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Education and Skills Committee

Secondary Education: Pupil Achievement

Seventh Report of Session 2002–03

Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence

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The Education and Skills Committee

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Footnotes
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Summary

In this, the second report of our inquiry into Secondary Education, we consider pupil achievement. We recognise that the Government has had considerable success in raising levels of literacy and numeracy in primary schools and is seeking to build on this in secondary education. But the evidence we have heard indicates that its approach here lacks the clear focus found in the primary phase.

It may be that as the differences between children become more apparent a greater variety of initiatives is needed, but we were left unclear as to the essential purposes and impact of some of the main Government strategies. In particular, Education Action Zones, introduced in 1998, are being merged into Excellence in Cities, yet we have not seen any detailed evaluation of EAZs. We applaud the Government’s adoption of an evidence-based approach to policy formation, but we are concerned that it does not seem to have taken the opportunity to learn fully the lessons arising from this initiative. This mirrors concerns we expressed in our previous report on diversity of school provision about the evidence informing the decision to expand the specialist schools programme.

The Government has made extensive use of centrally-set targets as a means of setting clear expectations for schools. This approach has met with some success and has contributed in our view to the rising levels of achievement in both primary and secondary schools, but we consider it has now served its purpose. We are not convinced that requiring teachers to achieve nationally predetermined targets is still the best way forward. In particular, we believe that a distinction one of our witnesses drew between ‘low achievement’ and ‘under-achievement’ is crucial. This suggests that much more individual assessment of children’s potential is necessary, and schools and teachers are in the best position to undertake this. We recommend that the Government should move from a system of national targets to allowing schools set their own targets, subject to review by local authorities and Ofsted, based on individual progress plans for their pupils. The aim should be for every child to achieve as much as they possibly can.

A particular drive in Government policy has been to raise the achievement of minority ethnic pupils. We noted the range in performance. The results of pupils from Chinese and Indian backgrounds tend to be above the overall average, while those of African Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils tend to be below. The evidence presented to us indicated the complexity of the reasons. Differences in performance by pupils from different ethnic backgrounds is a sensitive topic but we suggest that if real improvements are to be made the issues must be thoroughly researched. We took less evidence on differences with gender but again we were struck by how little solid information as to the reasons there seems to be in comparison with the extensive media speculation.

One thing that is clear from the evidence presented to us is that poverty is a significant indicator of low educational achievement. Some of the Department’s initiatives address the issue directly, but tackling this problem effectively will require co-ordination across Government as a whole.
The role of teachers is crucial. We were concerned to learn from our witnesses and the Annual Report of HMCI for 2001–02 of the difficulties some of the schools with most to do in raising achievement are finding in attracting good teachers. We shall be examining teacher recruitment and retention in detail in our next report, but we recommend at this stage that the government should give greater attention to strategies to encourage the best teachers to work in the most challenging schools. Effective leadership in schools is also vital. The evidence we received in this inquiry showed that schools which are well managed and have proactive leadership are much better placed than others to enable all children, even those most at risk of failing, to succeed.
Introduction

Scope of the inquiry

1. The Committee announced its Secondary Education inquiry on 4 November 2002, with its focus on four areas: Diversity of Provision; Pupil Achievement; Teacher Retention and School Admissions.

2. The inquiry benefited from the Committee’s innovative visits to Birmingham and to Auckland in New Zealand in the autumn of 2002. We were gratified that so many were able to contribute to our visits, sharing with us their expertise and experience of the problems facing the secondary education sector and how those issues might be addressed by government policy. Our deliberations were also informed by visits to Belfast and Dublin in March and April 2003. We were also grateful for the frank and informed discussions we were able to have with people regarding educational issues in Ireland and the U.K.

3. Secondary education in Birmingham and Auckland was the subject of the first of six reports on this theme. This report on pupil achievement is the third in the series. Subsequent reports will focus on teacher retention and school admissions. The sixth and final report in the series will attempt to unite the recurrent themes of the five reports and analyse the broader issues in secondary education.

4. The purpose of this part of the inquiry was to examine the factors which affect the achievement of pupils in secondary education. We have focused on the various initiatives directed at raising pupil achievement outlined in the present Government’s main policy statements; the 2001 White Paper Schools achieving success,1 the Key Stage 3 Strategy, Excellence in Cities2 and the 2003 consultation document Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Minority Ethnic Pupils.3

5. Some of the important issues we have encountered during this stage of our secondary education inquiry were discussed in our report on the diversity of provision in secondary education and other issues will be revisited in the later stages, as issues surrounding pupil achievement are closely related to diversity of provision, school admissions, selection and the distribution and retention of subject specialist staff in the secondary sector.

6. During the course of our inquiry we took evidence from Mr David Miliband, Minister of State for School Standards, Mr Stephen Twigg MP, Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Schools, Professor Sally Tomlinson, from Oxford University, Professor John Bynner, from the Institute of Education, University of London, Dr Emma Smith, from the University of Cardiff, Professor Carol Fitz-Gibbon, from Durham University, Mr Barnaby Shaw, Divisional

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1 DFES, Schools – achieving success, Cm 5230, September 2001.
Manager, School Improvement and Excellence in Cities, DfES, Miss Annabel Burns, Head of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Project, DfES, and Mr Andrew McCully, Divisional Manager, Pupil Standards, DfES, Mrs Anne Cole, Headteacher, Saltley School, Birmingham and Mr David Daniels, Headteacher, White Hart Lane School, Haringey, London. In addition we received 29 written memoranda, some of which are published with this report.

**English achievement?**

7. There has always been a lively debate about the standard of English education and its standing against education in other countries, but sensible comparisons have often been difficult to make. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international study designed to assess the skills and knowledge of 15 year old students in literacy, mathematics and the sciences. It was first conducted in 2000 and was commissioned by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); 32 OECD member countries took part.

8. The results of the study were greeted with surprise, scepticism, and celebration. The English students who participated in the study demonstrated ability in mathematics, reading, and science significantly above the OECD average, ahead of those in France, Germany and the USA. England was ranked 8th and 9th in the PISA study for mathematics and literacy examination results. We travelled to Paris in March 2002 to take formal oral evidence from the OECD regarding its international study.

9. We were interested to learn that the scores of the lowest performing English students compared well with those in other countries but that the study showed England to have a wide variation in the performance of the most and least able students. This variation was shown to be greater within schools rather than between schools and showed a clear correlation between pupil achievement and social class. Professor John Bynner cautioned us against drawing firm conclusions from the PISA study; “it is a cross-sectional survey, and there are always question marks”.

10. Dr Emma Smith of Cardiff University has undertaken an analysis of the performance of the poorest 10 per cent of students undertaking the study. She told us that students in the UK were ranked 3rd or 4th highest of all EU countries based on their literacy results and pointed

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5 Minutes of Evidence taken before the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2001–02, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, HC 711–I.

6 Education and Skills Committee, First Report of 2003–04, Secondary Education: Visits To Birmingham And Auckland, paragraphs 11–12

7 Other studies, including the 1999 Third International Maths and Science Study (TIMMS). The Committee’s emphasis on PISA arises from its evidence taking in March 2002.

8 Knowledge and Skills for Life, first results from the OECD Programme for Student Assessment (PISA) 2000, OECD, Paris, 2001, p 81 Fig 2.6.

9 Q 3
out that “the performance of our poorer children was at least as good as the performance of [similar] students in Finland”.  

11. The PISA study highlighted an important issue for British educators, a long tail of low achievement. Professor Tomlinson said the PISA study showed that “we have high achievers and a tail of young people who are not achieving well”. She told us that “the major thing to come out of the PISA study is that the high achievement goes along with non-selective systems in Finland, South Korea—not North Korea—Canada, and Scotland... selective systems tend to have this tail of low achievers, which is what we have here”. The study showed correlation between the structure and organisation of education and the performance within schools. Education systems which displayed a selective element generated wider differences than others in achievement between the most and the least able. The study suggested that selective practices, including streaming, can have the effect of depressing levels of pupil attainment.

