

**SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DISADVANTAGED AREAS:  
THE IMPACT OF CONTEXT ON SCHOOL PROCESSES  
AND QUALITY**

**Ruth Lupton**

**London School of Economics and Political Science**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how a disadvantaged context impacts on secondary school organisation and processes, and how this affects quality, as measured by OFSTED<sup>1</sup> inspection.

OFSTED data indicates a school quality problem in disadvantaged areas. This is often interpreted as arising from factors internal to the school. Policy interventions have concentrated on generic school improvement measures. However, it may be argued that if poor quality arises from context as well as from internal factors, policy responses should also be contextualised. Earlier work (Gewirtz 1998; Thrupp 1999) has begun to reveal process effects of disadvantaged contexts. This thesis builds on that work by exploring differences *between* disadvantaged areas, making an explicit link to quality measures, and using wider literatures from the fields of neighbourhood studies and organisation theory to develop an understanding of schools as contextualised organisations.

The thesis begins with a quantitative analysis of context/quality relationships, but is principally based on four qualitative case studies. These consider context objectively, analysing socio-economic, market and institutional factors, and also explore staff's subjective interpretations. Process implications for schools are examined, as are the schools' responses, in terms of the design and delivery of schooling. These findings are discussed in relation to OFSTED quality measures.

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<sup>1</sup> OFSTED is the Office for Standards in Education

The research reveals that the quality problem in poor areas is partly an artefact of the inspection system but also reflects contextual effects. It also finds that there are significant differences between the contexts of schools in disadvantaged areas, and that these are not captured by typical context measures. The study concludes that changes are needed in school funding and inspection to recognise contextual effects, and that specific practices need to be developed to enable school improvement in poor areas. Relying on schools to apply generic 'good practice' within existing constraints will not be sufficient to eliminate the quality problem.

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## PREFACE

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This thesis owes its origins to events over forty years ago at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, where a group of researchers under the leadership of South African anthropologist Max Gluckman began to apply the methods and principles of anthropological research to the study of industrial organisations. The ‘Manchester school’ under Gluckman’s direction had already extended its anthropological work from the study of primitive societies to modern British settings when, in the early 1950s, it benefited from a visit from American professor George Homans, author of the influential work *The Human Group* (Homans 1951), which set out a single conceptual scheme to analyse social groups in a wide variety of settings from industrial workplaces to primitive families. A major element of the work was based on part of Elton Mayo’s famous research programme at the Hawthorne works of the Western Electrical Company, the Bank Wiring Observation Room, in which it was observed that output norms and standards were created and upheld informally by groups of workers (Reothlisberger and Dickson 1939). With Homans on hand, Gluckman decided to adopt a similar research focus in the UK, in a variety of industrial settings, but using the anthropological method of extended case study, with single researchers undertaking participant observation for six months or more. Tom Lupton, an industrial sociologist, was recruited to direct the studies, along with Sheila Cunnison and Shirley Wilson. Their five pieces of work, undertaken over a period of four years, subsequently became known as ‘the Manchester factory studies’. Methodologically innovative in their field, these industrial ethnographies, with their emphasis on the nature and role of intra-group conflict within each organisation and on the inter-

relationship between the specific social setting and the wider society, have been described as “*the most enduring and specific of legacies that Gluckman left to British sociology*” (Frankenberg 1982:p.26). Their origin, development and findings were later summarised in a paper by Cunnison (1982), upon which much of this account is based.

Drawing both on Gluckman’s analysis of custom and conflict and on Lupton’s own experience as an industrial worker, the researchers rejected the notion that the behaviour of workers (and thus the output and performance of organisations) was controlled by management, seeing it instead as an accommodation between workers and management. The particular focus in each study was the accommodation reached over systems of wages and work allocation, with the central issue being to understand why this took different forms in different settings. Why did workers in one factory acquiesce in the way in which work was allocated or piece-work rates set, while in another they acted collectively to protect workers’ interests against management and in another formed diverse interest groups each trying to control output or influence management for its own benefit? Cunnison explains how the group’s analysis of this problem evolved over the course of the studies. Initially, the work had an essentially social psychological approach, tending to seek explanations for workers’ behaviour within the parameters of the organisation. Thus Lupton’s account of the first two studies<sup>2</sup> explained differences largely in terms of the way work was organised. He noted that in one factory (a garment workshop), where workers tended to acquiesce with management, the workers worked in multi-skilled benches where each worker had different earnings. The system was geared to

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<sup>2</sup> His PhD thesis, later published as the book *On the Shop Floor* (Lupton 1963)

individual effort, and communication between and organisation of workers doing the same kind of work would have been difficult. In the second setting (an electrical components factory), workers worked in pairs of their own choosing, often friendship groups, and were moved around from one type of work to another, so had an interest in collaborating to secure beneficial rates for each task. In this factory, workers conspired to 'fiddle' rates, working more slowly when rates were being set, and putting a ceiling on output in order to avoid rate cutting.

However, Lupton found his own analysis somewhat incomplete. He observed that both the industrial setting (the type of industry, market competition, level of technology and so on) and the social composition of the workforce could potentially be important, noting that the female workers in the garment workshop brought a different orientation to their work than the men in the components factory, seeing work as bringing a marginal income and an opportunity to mix with their friends, rather than as the central income for their families. Along with Cunnison, who had also been working in a garment factory, he developed the notion that behaviour needed to be explained not just by relations within the social system of the factory but by wider social systems. Each factory was included within a larger industrial structure, determining demand, levels of unionisation, role traditions and technology, and overlapped with the social systems of family, religion and local class structure, which would also influence behaviour. They suggested that clusters of particular external variables might produce certain expected behaviours; that certain types of industry would lead themselves to collective controls over output while others would not (Lupton and Cunnison 1964).

The fourth study, conducted by Wilson in a valve assembly shop, brought a new dimension. Wilson disagreed that social relations outside the workplace could be regarded as 'external factors'. Instead she argued that social class and gender relations interacted with the system of industrial organisation to produce workshop behaviour. Accommodation between managers and workers over wage rates was largely driven by actors playing out roles brought to the factory from the wider society: the managers being mainly male, middle class and educated, and the operatives mainly working class women and girls, whose social relationships, inside and outside the factory, frequently took the form of a 'best friend' pattern. These factors were illustrated when management (in the guise of a new young graduate trainee) attempted to introduce a change in payment methods, which was initially rejected by a pair of female workers. Accommodation was eventually reached when the girls developed a fantasy courtship with the new manager, giving them a motivation to acquiesce to the new system (Wilson 1963). This interweaving of internal and external factors was also evident in the fifth study, by Cunnison, which noted demarcations between groups of workers on the basis of skill level, gender and religion. The fourth and fifth studies led the group to conclude that "*patterns of behaviour can be quite clearly connected to the social context of the work situation in which it occurs, and that this is a much more satisfactory form of explanation, in a sociological sense, than one attempted in terms of matters internal to the workshop*". (Cunnison 1982: p125).

The Manchester studies came at a time when the study of organisations was largely decontextualised and managerial in its perspective. Their two central contentions, that organisational behaviour was not essentially controlled by management and that

it could only be fully understood in relation to its specific social context, were important developments. For a while they were influential. Methodologically, they added a new dimension to organisational sociology, and gave rise to a number of other ethnographic studies, not least a group of important works on schools as social systems (Hargreaves 1967; Lacey 1970; Ball 1981). They also influenced management education, a developing field in which Lupton became a pioneer. As a writer and teacher of management, his distinct contribution was to bring a social science approach to the practical management of organisations and the problems of underperformance, advocating the use of detailed situational analysis rather than generalised management fixes (Thomas 2002). The studies also had another indirect output, with the marriage of Lupton and Shirley Wilson precipitating Wilson's departure from academic life to become full time mother to Ben (1963)<sup>3</sup> and myself (1964).

By the late 1990s, when my parents' interest in the workings of organisations began to reproduce itself in my own thinking, the intellectual climate had changed again. Detailed sociological studies of organisations had become less fashionable. Management was in the ascendancy as an academic discipline and a profession. Studies of social relationships in the workplace had given way to the search for practical management solutions; interest in contextual complexities to thirst for transferable good practice and knowledge of 'what works'. In this intellectual context, the interest that I had developed, as a teacher and local government researcher, in the operation of public sector organisations, was principally an interest

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<sup>3</sup> Now Senior Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School.

in their management, and in how the problems of underperformance could be solved by better management and re-designed organisational practice.

My thinking began to change during the course of my research at the LSE's Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) from 1998 onwards. Working on an ongoing study of the trajectories of twelve disadvantaged neighbourhoods, I became intrigued by the apparent underperformance of public service organisations in these areas, both in terms of outcomes (such as educational attainment or litter cleared) and in terms of processes and outputs. It appeared that in the poorest areas, welfare organisations were not just struggling to meet extra demands, but were actually doing different things, with less effective practices. They seemed to be less good as organisations, and the relationship between poor areas and organisational underperformance seemed too strong to be coincidental. The pattern was most obvious in the case of schools, which could be closely identified with specific areas and were the subject of regular and public quality checks through the OFSTED system. I began to focus increasingly on schools, while retaining an interest in whether the same issues would also hold for other local public services.

Prima facie, there appeared to be two possible explanations for the quality problem in poor areas. The one principally put forward by government has been that managers and staff in these areas are less good at their jobs than those in other areas. Policy responses have accordingly focused on spreading good practice, upskilling and incentivising staff, sending in support teams, setting targets and applying public pressure, appointing new staff, and providing extra sums of money to tackle specific additional challenges. These are responses aimed at the level of the institution, and



premised on the twin assumptions that good organisational practice is transferable from one situation to another and that what happens in organisations is largely controlled by management. My own observations led me to another possible explanation: that the context of organisations in deprived neighbourhoods might have an impact on their behaviour. There might be influences at a number of levels: problems raising funds or recruiting staff; the need to carry out additional or different tasks; pressures on relationships between management, staff and pupils (or clients in other organisations). If this were the case, policy responses would need to be based on contextualised versions of good practice, rather than blanket solutions. A way forward, it seemed, could only be found through exploring the day-to-day operations of schools in different circumstances, and trying to illuminate the relative importance of context and other factors. Detailed situational analysis was called for.

Exploring these ideas and methodologies further as a basis for my thesis, I came quickly to Lacey's, Ball's and Hargreaves' classic school ethnographies and thence to the Manchester factory studies, at which point I realised that, through nature or nurture or both, I had alighted on exactly the same problem that had pre-occupied both my parents at the same stage of their careers: why do organisations in different social settings behave differently? While their approach had been sociological, and focused on social relations and social processes in the workplace, mine originated from a social policy perspective, and focused on organisational processes and outputs. They used ethnographic methods, while I planned a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach. But my work was clearly a direct descendent of theirs. By a strange quirk of fate, I had also selected for one of my case studies a school in the

small town where my father grew up, then (as now) one of the most deprived industrial areas in the country.

The purpose of this tale is not only to clarify the intellectual roots of my thesis, but to offer belated thanks to my parents for their contribution to my work and an apology for the failure of their strenuous and expensive attempts to help me to become an independent thinker! There are other thanks due too: to Anne Power, Howard Glennerster, Anne West and Helen Bowman at the LSE for their ideas and support; to Sharon Gewirtz and Martin Thrupp for encouraging and challenging me in the latter stages of the work; to Helen Davies and Heather Jacklin for enabling an invaluable three-month study break in Cape Town in 2002 and Julie Keylock for her help with piloting and ongoing ‘reality checks’; to the Office for Standards in Education for allowing me access to their data, and most importantly, to the headteachers and staff of the schools who allowed me to study them.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

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### **Schools in Disadvantaged Areas: The Low Attainment Problem**

Schools in disadvantaged areas present a problem for policy makers in England. Their academic performance is well below the national norm. 2001 data show that on average only a fifth of pupils in schools with the poorest intakes achieved five GCSE passes at grades A\*-C, compared with 50% nationally (DfES 2002a). In 1998, OFSTED reported that only three of the top one hundred schools in terms of free school meal eligibility (FSM)<sup>1</sup> attained the national average GCSE points score (OFSTED 1998). At Key Stage 3 (age 14) in 2000, the median for schools with more than 40% FSM was that no pupil (0%) achieved the expected performance level in English, compared with 83% in schools with less than 5% FSM (Glennerster 2001).

### **The Impact of A Disadvantaged Socio-Economic Context on School-Level Attainment**

Low attainment in high poverty areas is a long established pattern (Floud et al. 1956, Douglas 1964), principally because poverty presents barriers to children's education which mean that they enter secondary school with lower than average attainment and dealing with social and economic problems that inhibit their learning. Over thirty years ago, James Coleman's landmark US report *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, and Jencks' subsequent work *Inequality* (Coleman 1966, Jencks 1972)

demonstrated that home and background characteristics of pupils largely accounted for attainment differences between schools. Their findings have been borne out by a large number of subsequent studies, which typically show only about 8-15% of the attainment difference between schools being accounted for by what they actually do, rather than by intake variations (Reynolds et al. 1996, Gibson and Asthana 1998, Sammons 1999).

Studies of the home and background factors that account for poverty/attainment links have demonstrated that it is household and family characteristics that make most difference to pupils' ability to progress. These include: lack of education resources at home (Snow 1991); low parental interest and involvement in schooling (Hobcraft 1998, Feinstein 1998); family stress and insecurity, and some forms of family disruption when experienced alongside low income (Snow 1991, Kiernan 1992); substandard or overcrowded housing (NCE 1996); homelessness (Whitty et al. 1999) and living in care (Colton and Heath 1994, Cheesbrough 2002). Sammons et al. (1981) demonstrated the strong association between multiple deprivation and attainment, finding that over 90% of children with seven 'risk factors' were in the bottom 25% of their age group on attainment at age 11, compared with 11% of children with just one risk factor. Low attendance at school, which itself contributes to low attainment, has been associated with caring responsibilities at home and with work undertaken to boost family incomes (Fox 1995, O'Keefe 1994).

Peer and neighbourhood characteristics also matter, although their effect counts for less than household and family characteristics. They include weak labour markets

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<sup>1</sup> Children are eligible for Free School Meals if their families are claiming Income-Based Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) or Income Support (IS).

(Wilson 1987), low levels of social capital (Putnam 2000), and racial harassment and violence (Gipps and Gillborn 1996). Crane (1991) found a non-linear relationship between neighbourhood characteristics and attainment, with children living in severely disadvantaged neighbourhoods having significantly worse attainment levels.

This literature has been criticised for failing to establish causation, rather than correlation, partly because theoretical models have not been systematically tested, because different variables are included in different studies, and because variables that are themselves causally connected, such as neighbourhood quality and parental income, are treated as independent (Haveman and Wolfe 1995, Sparkes 1999). It has also been criticised for failing to illuminate how, in practice, these factors combine to affect children's education:

*We are still not clear what makes the difference in the poor child's day; is it whether or not they had breakfast; how well they slept; what they wear; whether or not the child has high self-esteem; if they had somewhere to go to do their homework; if they bring to school anxieties based on family arguments and disruption; whether or not their parents heard them read; if they were distracted at home or in the school; or simply if they bothered to attend, or truanted. (Tabberer 1999 p.122)*

Nevertheless, the evidence that factors associated with poverty make it harder for children to succeed academically is not seriously disputed. There is a '*profoundly close*' relationship between poverty and attainment, such that "*the more socially*

*disadvantaged the community served by a school, the very much more likely it is that the school will appear to underachieve” (Gibson and Asthana 1998).*

This suggests that in the long run, broader social policies will contribute more reducing school attainment differences than educational interventions (Whitty 2001). But educational interventions can obviously play a part. So what are the implications for educational policy?

### **Policy Responses: Recognising the Importance of Context**

The nature of the educational response depends on how one defines the ‘problem’ of low attainment among the poor. Arguably, attainment in public examinations mattered less when a higher proportion of people worked in manual jobs which required practical, personal, and organisational skills rather than intellectual ones. The UK’s post-war system of grammars, secondary moderns and technical schools reflected a belief that education prepared people from different social classes for different things, and that social justice was delivered by giving bright individuals from working class backgrounds the possibility of a grammar school education, not by providing everyone with access to the same kind of schooling. However, education in each of the tiers of the system was not equally valued, and academic attainment continued to be regarded as constituting the only real school ‘success’ even after the introduction of the comprehensive system, leading the educational sociologists of the 1970s to point out that the ‘problem’ of low attainment among the poor arose not because of any deficit of intelligence or motivation amongst the poor

themselves, but because achievement and success were defined in middle class terms. By making academic attainment, which was largely irrelevant to working class lives, the benchmark of success, policy makers created working class 'failure'. Proposed policy responses included the development of an equally valued curriculum based on social and practical skills and community-based learning, along with changes to teaching and assessment methods (Fantini and Weinstein 1973, Midwinter 1973).

This continues to be an important issue thirty years later, perhaps especially now that educational 'achievement' seems to have become so narrowly defined in terms of academic attainment and preparedness for the world of work. It remains important to ask how much it matters that levels of higher grade GCSE attainment are lower in some areas than others, and whether we should be more concerned with whether the education system is enabling all young people to recognise their potential, develop a broad range of skills and knowledge, learn to love learning, and value themselves and others. As Whitty (2001) has pointed out, however, the world is as it is, and young people from working class backgrounds are, whether we like it or not, entering a society where formal knowledge and qualifications are what is valued. Academic attainment matters. This being the case, while education policy-makers may choose to influence the broader picture by broadening curriculum and changing teaching methods, they also have to recognise that academic 'under-achievement' among the poor is a problem for the future life chances of those pupils. Social justice is arguably delivered in the short term by giving every child the same opportunity to gain academic qualifications, and by breaking down some of the barriers that prevent individuals from poor backgrounds from achieving as much as they otherwise might.

This, very broadly, has been the approach of successive governments since the 1970s. They have sought, within the state system, to give all pupils access to the same kinds of schools, with broadly the same levels of central government funding, the same examination courses and, since 1988, a standard curriculum. Of course, many aspects of policy over this period, such as the retention of selection in the private sector and in some areas of the state sector, the introduction of the education quasi-market, and the promotion of grant-maintained and specialist schools, mean that in practice, access to education is far from equal. Nevertheless, the general thrust has been to provide equal educational opportunity, rather than a tiered system in which some pupils get a second class education. Within this equal access framework, compensatory measures have been introduced to assist children from disadvantaged backgrounds. These have taken various forms:

- Individual benefits such as free school meals, school clothing grants, and breakfast clubs.
- Additional school-based educational provision such as making homework space or computers available after school.
- Specific educational initiatives such as reading recovery programmes.
- Measures to enhance the welfare of pupils and families such as counselling and family support.

Some of these measures have been funded through mainstream school budgets. Currently about 19% of core funding to schools is allocated on the basis of Additional Educational Needs, based on poverty and ethnicity measures (DfES 2003a). Extra initiatives have also been funded through specific programmes aimed



at the poorest areas or schools, beginning with the Educational Priority Areas and Urban Programme initiatives of the late 1960s and 1970s.

The New Labour government has particularly favoured the compensatory education approach. It has increased resources to schools in deprived areas through a number of targeted initiatives including Education Action Zones (EAZs) and Excellence in Cities (EiC), which will eventually cover about one third of all secondary schools. EiC, the government's principal programme, provides learning mentors, out-of-hours study support, learning support units for pupils with the most disruptive behaviour, a network of high-tech City Learning Centres, and extended opportunities for gifted and talented pupils. These policies appear to be having an impact, with GCSE higher grade attainment levels rising more quickly in EiC areas than others in 2001 and 2002 (OFSTED 2003). In 2001, the government piloted a new fund, Pupil Learning Credits, for schools in some of the poorest areas to spend on enrichment activities<sup>2</sup>, and in 2003, it announced the launch of 240 'extended schools' offering facilities for specialist support like speech therapy, and services for families such as community education, out-of-hours childcare, and health services.

Even disregarding the argument that it is anti-poverty policies not educational policies that will do most to close the attainment gap, it is not universally agreed that the present compensatory education approach is a sufficient response. By the government's own admission, the current funding settlement does not meet all of the needs that schools have identified in poor areas (DfES 2003a). Even if it did, some critics have argued that it would not close the gap between low attaining schools and

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<sup>2</sup> Pupil Learning Credits have subsequently been withdrawn and absorbed within schools' core funding.

others while the system of parental choice enables parents with greater cultural capital to avoid schools with low results (Johnson 2003). Nevertheless, these additional initiatives represent a recognition that context matters for attainment, and that something different and extra is needed for schools in poor areas if attainment is to reach expected levels.

However, the government also faces another problem with schools in poor areas, which is not addressed by compensatory education initiatives. It is that such schools typically do less well in inspections by OFSTED, central government's principal mechanism for checking the quality of schooling. There is an apparent quality problem as well as an attainment problem.

### **Schools in Disadvantaged Areas: The Low Quality Problem**

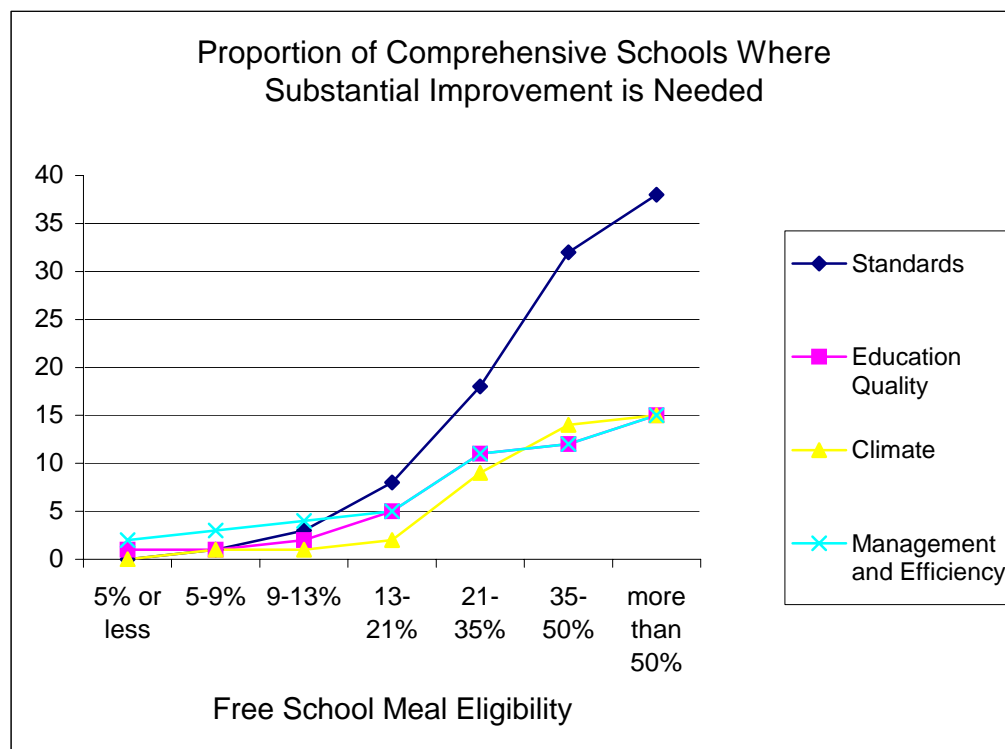
The creation of OFSTED in 1992 presented the public, for the first time, with an opportunity for comparison between schools inspected according to a national framework. Every school in the country is inspected regularly, on average once every four years, by inspectors using a standard assessment tool. Schools whose performance in inspection is unsatisfactory are described as having '*serious weaknesses*', or put into special measures if they are "*failing or likely to fail to give pupils an acceptable standard of education*" (School Inspections Act 1996 Section 13(9)).

The evidence emerging from the growing database of inspection results is that schools in deprived areas tend to perform badly on OFSTED measures. In 1998, the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) found that five times as many secondary schools in 'worst neighbourhoods' were in special measures than was typically the case (SEU 1998). In more detailed analyses, OFSTED combines its inspection grades into four areas: '*standards*' (attainment and progress); '*quality of education*' (teaching and the curriculum); '*climate and ethos*'; and '*management and efficiency*'. Figure 1.1 shows that, as might be expected given poverty/attainment links, it is standards that are most strongly associated with FSM. But high levels of FSM eligibility are associated with worse inspection grades on all the measures, not just on standards. In other words, poor schools appear worse on direct measures of what they actually do as well as on measures of attainment and progress. Schools with high FSM (more than 35%) are less likely to be graded as good or very good by OFSTED for school ethos (63% compared with 76% for all schools) or management (49% compared with 57%) (OFSTED 2000a). About 15% (nearly one in six) are adjudged to need substantial improvement in their quality of education, climate, or management and efficiency, compared with 2% or less of schools with the most advantaged intakes (5% or less eligible for FSM)(OFSTED 2001a).

These data cannot necessarily be accepted uncritically. Like any quality measure, the OFSTED inspection system embodies a particular set of values about what is 'good' and 'bad' practice (Juran 1988). Quality is not a neutral concept, but reflects what we consider to be the purposes of education and the values underpinning it (Gewirtz 2000). Within the system, further subjectivity is built in by the fact that inspections are carried out by different teams, at different times (Schagen and

Watson 1998). This may be of particular importance in relation to interpretation of contextual issues (Power et al. 2002). As Smith (2000) has observed, whether schools should be judged absolutely, or in relative terms, taking account of their circumstances, has always been a contested issue for inspectors.

**Figure 1.1: Relationship Between OFSTED Inspection Outcome and FSM**



Source: National Summary Data Report for Secondary Schools 2001 Data (OFSTED 2001a)

These issues about the concept of quality and the importance of context are the subject of further elaboration in this thesis. However, the starting point is that, for policy purposes, the OFSTED inspection is accepted as a robust and objective indicator of school quality, and on this measure there are striking associations between low quality and disadvantaged socio-economic contexts.

The critical issue in relation to the poverty/education debate is that the OFSTED inspection is not primarily an attainment measure but a measure of the quality what schools do. While inspectors do examine measures of attainment and pupil progress, they focus principally on the quality of school management and educational practices, and whether these deliver an environment where children learn, develop, and experience positive relationships. Power et al. (2002) in a recent synthesis of evidence on education in deprived areas, labelled these ‘processes’, distinguishing them from ‘inputs’ (financial and other) and ‘outcomes’ (attainment and intermediate outcomes) (Figure 1.2).

This distinction between processes and outcomes is not always made in popular or political discourse, where quality judgements such as ‘good school’ and ‘bad school’, are often used to refer to attainment levels. However, it is clear that for OFSTED purposes, a ‘good’ school is one that does things well, with good processes, not simply one where the majority of pupils achieve success in public examinations. The quality problem that OFSTED highlights in disadvantaged areas is thus one of processes, and needs to be distinguished in policy discourse from the more commonly publicised problem of poverty and low attainment.

Of course, one reason that low quality schooling is a matter for concern is that it contributes to low attainment, creating a double disadvantage for the poor. School effectiveness studies during the 1980s and 1990s demonstrated that, although the ‘school effect’ may be small relative to home and background factors, it is not insignificant (Sammons 1999). Thomas and Mortimore (1996), for example, suggested that, taking background factors into account, schools can lift GCSE results

by about fourteen points for pupils with average prior attainment – equivalent to the difference between six Bs and six Ds. Moreover, as Mortimore et al. (1988) report, school effects appear to be more important than background factors in terms of the progress that pupils make, if not in terms of final outcomes.

**Figure 1.2: Power et al.’s Input-Outcome Model of Schooling<sup>3</sup>**

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Financial Inputs<br>↓      | LEA<br>Government programmes (eg Excellence in Cities)<br>Private Sponsorship                           |
| Real Resource Inputs<br>↓  | Pupils<br>Capacity<br>Access<br>Personnel (teachers)<br>Volunteers (governors)                          |
| Processes (Outputs)<br>↓   | School effectiveness<br>School ethos<br>Curriculum coverage<br>Home-school liaison<br>Special provision |
| Intermediate Outcomes<br>↓ | Student participation<br>Exclusions<br>Student dropout  |
| Outcomes                   | Examination attainments<br>Affective outcomes<br>Continuation to next stage of education                |

Source: Power et al.(2002)

Drawing on this research, the policy discourse of recent years has tended to play down the importance of home and background factors, which were so prominently highlighted in the 1960s and 1970s, and has featured a strong emphasis on the differences that schools can make to attainment. Leading educationalist Professor Michael Barber, for example, argued that the findings of school effectiveness research required “*teachers to face up to their own importance ....whereas under the*

<sup>3</sup> This model could be criticised for presenting education in a linear way, rather than as a social process, and for looking at schools as production systems rather than social systems. However, it does pinpoint a valid distinction between inputs to schools, what schools do with those inputs, and pupil attainment.

*old order there was a tendency to blame the system, society, the class structure – anyone other than schools themselves – for underperformance, now there is no escape”* (Barber 1996, p131). Barber became a senior advisor to Education Secretary David Blunkett, who himself criticised the ‘*defeatist*’ and ‘*cynical*’ attitude of people who say “*school performance is all about socio-economics and the areas these schools are located in. No child is pre-ordained to fail*”(quoted in TES 3/3/00). So dominant was this line of argument that by the late 1990s, even some of those most closely involved in school improvement had begun to argue that it had been overplayed as a tool for raising attainment and that governments needed to re-emphasise broader socio-economic issues not just the activities of heads and teachers (Mortimore and Whitty 1997).

However, attainment is not the only reason to be concerned about low quality schooling in poor areas. Whether we define the purposes of education in terms of academic attainment or broader personal development, it is a public good. There are equity grounds for distributing the quality of education evenly between areas, and there may be social consequences of not doing so, since exclusion from universal service provision contributes to social exclusion and reduced social cohesion. Moreover, discrepancies in school quality can influence the dynamics of housing markets and reinforce residential social segregation (Gibbons 2001). Thus the fact that there appears to be a strong relationship between low school quality and areas of socio-economic disadvantage is problematic for policy makers for a number of reasons, not just because of attainment. The need for school improvement in deprived areas deserves to be considered as a problem in its own right. It is the low quality problem, not the low attainment problem, that is the subject of this thesis.

## **Internal Explanations for the Low Quality Problem and a Decontextualised Policy Response**

While the need to improve schools in deprived areas has been widely recognised, however, the explanation for their poor performance is contested, with some people suggesting that the problem is internal to schools and others emphasising the influence of context on poor performance. Support for the internal argument comes from the inconsistent relationship between area deprivation and low school quality. While schools in disadvantaged areas are much more likely than others to fail, by no means all of them offer a poor quality education. In fact, five out of six high FSM schools are not adjudged to need substantial improvement in their quality of education, climate, or management and efficiency. Two-thirds are adjudged to have a good ethos, and half to be well managed. This would seem to suggest that a deprived socio-economic context does not in itself determine school failure, and that the low quality problem in many schools in deprived areas lies within the schools themselves, accounted for by poor management and professional practice.

School effectiveness and school improvement research (SEI), dominant in educational research since the late 1980s, has tended to support this view, if only because it has not produced any critical evaluation of the impact of context on school quality. School effectiveness research uses large scale quantitative studies to determine the characteristics of effective schools, while school improvement research focuses on the organisational processes and practices that deliver effectiveness. Both have concentrated very much on the internal life of schools: school improvement because it is largely a practitioner-led field (Reynolds et al.



1996), and school effectiveness because it grew directly out of a denial of the seemingly negative findings of Coleman and others during the 1960s and early 1970s, and criticism of their use of crude measures of school inputs and their neglect of the detail of school practice (Rutter et al. 1979, Sammons 1999). Exploring constraints or variations in practice arising from context has been of less interest to school effectiveness and improvement researchers than exploring internal organisational factors. Angus, one of SEI's main critics, has argued that "*family background, social class, any notion of context, are typically regarded as "noise" – as outside background factors which must be controlled and then stripped away so that the researcher can concentrate on the important domain of school factors.*" (1993: p341). The quantitative methodology of school effectiveness research has also contributed, because it offers no way to explore the impact of context on ongoing social relationships and school processes. Context has to be reduced to a set of input variables that can be correlated with outcomes and/or controlled for in order to focus on school effects (Willmott 1999). Thus Thrupp (1999: p17) has argued that SEI lacks '*any critical perspective on the relationship between schools and their social and economic context*'.

Because of its lack of attention to context, school effectiveness research has tended to produce what appear to be generic findings, applicable to all schools. Key findings have been usefully synthesised by Sammons et al. (1995, 1999) under eleven main headings: professional leadership, a shared vision and goals, a learning environment, concentration on teaching and learning, purposeful teaching, high expectations, positive reinforcement, monitoring progress, pupil rights and responsibilities, home/school partnership and the ability to be a learning

organisation. Sammons and colleagues have argued that these findings are not intended to be interpreted as a blueprint for schooling, rather as a starting point for self-evaluation and review, recognising that every school is different in its context and the particular challenges it faces. However, contextual impacts on practice have not been brought out through more finely-grained effectiveness studies, nor in school improvement studies, which have tended to look at how schools can achieve these desirable features, not on how context can impede them. The major UK studies of schools in disadvantaged areas in the early to mid 1990s examined successful or improving schools, in order to identify what they do well (OFSTED 1993a, NCE 1996), and perhaps unsurprisingly identified exemplary schools where good leadership and teaching appeared to overcome the problems of a disadvantaged context. Even a recent follow-up study (Maden 2001), while acknowledging that “*context is all*” (p309), nevertheless derives lessons that principally relate to internal processes rather than changes in policy or funding. Presented with a set of features of good schools, and some examples of schools in disadvantaged areas that are achieving them, it is easy to reach the conclusion that if one school can do it, they all can.

This internal focus has had two implications for policy. The first is that there has been an emphasis on fixing the problem by intervening in the internal life of schools, in the belief that these interventions can be successful even in the face of continuing concentrations of poverty and social exclusion. Both Conservative and Labour governments have argued that it is not acceptable to make excuses for organisational failure on the basis of socio-economic circumstances. Rather, all schools should be able to offer a high quality education, regardless of their context. Much faith has

been placed in school improvement policies to improve schools and to improve educational outcomes. New Labour, particularly, has been criticised for adopting a '*new pragmatism*' that claims to be able to deliver social inclusion through managerial interventions and without tackling fundamental economic inequalities (Hatcher 1998, Oatley 1998). However, faith in institutional reform is not a New Labour phenomenon, nor does it arise simply from school effectiveness research. Since the 1980s, politicians of both parties have been operating in an era of public spending restraints, performativity, and managerialism, in which improved management practice and better accountability have been dominant themes (Glennerster and Hills 1998, Keen and Scase 1998, Clarke et al. 2000, Morley and Rasool 2000). An internal managerial focus on schools is consistent with a similar approach in public services more generally.

The second implication is that there has been little attempt to tailor school improvement policies to particular contexts. One might argue that schools in poor areas can deliver a high quality education, even in difficult circumstances, but also that this needs to be enabled by additional support and possibly different organisational design and practices. However, the exemplary schools evidence has tended to divert attention from such an argument, suggesting that what is needed is for those working within schools in deprived areas to apply the same good practice that is applied elsewhere. As a result, while policies to raise attainment have consistently featured additional support measures for disadvantaged pupils, school improvement policies have tended to be generic: supporting the dissemination and take-up of good practice; increasing accountability through the inspection process; and intervening with additional pressure, funding and support for schools that are

failing. Under the New Labour government, good practice advice has been disseminated through measures such as the Beacon Schools scheme, web-based resources for governors, heads and teachers, and by more direct measures like the standardisation of numeracy and literacy teaching. Scrutiny through the inspection system has been lightened for successful schools but tightened for struggling schools, which are also subject to closure and a 'Fresh Start' if they consistently fail to improve. These school-level interventions have been underpinned by efforts to strengthen the teaching profession, through pay increases, performance related pay, recruitment incentives and training bursaries, the introduction of a national professional qualification for headteachers and, most recently, workforce reform to cut bureaucracy, increase levels of support staff and allow teachers more time for teaching.

However, these are all policies that apply across the board, simply with more pressure for those schools that are failing. Only very recently has there been a recognition that additional or different measures may be needed in schools in disadvantaged areas. In 2001, the government launched its 'Schools in Challenging Circumstances' initiative, interestingly aimed at schools with fewer than 25% A\*-C GCSEs<sup>4</sup> not at those in poor areas per se. This incorporates extra funds along with additional inspection visits to support the achievement of a 'Raising Attainment' plan, support from specialist recruitment managers, and trainee headship posts so that heads can gain the additional skills needed to succeed in difficult circumstances. Even so, the government's analysis of the problem is still dominated by the poor practice of heads and teachers (DfES 2001c: p49) and the initiative dominated by

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<sup>4</sup> Also at schools with more than 35% FSM eligibility that are not already included in an EiC area or EAZ.

“access to good practice and advice” (p50) and support to schools to “turn themselves around” (p51). A more significant departure is an associated pilot project in eight schools looking at more radical changes, such as significantly reduced class sizes and integration of activities with community regeneration programmes. This is a promising development but, as yet, a small one.

### **A Contextualised Explanation for the Low Quality Problem**

Meanwhile, the view that the school quality problem in disadvantaged areas is principally an internal problem has been increasingly criticised. Firstly, it offers no explanation, other than coincidence, as to why schools in poor areas are so much more likely to be bad at what they do, according to OFSTED inspection, than other schools. Secondly, it overlooks a growing body of evidence that suggests that being located in a disadvantaged area has an impact on school processes, which is precisely what is being measured by the OFSTED inspection.

Research on the consequences for schools of being located in a disadvantaged area has appeared in two distinct phases: one in the 1960s and 1970s before the rise of the SEI paradigm; and one in response to it, in the late 1990s.

Early work was influential in policy terms. The Plowden report *Children and Their Primary Schools* (Plowden 1967), which gave rise to Educational Priority Areas (EPAs), focused both on resource problems and the need for compensatory measures to boost educational inputs and tackle social problems. Plowden called for building

improvements, salary incentives, support teachers, school-based social work and the development of community schools. She noted high pupil and staff turnover, poor environments and clashes of values between school and home, findings subsequently borne out by EPA action research (Halsey 1972).

At the same time, several ethnographic studies explored the impact of pupil composition on social relations, noting how social processes and pupil behaviour were shaped not just by the backgrounds of pupils and teachers, nor just by the organisation of the school, but by a combination of the two. Hargreaves (1967) and Willis (1977) showed how anti-school subcultures developed among working class 'lads' in bottom stream classes. Ball (1981) examined the social process of change from streaming to mixed ability teaching in a comprehensive school, finding that middle class teachers oriented their interactions towards middle class children, allowing them to dominate mixed ability groups. Rutter et al.'s detailed study *Fifteen Thousand Hours* (1979), also acknowledged '*peer-group contra-cultures*' in schools where a preponderance of pupils was likely to fail. While it emphasised school effects and was, as such, influential in shaping the argument that good headteachers and teachers can create good schools despite disadvantaged contexts, this study also noted the additional challenges that made teaching and management more difficult in poorer areas, including neighbourhood factors, parental support and community involvement, as well as pupil characteristics.

For much of the 1980s and 1990s, research on the contextual influences on school processes took a back seat while SEI focused on the internal aspects of schools, and it was not until the late 1990s that a significant body of work began to re-emerge

suggesting that the importance of a disadvantaged context for schooling had been underplayed, and was more influential for school process and school quality than previously allowed.

Martin Thrupp's detailed study of four schools in New Zealand, two in disadvantaged and two in advantaged areas, was the major contribution. Thrupp (1999) observed diminished resources in the high poverty areas. Teachers in the middle class schools were more likely than those in the lower class schools to be subject specialists and more likely to be qualified. Their pupils were better equipped with their own learning resources, and the schools better equipped with books, computers and musical instruments. He also noted that both instructional processes and organisation and management processes were affected by the schools' context through a range of comparatively minor process effects that cumulatively comprised a very different school environment in low socio-economic status (SES) schools than in high SES schools. On the instructional side, the lower SES schools had a shallower and less demanding curriculum, lower levels of pupil engagement, less formal assessment, and fewer extra-curricular activities. Negotiated compromises tended to be reached rather than strict rule compliance. On the organisation and management side, teachers spent more time chasing up attendance or pursuing pupils for homework or fees. More time was spent on serious multi-agency welfare issues (Figure 1.3).

**Figure 1.3: Effects of Disadvantaged Areas on Instruction, Organisation and Management**

| Instructional Processes  | Organisation and Management Processes  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A less academic school programme.</li> <li>• A smaller range of extracurricular activities.</li> <li>• Less engaged, lower difficulty classes.</li> <li>• Less demanding use of texts and other resources.</li> <li>• Less demanding assessment and reporting.</li> <li>• Less access to expensive video and computer resources.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less efficient daily routines.</li> <li>• More pressured guidance and discipline systems.</li> <li>• More pressured school management.</li> <li>• More pressured Boards of Trustees.</li> </ul> |

Source: Adapted from Thrupp (1999)

In the UK, Sharon Gewirtz’s study of two inner London secondary schools demonstrated the *‘intricate and intimate connections between what school managers do and the socio-economic and discursive contexts within which they operate’* (Gewirtz 1998: p 440). She showed that staff spent time on different activities, spending less time in the struggling school on curriculum matters and extra curricular activities. There were difficulties in staff recruitment and parental involvement, and strained relationships between management and staff as improvement agendas became hijacked by day-to-day firefighting. The Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (1997, 1999), reporting on Catholic schools in urban poverty areas, also found staffing problems, along with run-down environments and organisational problems caused by poor punctuality, high levels of non-statemented special needs, health problems, family breakdown and mobile school populations. Clark et al. (1999) described the changes to discipline policies, grouping strategies and teaching practices caused by an influx of more disadvantaged children to a school serving a single housing estate. Johnson (1999) described inner city schools where pupils were



hostile or indifferent to learning and relationships based on conflict and mistrust, noting high levels of sickness, tiredness and aggression among pupils, and teacher shortages, absence and stress. He observed teachers adopting strategies of “*cajoling, compromise and conciliation*” to maintain order and achieve some coverage of the curriculum. In Australia, Proudford and Baker (1995) demonstrated how schools in different contexts responded by adopting differing educational philosophies and curriculum choices.

Finally, in a set of articles in *The Guardian*, entitled ‘*Education in Crisis*’, Nick Davies described day-to-day problems in schools with high levels of disadvantage; discipline and teaching problems, extreme stress on staff, large amounts of time being spent on pupils’ social problems (Davies 1999, 2000). He concluded that ‘*a disadvantaged intake can make life tough for the whole school, not just individuals*’.

Collectively, these studies have highlighted three main issues: resources (including staff); relationships; and the impact of both resources and relationships on school practice, on curriculum coverage, classroom practice, teachers’ activities and time allocation, and organisation and management. They do not contradict the notion that some contextual difficulties can be overcome by excellent management and highly skilled and hard working teachers, nor do they claim that difficult contexts necessarily lead to school failure. However, they do suggest that achieving success is difficult, even where good professional practice is in place. In 2000, OFSTED produced its own report on *Improving City Schools*, noting the difficulties that disadvantaged contexts presented for the implementation of school improvement strategies. It observed that it was difficult for schools to do well on school quality

measures when they struggled to recruit experienced teachers, had limited learning resources, and had pupils who were disinterested in education or whose emotional and behavioural difficulties made for volatile environments and contested relationships. Moreover, achieving sustained improvement in an organisation which was already under extreme pressure was an uphill task, even for an effective school.

### **Policy Alternatives: Recognising the Importance of Context**

By the end of the 1990s, the findings of studies like these were beginning to be influential within the school improvement field. On the research side, quantitative school effectiveness studies were beginning to show increased interest in contextual factors. On the policy side, the 'Schools in Challenging Circumstances' initiative suggests a growing recognition that the organisational difficulties thrown up by disadvantaged areas may not necessarily be overcome entirely by good teaching and management, and that contextualised measures might be needed.

The existing work suggests that these might take a number of different forms. Two main issues emerge. The first is that implementing what is known to be 'good practice' may need more resources in deprived areas than in others. For example, if recruitment and retention is an issue, more money may need to be spent on salaries and incentives, and on staff development. It may also need structural changes to the education system, in recognition of the fact that the operation of parental choice, especially in areas of serious over-capacity, makes intakes so unbalanced in some deprived areas that it is very difficult for schools to offer a high quality education even with additional funds (Johnson 2003).

The second is that different practices might be needed for schools in disadvantaged areas. These might be tailored practices, requiring a different approach rather than extra resources. Mortimore and Whitty (1997), for example, have pointed to the possibility that different learning approaches may be needed, that curriculum content may need to be adapted to make it inclusive for diverse pupil populations. In *Improving City Schools*, OFSTED (2000a) called for the sharing of good practice between schools in disadvantaged areas, to enable the development of contextually appropriate measures, rather than generic solutions. Johnson (1999) called for teacher training to develop the specific skills needed for teachers in disadvantaged areas, as well as more general pedagogic techniques.

There might also be a need for additional initiatives: compensatory measures for schools in deprived areas as well as for pupils. For example, the co-ordination of support agencies may need to be a priority activity. Some schools may need to work harder at home-school partnership, with extra activities such as home visits, parent education or joint staff-parent activities, in order to achieve the same results. Extra staff may need to be deployed on attendance initiatives. Smaller class sizes may be needed in order to ensure high quality teaching and learning where needs are diverse and some behaviour problematic. Clearly, these additional measures would have resource implications, which have to date not been quantified. For this reason, OFSTED (2000a) pointed to the need for a fuller analysis of the costs of meeting educational needs in disadvantaged schools, while West et al. (2000) proposed an activity-led funding approach.

## **Limitations of the Evidence Base for Contextualised School Improvement**

However, while awareness is growing that school improvement policies need to take more account of the context in which schools are operating, and must be based on an understanding of the ways in which context affects what schools do, the evidence to support the development of such policies is still limited, not just in quantity but in approach.

A first limitation is that existing work has concentrated on highlighting differences between ‘poor’ and ‘rich’ schools, not yet on elaborating differences between schools in different kinds of deprived area. Power et al. (2002) found no study explicitly investigating differences between schools in different types of poor areas, despite the fact that more broad-ranging research has indicated that specific area characteristics may matter. Benn and Chitty (1996) and Dobson et al. (2002) have pointed to the impact of pupil mobility on schools, with schools in areas of temporary housing or those with large numbers of refugees or armed forces personnel being particularly affected. Strand (2000) noted that although the impact of pupil mobility on attainment is relatively low, “*the implications of mobility for school and classroom management, planning and resourcing are substantial*” (cited in Power et al. 2002 p39). Benn and Chitty (1996) have highlighted problems caused by over-capacity in inaccessible or run-down areas, and Mumford (1998) demonstrated how falling population in a housing clearance area led to staff redundancies, an imbalance in curriculum expertise, and extra problems caused by having to take on children excluded from other schools. Maden (2001) touched on issues affecting relationships and attitudes to learning, such as sectarian violence and

religious fundamentalism, and differences between ambitious parents in minority ethnic areas and sceptical parents in coalfield areas. Straker (1991) suggested that the cost of living in an area, and the availability of well-paid graduate jobs outside teaching would affect teacher recruitment, over and above pupil and school factors. Gewirtz et al. (1995), Lauder and Hughes (1999), and Woods et al. (1998) have all pointed to the implications of the local competitive context, not just for pupil numbers but for the internal practices of schools: time spent on marketing and image; policies towards able pupils or those with special needs; grouping strategies and curriculum choices. OFSTED's finding (2000a) that some schools in deprived areas spend substantial sums on security and repairs suggests that the local crime rate may be significant, while pupil composition factors, such as the numbers of pupils having English as an Additional Language, clearly generate specific demands.

These findings suggest that looking at relationships between area type and quality, and exploring the impacts of different types of deprived area on school processes, would be useful developments, leading to specific tailored measures for schools in different circumstances.

The second limitation of the existing work is that it has been somewhat opportunistic in the elements of context that have been observed. Qualitative descriptions vary greatly in their content, each study including those factors that appear relevant to the researcher concerned: most commonly composition of the pupil body and sometimes the demographic, residential or economic characteristics of the wider area. Quantitative studies tend to use limited indicators, typically levels of FSM. This is perhaps inevitable, given data availability in the quantitative case, and the

exploratory nature of qualitative studies. However, opportunistic approaches may also be partial ones, and there is a danger of missing contextual factors that may be important. For example, Power et al. (2002) have argued that the use of the FSM measure over-simplifies the notion of context and also eliminates any basis for drawing out differences in context between schools with similar poverty levels. They suggest that there is a need for “*more systematic research to be undertaken which considers neighbourhood factors in addition to pupil- and school-level factors*” (2002:p.7). However, there is nothing in the current literature that draws together the many observations of contextual influences in a systematic way, to suggest which factors should routinely be considered, and to theorise about the potential links between them. A more developed conceptualisation of context could provide a better basis for quantitative testing of contextual effects.

Similarly, accounts of the impact of context on schools have thus far tended to be driven mainly by empirical observation, rather than by a theoretical perspective on schools as organisations. Our thinking about what aspects of organisation might be impacted by context, and how, is not yet well-developed. Thrupp (1999) made an important contribution in this respect by categorising contextual influences into effects on peer group processes, instructional processes, and management and organisation, thus distinguishing impacts that came about through differing social relations, through teacher agency, and through resource pressures. This kind of approach makes it easier to understand what kinds of impacts we could expect to find in different circumstances, the mechanisms by which context impacts on schools, and the aspects of schooling that could be targeted by policy interventions. It is, however, a rare approach in the current literature.

Both in relation to understanding context, and understanding its impact, therefore, there is a need for the development of more systematic thinking as well as more empirical evidence. Existing literatures within education and in the wider fields of organisational behaviour and neighbourhood studies provide a basis for the development of such approaches.

### **Thinking About ‘Context’**

To begin with, the nature of ‘context’ for organisations was considered in the early organisational behaviour literature, which identified five main aspects of an organisation’s external environment that are influential for internal processes: physical, economic, technological, political/regulatory, and socio-cultural (Aldrich 1979, Handy 1999); and a sixth internal dimension, the institutional environment (Burns and Stalker 1961, Woodward 1965, Donaldson 1985). Figure 1.4 demonstrates how these can be applied to schools.

However, the national education system in Britain means that what is described in these terms as the technology of schooling is to a large extent standardised between schools, with a national curriculum and teacher training programme. Similarly, all schools exist within a national political and regulatory framework.

**Figure 1.4: Dimensions of the Organisational Environment of Schools**

| <b>Aspect of Environment</b> | <b>Application in case of Schools</b>  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Physical                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location, transport, communications</li> </ul>  |
| Economic                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature of wider economy and labour markets in shaping views of schooling</li> <li>• Availability of resources</li> <li>• Extent of competition</li> </ul>   |
| Technological                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum</li> <li>• Teaching resources</li> <li>• Teaching methods</li> </ul>   |
| Political/regulatory         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislative framework for compulsory schooling</li> <li>• Determination of school resources</li> <li>• National curriculum</li> <li>• Objectives of schooling (and monitoring systems/performance indicators)</li> <li>• Distribution of school places</li> <li>• Teachers' pay and conditions</li> </ul> |
| Socio-cultural               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Factors affecting access to learning eg poverty, language</li> <li>• Attitudes to schooling</li> <li>• Relationships between parents and school</li> </ul>  |
| Institutional                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Size</li> <li>• Type</li> <li>• History</li> <li>• Reputation and media reportage</li> </ul>  |

Source: Own application of organisational studies literature to school situation.

The factors that principally vary locally can be distilled into three groupings: the local area context (incorporating physical, socio-cultural and local economic factors); the local market context (incorporating competition and local political/regulatory factors); and the institutional context, including the basic characteristics of the school: its type, size, status and physical environment and also its institutional history, reputation, and established culture.

Local area contexts are typically described in the educational literature in terms of demographic and social class characteristics of the population but may also include: locational, environmental and physical characteristics; social interactive



characteristics such as friend and family networks and the strength of social control forces; sentimental characteristics such as the sense of identification with place; and the quality of local services (Galster 2001). All of these interact, because physical and locational characteristics influence population composition, and the combination of people and place causes neighbourhoods to acquire new characteristics including services and facilities, reputation, social order and patterns of social interaction (Lupton and Power 2002).

Local market contexts have been extensively considered in the educational literature, since the introduction of parental choice in 1988. Although the impact of this reform on school performance and on social and academic segregation is disputed, researchers do agree that there is an enormous diversity of local market circumstances (McPherson and Willms 1987, Gewirtz al. 1995, Gibson and Asthana 1999, Taylor 2002). Gewirtz et al. (1995) identified seven market variables: local systemic histories, parental inclination to choice, transport, existence of 'natural' catchments, LEA policy, extent of competition, and extent of hierarchy, in addition to area context variables. They made a distinction between formal characteristics, such as LEA policy, and informal characteristics such as the responses of schools and parents. Lauder and Hughes (1999) also highlighted the importance of informal characteristics or 'lived markets', while other authors have attempted to describe and classify formal characteristics. Mayet (1997) described a continuum of LEA admission arrangements from strict catchment areas to an admissions lottery. Taylor (2002) used the idea of a private-state continuum to categorise markets, depending on the degree of 'privateness' of each school and percentage of schools of each type. From an organisational behaviour perspective, Aldrich (1979) classified

organisational environments in terms of their overall capacity, their homogeneity, their stability or instability, and their concentration or dispersion: a schema that could be applied to educational markets, observing school types (homogeneity), number of pupils relative to number of school places (capacity), volatility of population composition and school trajectories (stability) and the size of the local competitive arena (concentration).

Institutional contexts have been less fully considered, although there are exceptions. Fink (1999), studying a successful school 'gone wrong', identified a number of elements of the institutional context beyond obvious features of size, type and status, including: political support; 'meaning' (the values and image of the school); leadership; the kind of staff recruited; and the school's culture and structures. He also noted the importance of critical events in the school's life cycle, such as the departure of a successful head, noting that institutional contexts change over time, as well as differing between one school and another. Both Proudford and Baker (1995) and Harris (2000) have emphasised cycles of school performance and pointed out that improvement strategies that work at one stage will not necessarily work at another. Gray and Wilcox (1995: p242) suggest that "*how an effective school improves may well differ from the ways in which more effective schools maintain their effectiveness*".

These studies provide a structure for thinking about the elements of school context, and their interaction, when considering the impact of context on school processes. Figure 1.5 highlights the main issues arising from the existing literature.

**Figure 1.5: Principal Aspects of Local Variation in School Contexts**

| Aspect of Context     | Key Issues   |
|-----------------------|--|
| Local Area Context    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographic and social class characteristics</li> <li>• Locational, environmental and physical characteristics</li> <li>• Social interactive characteristics</li> <li>• Sentimental characteristics</li> </ul>  |
| Local Market Context  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local systemic histories</li> <li>• Parental inclination to choice</li> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Existence of ‘natural’ catchments</li> <li>• LEA policy</li> <li>• Extent of competition</li> <li>• Extent of hierarchy</li> <li>• Formal and informal characteristics</li> <li>• Capacity</li> <li>• Homogeneity</li> <li>• Stability</li> <li>• Concentration</li> </ul> |
| Institutional Context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Size, type, status</li> <li>• Political support</li> <li>• ‘Meaning’</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Recruitment</li> <li>• School’s culture and structure</li> <li>• Critical events/school life cycle</li> </ul>   |

Principal sources: Galster (2001), Gewirtz et al. (1995), Aldrich (1979), Fink (1999)

### **Thinking About Schools As Contextualised Organisations**

Organisational and educational literatures also provide a basis for considering, in a systematic way, how context impacts on schools. In a similar way, they highlight the value of considering both formal and informal or ‘lived’ elements of organisations.

The formal aspects of organisations have been considered in the organisational behaviour literature. Early organisation theory presented organisations as systems, highlighting characteristics such as their size, structures, and technology as being

influential on performance (Pugh and Hickson 1976, 1996; Owens and Steinhoff 1976). From this perspective context has principally been seen as being important for its influence on managerial decisions about strategic positioning, structure and organisation. Managers respond to external contingencies in order to ensure organisational survival or maximise organisational performance (Child 1972, Aldrich 1979). Applying this to schools, we would expect to see the impact of context in strategic decisions about school objectives, educational values and market positioning; and in the way schools are organised to deliver these objectives – staff structures, support roles, pupil groupings, timetabling and so on.

At the strategic level, Miles and Snow (1978) emphasised the importance of managers' own perspectives in their responses to context. They identified three essential problems for any organisation: entrepreneurial (i.e. market positioning); engineering (i.e getting the product right); and administrative (i.e. organising and managing the work); and described a range of strategic responses including 'defenders', who concentrate on engineering, 'prospectors', who focus on the market, and 'analysers' who attempt to balance the two. Studies of schools in local markets suggest that this analysis is applicable in an educational context, as headteachers juggle educational objectives and market imperatives in determining school strategy and organisation (Lauder and Hughes 1999, Woods et al. 1998). Murgatroyd and Morgan (1993) argued that good school management demands the adoption of a consistent generic strategy that positions the school in the market and determines its activity mix. They identified four core strategies pursued by schools, on a service mix/access matrix. Service mix could be broad (basic) or enhanced, with broad schools attempting to offer a good basic service across the board, and

enhanced schools also offering service enhancements such as extra tuition and better facilities. Access could be open or 'niche', with niche schools restricting access on the basis of ability, gender, religion or other affiliation. Somewhat confusingly, they also included as 'niche' schools those which have open access but attempt to differentiate themselves strongly on the basis of specialisms in a particular subject (such as 'strong science schools'), suggesting that in fact there are three strategic dimensions: access (open or restricted), service mix (broad or enhanced) and differentiation (low or high). Differentiation could be used by restricted access schools on the basis of their selective intake, or by enhanced service schools on the basis of service enhancements.

Thompson (1967) focused on organisational implications, looking specifically at the impact of uncertainty. He observed that organisations in uncertain environments tended to divide into a technical core, carrying out the key tasks, and 'boundary spanning units' (such as fundraising departments) which were in contact with the outside world and dealing with its uncertainties. Organisations in more certain environments could concentrate more on core activities. Similarly Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) found that uncertain or differentiated environments tended to give rise to more highly differentiated roles within organisations than did stable or certain environments. These ideas have been borne out to some extent by school-based studies. OFSTED(2000a), for example, found that successful schools in disadvantaged areas tended to employ more educational and administrative support staff to enable teachers to concentrate on teaching. Moves towards extended schools, with other agencies on site dealing with pupil and family welfare issues, also bear out the demand for differentiated roles in uncertain environments.

Formal organisation theory, however, has been criticised for offering only a partial explanation for how organisations behave in relation to their contexts, because it sees workers in organisations only as organisational actors, making rational decisions in relation to the objectives of the organisation. Both from social psychological and sociological perspectives, this is an inadequate conceptualisation (Argyris 1972). As the Manchester factory studies showed, organisational objectives, rules and structures provide one set of influences on workers' behaviour, but so do relationships, values and norms formed within the workplace, and those outside it (Cunnison 1982). These cannot be entirely disentangled, since at any one time, any individual acts within a number of roles, shaped by organisation and social structures and relationships. A teacher can be simultaneously a professional, bringing her own values, experience and professional socialisation, a subordinate within a department, a woman, a parent, and a member of the white middle class. There is a constant *“criss-crossing of experience and its social formulation back and forth between work sites and the community”* (Donaldson 1985).

From this viewpoint, it is evident that the decisions of managers and the formal structures and procedures of an organisation only partially describe what actually goes on (Silverman 1970, Greenfield 1975). Empirical studies of 'street-level bureaucrats' have borne this out (Lipsky 1980, Wright 2002), showing that front line staff necessarily make their own decisions about the distribution of time and resources and the nature of the service they supply, applying professional, personal, political and moral judgements as they negotiate the dilemma of wanting to provide an 'ideal' service within limited resources. Policy is thus not 'implemented' as such but 'co-produced' through the face to face interaction of staff and client (Wright

2002). School-based studies also show substantial variation in practice as individuals juggle varying professional, ideological and organisational objectives. Best et al. (1983), for example, identified five different perspectives on pastoral care among teachers in an English comprehensive school, each shaping how they approached their pastoral roles. Indeed, schools may be seen as particularly complex environments, with room for multiple variations of interpretation and practice. Education is a contested, value-driven occupation, with a range of perspectives about the balance between academic and broader educational aims, and about curriculum content. Schools are 'loose-coupled' systems, where professionals work independently and have a high degree of personal control over their practice, and where professional activity is carried out within the context of ongoing personal relationships, between pupils and teachers and between pupils and their peers (Owens and Steinhoff 1976). Organisation structure enables variations in practice between individual teachers. However, schools are also formed of a variety of groupings, such as subjects, year groups and houses, that build social bonds and personal allegiances, and that shape the development of educational beliefs and shared practices. Bush (1995) has identified four distinct theories about how these forces for disagreement and consensus combine to produce school strategy, policy and practice: those that see schools as collegiate organisations, where decisions are made through consensus and discussion; those that emphasise micro-political processes of conflict resolution through negotiation and bargaining; those that emphasise turbulence and instability; and those that focus on the development of shared traditions and cultures through repeated practices, symbols and ritual. Precisely because of this scope for variation, school effectiveness researchers have

argued that it is critical to look for effects not just at school level, as though the school was one entity, but at classroom and teacher level (Mortimore 1997).

This more subjective view of organisations suggests that there will always be a number of interpretations of reality within any organisation, deriving from formal organisational objectives, political considerations and internal structures and relationships. However, external context will also provide a “*source of meanings through which members define their actions and make sense of the actions of others*” (Silverman 1970: p126). Moreover, external context itself will be interpreted differently by different actors depending on their own social position and relationships. Levin and Riffel (1997: p46), writing on school strategies, have suggested that ‘context’ is “*mediated or constructed at least to some degree by people in the organisation itself*”, influenced by a range of factors including individual characteristics, position in the organisation, training and professional socialisation, and organisational structures, history and prevailing practice. Empirical studies have shown how the issue of how to respond to context can provide the material for consensus, negotiation or dispute between staff and managers: an opportunity for the development and strengthening of shared values, or a source of ambiguity, uncertainty or conflict (Corbett 1991, Greenfield 1991, Gewirtz 1998, Johnson 1999). Some responses will be conscious. For example, teachers adapt their practice to academic and emotional needs to their pupils, in order to maximise learning opportunities and minimise conflict (Owens and Steinhoff 1981, Johnson 1999, Thrupp 1999). However, there will also be a range of unconscious adaptations, based on values or assumptions about class, race or gender (Ball 1981). Plewis (1996), for example, found that teachers in the schools he



studied covered less of the mathematics curriculum for African-Caribbean pupils than for white pupils, because of assumptions about their aptitude and level of prior knowledge. Lower expectations and harsher discipline towards African-Caribbean pupils have also been noted in other studies (Gipps and Gillborn 1996), and it has repeatedly been demonstrated that Black and working class pupils tend to be over-represented in lower-ranked teaching groups. Outside the classroom, Lareau (1989) reported that schools established home-school liaison arrangements based on middle class norms, knowledge and expectations, and interpreted parental non-participation as a lack of interest in education rather than as a deficit of cultural capital.

These perspectives suggest that while analysis of organisational strategies and formal organisation structures, roles and practices provide one level of understanding about how organisations are affected by their contexts, these cannot be seen in isolation from the beliefs, values and social positioning of the people who construct them. They also suggest that contextual effects on school processes can only be fully understood if explored at the level of the individual teacher, not just at school and management level (Figure 1.6).

**Figure 1.6: Schools as Organisations: Key Ideas**

| <b>Organisation Theory Perspective</b> | <b>Aspects of Organisation Affected by Context</b>   | <b>Key Ideas</b>   |
|--|--|--|
| Formal                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategy</li> <li>• Organisation structure and roles</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balance between enterprise, engineering and administration</li> <li>• Generic strategies based on service mix/access</li> <li>• Responses to uncertainty - boundary-spanning roles or role differentiation</li> </ul>                               |
| Informal /subjective                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual perspectives and practices</li> </ul>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different perspectives on ideal practice and its implementation</li> <li>• Context one source of ‘meanings’ shaping perspectives and practice</li> <li>• Context subjectively interpreted</li> <li>• Conscious and unconscious responses</li> </ul> |

Principal sources: Miles and Snow (1978), Murgatroyd and Morgan (1993), Thompson (1967), Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), Silverman (1970)

### **Summary of Literature and Aims of This Thesis**

This review started by exploring the links between area deprivation, low attainment and low school quality. It revealed three main issues.

First, there is an apparent quality problem in schools in disadvantaged areas, which can be distinguished from the equally important but better researched attainment problem. Schools in poor areas do worse on quality measures as defined by the current inspection system. Low quality contributes to low attainment but is also important in its own right.

Second, the processes and activities of schools, that combine to constitute ‘quality’, cannot be considered to be entirely the construction of managers and teachers, independent of context. Rather, they are the product of the interplay between

contextual factors, which affect schools' resources and relationships, and the decisions and responses of staff and pupils. Neither context alone, nor management and professional practice alone, determines school quality - one impacts on the other. It follows that if school quality is worse in disadvantaged areas than in others, part of the problem is likely to be accounted for by the impact of contextual factors on school processes. Understanding these process effects must be crucial for understanding the quality problem and for working out how schools can improve.

Third, because processes differ according to context, so must school improvement policies. Approaches to school improvement to date have been generic in nature, concentrating on improving management and professional practice in all settings, and aimed mainly at the school level. These are unlikely to be wholly effective in schools in disadvantaged settings because they do not recognise the impact of context on school process. Thus they do not incorporate measures to limit negative impacts of context or encourage beneficial ones, either by different in-school practices or by interventions at LEA or government level. What is needed is a more contextualised approach, based on an understanding of the impact of context on schools, and its interplay with management and professional practice.

The review also reveals that the evidence base to support such an approach could benefit from further development. It lacks detailed evidence on the different contexts that exist between deprived areas. There is also a case for the development of more systematic approaches to the consideration of what constitutes context and how it impacts on schools as organisations. Existing literatures in the fields of neighbourhood studies and organisational behaviour provide a basis for applying

such approaches, but have not hitherto been applied in research on schools in disadvantaged areas.

