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# A review of the impact of the London Challenge (2003-8) and the City Challenge (2008-11)

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**Research paper for Ofsted's 'Access and achievement in education 2013 review'**

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We are very grateful to all the individuals who took part in interviews. We recognise that in this very small scale piece of research, we have only been able to interview a small number of those who could have made useful contributions and we apologise for all that is omitted.

We would also like to thank Colin Rainey, Teresa Carbajo Garcia and Angela Kamara, the administrative team of the Institute for Policy Studies in Education at London Metropolitan University, for the invaluable support they have provided.

## Executive summary

This report summarises previous evaluations of London Challenge and City Challenge; reviews the sustainability of the school improvement that took place; explores the legacy of the Challenges; reviews possible reasons for London's high attainment; and identifies aspects of the Challenge strategy that could be adopted more widely.

### *London Challenge (2003-08) and City Challenge (2008-11)*

The London Challenge was a strategy to improve secondary education. As a result of its success, City Challenge was launched in 2008 as a three-year strategy to improve educational outcomes for young people in Greater Manchester and the Black Country, and to continue work in London.

The City Challenge evaluation (Hutchings et al., 2012) concluded that the Challenge had generally been successful in achieving its objectives, and that factors contributing to this success were the time-scale; the focus on specific urban areas; flexibility of approach; use of expert Advisors and bespoke solutions; school staff learning from practice in other schools; and the programme ethos of trust, support and encouragement.

Total funding was £160 million. Comparison of two different strategies for improving the most vulnerable schools – Keys to Success (the Challenge programme to support such schools), and replacement of 'failing' schools by sponsored academies – shows that Keys to Success is a very much cheaper approach, and is equally or more effective.

### *Sustainability of school improvement brought about by the Challenge*

A review of attainment in 2011-12, the year after Challenge funding ended, shows that the improvement which took place during the Challenge was generally sustained in London and Greater Manchester, but that in the Black Country improvement during 2011-12 was below the national average. While London attainment was well above the national average, there were some signs that the trajectory of improvement may be slowing down. Factors that may have impacted on sustainability include the longer time scale in London; the size and characteristics of the areas; and the extent to which those in each area felt ownership of the Challenge. It was argued that it is still too early to see the full impact of the Challenge, as pupils affected by initiatives to improve early years education or primary-secondary transition will not yet have taken national tests.

### *Legacies of the Challenge*

The Challenge has had a very wide range of legacies. Nationally, these include Teaching Schools and National and Local Leaders of Education. In each Challenge area, organisations with a strong focus on schools learning from each other have been created to take forward the Challenge approaches. In London and Greater Manchester they are led by groups of headteachers. Other organisations have also adopted aspects of the Challenge approach to school improvement; these include LAs, a Catholic diocese, an academy chain and private businesses. In schools in Challenge areas, the legacy included a more outward looking approach; more effective processes and strategies; higher expectations of pupils; stronger coaching skills among middle and senior leaders; and a greater awareness of what to do to improve further. While this is a substantial legacy, interviewees argued that current arrangements and structures for school improvement have considerable limitations. Most important among these is fragmentation and lack of structure, which may result in vulnerable schools not getting support they need.

### *London's improvement*

London has frequently been identified as having poor schools and low pupil attainment. But for many years, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in London (e.g. those eligible for Free School Meals) has been higher than elsewhere in the country. In the last decade, while the London Challenge has been in operation, the gap between Free School Meals pupils in London and those elsewhere has widened considerably. In 2012, attainment of pupils not eligible for Free School meals was also higher in London than in any other region.

A number of explanations of London's high attainment have been suggested. Factors that may have contributed include the high proportion of minority ethnic pupils, and higher aspirations resulting from the more dynamic economy of London. Interviewees in this research also argued that London teachers have to adapt their teaching styles to classes with large numbers of pupils who are disadvantaged, from minority ethnic groups, or have English as an additional language; this may be beneficial for all pupils. However, the main factor responsible for the improvement in attainment in London over the last decade is the London Challenge. As well as working directly with schools and local authorities to bring about improvement, the London Challenge was involved in the early start to the academies programme in London; bringing about changes to pay structures and housing schemes which encouraged more young teachers to remain in London and take leadership posts; and the introduction of Teach First. Together these strategies resulted in an improved reputation of London schools; improved teacher recruitment and retention, and a better supply of school leaders.

### *The potential for future adoption of aspects of Challenge programmes*

Many aspects of the Challenge programmes have already been adopted nationally and locally. However, some central elements of the Challenge are missing from current school improvement structures. Interviewees called for:

- coordinators and administration at area or regional level;
- a rigorous process of review to identify schools with the greatest support needs and enable appropriate support to be commissioned;
- some Advisors and funding to support the most vulnerable schools;
- wider adoption of Challenge strategies to improve Satisfactory and Good schools;
- improved information for headteachers about what is available;
- the geographical distribution of Teaching Schools and National Leaders of Education across regions and local authorities to be taken into account in decisions about the next round of applications;
- the balance between encouraging competition and collaboration to be reviewed; for example, school inspection could take into account the work some schools do in supporting others;
- a greater recognition that school improvement takes time, and that focusing on immediate improvement in attainment may be counter-productive in the long term; and
- a stronger recognition of the importance of an ethos in which schools are supported and encouraged.

Interviewees also drew attention to the links between poverty and low attainment, and the risk that school improvement efforts may be undermined by increases in child poverty.

# 1 Introduction

This report builds on the evaluation of City Challenge commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE)<sup>1</sup> and conducted during the final year of the Challenge (Hutchings et al., 2012). It aims to inform future strategies to improve schools in urban areas, by:

- drawing out findings from the City Challenge evaluation which are relevant to Ofsted's Access and Achievement 20 years On project;
- exploring the sustainability of the improvement brought about by City Challenge;
- exploring the Challenge legacy by identifying school improvement initiatives that are based on key aspects of City Challenge;
- examining other factors that may have contributed to London's above average attainment;
- identifying aspects of City Challenge that might be adopted more widely.

## 1.1 Research design

This report is based on:

- the data and findings of a DfE-commissioned evaluation of City Challenge (Hutchings et al., 2012);
- an analysis of 2012 attainment data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) and the School Performance Tables; this was conducted to review whether the improvements in attainment which took place during the programme have been sustained after it ended; and
- 20 interviews with key stakeholders, including headteachers working in the three City Challenge areas, Local Authority (LA) officers, former City Challenge Advisors, and individuals involved in legacy activities. The purpose of the interviews was to explore the sustainability of the changes brought about during City Challenge, and the range of legacy activities. They took place between December 2012 and April 2013.

## 1.2 Structure of report

This report is organised around the questions posed by Ofsted in the project specification. It starts by focusing on the London Challenge and City Challenge programmes. Section 2 introduces the Challenges; summarises the key findings from published evaluations; identifies the most effective aspects of the Challenges; reviews the cost of the Challenges relative to other approaches to school improvement; and considers the extent to which economic or other factors in each area might have contributed to success.

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<sup>1</sup> The government department responsible for education has changed its name during the period covered by this report. Before June 2007 it was the Department for Education and Skills (DfES); it then became the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), and in May 2010 was renamed as the Department for Education (DfE).

The next two sections focus on the sustainability of the Challenge outcomes and the legacies of the Challenge. Section 3 explores whether the trajectory of improved attainment that took place during the Challenges has been sustained in 2011-12, and Section 4 outlines the legacy of the London Challenge and City Challenge nationally, in the Challenge areas, in individual schools, and in other organisations, and reviews the strengths and limitations of this legacy.

Section 5 focuses on the specific case of London, where primary and secondary attainment is now higher than in any other region. While the London Challenge undoubtedly had a strong impact, a number of other factors have contributed to the attainment of pupils in London, and Section 5 reviews these.

The report concludes by considering which aspects of the Challenge might usefully be adopted more widely.

## **2 The London Challenge and City Challenge**

### **2.1 Outline of the London Challenge and City Challenge**

Launched in May 2003, the London Challenge was a five-year strategy which aimed to improve results in London secondary schools<sup>2</sup>, and also to bring about a cultural change, raising aspirations and expectations, improving teacher morale, and increasing parental confidence in London schools. The ambition was to make London a world-class leader in education. It was a partnership between central government, local government, schools and other key players in London. Attainment in London secondary schools increased rapidly, and by 2008 was above the national average<sup>3</sup>.

As a result, City Challenge was launched by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) in April 2008 as a three-year programme. In London, it was a continuation of the London Challenge 2003-8 (DCSF, 2008a), while in the Black Country and Greater Manchester, new programmes were designed which followed some of the key principles of the London Challenge but also focused on meeting local needs (DCSF, 2008b, 2008c). City Challenge included primary schools in all three areas, in contrast to the London Challenge which had focused almost entirely on secondary schools.

City Challenge was designed to improve educational outcomes for young people and ‘to crack the associated cycle of disadvantage and underachievement’ in the Black Country, Greater Manchester and London’ (DfES, 2007: 1). Its objectives were:

- to reduce the number of underperforming schools, especially in relation to English and mathematics;
- to increase the number of Good and Outstanding schools;
- to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children.

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<sup>2</sup> The London Challenge also started to work with some primary schools from 2006.

<sup>3</sup> See Hutchings et al., 2012, pp20-23.

City Challenge was distinctive in a number of ways. It was underpinned by a belief that the educational problems facing urban areas should be addressed at area level, and that LAs and schools need to work together to do this. Thus it aimed to improve educational provision and school performance across broad geographical areas, not simply in a specific group of participating schools. City Challenge focused on all aspects of the education system; it worked strategically at area level and with LAs, community organisations, parents and pupils, and developed a range of specific school interventions which were closely focused on the objectives above. There was no single view of what schools needed to do to improve; all the interventions involved local solutions with key stakeholders (including headteachers and LAs) centrally involved in the decisions. The various activities and interventions were characterised by a belief that school-to-school collaboration has a central role to play in school improvement; a recognition of the importance of school leadership; and a data-rich approach to tackling issues and sharing learning.