12. Mr Barnaby Shaw, Divisional Manager, School Improvement and Excellence in Cities, DfES, told us that “The gap between the best and lowest performing is strikingly big in England...It underlines the fact that this is quite a priority for England to try and narrow the gap and it is an uphill struggle because it is quite endemic.”

13. The PISA study raised important questions, and has given rise to a number of different interpretations of the performance of pupils in England. We developed our terms of reference for this inquiry based on some of the issues arising out of it. We wished to explore the effectiveness of policy designed to raise the achievement of the most disadvantaged as well as the more able students.

14. In this report we explore the use of education as a means of improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged. The Committee has consistently reported our firm belief in the importance of widening access to higher education. Success in secondary education is a fundamental requirement for further and higher education. The benefits of higher education include greater access to employment and financial independence, so it is vital that children are able to realise their potential at school. We recognise that this Government is committed to raising the achievement of pupils in secondary education. Our intention is to examine how effective Government policy is in achieving this aim.
Pupil achievement in secondary education

Development of Government policy

15. In the last 20 years the skills required by workers in this country have changed beyond recognition. The number of people employed in traditional manufacturing industries has significantly declined, and the other industries that have risen to take their place require very different skills. Education has evolved in response to these new requirements. Standards in schools have risen and education is increasingly seen by many as the key to a better life. Most schools have moved away from the highly selective grammar/secondary modern school system and children from all backgrounds have had greater opportunities to succeed. Professor Tomlinson said that in her view the PISA study had highlighted the success of non-selective education systems: “high achievement goes along with non-selection and more equity”.

16. When Labour came to power it was with the promise of reforming education. Six years later the Department is implementing a variety of strategies to transform secondary education. We focus in this report on the policies on which we have received oral and written evidence, but, in doing so, we need to remind ourselves of developments since 1997.

“Education, education, education”

17. In 1997 the Prime Minister pledged that a Labour Government’s priority would be ‘education, education, education’. There was a clear focus during the first parliament, on literacy, numeracy and class sizes at primary school. This resulted in free nursery places provided for every 4-year-old and class sizes for 5-year-olds were reduced to 30 or fewer. These policies appear, for the most part, to have been successful. The Government later introduced the literacy and numeracy hours in primary schools. Other Government initiatives have focused on inner city schools, and education action zones were launched. Secondary education was not the main focus of reform in the first four years after 1997, although some important funding changes were made.

18. More recently, the focus on key stage test results has intensified. The Government wanted to be assured of the benefit of its new primary strategies. This focus shifted later to secondary schools when it became apparent that success in the Key Stage 1 and 2 tests was not always followed with a similar improvement at Key Stage 3 test results.

Labour’s second term

19. From 2001 the range of educational targets has increased. Targets currently exist for early years, secondary education, disadvantaged groups, 16-year-olds, A-level reform, skills training, and university entrance. We recognise that these targets are designed to improve standards across education but are concerned that the Department is trying to address too many issues at
once. During this inquiry into pupil achievement in secondary education we have become aware of the extensive number of programmes, strategies and targets that apply to this area. In this report we explore the intentions behind education policy and ask if the present approach is the best way of improving secondary education.

20. The 2001 White Paper *Schools: achieving success* \(^{19}\) sets out one of the Department’s ambitions for its second term: “the transformation of secondary education” \(^{20}\). The Government has chosen to focus on gaps in achievement between groups of children; specifically the wide variation in performance between social and ethnic groups and the widening gap between the achievement of boys and girls in public examinations. During this Parliament the DfES has increased the number of targeted programmes aimed at raising achievement.

21. The 2003 Departmental Report said

> “The transformation of secondary education is central to the Department’s overall strategy for raising school standards. We are, therefore, focusing on improving teaching and learning for all young people. We are working to create a new specialist system where each school has its own ethos and works with others to share best practice and raise standards. We are determined to accelerate the improvements in attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4 by investing in the professional development of secondary teachers and supporting school leadership to ensure that pupils’ teaching and learning experience improves. We will also continue to focus on those schools where attainment remains low through targeted programmes of challenge and support to ensure pupils in those schools reach their potential.” \(^{21}\)

22. There are problems with the multi-targeted approach that has been adopted. Professor Fitz Gibbon of the University of Durham has argued that “There is always likely to be a struggle between classroom realities and ministerial ambitions, egged on by an insatiable media demanding that ‘something be done’. It is a remarkable revelation that Labour in England has introduced 650 initiatives on the basics since it came to power, yet there has been little impact at all on literacy standards”. \(^{22}\)

23. A recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Developing people: regenerating place: Achieving greater integration for local areas*, has expressed concern about the number of initiatives launched by the Government. \(^{23}\) Professor Alan McGregor of the University of Glasgow, author of the report, said, “the problem is the landscape keeps changing”. During our visits to Birmingham and Northern Ireland we had many discussions with teachers struggling

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\(^{22}\) *Times Educational Supplement*, 14 February 2003.

to keep up with the latest initiatives. One of our major concerns is that many head teachers spend too much valuable time implementing the plethora of initiatives targeted at specific student groups. During our discussions with DfES officials on this issue, Mr Shaw conceded that “[the DfES] had been hitting the school system with a lot of initiatives, what we need to be better at is making Government policy into fewer more coherent chunks rather than a scattering of minor initiatives.”

He added that the DfES “badly wants standards to improve, we want to close the attainment gap and we are keen to find ways that will work.”

We welcome the Department’s commitment to raising standards. We would caution the Department against introducing further initiatives until earlier ones have been properly evaluated and assessed. We note that at the time of giving evidence to us during this inquiry the Schools Standards Minister had not launched an initiative since arriving at the Department.

24. The National Union of Teachers announced at its annual conference in April that it would be balloting its members on boycotting Standard Assessment tests [SATs] for seven, 11 and 14 year olds in England. When we raised this issue with Mr Miliband he said that these tests represented “three national tests in the first nine years of the education system. I think that is a balance of assessment that gives the right scope for teachers and pupils to develop themselves, to pursue creative and other activities.” Nevertheless, if the Government’s mantra for its first term was “education, education, education”, its mantra for the second term has at times sounded rather more like “assessment, assessment, assessment”.

24 Q 173
25 Q 173
26 Q 320
27 Q 369
Policies contributing to pupil achievement

The National Curriculum

The National Curriculum sets out a clear, full and statutory entitlement to learning for all pupils. It determines the content of what will be taught, and sets attainment targets for learning. It also determines how performance will be assessed and reported.

An attainment target sets out the ‘knowledge, skills and understanding which pupils of different abilities and maturities are expected to have by the end of each key stage’ (as defined by the Education Act 1996, section 353a). Attainment targets consist of eight level descriptions of increasing difficulty, plus a description for exceptional performance above level 8. Each level description describes the types and range of performance that pupils working at that level should characteristically demonstrate.

Pupils are assessed by statutory National Curriculum tests at ages 7, 11 and 14. These tests assess the level a pupil has reached at the end of a Key Stage. Key Stage 1 assessments are taken at age 7, Key Stage 2 assessments at age 11 and Key Stage 3 assessments at age 14. Assessment at the end of Key Stage 4 (typically by those who will be 16 at the end of the school year) is measured by achievements at GCSE and GNVQ.

The National Curriculum defines expected levels of achievement for the Key Stages. It is possible to obtain a range of levels in each Key Stage. The National levels have been designed so that most pupils are expected to progress approximately one level every two years.

The expected level at each Key Stage describes the level achieved by the typical pupil. The expected levels are a level 2C at Key Stage 1, a level 4 at Key Stage 2 and levels 5 or 6 at Key Stage 3. There is no equivalent expected measurement at GCSE, 5 “good” GCSEs (i.e. 5 or more GCSEs at grade C or above) has been cited as the “expected level”.

Key Stage 3 Strategy

25. The Department has frequently voiced concern about the slow progress that many children make between the ages of 11 and 14 (Key Stage 3). The 2001 White Paper, Schools achieving success, highlighted the importance of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in primary education in providing the background success from which the Key Stage 3 strategy would be launched in an attempt to address the problem.