This thesis therefore aims to contribute to the development of more context-sensitive policies for school improvement by developing a richer understanding of the impact of disadvantaged socio-economic contexts on school processes. Specifically it aims to add to the existing literature in three ways. First, by investigating whether different impacts arise from different kinds of deprived context. Second, approaching context in a more systematic way than is typically the case, incorporating socio-economic, market and institutional contexts and developing an understanding of their interaction. Third, by applying theoretical insights from studies of organisational behaviour to illuminate contextual influences on school strategy, organisation systems and structures, and individual practice. For consistency with other studies (eg Gewirtz et al. 1998, Thrupp 1999), and because their larger size makes them a richer environment for organisational research, the research focuses on secondary, rather than primary, schools.

### **The Research Approach**

The research incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The first part, which is quantitative, is an initial exploration of the quality problem in disadvantaged areas. Looking at the relationship between OFSTED inspection results and area deprivation, it specifically aims to explore whether there are quality differences between schools in different types of areas, in different educational

markets and of different institutional types. Two measures of school quality are used: OFSTED inspection grades; and an absolute failure measure, whether or not a school has been placed in special measures. These are analysed in conjunction with a range of contextual measures: FSM, area deprivation measures, Census data and institution type variables. The research draws on a sample of schools in eleven Local Education Authorities (LEAs) for the analysis of inspection grades, and on all secondary schools placed in special measures up to the end of the 1999/00 academic year for the special measures analysis. Its purpose is to identify relationships between quality and different contextual variables, for further qualitative exploration, not to establish causation or to attribute relative statistical importance to different factors. It uses bivariate rather than multivariate analysis. Chapter 2 has full details of the datasets, the analysis and the findings of this quantitative work.

The second part, which makes up the bulk of the thesis, takes a case study approach, in four schools, in order to allow the development of a fuller understanding of context than is possible from the limited indicators available for large scale quantitative analysis, and to illuminate contextual effects on school processes, rather than simply on quality outcomes. The case study is the method which is typically used for examining social processes and behaviour within specific contextual settings (Ragin and Becker 1992, Walton 1992, Yin 1993). In this case, it predominantly involves qualitative methods (in-depth interviews and observations), while also incorporating analyses of socio-economic data about the areas and administrative data, such as absence records, provided by the schools.

The case studies nest within the quantitative study, in the sense that they were selected from within the eleven sampled LEAs. They are based on two phases of work. Phase I was designed to gain an initial understanding of school context, exploring the three key aspects that appeared from the existing literature to vary locally: the local area context, the market context and the institutional context. This phase involved interviews with headteachers and LEA representatives, collection and analysis of socio-economic data, and mapping of pupil postcodes. Details of these methods are set out in Chapter 3, which describes the schools and their contexts.

Phase II was designed to explore contextual factors in more depth, including the ways in which they were subjectively interpreted by headteachers and staff, and to illuminate contextual impacts on process and quality. Specifically it aimed to explore three issues that emerged from the organisational literature: the schools' overall values and strategy; their internal organisation; and the day-to-day practices of teaching staff. This phase contained both a factual element, based on documentary and statistical evidence (such as the school prospectus and analyses of pupil and staff attendance) and factual interviews with senior staff, and a more in-depth, qualitative element, based on interviews with the headteacher and a sample of teaching staff (6 to 8 in each school), as well as teaching and support staff with specific roles in relation to attendance, behaviour or learning support. Additional information was gained through informal, unstructured, observations. Full details of the methods used in Phase II are set out at the beginning of Chapter 4, and the interview schedules are attached in full as Annexes. Appendix 1 details some of the practical difficulties encountered in carrying out the work, including information about an aborted attempt to carry out a self-completion survey of time spent by

teachers in different activities. It also contains my reflections on the fieldwork process generally, and on my approach to the interpretation of the data collected.

### **The Case Studies**

Lastly, I come to the issue of which schools were studied and how they were chosen. The primary objective was to choose four schools in different types of disadvantaged area, to illuminate any different contextual impacts in different settings. Identifying schools in disadvantaged areas was unproblematic. I drew on CASE's prior analysis of deprived neighbourhoods to identify such neighbourhoods within the eleven LEAs in the quantitative part of my study<sup>5</sup>. Schools within these neighbourhoods were shortlisted as potential case studies. Selecting schools in different settings was more difficult, since in-depth understanding of local contexts, based on the multiple factors identified in the neighbourhood studies and education markets literature, is not possible from publicly available data. It was evident that a limited number of publicly available 'context type' indicators would have to be used for selection purposes, with a further and more detailed exploration of context taking place once the schools had been identified. But which indicators to use? The quantitative analysis had suggested that area 'type' (using the Office for National Statistics categorisation) might be important, but this typology incorporates a broad range of area characteristics including region, settlement type and location, housing, demographic characteristics and economic variables. It also suggested specifically

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<sup>5</sup> These were neighbourhoods that had already been identified by CASE as being among the most deprived 3% in the country, being within the top 5% on each of two deprivation indicators (multiple deprivation and work poverty). See Glennerster et al. (1999) for a fuller description of the indicators.

that ethnic mix might be important, as well as the socio-economic mix within the LEA as a whole, and the corresponding characteristics of the educational market. It therefore seemed to indicate that a number of contextual factors might combine to influence school process in a complex way, rather than one or two aspects leading to definitive differences between schools. Indeed one aspect of context might offset another. I therefore decided not to privilege one contextual indicator (such as ethnic mix) but simply to select schools in areas that were clearly different across a wide range of indicators, so that I could explore which contextual variables seemed to matter, once in the schools. Appendix 2 describes in more detail the process by which I shortlisted and selected schools.

In the end, it was clear that the four case studies did indeed involve schools in very different circumstances (Table 1.1). Southside Grange school<sup>6</sup> was a co-educational comprehensive in an industrial area in the North East of England, with pockets of deprivation among the most severe in the country. Middle Row High School was also a co-educational comprehensive, in an inner area of a large Midlands city. It had recently been awarded specialist sports college status. West-City High School for Girls was a single sex comprehensive, in Inner London, with technology college status, and The Farcliffe School was a co-educational secondary modern school in a seaside town in the South East of England. These four schools are the focus of most of the work that follows.

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<sup>6</sup> Not its real name. The names of all the schools have been changed to protect their identities.



**Table 1:1 Case Study Schools**

| <b>School Name</b>      | <b>Region</b> | <b>Area Type</b>                  | <b>Ethnic Mix</b> | <b>Housing Type and tenure</b>            | <b>School Status</b>      | <b>Sex</b> | <b>No. on Roll Jan 2001</b> | <b>OFSTED</b>                  | <b>GCSE 5 A*-C 2000</b> |
|-------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|---|---------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Southside Grange School | North-East    | Industrial area in semi-rural LEA | Mainly white      | Mixed                                     | Comp                      | M          | 670                         | An improving school            | 19                      |
| Middle Row HS           | Midlands      | Inner city                        | Mainly Asian      | Victorian street terraces, mainly private | Comp. Sports College      | M          | 843                         | A good school                  | 36                      |
| West-City HSG           | London        | Inner city                        | Mixed             | Medium to high rise flats, mainly Council | Comp. Technology College. | G          | 892                         | A good school                  | 41                      |
| The Farcliffe School    | South-East    | Seaside town                      | Mainly White      | Mixed                                     | Mod                       | M          | 626                         | More strengths than weaknesses | 3                       |

## **Structure of the Thesis**

The structure of the thesis reflects the nested methodology and the investigation of the impact of context at different levels. It starts with the quantitative analysis of OFSTED quality judgements, in Chapter 2. Chapters 3 to 7 are based on the qualitative case studies and progressively ‘unwrap’ context and its impact at different levels. Chapter 3 introduces the schools and describes their contexts using socio-economic statistics and descriptions of the local educational markets and the schools’ institutional characteristics and histories. Chapter 4 looks at context through the eyes of headteachers and staff, seeing what they thought were relevant factors for the school. Chapter 5 explores how these factors impacted on the schools on a daily basis, on the nature of teachers’ work and on pupil/teacher and staff relationships. Chapters 6 and 7 look at more formal, management responses, firstly in the design of schooling, such as curriculum and pastoral care, and the positioning of the school in the marketplace, and then on the actual practice of schooling: securing participation, managing behaviour, working with parents and dealing with social needs. Finally, Chapter 8 draws conclusions about the links between context and school processes, and relates this back directly to quality measures, before considering implications for research and for policy.

## Chapter 2: School Quality and School Context: Exploring the Relationships

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The starting point for this thesis was the evidence that there is apparently a problem of low school quality in disadvantaged areas as well as a problem of low attainment. OFSTED's analysis (see Figure 1.2) demonstrates that all headline measures of school quality tend to be worse in schools with high FSM than those with low FSM. However, this analysis does not tell us whether there is any variation between different types of deprived context, and what might explain such variations. It is these questions that are the subject of this chapter, which is based on a quantitative analysis of OFSTED quality measures, covering the period 1996/7 to 2000/01<sup>1</sup>. The chapter first describes the measures of quality and context used in the analysis before presenting findings.

### **Measures of Quality and Context**

#### *Quality Measures*

The analysis in this chapter draws on two measures of school quality. One is the Judgement Recording Score (JRS) given by OFSTED inspectors for different aspects of school performance, and on which published analyses are based. The other is a measure of absolute failure, whether a school has been placed in 'special measures'.

JRS are given for twenty-eight broad categories of school performance, such as 'teaching' and a further seventy-two detailed aspects within these categories, such as

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<sup>1</sup> The longest period for which the data is available and almost a full inspection cycle.

‘use of homework’, making one hundred scores in all. Each measure is scored between 1 (excellent) and 7 (very poor).

A full list of all the one hundred JRS appears at Appendix 3. In its analyses, OFSTED uses four composite variables: standards achieved; educational quality; school climate; and management and efficiency; made up of combined scores from the broad categories, including only those consistent across post-2000 and pre-2000 inspection frameworks. My analysis is based on a similar approach, using the same composite variables, but based on fewer categories (twelve) because some are not given out to external researchers.<sup>2</sup> Figure 2.1 shows the composite variables and component categories used in my analysis.

**Figure 2.1: Judgement Recording Scores Used in Analysis**

| <b>Post 2000 Inspection Framework</b>   | <b>Pre 2000-closest match</b>   |
|---|---|
| <b>Standards Achieved</b><br>How well pupils achieve  | Progress  |
| <b>Quality of Education</b><br>Teaching<br>Appropriate statutory curriculum in place  | Teaching (school grade)<br>The curriculum (school grade)  |
| <b>School Climate</b><br>Attitudes to the school<br>Behaviour, including the incidence of exclusions<br>Personal development and relationships<br>Attendance<br>Provision for personal, including SMSC, development<br>Procedures for child protection and for ensuring pupils’ welfare | Attitudes<br>Behaviour<br>Personal development<br>Attendance<br>Provision for SMSC development<br>Support, guidance & pupil welfare |
| <b>Management and Efficiency</b><br>The leadership and management of the head teacher and key staff<br>Monitoring and evaluation of the school’s performance and taking effective action<br>Value for money provided by the school  | Leadership and management<br>Development planning, monitoring and evaluation<br>Value for money                                     |

Source: OFSTED. Note: SMSC stands for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

<sup>2</sup> My analysis is therefore not directly comparable with OFSTED’s results. Further, OFSTED uses a weighting system to give more importance to certain aspects of performance, whereas my analysis gives each category equal weight.

The second quality measure used here is whether a school has failed its OFSTED inspection and been placed in special measures. The decision to place a school in special measures is not based on a summing of JRS but is a qualitative judgement made on the criteria set out in Figure 2.2. The decision rests on the ‘*combined weight of features*’, rather than on one factor alone (OFSTED 2000c: p55).

**Figure 2.2: Factors Considered when Placing a School in Special Measures**

|   |
|---|
| <p><b>Education Standards Achieved:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there low achievement in the subjects of the curriculum by the majority of pupils or consistently among particular groups of pupils?</li> <li>• Is there poor learning or progress in the subjects of the curriculum by the majority of pupils or consistently among particular groups of pupils?</li> <li>• Are there poor examination results?</li> <li>• Are the National Curriculum assessment and other accredited results poor?</li> <li>• Is there regular disruptive behaviour?</li> <li>• Is there a breakdown of discipline?</li> <li>• Are there high levels of exclusions?</li> <li>• Are there significant levels of racial tension or harassment?</li> <li>• Is there poor attendance by a substantial proportion of pupils?</li> <li>• Is there poor attendance by particular groups of pupils?</li> <li>• Is there a high level of truancy?</li> </ul> <p><b>Quality of Education Provided:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a high proportion of unsatisfactory teaching?</li> <li>• Are there low expectations of pupils?</li> <li>• Is there failure to implement the National Curriculum?</li> <li>• Is there poor provision for pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?</li> <li>• Are pupils at physical or emotional risk from other pupils or adults in the school?</li> <li>• Are there abrasive and confrontational relationships between staff and pupils?</li> </ul> <p><b>The Leadership and Management of the School:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the headteacher, senior management team and/or the governors ineffective ?</li> <li>• Is there significant loss of confidence in the headteacher by the staff and/or the parents and/or the governors ?</li> <li>• Is there demoralisation and disenchantment amongst staff?</li> <li>• Are there high levels of staff turnover or absence?</li> <li>• Is there poor management?</li> <li>• Is inefficient use made of the resources available to the school including finance?</li> <li>• Does the school apply principles of best value in its use of resources?</li> </ul> |
|---|

Source: OFSTED Handbook for Inspecting Secondary Schools (2000)

### *Context Measures*

The chapter analyses these two measures of school quality alongside measures of school context. First, I use the standard measure of deprivation at school level: the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM. I use the standard groupings used in analysis by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES): 5% or less, 5-9%, 9-13%, 13-21%, 21-35%, 35-50% and more than 50%.

FSM is the best available indicator of the economic circumstances of pupils in a school, but it is an imperfect one. Eligibility requires parents to complete the relevant paperwork and schools may encourage completion, because high levels of FSM bring additional funding. However, literacy difficulties or pride may deter some parents and others may not complete the form if their child does not wish to eat a school meal. Moreover, FSM only measures income poverty.<sup>3</sup> It does not tell us anything else about the characteristics of the pupils or the area. For this reason, I also make use here of several other measures of area deprivation, as follows:

- Ethnicity and housing tenure data from the 1991 Census<sup>4</sup> and a measure of ‘work poverty’ based on 1991 Census data (the proportion of people of working age not working, studying or on a government training scheme).<sup>5</sup>
- ‘Area Type’, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) ward classification (Wallace and Denham 1996), providing categories such as ‘Inner City Estate’ or ‘Rural Area’, also based on 1991 Census data.

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<sup>3</sup> Maden (2001) notes that FSM captures income poverty less well since the introduction of Working Families Tax Credit, since some households have moved off IS into very low paid work.

<sup>4</sup> The most recent Census at the time of this analysis. 2001 Census data at ward level have yet to be released at the time of writing.

<sup>5</sup> Developed by Philip Noden at CASE (Glennerster et al. 1999).

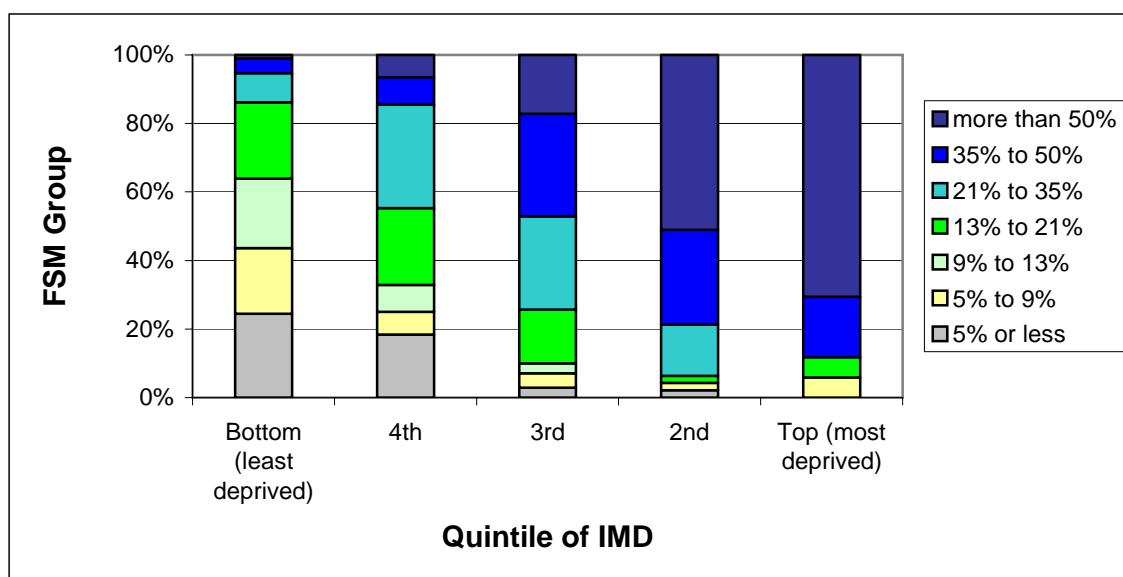
- The Index of Multiple Deprivation or IMD (DETR 2000), which draws on more up-to-date administrative sources than the 1991 Census. The IMD gives a deprivation score and rank for each of England's 8414 wards. For the purposes of certain analyses, I divided it into quintile groups by ranking, with the top fifth (quintile) representing the most deprived group of wards.

These indicators are all published at electoral ward level and give a broader view of the local area context than FSM. The drawback of these measures, of course, is that the ward in which a school is located does not necessarily correspond to its natural catchment area, because it may be located on a ward boundary and draw mainly from the adjacent ward. Nor does the population of a school necessarily reflect its catchment area, because local pupils may choose to go elsewhere to school. For this reason, the local context as reflected in the school can really only be assessed by a combination of area measures and FSM, which is the approach taken here. In fact, for the sample of schools used in this analysis, there was a strong relationship between IMD area deprivation ranking and FSM, with a correlation coefficient of .708. As Figure 2.3 shows, schools in wards in the top two quintile groups (the most deprived 40%) on the IMD were predominantly high FSM schools (over 35% FSM), as were half of the schools in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quintile. However, the relationship was not a perfect one. The presence in the top IMD quintile of a small number of low FSM schools indicates sought-after schools (usually selective schools, faith schools or single sex schools)<sup>6</sup> in inner city areas, while high FSM schools also existed in better off wards, drawing pupils from nearby disadvantaged areas.

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<sup>6</sup> Other studies have also suggested that travel to schools in disadvantaged areas from more advantaged areas is relatively unusual except where schools have some particular differentiating characteristics. (Raab and Adler 1988; Waslander and Thrupp 1995; Broccolichi and Van Zanten 2000).

**Figure 2.3: Relationship Between IMD and FSM**



In addition to these measures of area context, I also use measures of institutional context: school type, status, gender and size, provided as part of the OFSTED JRS dataset. There is no dataset that classifies local educational markets, so to explore the influence of market characteristics the last part of the chapter consists of three LEA case studies, looking at the statistical relationships between area context and quality in the light of a qualitative assessment of market circumstances.

These measures used here are far from perfect as a reflection of the complexities of school contexts. However, in exploring area as well as school-level variables they represent a much more comprehensive approach than has hitherto been attempted.



### *The Sample of Schools*

The analysis draws on two samples of schools. The JRS measure is analysed in relation to all secondary schools in the eleven English LEAs included in CASE's study of disadvantaged areas, on which I have been working since 1998 (Lupton 2001a, 2003b). Sampling within selected LEAs (rather than selecting a representative sample of schools scattered across many LEAs) enabled 'within-LEA' as well as 'between-school' analysis. The eleven selected LEAs are in five different regions and include inner London boroughs, large industrial cities, and semi-rural/semi-urban authorities in industrial and coastal areas. They are not named here, in order to safeguard the identities of the case study schools, but Table 2.1 gives an indication of their characteristics.

**Table 2.1: Characteristics of LEAs in JRS Sample**

| LEA | Region                   | LEA Type       | Decile Group on IMD <sup>7</sup> | % Social Housing 1991 | % Ethnic Minority Residents 1991 |
|-----|--------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| A   | London                   | London Borough | 1                                | 60                    | 36                               |
| B   | London                   | London Borough | 1                                | 38                    | 42                               |
| C   | North West               | Met.Borough    | 1                                | 42                    | 1                                |
| D   | East Midlands            | City           | 1                                | 39                    | 11                               |
| E   | North East               | City           | 1                                | 40                    | 4                                |
| F   | Yorkshire and Humberside | City           | 1                                | 36                    | 5                                |
| G   | North West               | Unitary        | 2                                | 26                    | 15                               |
| H   | West Midlands            | City           | 1                                | 32                    | 22                               |
| I   | North East               | Unitary        | 2                                | 26                    | 1                                |
| J   | Yorkshire and Humberside | City           | 2                                | 31                    | 6                                |
| K   | South East               | County         | 2                                | 14                    | 1                                |
|     | <b>National</b>          |                |                                  | <b>23</b>             | <b>5</b>                         |

Sources: IMD 2000, 1991 Census

Notes:

- i) Decile Group 1 includes the most deprived 10% of authorities
- ii) The IMD is at Borough/District Level, not County. For consistency, all data for LEA K is for the district in which the case study school is located, not for the county as a whole.

<sup>7</sup> Actual rankings cannot be given as this would identify the LEAs.

It is important to note that these LEAs, although varied, cannot be considered a representative sample of LEAs in England. They were originally selected for the CASE study because they contained at least one of the most severely deprived electoral wards in the country (Glennister et al. 1999), and all were, as a whole, relatively deprived local authorities (see Table 2.1). No rural LEAs were included. Two very large LEAs were included, making up between them 70% of the schools in the sample, and one of these LEAs was unusual because it operated a selective system. The choice of these eleven LEAs was governed by the decision to link the entire thesis to the CASE study, in order to benefit from the thorough knowledge already gained of local socio-economic and education market contexts, and to facilitate access to schools. The benefit of existing contextual knowledge to the qualitative study, which is the biggest part of the thesis, was offset against the problem that the sample for the quantitative study is biased towards deprived authorities. Had the quantitative analysis been undertaken in isolation, a larger and more representative sample of LEAs could have been used, and this remains a possibility for future research.

There were 337 maintained secondary schools, in total, in the eleven LEAs. Of these, six were new schools and had not yet been inspected, and there was no inspection data for seventeen others, mostly because their inspections had fallen just outside the period covered. This left a total of 314 schools (Table 2.2).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The process of matching the datasets raised an interesting issue for further research, which is that poorly rated schools are more easily eliminated than high quality schools. The total of 'current schools' excludes those that have been closed. Failing schools are more likely to have been closed than succeeding schools. In this case, inspection data were held for seventeen schools that had subsequently closed, of which ten had failed an inspection. Five had been replaced by new schools but these had not yet been inspected. An alternative would have been to start with 'inspected schools' rather than 'current schools'. However, this presents the difficulty of tracking down postcode and composition data for schools closed up to five years previously. These difficulties would need to be addressed if working with a larger sample.

**Table 2.2: Sample of Schools for JRS Analysis**

| LEA          | All Current Schools | Independent | Main tained | New schools | Not inspected in period | Included in Sample |
|--------------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| A            | 16                  | 7           | 9           | 0           | 0                       | 9                  |
| B            | 16                  | 1           | 15          | 1           | 0                       | 14                 |
| C            | 11                  | 0           | 11          | 0           | 0                       | 11                 |
| D            | 26                  | 5           | 21          | 1           | 3                       | 17                 |
| E            | 20                  | 8           | 12          | 1           | 1                       | 10                 |
| F            | 31                  | 5           | 26          | 2           | 2                       | 22                 |
| G            | 14                  | 5           | 9           | 0           | 0                       | 9                  |
| H            | 90                  | 14          | 76          | 0           | 5                       | 71                 |
| I            | 13                  | 0           | 13          | 0           | 0                       | 13                 |
| J            | 49                  | 6           | 43          | 0           | 4                       | 39                 |
| K            | 131                 | 29          | 102         | 1           | 2                       | 99                 |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>417</b>          | <b>80</b>   | <b>337</b>  | <b>6</b>    | <b>17</b>               | <b>314</b>         |

For the absolute failure measure (special measures) a larger sample was needed than could be constructed from within the eleven LEAs, since only about 2% of schools are in special measures. I therefore compiled a list of all secondary schools<sup>9</sup> in England placed in special measures up to the end of the 1999-2000 school year.<sup>10</sup> There were 180 schools<sup>11</sup>, which were located in 175 different electoral wards.

### *Analysis Methods*

The data were analysed using SPSS v10. Given the purpose of the exercise, which was to highlight potentially important relationships for qualitative exploration, the analysis was limited to straightforward bivariate analysis using crosstabulations and measures of correlation.

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<sup>9</sup> Excludes middle schools deemed secondary (i.e those covering the age band 11-14). The schools included all serve the 11-16 or 11-18 age band.

<sup>10</sup> OFSTED does not routinely publish details of these schools. However, a list of schools placed in special measures up to the end of 1997/8 was provided for the Education and Employment Committee in 1999(House of Commons 1999) and OFSTED provided me with subsequent data in order to update the list to the end of the 1999-2000 school year.

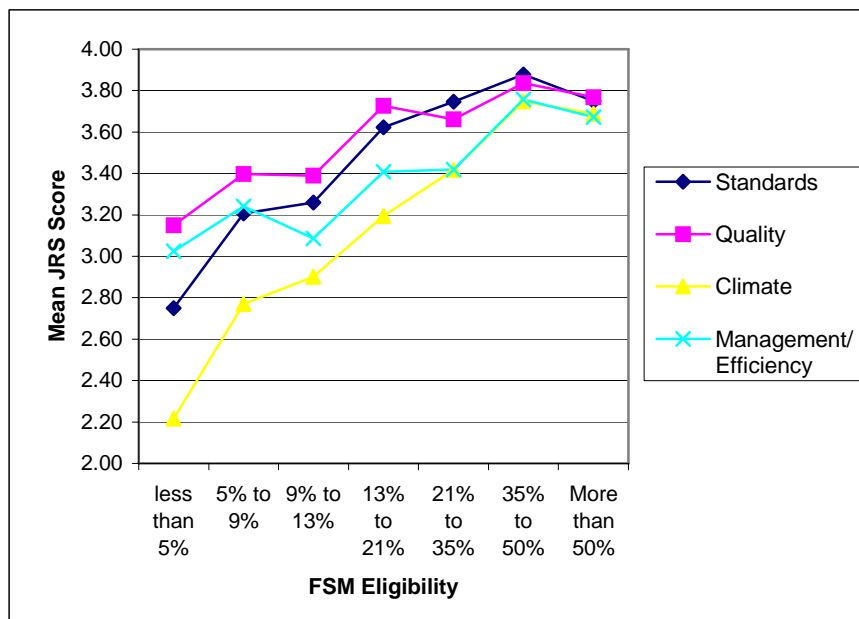
<sup>11</sup> 122 secondary schools were included in the list provided to the Education and Employment Committee. A further 25 went into special measures in 1998/9 and 33 in 1999/00. By the time of

## Findings

### *Area Deprivation and School Quality*

The first finding that emerged from the analysis was that there was a strong association between area deprivation and school quality, as OFSTED's own analysis shows. Schools in more deprived areas generally gained higher (ie worse) JRS scores on all the composite variables, whether FSM (Figure 2.4) or area deprivation measures (Figure 2.5) were used. The relationship was less strong for area deprivation than for FSM, reflecting the fact that the two are not exactly matched. Interestingly, scores improved slightly in the most deprived schools, with more than 50% eligible for FSM or in the top quintile of the IMD.

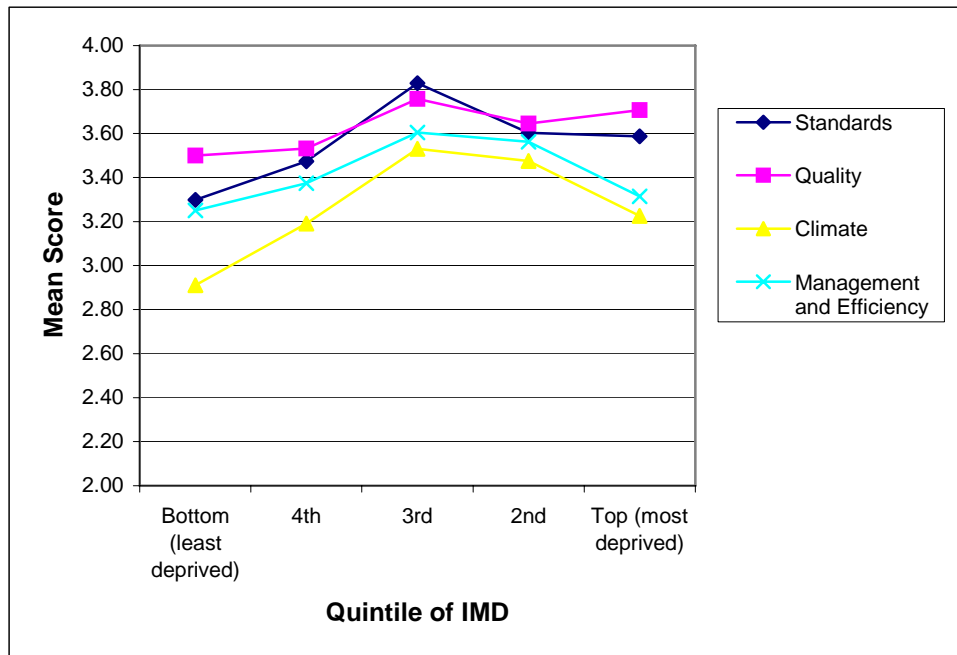
**Figure 2.4: Relationship Between JRS Scores and FSM**



Source: OFSTED JRS data. Note higher JRS scores denote worse performance.

this analysis, 45 had closed. 75 had been removed from special measures and 60 remained. These 60 represent 1.9% of all secondary schools in England.

**Figure 2.5: Relationship between JRS Scores and IMD**

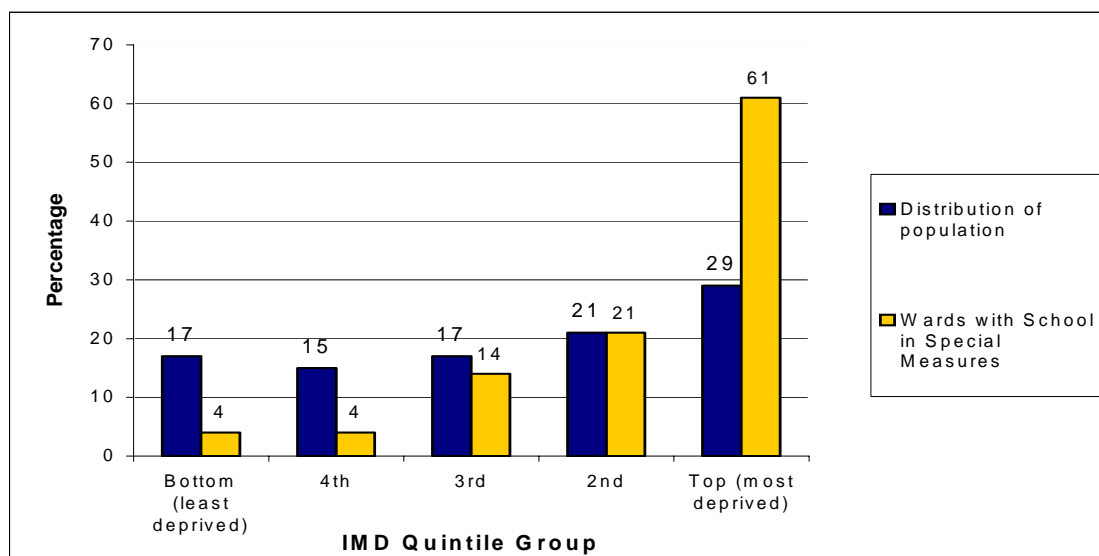


Source: OFSTED JRS data. Note higher JRS scores denote worse performance.

The absolute failure measure showed a similarly strong relationship between quality and area deprivation. 61% of the wards with a school in special measures were in the top 20% on the IMD (Figure 2.6). A further 35% were in quintiles two and three, with just 8% in relatively affluent areas. In part, this can be explained by the fact that schools are disproportionately located in urban wards, where there are more people, than in rural wards. Urban wards are more likely to be deprived.<sup>12</sup> However, comparison of the distribution of schools in special measures with the distribution of the population indicates that the key finding still holds. Correspondingly, FSM was much higher in the special measures schools than in all schools across the country (Figure 2.7).

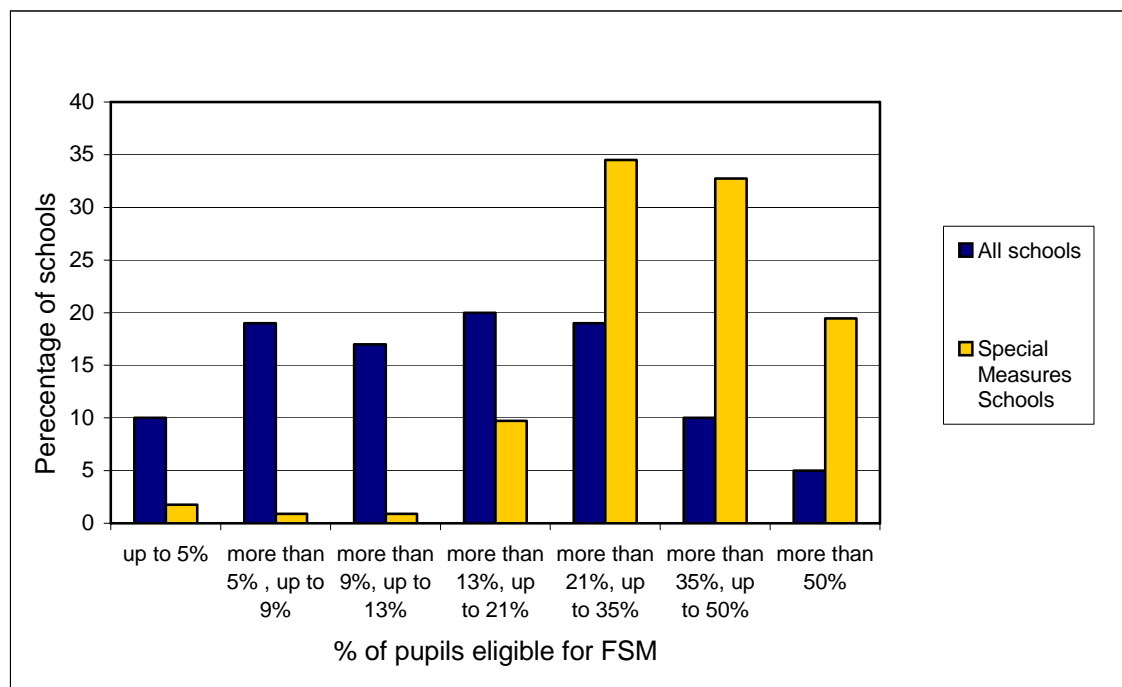
<sup>12</sup> 48% of English electoral wards are rural, but only 13% of the wards in the top 20% of the IMD are in rural areas (Tunstall and Lupton 2003).

**Figure 2.6: IMD Quintile Group of Wards with a School in Special Measures, compared with distribution of population.**



Sources: OFSTED, IMD 2000. Oxford University Population estimates for wards in England, Mid Year 1998.

**Figure 2.7: FSM for Schools in Special Measures**



Source: OFSTED.

OFSTED's analysis indicates that it is standards that vary most with FSM. In this sample, using either measure of deprivation (FSM or IMD), the aspect of school quality that was most strongly associated with deprivation was school climate and that which was least strongly associated with deprivation was the management and efficiency of the school (Table 2.3). This difference may arise because of OFSTED's wider sample or because of the weighting given to attainment in its analysis.

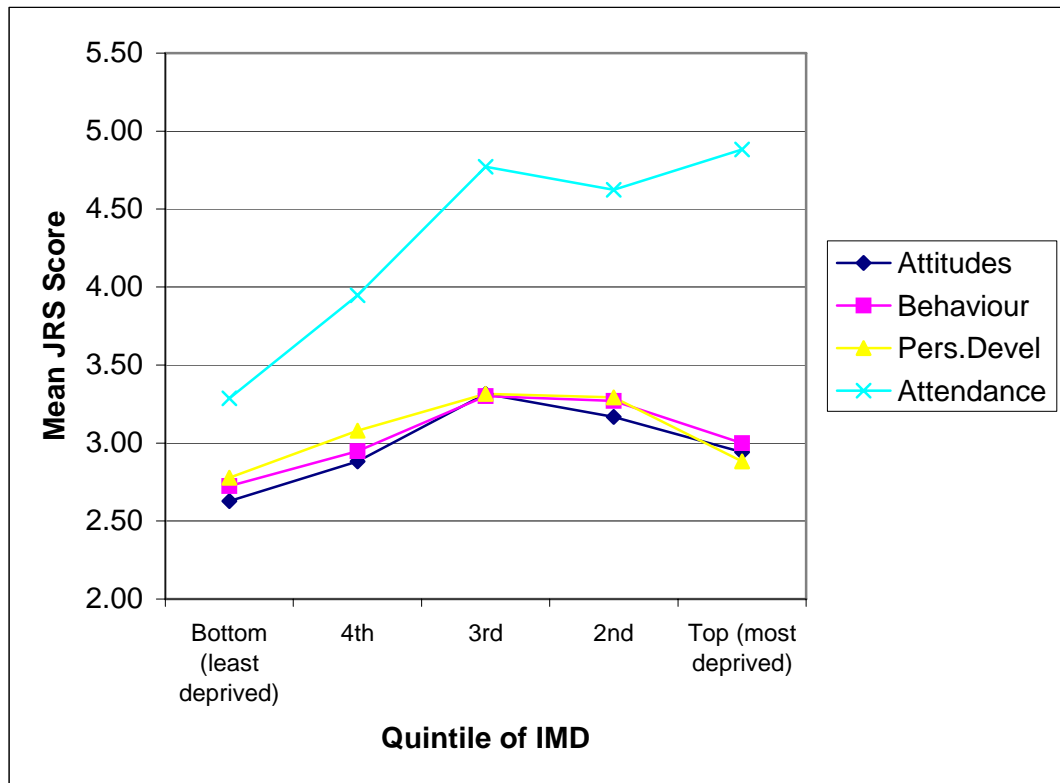
**Table 2.3: Correlations Between Deprivation and School Quality Measures**

|                 | <b>Standards</b> | <b>Quality of Education</b> | <b>Climate</b> | <b>Management and Efficiency</b> |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| FSM Eligibility | .357**           | .262**                      | .503**         | .226**                           |
| IMD Score       | .182**           | .124*                       | .229**         | .116*                            |

\*\* significant at the 0.01 level. \* significant at the 0.05 level  
Source: OFSTED JRS data.

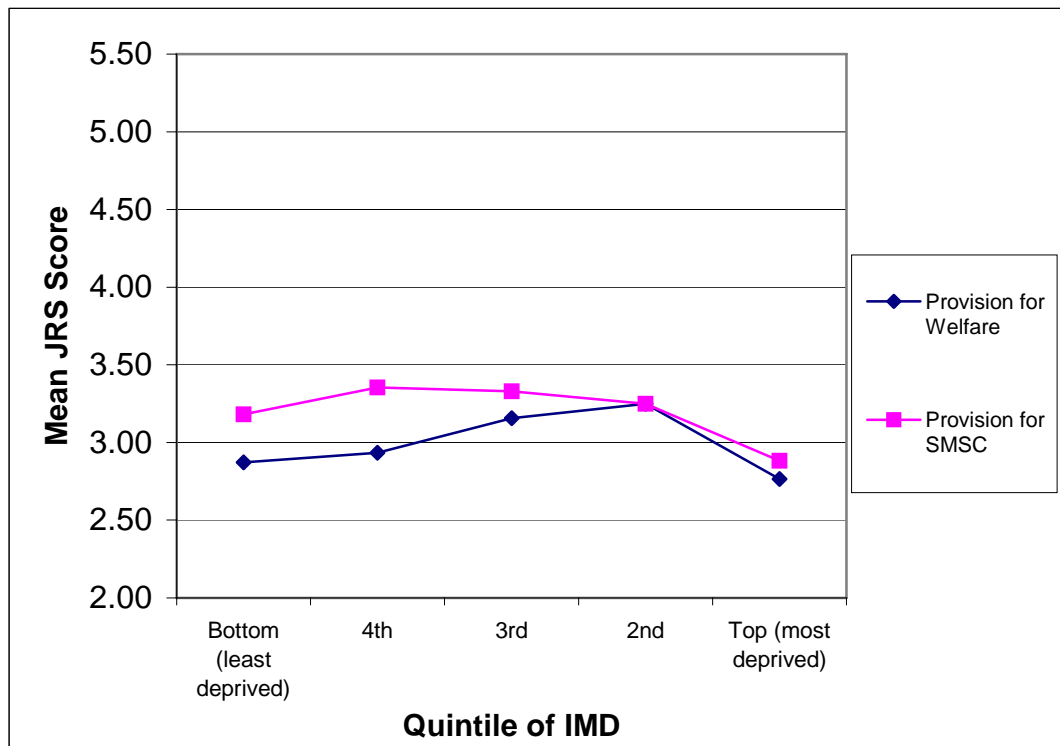
My analysis, looking more closely at the components of 'climate', shows that the aspect that was most closely associated with area deprivation was attendance. Attendance got significantly worse as area deprivation increased. The other aspects of climate all followed the general pattern of being worse in deprived than non-deprived areas, but peaking in areas of moderate deprivation, except that provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development got better as area deprivation increased (Figures 2.8 and 2.9).

**Figure 2.8 Area Deprivation and Aspects of School Climate (1)**



Source: OFSTED JRS data.

**Figure 2.9: Area Deprivation and Aspects of School Climate (2)**



Source: OFSTED JRS data



### *Type of Area and School Quality*

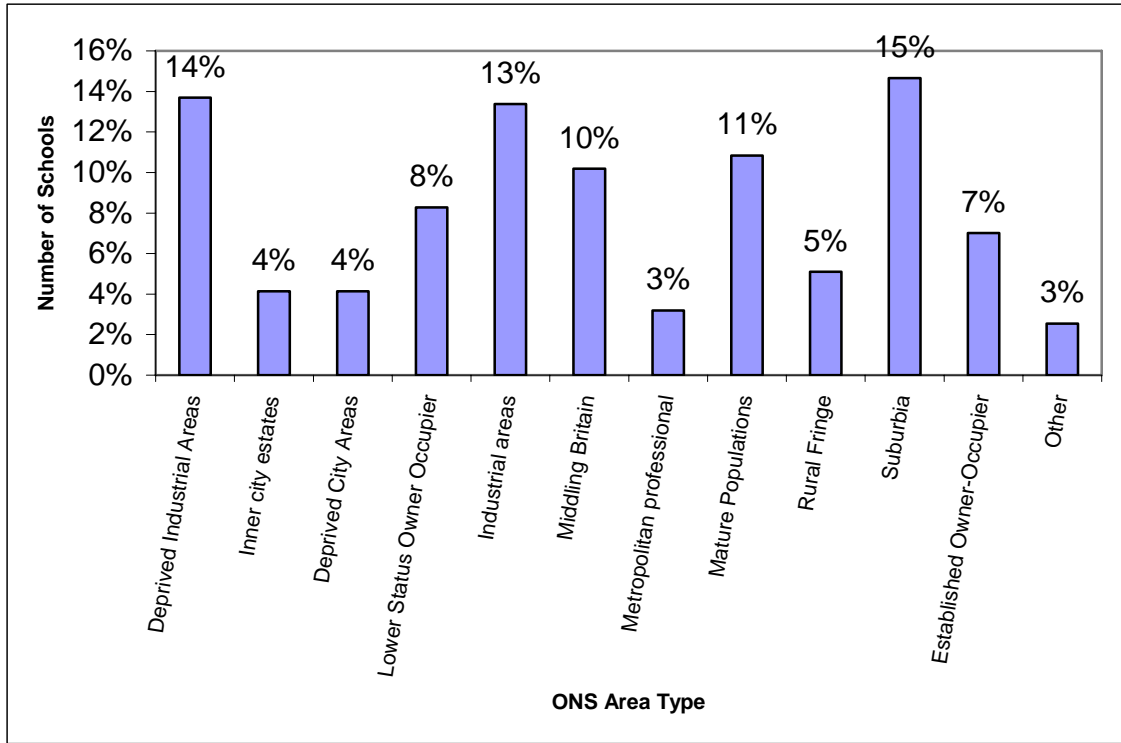
These findings confirmed the existence of a link between area deprivation and low school quality. The use of area data as well as FSM data enabled further analysis, looking at the influence of area characteristics as well as deprivation per se.

The schools in the JRS sample were scattered throughout the eleven LEAs and were therefore located in a range of different types of areas, as classified by the ONS. Overall, the greatest number of schools (46) was in suburbia with other major categories being deprived industrial (42) and industrial areas (42). It should be noted that the number of schools in some categories was small (Table 2.4).

Figure 2.10 shows the percentage of schools in each area type, excluding area types with fewer than ten schools. The more deprived area types are shown on the left of the graph: deprived industrial areas, inner city estates, deprived city areas, low status owner occupied areas and industrial areas, with Table 2.4 showing the relationship between area type and IMD ranking in this sample.

Most (65%) of the schools were in areas with less than 5% ethnic minority population (i.e. the national average or less), and 63% had 23% or less social housing (ie the national average or less).

**Figure 2.10: Distribution of Schools by Type of Area**



Source: ONS Classification of Local Authority Areas

**Table 2.4: Relationship Between Area Type and Deprivation (IMD)**

|                                    | n  | Percentage of Wards in Each Quintile of IMD |     |     |     |        |
|------------------------------------|----|---|-----|-----|-----|--------|
|                                    |    | Top quintile                                | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | Bottom |
| <b>Deprived Industrial Areas</b>   | 43 | 37%   | 58% | 5%  |     |        |
| <b>Inner city estates</b>          | 13 | 8%  | 54% | 38% |     |        |
| <b>Deprived City Areas</b>         | 13 |   | 85% | 15% |     |        |
| <b>Lower Status Owner Occupier</b> | 26 |   | 15% | 42% | 42% |        |
| <b>Industrial areas</b>            | 42 |   | 2%  | 90% | 7%  |        |
| <b>Middling Britain</b>            | 32 |   |     | 22% | 78% |        |
| <b>Metropolitan professional</b>   | 10 |   |     | 10% | 60% | 30%    |
| <b>Mature Populations</b>          | 34 |   |     | 12% | 38% | 50%    |
| <b>Rural Fringe</b>                | 16 |   |     |     | 44% | 56%    |
| <b>Suburbia</b>                    | 46 |   |     |     | 20% | 80%    |
| <b>Established Owner-Occupier</b>  | 22 |   |     |     | 9%  | 91%    |

NOTE:

Did not include categories with very few observations (Prosperous areas: n=7, Transient Populations:n=1)

The main finding that emerged from this analysis was that ethnic mix appeared to be important. Although wards with a school in special measures were more likely than others to have higher than average ethnic minority populations (41% did so compared with 23% of wards nationally), this was simply a reflection of the fact that ethnically mixed areas are over-represented among the poorest areas in the country (Lupton 2001). JRS analysis showed that the percentage of non-white residents was significantly, although not strongly, associated with better quality in deprived areas. JRS scores were slightly but not significantly better in ethnic minority areas regardless of deprivation. They were significantly better in the case of climate and standards once the effect of deprivation was controlled for (Table 2.5).

**Table 2.5: School Quality Measures and Ethnicity**  
(each column shows original correlation then result after controlling for IMD score)

| Area Ethnic Composition | Standards         | Quality of Education | Climate          | Management and Efficiency |
|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| % Asian residents       | -.142*<br>-.282** | -.024<br>-.115       | -.049<br>-.195** | -.088<br>-.182*           |
| % Black Residents       | -.003<br>-.144    | .054<br>-.024        | .080<br>-.078    | .042<br>-.031             |
| % Black and Asian       | -.107<br>-.271**  | -.002<br>-.095       | -.007<br>-.185** | -.051<br>-.150            |

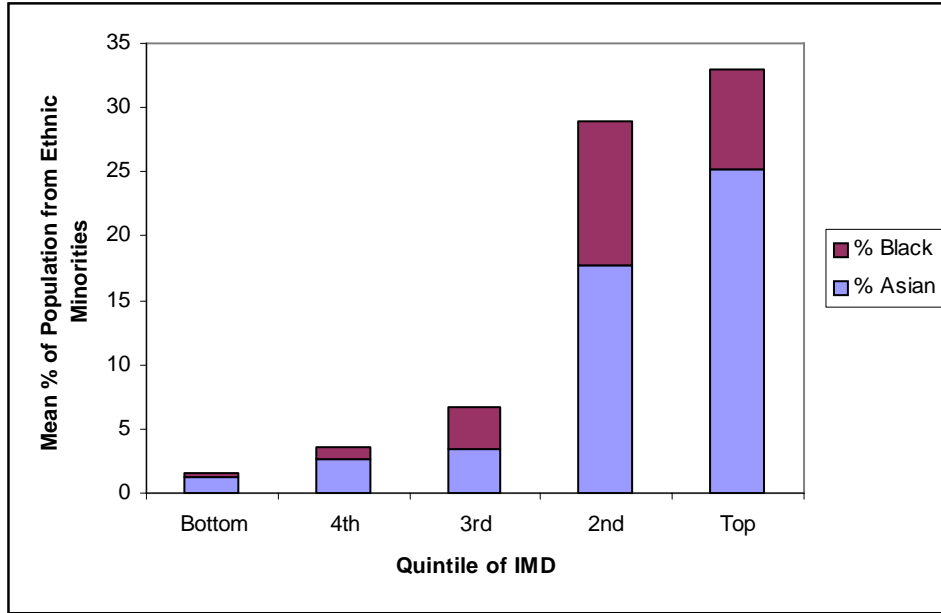
\*\* significant at the 0.01 level. \* significant at the 0.05 level  
Source: OFSTED JRS data,

As the table shows, this effect was associated with a high percentage of Asian rather than black residents. Thus schools in deprived areas with high proportions of Asian residents had more favourable climates and better pupil progress than schools in similarly deprived areas with low Asian populations. Closer analysis showed that proportion of Asian residents was significantly correlated with attendance (.327), attitudes (.249) and provision made for spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC)

development (.248), but not with other aspects of school climate. It was also correlated with management and efficiency and educational quality but not significantly; an interesting finding that suggests that within deprived areas, differences in ethnic mix may not make a big difference to teaching or to management despite their effects on aspects of climate.

This apparently beneficial effect of a high Asian population may in part explain the earlier finding that quality appears to be better in schools in the most deprived areas on the IMD than in slightly less deprived areas, because high ethnic minority populations and particularly high Asian populations are much more commonly found in the wards at the top end of the IMD. In this sample, wards for schools in the bottom three quintiles of the IMD (i.e. the less deprived areas) had ethnic minority populations close to the national average (about 5%), whereas in the top two quintiles, the non-white population was 29% and 33% respectively (Figure 2.11), with the Asian population being particularly high in the top quintile. There was a positive and significant correlation between FSM and % ethnic minority population (.465), while the relationship with the % Asian population was slightly weaker but still significant (.396).

**Figure 2.11: Mean Ethnic Minority Populations by Quintile of IMD**



Other area characteristics were also associated with quality. High JRS scores (indicating low quality), especially in relation to school climate, were positively and significantly correlated with high levels of work poverty and with high levels of social housing. However, these associations were shown not to be significant after controlling for IMD score. In the case of work poverty, they became weakly negative, suggesting that they reflected deprivation levels rather than any independent effects.

**Table 2.6: School Quality Measures and Area Characteristics**  
(each column shows original correlation then result after controlling for IMD score)

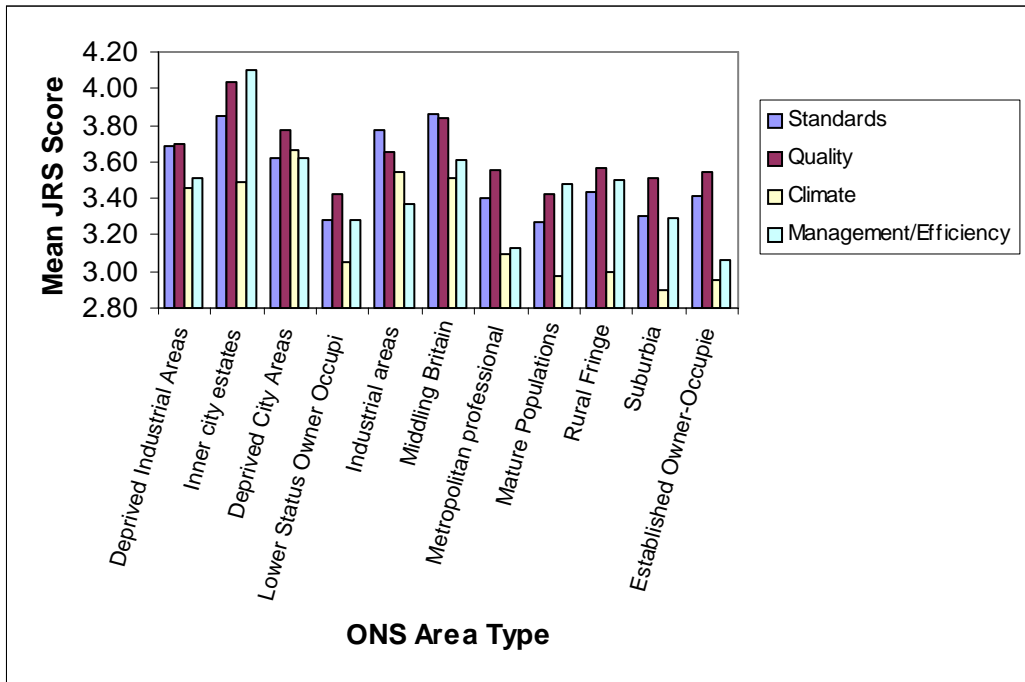
| Area Characteristic | Standards        | Quality of Education | Climate         | Management and Efficiency |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| Work Poverty Score  | .142*<br>-.097   | .112*<br>-.056       | .177**<br>-.102 | .084<br>-.095             |
| % Social Housing    | .249**<br>.197** | .154**<br>.092       | .241**<br>.138  | .157**<br>.122            |

\*\* significant at the 0.01 level. \* significant at the 0.05 level  
Source: OFSTED JRS data,

The broader indicator of 'area type', using the ONS classification, reinforced the deprivation/low quality link. Figure 2.12 shows mean JRS scores for each composite variable for different area types on the ONS classification. Figure 2.13 shows the distribution of schools in special measures by area type. Again, the more deprived area types are shown on the left of the graph. Both the graphs show lower quality (higher JRS scores) in more deprived area types. The graphs also suggest that there may be mileage in exploring differences between different types of deprived area, although they are by no means conclusive, and are based on small sample sizes. On the JRS graph, quality appears to be lowest in inner city estates particularly in relation to management and efficiency and the quality of education offered, and it is notable that quality appears to be higher in low status owner occupied areas than in other kinds of deprived area. On the special measures graph, there is a particular concentration of schools in special measures in industrial areas. Both graphs show worse quality in 'middling Britain' than would be expected given deprivation levels. 'Middling Britain' areas are typically outer areas of cities or small towns, mixed in tenure with an average or slightly above average proportion of social housing.

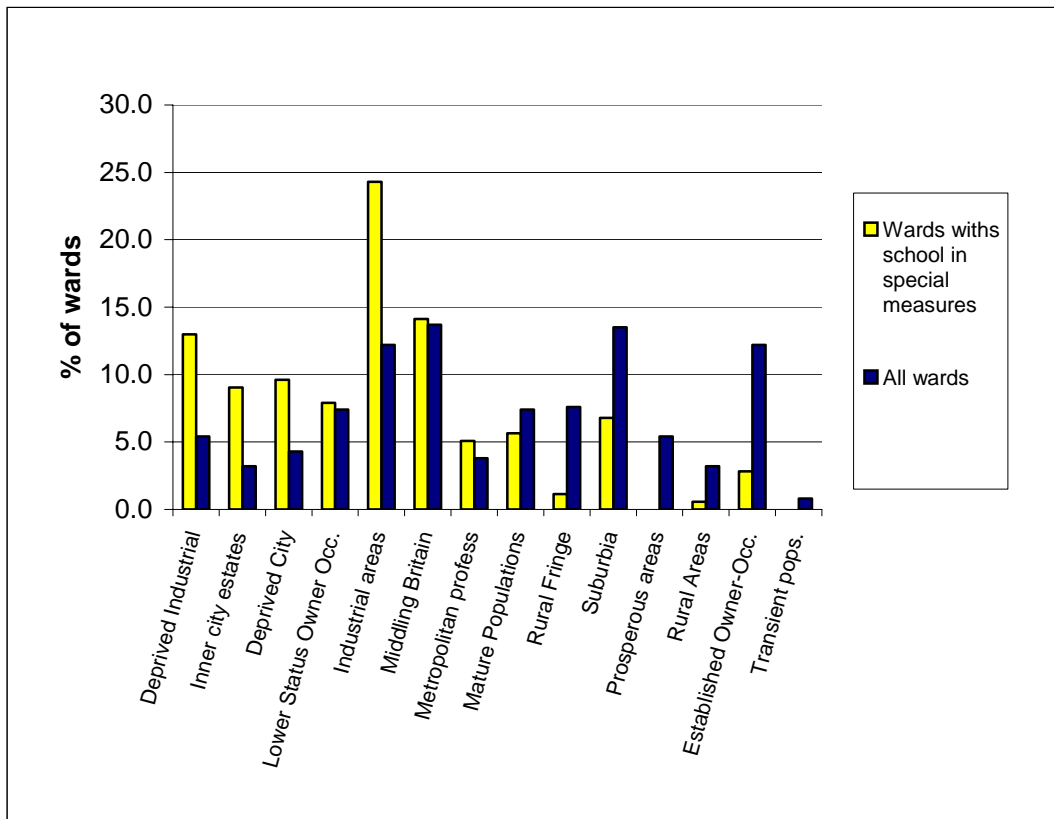
To some extent these findings reflect the association already highlighted between quality and ethnic mix. In this sample, the areas classified by ONS as industrial areas were predominantly white, compared with other deprived areas which had above average ethnic minority populations. Inner city estates had particularly high black populations (Table 2.7). Low status owner-occupier areas had high Asian populations.

**Figure 2.12: JRS Scores by ONS Area Type**



Sources: OFSTED JRS data, ONS Classification of Local Authority Areas.

**Figure 2.13 : Types of Area : Wards with a School in Special Measures**



Source: OFSTED, ONS Classification of Local Authority Areas.

**Table 2.7: Non-White Populations in Different ONS Area Types**

| <b>ONS area type</b>        | <b>Mean % Asian Residents in Wards of Each Type</b> | <b>Mean % Black Residents in Wards of Each Type</b> |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Deprived Industrial Areas   | 20.4  | 6.3   |
| Inner City Estates          | 6.4   | 13.3  |
| Deprived City Areas         | 11.4  | 17.9  |
| Lower Status Owner Occupier | 13.5  | 4.6   |
| Industrial Areas            | 1.8   | 1.7   |
| Middling Britain            | 0.8   | 0.7   |
| Established Owner-Occupier  | 1.3   | 0.3   |
| Metropolitan Professional   | 7.5   | 2.7   |
| Mature Populations          | 1.6   | 0.5   |
| Suburbia                    | 1.7   | 0.5   |
| Rural Fringe                | 1.4   | 0.1   |

However, ethnicity did not seem to offer a consistent explanation. Deprived industrial areas, for example, tended to have high Asian populations but scored relatively badly on quality measures. This suggests that all we can draw from these ‘area type’ findings is that quality varies from one area type to another, in ways which are not wholly explained by the variables examined here, which are themselves more comprehensive than those typically used. This highlights the need for measures that can capture more fully the complexities of area context.

### ***School Type and School Quality***

A third consideration was the importance of school type. In its analysis, OFSTED found that school type was associated with differences in school quality, with grammar schools performing much better than comprehensives, which were in turn much better than secondary moderns. Differences in management and efficiency were less pronounced than those in other aspects of schooling (Table 2.8).



**Table 2.8: OFSTED Analysis of School Type and Quality. Percentage of Schools where Some or Substantial Improvement is Needed, by Type of School**

|                  | Standards | Quality of Education | Climate | Management and Efficiency |
|------------------|-----------|----------------------|---------|---------------------------|
| All Schools      | 46        | 37                   | 20      | 27                        |
| Grammar          | 2         | 7                    | 1       | 13                        |
| Secondary Modern | 70        | 49                   | 28      | 34                        |

Source: National Summary Data Report for Secondary Schools 2001 Data (OFSTED 2001)

My analysis showed the same pattern (Table 2.9). It also showed that school quality was consistently higher in single sex schools than in mixed schools. Girls' schools were better (i.e had lower JRS scores) on all measures than boys' schools. There were also significant negative correlations between the number of pupils on roll and all of the composite school quality variables, indicating that smaller schools were, in general, better schools (Table 2.10)

**Table 2.9: Mean JRS Scores for Different Types of Schools**

|                  | Standards | Quality of Education | Climate | Management and Efficiency |
|------------------|-----------|----------------------|---------|---------------------------|
| Comprehensive    | 3.61      | 3.65                 | 3.33    | 3.47                      |
| Grammar          | 2.65      | 3.08                 | 2.17    | 2.97                      |
| Secondary Modern | 3.78      | 3.74                 | 3.47    | 3.37                      |
| Boys             | 3.31      | 3.40                 | 2.89    | 3.48                      |
| Girls            | 2.83      | 3.18                 | 2.45    | 2.78                      |
| Mixed            | 3.67      | 3.70                 | 3.40    | 3.52                      |

Source: OFSTED JRS data.

**Table 2.10: Correlations Between School Quality Measures and Size of School**

|                           | Standards | Quality of Education | Climate | Management and Efficiency |
|---------------------------|-----------|----------------------|---------|---------------------------|
| No. on Roll (All schools) | -.122*    | -.226**              | -.229** | -.209**                   |

\*\* significant at the 0.01 level. \* significant at the 0.05 level

Source: OFSTED JRS data.

Similar relationships were observed in the special measures data. Schools in special measures were over twice as likely to be secondary modern schools as would be expected. No selective grammar schools have been placed in special measures (Table 2.11).<sup>13</sup> They were also twice as likely to be boys' schools. No girls' schools have been in special measures. Even for mixed schools, the data suggested a possible association between gender mix and school failure. In nineteen of the one hundred and fifty-seven mixed schools in special measures, inspection reports made particular mention of the intake being skewed towards boys. There were no cases where the inspection report indicated that the intake was skewed towards girls.

**Table 2.11 Schools in Special Measures, by School Type**

|                               | <b>Schools in Special Measures (%)</b> | <b>All Schools in England (%)</b> |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Intake:                       |  |                                   |
| Comprehensive                 | 88                                     | 90                                |
| Secondary Modern              | 12                                     | 5                                 |
| Grammar                       | 0                                      | 5                                 |
| Gender:                       |  |                                   |
| Mixed                         | 89                                     | 89                                |
| Boys                          | 11                                     | 5                                 |
| Girls                         | 0                                      | 6                                 |
| Type :                        |  |                                   |
| Community                     | 77                                     | 67                                |
| Foundation/GM                 | 11                                     | 14                                |
| Voluntary Aided or Controlled | 12                                     | 19                                |

Sources: OFSTED , Statistics of Education : Schools in England 2000.

Some of these variables were inter-related, such that there was a possibility that apparent gender and size effects could actually be explained simply by the

<sup>13</sup> Based on analysis of 177 schools : the 180 schools in special measures with the exception of three schools which are 'Fresh Start' schools from other schools which were themselves in special measures. As none of these schools had changed in type during their Fresh Start, I have treated them for this purpose as the same school as their predecessor, and not included them.

differences between selective and non-selective schools. In the JRS sample, grammar schools were smaller than comprehensive schools (mean 848 pupils compared with 953), and 87% of grammar schools were single sex schools. However, when selective schools were removed from the sample, the relationships between other school type variables and quality remained, and were in fact slightly more marked than in the sample as a whole. Girls' schools continued to outperform boys' and mixed schools and the difference in climate between girls' schools and others was more pronounced when only comprehensive schools were included. Boys' comprehensives performed worse on standards and on management and efficiency than mixed comprehensives (Table 2.12). The relationship with school size was slightly stronger than for all schools (Table 2.13).

**Table 2.12: Mean JRS Scores by Gender (Comprehensives Only)**

|       | Standards | Quality of Education | Climate | Management and Efficiency |
|-------|-----------|----------------------|---------|---------------------------|
| Boys  | 3.78      | 3.56                 | 3.33    | 3.78                      |
| Girls | 2.95      | 3.18                 | 2.70    | 2.78                      |
| Mixed | 3.67      | 3.71                 | 3.40    | 3.53                      |

Source: OFSTED JRS data.

**Table 2.13: Correlations Between School Quality Measures and Size of School**

|                | Standards | Quality of Education | Climate | Management and Efficiency |
|----------------|-----------|----------------------|---------|---------------------------|
| All Schools    | -.122*    | -.226**              | -.229** | -.209**                   |
| Comprehensives | -.148*    | -.272**              | -.276** | -.211**                   |

\*\* significant at the 0.01 level. \* significant at the 0.05 level

Source: OFSTED JRS data.

Importantly, the overall relationship between area deprivation and school quality persisted even when only comprehensive schools were included, although it was, as would be expected, slightly weaker (Table 2.14).

