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2012/13

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector  
of **Education, Children's Services and Skills**



# The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2012/13

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Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 121  
of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

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**Sir Michael Wilshaw**  
Her Majesty's Chief  
Inspector

Dear Secretary of State

**The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector 2012/13**

I have pleasure in presenting to Parliament my Annual Report, as required by the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

This report is underpinned by the findings of more than 8,500 inspections carried out during 2012/13 of schools, adult learning and skills and colleges. These inspections provide a unique evidence base for the conclusions we draw.

In this commentary I identify significant trends which demonstrate that, while improvements are being seen, there is much to be done to address the persistent variations in performance that disproportionately affect some children in particular parts of the country. This is why, for the first time, I am also publishing eight separate regional reports, one for each of Ofsted's regions, which focus closely on local issues.

According to the practice established last year, my commentary is supported by two reports that give more detail on schools and the further education and skills sector – copies of which will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Following the launch of the first social care report in October 2013, which proved a valuable opportunity to focus on the unique challenges facing this sector, we will be publishing a separate early years report in spring 2014.

Ofsted is absolutely committed to supporting improvement and raising standards for every child and every learner – but particularly for the most disadvantaged. It is my hope that our report and its findings will contribute to the vital national debate taking place in this regard.

Yours sincerely

**Sir Michael Wilshaw**







# Contents

<b>HMCI's letter to the Secretary of State</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Grounds for optimism – but more needs to be done</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Robust accountability drives improvement</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>A changing landscape: academies and trusts are now well established</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The barrier to excellence is inconsistency</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Mistaking the process of education with its purpose</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Every child should have the same chance to progress to their full potential</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The best teaching does not happen by accident</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Weak leadership must be challenged to improve; strong governance is therefore critical</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Regional variation is holding some children and young people back</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Raising the achievement of disadvantaged children is a moral and economic imperative</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>12</b>

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**Data View:** Inspection findings can also be viewed at [www.dataview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.dataview.ofsted.gov.uk). Data View enables users to compare the performance of providers over time from Ofsted inspections across England by region, local authority and constituency area.



# The battle against mediocrity

## Grounds for optimism – but more needs to be done

In my report last year, I challenged the system to do better and expressed grave concern about the varying quality of schools and colleges across England.



I am pleased to report that this year, in some respects, the landscape has improved. **The challenge for our nation is to build on these improvements and accelerate progress to ensure that England's education system is viewed as one of the best in the developed world.**

Better teaching and more effective leadership mean that more children in England have a better chance of attending a good or better school. Nearly eight in 10 schools in England are now good or better, which is the highest proportion since Ofsted was founded 20 years ago.<sup>1</sup> Around 485,000 more primary school pupils and 188,000 more secondary school pupils attend a good or better school than last year.

In primary schools particularly, there has been a marked gain. In 2011/12, there were 23 local authorities where fewer than 60% of primary school pupils attended good or

better schools. This year, there are only three such local authorities.

The further education (FE) and skills sector has also raised its game. Across the whole FE and skills sector, 71% of all providers were judged good or outstanding, an increase of seven percentage points on last year. In 2011/12, a third of learners were in provision judged less than good but now only a quarter are. Two general further education (GFE) colleges were judged outstanding for teaching and learning, the first time any GFE college has achieved this judgement in over three years.

Last year, I was troubled by weaknesses in leadership in this important sector, its inability to provide courses of value to local employers and the poor quality of English and mathematics teaching. Although I remain concerned over the quality of apprenticeships and whether the right



**Nearly eight in 10 schools in England are now good or better, which is the highest proportion since Ofsted was founded 20 years ago.**



<sup>1</sup> In 1993/94, Ofsted did not assign overall judgements to schools, but for the purposes of the Annual Report did aggregate the standards in all lessons across all subjects for secondary schools, of which only 51% were judged to be good, compared with 71% for secondary schools this year.





courses are always offered, there are now more grounds for optimism.

I am also pleased that this year, for the first time, in October we published an annual report dedicated to social care. Our inspections have found too many local authorities failing in their duty to safeguard and protect children and young people. We will monitor these inadequate authorities until they improve. Our children's social care services must be of the highest quality in order to improve the lives of our most vulnerable children.

