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Secretary of State foreword  
– building the foundations for change:

I’ve always believed that you shouldn’t be destined to travel a certain path in life just because of where you start out. In the past this has too often been the case. Not only is this unjust, it also makes no economic sense. As Britain prepares for a new and exciting future it is more important than ever before that everyone makes the most of their potential.

Social mobility is the key to unlocking this and it is at the heart of our education policy. We are determined that everyone gets a chance to go as far as their abilities and ambition will take them.

As Secretary of State my ambition is to provide every child and young person with world-class education, training and care, whatever their background and wherever they come from. Many are already beginning to see the benefits from our ambitious reform programme to raise standards and increase choice: 86% of children - up from 66% in 2010 – are now being taught in a good or outstanding school, while the number of six-year-olds who are meeting the expected standard in reading has gone from 58% in 2012 to 81% last year.

There is so much more to come, but there is also so much more yet to do. We know there are areas in the country that have not yet felt the full benefits of our reforms.

The Opportunity Areas programme is one of the ways in which we are addressing this. We have been working with a host of people in twelve of the most disadvantaged areas of the country - teachers, businesses, charities, nurseries, health professionals, community centres, and many others - to identify and break down the barriers that can hold back children and young people.

Each of those areas have their own particular challenges. For some it might be nursery provision, where not enough is being done to help disadvantaged children reach the same levels as their more affluent peers before they go to primary school. This creates a gap that only widens as they grow up. In others, schools might be experiencing high rates of exclusion and low attendance; or see their pupils leave with good grades, but struggle to make the leap into work, lacking the skills and confidence they need to take the next steps towards a rewarding and fulfilling career.

In my visits to the Opportunity Areas I’ve seen for myself the passion and commitment of those involved in trying to drive change. On one visit, I saw how schools, colleges, and healthcare providers in Hastings are working with us to make sure even more young people can get the help they need to improve their mental health and wellbeing. Another project involved community centres and charities in Doncaster partnering with us to provide a range of out-of-school activities for vulnerable youngsters, building their life skills and increasing their self-confidence. These people and many others like them work tirelessly in their communities to help bring about improvements in social mobility.

Is it working? Whilst it is too early to determine the full impact of the programme, I have seen first-hand the difference it is making to the lives of young people on the ground. And the early evaluation suggests some successes around the collaborative approach to improving the life chances of children and young people in the Opportunity Areas.

1 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/opportunity-area-programme-research-and-analysis
Which is why now is the right moment to reflect on where we are and what we’ve learnt, the difference we are making, and those things that are still on the ‘to do’ list. In this report we have brought all our learning to date together, and hope that other organisations or communities that may be facing similar challenges, can benefit from what we have found so far.

Only last week we launched Opportunity North East – a programme focused on tackling five clear issues holding young people back in the North East of England - which will be able to borrow and benefit from much of what we have learnt in setting up the Opportunity Areas. And my ambition is that other areas also facing entrenched social mobility issues – from coastal towns to the inner cities – can do likewise.

Improving social mobility is a complex, intergenerational issue, and nobody involved in this programme thinks that change will come easily. But all of us in the department, and many others further afield, are determined to make a difference.

For me, social mobility is not just a basic human right, it is about creating a strong, highly skilled, productive economy, where we can all make the most of all our talents and skills. And it is through this that we will create a dynamic Britain fit for the future.

The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
Secretary of State for Education
Our approach in Opportunity Areas: early successes

Whilst early days, we are already seeing some successes in areas, particularly in the place-based, collaborative way we are working in Opportunity Areas. Common features include:

- **Partnership and collaboration** – partnership working in the programme has been vital. Our local partners include local authorities, early years providers, schools, colleges, universities, businesses, health professionals and voluntary and community organisations. They are all working beyond organisational boundaries towards a shared aim. This provides the opportunity to have a greater collective impact than is possible to do as individual organisations, and should lead to a greater benefit for those children and young people we are striving to help. In North Yorkshire Coast, for example, a Maths Centre has been established to support schools across the area to improve the teaching of maths across the whole Opportunity Area.

  “The fact [the Opportunity Area programme] has galvanised a community of interested parties… has been a highly valuable thing.”
  
  Opportunity Area partnership board member

- **Strong local leadership** – this has been essential during the early days of the programme. We are fortunate to have committed, independent Chairs of local partnership boards who have a range of experience across the business and the education sectors.

  “The Chair has had a dramatic impact on the way the partnership board is operating…he has got that level of respect and expertise that has changed the dynamic.”
  
  Opportunity Area partnership board member

- **Joint vision, single purpose and relentless focus on the priorities** – local partners in Opportunity Areas have acknowledged the challenges that areas are facing and have worked with others locally to develop a shared awareness and understanding of the issues. Regular open communication with all stakeholders secured their commitment to a common goal. This upfront agreement and shared understanding of the challenges and the objectives of the programme has set the direction from the outset.

  “There was significant awareness lacking of how poor social mobility is…this has been a real wake-up call and with that has come action.”
  
  Opportunity Area partnership board member
• **The voice of young people** – we have listened to young people in Opportunity Areas. We want them to be involved in shaping the programme. In Norwich, for example, a youth board challenges the programme strategy and has developed interventions for the area. The youth board hosted a celebration event in September to share their experiences of living in Norwich and what social mobility means to them. At that event, one young person from the Norwich Youth Board said:

> “…we already find ourselves in a different place to a year ago, and hope that in another two years we will have made so much difference that all young people, like me, will feel supported and able to make the best choices for their future.”