26. The Key Stage 3 Strategy was designed to address the issue of the seeming dip in achievement at Key Stage 3, following the rise in national results in Key Stages 1 and 2. It has four main aims: to create high expectations for all pupils, to strengthen the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, to promote approaches to teaching and learning that engage and motivate pupils and to strengthen teaching and learning through a programme of professional development and practical support.

27. Following the commencement of a two-year pilot, which began in April 2000 and involved 205 schools, the Department for Education and Skills began implementing a national strategy
for Key Stage 3 in summer 2001. The programme began with training for teachers in secondary schools outside the pilot scheme. The schools in the national programme were given funding to support the implementation of the Strategy; they were able to use this flexibly to support a range of activities. The activities included summer schools in literacy and numeracy for pupils about to join Year 7 whose standard of achievement was below level 4, and the provision of a catch-up programme in the autumn term onwards to enable pupils to reach level 4 as soon as possible.

28. The National Key Stage 3 strategy is the government’s flagship for raising standards of achievement of 11–14-year-olds across all secondary curriculum subjects. It aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the whole school, through high quality professional development for teachers. The Government has cited the rise in achievement in the 2003 Key Stage 3 test results as a positive indication that the strategy is working. The percentage of pupils reaching level 5 or above at Key Stage 3 in the three subjects has changed as follows:

- English: 67% this year rising from 65% in 2001;
- Mathematics: 67% this year rising from 66% in 2001;
- Science: 67% this year rising from 66% in 2001.

29. The Key Stage 3 Strategy aims to ensure that by age 14, the vast majority of pupils have: reached acceptable standards (Level 5 or above in the end of key stage National Curriculum tests) in the basics of English, mathematics, science and ICT; benefited from a broad curriculum, including studying each of the National Curriculum subjects; and learned how to reason, think logically and creatively and to take increasing responsibility for their own learning.

30. The Government has set targets for Key Stage 3 tests of 75% of 14-year-olds achieving level 5 (the standard expected for their age) in English, maths and ICT, and 70% in science, by 2004, and 85% achieving level 5 and above in English, maths and ICT, and 80% in science, by 2007.

31. We have been able to discuss the Key Stage 3 strategy with witnesses and with many teachers during our visits to Birmingham and Northern Ireland. The Strategy has been greeted with a mix of support, enthusiasm and concern. At the Committee’s secondary education seminar in July 2002, we were told informally that secondary school headteachers viewed the strategy as an ‘enabling tool’ to achieve improved standards. The strategy had also increased the workload of secondary school teachers. We were told that the national team supporting the Key Stage 3 Strategy was taking experienced teachers out of schools in every LEA in England.

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28 The Key Stage 3 National Strategy is based on four principles: Expectations: establishing high expectations for all pupils and setting challenging targets for them to achieve; Progression: strengthening the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 and ensuring progression in teaching and learning across Key Stage 3; Engagement: promoting approaches to teaching and learning that engage and motivate pupils and demand their active participation; Transformation: strengthening teaching and learning through a programme of professional development and practical support [DfES website].

29 DfES press notice 2003–05
Mr David Daniels, Headteacher of White Hart Lane School, Haringey, London, was concerned that the Key Stage 3 Strategy took around 6 people in each Authority to run. He pointed out that nationally “that is roughly 600 plus very experienced teachers, and they are all probably ex-heads of department, who are taken out of the system”. He asked, “Where do we find the replacements?”

32. Ofsted has reported that its evaluation of the strategy had shown promising signs, but concluded it was at that stage too early to tell how successful the strategy had been.30 The Minister for School Standards said “this year’s group of 11–12-year-olds, the year sevens, will feel the full benefit of it over the next three years. …When they reach the end of Key Stage 3 we will have a full picture of the effects of the programme across the three years.”31

33. We are convinced that for an effective evaluation of the Key Stage 3 strategy to take place the standards in schools involved from the outset should be measured against comparable schools which were not in the original pilot scheme. We asked Mr Miliband if he intended to have a statistically rigorous evaluation of the strategy. He told us that he wanted the strategy “evaluated properly”.32

**Education Action Zones**

34. Education Action Zones (EAZs) were introduced in The School Standards and Framework Act 1998. EAZs were generally set up in urban or rural areas with a mixture of socio-economic disadvantage and under-performance in schools. Such zones enabled local partnerships, which included the private sector, to target action on areas of need and to develop innovative and radical solutions for raising educational standards. There are currently 72 EAZs operating across England. They were launched between September 1998 and April 2000 with a maximum lifespan of five years. The Department has said that EAZs are making some useful contributions to raising standards. However, it was announced in November 2001 that when zones reach the end of their five year lifespan ex-EAZ schools will be merged into the Excellence in Cities initiative to ensure that wherever possible schools serving the most disadvantaged communities continue to receive additional support in their drive to raise standards.

35. Mr Miliband told us that Education Action Zones had “spawned some useful innovation. They have helped focus on the key drivers of achievement in the most disadvantaged areas. They have helped teachers come to terms with the challenges of teaching some of those children. However, I think that there was a strong view that while that innovation was worthwhile the Education Action Zones would benefit from being integrated in a more holistic way with the rest of government policy.”

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31 Q 312
32 Q 313
36. Education Action Zones have now been superseded by Excellence in Cities, but we have not seen any detailed evaluation of the success or otherwise of EAZs. We want to ensure that the Department has learnt the lessons arising from this initiative. It would be better to introduce one initiative which has been sufficiently thought through, rather than a series of overlapping initiatives.

Excellence in Cities

37. The Excellence in Cities (EiC) initiative, launched in September 1999 provides targeted support to approximately 2,400 schools in 58 of the most disadvantaged local authority areas. It includes local authorities which serve 75% of all ethnic minority pupils. The initiative provides Learning Mentors for pupils facing barriers to learning; Learning Support Units to tackle disruption; enhanced opportunities for Gifted and Talented pupils; and support for schools through a network of City Learning Centres, the strategic use of Specialist schools and EiC Action Zones. The DfES has reported that standards of achievement are rising in Excellence in Cities schools more quickly than in non-EiC schools. Last year the percentage of pupils gaining 5+ A*-C GCSEs or their equivalent improved on average at nearly twice the rate in EiC schools compared to those outside the initiative.33 Excellence Clusters have been designed to bring the benefits of the EiC initiative to smaller pockets of deprivation in our urban and rural areas.

38. Mr Barnaby Shaw, Divisional Manager for Excellence in Cities at the DfES, explained the benefits of learning mentors in the EiC programme: “there are very, very few ethnic minority teachers overall in English schools, so ...to increase the number of ethnic minority adults in school who can work with ethnic minority pupils ...we have recruited something like 4,000 learning mentors. Their job is to work with children on their barriers to learning and... a large proportion of them are from ethnic minority backgrounds.”34

39. Mr Shaw was also pleased with the development of “learning support units which are quiet places with a very high teacher to pupil ratio for children who are not coping in class, usually children who are disrupting learning for other children”.35 He said that based on evidence from Ofsted and other evaluators these units were successful : “not only are exclusions falling, but also pupil behaviour is improving and pupil motivation is improving.”36

40. Most pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds live in the major conurbations: around 75% of all minority ethnic pupils in England go to schools in 50 local authorities and 40% attend schools in London. The DfES has said that Excellence in Cities (EiC) had made a
significant impact in raising standards of attainment for pupils in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.\textsuperscript{37}

41. Mr Shaw told us that “the secondary schools within Excellence in Cities improved their GCSE results by 2.3 percentage points, whereas schools outside Excellence in Cities improved their results by 1.3 percentage points. That is a significant difference in improvement rates, and it is one which has now been sustained for three years in the places where the programme has been running for three years.”\textsuperscript{38}

42. Both Mr David Daniels, Headteacher of White Hart Lane School, Haringey, London, and Mrs Anne Cole, Headteacher of Saltley School, Birmingham, were positive about the impact Excellence in Cities had on their schools. Mr Daniels told us that EiC had been “of demonstrable advantage to White Hart Lane, it has allowed us to be fairly creative in some of the different aspects we provide.”\textsuperscript{39} Mrs Cole said that her school had “hugely benefited from both Excellence in Cities funding and from the Ethnic Minorities Achievement Grant”\textsuperscript{40}. She added that EiC had “provided support mechanisms and enrichment mechanisms which are particularly lacking in communities of disadvantaged pupils”.

