pathways; and

- teachers responded quickly, and with a sense of urgency, to any drop off in an individual pupil's progress in a particular subject, and provided more individually-tailored support for pupils in lessons.

12.1.2   Shades of practice

Differences also existed between high- and lower-performing schools in the extent to which particular practices occurred within schools, but these were differences of degree rather than binary distinctions of presence or absence of practices. High-performing schools (both primary and secondary) seemed to make more use of:

- engagement in a variety of community partnerships to deliver extra-curricular activities (and work experience opportunities in the case of secondary schools);

- evaluations of the impact of interventions on pupil progress, usually by comparing pupil attainment in a subject relative to others in the class before and after an intervention. This evaluation was both to ensure that interventions were flexible and responsive to changes in pupils' needs, and to ensure cost-effectiveness;

- creation of a range of leadership opportunities for teachers hoping to progress in their careers. These schools seemed to place greater emphasis on talent management as a means of retaining good staff;

- consistently high expectations for pupil behaviour, extending to behaviour both within and outside of lessons; and

- tailored teaching and support that met individual pupils' needs, for example through differentiation or setting more challenging work for pupils who are progressing well.

High-performing primary schools also seemed more likely than lower-performing primaries to:

- create opportunities for oracy, debating and philosophy;

- demonstrate universally high staff morale;

- celebrate pupil achievements on a daily or weekly basis;

- demonstrate awareness of educational research;

- use positive behaviour management without over-reliance on sanctions; and

- report that all staff, including TAs, were confident using data to improve their practice.

12.1.3   Consistency of practice

High- and lower-performing schools also differed in the extent to which practices appeared to be consistent within schools. In general, high-performing schools (both primary and secondary) displayed high levels of consistency, with teachers, leaders, governors, parents and pupils describing practices in similar terms, and demonstrating collective 'buy in' to their school's aims and vision. Lower-performing schools reported less consistent practice in some areas, and this was the case amongst both secondary and primary schools. In lower-performing schools, we found evidence of multiple competing practices, or gaps between schools' stated policies and actual day-to-day practice. We did not find evidence of inconsistency of practice in all lower-performing schools, and some appeared more similar to high-performing schools than others. However in some lower-performing schools, we found that:

- teachers' emphasis on high expectations of behaviour varied, while some teachers were unsure about the effectiveness of their school's behaviour management policy;

- where behaviour was managed differently in different circumstances, this was less often the result of a deliberate or planned policy of flexibility than in high-performing schools;

- some staff and parents reported low levels of 'buy in' to the vision put forward by the school leadership team, and sometimes felt leaders could do more to share a clear vision for the school; and

- some teaching was not delivered to high standards, despite the school's commitment to high quality teaching.

12.1.4   Differences in culture

Several school cultures appeared to differ between high- and lower-performing schools. High-performing schools demonstrated two particularly distinctive cultures. In high-performing primary and secondary schools, in contrast to lower-performing schools, teachers were consistent in their belief that disadvantaged pupils could achieve academic results in line with or above national benchmarks. Meanwhile, teachers in high-performing primary schools believed that where pupils held idealistic aspirations, this was a useful 'hook' to use in engaging pupils in their learning, rather than a problematic 'mismatch' between aspirations and reality.

In lower-performing primary and secondary schools:

- teachers were more likely to believe that attendance was, to some extent, outside of their school's control; and

- leaders were more likely to feel that recruiting inexperienced staff was problematic because they might struggle to provide the necessary support.

Meanwhile, in lower-performing primaries:

- teachers in some schools believed that leaders' focus on pupil performance data was driven as much by a desire to meet accountability targets as it was by a desire to support individual pupils' learning; and

- staff were more likely to use a range of data, such as parent reviews or teacher judgements, when comparing themselves to other schools – sometimes as a substitute for published performance data.

Finally, leaders in lower-performing schools outside London in particular often reported difficulties recruiting governors, and at least amongst primary schools, in retaining teachers.

12.2 The interaction of geography and performance

In other cases, patterns of cultures and practices in schools appeared to vary both by the schools' location and their performance.