Ofsted is acutely conscious of the important role of early years education in alleviating social disadvantage. Tackling inequality at the earliest possible opportunity is the most effective way of ensuring that children reach their full potential. As this is such a crucial area, we will devote an annual report to the subject early in 2014.

## Robust accountability drives improvement

When I joined Ofsted, one of the first statements I made was that 'we have tolerated mediocrity for far too long – it has settled into the system'. Looking at the evidence across all sectors, there are unmistakable signs that England's education system is gradually improving.

**Accountability has played a critical part in this success.** It is no surprise that several countries around the world are imitating the way we inspect in England, including some countries that had abolished inspection regimes only to see outcomes decline.<sup>2</sup> Our new frameworks have raised expectations and established that only 'good' is good enough. This has helped the system to challenge mediocrity. In schools, for example, more is now done when a school is judged as requires improvement than happened previously following a judgement of satisfactory.

We have also encouraged leaders of schools and colleges to participate in inspection. As a result, over a half of all school inspections have a serving leader on the inspection team. This is a major advance on just a few years ago, when only a quarter of inspection teams included a serving leader.

Although these improved inspection judgements are not yet reflected in all national test and examination results, I am confident that as long as progress is maintained, better results will follow. Importantly, test results at Key

Stage 2 and examination results at Key Stage 4 were markedly better in those schools awarded a higher inspection grade than at the previous inspection.

The changes we have made to inspection for 2013/14 will focus even more on how well school and college leaders ensure that teaching leads to better outcomes for all children and young people. Although this may limit the growth of good or better schools and colleges in the short term, it will act as a necessary catalyst for even higher standards.

The battle against mediocrity will be a long fight, but it is gradually being won. Tenacious and committed teachers and leaders are at the forefront of this. We must recognise their achievement and encourage others to demonstrate the same restlessness in pursuit of better outcomes.

## A changing landscape: academies and trusts are now well established

The significant growth in the number of academies over the last few years has helped to raise standards in some of our weakest schools. More than half of all secondary schools are now academies and many of these are in federations, clusters and trusts.

**The best sponsored academies and multi-academy trusts use their new freedoms well.** Many have strong governance and this can make a big difference to children's lives, particularly those who live in our most disadvantaged communities. Sponsored academies that have taken over failing schools are doing particularly well with many closing the gap in GCSE performance.



<sup>2</sup> The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) describes quality assurance systems, including inspection, as the key to raising standards. India and Saudi Arabia are now introducing inspection systems in order to improve outcomes. Mauritius is replacing its inspection system after outcomes declined. New Zealand has recently strengthened its quality assurance system.



But it is important that any expansion of an academy trust is commensurate with its ability to assure the quality of constituent schools. We intend in 2013/14 to take a closer look at the governance structures and the support and challenge provided by academy chains to their schools.

**Around two thirds of all academies are now converter academies.** Many of these academies were previously good or outstanding and this is reflected in generally strong performance. However, too few of the new converter academies are using their status to raise standards further and disadvantaged pupils still do much less well than other pupils.

It is too early to report in detail on the standards achieved in the new **free schools** and very few have been inspected. Given the strong public interest in academies and free schools, I will report on this in more detail in the coming year.

## **The barrier to excellence is inconsistency**

Serious challenges remain. If these are not addressed, it will be difficult for England to move from average to excellent outcomes. Nearly a quarter of a million pupils still languish in inadequate schools and a further 1.5 million are in schools that require improvement because they are not yet good. Secondary schools do not do as well as primary schools overall. Too many apprenticeships are inadequate. These are all major concerns.

Meanwhile, many of our international competitors are improving at a faster rate than we are. They will not wait for us to catch up.



**Three factors are impeding educational progress:**

- **too much mediocre teaching and weak leadership**
- **regional variation in the quality of education**
- **the significant underachievement of children from low-income families, particularly White children.**

It is not an exaggeration to report that the story of our schools and colleges today is a tale of two nations. Children from similar backgrounds with similar abilities, but who happen to be born in different regions and attend different schools and colleges, can end up with widely different prospects because of the variable quality of their education.

## **Mistaking the process of education with its purpose**

Although there are now more good schools, and teaching and leadership are improving, the variation in quality between schools and colleges in different parts of the country, and between lessons in the same school or college, is a major challenge.