43. At this early stage we have not been able to evaluate properly the impact of Excellence in Cities. There are many other initiatives aimed at raising pupil achievement. The evidence we have received does not provide any means of establishing with certainty which of these initiatives has been most effective in improving the performance of pupils, although the headteachers we spoke to were clear that the additional investment provided by EiC has enabled their schools to improve achievement. We urge the Government to undertake a detailed assessment of the effectiveness of Excellence in Cities. If it is proved to be effective, there would be grounds for saying that similar investment should be made in all schools with a significant number of disadvantaged pupils.\textsuperscript{41}

\textit{Ethnic minorities achieving success}

44. Some £400 million of the general resources targeted at local education authorities through Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs) in 2002–03 take account of ethnicity.\textsuperscript{42} In 2002–03 the Standards Fund supported total expenditure of some £3.6 billion to raise standards. This includes Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG), which is ring-fenced support of £154 million to help schools raise ethnic minority achievement and meet the particular needs of pupils for whom English is an additional language. LEAs and schools also have the flexibility to use money from other Standards Fund streams, and can benefit from resources provided

\textsuperscript{37} Ev 18, para 3.
\textsuperscript{38} Q 85
\textsuperscript{39} Q 268
\textsuperscript{40} Q 267
\textsuperscript{41} Q 267
\textsuperscript{42} The SSA has been replaced by Formula Spending Share (FSS).
through Key Stage 3, Excellence in Cities, and the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, which also contribute to narrowing attainment gaps. Around 75% of the Standards Fund resources are devolved to schools so that they can determine their own priorities. This could include deploying additional teachers or classroom support, the provision of training or the purchase of relevant teaching materials. There is some evidence that schools welcomed a reduction in the number and complexity of funding streams.

**Personal Achievement**

45. The evidence we have received suggests that an improved definition of what is described as ‘personal achievement’ is needed. Qualifications gained at school are instrumental in the quality of life experience a child will have and are an important way of defining personal achievement. As government policy has recently placed more emphasis on developing teaching plans suited to the individual needs of each child, it is appropriate also to recognise that each child cannot reach the same academic standard. In continuing to set the average acceptable level of attainment expected of children throughout the Key Stages, the Government needs to make it clear that by no means every child will be able to meet this standard.

46. Government policy documents regularly refer to the “under-achievement” of specific groups of children in education. It describes under-achievement in the Key Stage tests as those children who fail to reach the appropriate National Curriculum Level. Dr Emma Smith of Cardiff University told the Committee that although one particular social group may exhibit lower achievement (as measured by public examination) than another, this does not necessarily imply that the lower-attaining group could or should do better on that assessment. She explained that there was a crucial difference between the term under-achievement (when a child is performing below the level that could be expected of him given his own specific circumstances) and low achievement (where a child does not perform at some pre-determined academic level but performs at a level that could reasonable be expected, given the nature of his abilities).43

47. Dr Smith’s research showed that “the children from the poorest homes certainly did appear to be the low achieving students. That does not necessarily mean that they were the under-achieving students”.44 Her research did not clearly define any particular group of children underachieving in the Key Stage tests. She told us that the “students that were under-achieving came from across the ability range”.45 Professor Sally Tomlinson told us that there was “a whole variety of explanations for children that are under-achieving—their potential is there and they should be achieving better”. She agreed that the “children who are lower achievers,

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43 Ev 130, paragraph 2.1.
44 Q 6
45 Q 9
tend to be children on free school meals—so we are talking about poverty here”.46 We discuss the impact of socio-economic disadvantage later in this report.

48. Dr Smith’s research distinguishes between children who do achieve highly in academic tests, low achievers and those who have not had the opportunity to reach their potential. Children who come from disadvantaged homes have to overcome huge obstacles to achieve the results some take for granted. We are satisfied that some children who fail to reach a government target may actually be making notable progress through the education system despite their difficult circumstances. Dr Smith concluded that “maybe in regard to under-achievement, things are not as bad as we are sometimes led to believe”.47

49. The distinction between under-achievement and low achievement applies to schools as well as to individual children or groups of them. Some low achieving schools in difficult areas are doing remarkably well for the children attending them. Unfortunately achievements of this nature are too often not recognised and the efforts of the teachers in these schools left unacknowledged.

50. We make no excuses for those who have not worked hard to achieve high standards and have little patience with the argument that some children will not achieve anything. Good schools and good teachers have high expectations of their pupils and this is fundamental to their success. We believe that in all its pronouncements the Government should distinguish between low achievement and under-achievement. We are concerned that the present use of the term under-achievement frequently fails to distinguish between children who could have achieved more and those children who have worked hard to fulfil their potential but have been unable to achieve high academic results.

51. We recommend also that the distinction between low achievement and under-achievement should be recognised when the standards achieved by groups of children and the individual schools they attend are compared publicly. Some comparatively high achieving schools may be under-performing in relation to the nature of their pupil intake while some low achieving schools are doing excellent work in relation to theirs.

52. We recommend that the causes of low academic achievement be more rigorously analysed so that remedies, across and beyond the range of educational services, may be developed. There is evidence that children of similar ability are achieving differentially. We intend in another inquiry to look at whether the curriculum provides opportunities for all pupils to develop their talents to the full.

**School intake and school achievement**

53. Parents are frequently given information to allow them to make an informed decision about the school to which they wish to send their children. During our visit to Birmingham we
had the opportunity to discuss school choice (or more accurately, preference) with parents from the area. They told us that they did not necessarily want to send their child to the best school in the area; they just wanted to be sure that their child attended a good school. Inevitably some children attend schools which are not labelled as good schools, often because they do not do well in the league tables, and this causes understandable anxiety for the parent and child.

54. As we will explore later in this report, performance tables do not define the quality of teaching in a school, they merely reflect a child or school’s achievement at a particular moment. Some inner city schools work extremely hard to ensure that their children are helped to overcome huge disadvantages, including an intake which is drawn from a narrow range of socio-economic groups and which therefore does not provide peer pressure to stimulate high achievement, but do not always get high results in their Key Stage tests. The results of the Key Stage tests cannot do anything more than hint at the quality of teaching and support in a school.
Issues arising from the evidence

Cycle of Deprivation

55. During this inquiry we have been told repeatedly that poor children are, on average, less likely than others to flourish at school. This is a major concern of the Government and has inspired strategies such as Excellence in Cities and the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant. Education can provide children with the skills they need to succeed and we are aware that those who have left school with few or no qualifications are statistically more likely to live below the poverty line. Poor education is one of the main reasons for poverty continuing from one generation to the next.\(^49\) Professor David Gillborn told us that “that if you want to predict how well a student will do, find out their social class. That is the best single predictor, not their gender, not their ethnicity”.

56. Nevertheless, this relationship between poverty and educational outcomes is not inevitable. Now, as in the past, many children from poor socio-economic backgrounds excel in school. In evaluating policy designed to help children from poor backgrounds, it has to be borne in mind that child poverty is not exclusively about income. Poverty impacts on children through lack of opportunities and of social capital in the form of the support available to families in better circumstances.