• **The role of data and evidence** – priorities and activities in the plans are underpinned by thorough data analysis. The actions we are taking are evidence-based and have gone through rigorous challenge, including from the Education Endowment Foundation and the local partnership board. Where interventions are more innovative, we are evaluating these to understand ‘what works’. Research Schools in Opportunity Areas are also supporting schools to embed evidence-based practice.

> “It is vital that we learn from what has worked elsewhere if we are to improve children’s outcomes in some of the most challenging areas of the country. The Education Endowment Foundation has been working closely with Opportunity Areas, including through our network of Research Schools, to ensure that activities and plans are underpinned by evidence.”

Sir Kevan Collins, CEO, Education Endowment Foundation

• **Use of national programmes and external funding** – historically, these areas haven’t always benefited fully from national funding and programmes, often because of their geographical isolation or low capacity. Opportunity Areas have worked hard to draw on these programmes - some of which are listed at the end of this report and are supporting those priorities set out in the delivery plans for each area.

We are also finding there is an appetite for external funding to support the aims of the programme. For example, in Bradford we have been able to bring in over £700,000 of external funding to help remove health barriers to learning, and we expect to double this by the end of the year. This will help to ensure that the improvements generated by the Opportunity Area programme are sustainable.

> “The Bradford Opportunity Area is ensuring that Bradford becomes the Hadron Collider of health and education research.”

Professor John Wright, Director of Research, Bradford Institute for Health Research

• **Building on strengths** – we did not start from zero. There was already good work being done in each Opportunity Area. Programmes like ‘Making it REAL’ in Oldham, the Blackpool School Improvement Board, and the Scarborough Pledge, meant we could build on and develop existing initiatives that were already making a difference. This allowed us to start delivering quickly by having key partners already on board with the aims of the programme and delivery structures for some interventions already in place.
**Our approach: what we did**

### Step 1 – exploring and defining the challenges and opportunities

- In-depth data analysis of education data from early years to post-19 destinations – ensuring the programme is ‘data driven’
- Local consultation – speaking to a wide range of organisations that work with children and young people
- Engagement with young people – to understand their perspective on challenges and opportunities in the area and involve them in the programme
- Mapping out existing activity to understand its impact so far

### Step 2 – building a coalition for change

- Invited local leaders from a range of sectors including early years, schools, colleges, universities, businesses and the voluntary and community sector to form a local ‘partnership board’
- Encouraged organisational boundaries to come down in order to form a shared vision for the area

### Step 3 – prioritising the issues

- Using the evidence gathered from the data, local consultation and understanding of the local context, the local partnership board agreed a list of priorities
- Each area worked hard to focus on just three to four priorities to ensure that the programme has focus and clear objectives

### Step 4 – developing the plan

- The local partnership board agreed a plan of activities for the first year and set three year targets for each priority, utilising a range of local and national funding to support evidence-based activity
- Sustainability of activity was a key consideration that underpinned the plans
- The Education Endowment Foundation provided challenge and support as areas developed plans

### Step 5 – putting the plan into action

- Subgroups were formed around priorities in the plans – these groups often had responsibility for sharing Opportunity Area plans more widely e.g. with other schools – to ensure wide buy-in and engagement
- Whilst the local partnership board maintains the strategic overview across all of the priorities, sub groups take forward specific work plans within a priority and drive them forward

### Step 6 – monitoring and evaluation

- Activity within the plan needs a clear monitoring framework – this will vary depending on the size of the project and the existing evidence base
- The overall programme has an independent process and impact evaluation
- Ensuring there is a clear plan for learning ‘what works’ and communicating findings is crucial for future decisions on where to focus energy and resources – and for sharing the learning with other areas
Partnership in action

Independent Chairs of Opportunity Area partnership boards

Graham Cowley
Blackpool

Anne-Marie Canning MBE
Bradford

Professor Kathryn Mitchell
Derby

Professor Sir Chris Husbands
Doncaster

Patricia Pritchard
Fenland and East Cambridgeshire

Richard Meddings
Hastings

Richard Lister OBE
Ipswich

Sir Martin Narey
North Yorkshire Coast

Dr. Tim Coulson
Norwich

James Kempton
Oldham

Dr. Carol Shanahan
Stoke-on-Trent

Professor Liz Barnes
Stoke-on-Trent

Dr. Fiona McMillan OBE
West Somerset
Supporting the transition from primary to secondary school

Background

The transition between primary and secondary school is a key point in a child’s development. Yet for Blackpool many children’s performance dips following this period – putting at risk their growth and opportunities in later life. Blackpool Opportunity Area is investing £440,000 in a project developed by Blackpool School Improvement Board to ease transition between the phases, encourage collegiate working between primary and secondary schools and improve academic progress in key stage 3 (years 7-9).

The project includes all 42 Blackpool mainstream schools. It has included School Family Groups, a common platform for measuring progress across all secondary schools, and a very successful transition week. Pamela Birch, Deputy CEO, Fylde Coast Academies Trust said of the programme:

“What is heartening has been the collective desire to identify where problems lay and to work collaboratively to overcome them. We all have one goal in mind, which is to improve children’s life chances. Not a moment can be wasted!”

