Estyn

Tackling child poverty and disadvantage in schools

JANUARY 2010

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities (LAs);
- primary schools;
- secondary schools;
- special schools;
- pupil referral units;
- independent schools;
- further education;
- adult community-based learning;
- youth support services;
- youth and community work training;
- Local authority education services (LAES);
- teacher education and training;
- work-based learning;
- careers companies;
- offender learning; and
- the education, guidance and training elements of the Department for Work and Pensions funded training programmes.

Estyn also:

- provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

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Introduction

1   This report looks at how schools are tackling child poverty and disadvantage in Wales. It draws on evidence from the three Estyn reports on the RAISE initiative that were published in 2007, 2008 and 2009, and from inspection reports on schools and local authorities[1]. It also comments on the performance of disadvantaged learners in Wales and considers relevant research evidence. It identifies examples of effective practice and makes suggestions about further action that might be taken to improve the performance of disadvantaged pupils.

2   The report is set in the context of the Welsh Assembly Government's developing policy on child poverty. In February 2005, the Welsh Assembly Government produced a strategy to tackle child poverty, called 'A Fair Future for Our Children'. The Child Poverty Implementation Plan: Phase 1 Proposals, published in 2006, included a general aim of steering initiatives and spending proposals towards the eradication of child poverty so as to benefit the poorest children and their families. The Welsh Assembly Government is currently developing a new child poverty strategy.

3   In March 2009, the Welsh Assembly Government introduced the proposed Children and Families (Wales) Measure into the National Assembly for Wales. The proposed Measure makes statutory provision, through a legislative framework, to take forward the Welsh Assembly Government's commitments on child poverty. The legislation makes provision for Welsh authorities, including Welsh Ministers and local authorities, to prepare and publish a strategy for contributing to the eradication of child poverty in Wales. It also includes provision for greater support to families where children may be at risk, and will strengthen regulation and enforcement in childminding and day care settings for children.

4   A number of educational policies and initiatives have derived from the Welsh Assembly Government's overall drive to tackle child poverty, including Flying Start and the School Effectiveness Framework[2]. One important development has been the 'Raise Attainment and Individual Standards in Education' or RAISE programme. Over the three-year period from 2006-2007 to 2008-2009, the Welsh Assembly Government provided an annual grant of £16.25m, of which around £14.5m has gone directly to schools. The grant was directed to schools with 20% or more pupils entitled to free school meals as long as they had 50 or more pupils of statutory school age. About 30% of primary schools, 28% of secondary schools and 75% of special schools received the grant.

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[1] The Impact of RAISE funding
     http://www.estyn.gov.uk/publications/The_impact_of_RAISE_funding_an_interim_report_July_2007.pdf
     The Impact of RAISE
     http://www.estyn.gov.uk/publications/the_impact_of_raise.pdf
     The Impact of RAISE 2008-2009
     http://www.estyn.gov.uk/thematicreports/Impact_of_RAISE_2008-2009.pdf
[2] School Effectiveness Framework: Building Effective Learning Communities Together'. Welsh Assembly Government 2008

5   In 2009-2010, the Welsh Assembly Government RAISE grant has reduced to £6.29m, with £4.5m going to schools, and a different approach has been adopted. Groups of schools, together with their local authority or authorities, sought funding for projects that explore key issues from the early evaluations of the RAISE programme. The purpose is to support activities to tackle the negative impact of poverty on pupils, especially those activities that that are transferable to other schools. It is intended to publicise these activities and their outcomes so that all schools can benefit more widely from the RAISE initiative. This Estyn report does not comment on the RAISE programme for 2009-2010.

Main findings

6   There is a strong statistical link between poverty and low educational attainment. In general, pupils from poorer families are still far more likely to attain at lower levels than other pupils.

7   At all key stages in Wales, pupils who are entitled to free school meals perform significantly less well than those not eligible for free school meals against a range of performance indicators. The gap in performance is larger in secondary schools than in primary schools.

8   In English, mathematics and science at key stage 2, the gap between the performance of free-school-meals pupils and non-free-school-meals pupils only reduced by a small amount in 2008 in Wales, whereas in England the gap has closed steadily over the period from 2006 to 2008. At key stage 4, the gap in the proportion of learners in both groups who attain five or more GCSE grades A* to C or equivalent is much smaller in England than in Wales[3].

9   In our surveys on RAISE, we found that in most schools, the achievement of pupils involved in specific RAISE-funded work improved a great deal. One of the most important benefits of RAISE was its impact on pupils' personal and social skills.

10   In the visits for our three RAISE reports we came across many examples of effective practice. These include:

- an approach to tackling disadvantage that includes all staff and not just the staff who were directly involved in RAISE-funded work;

- procedures to track the progress of all pupils that allow staff to monitor the progress of different groups of pupils, including those who are eligible for free school meals;

- constructive work with other services in the area and with the local community;

- an increase in the expertise of teaching assistants; and

- more attention to developing pupils' social and emotional skills.

11   Some schools succeed despite facing challenging circumstances. These successful schools tend to do well by doing the same kinds of things that all successful schools do. What is different in the schools that do well in disadvantaged areas is that they have highly effective leadership and consistently good teaching, and place an emphasis on particular activities or combination of activities. For instance, they:

- attach great importance to extra-curricular and out-of-school-hours provision, including cultural and sport enrichment, as well as extra educational support such as homework clubs, at lunch times or after school;

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[3]   We use five or more GCSE grades A* to C or equivalent because we have only this performance indicator for free-school-meals pupils and non-free-school-meals pupils for 2006, 2007 and 2008.

- have high expectations of standards and behaviour and a zero tolerance of excuses for poor provision or underachievement;

- work closely with parents and the wider community to reinforce expectations; and

- give substantial attention to developing pupils' social and emotional skills, and improving their confidence and self-esteem.

12   In addition to these general features, primary schools that do well in challenging circumstances also have a vibrant curriculum that includes enrichment activities, a well-structured and delivered personal and social education programme, and a genuine place for pupils' voice that ensures all pupils have a chance to have their say about what and how they learn. They also emphasise a quick start on entry to school through early assessment and intervention.

13   In successful secondary schools, the additional features include a strong emphasis on social inclusion, a focus on meeting the needs of all pupils without compromising high academic standards and a willingness to develop the curriculum to meet needs, especially in key stage 4 where the ambitions of Learning Pathways 14-19 have been embraced. These schools have a positive view of the value of vocational education and readily work with other schools, further education colleges and work-based learning providers to develop collaborative provision at key stage 4 and in post 16.