57. Mr Barnaby Shaw, Divisional Manager, School Improvement and Excellence in Cities, DfES, told us that “poverty combined with low educational aspirations is a very big chunk of the problem.”\(^50\) He went on to say that “The analysis we have done so far on deprivation uncomfortably tells us that high deprivation schools tend to add lower value. You can imagine why that is: that is because in a high deprivation school, they are coping with a lot of problems—children who arrive with poorer attitudes towards learning; a high turnover of pupils; a high turnover of staff. Everything is against effective teaching in those schools.”\(^51\)

58. Professor Tomlinson of the University of Oxford reminded us of the financial support that parents can give their children: “a home computer ..gives children an enormous edge. There is a lot of profit to be made now to selling home computers, and so people who can afford it get them. There is also home tutoring by people who can afford to tutor their children. I know quite a lot of people from minority groups, particularly Indian groups, who spend an awful lot on home tutoring. Then there are the study guides to the text, the revision guides. They cost an awful lot of money, but if you can afford to buy them, then money still does count in building up your cultural capital as well.”\(^52\)
59. Mr Shaw recognised that “lower educational attainment is mixed up with a whole load of social factors outside the school. When we are looking for effective policies that will bear on educational attainment as our priority, we tend to work most of all with those which are under our direct hand, which are within the school.”\(^{53}\) He told us that the Government had allocated a large amount of extra resources into schools with the highest proportion of pupils from poor backgrounds. He said that “the improvement in the high poverty schools is because of that investment.”\(^{54}\)

60. It is unarguable from the evidence presented to us that poverty is the biggest single indicator of low educational achievement. Some of the Department’s initiatives address the issue directly, but tackling this problem effectively will require co-ordination across Government as a whole.

**Parental aspiration**

61. The DfES told us that parental education and aspirations had an important impact on the educational attainment of minority ethnic and socio-economically disadvantaged pupils. It cited research by Feinstein and Symons,\(^{55}\) who through statistical modelling had found that the major family factor influencing attainment at secondary school was parental interest. The research also noted that parental interest was correlated with parental education and class. The involvement of parents in their children’s secondary education has an important impact on continued development.\(^{56}\)

62. Professor John Bynner, Director of the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the Institute of Education, University of London, told us that “key factors that predict achievement and its counterpart, under-achievement, [include] the educational level of families”. He argued that whatever type of school children attended, their educational performance would reflect the social position of their parents. Professor Bynner told us that non-working families were less likely to have high aspirations for their children. His work with teachers had shown that when “parents are not really working with the school or that much interested in the child’s interest, it will typically show up in the child’s poor performance later on.”\(^{57}\)

63. Dr Smith of Cardiff University, said that her study had shown that parents of low-achievers were less involved in their education; “they were less likely to attend parents’ evening or ask them about their schooling; but the children were not noticeably [more] negative in how they enjoyed school. There was no difference in their attitude towards school: they were positive. I

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53 Q 144
54 Q 159
55 Ev 21
56 ibid
57 Q 24
think they want to do well in school but they do not always know how to go about doing it, and they did not have that support at school.\textsuperscript{58}

64. We recognise that not all parents are able to support their children’s education by buying additional books, computers and extra tuition. All parents should be encouraged to support their children’s education, but we remind the Government that policy designed to raise the educational achievement of all children must in some way address the lack of access children from deprived backgrounds have to educational resources in the home. As our predecessor Committee concluded in its report on Early Years, if a child has a lack of stimulation in the home in the early years of life it can have a seriously detrimental effect on his or her lifetime educational achievement.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{58} Q 24

\textsuperscript{59} Education and Employment Committee, First Report of Session 2000-01, Early Years, HC 33.
The complex culture and ethnic diversity of our schools

65. The 2001 Census showed that nearly one in eight pupils comes from a minority ethnic background. By 2010, the proportion is expected to be around one in five. Significant differences in minority ethnic educational attainment continue to exist despite many efforts to address inequalities in the system. These differences are not easy to evaluate, as, apart from ethnic origins, there are many additional factors which can affect a child’s achievement. While gender and social class are key factors which dominate pupil achievement there are a number of issues which are specific to certain ethnic groups.

66. In focusing our attention on the evidence underpinning the Government’s efforts to raise the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, we have seen that there are many policies addressing this issue but a limited amount of data available to the Government to evaluate how successful they are.

Comparisons of academic achievement

67. Comparisons of the academic achievements of minority ethnic and other children have failed in the past to take into account key influences such as social background. Children from some ethnic minorities are statistically more likely to belong to socio-economic groups which may increase their academic disadvantage.

68. The Government has invested in targeted programmes such as Excellence in Cities (EiC) which aim to support disadvantaged children. However, as a significant number of children from ethnic minorities live in areas of the country not served by the EiC programme, the Government hopes to support these pupils through national strategies such as the Key Stage 3 Strategy designed to improve standards for all pupils.60 The DfES told us that there was “encouraging evidence in recent years that EiC and other targeted programmes are beginning to narrow the gap in performance at both KS3 and GCSE of pupils from minority ethnic and disadvantaged backgrounds. While patterns of achievement vary across the country, on the whole, pupils from certain groups are still underachieving at school”.61

69. The DfES has provided information on the percentage of children receiving 5 GSCEs grade A*–C distinguished by ethnic group, taken from the pupil level annual school census (PLASC) 2002. Students from Chinese and Indian backgrounds achieve significantly above average results.62 Black pupils and those from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds achieve, on average, poorer GCSE results than other groups.

60  Ev 18
61  ibid
62  It should be noted there are only 12,033 Chinese pupils in this country, compared with 2,707,404 white pupils and 42,146 Black Caribbean pupils.
70. Looking at relative achievement between ethnic groups is an important means of monitoring the educational system for inequalities. Significant differences between groups highlight potential cause for concern because they suggest that the lower achieving group may not be enjoying equal educational opportunities. Such a group could also be facing additional barriers that prevent its children fulfilling their potential.

71. However, identifying differences in levels of achievement may, if not handled sensitively, lead to stereotyping. Group averages should not be used to define or predict the capacity or future progress of any individual child, although they could indicate where problems may occur.

72. The Government has been concerned by the underachievement of specific ethnic minority groups for many years. In the consultation document, *Aiming High: Raising Minority Ethnic Achievement*, the DfES states that “the new data collected through the pupil census give schools the tools to analyse the impact of school policies and procedures on different ethnic groups as well as on achievement”.

73. It is clear from the evidence presented to the Committee that some minority ethnic groups achieve on average at a higher level than white pupils, and other groups achieve at a lower level. It does no one any good to ignore or explain away these differences. The issues involved need to be thoroughly researched so that effective solutions can be found to overcome the problems.

*African Caribbean heritage*

74. There is a particular problem affecting pupils of African Caribbean heritage, particularly boys. Evidence suggests that the relative performance of African Carribean pupils is initially high, begins to decline during Key Stage 2, drops significantly in Key Stage 3 and is below the majority of other ethnic groups at Key Stage 4. This indicates under-achievement rather than simply low achievement. Some schools, however, have successfully tackled the underachievement of specific ethnic minority groups by well-targeted initiatives. In April 2002 Ofsted reported on six secondary schools who were helping to raise the achievement of African Caribbean students. The report has an encouraging conclusion: “the six schools provide, from their varying contexts and histories, positive messages about what can be done not only for African Caribbean youngsters but also for other groups, including white youngsters, at risk of under-achievement.”

75. The primary means of addressing the causes of under-achievement and creating effective ways of improving achievement levels is by promoting greater dialogue and understanding between parents, schools, and local communities.

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64 Ibid
76. African Caribbean students’ relationships with teachers are often characterised by relatively high levels of control and criticism. They are always over-represented when exclusion statistics are broken down by ethnicity. While exclusions are commonly associated with serious misconduct such as violence or threatening behaviour, there is some evidence to suggest that other forms of conflict with teachers may lead to the disproportionate expulsion of black pupils.

**Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000**

77. An important recent development in relation to the level of achievement at school by certain minority ethnic groups is the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Section 2 of the Act amends section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976 to provide that prescribed bodies or persons, in carrying out their functions, shall have due regard to the need, amongst other things,

“to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.”

Amongst the bodies to which this provision applies are “governing bodies of…educational establishments maintained by local authorities”. In using the term "promote", the 2000 Act goes beyond the existing requirement to avoid unlawful discrimination; it requires a conscious effort to improve equality of opportunity and relationships between ethnic groups.

78. We took evidence in Birmingham from Professor David Gillborn from the Institute of Education, University of London, who told us:

“There is an awful lot of research in education suggesting that particularly white teachers’ assumptions of different minority groups differ. It is not the case that if a teacher assumes that African Caribbean students will be badly behaved they automatically assume that all students who are not white will be badly behaved. The same teacher may have exaggerated expectations of, for example, Indian students or Chinese students. Stereotypes do not always work in one direction.”