Collegiate working

The project involved grouping schools into School Family Groups to share good practice. Secondary teachers observed lessons in primary, and vice versa, and the groups are designing curricula in English, maths and science to make sure secondary lessons build on the great teaching in primary.

Using data and evidence: single assessment platform

The project funded a common platform for testing pupils’ progress in English, maths and science in key stage 3. This will enable all Blackpool secondary schools to have a clear benchmark at the start of each year and to measure the progress of each student. Assessment will enable identification of the students who need the most support, and will help schools to measure the impact of interventions. The data from these assessments will also help evaluate the impact of other Opportunity Area funded projects.

Transition week

Transition week allowed Blackpool’s year 6 pupils to spend a week attending their new secondary school. By reducing their anxiety about moving to a new school, it ensured that they and their families settled seamlessly. The week included timetabled activities and taster lessons, which gave a real idea of what secondary school would be like. Teachers from primary and secondary schools worked together to make the week a success and to support the children who needed it.

“Transition week allowed our new starters to experience activities with both staff and older pupils leading lessons. Pupils explored the challenges and experiences they would encounter as they made a successful transition into secondary school life.”

Matt Holden, Teacher, St Mary’s Catholic Academy

“I am in an electric wheelchair as I have cerebral palsy. It kept playing on my mind how I was going to get around school but I found out there are two lifts to take me to any classroom in the school. This made me feel really pleased. I met new people during my Transition Week, one who is now my best friend.”

Murcia-Eva, aged 11
Background

The Bradford Opportunity Area is investing around £1 million to better understand the links between children’s learning and their physical, emotional and mental health. This funding is building a partnership between schools and world-leading health research organisations that will develop effective tools and techniques to improve education and health outcomes. The Opportunity Area’s work on eyesight and literacy is one such project.

Reading, writing and communicating with confidence are essential skills for life, learning and work. But on average, across Bradford, pupils’ attainment in 2017 was six percentage points lower in reading at the end of primary school than nationally. Disadvantaged pupils also tended to do worse than their peers.

The Opportunity Area explored the data behind this, and found that poor eyesight could be contributing to this gap.

Children’s eyesight is screened in schools. Where a child’s eyesight requires correction, letters are sent home to parents referring them to an ophthalmic service. Yet health professionals estimate that more than 2,500 children in Bradford who have sight problems have been offered a referral, but have not been taken to their optometrist to get help. This is clearly not just a health issue.

“‘Glasses in Classes’ – improving literacy by tackling uncorrected eyesight problems in schools

Our project

The Opportunity Area has now started recruiting schools in Bradford to ensure children with eyesight problems are provided, in schools, with two pairs of glasses. Activity will begin in up to 50 schools in September 2019. They will take one pair home and keep one pair at school, ensuring they can see properly in and out of the classroom. We expect to see improvements in reading and engagement, and will carry out robust monitoring and evaluation to draw out and share good practice.

This is an exciting time to be teaching and learning in Bradford. The Opportunity Area is also developing new tools to aid handwriting, to help teachers identify children who might have signs of autism, and bring virtual reality and robotics into the classroom. We will launch our ‘Evidence Active Schools’ programme to help every school in the district become a champion of evidence-based, test-and-learn teaching methods, and provide unparalleled opportunities for teachers, leaders and pupils to participate in world-leading education research.

“If the children are struggling to see the letters then of course they will find it difficult to read!”

Kevin Holland, CEO, Priestley Academy Trust

“The Bradford Opportunity Area work is showing how health and education services can work together to improve outcomes for children. The ‘Glasses in Classes’ project is a wonderful example of how we can remove health barriers to education, and help children fulfil their academic potential. Evidence shows that children’s increased educational attainment can improve physical and mental health during their adult lives”.

Professor Mark Mon-Williams, Bradford partnership board member
Background

Standards of primary education in Derby were not strong enough in both English and maths, particularly in schools in areas of deprivation. Only 78% of children in year 1 achieved the phonics standard in 2016 compared to 81% nationally and only 68% of pupils receiving free school meals achieved the standard. At key stage 1, Derby’s children lagged behind national standards in reading, writing and mathematics by as much as 10 percentage points. At key stage 2, the percentage of children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was 48% against 54% nationally. This means many children in Derby are left behind.

Building on existing collaborative approaches

Made up of strong local headteachers and educational experts, Derby’s Primary Strategy Group (PSG) supports the city’s primary schools and academies to improve the educational outcomes of Derby’s children. The PSG has driven change in the primary sector, through embedding evidence-based interventions, including English as an additional language, leadership development, improving reading and writing programmes and pupil premium reviews. The successes from its first year in 2016 included significant improvements in the phonics screening test results in schools. This made the group excellently placed to provide primary advice and expertise.

Delivering success

The PSG recommended that the Opportunity Area should build on its previous achievements by expanding the phonics programmes, alongside school-led primary programmes including reading, comprehension, maths, and support for children with English as an additional language. These recommendations were taken up by the Opportunity Area, investing over £100,000. This is supporting 48 primary schools across the city, with improvements in many participating schools outstripping that seen both locally and nationally. Reading at both key stage 1 and key stage 2 is improving faster in Derby than nationally.