City Challenge built on a substantial body of research about school improvement which emphasised the importance of effective leadership, networking and collaboration, system leadership roles and sustainability. It also built on the experiences of previous strategies and initiatives intended to improve schools, such as Excellence in Cities; Education Action Zones; the introduction of leadership training for headteachers; the National Strategies; and most importantly, the London Challenge 2003-8.

## 2.2 Summary of key findings from evaluations

The evaluation of the City Challenge programme commissioned by the DfE (Hutchings et al., 2012) had as its objectives:

- to assess the City Challenge programme in relation to its key objectives;
- to establish the efficacy of different approaches to the improvement of school performance and schools systems in urban conurbations.

The evaluation design included an analysis of attainment data; a survey of schools; case studies of 21 schools, one school cluster and four LAs; and a further 103 interviews with key stakeholders including headteachers. It also drew together the findings from previous research and evaluations of various aspects of London Challenge and City Challenge (e.g. Ofsted, 2006, 2010; Matthews and McLaughlin, 2010; Rudd et al., 2011; Street, 2011; Ainscow, 2013).

This section presents the key findings of the evaluation.

### 2.2.1 Achievement in relation to City Challenge objectives

- *To reduce the number of underperforming schools.* The number of schools below the floor target showed a significantly greater reduction than was the case in the rest of England. The programme to improve Inadequate or underperforming schools (known as Keys to Success in London and Greater Manchester, and Pathways to Achievement in the Black Country) was successful; a regression based analysis showed that the improvement in year-on-year change in attainment relative to secondary schools with equivalent results was approximately two per cent, and for primary schools, five per cent (over a shorter time period).

- *To increase the number of Good and Outstanding schools:* The number of such schools increased, despite changes to the Ofsted framework which made this target harder to achieve;
- *To improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children:* The attainment of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) increased by more than the national figure. However, attainment gaps between FSM pupils and their peers narrowed only for London primary and secondary pupils and Greater Manchester primary pupils.

Clearly a great many factors contributed to these improvements, including national policies and strategies and the considerable efforts of headteachers and staff. However, these factors apply everywhere in the country. The most plausible explanation for the greater improvement in Challenge areas is that the City Challenge programme was responsible. The vast majority of stakeholders at all levels who contributed to this evaluation attributed the additional improvements that have been made in these areas to the work of City Challenge.

### **2.2.2 Effective approaches to school improvement in City Challenge**

- The Challenges ran over a sustained period of time (eight years in London and three in Greater Manchester and the Black Country). The longer time scale for the London Challenge was a key factor in its success and the sustained improvement found in London.
- Working at area level meant that each area could use its local identity to try and unite all those concerned with education in raising aspirations. It also provided an opportunity for learning across LA boundaries.
- A key characteristic of City Challenge was its flexibility. When civil servants, steering groups or Advisors saw a need, they were able to respond by creating a new activity or intervention. There was no single model of what a school needed to do to improve, and issues such as teacher supply and retention, and parental aspirations, were also tackled.
- City Challenge supported schools to become more outward looking, and created structures through which school staff were able to learn from practice in other schools.
- The expert roles created, Challenge Advisors and National and Local Leaders of Education, were extremely effective. In particular, the role of Chief Advisor in each area was a critical one.
- The use of bespoke solutions enabled the specific issues facing each school to be tackled, and gave a sense of ownership to headteachers and staff.
- It was recognised that individuals and school communities tend to thrive when they feel trusted, supported and encouraged, and achievements are celebrated.

### **2.3 The effectiveness of specific elements of the Challenge programmes**

The London Challenge was a strategy to improve London secondary schools, and it tackled this in a vast range of ways, focusing on different issues. For example, teacher shortages and quality were addressed through establishing higher pay scale for teachers in London; developing housing schemes (because teachers could not afford to buy property in London); supporting the development of Teach First, a scheme through which ‘top’ graduates taught in the most challenging schools; and creating the London Chartered Teacher status to reward expert teachers who remained teaching in

London. Similarly, it developed schemes to raise pupils' aspirations, and to improve the weakest schools. It was an extremely flexible strategy; if something did not work, another approach was tried. This flexibility, together with the broad and imaginative approach to tackling London's problems, was a key strength.

City Challenge was rather different in that part of the intention was to learn from what had been effective in London and to apply it elsewhere. Thus some aspects of the London Challenge were replicated in the other areas, in particular, the use of Advisors directly employed by the DCSF, and the approach to improving the weakest schools (Keys to Success/Pathways to Achievement). However, each area also adapted and developed ideas to meet the need of its own particular context.

In this section we have distinguished between overarching strategies and specific programmes that worked in schools.

### *Effective strategies*

The overall success of the Challenges was perhaps that they involved an ongoing focus on improving education in the Challenge areas, and in that sense, **the most effective elements were the central teams that led the Challenge in each area**, developed new approaches, and monitored progress. These brought together civil servants, and the Chief Advisor and Challenge Advisors in each area. In the Black Country and Greater Manchester, the LAs were also very much involved. Members of this team reviewed all schools in the area, ensured that schools most in need of support received it, and that the different stakeholders involved worked together effectively. They also brokered effective partnerships between schools.

A second over-arching and highly effective element was the **Leadership Strategy** in each area. Rudd et al. (2011), in their evaluation, state that the Leadership Strategies aimed to promote a systematic approach to the sharing of expertise and knowledge among school leaders, and between the most successful schools and those aspiring to improve. The emphasis was on collaboration rather than competition, and the Strategies involved building supportive networks between schools and across LA boundaries. Defining elements of the Leadership Strategies were:

- National Teaching and Facilitation Schools: these offered quality assured professional development courses such as the Improving Teacher Programme and the Outstanding Teacher Programme (ITP and OTP);
- National and Local Leaders of Education (NLEs and LLEs): outstanding school leaders who provided support to other school leaders;
- Local projects in each area: these included the VIP Sixth Form Programme and Moving to New Headship in London, and Middle Leaders of Education in Greater Manchester.

The Leadership Strategies were extensively used in the various programmes in schools described below. Keys to Success/Pathways to Achievement schools were often supported by NLEs and LLEs and sent teachers on the ITP and OTP. Rudd et al. report that the Teaching Schools and NLE/LLE provision were seen as highly effective and as representing good value for money.

It is impossible in this short report to do justice to the range of activity within the Challenges. However, a smaller scale strategy that was particularly effective was the **Pan London EAL strategy**.

This strategy illustrates the way that the Challenge tried to ensure a coherent approach that made effective use of limited resources to benefit all schools. It funded LAs that had effective teams to support the teaching of pupils for whom English was an additional language (EAL) to spread their expertise across London. A website enabled schools that needed training to bid for and access it. This had overwhelmingly positive feedback indicating that participants had changed the way they taught as a result of what they had learned. The Pan London EAL Strategy was a particularly important structure in a city with such a high proportion of EAL learners (some 36 per cent of those in secondary schools).

### *Effective programmes*

Each area had specific programmes in schools. Some were common to all three areas; others operated in a single area. They were developed at different times to meet the needs of different groups of schools. Many of the smaller programmes and activities have been identified as highly successful; however, in the City Challenge evaluation, and therefore in this report, the focus is on programmes that operated the most widely. The most successful of these programmes were:

- Keys to Success (Pathways to Achievement in the Black Country), which focused on **vulnerable schools** (generally with low attainment or judged inadequate on inspection). A Challenge Advisor was allocated to each school. Their first task was to scope the issues with the headteacher and LA officer. They then devised a bespoke programme of support to help the school improve both in terms of pupil outcomes and leadership and management, and the necessary support and funding was provided. As Section 2.2.1 reports, attainment in these schools improved significantly more than in schools with comparable initial attainment. Ofsted grades also improved.
- the London programmes to support the improvement of primary **schools that were judged Satisfactory** (Primary Challenge Groups and ISP Leadership). Both these programmes involved two Satisfactory schools working with a Good or Outstanding school. Each group set their own targets and drew up an action plan. The headteachers leading the groups were supported in termly meetings. Improvement in attainment was significantly more than in other schools with similar initial attainment. The key factors in success were the provision of a small amount of funding to enable staff to visit the other schools; clearly agreed plans and a limited time frame; and having a lead headteacher to drive the agenda.
- programmes in all three areas to support **schools judged to be Good** that aimed to become Outstanding.<sup>4</sup> The most successful of these were the London programmes, which focused on motivating and inspiring school leaders, and sharing outstanding practice. This was done through conferences, schools working together in small groups, and the setting up of knowledge centres in schools that had specific areas of outstanding practice that others could visit and learn from. The feedback on all these aspects of the programmes was overwhelmingly positive. Interviewees valued the ethos of the programmes, and the opportunities to network with heads of Outstanding schools, and reported a direct impact on practice in their own schools and the quality of education they were providing for pupils.

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<sup>4</sup> London also developed a similar programme for heads of Outstanding secondary schools who wished to further improve.

What distinguished these three programmes was that the nature of the support provided was reported to be appropriate for the needs of the school. Thus the most vulnerable schools learned best from experienced individuals who worked closely with them; the Satisfactory schools learned effectively in small groups, and the Good and Outstanding school sought out a wide range of outstanding practice in different schools.

Other programmes were partially successful. Both the **Narrowing the Gap** programmes (designed to narrow the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers) and the Greater Manchester programme, **Families of Schools**, were effective in that they encouraged schools to work with and learn from other schools, but during the time span of the Challenge, there was no impact on attainment outcomes. **Families of Schools data** was provided in all three areas, and was intended to encourage schools to share ideas with schools that had similar intakes. However, the evaluation found that schools did not use the data, and had not understood the basis of the Family groupings.

#### *A note on sponsored academies*

A feature of the London Challenge from the very beginning was the plan to create academy schools to replace the very weakest schools. This was subsequently a strategy within City Challenge. It was always considered as a possibility for schools which failed to improve and which had lost the confidence of parents in their local communities. One result of this was that London had significant numbers of sponsored academies earlier than other parts of the country. However, the creation of sponsored academies was not part of the evaluation of the Challenges because the academies programme has been separately evaluated. We comment briefly here on the effectiveness of this strategy.