12.2.1 Lower-performing schools outside the capital

In general, lower-performing schools outside London were the most distinctive compared to the other schools we studied. Distinctive features of lower-performing primaries outside the capital included:

- more limited variety of extra-curricular activities, reported as being due to cuts and lack of uptake;

- less use of peer-to-peer support amongst pupils in lessons;

- fewer references to instilling a love of learning amongst pupils (such as making lessons fun so that pupils want to attend school); and

- less emphasis on support for SEND.

Meanwhile, some cultures and practices appeared to be shared by both lower-performing primaries and secondaries outside the capital, including:

- some reports of lower quality teaching; and

- less consistency amongst staff in their reported sense of responsibility for disadvantaged pupils not in their own school.

12.2.2 High-performing schools in the capital

Some cultures and practices appeared to be distinctive to high-performing schools in London:

- Some high-performing schools, both primary and secondary, believed that being located in London contributed to their sense of purpose through a common vision with other schools and, for some teachers, sharing a minority ethnic background with their pupils.

- Leaders in high-performing London primary schools (and to a lesser extent secondaries) placed more emphasis on strategies to share their school's ethos with parents.

- Pupils in high-performing London primary schools were more involved in their school's behaviour management systems.

12.2.3   High-performing schools outside London

High-performing schools outside the capital displayed some distinctive cultures and practices, although these were mostly found in primary schools. In these schools:

- leaders were more likely to draw ambitious comparisons with other schools, for example aiming to meet or exceed the attainment of the highest-performing local schools, rather than those in similar catchment areas;

- support staff were especially valued and leaders ensured they had access to opportunities for professional development;

- there was greater emphasis on academic outcomes compared to other aspects of pupils' development; and

- links with local secondary schools were stronger than amongst other primary schools, and these links were used to support pupils' academic aspirations.

12.3 Differences between London and non-London schools

There were few distinct features common to most schools based in London. Looking across all schools (primary and secondary; high- and lower-performing) one distinct feature of London schools emerged: teachers reported being part of particularly resilient networks of other teachers and schools. These appeared to last longer and weather changes in funding and school governance better than those outside the capital. London schools also appeared to place more emphasis on engaging parents in school culture and practices.

London-specific features shared by both high- and lower-performing schools were most frequently found amongst primary schools; secondary schools outside London appeared closer to their counterparts in London. At primary level there were a number of characteristics that were distinctive to London schools:

- London primary schools placed more emphasis on support for pupils with EAL, most likely due to them serving a higher proportion of pupils with EAL.

- London primaries tended to start working with pupils' aspirations earlier than outside the capital, used a wider range of trips and visits to broaden horizons, and engaged more with parents to influence expectations for their children.

- London primary schools more frequently reported employing literacy specialists.

12.4 How do our findings relate to school effectiveness, in particular in terms of outcomes for disadvantaged pupils?

This report does not set out to reach a judgment on the causal links between specific school cultures and practices and the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, since culture and practices may be effects or causes of school performance (or both). In some cases, a school's culture may have been driven by its performance; for example, teachers' high expectations in high-performing schools may result from pupils' high performance in previous years. At the same time, pupil performance may be reinforced by these teacher expectations. As such, our findings describe differences in culture and practices between schools, rather than explaining differences in performance. However, many of our findings resonate with literature, both international and from the UK, which attempts to explain how culture and practices might influence either overall school effectiveness, or outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. In addition, the participants in our research sometimes posited links between their school's performance and the culture and practices they were describing. We have endeavoured to acknowledge these 'causal accounts' in our analysis. With these inferences from existing research and from the perspectives of our participants in mind, we identify the following as aspects of schools' culture and practices that might be most likely to influence outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

12.4.1   A shared sense of purpose within schools

International literature on the links between culture and practices in schools and school effectiveness suggests a number of ways in which schools' values, purpose and ethos influence both overall effectiveness and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Our findings corroborate this literature. The high-performing schools in our sample demonstrated greater cohesiveness, sense of collective purpose and values that were shared amongst all staff, pupils and parents, backing up findings from Sammons et al. (1995) and Stewart (2008). Our research also lends weight to Yu and Yeung's (2003) findings, as staff morale was high in these high-performing schools, and whilst teachers in all schools generally reported positive relationships with pupils and satisfaction with their jobs, where teachers did admit to frustration in their roles, this was exclusively in lower-performing schools.