Building on our achievements

Building on this success, the PSG has again recommended the Opportunity Area invest up to £125,000 in primary programmes in the current academic year (2018/19). This will support schools most in need so that Derby’s children continue to reap the benefits of improving education provision across the city.

“Our Opportunity Area involvement has given us the chance to build upon the work of the Primary Strategy Group. We have broadened our membership to include professionals from across the city, and can ‘think big’ in terms of the impact we want to have for disadvantaged pupils. Our work is carefully targeted on sustainable leadership development within schools. The early impact data from our first year of programmes is good news, and very encouraging.”

Mrs Jane Calladine, Executive Head, Parkview and Redwood Primary Schools Federation, and Chair, Derby’s Primary Strategy Group
Background

When young people take part in extra-curricular activity it enhances their resilience and their social and emotional skills. This supports academic performance and success in work.

The Opportunity Area carried out data mapping to assess the number of children who experience multiple layers of disadvantage and vulnerability and their experiences of education and opportunities. This found that for children and young people in these circumstances, life in Doncaster can be challenging, resulting in a lack of experiences, limited access to enrichment opportunities and reduced engagement in education.

In July 2018, the Education Secretary announced the £1 million Essential Life Skills programme for the Doncaster Opportunity Area, as part of a wider £2.75 million funding pot. This programme will help children and young people in Doncaster to develop non-cognitive skills such as confidence, resilience and punctuality.

The Opportunity Area wanted to ensure this funding was targeted at the most disadvantaged in the borough and launched a summer activities programme with a local youth consortium in the six most disadvantaged wards. It has also awarded funding to nineteen organisations to deliver term-time activities.

The life skills programme includes:

- a summer programme in 2018 where 3,462 individual young people attended one of 65 different activities at 828 events in the six most deprived wards in Doncaster

- a term-time extra-curricular offer to schools from nineteen different organisations, including the Prince’s Trust ‘Achieve’ programme, breakfast clubs, sporting activities and specialist offers for the children of substance misusers and for those from Gypsy, Roma and traveller communities

Noah’s story

Noah is nine years old and lives in Edlington, one of the most deprived wards in Doncaster. This summer, he took part in over fifteen free sessions and over 34 hours of activities through our summer programme. At first, Noah was reluctant to participate in activities without his brother and was nervous around children he didn’t know. As summer went on and Noah enjoyed football, archery and fencing, his self-confidence developed. By the end of the programme, Noah was taking a leadership role within the sessions, helping to set out equipment and give demonstrations to others.

“My boys have been kept active outdoors and less reliant on technology for entertainment. They have integrated with kids of the same and different ages, and made new friends. The programme has helped Noah develop confidence in his own abilities and skills and helped him to join in new activities. This is something that my son would never normally do. It has been brilliant.”

Noah’s mum, Sarah
Background

In Fenland and East Cambridgeshire there is a clear attainment gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and other pupils, with particular challenges around reading, writing and communication.

The Opportunity Area programme is supporting schools to take an evidence-based approach to tackle these issues. It has made grants of up to £25,000 available to projects that improve outcomes for children and young people struggling with these issues. Over £400,000 has been invested in schools with a further £200,000 available in 2018/19 to help more get involved.

Creating strong networks

More than 50 schools have been involved in projects (over two-thirds of the schools in the Opportunity Area) and the fund is encouraging schools to collaborate on shared issues and projects. One bid brings together 20 primary and secondary schools to develop whole-school mental health strategies. Another funds a cluster of local primaries to build on the success of phonics approaches in early years and key stage 1, with a programme to strengthen decoding skills for pupils in years 5-11 who need to improve their reading.

Supporting all schools to succeed

A panel of experts review every bid to make sure funding has the greatest impact. The Opportunity Area’s aim is that every child, regardless of where they live or go to school, can benefit. Therefore the Opportunity Area works with schools that are not successful in their first bid to redesign their project and get funding.

Embedding evidence-based practice in the classroom

Research leads are eligible for continuing professional development through the Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Research School. Training sessions will challenge schools to set ambitious targets, and support them to embed best practice and create change.

Impact

We expect the diverse range of projects will give schools information on improving outcomes for children in their particular local context. We also hope the increased focus on collaboration and evidence-based practice will leave a legacy of school-to-school support.

“Our project on conversational turn taking aims to give children different language opportunities in order to be ready to learn. We need adults to talk to children and give them conversational feedback to develop their cognitive processes and provide them with rich language experiences.

We want children whose parents are time and resource poor to have the chance to catch up so they can go on to learn well in the Early Years Foundation Stage.”

Kate Bonney, Headteacher, Robert Arkenstall Primary School
Background

In a survey by the Hastings Youth Council, 82% of young people ranked their mental and emotional health and wellbeing as their biggest concern. The Opportunity Area identified this as a priority, and recognised that improving access to mental health provision would require education, health and community services working together. Through partnership working between the local NHS, schools, multi-academy trusts, East Sussex County Council, Hastings Borough Council, and the voluntary and community sector, the Hastings Opportunity Area programme is investing over £600,000 a year to address this.

Targeted key work service focusing on emotional well-being

Around £250,000 a year will fund a key work service for school children in years 5 to 9. This will offer one-to-one interventions and group work programmes to children and young people with early warning signs of anxiety, depression, anger issues or those at risk of self-harm or eating disorders.