**Table 2.14: Correlations Between IMD Score, FSM and School Quality Measures**

|                      | <b>Standards</b> | <b>Quality of Education</b> | <b>Climate</b> | <b>Management and Efficiency</b> |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| All Schools (FSM)    | .357**           | .262**                      | .503**         | .226**                           |
| Comprehensives (FSM) | .271**           | .181**                      | .443**         | .190**                           |
| All Schools (IMD)    | .182**           | .124*                       | .229**         | .116*                            |
| Comprehensives (IMD) | .177*            | .123                        | .218*          | .086                             |

\*\* significant at the 0.01 level. \* significant at the 0.05 level

Source: OFSTED JRS data..

### *School Markets, Area Deprivation and School Quality*

In order to understand the influence of school markets on the relationships between area deprivation and school quality, I adopted a case study approach, since there is no data set containing indicators of market type. I looked at three LEA case studies, with different educational markets and different levels and patterns of deprivation. These were LEAs C, H and J.

LEA C was a small metropolitan borough in the North-West. Its population was almost exclusively white and predominantly working class. Most of the borough was deprived and this was reflected in the schools, all of which had FSM eligibility higher than 35%. The school in the most deprived ward had approximately the same FSM as the school in least deprived ward. The education market was small, with just eleven schools, and with a relatively flat hierarchy. There were no independent schools, no selective schools and no single sex schools. Three of the schools had sixth forms and four were Roman Catholic schools. Because of the large proportion of Roman Catholic families in the area and the traditional preference of many for a religious education, it was not uncommon for pupils in this Borough to travel to a

Catholic school further from their home than the local secular school, but in other respects, this was not a highly differentiated or competitive market. Attainment was generally low. No school attained more than 41% 5 A\*-C passes in 2000, with the lowest attaining school reaching 14%.

LEA H was a large and ethnically diverse Midlands city, with an inner ring of very deprived areas with majority Asian and black populations and an outer ring of white-occupied Council estates, as well as a number of affluent outer suburbs. The education market was large, diverse and differentiated. It included 90 schools, including 14 independent schools, both large established independents with strong national reputations, and small religious schools. Five of the remaining schools were not inspected in the period of analysis. The remaining 71 maintained schools offered a varied selection. Six were grammar schools, thirteen voluntary aided denominational schools, twelve grant maintained and two established by special agreement. There were seven boys schools and thirteen girls schools. Just over half the schools had sixth forms. GCSE attainment at 5 A\*-C ranged from 11% to 100% in 2000. The result of this great variety of schools (combined with good transport provision) was that it was not uncommon for pupils to travel out-of-area to school. In particular, there was evidence of inner city families sending their children to outlying areas to school. On the other hand, the inner city also had a number of long established and very successful voluntary aided and grammar schools which drew from throughout the city and in no way reflected the composition of the areas in which they were situated.

Finally, LEA J covered a large Northern city, with great socio-economic contrast. Its boundary included a deprived inner city area with a substantial minority Asian population, outer city council estates with predominantly white populations, and a number of outlying suburbs and small towns with considerably more advantaged populations. The educational market reflected this diversity. There were 49 schools in the city, of which 6 were independent. Four of the remainder were not included in this sample because they had not been recently inspected. All of the remaining 39 schools were comprehensive and all had sixth forms. All but two were mixed, with one boys' school and one girls', which was situated in a deprived area but drew pupils from throughout the city. Eight of the schools were church schools. This was, therefore, a relatively flat hierarchy of state maintained schools in terms of the type of school. However, there were considerable differences between schools in terms of their attainment (which varied from 6% 5 A\*-C in 2000 to 69%) and their intakes, which reflected the social division in the city. The most advantaged school had just 3.5% of pupils eligible for FSM, compared with 64% at the least advantaged.

Relationships between area deprivation and school quality in these LEAs reflected their socio-economic composition and the extent of differentiation in the school market. In LEA C, the correlation between area deprivation and school quality was negative, although the number of observations was small and the findings were not significant (Table 2.15). The school with the lowest JRS scores (ie highest quality) was in an area more deprived than the school with the highest, which was the only school to have been placed in special measures.

**Table 2.15: Correlations Between IMD and School Quality Measures- Case Study LEAS**

| LEA<br>N= number of<br>schools | Standards | Quality of<br>Education | Climate | Management<br>and Efficiency |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|---------|------------------------------|
| C (n=11)                       | -.307     | -.314                   | -.308   | -.589                        |
| H (n=71)                       | .206      | .236*                   | .216    | .200                         |
| J (n=39)                       | .505**    | .307                    | .546**  | .430**                       |

\*\* significant at the 0.01 level. \* significant at the 0.05 level. Source: OFSTED JRS data.

LEA H showed a positive but not significant correlation between area deprivation and school quality. However, closer analysis revealed that this was partly because of the effect of select voluntary-aided schools in the inner city. All relationships were stronger (and those between quality of education, climate and IMD score were significant) when only county schools were considered (Table 2.16). Moreover, the overall picture was confounded by the fact that there were two distinct kinds of deprived area in this LEA – predominantly white and predominantly non-white. As in the sample generally, there was a positive association between a high ethnic minority population in this LEA and school quality.

**Table 2.16: Correlations Between IMD and School Quality Measures- LEA H**

| LEA            | Standards | Quality of<br>Education | Climate | Management<br>and Efficiency |
|----------------|-----------|-------------------------|---------|------------------------------|
| Overall        | .206      | .236*                   | .216    | .200                         |
| County schools | .296      | .400**                  | .304*   | .222                         |

\*\* significant at the 0.01 level. \* significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: OFSTED JRS data.

In LEA J, there was a strong correlation between school quality and area deprivation. The ten schools in the most deprived areas had higher mean JRS scores than the remaining schools on every school quality variable, with the only anomalous cases being schools situated in advantaged areas but drawing pupils from more deprived

ones. Four schools (all in deprived areas) had been placed in special measures, and two of these had subsequently closed.

Clearly, these case studies do not offer conclusive findings, but do suggest that the relationship between school quality and area deprivation is related to the wider context of schooling in the LEA as a whole: levels of socio-economic and ethnic concentration and levels of differentiation between schools. Highly differentiated areas and markets seem to be associated with strong relationships between deprivation and school quality, with the poorer schools serving the poorer areas. A more uniform pattern of deprivation and school provision seems to be associated with a more even distribution of school quality and less variation according to deprivation in the area. The relationships appear to be complicated and particular to each LEA, supporting Gibson and Asthana's assertion that aggregate analyses across LEAs can be misleading because they obscure the significant explanatory power of local geographies and educational markets (Gibson and Asthana 1999).

### **Summary and Discussion**

This chapter confirms OFSTED's findings that there is a link between area deprivation and school quality as assessed by the inspection process. Failing schools are disproportionately located in the poorest areas. JRS analysis shows that all aspects of schooling tend to get worse with deprivation. 'Climate' is most strongly affected, and within that, attendance. Other aspects of climate such as attitudes, behaviour and personal development are worst in moderately deprived areas, and provision for pupil welfare actually improves with increasing deprivation.



However, this analysis also demonstrates that the relationship is not a straightforward one. Schools in very highly deprived areas and with the highest levels of FSM actually do better on quality measures than moderately deprived schools. Area characteristics other than deprivation seem to be important, particularly ethnic mix. School type matters, with grammar schools, girls' schools and smaller schools all doing better than others, and so does the wider context of schooling in the LEA. Highly differentiated areas and markets show a strong relationship between quality and deprivation whereas quality is more even in less differentiated areas and markets.

These findings could be tested in further statistical analyses using large datasets and multivariate analysis. Specifically the relative importance of deprivation, school type and market factors could be usefully investigated. However, there is also a need for better knowledge of how 'context' differs from one deprived area to another; why area 'type' or ethnicity should make a difference to what schools do; and how local educational markets contribute to or alleviate quality problems associated with deprivation. These issues are hard to explore quantitatively. The remainder of the thesis, therefore, is based on four qualitative case studies, of schools in LEAs A, H, I and K in this analysis. Chapter 3 begins by introducing the schools and exploring their contexts in more detail.

## Chapter 3: The Case Study Schools and Their Contexts

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### **The National Context**

The fieldwork for this study took place between 1999 and 2003, a decade since the Education Acts of 1988 and 1993 had instituted the national curriculum and created what has become known as the quasi-market in schooling, with self-managed schools competing for pupils under a system of parental choice and assessed by publicly available indicators in the form of GCSE results and OFSTED reports. In combination, these reforms significantly changed the context for schooling, combining increased centralisation with greater local flexibility. While they increased the standardisation of curriculum and pedagogic approaches and enhanced the focus on GCSE results, particularly at higher grades, they also devolved greater responsibility to headteachers and governors, and strengthened the importance of market imperatives in determining school strategy (Gewirtz 1997, Ozga 2000, Simkins 2000). On the one hand, there were more opportunities for schools to differentiate themselves from others in order to win pupils and funding and to develop distinctive educational offerings. On the other, the criteria on which schools were judged were more tightly specified, and the consequences of failure could be more serious, since enhanced choice and differentiation could lead to increasing segregation of pupils by ability or social class, leaving unpopular schools with unbalanced intakes, falling rolls and declining funding. In many large cities, declining populations exacerbated the impact of the market, with a situation of far

fewer pupils than places leaving the least popular schools vulnerable to rapid decline.<sup>1</sup>

During the fieldwork period, the 1998 and 2002 Education Acts came into operation. Pressures on academic attainment increased, with targets being set for every school, and the lowest attaining schools coming under specific threat of closure by the Secretary of State. Pressures on quality also increased, with the tightening of the OFSTED inspection system to give intense attention to poorly performing schools, and the introduction of the Fresh Start initiative. There was greater centralisation in some respects, with the launch of national strategies and teaching methods for literacy and numeracy, but at the same time more flexibility for schools to develop different curricular options in vocational subjects, and encouragement to differentiate themselves as specialist schools. Funding was increased, not only through core LEA and school funding but through a plethora of new funding streams including EiC, EAZs, Standards Fund, New Opportunities Fund and Pupil Learning Credits. New Labour's drive to improve educational standards left schools better resourced but having to accommodate many new initiatives, monitoring and paperwork. Away from the immediate legislative arena, the teaching profession was facing a national recruitment and retention crisis, resulting in the introduction of new training options and salary incentives, and workforce reforms including performance related pay and proposed reorganisation to take some of the administrative pressures away from teachers and get more support staff into classrooms.

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<sup>1</sup> The impact of 'market reforms' on schools is disputed (Gibson and Asthana 1999, Noden 2000, Gorard et.al 2002). My purpose here is not to engage in this debate but simply to note the policy context in which the schools were operating.

This, then, was the national context in which the schools were operating. The focus of this study, however, is their local area, market and institutional contexts. This chapter introduces the local contexts of the case study schools.

### **Establishing the Local Contexts of the Schools**

To investigate the contexts of the schools, I employed three methods. First, I conducted structured interviews, lasting about 45 minutes, with each headteacher and a representative from each LEA. The headteacher interviews were carried out face to face<sup>2</sup>. They covered issues relating to the history of the school, the effective 'catchment area', the other schools in the area and the system for allocating places, and the nature of the intake. The interview schedule is attached as Annex 1. LEA interviews (Annex 2) were conducted either on the telephone or in person.<sup>3</sup> They covered the local school market and admissions system and the patterns of pupil movement, as well as specific questions about the case study school, its popularity, and factors affecting its intake.

Second, I collected secondary data. A major source was each school's DfEE School Census return (Form 7), which I obtained for 2000/01 and the preceding five years, and from which the following data was extracted:

- Number of pupils on roll.

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<sup>2</sup> In one case (West-City HSG) the headteacher delegated the interview to a deputy head.

<sup>3</sup> LEA representatives were initially identified via a letter to the Director of Education requesting co-operation with the research and the name of a nominated liaison officer. In some cases this officer had the knowledge to act as the LEA representative. In other cases, s(he) referred me to colleagues in charge of admissions.

- Number of new admissions of basic entry age.
- Number eligible for FSM.
- Number of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL).
- Ethnic breakdown of pupils.
- Number of permanent exclusions.
- Number of pupils with statement of Special Educational Need (SEN).
- Number of pupils with SEN but without statement.

I also collected each LEA's school organisation plan<sup>4</sup> and the secondary schools admission booklet. Two LEAs were also able to supply an analysis of parental choices of schools. Attainment data at GCSE was collected from the DfEE website ([www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk)) and the most recent OFSTED report from the OFSTED website ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). To familiarise myself with each school, I also collected its prospectus and development plan.

Third, I used data at enumeration district (ED) level, to establish the socio-economic geography of each school's catchment area. I used deprivation data from the 1998 Index of Local Deprivation, since the more up-to-date IMD 2000 uses wards as the smallest unit of analysis, a level too crude for inner city areas, where wards can contain up to about 30,000 people.<sup>5</sup> I also used demographic and socio-economic data from the 1991 Census.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Not supplied by the LEA for School 3.

<sup>5</sup> The disadvantage of using this index is that it is based primarily on 1991 Census data, whereas the 2000 Index uses more up-to-date administrative data.

<sup>6</sup> Anecdotal data and mid-year estimates suggest that significant changes have taken place since 1991. The area around Southside Grange School has experienced population loss, Middle Row and West-City have had population increase and a growth in the ethnic minority population, and the area around The Farcliffe School has had a large increase in the number of refugee and asylum seeking families. These changes cannot be quantified until the 2001 Census results are known in mid 2003.

A critical issue was to decide what area was relevant to consider for each school. Neighbourhood studies show that area effects occur at different levels. Factors such as housing, safety and amenities, peer group or cultural factors, can vary very locally, by street or estate (Galster 2001). Taylor et al. (1996) refer to a local 'structure of feeling', shaped by history, topography, labour market opportunities and patterns of industrial organisation, which might be city- or region-wide. However, researchers are only just beginning to develop methods to reflect these multiple layers in the drawing of area boundaries. In current practice, the areas considered in neighbourhood studies or research into area effects tend to have much more crudely drawn boundaries, usually coinciding with administrative areas for data purposes (Lupton 2003a).

One approach that has been used in school-based studies has been to consider the relevant area as the catchment area defined by the LEA or school. However, since the introduction of open enrolment in 1988, formal catchment areas are no longer employed. Some LEAs have geographical admissions zones, so that pupils are automatically considered as first preference applicants at their local schools, and many schools include proximity to the school as an admissions criterion if they are oversubscribed, but neither schools nor LEAs can define a certain area from which pupils must come, to the exclusion of other applications. Neatly defined catchment areas are not, therefore, readily available in many cases.

For these reasons, I decided to define a notional catchment area based on the opinions of headteachers and LEA representatives as to the relevant area for the school, and based on the postcodes of its pupils. All the schools were able to provide

pupil postcode data by year group and, in one case, by FSM availability and Key Stage 2 SAT scores.<sup>7</sup> There were, inevitably, some pupils in each school whose postcode was not recorded but the vast majority were included (Table 3.1). I then plotted the postcodes using Arcview GIS.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 3.1: Proportion of Pupils Captured by Postcode Data**

| <b>School</b>                  | <b>Date of Capture</b> | <b>Pupils on Roll at that Date</b> | <b>Number of Pupils with Postcode</b> | <b>% of Pupils with Postcode</b> | <b>Number on Roll Jan 2001</b> |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Southside Grange School</b> | October 2000           | 674                                | 652                                   | 97                               | 670                            |
| <b>Middle Row HS</b>           | November 2000          | 838                                | 825                                   | 98                               | 843                            |
| <b>West-City HSG</b>           | January 2001           | 886                                | 855                                   | 96                               | 892                            |
| <b>The Farcliffe School</b>    | May 2001               | 597                                | 593                                   | 99                               | 626                            |

The postcode plots revealed that, in each case, while there was a small minority of pupils who travelled a considerable distance, it was always possible to draw an outer boundary within travelling distance of the school within which most pupils resided, and which corresponded broadly to what the headteachers considered as their catchment areas. These were what I defined as the ‘local areas’ for the purposes of considering local context. They varied in size, as Table 3.2 demonstrates, because of a combination of factors which are discussed later in this chapter, including the type of school, its position in the local market and the nature of the area.

<sup>7</sup> These were drawn from the pupil record system, a system that is constantly updated. The numbers of pupils in this analysis therefore relates to the date of my initial fieldwork, and does not correspond exactly to official pupil numbers as collated by the DfES in January of each year. Much of my other analysis of the school’s data relates to the January 2001 intake.

<sup>8</sup> To plot the postcodes, I first cleaned the raw data to remove duplicate entries or those that had errors in spacing or case, and replaced pupil names with reference numbers for confidentiality. I then used the PC2ED facility in the Central Postcode Directory to allocate each pupil to an ED. The method of allocating pupils to EDs ensured that exact addresses were obscured in mapping and also enabled me to calculate proportions of pupils in EDs with different socio-economic characteristics.

**Table 3.2: Size of Notional Catchment Areas**

|                                | <b>Approximate Size in Miles</b> | <b>Estimated Population in Electoral Wards within Area</b> | <b>Percentage of Pupils Living in Area</b> |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Southside Grange School</b> | 1.5                              | 35,700   | 97   |
| <b>Middle Row HS</b>           | 1.5                              | 94,200   | 93   |
| <b>West-City HSG</b>           | 2.5                              | 234,650  | 96   |
| <b>The Farcliffe School</b>    | 3.5                              | 126,900  | 99   |

Sources: Postcode Analysis of School Data, Oxford University population estimates for wards in England, mid 1998 (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/neighbourhood>)

Having established these areas, I was able to profile them by analysing and mapping the ILD and Census data at ED level. This process revealed that each catchment area actually divided into smaller localities that were distinct in their socio-economic make-up, and I was able to calculate how many pupils came from each of these localities, as well as reporting on the characteristics of the catchment area as a whole.

The combination of the interviews, secondary data, and mapping provided a detailed picture of the contexts of the schools, which I checked with them and with LEA representatives before producing them in the form that follows here. The remainder of the chapter describes the context of each of the schools in turn, concluding with a summary section.

### **Southside Grange School**

Southside Grange School was a small (670 pupil), co-educational, 11-16 community comprehensive school, serving an area known as Southside, in the largely rural



Borough of Riverdale in the North East of England.<sup>9</sup> Its effective catchment area, incorporating 97% of the school's pupils,<sup>10</sup> was defined by Southside's urban boundaries, extending no more than a mile and a half from the school in any direction. Southside Grange was very much a local school (Map 3.1).

It was also a disadvantaged school. Most of Southside was a white working class area<sup>11</sup>. Literally overlooked by a giant steelworks and chemical plant, it had been in steady and serious decline since the 1970s when jobs had started to be lost on a large scale and population had begun to ebb away. This decline had been felt most keenly in two neighbourhoods in the north of the area, known as Borough View and Furnace Walk. These neighbourhoods, closest to the industrial works, had traditionally housed their least well-off workers. By the end of the 1990s, they had become extremely deprived, ranking in the top 100 wards in England on the IMD 2000, out of a total of more than 8,000. In 1998, 62% of children in Furnace Walk and 52% in Borough View lived in families claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) or Income Support (IS). In addition to unemployment, low income and social problems, there had been an eruption of serious crime problems in the early 1990s, triggering housing abandonment, vandalism to empty properties, and environmental decline. To stem the crisis, funding had been secured from the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and by 2000, the worst affected areas had seen substantial demolition of vacant homes. Remaining properties had been improved. CCTV had been installed and there were extra police patrols. There were new community and leisure facilities and initiatives to help people into training and work. These measures had

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<sup>9</sup> LEA 'T' in the analysis in Chapter 2.

<sup>10</sup> Own analysis of pupil postcodes as at October 2000.

<sup>11</sup> There was a small South Asian community in one part of Borough View and about fifty recently-arrived asylum seekers of varying nationalities.

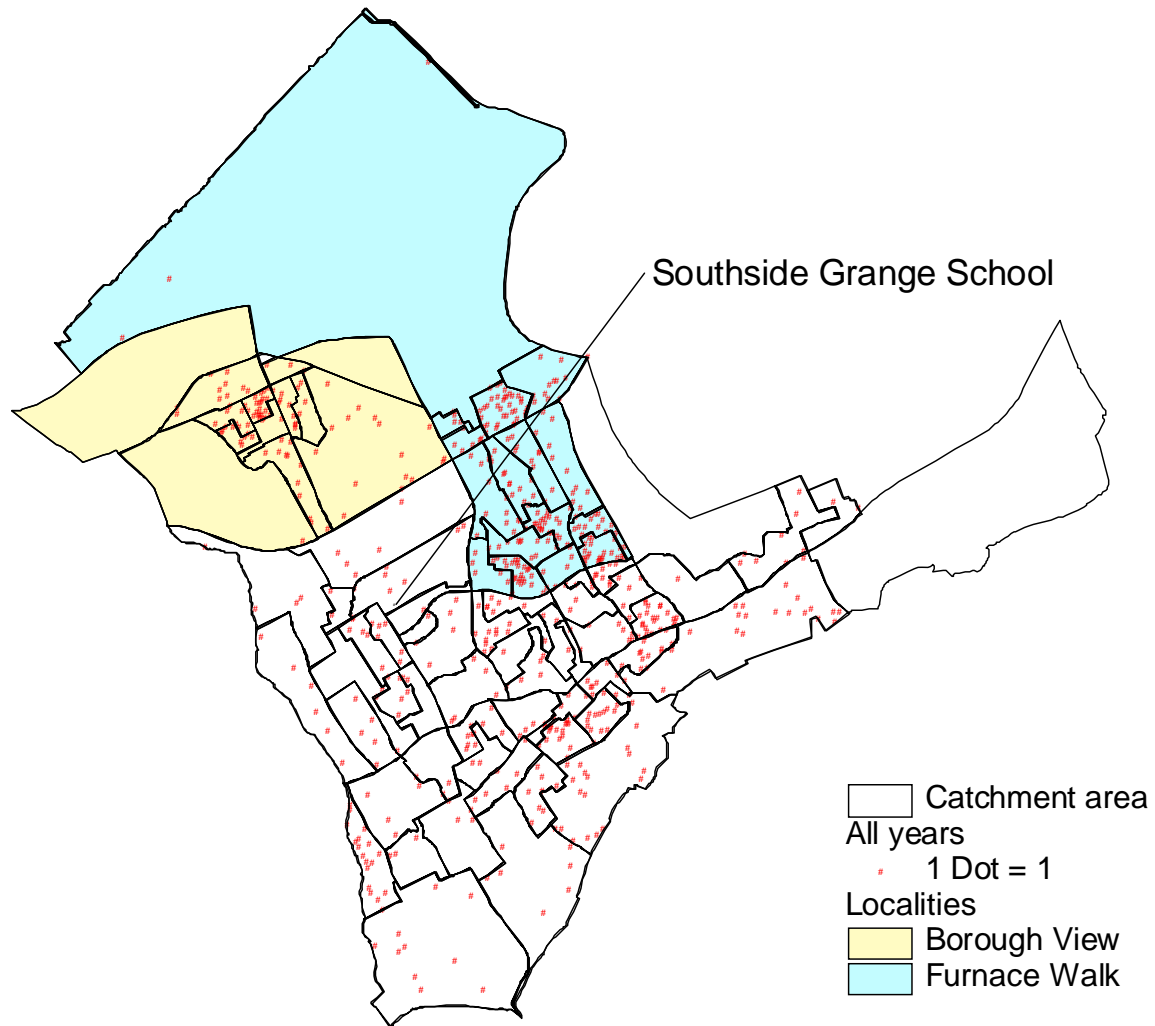
significantly improved the appearance and amenities of the area. However, some pockets were still blighted by empty property, troubled by anti-social behaviour, and retained high levels of social problems. The areas had stabilised rather than recovered. Underlying problems of housing demand and economic restructuring were forcing professionals and residents to question the area's long-term viability.

These difficulties did not extend to the rest of the catchment area, which could be divided into four other localities (Map 3.2), with lower but varying levels of deprivation. Newtown and Lowhills were in the top fifth of the IMD, Beckfields approximately 3500<sup>th</sup>, and Hastings in the bottom half of the index. Proportions of children in benefit households ranged between about one fifth and one third in these neighbourhoods, compared with over half in Furnace Walk and Borough View, such that in Southside as a whole, the figure was approximately 40%. Table 3.3 shows the differences in socio-economic composition between the localities. Map 3.3, showing the 1998 Index of Local Deprivation at enumeration district level<sup>12</sup> clearly demonstrates the clustering of deprivation in the north of the area.

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<sup>12</sup> The IMD 2000 is not available at ED level, so the ILD 1998 is used to indicate sub-ward differences.

**Map 3.1: Residence of Pupils at Southside Grange School**



**Table 3.3: Characteristics of Localities in Southside**

|                  | <b>% Owner Occupation</b> | <b>% Social Housing</b> | <b>% Private Renting</b> | <b>% Ethnic minority residents</b> |
|------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Furnace Walk     | 29                        | 68                      | 3                        | 0                                  |
| Borough View     | 36                        | 56                      | 7                        | 5                                  |
| Newtown          | 65                        | 31                      | 3                        | 0                                  |
| Lowhills         | 55                        | 42                      | 3                        | 0                                  |
| Beckfields       | 79                        | 19                      | 1                        | 0                                  |
| Hastings         | 90                        | 8                       | 1                        | 0                                  |
| <b>Southside</b> | <b>56</b>                 | <b>40</b>               | <b>3</b>                 | <b>0</b>                           |

Source: 1991 Census.

The socio-economic makeup of the area overall meant that Southside Grange School could be expected to have a higher than average level of deprivation in its intake, but that the composition of the school would very much depend on which neighbourhoods its pupils came from. An intake skewed towards Borough View and Furnace Walk would result in very high levels of social need, whereas an intake skewed towards Hastings and Beckfields would result in deprivation levels only a little above the national average. A critical issue, therefore, was the nature of the local education market, and the extent to which it distributed pupils evenly between schools.

In general terms, the education market in the LEA, Riverdale, favoured an even distribution of pupils between schools. There were no independent schools, and all of the Borough's thirteen secondaries were co-educational 11-16 comprehensives. Its largely rural nature determined that most pupils attended their local school and this was reinforced by an LEA policy of geographical admission zones, whereby all parents were initially offered a place close to where they lived. Most accepted. Of about 10,000 pupils at secondary school in Riverdale, less than 300 (3%) attended a

school outside their admission zone, and less than one per cent went to out-of-Borough schools.

In the Southside area, however, the local competitive arena was more sharply contested. It was a concentrated market, with only five schools, including Southside Grange, in or close to the catchment area (Table 3.4 and Map 3.2). One (School A), was immediately next door. One (School B) was a Roman Catholic school, and there were also two more popular and successful comprehensives in the south of the area (Schools C and D). Critically, Southside Grange and School A shared an admission zone. While both were affected by a small net loss of pupils to the other schools outside the zone<sup>13</sup>, it was the distribution of the Southside pupils between them that made the biggest difference to their intakes.

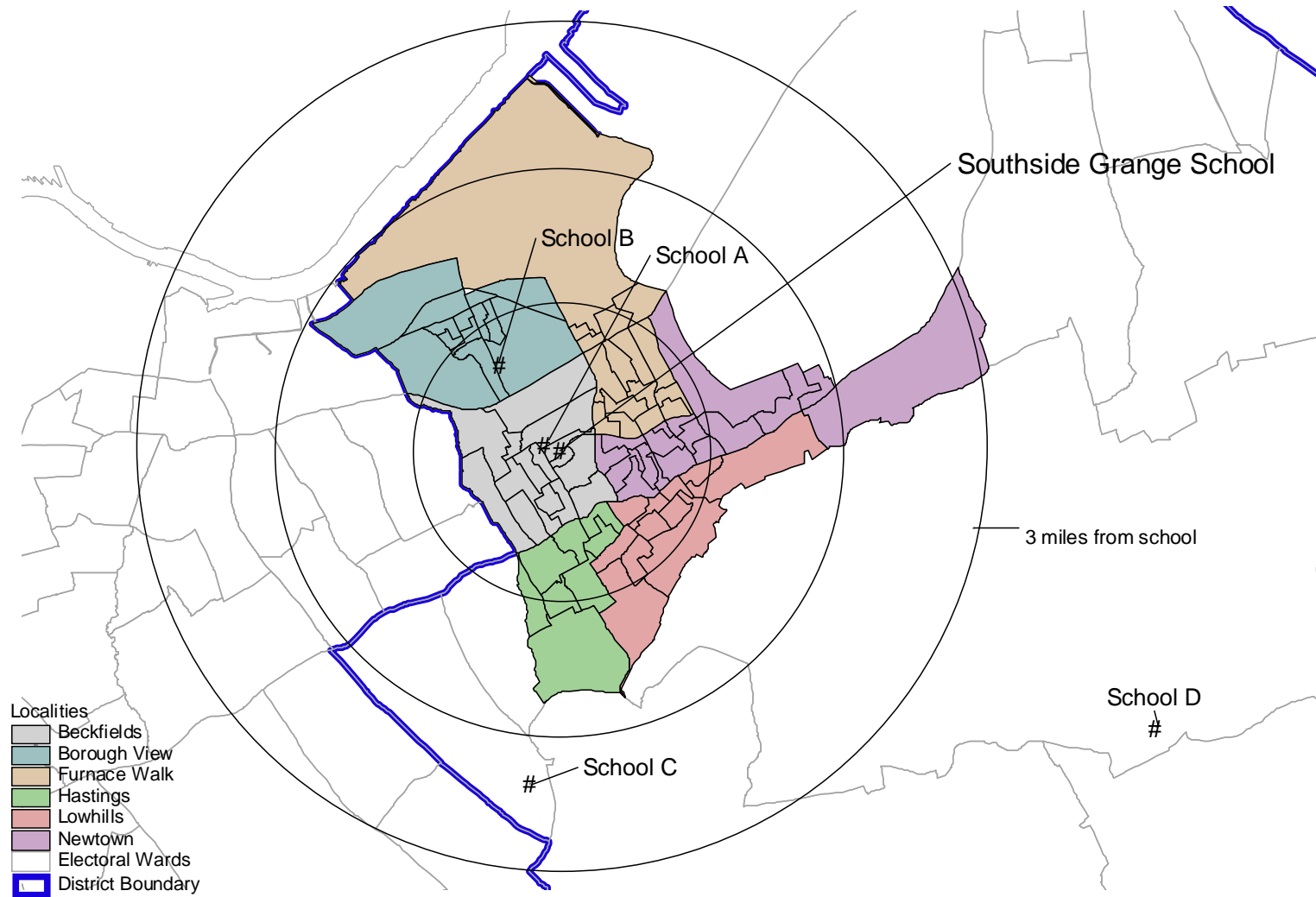
**Table 3.4: Other Secondary Schools close to Southside Grange**

| School | Approximate distance from Southside Grange (miles) | Type* | Status | Age   | Sex | Other      | GCSE pass rate (5 A*-C) 2001 |
|--------|--|-------|--------|-------|-----|------------|------------------------------|
| A      | 0  | C     | Comp   | 11-16 | M   | Technology | 30                           |
| B      | 0.5  | V     | Comp   | 11-16 | M   |            | 22                           |
| C      | 2.5  | C     | Comp   | 11-16 | M   |            | 74                           |
| D      | 4  | C     | Comp   | 11-16 | M   |            | 62                           |

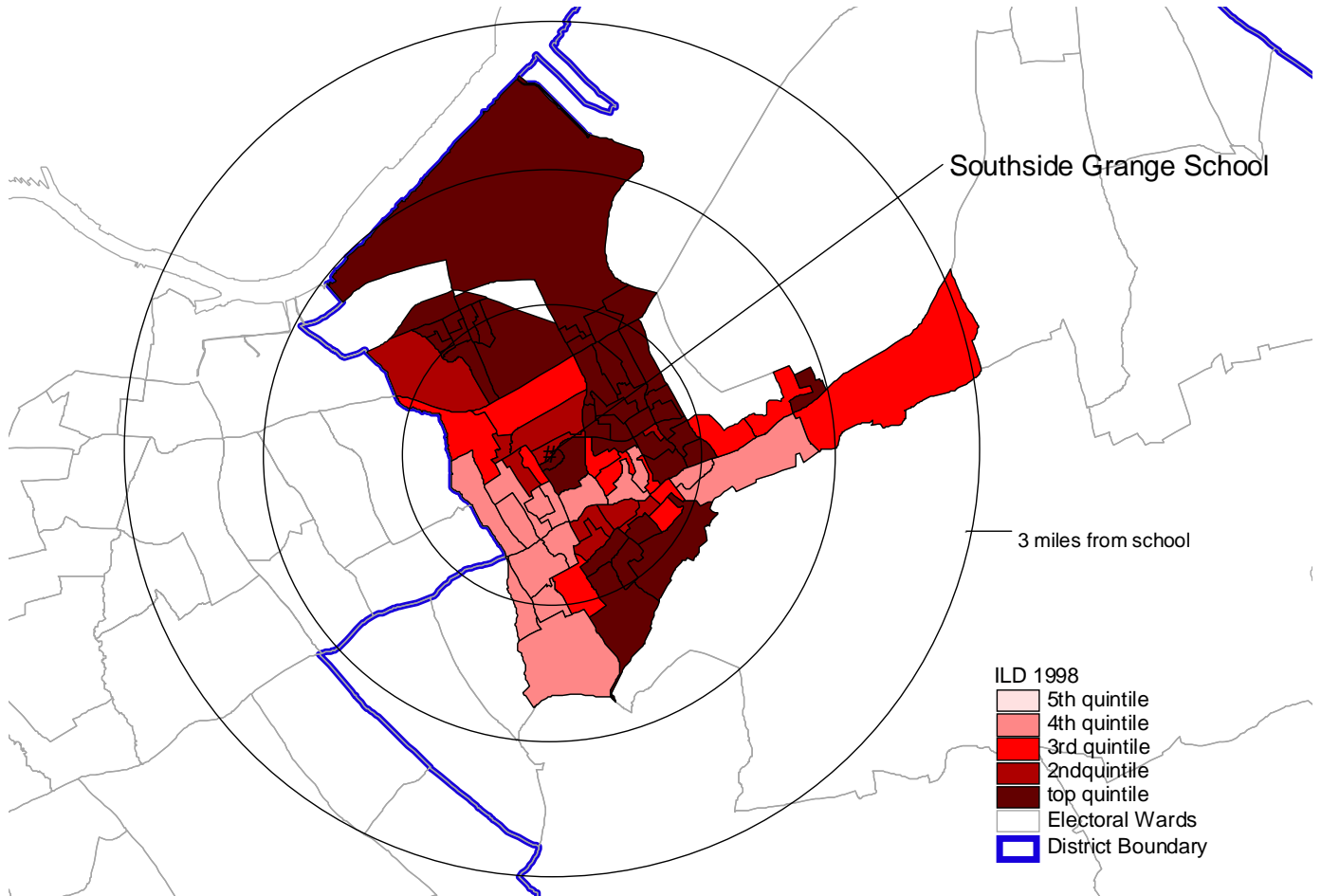
\* C= Community, V=Voluntary, F=Foundation  
Source: Riverdale LEA

<sup>13</sup> Analysis of data for the last four years showed that hardly any pupils (4 in the year 2000) from outside Southside expressed a preference for a school in the zone, while about 50 Southside pupils each year expressed a preference for schools elsewhere, most commonly for School D. School C, though nearer, gained about 70 pupils a year from the neighbouring Borough, making it more difficult for pupils in the Southside area to gain a place there.

**Map 3.2 : Localities and Schools in the Southside Grange Catchment Area**



**Map 3.3 : Index of Local Deprivation for Southside Grange School Catchment Area**



The characteristics and reputations of these two schools meant that, historically, pupils were not evenly distributed between them. Both were established in 1992, when the LEA moved from a selective to a comprehensive system. At the time, there were three schools adjacent to each other: a grammar, a secondary modern, and a special school. School A took over the grammar school's buildings and staff, and retained its status locally. Southside Grange was created from the amalgamation of the other two schools, giving it a difficult start both in terms of its external reputation and its internal organisation. It inherited the secondary modern's poor reputation, an under-occupied split site and a divided staff, and was deeply unpopular. In the words of its headteacher, it "*started life as a sink school*". First preference applications for an intake of 160 numbered approximately 30.

While better-resourced parents exercised their choice of school elsewhere, Southside Grange's intake became skewed towards the most deprived neighbourhoods (about sixty per cent of its pupils), and it found itself dealing with high levels of social and educational need. In the mid-1990s, nearly 60% of pupils were eligible for FSM. Approximately 60 pupils had SEN statements. Behavioural problems were extreme, such that the head described the school as doing "*education by containment*", with a "*we can't do that*" attitude for fear of uncontrollable behaviour. Sports events, productions and school trips were minimal. Even toilets were locked because of persistent vandalism. GCSE results were extremely low on all measures (Table 3.5).



**Table 3.5: GCSE Attainment at Southside Grange School 1994-2001**

|  | 1994       | 1995       | 1996       | 1997       | 1998       | 1999       | 2000       | 2001       |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| % passing 1 or more GCSEs at grades A*-G<br><i>(England average)</i> | 75<br>(92) | 69<br>(92) | 76<br>(92) | 63<br>(92) | 74<br>(92) | 74<br>(94) | 83<br>(94) | 86<br>(94) |
| % passing 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-G<br><i>(England average)</i> | 49<br>(86) | 55<br>(86) | 54<br>(86) | 46<br>(86) | 39<br>(83) | 57<br>(88) | 78<br>(89) | 72<br>(89) |
| % passing 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C<br><i>(England average)</i> | 10<br>(43) | 13<br>(44) | 18<br>(45) | 10<br>(45) | 15<br>(46) | 13<br>(48) | 19<br>(49) | 12<br>(50) |

This was not, however, the situation at the time of my study. In 1995/6, the school began to turn a corner. Following lengthy negotiations with the LEA, it finally retrenched onto a single, smaller site, in return for investment in the remaining buildings. At the same time, a new head, Mr Matthews, was appointed. Under his direction, staffing was rationalised, with specialist teachers being appointed in all subjects. A new pastoral system was introduced. Discipline and attendance systems were reinforced, and a new uniform code gradually brought in. Monitoring of pupil progress was improved, with a greater focus on academic attainment. Streaming was introduced and the range of extra-curricular activities was significantly expanded. Buildings were gradually improved, providing upgraded science labs, a well-equipped technology area, a modern library and two computer suites. All classrooms were fitted with carpets and most with curtains. A site manager was appointed, ensuring prompt maintenance and damage repairs, and staff and pupils provided good displays of work in corridors and reception areas.

These improvements were noted by OFSTED when it inspected the school in 1998. Inspectors reported that it was “*an improving school which has made considerable*

*progress...the headteacher, in conjunction with the governors and staff, has provided strong leadership, raised the confidence of the staff and strengthened links between the school and wider community".* JRS showed acceptable performance in all areas of the school's work, except that attendance was poor, while behaviour and attitudes were judged to be good. Academic attainment had begun to improve at the lower levels, although remaining very low by national standards, while at the higher level it continued to be low and fluctuating, apparently reflecting year-on-year differences in prior attainment, rather than varying interventions by the school.<sup>14</sup>

Gradually, the school's improvements had an effect on its reputation locally and its standing vis-à-vis School A. They were also accompanied by a concerted and proactive marketing strategy to boost the school's image and intake. This strategy is discussed in Chapter 6. Suffice to say at this point that it was successful, and gradually began to alter the balance of pupils in the school, reducing the number from Borough View and Furnace Walk and increasing the numbers from the more advantaged areas.<sup>15</sup> In 2000, the proportion from the poorer neighbourhoods had reduced to 47% and was falling, with significantly lower proportions in lower years (Table 3.6). According to the headteacher, approximately 35% of the Year 2000 intake was from two primary schools in Hastings (the most advantaged locality) neither of which had supplied any children four years previously. A further 20% were from schools in Lowhills and Newtown that also used to provide very few

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<sup>14</sup> The significant drop in results in 2001, for example, can be ascribed almost entirely to prior attainment differences. LEA data shows that the pass rate at 5 A\*-C in 2001 was less than half a percentage point below what would have been expected given the prior attainment of pupils in that year.

<sup>15</sup> Some of this decline is likely to be accounted for by a fall in the populations of Borough View and Furnace Walk, but this cannot be quantified until 2001 Census data is available.

children. FSM eligibility accordingly fell. In 2000/01, 37% of pupils were eligible for Free School Meals, compared with 59% in 1996/7<sup>16</sup>.

**Table 3.6: Percentage of School Population by Locality and Year Group**

| %                                      | Year 11   | Year 10   | Year 9    | Year 8    | Year 7    |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Intake Year                            | 1996      | 1997      | 1998      | 1999      | 2000      |
| Furnace Walk                           | 36        | 38        | 30        | 31        | 27        |
| Borough View                           | 21        | 13        | 15        | 13        | 10        |
| Newtown                                | 15        | 12        | 16        | 15        | 11        |
| Lowhills                               | 20        | 17        | 20        | 18        | 19        |
| Beckfields                             | 4         | 7         | 11        | 10        | 17        |
| Hastings                               | 1         | 9         | 6         | 12        | 13        |
| Outside Southside                      | 5         | 4         | 2         | 1         | 3         |
| <b>% Furnace Walk and Borough View</b> | <b>57</b> | <b>51</b> | <b>45</b> | <b>44</b> | <b>37</b> |

Source: Southside Grange School

Note: This data is based on the population of these year groups in 2000, and therefore reflects any changes since the intake year.

The change in intake led to a significant rise in levels of prior attainment because, as Table 3.7 shows, pupils from the more advantaged areas consistently entered the school at a more advanced level.<sup>17</sup> The 2000 cohort had attainment levels close to the national average (Table 3.8), compared with 1997 cohort<sup>18</sup>, which had relatively very low prior attainment.

<sup>16</sup> A small part of this change is accounted for by a fall in the number of people on low incomes locally. In 2000 the number of IS/JSA claimants in Riverdale was 84% of its 1996 level.

<sup>17</sup> Some of the improvement in prior attainment levels is also accounted for by an increase in performance in SATs in local primary schools, greater than the national or borough averages. On average the nine schools in the area showed an improvement of 31 percentage points between 1996 and 2000 in English and 35 percentage points in mathematics, compared with increases of 21 and 20 respectively in Riverdale, and 19 and 19 in England. Improvements were greater in the schools in the more disadvantaged parts of the area.

<sup>18</sup> First year that national comparisons are available.

**Table 3.7: Key Stage 2 Attainment (1996-2000) by Locality of Residence,**

| <b>% attaining Level 4 or Higher</b> | <b>English</b> | <b>Maths</b> | <b>Science</b> |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| Furnace Walk                         | 42             | 38           | 47             |
| Borough View                         | 29             | 32           | 39             |
| Newtown                              | 45             | 43           | 60             |
| Lowhills                             | 54             | 46           | 65             |
| Beckfields                           | 57             | 57           | 74             |
| Hastings                             | 76             | 78           | 90             |
| Outside Southside                    | 33             | 31           | 46             |

Source: Southside Grange School

**Table 3.8: Key Stage 2 Attainment : National Comparison**  
(% achieving Level 4 or above, as % of those with test score results)

| <b>Year Group at Southside Grange (in 2000/01 year)</b> | <b>Year 10</b> | <b>National Average</b> | <b>Year 7</b> | <b>National Average</b> |
|---|----------------|-------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Intake Year</b>                                      | <b>1997</b>    |                         | <b>2000</b>   |                         |
| English   | 38             | 56                      | 64            | 70                      |
| Maths   | 35             | 53                      | 66            | 68                      |
| Science   | 50             | 61                      | 80            | 78                      |

Sources: Southside Grange School, DfES School Performance Tables 1996 and 1999

In combination, changes in intake and internal school improvement measures made for a very different institutional climate in 2001 than in 1995/6. Absence had reduced from 22.8% to 12.1% of pupil half-days, compared with 9% nationally. Behaviour had improved and fixed term exclusions were now confined almost entirely to Years 10 and 11. Big increases in GCSE attainment were predicted from 2002 onwards, and particularly from 2004 onwards, when the big gains in prior attainment from 1999 onwards would be reflected.<sup>19</sup> For 2004, the school had a target of 37%-40% A\*-C passes, more than twice its level at the time of the study. The school had become relatively popular. By 2001/02 there were more first preference applications than places. It was fully staffed, with unqualified teachers making up just 6% of the teaching staff. Its budget generally was '*nicely in surplus*'

<sup>19</sup> In 2002, after the fieldwork was completed, the school achieved 34% A\*-C passes.

(Headteacher), and most departments were adequately resourced. Additional finances had been secured from EiC and the local SRB. The budget surplus allowed for forward planning, in the short term for increased spending on books, and in the longer term for additions to the support staff.

Undoubtedly there were still considerable challenges. FSM eligibility (37%) was twice the national average. 24% of pupils had special educational needs, including 6% who had a statement, a high proportion relative to other Riverdale schools and to typical levels (about 1-2%). There were more boys (53%) than girls (47%). The roll was still falling due to falling population in the area even though the school's popularity was rising, and it was substantially lower than the official 840-pupil capacity.

**Table 3.9: School Population 1995/6 – 2000/01, Southside Grange School**

|                               | 1995/6 | 1996/7 | 1997/8 | 1998/9 | 1999/00 | 2000/01 |
|-------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| Number on Register in January | 816    | 766    | 729    | 699    | 679     | 670     |

Source: DfEE Form 7, Southside Grange School

However, there was no doubt that the school had entered a virtuous circle of improvement rather than the vicious circle of decline in which it had appeared trapped just six years previously. As one member of staff described it:

*“In this school at the moment we’re reaping the benefits of being on an upswing rather than a downswing.”* (Class Teacher 5, Southside Grange School)

## **Middle Row High School**

Middle Row High was an average sized (843 pupils), co-educational, 11-16 community comprehensive school and a specialist Sports College.<sup>20</sup>

It was an inner city school, located about three miles from the centre of a large Midlands city<sup>21</sup> and on the boundary of three electoral wards, which were together regarded by the head as the effective 'catchment area' for the school. All of this catchment area was contained within 1.5 miles of the school and most of it within one mile (Map 3.4). Approximately 93% of the school's pupils came from this area.

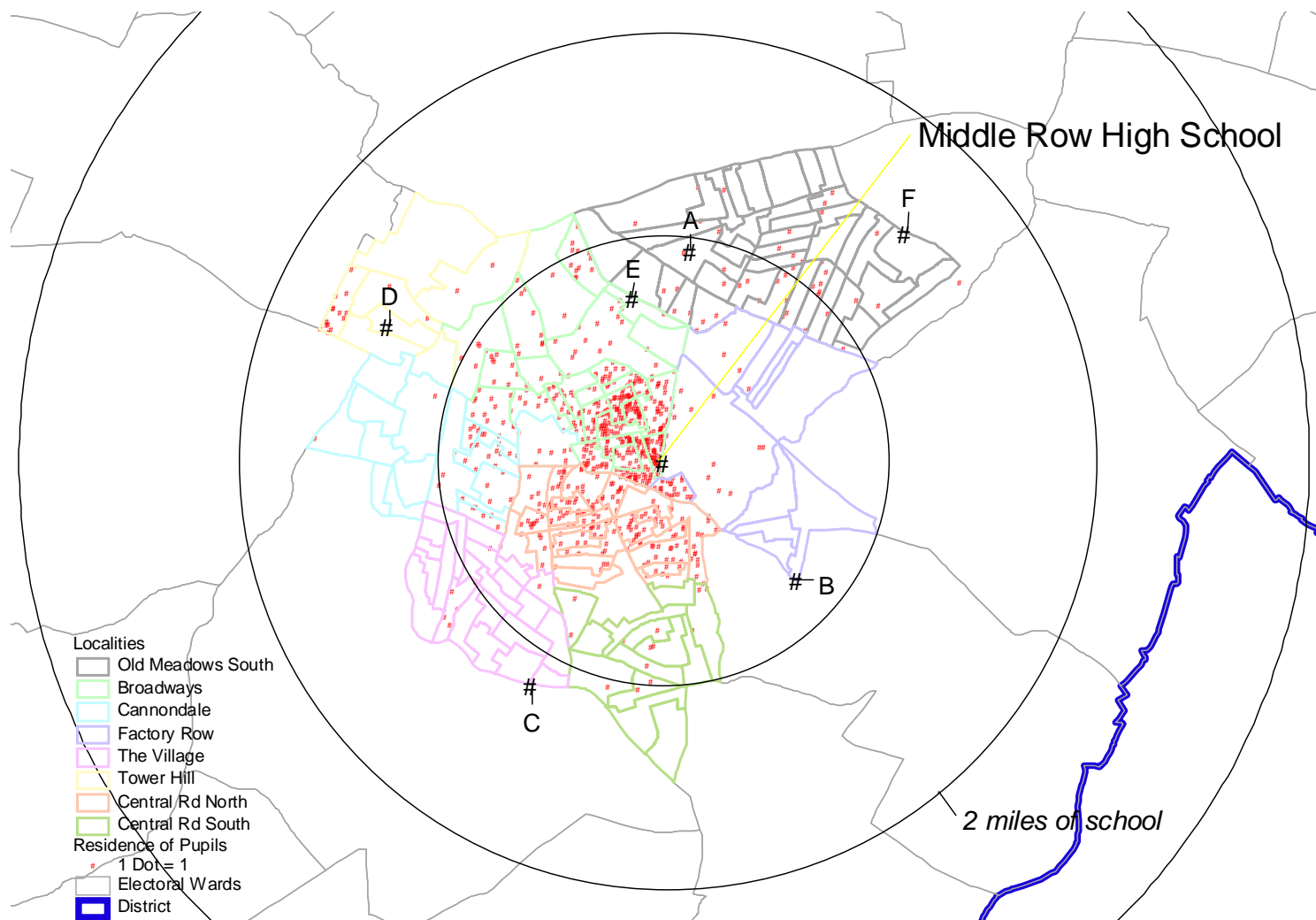
Unlike Southside, Middle Row had not always been a high poverty area. Its Victorian properties and streets of terraced cottages had once been owned, respectively, by the city's leading merchant and professional families, and by artisans. However, after the Second World War, when the middle classes moved out to the suburbs, the area's social status dropped and it became home to Irish, and later Caribbean, immigrants who could not gain access to social housing, and who rented homes in overcrowded multi-occupied properties. These communities were gradually replaced by Indian immigrants, then Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. By the time of the study, Middle Row had become the main home of the city's Pakistani community.

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<sup>20</sup> With effect from September 2001.

<sup>21</sup> LEA 'H' in the analysis in Chapter 2.

**Map 3.4 : Residence of Pupils at Middle Row High School, showing localities and schools**



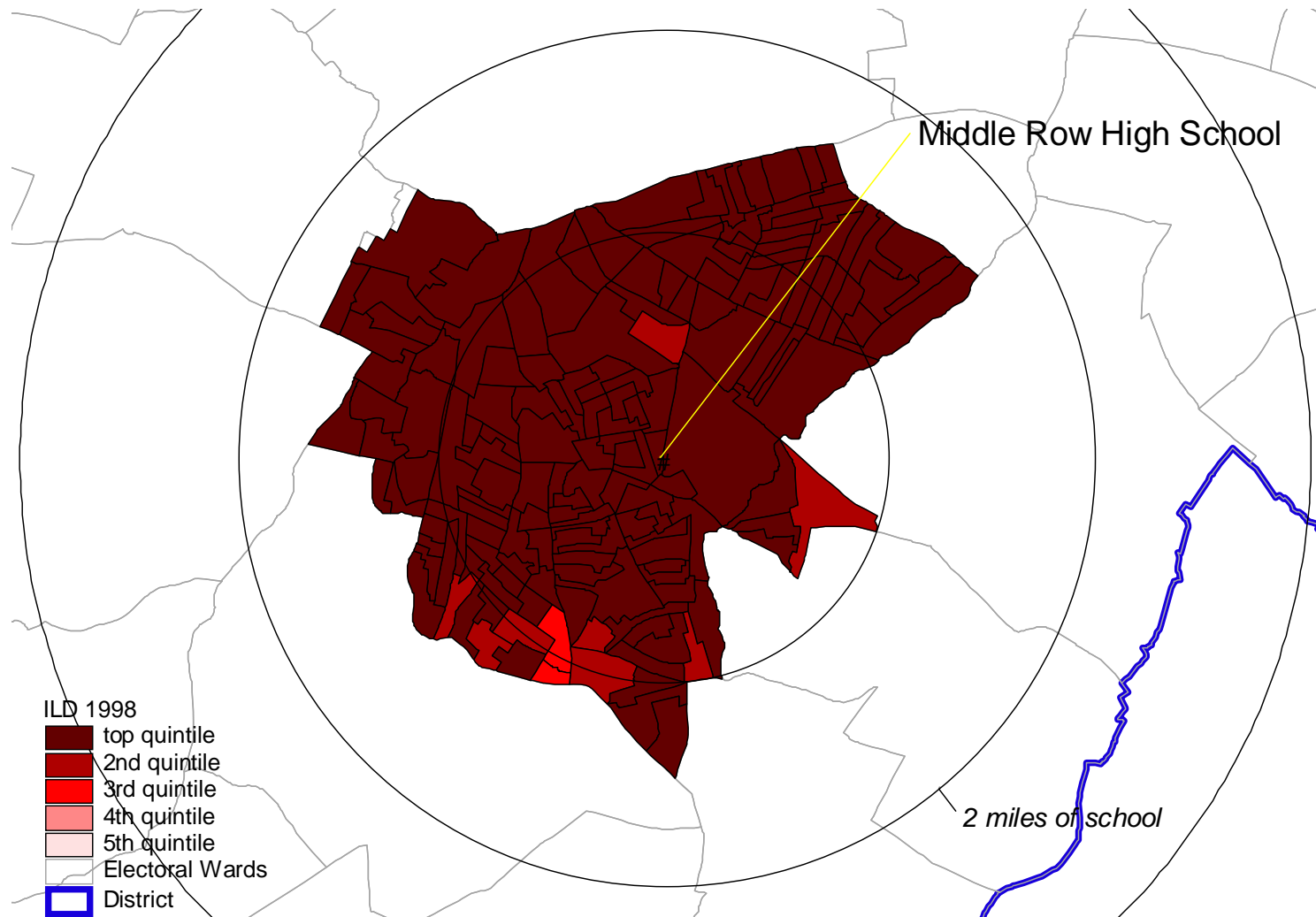
Socio-economic disadvantage among England's Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities is well documented. These groups have the highest rates of long-term illness, household overcrowding and unemployment (SEU 2000b). They are less well paid than others and draw the largest proportion of their incomes from state benefits (ONS 1996). As a result, although there were professional families in Middle Row and those with business incomes, there were also a large number on very low incomes. All three wards ranked in the top 5% of wards on the 2000 IMD. 42% of children lived in IS/JSA households in 1998 and there is reason to believe that this might have increased since, given the recent arrival in the area of several new refugee communities, particularly from the Yemen and from Somalia.

This was a similar poverty level to that in Southside, but it was a very different situation. First, the community in Middle Row, though disadvantaged, was settled and growing, as local men brought their families to join them, or married women from their home communities in Pakistan and brought them to England. Housing demand was high, and there was a relatively high level of household overcrowding. In contrast to the abandoned streets and derelict shops in parts of Southside, Middle Row was busy and vibrant, supporting numerous Asian restaurants, food and clothes shops, and well-developed community networks and self-help welfare organisations.

Second, there was a less marked clustering of deprivation. Map 3.5 shows that deprivation in Middle Row was much more evenly spread than in Southside. Proportions of children in IS/JSA households ranged between 38% and 49% in the three wards, rather than between 20% and 62% as they had in Southside. There was a less evident sense of social division between neighbourhoods.



**Map 3.5 : Index of Local Deprivation for Middle Row High School Catchment Area**



This is not to say that there was no difference between neighbourhoods. 1991 Census data indicates that the two localities closest to the school were the most disadvantaged, with the most concentrated Asian populations, the highest proportion of families in low social classes and the highest levels of household overcrowding (Table 3.10). One neighbourhood towards the edge of the area (Tower Hill) was a Council estate with a predominantly white and African-Caribbean population, while two others, Central Rd South and The Village, were more ethnically mixed and slightly better off. Nevertheless, as Map 3.5 indicates, there was not the same degree of neighbourhood differentiation as in Southside and thus, in terms of the educational market, less sense in targeting particular primary schools in order to achieve social mix in the secondary population.

**Table 3.10: Characteristics of Localities in Middle Row High Catchment Area**

|                                  | <b>% Owner Occupation</b> | <b>% Social Housing</b> | <b>% Private Renting</b> | <b>% Asian</b> | <b>% social class 4 and 5</b> | <b>% h'holds crowded</b> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Central Rd North                 | 64                        | 17                      | 17                       | 70             | 40                            | 4                        |
| Broadways                        | 39                        | 52                      | 7                        | 58             | 37                            | 5                        |
| Factory Row                      | 63                        | 19                      | 16                       | 40             | 29                            | 3                        |
| Cannondale                       | 35                        | 52                      | 11                       | 38             | 34                            | 3                        |
| Old Meadows South                | 61                        | 27                      | 11                       | 54             | 33                            | 4                        |
| Central Rd South                 | 72                        | 8                       | 18                       | 43             | 18                            | 2                        |
| The Village                      | 43                        | 31                      | 25                       | 30             | 19                            | 2                        |
| Tower Hill                       | 17                        | 78                      | 3                        | 13             | 31                            | 2                        |
| <b>Middle Row High Catchment</b> | <b>52</b>                 | <b>33</b>               | <b>13</b>                | <b>50</b>      | <b>32</b>                     | <b>3</b>                 |

Source: 1991 Census. Crowded households = more than 1.5 persons per room

In practice, the market tended to produce a pattern of local schooling in any case. In the city as a whole, there was a complex pattern of travel to schools, facilitated by dense population, overlapping school catchment areas and good public transport.

The LEA had observed a ‘*doughnut effect*’ (LEA representative) whereby many inner city parents sent their children further out to school, because of concerns about inner city education. However, this effect was observed much less in Asian-dominated parts of the inner city, where there was a more noticeable pattern of local schooling and correspondingly less competition between schools. This, indeed, was the case in Middle Row. There were six other maintained secondary schools<sup>22</sup> less than 1.5 miles from Middle Row HS, within, or on the edge of the school’s effective catchment area (Table 3.11). Their location is shown on Map 3.4.

**Table 3.11: Other Schools Close to Middle Row High**

| School | Approximate Distance from Middle Row HS (miles) | Type | Status | Age   | Sex | Other      | GCSE pass rate (5 A*-C) 2001 |
|--------|---|------|--------|-------|-----|------------|------------------------------|
| A      | 1   | F    | Comp   | 11-18 | M   | Technology | 51                           |
| B      | 0.75  | C    | Comp   | 11-16 | M   |            | 27                           |
| C      | 1   | C    | Comp   | 11-16 | M   |            | 31                           |
| D      | 1.5   | V    | Comp   | 11-16 | M   | C of E     | 10                           |
| E      | 0.75  | V    | Comp   | 11-16 | M   | RC         | 31                           |
| F      | 1.5   | C    | Comp   | 11-16 | M   |            | 16                           |

\* C= Community, V=Voluntary, F=Foundation  
Source: LEA

Schools A and B were popular schools; both full and only able to offer places to first preference applicants. Indeed, at school A, only children who lived within half a mile of the school were likely to be admitted, thus excluding most of the pupils from Middle Row HS’s catchment area. However, the remaining schools all had similar or lower levels of GCSE attainment and all could offer places to anyone who expressed a first, second or third preference. None could be regarded as exceptional nor as a ‘sink school’, deeply unpopular and struggling with rapidly falling numbers

<sup>22</sup> In addition, there was a small grant-maintained, community run school, a special school, and several small independent Islamic Girls Schools. The latter schools are not all registered and the number of places is not known.

or with a serious problem of surplus places<sup>23</sup>. There was a good balance between supply and demand for places in the city as a whole and particularly buoyant demand in the local area, where no primary school had a significant number of surplus places<sup>24</sup>. There were differences between schools but not a sharp status hierarchy.

This tendency to local schooling did not mean that schools could afford not to work hard to demonstrate their value to parents. Middle Row's own recent history was a sharp reminder of this. In the early 1990s it had falling pupil numbers because the head had lost the confidence of the local community, particularly over the failure to make concessions to the religious and cultural needs of the pupils. However, this situation had been reversed by the time of the study. The current head, Miss Wilson, had pursued a policy of close liaison with leaders of community organisations and parents, and had restored the school's standing in the community. The number of first preferences increased from about 82% of the standard admission number in 1995 to about 90% in 2001 and by the time of the fieldwork, Middle Row HS was described by an LEA officer as being '*in the middle range*' of popularity – a local school which held its own, was nearly full (Table 3.12), and might conceivably have been over-subscribed were it not for the preference of many Muslim families for a single sex education for their girls.

**Table 3.12: School Population 1995/6 – 2000/01. Middle Row High School**

|                                | 1995/6 | 1996/7 | 1997/8 | 1998/9 | 1999/00 | 2000/01 |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| Number on Register in January. | 735    | 748    | 747    | 775    | 777     | 843     |

Source: DfEE Form 7, Middle Row High

<sup>23</sup> Schools D, E and Middle Row High had about 5% surplus places, and the other two schools (C and F) about 15%. A serious problem with surplus places is defined here as more than 25% surplus places, following the definition given by the Audit Commission (1997).

<sup>24</sup> The number of secondary school places only exceeds the number of pupils by 7%, and a 'bulge' in pupil numbers is expected in 2002/03 (LEA School Organisation Plan).

As a result both of the tendency to local schooling and of the growing reputation of Middle Row HS, by the time of the study it had become very much a local school, drawing three quarters of its pupils from the area immediately around it, the two neighbourhoods known as Broadways and Central Rd North, for which it was the nearest school. A small proportion of pupils came from each of the other localities in the catchment area, for which other schools were equidistant or closer.

**Table 3.13 : School Population by Locality – Middle Row HS**

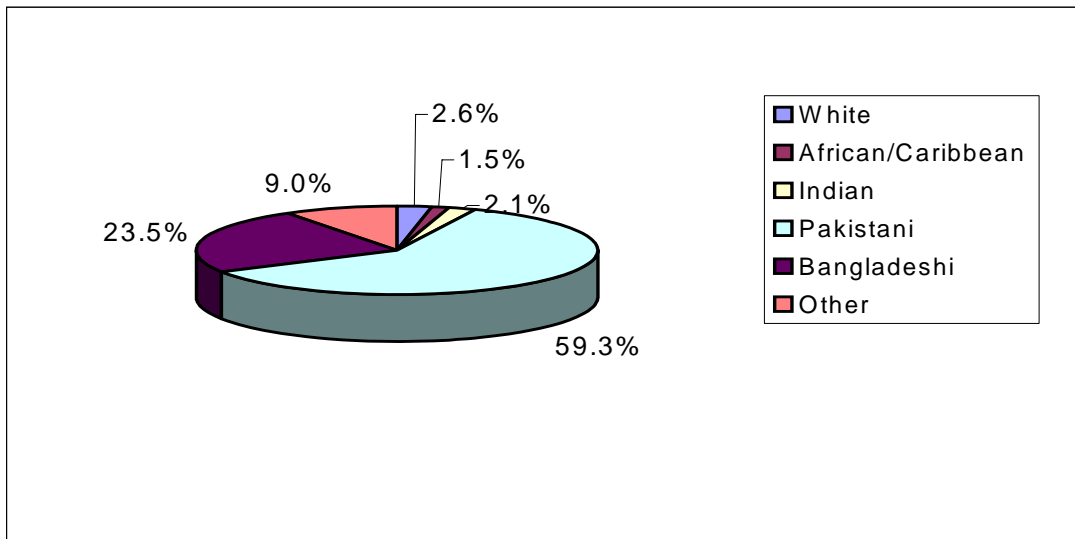
|                   | <b>% of School Population<br/>Nov 2000</b> |
|-------------------|--|
| Broadways         | 52   |
| Central Rd North  | 22   |
| Cannondale        | 5  |
| Factory Row       | 5  |
| Old Meadows South | 5  |
| Central Rd South  | 2  |
| Tower Hill        | 2  |
| The Village       | 1  |
| Outside catchment | 7  |

Source: Middle Row High School. 1991 Census

Broadways and Central Rd North were the poorer neighbourhoods in the area and those with the most concentrated Asian populations. As a result, in the school's population, 60.5% of pupils were eligible for FSM, higher than would be expected for the catchment area as a whole<sup>25</sup>. 97.4% came from an ethnic minority, with 84.8% being Pakistani or Bangladeshi (Figure 3.1). Staff reported that in recent years there had been a gradual increase in the number of Bangladeshi pupils, Yemenis and Somalis, and refugees and asylum seekers from Africa and Eastern Europe. Only 4.6% of pupils had English as their home language, the most common home languages being Urdu (26%), Bengali (25%) and Punjabi (21%).

<sup>25</sup> This is an exceptionally high level of eligibility. Only 5% of non-selective schools nationally have FSM Eligibility higher than 50%.

**Figure 3.1: Ethnic Origin of Pupils at Middle Row HS, Year 2000**



Source: Middle Row High School

Although the school's standing locally meant that it attracted some very able pupils, prior attainment overall was very low. In 2000, just 34% were at the expected level at KS2, about half the national average. The proportion of pupils with statements of SEN was higher than the city average (2.7% compared with 1.6% in 2000). Approximately 45% had SEN but no statement. Like Southside Grange, the school was boy-heavy (54% to 46%), and more so in Year 7, probably because several small Islamic girls schools had recently opened in the area.

**Table 3.14: Gender of Pupils at Middle Row HS, by Year Group**

| %           | Year 11 | Year 10 | Year 9 | Year 8 | Year 7 |
|-------------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| Intake Year | 1996    | 1997    | 1998   | 1999   | 2000   |
| % Boys      | 50      | 55      | 55     | 51     | 59     |

Source: Middle Row High School

At the time of the study, Middle Row HS faced these challenges from a position of relative organisational stability. The headteacher was highly regarded, both internally and outside the school,<sup>26</sup> and at the school's last OFSTED inspection in May 1998, her leadership and that of senior managers were particularly praised. OFSTED noted that Middle Row HS was "*a good school with a considerable number of important strengths. These include the school's clear ethos and values, a commitment to raising standards of attainment, excellent relationships with the local community and pupils' overwhelming sense of pride in the school.*" Attitudes and personal development were also rated as very good, and only attendance was unsatisfactory. While recruiting suitable staff was not easy, at the time of the study, the staff were experienced and well qualified, and the school had a healthy budgetary position.