14   Some schools do well in challenging circumstances and some local authorities also do particularly well. Disadvantaged pupils do relatively well in a few local authorities and there is a significant gap between the best performing and the worst authorities. In one local authority the key success factors include:

- energetic leadership from the local authority and from individual schools that focuses on finding innovative ways to tackle disadvantage;

- a thorough analysis of the performance of individual pupils; and

- an effective approach to challenging underperformance and intervening where necessary.

15   Schools alone cannot break the link between poverty and underachievement. Research stresses the need for integrated and broad-based approaches that involve a number of agencies working together[4]. Community-focused schools can contribute to this work but there are no agreed and specific criteria for what community-focused schools should do and no specific guidance about how community-focused schools can help to tackle the link between disadvantage and underachievement through joint agency collaboration.

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[4]   'Evaluation of the Full Service Extended Schools Initiative: Final Report', C. Cummins et al Department for Education and Skills 2007

Recommendations

16 In order to continue improving the performance of disadvantaged pupils, there should be an increased emphasis on a number of activities that are already underway, including those that are part of the School Effectiveness Framework. In particular,

schools should:

R1 maintain a clearer focus on disadvantaged pupils in all aspects of their work and develop a strategy that directly tackles disadvantage;

R2 track the performance of disadvantaged pupils and intervene accordingly;

R3 improve pupils' social and emotional skills;

R4 work more systematically with parents to support disadvantaged pupils; and

R5 give a senior leader managerial responsibility for improving the standards achieved by disadvantaged learners;

local authorities should:

R6 monitor the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils in the authority as a whole; and

R7 challenge schools on the performance of disadvantaged learners;

and the Welsh Assembly Government should:

R8 develop national benchmarks and targets for improvements in the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils;

R9 clarify the nature and role of community-focused schools and offer comprehensive guidance as how to deliver a community-focused approach to improving the education and services for disadvantaged pupils in the most deprived areas; and

R10 work with local authorities to prioritise the development of community-focused schools in disadvantaged areas.
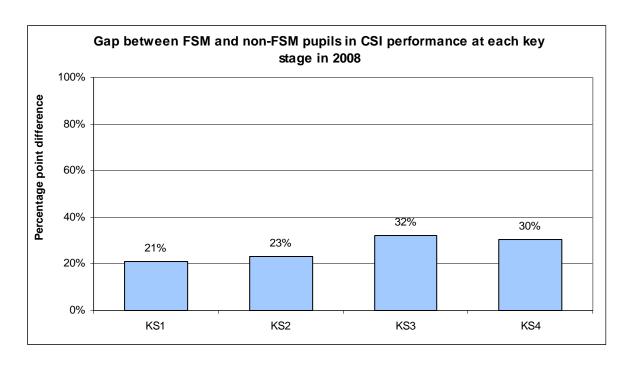
How disadvantaged pupils perform in Wales

Measuring deprivation

17   There is a strong statistical link between poverty and low educational attainment. In general, pupils from poorer families are far more likely to attain at lower levels than other pupils. As a result, it is often harder for these pupils to gain high-skilled employment or to engage in further or higher education later on.

18   The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is often used as a proxy for relative deprivation because pupils can receive free school meals if their families get a designated state benefit, such as income support or job seeker's allowance, as a result of relatively low income. Entitlement to free school meals does not mean that a child is destined to underachieve. Children from relatively poor backgrounds can and do achieve at the highest level and schools serving poor neighbourhoods can also sometimes outperform schools with more affluent catchment areas.

19   Free school meals is an imperfect indicator of disadvantage, because it does not include all disadvantaged pupils or all types of disadvantage. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) is available for small local areas of about 1,500 people called lower layer super output areas (LSOAs) and is the official measure of deprivation at local area level in Wales. This is a much broader measure of deprivation in that it includes all the people in the area whereas the free-school-meals indicator relates to specific pupils. It is possible by using an individual pupil's postcode to relate them to specific LSOAs, but even in a small area such as a LSOA, there may be a range of socio-economic circumstances and it may not be an accurate reflection of the home circumstances of an individual pupil. In addition, the WIMD is not as up to date as the free-school-meals indicator as the WIMD is produced only every three years, whereas the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is recorded annually. Despite the acknowledged weaknesses of using free school meals, it is useful as a proxy measure for disadvantaged and it is the most commonly-used tool for analysing the impact of deprivation on pupils' educational outcomes.

Underachievement

20   At all key stages in Wales, pupils who are entitled to free school meals perform significantly less well than those not eligible for free school meals against a range of performance indicators. The gap in performance is larger in secondary schools than in primary schools. There is a difference between the performance of the boys and girls entitled to free school meals, but this is in line with the difference in performance of all boys and girls. The following chart shows the gap in performance between all free-school-meals (FSM) pupils and non-free-school-meals pupils in the core subject indicator (CSI) in 2008[5].

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[5]   The core subject indicator relates to performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum.

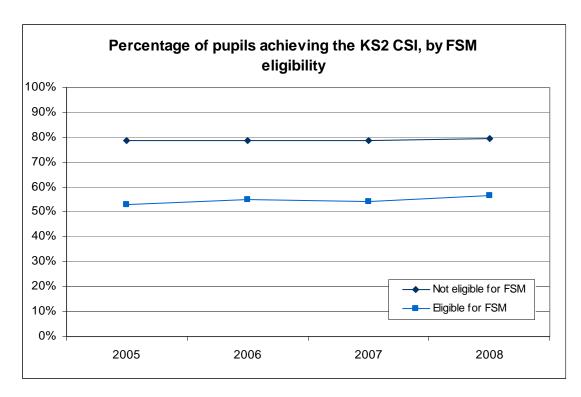**Gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils in CSI performance at each key stage in 2008**

Percentage point difference

100%			
80%			
60%			
40%		32%	30%
20%	21% 23%		
0%	KS1 KS2	KS3	KS4

21 Over the last three years the pattern has not changed much as is shown in the following chart.

Gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils in CSI performance at each key stage between 2006 and 2008

Percentage point difference

	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS4
	21% 22% 21%	24% 24% 23%	32% 31% 32%	29% 29% 30%

22 The rate of improvement in the performance of free-school-meals pupils over time is very similar to the rate of improvement of non-free-school-meal pupils as is shown in the following charts for key stage 2 and key stage 4.