While it is encouraging that inspectors judged more schools to have good or outstanding teaching this year, teaching observed was less than good in around three in 10 lessons. What is particularly worrying is that there were more English and mathematics lessons judged less than good than in many other parts of the curriculum. It goes without saying that children will struggle without basic numeracy and literacy skills. In mathematics, too many teachers still do not communicate key mathematical concepts or provide the opportunity to develop reasoning and problem-solving skills. Too many secondary schools fail to tackle poor literacy skills.

The position in colleges is even worse, particularly for functional English and foundation mathematics. It is shocking that 82% of 16-year-olds who do not achieve at least a C grade in GCSE English and mathematics do not go on to achieve these grades three years later at 19. In my view, the government is right to want young people to study these important subjects to the age of 18. Success will be predicated on the ability of FE colleges to deliver this ambition.

**I remain concerned that many teachers believe that they have to teach lessons in a particular way.** A minority of teachers and school leaders often confuse a 'busy' lesson for a good one and some teachers have been led to believe that the more activities they can cram into a lesson, the more effective it will be.



Moreover, some schools expect overly detailed lesson plans, which can stifle initiative and flair. Such schools mistake the process of education with its purpose. For example, some school leaders can talk the language of literacy, but neglect the basics: teaching spelling; insisting that children take home books and return them the following day; filling corridors and classrooms with inspiring poems and quotations; displaying subject-specific vocabulary in specialist areas; correcting poor grammar at the earliest opportunity.

A good lesson is one where children are attentive, challenged, acquire knowledge and make progress. Our judgements about the quality of teaching are predicated not on the style of teaching, but on the amount of useful learning that takes place in the lesson. But classrooms must be orderly places. **We have accepted for far too long minor disruption and inattention in schools.** Around 700,000 pupils attend schools where behaviour needs to improve. Unless this changes, teachers will struggle to create an environment in which all children learn well. Furthermore, if teaching becomes a daily struggle to maintain order in the classroom, not only will standards decline but good teachers will leave the profession.

## Every child should have the same chance to progress to their full potential

Research shows that unless children have mastered the basic skills by the age of seven, they find it difficult to catch up. Yet inspectors found that much of the weakest teaching in primary schools was concentrated in the younger age groups. In these formative years, pupils need the best teaching, not the poorest. If schools are to close the attainment gap, they must devote sufficient resources and better quality teaching to the earlier primary years and the children who need it most.

The government is right to consider measuring progress from the start of Reception to Key Stage 1. However, inspectors have noted worrying inconsistencies in teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 1. In infant schools, for example, children are more likely to be assessed as reaching, or exceeding, the standards expected for their age than they are in all-through primary schools. Moreover, uneven moderation by local authorities of the work carried out by schools can lead to poor quality and unreliable assessment. For these reasons, I urge government to consider a return to external assessment at the end of Key Stage 1.



We also need to worry about the progress of our more able children. As our June report *Most able students: are they doing well enough in our non-selective secondary schools?* found, many able children achieve reasonably good results compared with the national level.<sup>3</sup> But this does little justice to their full potential. Just over a quarter of previously high-attaining students at primary school did not achieve at least a grade B in both English and mathematics at GCSE in 2012. This represents just over 27,000 children.



**Our judgements about the quality of teaching are predicated not on the style of teaching, but on the amount of useful learning that takes place in the lesson.**



## The best teaching does not happen by accident

A key responsibility of school and college leaders is to provide an inspiring and disciplined environment in which all teachers, including those new to the profession, can thrive. In the best schools, all teachers should see good or better practice and be challenged to match the best. This year, headteachers have told inspectors that the quality of new entrants to teaching is improving, particularly in secondary schools. Schools must take advantage of this. It is important that the most talented teachers are nurtured and developed to become the leaders of tomorrow.

<sup>3</sup> *The most able students: are they doing as well as they should in our non-selective secondary schools?*, (130118), Ofsted, 2013; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/most-able-students-are-they-doing-well-they-should-our-non-selective-secondary-schools](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/most-able-students-are-they-doing-well-they-should-our-non-selective-secondary-schools).

There needs to be a fair distribution of good teachers and leaders throughout our country if we are to raise standards in those underperforming areas highlighted in this report. This has important implications for the quality of **initial teacher education (ITE)** in our country. This year, we have focused more intently on the teaching ability of trainees and new teachers in our inspections of ITE partnerships. Fewer partnerships have received the highest judgements as a result. Those that have done well have been the smaller partnerships, because the schools in the partnerships were closely involved in every element of the programme. When partnerships provided trainees with tailored training and support, the schools and colleges who went on to employ them valued them highly.