Michael Gove (Secretary of State for Education since 2010), in a 2012 speech, identified sponsored academies as one of the three most important elements in the success of the London Challenge. However, this analysis is not supported by Ofsted's (2010) report on the London Challenge, which commented:

Twenty former London Challenge schools have become academies. In five of the six academies visited for this survey, the change in designation appears to have separated them from the networks of support that they once enjoyed. [...] Those who had made these structural changes still considered that the key drivers behind school improvement were: improving the quality of teaching and learning; better use of data to track pupils' progress; the resultant timely interventions for individual pupils; [and] more flexible approaches to the curriculum. (paras 24-25)

To date, the evidence about the success of sponsored academies in improving attainment has varied from identifying no effect to identifying a small effect, depending on which schools are chosen as a comparator group and which sponsored academies are included (see, for example, Machin and Wilson, 2009; Machin and Vernoit, 2010, 2011; National Audit Office, 2010; DfE, 2012a; and the summary by the Academies Commission, 2013). The most positive studies report that results in sponsored academies have improved at a faster rate than those in comparator schools; for example, the DfE analysis states that over the year 2010-11, academies improved by 5.6% and comparable schools by 3.4%. However, academies formed only a small percentage of all secondary schools in Challenge areas, so their impact on attainment at area level was small.

Research has also shown that sponsored academies tend to attract a more middle class intake than their predecessor schools, and this may be partly responsible for improvements in attainment (National Audit Office, 2010; Machin and Veroit, 2011). At worst, academies are accused of manipulating the admissions system to ensure that they take fewer disadvantaged pupils (see Academies Commission, 2013).

## **2.4 Relative cost of the Challenge initiatives and the benefits achieved.**

Over three years the allocated budget for City Challenge was £160m: London was allocated around £80m, Greater Manchester £50m and the Black Country 28m.

Since City Challenge was a unique strategy, it is not possible to make comparisons with similar initiatives. However, we can compare the cost of Keys to Success/Pathways to Achievement<sup>5</sup> with the cost of creating a sponsored academy, as these are both strategies to improve the most vulnerable schools.

At the time of the evaluation, the DfE were unable to supply a detailed breakdown of spending by the different interventions within City Challenge, though it was suggested that the programmes for the most vulnerable schools involved the largest expenditure, taking up some 40% of the total budget i.e. approximately £65m over three years to support around 600 schools. This suggests an average expenditure of £92k per school. Clearly, more funding was used for secondary schools. If we assume that funding for a secondary school was four times as much as for a primary (which is probably an overestimate), this would suggest that the total expenditure on a Keys to Success secondary school averaged around £250k<sup>6</sup>. This covered Advisor time; support, including that provided through the Leadership Strategies; and direct funding for staffing, resources or staff development.

The National Audit Office (2012) reported that, over the two years 2010-12, total spending on the Academies programme was £8.3 billion, which was £1 billion over the allocated budget. Of this sum, £279 billion was spent on transition costs for new sponsored academies; it is this element that can be compared with the cost of Keys to Success. The National Audit Office explained:

Academies opening in September 2010 had received average transitional funding of over £2 million each by August 2012; over 90 per cent of these academies will continue to receive transitional funding in 2012/13. (para. 2.5)

Thus the average secondary sponsored academy cost over £2 million in transition funding, while the average vulnerable secondary school supported through City Challenge cost about £250k. The cost of the Challenge approach is therefore substantially less than the creation of a sponsored academy.

We then need to review which of these approaches has been more effective. As indicated above, Keys to Success schools improved by significantly more over the three years 2008-11 than other

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<sup>5</sup> All futures references to Keys to Success schools in this report should be taken to include schools in the equivalent Black Country programme, Pathways to Achievement.

<sup>6</sup> Even if the estimate of Keys to Success schools taking up 40% of the total budget were on the low side, average expenditure on a secondary Keys to Success school must have been less than £350k, to fit within the total Challenge budget.

schools with similar initial attainment. A regression-based analysis showed that the Keys to Success secondary schools improved by 2% more per year than schools with similar initial results that were not in the programme. As Section 2.3 indicated, the evidence about improvement in sponsored academies has varied, but the most positive studies indicate that, like Keys to Success schools, they improved approximately 2% per year more than schools with similar initial attainment. This indicates that the greater expenditure on academies did not produce any *greater* improvement than the Keys to Success programme, and Keys to Success was a substantially cheaper strategy.

A comparison of improvement over the period 2008-11 of secondary schools in the lowest quintile of 2008 attainment made by Hutchings et al. (2012). They compared sponsored academies, Keys to Success schools, and other low-attaining schools which had not received support from either source. They found that, on average, schools that had received support from Keys to Success improved significantly more than those that had not. Some Keys to Success schools had subsequently become sponsored academies, and they also showed significantly greater improvement than academies that had not been supported by Keys to Success. However, the sponsored academies that had never been part of Keys to Success did not improve any more than other schools in the same quintile of 2008 attainment that had experienced neither intervention. (For details, see Hutchings et al., 2012: 54-55.)

Most of the other Challenge programmes were very cheap indeed, allocating between £1k and £3k a year to each school involved. This was largely used for cover to release staff to visit other schools, and again appeared to be excellent value for money as a form of staff development. Moreover, the programmes for Satisfactory and Good schools also resulted in an improvement in attainment significantly greater than that in schools with equivalent initial results.

Overall, then, City Challenge appear to have been excellent value for money.

## 2.5 Contextual factors in area-based improvement programmes

The three Challenge areas were all urban areas with considerable levels of deprivation; thus the overall aim of the City Challenge, 'to crack the associated cycle of disadvantage and underachievement' in each area applied equally in all cases (DfES, 2007: 1).

However, there were also considerable variations across the areas. London is by far the largest area, with 32 LAs and over 1,100,000 pupils. Greater Manchester is about a third the size of London (ten LAs and 400,000 pupils, and the Black Country is much the smallest area (four LAs and less than 200,000 pupils).

It was important that each of the three areas had a **strong sense of identity** and civic pride, and a tradition of LAs working together. It has been suggested that the Black Country Challenge might have benefited from being based in a larger area, including Birmingham, but this would not have fitted with the local identities which clearly distinguished between these areas.

**Local attitudes** were undoubtedly key to setting up strategies such as City Challenge. While London had clear ownership of its Challenge, there were greater difficulties in the other two areas. A stakeholder interviewed during the City Challenge evaluation said '*it was very evident early on that the other two Challenges wanted to distance themselves from London, they didn't want the London*

*model*'. In Greater Manchester, a great deal of effort was made to secure local buy-in and a willingness to collaborate across the whole area (Ainscow, 2013). This preliminary work generally paid off in terms of local commitment to the Challenge. However, interviewees in the Black Country reported some ongoing resistance and lack of enthusiasm because the Black Country Challenge was seen as an imposed 'London' programme, and did not fit with local aspirations for school improvement (a Challenge programme with rather different activities had already been designed locally).

The **economies of the three areas** also vary. London is the capital, a global city, a financial centre, and a centre for media and the arts. Greater Manchester suffered considerably from the decline of manufacturing industry during the twentieth century, but has now diversified, and is reported to have the largest sub-regional economy outside London and South East England (New Economy, 2012). It is a centre of the arts, the media, higher education and commerce. The Black Country also suffered from the decline of manufacturing, and continues to face many economic challenges (Black Country Consortium, 2010). Where the local economy is more vibrant, pupils may develop higher aspirations; thus the Black Country faced greater challenges than the other areas in this respect. However, it is important to recognise that there are children in large urban areas who rarely leave the estates they live on and may be relatively unaware of the opportunities only a few miles away.

All three Challenge areas drew on **local institutions such as HEIs and cultural institutions**. The original plans for the London Challenge (DfES, 2003) emphasised the importance of drawing on all the resources of London, including local communities, arts organisations and businesses through the Business Challenge. The London Student Pledge was designed to widen young people's experiences and raise aspirations through the creation of enrichment activities inside and outside school. Other aspects of the London Challenge were the Summer University programme, and other links with higher education institutions. Similarly, in Greater Manchester, links with the various '*iconic organisations*' – the universities, media organisations and football clubs – were all central to the Challenge. The Chief Advisor reported that these organisations were keen to have more involvement with schools, and welcomed the joined up approach to this offered through the Greater Manchester Challenge.

Black Country interviewees strongly argued that the involvement of both the university and local businesses was a key aspect of raising aspirations. The original idea for the Black Country Challenge had come from the Black Country Consortium (a strategic partnership between the four LAs set up to coordinate urban regeneration), demonstrating that the Challenge was seen as an integral part of economic growth in the area. Wolverhampton University, the only higher education institution in the Black Country, was centrally involved in the Challenge; the Chief Advisor was based there and some university students worked in a mentoring role in schools, raising aspirations. While the arts and cultural institutions in the Black Country are more limited than in the other areas, the Black Country Challenge developed some successful work with the Royal Shakespeare Company, based outside the Black Country.

For pupils the key benefits of such links were widening horizons and raising aspirations. The London Student Pledge evaluation (Hoggart et al, 2008: 8) stated that:

Pledge activity was reported by teachers and students to have had a significant range of benefits for students and schools. Positive changes were reported in curriculum based skills, confidence, staff-student relations, and behaviour and attitudes to learning. Some of the evidence suggests the exposure to new experiences enabled students to begin a process of 'enrichment' activities, nurturing aspirations that were sustained beyond the funded activity.

The more limited range of educational and cultural activities available in the Black Country may have contributed to greater difficulty in raising pupil aspirations, and thus to the fact that the immediate outcomes of the Challenge suggest that it was less effective there.

Another important contextual factor is **the characteristics of the school intake**. All three areas have higher than average percentages of pupils eligible for Free School Meals, but this is highest in Inner London. London also has the greatest ethnic diversity; more than half the pupils came from Black and minority ethnic groups, compared with less than 30% in the Black Country and less than 20% in Greater Manchester (2011 figures).