Percentage of pupils achieving the KS2 CSI, by FSM eligibility

Percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more GSCEs at grades A*-C, by FSM eligibility

The 'school effect'

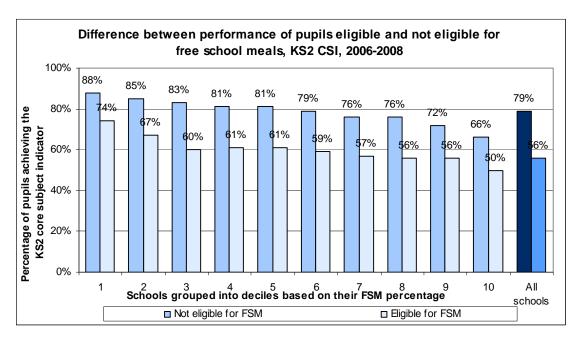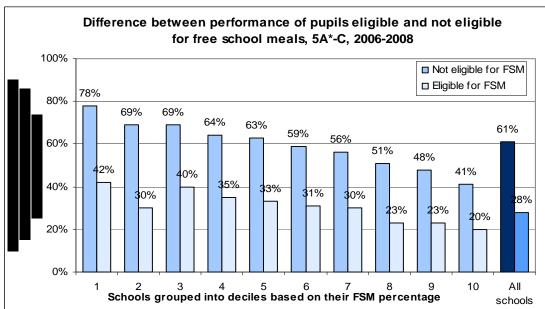23   The following charts show the difference in performance between free-school-meal pupils and non-free-school-meal pupils in primary schools and in secondary schools with different proportions of free-school meals. The chart divides schools into deciles with each group containing a tenth of schools and the proportion of free school meals increases from left to right on the horizontal axes.

Difference between performance of pupils eligible and not eligible for free school meals, KS2 CSI, 2006-2008

Difference between performance of pupils eligible and not eligible for free school meals, 5A*-C, 2006-2008
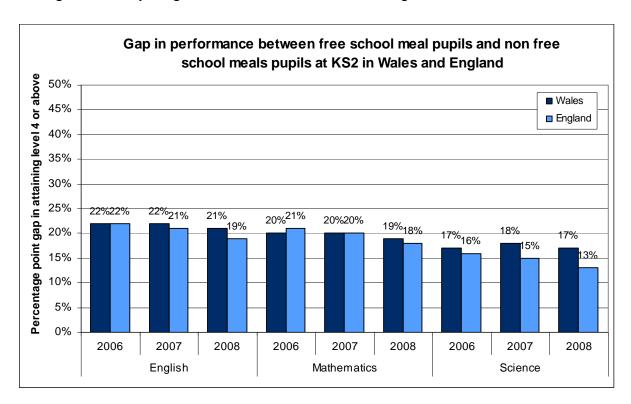

24   The charts show that in general the performance of all pupils declines as the proportion of free school meals increases, irrespective of whether the pupils receive free school meals. It appears that, in schools with higher proportions of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, there is also a negative effect on the performance of pupils who are not disadvantaged as well as on those who are disadvantaged. This indicates that the nature of the school catchment has an important effect on the performance of all pupils. This may be because, in the most disadvantaged schools, the non-free-school-meals pupils are likely to include many who are close to being eligible for free school meals and face many of the same barriers as pupils eligible for free school meals. In addition, many pupils enter these schools with lower than average attainment and these schools also tend to have higher proportions of pupils with additional learning needs. These schools may spend disproportionate amounts of time dealing with social and economic problems that inhibit pupils' learning. Some of these schools can also have difficulties in recruiting staff.
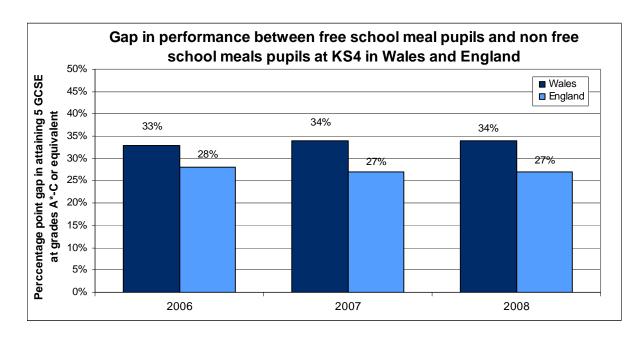
25   Even so, this pattern appears to confirm that pupils' performance is negatively affected by their own experience of poverty, but also that other pupils who may not be materially deprived are additionally affected by the general level of deprivation in the school. In fact, the charts above suggest that the school effect is greater than the individual effect, particularly when the proportion of free-school-meals pupils in a school is relatively high.

26   Free-school-meal pupils in schools where there are high proportions of free-school meals are therefore doubly disadvantaged. This is because, in addition to performing worse than non-free-school-meal pupils in the same school, these pupils are likely to perform less well than they would do had they been in a school with a lower proportion of free-school-meal pupils.

Comparisons with England

27   There is some variation in the overall performance of free-school-meal pupils in Wales when compared with England. The following charts show the gap between the performance of free-school-meals pupils and non-free-school-meals pupils at key stage 2 and key stage 4 in schools in Wales and England.
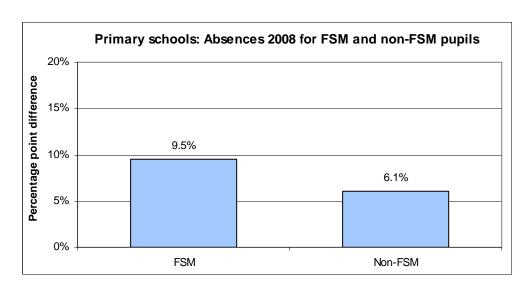

28   At key stage 2, we compare the performance of pupils in English, mathematics and science separately as there is no CSI in England. In all three subjects in Wales, the gap reduced only by a small amount in 2008, whereas in England the gap has been closing steadily over the period 2006 to 2008.
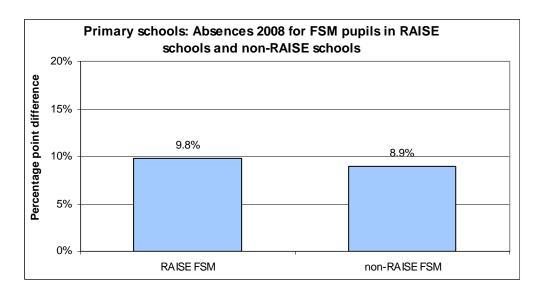
Gap in performance between free school meal pupils and non free school meals pupils at KS4 in Wales and England

Perccentage point gap in attaining 5 GCSE at grades A*-C or equivalent

	Wales	England
2006	33%	28%
2007	34%	27%
2008	34%	27%

29   At key stage 4 in 2006, the gap was already much smaller in England than in Wales. In the following two years, the gap in England has reduced slightly, while in Wales it has got slightly larger.