As the system moves to more school-based training, it is important that ITE trainees see good practice and have the opportunity to move to the parts of the country that need their skills most. This will not happen by chance. The **new National College for Teaching and Leadership** must ensure that teachers and leaders are provided with the necessary incentives to move to the parts of the country with the greatest need for high quality staff.

## **Weak leadership must be challenged to improve; strong governance is therefore critical**

Although the quality of leadership is improving, 18% of schools still have leadership that is less than good.<sup>4</sup> Where leadership was judged inadequate, leaders had rarely updated their own skills, or monitored the quality of teaching, or understood what constitutes effective teaching. Their aspirations for the school and its pupils were low. They were rarely challenged by governors and, in some cases, resisted attempts by local authorities and other agencies to provide support.

Invariably, weak and ineffective schools have governing bodies that do not challenge the school to do better. **In around 400 schools inspected this year, governing bodies were so weak that inspectors recommended an external independent review of governance.** It is worrying to note that, in a few of these schools, the governors did not quickly act on this recommendation.

I have argued on a number of occasions for more professional governance in underperforming schools and particularly in disadvantaged communities. Because good governance is even more important in an increasingly autonomous education system, the government must continue to review what else it can do to strengthen this in our schools.

<sup>4</sup> At their most recent inspection as at 31 August 2013.

## **Regional variation is holding some children and young people back**

For the first time, I am publishing reports on standards in each of England's regions. These will provide greater insight into what people should expect from their local schools and colleges. We must focus minds, across the country, on where schools and colleges need to improve. If a school or college is not doing well enough, then key stakeholders such as parents, governors and local councillors should all demand an explanation and ask, 'who will make it better?'

In truth, England is a patchwork of provision. There are disadvantaged areas that provide an excellent education and affluent regions that could do much better.

In some areas, primary schools are improving rapidly while secondary schools and FE colleges languish. In other areas, this is reversed. These regional discrepancies act as an unnecessary brake on the country's educational performance. Alongside this report, we are publishing an interactive tool on our website, Data View, which will highlight the sometimes







stark differences in performance between schools and colleges in local authority areas.<sup>5</sup>

On the whole, primary school performance has risen. Many of the local authorities with underperforming primary schools have made significant progress. For instance, the proportion of pupils attending a good or better primary school has risen from 42% to 64% in **Coventry** and from 43% to 69% in **Derby**. Even **Thurrock**, which remains near the foot of the table, has seen a substantial improvement of 10 percentage points.

Unfortunately, improvement hasn't been universal. Performance declined in **Southend-on-Sea**, where the proportion of pupils attending good or better primary schools fell by 6%, and in **Bracknell Forest**, which saw a decline of 8 percentage points.

The picture is even poorer in secondary schools. There are 13 local authorities where less than half of all pupils attend a good or outstanding school. Of these, five are in **Yorkshire and Humber**. Conversely, there are nine local authorities, mainly in **London**, where every secondary pupil attends a good or outstanding school.

Even where circumstances are relatively benign, poor leadership and teaching can conspire to deliver a mediocre education. Take the **East of England, an often attractive and largely rural area not commonly associated with educational failure**. Children in this region have among the lowest chances in the country of attending a good or better school. Primary schools are worse here than in any other region of the country. Secondary schools, too, lag behind, though they are beginning to get better. Leadership and management of schools is among the weakest in the country and the quality of independent learning providers is also weak.

Inspectors have led focused school inspections in **Coventry, Derby, Bristol, Norfolk, Portsmouth, East Riding of Yorkshire** and **Medway**. The results of these inspections led to the inspection of school improvement arrangements in **Norfolk** and the **Isle of Wight**. Both have been found to be ineffective. Inspectors found that both authorities had been complacent and slow to challenge underperformance in their schools.

If local authorities are to play any future part in raising standards, they must use their existing powers more effectively and encourage the systematic involvement of good and outstanding leaders to support weaker schools.

A lack of strategic oversight is also hampering the ability of colleges and independent learning providers to provide students with the learning and training that employers want. Too often, inspectors find that no one is responsible for ensuring that local provision is coordinated to support local needs. Only a third of Local Enterprise Partnerships, for instance, have an FE and skills representative on its board.