Academic performance was also relatively good, given the high levels of deprivation in the intake. Since 1997, the proportion of pupils passing at least one GCSE had been higher than the national average. Higher grade GCSE attainment was still low by national standards in 2001, but good compared with other schools with similar proportions of children from low income homes. It had also improved significantly since the mid-1990s, and in 2000, the school was in the top 100 most improved schools in the country on GCSE results.

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<sup>26</sup> The headteacher was highly spoken of by community leaders in the CASE 12 areas study, and was well regarded within the LEA. While the study was ongoing, she was awarded an OBE for her services to education.

**Table 3.15: GCSE Attainment at Middle Row HS 1994-2001**

|  | 1994       | 1995       | 1996       | 1997       | 1998       | 1999       | 2000       | 2001       |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| % passing 1 or more GCSEs at grades A*-G<br>( <i>England average</i> ) | 76<br>(92) | 78<br>(92) | 78<br>(92) | 97<br>(92) | 98<br>(92) | 95<br>(94) | 97<br>(94) | 99<br>(94) |
| % passing 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-G<br>( <i>England average</i> ) | 54<br>(86) | 59<br>(86) | 58<br>(86) | 79<br>(86) | 74<br>(83) | 82<br>(88) | 87<br>(89) | 89<br>(89) |
| % passing 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C<br>( <i>England average</i> ) | 16<br>(43) | 9<br>(44)  | 21<br>(45) | 20<br>(45) | 22<br>(46) | 29<br>(48) | 36<br>(49) | 33<br>(50) |

Like Southside Grange, Middle Row HS also faced considerable challenges, not least its cramped site and dilapidated Victorian buildings. Nevertheless, like that school, it was in an upward phase in its life cycle.

### **West-City High School for Girls**

West-City High School was an average sized (892 pupils), girls', 11-16 community comprehensive school, with Technology College status. It was located in the Inner London Borough of Weldon<sup>27</sup>, in an area close to the City, and its environs were, like Middle Row's, extensively deprived. The school's catchment area extended only about half a mile to the South, where land use became non-residential. Being a single sex school, it had a wide catchment in other directions, extending about two and a half miles to the north, over a large and densely populated urban area known, like the school, as West-City. However, it drew the majority of its pupils (71% in

<sup>27</sup> LEA 'A' in the quantitative analysis in Chapter 2.



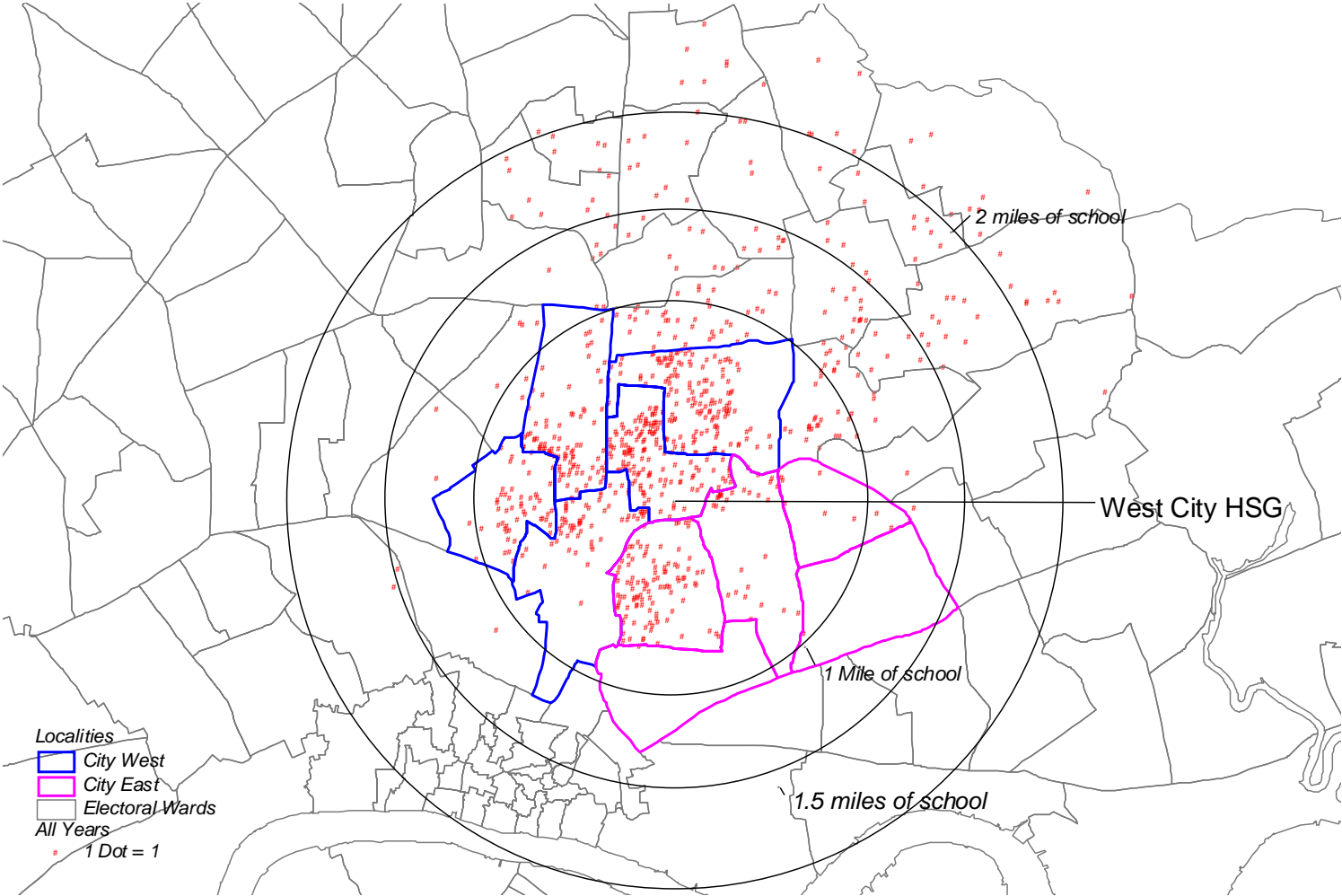
January 2001)<sup>28</sup> from the two neighbourhoods closest to the school, City West (55%) and City East (17%) (Map 3.6).

West-City had originally been developed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to accommodate industrial growth alongside the nearby canal. Many of its original warehouses remained, but the original housing had been cleared in an extended period of redevelopment between the 1920s and the 1960s and replaced with Council flats and maisonettes, many of them in very poor condition. It had, for a long time, been known as one of the East End's white working class areas, but was undergoing rapid change at the time of the study. On the one hand, parts of the area had begun to be repopularised as a result of their proximity to central London and rocketing house prices in more 'desirable' localities nearby. On the other hand, there was growing pressure on the local authority housing stock from homeless people, including asylum seekers. The population was growing and there was a marked sense of social polarisation, with expensive flats and conversions and new bars and media companies appearing alongside poor quality social housing.

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<sup>28</sup> All analyses based on the 96% (855) whose postcodes are known.

**Map 3.6 : Residence of Pupils at West City HSG, Showing Localities**



There was also a rapid rate of ethnic change, both because of new immigration and because of the natural growth of existing minority communities. In 1991, approximately 30% of the population were from ethnic minorities but qualitative data suggests that a much larger figure will be revealed by the 2001 Census. A survey carried out in City West in 1999 showed that 73% of children had ethnic minority parents (Mumford and Power 2003).

High levels of deprivation extended throughout the West City area. All but two of the wards were within the top 10% of the IMD and over half were within the top 5% (Map 3.7). As at Middle Row HS, the most deprived were closest to the school, with more advantaged neighbourhoods further to the east and west. City West and City East, largely within this inner area, were particularly deprived, each having 55% of children living in benefit-dependent households in 1998. However, they were different in character. City West, within the Borough of Weldon, had a mainly white population but a sizeable African Caribbean minority (22% in 1991). City East, in the neighbouring Borough of Churchfields, had fewer African-Caribbean families (7% in 1991) and a high proportion of Bangladeshi families (27%). The level of household overcrowding in this locality was relatively high (Table 3.16).

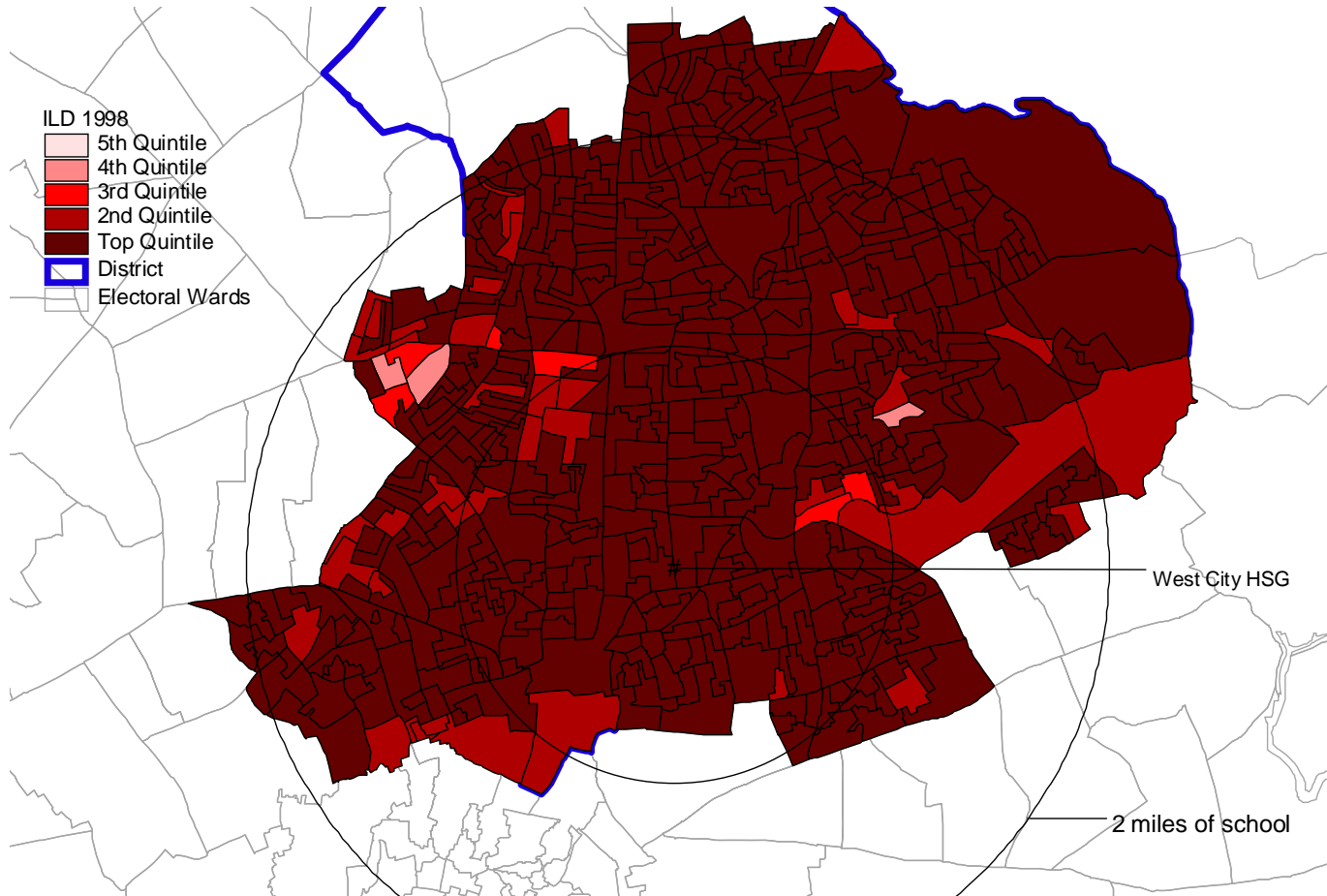
**Table 3.16: Characteristics of Localities closest to West City HSG**

|              | <b>Population<br/>1991</b> | <b>% Social<br/>Housing</b> | <b>% Owner<br/>Occupation</b> | <b>%<br/>Asian</b> | <b>%<br/>Black</b> | <b>%<br/>social<br/>class 4<br/>and 5</b> | <b>%<br/>h'holds<br/>crowded</b> |
|--------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| City East    | 44,000                     | 70                          | 21                            | 27                 | 7                  | 25  | 7                                |
| City<br>West | 37,000                     | 75                          | 17                            | 3                  | 22                 | 25  | 2                                |

Source: 1991 Census

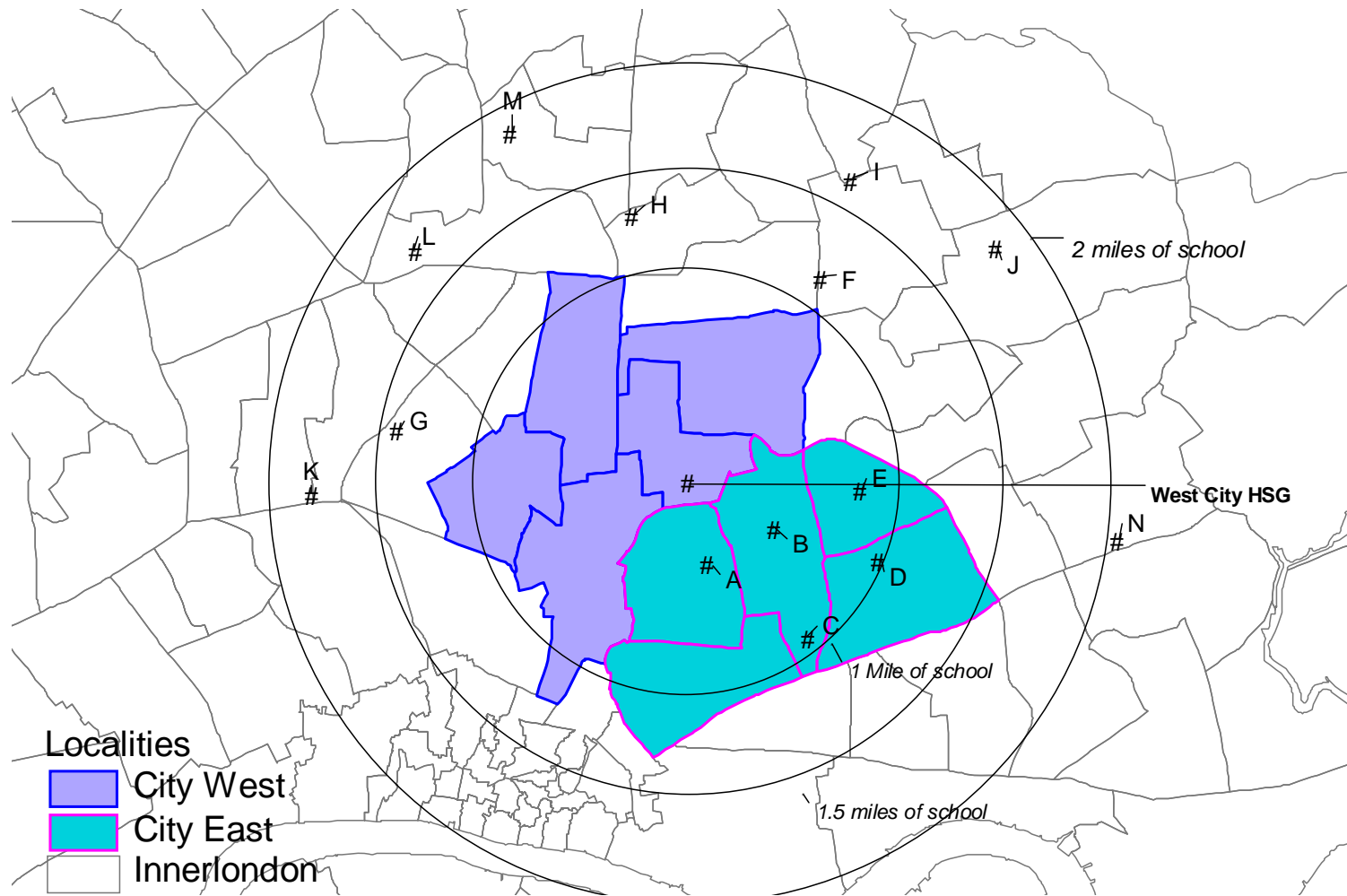
Crowded households = more than 1.5 persons per room

**Map 3.7 : Index of Local Deprivation for West City HSG Catchment Area**



This analysis suggests that at West-City HSG, even more so than at Middle Row HS and at Southside, the deprived nature of the area meant that the school was always likely to receive a highly disadvantaged intake. However, this situation was mediated by the complex Inner London educational market, with its many competing schools and a tradition of pupil mobility. Quite apart from the existence of independent schools and the well-documented tendency for middle-class Inner London families to opt out of the state sector (Johnson 2003) there were fourteen other maintained girls or mixed secondary schools in or just outside West-City HSG's catchment area, as well as a number of small Islamic and Jewish independent girls' schools (Table 3.17). The majority were 11-16 comprehensives and many had similar GCSE results, although they had different strengths and reputations. Two were specialist in technology and one in languages. One was a Church of England School and one Roman Catholic. There were three girls' schools other than West City HSG, all just a little over a mile and a half away, geographically spread in the north, east and west. Nine of the schools were in other Boroughs, but it was not uncommon for pupils to attend out-of-borough schools. In 2001, 14% of acceptances for West-City HSG were for out-of-borough pupils. The location of the state schools is shown on Map 3.8. It is significant to note the precise location of these schools, with a cluster of schools in the City East locality, but no other school in City West. This meant that for pupils living in City West, West-City HSG was the nearest school, whereas for those living equally close to the school on the City East side, there were a number of other schools that were equidistant or closer.

**Map 3.8: Location of Other Schools Close to West-City HSG**



Prima facie, this was a situation where there was considerable scope for choice to be exercised and where one would expect to see pupils of more advantaged or aspiring families leapfrogging their nearest school to get to a school of their choice. In order to try to achieve a comprehensive intake in each school, the LEA had adopted a banding system for admissions, but this was not entirely successful since it had to operate within the system of parental choice.<sup>29</sup>

**Table 3.17: Other Schools Close to West-City HSG**

|   | Approx Distance From West-City HSG (miles) | In Weldon or Not? | Type | Status | Age   | Sex | Other | GCSE (5 A*-C) 2000 |
|---|--|-------------------|------|--------|-------|-----|-------|--------------------|
| A | 0.5  | N                 | C    | Comp   | 11-16 | M   | Tech. | 24                 |
| B | 0.5  | N                 | C    | Comp   | 11-16 | M   |       | 41                 |
| C | 0.75                                       | N                 | C    | Comp   | 11-16 | M   |       | 38                 |
| D | 1  | N                 | C    | Comp   | 11-16 | M   |       | 50                 |
| E | 1  | N                 | V    | Comp   | 11-18 | M   |       | 39                 |
| F | 1.25                                       | Y                 | V    | Comp   | 11-16 | M   |       | 21                 |
| G | 1.25                                       | N                 | C    | Comp   | 11-16 | M   |       | 24                 |
| H | 1.25                                       | Y                 | C    | Comp   | 11-16 | M   |       | 20                 |
| I | 1.25                                       | Y                 | C    | Comp   | 11-16 | G   | Tech. | 29                 |
| J | 1.75                                       | Y                 | V    | Comp   | 11-18 | M   |       | 46                 |
| K | 1.75                                       | N                 | C    | Comp   | 11-16 | G   | Lang. | 32                 |
| L | 1.75                                       | N                 | C    | Comp   | 11-18 | M   |       | 30                 |
| M | 1.75                                       | Y                 | C    | Comp   | 11-16 | M   |       | 49                 |
| N | 2.0  | N                 | V    | Comp   | 11-18 | G   |       | 46                 |

\* C= Community, V=Voluntary, F=Foundation

West-City HSG was differentiated in this market anyway because it was a single sex school. However, this was not the school's only differentiating feature. It also had a reputation as a very good school. At the time of the study, the school could reflect

<sup>29</sup> All applicants were banded according to a reading test taken in primary school, and schools required to admit about one-third of their pupils from each of three bands. However, if there were not enough applications to fill one-third of the places from a certain band, numbers could be made up from other bands. This meant that popular schools that attracted more applicants from the top band, and less than a third from other bands could 'fill up' with more top band pupils, while the reverse was the case in less popular schools.

on a period of ten years or more of stability and success. Under the strong leadership of two headteachers during the 1990s, it had established a culture of ambition and achievement. During the late 1990s, it had sought to gain recognition for its work and to involve other successful institutions and people. It had actively pursued, and was successful in gaining, national awards. In addition to being a Beacon school for the Expressive Arts and also for Pupil Voice<sup>30</sup>, it also had Investors in People status and had applied for an 'Artsmark'. The Chair of Governors at one time was a well known Professor of Education, influential in government circles, and the Chair at the time of the study was a high profile figure in the media industry. The school used to host an annual conference that raised its profile in the educational world. At its OFSTED inspection in December 2000, inspectors found it to be "*a very good school that succeeds in encouraging pupils to achieve to the best of their ability*", "*a vibrant community with learning as its focus*" with "*very good leadership...high expectations.. and very good teaching*". It was rated very good on all the major JRS areas except attendance and the curriculum, which were both acceptable.

Academic performance was, and had been, consistently high for a school with such a high proportion of children from low income families. From 1995 to 1999, the proportion of pupils leaving with at least one GCSE was higher than the national average, as was the proportion passing 5 GCSEs at grades A\*-G in most years. Both of these proportions fell in 2000 and improved slightly again in 2001, a fact attributed by the headteacher to a group of disaffected pupils in the Year 2000 exam cohort.<sup>31</sup> Higher grade GCSE performance was consistently good for a school with a disadvantaged intake.

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<sup>30</sup> Pupil representation in school affairs.

<sup>31</sup> OFSTED report on West-City HSG, November 2000.



**Table 3.18: GCSE Attainment at West-City HSG 1994-2001**

|  | 1994       | 1995       | 1996       | 1997       | 1998       | 1999       | 2000       | 2001       |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| % passing 1 or more GCSEs at grades A*-G<br><i>(England average)</i> | 91<br>(92) | 98<br>(92) | 96<br>(92) | 94<br>(92) | 95<br>(92) | 94<br>(94) | 89<br>(94) | 91<br>(94) |
| % passing 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-G<br><i>(England average)</i> | 73<br>(86) | 88<br>(86) | 87<br>(86) | 85<br>(86) | 85<br>(83) | 88<br>(88) | 80<br>(89) | 84<br>(89) |
| % passing 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C<br><i>(England average)</i> | 19<br>(43) | 37<br>(44) | 39<br>(45) | 43<br>(45) | 31<br>(46) | 32<br>(48) | 41<br>(49) | 35<br>(50) |

With these selling points, the school had consistently been full (Table 3.19) and was growing in popularity. Table 3.20 demonstrates that there was more demand for places in Years 7, 8 and 9 than Years 10 and 11.

**Table 3.19: School Population 1995/6 –1999/00. West-City HSG**

|                            | 1995/6 | 1996/7 | 1997/8 | 1998/9 | 1999/00 | 2000/01 |
|----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| Number on Register in Jan. | 876    | 833    | 871    | 894    | 886     | 892     |

Source: DfEE Form 7, West City High School for Girls

**Table 3.20: Number of First Preference Applicants Per Place, West-City HSG**

| %                    | Year 11 | Year 10 | Year 9 | Year 8 | Year 7 |
|----------------------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| Intake Year          | 1996    | 1997    | 1998   | 1999   | 2000   |
| Applicants per place | 1.24    | 1.1     | 1.26   | 1.66   | 1.31   |

Source: Weldon LEA

The success of the school put it in an interesting position. On the one hand, its reputation attracted families from a considerable distance. On the other, its increasing popularity meant, during the late 1990s, fewer and fewer of these pupils could gain access to the school, since proximity to the school was one of the main criteria for deciding between first preference applications. The result was that an increasing proportion of pupils started to come from the more deprived localities

immediately adjacent to the school. Just 25% of the Year 2000 intake were from outside the immediate area of the school, compared with 37% in 1996 (Table 3.21), and it was anticipated that this number would continue to fall, as the number of out-of-area siblings diminished.

**Table 3.21: Percentage of School Population by Locality and Year Group**

| %   | Year 11   | Year 10   | Year 9    | Year 8    | Year 7    |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Intake Year                               | 1996      | 1997      | 1998      | 1999      | 2000      |
| City East                                 | 18        | 17        | 18        | 13        | 17        |
| City West                                 | 45        | 50        | 59        | 63        | 58        |
| <b>TOTAL from City East and City West</b> | <b>63</b> | <b>67</b> | <b>77</b> | <b>76</b> | <b>75</b> |
| Elsewhere                                 | 37        | 33        | 23        | 24        | 25        |

Source: West City HSG. 855 pupils with known postcodes.

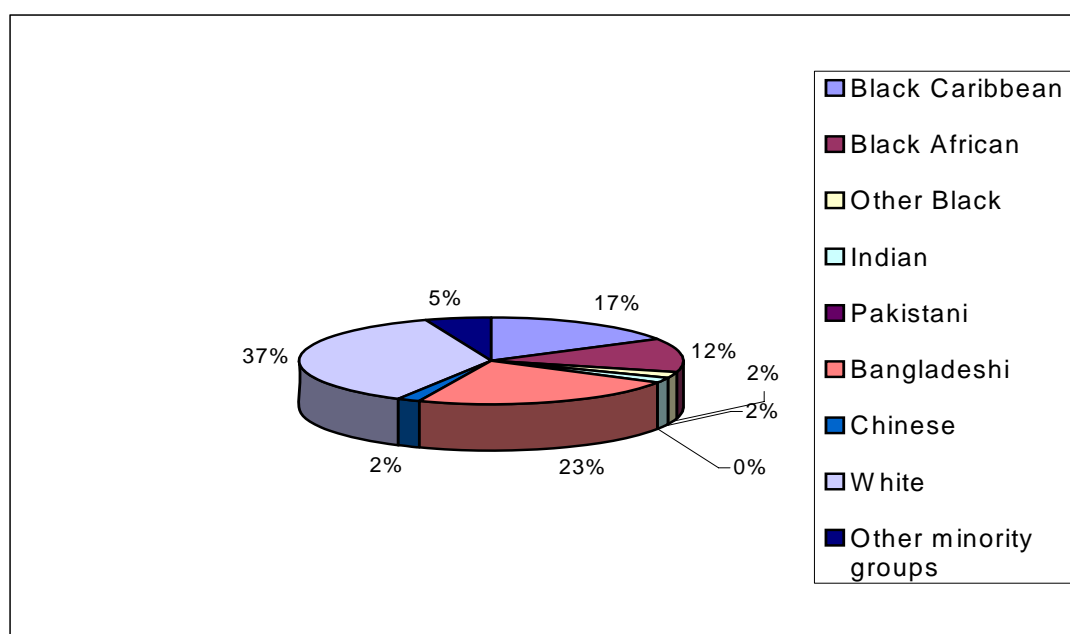
Accordingly, the school population in 2001 was highly deprived and extremely diverse. FSM, at 62%, was four times the national average and had remained consistently high over recent years despite falling levels of IS/JSA claims. Ethnic minority groups were in the majority. The largest single ethnic minority group was Bangladeshi (23%). Black African, Black Caribbean and Other Black pupils together made up a large group (31%), which was growing as the proportion of City West residents increased (Table 3.12). 36% of the pupils were classified as white, but one-third of these were from Turkish-speaking families, including Turks, Kurds and Cypriots, meaning that white British pupils made up only about one-fifth of the school population. The school's annual language survey showed that no less than 34 different languages were spoken, with the most common being Bengali (spoken by 19% of pupils), Turkish (13%) and Yoruba (4%). English was an additional language for more than half (56%) of the pupils. The proportion of children with special educational needs was also slightly above average. In January 2000, 30% of students were on the school's special needs register and 4% had SEN statements.

**Table 3.22: Ethnic Breakdown of School Population 1996/7–1999/00**

| %               | 1996/7 | 1997/8 | 1998/9 | 1999/00 |
|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| White UK        | 26     | 24     | 25     | 23      |
| White European  | 12     | 14     | 12     | 13      |
| Black Caribbean | 9      | 14     | 15     | 17      |
| Black African   | 9      | 10     | 12     | 12      |
| Bangladeshi     | 33     | 29     | 25     | 23      |
| Other           | 11     | 9      | 11     | 12      |

Source: DfEE Form 7, West City High School for Girls

**Figure 3.2: Ethnic Origin of Pupils at West-City HSG, Year 2000**



A substantial number of the ethnic minority pupils had been born in the UK or had had been in the country a long time. However, many pupils were more recently arrived, joining these established communities or arriving from war-torn countries around the world. The school estimated that about 140 pupils (close to one sixth of the school) were from refugee or asylum seeking families, many of them West African. Some of these pupils had experienced huge emotional trauma and loss, and

were living in extremely straitened circumstances in the UK. White pupils came mainly from the working class community which had traditionally dominated the area, although staff also remarked on a small but significant number of middle class pupils, some of whom had moved to come within the school's catchment area.

The change in intake was beginning to cause some concern within the school, the headteacher noting that it was losing the '*comprehensiveness*' that it had enjoyed when it had been able to attract aspiring pupils from slightly further afield. Moreover, there were other concerns. The school was in a strong position organisationally with a sound budgetary position and fully staffed with an experienced core team, but it was also entering a period of uncertainty. During the fieldwork period, there was a change of leadership, with a new headteacher and deputy arriving simultaneously. Being in Inner London, the school was particularly affected by recruitment difficulties, and was increasingly relying on agency and overseas staff. Its LEA was also in severe financial crisis, leaving the school to meet more of the costs of maintaining its buildings, which were less than adequate for effective teaching, with leaking roof and windows and no curtains or blinds. This was a strong and successful school but one with new challenges immediately ahead.

### **The Farcliffe School**

The fourth school was The Farcliffe School, a small (626 pupils), mixed, 11-16 secondary modern in the coastal town of Farcliffe in Southern England, part of the

district of Greenford, and within the County LEA of Downshire.<sup>32</sup> Farcliffe was one of three main towns in Greenford, all less than four miles apart, and the geography of the area and the nature of the education market was such that the whole of the Borough could be considered as its catchment area. In terms of area, if not of population, it had the most dispersed catchment area of all the four schools, covering twenty-seven electoral wards and three towns (Farcliffe, Seaview and Beachville) as well as the rural areas between them (Map 3.9).

Unlike the other three areas in this study, Greenford did not have a predominantly industrial history. It had a mixed low-wage economy based on bucket-and-spade tourism, agriculture, its ports, and some manufacturing. Tourism collapsed in the 1980s, leaving the entire Borough with a high unemployment rate compared with the national average (8.4% in April 2000 compared with 3.6% nationally), and overall about 30% of children lived in benefit households in 1998. However, the area also had a pleasant rural environment and an abundance of retirement homes, and this was a lower rate of child poverty overall than in the other areas in the study.

Deprivation within the area had a marked spatial pattern. One ward in central Beachville ranked in the top 1% on the IMD, and six others were in the top 10%. At the other end of the scale, the most advantaged wards ranked around 4000ths out of 8414 wards. Whereas the other areas in the study had quite extensive areas of deprivation, Greenford had distinct pockets (Map 3.10), with highly specific social and economic problems. The central parts of both Farcliffe and Beachville (known as Farcliffe South and Beachville North) were made up of former hotel properties

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<sup>32</sup> LEA 'K' in the analysis in Chapter 2.

which provided hostel accommodation for a highly transient and disadvantaged population. In 1999, the Council estimated that there were about 65 such hostels in Beachville alone, catering for about 500 people.

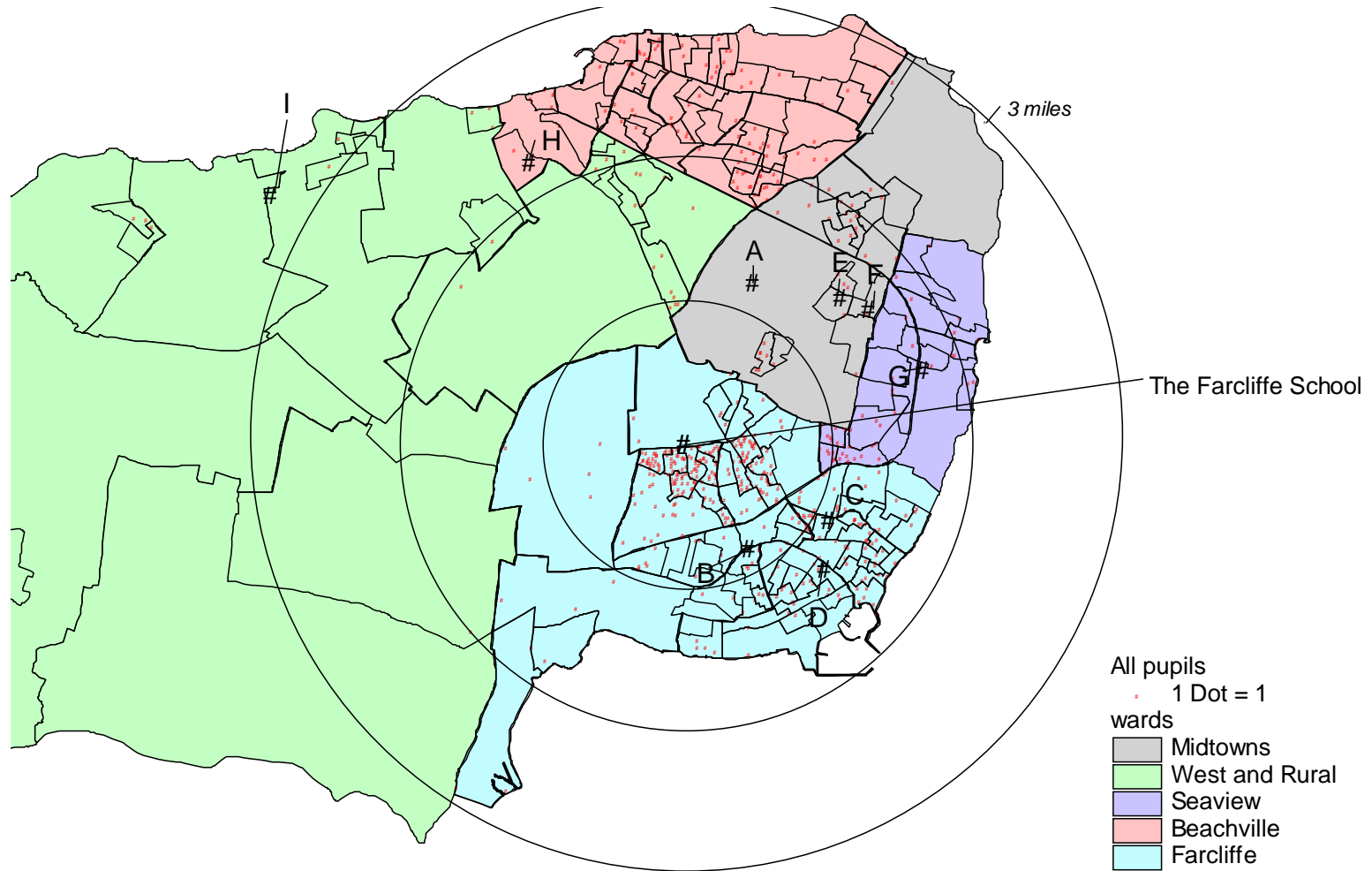
The late 1990s had seen an influx of asylum seekers and refugees to these areas, mainly from Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Estimates of the numbers varied between 300 and 3000. By contrast, Farcliffe North and Beachville South contained large social housing estates, largely occupied by local people on low incomes, but which were fully occupied and in reasonable physical condition.

**Table 3.23 Characteristics of Deprived Areas within The Farcliffe School Catchment Area**

|                   | <b>% Social Housing</b> | <b>% Private Renting</b> | <b>% social class 4 and 5</b> | <b>Residents with a different address 1 year ago</b> |
|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Farcliffe North   | 38                      | 3                        | 27                            | 8  |
| Farcliffe South   | 12                      | 21                       | 23                            | 14   |
| Beachville South  | 32                      | 9                        | 25                            | 11   |
| Beachville North  | 8                       | 21                       | 21                            | 16   |
| Rest of District  | 9                       | 7                        | 19                            | 8  |
| ENGLAND AND WALES | 23                      | 7                        | 11                            | 10   |

Source: 1991 Census

**Map 3.9 : Residence of Pupils at The Farcliffe School, Showing Localities and Other Schools**



A striking feature of the area was the large number of vulnerable children. At the time of the fieldwork, 1 in 100 children in the Borough as a whole were in care and six times as many were on the child protection register as in a similar sized neighbouring borough. Surplus large property had also produced a thriving children's home industry for children placed by other Boroughs, as properties were converted into care homes. Approximately one third of the looked-after children living in Greenford had been placed in residential care in the Borough by other local authorities.

As Map 3.9 shows, the school itself was located in Farcliffe North, on the edge of the main Council estate, and drew two fifths of its pupils from that area, meaning that it automatically had a more disadvantaged population than the Borough as a whole. However, it also drew in significant numbers from the other deprived areas in Greenford, even those which were up to three miles away. In 2000/01, 71% came from the pockets of deprivation identified on Map 3.10.

**Table 3.24: School Population by Locality, The Farcliffe School**

|                                       | <b>% of school population 2000/01</b> |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Farcliffe North                       | 39                                    |
| Farcliffe South                       | 17                                    |
| Beachville South                      | 9                                     |
| Beachville North                      | 9                                     |
| West                                  | 1                                     |
| <b>Total from Disadvantaged Areas</b> | <b>71</b>                             |
| Rest of District                      | 28                                    |
| Other                                 | 1                                     |

Source: Analysis of Pupil Postcodes at the Farcliffe School.

As a result, the school's population was more disadvantaged than would be expected given its location. 36% of pupils were eligible for FSM, more than twice the national average and a higher proportion than would be expected if the school drew evenly



from its catchment area. A high proportion (6.5%) were looked after, far more than the national percentage (0.5%)<sup>33</sup>. Although the vast majority of pupils (99%) were white and a only a very small proportion had English as an Additional Language, the number of non-English speakers was rising as the area's refugee population grew. The combination of refugees, looked-after children, and children from the bed-and-breakfast areas of Farcliffe South and Beachville North meant that transience in the school was a major issue – in the head's words “*one of the biggest problems. Every class has got changes all the time*”.

Up until 1998/9 the school had an extremely high proportion of pupils with special educational needs (around 70%). This subsequently dropped, and at the time of the fieldwork stood at 44%<sup>34</sup>, although the proportion of pupils with an SEN statement remained consistent at around 8%. Both proportions were very high by comparison with the national averages (19.5% overall and 2.5% with statements).<sup>35</sup>

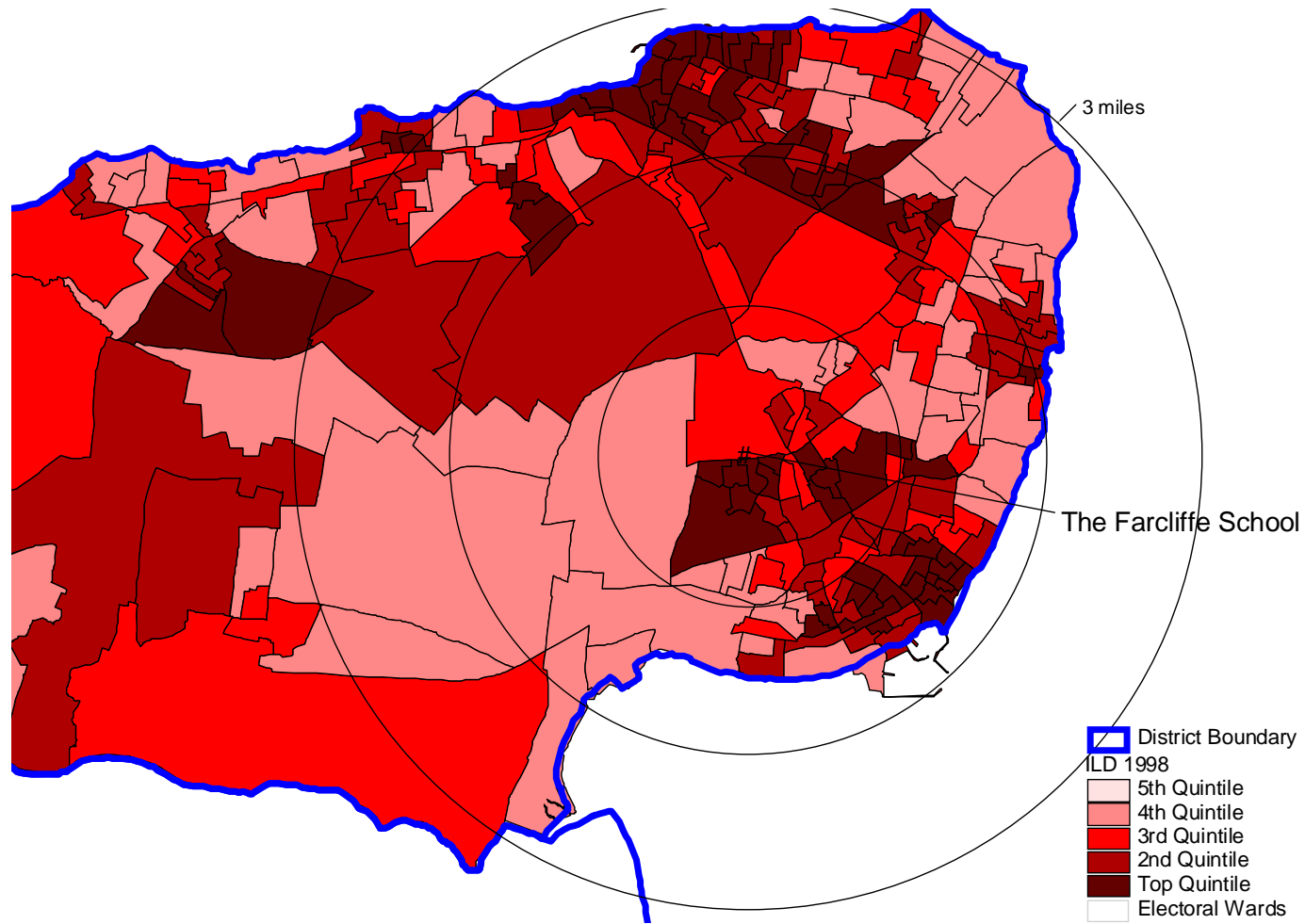
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<sup>33</sup> Based on all children in care under the age of 16. It was not possible to get a figure for children of secondary school age.

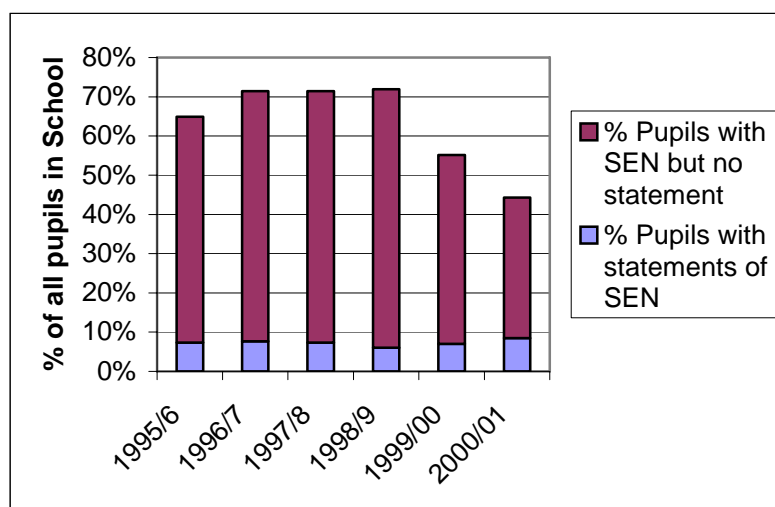
<sup>34</sup> This change in proportion may be associated with the rise in pupil numbers – if the school took most of the children in the area with special needs, the admission of additional children would ‘water down’ the overall proportion of special needs children in the school. However, the reduction in special needs occurred after the big rise in pupil numbers in 1998/9, not simultaneously with it, and is more likely to be associated with a change in practice in recording these needs.

<sup>35</sup> Statistics of Education : Schools in England 2000.

**Map 3.10 : Index of Local Deprivation for The Farcliffe School Catchment Area**



**Figure 3.3: Pupils With Special Educational Needs at the Farcliffe School**



The reason for this over-representation of disadvantaged pupils in The Farcliffe School was the operation of the local educational market and the school's position within it. The market was highly differentiated, operating a selective system, with grammar schools for those who passed the 11-plus examination and secondary modern schools for those who failed. As Woods et al. (1998) have documented in other LEAs, the existence of the selective system created a wider expectation of choice and it was not uncommon for pupils to bypass local schools in order to attend one that offered something better or different. Of the eight other schools in the Borough, three were grammar schools, one a Church of England comprehensive, and there were five secondary moderns in addition to The Farcliffe School. However, of these secondary moderns, one was a technology college with sixth form provision, another was a foundation school with sixth form, and two others were single sex schools. Only two secondary moderns, The Farcliffe School and a school at the other end of the district (school I), had no particular distinctive features. Both considered themselves stuck at the bottom of a fairly steep hierarchy of schools. The

Farcliffe School received only 33 first preference applications for 2001/2002, predominantly children from the nearby estate<sup>36</sup>, with the majority of pupils ‘ending up’ at The Farcliffe, rather than choosing it. Unlike Southside Grange, The Farcliffe School had no obvious competitor, but was simply disadvantaged by the whole system, as a school in a highly differentiated market with nothing special to offer.

**Table 3.25: Other Maintained Schools Close to the Farcliffe School**

| School | Approx Distance from The Farcliffe School | Type | Status  | Age   | Sex | Other      | GCSE pass rate (5 A*-C) 2001 |
|--------|---|------|---------|-------|-----|------------|------------------------------|
| A      | < 1 mile                                  | V    | Comp    | 11-18 | M   | Languages  | 34                           |
| B      | <1 mile                                   | C    | Modern  | 11-16 | G   |            | 30                           |
| C      | 1-2 miles                                 | F    | Grammar | 11-18 | B   |            | 95                           |
| D      | 1-2 miles                                 | C    | Grammar | 11-18 | G   |            | 100                          |
| E      | 1-2 miles                                 | F    | Grammar | 11-18 | M   |            | 99                           |
| F      | 1-2 miles                                 | F    | Modern  | 11-18 | M   |            | 39                           |
| G      | 1-2 miles                                 | C    | Modern  | 11-16 | B   |            | 8                            |
| H      | 2-3 miles                                 | C    | Modern  | 11-18 | M   | Technology | 44                           |
| I      | > 3 miles                                 | C    | Modern  | 11-16 | M   |            | 25                           |

- C= Community, V=Voluntary, F=Foundation

*“we’ve got two primary schools which are our biggest feeders ... they’re schools with problems, without a doubt, but what happens is that the top 15% of kids in terms of academic ability, but that also is in terms of parental support, get farmed off to grammar schools, which has a damaging effect, but more problematic in my opinion is the next layer that’s taken off. There are two schools which are officially non selective – (School A) which is a church school and (School F) which has some kind of musical specialism – they take the next layer of kids, the kids who, quite a few of them will get 5 A-Cs for example. If you got a pyramid, the top few go to the grammars, then you’ve*

<sup>36</sup> 25 were from pupils at the two local primary schools and 6 from pupils with siblings at the school.

*got this big layer of kids who are quite well motivated and they go to these other schools and there's two single sex schools so what tends to happen is you get kids whose parents either don't care or they can't get in – they want to go somewhere else but they can't. So that's the way selection works here. This is the school of last resort.”*

(Class Teacher 4, The Farcliffe School)

Being ‘the school of last resort’ for a long period of time had left The Farcliffe School in real institutional difficulties. Despite relatively good performance in respect of pupils passing at least one GCSE at any grade, the school’s higher grade GCSE results had been, since the start of league tables, among the worst in the country.

**Table 3.26: GCSE Attainment at the Farcliffe School 1994-2001**

|  | 1994       | 1995       | 1996       | 1997       | 1998       | 1999       | 2000       | 2001       |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| % passing 1 or more GCSEs at grades A*-G<br><i>(England average)</i> | 84<br>(92) | 84<br>(92) | 81<br>(92) | 81<br>(92) | 92<br>(92) | 92<br>(94) | 90<br>(94) | 85<br>(94) |
| % passing 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-G<br><i>(England average)</i> | 63<br>(86) | 67<br>(86) | 63<br>(86) | 49<br>(86) | 59<br>(83) | 66<br>(88) | 66<br>(89) | 59<br>(89) |
| % passing 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C<br><i>(England average)</i> | 1<br>(43)  | 1<br>(44)  | 1<br>(45)  | 1<br>(45)  | 10<br>(46) | 7<br>(48)  | 3<br>(49)  | 4<br>(50)  |

In 1998 the school was subject to a torrent of criticism and bad publicity after it achieved the nation’s lowest rate of GCSE passes (5 A\*-C). One of the current deputies described the school at that stage as “*run down in every way. If there was an example of how not to run a school, this was it*”. The buildings were in poor

condition, expectations of pupils were low, and staff/pupil relationships were poor: “*pupils thought that if you spoke to them you were going to tell them off*” (Deputy Headteacher). Accommodation was adequate but not attractive, a sprawling site of one, two and three storey 1960s blocks separated by courtyards and grassed areas with large playing fields at one side, with a tatty appearance and run-down environment. The governing body was described to me by a member of the management team as “*well meaning but clueless*” on matters of educational policy and practice. It had been difficult to find governors with the skills and knowledge to direct the school.

At this point, the long-serving headteacher, and a number of other staff, left and an acting head took control of the school for a year. By 1999, OFSTED noted that the school had more strengths than weaknesses. Its strengths included provision for pupils with special educational needs, concern for pupils’ well-being, safety and moral and social development, good guidance, support and extra-curricular provision and a strong partnership with parents and the community. However, inspectors noted that attainment was below average, the quality of teaching uneven, attendance poor, and curriculum planning not sufficient to ensure equal access and progression for all pupils.

The current head, Mrs May, arrived in 2000, appointed on a two year contract to turn the school around. She described herself as being “*parachuted in*” along with two of her deputies, and recalled an atmosphere of considerable resentment amongst the existing staff, some of whom were reluctant to co-operate with the new management, and criticised the school publicly. Ten staff (nearly a quarter of the total) left at the

end of Mrs May’s first term, and eight more followed the next term. Staff absence was extremely high and the school was running a budget deficit of £147k.

Towards the end of Mrs May’s first year “*things began to settle down*”. The senior management team began to work together well and staff turnover and absence began to fall. The school received additional support from the LEA, and from a Virtual Education Action Zone, and was included in the DfES programme of support for Schools in Challenging Circumstances. Its budget deficit reduced to £40k. Pupil numbers began to increase because of a shortage of school places in the area, and the school expected to be fully subscribed in the immediate future (Table 3.27). It appeared that it was entering a period of recovery.

**Table 3.27: School Population 1995/6 – 2000/01. The Farcliffe School**

|                            | 1995/6 | 1996/7 | 1997/8 | 1998/9 | 1999/00 | 2000/01 |
|----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| Number on Register in Jan. | 408    | 378    | 410    | 560    | 597     | 626     |

Source: DfEE Form 7, Farcliffe School

However, despite this considerable progress, the problems were still immense. It continued to be the case that very few parents expressed a preference for the school. In the headteacher’s words “*there’s only one thing bugging this school, and that’s that no-one wants to come to it*”. The over-representation of disadvantaged pupils continued. The announcement of the 2001 GCSE results, in which the school again finished close to the bottom of the national league table, saw it once again damned in the newspapers. Parents from Beachville began a vigorous local press campaign lobbying for a school in the town and bitterly criticising The Farcliffe School that their children were ‘forced’ to attend. The school continued to struggle with being a school of last resort for staff as well as children. Recruitment was so difficult that

the head described her strategy for curriculum coverage as “*get them in then shuffle them around*”. At the time of the study, the timetable had changed three times in a term to accommodate vacancies and fit in new staff in different subjects. Although the school was fully staffed, the proportion of inexperienced or under-qualified staff was high. Of 40 full-time teaching staff, 11 were unqualified in January 2001, and there were only two staff sufficiently experienced to fill head of year positions. Faculty heads were appropriately experienced, but some subjects were headed by inexperienced staff. For example, a graduate trainee had to take on the role of acting head of history in the absence of more experienced teachers. Staff turnover was also high. And although Mrs May was mid-way through her second year, the LEA had still not started to seek a replacement, and was likely to undertake a review of all the secondary provision in the Farcliffe area. At the time of my fieldwork, rumours were circulating that the school might be closed down.<sup>37</sup>

### **Exemplary Schools?**

This investigation of the contexts of the schools confirms what initial data had indicated. These were all schools facing difficult challenges. They all had a high proportion of pupils from low income homes, with at least twice the average level of FSM eligibility, and the sheer volume of pupils with complex emotional and educational needs marked them out as very different from ‘average’ schools. Three had significantly higher levels of special educational needs than average, and two had high proportions of pupils from ethnic minorities. Their higher grade GCSE

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<sup>37</sup> It was subsequently announced that the school would be closed and re-opened as a City Academy.



results were all low by national standards, although two did relatively well in comparison with other schools in deprived areas.

Yet these were not ‘bad’ schools. Despite the challenges of their intakes, and the difficulties they faced with recruiting staff, none was failing and two were deemed to be good by OFSTED. Three had well regarded headteachers who had had a strong personal influence on the school’s performance. From a management perspective, these schools could be analysed as cases of successful headship in the face of challenging circumstances. Indeed, as the two schools in the more deprived areas (West-City and Middle Row) were performing better than the others and relatively well compared with other high FSM schools both in academic terms and in terms of OFSTED judgements (Table 3.28) they might particularly be held up as exemplary schools, whose performance could be copied with similar results in other highly deprived areas. Table 3.28 demonstrates that these schools also added value to the performance of their pupils between KS3 and KS4. In other words, pupils made more progress than might have been expected given their attainment at KS3.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Value-added measures have been widely welcomed as offering a much truer assessment of school inputs than raw GCSE scores, which take no account of pupils’ starting points. However, as Wilson (2003) points out, even value-added measures do not control for family background characteristics. It might be expected that factors impeding readiness to learn might limit progress as well as raw achievement.

**Table 3.28: School Characteristics (2001)**

|  | <b>Southside Grange School</b> | <b>Middle Row HS</b>   | <b>West-City HSG</b>   | <b>The Farcliffe School</b>             | <b>National Average</b> |
|--|--------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| <b>% Eligible for FSM</b>                    | 37                             | 61                     | 62                     | 36                                      | 16                      |
| <b>% with SEN</b>                            | 24                             | 48                     | 30                     | 44                                      | 23                      |
| <b>% with English as Additional Language</b> | 1                              | 95                     | 56                     | 1                                       | 8                       |
| <b>GCSE passes 5 A*-C 2001</b>               | 12                             | 33                     | 35                     | 4                                       | 50                      |
| <b>Value Added KS3 to KS4 2002</b>           | 97.9                           | 104.6                  | 106.9                  | 87.3                                    |                         |
| <b>OFSTED summary (most recent report)</b>   | <i>“an improving school”</i>   | <i>“a good school”</i> | <i>“a good school”</i> | <i>“more strengths than weaknesses”</i> |                         |

Sources: DfES, OFSTED reports.

However, the contextual analysis suggests that looking at the performance of the schools only in terms of their management practices would be a limited approach. Firstly, it demonstrates that contextual factors may contribute to difficulties that even good managers find hard or impossible to overcome. Secondly, it shows just how much these local contextual factors can differ from one school to another, even when all are in poor neighbourhoods. To look only at how managers overcome the circumstances of ‘deprived’ schools would be to obscure much of the relevant detail.

In terms of their local area characteristics, these four schools fell loosely into two pairings. Two, Middle Row HS and West-City HSG, were inner city schools, in areas of dense population and extensive deprivation, and with high proportions of pupils from ethnic minorities. Benefit data from 1998 suggests that West-City was

the more deprived area at that time, with just over half its children living in benefit-dependent households, compared with two fifths in Middle Row, although broader measures of deprivation, the 1998 ILD at ED level and the 2000 IMD at ward level, find the areas to be similarly deprived. Both schools had FSM levels among the top 5% in the country. They were, however, different in their cultural contexts. Middle Row HS was in an almost entirely Muslim area, with established and settled Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities and a strong social and community infrastructure and a vibrant, if low-paying, local economy of shops, restaurants and other small firms, as well as proximity to the city centre. Many families were owner occupiers, albeit on low incomes and in crowded and poor quality housing. West-City HSG, by contrast, was in an area of striking ethnic and cultural diversity. Its population was rapidly changing. White English, Turkish and a number of African and Caribbean communities were established in the area but none was culturally dominant. The area was a melting pot of different communities and cultures, a first port of call for new settlers in London, and traditionally a place from which people moved on and up. There was a lack of very local employment but central London and the City offered a wide range of job opportunities. A high proportion of families were renters, living in Council flats.

The two other schools were outside major conurbations in areas that were more differentiated socio-economically. Both areas had pockets of deprivation alongside more advantaged neighbourhoods. In Southside, these pockets were severely deprived (more so than in either Middle Row or West-City). However, overall, both the schools had lower levels of FSM than their inner city counterparts.

These two schools also had very different socio-cultural contexts, although they were both predominately white. Southside Grange was in an area that was dominated by manufacturing employment in heavy industries. Its economy was devastated during the 1970s and 1980s and had not recovered, giving rise to third generation unemployment. The area had depopulated and some streets were still being abandoned in the face of empty housing, extremely low property values, crime and anti-social behaviour. Farcliffe, although a working class area, traditionally had a more diverse and more service-oriented economy. Its population was growing slightly. There were few empty homes and the living environment was much better than in Southside. However, as a coastal town with an abundant supply of cheap temporary accommodation, the area had always attracted disadvantaged individuals and families and had high levels of social problems. There were large numbers of children in care, and a significant asylum-seeker population.

Moreover, the four schools differed in their institutional contexts. West-City HSG had enjoyed a long period of high performance and high reputation under two good headteachers, with a new one recently in post. Both Southside Grange and Middle Row HS had recovered in the last five years from positions of unpopularity and poor performance, while The Farcliffe School was beginning to make a tentative recovery from a similar position.

**Table 3.29: Area Characteristics**

(1991 Census data unless otherwise stated)

|   | <b>Southside Grange School</b>                       | <b>Middle Row HS</b> | <b>West-City HSG</b>                    | <b>The Farcliffe School</b>   |
|---|--|----------------------|---|---|
| <b>Region</b>                                       | North-East   | Midlands             | London                                  | South-East  |
| <b>Area Type for Wards in Catchment Area (ONS)</b>  | Deprived Indust., Industrial Areas, Middling Britain | Deprived Indust.     | Inner City Estates, Deprived City Areas | Middling Brit., Mature Pops, Lower Status O/-Occupied, Prosperous, Industrial, Deprived City, Rural |
| <b>Predominant Housing Type</b>                     | Mixed – mainly houses                                | Victorian terraces   | 1950s and 1960s flats                   | Mixed – mainly houses   |
| <b>% social housing</b>                             | 40   | 33                   | 64                                      | 14  |
| <b>% overcrowding &gt;1.5ppr</b>                    | 0  | 3                    | 4                                       | 0   |
| <b>Population density (persons per hectare)</b>     | 19   | 63                   | 98                                      | 19  |
| <b>% White residents</b>                            | 100  | 37                   | 69                                      | 100   |
| <b>% Black residents</b>                            | 0  | 9                    | 16                                      | 0   |
| <b>% Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Indian residents</b> | 0  | 50                   | 11                                      | 0   |
| <b>% adults on IS/JSA 1998</b>                      | 20   | 28                   | 26                                      | 14  |
| <b>Rank of Highest Ranking Ward on IMD 2000</b>     | 9  | 33                   | 46                                      | 77  |
| <b>Rank of Lowest Ranking ward IMD 2000</b>         | 1842   | 343                  | 575                                     | 4347  |
| <b>Population</b>                                   | Declining  | Increasing           | Increasing                              | Increasing  |

Differing market contexts contributed an additional dimension. Table 3.30 summarises market characteristics using Gewirtz et al.'s schema (1995). It demonstrates the continuum of circumstances from The Farcliffe's highly differentiated and competitive market to Middle Row's flatter hierarchy and tendency to local schooling.

**Table 3.30 : The Local Educational Markets**

|  | <b>Southside Grange School</b>   | <b>Middle Row HS</b>   | <b>West-City HSG</b>   | <b>The Farcliffe School</b>  |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Selection in State System</b>         | N  | N  | N  | Y  |
| <b>Local systemic history</b>            | Change to comprehensive system in early 1990s but legacy of selective status hierarchy.  | Comprehensive system with mutable status hierarchies.                                      | Comprehensive system with mutable status hierarchies.  | Selective system with established hierarchies even among secondary modern schools.         |
| <b>Connection with other LEAs</b>        | School borders another LEA but vast majority of pupils in both LEAs stay in Borough.   | Entirely contained in one large LEA.   | School borders another LEA. Considerable movement between LEAs.  | Entirely contained in one large LEA.   |
| <b>Parental Inclination to Choice</b>    | Strong localism and little inclination to out of borough schooling.  | Strong localism. Preference among some Muslim families for single sex education for girls. | Many parents willing for children to travel within and out of Borough.   | Many parents willing for children to travel, mainly within Borough.                        |
| <b>Transport</b>                         | Poorer transport links.  | Good.  | Good.  | Poorer transport links.  |
| <b>Existence of 'Natural catchments'</b> | Stable natural catchments although some schools share a zone.  | Dense population and overlapping catchments.   | Dense population and overlapping catchments.   | No real sense of natural catchments due to selective system.                               |
| <b>Admissions system in LEA</b>          | Geographical admission zones. Place offered in home zone. Parents accept or express other preference.                              | Open preference form completed by parents.   | Open preference form completed by parents. Banding system to ensure even distribution by ability.                | 11-plus exam determines tier of schooling. Open preference form then completed by parents. |
| <b>Hierarchy of schools in area</b>      | Relatively flat hierarchy but with some high performing and some 'sink' schools,. Status differences remaining from selective era. | Relatively undifferentiated with emphasis on community comprehensive ethos.                | Moderately differentiated with variety of schools in a mutable hierarchy. Community comprehensive ideal remains. | Highly differentiated with strong sense of hierarchy.                                      |
| <b>Popularity of School</b>              | Becoming popular After being very unpopular.   | Moderately popular.  | Popular (consistent for several years).  | Very unpopular.  |

Thus what could be interpreted from a management perspective as a picture of four schools in deprived areas all performing differently looks, from a contextual perspective, like a picture of four very different institutions in different socio-economic, cultural and competitive circumstances. The chapters that follow explore the implications of these different contexts for school processes and quality.

## Chapter 4: Interpreting Context

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The remainder of the thesis is based on data collected during several days intensive fieldwork in each school. This chapter describes that work<sup>1</sup>, and then reflects on staff observations of local context as they emerged from it.

### **The School-Based Fieldwork**

The bulk of the information on which the analysis is based was gained from a series of semi-structured interviews with headteachers and teaching staff, 32 in all, all of which were taped and fully transcribed. Headteacher interviews lasted between two and three hours and were always conducted in several sittings.<sup>2</sup> They included factual sections on the school's staffing and resources, staff organisation, pupil mobility and attendance, parental involvement, and interactions with other agencies. There were also more loosely structured sections on the impact of disadvantage on pupils' education, the notion of quality in education, and government policy. These sections allowed the respondents to expound their own views and their accounts of the school. The full interview schedule is attached as Annex 3.

The teacher interviews were shorter, lasting one teaching period (between 50 minutes and one hour). They aimed to explore teachers' understanding of how the context of the school affected their work, and they covered three areas:

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 1 contains some further information about the practicalities of carrying out the work and my reflections on the fieldwork process.

<sup>2</sup> At Middle Row HS and at West City HSG, I covered some of the material in interviews with deputy headteachers, and had shorter interviews with the head.



- How socio-economic disadvantage manifested itself in the pupil population and how this affected teachers' classroom practice, the time they spent on different activities, and their approach to their work.
- Teachers' notions of 'quality' in education and their reflections on how aspects of good schools could be achieved in schools in disadvantaged areas.
- Teachers' reflections on the general direction of change in education towards greater curriculum standardisation, an emphasis on academic attainment, and greater external scrutiny.

The interview schedule is attached as Annex 4. Although it is fairly closely structured, in practice I allowed respondents to discuss issues at length even if this meant that not all areas were fully covered.

I requested eight staff interviews in each school (between a quarter and fifth of the full time staff), which would provide a large sample (in qualitative terms) of 32 staff across the four schools, and sufficient in each school to draw out particular patterns and differences. This approach presented a dilemma about whether to try to draw a sample representative of staff in schools in disadvantaged areas or one that was representative of the staff in each school. Because of my case study approach and the importance of context, I decided to sample within each school, rather than across schools. Some of these schools had a relatively old and experienced staff, whereas one had a very inexperienced staff. I asked each school to select teachers for interview who reflected the age of the staff in the school and who were willing to participate. In practice, sampling was not precise. Only one school had readily available information about the age of the staff, and in any case there was an issue of staff availability. I took the view that insisting on a finely constructed sample might

jeopardise the whole research process, so I agreed that they should get ‘a representative range’ of staff. At each interview, I then collected details of age and teaching experience, subject and other responsibilities within the school.