30   Care needs to be taken in making these national comparisons, particularly as Wales has a generally higher level of deprivation than England. As our comments in paragraphs 22 and 25 suggest, the impact of disadvantage depends on the level of disadvantage in complex ways and, in the same way as free-school-meal pupils are doubly disadvantaged in a school with high levels of deprivation, the same may be true at a national level.

Attendance

31   There is also a link between deprivation and absences, with absences being higher for disadvantaged pupils. This is shown in the chart for primary schools below:

Primary schools: Absences 2008 for FSM and non-FSM pupils

Percentage point difference

FSM	Non-FSM
9.5%	6.1%

32   The pattern is similar in secondary schools as in the chart below:

Primary schools: Absences 2008 for FSM pupils in RAISE schools and non-RAISE schools

Percentage point difference

- 20%
- 15%
- 10% — RAISE FSM: 9.8% / non-RAISE FSM: 8.9%
- 5%
- 0%

RAISE FSM   non-RAISE FSM

Reasons for the performance gap

33   There has been considerable research into why disadvantaged pupils do not perform as well as other pupils[6]. Below are some of the main reasons that have emerged from that research. The home circumstances of pupils have a significant impact on them and poverty can affect a pupil through a number of factors such as:

- too few **resources** at home to support a pupil's education;

- a greater risk of low birth weight which influences cognitive and physical development, and consequently a higher incidence of **ill health**;

- increased stress on the family that may affect the quality of **parenting**;

- lower levels of **parental education** and a lack of involvement in their children's education (parents with unhappy memories of their time at school are not convinced that schools can make a difference);

- local **cultural and social factors** that undermine positive attitudes to success at school;

- **low aspirations** amongst parents and children; and

- falling behind in **literacy** at an early age, which has a knock-on effect future progress and attainment.

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[6]   For example, 'Deprivation and Education' Department for Children, Schools and Families 2009 and 'Combating Child Poverty in Wales: Are Effective Education Strategies in Place' Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2007

Why some schools in disadvantaged areas are more successful than others

34 Pupils' home circumstances have the most significant impact on their progress and achievement. Many disadvantaged children start school behind other children and do not manage to close the gap as they move through the education system. However, schools can still have a positive influence on the progress and achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Some schools are better than others in doing this, because we see examples of schools performing differently even though they serve similar catchments and have similar levels of deprivation. It is possible to analyse what these effective schools do and to help other less successful schools learn from them.

Successful RAISE-funded activities

35 In our surveys on RAISE, we found that, in most schools, the achievement of pupils involved in specific RAISE-funded work improved a great deal. One of the most important benefits of RAISE was its impact on pupils' personal and social skills. In many schools, pupils' involvement in the RAISE-funded work gave them increased confidence and self-esteem. In nearly all primary and special schools, and in many secondary schools, there were gains in pupils' literacy, especially in reading. In many secondary schools, pupils' attendance and behaviour also improved after RAISE-funded work.

36 In the visits for three RAISE reports, we came across many examples of effective practice, as described in the next few paragraphs.

37 While still keeping a clear focus on raising the standards achieved by disadvantaged pupils, a few schools, especially those with high proportions of disadvantaged pupils, devised a **whole-school approach** to tackling disadvantage that did not just include those staff who were directly involved in RAISE-funded work. One primary school incorporated its RAISE work into the whole-school strategy for literacy development that involved all the staff. It used a variety of strategies to engage learners to boost their self-esteem and achievement. One secondary school with high proportions of free-school-meal pupils set up a series of activities that involved developing the curriculum through:

- introducing a comprehensive skills-based approach to learning in Year 7, where there were concerns about the low levels of attainment and social skills;

- targeting most of the cohort in Year 8 and Year 9 for the development of literacy skills;

- offering more vocational choices for about a quarter of Year 10 pupils;

- targeting new provision, such as workshops and revision sessions, at a fifth of pupils in key stage 4 identified as being more able and talented;

- setting up an extra-curricular opportunity to participate in a communications project in the school's 'TV centre'; and

- establishing a partnership project with work-based providers for pupils studying BTEC first diploma in Business Studies and information and communications technology (ICT).

38　In addition to these curriculum developments, the school established new support provision, for example by setting up a new 'learning support unit' for pupils whose behaviour puts them at risk of exclusion, and introducing systems to target the large number of key stage 4 pupils with poor attendance levels.

39　Another secondary school used RAISE funding to develop its extended curriculum model in key stage 4, expand its key skills programme throughout the school and strengthen its provision for the Welsh Baccalaureate.

40　A number of schools used RAISE funding to improve their **monitoring and evaluation** procedures. This helped schools not only to identify all the disadvantaged pupils, but also to monitor their progress. The key activity was based on ICT systems to track the progress of all pupils and this allowed the progress of different groups of pupils, such as free-school-meal pupils, to be monitored as a group. One or two schools developed their system so that it measured the progress of pupils in 'soft skills', such as learning skills and self-esteem. The best schools then devised suitable strategies to meet the needs that their system had identified.

41　**Working with other services in the area and with the local community** are important ways that schools can help to improve the standards of disadvantaged pupils. These holistic approaches were seen in one school that used its specific RAISE-funded activities of small group and in-class support in literacy and numeracy to complement a large number of other activities that had the same aim of raising standards in a disadvantaged community. These other activities included a breakfast club, Flying Start, counselling service, family learning, a local authority pilot school for 'Team around the Child' initiative[7], links with Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services, and use of PASS[8].

42　Many primary schools recognise that **early intervention** is an important strategy in helping to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. One school that linked up with Flying Start for early identification of needs was able to reduce the need for on-going language support as a result. Another school's early intervention programme aimed to develop a strong foundation of skills. The funding was used to employ an extra teacher and allowed the school to offer nursery places alongside a parents' support programme that included training sessions for parents on learning through play. A simple weekly activity was given to parents in order to stimulate discussion at home.

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[7]　'Team Around the Child' is a model of service provision in which a range of different practitioners come together to help and support an individual child.

[8]　PASS is the 'Pupil Attitude to Self and School' electronic rating scale which provides a profile of the learner's self-regard, perceived capabilities, perseverance, motivation, general work ethic, attitudes to teachers, their school and attendance, preparedness for learning and response to the curriculum.