**There are 13 local authorities where less than half of all pupils attend a good or outstanding secondary school**



In the West of England, including **Bristol**, only 20% of learners at FE colleges are on courses that relate to the skills local employers need. Too few youngsters are prepared for the jobs and apprenticeships the city has to offer. This mismatch is a direct result of the perverse incentives that encourage colleges to provide courses that appeal to learners rather than ones that meet local employment needs.

This is a huge waste of potential at a time when over a million young people are without jobs and employers complain about a shortage of skills. The government's determination to promote apprenticeships in the 16–24 age range will only succeed if employers are engaged and work collaboratively with the FE and skills sector to ensure that provision is of high quality.

As the education system becomes more autonomous, a coherent response to underperformance and the demands of the local economy is more important than ever.

<sup>5</sup> To find out more about Data View access it directly at [dataview.ofsted.gov.uk](https://dataview.ofsted.gov.uk).



Some of the areas most in need of inspiring leadership are those least likely to have access to National Leaders of Education (NLEs). It is essential that the strongest leaders have some incentive to help the weakest areas to move forward.



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**White boys and girls from low-income families have the lowest attainment of any poor ethnic group.**

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In my *Unseen children* report, I argued for sub-regional challenges to coordinate the recruitment of good teachers and leaders and to galvanise improvement where inspectors see little of it.<sup>6</sup> This should be part of a national strategy to address regional disparities and apply effective remedies. Without this, the country stands little chance of fully realising its educational ambitions.

**Raising the achievement of disadvantaged children is a moral and economic imperative**

In recent years, the attainment gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and others has narrowed at Key Stage 2, falling from 24 percentage points in 2007 to 16 percentage points in 2012. But it remains stubbornly wide at GCSE, at around 27 percentage points. Poor White children, by far the largest proportion of children eligible for free school meals, do particularly badly. They are being left behind.

Since 2007, the attainment of White British pupils eligible for free school meals has improved more slowly than for many other ethnic groups. Today, White boys and girls from low-income families have the lowest attainment of any poor ethnic group. In 2012, only 26% of disadvantaged White British boys and 35% of girls achieved five good GCSEs including English and mathematics.

As I said in our significant *Unseen children* report, too many children from poor backgrounds still do not succeed at school or college, and they become less visible as they progress through the system. **This represents an unacceptable waste of human potential and incurs significant subsequent costs for all of us.**

So why do these pupils from low-income backgrounds do so poorly? It is not solely a question of material poverty. It is often poverty of expectation in families, schools and in the communities they serve that is limiting the achievement of these children.

But it does not have to be like this. Some schools get impressive results. Leaders in these schools focus relentlessly on the quality of teaching, forge strong relationships with families and parents, arrange the necessary interventions and constantly reinforce high expectations. Inspectors also note that they make much better use of the pupil premium.<sup>7</sup>

FE colleges and providers must also play their part. They can be the 'last-chance saloon' for some of the most deprived children in the country. If their provision isn't up to scratch, these young people have little opportunity of embarking on any kind of worthwhile career.

**Conclusion**

We should be optimistic about the state of our nation's education system. On the whole, our schools and colleges have responded well to the increased demands placed on them. Being asked to jump higher, and further, is not easy to accomplish. But schools, colleges and other providers must have greater ambition if we are to compete successfully in the 'global race'.

Put simply, **I want educational opportunities open to the most fortunate children to be available to all.** It would be self-defeating to dismiss this aspiration as unattainable. There is no good reason why weak leaders cannot become strong ones. There is no acceptable reason why poor teachers cannot learn to teach well. There is no rational reason why one region, or one ethnic group, should perform worse than another. These things can be done because we have seen them being done.

**I cannot excuse mediocrity just because it is hard to do better. No good teacher would say that to a pupil. And no country should say that to itself.**

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<sup>6</sup> *Unseen children* (130155), Ofsted, 2013; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/accessandachievement](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/accessandachievement).

<sup>7</sup> School inspection reports included comment on the use of the pupil premium this year. In a sample of reports, those schools that are successful in improving outcomes for pupils from low income backgrounds are also making effective use of the pupil premium. In many cases inspectors have noted a direct link between the use of the pupil premium and good outcomes.



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