Arranging the sample via the school management was the only practical way to work, since my access to the school was controlled by the headteacher. Inevitably there was a possibility that the sample would be biased towards ‘better’ teachers (whom the school was prepared to show off), more pro-management teachers (who would portray the school in a good light), or teachers who were known to have something particular to say about the subject. However, one could argue that a direct approach to staff might have generated a similar sample.

A breakdown of the staff interviews is shown in Table 4.1. In all, 28 teaching staff were interviewed<sup>3</sup>, the sample being slightly reduced because not all the schools could make sufficient staff available.

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<sup>3</sup> I also interviewed both deputy headteachers at Middle Row HS and one at West-City HSG, who covered their perspectives as class teachers as well as providing information about school organisation. These staff are not included in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Teaching Staff Interviews**

|   | <b>Southside Grange</b> | <b>Middle Row HS</b> | <b>West-City HSG</b> | <b>The Farcliffe School</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Total number of full time staff in school | 50                      | 48                   | 59                   | 40                          | 197          |
| Number interviewed                        | 8                       | 7                    | 7                    | 6                           | 28           |
| Gender:                                   |                         |                      |                      |                             |              |
| Male                                      | 4                       | 1                    | 2                    | 4                           | 11           |
| Female                                    | 4                       | 6                    | 5                    | 2                           | 17           |
| Age:                                      |                         |                      |                      |                             |              |
| 21-30                                     | 2                       | 2                    | 1                    | 1                           | 6            |
| 31-40                                     | 1                       | 1                    | 3                    | 3                           | 8            |
| 41-50                                     | 2                       | 2                    | 2                    | 2                           | 8            |
| 51-60                                     | 3                       | 2                    | 1                    | 0                           | 6            |
| Academic Seniority:                       |                         |                      |                      |                             |              |
| Faculty/ Subject Head                     | 3                       | 3                    | 1                    | 3                           | 10           |
| Class Teacher                             | 5                       | 4                    | 6                    | 3                           | 18           |

In addition to these structured interviews with headteachers and teaching staff, I used three other methods to find out about contextual impacts on the schools. The first was to conduct shorter, unstructured interviews (20-30 minutes) with members of the non-teaching staff responsible for attendance, behaviour and learning support. The division of responsibilities and the post titles were different in each school. However, in each school I interviewed senior staff in charge of inclusion or SEN, staff in charge of learning support centres, and EAL staff where applicable. I also interviewed attendance officers (in three schools), learning and behaviour support assistants (in two schools) and staff with specific project responsibilities, such as the emotional intelligence project worker at The Farcliffe School. Table 4.2 shows the staff interviewed in each school. These conversations were my main method of establishing the detail of the specific projects that were underway. I also had the opportunity to interview the Chair of Governors in one school. The topic guide for this interview is attached as Annex 5.

**Table 4.2: Additional Staff Interviews**

|   | <b>Southside Grange</b>   | <b>Middle Row HS</b>   | <b>West-City HSG</b>   | <b>The Farcliffe School</b>   |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| <b>Senior Staff In Charge of Inclusion/ Learning Support or SEN</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of Inclusion.</li> <li>• Head of Learning Support.</li> </ul> | N/A : Post Vacant  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SEN Coordinator.</li> </ul>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deputy Head i/c student support.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Staff in Charge of Learning Support Centres for Pupils with Behavioural Problems</b> | N/A : responsibility of Head of Inclusion   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead learning mentor</li> </ul>       | N/A : responsibility of SEN co-ordinator   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion Teacher (Learning Support Centre)</li> </ul>                                       |
| <b>Other Learning or Behaviour Support Staff</b>  |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning Support Assistant</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning Support Assistant.</li> </ul>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key Stage Assistant.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Language Support</b>   | N/A   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of EAL*</li> </ul>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EAL co-ordinator.</li> </ul>                                  | N/A   |
| <b>Attendance</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance Officers.</li> </ul>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home/School Liaison</li> </ul>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School-based EWO.</li> </ul>                                  |   |
| <b>Others</b>   |   |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning mentor.</li> <li>• Trainee Social Worker.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant Headteacher (ext. relations).</li> <li>• Emotional intelligence worker.</li> </ul> |
| <b>NUMBER</b>   | <b>3</b>  | <b>4</b>   | <b>6</b>   | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Relevant staff in school whom it was not possible to interview</b>                   |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somali parent link worker</li> </ul>  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Liaison Officer</li> </ul>  |

\* This member of staff was also a class teacher and is included in Table 4.1

The second additional method was to conduct in-school observations. Many previous school case studies have used observation to document social relations in schools (Willis 1977; Ball 1981) and to identify aspects of school organisation that contribute to effectiveness (Rutter et al. 1979). Systematic classroom observation is an established tool in school improvement (Beresford 1998). However, given the short amount of time that I was able to spend in each school, I decided that observation data would be too partial to contribute significantly. I decided not to use

systematic observations as a major part of my research design, but to record any incidental observations. I did this in note form or using a dictaphone, and typed my notes up on the same day.

I made two kinds of observations. The first were of a factual nature and were used in conjunction with data from the interviews and documents to draw up a descriptive picture of the school. They included notes on the physical layout and condition of the school buildings, the presence of computers and other equipment, displays of work, school policies and so on. I worked with an observation checklist for these items. These factual observations also included random observations of people and space: where activities took place, who was present at the school gate in the evening, and so on. The second type of observations was of behaviour and relationships, for example, levels of noise in corridors and classrooms, interactions between pupils and staff, observance of uniform rules. These observations depended very much on what I saw and on my interpretation of it. I recognised a tendency to record unusual or interesting incidents. For example, in one school I documented events surrounding a pupil letting off a firework inside and in another, a conversation about theft of marker pens. However, I did not document pupils handling and dealing with school equipment in a routine manner without stealing it. Because of the acknowledged partiality of this data, I decided not to use it independently, but only to query or confirm interview data, where inconsistencies arose.

Finally, I requested supporting data and documents. Table 4.3 shows what each school was able to provide.

**Table 4.3: Data Provided by Each School**

| Data Item   | School<br>1 | School<br>2 | School<br>3 | School<br>4 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Form 7: January 2001  | ◆           | ◆           | N           | ◆           |
| List of education support staff   | ◆           | ◆           | N           | ◆           |
| List of admin/clerical staff  | ◆           | N           | N           | ◆           |
| No of teachers employed for EAL or to meet needs of ethnic minority students.   | ◆           | ◆           | ◆           | ◆           |
| Total number of students on the register (current)  | ◆           | ◆           | ◆           | ◆           |
| Teacher absence data (calendar year 2000) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number (and %) of all teachers taking sickness absence</li> <li>• Total teachers days lost to sickness</li> <li>• Number of staff long-term sick</li> <li>• Number of total days sickness accounted for by these staff</li> </ul>                            | ◆           | N           | N           | ◆           |
| Pupil absence data for 2000/01 year: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of half days missed (authorised)</li> <li>• Number of half days missed (unauthorised)</li> <li>• Total number of pupils with persistent unauthorised absence (10% or more)</li> <li>• Number of unauthorised days accounted for by these pupils</li> </ul> | ◆           | ◆           | N           | N           |
| % of parents at parents evenings by year group  | ◆           | N           | N           | ◆           |
| Data from discipline system in 2000/1 showing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nos. of pupils on different levels of report</li> <li>• Numbers temporarily excluded</li> <li>• Numbers of permanently excluded pupils</li> </ul>   | N           | N           | N           | N           |

N= not provided. ◆ = provided

### Formal Knowledge of Context

The first thing that was striking from the interview material is that headteachers and staff in the different schools had different levels of formal knowledge about the socio-economic contexts in which they were working. Formal knowledge is defined here in the sense of statistics and reports from other agencies and groups. Some schools made more systematic efforts to gather these than others.

The Farcliffe School was the most systematic. The new management team, perceiving a need to engage the services of other agencies, was making a considerable effort to identify the needs of the area and plan accordingly. It had recently run a multi-agency event and produced a booklet containing social and demographic information about the area and about the intake and performance of the school. All staff had access to this information, and several also commented on maps that were on display in the headteacher's office, charting deprivation in the area.

At Middle Row HS, the experience that the school had had in the early 1990s, losing the confidence of the local community, had also led to the school adopting an external focus. The school's development plan positioned external change in the area as integral to the process of internal school development. Its first objective was *"to monitor and respond appropriately to socio-political imperatives: governance, demography, religion and culture"*. In addition to responding to national and LEA policies, this meant maintaining and strengthening dialogue with the local community, maintaining awareness of the local cultural and political climate, taking account of increasing numbers of children with parents educated in Britain, taking steps to maintain gender balance and planning for more refugee children. Knowledge of the local area was seen as vital and was explicitly sought, through various channels of external communication, including meetings with resident and religious leaders and the work of bi-lingual parent-link workers.

This explicit attempt to find out about the area and to maintain a dialogue with the community and with other professional agencies was not such a feature of the other

two schools. It was time consuming for senior management and competed for time that could otherwise be spent on in-school activities with a direct focus on pupils' learning. As the headteacher at Southside Grange pointed out, the more demanding the school, the less easy it was to find time to become involved in interactions that would result in better information about the area more generally.

*“We have been asked [to become involved in multi-agency partnerships] and I did go to some of the early meetings, but I feel that you have to cut your cloth to what you feel you can cope with. It’s just too much for me to do, and one of the big issues about being head here is that you need to be in the school as much as possible and I just felt there’s an enormous preponderance of meetings. You could meet for ever and they might all be very very worthy but ultimately I believe I need to be in school.., which can be interpreted to be an isolationist approach. But I just couldn’t do anything else, because I’d end up selling everybody short.”*

(Headteacher, Southside Grange School)

Moreover, it was also clear that even where schools did attempt to gather and circulate local information, this did not always translate directly to staff. Teachers' perceptions of what was important about the local area were shaped by discussion and shared experience as well as by this received knowledge. Comments on context made by one member of staff in a school tended to be echoed by others. Some issues were given greater prominence than, objectively, one would expect. For example, The Farcliffe School's multi-agency initiative drew particular attention to the large number of looked after children. A new initiative for children in care had



recently been introduced. The needs of such children featured prominently in the comments of staff in this school, with several quoting the figure 20% (of the pupils being in care), even though the school's official data put the figure at 6.5%. Their complex needs and '*emotional baggage*' meant that they sprang readily to mind.

### **Informal Knowledge and Staff Observations of Context**

It was also clear that 'formal knowledge' was only a very small element of teachers' overall understandings of the contexts in which they worked. Far more was gleaned from working with the pupils and their families, and it was the impressions gained from these interactions, more so than the facts handed down by school management, that determined how teachers responded on a day-to-day basis. The remainder of this chapter therefore explores how teachers observed and interpreted their contexts, illustrating the 'meanings' that context brought to their work, as well as the practical realities to which they were responding.

Most of the material gathered in the interviews related to local area contexts. Respondents' comments on these fell into three main categories. The first was a group of factors related to pupils' social and economic characteristics. These included family income, ethnic origin, gender, family structure and relationships, and family resources such as housing, transport, books and computers. Linked to these was pupils' prior attainment. In the school effectiveness literature, these would be referred to as **intake characteristics**, generating a 'compositional' effect on the school. The second set of issues, observed much less frequently, related to the

**environmental characteristics** of the area. They could be referred to as generating ‘area effects’ over and above disadvantages conferred by individual and household circumstances. Third, and most commonly, staff spoke about the **cultures** of the areas they were working in: the prevailing norms, values and behaviours. They commented on area cultures generally, as they affected relationships and behavioural norms, and specifically on orientations towards learning and attitudes towards school. These were area effects of a less tangible and measurable kind. Additionally, as well as comments on the local area, staff reflected on the schools as institutions, and how they found them as places to work.

### **Intake Characteristics**

Two characteristics of intake were observed by staff in all the schools: low prior attainment and material poverty. Every school had a high proportion of pupils with additional learning needs and low basic skills. The inner city schools also had pupils who did not speak English. Yet there were also pupils with moderate and high ability, which meant that classes tended to contain a wide range of abilities and needs. Bottom groups could be arranged with relatively small numbers of pupils (up to 15), all with additional learning needs, but there were not enough higher ability pupils to fill classes of 30 or more at the top end, nor enough teachers or classrooms to make smaller sets of even ability. Thus the range of abilities within an upper set could be high. At Southside Grange, for example, top sets could include pupils ranging in likely GCSE attainment from grade A to grade D, particularly in Year 11 which had 57% of pupils on the SEN register.

Staff in all the schools also commented on pupils' low household incomes, lack of educational resources at home, and narrow range of cultural experiences. There was an almost endless need for enrichment activities, to make up for pupils' lack of opportunities at home. Several staff at Middle Row HS, for example, observed that school trips were often a 'first' for many pupils: a first visit to the city centre, to the countryside or to a theatre.

These comments were echoed in every school. However, there were also differences between the schools in the kinds of intake characteristics that were noted. A general distinction could be made between the two inner city schools, West-City HSG and Middle Row HS, and the two schools in white working class areas outside major cities. In the latter schools, Southside Grange and The Farcliffe, staff drew attention to the emotional and practical needs of pupils who came from disrupted families or violent families, or whose mothers were bringing them up with a succession of different partners. Some children were perceived to be lacking consistent love, attention and support at home, while a minority were actually neglected or abused. Staff talked about a very small number of children whose parents would not take them to the doctor or administer medicine, who did not wash or have clean clothes or even have items like soap and toothbrushes at home.

One teacher at The Farcliffe School estimated that a minority in most classes had "*a nice stable home life*". Several noted that it was the volume of these problems, not the nature of particular cases, that marked the school out from others in which they had taught.

*“Their backgrounds? I don’t like the word dysfunctional family but I have to use the word dysfunctional family... these students live in circumstances which would horrify the vast majority of people. I mean one student went home and that was it, he lost everything, because they had been thrown out by the bailiff. There’s one family that’s affected by alcohol. There’s another family that’s affected by the father... he’s actually in prison and mum’s having to cope with lots of young children as well as this particular student. There’s another child who is looked after and he’s having to go through quite a traumatic existence, and there’s another child who is a product of family breakdown and is having to deal with all the consequences.”*

(Head of Student Support, The Farcliffe School)

Difficulties at home played themselves out at school in concentration problems, attention-seeking behaviour, difficulties adapting to a consistent rule structure, unwillingness to trust and the need for emotional support and reassurance. Although behaviour at both The Farcliffe School and Southside Grange was generally good, staff at both referred to the frequency of minor disruption. At Southside Grange, they also spoke about the very disturbed behaviour of a minority of pupils, whose emotional outbursts could be extraordinarily disruptive to the general order of the school. Managing such pupils and engaging them was a daily struggle in which progress was slow and success could never be taken for granted:

*“...for example, an incredibly difficult girl. Nobody in the family wants her. She just feels totally unloved and unwanted. It comes out in school in the*

*most appalling verbal abuse and aggression. She's a very angry girl. She's 13, and we've now got her on a modified timetable where she comes in mornings only and we've had, touch wood, a couple of good days."*

(Headteacher, Southside Grange School)

Different issues were raised in the inner city schools. These schools both had small numbers of children who arrived at the school with no English, and large numbers who did not speak any English at home, or have access to English television, films, books or magazines, presenting a barrier to their learning in all subjects. Outside the school, many pupils from non-English speaking families were expected to help with translation and to take adult responsibilities for their parents. These activities impinged upon their school work. Among Bangladeshi and Turkish Muslim families there were expectations on girls to undertake domestic chores, as well as restrictions on their social activities and expectations of early marriage, that generated extra emotional as well as practical demands:

*"The emotional climate of any given classroom is much more complicated in this school. We do know kids who haven't gone home, who've slept rough, who come in and are then expected to conform to our rules and expectations. Rightly so but they're starving hungry and thirsty and haven't had any sleep. We have cultural expectations on girls, say girls who are under the constant threat of being returned to Bangladesh. We have girls who know they are going to have an arranged marriage, and so you've got all of this going on in the classroom."* (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, West-City HSG)

It was these kinds of issues that were raised most commonly by staff, rather than concerns about emotional relationships and support within families. Although staff at West-City HSG did mention individual pupils who suffered violence and neglect at home, they did not convey a sense of a significant minority who were unloved and unsupported. Nor did they do so at Middle Row HS, where most of the pupils were from large Pakistani and Bangladeshi families, often in shared accommodation with grandparents. Parents married young and family breakdown was regarded as shameful. Several staff noted that children might be dealing with hidden violence and abuse, and sometimes with unacknowledged family breakdowns. There were also inter-generational tensions within families in Middle Row that led to frustration, conflict and sometimes emotional outbursts. The headteacher explained the issues of cultural transition that were affecting both girls and boys, and which needed to be handled well if disaffection and conflict were to be avoided:

*“on the one hand you’ve got bright, ambitious children, particularly girls, who want to get on but also want to stay within their culture. The girls are gradually starting to get to college and university and they’re going to be more influential in families, and more likely to be earning. On the other hand, you’ve got an underclass developing with young people becoming disaffected and slipping into a street culture, a drug culture. It’s mainly happening to boys, partly because the girls are so protected. Bangladeshi boys here are keeping up, but we’re finding that Pakistani boys are getting left behind in school and featuring more and more in exclusions and crime. It’s exacerbated by the girls’ success and the changing power relationships between men and women. Boys can’t necessarily follow in the roles of their*

*fathers, and it's hard for them to see their role and their future.”*

(Headteacher, Middle Row HS)

These were different issues about family relationships than those that had been raised in the two schools in the white working class areas. Moreover, each area also had its own specific local characteristics that formed the context for schooling. The extreme unpopularity of parts of Southside meant that it housed families who had no choice of accommodation elsewhere, including homeless families. At The Farcliffe School, the conversion of hotel properties to private children's homes created an additional problem: an unusually high proportion of children in care, including not just local children but those from other areas with complex problems who had not been able to be fostered and had been placed in Greenford care homes by other local authorities.

*“20% of our kids are what are now euphemistically called looked after children. A lot of those come in from outside and their background is quite often really really difficult which makes it very difficult for them to trust any adult, maybe impossible. But 20% is a very high proportion. It was nothing like that in [deprived area in Essex where respondent had previously worked]. Awful things have happened to these kids. You know, I've dealt with child protection issues at other schools but I can't believe another school in the country has the same kinds of levels of sexual abuse of minors as we've had to deal with. You know, beating of kids is very very common. It's distorted because 20% of our kids come from outside, so you've got 20% of kids with those kind of problems. None of them have come in because their*

*mum and dad both got killed in a car crash, because those kids don't get farmed out. We tend to get the kids...well, we've had two or three children's home kids, and these are ones that have either repeatedly failed foster care or they can't get anyone because of the way they're so badly affected."*

(Class Teacher 4, The Farcliffe School)

The inner city locations of West-City HSG and Middle Row HS meant that they had a relatively high proportion of asylum seekers and refugees. Staff spoke about pupils dealing with loss, upheaval and trauma, and about families in inadequate or temporary housing with no money for furniture. Some families were genuinely destitute. Thus it was clear that although material poverty and associated learning needs were common across areas, different areas generated very different demands.

### **Area Environmental Characteristics**

Area environmental characteristics were mentioned much less commonly than intake characteristics and mostly related to crime. Only at The Farcliffe School was crime not mentioned as a relevant environmental characteristic.

At Southside Grange, staff observed that the area was a risky and insecure environment in which to grow up. Borough View was known as a major heroin market, and there had been sporadic episodes of serious violent crime, including a recent drug-related murder. There was also a high level of disorder and threatening behaviour by groups of youths. One member of staff reported the school minibus being stoned as he dropped pupils off after youth club. Moreover, this environment



affected the school directly. At one time, it had had frequent trespassers on the school site, including youths riding stolen motorbikes on its fields during school hours, but the installation of a perimeter fence had alleviated these. Nevertheless intruders were not uncommon. My interview with the headteacher was interrupted when he had to chase a group of young men off the school site.

Similar problems were reported at both the inner city schools. Access to West-City HSG was only via a security gate controlled from the school office. Staff reported that pupils were unwilling to take part in after-school activities because of the dangers of travelling home after dark in the area. Fear had been fuelled by a fire-bomb attack on a pupil outside the school gates, and by recent fights and robberies on buses. At Middle Row HS, incidents of vandalism against the school were rare, although in one incident two school minibuses had been burnt out, but there were concerns about intruders, not strangers but ex-pupils or local people settling scores. Anxiety was heightened because “*we know people out in the community do have access to weapons – it is an issue being where we are*” (Deputy Head). As in Southside, recent drug-related murders had added to safety fears. The school had installed CCTV and was hoping to raise money for security gates.

### **‘Culture’ and Attitudes to Learning**

The majority of teachers’ remarks about local context, however, related to pupils’ culture and attitudes. They suggested that five main contextual factors were important: ethnicity and cultural difference; gender and prior attainment; economic

opportunity; the nature of social networks; and the reputations of the areas and the schools.

### ***Ethnicity and Cultural Difference***

As with intake characteristics, teachers observed cultural contrasts between the white working class areas (Southside and Farcliffe) and the inner city areas with high ethnic minority populations (West-City and Middle Row).

At both Southside Grange and The Farcliffe School, pupils were perceived as having different behavioural expectations at home than at school. Several staff in both schools spoke about children having '*different sets of rules*' at home, governing their manners towards adults and other children, their use of language, aggression or physical violence, and the acceptability of adult behaviours (smoking, drinking and sex) and illegal behaviours. In some instances, this was seen as an issue of different norms, or standards, of behaviour, as illustrated by this description of the school attempting to enforce a ban on gambling:

*“We took one bairn home one day for playing pitch and toss, which is a local gambling game. ... took the bairn home in the middle of the afternoon, took them in and there was a gambling school going on in the house. All these people in their underwear, sitting there drinking beer, playing poker and the father just said “what’s the problem?” and in the end we brought the kid back to school because we thought he’d be better off at school. And the father wasn’t being awkward. He simply could not understand why I didn’t want these kids gambling, because it was part of their life.”* (Headteacher, Southside Grange School)

In other cases, the problem was seen to arise from the structures of family and society, which failed to provide children with any constant set of rules. Children generally were perceived to have a lot of freedom and unsupervised leisure. Some only had one parent at home or alternated between different step-families and grandparents who had different behavioural expectations. As a result, they found it hard to adjust to the disciplined environment of school:

*“There’s the fact that a lot of them have an awful lot of freedom. They’re streetwise, because of the time that they spend independent of adults. There’s not a lot of what we call “the old fashioned family sit down and eat dinner”. There again, that applies throughout different socio-economic ranges but I do tend to find that it’s very difficult for them to accept that an adult is saying “this is not acceptable”. They don’t sort of stick to the rules, they want to push the rules, they totally ignore the rules.” (Class Teacher 2, Southside Grange School)*

These comments related to expectations of children’s behaviour generally. Teachers in the white working class areas also alluded specifically and frequently to negative or indifferent attitudes towards learning and towards school, among both children and parents. The headteacher at Southside Grange noted that pupils were reluctant to bring bags to school because bringing a bag implied taking work home, which might bring scorn from peers. At The Farcliffe School, the headteacher talked about an *“anti-boff culture ... You don’t want to be seen to be keen. One girl here got so much stick at home and from her friends about being interested in school work that she’s gone right the other way and only comes part time.”*

This disinterest in school was seen as stemming largely from parents, who did not share the school's orientation towards learning and in some cases were seen as giving clear messages to children that their school work was unimportant. Parents were seen as willing to condone absence from school, keeping children off to go shopping, work on the market, or take holidays during term time, and unwilling to participate actively in their children's education, helping with homework or collaborating with school over homework and discipline.

*“Lots of our parents, very nice parents, simply do not think that education is important because it won't make any difference to anybody.. so you get a lack of support for homework for example...Home school partnership is very hard... To get parents to support you consistently, to get them to come in, is hard, to get them to sign homework diaries, to get them to engage with you is hard. A lot of it is just trying to get parents to see the purpose of it. I'm sure that's much harder than where most of the kids have got two parents at home and most of the parents come to parents' evening and most parents actually want their kids to do well.”*

(Headteacher, Southside Grange School)

*“ there's a lad who was excluded last week for a violent incident... we bring the parents in because he's been misbehaving. We'll say right, he needs to behave himself in his geography lesson. And his parents say “well why, I never learnt any geography, why should he have to learn geography?” and you say “well whether he wants to learn geography or not, the law in this country is that he's got to attend school, and attending school means going to the lessons that are laid on. He doesn't have a choice about that”, “but I*

*can't see the point". So no support. I'm not saying I want the kids to be hammered by their parents but when the message clearly from a parent, in a meeting with the kid, is "well I don't think it's important either... [respondent shrugs]"*.

(Class Teacher 4, The Farcliffe School)

As previous research (Lareau 1987) has found, some teachers were inclined to interpret lack of parental participation as a parental failing, indicating lack of interest in education and sometimes lack of interest in the children themselves:

A: *"Er from what the kids say to me I'd say that a lot of them lack support at home, from their parents, they just don't seem to have, for whatever reasons, the pushing power from their parents to sort of do a little bit better. I know my own parents were fairly pushy with me but they weren't too pushy. It was just their attitude. It didn't revolve around finance, it revolved around their attitude.*

Q: *OK, so it's not sort of lack of resources and books and so on ?*

A: *No, because they know that we've got them here and they know that we're willing to give them the extra time. It's just... the amount of times that I hear a child say "dad doesn't care, mum doesn't care." It's quite incredible. So we do our bit but sometimes you're hitting a brick wall."*

(Class Teacher 1, The Farcliffe School)

However, some staff offered more structural explanations, noting that white working class areas contained many families whose expectations of social mobility through education were small, conditioned by their own experiences over several generations. Others also remarked on the impact of parents' own negative experiences of schooling.

*“A lot of kids come from families where education is irrelevant. I'm not saying they're wrong to see it as irrelevant. It probably is irrelevant. If you've got 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation people who are on the DSS, and not got a real prospect, realistically, of getting out of it, and sometimes that has a cumulative effect that in the end you don't even want to get out of it. Schooling doesn't figure very high on a lot of these families' sets of priorities.”*

(Class Teacher 4, The Farcliffe School)

*“ I was parent liaison officer for a while here which involved getting them to come to parents' evenings.. I actually got it up to 50% in the end, and I had to phone them all up, you know, and encourage them, because letters went home and a lot I think, couldn't read them or understand them so I used to phone them up and I used to get quite stroppy sometimes. They'd say “I'm not coming” and I'd say “well why aren't you coming?” and in the end I opened a crèche for parents' evening, because they'd say “I've got little ones at home” so I'd say “that's OK, we've got a crèche”, because it was almost like they were scared to come into school and they were using every excuse they could find... some, as they came in the school, remembered their*

*days at school and really couldn't face it, and a lot feel very inferior when they're spoken to by a member of staff. They get very scared.. I think it's very sad, because they haven't got any self confidence at all, so of course that rubs off on the children and then you have a school that can't do its job because of that."*

(Class Teacher 3, The Farcliffe School)

Reviewing these cultural issues, Mrs May, the headteacher at The Farcliffe School, reflected that "*it must be easier at inner city schools where they have ethnic minority pupils whose parents think education is important and also where there's a work ethic*".

On the face of it, this was borne out by the observations of teachers at West-City HSG and Middle Row HS. Firstly, there was the issue of discipline and behaviour. Family life certainly played a bigger part within the Islamic culture than in liberal western families, where children had much less freedom and unsupervised leisure time. Many attended evening Islamic school, worked in family businesses, or were expected to visit or receive family members in the evening and at weekends. Both Muslim families and African Christian families brought their children up in more disciplined environments than white British families on similarly low incomes. This created its own problems. Some children had little homework time as well as little leisure time, and in some cases, parental restrictions on children, and their expectations of being able to enforce these with punishment, were uncomfortably authoritarian for staff accustomed to a more liberal culture. Rather than cajoling parents to exert more discipline and control, teachers at Middle Row HS spent "*a lot*

*of time dealing with parents or trying to negotiate a better understanding between parents and children”* (Headteacher, Middle Row HS). However, because respectful behaviour towards adults was expected from children, parents were more likely to be supportive of school behaviour policies and sanctions.

Secondly, there was the issue of orientation towards learning. Many families in the inner city areas were new to British education and the British labour market. If a low value on education arose in white working class communities from generations of manual labour or unemployment and low expectations of social mobility, this was not the case among many immigrant families, who saw education as a way up in society. Again this was perceived to create its own problems because parents lacked knowledge of the education system. For example, staff at Middle Row HS noted that some parents did not have a good understanding of the different levels of achievements signified by the different GCSE grades, nor of the amount of coursework or homework required. Nor was there always an appreciation of the range of jobs that were potentially available. Many parents envisaged professional careers for their children in medicine or law, rather than looking more broadly at, for example, careers in the creative or media industries, or the wider range of medical or legal jobs, such as physiotherapy, health service administration, occupational therapy, or legal secretarial work. Nevertheless there was a commitment to academic success and a positive attitude towards schooling:

*“in many ways this is an area of hope and vibrancy. Immigrant families have to be hopeful and determined. We find that parents here have very high*



*aspirations for their children. Sometimes too high.” (Headteacher, Middle Row HS)*

This was a finding also reported by Buck et al. in their study of London schools (2002) as was the fact that within these ethnic communities, a commitment to education was largely shared by pupils. Bhatti’s (1999) ethnographic study of a Pakistani community revealed similar findings: high aspirations, a determination that children should ‘break the mould’ and achieve more than their parents, and the perceived shame of failure. Staff at West-City HSG explicitly contrasted pupils’ and parents’ attitudes with those in white working class cultures:

*“The thing that struck me the most when I got here was the quality of homework. ... I think there’s a substantial proportion of girls here who take their education extremely seriously, much more so than my previous school were it was just a given, they expected it. A lot of them do actually deep down realise that this is their way forward.” (Class Teacher 3, West-City HSG)*

*A : “...different values and priorities in terms of education, particularly in the white population, about the value of education.*

*Q: Could you tease that out a bit more?*

*A: I can. We do find that our Bengali and Turkish and African families and to a certain degree African-Caribbean families, and certainly the Vietnamese and Chinese families really value education and see the importance of it. In*

*the main, our English, Scottish and Welsh less so.”* (Deputy Head, West-City HSG)

In both the inner city schools, staff reported practical difficulties dealing with parents, such as lack of translation, parents not understanding the educational system, or not being on the telephone. However, they rarely mentioned lack of support for the school’s values. Behaviour was also generally good, with several staff remarking that most pupils were focused on learning and that *“you’re not firefighting all the time and dealing with behavioural problems. You are dealing with issues to do with the socio-economic area and environment but I think it’s an orderly environment. Teachers feel that they can teach most of the time”* (Deputy Head, West-City HSG). As one teacher at Middle Row HS said *“most of the children really want to learn”* (Class Teacher 3, Middle Row HS).

Thus although the socio-economic context created barriers to learning, the cultural context in these areas appeared in some respects to be beneficial to the school.

### ***Gender and Prior Attainment***

On the basis of this evidence, it appeared that differences between areas in attitudes towards learning were a reflection of ethnic differences. But this was not the only explanation, nor does it explain differences between schools in ‘white’ areas and between schools in ‘ethnic’ areas.

One obvious point was that teachers were observing area cultures through their dealings with the pupils in the school, whose behaviour and orientation towards

learning were also influenced by individual characteristics. West-City HSG was a girls' school, and several staff observed that this was a key factor determining attitudes to learning and to school in general. Even in the other schools, staff commented on gender mix within classes and year groups as impacting on levels of disruptive behaviour and on teaching strategies. More boys tended to mean more disruption.

Prior attainment also made a difference. In all the schools, staff noted that it was the lower attaining pupils who most easily became disaffected and who reacted by non-participation or disruptive behaviour. At Southside Grange, these problems were markedly greater in the lower attaining Years 10 and 11 than lower down the school. Thus it was not surprising that pro-school attitudes were less commonly reported in the secondary modern school, The Farcliffe, than the higher attaining comprehensive, West-City HSG, which had prior attainment close to the national average in some years. On the other hand, Middle Row HS had low prior attainment but reported generally positive orientations towards education. Like all the factors mentioned here, attainment was not an adequate explanation on its own for attitudes towards learning at the school level.

### *Economic Opportunity*

Another factor shaping aspirations and future expectations was the structure of economic opportunity in each area. All of the areas in the study had suffered major employment decline between the 1970s and the mid 1990s, impacting on expectations of work. But current opportunity structures also mattered. As it

happened, both of the white working class areas in this study were peripheral: - physically isolated from the wide range of opportunities and high-achieving role models that large urban areas could provide. Each had relied on specific geographically-based industries that had seriously declined: tourism in Farcliffe and the steel and chemical industries in Southside. Southside had since experienced virtually no economic recovery. Farcliffe had gained jobs principally in other low paid sectors, notably care. Both economies offered limited opportunities in the formal labour market, with high unemployment and a predominance of low wage employment for the lower skilled, and they had well established illegal economies. Farcliffe's proximity to a cross-Channel port provided a specific alternative economy for young people with few qualifications:

*“there are some different things here compared with other areas where I've taught. I'd say limited aspiration, even compared with other deprived areas. The children seem to expect to stay in Greenford and not really to have a great deal of opportunities. They call it the Isle of Greenford and it does feel like an island mentality. We have quite a lot of lesson avoidance. Kids hanging around school, not doing anything, but just trying to avoid going to lessons. Parental support is lower. Oh and a huge drug problem. We've got quite a few kids who are involved in the drug trade and some parents who we think are dealing. Contraband tobacco too. We had a couple of older girls missing from school because they were doing 'runs' to France. You wonder why they bother to attend school at all.”*

(Headteacher, The Farcliffe School)

Illegal economies were established in the other two areas as well, but these neighbourhoods were also closer to the opportunities afforded by major urban centres. Although both of these economies had suffered major manufacturing decline, the nearby city centres had, from the mid to late 1990s, experienced rapid growth in professional and financial service jobs and in retail and hospitality industries. In theory, at least, there was a wider world of opportunity to connect to. West-City HSG was best placed and was making particular attempts to make these links. Being in London, pupils had the opportunity to visit West End theatres and had performed at Shakespeare's Globe. The school had an expansive programme of careers education from Year 7, and had developed relationships with a large firm of City solicitors, whose staff provided mentoring, visits, careers talks and work experience. This situation could be contrasted with that of Southside Grange School, which had no large white-collar firms to connect with. Industrial structure and its change over time, not just ethnicity, must therefore be considered as a factor in shaping attitudes and aspirations. Whether the orientations of white working class pupils in areas in major urban centres, with booming service economies, would be the same as in the economically marginalised ones in this study is not clear.

### *Social Networks and Cultural Embeddedness*

Nor is it clear that the location of economic opportunity, on its own, is enough to influence perceptions of futures. As Putnam (2000) has suggested, people in low income communities do not necessarily benefit from the proximity of wider opportunity structures unless they also have 'bridging' social networks that give them 'word of mouth' access to employment or shared leisure interests. 'Bonding' networks, within communities, are valuable for social and practical support but may

serve to keep people embedded within these communities rather than connected to others.

‘Embeddedness’ was certainly a feature of the white working class areas in this study, but the notion emerged most strongly in interviews with staff from Middle Row HS. Staff pointed to three issues. Firstly, many marriages were to people from Pakistan, so marriage did not extend links to other areas of the city or country. Secondly there were strong links and time-consuming family and religious networks within the area. Thirdly, local families were investing in property and businesses, demonstrating a commitment to staying in the area. Racism was a deterrent to reaching out into other areas, but it was also the case that one of the strengths of the area for Pakistani families was its cultural homogeneity and the familiarity and support that it offered. Several teachers commented that the biggest difficulty that pupils faced was the insularity of their environment:

*“Middle Row is a ghetto for the kids of this area. They very seldom get out.... If you take white middle class kids, they’re quite cute. They know about things, they know about the world. These kids don’t. They live in a closed society. If you put them down anywhere else in England they’re be totally lost. They’d have no support, no nothing”.*

(Class Teacher 6, Middle Row HS)

By contrast, West-City did not have one ethnic community but many. As well as having strong in-group networks, particularly within the sizeable Turkish and Bangladeshi communities, it was also a ‘melting pot’ of different ethnic groups, that

did not necessarily see themselves as settled in the area. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some African groups were demonstrating patterns of traditional white migration: aspiring to move out to the suburbs and to Essex as they became more upwardly mobile. Some staff referred to the determination of families to succeed in British society and not necessarily to make their lives within the community of West-City.

### ***Reputations of Areas and Schools***

A fifth, and connected, issue was the extent to which the images that schools and areas conveyed contributed to feelings of self-esteem. In this study, both of the inner city schools were institutionally stable and well regarded, and had a local image that pupils could be proud of. The other schools were not in this position. Southside Grange was improving but still had to overcome the legacy of its previous reputation. The Farcliffe School had a very poor reputation and little distinctive to offer pupils in the way of facilities and curriculum. Moreover, rejection in the selective system also conveyed to pupils a sense that learning was something they were not very good at. One member of staff said that failing the 11-plus and being allocated to the '*worst school*' meant that some pupils "*just walk through the door and just give up*". Another noted that "*kids come here because no-one can be bothered to get them into somewhere else... those kids come in with those chips very firmly on their shoulder*".

Neighbourhood images were also important. As Howarth (2002) has demonstrated, living in a stigmatised neighbourhood can engender low self-esteem, presenting

particular challenges for schools in helping pupils to develop positive identities and take their place confidently in society. In the schools in this study, there were certainly issues of racial stigmatisation in the inner city schools, perhaps particularly in Middle Row, which had a strong identity as an 'Asian' area, often poorly regarded by those outside it (Lupton 2003b fc). In the predominantly white areas, stigma was also an issue, especially in Southside, where low housing demand contributed to a marked polarisation between neighbourhoods:

*“I think you’ve got to look at the kind of mechanics that lead to people living in Furnace Walk. I don’t think many people would disagree with me when I say that the mechanism by which somebody arrives in Furnace Walk is not the same as the mechanism by which somebody arrives in, let’s say, [nearby market town]. I mean, you don’t get someone from Furnace Walk saying as a topic of conversation “yes but Jonathan and I, we looked at the property in [nearby village] and [other village] but by far and away the Furnace Walk property offered much better value for money, isn’t that right darling?”... They arrive in Furnace Walk because basically they are the bottom of the pile, and that’s basically where they sediment out to... People don’t arrive in Borough View to live there, nowadays, by choice. You don’t sort of target that and say “thats where we want to go” and it suffers from that in that such a large area of somewhere like Borough View is viewed as and used as a sink area that it kind of tarnishes the whole area. I mean we haven’t in [market town] got hundreds of asylum seekers from Kosovo. The first time that anybody like this arrives en masse to the housing authority, they think “ah how fortunate, we’ve got all those derelict houses down in Furnace Walk or*



*Borough View, let's bung some Kosovans in there". It's the way things are, isn't it, and the whole place kind of reflects that. A lot of the people that live there kind of feel that this is a dump and they kind of feel a bit like rejects themselves, you know. I don't think they have anything like the kind of self-esteem that somebody who's arrived in [market town] has got, nothing like it". (Class Teacher 5, Southside Grange School)*

### **The Schools as Institutions**

The last issue that teachers and senior managers reflected on was the kind of school they were working in. Given that the staff who were interviewed were selected by the school management, one would perhaps expect them to be reluctant to criticise. Nevertheless, given the challenging circumstances in which they were working, it was striking and significant that most of the teachers gave positive feedback about the schools as institutions.

All of the respondents considered that they worked in 'good' schools, although all conceded that not all teachers were good and that there were aspects that could be improved upon. They did not appear to be defeated by the challenges of the environment. Indeed, in one sense, these challenges provided a sense of personal pride and status for the staff. They were well aware that the schools they taught in would be "no-go areas" (Class Teacher 1, West-City HSG) for many teachers and they commonly reflected that many other teachers would not be able to survive in their environments and that teachers had to be good to work in these schools. All the

headteachers talked about needing ‘*special*’ staff and one teacher at The Farcliffe School even referred to the school as a ‘*specialist school*’ where teachers with particular expertise in working with educational special needs should be appointed.

In all four schools, there was a consensus among respondents that staff morale was good and confidence in management was high, and that these were positive, rewarding and supportive environments in which to work. Only one member of staff had plans to leave because of the nature of the work. No school had serious problems with staff absence. The challenging environment seemed to boost the sense of collegiality and mutual support, partly because teachers were equally under pressure and partly because there were always issues about children to be discussed and problems shared. Respondents talked about “*a fantastic supportive nature of the staff*” (Deputy Head, West-City HSG) and a “*collective “we’ll get through it”*” sentiment (Class Teacher 3, The Farcliffe School). Without exception, the staff felt that they were never left on their own to deal with a problem and that there was always someone to turn to for support. People could not afford to be insular in this environment. The headteacher at Southside Grange actually felt that schools in disadvantaged areas were advantaged in this respect:

*“Shared vision and goals.... I actually would say that might be slightly easier in a difficult school because you pull staff together. If you work in a difficult area, you generate a far higher sense of loyalty somehow. I think if you talk to staff who work in very good schools, there’s a lot of bitching and falling out going on. Here we have, on the whole, a very unified staff,*

*stunning staff attendance record, a high level of commitment, staff working at lunchtime, staff working after school.”*

(Headteacher, Southside Grange School)

The principal difficulty institutionally appeared to be the pressure of external criticism. In all the schools, headteachers and staff were frustrated about being judged on higher grade GCSE results, which did not reflect their successes with less academically able pupils, and also about being pressurised to achieve government targets that had been set without specific knowledge of their pupils. None of the schools was far above the government's target that all schools should achieve 25% A\*-Cs. Even the more successful ones, West-City HSG and Middle Row HS, were operating in an environment of constant pressure:

*“a drop of a few percentage points doesn't matter to a school in the 50s or 60s but it does to us. I mean we could drop from 36% to 29% and that's probably what will happen, and then they'll be looking at us and saying “oh, that school's in decline” and then the pressure will mount on teachers and suddenly it's harder. There needs to be more recognition of how ‘on the edge’ schools are in this context, even if they appear to be stable”.*

(Headteacher, Middle Row HS)

The pressure was, however, much greater in the lower achieving schools. At both Southside Grange and The Farcliffe School, staff alluded to the criticism the schools received in the local press and their poor standing in the local community. Although in each case there was good morale, a sense of moving in the right direction, and a

high level of confidence in the headteacher, staff in these schools tended to be defensive about the school and felt that their contributions and achievements were undervalued by those outside. By contrast, staff at West-City HSG, which had had a long period of stability and strong leadership, exuded a sense of institutional confidence. They were positive rather than defensive, compared themselves favourably to other organisations, cited the benefits of working in the organisation rather than its drawbacks, and made little mention of outside criticism. They spoke about established policies, practices and values, rather than about what the school was changing and introducing. Their language was about ‘where we are’ not ‘where we are going’. The sense of the school conveyed by the staff was of a mature organisation that looked outward with confidence, despite dealing with the *“norming, storming and performing situation”* (Deputy Head) that was occurring because of its recent change of leadership. This sense of confidence was also evident at Middle Row HS, although perhaps slightly less so, reflecting its more recently established reputation as a good school. Thus there appeared to be a virtuous circle, whereby ‘success’ on official indicators helped to develop institutional confidence and remove pressure, probably helping the schools to develop even further, while staff in less successful schools worked in a pressured and defensive atmosphere, not ideal for optimum performance and organisational development.

### **The Construction of Context and Its Impact on Practice**

These understandings of context, articulated by headteachers and staff, formed the basis upon which decisions about contextualised practice were made. It is, therefore, worth considering briefly how they were constructed.

Sociological and social psychological understandings would suggest that many factors would influence what teachers observed as significant in their context and how they interpreted it, including teachers' social status, ethnic origin, gender, personal experience, political orientation and training, as well the management of the school and the nature of social relations within it. The data collected here does not allow for a full explanation of the influence of all of these factors. However, it does offer some insights into what lay behind the teachers' narratives.

Information was not collected about the teachers' social origins. However, it was clear from their comments that most were from middle class families where there had been an expectation of continuing education and good employment. Those (one or two teachers in each school) who alluded to being brought up in working class families also spoke about high aspirations and parental support. None alluded to coming from a family with serious economic or social problems or where education was not seen as important. All of the teachers were now in what would be described as middle class occupations and had higher household incomes than many of the families of the pupils. Although, as Maguire's (2001) paper on inner London teachers suggests, this did not necessarily lead to middle class identification, it did lead to a different experience than that of many of the pupils. For example, it enabled them to provide books, computers and educational activities for their own children, and also to exercise greater residential choice than pupils' families. With a few exceptions, like the teacher (Class Teacher 1) at West-City HSG who "*had a very high ethic of teachers teaching where they live*", most of the teachers did not live locally. Most, with exceptions such as a teacher at Southside Grange who

played football locally, had no connections with the local area apart from teaching. Sometimes this was because they wanted to make sure that their personal lives were not conducted under the noses of the pupils, but sometimes it was simply a choice not to live in an undesirable area, when they could afford to live somewhere nicer. One or two staff expressed overtly negative comments about the areas in which the schools were situated or the people that lived there.

All of the teachers interviewed at Southside Grange School and at The Farcliffe School were white British, in common with the majority of the pupils. So too were most of the teachers at West-City HSG and at Middle Row HS, where the majority of pupils were from minority ethnic groups. In each of these schools, I interviewed one teacher of Asian origin and one of African/Caribbean origin.

Thus, most of the staff were not from the same social class background as their pupils and in the inner city schools, most were not from the same ethnic background. Previous work (Bhatti 1999), has pointed to lack of cultural awareness and racial prejudice among teachers, but my interviews suggested that white teachers in the inner city schools were very conscious of the cultural differences between themselves and their pupils, and made strenuous attempts to counter prejudicial attitudes. Pejorative remarks about behaviours within families were carefully avoided, and there was a reluctance to attribute non-participation in education to 'norms', 'values' or 'attitudes', which could be interpreted as culturally prejudicial statements. Practical reasons for non-participation, or personal ones such as lack of confidence, were more often identified than cultural or attitudinal ones. At both of these schools, the only teachers who were critical of the 'culture' of some Asian

families in respect of their attitudes toward education were themselves of Asian origin: perhaps more able to make distinctions between different Asian families and more willing to make critical observations.

The practices of these schools were also carefully adapted in order to ensure that pupils from all ethnic groups could participate equally. There was an awareness that both the curriculum and the social organisation of the school were likely to be set up according to white British expectations and norms, and that this could be exclusive to people from other religions and cultures. Staff adapted accordingly. At West-City HSG, for example, the food technology teacher described how she researched menus and ingredients from pupils' home countries so that the white British diet was not privileged over others. The history teacher at Middle Row HS adapted the curriculum to incorporate a focus on Black and Asian history. Both of the schools celebrated all the major religious festivals and actively promoted minority ethnic cultures through art and music events. Teachers in subjects like religious education, art, drama and music, saw the multi-culturalism of the schools as an advantage in terms of the range of experiences and perspectives that pupils could bring to the work and followed a broad multi-cultural curriculum. These are exactly the kinds of good practice that have been highlighted as being necessary to raise the achievement of minority ethnic pupils (Blair et al. 1998). They recognise the need to bend curriculum and organisational practice as a strategy for reducing inequality.

However, the same adaptations were not made in respect of social class differences between pupils and teachers. In the two schools in white working class areas, it was not evident that staff were attempting to counter class prejudices in the same way

that staff in the inner city schools were challenging racial prejudices. Teachers in these two schools commented more readily on the values and attitudes of pupils and their families. Although some acknowledged the legitimacy of the position of those working class parents and pupils who were disinterested in education, others regarded this as a cultural deficit. No member of staff in these schools made mention of tailoring the curriculum to reflect pupils' cultural origins, interests and beliefs. It appeared that pupils needed to adapt to the school and the curriculum, not the other way round. While the culture of the area at the ethnically mixed schools was presented as something to be understood, accommodated and celebrated, at the white working class schools it was presented as something to be overcome.

This comment is not intended as a criticism of these particular teachers. Given that the key cultural problems identified were a lack of interest in education and an unwillingness to accept rules and discipline, and that teachers were operating in an environment geared to promoting academic success within a disciplined environment, it was hard to see how the culture of the pupils could be actively celebrated in the same way as at the inner city schools. While the evidence suggests that teachers may not recognise class differences between themselves and their pupils in the same way that they recognise ethnic and cultural differences, their jobs as currently constructed give them little room for manoeuvre even if they did.

### **Summary: Context and Schools**

Analysing context from the perspective of teaching staff and headteachers demonstrates differences between schools in disadvantaged areas that are not



revealed by simple deprivation statistics. While issues of material poverty were common in all areas, others were different from one area to another.

Table 4.4 offers a summary of the issues raised by staff. It shows particular problems with language, newly-arrived pupils and the domestic expectations of pupils in the inner city schools, and more comments about family and social problems in the other schools.

The biggest difference was between the perceived pro-education and pro-school attitudes of pupils in the ethnically mixed areas, compared with the apparently disinterested and un-cooperative attitudes of some of the parents and pupils in the white working class areas. Emotional and behaviour problems were also more common in the latter schools. This, however, is a somewhat crude distinction, obscuring more subtle differences in the social and economic make-up of the areas: social networks and identity; opportunities for legal and illegal work; and indeed the gender and prior attainment of the pupils in the school. The key point is that, once the detail is explored, these deprived areas were more different than they were similar, in ways not wholly reflected by poverty indicators. In fact, the higher poverty areas, with the greatest problems of material deprivation, appeared to enjoy an environment more favourable to schooling than the lower poverty areas, although there were concerns that this should not be taken for granted for the future. Schools in these areas also had an environment that they could attempt to accommodate by a positive approach to cultural difference, whereas it was hard to see how schools in the lower poverty areas could embrace the elements of white working class culture that they had identified.

**Table 4.4: Features of Context Mentioned by Staff in the Four Schools**

| <b>School</b>           | <b>Low Prior Attainment</b> | <b>Low/No English</b> | <b>Material Poverty</b> | <b>Limited Cultural Experiences</b> | <b>Domestic Demands on Pupils</b> | <b>Children in Care</b> | <b>Pupil Mobility</b> | <b>Newly Arrived Pupils</b> | <b>Safety in Area/School</b> | <b>Neglect/Abuse</b> | <b>Family Breakdown/Instability</b> | <b>Different Behavioural Norms at Home</b> | <b>Lack of Motivation for Learning</b> | <b>Parents not Valuing Education</b> | <b>Low Self-esteem</b> | <b>Limited Aspirations</b> | <b>Lack of Economic Opportunity</b> | <b>Alternative Economy</b> | <b>School Stigma</b> | <b>Area Stigma</b> |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Southside Grange</b> | **                          |                       | *                       | *                                   | *                                 |                         |                       | *                           | *                            | **                   | **                                  | *  | *                                      | **                                   | **                     | **                         | *                                   | *                          |                      | *                  |
| <b>Middle Row HS</b>    | *                           | **                    | *                       | *                                   | **                                |                         | *                     | **                          | *                            |                      |                                     |  |  | * for girls                          | *                      | *                          |                                     | *                          |                      | *                  |
| <b>West-City HSG</b>    |                             | *                     | *                       | *                                   | **                                |                         | *                     | **                          | *                            | *                    | *                                   |  |  | *                                    | *                      | *                          |                                     |                            |                      | *                  |
| <b>The Farcliffe</b>    | **                          |                       | *                       | *                                   |                                   | **                      | *                     | *                           |                              | **                   | **                                  | *  | *                                      | **                                   | **                     | **                         | *                                   | *                          | **                   |                    |

\*\* denotes commonly mentioned. \* denotes mentioned by some staff

In these four cases, the two inner city schools also happened to be better placed institutionally to deal with the challenges that these environments presented than the other two schools: better positioned in the market, more stable, and less conscious of looking over their shoulder for external criticism.

If context does impact on quality, one would thus expect these multi-cultural inner city schools to do better than the two schools in the white working class areas, and indeed this was the case, the two inner city schools performing better both in terms of quality and examination results. These findings resonate with those of the quantitative analysis in Chapter 2, which showed positive associations between ethnically mixed areas and school quality, higher quality in very deprived than in moderately deprived areas, and bigger quality differences according to deprivation in highly segregated markets than those with flatter hierarchies.

However, this chapter has only dealt with the contexts of the schools and how they were perceived, not with how this impacted on processes, practice or quality. It hints at a link between context and practice, but does not explore it. Chapter 5, therefore, begins to examine how being located in these areas made a difference to what schools and teachers actually did.

### **Context and Its Implications**

These then, were the contexts of the schools as headteachers and teachers saw them. But what were their implications for schools? Were these schools any different from others in terms of the nature of the work they had to do, the relationships within them and the activities of staff and managers? And were they any different from each other?

It is, of course, hard to answer directly the question of whether these schools were different from those in more advantaged areas, since this was not a comparative study. A tendency to exaggerate the difficulties of the job might be expected, as well as to focus only on the particular setting. However, about half of the staff interviewed volunteered comparisons with other schools in which they had taught, and others had experience as parents or pupils, and drew on the accounts of colleagues in other schools. They also reflected on the expectations they had formed in teacher training. Therefore some comparative inferences can be drawn. The respondents highlighted five broad issues which were significant for these schools and with which other schools would have had to deal in a much more limited way: additional learning needs, material poverty and social needs, the emotional climate and disturbed behaviour, the reluctance of pupils and parents to participate, and the unpredictability of the organisational environment. This chapter examines how dealing with these impacted on the processes of the schools and the activities of teachers. It is a ground-level view, looking through the eyes of teachers at routine adaptations that they had to make, often at classroom level and sometimes

unconsciously. The deliberate and conscious choices made by management to respond to school context are covered in Chapters 6 and 7.

### **Additional Learning Needs**

The first issue to deal with was the fact that there was a wide range of abilities and prior attainment within the schools and often within classes. The diversity of needs in itself was challenging for teachers, both in terms of the time spent preparing lessons and in conducting lessons that met the needs of all pupils.

Mixed ability teaching is known to require highly developed teaching skills and to be difficult to do well (Hallam 2002). I could not make any judgement on the effectiveness with which it was actually carried out in these schools, only observe what teachers said about their practice. The interview data suggests that few staff regarded the diversity of needs in itself as a problem. They expected to have to differentiate work and had been trained to do so. What they did point to was the difficulty of dealing effectively with pupils at the lower end of the attainment range. Many felt that these pupils struggled with the curriculum despite additional learning support.

One problem was resources. It was difficult to get 'off the shelf' learning resources that worked for lower ability pupils. Published books and worksheets were often felt to be '*too broad*' or just too complex for the lower ability pupils. More able and independent learners could work around materials that were not exactly right for their needs, because they could independently investigate other sources and not be

deterred by materials that were initially inaccessible. Less able and less confident learners needed resources that were specifically suitable for them. This meant that staff had to create their own resources, a disproportionately time-consuming activity. At both of the inner city schools, the same was also said of resources for pupils at the early stages of English. This was a critical issue, not least because if pupils could not understand written instructions, they could easily lose confidence and concentration before even engaging with the subject.

*“A: I’d say probably the first four or five groups in a year group you can probably teach out of books and things like that but the bottom group you’ve got to adapt your resources. I’ll probably have to use worksheets with bigger writing or with less on a page, and they can’t cope with the exercises that are in the text book so you’ve got to adapt them. We’re not very well equipped for that.*

*Q: And is it the school that’s not well equipped or is it that those resources aren’t available at all ?*

*A: I think it’s that they’re not available or if they are available you have to use so many of them because you’ve got to keep them occupied as well. You’ve got to have so many things planned, just in case.. so if this doesn’t work you’ve got to have something else. I find it very time consuming. I probably spend more time finding things for the bottom groups than I do for all the other groups.”*

(Class Teacher 8, Southside Grange School)

Not all the teachers were confident of their ability to create appropriate resources for pupils at the very early stages of learning, or with limited English. They saw this in some senses as a specialist job for which their general teacher training had not

equipped them. There was a call for more staff in language and learning support departments who could acquire subject knowledge and help with preparation.

Another problem was that where the majority of a class were low attainers, teaching approaches tended to be adapted. In some cases, these adaptations reflected different learning styles and levels of prior attainment. For example, teachers made greater use of telling rather than writing when they gave their instructions, and more use of practical exercises. However, in some cases, they reflected the difficulty of finding a balance between preparing tasks that the pupils could do, so as to raise their self-esteem, and preparing tasks that would challenge them, especially where controlling the classroom was difficult. It was usually the pupils with lower attainment who had the greatest concentration or behaviour problems. Finding it difficult to do their work, they could quickly lose confidence and 'play up' as a way of feeling important. Therefore lower ability classes, which required the most effort in terms of preparation and tailored curriculum delivery, were precisely the classes where managing the situation and keeping order made it difficult for teachers to concentrate on differentiating work and giving attention to individual pupils. Some admitted that, with groups with the most challenging behaviour, it was easy to slip into feeling that a good lesson was one in which most of the pupils had been on task for most of the time, and major disruption had been avoided. The quality and the challenge of the task could be seen as secondary. Worksheets and copying exercises were used more commonly with lower classes. Subject content was simplified and discussion was limited. Several staff referred to their need to speak in shorter sentences and with a more limited vocabulary than they had had to do with groups of more advanced learners in other schools. These quotations from one teacher at

Southside Grange indicate how teachers could reluctantly begin to accept a lower level of challenge in their lessons.

*“...a lot of our kids like copying. They like shading in, they like doing these word searchy things ... They’ll copy from the board, they won’t have a problem with it, and it’ll look really pretty and there’ll be flowers round it and everything and they’ll shade everything in, but they won’t understand anything about it, it just looks good. I think a lot of teachers actually go that way. Pretty’s good, full stop.”*

*A: “I tend to work with closed question stuff so they can just chuck the answers in but from where I come from that to me is like special needy sort of thing, which I never did before I came here, which is a shame isn’t it? I feel sorry for some of the kids because they’re trapped.*

*Q: Because they could be working at a higher level?*

*A: Yes, oh yes. They have the ability. If you talk to them, they haven’t got a problem with it at all.”*

*(Class Teacher 7, Southside Grange School)*

A substantial body of research (see Hallam 2002 for a review) supports these findings, suggesting that teaching for groups with many lower ability pupils tends to be insufficiently challenging, and therefore of a lower quality than for higher ability groups. Duffield (1998) has made an important contribution to this debate, pointing out the need to distinguish very carefully between instructional methods that are



appropriate and those that are not, rather than assuming that practices used in working class schools are less good, just because they are different to those used in other schools. Extended private reading in class may, for example, be an effective and valid strategy when pupils have high motivation but limited opportunity for reading at home, but not effective when used as a control strategy for a group that lacks the concentration for independent learning.

Nevertheless, it is clear that delivering appropriate teaching in these settings is difficult to do. At all the schools in this study, the more experienced teachers spoke less about their tendency to simplify techniques and content for whole classes than did the newer teachers, who were still developing their skills. Such approaches were also mentioned more frequently at Southside Grange and The Farcliffe School (the lower attaining schools) than at Middle Row HS and West-City HSG (the higher attaining schools). It must be stressed that this does not necessarily indicate poorer teaching in the first two schools, not just for Duffield's reasons but because these were simply reflections from a sample of teachers, some of whom may have been more self-critical than others. However, there were certain contextual factors that worked in favour of better teaching at the inner city schools. They enjoyed better reputations and were therefore more likely to attract more experienced or able teachers. At West-City HSG, particularly, senior managers felt that the school attracted teachers who were experienced in inner city environments, whereas The Farcliffe School had a high proportion who were in their first teaching job. The inner city schools also suffered slightly less external criticism, which made it easier to develop an environment of critical self-evaluation and peer review. And they apparently had fewer pupils who were disinterested or disruptive, making classroom

management less of a concern. Although it is not possible to demonstrate here whether these factors actually resulted in better teaching in one school than another, headteachers' and teachers' accounts suggest that they were influential at least for some individuals, and that they certainly need to be considered in the training and professional development of teachers in disadvantaged schools.

### **Material Poverty and Social Needs**

A second issue was the adjustments that were made to deal with poverty, which affected all the schools to a greater or lesser extent. On the whole, this was not allowed to affect curriculum and considerable resources went into making sure that this was the case. None of the schools expected financial contributions from parents and pupils, for example for materials for practical subjects. Some teachers spent time outside school tracking down low-priced materials or negotiating donations or discounts from local suppliers. Only in some practical subjects were curriculum options constrained because of the nature of the intake and the resources available. For example, at Southside Grange, PE staff reported being unable to teach hockey because few pupils could afford boots. However, in general, curriculum coverage and choices were not impeded.

What was more at issue was the range of extra-curricular activities and the minor organisational and administrative implications that pupils' lack of resources had for the school. Enrichment activities had to be carefully chosen so that parents could afford to pay, and major trips had to be subsidised heavily and planned well in advance so that parents had time to save. Homework was another issue that had to

be carefully considered. Few pupils in any of the schools could be assumed to have learning resources like reference books, dictionaries and computers at home. Computers were becoming an increasing problem as more of the extension work in the national curriculum was becoming computer and internet based. All the schools recognised the need to provide access to libraries and computers after school, and all were running homework clubs after school and/or at lunchtimes. At West-City HSG, extra curricular activities mostly took place before school or at lunchtime, partly because girls were unwilling to go home after dark because of violence in the area. Even on a daily basis, lack of resources made a difference. Pupils did not always come to lessons with basic equipment like a pen or ruler, which necessitated time being spent in lessons giving it out or collecting it in.

Pupils' social problems, such as their family circumstances or relationships, nutrition or health, tended to manifest themselves in ways which are covered elsewhere in this chapter, such as poor attendance or behaviour. However they also impacted directly on school activities, because teaching staff were often drawn into these problems, particularly as form tutors or Heads of Year. As this Faculty Head described, teachers' social work role could be immensely time consuming. In her view, the introduction of learning mentors had cut her non-teaching workload by 50%.

A: *“.... you always have to be aware, that's the nature of teaching these kind of children, it's never a situation where it's just about education... you know the 'no uniform', the 'mum can't get up in the morning' so you're not getting to school on time, you know, 'I've got no money and we're going to be chucked out of our house'. These are very real*

*problems but [the mentors] are dealing with that so we could deal with the actual teaching.*

*Q: They deal with a relatively small number of students don't they?*

*A: Yes, but when it first happened, quite a few of the kids I taught were mentored, or the kids who were problematic, and then you'd realise how much of your time you were spending with those kids, but also as a tutor, and I had a kid a couple of years ago whose dad had gone back to Bangladesh and got remarried and the daughter was living with the two elder sisters and the mum. Mum didn't speak any English. He'd got credit cards and run up massive debts and the bills were coming to the address. And she was the eldest daughter and she was about to do her GCSEs and she was beside herself because her mum was beside herself. Now I wouldn't even have known where to begin apart from to go 'oh its all right' and the learning mentor gets on to the bank, cancels the credit cards, gets onto social services, gets them moved, gets her name put on the rent book, puts her in touch with the Bengali women's association. That's like a day's work, and she's sorted and that girl can therefore go on and focus on her education."*

*(Class Teacher 7, West-City HSG)*

These kind of interventions to deal with social needs are addressed further in later chapters. The point at this stage is simply to note the workload implications of social need for teaching staff, as well as for senior managers, who had overall responsibility for child protection and for family liaison in the more serious cases.

## **The Emotional Climate and Disturbed Behaviour**

Third, and possibly most distinctively, all the schools had a charged emotional environment. The number of pupils who were anxious, traumatised, unhappy, jealous, angry or vulnerable was greater than in schools where parents were materially well off, less stressed or traumatised themselves and more able to secure a stable and comfortable environment for their children. This was particularly important, given the emphasis that school effectiveness studies have put on the nature of relationships within schools, for example, Rutter et al.'s finding that:

*... the essential differences (associated with pupil success) seem to lie in the schools functioning as a social organisation, and as a setting for teaching and learning. (Rutter et al. 1979 :p145)*

The nature of the intakes at the case study schools meant that in each case there were a minority of children who had severely disturbed behaviour, probably no more than about twenty in any school and fewer at West-City HSG and at Middle Row HS. These pupils were disruptive in lessons, found it difficult to concentrate, had angry outbursts, were sometimes aggressive towards other pupils and staff, found it difficult to accept rules, and simply found it difficult to get through the school day smoothly on a regular basis.

However, apart from these pupils, the emotional needs of the pupils more generally had a wider impact on the schools. Pupils shared their emotions with staff, meaning that the teacher/pupil relationship was distinctive for all teachers, not just one of

educator/learner, but significant adult/child. They talked about ‘*mothering*’, ‘*caring*’ and ‘*social work*’ as well as about teaching and learning.

*“our children are the sort of children who do not leave their problems at the door. They have a problem and it goes with them wherever they go and arguments that have started at home come into school and often of course they blow up here and we end up having to deal with it, because somebody has to. I mean you can’t just leave these poor mites on their own, because they don’t seem to have, this might sound patronising, but the emotional capability to think, ‘right this is school, my life matters, I’ve got to get on with my work and I’ll deal with that later’. They can’t do that. Now, I went to a grammar school and we wouldn’t even have considered discussing any home problems with a member of staff because, for a start, you didn’t have that relationship with them. They were there, they taught you, they went out of the room, someone else came in, and you just got on with it”.* (Class Teacher 4, The Farcliffe School).

*“I think you feel more sort of motherly. It’s the wrong word but you feel you ought to protect them and look after them.... at [middle class school where she had taught] I wouldn’t have dreamed of saying to a kid “have you had any breakfast” whereas here it’s fairly commonplace, or ‘have you got this’ or ‘can your mum afford this’. You do tend to take more care of them I think because you know they don’t have that care at home. Maybe care’s the wrong word but maybe their parents just don’t have time or the money or know-how*

*sometimes to give them that attention. Some of them, you can tell they really like the attention and you make a fuss of them.”*

(Class Teacher 6, Southside Grange School)

*“I see myself very much as a parent figure, because so many of them don’t have very stable homes. That’s not instead of learning because let’s face it, they are going to have to leave school and have to cope. It’s just that while they’re learning the personal support and social skills are really important. Their social skills are just as important as their academic skills”*

(Class Teacher 4, Middle Row HS)

This had three main implications for teachers’ work. Firstly, they had to develop strategies for dealing with pupils’ emotional needs in the classroom. At West-City HSG for example, one teacher described limiting the amount of time he spent on whole group instruction, in order to spend more time walking around the classroom to support individual pupils. Several teachers referred to the need to develop clear routines and to introduce new challenges carefully and with reassurance because children with insecure or disrupted home lives sometimes felt threatened by change. Some broke the lessons into very small chunks because of concentration difficulties.