43   The **movement between primary and secondary schools** often leads to some difficulties for pupils. Some clusters of primary and secondary schools recognised the potentially disruptive effect of transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3 for disadvantaged pupils and set up collaborative activities. One group of schools organised 'transition projects' in numeracy and literacy where pupils started work in their primary schools and completed once they had started secondary school. In another cluster, a 'transition coach' worked with partner primary schools to identify free-school-meal pupils in Year 5 and Year 6. He assessed pupils for emotional literacy using NFER tests, and introduced them to the secondary school's SEAL programme to boost their attainment.[9] The secondary school then continued with the programme when these pupils reached Year 7.

44   Increasing the **expertise of teaching assistants** has helped to support RAISE-funded activities. In one primary school, teaching assistants were involved in analysing the data on pupil performance and in setting specific targets for the participating pupils to achieve. In another primary school, the teaching assistants became specialists in delivering an intervention strategy in reading and were responsible for updating the teaching staff so that they could develop the same skills.

45   Over three years, RAISE-funded schools have increasingly given more attention to the development of pupils' **social and emotional skills**. They have seen the value of increasing pupils' self-esteem and confidence as an essential first step to improving pupils' achievements as well as improving the attendance and behaviour of some pupils. One strategy used in a number of primary schools was that of nurture groups. For example, in one school, the approach targeted pupils with social and behavioural problems, and focused on those where early learning experiences had been inadequate or where social issues in the home were having a detrimental impact. Pupils were initially identified by using the school's system for monitoring behaviour that involves using a three-point scale. Pupils who received a significant or regular number of lowest grades formed the target group. Further discussions with class teachers, and occasionally other agencies, identified those children who were likely to benefit from participation in nurture group or mentoring provision.

46   One secondary school set a target of improving the number of key stage 4 learners who achieve the Level 2 Threshold[10]. This was done by setting up activities to improve the pupils' attitudes and learning skills, and included measuring the existing social and emotional skills so that intervention could be targeted. This led to direct teaching to support the specific areas of deficit revealed by the diagnosis.

47   A few secondary schools exploited the potential of **learning coaches** to help improve the performance of disadvantaged pupils by providing additional support and guidance. One school had a coach assigned to each year group and interviewed the pupils each month. In these meetings, the learning coach had the brief of developing a relationship with the pupil so that they could support and guide them through difficulties with class work, behavioural issues and relationships. The coach advised on study skills, organisational strategies and approaches to homework.

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9   SEAL is a programme designed to develop the social and emotional skills of all pupils, including self-awareness, managing feelings, empathy, motivation and social skills.

10 Level 2 Threshold is a volume of qualifications at Level 2 equivalent to the volume of five GCSEs at Grade A* to C.

Successful schools in disadvantaged areas

48   Some schools succeed despite facing challenging circumstances. Estyn inspects schools every six years under Section 28 of the Education Act 2005 and the inspection reports show that some schools do well despite having high proportions of disadvantaged pupils. In this section, we draw out the key features of these successful schools on the basis of our inspection evidence.

49   Successful schools in disadvantaged areas tend to do well by doing the same kinds of things that other successful schools do. What is different in the schools that do well in disadvantaged areas is the emphasis they place on particular activities or combination of activities. All the schools that do well in these circumstances have most or all of the features listed below:

- high-quality and consistent leadership, including a clear and well-understood vision and sense of direction that leaves no-one in any doubt about what the school wants to achieve;

- high proportions of consistently good or very good teaching, including no year groups in primary school or subjects in secondary schools where teaching is just adequate;

- extra-curricular activities and extra support at lunch times or after school;

- effective assessment practices, especially in the quality of the oral and written marking of pupils' work, that provides clear guidance on how to improve;

- clear, shared target-setting based on realistic but nonetheless high expectations;

- high expectations of both standards and behaviour and a zero tolerance for excuses for poor provision or underachievement;

- substantial attention to developing social and emotional skills, and improving confidence and self-esteem;

- considerable provision of enrichment in extra-curricular activities and out-of-school-hours;

- a strong role in the local community, in which the school is a focal point;

- well-developed links with parents, including having systems for consulting parents on important matters and involving them in the school's self-evaluation procedures;

- well-managed and organised procedures that include clear and efficient procedures for responding to unexpected circumstances;

- consistently efficient middle managers who sustain a strong and consistent focus on raising standards;

- rigorous monitoring and follow-up action to address breaches in attendance or behaviour; and

- rigorous and honest self-evaluation that is firmly based on observation of lessons, a robust analysis of data on outcomes and scrutiny of progress in pupils' work.

50 In addition to these features, primary schools that do well in challenging circumstances also have:

- opportunities for the pupil's voice to be heard so that all pupils have a chance to have their say;

- a high standard and quality of teaching assistants; and

- an emphasis on a quick start on entry to school through early assessment and intervention.

51 In successful secondary schools, there are also additional features that include:

- a willingness to develop the curriculum to meet needs, especially in key stage 4 where the ambitions of Learning Pathways 14-19 have been embraced;

- a positive view of the value of vocational education;

- well-organised on-site support for pupils to do their homework after school or to have ready access to specialist ICT equipment;

- a willingness to work with other schools, colleges and work-based learning providers to develop collaborative provision at key stage 4 and post 16; and

- effective curriculum links and social arrangements for key stage 2 to key stage 3 transition.

Why some local authorities are more successful than others in tackling disadvantage

52   As well as the schools that do well in challenging circumstances, there are also some local authorities that do particularly well. Disadvantaged pupils do relatively well in a few local authorities and there is a significant gap between the best performing and the worst. In our previous reports on RAISE, we have stated that there is too much variation between different local authorities in the level of performance of free-school-meal pupils and the rates of their improvement over the last three years.

53   Local authorities can contribute a great deal to improving the achievements of disadvantaged pupils. Neath Port Talbot is one local authority where disadvantaged learners in secondary schools achieve well. At key stage 4 in 2008, it was the best-performing local authority, with 28% of free-school-meal pupils achieving the CSI compared to just 8% in the worst local authority and 17% across Wales.

54   A key factor in the success of Neath Port Talbot has been the high quality of leadership from the local authority and from individual schools. The local authority and schools have worked together over a number of years to develop a culture that promotes high standards of achievement, especially for disadvantaged learners. There is a clear emphasis on openness, partnership working and a strong sense of trust between the authority and schools, and between schools. This has led to a transparency in sharing information about the performance of all schools and a willingness to share good practice.

55   The authority and schools analyse performance data thoroughly. This focuses on the performance of individual pupils as well as the performance of the school as a whole and lot of attention is given to comparative data, for example by comparing the performance of schools in similar socio-economic circumstances. This has helped schools to focus over a number of years on the performance of disadvantaged learners. The authority and the schools are data rich. The authority produces a comprehensive annual 'autumn report on pupil performance' which contains data on socio-economic circumstances and the performance of different groups of pupils. The tracking of pupils' progress and target setting are well embedded in schools and includes extensive use of information on prior attainment.