Improving access

A £100,000 a year fund will expand Hastings’ award-winning i-Rock service to five days a week from three. This is a drop-in service for young people aged 14 to 25, providing advice on emotional and mental wellbeing, employment, education and housing.

“I was really struggling with my children and being able to cope with their needs. My confidence was low and I felt like a rubbish mum. I was desperate. Triple P has helped me pull together things I was already doing and make stronger strategies. My house is calmer and I know how to handle the occasional ‘meltdown’. The change in my confidence is massive and I have even had positive comments from strangers about how I manage the children’s behaviour outside the home.”

Mum of three

Expanding parental support and support for the most vulnerable

More than £250,000 a year will expand support for parents and carers in Hastings, including ‘Triple P – Positive Parenting Programme’, which encourages parents to seek support and offers practical strategies to foster healthy family relationships. This can prevent problems developing at home. It includes £75,000 to support schools, parents and voluntary organisations to deliver interventions for children and young people who have experienced domestic violence, are at risk of knife crime or peer on peer sexually harmful behaviours.

Working with schools and colleges

Schools and colleges will be supported to embed a sustainable whole school approach to improving mental health and emotional wellbeing. This will identify good practice in supporting students’ and teachers’ mental health.

Young people using the i-ROCK service have said:

“I came away feeling there might be a light at the end of the tunnel.”

“It’s the most amazing supportive team. I know if it wasn’t for i-Rock and their help I would have seriously struggled.”
Background

In Ipswich, educational outcomes at both key stage 2 and key stage 4 are below the national average and absence rates for disadvantaged pupils are high.

The Opportunity Area identified that when it came to tackling this, parents and carers needed to be involved alongside teachers and others in formal education. It has invested in supporting schools to understand and implement effective ways to communicate with parents, so that young people are supported to achieve in school and at home.

Supporting parents through behavioural nudges

The Ipswich Opportunity Area has partnered with the Behavioural Insights Team and Easy Peasy to deliver two exciting randomised control trials that use behavioural insights and technology to improve parent engagement in pupil’s learning and development.

They are working with schools to design and implement text-messaging interventions to reduce persistent unauthorised absences and improve communication between parents, carers and schools to boost student attainment. The texts will be based on:

- the importance of school attendance, advance preparation for tests, study skills and other positive learning behaviours
- helping parents to identify obstacles to attendance and homework and create plans to address them
- reminding parents to maintain a goal of daily attendance and frequent homework completion using an ‘implementation-intentions’ approach

The trials will build on a promising evidence base of approaches that use behavioural insights, coupled with technology, to improve parental engagement in education.

Text messages are ubiquitous, low-cost and require minimal additional work for teachers. Texts developed as part of this project will still be personal, but automated to reach a larger number of parents with greater frequency. This will encourage parents to build positive parenting habits over time. If these trials prove effective, this will offer a sustainable way to improve communications between schools and parents for all Ipswich schools.

“The importance of parental engagement cannot be understated and it is one of the greatest barriers to student achievement. Research has found that getting parents engaged with the school to take an interest in their child’s education is more important in areas of deprivation. Westbourne Academy is excited about trialling this innovative approach.”

Maxine Abbott, Teacher, Westbourne Academy
Background

Too few young people from disadvantaged backgrounds secure good maths outcomes on the North Yorkshire Coast. In 2016, disadvantaged pupils across the Coast attained almost nine percentage points lower in maths than disadvantaged pupils nationally at the end of key stage 4. This affects their next step in education and career prospects for the rest of their life.

Improving maths outcomes is one of the four priorities of the North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area. We are maximising local expertise in the area and focusing on strengthening how the subject is taught.

Mastery is at the heart of our approach

The principles of teaching for mastery – an inclusive approach to maths that builds in-depth understanding of maths structures and concepts – is at the heart of our strategy. We are working with the Yorkshire Ridings Maths Hub to instil mastery approaches across all school phases. Our aim is to build a network of Mastery Specialists across the district. We will draw on expertise in the area to ensure a programme of maths improvement.

We have established a Scarborough based maths centre and appointed a lead to ensure that support from the Yorkshire Ridings Maths Hub is accessible to local teachers. Three teachers are now being trained in mastery at primary and secondary level, and six schools have registered to join a new NCETM-led Mastery Readiness programme. We are working with the Maths Hub to establish an early years mastery programme. The maths centre has also been selected to host two Shanghai teachers as part of a teacher exchange.

Embedding mastery through collaboration

A series of projects and activities are improving collaboration and embedding our mastery approach. The maths centre is delivering continuous professional development events and our Research School has provided workshops using the Education Endowment Foundation’s new key stage 1 and key stage 2 guidance report. We are expanding a maths transition project in Whitby, working with year 6 and 7 teachers to improve collaboration across schools and ensure a continuation of maths learning across the age phase. We are hosting a maths month in March to help children and young people feel more confident and positive about maths.

“Teaching for mastery is taking a hold of the North Yorkshire Coast. Children are excited to share their growing sense of understanding in maths – explaining why and how... the answer is just the beginning! Fellow teachers are excited by the challenge of developing mastery through a growing sense of collaboration. I enjoy my part in sharing mastery across the Opportunity Area through links with Yorkshire Ridings Maths Hub and North Yorkshire Coast Research School.”