*“ You’re always having to scan the room, you’re always sort of having to have what you’re saying in mind and yet deal with the distractions. You’d go through all the motions of the look and the hand signals and invading their space and then moving them and it goes on like that. You go through all of those day in and day out with the same pupils and when you’re at one stage*

*with one pupil and another stage with another, you know, it's quite a juggling act really, when you're in the classroom and quite physically and mentally exhausting "*

(Class Teacher 2, Southside Grange School)

*"... a lot of the lessons are organised around supporting in one way or another a fairly small group of kids who need support. A lot of that is emotional support rather than supporting the actual piece of work. It's like 'yes you can do this', so security in doing the piece of work. Some kids who can do it will want you just to sit with them endlessly, for reassurance or wanting to get attention, just for its own sake, or wherever the desire for the attention is coming from. It's not always attention for work. There's a big difference between the groups of kids who are quite self contained emotionally, whether they're more able or less able and those who are not".*

(Class Teacher 6, West-City HSG)

As with teaching strategies for lower ability children, there was a distinction between the inner city schools and the others. At West-City HSG and Middle Row HS, teachers noted that they adopted different strategies but not that they had significant problems keeping pupils on task. At the other two schools, staff reported more difficulties in achieving a learning focus and more problems with disruptive behaviour in the school generally. There were many more references to attention-seeking behaviour, to lack of concentration, to lack of social skills and an inability to be quiet at the right time or to work constructively with others. For teachers at these



schools, there was more to be done “*before you can do any teaching*”, or as a distraction from teaching. As the Deputy Head commented, comparing her experience at another school: “*at [previous school]) you could just go in and you could expect that most of your lesson would be spent on teaching and learning – that was your time. Here, there’s all the peripherals*”. Similarly, her colleague said:

*“I think staff here generally spend a lot of their day dealing with emotional problems as opposed to actually teaching. I taught in a less disadvantaged school only for a term and it was like being on holiday, because you were teaching. I mean I would teach and they did the work. I could do the crossword! Because having taught at a disadvantaged school you expect to have to repeat yourself millions of times and this that and the other and I didn’t. I set the work and it was done.”*

(Class Teacher 3, The Farcliffe School)

Because of this, teachers sometimes felt that dealing with the emotional issues and helping pupils to work on handling their emotions more positively, developing their abilities to interact well with each other and to listen and concentrate, were valuable in themselves as lesson outcomes. These skills were seen as valuable for later life and for later learning, even if short-term academic learning was limited.

*“I think that probably with the lower groups in this school I’ve had a good lesson if the kids have actually done what I wanted them to do and maybe not that they’ve learned so much but they’ve actually followed their instructions, whereas I think probably in the very good schools.. I mean a very academic*

*school, I shouldn't say good school.. I think that a good lesson would be where the kids have really learnt something and been more knowledgeable at the end of the lesson that at the beginning... sometimes like for lower groups, sometimes when you can ask children to work in a group together, do some pair work or a role play or something like that and if they manage to do that without really grasping the language but they manage to do the activity then I think it's a really big achievement because those children sometimes don't interact with each other very well and I think when they can do that, it's great."*

(Class Teacher 8, Southside Grange School)

The second implication was that supposed non-contact time was taken up with pupils emotional and behavioural problems. Form tutors, particularly, seemed to “*spend forever on pastoral issues*” (Class Teacher 3, West-City HSG), including contacting parents. In the schools with the greater behavioural problems, filling in incident sheets and discussing difficult pupils with other staff also ate into time for planning and marking.

The third implication was a more general one relating to the nature of the work and teachers' motivations. These were draining atmospheres in which to work: more demanding on a personal level than simply delivering the subject. Teachers had serious pupil welfare issues to worry about as well as academic outcomes. They were also regularly dealing with situations of drama, tears, or conflict in which it was difficult to find the right response, and hard not to feel attacked personally nor drawn in too closely. One member of staff described how in her previous school,

emotional outbursts had been a rare occurrence and could be passed up the line to heads of year. At The Farcliffe, they were part of day-to-day life:

*“It’s not that you’re doing battle all the time. I wouldn’t say that – it’s the emotional baggage and having to deal with all of that before you even begin to teach. It’s emotionally draining and that makes you feel more physically tired.”* (Deputy Headteacher, The Farcliffe School).

However, it was also rewarding. With only one exception, all the staff I interviewed enjoyed this aspect of their work and were motivated by it. They wanted to work with *‘these kinds of kids’* (Class Teacher 4, The Farcliffe School). As discussed in Chapter 4, challenge and adversity made for highly committed staff and strong staff cohesion – the kind of people who would *“go the extra marathon for the kids”* (Deputy Headteacher, Middle Row HS) and stick together as a group.

### **Reluctant Participation**

The enthusiasm of staff, however, was not always matched by the enthusiasm of parents and pupils. Low attendance was a problem in all the schools (Table 5.1).

**Table 5.1: Percentage of Pupil Half Days Missed Through Absence 2000/01**

|                  | <b>Authorised</b> | <b>Unauthorised</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Southside Grange | 8.6               | 3.5                 | 12.1         |
| Middle Row HS    | 9.7               | 3.8                 | 13.5         |
| West-City HSG    | 10.0              | 1.3                 | 11.3         |
| The Farcliffe    | 10.0              | 3.0                 | 13.0         |
| England          | 7.8               | 1.1                 | 8.9          |

Source: 2001 DfES National Pupil Absence Tables

At all the schools, a significant proportion of absences was accounted for by a small numbers of persistent non-attenders or pupils who took whole weeks off at a time. Most of the children were at school most of the time. At Southside Grange, for example, an analysis of absence data for one term in 2000/01 showed that 28 pupils (4%), of which 20 were in Years 10 and 11, accounted for 22% of all the absences. This is an important point, because attendance figures are used to indicate school dysfunction (one of the criteria for special measures, for example). The experience of these schools suggests that schools dealing with a higher than average number of extremely disaffected pupils will tend to have low overall attendance rates, even if the vast majority of pupils attend most of the time, because of the effect on statistics of the virtual non-attendance of a small group.

Problems with attendance were attributed to different things at the different schools. At Southside Grange and The Farcliffe School, low attendance was seen to represent lack of interest in schooling, often reinforced by parents who condoned absence and indeed encouraged pupils to take time off school to go shopping with them or stay at home with younger children. By contrast, at West-City HSG and at Middle Row HS, lack of interest among children and parents was not seen as the main reason for low attendance, although there were small groups of disaffected pupils as well. Middle Row HS suffered particularly from families making extended visits to Pakistan and not returning as scheduled, while at West-City HSG, a significant portion of non-attendance was attributed to genuine sickness and to pupils' responsibilities as carers or translators. Similar problems, in different contexts, appeared to have different explanations.

*“there’s a lot of caring for parents. I don’t mean it offensively when I say inadequacy of parents. Very often our girls have to go with them because they don’t speak the language, and they have to go to doctor’s appointments, appointments with solicitors, you name it, so there’s a lot of absence for that. There’s also a lot of absence because the families tend to have cultural holidays in their home country, so children disappear for months on end towards the end of the summer term, so they’re missing a lot of their education, to return often late in September, which obviously brings the whole school attendance figures down.”*

(Deputy Headteacher, West-City HSG)

Similarly, formal parental participation through consultation evenings and parents’ meetings, was said to be low in all the schools. There are no national data with which to compare, and not all of the schools kept data. The estimates of staff suggested that attendance rates of about 50% were considered to be good. At Southside Grange School, which monitored this data, attendance was twice as good in Year 7 (65%) as in Year 11 (28%), a fact attributed to the change in the nature of the intake rather than simply to the greater enthusiasm of parents at the transfer from primary school.

A: *Well as a tutor I don’t get any parental support, very little. .. I contact the parent and then the parent doesn’t want to know, so you get that hassle. There are one or two parents who are quite nice now, because we’ve got a different catchment and it’s changing slowly... I didn’t have any parents come to me last year at parents evening. None. In Year 11 I sat on me tod for three hours.*

*Q: Contrast Year 7, say ?*

*A: Year 7, yes, full. Full to none, it's frightening when I think about it.*

*27 to zero. (Class Teacher 7, Southside Grange School)*

As indicated in Chapter 4, parental non-participation was also attributed to different reasons in the different schools: principally to lack of interest and support in the white working class schools, and principally to lack of confidence, lack of understanding or inability to speak English in the inner city schools.

A fourth issue for schools in these disadvantaged contexts was, therefore, the need for strenuous efforts to increase participation rates. All of the schools had invested additional resources in increasing attendance and in working with parents, and these are discussed further in Chapter 7. There were also, however, day-to-day issues for teaching staff, encouraging and cajoling pupils to complete homework and return it and bring the relevant books and equipment to lessons.

Again, these featured more strongly at The Farcliffe School and at Southside Grange than at the other two schools, although there were issues in all the schools. At Middle Row HS, for example, teachers reported having to negotiate with parents because homework was sometimes accorded a low priority compared with attending mosque school or undertaking family duties. At all of the schools, staff talked about the need to deal sensitively with pupils who were not producing work, while also making clear that it was expected. These were difficult situations to resolve. Learners could not be seen in isolation from their home circumstances, but at the same time, the school had to do its best to ensure that their learning did not suffer.

With many pupils in a class with problems, the task of collecting homework was a more complex one than where a few children might need to be dealt with. Some staff were diligent about chasing up homework, applying a system of automatic sanctions for non-completion. Others were reluctant to spend lesson time dealing with the excuses of persistent homework non-producers.

*“the same with setting homework for them. They can’t do their homework because there’s nowhere to do their homework and of course they’re not going to say ‘actually miss I can’t do my homework because my dad is drinking with his friends or my mum’s out all the time and I’ve got to look after my little brother and sister’ .... I mean I’ve just had a problem with a child and I’ve just been told that there’s stuff going on at home and that I’ve got to be a bit more aware just to tread carefully, but at the same time I can’t let him get away with it, but you’ve got to be aware all the time of their backgrounds.”*

(Class Teacher 2, The Farcliffe School)

Several teachers mentioned that homework often had to be set in the form of worksheets, because pupils would frequently lose textbooks and/or homework exercise books. On the other hand, setting work to be handed in on one sheet of paper made it easier for pupils to lose, before or after marking, accidentally or on purpose.

*“in maths, we don’t give them homework books because they lose them, so we give them sheets of paper and then they lose those as well.”*

(Class Teacher 4, Southside Grange School)

*“you do have to be careful what you send home, very careful, because sometimes you never see it again, because I suppose part of it is that they just don’t realise how expensive books are. I mean if you send a textbook home you might well not see it again and it’s probably under their bed but they don’t seem to see the value of books and they don’t seem to see the responsibility to return them, I don’t know why.”*

(Class Teacher 3, The Farcliffe School)

While setting appropriate homework could be problematic, sending work home could be a convenient way of getting through work that couldn’t be adequately finished off within lesson time because of behaviour problems. Using this strategy, the curriculum could be covered, at least in theory. Time was a particular problem in practical subjects like science, where, because of time-wasting or behaviour incidents by pupils, lessons of 50 minutes or an hour did not always allow time for a practical session to be set up, completed and written up. The extent of disruption was unpredictable, so teachers could plan to spend the last part of the lesson writing the exercise up, but end up sending it home instead, knowing full well that many pupils would not complete it and that more time would be spent in the next lesson chasing up missing homework.



None of these problems were intractable, and staff reported that clear and consistent policies within departments and across the school, and the provision of homework clubs, all helped. But they demanded constant reinforcement. As one manager put it, it was easy to design initiatives but *“it’s the energy to sustain these things that’s difficult.”* (Deputy Headteacher, Middle Row HS)

### **The Unpredictable School**

These issues, together, added up to an extremely unpredictable working environment. At the most basic level, pupil mobility meant that it was never clear how many pupils, with what needs, would be in the school at any time. New arrivals had to be catered for at short notice. At The Farcliffe School, so many new pupils were arriving that the school was running an admissions day each month, followed by an assessment day, rather than having to deal with new admissions on an ad hoc basis. At the time of the fieldwork in December 2001, 37 new pupils were expected at an upcoming admissions day. Meanwhile, existing pupils could suddenly disappear. At Middle Row HS, a Year 11 girl, the highest achiever in the school and Chair of the School Council had recently gone missing, with her family, without warning, thought to have returned to Bangladesh. Two Year 11 girls at West-City HSG were missing from home. This level of mobility meant that setting and achieving academic targets was difficult, as was planning class and ability groupings.

No school is an island, but these schools seemed to be particularly affected by external events, as fights or family feuds in the local communities spilled over into school. In the inner city schools, international events were also important. Staff at

the predominantly Muslim Middle Row HS, for example, had had to spend a lot of time ‘*settling*’ children after the World Trade Centre attack and during the Iraq war. Staff had to be briefed and supported in their responses. On a day-to-day basis, these issues and the general emotional climate meant that incidents could erupt at any time, such that neither lessons nor free time could be relied upon to go according to plan.

A: *We do spend a lot of our time dealing with personal problems of pupils.*

Q: *In the lessons?*

A: *Oh, in the lessons, outside the lessons. You can be teaching and someone from your tutor group or someone you get on well with will come and get you because they’ve got a problem. It’s part of the job here.*

Q: *Can you give me an example?*

A: *Well I mean you can be called out at a moment because someone might think they’re pregnant or someone’s having a fight or someone’s stormed out of the lesson and broken something and they’ve come to you and you have to deal with it. I mean you have to deal with it there and then. You can’t send them on. You just have to pull them in to your room and try to deal with 25 things at once.”*

(Class Teacher 3, The Farcliffe School)

Unplanned events impacted on senior managers as well as teachers. Mrs May, the headteacher at The Farcliffe School, compared her daily work with her experience in more advantaged schools. At The Farcliffe, she was “*doing things I haven’t done in twenty years*”: pupil counselling, staff support and involvement in daily discipline or

welfare issues. As a result, strategic issues and planning were disrupted. At Southside Grange, Mr Matthews' typical day involved seeing pupils into the school in the morning, taking assembly, standing in the corridor between lessons, doing back-up patrol, talking to pupils and staff in the dining hall at lunchtime, dealing with several disciplinary incidents or counselling children with emotional outbursts, supervising pupils leaving at the end of the day and (on some days) teaching. Paperwork and planning were usually done in the evenings.

### **The Reality of Poor Schooling: Pressures, Trade-Offs and Visions of Success**

These accounts of life in the four schools and of teachers' work confirm Thrupp's view (1999) of a myriad of unintended and comparatively minor process effects, that together constituted significantly different environments in these disadvantaged schools than might be expected in more advantaged settings. Negotiating with a pupil over homework, preparing a worksheet for a pupil with low literacy, dealing with a sulky or upset or angry teenager or filling in an incident form were, in themselves, small events. Although this study has collected no evidence on this, we might assume some of these same small events might also be taking place in the lives of teachers in more advantaged settings, and that such teachers might also have a different set of circumstances to deal with: counselling children under pressure to fulfil academic expectations, advising on 'A' levels, or developing extension activities, for example. So what was it that was distinctive about the reality of teaching and managing these schools?

Two key points can be distilled. First, these schools were dealing with a large proportion of pupils who were of below average academic ability or who were academically able but whose circumstances presented constant barriers to them achieving what they were capable of, whether these barriers were linguistic, practical or emotional. Since the expectation upon schools is that they should enable pupils to make the progress expected given their ability, and ideally to achieve an 'expected' level of 5 A\*-C passes, the case study schools were in an invidious position. In contrast to schools that could readily achieve expected levels and where the pressure was to stretch pupils beyond these levels, they were constantly working to pull pupils up to the level. This is a quite different situation, given the connotations of failure attached to not meeting expected targets. Moreover, the nature of the barriers to learning was that not all of them could be dismantled by the schools, and if they could, successes could not always be sustained. A pupil neglected at home might make good progress for a while, but be set back by being taken into care. Improvements in attendance for a young carer might be achieved for a while and not sustained. And progress made with some pupils might be lost to the school by their sudden departure, only to be replaced by others starting with the same kinds of problems. The sense of these schools was very much of a relentless battle, under considerable external pressure, but where one step forward was often followed by two steps back. In terms of meeting their educational objectives, there was simply no comfort zone for these schools. There was no room not to be consistently pushing for better behaviour, no room not to chase up homework or to relieve academic pressure, no room not to give an excellent lesson or to deal with an angry pupil effectively.

The second point was this uphill battle was being 'fought', as it were, in a pressurised organisational environment. Although headteachers and their deputies needed time to plan strategies to meet additional needs, raise attendance, improve parental involvement and so on, in practice much of their time was spent dealing with pupils, supporting staff, or liaising with other agencies. Although teaching staff needed time to plan differentiated work for diverse classes and to prepare resources for low attaining pupils or those with little English, and energy to manage challenging classrooms and handle relationships sensitively, their non-contact time was eroded by the need to follow up behavioural incidents, deal with welfare issues and contact parents, and their energies were sapped by the emotional climate of the school.

According to their own accounts and those of their managers, this environment attracted some good teachers and brought out the best in them. Staff adapted to the pressure by supporting each other and by developing a shared commitment to the pupils in their charge. When invited to discuss how aspects of effective schooling were affected by contextual pressures, many teachers volunteered that developing a shared vision amongst the staff, and giving positive reinforcement to pupils probably came more effortlessly in these schools than in others.

However, other aspects of good schooling were negatively impacted by the environment. Most commonly, teachers mentioned the difficulty of maintaining high expectations when frequently disappointed, and the difficulty of consistently delivering a good environment for learning and a high quality of teaching. Even among good teachers, there were lessons where standards were not met.

*“I have high expectations despite all the negative things I’ve said. There’s no reason why these kids can’t learn a language. My dad was a motor mechanic, I learnt languages, they can do it, but do they think they can do it? I think there’s a constant battle to maintain your beliefs that they can do it, because getting it over to them can be knocking your head against a brick wall, so high expectations can be quite hard to sustain. I’ve done it today. There was a class where I haven’t even attempted to do the lesson in the way I would have wanted to. That’s partly realism, in that case, but you can see how that can be the sediment of lowering expectations”.*

(Class Teacher 4, The Farcliffe School)

*“I have very high expectations. I think if you don’t have high expectations then you’re selling everybody short. You know, whatever kids you’ve got, you’ve got to say “I’m only going to accept this”. That’s your starting point... whatever’s happened yesterday I’m going to be positive .. today. But it is exhausting and sadly, sometimes, I don’t live up to my own high expectations because I haven’t slept or because I’m knackered or from someone saying they want me to do more paperwork for an inspection because I’m no good at my job. It is doable, it’s just hard work.”*

(Headteacher, Southside Grange School)

*“ I don’t consider myself a poor teacher but the first term I taught here, God, it was awful. I must have taught half a dozen lessons that I was pleased with, certainly no more. It was awful. Forced into a conflict situation where you*

*have to either prevail or be trodden underfoot, and I hate that. It's not easy to give a good lesson here, however good the teacher is."*

(Class Teacher 4, The Farcliffe School)

*"High expectations can be more difficult. You can get worn down. You can find yourself thinking 'they're never going to learn, what's the point'".*

(Class Teacher 3, Middle Row HS)

*"High quality teaching and learning is possible but it's harder. It's harder because your teachers cannot focus purely on high quality teaching and learning because they're focusing so much on other things. ... The number of times that you're trying to deal with a [emotionally disturbed child] in the class, and you're trying to keep that kid on board and you're trying to avoid a major confrontation, you're trying to avoid problems for other ones. It makes it harder." (Headteacher, Southside Grange School)*

At a more subtle level, teachers appeared to engage in a series of reluctant trade-offs, since not all of the needs of all of the pupils could be met all of the time. In contrast to a situation where most of the pupils arrived at school ready and equipped to learn and with their practical and emotional needs looked after at home, many of the pupils in these schools were equally needy as learners and as people. It was hard for teachers to retain a focus purely on the academic. Rather than concentrating on one version of success – an academic one – they tried to balance a number of different versions, that were sometimes in conflict.

For individual pupils, a balance had to be struck between a focus on learning in the short term and a focus on welfare, which could not only meet pupils' immediate needs but provide a better foundation for learning in the long term. These teachers were among many whose comments revealed a deep ambivalence about the purpose of teaching in a disadvantaged setting and about measuring success:

*“that’s the currency, isn’t it, exam results . But it means that other things go by the wayside because of this focus on results and statistics. I think staff think it’s important because that’s what they’re there for, but sometimes it is overwhelming, you know about passes and grades and borders and like I said a lot of our students make this incredible journey from having nothing to coming out as a completely different person, and part of me argues ‘that’s enough isn’t it, look at where they’ve come’, and part of me is ‘but so what, they need to have the currency to carry on with the rest of their lives’, and I’m not sure about that”.*

(Class Teacher 7, West-City HSG)

*“to me people have got to come into the school and sort of gauge what success really is and what it means. I think getting the children here to participate , it’s like at sport, it’s not necessarily the winning. I mean personally when I was at school I believed that it was the winning that was important but I’ve come to the conclusion after working here that it is the competing. It’s getting them to at least to compete in the school, and be there.”* (Class Teacher 1, The Farcliffe School)



Investment in pupil welfare was not only done in the interests of short-term academic learning. It was also a response to the primary needs of pupils. Given the starting point and the circumstances of many pupils, providing emotional support, raising self-esteem and developing social skills were viewed as being just as important as academic qualifications in equipping them for later life. Just as schools were the only chance for pupils to gain GCSEs, they were also, for some, the only place to feel valued, to form trusting relationships with adults, to learn to relate constructively to others, and so on. In some cases, focusing in the short term on specific learning outcomes could actually be seen as detrimental, contributing to emotional problems for pupils. This did not mean that learning was regarded as unimportant. On the contrary. However, teachers recognised that in some cases, dealing with non-academic issues in the short term could give a pupil the basis for later learning, either in later years of school or beyond, whereas focusing only on learning and neglecting social and emotional needs might mean that a pupil might never learn.

Similarly, there could be trade-offs within lessons, between the learning needs of some pupils and the welfare needs of others, and even between groups of pupils. Teachers at West-City HSG described tensions, for example, over the introduction of a new programme for gifted and talented pupils, until it was agreed that funds should be spent on resources that benefited all pupils equally, such as good dictionaries for classrooms. Similar tensions were reported over the level of investment in pupils with problematic behaviour.

It was clear that the context of the schools meant that these conflicts arose in greater or lesser number in different places. It was also clear that more skilled and more experienced teachers could develop strategies to deliver the curriculum while also skilfully managing behaviour and responding to pupils' emotional demands. There were some of these teachers in all of the schools, but their continued recruitment could not be guaranteed, especially where school reputations were weakest.

Context, thus, was impacting on school processes in many ways, affecting not just what teachers did but how they thought about their work and balanced competing priorities. These were day-to-day responses, and often unconscious ones. But managers of these schools were also responding to context, in a conscious and strategic way. The next two chapters explore what they were doing.

### **Enterprise and Engineering**

In Chapter 1, I referred to Miles and Snow's (1978) analysis of organisations as providing a useful framework for assessing management responses to context in schools in disadvantaged areas. Miles and Snow pointed to three concerns for managers: entrepreneurial (i.e. market positioning); engineering (i.e. getting the product right); and administrative (i.e. organising and managing the work). They suggested that some managers would be more drawn to the internal processes of the organisation, while others would be more orientated towards the market, as well as acknowledging that there would be a range of specific strategic responses within each broad approach.

In this chapter and the next, I draw on this theoretical approach as a basis for organising material from the case study schools. This chapter considers what might be described as the engineering of the schools: the essential decisions about the form of their educational offering, including the organisation of the curriculum and pastoral care. It also looks at their positioning and strategies in the marketplace. Chapter 7 goes on to look at how specific issues for these schools like attendance and behaviour were managed and organised on a day-to-day basis. Both chapters begin by presenting evidence from the schools, and close with a discussion about the extent to which the decisions of managers could be considered to be responses to context, and the factors shaping the choices that were made.

## **Curriculum and the Organisation of Teaching and Learning**

Curriculum is at the centre of schooling, its core product, and if schools were free-standing businesses, one might expect that it would be curriculum that would vary most with context. However, they are not, and given the dominant framework of the national curriculum, it was perhaps not surprising that there was little curriculum variation between the case study schools. Their core curricula were dominated by the core subjects of the national curriculum, and they all offered a similar range of extra-curricular opportunities.

Some differentiation occurred at the margins. For example, all pupils at Middle Row HS took religious education to GCSE level. This school also had a strong emphasis on sports, expressive arts and leadership development. Once a term, the whole school had ‘challenge days’, where each year group had to work together on a challenge, such as writing and performing a play. West-City HSG focused strongly on expressive arts, partly because this was a curriculum area in which pupils could excel despite disadvantaged backgrounds, and partly because it differentiated the school from others in the area.

*“Drama is not a national curriculum subject so you go to many schools and there won’t be drama on the curriculum or drama will be part of an English department. Here we have drama, art, music, dance and PE in an expressive arts faculty, so just by putting the arts together in a faculty you are saying ‘we believe the arts are important, we believe the arts aren’t just an add-on, they’re something that the school can achieve at’. And again, they’ve made a commitment to drama, because we have things like the school production*

*which is a huge thing, and it's good publicity and we've gone to The Globe and performed. Personally...I think the school has realised that the arts can be like a lot of the sparkly bits on the top of the cake and can sell the school and can show it off, and especially in areas like this, where you need something sparkly, so they've recognised that and they've therefore given us time on the timetable and given us resources.” (Class Teacher 7, West-City HSG)*

However, in broad terms, the principal differences between the schools were not in what was offered, but in how it was organised. Similar contexts were associated with different approaches to ability groupings, class sizes, and the organisation of the school day.

Southside Grange had a banding system for all teaching, except for Key Stage 4 subjects with small numbers of pupils. Pupils were placed in an upper and lower band in Key Stage 3, then into sets for each subject. Higher sets were taught in larger groups, typically about 27 to 30 pupils, and lower sets in smaller groups which could be small as 10 pupils. According to Mr Matthews, who described mixed ability teaching as ‘*anathema*’, this allowed able pupils to learn at their own rate, but also enabled teachers to develop specialisms in teaching pupils of lower ability. Teachers had their own classrooms, so that they could customise these according to the groups they most commonly taught.

*“We have one woman in English who teaches only the bottom groups. That’s what she wants to do, so she can concentrate all her resources on that end of the ability range, she can set the room up in a way that’s more amenable to children with learning difficulties so it’s more of a comfort zone. Same in maths, we have one woman who teaches all the bottom sets and within her room she’s got workstations with specialist numeracy software. She’s got sort of a lounge area because it’s more effective, but as far as the kids are concerned, they’re going to maths, and they’re all on the same corridor, all together.”*

(Headteacher, Southside Grange School)

Teaching here took place in one-hour lessons, which was felt to be as long as could be afforded given the concentration span of some of the pupils, while allowing enough time for practical subjects.

**Figure 6.1: The School Day at Southside Grange**

|       |              |
|-------|--------------|
| 8.40  | Registration |
| 9.05  | Lesson 1     |
| 10.05 | Lesson 2     |
| 11.05 | Break        |
| 11.15 | Lesson 3     |
| 12.15 | Lunch        |
| 1.05  | Registration |
| 1.15  | Lesson 4     |
| 2.15  | Lesson 5     |

The Farcliffe School had a very different approach. Mrs May, on her arrival as head, had abolished an existing banding system, principally to counter problems of low self-esteem among pupils in the lower band. Within the context of the selective system and the school's poor performance and reputation, mixed ability teaching was seen as an important way to give all pupils the message that they were equally valued. As one teacher, who had supported the change, put it:

*“bottom school in the country, bottom band, bottom class in the band, it’s unlikely that that kid’s going to think “well if I do my French homework it’s going to make a big difference to my life”. All the signals from the school were negative” (Class Teacher 4).*

Under the new system, Year 7 was a transitional year in which pupils were taught as much as possible by one member of staff, thus easing the transfer from primary school. In Years 8 and 9, most of the teaching was in mixed ability groups, although setting was used in KS4 in science, mathematics and humanities. Most classes were fairly small, about 20 pupils, while under the previous system, top sets had been larger and bottom sets smaller. Lessons were fifty minutes long.

**Figure 6.2: The School Day at The Farcliffe School**

|       |              |
|-------|--------------|
| 8.45  | Registration |
| 8.55  | Assembly     |
| 9.10  | Lesson 1     |
| 10.00 | Lesson 2     |
| 10.50 | Break        |
| 11.05 | Lesson 3     |
| 11.55 | Lesson 4     |
| 12.45 | Lunch        |
| 1.35  | Registration |
| 1.40  | Lesson 5     |
| 2.30  | Lesson 6     |

At the inner city schools, there were no banding systems, although setting was used in some subjects. Because of the popularity of the schools and population growth in both areas, class sizes were relatively large (Table 6.1). At Middle Row HS, a decision had been made to try to reduce class sizes at Key Stage 3, with most classes now at about 25, although the physical capacity of the school precluded any further reduction.

**Table 6.1: Organisation of Teaching and Learning**

|  | <b>Southside Grange School</b>                                     | <b>Middle Row HS</b>   | <b>West-City HSG</b>   | <b>The Farcliffe School</b>  |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Organisation of Teaching Groups</b> | Banded and set within bands throughout school                      | No banding. English taught in mixed ability groups. Sets for maths, science and humanities | No banding. Most subjects taught in mixed ability groups. Sets in maths throughout school and science at KS4 | No banding. Mixed ability at KS3. Sets in maths, science and humanities at KS4 |
| <b>Size of groups</b>                  | Upper sets in large groups (27-30)<br>Lower sets in smaller groups | Typically 30-32 at KS4, 25 at KS3.<br>Lower sets in smaller groups                         | Typically 30-32. Smaller (up to 25) for practical subjects   | Typically about 20 pupils  |
| <b>Number and Length of lessons</b>    | 5 * 1 hour   | 5 * 1 hour   | 6 * 50 minutes. Mostly taught in double periods (i.e 100 minutes)  | 6*50 minutes   |

**Figure 6.3 :The School Day at West-City HSG**

|       |              |
|-------|--------------|
| 8.50  | Registration |
| 9.05  | Lesson 1     |
| 9.55  | Lesson 2     |
| 10.50 | Break        |
| 11.05 | Lesson 3     |
| 11.55 | Lesson 4     |
| 12.45 | Lunch        |
| 1.45  | Registration |
| 1.55  | Lesson 5     |
| 2.45  | Lesson 6     |



**Figure 6.4: The School Day at Middle Row HS**

|       |              |
|-------|--------------|
| 8.45  | Registration |
| 9.00  | Lesson 1     |
| 10.00 | Lesson 2     |
| 11.00 | Break        |
| 11.20 | Lesson 3     |
| 12.20 | Lunch        |
| 1.20  | Lesson 4     |
| 2.20  | Lesson 5     |
| 3.20  | Registration |

Both of these schools operated a two-week timetable. Interestingly, Middle Row HS had reduced its lesson length from seventy minutes to one hour, because of concentration difficulties, while at West-City HSG, most lessons were taught in double periods of one hour and forty minutes, which staff said presented no concentration difficulties. In fact, they were seen as an advantage because they allowed pupils time to settle and work on a task for a reasonable period of time. For practical subjects, the extra time was particularly valued.

### **Meeting Additional Learning Needs**

In all the schools, the curriculum was delivered with the assistance of support staff funded by central government in recognition of additional learning needs. Broadly speaking, staffing levels reflected relative levels of need. The two inner city schools had majorities of pupils with English as an Additional Language: 56% at West-City HSG and 95% at Middle Row HS, and both had language support staff. Middle Row

HS and The Farcliffe School had the highest proportions of pupils with SEN (48% and 44% respectively) and correspondingly the largest numbers of Learning Support staff. Several staff at The Farcliffe School commented on the relatively good provision of support staff compared with other schools. In some classes there might be two additional adults working alongside the teacher. At Southside Grange (24% SEN) and West-City HSG (30%), support staff were fewer in number (Table 6.2).

**Table 6.2: Deployment of Language and Learning Support Staff**

|   | <b>Southside Grange School</b>   | <b>Middle Row HS</b>  | <b>West-City HSG</b>  | <b>The Farcliffe School</b>  |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <b>Numbers of Language Support Staff</b>    | 0  | 2 PT<br>1 LSA<br>(vacant)   | 2FT<br>1PT  | 1FT<br>3PT<br>(for refugees)   |
| <b>Numbers of Learning Support Staff</b>    | 3 support teachers<br>3 LSAs   | 3 PT support teachers.<br>10 LSAs   | 2 support teachers plus<br>Basic Skills Teacher<br>2 LSAs                           | 33 LSAs<br>(see note)  |
| <b>Deployment of Learning Support Staff</b> | Support teachers teach or support bottom sets. Focus on literacy. Pupils withdrawn for literacy in Yr 7 and 9. | Support teachers teach or support bottom sets. LSAs in depts. Where they support individuals or class. LSAs developing SEN specialisms. | Support teachers and LSAs support bottom sets or individuals. Basic skills teacher. | LSAs in various roles: individual support, faculty support, reading programme and clubs. |

Note: This figure includes a number of roles not included at the other schools e.g. technician, AEN administration. The school did not supply a breakdown of positions. However, qualitative data suggests that the number of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) in comparable roles was much higher in this school than in the others.

In none of the schools, even The Farcliffe, were funding levels for support staff felt to be adequate. As a result, there was considerable variation in the way they were deployed, as managers attempted to maximise impact given a limited resource.

Both of the inner city schools had experienced recent reductions in language staffing with the change from 'Section 11' funding to the 'Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant'(EMAG). West-City's staffing had been reduced from seven to three (including two full time), and Middle Row's from four to two (both part time in this role), although staff in neither school felt that the extent of pupil need had diminished.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, numbers of newly-arrived pupils (NAPs), with intensive needs for basic English, had increased. At Middle Row, almost all the support went to NAPs, who were withdrawn from mainstream classes for four periods per week. Support for other pupils was limited to occasional collaborative teaching or support from the language support assistant (currently a vacant post). Staff at the school felt that additional support was actually needed for about two-thirds of the pupils, who did not speak English at home and lacked the language sophistication to progress as well as they might. The more generous staffing at West-City enabled more support in mainstream lessons, as well as withdrawal for NAPs. EAL staff also offered guidance and developed materials for mainstream teaching. In Key Stage 4, pupils were offered a 'study option' instead of one GCSE: timetabled periods to work on their other subjects with help from an EAL teacher. However at this school too, resources were felt to be inadequate as the allocation formula only recognised numbers of EAL pupils, not mobility. Several tranches of NAPs could arrive in a year.

Funding for other learning support (not in relation to language) came with individual pupils with statements of special educational need (SEN). The purpose and

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<sup>1</sup> OFSTED (2001b) reported that although the introduction of the EMAG was accompanied by an increase in government funding, many schools actually experienced a reduction, because the grant covered more schools and a wider range of work. In addition, funding was delegated to schools to spend on any measures to raise ethnic minority achievement, allowing more flexible use for roles such as home/school liaison as well as language teaching.

condition of the funding was that the specific needs of these individual pupils had to be met. However, all the schools were attempting to spread the support more widely, because the number of pupils in need of support was far greater than the number stated. Middle Row HS had integrated its Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) into departments and was also developing them as specialists in specific areas of SEN. Another strategy was to concentrate on basic skills through group work. For example, West-City HSG used one of its support teachers as a basic skills teacher, offering three hours input per fortnight to pupils with weak basic skills, instead of them taking a second language. At Southside Grange, all the support teachers worked with bottom sets, but LSAs were involved in timetabled literacy sessions in Key Stage 3, which meant that individual LSA support in class was more limited than the school would have liked. By contrast, The Farcliffe School managed to maintain a high level of individual support from its core LSAs in lessons, by employing part-time LSAs to assist with literacy at early morning sessions and homework clubs. Continuing experimentation with the deployment of LSAs was something all of the schools were engaged in.

### **Pastoral Care**

The last area of variation was the pastoral system. All of the schools emphasised the importance of pastoral care in their publicity documents, but this did not mean that they did the same things.

Southside Grange had a very strong pastoral system, based on four houses, each containing tutor groups with pupils from each year ('vertical' groups). Tutor groups themselves were seen as having an important developmental function. Each day began with a twenty-five minute tutor group period, used for house assembly once a week, whole school assembly on another day, literacy sessions and discussions on others. Moreover, the houses themselves had a strong identity and formed the basis for much of the social organisation of the school, with their own colours, social areas for break times, house trips, sports teams, prefects and games captains. The house system was seen as vital in creating a sense of belonging and value for all pupils, and also provided the structure for dealing with pupil welfare issues, with heads of house having pastoral responsibility and having a timetabled period each week to discuss pupils and meet parents if necessary.

At the other schools, pastoral care was more traditionally organised, with each year divided into tutor groups, and form tutors reporting to heads of year (Table 6.3). But the institutional capacity of schools to run these systems varied considerably. West-City HSG, with its strong ethos and core staff group, was able to use the pastoral system as the core structure for pupils' moral and spiritual development. Tutor group time consisted of fifteen minutes in the morning, and ten in the afternoon, as well as PHSE sessions taken by tutors. The morning session was used for assembly once a week and otherwise for reflection on moral and spiritual subjects, using the school's own 'Reflections Booklet'. Weekly "West-City" reflections were posted around the school to encourage whole-school involvement. Middle Row HS also was gradually increasing the importance of its pastoral system and increasing the status and importance of Heads of Year. Heads of Year were, for example, chairing

‘predictions meetings’ to monitor pupil progress, where they could hold Heads of Department accountable for the academic performance of the pupils in their charge. The school also had weekly ‘themes’ reinforced by form tutors, and a system of mentoring by form tutors for selected pupils while others were at assembly.

**Table 6.3: Pastoral Systems**

|                        | <b>Southside Grange School</b>  | <b>Middle Row HS</b>   | <b>West-City HSG</b>   | <b>The Farcliffe School</b>  |
|------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Pastoral System</b> | House System. Mixed aged tutor groups move through school with same tutor. Heads of House have pastoral responsibility. | Each year divided into tutor groups. Heads of Year have pastoral responsibility. | Each year divided into tutor groups. Heads of Year have pastoral responsibility. | Each year divided into tutor groups. Key Stage Managers have pastoral responsibility, Also Key Stage Pastoral Assistants supporting individuals. |

By contrast, the staffing situation at The Farcliffe School made it impossible to run the pastoral system as the school would have wished. Form tutors reported, in theory, to Heads of Year, although lack of experienced staff meant that three of these posts were vacant at the time of the fieldwork, and the two staff in post had become Key Stage Managers instead. Tutor group time was limited to ten minutes in the morning and five minutes in the afternoon for registration. To try to overcome these difficulties, the school had introduced an additional layer of pastoral support in the form of five former LSAs working as full-time Key Stage Pastoral Assistants (KSPAs). These staff were funded by the school out of its LSA budget. They supported about ten pupils in each year, monitoring attendance and welfare issues but also sometimes providing learning support in lessons. Overall, the effect of the

creation of this post was to lead to a reduction in in-class support that was, according to the Deputy Head “*made up for by the out-of-class support*”. In other words, a direct resource transfer had been made from short-term learning support to pastoral support in order to yield longer-term benefits.

### **Operating in the Marketplace**

This, then, was the engineering of each of the schools. But it is only part of the picture of school management. Since the introduction of open enrolment in 1988, headteachers have not been able to concentrate solely on what happens inside the school, but have also had to focus on its external presentation, since parental choice determines pupil numbers and resources. Levacic and Hardman (1998) have demonstrated that for schools in disadvantaged areas, the school market often represents a threat rather than an opportunity. High FSM schools can be at risk of a loss of pupils and funding, creating a competitive pressure that causes managers to have to devote considerable efforts to the maintenance of market position (Waslander and Thrupp 1995; Woods et al. 1998). Another question, therefore, was the extent to which enterprise strategies and marketing activities formed part of the response to context within the case study schools.

Miles and Snow may well be right that some managers are more inclined to focus on internal matters and let the product speak for itself, while others are more likely to try to influence customer choices directly. However, what seemed to be the case with these four schools was that the key issue was not the inclination of the

headteacher but the extent to which the market mattered and why. In theory, the educational market could influence both the numbers of pupils in a school, and the type of pupils. The former would have an impact on funding and staffing; the latter on the activities of a school. High numbers of very disruptive pupils would, for example, impact on a school's order and discipline and the recruitment of other pupils and staff, while high numbers of children with low prior attainment would affect a school's prospects of achieving good GCSE results, and switch its focus more to catering for pupils with learning needs rather than extending able pupils.

In the case of these four schools, pupil numbers were only a major issue for one school, Southside Grange, where the area population overall was falling. In all the other schools, population was increasing and there was pressure on school places. The Farcliffe School, for example, was almost full despite being so unpopular that parents were petitioning not to have to send their children there. For this reason, Southside Grange had a stronger reason to be market-oriented than others.

The second issue was that of pupil type. Understanding the extent to which markets mattered from this perspective demands an understanding of the aims of each school, what they stood for, and for whom they thought they were catering. These aims were stated most clearly in the prospectuses of the schools, and are presented here in the form of extracts from these prospectuses, as Figures 6.5 to 6.8. It is, of course, important to remember that the prospectuses were themselves marketing documents, and that the aims of the schools might well have been influenced by market imperatives as well as by the educational values of their governors, headteachers and staff. However, evidence from the interviews suggests that in all of the schools, the



aims as expressed in the literature reflected widely held values amongst the staff about what the school was trying to achieve educationally. It is legitimate, therefore, to consider them as genuine statements of mission that the current market situation might facilitate or impede.

**Figure 6.5: Aims of Southside Grange School**

At Southside Grange School we believe absolutely in the importance of education and in the right of every individual to have the best possible start in life. Our aim is to create a caring environment in which young people can learn and enjoy themselves in an atmosphere of security and mutual consideration. We organise the school to ensure that everyone feels important as an individual, whilst at the same time benefiting from being part of a larger community which offers well qualified, hard working and committed staff (both teaching and non teaching), excellent facilities and wide range of opportunities.

To enable each pupil to achieve his/her potential we:

- Provide a pastoral system which supports each pupil and reinforces the value of the individual
- Offer a curriculum which is broad, balanced and tailored to suit the needs of the individual
- Make available a wide range of extra curricular activities
- Work closely with the community which we seek to serve
- Provide an environment which is safe, warm and comfortable

### **Figure 6.6: Aims of The Farcliffe School**

The school must provide the highest quality of education to each student: maximising potential and developing individual talents, thus enabling all students to play a productive educational and social role in their homes and community.

Our aims are:

- To maintain a positive orderly atmosphere throughout the school in which pupils of different ages and abilities can achieve high standards of work and behaviour
- To provide a balanced, flexible and relevant curriculum to which all pupils have access
- To encourage higher standards of self motivation, sense of pride, confidence and personal achievement in all aspects of life
- To enable our pupils to develop lively enquiring minds and skills, strengths and characteristics which will benefit themselves and enable pupils to take their place in society
- To help our pupils to recognise the importance of religious and moral values throughout the community encouraging mutual respect, sensitivity, tolerance, cooperation and goodwill in human relations
- To develop links with community, commerce and industry so as to enable our pupils to understand and appreciate the values of the world in which they live.

### **Figure 6.7: Aims of Middle Row HS**

We want to prepare our pupils to take their place usefully, confidently and happily in society. To do this, we aim to:

- Help children to develop their skills and abilities to the highest possible level
- Encourage children to enjoy learning, so that they can go on learning throughout life
- Teach children to understand and respect themselves and others
- Prepare children for the world of work
- Encourage children to develop responsible attitudes towards caring for themselves and the wise use of their time
- Help children to care for their community and their environment
- Provide an orderly, safe and stimulating environment in which children can learn effectively

At Middle Row HS, we create a community where all are learning together.

### **Figure 6.8: Aims of West-City HSG**

West-City HSG is a creative learning community. High standards and high expectations enable everyone to succeed. A love of learning is our priority. We work in partnerships based on mutual respect. We develop confident, responsible young women who will contribute to and lead society in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Our high standards and high expectations lead to high achievement for all girls. We provide a high quality education within a supportive pastoral system to ensure that our pupils achieve beyond expectation and are constantly challenged to improve on their personal best. Our strength and popularity derive from our ability to provide a broad, balanced education for girls in a calm, caring environment.

Our learning community is founded on a love of learning. We aim to create a welcoming, supportive environment where the emphasis is on achievement and pupils focus on learning.

It is evident from these statements that there was a difference of aims between West-City HSG and the other three schools. Southside Grange, Middle Row HS and The Farcliffe School aimed to be good all-round schools, with a broad service mix. Their statements were child-centred, emphasising the importance of valuing each individual pupil, and creating a supportive and safe environment, where everyone could learn, develop and enjoy themselves. Words associated with the government's academic standards agenda, such as 'attainment' and 'excellence', were notable by their absence.

There were certain differences between the approaches of these three schools. Southside Grange's brochure focused particularly on what happened inside the school, its environment, curriculum and pastoral care, while The Farcliffe School and Middle Row HS emphasised their role in preparing pupils for their role in the world beyond school, as citizens, learners and employees. Middle Row HS, the school that

had previously lost the confidence of local parents by not recognising their cultural needs, placed a strong emphasis on its integration with the local community. It was a specialist sports college but did not select pupils on the basis of sporting ability. On the contrary, it emphasised the opportunities that its sports college status gave to offer sporting opportunities to the wider community and to work in partnership with the local special school. The school's motto "learning together", emphasised diversity, understanding and partnership with the community and parents, and the prospectus underlined the school's commitment to this approach and the steps being taken to realise it:

*"we work closely in partnership with parents. We have excellent links with Primary Schools, colleges and local businesses. We are particularly proud of our warm and close links with local community organisations and religious centres. Middle Row HS pupils grow up feeling proud of their school, their community and their cultural traditions".* (School Prospectus: Middle Row HS)

Nevertheless despite their differences, all of these schools expressed a vision of education in which academic attainment was only one among a number of equally important objectives. This also emerged from headteachers' comments:

*"the emphasis now is on turning people out who have the skills and knowledge for business and I can see that, but what about aesthetic awareness, creativity, being able to communicate? I don't see education as*

*being all about instrumental skills... Schools aren't just about providing fodder for business and industry. They're also about producing young people who are healthy all round"* (Headteacher, Middle Row HS)

*"I have previously stressed that I am concerned by a system which judges success purely in terms of examination success and not enough by looking at the whole educational experience which we offer to pupils. The Government's so-called agenda for standards uses GCSE and SATS results as a measure of success simply because they are measurable. It is harder-but actually more important to ask if pupils are happy, fulfilled, challenged, progressing, reaching their potential; to ask if they behave well, if they are morally and spiritually aware, if they are good, decent, hard working, honest young people. Ironically if we got rid of drama, music, sports, trips, visits, social activities, opportunities to develop – and concentrated simply on maths, English and Science, we would be deemed to be a better, more successful school- but at what cost? Exams are based on failure – rather than success; they put people in a rank order based on narrow criteria in a short period of time. We are about much more. What matters to us is the whole picture".*

(Head – address to presentation evening 2001, Southside Grange School)

West-City HSG had a different emphasis, aiming more overtly for achievement, high standards and high expectations. Achievement and challenge were dominant themes in the prospectus. The comments of staff at this school reflected a broad view of education, but also a firm focus on high attainment, especially important in this area

because it enabled pupils to break out of a cycle of poverty. This extract illustrates both the commitment to balancing academic and social needs, and the up-front commitment within the school to pushing up higher grade attainment and to reaching certain target levels.

*Q: “How much would you say in this school the emphasis is on academic attainment and how much on the other aspects that you’ve talked about, enjoying learning and being good citizens and so on?”*

*A: Well, it’s a personal thing. I would say hopefully, with me, it’s a 50-50. I want them to do well and I want them to learn. But there’s this side where you think, you give them examples, and we do PHSE<sup>2</sup> lessons with them and that also enforces lots of other issues, you know drug use, sex education, policing, careers and jobs. So I would hope that as a school it’s got to be 50-50, really, for it to be a successful school. Not all of them are going to get A\* grades but they can all be responsible citizens.*

*Q: And would you say within the school there’s a general agreement on the balance?”*

*A: I mean obviously we’ve got to get academic results because if we don’t, we get frowned upon. We’ve got to keep the results up. As a school, we would like to get 60% A-Cs, and we do really want that as well. That’s something that we really aim for, good academic results. I suppose a little bit more so than what I’ve just said actually”.*

(Class teacher 2, West-City HSG )

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<sup>2</sup> Personal, Health and Social Education.

Clearly, these differences of aim and philosophy did not mean that the schools were doing entirely different things and that areas of education not emphasised in the prospectus were neglected. All the schools were, of course, interested in the welfare and development of pupils. West-City HSG prided itself on its care for pupils and on the positive and supportive relationships between pupils and staff, and within its diverse pupil body. Although a technology college, it did not select on ability. It placed a strong emphasis on the expressive arts and on pupil's participation and ownership, through a Pupil Council which was involved in policy-making and staff recruitment. It was a Beacon School in both these areas. Similarly, managers of all the schools were pushing to make sure that pupils' academic attainment matched their potential. Middle Row HS had a system of close monitoring of pupil progress and regular 'predictions meetings' where the attainment of each pupil was reviewed across all subjects, highlighting individual problems or subjects where predicted grades were low in comparison with others. Photographs of high attaining pupils with their GCSE certificates and their results were displayed in the school's reception area, as was a graph of the school's rising attainment. The headteacher at The Farcliffe School was working with staff to re-evaluate predictions for children, which she felt were too low, while at Southside Grange, Mr Matthews was determined to throw out the "*cuddle and muddle*" approach that had prevented children from achieving their potential. Differences of aim reflected slightly different values about what was important in education, rather than wholesale different approaches.

Given these aims, the question was whether any school needed to 'play' the market in order to secure the kind of pupils that they wanted.

For the one school that had deliberately set out its stall for high achievement, West-City HSG, the answer was yes. The school needed a critical mass of pupils who were able and aspiring, and would maintain its focus on learning and on academic success. Moreover, while the school was located in a very deprived area, it was also located in a market where parents expected to exercise choice and where pupils were prepared to travel. It was possible, as well as necessary, to influence intake.

For the other schools, which had set out to cater for the needs of all-comers, intervention in the market was less necessary. There was less need to appeal to particularly aspiring or better-off parents in order to try to gain high levels of GCSE passes. However, there was an incentive to gain a critical mass of committed parents and pupils who would help the school to push its results to what the government would regard as an acceptable level (25% 5 A\*-C), thereby taking pressure off the school, and to avoid large numbers of severely disaffected pupils. This incentive affected the three schools differently, according to the types of area they were in and their market situations.

At Middle Row HS, in the predominantly Pakistani and Bangladeshi inner city area, pupil and parental commitment seemed to be a feature of the area, and large numbers of very disruptive pupils were not. The school could afford not to spend a great deal of its time on marketing activities and would still get a workable balance of pupils in the school. For the other two schools, as Chapter 4 demonstrated, parental and pupil commitment to school was not perceived to be a feature of many working class families in the area, and there were significant numbers of pupils whose behaviour was challenging. There were clear organisational incentives in each case for the



schools to pursue more market-oriented strategies, to attempt to ensure that their intakes matched the socially mixed nature of the catchment area, rather than being skewed towards the more deprived pupils. Market intervention in these areas could be seen as ‘levelling-up’ strategies, rather than attempts to gain a particular advantage. Table 6.4 summarises the different positions in which the schools found themselves.

**Table 6.4 : Areas and Organisational Incentives for Schools**

|                         | Values  | Socio-Economic Mix            | Ethnicity                                   | Population change | Organisational Incentive  |
|-------------------------|---|-------------------------------|---|-------------------|---|
| <b>West-City HSG</b>    | Comprehensive but tending to high achievement | Evenly deprived               | Very diverse.                               | Growth            | Seek more aspiring pupils in order to retain achievement and differentiation from other schools |
| <b>Middle Row HS</b>    | Meet needs of all comers                      | Evenly deprived               | Predominantly Pakistani/Bangladeshi         | Growth            | Accept intake reflecting local area   |
| <b>Southside Grange</b> | Meet needs of all comers                      | Varying levels of deprivation | Predominantly white British.                | Decline           | Seek more middle class pupils to secure roll and mixed intake, reflecting area                  |
| <b>The Farcliffe</b>    | Meet needs of all comers                      | Varying levels of deprivation | Predominantly white British. Some refugees. | Growth            | Seek more middle class pupils to secure mixed intake, reflecting area                           |

The result was that the extent of marketing activity varied considerably between the schools.

At Middle Row HS, marketing activity per se had a low profile, although the headteacher’s links within the local community and the specialist sports college programme could all be seen to be contributing to establishing the reputation of the school as well as contributing to meeting pupils’ needs.

Marketing activity was more in evidence at West-City HSG, but it took a particular form. The school had a dispersed market, with a dense population and a large number of primary schools. Sample data for the 1999 intake revealed that pupils at West-City HSG came from no fewer than 39 different primary schools. This meant that establishing the distinctive reputation of the school would necessarily play a bigger part in any marketing strategy than direct targeting of certain primary schools. Efforts were therefore directed to promoting the school's image. Its prospectus was expensively produced, and dominated by references to high achievement and to high expectations, and it constantly pushed for recognition through national events and awards.

*“We’re constantly, like the Artsmark I was telling you about. Now why on earth do we want to go for the Artsmark? There’s no financial reward in it. It took me like a term of paperwork, we already have excellent exam results, you know, on our piece of headed paper we’ve got Beacon School, we’ve got Investors in People, for God’s sake. Yes OK we train our staff, but it’s like we’re constantly looking for things to say “look”, in order to sell ourselves, I suppose. And also because of the challenge, because of the nature of the cohort that come in and the parents, we’re always looking for different things. And a huge shift, obviously from government as well, you know they’ve given all this money for gifted and talented, you know. Certainly seven years ago when I got here there were bright kids but no-one mentioned gifted and talented, and now as the school has been successful and a small but significant number of children are now coming from middle class backgrounds and parents are moving to get their children in here because in*

*Weldon provision is limited, we are [saying], right, what do we do for gifted and talented then, and we're constantly sort of looking to change, to do different things, to get more people in, to get more little stamps on our headed note paper."*

(Class Teacher 7, West City HSG)

At The Farcliffe School, marketing was seen as important, but the headteacher also recognised the enormous challenge of changing the popularity of the school given the selective system and the established status hierarchies of the schools. Marketing became a secondary activity while she concentrated on internal improvements and retained the broad, undifferentiated strategy that the school had traditionally adopted. Marketing activities had a low profile, and little investment of time and money. Importantly, they were seen as building on internal changes, not driving them. The school did not invest in a glossy brochure for prospective parents, preferring a pack of photocopied sheets providing details of the school's systems and procedures - more of a tool for parents of new pupils than a prospectus. The head's introduction to this document made no appeal to the supposed values of middle class or aspiring working-class parents, but attempted to counter the negative press attracted by the school by emphasising its tangible improvements, in buildings, equipment and the recruitment of new staff, and the broad education offered. Primary school liaison was limited, and while the new head was anxious to build this up, she did so cautiously, on the back of improvements to the school, rather than as an immediate strategy to boost numbers.

*“I deliberately didn’t go rushing out to primary schools when I arrived here because I thought we had to have something to sell first – now I’m organising a lunch for primary heads.”* (Headteacher at end of her first year in post)

Similarly, while one of Mrs May’s innovations was to give one of the assistant headteachers a new responsibility for external relations, this member of staff explicitly downplayed the element of selling the school.

Q: *To what extent are you doing marketing ?*

A: *Well marketing suggests that we’re selling. I’m not actually trying to sell the spaces. What I’m trying to do is make sure that people give the school a fair crack of the whip when it comes to their understanding of the place. For example, we have quite a low level of 5 A-C grades, so people latch on to that because it’s the only measure that’s available, but if you were to compare us with other schools on the care element we would win hands down, so I mean I could be marketing that side of things, but I don’t. I just say to people, come and see what we do. See how we deal with the young people, cope with any problems and baggage that they bring with them.”*

The presentation of this strategy makes an interesting contrast with Southside Grange. Mr Matthews, the headteacher at this school, had both the incentive and the opportunity to change the school’s intake, given the concentrated nature of the educational market (with few primary schools and just one other direct competitor)

and the tradition of local schooling. On arrival at the school in 1995/6, he adopted a high profile market-oriented strategy, actively competing with School A for the more able and more middle class pupils in the area. This included a number of different elements. First, limits were negotiated with the LEA for the number of statemented pupils (44) and pupils excluded from other schools (8). Second, changes were made within the school to make it more attractive to middle class parents. These included cosmetic changes to the school environment, such as the addition of hanging baskets around the main entrance and a carpeted reception area with attractive displays. They also included enhancements to the curriculum, with a wider range of extra-curricular activities such as trips and peripatetic music tuition, and the introduction of the banding system. These, of course, were seen as being educationally valuable, not just marketing ploys. Third, the school began to actively market itself. Primary school liaison was given a much higher priority. The headteacher began to establish relationships with primary heads and to invite them in to see the school. Cooperative ventures were developed, such as providing staff to run sessions for Year 6 pupils in science and computing, running a two day curriculum event for Year 5 pupils, a sports day and a quiz. In addition, the school introduced an open evening for prospective parents, and invested in a professionally-produced prospectus, that emphasised aspects of the school that would appeal to middle class parents, such as specialist teachers, extra-curricular activities, the school's improvement and positive quotations from OFSTED, as well as the supportive, caring ethos of the school.

The marketing of the school was a clearly articulated and prominent strategy, commented on by most of the teachers:

*“we’re selling the school. The government doesn’t like the word selling, but that’s what it is. We’re trying to fill the school and we want to fill it with the best kids and the best parents we can get” (Chair of Governors)*

*A: The new head’s been playing them (policy makers who introduced the educational market) at their own game”*

*Q: What do you mean by that ?*

*A: Well he’s been actively going round primary schools whereas before the other head didn’t do that, he just sort of took what we got and our head has been active in going round in to all the primary schools and selling our school. And whereas the old head at [primary in middle class neighbourhood] used to say “don’t send your kids to Southside Grange”, the new ones’ll say “you’d be happy going to Southside Grange” and those types of schools in the area are now sending their kids to us. That’s why for the first year ever we’ve got more first choices than our 160 Year 7s. It’s been work over the last five years that he’s been here where it’s been planned that we’ve done Year 5 and Year 6 events in school and we’ve got them in here when they were nine and ten and when they choose at eleven they think “oh well, we’ll go there” (Class Teacher 4, Southside Grange School)*

This strategy had given rise to some tensions within the school over the emphasis given to academic achievement, as this extract illustrates:

*A: I think it’s slightly easier to work in (since the change of intake). I wouldn’t say better. I think you’ve got to be careful not to go for the*

*more academic kids at the expense of the less academic and maybe less deprived ones. Sometimes those kids that are not academic have an awful lot to offer. Sometimes you can push too hard in one direction. I think you've got to have a school which caters for all kids really and not have one group of kids that is seen as an elite group. For instance, the first class club, which is a club for the more academic kids. Only those kids are allowed to do things within that club, maybe trips organised especially for them. I don't necessarily agree with that. I think it makes other kids seem as though they're second class just because they're not academic".*

(Class Teacher 6, Southside Grange School)

However, in general, it was the 'easier to work in' sentiment that dominated staff's comments. The change of intake which resulted from the strategy, and which was documented in Chapter 3, reduced disruption and introduced a greater number of motivated pupils and parents. Less time was spent on keeping order and managing behaviour, and there were more high-achieving pupils to act as role models to motivate others. Most staff therefore agreed that marketing the school had helped it to pursue its core educational objectives. They felt that they were working in a comprehensive school rather than a 'sink' school, and that a more balanced intake enabled better schooling across the board.

## **Contextualised Practice?**

This review of the engineering (the core activities) and the enterprise (market positioning) of the case study schools reveals that, while both were clearly contextualised, neither could be linked to context in a straightforward way. In terms of their core objectives, the two schools in the white working class areas had adopted similar approaches to one another, each trying to cater for all-comers, but the two inner city schools had not. Middle Row HS, in an extensively deprived area, had adopted a vision of a broad developmental education, firmly linked to the local community. It positioned itself as a local comprehensive school, serving its local area and responding to its constantly changing character. West-City HSG, also in an extensively deprived area, positioned itself as a high achieving school, offering a distinctive education with a strong focus on attainment. In terms of Murgatroyd and Morgan's analysis of school strategies (1993), West-City HSG was pursuing a strategy of differentiation, whereas the other schools were not.

All of the schools were offering a broad service mix, but with variations, particularly with regard to decisions about ability groupings. The use of setting varied within schools by subject and by key stage, except at Southside Grange, where a system of banding had been introduced, apparently bringing benefits to lower ability pupils who could work in smaller groups with specialised teachers. At The Farcliffe School, in a social setting with considerable similarities, a banding system had been abolished, apparently also for the benefit of lower ability pupils. The schools were experimenting with their use of support staff, in different ways. All emphasised pastoral care, but there were considerable variations in the organisation of pastoral



systems and the time and status given to pastoral work. What explained these variations?

A first issue is that the approaches adopted in the schools appeared very much to reflect the educational philosophies of the headteachers, which emerged strongly from the data. This is important because, as Proudford and Baker (1994) have shown, it means that changes in practice to respond to context tend to be made wholesale with the arrival of new headteachers, and may then be reversed by the next incumbent, rather than being a product of continuous organisational learning. In one sense, these philosophies appeared to be contextualised, in that they reflected strong beliefs about what was best for pupils in those particular circumstances. However, they were also deeply held and consistent philosophies, which appeared to be influenced by other non-contextual factors, including training, experience and political beliefs. Hallam (2002) has shown that subject specialism is an important influence on teacher attitudes to ability grouping and there is some evidence that this may have been a factor here. Miss Wilson, at Middle Row HS, had taught English, a subject which is generally considered amenable for mixed ability groups, while Mr Matthews at Southside Grange taught modern languages, which lend themselves better to tiered groups because prior language acquisition determines the activities undertaken. These experiences may well have influenced their opposing attitudes to ability groupings. Essentially, it did not appear that these headteachers were changing their philosophies according to the specific context of each new job they took on. Thus, ensuring that strategies are appropriately contextualised rests on governors' ability to appoint a headteacher whose philosophy matches the needs of the area.

A second issue is that, despite many years of research, it is still not entirely clear what the appropriate strategies are in specific contexts, leaving headteachers to rely on their professional judgement and intuition. For example, it is known that mixed ability groups tend to benefit lower attaining pupils both socially and educationally (Hallam 2002), which might suggest that mixed ability teaching would always be the right approach in a school with a large number of low ability pupils. On the other hand, pupils themselves report that the benefit of setting is that the most disruptive pupils are all removed into bottom sets, leaving others to learn (Ireson and Hallam, 2001), which would suggest that setting might be a beneficial strategy in schools where the behaviour problems of a minority are significantly disruptive. The seemingly opposite strategies of The Farcliffe School and Southside Grange School towards ability grouping might both be right in their specific contexts, especially because research also suggests that the effects of grouping strategies may vary depending on other issues within a school, such as its ethos. Further, more detailed research is needed to establish these finer contextual nuances. Similarly, there is scope for more detailed information about what works best for particular groups of pupils (in terms of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic circumstances, learning needs and behaviour) in respect of class sizes, withdrawal groups and pastoral care arrangements.

A third issue is that there was obviously a limit to the extent that the design of schooling could be contextualised. There were three main constraints on these schools, preventing them from making changes that might have been beneficial to pupils. The first was resources. Although schools had flexibility over group sizes and the deployment of support staff, they were ultimately constrained by a national

funding system for schools that determines school resources principally on the basis of numbers of pupils, and by the physical limitations of their buildings. Examples from Middle Row HS illustrate the problem. The physical size of the school meant that the potential for moving into smaller classes had been exhausted, even had there been more teachers available. Another option was to increase the number of support staff. Several staff suggested that, given the limited language development of a majority of pupils, a support worker in each class in Years 7 and 8 would probably be an optimum strategy for pupil progress, but this was far in excess of the level of staffing that the school could afford. Although there was some extra funding, and although none of the schools was in financial crisis, they were essentially working within a funding system designed for all schools, not for their special circumstances. Moreover, the schools were also hampered by resource outflows, the ‘dripping tap’ effect on school budgets of minor expenditures: repairing damage and paying higher insurance premiums, replacing lost equipment and subsidising trips, and the complex systems for increasing resource inflows. Much of the additional money for which they were eligible had to be bid for from special funding streams and be tightly monitored, creating an additional burden for senior management, such that one headteacher said she would rather put in £5k of her own money than spend another weekend filling in extensive application forms.

The second constraint was the institutional context of the schools. As The Farcliffe School’s pastoral system illustrated, notions of ‘ideal practice’ were less than useful where a school’s reputation left it with insufficient senior staff. West-City HSG could afford to give time to drama because it had a good reputation and a record of success in core national curriculum subjects.

Third, although the schools were locally managed, there were some things that they did not have the autonomy to change, principally the curriculum and the values underlying the education system that privilege academic knowledge over other attributes and achievements. Most staff welcomed the national curriculum because it brought clear structure and aims for teaching, but there were also those who felt that its academic emphasis was inappropriate for some pupils, at some stages of their learning careers. They felt that contextualised practice might involve more vocational and less academic subjects, and teaching life skills as well as the acquisition of vocational qualifications. Mrs May used the example of changes in Home Economics. Under the old system, getting pupils to make a cup of coffee for a visitor could be seen as a valuable use of time, teaching life skills, whereas the new subject, Food Technology, was more strongly based on technical skills and knowledge. Practical and vocational courses were among the most successful at The Farcliffe School.