56   The local authority has been effective in developing its role in challenging schools and intervening where necessary. It has had for some time an effective school improvement service that has established successful ways of working. It uses performance data to identify where there is underachievement and targets its efforts to help address the weaknesses. Where unsatisfactory performance has been identified, the authority has worked with the school in an open and direct way. This same approach to challenge and targeted intervention is also used by schools themselves to address any identified weaknesses in their performance or provision.

57   In addition to the development of a culture that focuses on performance, using data and challenging underperformance, the local authority has a very good educational welfare service that helps to promote inclusion, good levels of attendance and multi-agency working.

58 One structural factor that has helped to raise the performance of disadvantaged pupils in this authority has been the existence of mainly 11 to 16 schools. The heads in most of these schools feel that this has made sure that their full attention is given to the 11 to 16 age range and that resources are not deflected towards the sixth form.

How schools can work with others to help disadvantaged pupils

59 Schools alone cannot break the link between disadvantage and achievement. Although the school has an important role to play in improving the achievements of disadvantaged pupils, research stresses the need for holistic and broad-based approaches that involve a number of agencies working together to address community-based issues. In addition to the school, these include other educational, social and health services.

60 The Welsh Assembly Government defines a community-focused school as 'one that provides a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider community'[11]. The circular states that 'there is no blueprint for the types of activities that schools can provide, or how they might be organised. Working with local partners, schools can develop as little or as much provision as they think suitable for their own community'. This lack of a blueprint, however, means that there are no agreed and specific criteria for what a community-focused school should do and no clarity about how community-focused schools can help to tackle the link between disadvantage and achievement.

61 The extended schools initiative in England is based on what these schools should offer in terms of access to a wide range of services from 8am to 6pm, 48 weeks a year, including school holidays. The core offer comprises:

- a varied menu of activities, including study support, play/recreation, sport, music, arts and crafts and other special interest clubs, volunteering and business and enterprise activities;

- childcare from 8am to 6pm for 48 weeks a year for primary schools;

- parenting support including family learning;

- swift and easy access to targeted and specialist services such as speech and language therapy; and

- community access to facilities including adult learning, ICT and sports facilities.

62 In our report on community-focused schools in Wales[12], we found that there is a wide variety of community-focused provision across Wales that ranges from basic activities, focusing mainly on improving the learning of schools' own pupils, to local community centres that can offer integrated services involving a number of agencies. However, this wide variety means that the benefits to pupils and the wider community have also been variable. Only a few schemes realise the full potential of bringing significant benefits to their local community.

63 The main benefit of community-focused schools to local communities has been improved access to school premises and resources, especially for physical exercise and ICT. Effective partnership work with a range of local agencies is a good feature in only a few schools that are designated as community-focused schools.

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[11] NAfW Circular No 34/2003 'Community Focused Schools'
[12] 'Provision of community-focused service and facilities by schools', Estyn 2008

64   We say in our report on community-focused schools that only a few local authorities have community-focused schools strategies that are clearly and coherently embedded in the strategic priorities, policies and plans of the council as a whole. In particular, only a few local authorities have prioritised schools in their most disadvantaged areas. Many local authority education departments have a relatively narrow view of multi-agency working. Most commonly, they do not have effective partnership arrangements with community health and social services. We recommended in our report that local authorities should ensure that they embed their community-focused school strategies firmly in corporate priorities, policies and plans, and that they work more closely with key strategic partners, especially health and social services.

65   Continyou Cymru, who provides support for the development of community-focused schools in Wales, is working with similar organisations in other countries to develop international standards for community schools. The standards are likely to cover nine key areas:

- leadership;

- partnership;

- social inclusion;

- services;

- volunteering;

- lifelong learning;

- community development;

- parent engagement; and

- school culture.

66   Although the standards are intended to act as a tool for self-assessment, they could also help to provide a specification and vision for community-focused schools. The standards are in the process of being trialled in a number of schools across Wales. As part of this trial, the links between the standards and the School Effectiveness Framework are being explored.

67   Many local authorities refer to community-focused schools in their Children and Young People plans, although a few do not. Where community-focused schools are mentioned, it is usually in connection with Core Aim 2: *have access to a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities, including acquisition of essential personal and social skills* which is where the plans include mainstream education. Only a few authorities' plans make a reference to community-focused schools in the section on Core Aim 7: *are not disadvantaged by child poverty*. These few local authorities have started to develop an approach to community-focused schools that involves multi-agency working.

68   In Rhondda Cynon Taff, for example, the development of a community focus in all schools has been a priority for over 10 years. Schools are organised into clusters, usually a secondary school and its partner primary schools, and each cluster has a designated 'cluster worker' whose role is to lead and co-ordinate this development. The aims of the policy is not only to raise achievement and participation of learners, but also to "provide a more holistic approach to the needs of children, young people and families" and "provide additional services" by developing the role of schools. The local authority's priority is to develop integrated and multi-agency working. It recognises that schools alone cannot tackle the underlying issues that are concerned with disadvantage.

69   One successful aspect of the community-focused schools programme in Rhondda Cynon Taff has been the 'E3+' programme which is seen as a key element of the authority's strategy to address the issues of child poverty by increasing the access to wide range of out-of-school activities, including opportunities for new experiences, skills and qualifications. Around 48 activities take place every week in each cluster, operating up to 8pm, and the provision includes free use of leisure centres, adult education classes and holiday programmes. The schools are increasingly becoming centres in their community where a wide range of services are available.

Key issues in further raising the performance of disadvantaged pupils

70   In our reports on the RAISE programme, we have identified the actions that schools should take to help raise the level of performance of disadvantaged pupils. In doing this, schools need to have the support of local authorities and the Welsh Assembly Government because they cannot do it alone. Some of the actions set out below are included in the themes for the RAISE programme in 2009-2010.

Focusing more clearly on disadvantaged pupils

71   Schools are generally effective in identifying where pupils are falling behind or not achieving as well as they should. They usually have suitable procedures to identify these pupils, to diagnose their needs and to make special or additional provision for them. However, schools usually identify and then focus their attention on those learners who are underachieving in comparison to their peers and are usually seen to be unlikely to achieve key performance indicators, for example level 4 at key stage 2 or grade C at GCSE, without additional support. This is a generally a sensible action for schools, but it does not directly tackle the underlying issue of the needs of all disadvantaged learners. The extra support will pick up some disadvantaged learners as they will often fall behind from an early age. It does not, however, ensure that all disadvantaged pupils, including those pupils who are achieving reasonably well but not to the level of their potential, receive the attention and support they need.