Matthew Davies, maths centre lead
Background

There are too many pupils being excluded in Norwich, with high numbers being educated in alternative provision where outcomes can be poor, or pupils not being in school at all.

The Opportunity Area brought together schools and partner organisations to agree an inclusion charter for Norwich schools. This was launched in April 2018, and has been backed with a £600,000 investment.

Impact

The investment has enabled schools to work together to reduce exclusion, connect with local leaders, agencies and providers, and engage with the latest evidence on inclusive practice in education. It provides additional support for staff, governors, students and families to prevent exclusions where appropriate.

The Opportunity Area is encouraging all local schools to join the Norwich Inclusion Charter. Schools nominate an Inclusion Champion, a senior member of staff focused on inclusion, and an Inclusion Governor, who is committed to inclusive practice.

The Opportunity Area goal is to reduce the rate of fixed term and permanent exclusions by two-thirds by 2020/21.

We know it is working: one school has seen an 86% drop in exclusions, and told us there is a changing culture around inclusion.

“I feel like my behaviour's improved, the teachers don’t just think I’m the naughty kid anymore. They’re trusting me and my grades are going up.”

“I haven’t gone to exclusion in five weeks since we started this!”

“I replace swears with ‘oh my days’.”

Pupil's feedback

“Since signing the Norwich Inclusion Charter we’ve seen a real step up in how schools work together to look after our most vulnerable and disadvantaged students. We’ve been supporting each other in preventing exclusions in our schools, by simple steps like working together on managed moves.

We have a parent who is over the moon about the positive impact it had on her son. She emailed me the photos of the work he was so proud of doing. I know it was a lot of effort to put this together so I owe it to you to share the thank you I received!

David Thomas, Principal, Jane Austen College
Helping all children be school ready by the age of five

Background

The proportion of Oldham children who reach a good level of development in the early years lags behind the national average. This matters, as when children go into reception behind, the gap only grows as they progress through school.

Expanding parental support

The award-winning ‘Making it REAL’ programme was already working with families with children aged between two and five years living in disadvantaged communities. It recognises that parents are children’s first educators and engaging them in their children’s early literacy development improves outcomes and helps narrow the disadvantage gap. The programme has been helping practitioners to build Oldham parents’ knowledge and confidence so that they can support their children with their early language, reading and writing and create a positive home learning environment. To date over 250 children have been involved in the programme through 709 home visits and 83 events.

The Opportunity Area injected £710,000 to expand the programme in the eight most disadvantaged wards in Oldham. Our ambition, through this programme and other initiatives, is that by 2021 70% of children in Oldham achieve a good level of development, with the greatest improvements coming from disadvantaged children.

Investing early

We have commissioned Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Trust to deliver a ‘Making it REAL’ programme for younger children between one and two years of age. This will be delivered by the Children’s Centre Right Start Service.

Beyond Literacy

Research has shown that a strong early home learning environment is closely linked to better attainment in maths. We are building on the ‘Making IT REAL’ programme by investing in the REAL Approach to Mathematics. This training will equip early years practitioners to build parents’ skills and confidence, so that they can support their child’s early mathematical development at home.

Quotes from parents

“The best part was realising how simple things can help your children… and most importantly it bonds your child with you.”

“How useful it is to acknowledge what we do every day is so beneficial to my child’s literacy development.”

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Quotes from parents

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“How useful it is to acknowledge what we do every day is so beneficial to my child’s literacy development.”
Background

When schools and social workers are able to work more closely together, they can identify families that need help earlier and better support the education and wellbeing of children.

The Opportunity Area, in partnership with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, has recently expanded the ‘Better Together’ project. This £1 million project will ensure that every primary and secondary school in the area is linked with a social worker and educational psychologist to identify children and families at risk of running into difficulties. It aims to give every child in Stoke-on-Trent the best possible start in life and learning.

Partnership and collaboration

The project is a multi-agency and close partnership working approach to safeguarding. It will support parenting, keep families together and have a positive impact on engagement in learning and attainment. It will enable closer and more effective working between schools and social workers, supporting families and children as early as possible. Schools will be able to access social workers and educational psychologists for advice, training and the development of joint approaches to support families and children.

Data and evidence

The project builds upon a pilot that ran last year in seven schools (five primary, one secondary school and one behaviour specialist unit), led by The Meadows Primary Academy. By helping children and their families at an early stage before problems developed, the schools involved found:

- improvement in attendance with a 15% increase in children with 95% or above attendance
- 32% increase of children in school on time with all belongings
- 5% increase of children making expected progress in reading, 14% in writing and 11% in maths
- 13% increase of children on Child Protection Plans which suggests that the pilot schools working with social workers correctly identified families in crisis (these children have been supported to remain with their families in almost all cases)
- 38% increase of children with no incidents or only occasional low level disruption.

- 11% increase of children with no in school seclusions and fixed term exclusions

The impact on attainment and other outcomes provided a case to expand the project and the aim is to cover all schools in the city.

“The support me and my daughter have had from the school has been phenomenal from both the teachers and support staff. I would like to become a parent governor to give back the help they have given me and make sure that the support the school gives every pupil both inside and outside of the classroom, educationally and emotionally is second to none.”