Such cohesiveness was not accidental. Leaders in the high-performing schools that reported high levels of collective purpose had worked hard to embed a shared ethos. For example, head teachers in these schools placed communicating their vision high on their list of priorities, especially when it came to parents. Another mechanism by which senior leaders in primary schools built collective purpose was through the frequency of celebrations with pupils. Both in and outside London, high-performing primary schools found time to celebrate pupils' successes in the everyday 'little things' as well as longer-

term outcomes such as attendance and attainment, which most schools tended to focus their attention on.

Recommendations:

- The Department for Education should commission research on the links between a shared sense of purpose and school performance: what are more or less successful strategies? How does a school's shared sense of purpose impact teacher performance? Is there a link to pupil outcomes? This could, for instance, take the form of in-depth longitudinal studies of schools with new leadership teams, exploring how shared purpose is established across a school and, in turn, the mechanisms through which it influences pupil outcomes

- Future research should collate and disseminate approaches to building collective purpose in sschools, drawing on the concrete examples we have explored in our research.

12.4.2 Using data

Literature from the UK suggests that robust use of data to track pupil progress and identify underachieving groups supports positive outcomes for disadvantaged pupils (Sharples, 2011; Ofsted, 2013; Macleod et al., 2015; Demie and Maclean, 2015). We found that all schools in our sample reported using pupil performance data as a core part of their activities. However, teachers and governors in high-performing schools appeared more consistent in their engagement with data, and were more likely to use pupil data to underpin evidence-informed support strategies (as referenced by Macleod et al., 2015) than those in lower-performing schools. Our research did not reveal differences in the strategies schools used to embed data fluency amongst their staff, and all the schools we visited had similar processes and routines for collecting and using data. However, some staff and governors in primary schools reported difficulties understanding data, and appeared to lack confidence in using data to inform their practice. In many cases this appeared to be underpinned by a lack of support from schools in data literacy, particularly for NQTs. Lower-performing primary schools, particularly those outside London, reported relying on NQTs to fill staffing gaps, whilst also finding it difficult to support NQTs. Lower-performing primary schools also reported difficulties recruiting governors. Both of these factors may play a part in explaining the lower levels of confidence with data that we found in lower-performing schools.

Recommendations:

- Teacher training providers, especially in the primary phase, should ensure that initial teacher training (ITT) programmes introduce new teachers to how they

can use a combination of data sources to inform classroom practice, for example, by informing planning and monitoring pupils' need for individual support.

- Schools should be encouraged to ensure NQTs and recently-qualified teachers (RQTs) have access to training that builds their data literacy.

- The Department for Education should ensure that its governance training and development providers provide sufficient data literacy training as part of their programmes.

- Schools and local authorities should encourage their governors and trustees to attend training and development programmes linked to data literacy.

- Schools should set up and provide login details for governors to the Department's *Analysing School Performance* service.

12.4.3 Engaging parents

UK literature suggests that schools where disadvantaged pupils attain highly engage disadvantaged pupils' parents effectively, especially in relation to raising their expectations of their children's achievement at school (Sharples et al., 2011). Although our findings did not reveal a consistent trend across both primary and secondary schools, they did suggest that London primary schools went further than schools outside the capital to work with parents in developing expectations for their children. High-performing primary schools were also more likely to employ a dedicated member of staff to provide outreach and support for parents and families, rather than assigning teaching staff to fulfil this function. School leaders in high-performing primary schools saw being available to parents as a core part of their role, and emphasised engaging 'hard to reach' parents.

Recommendation:

- The Department for Education should collate examples of effective practice in engaging parents to share with schools. This could include insights into the ways in which schools have made use of dedicated members of staff to engage with and support parents and families.