Lupton (2004) has shown that high levels of material poverty may impact differently on pupils of different ethnicities. In the white working class schools she studied, pupils had emotional needs, often lacking in consistent attention at home. In contrast, the schools with large minority ethnic populations reported that pupils from minority ethnic families, and particularly those that did not speak English, were more likely to have home responsibilities (supporting parents in their work, translating) which impinged on their school work. Lupton also identified differences in parental attitude to education. Some white working class parents were reported to be giving clear messages to their children that school work was not important – possibly because family expectations of social mobility through education were conditioned by their own experiences. In contrast, some migrant families had high expectations that education was the key to social mobility. However, where second and third generation migrant families still find themselves in poverty, they, like the white working class, can lose faith in education as a route to social mobility.

Experience from the schools visited as part of the City Challenge evaluation suggested that the nature of some large working class estates with relatively little in/outward migration or population change militated against school improvement. The ethnicity of the inhabitants appeared to be less important than the general attitude of looking inwards and parochialism. Where all the pupils had similar levels of disadvantage, it was hard for the teachers to raise their own expectations, and for them to raise pupil aspirations. This was particularly the case in primary schools, where the entire school intake could come from a very limited area. Some schools on such estates characterised themselves as happy communities, but did little to stretch the children, and some staff were apparently unaware of the need to do so. However, coaching was an effective strategy to counter this. For example, one teacher reported that, when an experienced teacher from an Outstanding school had worked alongside her in her own classroom, the pupils had produced much better work than she had previously seen. As a result, she had raised the level of her expectations and demands of pupils.

Contextual factors, then, make it more challenging to raise attainment in some areas than others, and this review shows that the Black Country faced greater challenges than the other two areas.

We return to this issue of contextual factors in Section 5, which focuses on attainment in London.

### 3 Sustainability of improvement brought about by the Challenge

Sustainability is explored through a review of 2012 school and pupil data. We review whether the trajectory of improvement which took place during the Challenge years has been sustained in 2011-12, the year after the Challenge funding ended.

#### 3.1 School level data

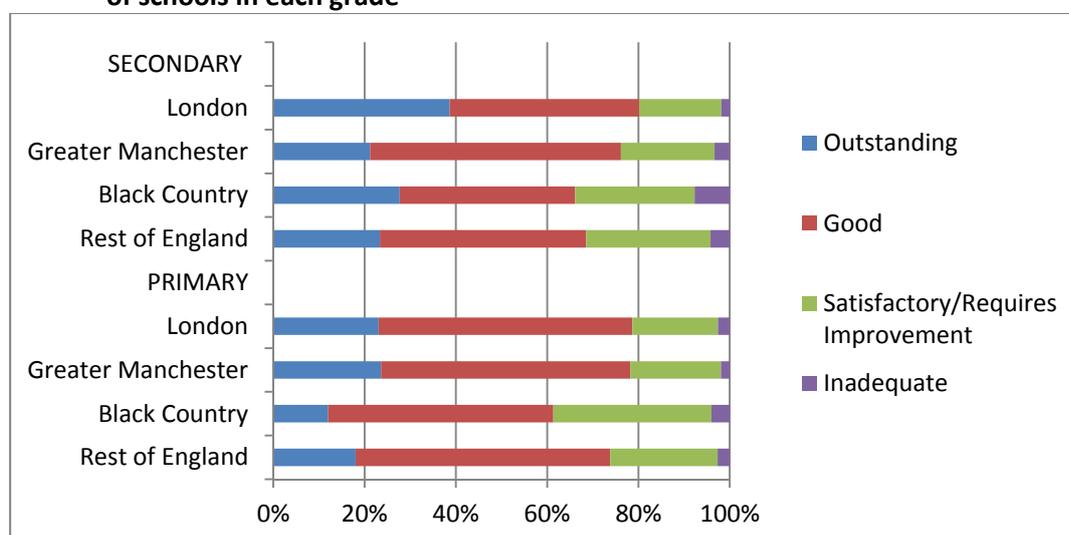
This section explores three forms of data about the quality of schools: Ofsted judgements for overall effectiveness; the extent to which schools achieved the floor standards<sup>7</sup>; and the percentage of pupils in each school achieving the expected level<sup>8</sup>.

##### 3.1.1 Ofsted judgements

Ofsted is the official body that inspects schools. Comparisons of Ofsted judgements over time are of limited value because, since the London Challenge began in 2003, the Ofsted inspection framework has changed a number of times<sup>9</sup>. Hutchings et al. (2012) showed that in each City Challenge area, the number of schools judged to be Good or Outstanding for overall effectiveness increased between 2008 and 2011. In London and Greater Manchester the proportion of Inadequate schools decreased over the same period, but in the Black Country it increased.

Recent inspection data (all Ofsted outcomes at the end of December 2012) show further increases in the percentage of Good and Outstanding schools in all three areas (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Most recent Ofsted grades for overall effectiveness as at end December 2012: percentage of schools in each grade**



Source: Ofsted Statistics

<sup>7</sup> Floor standards are the minimum levels of pupil attainment that the government expects schools to achieve (DfE, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> The government has defined the levels of attainment expected of pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 (age 11) and the end of Key Stage 4 (age 16).

<sup>9</sup> The Framework changed in 2005 and 2009 and in January and September 2012.

London has a higher proportion of Outstanding secondary schools than any other part of the country, and fewer Satisfactory /Requires Improvement<sup>10</sup>. In the primary sector, both London and Greater Manchester have more Outstanding and fewer Satisfactory /Requires Improvement than the rest of the country. However, the Ofsted outcomes in the Black Country show a higher proportion of Inadequate schools than the other Challenge areas and the rest of England.

### 3.1.2 School floor standards

Between 2008 and 2011, there was a greater reduction in the percentage of schools below the floor standard<sup>11</sup> in each City Challenge area than was the case in the rest of England. The pattern of change between 2011 and 2012 differed between primary and secondary schools:

- Primary: The percentage of schools that did not reach the floor standard decreased in each City Challenge area in 2012. The percentage in the Black Country matched the national figure (3.7%) while in London and Greater Manchester, it was lower (London 1.1%; Greater Manchester 2.5%).
- Secondary: The pattern in secondary schools was more complex, because the 2012 floor target was considerably more challenging than that for 2011. Thus the percentage of secondary schools below the floor target *increased* nationally and in each City Challenge area. Despite this increase, London and Greater Manchester had fewer schools below floor than the national figure (London 3%, Greater Manchester 6%, national 7%). However, in the Black Country, 15% of secondary schools failed to meet the floor standard in 2012.

### 3.1.3 Percentage of pupils in each school achieving expected level

In comparing the extent to which schools have improved over a period of time, it is important to recognise that the lowest attaining schools always show more improvement than those with the highest attainment, and indeed, on average, schools with high attainment may do less well year on year. Thus comparisons should only be made between schools with similar initial attainment.

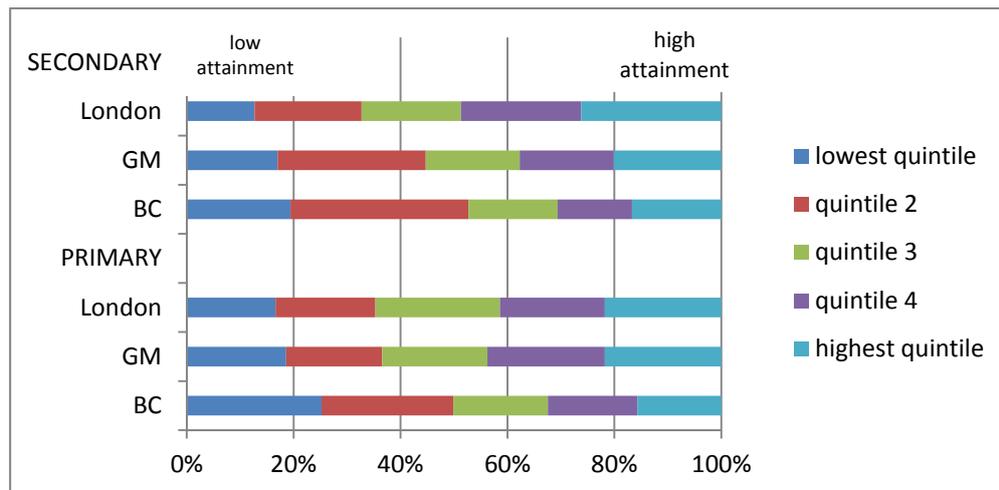
We have therefore divided all schools in England into five groups (quintiles) based on the percentage of pupils reaching the expected level in 2011. By definition, 20% of schools lie in each quintile; however, the percentage of schools in each Challenge area in each quintile varies. In London, almost half the secondary schools are found in the highest two quintiles. In contrast, in the Black Country fewer than 33% of schools are in the higher attainment quintiles (Figure 2).

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<sup>10</sup> Until 2012, this grade was known as Satisfactory, but under the new Framework, it has changed to Requires Improvement. However, schools that were inspected under the previous Framework and judged to be Satisfactory retain that grade until their next inspection.

<sup>11</sup> In 2012, a primary school was below the floor standard if fewer than 60% of pupils achieved the expected level (Level 4 in both English and mathematics), and less than the median percentage made the expected progress in English and mathematics. A secondary school was below the floor standard if fewer than 40% of pupils achieved the expected level (five A\*-C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics) and fewer than the median percentage made the expected progress in English and mathematics.