Parent

“Through Better Together, children in Stoke-on-Trent who are at risk of entering social care are able to make sure their voice is heard and to access the support they need in a timely way. They are being helped to feel secure in school and to be able to learn and achieve.

We’ve already seen huge benefits for the children who took part in the pilot and look forward to being able to extend this across the city and as the children grow. This is about raising aspirations and helping young people to achieve more with their learning. It’s not only a win for the children themselves but also for the parents, school staff and for the local authority too with the aim of supporting more children so they don’t come into care.”

Councillor Janine Bridges, cabinet member for education and economy at Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Background

In 2017, 73% of children in West Somerset achieved the expected standard in phonics, below the national average of 81%. Evidence shows that a systematic approach to teaching phonics helps children learn to read. The Opportunity Area has shone a spotlight on this issue, and as a result schools in West Somerset are working together to help more children to reach the expected standard in phonics.

Our ambition

Our ambition is that by 2020, the percentage of children achieving the expected standard in phonics exceeds the national average. Collaboration between schools in West Somerset, which is a rural and sparsely populated area, is an important aspect of achieving this goal.

Working together

West Somerset Opportunity Area brought together teachers from thirteen schools and seven early years’ settings in October 2017, to take part in a phonics roadshow delivered by the University of Reading. Participants learned about how research can benefit teaching of early reading and how practice can be adapted to better support young learners.

Schools with the weakest phonics scores in West Somerset took part in a school level phonics audit delivered by a local speech and language consultant. The audit identified the need for training in some language areas, and tighter tracking of progress. The Opportunity Area has also offered the audit intervention to early years settings.

As a result of the Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund some schools in West Somerset have taken part in phase two of the Read Write Inc systematic synthetic phonics programme delivered by Ruth Miskin Training.

As a result of the focus placed on phonics and the collaborative working schools have decided to take a ‘one West Somerset’ approach to delivery of phonics. In 2019, supported by the Opportunity Area, a local programme will help other schools adopt a systematic synthetic phonics approach, regardless of current levels of phonics attainment.

Results

“As a result of interventions designed to support language acquisition, the phonics outcomes have risen to at or above national averages in most schools this year. All schools have worked together to ensure that we build a robust and resilient system in which we can share good practice. This progress will continue to build well beyond the life of the Opportunity Area and ensure our children have the very best start to their education.”

Paul Rushforth, CEO, West Somerset Opportunity Area
Inspiring and preparing young people for the world of work

Background

We know that employer encounters matter. Research from the Education and Employers Taskforce shows that a young person who has four or more encounters with an employer is 86% less likely to be unemployed or not in education or training, and can earn up to 18% more during their career. The Careers & Enterprise Company has made a commitment for all secondary school and college pupils to receive at least four meaningful encounters with employers.3

The Careers & Enterprise Company committed to work with more than 220 secondary schools and colleges in the Opportunity Areas to help inspire and prepare their pupils for the fast changing world of work. Businesses have committed to work together, with the support of a £2 million government-backed fund to guarantee that all pupils aged eleven to eighteen will have access to at least four inspiring ‘encounters’ with the world of work. Senior business volunteers called enterprise advisors are matched to each school, supporting and advising its leadership team in shaping and implementing careers plans.

Inspiring girls

The enterprise advisor from Sirius Minerals, linked to Caedmon College Whitby, organised a six week programme for a group of year 9 girls who were at risk of disengaging from their studies. The aim was to inspire them and provide a glimpse into potential future careers.

The school worked with Sirius to develop a programme that saw the year 9 girls have weekly visits to Sirius Offices, as well as a visit to the mining site currently under construction.

The girls visited various departments at Sirius and undertook tasks intended to help them build employability skills, including team work, communication, resilience, problem solving and punctuality. Additionally, the girls had an opportunity to explore the potential careers and different pathways available to them.

Impact

“It’s a fantastic opportunity for our students to gain first hand experience of what it is like inside such a large organisation. The girls have reacted very positively and the feedback we have received from their tutor coordinating the project and visits has been excellent”.

Feedback from Caedmon College Whitby

“We believe in supporting young people to fulfil their potential and work closely with schools across the area. This project that has given young people the opportunity to spend a lot of time in the workplace and learn about the wide range of job roles. Over twenty of the Sirius team have really enjoyed taking part and it has been rewarding see the girls grow in confidence and expand their ideas about what they want to do the future.”

Matt Parsons, General Manager, Sirius Minerals

Beyond Opportunity Areas: signposting support

Opportunity Areas have used national programmes and funding to address priorities and improve life chances for children and young people in their areas. This section provides information about some of those resources, so that areas facing similar challenges can access them as well.

Early years

Early Years social mobility peer review
The Department for Education (DfE) has partnered with the Local Government Association to develop a new programme of peer review focused on improving early outcomes for disadvantaged five year olds, with a particular focus on early language.