12.4.4 High quality teaching

A number of UK studies highlight the benefits of deploying schools' best staff to work with disadvantaged pupils, ensuring that disadvantaged pupils have access to the highest quality teaching available in the school (Ofsted, 2013; Macleod et al., 2015; Demie and Maclean, 2015). Our findings did not reveal significant differences between the way high- and lower-performing schools, or those within and outside London, deployed teachers. We did, however find that high-performing primary schools (in particular those outside

London) paid particular attention to the deployment and training of support staff. Lower-performing schools also placed less emphasis on CPD that was targeted at individual staff and responsive to the individual needs of staff. Lower-performing schools outside London, both primary and secondary, were further constrained by recruitment and retention difficulties. Additionally, our research found that lower-performing primary schools outside London were less likely to prioritise either high quality teaching or specialist provision for pupils with SEND. Given the strength of the causal links between SEND and disadvantage and vice versa (Shaw et al., 2016) this lack of emphasis on SEND may contribute to lower outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

Recommendations:

- The Department for Education should build on the 2016 Standards for Teachers' Professional Development and continue to work with bodies such as the Chartered College of Teaching and high-quality CPD providers, to ensure that lower-performing schools in areas that have fallen behind have access to good quality CPD).

- Any moves to address current national recruitment and retention problems should pay particular attention to the needs of lower-performing schools in disadvantaged areas outside London. In accordance with the social mobility action plan, the Department for Education should ensure that factors affecting teacher supply and retention, such as the availability of affordable housing, good transport links and quality of life are addressed across government.

12.4.5   Strong and visionary leadership

The role of school leaders in improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils is well documented (Ofsted, 2013; Demie and Maclean, 2015). This report contributes further detail to our existing understanding of the role of school leaders, suggesting that strong and visionary leadership is underpinned by cultures and practices such as:

- leaders' emphasis on sharing their vision amongst staff, pupils and parents;

- leaders prioritising parental engagement;

- leaders continuing to teach, in order to provide professional development opportunities for less experienced teachers, rather than to cover staffing gaps; and,

- ensuring that 'everyday' achievements are routinely and frequently celebrated.

Recommendations:

- The Department for Education should share examples of strong and visionary leadership practices revealed in this research, in order to provide tangible examples of practice for leaders in schools across the country.

- Schools should prioritise development of middle leaders, in order to enhance the quality of teaching in classrooms, as well as to nuture the next generation of senior leaders (Baars et al., 2016; Small et al., 2017). To do so, schools should:
  - Provide clear development pathways and mentorship opportunities for staff.
  - Provide opportunities for aspiring middle leaders to engage with research and policy and use this as a basis to drive innovation within their departments.

- To support schools' development of middle leaders, the Department for Education should issue guidance to schools on the factors that shape effective middle leadership, as well as signposting to existing organisations that support and train middle leaders.

- To support schools' efforts in recruiting high-quality governors, particularly in areas outside London where recruitment may be more difficult, the Department for Education should work with organisations such as the National Governors Association and SGOSS in order to promote the range of existing programmes to recruit and support governors, such as National Leaders of Governance.

12.5 Recommendation for follow-up research

This research has focused on depth of insight and comparison rather than scale. We recommend, therefore, that our conclusions be interrogated further using a large-scale national survey of schools, such as DfE's School Snapshot Survey. Questions should be based on statements relating to the key differences highlighted in this report, in order to provide more generalisable assessments of the prevalence of key cultures and practices in different areas of the country, alongside comparisons between schools with different characteristics. Examples of agree/disagree-type statements might include : *"My primary school follows up and supports disadvantaged pupils when they transition to secondary school"* and *"I feel confident using a range of data (such as progress, attainment and observation) to identify pupils who would benefit from further intervention."* Including such questions in a new or existing survey of schools might run alongside additional analysis of any relevant data already held by the Department for Education.

12.6 Summary of recommendations

- The Department for Education should commission a large scale national survey of schools to test and compare the prevalence of cultures and practices highlighted in this research. This large scale survey might run alongside analysis of data already held by the Department for Education

- The Department for Education should commission research on the links between a shared sense of purpose and school performance: what are more or less successful strategies? How does a school's shared sense of purpose impact teacher performance? Is there a link to pupil outcomes? This could, for instance, take the form of in-depth longitudinal studies of schools with new leadership teams, exploring how shared purpose is established across a school and, in turn, the mechanisms through which it influences pupil outcomes

- Future research should collate and disseminate approaches to building collective purpose in schools, drawing on the concrete examples we have drawn on in our research.

- Teacher training providers, especially in the primary phase, should ensure that initial teacher training (ITT) programmes introduce new teachers to how they can use a combination of data sources to inform classroom practice, for example, by informing planning and monitoring pupils' need for individual support.

