Ofsted report “Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on”

Twenty years ago, Ofsted published *Access and achievement in urban education*, a report looking at seven urban areas with high levels of deprivation, with an update published 10 years later in 2003.

Over the past year Ofsted has undertaken a review in order to understand the current pattern of disadvantage and educational success across England, to learn the lessons of recent policy initiatives, and to come forward with proposals that would really make a difference.

This report, published by Ofsted on 20th Jun 2013, sets out some of the main evidence that informed the review. It draws on test and examination data, inspection outcomes, and published reports and research. Access the report here.

In a speech, Sir Michael Wilshaw HMCI set out the main conclusions of the report, which are:

- The distribution of underachievement has shifted. Twenty or thirty years ago, the problems were in the big cities. Inner London schools were the best funded and worst achieving in the country. Now, schools in inner and outer London are the best performing, and performance in parts of Birmingham, Greater Manchester, Liverpool and Leicester has also improved.
- The areas where the most disadvantaged children are being let down by the education system in 2013 are no longer deprived inner city areas, instead the focus has shifted to deprived coastal towns and rural, less populous regions of the country, particularly down the East and South-East of England. These are places that have felt little impact from national initiatives designed to drive up standards for the poorest children.
- A significant number of poorer children are also being failed by schools in areas of relative affluence, such as Kettering, Wokingham, Norwich and Newbury. It is in these areas, in coasting or sometimes sinking schools, that unseen disadvantaged children remain unsupported and unchallenged.

Alongside the evidence report published by Ofsted is a league table ranking local authorities based on how effectively schools in these areas are serving their most disadvantaged pupils.

Strikingly, this shows that the areas where poor children are doing worst in terms of educational opportunity are relatively prosperous parts of South East England, like West Berkshire. As a local authority area, West Berkshire:

- Has the worst attainment in the whole country at primary school
- Has the second worst attainment at secondary school
Is in the bottom three local authorities for qualifications at 19.

In his speech, Sir Michael set out eight recommendations aimed at making a lasting difference in closing the attainment gap for the poorest children. These are:

- Ofsted to be tougher in future with schools that are letting down their poor children. Schools previously judged outstanding, which are not doing well by their poorest children, will be re-inspected.
- The development and roll-out of sub-regional challenges aimed particularly at raising the achievement of disadvantaged children.
- A more strategic approach should be taken to the appointment of National Leaders of Education to ensure that they are matched with schools in need of support.
- Government should ensure that teachers on funded schemes are directed to underperforming schools in less fashionable or more remote or challenging places. The concept of a ‘National Service Teacher’ should be an urgent consideration for government.
- Government should review assessment in reception and Key Stage 1, with a view to publishing progress measures from the start of school to end of Key Stage 1.
- Government should be prepared to dismantle inadequate colleges that have grown too large to assure quality across their different activities. Smaller specialist units, particularly University Technology Colleges, should be created with stronger links to business, commerce and industry.
- All recommendations in the Richard Review of apprenticeships should be implemented in full.
- All post-16 providers should report on the rate of progress and outcomes for all young people who had previously been eligible for free school meals.

Sir Michael said:

“The quality of education is the most important issue facing Britain today. In the long term, our success as a nation – our prosperity, our security, our society – depends on how well we raise and educate our young people across the social spectrum.

“In the last twenty or thirty years, the performance of schools in inner London, Birmingham, Greater Manchester, Liverpool and Leicester has been transformed. The distribution in educational underachievement has shifted.
“Today, many of the disadvantaged children performing least well in school can be found in leafy suburbs, market towns or seaside resorts. Often they are spread thinly, as an ‘invisible minority’ across areas that are relatively affluent. We need new policies and approaches to deal with underachievement in these areas.

“Poor, unseen children can be found in mediocre schools the length and breadth of our country. They are labelled, buried in lower sets, consigned as often as not to indifferent teaching. They coast through education until – at the earliest opportunity – they sever their ties with it.

“There are stark consequences for our nation if we do not act with sufficient urgency. We will continue to lose our place as a competitive nation and bear great economic costs of failure. By the time the next Access and Achievement report is published, I hope I can say that most if not all of the recommendations I have made today have been implemented and that our poorest children have continued to improve their educational performance.”