79. He added that the evidence suggested that “crude” racism “had virtually disappeared from the staff room” but that more subtle forms persisted:

“The way in which that works through decisions about which group a kid is going to be taught in, which subject is more or less appropriate when they come to choose their GCSE options, which tier of exam they are going to be entered in (which can set a limit on the grades they can gain), is that those decisions are quite mundane, they are not

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65 Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (c.34), section 2.
66 Paragraph 46 of Schedule 1A to the Race Relations Act 1976, as inserted by Schedule 1 to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.
67 Q 190
dramatic, obviously racist incidents, but they are decisions which over time tend to work against particular minority ethnic groups.”68

80. The requirement in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 for schools to promote equality of opportunity means that achieving equality of opportunity for pupils of different ethnic backgrounds is an issue that should already be addressed in every school. It adds weight to our recommendations for the development of personalised teaching plans for each child, with an explicit assessment of his or her individual abilities and needs.

**Understanding the role of parents and the local communities**

81. Professor Tomlinson suggested to us that the explanations for minority ethnic (and working class) achievements centred on “culture”—the levels of cultural support given by families. While “Asian” cultures are popularly regarded as more supportive of education, both Caribbean and Asian cultures are more effective than white in encouraging children to stay on in post-compulsory schooling. The educational success of Chinese children, again popularly attributed to cultural characteristics, could also be explained by the proportion of affluent Chinese children attending independent schools.

82. The “street culture” of some minority ethnic young people, and popular representations of black masculinity, sometimes cited as leading to lower educational performance, do not necessarily lead to an “anti-school culture”. Indeed, evidence suggests that African Caribbean pupils attend school more regularly than other groups. There is evidence that too many teachers still regard children with a Caribbean background as potential low achievers. A study of children arriving from 1995 from the volcanic island of Montserrat showed, for example, that the children were well motivated and achieving well on arrival, but several years later had become de-motivated and underachieving.

83. The DfES consultation paper highlights the fact that 28% of African Caribbean secondary school pupils are recorded as having special educational needs, as were 23% of Pakistani pupils and 23% of Bangladeshi pupils, compared with 18% of white pupils. Schools are also up to four times more likely permanently to exclude African Caribbean pupils, increasing the chances that they will be disengaged from education in the longer term.

84. *Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Minority Ethnic Pupils* recognises that socio-economic disadvantage is closely associated with low educational attainment. It says “poverty is not the only factor which impacts on the achievement of minority ethnic pupils. We need to look seriously at the impact of policies, practice and procedures within schools and the wider education system.”69

85. The influence of supplementary schools on pupil achievement has been underestimated. During our discussions with parents in Birmingham we were told that many Muslim children
attended religious instruction during the evenings. This impacted on the amount of time and energy children had available to undertake homework. We believe it is important that teachers are sensitive to the home cultures of their students. Teachers only have access to a child for 6 to 8 hours a day. While independent learning—including homework—is a valuable skill to acquire, if they expect the child to carry out study at home they must be aware of other demands on the child’s time. Equally parents must be encouraged to work closely with the school to ensure their children are being supported through their education both in school and at home. The key is to link pupils’ independent learning, and what the supplementary schools do, with the other schools the pupils attend.
Gender

86. Research shows that in the last 10 years boys have consistently had a lower level of achievement than girls at GCSE and A Level. This has been generally attributed to the problems some boys experience with engagement and involvement in schooling. Our discussions with teachers and educationalists highlighted the complexity of this issue. There is a tendency to discuss the underachievement of boys as an isolated issue, but gender is only one factor of many that can result in pupil underachievement.

87. DfES statistics show us that girls make better progress than boys on average in English throughout school. At Key Stage 2, the difference between girls and boys (from the expected level at Key Stage 1) is 5 percentage points. At Key Stage 3, this difference increases to 18 percentage points. Boys make greater progress than girls in mathematics and science throughout school, although the differences are smaller than those in English. During Key Stage 4 girls make more progress than boys.

88. In July 2003 Ofsted published a report on boys’ achievement. The relatively poor performance of some boys is often linked to weakness in their basic skills and failings in their commitment to school. However, schools have improved their monitoring of pupil progress, particularly in Key Stage 4, and some schools are giving increased tutorial support to boys who are identified as underachieving. Additionally, some schools are attempting to combat an anti-achievement culture, through emphasising the rewards of success and establishing closer links with parents.

89. Mrs Anne Cole, Headteacher of Saltley School, Birmingham told us that schools needed support to address the underachievement of boys. She said that improving the achievement of boys represented a “cultural challenge” where teachers had to deal with boys whose role models were based on characters like that of Phil Mitchell from EastEnders. Mrs Cole believed that schools needed guidance to deal with the ‘macho’ culture which was prevalent in some inner city schools. There is a significant problem with working class boys from white as well as minority ethnic backgrounds, amongst whom the anti-achievement culture is strong.

90. The Secondary Heads Association [SHA] told us that over the nation as a whole, 10% more girls than boys achieve 5 or more higher grades at GCSE and 3% more girls achieve 3 passes at Advanced Level. SHA believed that special schools and low ability classes in mainstream schools often comprised 80% boys. In most of the negative indicators (exclusion from school, youth crime, fatal accidents, and long-term unemployment) boys were increasingly over-represented.

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71 Q 299
72 Q 299
73 Ev 160, paragraph B.
91. SHA has expressed concern that there are increasing problems for boys in the earliest years of life, the first five years when talking and reading are established, together with habits of concentration and patterns of play. They suggested that the general trends in society—more one parent families, fewer male role models, increased viewing of television and videos, more playing of computer games, less time for intellectually stimulating play—could have a greater effect on boys than on girls. Experienced teachers working in infant schools have reported the trend for boys to be arriving at full-time schooling less prepared to sit and concentrate, less motivated towards books, more pre-disposed to opting out of the educational process and into ‘laddishness’.

92. The Ofsted report brings a helpful insight to practitioners by explicitly stating, what is “commonly agreed to be best practice”. It concludes that boys respond well to teachers who set clear limits and high expectations, give constructive feedback, and maintain a sense of humour. The report does not say that there is a single established approach which will raise boys’ achievement, but suggests that there are a wide range of strategies which, if implemented carefully, have been seen to make a positive difference. These strategies are “not gender-specific” and, as with most good practice, benefit the entire school.

93. The recognised “best practice” found which successfully raises the achievement of boys has been shown to add value for the entire school. We believe that such best practice should be implemented in all schools.

**How much can one school do?**

94. In *Aiming Higher: Raising Minority Ethnic Achievement*, the DfES says that leadership and vision are crucial to raising standards and aspirations. Well-led schools provide the best educational experience and the highest standards for their pupils. Ofsted told us in November 2002 that “the mainsprings of improvement come down to the few extremely important features of good management in schools”.

95. Mr David Daniels, Headteacher of White Hart Lane School in Haringey, told us that the foundations of a good school were based on “active leadership”. He explained that leadership had to set clear tones and expectations but also involved being “out on the corridors doing the job day in day out”. White Hart Lane School has implemented clear standards across the school. Attendance, punctuality, behaviour and uniform are treated as high priorities and teachers at White Hart Lane believe that this has been an underlying feature of raising achievement. Mrs Cole agreed that school leadership was fundamental to improving

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74 Ofsted, *Boys’ achievement in secondary schools*, HMI 1659, July 2003, p 34.
75 Q 264
76 Q 264
77 Ev 76
achievement. She told us that well defined teaching and learning objectives had made a real contribution to pupils’ achievement.78

**Achievement and understaffing**

96. Schools in challenging areas are often inadequately staffed. The Annual Report of the HMCI for 2001–02 reported that schools in which pupils’ behaviour was poor were having increasing difficulties in recruiting well qualified permanent staff.79 The report also recognised that where the problems of recruitment are most severe, vacancies attract few applicants and some schools have reported appointing candidates who are not ready for promotion and who have required substantial support after their appointment.