- Schools should ensure that NQTs and recently-qualified teachers (RQTs) have access to training that builds their data literacy.

- The Department for Education should consider how to improve governors' data literacy. For example this could include work with the National Governors Association and other providers to ensure data literacy is part of every governor's training.

- The Department for Education should share the examples of strong and visionary leadership revealed in this research in order to provide tangible examples of practice for leaders in primary schools across the country.

- Any moves to address current national recruitment and retention problems should pay particular attention to the needs of lower-performing schools in disadvantaged areas outside London.

- The Department for Education should collate examples of effective practice in engaging parents to share with schools

- The Department for Education should build on the 2016 Standards for Teacher Professional Development to work with bodies such as the Chartered College

of Teaching and high-quality CPD providers, to ensure that all schools have equal access to good quality CPD, and that access is not compromised by costs such as the expense of travel or cover.

Annex 1 - School cultures and practices: a review of the literature

How is 'school culture' defined?

The idea of 'school culture' is grounded in definitions of 'organisational culture' (Van Houtte, 2005: 73-74). Nind et al. argue that school cultures have 'layers': "the official culture, the school culture, classroom culture, playground culture, subcultures related to class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and so on" (2004: 263). Likewise, Corbett argues that school culture can be gleaned from a variety of observations: "school culture can be felt in the general atmosphere of the building, in the way people speak to each other, what is visible and valued, where images and artefacts are placed and how the school projects its 'self'" (2001: 40). Schein (1985: 14) delineates three 'levels' of school culture, from the intangible assumptions and values that teachers hold to the observable, concrete practices that emerge from them. Schoen and Teddlie (2008) find that this three-level model effectively captures a wide range of conceptions and typologies of school culture in the existing literature. School cultures can also be defined by their content, homogeneity and strength (Kilmann et al., 1986; Maslowski, 2001), which help to capture how far a school culture reaches and the degree of influence it has over teachers' everyday practice. These cross-cutting dimensions of school culture are summarised in Figure 1 in the introduction to this report.

From culture to practice

As Schein's typology suggests, school practices emerge from school culture; they are the most concrete, visible aspect of that culture and allow insights into its constituent underlying assumptions and values. As Maslowski argues, "in these practices or behavioural patterns, the underlying assumptions, values and norms [in a school] come to the surface" (2006: 8). Patterns of practice in a school, such as the way in which staff meetings are conducted or pupils' behaviour is managed, are not necessarily due to formal arrangements or agreements between school staff. Instead, school-wide practices can merely develop over time as teachers are socialised in the norms or 'accepted ways of doing things' that already exist in the school.

Identifying school culture and practice

As Maslowski argues, studies of school culture, both qualitative and quantitative, tend to focus on observations of practice. These studies rely on inference to connect observed practices back to underlying values and culture (2006: 28). However, careful selection of research techniques allows each level of school culture to be examined directly. In a wide-reaching review of qualitative studies of school culture, Schoen and Teddlie (2008) lay out the research methods that are most appropriate for studying the three levels of

culture. While survey-based techniques can be used to study teachers' beliefs and attitudes (the second level of school culture), qualitative tools such as observations and interviews are better placed to examine the practices and underlying assumptions which form the first and third levels of school culture (2008: 138). Given that interviews can also be used to gauge beliefs and attitudes, qualitative tools are particularly well placed to gain a holistic picture of school culture (Schoen and Teddlie, 2008: 135). For instance Zollers et al. (1999) conducted a year-long ethnographic study to assess school culture in a US elementary school, making use of participant observation, formal and informal interviews and document review with teachers, parents and pupils. Likewise, van der Westhuizen et al.'s study of school culture in South African secondary schools used a combination of qualitative techniques including semi-structured interviews with school leaders, teachers and pupils, and a wide range of observations which focused on "the school terrain, buildings, facilities, symbols, school uniform, and publications (e.g., yearbook, prospectus, school newspaper, and newsletters). Relationships between the staff and learners, handling of discipline, punctuality, and the general spirit and atmosphere of the school were also observed" (2005: 96).

What practices and cultures have been linked to strong performance for disadvantaged pupils?