The programme was piloted over the summer, with the first wave due to begin in early autumn. To register your local authority’s interest, please see: www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-social-mobility-peer-review-programme

School Nurseries Capital Fund
This fund is designed to create more good, school-based nursery places for pupils in disadvantaged areas. It is open to good and outstanding primary schools that have over 20% of FSM pupils. The deadline for applications is 22 November. For details of how to apply, see: www.gov.uk/guidance/school-nurseries-capital-fund

Schools

School Improvement Support
The Department for Education has produced a comprehensive summary of support available to schools. This information is grouped into categories such as curriculum and leadership and structured in a way to easily identify support that is available to meet a particular school improvement need, accompanied with eligibility criteria. More information can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/collections/school-improvement-support

English hubs
The Department for Education has announced the creation of 32 English hubs. These will form a national network to provide support and guidance to improve teaching reading for reception and year 1. You can find your nearest hub at www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-hubs-list-of-primary-schools/english-hubs-list-of-primary-schools

Maths hubs
The Maths hubs programme brings together mathematics education professionals in a collaborative national network of 35 hubs, each led locally by an outstanding school or college, to develop and spread excellent practice for the benefit of all pupils and students. Find your hub at www.mathshubs.org.uk/find-your-hub/

National Professional Qualifications (NPQs): scholarships
This is a fully funded offer for participants in category 5 and 6 areas to take one of the ‘gold standard’ National Professional Qualifications for existing and aspirant leaders. So far, the scholarships have had a particularly good uptake in Opportunity Areas. You can find out more about the funding criteria, and the areas in which providers operate at www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-professional-qualifications-npq-list-of-providers/list-of-national-professional-qualification-npq-providers
National School Breakfast Programme
The National School Breakfast Programme is Department for Education funded and delivered by the charities Family Action and Magic Breakfast for schools in areas of high disadvantage. More information, including how schools can submit an expression of interest, can be found at www.family-action.org.uk/breakfast.

Teach First
We have worked with Teach First in Opportunity Areas to get more great teachers working in schools facing challenges. You can find out more about Teach First at www.teachfirst.org.uk/

Teaching and Leadership Fund (TLIF)
TILF funds professional development programmes for teachers and leaders in priority schools (Ofsted requires improvement and inadequate) in priority areas (category 5 and 6 areas, including Opportunity Areas). More details on the programmes available can be found at www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-and-leadership-innovation-fund-programmes-for-teachers-and-school-leaders.

Post 16
Advanced Mathematics Support Programme
The Advanced Mathematics Support Programme (AMSP) is a government-funded initiative, managed by Mathematics Education Innovation (MEI), which aims to increase participation in AS/A level Mathematics, and AS/A level Further Mathematics, and level 3 Core Maths qualifications, and improve the teaching of these courses.

The AMSP provides national support for teachers and students in all state-funded schools and colleges in England. Additional support is given to those in priority areas to boost social mobility. More information is available at www.amsp.org.uk.

National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP)
NCOP aims to rapidly increase the number of young people from underrepresented groups who go into higher education. NCOP local partnerships focus their attention on geographic areas in England where higher education participation is low and lower than might be expected given the GCSE results of the young people who live there. Find out more about NCOP at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/national-collaborative-outreach-programme-ncop/

Strategic College Improvement Fund (SCIF)
SCIF grants will support colleges graded requires improvement or inadequate at their last Ofsted inspection, to deliver better outcomes for learners, employers and local communities. Further information is available at www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-applicants-to-the-strategic-college-improvement-fund.

Careers
The Careers & Enterprise Company
The Careers & Enterprise Company supports Opportunity Areas so that every young person has access to opportunities in the world of work, no matter what their background. The Company has established a national network connecting schools and colleges with employers and careers programme providers, providing dedicated support for them to work together in enabling access to and experience of the world of work for young people. The network is made up of enterprise coordinators, a dedicated role co-funded by Local Enterprise Partnerships. Enterprise coordinators are trained professionals who work with clusters of twenty schools and colleges to build careers plans and make connections to local and national employers. Senior business volunteers called enterprise advisors are also matched to each school within the network, supporting and advising its leadership team in shaping and implementing careers plans.

Find out more at www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/about-us/our-network.

Social action
National Citizen Service
The National Citizen Service (NCS) brings together young people from different backgrounds for a unique shared experience to help them to become better individuals, and in turn better citizens. NCS works with a wide range
of organisations in Opportunity Areas and aligns its programmes to the needs of that community – ensuring the benefits of NCS can be accessed by all their young people. More information about the NCS can be found at www.ncsyes.co.uk/

What works centres

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and Research Schools

The EEF have provided support and challenge to the Opportunity Area programme. Guidance reports such as ‘Putting evidence to work – a school’s guide to implementation’ and EEF toolkits have been used widely by local partners in Opportunity Areas.

Areas have also been supported by the Research School network – you can find out more about the network, including where your nearest Research School is at www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/scaling-up-evidence/research-schools/

Early Intervention Foundation (EIF)

The EIF has also provided support and challenge to the Opportunity Area programme. The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) is a research charity and one of the Government’s ‘What Works Centres’, focused on promoting and enabling an evidence-based approach to early intervention. They evaluate the evidence of what works in the field of early intervention, for both programmes and innovative local practice, and work with government and all levels of the early intervention sector to ensure this evidence is used in decisions about how early intervention is supported and implemented, from national policy to frontline practice. Find out more at www.eif.org.uk/about-us/
Key partners
Contact us

We are keen to share what we have learnt from this initial phase of the Opportunity Areas programme with other areas. If you would like to learn more, please contact us at opportunity.areas@education.gov.uk

If you would like to learn more about a particular area, please contact them using the details below.

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