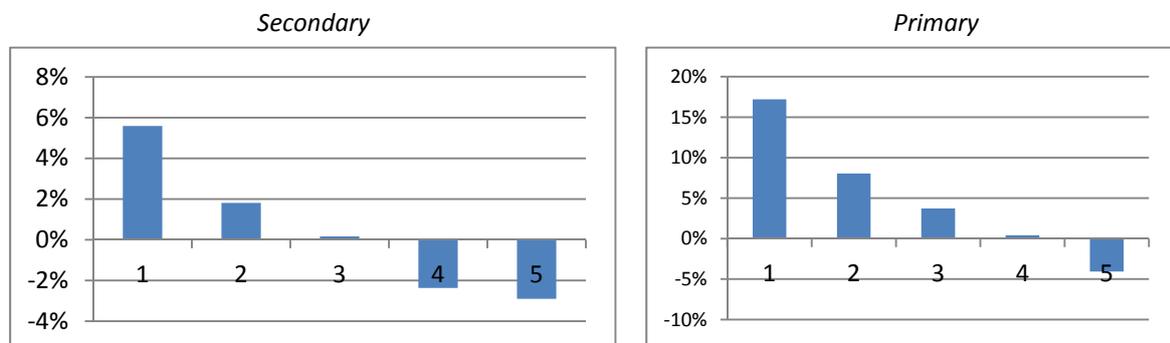
**Figure 2: Percentage of schools in Challenge areas in each 2011 performance quintile**



Source: School Performance Tables 2011 (DfE 2012b)

Figure 3 then shows the national pattern of change in attainment between 2011 and 2012 for each quintile. It can be seen that the schools in the lowest performance quintile showed the greatest improvement, while, on average, the schools in the highest performance quintile did less well in 2012 than in 2011.

**Figure 3: Mean improvement / reduction in percentage of pupils reaching the expected levels 2011-12, by 2011 school performance quintile (national figures)**



Source: School Performance Tables, 2011 and 2012 (DfE 2012b, 2013a)

Table 1 then shows the amounts by which mean improvement of school attainment in each quintile between 2011 and 2012 in each City Challenge area differed from the national pattern. In London, secondary schools in each quintile did better than was the case nationally, and the same was true for primary schools apart from those in the lowest quintile.

In Greater Manchester and the Black Country the picture was more mixed; in particular, this analysis shows that in the Black Country, the schools in the lowest two quintiles of 2011 attainment did considerably *less* well than schools nationally (and, as Figure 2 shows, around half the schools in the Black Country are in these quintiles).

**Table 1: Percentage by which schools in City Challenge areas in each 2011 school performance quintile did better or worse than the national pattern of change in percentage of pupils reaching the expected level**

	SECONDARY			PRIMARY		
	London %	Greater Manchester %	Black Country %	London %	Greater Manchester %	Black Country %
lowest quintile	+1.7	-1.7	-2.5	-0.3	+0.6	-2.7
quintile 2	+1.2	+0.2	-4.1	+1.1	-0.3	-0.3
quintile 3	+1.0	+1.8	-1.4	+1.0	-0.1	+0.3
quintile 4	+0.6	+1.7	+6.2	+0.9	+0.4	-0.7
highest quintile	+0.2	-0.6	+1.6	+1.8	-0.6	+1.1
all schools	-0.1	+0.2	-0.6	+0.1	-0.7	+0.5

Source: National Pupil Database

### 3.1.4 School performance: summary:

All three measures of school performance suggest that the improvements that occurred during the time the Challenge programmes were in operation have generally been sustained in London and Greater Manchester, but that in the Black Country, low-attaining schools did less well than schools nationally over the year 2011-12.

## 3.2 Pupil level data

In this section we consider pupil level attainment data, focusing on the percentage of pupils in each area reaching the expected levels<sup>12</sup>. Pupil attainment nationally has increased in primary and secondary schools. Figure 4 shows the national improvement and the improvement in each Challenge area since 2008, when City Challenge started.<sup>13</sup>

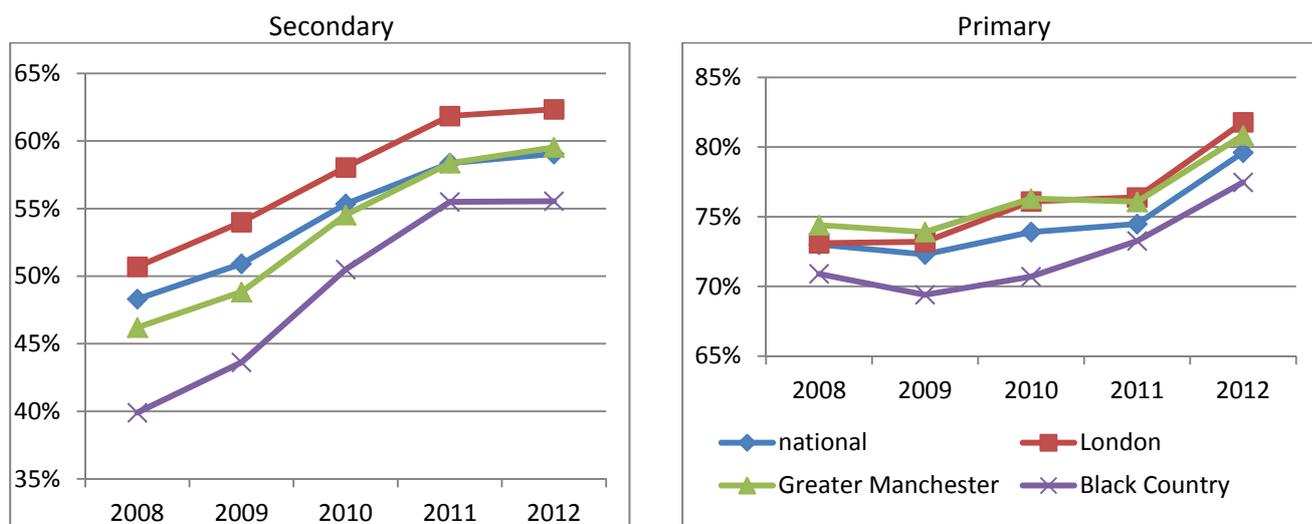
Figure 4 shows that since 2008, secondary pupils' attainment has improved rapidly, but in 2011-12, this slowed down<sup>14</sup>. In contrast, the primary 2012 figures showed a much greater increase in percentage of pupils achieving the expected level than had been the case in previous years. This relates to a change in the way primary pupils were assessed in English; the 2012 figures are explicitly stated to be not comparable with those from earlier years. However, the concern in this report is not the overall amount of improvement, but whether attainment in City Challenge areas improved more or less than the national improvement.

<sup>12</sup> The expected level for secondary pupils is five A\*-C GCSE grades including English and mathematics. For primary pupils it is Level 4 in both English and mathematics in national tests.

<sup>13</sup> In 2003, when the London Challenge started, the percentage of London pupils achieving the expected level was less than the national figure, but by 2008 it was higher than the national figure.

<sup>14</sup> This may be related to a change in grade boundaries in English GCSE. Whereas in 2011, 72% of those who took the exam achieved an A\*-C grade, in 2012, only 69% did so.

**Figure 4: Percentage of pupils achieving the expected levels at Key Stage 4 (secondary) and Key Stage 2 (primary), 2008-11**



Source: National Pupil Database

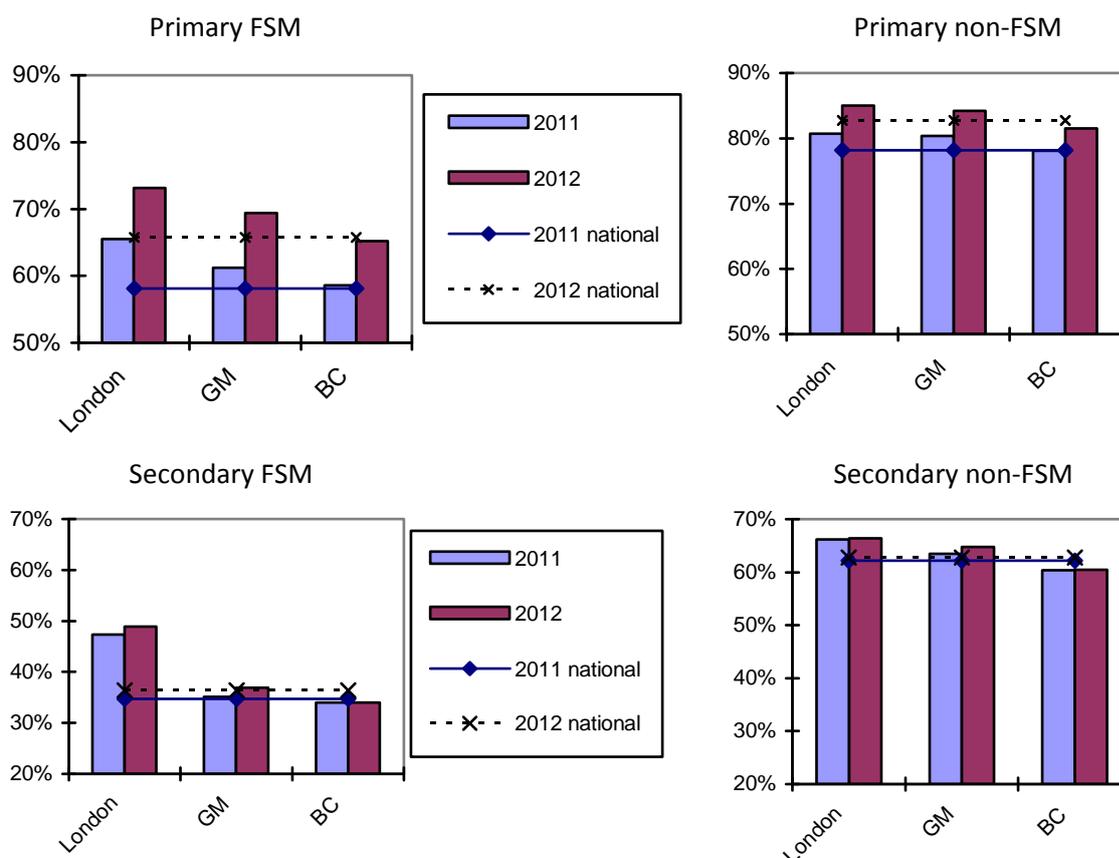
Figure 4 shows that between 2008 and 2011, all three Challenge areas showed a more rapid increase in percentage of pupils achieving the expected level than the national figure. In 2011-12, secondary attainment in the Black Country and London improved slightly less than the national figure, as did primary attainment in Greater Manchester and the Black Country. Thus, relative to national figures, the trajectory of improvement in these areas appears to have slightly slowed down.