As well as identifying and describing school cultures and practices, the literature identifies a range of ways in which particular cultures and practices support school- and pupil-level outcomes. For instance, Sammons et al. (1995) identify shared values and cohesiveness (core features of cultural 'homogeneity' identified in Figure 1) as factors that enhance school effectiveness. Likewise, quantitative analysis of US survey data finds that particular elements of school culture related to school cohesiveness are important factors behind high school pupils' educational attainment (Stewart, 2008). A study of high school cultures in California (Goldring, 2002) found that high-achieving schools had the following set of traits:

- Shared vision

- Traditions

- Collaboration

- Shared decision making

- Innovation

- Communication

Meanwhile, a study of Hong Kong primary schools (Yu and Yeung, 2003) identified five features of school culture that were common to high-performing schools:

- Support from school administrators

- Shared values and positive atmosphere

- Safety and order collaboration in teaching

- Commitment to student learning

- Teachers' job satisfaction and the quality of their relationships with students

A more limited pool of research examines the relationship between school practices and cultures and the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils specifically:

- In their quantitative analysis of 24 elementary schools in the US, Battistich et al. (1995) find that students' sense of school community is significantly related to student outcomes, and particularly so for the most disadvantaged pupils.

- A study of the relationship between school culture and school effectiveness in 20 secondary schools in Israel (Gaziel, 1997: 310), all of which had primarily disadvantaged intakes, revealed a five-factor model of school effectiveness based on the following cultures and practices:

  - Strong educational leadership

  - High expectations of student achievement

  - Emphasis on basic skills

  - A safe and orderly climate

  - Frequent evaluation of pupil progress

- A survey of over 1,300 primary and secondary schools in the UK, analysis of national performance data and interviews with 49 school leaders identified the following practices and cultures as being more common in schools that achieved better results for disadvantaged pupils (Macleod et al., 2015):

  - A whole-school ethos of 'attainment for all pupils'

    - Seeing disadvantaged pupils as individuals rather then stereotyping them as a group/believing they are capable of less

  - Addressing behaviour and attendance

    - Following up quickly with pupils and families, providing emotional support to address underlying issues

  - High quality teaching for all

    - Investing in staff training, monitoring performance and sharing best practice

  - Meeting individual learning needs

- Targeted support during curriculum time, support strategies tailored to each pupil

- Deploying staff effectively

  - Deploying best staff to teach pupils who need the most support, devolving responsibility to frontline staff

- Data driven and responding to evidence

  - Reviewing progress regularly during term, teachers engaging with data, consistent marking schemes, evidence-based support strategies

- Clear, responsive leadership

  - Ensuring discretionary effort, holding staff accountable for pupil progress, sharing best practice inside and beyond school

- Sharples et al. (2011) identify the following set of practices being adopted by schools in the UK to support positive outcomes for disadvantaged students:

  - Rigorous monitoring and use of data

  - Raising pupil aspirations using engagement/aspiration programmes

  - Engaging parents and raising parental aspirations

  - Developing social and emotional competencies

  - Supporting school transitions

- Demie and McLean (2015) identify the following sets of practices as key to supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, based on case studies in four London primaries and two London secondaries:

  - Strong leadership

  - High quality teaching and learning

  - Inclusive curriculum

  - Effective use of data to identify underachieving groups

  - Using the best teachers to teach intervention groups

- Ofsted (2013) argue that the following four school practices emerge from the existing literature on supporting the attainment of disadvantaged groups:

  - Rigorous monitoring of data and its effective use in feedback, planning, support and intervention

  - Ensuring access to the highest quality teaching

  - Providing strong and visionary leadership

- Working with pupils and parents to increase engagement and raise expectations

Annex 2 – Notes on methodology

Sampling

Our sampling strategy was designed to test our hypotheses in schools that had consistently achieved either stronger or weaker results for their disadvantaged pupils, and which were situated both inside and outside the capital (defined as the 32 London boroughs and the City of London local authority). The sample was skewed towards primary schools, with the intention to visit 16 primary schools and 8 secondary schools. This was done in order to further develop the evidence base, as existing research into the London Effect has tended to focus on secondary schools, despite some studies suggesting that improvements in primary schools play a significant role in the capital's success. We approached a total of 68 primary and secondary schools by email and phone, with the final sample of 23 schools representing a 34% positive response rate.