Tracking the performance of disadvantaged pupils

72   Schools should establish systems to monitor and report on the standards achieved by disadvantaged learners. This means that schools should have systems to monitor and track the progress of all pupils. However, procedures that just consider and judge the aggregate performance of all pupils are not good enough. The system needs to track the progress of groups of pupils according to certain characteristics, such as disadvantage, gender and ethnicity. Once this information is available, schools can identify how well these pupils are doing, and tailor teaching and learning to address the specific weaknesses identified for disadvantaged learners.

Giving attention to personal development

73   Improving pupils' social and emotional skills, and giving them the self-belief in what they can achieve are often necessary initial steps in improving their academic performance. Schools need to track pupils' personal development as well their academic performance in order to target their work in this area and to evaluate its success.

Making tackling disadvantage a priority and developing a strategy

74   Schools need to ensure they focus their attention on all disadvantaged learners. If they develop the monitoring and tracking systems described above, then they will start to generate the management information needed to address this problem. Schools should have a clear strategy that shows what they plan to do about raising

the performance of disadvantaged learners. The strategy should cover the whole range of activities that have an impact on this issue, including closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged learners and others. It should show how it targets disadvantaged learners and which interventions the school is going to use.

75   As disadvantaged learners are usually over-represented in groups of low attainers, the strategy should explain how the school intends to support them. This should include early intervention once the need has been identified. It should also show how it ensures that these learners have an equal access in school to the best teachers. This is not always the case as schools often deploy their best teachers with classes subject to end-of-key-stage assessments in primary schools and with more able GCSE and A level groups in secondary schools. Research from around the world, such as the McKinsey report[13], shows that one of the characteristics of successful education systems is that they ensure that all learners have access to the best teachers.

Setting clear leadership roles and responsibilities

76   Schools should ensure that a senior leader has managerial responsibility for overseeing and co-ordinating the school's work on tackling the impact of disadvantage. Many school activities are likely to have an effect on disadvantaged learners, and so someone in authority is needed to ensure that all the work fits together and pulls in the right direction. The School Effectiveness Framework can help in developing this aspect as it has 'leadership' as one of its six elements. In developing this element, schools need to ensure that the performance of disadvantaged pupils plays a prominent part.

Working with parents

77   Our report on parental involvement in primary schools[14] showed that home-school links can have a significant impact on improving pupils' wellbeing, particularly in relation to behaviour and school attendance. The report recognises the potential role that the School Effectiveness Framework has in strengthening the links between schools and parents. The most effective work was where the school had been proactive, had listened to parents, refined its work to take account of their suggestions and built on activities it considered successful. The report recommended that schools build positive relationships with parents, provide more information for them, and be imaginative and innovative in planning how they can involve parents more effectively, particularly those who may need help to develop parenting skills. Induction in the early years is seen as particularly important and effective schools produce packs of useful information, show parents the classroom and provide good opportunities for them to meet the staff. In the best practice, schools create an atmosphere of trust and find ways to make parents feel very welcome to come to school at any time. These schools attach great importance to raising esteem where the community as a whole has very low self-esteem because of socio-economic difficulties.

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[13] 'How the world's best performing school systems come out on top', McKinsey and Company 2007
[14] 'Good practice in parental involvement in primary schools', Estyn 2009

Challenging schools on the performance of disadvantaged learners

78   Local authorities play a key role in supporting schools to improve their performance. In helping to improve the performance of disadvantaged pupils, local authorities should use data on their performance when monitoring and challenging schools. This means that they will have to obtain data routinely on the performance of disadvantaged pupils and to include this in any regular analysis they provide for schools, for example digests of schools' performance produced in the autumn term. When local authority officers visit schools to discuss their performance, they need to discuss the progress of disadvantaged pupils and challenge those schools where there is underperformance. Local authorities need to include the performance of disadvantaged pupils in their policies on monitoring, challenge and intervention.

79   Local authorities also need to monitor the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils in the authority as a whole. They need to see this as a key priority and to benchmark their performance against other authorities and Wales as a whole. If they are not achieving as well as they should, they need to address this issue prominently in any improvement plans.

80   Local authorities should consider directing more resources to those schools that serve the most disadvantaged areas or where disadvantaged pupils are not achieving as well as they should. This could include looking at ways of paying teachers more to teach in disadvantaged areas so as to attract better teachers.

Establishing benchmarks

81   Benchmarks are needed so that schools and local authorities can compare their performance with others. At present, the Welsh Assembly Government provides annual information on the performance of free-school-meals pupils in secondary schools in Wales and in each local authority. There is also information about the end-of-key-stage performance of free-school-meal pupils in primary schools, but not for each local authority. Other gaps in the current publicly-available information include that on the attendance of free-school-meals pupils for each local authority, the numbers of free-school-meals pupils who are on the different stages of the SEN register (school action, school action plus and statements) and the numbers of free-school-meals pupils who are excluded permanently or for fixed periods. There is scope to increase the range of data on the characteristics and performance of free-school-meals pupils so that there is a more comprehensive database. This can then be used to evaluate the success of policies and to guide planning to tackle the link between disadvantage and attainment.

82   The specific targets for outcomes of disadvantaged pupils will help to sharpen the focus of schools and local authorities on raising their performance. This does not need any new performance indicators, but rather that the current ones are used to monitor the performance of groups of pupils, such as those on free school meals, and to help set targets. The target could be concerned with the overall level of performance of disadvantaged pupils for a particular indicator or for closing the gap between the performance of disadvantaged pupils and others.

Supporting the development of social and emotional skills

83   At present, social and emotional skills feature in the Personal and Social Education Framework, where it includes the development of self-esteem and a sense of personal responsibility and in the wider key skills qualification of working with others. However, these skills are not as prominent as the four skills that are in the Skills Framework. Currently, tools for assessing social and emotional skills are being trialled as part of the Demonstrating Success initiative and this may help schools to monitor pupils' progress in these areas.

Broad-based and holistic approaches

84   Schools that make most progress in tackling disadvantage have comprehensive strategies to close the attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils and try to compensate systematically for barriers to the progress of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is those schools that work with a range of other agencies that tend to be the most effective ones.