Some teachers felt that, ironically, schools' inability to contextualise the curriculum, in its broadest sense, created problems in terms of disillusionment and behavioural problems, which increased the need to contextualise practice in other aspects of school life. It might also be creating problems outside school, as these quotations suggest:

*“my aim is not to get kids through school, it's to get kids ready for the outside world at the end of it and I'm not allowed to do that to a great extent because of the pressures of exams and so on...looking at the needs of the kids, so that when this kid leaves school he becomes a citizen and he needs certain skills and certain attitudes and certain ways of looking at life in a positive way that*

*will benefit them and benefit the community and at the moment, we're helping kids get through a science exam and they're kids who'll get two GCSEs in science, probably with a G, who have massive social needs that we meet in only a very small way, in terms of parentcraft, in terms of living life...In the past I could take kids and say "this kid is getting nothing from the class, he's disrupting the class and stopping the other kids from learning. Can we find something else for him to do around the school?", so we were identifying not just the needs of the school but that this kid needs to be helped as well. You talk about different kinds of intelligence. He may have a different type of intelligence – he hasn't got the linguistic power or the learning style to cope with school as it is set up, but there are other things we can do that will make him a better citizen when he leaves and prepare him to do some learning after school. There are kids who are highly unsuited to the academic approach in ten subjects and when we get that balance back into schools we won't put those kids off and make them aggressive. There'll always be exceptions but there'll be less exceptions. The school is creating problems and it's doing it more and more now because of the pressure being put on it by politicians, basically."*

(Head of Special Needs, Southside Grange School)

A: *"I think what's happened since the introduction of the national curriculum is that education is curriculum driven. ...curriculum in a sense becomes divorced from life and in a sense all you're doing is producing results, and I don't think the correlation is made between results and its ultimate effect. We're very dominated by the idea of*

*achievement in terms of academic excellence...When I was at school, there was a whole group of people who were never put through an academic curriculum. They had basic reading and writing and maths skills and the rest of the time they followed a curriculum which was practical based and I bump into people from those groups in my home town and they've had happy lives, because they've actually found employment using the skills that they've got and they've earned money and had families and maintained themselves, probably better than people who have been put through an academic curriculum and didn't achieve very well, so there's an irony that there's a ludicrous expectation in most of the families that we're teaching here that their kids can achieve very high results, and consistent with high results goes the idea that they can get into any college or after here that they want to, and then to any job that they want to, and I think they'll be disappointed...you're building disillusionment in society. I'm not saying that you should kill dreams, but I think you have to promote a certain amount of realism within the educational process.*

*Q: And how do you think the management of the school feel about that emphasis on academic standards. Does that cause any tension?*

*A: Well I don't think there's any tension because we're all so bulldozered by it that we all go in that direction so willingly, almost like lambing, that nobody really stands back and says "hang on a bit, what are we going to do about these students who, you know, we're putting through hell, absolute hell" and I don't think many of us have time to think "what are we doing, Why are we doing this?." Wouldn't*

*it be much nicer, much better for them to use this time to get a skill which they can then use, rather than not given the opportunity to even develop the skills that they could use. Find out what they're good at and then go down that road, rather than saying "right you must be able to achieve level whatever it is in maths and English before you leave this school.l"*

(Class Teacher 1, West-City HSG)

Lastly, there was the issue of the schools' market positions, and the extent to which each had the incentive or the opportunity to intervene. While it is probably true that some headteachers were more market-orientated by nature than others, it was also the case that the extent to which schools could compete in their local markets, and the extent to which they needed to compete in order to ensure organisational survival and carry out their educational objectives, were in part shaped by the characteristics of the market as well as by the characteristics of the head.

This chapter, therefore, reveals a complicated picture. While it suggests that the schools' managers were certainly responding to their socio-economic context in their core objectives, the design of their basic activities and their marketing strategies, these responses were also dependent on professional judgement and prior educational philosophies, on the levels of autonomy schools actually had to make changes, on their institutional capacities, and on their market positions. Contextualised responses were not always fully informed by research knowledge and were constrained by government policy and resources.

## Chapter 7: Responding to Context: Delivering Schooling

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Developing a vision of appropriate schooling, designing systems to deliver it, and positioning the school in the marketplace were all ways in which the schools responded to their context, and in some senses tried to control the extent to which context impacted on the school organisationally, and on the pupils' learning. But this still left them, in different measure, with the problems described in Chapter 5: difficulties securing participation; a highly charged emotional environment with inevitable emotional outbursts; a minority of pupils with extremely disturbed behaviour; many pupils with needs in addition to learning, and an environment of pressure and uncertainty caused by performance demands and recruitment difficulties. This meant that, in order to deliver teaching and learning, the schools faced a considerable organisational task. As well as the organisation of teaching and learning itself, they were engaged in a range of activities designed to minimise unpredictability and maximise a focus on learning. These were, in Thompson's organisational theory, the boundary-spanning activities that protected the technical core to get on with its work, or in Lawrence and Lorsch's terms, differentiated roles to cope with uncertain and differentiated environments (Thompson 1967, Lawrence and Lorsch 1967). This chapter focuses on these activities, and at how the schools attempted to cope with staffing uncertainties and performance pressures.



## Securing Participation

### *Managing Attendance*

The first problem for all the schools was getting the pupils to school. All of them had implemented what is now regarded as good practice in raising attendance: a first-day contact system, by which nominated staff would identify non-attenders on the first morning and ring home, if necessary targeting pupils who were developing a poor attendance pattern. Persistent non-attendance would be referred into the pastoral system to try to identify problems and develop support strategies. Educational Welfare Officers (EWO) or Educational Social Workers (ESW) would become involved in the most serious cases, which could lead to prosecution. Nevertheless, even with these systems in place, none of the schools could expect good attendance as a matter of course. Moreover, because of the number of absent pupils, it was impractical to leave attendance to form tutors or Heads of Year to deal with, since teachers with a full timetable could not necessarily find the time to telephone several pupils' homes each morning. Three of the schools had therefore invested in additional staff specifically for this purpose.

**Table 7.1: Day to Day Management of Attendance**

| <b>Southside Grange School</b>   | <b>Middle Row HS</b>   | <b>West-City HSG</b>  | <b>The Farcliffe School</b>  |
|--|--|---|--|
| Registers checked and followed up by two part-time attendance officers (school funded) | Registers checked and followed up by Home/School Liaison Officer (school funded) | Initially dealt with by tutors and heads of house. Then by school-based EWO (half funded by school) | Registers checked by Pastoral Assistants and followed up by Family Liaison Officer (school funded) |

Southside Grange had two part-time staff, working every morning, one of them a former deputy head who was known in the local community by parents who had

themselves attended the school, and who was regarded by some pupils as still being a senior authority figure in the school. These attendance officers stood at the gate in the morning to record and admonish latecomers, collected registers, contacted parents, and sometimes went out to collect pupils if necessary.

A similar system operated at The Farcliffe School, although operated by staff who also had other pastoral responsibilities. The Key Stage Pastoral Assistants monitored registers, with first day calls made by a Family Liaison Officer. While Southside Grange had seen the benefit of having an authority figure in the attendance role, the headteacher at The Farcliffe School felt that a non-teacher made a less threatening and more approachable contact.

Similarly, Middle Row HS had a full-time Home/School Liaison worker, who was bi-lingual in English and Urdu, and spent the majority of her time dealing with attendance. Equipped with a laptop and access to the schools electronic registration system, she made first day calls, monitored attendance patterns and targeted frequent non-attenders. Middle Row HS had recently introduced a series of measures over and above its regular system. Afternoon registration was taken at the end of the afternoon, not the beginning, and 'spot-checks' were made in classrooms during the after lunch period. Attendance targets were set for each pupil, form and year group. An attendance board displayed the names of gold (100%), silver (97%) and bronze (95%) attenders. Each week, 100% attenders were entered into a voucher draw, and high attending forms were given end-of-year trips. Moreover, all pupils whose attendance was below 91% had received a home visit from the Home/School Liaison worker or ESW. This school encountered a particular problem with extended absences for family visits to Pakistan or Bangladesh. To reinforce the message that

school attendance was important and had to be taken seriously alongside family responsibilities, the school had recently '*tightened up*', taking pupils off the roll if they failed to return after four weeks, a difficult decision because "*of course, sometimes they're good pupils and you don't necessarily want them off the roll, but we need to get the message across*" (Deputy Head).

West-City HSG was the only one of the schools with no dedicated resource for following up first day non-attendance. This responsibility fell to tutors and heads of year, backed up by certificates and prizes for good attendance. However, attendance had been identified as a key area for improvement, and the efforts made with persistent non-attenders had recently been increased. From the beginning of the 2001/02 academic year, the school provided funding from its own budget to increase its EWO provision to a full-time worker, working specifically with the most serious cases through individual and group work and reward schemes. She was physically based in the school at least two days a week, enabling her to check and act on pupils' attendance quickly.

### ***Working with Parents***

The second problem was getting parents to participate. As Chapter 4 showed, none of the schools enjoyed high levels of parent involvement, but for what was perceived to be different reasons. In the inner city schools, practical problems such as caring responsibilities, transport problems, inability to speak English and lack of knowledge of the education system were believed to be getting in the way for parents who wanted to support the school and be involved in their children's education. At the other schools, there was a sense that many parents were not interested in

participating. Schools were effectively faced with a choice: try to encourage parents with the normal approaches and exhortations or invest greater time and effort in trying to bring parents on board. Interestingly two of the schools, one in the inner city (West-City HSG) and one outside (Southside Grange) did the former, while two did the latter, their commitment and investment apparently reflecting the relative importance given to the parental role in education as well as their underlying impressions of the reasons for non-participation.

All of the schools did something to develop parental involvement. All had parents' evenings and meetings and encouraged parents to meet with staff by appointment. West-City HSG and Southside Grange had also had made some additional investments. At Southside Grange, two members of the teaching staff had a home-school liaison role, mainly confined to a small number of pupils whose behaviour, attendance or performance were problematic and where the school wanted to initiate action. West-City HSG had a parents' room, and the head had an 'open-door' policy for parents to come in on a Wednesday afternoon. However, the onus here was principally on parents to take part. The school's prospectus expressed an enthusiasm for parental involvement, but with the school at the centre, supported by parents, of whom the school had certain expectations:

*“we work in partnership with parents, valuing their support to encourage pupils to make the most of their educational opportunities at West-City HSG... we welcome parents into school, valuing their support to encourage their daughters to work hard to achieve success at school. We believe that by working and talking together we can support pupils' learning...parents are*

*asked to make an appointment to discuss specific concerns with the appropriate staff... we report home formally each year through the annual profile... we expect parents to attend the annual parents evening to discuss this report with teachers”*

(Extract from West-City HSG prospectus)

By contrast, The Farcliffe School and Middle Row HS seemed to be engaged proactively in partnership-building with parents and both made a bigger investment in this aspect of their work, employing non-teaching staff to build relationships with parents and to be available for parents, whereas teaching staff were usually involved in lessons. At The Farcliffe School, the Family Liaison Officer, working four days a week, was positioned as first port of call for parents on any matter. She issued cards to all parents inviting them to contact her about issues that may be affecting the child’s schooling, such as inability to afford uniform, or family problems. Her role was then to liaise with staff or other agencies to tackle problems.

Middle Row’s Home-School Liaison worker was similarly trying to build parents’ confidence in and knowledge of the school. She had started a parents’ group to discuss school issues and think of ways to involve parents, and the group was producing its own newsletter for other parents. Parents were being taken on subsidised educational trips, similar to those their children might experience, such as a visit to Stratford, so that they could see that these outings would be suitable for their girls and understand more about what was being taught at school. Afternoon parents’ meetings were run each term to talk about issues such as options, and the

systems for homework. A parents' activity day had been held, trying out activities such as IT, flower arranging and dress-making, with a view to running classes. The school was already running an exercise class for parents. It had also appointed a bilingual receptionist so that it was easier for parents to contact the school generally, and had recently employed a part-time worker to liaise specifically with parents of Somali pupils, a new group in the area. It was a proactive approach that reflected the statement in the school's prospectus that it "*enjoys excellent relationships with parents and places great emphasis on teachers and parents working together in partnership*". Participation was still small, about 15-20 in the parents' group and 50 attending parents meetings, but confidence was beginning to grow.

## **Managing Behaviour**

### *Day-to-Day Behaviour Management*

Behaviour was another issue that demanded considerable time and investment, more so at Southside Grange and The Farcliffe School than in the inner city areas. While all the schools had systems for incident reporting, and referring pupils with persistent bad behaviour up to senior management (Table 7.2), both of these schools also had staff on patrol throughout the day, dealing with any incidents where a pupil had been removed from class or where members of staff needed assistance with disruptive behaviour. At Southside Grange, 'back-up', as it was known, was done by a senior member of staff. The Farcliffe's patrols were carried out by the Key Stage Pastoral Assistants. The headteacher noted that this was not only a lot cheaper and more efficient than providing the same role through senior staff who were the most skilled

and experienced teachers and managers, but that it was possibly more effective, since some children related better to non-teaching staff.

**Table 7.2: Day-to-Day Management of Behaviour**

| <b>Southside Grange School</b>   | <b>Middle Row HS</b>  | <b>West-City HSG</b>  | <b>The Farcliffe School</b>   |
|--|---|---|---|
| Incidents recorded by staff and passed to head of house and tutor. Senior staff on back-up patrol, deal with and record any incidents and pupils out of lessons. Pass to house system. | Incidents recorded by staff on green slip and passed to form tutor. | Class teacher expected to deal with incidents. Senior staff on call if necessary. If repeated, referral system through head of faculty, head of year and senior management. | Key Stage Assistants patrol school and deal with incidents where pupils are out of lessons or support needed by staff.. Refer to head of year if necessary. |

At West-City, a senior member of staff was always ‘on-call’ but not proactively patrolling the buildings, while Middle Row HS had no on-call system. The deputy head suggested that *“we don’t need it,. we’re not that sort of school that needs pagers and the like.”* However, the offices of senior staff were strategically dispersed to enable prompt support. Both schools had systems for dealing with behavioural outbursts. West-City HSG had ‘time out cards’ which could be issued to pupils with behaviour problems, to allow themselves to remove themselves from lessons, for example, to their head of year’s room, if they felt their behaviour was about to ‘blow’, while Middle Row HS had room for ‘emergency placements’ in its Learning Support Centre. However, dealing with disruptive behaviour was less of a feature of these schools than the others, and occupied less staff time and energy.

### *Dealing with the Most Difficult*

Systems for dealing with behaviour applied to all pupils. However, at all the schools, a small minority of pupils with extremely disruptive behaviour were responsible for a significant proportion of the incidents. As I indicated in Chapter 4, staff felt that there were cultural reasons, and gender reasons, why there appeared to be fewer of these pupils at West-City HSG and Middle Row HS than at The Farcliffe School or particularly at Southside Grange, but this was not the only explanation. The way in which schools approached the management of these pupils also made a difference to whether they were in the school in the first place, and their impact on the general order.

It should be emphasised that all these schools placed a high value on inclusion. Nevertheless each had made choices about whether to keep disruptive pupils in school or not. Some were more vulnerable than others to receiving them from elsewhere. West-City HSG, for example, was full and could not always accommodate pupils excluded from other schools. The level and use of support from the LEA also made a difference, as did the ways in which the schools decided to accommodate the needs of disruptive pupils and weigh them against the needs of others. A detailed look at the situation in each school reveals the interplay of these factors.

While all of the schools maintained that they were unwilling to exclude unless absolutely necessary, it was also true to say that they had different perceptions of their ability to provide for the needs of very disruptive pupils. West-City HSG had



experienced a problem in the late 1990s with about ten pupils with what were described as ‘appalling’ behavioural problems “*whose influence permeated the whole school... it was a behavioural nightmare*” (Deputy Head). The school’s response was to remove the pupils:

*“Extremely selfish, needy behaviour. And the school could genuinely not provide what those girls needed. So I have to say, by fair means or foul, I changed that very quickly. Through working with SEN in the Borough, working with families, we gradually managed to place those children elsewhere into a more suitable learning environment and the school calmed down. Behaviour standards have risen, as they would with girls like that not around”.* (Deputy Headteacher, West-City HSG)

Since then the school had established its Learning Support Centre, with two full-time staff. The Centre ran individualised programmes for pupils returning from exclusion, involving withdrawal from certain subjects or individual support in others, alongside counselling on managing behaviour and anger, specialist counselling, or the involvement of other agencies to alleviate home or family problems. It also ran broader programmes on behaviour management and self esteem, for pupils whose behaviour was of concern. Significantly, the school was also proactive in trying to place disaffected Key Stage 4 pupils in more appropriate vocational provision. Weldon’s provision of alternative education was not well-regarded, so the school had developed good links with local colleges and was paying for some pupils to take college-based access courses, as well as sending some to Weldon’s provision.

The other schools appeared to be more reluctant to exclude the unruly minority for the benefit of the majority. All of them had strong reputations for dealing with pupils with special educational needs and disaffected pupils who struggled to thrive at other schools. Staff in all these schools had a strong commitment to working with troublesome pupils and believed that they had to work hard to keep them engaged in some way, because they would be unlikely to succeed if excluded and made to start again somewhere less sympathetic. However, they had adopted different strategies for dealing with them.

Collaboration with the LEA and other schools was a key factor. Both at The Farcliffe School and at Middle Row HS, the LEA's Behaviour Support Service was well regarded by the schools. Middle Row HS also benefited from close collaboration with other local schools. At this school, an LEA Behaviour Support Worker visited regularly, assessing and working with disaffected pupils, and the school bought six places per year at the LEA's Behaviour Support Centre. Pupils accessing the Centre might then move on to another local school via a collaborative system of 'managed moves', arranged and supported by the Centre. 'Managed moves' were also occasionally used directly between schools to deal with pupils who had committed isolated offences (such as bringing a weapon) that meant they could not continue in a school, but whose normal behaviour did not warrant exclusion. This system of collaboration meant that disruptive pupils could be moved without being excluded and that incoming disaffected pupils were adequately supported. Senior management at Middle Row HS expressed extreme reluctance to exclude pupils. There were few exclusions and, according to the head, no appeals when pupils did have to be excluded. Similarly, The Farcliffe School had regular

involvement from the Behaviour Support Service, and removed the most problematic pupils for short term 'time-out' placements at the Pupil Referral Unit.

These schools were therefore left with fewer disruptive pupils at any one time than they might otherwise have had, and dealt with these through specialist Learning Support Units. As at West-City HSG, Middle Row's Learning Support Centre (LSC) was designed so as not to institutionalise pupils, and to retain them as much as possible within the main body of the school, a strategy that was possible because the behaviour of these pupils was manageable. The LSC, located close to the staff room at the centre of the school, offered two-week placements for pupils referred through the behaviour system, as well as emergency places for pupils who had 'blown' and needed a temporary calm and supported environment. Five pupils at a time, one from each year, accessed the LSC, spending the entire school day (including breaks) within it. The short placement was followed by ongoing mentoring by the learning mentors who ran the Centre. Its focus was on tackling learning problems and raising self-esteem, since the school believed that it was usually difficulties accessing learning that led to behavioural problems. Pupils worked to a fixed two-week timetable, comprising lessons on literacy, numeracy and ICT, core subjects taught by senior subject teachers, individual mentoring and sessions looking at issues like anger management. When I visited the Centre, there was a calm, learning environment, with pupils enthusiastically participating in spelling and reading exercises. It was impossible to tell that these were pupils whose behaviour was considered problematic.

By contrast, The Farcliffe School had opted for a more removed environment, with a focus on behaviour improvement. The 'Learning Zone' concentrated on small groups of pupils, taking them out of mainstream lessons for a term at a time. The Zone (a large classroom at the rear of the school) represented a significant investment for the school, staffed with a full time teacher and LSA, and well equipped with new tables and office chairs, easy chairs, a wide screen TV and video, 12 new computers and a printer, and new, high quality, reference books and materials. Pupils had a limited curriculum of English, maths and ICT, but the main purpose was to get them to address their behaviour and to set and attain targets, through group work and one-to-one counselling. At Key Stage 4, another ten pupils were on modified timetables, coming to school three days a week and working in one of the 'huts' at the rear of the school, where they had a more relaxed, college-like environment with a kettle and music. They studied a limited curriculum of English, Maths and ICT, and attended work-based learning or work experience on the other days. If not exactly off the premises, they were out of the way, in an environment that suited them better, and the environment of the rest of the school was relatively calm.

The situation at Southside Grange was different, partly because the school was extremely reluctant to use the LEA's PRU because of its poor record in successful re-integration. It was also extremely unwilling to exclude, believing that if a pupil could not succeed at Southside Grange, s(he) would have little chance elsewhere. Riverdale LEA also had no special schools for pupils with EBD. The result was that extremely disturbed pupils, at risk of exclusion, were usually retained within the school. They registered separately, for half a term at a time, in a special tutor group,

with the Head of Inclusion and another senior member of staff, in order to build up relationships with staff and address behavioural issues, before being fed back into the mainstream. At the time of my visit, 15 pupils were in this group. They were a prominent group of pupils whose treatment was a source of tension within the school. Given the level of disruption they caused, some teachers found them an unwelcome influence and objected to resources being spent on them. While the four houses in the school were named after cathedral cities, the special registration group had the nickname 'Coventry house' among staff, denoting unwanted pupils being 'sent to Coventry'. Because of these tensions, and because of other resource pressures, the school had invested less in provision for these pupils than was the case at the other schools. Most attended 'The Base': a Behaviour Support Unit established under Excellence in Cities funding.

In contrast to 'The Zone' at The Farcliffe School, 'The Base' was not well resourced. It was an ordinary classroom, situated close to the headteacher's office at the centre of the school, with no special equipment or furniture, except three computers and a television and video brought from home by a member of staff. It operated in the mornings only, and its staffing consisted of the Head of Inclusion, who did home-school tuition for school refusers in the afternoons. Some of the pupils returned to lessons in the afternoon, while others were on modified timetables.

**Table 7.3: Dealing with the Most Disruptive Pupils**

|   | <b>Southside Grange School</b>  | <b>Middle Row HS</b>   | <b>West-City HSG</b>   | <b>The Farcliffe School</b>  |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| <b>In-School Provision</b>  | Registered in separate tutor group. Classroom known as ‘the Base’. Mornings only. 1 member of staff. Pupils attend for some or all lessons and attempt to keep up with curriculum, prior to reintegration when ready. | Learning Support Centre, 2 staff (learning mentors). Pupils from all years spend two weeks full time before reintegration and follow-up mentoring. Focus on helping with learning problems – basic skills, ICT and core subjects as well as sessions on behaviour. | Learning Support Centre, 2 staff. Used for 1:1 programmes on return from exclusion and for proactive group work. Pupils not in centre full time. | Learning Zone for KS3. 1 Teacher and 1 LSA. KS3 pupils, full time. Pupils spend one term before reintegration. Focus on behaviour, plus basic skills and group work. KS4 group on modified timetables. |
| <b>Number of pupils accessing this provision at time of Fieldwork</b> | 15 (tutor group) of which 12 attend Base  | 5 (one from each year)   | N/A.   | 10 in KS3, 10 in KS4   |
| <b>Out-of-School Provision for Disruptive Pupils</b>                  | LEA has Pupil Referral Unit and Education Otherwise for refusers. School prefers not to use.  | School uses LEA Behaviour Support Centre. Buys six places per year.  | School uses alternative provision for refusers or those whose behaviour is very disruptive.  | School uses PRU for time-out placements.   |

The aim of ‘The Base’ was to get pupils to discuss and address their behaviour problems in a smaller and less pressured group, but they were also expected to bring work with them and keep up with the curriculum, so that they could be readily reintegrated. In fact the emphasis was very much on retaining links with mainstream

and most pupils came in and out of 'The Base' in the morning, attending those lessons that they could cope with, but not others. In some lessons, they were supported by a Behaviour Support Auxiliary. According to the Head of Inclusion, maintaining this mainstream link was problematic, since work could not always be supplied (for example, in practical subjects) and it was difficult for one member of staff to support all subjects and keep a range of pupils of different ages and abilities, doing different subjects, on academic tasks for entire lessons.

The presence of 'The Base' at the centre of the school was an advantage in some respects, because pupils were always under the watchful eye of the headteacher or staff coming in and out of the staff room. However, it also contributed to the high profile of these pupils within the school. During my fieldwork period, I observed numerous incidents of disruption caused by these pupils coming and going from 'The Base', simply because it was at the hub of the school. The topic of dealing with behavioural difficulties was mentioned twice as many times by staff at Southside Grange than at any other school. It was clear that strategies for dealing with very small numbers of extremely disruptive pupils could have a significant impact on the overall climate and on teachers' work.

### **Meeting Social Needs**

This discussion of attendance and behaviour demonstrates that, although the contexts of the schools gave rise to different levels of problems, there were also variations in approach to the same kinds of problems, as managers made decisions about how best to respond, given their own educational philosophies and the other pressures on the

schools. Nowhere was this more clear than in the school's responses to pupils' social needs, where headteachers had widely different opinions.

At one level, there was apparent consensus. All the headteachers insisted that the socio-economic disadvantage in the area should not be allowed to affect expectations of pupils nor limit their access to the curriculum. As Mrs May at the Farcliffe school said *"we don't allow for the social problems. Well, we do in one sense but not in terms of the level they're working at"*. Education was seen as pupils' passport out of disadvantage. Failing to deliver the best education on the basis of responding to pupils' welfare needs would add to their existing disadvantage and was seen as something clearly to be avoided. All the schools were attempting to create a kind of haven in which pupils could concentrate on their education and experience positive relationships and be socialised into the norms and values of the wider society.

*"Someone said to me recently you seem to see the school as a haven away from the community and to a large extent that's true. I like kids to come into here and whatever's happening out there, they're on my terms, so they dress properly, they behave properly, they don't use bad language, they don't experience aggression and violence and prejudice, but I know that out there they do. My view of regeneration is a much longer term strategy [than dealing with social issues]. By making children into better human beings, by caring for them and teaching them to value themselves and educating them, that's a long term knock-on effect isn't it?"* (Headteacher, Southside Grange School)



*“The successful schools in deprived areas are the ones that have managed to cut out the outside.”* (Headteacher, The Farcliffe School)

*“...there’s a culture of saying, ...don’t become despondent. Don’t go down the road of saying ‘oh isn’t a real pain and we live in a really rough and awful area, isn’t it terrible’. Yes we do live in a rough and awful area but we actually consider ourselves a sort of oasis in the middle of it and a powerhouse if you like, which can be dynamic and which can conquer it.”*  
(Class Teacher 1, West-City HSG)

*“in a sense, West-City’s like a little bubble within Weldon, a protected little bubble”* (Deputy Head, West-City HSG)

But how did being a haven from the outside, and concentrating on education, work when the reality of many pupils’ lives meant that it was very difficult for them to concentrate on education or behave in the way that was expected? Someone clearly had to deal with these barriers to learning, but was it the school’s job?

On this issue, there were widely differing views. At one end of the continuum was Mr Matthews at Southside Grange. He argued unequivocally that the school should concentrate on its educational role, and not become involved in trying to resolve other problems associated with poverty. He promoted compensatory measures that were clearly within the school’s remit, such as making sure pupils could have hot meals, investing in pastoral care and trying to broaden educational experiences by organising holidays and educational visits. However, a deliberate decision had been

made not to have external agencies on the school site. This was, at first glance, surprising, given the school's positioning as a caring school, and the head's obvious sympathy with the socio-economic circumstances of the pupils and families. It reflected a decision to focus organisational resources on the core area of work, education, and on the core performance indicator, attainment. Involvement in social issues was seen as detracting from the school's ability to fulfil its unique role.

A: *“The current government view as I understand it..., is to see the school as responsible for some degree of community regeneration which means the school would accept some responsibility for things like housing and things like that. I do not. I just think it's beyond my ability physically and mentally to take any more on, and we take the view that if it's an issue outside school that clearly there is an agency with responsibility for that and we simply refer people to that agency. ...I just think it's not possible really given the breadth of everything else we're required to do. And I feel that a lot of what the government tells you to do is contradictory and if you spent your time worrying about health care and housing and everything, how is that compatible with the obsession with league tables and everything else?.*

Q: *So do any of the organisations like police, housing, social services, voluntary organisations have a presence on the school site?*

A: *No.*

Q: *And you don't want them there?*

A: *No.*

(Headteacher, Southside Grange School)

Similarly, other agencies were not regularly involved at Middle Row HS, and the focus of additional support staff in the school was very much on learning. For example, the school's two learning mentors, funded by Excellence in Cities, had a purely educational role, running the Learning Support Centre and doing follow-up mentoring, not getting involved in liaison with other agencies to deal with social or economic problems. Involvement with other agencies tended to be opportunistic, rather than part of a planned multi-agency strategy. For example, Middle Row HS was one of several schools in the area whose pupils were involved in a citizenship project in their local communities. The potential value of other agencies was recognised within the senior management team. The Deputy Head, who had been involved in building up the school's Sports College programme, noted that her exposure to other agencies had made her realise that "*if we had more money, other agencies could be a fantastic resource*". However, it was not something that had been pursued in a strategic way.

In the other schools, the view was that, although efforts to engage other agencies in tackling social problems might take some energy away from core educational tasks, this was a worthwhile trade-off, because the gain in pupils' ability to learn would offset the loss of learning time and energy devoted to it. Mrs May, at the Farcliffe School, was the strongest proponent of this position.

*“This isn’t a school; it’s a family, a social services department, and the rest. If we’re going to improve on education, these other things have got to be dealt with.”* (Headteacher, The Farcliffe School)

Working with other agencies was also seen as a way of building relationships in the local community and improving the reputation of the school:

*“For any initiative, you have to ask the question, does it benefit the students? If it benefits the students, it benefits the school. If it’s breaking down the barriers to learning and participation, it benefits the school, it benefits the students. Some of our students walk into this school and they have got so much baggage that if you don’t break that down... so yes it benefits the school in all kinds of ways. It benefits the school because the students are more ready to learn. It benefits the school because we’re breaking down the barrier and the misconception of people from the outside community. The more people we’re getting into this school, the more our messages will go out to the community. For example, going to all the reviews means that we’re spoken about at social services and all the foster agencies, and they know that we support them. To have other agencies involved means that they understand the type of work that we’re doing, rather than, because as you know our school suffers from a bad reputation, but it’s about breaking down that reputation. It is about getting the community in, and we can’t do that in isolation. I don’t believe that a school can be an island. I mean school is about preparing students for society, the next step. Now if you’re just going*

*to be “I am a school and that’s it” you’d never do it, not in this community.”*

(Inclusion Manager, The Farcliffe School)

The Farcliffe was the school in which attempts to deal with socio-economic disadvantage were most fully implemented. The school’s approach involved two elements. The first was working actively with other agencies to provide services in the school, and giving these a high priority, allowing pupils to miss lessons to access them if necessary. In 2001, the school launched its *“One-Stop – A multi-agency approach breaking down barriers to learning and participation”* with a one day multi-agency conference, taking as its starting point the County Council’s Public Service Agreement targets and the ways in which provision of support services on the school site might make a contribution. Following that, which the Inclusion Manager described as her *“passionate plea”* for help from other agencies, some additional services were established. A social worker visited the school for half a day each fortnight, offering a drop-in for pupils at lunchtime and a ‘by appointment’ service in the afternoon, open to parents by self referral or at the suggestion of the school. There was a counsellor in school four days a week. The police also started a monthly drop-in at the school, but at the time of the fieldwork it was temporarily discontinued due to staff illness. Relationships between the school and the police Youth Crime Reduction Officers were strong. The Youth Offending Team visited the school regularly, working with young offenders and those at risk of offending, and liaising with the school about appropriate support ‘packages’. A local voluntary organisation worked once a week in lesson time with a small number of vulnerable

students who were known to be neglected at home, teaching them practical skills like sewing, cooking and ironing.

Arrangements with LEA support services had also been renegotiated. Rather than having a variety of behaviour support staff working with individual pupils, the school had secured a dedicated member of staff two days a week, providing weekly one-to-one counselling for identified pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9, as well as advice for teaching staff. Input from the Learning and Cognition Service (LCS) had been changed so that the school had responsibility for testing, while LCS staff provided group work for students with limited speech and language skills. Negotiations were underway with the Language and Traveller Service to provide additional language support for refugees, and with the educational psychologists to be based in school once a fortnight, observing children in class and providing support and advice to teachers, rather than testing pupils and then being unable to offer much practical support. It was also hoped that a site-based school nurse could be provided, running a drop-in health service.

The second element was to invest the schools own resources in meeting pupils' emotional and practical needs, over and above the considerable efforts involved in inter-agency liaison. The creation of the Key Stage Pastoral Assistant role was one aspect. Another was physical – the creation of a student support centre in which support activities were based, including a home-like area with toys and games for looked-after children and an 'advice den'. Yet another was the development of a whole-school focus on emotional intelligence. This had begun initially with four-year funding from a Virtual Education Action Zone, which was used to establish a

project known as 'The Powerhouse', targeting both learning and behaviour support needs. Run by a former careers advisor at the school, the project was located in a small, welcoming, room at the back of the school. Twelve groups of five pupils from each of the tutor groups in Year 7 and Year 8 (who were having difficulty settling or who were withdrawn or isolated) had weekly sessions on emotional intelligence, to help them to recognise and handle their emotions, and to recognise the ways in which they and others learned. The Powerhouse also gained external funding for special projects. All girls in Year 9 had been participating in 'Sisters Clubs', sessions on lifestyle, health, appearance and expression with external agencies, such as a dance tutor and a group of actors at a local theatre. In Year 10, they were developing specific clubs such as 'Singing Sisters' and 'Dancing Sisters' as part of a creative arts programme. A group of eight children with severe emotional problems were involved in making a professional film on 'dealing with feeling', and eight children who were carers at home attended a lunchtime club where they could relax and do recreational activities, but also had a chance to share emotional issues. Several staff reported a positive impact of The Powerhouse on students' self esteem and self management. Following this success, the school was broadening its use of the emotional intelligence curriculum, with sessions for staff, incorporation into certain mainstream curriculum subjects, and assessment for all Year 7 pupils.

West-City's approach, although not developed to the same extent, was similarly outward looking, trying to work with other agencies. The school took advantage of external funding sources to provide support services for pupils. In this school, the two part-time learning mentors funded by Excellence in Cities dealt with about sixty pupils between them (7%), referred by Heads of Year. While they mainly worked on

individual learning barriers such as organisation or peer group pressures, they would also get involved with social problems such as housing issues, supporting families in contacting other support agencies. Some group work, such as a young carers group, was planned. One of the learning mentors also worked part-time in a specific family liaison role at secondary transfer, funded by a charitable educational organisation. She visited local primary schools and identified pupils who might find secondary transfer difficult or be vulnerable when joining their new school, then monitored their progress on joining West-City HSG and worked with them and their families to sort problems out and help them settle. She was also available as a point of contact for families who had their own concerns. Since October 2001, the school had also had the benefit of a trainee social worker based on site (self funded as part of his training) and working three days a week. Working with pupils identified by learning mentors or heads of year, his role was one of individual advocacy, liaising with other organisations such as housing and social services to progress cases and remove obstacles to learning. At the time of the fieldwork he had a caseload of six, and reported weekly through the pastoral system.

A number of other initiatives were also in place. The school employed an independent counsellor who visited once a week and was available to pupils for counselling on personal matters. It was pursuing the healthy schools initiative and working with the Borough's drugs and alcohol advisory teacher, and had close links with the local police, who provided citizenship lessons, involved pupils in crime prevention projects and provided an additional presence at the end of the school day, because of concerns about pupil safety. A child protection consultant came to the school once a week to advise and debrief staff, and there was a visiting educational



psychologist. None of the other agencies currently had a presence on the school site, although there was some support in principle for this approach among senior management.

Q *“What happens in the case of an individual pupil where there’s a problem in the family, maybe an alcohol problem or a money problem or a housing problem ?*

A *The head of year could obviously make a referral to educational welfare, but if it were a more serious problem it would be referred to social services or the police or housing..., we have to draw on those sorts of agencies because schools aren’t equipped at the moment.. we’re not a sort of one stop shop, at the moment, which possibly..*

Q. *How much do you think those things should be the role of schools?*

A *I think if schools could have the professionals on site, and there was the physical accommodation for that, I think it would be brilliant, because I think it could streamline the whole process for families. I think it could be enormously beneficial.” (Deputy head, West-City HSG)*

### **Recruiting and Supporting Teachers**

Another area of uncertainty for schools was being able to recruit and retain staff. Since teachers are paid on a national scale, there was little that headteachers could do to influence recruitment, apart from sell the school on the strength of their own reputations. At The Farcliffe School, Mrs May had ‘poached’ staff from schools at which she had worked before, while new staff at Southside Grange acknowledged

that what had attracted them to the school was the good reputation and charismatic personality of Mr Matthews. Otherwise, they could do little to ensure that posts would be filled. The Farcliffe School responded to its recruitment crisis by encouraging teachers to come in on the Graduate Trainee Scheme. All the schools actively encouraged able Learning Support Assistants to undertake teacher training. At West-City HSG, such was the poor response from national advertisements that staff were mainly recruited through agencies, meaning that there were increasing numbers of overseas teachers who tended to stay only one or two years.

Recruiting capable supply teachers was also a problem, since the emotional climate of the schools was problematic for staff who did not have an existing relationship with the pupils, and many supply teachers avoided particularly challenging schools. At Middle Row HS, Miss Wilson had tackled these problems by engaging three of the better supply teachers on contracts directly with the school, rather than reverting to agencies.

However, these were limited strategies, and all the schools recognised the vital importance of retaining their staff. Professional development was taken very seriously, particularly at West-City HSG and at Middle Row HS, where the opportunities for training and development were commented on positively by staff. They also made every attempt to value and support their staff, in a variety of ways apart from the supportive styles adopted by the headteachers. At Southside Grange, governors paid the staff as generously as their experience would allow and the headteacher tended to be generous over time off for personal matters, in order to secure better staff attendance in the longer term. Staff absence at Southside Grange absence was extremely low – just 3% of staff days in 2000 - relieving pressure on

staff to cover for colleagues and reducing the supply cover budget from £80k in the mid-1990s to just £5k in 2000/01. The headteacher also pursued an explicit strategy of trying to pull the staff and management together by creating common enemies out of other schools, the government and OFSTED.

*“I’m a bit naughty in that I create common enemies because I think it’s a good psychological thing, you know “we’re all up against this”. I did make it quite clear of the opposition, as it were, the school over the way, and I said on my opening staff meeting, “and we’ll sort them buggers out” and staff said that was the best thing you said, because you just need to rally the troops against a common enemy. And you have to constantly bolster the morale of the staff who are being told they’re useless, but its certainly doable and I think we’re a good example of where virtually everybody here knows what we’re trying to do and believes in what we’re trying to do and will work towards it.” (Headteacher, Southside Grange School)*

At Middle Row HS, governors paid for all of their staff to have a day at a health club every year, while at The Farcliffe School, one of Mrs May’s first moves upon being appointed was to improve the facilities in the staff room, and to buy laptop computers and kettles for staff in their offices.

Efforts were also made to remove pressures from staff wherever possible. At The Farcliffe School, for example, the new headteacher had increased the number of administrative support staff so that teaching staff could concentrate more on teaching. A similar thing had happened at Southside Grange, where the head also

attempted to take the pressure off staff by providing cover when they were particularly under pressure. Several staff remembered that one department had been put on to reduced timetables during the exam period in order to prepare new schemes of work when there were major curriculum changes.

While these were strategies that might well have been pursued in many other schools as well, they were all referred to in these schools as being absolutely essential because of the stressful environments that teachers were working in. Because morale and confidence could be battered by the challenges of the work, and by the difficulties of achieving results that would be recognised as good by national standards', there was a particular need to support staff and to make them feel valued. Especially at Southside Grange and The Farcliffe School, where academic results were low and the schools were criticised in local media, there was a perception that teachers' efforts and skills were not valued externally, creating a particular need to value them internally. The most important thing in retaining good teachers, said Miss Wilson at Middle Row HS *"isn't money, its making them feel valued"*.

### **Contextualised Practice?**

As was the case with the organisational design and strategic issues covered in Chapter 6, the elements of school practice reviewed in this chapter exhibited a degree of similarity but also significant differences, influenced by headteachers' perspectives of what was the right thing to do given the school's socio-economic context, institutional capacity and market position.

While some of the schools' practices could be considered to be standard practice (such as first day contacts on attendance or referrals to educational psychologists) many were certainly over and above what schools in less deprived areas would have had to do to achieve the same results. For example Middle Row HS's multi-pronged drive to improve attendance was something that would be highly unlikely to feature in a more advantaged school. These practices were necessary and they seemed to be effective. Middle Row's attendance had improved from 89% to 92% in a term. But they were costly. Quite apart from the cost of the Home/School Liaison Officer (funded by the Standards Fund), vouchers given for good attendance cost £200 per month and other trips and rewards several thousand pounds a year. These were funded by Pupil Learning Credits, which were being discontinued. Attendance alone took up to a day a week of the deputy head's time. In devoting such efforts towards getting pupils to school, keeping their behaviour in check and making sure there were enough capable staff to teach them, the schools were, in a sense, running to stand still.

A number of other points are also important. Once again, as with the basic design of the school day and the activity mix, it was evident that managers' decisions about the extent and form of welfare interventions rested on their interpretations of the proper role of the school and their decisions about the trade-offs between different priorities.

As this teacher indicated, attendance and behaviour initiatives involved direct resource trade-offs: money being spent on ensuring the participation and compliance of pupils rather than on resources for their learning. As a result, they also

represented a trade-off between the needs of the majority of pupils and the needs of the disruptive or absent minority.

A: *“It doesn’t take many (problematic pupils), before you’ve got someone on good money like me being diverted to that sort of activity.*

Q: *How many pupils do you think it does take?*

A: *Handfuls. I don’t think we’re talking about hundreds. Now we’ve got two people whose brief is attendance. We are then spending maybe £20K on attendance. I bet there’s loads of schools that don’t have to spend anything on attendance. I bet there are some schools where attendance isn’t even any kind of a problem at all and the only money that’s spent on attendance is how much the bloody registers cost each year. Now you imagine if every department could have another thousand pounds, and imagine if that same amount was spent on behaviour and all of a sudden you could have two thousand pounds. And then you can see how just a handful of children can really start to suck resources away from the majority.”*

(Class Teacher 5, Southside Grange School)

While no school could afford not to pursue these kinds of initiatives, there were decisions to be made about resource levels, as the different levels of investment in learning support units indicate.

Interventions involving other agencies also involved trade-offs, between what might be seen as the core activities of the school (teaching the curriculum) and broader

initiatives to promote pupil welfare. These activities could not be absorbed without any wider ramifications. They took management time, and in some cases they took curriculum time, if children were withdrawn from lessons to participate. Whether or not they were pursued depended therefore on whether headteachers viewed the role of the school as pedagogic, with welfare interventions more properly the remit of other organisations (as at Southside Grange), or whether they saw interventions in the lives of pupils and families as properly the role of the school and something which promoted better learning (as at The Farcliffe School).

These were largely personal views, based on personal educational philosophies. But management decisions were also influenced by perceptions of the institutional context and the market. Pursuing a market-driven strategy to appeal to more middle-class parents, Mr Matthews at Southside Grange school could hardly afford to take his eye off of the ball to develop welfare programmes, whereas Mrs May at The Farcliffe School, with *'nothing to sell'* had nothing to lose in the marketplace by spending time and money doing what she felt was best for the pupils in the school. Perceptions of the socio-economic context were also critical, as was evidenced by the ways in which schools defined the problem of low parental participation and designed their liaison activities accordingly.

Finally, as with broader curriculum and pastoral issues, there was considerable variation in the schools' responses to these contextual influences. Learning Support Centres were new, and schools were developing them in their own way to meet what they thought were the most pressing needs. They varied enormously in their size, the resources supplied, the length of placement, and the nature of their activities. Social

welfare programmes were highly opportunistic. From West-City's trainee social worker to The Farcliffe's emotional intelligence programme, the schools tried things that seemed right where they were offered funding or personnel to do them. Apart from at The Farcliffe School where a Head of Student Support was actively engaged in multi-agency liaison, there was no sense that managers had the time to plan welfare interventions in a strategic way, nor that they were drawing on a body of good practice to support their decisions. In general terms, responses to context were energetic and committed, but also patchy and tenuously funded. The practices of these schools were not systematically designed to cater for additional contextual pressures. They were developed piecemeal, depending on intuition, experience, personal philosophy and the bits of additional funding that happened to be available.



### **Exploring Context, Processes and Quality**

This thesis started by identifying a problem with the quality of school processes (i.e. what schools do, as assessed by OFSTED) in disadvantaged areas, as well as the more often debated problem of low attainment (i.e. what pupils achieve). However, not all schools in poor areas are adjudged by OFSTED to be of poor quality, and this has led to what has been described as the exemplary schools approach, the belief that what is wrong with those schools that are failing is that their headteachers and staff are underperforming. Explanations for the differences in organisational performance between ‘poor’ and ‘rich’ schools have focused on the internal, not on how the context of schools in disadvantaged areas might contribute to different organisational processes, dragging down quality. As a result, while policies aimed at raising attainment have to some extent been contextualised to take account of the additional problems in deprived areas, policies aimed at improving school quality have been largely generic, and not tailored to particular contexts. They have relied on headteachers and teachers in disadvantaged areas implementing the same good practice measures as applied elsewhere.

I argued in Chapter 1 that this decontextualised policy approach has not arisen purely out of political conviction or convenience, but because the research that has underpinned policy has itself lacked any real perspective on contextual effects, concentrating almost entirely on internal explanations. It is only recently that a new generation of qualitative studies has begun to highlight the impact of a disadvantaged

socio-economic context on school processes, encouraging both school effectiveness researchers and policy makers to look further at the particular processes of schools in 'challenging circumstances'. However, although the number of studies has been growing, they have not yet illuminated the different issues that might be thrown up by different types of deprived context, because they have concentrated on differences between high poverty schools and others, rather than on differences between them. This thesis aimed to explore the more subtle differences in context between schools in deprived areas. It also aimed to contribute to a fuller knowledge of the mechanisms by which context is linked to school processes and quality, by applying understandings drawn from wider neighbourhood studies and organisational behaviour literatures about context and about schools as organisations.

This was a small-scale study, and many stones have been left unturned. The findings of the quantitative analysis in Chapter 2 indicate the potential value of exploring area type variables more fully in analyses of school quality and performance, using a larger sample and more complex multivariate techniques, which would enable accurate assessment of the relative importance of socio-economic variables and school type variables such as size and gender mix. The availability of 2001 Census data and of a greater number of administrative datasets through the ONS Neighbourhood Statistics service has expanded the possibilities for this kind of work since my own analysis was undertaken. So too has the DfES' new Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), which enables the mapping of school catchment areas and the use of school compositional data (such as pupil ethnicity and prior attainment) on a widespread scale. In terms of the school case studies, the emphasis given by respondents in this study to issues of pupil/teacher relationships and the

impacts of context on time and workload suggest that these aspects need to be explored through more detailed work: through ethnographic studies that involve pupil as well as teacher perspectives and observational data as well as interview material; through survey evidence to quantify the extent of contextual factors such as the living conditions and diets of the pupils; and through shadowing and activity analysis to determine what teachers actually do spend their time on. Funding implications for schools need to be properly explored through budgetary analysis and fuller qualitative exploration of the ways in which needs are prioritised. Other settings within deprived areas could usefully be studied, and other types of school, particularly a faith school or a boys' school, and all of these issues would also ultimately benefit from comparative analyses with schools in more advantaged areas, to start to address the difficult issue of resource distribution within the education system.

There is, therefore, more to be done, but the findings of this study also have much to offer. The situations described will be familiar to many of the headteachers and staff of schools in England's poorest areas: a de-industrialised, predominantly white industrial area in the north; a midlands inner city area primarily of low-income home ownership and with a predominantly Pakistani/Bangladeshi community; an ethnically mixed and rapidly changing inner London neighbourhood with poor quality and overcrowded council flats mingled with expensive private homes; and a coastal town with a weak economy, a transient population and a new community of refugees. There is much to be learned from these schools and the accounts of the headteachers and staff within them. This final chapter reviews these lessons and offers some implications for policy. It covers five areas: how we can think about the

'context' for schools; the implications of context for school processes; management responses; implications for quality; and considerations for policy.

### **Elements of Context**

The first set of findings relates to the nature of context and its relationship to school processes. Schools evidently have a national context: economic, cultural, political and technological. This formed the backdrop for the study, which focused in detail on local context. The study took a broad view of social context, drawing on literature from the fields of organisational behaviour, education and neighbourhood studies to identify three key dimensions: the area context (incorporating physical, socio-cultural and local economic factors); the market context (incorporating competition and local political/regulatory factors); and the institutional context (incorporating school type and size as well as history, reputation and culture). Examining these in relation to individual schools reveals three points about the way we think about context and its influence.

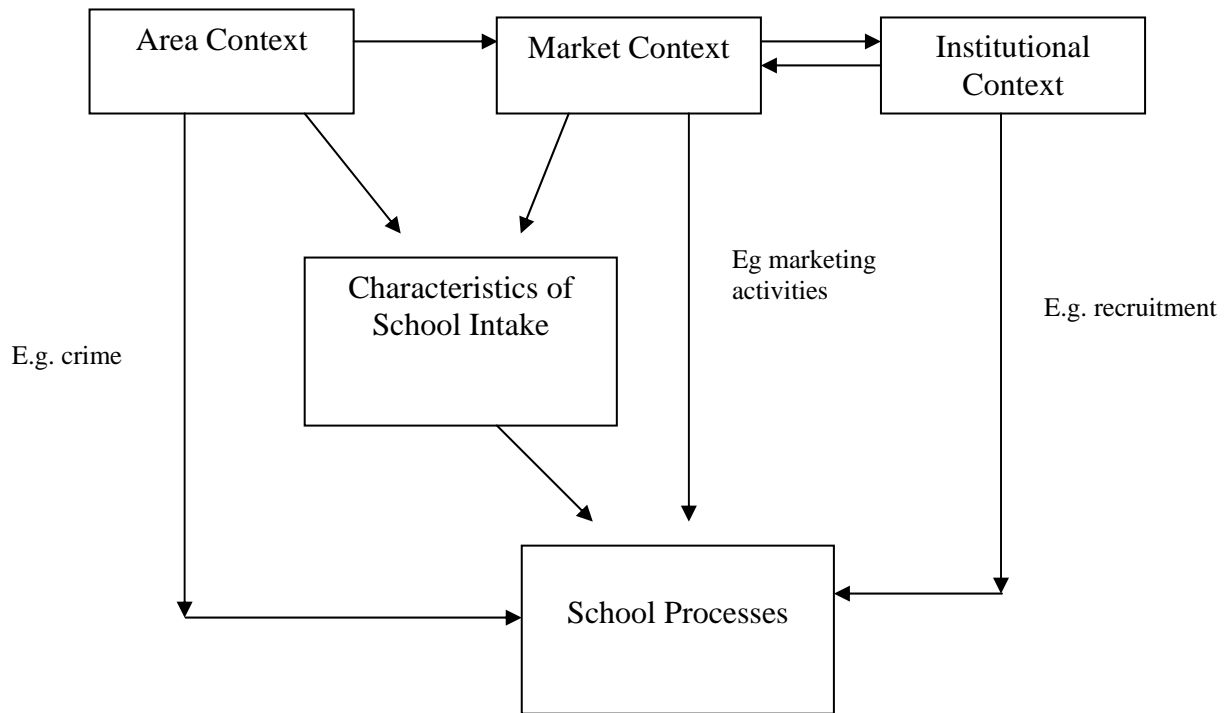
Firstly, the three elements of context tend to be inter-related. Market characteristics tend to be influenced by the socio-economic characteristics of the area, with areas that are highly differentiated socially, like Greenford (the LEA in which The Farcliffe School was situated) having steeper hierarchies of schooling than those with lower socio-economic inequality. Some institutional characteristics, such as a school's type or gender mix, are independent of other contextual factors but others, such as popularity, are clearly linked to their position in the market not just to the

characteristics of the institution per se. However, it is also the case that in some circumstances, the elements of context may offset each other, with favourable institutional contexts offsetting unfavourable area contexts or unfavourable market contexts offsetting relatively favourable area contexts. The Farcliffe School, for example, was in a mixed area socio-economically, but the selective system and the steep hierarchy of schools funnelled a higher proportion of less advantaged pupils towards The Farcliffe School. This was an area in which specific residential characteristics, notably the large number of childrens' homes, generated a pool of pupils with significant additional needs that would be undetected by standard deprivation indicators. West-City HSG, on the other hand, was in an extensively deprived area, but the fact that it was a girls' school and a popular one enabled it to draw from further afield and also to attract some of the more aspiring families in the area. These examples indicate that when assessing school quality and performance, it is essential to examine all elements of context, not just one.

Secondly, the main influence of context is through the mechanism of school intake, which is what is typically noted through indicators like FSM and EAL. Intake matters for several reasons: because of the educational characteristics of the pupils (for example, language needs), because of their home and family circumstances and because of their attitudes, and their parents' attitudes, towards school and towards learning. However, context is also influential, although to a much lesser extent, in a direct way. Poor reputations of schools affect recruitment, high crime means that sites have to be secured and money spent on repairs, and time and money may have to be spent on marketing. Figure 8.1 demonstrates these relationships. It emphasises

the importance of thinking about context in the round, and of considering neighbourhood factors as well as simply intake factors.

**Figure 8.1: Contextual Influences on Schools**



Thirdly, the evidence from these four schools suggests that context is neither necessarily well known to schools, nor something that can be viewed entirely objectively. Headteachers spend varying amounts of time finding out about their local context and involving themselves in the local community, so some are better informed than others. Moreover, ‘perceived context’ as well as ‘objective context’ may be influential on practice. What headteachers and staff observe in their contexts is inevitably conditioned by their own backgrounds and connections with the area. Comments of teachers in these schools suggest that a particular distinction that can be made is that white middle class teachers in ethnic minority areas are likely to be

conscious of the cultures of pupils and parents and conscious of treating these in a non-prejudicial way, adapting their practice accordingly, whereas in white working class areas, teachers are less likely to adapt to what are seen as anti-education cultures. Of course, their ability to adapt is also limited, given the constraints of school organisation and the curriculum.

### **Implications for School Processes**

The second set of findings concerns the implications of context for school processes. They support the conclusions of Gewirtz (1998), Thrupp (1999), Johnson (1999) and others that context has numerous small and unintended consequences for school organisation, resources and relationships. Some findings can be generalised to schools in disadvantaged areas, in comparison with schools in advantaged areas. Others relate to the differences between schools in different kinds of disadvantaged areas.

### ***Schools in Disadvantaged Areas***

Although the study was not directly comparative with more advantaged schools, the experiences of respondents who had worked in other settings made it possible to identify ways in which the contexts of schools in disadvantaged areas are different from those of more advantaged areas. The first is that pupils come with additional learning needs: lower prior attainment, less independence, and in some cases, no knowledge of English. Teachers have to use practical exercises and more verbal

instruction to engage pupils with low academic ability, and spend a lot of time preparing resources for this group. The withdrawal of pupils for help with English or extra literacy is a routine part of the job of the school. Second, there are pupils whose economic circumstances mean that their families cannot afford uniform, equipment, books and computers at home, and trips away with the school. Schools have to subsidise practical subjects and trips and run homework clubs to make up for the lack of facilities at home. Third, the social circumstances of many pupils mean not just that there is a need for greater liaison with outside agencies, but that relationships within the school are different. Many pupils are more emotionally needy than children from more advantaged backgrounds and less predictable, and look to staff for emotional support and attention, both inside and outside lessons. A small number of pupils with extremely disturbed behaviour, probably no more than twenty in a school and fewer in some cases, take up a disproportionate amount of time. Teaching strategies and time management within the classroom have to be adapted to allow staff to meet these needs, while also meeting academic needs. Teachers juggle different requirements: dealing with the needy or disruptive few as well as the quiet majority; keeping control and stimulating learning; avoiding disruption and delivering the curriculum. Fourth, securing the participation of pupils and parents is hard work. Attendance is low. At least half of the parents do not participate in any formal way, such as attending parents evenings, and some are reluctant to support the school over attendance, behaviour or homework.

These issues, together, add up to an unpredictable day-to-day environment, in which both managers and staff spend a lot of time responding to unplanned events and in which progress is uneven. Unlike the situation in schools where average academic



performance is assured, there are tensions between pushing pupils towards academic goals, on which schools are judged, and pursuing welfare goals, which are often perceived to be at least as important in terms of the development of the whole child and which, in the longer term, may secure better learning outcomes. Moreover, for some schools, all of this is played out in an unstable institutional context where it is difficult to recruit teachers and where there is constant public scrutiny and criticism.

### *Different Contexts, Different Challenges*

However, what is also evident from this study is that schools in disadvantaged areas are not just different from schools in more advantaged areas. They are different from one another, in terms of the specific educational, emotional or practical needs of pupils, pupils' attitudes to learning, and organisational issues such as staff recruitment or morale. Some schools in disadvantaged areas have more favourable area contexts where parents and pupils place a high value on the importance of education and are supportive of the schools' attempts to maintain a well-ordered community with a focus on learning. Some have more favourable market contexts, with a balance between supply and demand for places, stable numbers of pupils and a tradition of local schooling, so that the number and type of pupils is predictable and there is no need to spend a lot of time or money on marketing activities. Some have more favourable institutional contexts, stable, with established practices, a core of long standing staff but a healthy turnover, the ability to recruit and retain qualified and able teachers, good morale, and a healthy financial situation. Schools may enjoy favourable situations in some aspects of context but not in others, as Table 8.1 shows in relation to the four schools in this study.

**Table 8.1: Favourable and Unfavourable Contexts**  
(more favourable indicated by + sign, less favourable by – sign)

|                                | <b>Area Context<br/>(Orientations<br/>towards<br/>learning)</b> | <b>Market Context</b> | <b>Institutional Context</b> |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Southside Grange School</b> | -   | +*                    | + (was -)                    |
| <b>Middle Row HS</b>           | +   | +                     | +                            |
| <b>West-City HSG</b>           | +   | -                     | +                            |
| <b>The Farcliffe School</b>    | -   | -                     | -                            |

\* Riverdale’s educational market generally supports local schooling, but the existence of another school on the same site provides a situation of direct competition even within this context.

Presenting contexts crudely as either more or less favourable is of course too simplistic. It is also too static. Contexts change, particularly institutional contexts. Several respondents made the point that a currently relatively favourable context should not be a reason for complacency or for redistribution of resources away from some schools in deprived areas. Particularly in relation to ethnic context, there is a clear need for schools in minority ethnic areas to counter discrimination and prevent the economic marginalisation and disaffection that has already occurred in more established, predominantly white, low income communities. Nevertheless this presentation illustrates the point that even within deprived areas, context can present different challenges and different priorities for managers and staff, indicating the difficulty of identifying the real implications of context from poverty indicators alone.

A notable finding of this study was that more favourable area contexts occurred in inner city areas with high proportions of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, even though FSM eligibility was higher there than in the white working class areas.

There were fewer pupils with extreme behavioural problems, more pupils who were anxious to learn, and more co-operative parents. However, closer examination of school contexts reveals that generalisations on the basis of class and ethnicity can obscure other potentially important factors: levels of economic opportunity; social networks; reputations of areas and schools; and gender and prior attainment differences. For example, both West-City and Middle Row had high ethnic minority populations and extensive poverty. However, West-City's extremely diverse ethnic community was perceived to be fragmented, mobile and geographically aspirant, whereas Middle Row's South Asian community was strongly embedded, with well developed family and community networks that were both supportive and limiting. Both West-City and Southside were former industrial areas, but West-City was adjacent to the wider economic opportunities of central London and the City, whereas the labour market in Southside was still weak. Moreover, West-City's industrial history had less significance for the learning orientation of the pupils than it did at Southside Grange, because many pupils were from immigrant families, whereas the families of many Southside Grange pupils had lived through the decline of the area and had it firmly etched on their memory. These complexities mean that the implications of area contexts for schools are hard to read off from basic socio-economic statistics.

### **Management Responses, Challenges and Constraints**

The third set of findings relates to the ways in which managers respond to their contexts and what determines their responses. Perhaps not surprisingly, it appears

that almost every aspect of the organisation of schools in poor areas is geared in some way to their particular socio-economic contexts. Their teaching and learning strategies are designed to meet what they perceive as the needs of the pupils in the catchment area. They provide additional learning support, enrichment activities, and homework and breakfast clubs. They have dedicated personnel to chase up attendance, and systems for monitoring behaviour and supporting teaching staff in dealing with behavioural incidents, especially so in areas where behaviour is worst. They have special learning support centres for pupils with the greatest behavioural problems, and, to varying degrees, mentors, social workers and home-school workers. As organisation theorists have suggested, the uncertainty of their environments leads to a wider range of roles and to protection of core activities by the deployment of support staff at the boundaries of the organisation. In one school in this study, Southside Grange, there was evidence of boundary closure (ie keeping other agencies out) in order to protect staff time for core activities.

However, what is also of interest is the extent to which these adaptations vary, and not necessarily in a predictable way according to obvious differences in context. There are substantial differences in core educational objectives, in grouping strategies, class sizes, lesson lengths and the deployment of support staff, not to mention the 'additional' activities such as learning support units and parent links.

These differences between schools arise in part from the particular educational philosophies of individual headteachers and their interpretation of the most effective educational strategies in their particular settings. There is significant disagreement. In this study, one school in a deprived inner city area (West-City HSG) pursued a

differentiated strategy based on high achievement and a strong focus on academic learning. Another (Middle Row HS) positioned itself very much as a community school with a focus on the broad development of pupils as people and citizens, and strong links with parents and the wider local community. One school in a white working class area (The Farcliffe School) abolished banding, while another (Southside Grange) introduced it. Headteachers' views about their role as professionals are also important. Some emphasise the importance of concentrating their efforts on education, as lead professionals and managers within the school, whereas others see themselves acting as the school's link with the outside world and with other agencies. However, there are other reasons for the differences in responses between schools, and these are important if we are to understand how to facilitate good, contextualised practice. Three issues stand out.

The first is that headteachers change what they can change, within the constraints of the national educational system. There are limits to what can be contextualised. For example, the national curriculum must be taught and there must be attempts to get pupils to maximise the number of A\*-C passes that they can achieve. Lesson lengths can be altered, but not the length of the school day. Group sizes can be changed, but only within the constraints of a school budget determined on a per capita funding ratio, that limits the numbers of teachers that may be employed. For this reason, there is more contextualisation at the margins than in core organisation. Some teachers and headteachers feel that this is not just a constraint but something which is counter-productive, preventing them from offering what is really needed for some pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The second issue is that institutional constraints limit the extent to which contextualised practices can be introduced. An obvious example is the inability of The Farcliffe School to staff up its pastoral system as desired, but there are more subtle consequences. Stable, confident, staff teams with experienced teachers and a firmly embedded set of practices, such as that at West-City HSG, have more confidence to take on new adaptations than those that are struggling to establish basic practices, and where individual teachers are preoccupied with learning their own classroom management techniques.

The third issue is the market. No school can afford to neglect its reputation with prospective parents. However, schools with more favourable market contexts (that is to say growing populations and a relatively flat hierarchy of schools), like Middle Row HS, have less need to orient their activities explicitly towards attracting aspiring parents, or indeed just towards keeping pupil numbers up, whereas those with less favourable contexts cannot afford to pursue strategies that would be perceived as unpopular in the market place. Heads need to juggle the competing demands of pupils in the school (such as the need to spend money on pupils with behavioural problems or special educational needs, or the need to boost pupils' self-esteem), and the market, which may demand appealing to middle class parents by adopting banding systems and running marketing activities for primary schools. Responses to socio-economic context have to be tailored to market circumstances.

Context, therefore, does not determine practice in any absolute sense, although it does shape it, along with the individual agency of headteachers and staff. It is too simplistic to attribute practice either wholly to context or wholly to agency.

Moreover, the evidence suggests that there are systemic limits to the extent to which headteachers can change what they do to make it fit their context: limits of curriculum, funding, and the competitive and performative culture in which schools operate.

### **Disadvantaged Contexts, School Processes and The Quality Problem**

The fourth set of findings relates to the problem of quality. The study provides quantitative evidence of the quality problem and qualitative evidence of the mechanisms by which context impacts on quality. The findings of the quantitative analysis demonstrate that, in general, quality as assessed by OFSTED is worse in disadvantaged areas than others, as OFSTED's own analyses have shown. There is a relationship between deprivation and all the elements of school process: management and efficiency, the quality of teaching and the curriculum, and school climate variables (attendance, behaviour, attitudes, personal development and relationships, provision for pupil welfare and spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development). Three important insights arise from looking at these results more closely and in the light of the four school case studies.