- The full *Access and Achievement* evidence report, local authority league tables and the ‘No Excuses’ video can be found at: [www.ofsted.gov.uk/accessandachievement](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/accessandachievement)
- [Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/accessandachievement)

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Summary of the report:

‘Unseen Children: access and achievement 20 years on’

By Cameron Wall, for Simon Kirby MP

ATTAINING A WORLD-CLASS EDUCATION SYSTEM:

· It is within the country’s reach to, as a country, provide a world-class education system

· However, there are two barriers that must be tackled prior to becoming world class

· The wide variety in regional performance – e.g. 90% chance of finding a good primary school in some parts of the country, only 50% in others

· The long tail of underperformance which primarily affects children from poorest backgrounds. (UK is worst performing of OECD countries)

· The two issues are closely related, as data shows that providers who fail their poorest children are more prevalent in some regions than in others

· Ofsted’s Regional Directors and HMI must shine a spotlight on local authorities and individual institutions that are failing children

· To reduce this, national and local government, as well as education professionals throughout the land must work together

· Over the past 20 years, findings from Stewart Sutherland in 1993 and David Bell in 2003 have improved

· These poor children exist throughout the land

· In good schools the best is expected of every child

· In more complacent schools, such children struggle

· Disadvantaged and poor achievement are not necessarily tied to urban deprivation and ‘inner city blight’

· It is within the country’s reach to, as a country, provide a world-class education system

· Black African children have now caught up with the performance of White British children by the end of secondary school

· Bangladeshi children have now caught up with the performance of White British
children by the end of secondary school

· There is now almost no difference between the GCSE results of children who speak English as their mother tongue and those for whom English is an additional language

· Out of the groups who are entitled to free school meals, White British Children do worst out of all the main ethnic groups

· The underperformance of this group matters particularly – they make up 2/3 of the entire student collective

· White, low-income, British girls do very badly too, it isn’t just white working class boys – therefore the problem isn’t gender specific

· Whilst some excellent schools often take up the role of surrogate parents for disadvantaged children, in lesser-performing schools the job of schools is made far easier by parents with high expectations for their children

· As a society we must create a culture of much higher expectations for young people, both in our homes and in our schools

· The previous point is evident where – far too many children fail because they live in families and attend schools which have far too low expectations of them

· The most effective schools can make up for this deficit (explained in the previous point), and other schools and heads must be motivated and incentivised to do more

· Children from low-income families tend to do better in areas where there are lots of similar background children in the area

· Children from low-income families do worse where they are spread thinly, as an invisible minority, across areas that are relatively affluent:

· For example, disadvantaged children in West Berkshire experienced:

§ The worst attainment in the whole country at primary school

§ The second worst at secondary school

§ One of the bottom three local authorities for qualifications at 19

RECOMMENDATIONS:

· Primarily, a tougher stance on schools which are letting their poor children down

· Schools previously judged outstanding, which are not doing well by their poorest students will be reinspected

· Schools located in coastal towns and rural schools haven’t been the focus of policy initiatives which have tended to operate in big cities

· The distribution of underachievement has shifted unlike 20 or 30 years ago where it existed in urban areas – now inner London schools are the best performing, and Birmingham, Greater Manchester, Liverpool and Leicester have also improved dramatically
· The development and roll-out of sub-regional challenges aimed particularly at raising the achievement of disadvantaged children

· A more strategic approach to appointment of National Leaders of Education

· For government to do more to ensure that teachers on funded schemes are directed to underperforming schools in less fashionable or more remote or challenging places – the concept of a ‘National Service Teacher’ should be an urgent consideration for government

· For government to review assessment in Reception and KS1

· The government should be more prepared to dismantle inadequate colleges that have grown too large to assure quality across their different activities

· Smaller units, incl. uni technology colleges should be created with stronger links to business, commerce and industry

· The Richard Review should be fully implemented, as it provides a sound basis on which to reform and grow this system

· All post-16 providers should report on the rate of progress and outcomes for all young people who had previously been eligible for free school meals

· These issues will be revisited every 5 years, not 10

· By 2018, the next report, the Chief Inspector hopes that most/all of these recommendations will have been implemented and that the poorest children have continued to improve their educational experience

· However, Ofsted can only count on the political will of government and the determination of professionals to act on these issues

CONSTITUENCY SPECIFIC:

· In Brighton and Hove

· About 60% of students not eligible for free school meals attained five GCSEs at grade A*-C including English and Maths

· roughly 25% of students eligible for free school meals attained five GCSEs at grade A*-C including English and Maths

· In East Sussex

· Just over 60% of students not eligible for free school meals attained five GCSEs at grade A*-C including English and Maths

· Approximately 30% of students eligible for free school meals attained five GCSEs at grade A*-C including English and Maths