97. **We recommend that the Government gives greater consideration to its strategies for encouraging teachers to work in challenging schools. Challenging schools require good teachers. All teachers should be encouraged to work in a challenging school as part of their career development.** For example, the Government is supporting initiatives such as Teach First, which encourages graduates to take on a teaching job before going on to whichever career they may have in mind. It combines “two years paid teaching in challenging London secondary schools with cutting-edge education and management training from highly respected institutions in the UK” 80

**English as an additional language**

98. SHA told us that some secondary schools had pupils with up to 70 different first languages. In attempting to raise the achievement of students from ethnic minorities it is important to recognise that many such students are educated in a language which is not their mother tongue. Children will not progress through secondary education, however good the teaching, if they are unable to understand the language in which they are taught. New approaches to teaching children have included lessons to allow them to experience some teaching in their own language.

99. Mr Daniels told us of the work his school had undertaken with pupils who did not have English as a first language. White Hart Lane school has a large number of Turkish and Kurdish children. The school initiated a pilot Turkish language science project which allowed children to learn science in their home language for a portion of their lessons, then gradually introduced more English until children were taught 99% in English in readiness for their exam. Mr Daniels believed that this approach engaged students who were expected to drop out and improved the results of the majority of students in the pilot.81

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78 Q 266
79 Standards and Quality in Education, CM 286, 2001–02, paragraph 419.
80 www.teachfirst.org.uk homepage.
81 Ev 74, paragraph 3.4
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools, told us that such a pilot was “very much the kind of good practice that we want to promote”.

100. Mr Twigg told us of some good examples in London schools of “how some of the specialist language schools have been able to extend some of that good practice from their English as an additional language students into the wider pupil population within their schools.”

101. Ms Annabel Burns pointed out that “there is a great deal of good practice in the national strategies about supporting bilingual learners through...sharing vocabulary within the lesson and using gestures to enable pupils to understand concepts more readily.”

102. Ofsted has recently analysed how support for bilingual learners is organised in schools. Ofsted noted that in the colleges and schools they had visited there was often a gap between bilingual students’ oral skills and their competence in handling written academic English, with the gap being more marked the higher the qualification being sought.

103. We welcome the innovative approach some schools have taken to developing their pupils’ understanding of the English language. It is admirable that schools which are faced with many children speaking different first languages have been able to work with local communities to provide more accessible education, sometimes in the language of the home, for those children. We would encourage the Department to support all schools, not just specialist language schools, who are prepared to develop this type of provision for their students.

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82 Q 390
83 Q 395
84 Q 127
85 Ofsted, More advanced learners of English as an additional language in secondary schools and colleges, HMI 1102.
Issues arising from the data

Measures of achievement

104. The main way in which information about the performance of secondary schools is made public is through the publication of DfES performance tables, which detail the Key Stage 3 results of pupils in English, mathematics and science, and the GCSE/GNVQ achievements of pupils who reached school leaving age in the school year. Value-added scores for all schools were added to the performance table for the first time in January 2003. Since the introduction of school performance tables in 1992, schools have been subject to comparison through the unofficial league tables published in the national press.

105. SHA told us that it has been frustrated that simplistic judgments are made about their members’ schools on the basis of examination performance summarised in league tables. They argue that tables of raw results give no credit to schools that perform well with students from disadvantaged backgrounds and are grossly unfair to certain schools. Even the ‘value added’ tables fail to reflect the fact that it is comparatively easy to add value to a young person’s academic achievements if that student has supportive parents, a place to study at home, their own computer and a generous supply of books in the home.

106. The tables detailing a school’s yearly success at SATs and GSCEs can present a narrow and misleading view of a school’s achievement. Schools which admit or select high performing students may not find it hard to generate good academic achievements. Schools which admit a disadvantaged intake of pupils may need to provide a greater degree of support to help their students to achieve similar grades. A school’s results cannot do much more than hint at the quality of teaching and support provided at that school.

107. Professor Bynner told the Committee that by publishing performance tables the DfES was “not going to reduce inequality, one is not going to pursue or achieve the social inclusion/anti-social exclusion agenda while education is moving in that direction. There is a complete contradiction which often seems apparent in many of the policies we hear about today.”

108. Performance tables were welcomed by many parents as useful information helping them to chose a school, but they provide only limited information. They can also be damaging to morale in schools which appear to be low achieving, but which are performing well in relation to their pupil intake. Any parent wishing to evaluate the quality of their local schools might be better advised to refer to the Ofsted inspection reports of those schools. These reports detail the leadership and management of the schools as well as the quality of teaching and support and the results achieved. As such, they provide a much broader analysis of the qualities of the school than any performance table.

86 Ev 162, paragraph 21.
87 Q 52
Value-added measures

109. In January 2003 the DfES published a new indicator in its performance tables. The new “value added” measures tracked children’s progress between the ages of 11 and 14, and between 14 and their GCSEs. Value added measures are intended to allow comparisons between schools with different pupil intakes. It is possible to measure the progress made by pupils from Key Stage 2 (KS2) to KS3 and KS3 to GCSE/GNVQ, relative to other pupils, by comparing their KS3/GCSE/GNVQ achievements with the achievements of other pupils nationally with the same or similar attainment at KS2/KS3.

110. The development and publication of the value-added measure in the performance tables was a welcome attempt to move them away from the crude analysis, which ranks schools on the basis of their average test results. However it is still largely overlooked by the media, and more needs to be done to promote awareness and understanding of the new measure.

Reaching the targets

111. There is some evidence that targets have affected the ways in which some schools work, by encouraging schools to concentrate their attention on those pupils whose achievement rests on a grade borderline.88

112. Some target-driven schools have focused on individuals and groups where results could be achieved more easily, for example children on the C/D border at GCSE and those that can reach level 5 at Key Stage 3. We recognise that it is important to help all children get the best grade possible, but we are concerned that targets are encouraging teachers to concentrate on those children able to achieve a target grade at the expense of children who may not be able to. Mr Miliband acknowledged that the prominence of the A*–C targets at GCSE did place pressure on teachers and said that a school’s average grade score was also published. This reflects all the grades achieved.89

113. We accept that the use of pupil attainment data is intended to reinforce public accountability. However, if pupil attainment data is to serve as a useful and meaningful source of information, the key measures of pupil and school achievement need to be developed further. These measures must provide information about the entire ability range, including the proportion of pupils who do not obtain any qualifications, and must take full account of the intake profile of each school.

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89 Q 348
Conclusion

114. The target-driven culture in secondary education arises from the best of Departmental intentions. We have not been convinced, however, that requiring teachers to concentrate on helping pupils achieve nationally pre-determined levels of achievement is now in the best interests of pupil, teacher or Government.

115. The Department has increasingly and helpfully emphasised the benefit of developing each child through personalised lesson plans. Value-added performance measures highlight the progress a child has made from one Key Stage to the next and are therefore more reflective than raw scores of the individual benefit a child has received from the school. **We recommend that the Department continues its recognition of a child’s individuality by, wherever possible, replacing national targets with individual progress targets. Targets for all schools should be defined in terms of the progress that each child makes through the Key Stages. This would provide challenges for both the most and least able students and would ensure that teachers did not have to over-emphasise the need for all children to reach a pre-determined academic level.**

116. The essential purpose of target setting from now on should be to ensure that children capable of higher achievement should be expected to achieve more, sometimes far more, in the Key Stage tests than the national average. Children whose educational achievement might never reach Government targets should, for their part, be challenged by individually established targets to make as much progress as they possibly can.

117. The impact of individual policies such as Excellence in Cities is difficult to assess. The multitude of Government initiatives which many schools have adopted have resulted in the raising of achievement in some schools, but there is no effective means of establishing which initiative improved the performance of the school. **Increased investment and support is always welcome, but a systematic effort should always be made to establish which interventions have led to the most effective use of taxpayers’ money.**

118. The benefits of the Key Stage 3 strategy have also been difficult to assess. The scheme is soundly based on a determination to reinforce good teaching practice across the country; but it is still too early to establish how successful the strategy has been at raising levels of attainment nationally.