The first is that the strongest relationship is with climate variables. The aspect of quality that is worst in disadvantaged areas is the climate of the school, particularly attendance but also behaviour, attitudes and relationships. The evidence from the four schools suggest that these are more directly measures of context than they are of what schools do. For example, none of the schools in this study were able to achieve acceptable levels of attendance, despite substantial efforts. This is not to say that

school practices make no difference. Systems for monitoring and following up non-attendance can vary in their quality. For example, staff at Middle Row HS admitted that they had, in the past, not been as systematic about following up non-attendance as they might have been, nor had they sufficiently encouraged and incentivised good attendance. Recently-introduced measures such as rewards and home visits had made a difference, raising attendance by three percentage points. But even these efforts left the school with a poor attendance record. Thus apparent differences in school 'quality' revealed by the inspection system may in fact reflect differences in context. This point is reinforced by the fact that, quantitatively, better quality seems to be associated with certain area characteristics, notably a high ethnic minority population. The qualitative work suggests that areas with high ethnic minority populations present a more favourable climate for schooling than low-income white areas, with fewer behaviour and attitude problems. This may in part explain why quality appears to be better in the most deprived areas with the highest levels of FSM than it is in those that are slightly less deprived. Ethnic minority populations tend to be concentrated in highly disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Quality differences, therefore, may partly arise simply because some inspection measures are measures of context as much as they are measures of process. However, the second point arising from the qualitative work is that this is not the whole explanation. There are differences between school practices. But these differences are themselves affected by context. Firstly, local educational markets and institutional histories can limit schools' capacities to recruit and retain skilled and experienced staff. Teachers' own accounts indicate that delivering good lessons



and getting through the curriculum in challenging circumstances is an acquired skill that newer or weaker teachers cannot be expected to master instantly.

Secondly, even when good teachers and good headteachers are in place, their practices are affected by context. Sometimes, contextual impacts are beneficial to quality. Many of the respondents in the four schools spoke about the strength of their pastoral systems and welfare support, and their investment in the all-round development of pupils. The quantitative analysis showed that provision for welfare and for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are in fact stronger in schools in disadvantaged areas than in others. The inner city schools in this study had made a strength out of responding to the different religious and cultural backgrounds of pupils, and both of the other schools had strong reputations for catering for pupils with special educational needs. Offering positive reinforcement to pupils and working together as a staff team were also areas of work that staff thought they could do particularly well because of their disadvantaged context.

However, there were other areas of work where it was harder, by teachers' own admission, to maintain quality: keeping high expectations; setting demanding work in situations where keeping order in the class was a main preoccupation; providing differentiated work and the right kind of input for the lowest ability pupils; keeping pupils on task; following up behavioural incidents consistently time after time. Non-contact time was used for dealing with welfare issues rather than planning or preparation. Headteachers played a bigger part in the day-to-day activities of the school, relating to pupils and supporting staff, thus putting pressure on their time for more strategic management activities. School resources were spent on support roles

to deal with pastoral issues, whereas in other schools they could have been spent on teaching and learning. In these respects, disadvantaged contexts appeared to exert a downward pressure on quality and it was less easy to see how quality could be improved by changes in practice, since the problems were ones of time, resources, motivation and relationships.

A third insight is that 'quality', in these settings, is not always clearly definable. With emotional, social, and academic needs to balance, there are trade-offs for individual pupils: between being made to complete work or taking time out to talk through emotional problems; between attending academic lessons or working with a counsellor or social worker or taking part in an enrichment activity. There are also trade-offs between pupils: setting challenging work or finding an activity that will keep the whole class quiet even if less stimulated; spending money on a few pupils with severe emotional problems or spending that money on extra books or on extra teachers to reduce class sizes across the school. If quality is about delivering what is right for the consumer, it may be different for some pupils and classes than it is for others. Gewirtz (2000) has argued that there have been two different ways of understanding quality in public services since the late 1980s. One is the idea of compliance with certain defined standards, implying standardisation of practice, and the other is the idea of meeting customer needs, implying flexibility, responsiveness and innovation. Teachers in this study indicated that both of these ideas featured in their notions of the quality of schooling. There were standards on which everyone agreed. No-one questioned the idea that good teaching should enable all pupils to achieve whatever they were capable of academically, nor that good lessons should be well planned, carefully differentiated, stimulating, enjoyable and orderly. But there

was also a perception that a good education in disadvantaged circumstances might differ from a good education in other circumstances. Specifically, it would involve building good relationships and providing emotional support, helping pupils to develop social skills and interact better with others, and helping them to cope with other problems in their lives, not just as a precursor to learning (because good quality teaching was no use if pupils could not access it), but to help pupils to thrive and develop as people. Logically, this might mean that teachers might focus on different parts of their jobs than those that are valued in the inspection process. While it is impossible to tell, without observing inspections of lessons, whether this issue accounts for quality differences between schools in OFSTED inspections, it raises an important point about the design of schooling in disadvantaged areas and the extent to which contextualisation contributes to quality or undermines it: is 'good' schooling the same in every circumstance or should some good schools be doing different things than others?

### **Policy Implications**

Finally, I turn to policy implications. The findings of the study demonstrate that the context for schooling is more complex than current measures allow. They show that context does impact on schools in disadvantaged areas in ways that make it more difficult for them to achieve high quality according to OFSTED inspection, and that there are differences between schools in different kinds of deprived area, with some having more favourable contexts for schooling than others. Market and institutional characteristics matter as well as socio-economic characteristics. They show that

contextual impacts are largely experienced in small and unintended effects on school processes but that teachers and managers also respond consciously to context, adapting their practices, and introducing new initiatives and ways of organisation. However, they also indicate that deprived contexts create demands on resources that are not always catered for by additional funding and that headteachers cannot necessarily make all the changes they would like to make to respond to context, because of the demands of the national curriculum and the need to match up to academic performance criteria, and because of institutional constraints. They show that there are different notions of success and of quality, which have to be balanced for the benefit of pupils.

All of these findings point to the fact that quality judgements of schools need to be based on a better understanding of context and its impacts. They also suggest that if we want to have good schools, consistently, in disadvantaged areas, we need to recognise and compensate for contextual effects on school processes, and support the introduction of contextualised practices. But what would a more contextualised policy look like?

### ***Beyond Poverty Measurements***

The first implication relates to the measurement of context, for inspection and for school funding purposes.

Currently, the indicators most commonly used to assess a school's context are FSM eligibility and numbers of pupils with English as an additional language.

OFSTED's pre-inspection guidance does not require inspectors to use any further standard indicators, although it does suggest the use of Census data such as proportions of children in high social class households, or from ethnic minorities.<sup>1</sup> Contextual descriptions of schools in OFSTED reports vary considerably in their coverage of area characteristics. This is an important issue, because as this study demonstrates, FSM and EAL measures are clearly inadequate for capturing the elements of context that have quality implications for schools. Very high FSM schools, in areas with disadvantaged immigrant populations, may actually have environments more conducive to good quality schooling than lower FSM schools in white working class areas. It is dangerous, therefore, to draw conclusions about the exemplary practice of staff in high FSM schools and assume that these can be reproduced in other disadvantaged settings. A broader range of measures is needed, including evidence about the local education market.

The development of neighbourhood statistics, the 2001 Census data, and the PLASC data that enables school catchment areas to be identified, provide new opportunities for the DfES to produce a set of standard contextual statistics for each school in the country, to be used by inspectors, LEAs and schools themselves. Ward-level and catchment data could both be used: the various domains of the IMD, income poverty measures, demographic data including ethnic mix and population trends, and information about area characteristics such as crime rates and housing type and tenure. The data would need to be regularly updated, perhaps in line with the inspection cycle. However, a qualitative understanding is also needed. If context is to be taken seriously in inspection, OFSTED, in conjunction with LEAs, needs to

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymised Pre-Inspection Context and School Indicator (PICS) Report (OFSTED).

make an assessment of the local education market and the school's position within it, derived from interviews with the headteacher and LEA staff, and using a standard categorisation along the lines proposed by Gewirtz et al. (1995). It also needs to establish a brief history of the area and the school, an assessment of the local labour market, and a checklist of other agencies, regeneration programmes, and special initiatives working locally. Of course, one can argue that this is yet another time-consuming task that would further divert resources into monitoring and away from the front line, but there is little alternative if context is to be treated seriously for inspection purposes.

The development of better indicators for funding purposes is also needed, since the proportion of extra funding allocated to schools in poor areas is currently determined by the proportion of families on means-tested benefits and the proportion from ethnic minorities. Yet it is clear that resource demands such as the need for additional staff to deal with attendance and behaviour, and the need for smaller classes, more support staff and tailored learning resources, can be similar in schools with wide variations on these measures. The use of broader contextual measures would help, but a better alternative would be activity-led funding, to which I return later. The critical issue here is that simple poverty and ethnicity measures are not sufficient, and may even be misleading.

### *Assessing Quality in Context*

If context could be more fully assessed, how should it be taken into account in the inspection process? Should inspection judgments actually be decontextualised, as they are now, because they represent an objective standard to which all schools in the

country should be aspiring? It may be argued that having a single, objective, standard helps parents and the wider community to judge the standard of education being provided and to make informed choices. On the other hand, if inspection is designed to inform the school's own development plans and to identify areas for LEA support, benchmarking against other similar schools would be a more helpful process, as it is with GCSE results, and would offset some of the public opprobrium that comes with OFSTED failure and that can be so damaging to schools institutionally and in the market.

Given this duality of purpose, what appears to be needed is a more refined reporting system that does two things in addition to reporting raw quality judgements. First it should make a clear distinction between inputs, processes and outcomes. Inputs could be covered by prior attainment and contextual data and even by direct contextual questions like "how easy is it to gain the support of parents for the school?". Processes include the school's provision: the quality of the teaching; whether non-attendance is followed up, and so on. Outcomes cover what is actually achieved: progress, attainment and attendance levels. These need to be more finely tuned so that we can see which groups of pupils achieve which outcomes. Adopting this three-stage approach would make it clearer what the school is dealing with, what it is doing and what is achieved as a result. Areas of poor performance by the school's management and staff could be identified, but so could areas where the school is doing all that it can but where outcomes are still poor. The second requirement is that each of these elements is benchmarked against national expectations and against the performance of schools in similar contexts.

Dealing with the issue of quality judgements is controversial and important. But the more critical issue is how to design and fund good practice in disadvantaged circumstances, whatever the vagaries of the measurement system. Four separate issues need attention: supporting schools in difficult institutional or market circumstances; recognising the fact that core activities are being carried out in a different and more demanding educational climate; implementing effective practices tailored to specific situations; and developing additional measures that are not needed in more advantaged schools. All these have implications beyond the level of the individual school.

### *Supporting Schools in Difficult Institutional or Market Circumstances*

A first issue that is clear from this study is that schools in similar socio-economic circumstances may have quite different institutional or market contexts, affecting their ability to deliver a high quality education. Some schools, like Middle Row HS in this study, may be under relatively little market pressure, if population levels are buoyant and there is a tendency to local schooling. Others, like The Farcliffe School, have little opportunity to change their intake or the perception of the school. 'Sink' schools such as this are likely to have recruitment difficulties, high turnover and inexperienced staff and may have staff morale and absence problems.

From one perspective, these findings are important because they mean that a strategy of relying on the market to pull up the performance of struggling schools will not be successful in all circumstances because it will not provide the necessary incentives, although it can work in situations such as the one in Southside, where a school has



lost its position in a market and has both incentive and opportunity to improve its performance and standing. The limitation of market incentives as a strategy for improving schools in poor areas has been recognised by the New Labour government, with its specific improvement initiatives, particularly 'Schools in Challenging Circumstances'.

However, these findings also mean that it will be more difficult for some schools in disadvantaged areas to improve than others, without specific measures to address unfavourable market or institutional contexts. Institutional issues are, at present, addressed by the Fresh Start initiative: closing a school and re-opening it with a new name, headteacher, staff and often new attractive facilities. These may be the kind of measures that are needed, but they are only introduced when schools have reached 'rock bottom', after OFSTED failure and intense public criticism. Public investment in top quality staff and improved facilities is needed for struggling schools before they reach this stage. Moreover, these initiatives do not address unfavourable market contexts, and some Fresh Start schools continue to be 'sink' schools for this reason. Short of dismantling the selective system in those authorities where it still exists, and short of dismantling the system of parental choice more generally, there are other measures that could be considered. One would be establishment of collaborative arrangements between neighbouring schools, with some shared resources, arrangements for 'sharing out' the most difficult pupils and, as was recently proposed in an IPPR report on London schools, performance targets for groups of schools rather than individual schools, so that it is in the interests of all schools to raise attainment across the board, rather than competing for the highest-attaining pupils (Johnson 2003). LEA interventions such as Riverdale's agreement

to set quotas for the number of pupils with special needs in any school and to get all schools to agree to taking a certain number of excluded pupils, could also help, as could the establishment of local admission zones within a system of parental choice. LEAs could be required to act as the admissions authority for all schools, thus preventing foundation schools and faith schools from removing themselves from the standards admissions system, and LEAs could be encouraged to use systems such as the one in Weldon that attempts to distribute pupils evenly between schools on the grounds of ability. All of these kinds of measures tend to flatten hierarchies within a market system, making it less likely that some schools will find themselves with very unbalanced intakes and deep unpopularity.

### ***Recognising the Different Organisational Climate***

These proposals focus on the market systems in which schools operate. There is also a need to respond to the internal climate of the school. One of the most important findings of this study is that teachers who are ostensibly doing the same job as their colleagues in more advantaged schools actually report a quite different experience. The constant mixing of pastoral and educational roles as emotional needs are met within and outside the classroom are energy-sapping, and time that could be used for preparation and marking is used instead for following up incidents, completing paperwork, counselling pupils, contacting parents and other agencies, and consulting with colleagues. In addition to this, there are needs for attendance workers, behavioural support workers and home/school liaison staff simply to secure the participation of pupils and parents.

These demands on teachers and support staff must be recognised as part of the bread-and-butter of schools in poor areas. They need to be funded through core funding not through additional grants that are time-consuming to bid for and monitor. At present, however, there is no research evidence to quantify the additional spend required. Unravelling it will be difficult, partly because schools are making trade-offs as a matter of course and without directly documenting them, and partly because the water is muddied by streams of additional short-life funding initiatives. But the work urgently needs to be done, to support the development of a funding regime based on the tasks that need to be undertaken, rather than the number of pupils (West et al. 2000).

Meanwhile, there is an even more pressing need. Critically, measures are needed to ensure that good teachers are recruited to do this job, that they are retained in it, and that they are equipped to perform to their optimum level despite the additional demands.

On the recruitment side, schools in disadvantaged areas need to be able to compete in a shortage market for good teachers. This study suggests that some schools find this easier than others. Not all schools in poor areas face a recruitment crisis. Location, the housing market, the reputation of the school and the reputation of the headteacher all seem to be important, making it unlikely that financial incentives alone would resolve the problem, although salary enhancements for teachers in poor areas to reflect the nature of the work would undoubtedly help. A more promising solution might be job and career re-design. Altering the balance between contact and non-contact time for mainstream teachers (and by implication altering staffing ratios), and

offering sabbaticals or secondment opportunities were ideas raised by respondents in this study.

However, teachers also need to be supported to perform at their best continuously, not only by reducing contact time but by training and career development. Many staff reported that the classroom management challenges posed in these schools were beyond what they were prepared for, whether moving from initial teacher training or from other more advantaged schools. Initially, they were disempowered and, by their own admission, ineffective. Those who persisted built up skills that were an asset to their colleagues (staff support was a feature of all these schools) and could also be an asset more generally in the profession. There was a clear need for teachers to be better prepared and more systematically supported for the special circumstances in these schools, as well as learning how to teach their subject and about general classroom management techniques.

On the other side of the coin, as teachers became more experienced in these settings, the nature of the job meant that they risked burn-out and/or became accustomed to working at a low level of academic challenge. Some staff suggested that having secondment opportunities to higher performing schools would enable them to re-acquaint themselves with higher levels of academic challenge and review their own practices. Significantly, these were not issues of school improvement or leadership, but calls for systemic changes that would enable different staffing arrangements in schools where teaching quality was hard to maintain.

### *Supporting Tailored Practice*

A third issue is the need to develop and facilitate tailored practices for schools in deprived areas. We need to know what makes a good school in different disadvantaged circumstances and we need to provide schools with the resources to implement these practices.

A wide range of issues needs to be considered here, from the very small to the very large. At the lowest level, there are issues of teaching practice that need to be addressed. For example, teachers need to be equipped with suitable resources for working with low ability pupils. There was a suggestion in this study that such materials do not exist, or are hard to find, which if supported more widely would be an immediate area for action by DfES and LEA curriculum specialists. It may be a case of developing new materials, or perhaps of making their availability widely known. There was also an indication that bottom set classes in schools with low prior attainment overall are effectively special needs groups, and present a challenge for which teachers are not prepared in their general teacher training. Mechanisms need to be developed to transfer expertise from special needs to mainstream education, either in initial or ongoing teacher training, or both.

Above the level of the individual teacher, there are issues about the organisation of teaching and learning, about pupil grouping and the use of support staff. The striking variation between practices in ostensibly similar schools, and the way in which these were developed out of the conviction and experience of headteachers, suggests that we are still some way from knowing what constitutes good practice in specific situations where many pupils have additional learning and behavioural

needs. What is the optimum size of groups for pupils with different kinds of needs? What are the benefits to different groups of pupils (for example those with high ability but behavioural problems or those with low attainment and self-esteem) from mixed ability or streamed groups? What is the optimum length of lessons, for different groups of pupils? Is it better to have teaching or non-teaching staff dealing with behavioural support? If good practice is to be developed, the practices of schools in particular situations need to be carefully evaluated. It is also essential that lessons from these evaluations become part of ongoing organisational learning, not just strategies that heads carry with them from one school to the next. Moreover, heads need to be in a position to make decisions on these issues on the basis of educational need, not organisational imperatives such as marketing.

All of these issues could be addressed within the basic organisation of schools as currently constituted. However, there may be a need to think more broadly about how the educational needs of some disadvantaged pupils can best be met.

Schools in this country operate to a standard model. They collect several hundred children in state-owned buildings where they are divided into groups and learn prescribed subjects (mainly academic) in fixed chunks. Learning is assessed by teachers and public examiners according to national benchmarks. Learning and social relationships are timetabled, and in order to make the whole machine run smoothly, pupils have to abide by sets of rules and adopt behavioural norms. They progress through the school and on to more advanced learning regardless of whether they have mastered earlier skills or knowledge. This model works for the majority of pupils in the country, but aspects of it work less well for some pupils from

disadvantaged backgrounds. Curriculum content is one issue. The experiences of family and friends do not convince all children that academic learning is valuable in itself or as a route to economic success or social status. Academic learning may seem largely irrelevant to the labour market in some disadvantaged areas (although not in others such as West-City, with its geographical proximity to a high-skill, high-pay labour market). The pace of curriculum and the form of assessment may not suit those with lower prior attainment or self esteem, and may lead to them writing themselves off as failures early on in their educational careers. For a minority of pupils, who find social relationships difficult, have concentration problems, or who have different behavioural norms at home, the whole organisation of school (large, disciplined and timetabled) may be unhelpful to their learning or development as people. While still providing an opportunity for all children to access a broad academic education (our current model), we also need to be able to identify and meet the needs of those who struggle to succeed within the standard framework.

The government's recent 14-19 Green Paper (DfES 2002b) and subsequent policy document *14-19: Opportunity and Excellence* (DfES 2003b) recognises the need for the development of a wider range of curricular options, and for the need for local variation relevant to local labour markets and training opportunities. There has been less progress towards adapting school organisation, for example, introducing much smaller teaching groups, expanding the provision of learning support centres, allowing a different balance between classroom-based learning and 'enrichment' activities at certain stages of the curriculum, or experimenting with different ways of involving parents. While the government considers developing 'extended schools' in poor areas to provide a wider range of compensatory measures, it might also consider

funding the development of some of these approaches in well-run schools in disadvantaged areas.

### *Additional Provision*

Fourthly, the issue of additional provision in schools in disadvantaged areas needs to be much more systematically considered, with the development of compensatory educational measures (such as homework facilities and extra teaching and enrichment activities, that make up for the lack of opportunities at home), practical provision such as meals and grants and loans for equipment and uniform, and support in tackling social or economic problems that impinge on pupils' readiness to learn. Many of these issues are beginning to be tackled through Excellence in Cities and other government initiatives, including the recent 'extended schools' initiative. But four additional points arose from this research that suggest that more needs to be done.

The first is that funding for these kinds of initiatives is variable, depending on which of the special funding streams a school is eligible for, and depends on staff having the time and skills to submit successful bids. There is apparently no reason why a breakfast club should be needed at The Farcliffe School one year, but not the next year when its funding ran out. These kinds of initiatives need to be seen as core activities for schools in high poverty areas, and funded accordingly.

Second, the delivery of welfare provision must be allowed to take place without diverting teachers and managers from their educational work. All the headteachers



in this study were adamant about this. Their experiences suggest that from the point of view of teachers' workloads, welfare roles such as mentoring and home/school liaison are always beneficial, releasing significant amounts of teacher time. However, what is not taken into account is the management time involved in bidding for these projects, planning them, monitoring them, liaising with other agencies and managing the staff involved. This is an extra burden that falls to senior management, or, as at Southside Grange, is rejected by schools because of the workload implications for the head and deputy. It is clear that if we expect schools to be a base and a link for welfare provision, we need to fund senior management time to do it. A pupil welfare or family support manager (not necessarily an educator by profession) in every disadvantaged school would be money well spent.

Third, funding for language support needs to be reviewed, in the light of increasing numbers of newly-arrived pupils who have extensive language needs and who absorb most of the time of existing language support staff, and in the light of the fact that there are established ethnic minority communities in this country where children are bi-lingual but where adults speak no English. The fact that English is not spoken at home impedes the development of the language at school, and hinders access to other curriculum subjects. Yet very little, if any, language support is available to such pupils, because they are not at the early stages of learning English. It may be the case that some inner city schools with high numbers of EAL pupils are achieving relatively highly, given their poverty levels, but what else could they achieve if language needs were better catered for?

Fourth, there is the issue of how to deal with the small numbers of pupils with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. Making appropriate provision for them can have a big impact on the rest of the school, but it does not appear to be well known what the appropriate provision should be. Should pupils be kept in school or be accessing special provision? For how long should they be withdrawn in Learning Support Units, in what size groups? What resources are needed to make these units work effectively? What kind of curriculum should be followed? Should pupils be concentrating on behaviour modification, on learning needs, on basic skills, or on keeping up with core subjects so that they can readily re-integrate? Are the answers to these questions the same in all settings, or are different practices required in single sex than in mixed schools, or in some cultural settings rather than others? These questions still need to be explored. Meanwhile, LEA provision is not always good, and schools may be reluctant to use it, and there are tensions between spending money on a few 'bad' pupils and spending it on the majority, especially when these pupils usually contribute little to the academic results on which schools are judged. Even money garnered through special funding initiatives such as Excellence in Cities can be diverted to wider causes. All of this suggests that there is still a need for greater understanding of what works for these kinds of pupils and their schools, and for funding to provide it.

### **Conclusion: Beyond the Teacher, Beyond the School**

At the start of this thesis, I argued that school improvement policies for schools in disadvantaged areas have to date been too generic in nature, not taking sufficient

account of the different contexts in which different schools are operating. I also noted that they were generally aimed at the teacher and the school, at generating improvements in management and professional practice. The work has demonstrated, on the one hand, that much of the practice that is in need of improvement is shaped by context as well as by the abilities of managers and staff, and on the other that some of the adaptations that might be made are constrained by national systems for funding and curriculum, and by local institutional and market circumstances, such that, as Goldstein and Woodhouse have argued:

*....attempts to change the practices of each school considered as an independently functioning unit seem ill-conceived but also likely to meet with limited success. Schools function within a social and political system which has its own structures and processes, whether these be ones of inter-school competition or those determined by externally imposed constraints of curriculum and resources. (Goldstein and Woodhouse 2000: p356)*

Schools in disadvantaged areas cannot be treated, organisationally, as though they are the same as schools in other areas, nor as if they are the same as each other. If we want them consistently to produce the same quality of education as schools elsewhere we need both to recognise the specific implications of their contexts and respond with policies that go beyond the teacher and beyond the school.

## THE FIELDWORK PROCESS

### Practical Problems and Constraints

The bulk of the work in each school could be completed within three full days. However, even this amount of time was hard for most of the schools to accommodate. Only Southside Grange School was able to host the fieldwork on the arranged dates, with all the other schools having to postpone on at least one occasion due to staff sickness and other pressures. As a result, the fieldwork timetable had to be considerably extended (Table A1.1). In two schools (West-City HSG and The Farcliffe School), it was only possible to conduct the work in several one-day visits, rather than being present for a single block of time.

**Table A1.1 : Fieldwork Timetable**

| <b>Stage of Research</b>                                      | <b>Dates work undertaken</b>   |
|---|--|
| Initial contact with schools as part of CASE 12 Areas Project | April to November 1999   |
| Phase 1 Fieldwork   | October 2000 to May 2001   |
| Phase 2 Fieldwork   | October – December 2001 (Schools 1,3 and 4)<br>March 2003 (School 2) |

The fieldwork process also varied. In two schools, Southside Grange School and Middle Row HS, I was allocated an office and given license to walk around the school and observe at will. Interviews were arranged for me in advance, according to my sampling criteria. Staff attended on time and expected to stay for a full lesson, enabling me to complete the entire interview with all staff.

At the other schools, I was not introduced in a staff meeting, nor was I invited to undertake ‘free’ observations. I went to staff, rather than them coming to me, and often found that they had not been briefed as to the purpose of the interview or its length, having not been given my briefing sheet or not had time to read it. Some interviews had to be curtailed for lack of time. These practical difficulties meant that, although I was able to complete the essential work in all schools, I gained more additional data and understanding at Southside Grange and at Middle Row HS than at the others (Table A1.2).

**Table A1.2 : Practicalities of the Fieldwork Process**

|                         | <b>Original Dates Kept</b> | <b>Work done in a block</b> | <b>Introduction in staff meeting</b> | <b>Pre arranged inter views</b> | <b>Staff fully briefed</b> | <b>Given Office</b> | <b>Head Involved</b> |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Southside Grange</b> | ✓                          | ✓                           | ✓                                    | ✓                               | ✓                          | ✓                   | ✓                    |
| <b>Middle Row HS</b>    |                            | ✓                           |                                      | ✓                               | ✓                          | ✓                   | ✓                    |
| <b>West-City HS</b>     |                            |                             |                                      |                                 |                            |                     |                      |
| <b>The Farcliffe</b>    |                            |                             | ✓                                    | ✓                               |                            |                     |                      |

Practical difficulties meant that I was also unable to complete the final part of my research design, which was a survey of the allocation of teacher time to different tasks. Other qualitative studies indicate that this is one of the main ways in which context impacts on schools (Gewirtz 1998; Thrupp 1999). However, none have measured it systematically. In fact, prior to 2001, the allocation of teachers’ time had rarely been analysed in the UK at all, even in quantitative studies (Campbell and Neill 1994).

In 2001, the DfES commissioned a teacher workload survey (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2001a; 2001b). This did not explore differences between workloads in schools in different areas, but provided a comparative framework for me to explore this issue. I designed and piloted an activity schedule, based on the national survey but including more detailed categorisations. All the schools initially agreed to the survey, if staff could participate voluntarily. On this basis, I decided to ask every full time member of the teaching staff in each school to participate, giving a total of approximately 180 staff and 900 teacher days, since the schedule was designed to be completed on each of five working days. I assumed a 30% completion rate (giving 60 staff and 270 teacher days).

It proved impossible to complete the survey. In the first school, Southside Grange, the headteacher introduced me and the survey in a staff briefing and encouraged staff to complete it. Following a reminder two weeks later, 4 out of 47 were returned. Fieldwork at The Farcliffe School and West-City HSG was carried out close to the end of term and in both schools, the headteachers felt that they could not ask staff to take on this burden at the time. I therefore decided not to pursue the activity survey in the fourth school. It remains a potentially useful tool for further work.

### **Presentation of the Work, Ethical Considerations, Interpretation and Bias**

The practical difficulties which I encountered in the schools and the way in which these varied from one school to another, raised issues about the presentation and interpretation of the work. It appeared to me that my experiences in the schools

reflected the personal interest of each headteacher and their commitment to my work. In the schools where the work went most smoothly, it was set up by the headteacher, who remained my liaison point throughout. In the others, I was passed to a deputy head with whom I had had less opportunity to discuss the work and its intended outcomes. This observation raises other issues about the way in which the work was perceived, and respondents' motivations for participation. Qualitative research is an interactive process, influenced by the attitudes, values and relationship of researcher and researched. It was inevitable that my own perspectives would influence the data I collected and my interpretation of it, and that people's perceptions of me and the research would influence their willingness to participate, and the information and opinions they shared.

My initial positioning towards the research could be described as sympathetic and policy-oriented. My view was that current policies on school improvement were taking insufficient account of the contextual difficulties facing disadvantaged schools, and I wanted to draw out policy implications as well as more academic understandings of the sociology or management of schools. This influenced my work in three ways.

First, I was particularly aware of the pressures and criticisms faced by these schools, and careful not to contribute any further to them. I attempted to minimise disruption by accepting cancellations, taking second place when more pressing issues came up, and paying for supply cover when necessary to release staff for interview. I was clear that my role had to be non-judgemental and appear so. I carefully avoided judgemental comments (good or bad) while interviewing, and attempted to do so in

analysis and writing. I did not observe lessons unless specifically invited by the teachers themselves. I changed the names of the schools, did not identify staff in interview transcripts, and agreed to check publication drafts with headteachers. I treated all data as confidential within the school and did not discuss one member of staff's opinions with another.

Second, I was honest in my presentation of the work to headteachers and staff. I usually introduced it with the statement that it was intended "*to explore how working in a disadvantaged area affects what schools do, so as to be able to understand what support or resources such schools need to be able to do a good job*". While I made it clear that this was independent academic research, I also explained that CASE's work is widely disseminated and influential, and that I had a personal commitment to influencing policy outcomes. I explained that I had links with colleagues at OFSTED who were interested in my findings. One headteacher (Southside Grange) encouraged staff to participate on the basis that he believed that I was '*close to government*'. It is probable that my presentation of the work made staff more likely to participate and also made them more likely to comment on support needs and possibly to flag up difficulties rather than advantages of working in the school.

Accordingly, I adopted my third strategy, which was to try to approach the data collection and analysis objectively. In the interviews, I made no reference to my policy pre-conceptions, my own experience as a teacher, or my close family links with one of the areas. I was careful not to lead respondents with my questions and only to interject to clarify or encourage elaboration, not to encourage certain responses or demonstrate agreement. Many of the transcripts record me listening to



accounts of other important influences on the school (such as the local school system or the department structure) before checking with the respondent whether any issues around deprivation were also important. By transcribing these tapes, I was able to identify parts of interviews where the sequence of answers or comments suggested that the respondent was saying what I wanted to hear. I disregarded these sections. In my analysis I was conscious not to impose a particular interpretation on the data through my questions and coding frameworks. Being rigorous in this way was laborious but satisfying, in that the data challenged some of my pre-conceived notions and enabled a genuine learning process. I believe I have been fair to the material I collected.

## CASE STUDY SELECTION

The case study schools were selected using a theoretical rather than a representative sampling approach (Silverman 2001), aiming to choose cases that would allow exploration of the key theoretical variable in my study, school context. Schools were initially drawn from the eleven LEAs included in the quantitative analysis in Chapter 2, and within these, from the specific areas in CASE's wider study of disadvantaged areas. These areas are among the most deprived in the country. Each contains at least one electoral ward in the most deprived 5% on each of two indicators of deprivation based on 1991 Census data (see Glennerster et al. 1999 for a fuller description of these indices). Each area contains about 20,000 people, and more than one secondary school. The CASE study also focuses on specific neighbourhoods within these areas. I decided to target the schools closest to these neighbourhoods, as I had already collected relevant socio-economic data and had, in most cases, already interviewed the headteacher as part of the CASE study.

I expected it to be hard to gain access to these schools, given the pressures on them. I therefore decided to build up my sample by negotiating with a small number of schools at a time, rather than making a large number of potentially fruitless approaches.

My initial strategy was to approach six schools within different LEAs, offering a range of contexts, as described in Chapter 1. Table A2.1 shows the shortlisted schools. I wrote to the headteacher of each school in September 2000, enclosing a

research brief, and followed up with a reminder letter after three weeks and then with telephone calls, faxes and copies of the initial letter as requested. Only one school (Southside Grange) replied to the first letter in the affirmative. After follow up, West-City HSG and Middle Row HS also agreed to participate. School 4 (with 'serious weaknesses') and School 6 (a Fresh Start school) declined, on account of pressures on the school and an atmosphere of intense scrutiny and criticism that, in the headteacher's opinion, would make staff reluctant to co-operate. The headteacher at School 5 did not respond to any letters or telephone calls.

I then sought a fourth school by contacting other schools serving the target areas. My preference was to find a school rated badly by OFSTED, so as to be able to observe schools across the quality continuum, so I approached another Fresh Start school serving the same area as School 6. This school also declined to take part, indicating the extreme difficulty of including a failing school in a study of this nature. Realising that my chances of including a failing school were small, I opted not to persist with this strategy and approached The Farcliffe School, which was the substitute school for School 4. The school agreed to take part early in 2001, after several letters and telephone calls and encouragement of an LEA official. Like School 4, this was also a secondary modern and served a similar catchment area. It was rated more highly by OFSTED than School 4 but had lower GCSE results.

Thus the four schools finally selected included three from the initial shortlist (Southside Grange, Middle Row HS and West-City HSG) along with the Farcliffe School. Summary characteristics for these four schools appear in Chapter 1. The absence of a failing school from the sample was disappointing because it made it

impossible to observe contextual impacts at the extreme end of the quality distribution, where quality had seriously broken down. However, it did not affect the primary purpose of the sampling, which was to observe schools in different disadvantaged contexts.

I did not attempt to sample on school size, type or pupil attainment but noted these characteristics in order to assess the transferability of my findings to other schools. The schools all served the 11-16 age range, in common with 50% of secondary schools nationally<sup>1</sup>, and were typical in size for such schools.<sup>2</sup> Three were co-educational and one (West City HSG) was a girls' school, in common with 11% of schools nationally. Three were comprehensives and The Farcliffe School a secondary modern (5% of schools nationally)<sup>3</sup>. Attainment at all the schools was below the national average but ranged from the lowest level of higher grade GCSE passes in the country (The Farcliffe School) to levels at West-City HSG and Middle Row HS that were relatively good for schools in disadvantaged areas with high FSM.<sup>4</sup> Thus the range of schools was wide enough to have some transferability to many other schools, with the exception that no boys-only school and no faith school was included.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics of Education, Schools in England 2001

<sup>2</sup> The Farcliffe School was a typical size for a secondary modern school and Middle Row HS and West-City HSG were typical of comprehensives without sixth forms. Southside Grange School was slightly smaller than the average for such schools. (OFSTED National Summary Data Report for Secondary Schools, 2000 Data Dec 2000).

<sup>3</sup> The selective system operating in this LEA is now an unusual one. Only fifteen of one hundred and forty-nine LEAs retain selection at 11+.

<sup>4</sup> In 2000, the average performance schools with 35%-50% FSM was 24%, and for those with >50%, 21%.

**Table A2.1: Shortlisted Schools**

| No | School Name <sup>5</sup> | Region                   | Area Type                             | Ethnic Mix   | Housing Type and Tenure                   | School Type    | Status | Sex | OFSTED                         | GCSE 5 A*-C 2000 |
|----|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|---|----------------|--------|-----|--------------------------------|------------------|
| 1  | Southside Grange School  | North-East               | Industrial area in semi-rural LEA     | Mainly white | Mixed                                     | Community      | Comp   | M   | An improving school            | 19               |
| 2  | Middle Row HS            | Midlands                 | Inner city                            | Mainly Asian | Victorian street terraces, mainly private | Community      | Comp   | M   | A good school                  | 36               |
| 3  | West-City HSG            | London                   | Inner city                            | Mixed        | Medium to high rise flats, mainly Council | Community      | Comp   | G   | A good school                  | 41               |
| 4  | The Farcliffe School     | South                    | Seaside town                          | Mainly White | Mixed                                     | Community      | Mod    | M   | 'Serious Weaknesses'           | 25               |
| 5  |                          | North-West               | Industrial. Edge of large conurbation | Mainly White | Pre and post-war Council housing          | Vol.Aided (RC) | Comp   | M   | More strengths than weaknesses | 14               |
| 6  |                          | Yorkshire and Humberside | Inner city                            | Mixed        | Mixed                                     | Community      | Comp   | M   | Fresh Start School             | 17               |

<sup>5</sup> All the schools eventually used in the study have been given false names to protect their identities.

## **OFSTED JUDGEMENT RECORDING SCORES**

Source: OFSTED Handbook for Inspection of Secondary Schools (Jan 2000)

### **WHAT SORT OF SCHOOL IS IT ?**

- 1A The school's socio-economic circumstances
- 1B Pupils' attainment on entry
- 1C Overall effectiveness of the school
- 1D Improvement since the last inspection
- 1E Value for money provided by the school

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED.**

- 2A Standards of work seen
- 2B How well pupils achieve
  - 2.1 Attainment in English
  - 2.2 Attainment in mathematics
  - 2.3 Attainment in science
  - 2.4 Progress made by pupils with SEN
  - 2.5 Progress made by pupils with EAL
  - 2.6 Progress made by gifted and talented pupils
- 2C Attitudes to the school
- 2D Behaviour, including the incidence of exclusions
- 2E Personal development and relationships
- 2F Attendance
  - 2.7 Enthusiasm for school
  - 2.8 Interest and involvement in activities
  - 2.9 Behaviour
  - 2.10 Absence of oppressive behaviour, including bullying, sexism and racism
  - 2.11 Pupils' understanding of the impact of their actions on others
  - 2.12 Respect for feelings, values and beliefs
  - 2.13 Initiative and personal responsibility
  - 2.14 Relationships

### **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- 3A Teaching
  - 3.1 Teachers' knowledge and understanding
  - 3.2 Teaching of basic skills
  - 3.3 Effectiveness of teachers' planning
  - 3.4 Teachers' expectations
  - 3.5 Effectiveness of teaching methods
  - 3.6 Management of pupils
  - 3.7 Use of time, support staff and resources

- 3.8 Quality and use of ongoing assessment
- 3.9 Use of homework

### 3B Learning

- 3.10 Acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding
- 3.11 Pupils' intellectual, physical or creative effort
- 3.12 Productivity and pace of working
- 3.13 Pupils' interest, concentration and independence
- 3.14 Pupils' own knowledge of their learning
- 3.15 How well pupils with SEN learn
- 3.16 How well pupils with EAL learn

## **LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

### 4A The quality and range of learning opportunities

#### 4B Appropriate statutory curriculum in place

- 4.1 Breadth, balance and relevance of the whole curriculum
- 4.2 Provision for pupils with special educational needs
- 4.3 Effectiveness of strategies for teaching literacy skills
- 4.4 Effectiveness of strategies for teaching numeracy skills
- 4.5 Provision for extra-curricular activities
- 4.6 Equality of access and opportunity
- 4.7 Provision for personal, social and health education
- 4.8 Careers and vocational education (SEC only)
- 4.9 Contribution of the community to pupils' learning
- 4.10 Constructiveness of relationships with partner institutions

#### 4C Provision for personal, including SMSC, development

- 4.11 Provision for pupils' spiritual development
- 4.12 Provision for pupils' moral development
- 4.13 Provision for pupils' social development
- 4.14 Provision for pupils' cultural development

## **HOW WELL DOES SCHOOL CARE FOR PUPILS AND STUDENTS ?**

### 5A Procedures for child protection and for ensuring pupils' welfare

### 5B Monitoring of pupils' academic performance and personal development

#### 5C Educational and personal support and guidance for pupils

- 5.1 Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance
- 5.2 Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour
- 5.3 Procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour
- 5.4 Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress
- 5.5 Use of assessment information to guide curricular planning
- 5.6 Procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' academic progress

- 5.7 Procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal development
- 5.8 Day / residential provision (where relevant or as outlined in statements of SEN)

## **PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS**

- 6A Parents' views of the school
- 6B The effectiveness of the school's links with parents
- 6C The impact of parents' involvement on the work of the school
- 6.1 The quality of information provided for parents, particularly about pupils' progress
- 6.2 Contribution of parents to children's learning at school and at home

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

- 7A The leadership and management of the head teacher and key staff
- 7B The effectiveness of the governing body in fulfilling its responsibilities
- 7C Monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance and taking effective action
- 7D Strategic use of resources, including specific grant and other funding
- 7E The extent to which the principles of best value are applied
- 7F Adequacy of staffing, accommodation and learning resources
- 7.1 Leadership ensures clear educational direction
- 7.2 Reflection of the school's aims and values in its work
- 7.3 Delegation and the contribution of staff with management responsibilities
- 7.4 Effectiveness of governing body in fulfilling statutory duties
- 7.5 Governors' role in shaping the direction of the school
- 7.6 Governors' understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school
- 7.7 The monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching
- 7.8 The school's strategy for appraisal and performance management
- 7.9 The appropriateness of the school's priorities for development
- 7.10 The action taken to meet the school's targets
- 7.11 Shared commitment to improvement and capacity to succeed
- 7.12 Induction of staff new to the school and effectiveness of provision, or potential, for training of new teachers
- 7.13 Educational priorities are supported through the school's financial planning
- 7.14 Effectiveness of the school's use of new technology
- 7.15 Specific grant is used effectively for its designated purpose(s)
- 7.16 Match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum
- 7.17 Adequacy of accommodation
- 7.18 Adequacy of learning resources



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## ANNEX 1

### PHASE ONE INTERVIEW WITH HEADTACHER: SCHOOL INTAKE

**First, please could you give me a brief history of the school, identifying any major changes in its size, status or reputation**

**What you would describe, broadly, as the main 'catchment area' for this school.**

What proportion of pupils, roughly, come from the different parts of this area ?

| Name | % |
|------|---|
|      |   |
|      |   |
|      |   |
|      |   |
|      |   |
|      |   |
|      |   |

And what proportion come from outside the area ?

What other secondary schools also serve your main catchment area ?

| Name | Type (V,C,F, Ind) | Status Comp/ Mod/Sel | Age | Sex B.G,M | Other (eg sports) |
|------|-------------------|----------------------|-----|-----------|-------------------|
|      |                   |                      |     |           |                   |
|      |                   |                      |     |           |                   |
|      |                   |                      |     |           |                   |
|      |                   |                      |     |           |                   |
|      |                   |                      |     |           |                   |
|      |                   |                      |     |           |                   |
|      |                   |                      |     |           |                   |

And what others schools might children in this area go to ?

**Is there a system of ‘feeder primaries’ and if so what is it ?**

**What are the feeder primaries for this school ?**

| Name | % of intake |
|------|-------------|
|      |             |
|      |             |
|      |             |
|      |             |
|      |             |

**I have requested data about the % of pupils who express a first preference for the school. What are the main reasons that people express a preference for this school ?**

**And the other schools ?**

| Name | Reasons for preference |
|------|------------------------|
|      |                        |
|      |                        |
|      |                        |

**Is there any difference between the socio-economic status of children going to this school and others in the area who go to other schools ? If so what ?**

**I have requested information about the attainment of pupils at entry and about eligibility for free school meals, and about ethnic breakdown. Do you have any other of these types of information about the intake or the population of the school? If so, could that also be made available?**

|  | <b>Exists</b> | <b>Available</b> |
|--|---------------|------------------|
| Whether pupil living with one, two or no natural parents |               |                  |
| Parental Occupation                                      |               |                  |
| Numbers of children looked after by local authority      |               |                  |
| Other, please state                                      |               |                  |

**Has anything about the area changed since 1995 to affect the intake to the school? If so what, and what has been its impact on the school? (prompt demolition, new build, change in socio-economic status, population gain or loss)**

| What | When |
|------|------|
|      |      |

**Has anything else changed since 1995 to affect the intake to the school? If so what, and what has been its impact on the school?**

**(prompt change in recruitment practice or image of school, change in local authority system, new school in area or school shutting down)**

| What | When |
|------|------|
|      |      |
|      |      |



**Finally, I just want to turn to joiners and leavers in years other than year 7, and people who join and leave throughout the year.**

**I've requested figures on pupil turnover. Do the factors that we have talked about also explain levels of pupil turnover? Or are there any other factors which explain why the level of turnover is as it is?**

How many pupils last year joined the school having been excluded from other schools?  
(prompt also for 'guided exclusion')

**How does this compare with numbers of excluded pupils joining other schools in the area? What explains any differences? What determines which schools excluded pupils go to?**

**Is there anything else we haven't mentioned that is relevant to the relationship between the area and the school's intake?**

School Identifier :

Name of Interviewee

Date Conducted:

## ANNEX 2

### PHASE ONE INTERVIEW WITH LEA REPRESENTATIVE: SCHOOL INTAKE

**In this research, one of the things I'm trying to do is establish the strength of links between disadvantaged areas and their local schools i.e to what extent can we assume that school populations reflect area populations, and what affects that relationship. That's why I've requested a lot of data about the school intake at xx school and hope to map intake and deprivation data. I also need to get an understanding of the factors which determine who ends up at which school.**

**All my questions relate only to secondary schools.**

Please could you explain the system of allocation of secondary school places in this local authority (including any system of 'feeder' primaries).?

What is the overall pattern of admissions in the local authority area and what are the main factors which determine who goes where ?

And some specific questions on that :

What proportion of pupils attends an out of Borough school ? And why ? Does it apply to all parts of the Borough ?

What proportion of maintained school places are taken by out-of Borough pupils ? In which schools ?

Is this changing over time ?

What proportion of pupils in the state sector attends their local school ? Does this vary across the city?

Is there any evidence that parents send their children to non-local primary schools or move area in order to be better located for secondary schools ? Whereabouts in the LEA does this apply ?

Overall, does the number of school places match the demand (present and projected) ? (collect any documents on this)

If not, what are the discrepancies ?

What is causing the mismatch between supply and demand ?

What measures are likely to be taken to resolve the mismatch between supply and demand ?

Would it be possible for me to identify from your data where children from a given area went to secondary school ? (Pursue)

If no hard data, approximately what proportion of children from xxx area would go to xxx school ? And to other schools ?

Do you keep data relating to first preferences expressed by parents ? If so, please could I collect the number of first preferences for xxx school, going back if possible to the 1995/6 school year ?

Turning now to xxxx school. How would you describe that school ?

How does the popularity of that school compare with others ?

Does the catchment area of that school have any characteristics that are markedly different from the rest of the LEA ?

Are these characteristics reflected in the school ?

Why might parents express a preference for xxx school ? And what about the other schools in the immediate vicinity ?

| Name | Reasons for preference |
|------|------------------------|
|      |                        |
|      |                        |
|      |                        |
|      |                        |
|      |                        |
|      |                        |

Is there any difference between the socio-economic status of children going to this school and others in the area who go to other schools ? If so what ?

Has anything changed since 1995 to affect the intake to the school ? If so what ?

*(prompt demolition, new build, change in socio-economic status, population gain or loss)  
 (prompt change in recruitment practice or image of school, change in local authority system, new school in area or school shutting down)*

| What | When |
|------|------|
|      |      |
|      |      |
|      |      |
|      |      |
|      |      |

And what has been its impact on the school ?

Finally, a few questions about the allocation of places to pupils who are particularly challenging for schools.

What determines the allocation of places to pupils who have statements of special educational needs (identified during their primary years) ?

And what about pupils who have identified special educational needs but who do not have a statement ?

What determines the allocation of places to pupils who have been excluded from school ?

Are you aware of any informal practices or informal arrangements between schools to intervene in the market for school places (eg agreements on recruiting, guided exclusions)

Is there anything else you would like to mention about the relationship between xxx school and its area ?

Office Use:

|                     |                      |                 |
|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| School Identifier : | Name of Interviewee: | Date Conducted: |
|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------|

**PHASE TWO INTERVIEW WITH HEADTEACHER**

**BACKGROUND**

Q1: How many years have you have been teaching ? -----

Q2 And how many years a head ? \_\_\_\_\_

Q3: And how many years have you been at this school? \_\_\_\_\_

Q4 And how many years head of this school ? \_\_\_\_\_

Q5. Have you taught at any other schools in deprived areas ?

Yes/No

Q6. Have you taught at any other schools in areas which are less deprived than this one ?

Yes/No

Q7: What were your reasons for coming to this school ?

*The rest of the interview is divided into three sections:*

- *A general section on disadvantage and education*
- *A section on staff and other resources*
- *A section on the impact of disadvantage on other aspects of the school*

*The interview is structured and I have a lot of questions to get through, so I'll try to keep it moving along.*

*Some of the questions are quite simple and factual, and others are more about your opinions and reflections on a subject. If you don't have anything to say on a question, that's fine. Equally, feel free to expand if you feel there's more to be said.*

*Your name and the name of the school will be changed in any publications.*

## **SECTION 1:**

### **IMPACT OF HOME BACKGROUND ON EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

1. Thinking about the pupils in this school who come from disadvantaged homes, what would you say are the factors in their home backgrounds which disadvantage them educationally, if any ?

(Prompt with examples if needed)

- 1a. And are there any factors associated with the nature of the area that disadvantage pupils educationally ?
2. Which of the factors you have described do you come across most commonly in this school ?  
(try to get a feel for how many pupils)
3. Do the factors which you have described all have the same impact, or would you say some have more impact than others on a child's education ?

If so, which and why ?

**I'd now like to make a distinction between action that might be taken to sort out pupils or families economic and social problems (such as helping sort out a housing problem) and action that might be taken to try to limit the effect that the underlying problem has on the child's education (eg providing somewhere to do homework, encouraging the children to come to school regardless of home problems).**

4. Has this school done anything explicitly to try to help tackle those home disadvantages (help sort out the problems the children face?  
(what)  
(ask how funded)

**And specifically on the help that you get from other agencies to tackle these issues:**

5. Aside from child protection referrals To what extent does the school get involved in trying to get help from other agencies for the economic and social problems of individual pupils and families ?

Health  
Drug and Alcohol  
Domestic Violence  
Housing  
Money problems  
Family support  
General counselling  
Fear of crime or violence

- 6 How much do you think this should be the role of the school ?
- 7 Who does it?
- 8 What has been your experience of trying to draw down support from these agencies ?
- 9 Do any of these organisations have a presence on the school site?
- 10 Should they ?
- 11 Is the school involved in any partnership groups with other agencies which are looking at tackling these economic and social problems in the area generally. (discuss – how useful/why not)

**Then looking at the specific educational impacts...**

12. Has the school done anything to try to minimise the **educational impact** of these home disadvantages ? (LIST only – we'll discuss these later) (how funded)
13. How much do think you have succeeded ?
14. How much more is there that you could realistically do ? (Allowed more resources but still basic set-up as a school)
15. Whats preventing you ?

**QUALITY IN EDUCATION**

16. How do you define a good school ?
17. Would your definition and measurement of a good schools vary at all according to the area the school serves
18. School effectiveness researchers have broadly agreed on 11 features that they would expect to see in a good school (Show list).
  - Professional Leadership
  - A Shared Vision and Goals
  - A Learning Environment
  - High Quality Teaching and Learning
  - High Expectations
  - Positive Reinforcement
  - Monitoring Pupil Progress
  - Pupil Rights and Responsibilities
  - Purposeful Teaching
  - Home-School Partnership

- A Learning Organisation

Looking at this list, are there any which you think its impossible to achieve, or more difficult, in a school like this ? why ?

19. And are any easier to achieve ? Why

**I'd like to explore some of these issues further in the rest of the interview.**

## **SECTION 2 : STAFF AND RESOURCES**

This first section is mainly about the school's resources and organisation, and the ways in which these are affected by the schools socio-economic context and other factors.

First some questions about **the staff** , beginning with the **teaching staff** :

Q1: In general terms, how would you describe the teaching staff here, in terms of age, experience and ability ?

Q2 : What factors do you think have determined the current composition of the staff ?

Prompt – are any of these factors to do with the socio-economic circumstances of the school ?

Is it changing at all ?

Q3. How many posts did you have to fill for the start of this term, and what were they ?

Q4 Which of these were filled at the first attempt by suitably qualified staff ?  
Filled at a later attempt by suitably qualified staff ?  
Filled by an applicant with less skill/experience than hoped ?  
Not filled at all ?

Q5 What comments would you make on how easy is it to recruit suitable staff at the moment ?

Q6. What factors do you think are affecting staff recruitment ?

Prompt – are any of these factors to do with the socio-economic circumstances of the school ?

Q7 And what about supply staff ? How easy is to get them to work here and what issues do you think affect their decisions ?

Q8. What in your view, would improve your ability to attract suitable staff to come and work at this school ?

Q9. Have you taken any initiatives to address recruitment difficulties ?



Prompt – how well have they worked

Q10. And what is the situation as regards staff retention and turnover at the moment ?

Q11. What in your view, would improve your ability to retain staff . ?

Q12. Have you taken any initiatives to increase teacher retention ?

Prompt – how well have they worked

Q13 What impact are difficulties in staff recruitment or retention having on the school ?

Prompt internal impact on organisation/stress levels of other staff/anything that has to go ?

Prompt impact on quality of education offered.

Q14. Do the skills and qualities that a teacher needs in this school differ from ones they might need in a school in a more advantaged area ?

How ?

Q15 What kind of training or career development, or in-school support, would help equip teachers with these skills and qualities ?

Q16. Have you done anything here to try to equip staff better for the particular challenges of this environment ?

Prompt – how well have they worked

Q17. Thinking about how you organise the teaching staff, the roles you give them, the way you deploy them to different classes etc, have you done anything here specifically to respond to the particular challenges of this school, being in a disadvantaged area ?

Prompt size of classes  
Organisation of pastoral care

Prompt – how well have they worked

Prompt – what trade offs were there, and what is the overall benefit ?

Q18 And what about specialist support staff (with teaching responsibilities) – what decisions have you made about the number and type of staff needed and the roles that they play ?

Prompt – how well have they worked

Prompt – what trade offs were there, and what is the overall benefit ?

- Q19 How would you describe levels of staff absence in this school ?
- Q20 How much of the absences would you say is attributable to stress ?
- Q21 Apart from absence, does stress among the staff have any other impacts on the school ?
- Q22 What are the main factors causing stress ?
- Q23 Would you say there are any aspects of working in this school that are more stressful than working in a school where fewer children are from deprived backgrounds ?
- Q24 And are there any aspects that are less stressful ? or which help mitigate stress ?
- Q25 Are these differences significant in relation to overall levels of stress ?
- Q26 Have you done anything here to try to alleviate stress ?  
Prompt – how well did it work ?
- Q27. I'd now like to touch on the **non-teaching staff**. Have you done anything in terms of the number or roles of these staff specifically to respond to the particular challenges of this school, being in a disadvantaged area ?  
  
Prompt – how well have they worked  
Prompt – what trade offs were there, and what is the overall benefit ?
- Q28. Do any of the issues we discussed before about teacher recruitment and retention also apply to these staff ?
- Q29. Now, some questions about the **headship role**. Do you think heads in schools in disadvantaged areas need different qualities or approaches from other heads ?
- Q30. In terms of the amount of time you spend on the job and the things you spend your time on, do you think your job is different from the job of a head in a more advantaged area ?
- Q31. Is there anything that could be done in terms of headship training or career development to equip heads better for leading schools in disadvantaged circumstances ?
- Q32 What is the overall financial position of the school ? Explain ?
- Q33 Disregarding for the moment the implications of the market, does the schools' disadvantaged intake create any additional demands on the resources of the school ?  
  
Probe what/how (eg language, damage etc)  
Probe level of resources
- Q33 Is there anything about the physical location of the school in this area (regardless of intake) which creates additional resource demands.  
  
Probe crime/vandalism

- Q34 How well are the resource needs of the school met by the core funding (ie per capita funding and the EMAG):
- Q35 Is the school included in any of the governments special funding programmes for schools in disadvantaged areas eg Excellence in Cities, EAZ, Schools in Challenging Circumstances ?
- Q36 How much money have these brought to the school and what have they been spent on ?
- Q37 To what extent have you been able to tap into additional funds - Standards Fund, Lottery, local regeneration funding and what for?
- Q38 What enables this ? What makes it more difficult ?
- Q39 Do you have any thoughts about the amount of money that goes to schools in disadvantaged areas, or the way in which it is allocated. ?
- Q39 In this school is there anything that you feel ought to be provided, or ought to be done, but isn't, because the school doesn't have the money ?.
- Q40 How would you think that position compares to other schools ?
- Q41 For what purposes does school seek contributions from parents ?
- Q42 What proportion of parents find it difficult to make these financial contributions ?
- Q43 How, if at all, have you adapted to the fact that some parents are on low incomes?
- Q44 Is there anything that is not done in this school because parents can't afford to pay ?

### **SECTION 3 : DISADVANTAGE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SCHOOL AS AN ORGANISATION**

1. How conscious do you think staff are of the economic or social disadvantages of the children, and do you think it impacts at all on the way they approach their work ?
2. Specifically do you think it affects their expectations of pupils?
3. And their relationships with pupils ?
4. And their classroom practice?

#### **Specifically on PARENTS**

- 5 In what ways are parents involved in the life of the school –try to get a feel for the levels of participation ?

Parents evenings  
 Parents meetings  
 PTA

Classroom support  
Other volunteer help

- 6 How would you describe parents support for their childrens education ?  
Explore barriers.
- 7 Would you say parents attitudes towards and expectations of the school are any different in this school than others in less deprived areas ?  
Examples ?
8. Would you say that the attitudes and expectations of staff towards parents are any different in this school than others in less deprived areas ?  
Examples ?
9. Does this have any impact on the way staff work ?
10. Has the school done anything to try to improve the partnership between school and home? How well has this worked ?

### **ETHOS**

11. Does the school have a guiding ethos ?
12. Why and how was that particular ethos decided on for this school ?
13. How well embedded would you say that ethos is ?  
Among pupils  
Among staff  
Among parents
14. What features of the school have made it possible to embed that ethos?
- 15 What features make it more difficult?

### **THE SCHOOL AS A CHANGE ORGANISATION**

**I now want to ask about some of the impacts of educational change on this school.**

**I want to ask about two specific aspects of change : the first is about school improvement and the standards agenda and the second is about operating in a market for pupils.**

First, the requirement to continuously improve both on internal performance and academic standards and to take on new ideas and initiatives.

16. How do you feel about these changes. Have they made it a better school ?, and have there been any other spin-offs, good or bad ?.
- 17 Would you say there's anything different about the way schools in disadvantaged areas can respond to the new changes in education, compared with schools in more advantaged areas ? If so what ?

Prompt for specific examples from this school..  
Ask why a change didn't work or why implemented successfully  
Ask how the obstacles were overcome

### **Then the market**

18. First , the market. To what extent is what you do in this school affected by the need to compete for pupils ?
19. Has this brought any positive benefits to the school ?
20. And any negative spin-offs ?

### **FINALLY SOME OTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT WAYS IN WHICH DISADVANTAGE MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT IMPACT ON THE SCHOOL**

#### **ABSENCE**

21. To what extent is absence a problem?
22. What is the pattern of absence ?
23. Who are the long term absent and what are they absent for ?  
Probe is it the more disadvantaged pupils ?
24. Apart from its obvious impact on the individual who is absent, how does absence impact on the learning of others, staff roles and workload?
25. What has school done about it?
26. Has it worked ?
27. What more could you do about it and what would be needed?

#### **MOBILITY**

28. To what extent is pupil mobility a problem?
29. What is the pattern of pupil mobility – who are the mobile pupils and why?  
Is it the more disadvantaged pupils ?
30. Apart from its obvious impact on the individual who is mobile, how does mobility impact on the learning of others, staff roles and workload?
31. What has school done about it?
32. Has it worked ?
33. What more could you do about it and what would be needed?

## **PUNCTUALITY**

34. To what extent is punctuality a problem ? Punctuality for school or lessons or both ?
35. Who is unpunctual ?
36. What accounts for poor punctuality, to lessons/to school?
- 36a. Apart from its obvious impact on the individual who is late, how does lateness impact on the learning of others, staff roles and workload?
37. What has school done about it?
38. Has it worked ?
39. What more could you do about it and what would be needed?

## **BEHAVIOUR**

40. How would you describe levels of behaviour in the school – lessons, non lessons?
41. What would you say accounts for poor behaviour?  
Probe relationship with disadvantage
42. Apart from immediate disruption to lessons, how does poor behaviour impact ?
43. What has school done about it?
44. Has it worked ?
45. What more could you do about it and what would be needed?
46. Some people have suggested that there is a critical mass of difficult pupils that can be absorbed in a school, but that beyond that there's a disproportionate impact on the school. Do you agree?  
If so, what is it ?

## **EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

Is the level and type of extra curricular activities typical of other schools in the area ?

If not, why not ?

**PHASE TWO TEACHER INTERVIEW**

- *Explain that purpose of study is to learn more about how socio-economic disadvantage impacts on schools and therefore what kinds of support and resources are need for schools in very disadvantaged areas.*
- *Mostly loosely structured so chance to express opinions. Please feel free to expand on any of the questions if you wish, and to make comparisons with teaching in other settings.*
- *Confidentiality arrangements (not named, not shared with other staff/management, referred to in report as by role, names of school and LEA changed)*
- *Tape.*

There are three parts to the interview :

- First I'd like to explore issues around socio-economic disadvantage and how it affects pupils and teachers.
- Then I'd like to discuss issues of quality in education,
- and finally talk about changes in education in the last few years, and how they've affected the school.

I'm hoping each section will take about 20 minutes, and I will try to move on so that we cover them all.

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE AMONG THE STUDENT POPULATION**

The fact that poverty can disadvantage children educationally is well known, but I'd like to get a better understanding about what aspects of poverty present the biggest obstacles to educational success.

1. Thinking about the pupils in this school who come from disadvantaged homes, what would you say are the factors in their home backgrounds which disadvantage them educationally, if any ?

(Prompt with examples if needed)

- 1a. And are there any factors associated with the nature of the area that disadvantage pupils educationally ?

2. Which of the factors you have described do you come across most commonly in this school ?  
(try to get a feel for how many pupils)

3. Do the factors which you have described all have the same impact, or would you say some have more impact than others on a child's education ?

If so, which and why ?

4. Does the fact that a lot of the children here are from deprived backgrounds have any impact on the nature of your work as a teacher ?

In what ways ?

**Some specific questions on that:**

5. Do you think you spend your time during the day on different things than you would do if fewer children were from deprived backgrounds ?

5a. And does that affect the amount of time you spend overall on your job?

6. And in terms of your actual teaching, have you found that it has changed at all ?

Probe were these deliberate strategies adopted, or unconscious changes

7. How do you think the changes have affected the effectiveness of your teaching ?

8. And have you found your expectations of the pupils changing at all ? In what ways ?

9. How does working with children who are from disadvantaged backgrounds make you feel about your work as a teacher ?  
(prompt -any impact on your motivation or job satisfaction or ideals ?)

- 10.. How well do you think your training equipped you for the challenges of teaching in this school ?

Prompt : Can you think of anything else that could be done in terms of teacher's training or career development that might help prepare them for teaching in a school with these kinds of challenges.

**QUALITY IN EDUCATION**

11. How do you define a good school ?

12. And a good teacher ?



13. And a good lesson ?
14. How much agreement would you say there is about those definitions in the teaching profession ?
15. Would you expect any difference in ideas about what constitutes quality between teachers working in schools in very disadvantaged areas, and those in other areas ?
16. Thinking about you personally, what outcomes are you trying to achieve for the pupils you teach at this school ?
17. School effectiveness researchers have broadly agreed on 11 features that they would expect to see in a good school (Show list).
  - Professional Leadership
  - A Shared Vision and Goals
  - A Learning Environment
  - High Quality Teaching and Learning
  - High Expectations
  - Positive Reinforcement
  - Monitoring Pupil Progress
  - Pupil Rights and Responsibilities
  - Purposeful Teaching
  - Home-School Partnership
  - A Learning Organisation

Are there any there that you disagree with ?

18. Looking at this list, are there any which you think its impossible to achieve, or more difficult, in a school in a disadvantaged area ? why ?
19. And are any easier to achieve ? Why

## **EDUCATIONAL CHANGE**

In this last section, I want to ask about some of the impacts of educational change on this school.

By educational change I'm referring to the fact that schools now have to compete in a market, with an emphasis on academic standards as a measure of success, and with a strong public pressure and scrutiny to improve standards. I'm talking about a broad shift in philosophy which incorporates a number of specific measures, such as Ofsted, the national curriculum, league tables and so on.

20. How do you feel about these changes ?

21. Thinking about this school, do you think the requirement to change in this way has made it a better school ?
- prompt for any spin offs, good or bad
22. And thinking about you personally, have the changes led to any changes in the way you approach your work - your attitude, goals or practices ?
23. And in terms of the nature of your job, and what you're actually required to do, has there been any change in the amount of work or the nature of work that you are required to do,? If so, what ?
24. how do you feel about that ?
25. How do you think the staff here, in general, feel about these changes in education ?
26. And what about the management here ?
27. Would you say there's anything different about the way schools in disadvantaged areas can respond to the new changes in education, compared with schools in more advantaged areas ? If so what ?
- Prompt for specific examples from this school..  
Ask why a change didn't work or why implemented successfully  
Ask how the obstacles were overcome
28. And finally, how would you describe your own morale, at the moment ?
29. And the morale of the staff generally in this school ?

- 
- *Thanks*
  - *Ask teacher to complete background details form*

**PHASE TWO INTERVIEW WITH CHAIR OF GOVERNORS**

Introduce study.

In this interview, I'd like to ask your views on the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on the running of the school and its quality.

**Impact of Disadvantage on School**

First, could I show you this list of features that school effectiveness researchers have agreed that they would expect to see in a good school (Show list).

- Professional Leadership
- A Shared Vision and Goals
- A Learning Environment
- High Quality Teaching and Learning
- High Expectations
- Positive Reinforcement
- Monitoring Pupil Progress
- Pupil Rights and Responsibilities
- Purposeful Teaching
- Home-School Partnership
- A Learning Organisation

Are there any there that you disagree with ?

Looking at the list, are there any which you think its impossible to achieve, or more difficult, in a school in a disadvantaged area ? why ?

And are any easier to achieve ? Why

In relation to this list, what are the things this school does particularly well ?

How has it done that?

**Resources**

How well resourced would you say the school is ?

What if anything does the school need more money for ?

**Governors**

How easy is it to find governing body members with the right levels of expertise ?

Is that a feature of the area, or something which schools find in general?