However, a key issue affecting attainment is the nature of the pupil body. All three City Challenge areas have higher proportions of pupils from economically disadvantaged families than the national figure. Here we use eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) as an indicator of disadvantage<sup>15</sup>. There is a persistent gap between the attainment of FSM pupils and non-FSM pupils; nationally, 63.8% of those secondary pupils who were *not* eligible for FSM achieved the expected level in 2012, while only 36.8% of the FSM pupils did so – a gap of 26.2% (DfE, 2013b). Thus one could expect areas with a high proportion of FSM pupils to have overall attainment below the national average. However, this is not necessarily the case.

Figure 5 shows that London’s high overall attainment is based on attainment for FSM primary and secondary pupils that is well above the national figure. This is particularly striking in Inner London, where 76% of primary and 53% of secondary FSM pupils achieved the expected levels in 2012. It also shows that in London and Greater Manchester, each pupil group (primary and secondary FSM and non-FSM) improved between 2011 and 2012 by almost the same amount as the national improvement, but in the Black Country improvement was below the national level in each case.

<sup>15</sup> In 2012, 14.3% of all secondary pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 were eligible for FSM. The percentages in the City Challenge areas were: Black Country 18.7%, Greater Manchester 18.9%, and London 23% (with Inner London much higher, at 35.3%, compared with 17.2% in Outer London) (DfE, 2013b).

**Figure 5: Percentage of FSM and non-FSM pupils achieving the expected level, 2011 and 2012, compared with the national figures, by City Challenge area**



Source: National Pupil Database

Other pupil characteristics also impact on attainment, including gender (girls do better than boys) and ethnicity (the highest attainment is among Chinese pupils, while Black Caribbean are below average). However, these gaps are smaller than the FSM gap. Tables 2-4 analyse the changes in percentages of pupils achieving the expected level (compared with the national change) for different pupil groups. For reasons of space, only the broad ethnic groups – White, Mixed, Asian and Black – are shown, though all have been reviewed; Chinese pupils and those of other ethnicities have been omitted because the numbers were small. Tables 2-4 also show the change in percentage making the expected progress in English and mathematics. Rather than show the percentages achieving the various targets, the focus in Tables 2-4 is on:

- 1) the extent to which each City Challenge area exceeded or fell below the national average in 2011, and
- 2) the extent to which improvement 2011-12 in the City Challenge area exceeded or fell below the national average improvement.

**Table 2: LONDON: amount by which London figures exceeded /fell short of national figures for  
a) percentage reaching expected levels and making expected progress in 2011; and  
b) improvement in these figures between 2011 and 2012**

	SECONDARY		PRIMARY	
	2011 attainment, London compared with national %	2011-12 change in attainment, London compared with national %	2011 attainment, London compared with national %	2011-12 change in attainment, London compared with national %
<i>achieving expected level</i>				
all pupils	+3.5	-0.2	+1.9	+0.3
pupils eligible for FSM	+12.6	-0.1	+7.4	0
pupils not eligible for FSM	+4.0	-0.4	+2.5	-0.2
boys	+3.5	+0.1	+2.1	+0.5
girls	+3.4	-0.5	+1.6	+0.1
White	+2.7	+0.2	+2.6	-0.2
Mixed	+2.7	+0.3	+2.6	+0.6
Asian	+6.9	-0.8	+5.2	-0.5
Black	+1.9	-0.4	+1.7	-0.1
<i>making expected progress</i>				
English	+5.1	+0.5	+3.9	-1.3
mathematics	+7.6	-1.0	+2.9	-0.4

Source: National Pupil Database

Table 2 shows that in 2011, a higher percentage of London pupils from each of the listed groups achieved the expected levels than was the case nationally. In particular, a far higher percentage of FSM pupils achieved the expected levels (secondary, +12.6%; primary, +7.4%). In the year 2011-12, improvement in London was marginally less than it was nationally for some pupil groups (e.g. secondary FSM, and primary and secondary non-FSM and Asian) – but this still left London pupils well ahead of the national average.

A higher percentage of both primary and secondary pupils in London made the expected progress in English and mathematics in 2011 than was the case nationally. This was particularly striking among secondary FSM pupils (English, +14%, mathematics, +17.8%). As with other measures, the London lead decreased slightly in 2012, suggesting a slight slowing down of the trajectory of improvement

The picture was rather more mixed for Greater Manchester schools (Table 3).

**Table 3: GREATER MANCHESTER: amount by which Greater Manchester figures exceeded /fell short of national figures for  
a) percentage reaching expected levels and making expected progress in 2011; and  
b) improvement in these figures between 2011 and 2012**

	SECONDARY		PRIMARY	
	2011 attainment, GM compared with national %	2011-12 change in attainment, GM compared with national %	2011 attainment, GM compared with national %	2011-12 change in attainment, GM compared with national %
<i>achieving expected level</i>				
all pupils	-0.3	+0.7	+1.6	-0.3
pupils eligible for FSM	+0.4	0.0	+3.1	+0.5
pupils not eligible for FSM	+1.3	+0.7	+2.2	-0.7
boys	-0.3	+0.8	+1.3	-0.3
girls	-0.2	+0.7	+1.8	-0.5
White	+0.3	+0.9	+2.4	-0.5
Mixed	-3.3	-0.3	0	-0.3
Asian	-3.7	-0.4	-2.2	+1.0
Black	-3.1	+0.1	+0.3	0.0
<i>making expected progress</i>				
English	-0.6	-0.4	+2.7	-0.7
mathematics	-2.0	-1.2	+3.3	-0.7

Source: National Pupil Database

In Greater Manchester, secondary attainment in 2011 was close to the national average, and generally improved 2011-12 by slightly more than the national figure. However, Black and minority ethnic (BME) pupils' attainment was below average and generally showed below average improvement. Pupils' progress in secondary schools was below the national figure in 2011, and fell slightly between 2011 and 2012.

Primary pupils' 2011 attainment and pupil progress was above the national average, but improvement was slightly below average for most groups.

The picture in the Black Country was rather different. Table 4 shows that, despite the increase in attainment during the Black Country Challenge years, the percentage of both primary and secondary pupils reaching the expected levels was still below the national figure in 2011, and improvement in 2011-12 was also below average for most groups. However, the percentage of pupils making the expected progress in mathematics, while still below the national percentage, closed the gap slightly in 2012; this improvement was particularly marked among the pupils not eligible for FSM.

**Table 4: Black Country: amount by which the Black Country figures exceeded /fell short of national figures for**  
**a) percentage reaching expected levels and making expected progress in 2011; and**  
**b) improvement in these figures between 2011 and 2012**

	SECONDARY		PRIMARY	
	2011 attainment, BC compared with national %	2011-12 change in attainment, BC compared with national %	2011 attainment, BC compared with national %	2011-12 change in attainment, BC compared with national %
<i>achieving expected level</i>				
all pupils	-2.9	-0.6	-1.2	-0.9
pupils eligible for FSM	-0.8	-1.7	+0.6	-1.1
pupils not eligible for FSM	-1.8	-0.4	-0.2	-1.1
boys	-3.0	-0.3	-1.7	-0.3
girls	-2.7	-0.9	-0.7	-1.7
White	-3.3	-1.0	-0.8	-0.6
Mixed	-6.8	+0.1	-5.5	+2.2
Asian	-1.3	+1.5	-0.9	-2.9
Black	-1.7	-4.3	-0.7	-2.8
<i>making expected progress</i>				
English	-1.9	-0.7	+1.6	-0.8
mathematics	-4.1	+0.2	+0.2	+0.4

Source: National Pupil Database

### 3.2.1 Pupil level attainment: summary

The pupil data show a similar pattern to the school data. London pupils from all groups (and particularly those eligible for FSM) achieved substantially above the national figures, and their attainment generally improved marginally less than the national pattern. Greater Manchester pupils' attainment was close to the national figure in 2011, and in secondary schools, showed slightly above average improvement. However, Greater Manchester pupils from BME groups did less well than the national pattern in 2011, and this did not improve in 2012. Attainment in the Black Country was below national figures in 2011, and, for most pupil groups, slipped slightly further behind in 2012.

### 3.3 Reasons for sustainability / lack of sustainability of improvement

This section reviews the reasons why the improvement that took place during City Challenge has been sustained or not sustained, drawing on the interviews carried out with stakeholders in each area.

Several interviewees pointed out that it is still **too soon to assess the full impact of City Challenge**. They pointed out that the effect of improvements in the Foundation stage, or in primary /secondary transition, will not yet be reflected in attainment figures, because the pupils affected have not yet reached the age for taking national tests or GCSEs. Thus interviewees in the Black Country said that they anticipated higher attainment in 2013.

Linked to this, interviewees (and particularly all those in the Black Country) reported that during City Challenge, there was a strong drive from the DfE for schools to improve their results for the next year. As a result, much of the effort went into the groups of pupils who were about to take GCSE or national tests. This was said to have affected secondary schools more than primary, and led to a very **strong focus on pupils who were borderline** between GCSE grades C and D. Clearly this strategy might result in an immediate improvement in results, but would not lead to sustained improvement.

Interviewees argued that it was unfortunate that **the end of the Challenge coincided with so many other changes**. These included a massive reduction in LA capacity to support vulnerable schools. This affected some LAs more than others; in some LAs, schools undoubtedly experienced a simultaneous withdrawal of support from both the Challenge and the LA School Improvement team. Some interviewees also argued that the opportunity for Outstanding schools to convert to Academy status had distracted some schools from ongoing efforts to raise attainment; this was said to be particularly the case in schools where the Outstanding grade was more *'fragile'*.