119. The DfES and Ofsted have published “best practice” guidance which addresses most of the factors which contribute to children failing to fulfil their potential. It is striking that, although this guidance is aimed at a variety of specific factors such as poverty, gender or ethnicity, the advice is often similar. It is apparent from the evidence received in this inquiry that schools which are well managed and have proactive leadership are much better placed than others to enable all children, even those most at risk of failing, to succeed. Given the similarity of the Department’s advice on issues related to raising achievement at school, **we recommend that such guidance should be issued from a central source within the Department from which grants could also be administered.** By reducing the diversity of
policies and funding streams aimed at raising achievement, schools would receive a properly co-ordinated message of best practice.

120. The distinction between ‘low’ achievement and ‘under’ achievement is one that we believe to be crucial and should inform all Government statements, critical or otherwise, comparing the achievements of individuals, groups of any kind and schools. It is unarguable from the evidence presented to us that poverty is the biggest single indicator of low educational achievement. Some of the Department’s initiatives address the issue directly, but tackling this problem effectively will require co-ordination across Government as a whole. The causes of low academic achievement need to be more rigorously analysed so that remedies, across and beyond the range of educational services, may be developed.
Conclusions and recommendations

Labour’s second term

1. We welcome the Department’s commitment to raising standards. We would caution the Department against introducing further initiatives until earlier ones have been properly evaluated and assessed. (Paragraph 23)

Key Stage 3 Strategy

2. We are convinced that for an effective evaluation of the Key Stage 3 strategy to take place the standards in schools involved from the outset should be measured against comparable schools which were not in the original pilot scheme. (Paragraph 33)

Education Action Zones

3. Education Action Zones have now been superseded by Excellence in Cities, but we have not seen any detailed evaluation of the success or otherwise of EAZs. We want to ensure that the Department has learnt the lessons arising from this initiative. It would be better to introduce one initiative which has been sufficiently thought through, rather than a series of overlapping initiatives. (Paragraph 36)

Excellence in Cities

4. At this early stage we have not been able to evaluate properly the impact of Excellence in Cities. There are many other initiatives aimed at raising pupil achievement. The evidence we have received does not provide any means of establishing with certainty which of these initiatives has been most effective in improving the performance of pupils, although the headteachers we spoke to were clear that the additional investment provided by EiC has enabled their schools to improve achievement. We urge the Government to undertake a detailed assessment of the effectiveness of Excellence in Cities. (Paragraph 43)

Personal Achievement

5. We believe that in all its pronouncements the Government should distinguish between low achievement and under-achievement. We are concerned that the present use of the term under-achievement frequently fails to distinguish between children who could have achieved more and those children who have worked hard to fulfil their potential but have been unable to achieve high academic results. (Paragraph 50)

6. We recommend that the distinction between low achievement and under-achievement should be recognised when the standards achieved by groups of children and the individual schools they attend are compared publicly. Some comparatively high
achieving schools may be under-performing in relation to the nature of their pupil intake while some low achieving schools are doing excellent work in relation to theirs. (Paragraph 51)

7. We recommend that the causes of low academic achievement be more rigorously analysed so that remedies, across and beyond the range of educational services, may be developed. There is evidence that children of similar ability are achieving differentially. We intend in another inquiry to look at whether the curriculum provides opportunities for all pupils to develop their talents to the full. (Paragraph 52)

**Cycle of Deprivation**

8. It is unarguable from the evidence presented to us that poverty is the biggest single indicator of low educational achievement. Some of the Department’s initiatives address the issue directly, but tackling this problem effectively will require co-ordination across Government as a whole. (Paragraph 60)

9. We recognise that not all parents are able to support their children’s education by buying additional books, computers and extra tuition. All parents should be encouraged to support their children’s education, but we remind the Government that policy designed to raise the educational achievement of all children must in some way address the lack of access children from deprived backgrounds have to educational resources in the home. (Paragraph 64)

**Comparisons of academic achievement**

10. It is clear from the evidence presented to the Committee that some minority ethnic groups achieve on average at a higher level than white pupils, and other groups achieve at a lower level. It does no one any good to ignore or explain away these differences. The issues involved need to be thoroughly researched so that effective solutions can be found to overcome the problems. (Paragraph 73)

**Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000**

11. The requirement in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 for schools to promote equality of opportunity means that achieving equality of opportunity for pupils of different ethnic backgrounds is an issue that should already be addressed in every school. It adds weight to our recommendations for the development of personalised teaching plans for each child, with an explicit assessment of his or her individual abilities and needs. (Paragraph 80)

12. The recognised “best practice” found which successfully raises the achievement of boys has been shown to add value for the entire school. We believe that such best practice should be implemented in all schools. (Paragraph 93)
Achievement and understaffing

13. We recommend that the Government gives greater consideration to its strategies for encouraging teachers to work in challenging schools. Challenging schools require good teachers. All teachers should be encouraged to work in a challenging school as part of their career development. (Paragraph 97)

English as an additional language

14. We welcome the innovative approach some schools have taken to developing their pupils’ understanding of the English language. It is admirable that schools which are faced with many children speaking different first languages have been able to work with local communities to provide more accessible education, sometimes in the language of the home, for those children. We would encourage the Department to support all schools, not just specialist language schools, who are prepared to develop this type of provision for their students. (Paragraph 103)

Measures of achievement

15. Any parent wishing to evaluate the quality of their local schools would be well advised to refer to the Ofsted inspection reports of those schools. These reports detail the leadership and management of the schools as well as the quality of teaching and support and the results achieved. As such, they provide a much broader analysis of the qualities of the school than any performance table. (Paragraph 108)

Value-added measures

16. We accept that the use of pupil attainment data is intended to reinforce public accountability. However, if pupil attainment data is to serve as a useful and meaningful source of information, the key measures of pupil and school achievement need to be developed further. These measures must provide information about the entire ability range, including the proportion of pupils who do not obtain any qualifications, and must take full account of the intake profile of each school. (Paragraph 113)

Conclusion

17. We recommend that the Department continues its recognition of a child’s individuality by, wherever possible, replacing national targets with individual progress targets. Targets for all schools should be defined in terms of the progress that each child makes through the Key Stages. (Paragraph 115)

18. Increased investment and support is always welcome, but a systematic effort should always be made to establish which interventions have led to the most effective use of taxpayers’ money. (Paragraph 117)
19. We recommend that such guidance should be issued from a central source within the Department from which grants could also be administered. By reducing the diversity of policies and funding streams aimed at raising achievement, schools would receive a properly co-ordinated message of best practice. (Paragraph 119)

20. The causes of low academic achievement need to be more rigorously analysed so that remedies, across and beyond the range of educational services, may be developed. (Paragraph 120)
Formal minutes

Wednesday 17 September 2003

Members present:
Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair
Mr David Chaytor
Valerie Davey
Jeff Ennis
Mr Kerry Pollard
Mr Andrew Turner

The Committee deliberated.

Draft Report (Secondary Education: Pupil Achievement), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chairman’s draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 120 agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Seventh Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman to make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That the provisions of Standing Order No. 134 (Select committees (reports)) be applied to the Report.

Ordered, That the Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee be reported to the House.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 15 October 2003 at 9.00 am]
Witnesses

Monday 10 March 2003

Professor John Bynner, Director, Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Institute of Education, University of London, Professor Sally Tomlinson, Department of Educational Studies, University of Oxford, and Dr Emma Smith, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University.

Monday 24 March 2003

Mr Barnaby Shaw, Divisional Director, School Improvement and Excellence in Cities, Miss Annabel Burns, Head of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Project and Mr Andrew McCully, Divisional Manager, Pupil Standards, Department for Education and Skills.

Monday 7 April 2003

Professor Carol Taylor Fitz-Gibbon, University of Durham
Mrs Anne Cole, Headteacher, Saltley School, Birmingham, and Mr David Daniels, Headteacher, White Hart Lane School

Wednesday 7 May 2003

Mr David Miliband MP, Minister of State for School Standards and Mr Stephen Twigg MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools.
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