The sampling process aimed to achieve 'matches' between high- and lower-performing schools, to enable us to compare schools with wide disparities in their results for disadvantaged pupils but with similar levels of per-pupil funding and similar pupil population profiles (for example, in terms of the proportion eligible for free school meals and the proportion from a minority ethnic background). The aim of 'matching' the samples in this way was to minimise the influence of these factors in interpreting differences in disadvantaged pupils' attainment, relative to the effect of schools' cultures and practices.

The sampling approach for this study involved two key steps:

- Checking school eligibility against threshold criteria, based on:
    - School size
    - KS2 pupils (primaries) or KS4 pupils (secondaries) eligible for FSM
    - % all pupils attaining KS2 Level 5+ in all subjects (primaries) or attaining 5+ A*-C at GCSE (including English and Maths) (secondaries)
    - % FSM pupils attaining KS2 Level 5+ in all subjects (primaries) or attaining 5+ A*-C at GCSE (including English and Maths) (secondaries)
    - Minimum KS2 Value Added score > 100 (Lower bound of 95% CI) (primaries) or minimum KS4 Value Added Score > 1,000 (Lower bound of 95% CI) (secondaries)
- Identifying matches for eligible schools within a permitted 'matching zone', based on the following criteria:
    - % KS2 pupils (primaries) or KS4 pupils (secondaries) eligible for FSM

- % all pupils attaining KS2 Level 5+ in all subjects (primaries) or attaining 5+ A*-C at GCSE (including English and Maths) (secondaries)

- % FSM pupils attaining KS2 Level 5+ in all subjects (primaries) or attaining 5+ A*-C at GCSE (including English and Maths) (secondaries)

Once matches were identified, our sample of 'high-performing schools' was selected from those matched schools which had the smallest differences in KS2 or KS4 attainment between their FSM pupils and that of the rest of their pupil population. Conversely, 'lower-performing schools' were those schools showing consistent underperformance of disvantaged pupils, where the attainment gap between FSM pupils and other pupils was largest. The sample of higher- and lower-performing schools was further divided into those situated in London, and those outside the capital, creating four groups of schools for both the primary and secondary phases.

From our sample we were able to successfully recruit 23 schools to participate, including 16 primary schools, and 7 secondary schools. Due to small sample sizes from which to draw on and challenges in recruitment, we were only able to secure one of the two planned lower-performing secondary schools in London. Of the twelve non-London schools, nine were located in major urban conurbations, two in smaller urban conurbations and one in a rural town. Five schools were located in Yorkshire and the Humber, five in the West Midlands, one in the North West and one in the South West of England

Literature review methodology

Literature was sourced from a search of academic databases and grey literature, and drew on international as well as UK-based research. We focused our search on literature dating from the last ten years, but expanded this to include older seminal studies and in order to follow up secondary citations.

Data collection

Case studies took place between September 2016 and July 2017 and were held over two consecutive days in each school. Each case study consisted of the following components:

- Desk-based background review of school performance data, inspection reports, history, values and ethos, and local area characteristics

- 40-minute, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with:

  - Three teachers

  - Two members of the senior leadership team

- Two governors (including the Chair where possible)

- Focus group with ~6 parents

- Focus group with ~6 pupils (a mix of pupils eligible for FSM and not eligible for FSM; a mix of year groups)

- Diary task with ~6 pupils

- 2-3 hours of observations of lessons, SLT meetings, playgrounds and corridors

Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed, while observations were notated using a standardised rubric. Pupil diaries were scanned, along with any flipchart notes taken during focus groups. Each case study was conducted by one researcher from the LKMco team.

Data analysis

Across all 23 case studies, 388 records (interview and focus group transcripts, observation sheets and pupil diaries) were analysed and any excerpts relating to one or more of the nine themes were identified and tagged with those themes. In total, we identified 9,596 excerpts of relevant data and applied 13,998 tags to map those excerpts onto themes. Individual items of data were then analysed, theme-by-theme, for each of the four groups of schools in our sample, in order to identify sub-themes relating to specific cultures and practices. These sub-themes were tabulated in a form which allowed the frequencies of specific sub-themes to be compared between the four school groups.

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