85   The time is right for a re-examination of the concept of community-focused schools and what they should do. The key responsibilities fall to the Welsh Assembly Government and local authorities to set up mechanisms for the relevant agencies to work together to make schools more community-focused. The Welsh Assembly Government can help by requiring and enabling all partners to work together, particularly those that are the responsibility of local authorities and health boards. Local authorities, through their Children and Young People's Plan, should develop a strategic approach to tackling disadvantage in the most deprived areas. This means ensuring that there is joined-up working within the authority, mainly between education services and social services, but also with those departments concerned with economic regeneration. Local authorities should also establish practical partnerships with health boards and other community-based agencies.

Conclusion

86   Education can play an important role in helping to tackle disadvantage in Wales. However, it cannot play that role alone and it needs to work alongside other services, such as social services, health and economic development, and together with aspects of provision over which it has no direct influence, for example training and employment opportunities, and the benefits system.

87   The gap in performance between disadvantaged learners and others is still too big and shows little signs of closing despite the efforts of schools and the provision of initiatives such as Flying Start. Our reports on RAISE show how schools can be effective when targeting their work on individuals or groups of pupils. The work has already led to improvements in pupils' attitudes to their work and in their personal and social skills. These attitudinal changes should impact, in time, on the achievement and attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

88   The School Effectiveness Framework is designed to help schools to raise the levels of attainment of disadvantaged pupils. In its 'national purpose for education' it includes in its description of the purpose of schools that they should:

- enable all children and young people to develop their full potential;

- promote a culture of social inclusion; and

- be a key player with other schools and partner service providers in planning and delivering integrated services for children and young people to improve their wellbeing.

89   In particular, the School Effectiveness Framework recognises that educational outcomes do not just depend on schools and that they are influenced by a range of factors including poverty, family circumstances, housing and health. It makes it clear that that social disadvantage is the single biggest obstacle to achievement in education. However, it states that if schools are to have any impact on this issue, they need to work with other schools, parents, the local community, statutory partners and voluntary organisations. To help this work, there needs to be clarity about the relationship between the School Effectiveness Framework and the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to the development of community-focused schools. Schools are essential partners with other service providers in working together to meet the needs of children and young people. Collaborative working across services within and between local authorities is particularly important in breaking the link between disadvantage and poor learning outcomes. The School Effectiveness Framework therefore has a major role to play in achieving the Welsh Assembly Government's objective of eliminating child poverty by 2020.

Estyn's contribution

90   School inspections currently have a focus on disadvantage. In looking at how well pupils do, we have always been concerned with achievement rather than raw attainment. That means that inspectors look at how well pupils are doing in relation

to where they started and in comparison with other similar pupils, and not just at how well they perform when compared to national averages. As a result, schools with low levels of attainment can and do gain high grades in their inspection reports if pupils are doing better than expected. Our criteria for current inspections exemplify this approach, for example, in the way we expect inspectors to consider whether pupils "*succeed regardless of their social, ethnic or linguistic background*".

91　We are introducing new inspection arrangements from September 2010 and we aim to sharpen the attention inspections give to the performance of disadvantaged pupils. Inspections will look at the performance of different groups of learners and this will include all pupils entitled to free school meals as well as other disadvantaged pupils. Inspectors will investigate the performance of these pupils and how their performance compares with other learners in the school. In secondary schools, we will also look at the destinations of all pupils and consider how well the school has prepared pupils for the next stage of learning or training. Part of this will involve considering how many pupils move into the not in education, employment or training (NEETs) category when they leave school.

92　Inspectors will also look at how the curriculum caters for the needs of the whole range of pupils, including pupils in specific groups such as disadvantaged learners. Inspectors will also consider the nature and extent of out-of-school learning, including extra-curricular activities, such as sport, clubs, visits, special events and links with the community, and the contribution all these make to standards of achievement and pupils' personal development.

93　The new inspection framework also includes a quality indicator on partnership working and part of this will include the consideration of how well the school works with other agencies and its local community.

94　New inspection arrangements will also apply to local authorities' education services and we will include a focus on disadvantaged learners when evaluating the overall performance of pupils in the local authority. In considering how well local authorities monitor and challenge schools, we will take into account the attention given to disadvantaged learners, for example by examining data on groups of disadvantaged learners when discussing progress with schools. We will also look at how well the local authority supports the development of holistic, community-focused and multi-agency approaches in the most deprived areas in the authority. The inspection of Education Services for Children and Young People (ESCYP) will take particular account of how effective leaders and managers work in partnership with other agencies and departments to support disadvantaged learners in the authority.

Annex: Self-evaluation checklist for schools

The list below contains statements which schools can use to judge their work on tackling disadvantage.

In the last four columns you can indicate where you think the current performance of your school lies by placing a tick in the appropriate column.

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The school has clearly identified its disadvantaged pupils				
The school knows how well disadvantaged pupils are performing in key performance indicators				
The school knows the gap between the performance of disadvantaged pupils and others, and how this compares to national and local averages				
The school tracks the performance of disadvantaged pupils				
The school targets interventions based on the findings of the tracking system				
The school supports all disadvantaged learners, including those of middle and high ability				
The school has an agreed and public strategy that directly tackles disadvantage				
The school meets the needs of all pupils, without compromising on high academic standards				
The school's annual self-evaluation update has a clear place for evaluating the performance of disadvantaged learners				
The school development plan shows how the school is raising the performance of disadvantaged learners				
A senior leader has managerial responsibility for overseeing and co-ordinating the work on improving the standards achieved by disadvantaged learners				
Disadvantaged pupils have equal access to the best teachers in the school				
The school has strategies to improve pupils' social and emotional skills				
The school has strategies to develop pupils' confidence and self-esteem				
The school tracks pupils' personal development as well their academic performance				
The schools works systematically with parents to support disadvantaged pupils				
The school has many high-quality extra-curricular and out-of-school-hours provision and monitors the participation of disadvantaged pupils				

There are suitable arrangements to ensure that disadvantaged pupils have a genuine chance to have their say				
There is well-organised on-site support for pupils to do their homework after school or to have ready access to specialist ICT equipment				
The school actively seeks to work with a wide range of support agencies in the local community, including social services, health services and the voluntary sector				
Teaching assistants are trained to work effectively with disadvantaged pupils				
Primary schools enable a quick start on entry to school through early assessment and intervention				
Transition arrangements for key stage 2 to key stage 3 take account of the needs of disadvantaged pupils				
Secondary schools work with other schools, colleges and work-based learning providers to develop broad-based collaborative provision at key stage 4 and post 16 and there is a positive view of the value of vocational education				

Summary

In tackling disadvantage, we are most successful in the following **three** areas:

1	
2	
3	

In tackling disadvantage, the **three** most important areas we need to address are:

1	
2	
3	

The remit author

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