Many interviewees identified **aspects of the City Challenge programme as impacting on the extent and sustainability of school improvement**. These included:

- The **time scale**: London secondary schools had the most sustained Challenge input over an eight year period, and the data indicate that improvement in these schools has been sustained. The other areas had only three years' funding, and it was argued that the fact that funding was slow to come through had delayed the start of some activities.
- **Continuity of personnel**: the Black Country interviewees argued that the number of changes to the DfE team responsible for the Black Country Challenge was unhelpful; in contrast, Greater Manchester interviewees argued that the continuity experienced there had resulted in the development of positive relationships which supported ongoing school improvement. Another aspect of continuity related to the team of Advisors in each area. The London secondary programme was run by a highly experienced team of Advisors who, over the eight years, were able to pool their ideas and develop more effective ways of working.
- The extent to which those in the area felt **ownership of the Challenge** in their area: this was discussed in Section 2.5.
- The **characteristics of each Challenge area**:
  - Throughout the fieldwork for the City Challenge evaluation, it appeared that there was a greater degree of insularity in the Black Country than in the other areas. This was evidenced by, for example, a strong feeling against working with NLEs and LLEs from outside the Black Country, or even those from another Black Country LA. One interviewee for this project argued that schools had tended to compare their attainment figures with other schools in the LA, rather than looking at the national picture; this had limited their aspirations, because none of the schools in that LA had high attainment.
  - One of the early issues that the Black Country Challenge had to face was that the number of Outstanding schools that could potentially support other schools was very limited. Possibly it would have been helpful in this respect if the Challenge had involved a larger area (for

example, including Birmingham), but, as Section 2.5 argued, this would have been unhelpful in relation to the need for each Challenge to have a strong local identity.

Finally, interviewees argued that there were a range of activities in each area which could be seen as a **legacy of the Challenge**, and that these impacted on the sustainability of school improvement in the area. These legacy activities are explored in Section 4.

### 3.4 Sustainability: summary

A review of attainment in 2011-12, the year after Challenge funding ended, shows that the improvement which took place during the Challenge was generally sustained in London and Greater Manchester, but that in the Black Country improvement during 2011-12 was below the national average. While London attainment was well above the national average, there were some signs that the trajectory of improvement may be slowing down. Factors that may have impacted on sustainability include the longer time scale in London; the size and characteristics of the areas; and the extent to which those in each area felt ownership of the Challenge. It was argued that it is still too early to see the full impact of the Challenge, as pupils affected by initiatives to improve early years education or primary-secondary transition will not yet have taken national tests.

## 4 The legacies of the London Challenge and City Challenge

The legacy of City Challenge can be seen in national school improvement strategies, specific activities in each Challenge area, in other organisations, and in individual schools.

### 4.1 National legacy activities

A number of school improvement strategies which originated in the Challenge have now been adopted nationally, and are organised through the National College<sup>16</sup>. An important aspect of City Challenge was that the National College played a key role in the Leadership Strategies within each Challenge area. Some of these strategies have continued and have spread across the country; these centre around the idea that schools can learn from other schools.

A central part of the Leadership Strategies was that individual headteachers and teachers from successful schools should play a key role in supporting the improvement of other schools. **National and Local Leaders of Education** (NLEs and LLEs) took on a wide range of roles in the Challenge, including supporting the weakest schools (those in the Keys to Success programme); leading groups of Good schools that aimed to become Outstanding, and of Satisfactory primary schools that aimed to become Good. Both the headteachers of the supported schools and the NLEs/LLEs themselves reported that the process of school-to-school support resulted in improvement in their schools. NLEs and LLEs are a key element in current school improvement strategies.

The Challenge evaluation (Hutchings et al., 2012) also reported on the very effective work of some individual teachers who worked alongside middle leaders or teachers in a more vulnerable school.

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<sup>16</sup> The National College for School Leadership merged with the Teaching Agency to become the National College for Teaching and Leadership in April 2013.

This role continues as **Specialist Leader in Education** (SLE) – an outstanding middle or senior leader who has the skills to support individuals or teams in similar positions in other schools.

A new role based on the NLE model is that of **National Leader of Governance** (NLG). NLGs are highly effective chairs of governors who use their skills and experience to support a chair of governors in another school or academy, providing additional support alongside provision offered by local authorities, dioceses and other partners.

Currently the National College recruits and designates NLEs. Deployments are then negotiated between the NLE and the relevant local authority or appropriate commissioning body. However, this varies in different areas. The College works closely with local authorities, diocesan bodies and other agencies to identify, recruit, train and deploy LLEs. They are deployed by LAs or Teaching Schools (see below). SLEs are recruited, designated and deployed through Teaching Schools. The College works closely with local authorities, diocesan bodies and other agencies to identify, recruit, train and deploy NLGs. College associates act as the brokers for NLGs (National College, 2012.)

A second key aspect of the legacy is the designation nationally of **Teaching Schools**. The London Challenge created quality assured professional development programmes which took place in Outstanding schools, designated Teaching or Facilitation Schools. The Outstanding Teacher Programme (OTP) and the Improving Teacher Programme (ITP) combined structured input and discussion with observation, and the Challenge evaluation (Hutchings et al., 2012) noted that they were widely praised by headteachers and teachers. This idea that schools can take a lead in professional development was then more widely adopted, with Teaching Schools designated throughout England from 2011.

The current model is an extension of the Teaching School model that operated during the Challenge, in that Teaching Schools now play a leading role in the training and professional development of teachers, support staff and headteachers, as well as contributing to the raising of standards through school-to-school support (National College, 2012). They do not necessarily run the OTP and ITP, though many do, but they do fit with the Challenge philosophy of teachers learning from their peers.

The scheme has further developed since the Challenge ended, with the creation of Teaching School Alliances. Each Teaching School is expected to develop a group of schools and other partners. This includes all those schools that benefit by receiving support, as well as strategic partners that will lead on certain aspects of delivery. Alliances may be cross-phase and cross-sector, work across local authorities and may include different types of organisations. This development supports school-to-school collaboration. In Greater Manchester, some Teaching School Alliances overlap with other Challenge legacy programmes such as the Family of Schools (see below), thus reinforcing connections and relationships within networks.

## 4.2 Legacy activities in each Challenge area

Each Challenge area has developed organisations that can be seen as legacies of the Challenge. These are all new and are developing rapidly; this report aims to represent the activities at the time of writing, but these are subject to change.

## London

The **London Leadership Strategy** (LLS) is a continuation of the London Leadership Strategy set up as part of the London Challenge in 2003, when it was run through the National College. Many of the Challenge interventions were led by headteachers as part of the Leadership Strategy (for example, the Good to Outstanding, Good to Great and Going for Great programmes, Moving to New Headship and the VI form project). When the London Challenge funding came to an end, the Leadership Strategy group formed a not-for-profit limited company and created a website. The Board is chaired by Professor David Woods, the former Chief Advisor for the London Challenge.

Schools pay for the programmes they engage in. The LLS is also bidding for funding to the London Schools Excellence Fund. No distinction is made between academies and other schools. A full-time administrator is employed who focuses on the secondary programmes.

The *secondary* programmes have a variety of approaches; some are based mainly around conferences at which heads are encouraged to network and learn from one another, while others consist mainly of brokerage of school-to-school support. They include some programmes that formed part of the London Challenge (e.g. Good to Great, Going for Great, the 6<sup>th</sup> Form project) and some which have been developed since that time. One of these, Securing Good, is focused on schools that are in the Ofsted categories Satisfactory or Requires Improvement. It consists of five conferences based around the Ofsted inspection framework, and five days support from a consultant head (who may be an NLE). From 2011, the LLS has also worked with schools outside London (see Section 4.4).

The main *primary* programme is Successful Teaching and Learning, together with developments of this focusing on behaviour and coaching and mentoring. This has been designed since the end of the Challenge with the new Ofsted Framework in mind. Facilitators attend a two-day training course which equips them to lead the programme; they must be based in schools led by NLEs or LLEs (though not necessarily Teaching Schools). The facilitator then runs the programme in their own school over a six-week period, with up to 12 participants from other schools. Each session is based around a theme, and involves observation of outstanding teaching and time for sharing and discussion. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive; teachers have commented that the course has given them the opportunity to reflect and the concrete strategies and motivation to develop their teaching. Take-up of this programme has been both within London and in other areas. The primary LLS also organise a programme of support for new headteachers when they first take up their posts.

The National College has recently asked the LLS to take over the coordination of the work of primary NLEs in vulnerable schools in London and in Kent. Funding is provided for this work, and the LLS take 10% as brokerage. In addition, the primary team broker NLE deployments for LAs and also for academy chains and free schools. Again this takes place both in London and elsewhere.

To date, the LLS carried out limited marketing of their offer because all their programmes have been over-subscribed. Indeed, the main problem they face (particularly at primary level), is that they are overwhelmed by the demand. However, for some programmes a targeting approach is used. For example, schools are contacted about the secondary programme Securing Good from a list of schools in London that are in the relevant Ofsted categories, following consultation with Ofsted.

These schools are invited to an initial day event, after which they decide whether they wish to pursue the programme.

### *Greater Manchester*

Two legacy organisations have been set up.

The **Greater Manchester School Improvement Partnership Board** was set up by the LA Chief Executives' group as part of the legacy of the Greater Manchester Challenge to help to coordinate collaborative school improvement activities across the sub-region. It meets six times a year. Membership includes representatives of the main groups involved in school improvement in Greater Manchester: LAs (Directors of Children's Services and Heads of School Improvement/Education lead officers); Teaching Schools; the National College of School Leadership; and By Schools for Schools (described below). There is also a Higher Education representative – Professor Mel Ainscow, the former Greater Manchester Challenge Chief Advisor. The Board is chaired by a Director of Children's Services; the intention of this is to convey the message that the focus is not narrowly on school improvement, but rather on a wider agenda, including community working, parenting and so on. Each LA contributes £1,000 a year which pays for the Board to be supported by a former Director of Children's Services.

The aim of the group is to share information in a constructive way about the range of school improvement practices and opportunities in Greater Manchester; it is not trying to control what is happening. The group is also applying for funding from the Education Endowment Fund to take forward some of the principles of the Greater Manchester Challenge.

It was clear from the interviews we conducted that this arrangement has led to close links between By schools for Schools, the Teaching School Alliances, and some of the LAs.

**By Schools for Schools** is a not-for-profit limited company set up and led by headteachers. Its main aim is to broker school-to-school support. It works in partnership with LAs, and has operational responsibility for NLEs and LLEs in Greater Manchester. The governance group includes representative headteachers from the ten LAs, the Chair of the Heads of School Improvement group, and National College representation. Again there is an explicit effort to bring together all relevant parties. By Schools for Schools also employs the same individual who supports the Partnership Board, which means that the two organisations are able to work very closely together.

It offers a variety of services to schools, including a process of school review in which a team including an NLE spend a day reviewing all aspects of a school. They then write a report and action plan. The website also identifies a range of ways in which support from experienced or outstanding practitioners can be brokered by By Schools for Schools.

Currently some funding left from the Greater Manchester Challenge is used to subsidise the support provided to vulnerable schools, but this money will soon run out, and the level of the subsidy has been reduced. In other cases the supported school pays the supporting school the cost of the NLE/LLE (or their staff), and the NLE/LLE pays commission to By Schools for Schools for the brokerage.

Requests for support come from individual schools and from LAs. In the case of the most vulnerable schools, requests most often come from the LA, because headteachers of such schools are often not

clear about the support that is needed. LAs are generally not now able to provide the necessary support themselves, and so turn to By Schools for Schools.

To date, By School for Schools is predominantly focusing on brokering support for weaker schools. In the future it aims work with schools that are Good and aim to become Outstanding.

Under the umbrella of By Schools for Schools is the primary Family of Schools, a legacy structure designed to encourage schools to communicate and work together. Although within the umbrella of By Schools for Schools, it has its own staff and independent organisation. The Family of Schools is funded by annual subscription from participating schools. It holds regular conferences and encourages collaborative activity between schools.

By Schools for Schools provides support for convertor academies on the same terms as for other schools. It does not generally work with sponsored academies because academy chains have their own school improvement arrangements. However, when asked, it has provided support, though sponsored academies are not eligible for the subsidised support.

### *Black Country*

At the end of the funded Challenge, The Chief Advisor for the Black Country Challenge said that the main legacy would be the BCCSIP offer. BCCSIP was a School Improvement Partnership based in the University of Wolverhampton, and involved all four Black Country LAs. It pre-dated the Black Country Challenge. During the Challenge it had a contract to deliver some school improvement activities in schools (in much the same way as Education London had a contract in London, and Tribal had in Greater Manchester).

BCCSIP has now been replaced by Education Central, which is also based in the University of Wolverhampton. Interviewees reported that Education Central is building on the experience of the Challenge. Their offer booklet refers to school-to-school support, saying that Education Central brokers customised support from successful headteachers and expert practitioners. Interviewees stressed that this is a key activity within BCCSIP. The offer booklet also sets out a wide range of fairly traditional courses for teachers and associate staff (for example, a one day course in creating a school culture which will prevent bullying; a practical training day focusing on circle time; teaching assistant training in developing basic mathematics). In addition, there are programmes for pupils such as motivational coaching provided by university students for those taking GCSE (an activity that originated during the Challenge).

## **4.3 Other legacy organisations**

A substantial number of initiatives across the country appear to have been modelled on aspects of City Challenge. Those referred to below simply illustrate a range of different types of organisation and structure; this list is not comprehensive.

**Challenge Partners** was launched in 2011 by some of the key players in the London Challenge, with the aim of continuing and developing the school-to-school approach to improvement. It is a collaborative network of more than 180 schools (the Partners) across the country. The organisation is built around a network of hubs, complemented by centrally run activities. Partner schools pay a

subscription. Additional funding has come from the Education Endowment Fund. (Challenge Partners, 2012)

As explained above, the **London Leadership Strategy also works with schools in other parts of the country**. This is partly a franchise model, and local facilitators are trained. Seminars are held in London, but local NLEs are used. Requests have been received from a range of areas including Devon, East Sussex, Greater Manchester, Medway and Cornwall.

**Salford LA** has set up a school-led school improvement strategy, the Salford School Provider Arm. This arose directly from experience of the Challenge. The headteacher of an Outstanding local secondary school leads this, and coordinates the work of local LLEs and SLEs. Support offered includes provision of investigation and diagnostic assessment of a school or department; peer mentoring; advice on use of data; teaching and learning support. To date, the main focus of this work has been secondary schools. Primary schools work in collaborative networks which were described as supportive but not sufficiently challenging; this is an area for development.

It was reported that a **Catholic diocese** is now aiming to set up a school-to-school support system, though this is still in the early stages of development.

**United Learning**, led by Jon Coles, who played a key role in setting up the London Challenge in 2003, have employed a number of the former Challenge Advisors to contribute to effective school improvement structures in the academy chain. Each of the sponsored academies is allocated an Advisor (regardless of whether that academy is vulnerable or not). The Advisor reviews the school with the headteacher, makes suggestions, and has access to funding where additional support is needed. United Learning has also developed arrangements for pairs of schools to work together; this includes independent schools working with sponsored academies, for example. These are intended to be equal partnership in which both schools learn, rather than arrangements where one school supports another.

There are a number of **initiatives in urban areas** to raise educational standards. For example, Leeds set up a Challenge programme two years ago. They commissioned an independent report of strengths and weaknesses which was conducted by Sir Tim Brighouse and Professor David Woods, chosen for their experience in the London Challenge. The **Leeds Children and Young People's Plan (2012)** states:

The Leeds Education Challenge sets out a vision for every child to be in learning, every school to be a great school and every young person to be succeeding. It outlines measurable priorities and indicators for achieving these ambitions and is supported by detailed action plans.

Commitment to support the Education Challenge was secured from various other agencies in the city – political, business, learning, third sector and public sector. Education Leeds started to act on some recommendations of the report, many of which related to school improvement. For example, school collaboration was encouraged. However, as a result of diminishing resources, less has been done than had perhaps been hoped.

A more recent initiative is in **Liverpool**. The Mayor has launched an Education Commission which aims to review achievement, identify where more support is needed, and work with partners and schools to respond to the Government's agenda of school autonomy.

These initiatives are both based in a single LA, and neither has specific additional funding. Thus they cannot be equated to City Challenge.

The Mayor of **London's** Education Inquiry can also be seen as an area-based initiative. Unlike the ventures in Leeds and Liverpool, it has secured government funding of £20m, to which the Greater London Authority has added a further £4.25m. This funding forms the London Schools Excellence Fund, and is being distributed in response to bids, rather than to lead or coordinate school improvement initiatives. Thus this initiative does not resemble the London Challenge.

#### 4.4 The legacy in schools

All the headteachers and other stakeholders argued that schools had changed considerably as a result of the Challenge, but the specific legacies they mentioned differed. This section includes all the points that were made by interviewees, but clearly not all the points would apply in every school.

- Interviewees reported that schools have become more **outward looking**. This included:
  - *Working with other schools*: Some have continued to work with schools they worked with during the Challenge. Others have developed new school links (in some cases formed through their LA, and in other cases brokered through other organisations e.g. Challenge Partners). Black Country interviewees reported that a key legacy is that schools are now more aware that they can learn from each other, and are now more prepared to look beyond LA boundaries.

Some of the groups or networks which were formed during the Challenge have been able to develop into groupings in the new school improvement structures, such as Teaching School Alliances.
  - *Comparing their data with national figures and schools outside their own LAs*: this was mentioned in the Black Country, where it was acknowledged that some schools had previously tended only to be concerned about the results of their immediate local competitors.
  - *Being more comfortable with external scrutiny* (for example, inviting other heads to conduct a review of the school).
- Interviewees argued that some schools had **more effective processes and structures in place** as a result of learning during the Challenge, for example:
  - regular and rigorous reviews of pupil progress in which teachers are held accountable for progress;
  - use of the coaching cycle experienced during the Challenge to improve the quality of teaching;
  - more effective data analysis and use of data;
  - improved primary/secondary transition arrangements;
  - improved leadership structures (for example, the structure of the senior leadership team or arrangements for middle leadership).

- More broadly, it appeared that heads had a greater **awareness of alternative ways of organising or doing things**, because they had seen more of the practices of other schools. This focused their attention on choosing the most effective strategies.
- Some schools had **maintained relationships with those who they had worked with during City Challenge**:
  - Challenge Advisors: reported by one school where the Challenge Advisor's new role made this possible. Other schools had lost contact;
  - NLE or LLE: reported by one school, which still paid the LLE for some support;
  - Teaching Schools: One school reported maintaining contact for a limited period with the Teaching School they had previously worked with;
  - schools with which they had worked collaboratively.

However, while some had maintained links formed during the Challenge, the majority of headteachers interviewed had not formed new school links.

- As a result of learning during the Challenge, it was reported that many headteachers and teachers now had **higher expectations** of their pupils. This was because, as a result of coaching or attending the ITP or OTP, they now had a clearer idea of what it was possible for pupils to achieve. In some schools, there appeared to be a shift from focusing on the deficit of the pupils to the need to improve teaching and learning.
- Some interviewees commented that the **coaching skills of senior and middle leaders** had developed. This was most often noted in relation to schools that had become Teaching Schools or were led by NLEs or LLEs.
- Some headteachers commented that they now have a **greater awareness of what to do to improve their schools further**. There was also a recognition that school improvement is a journey, and that whilst it is possible to make 'quick gains' in some areas (particularly boosting the attainment of pupils taking national tests), long-term school improvement involves reviewing all the processes and structures in the school, not simply focusing on exam classes. Linked to this, some (but not all) of the heads interviewed appeared to have become more confident in directing their own school's improvement, and more confident in accessing any support they needed.
- Many **teachers' and school leaders' careers** had opened up as a result of the opportunities afforded to work outside their own schools both during the Challenge and in its legacy. This had provided an injection of renewed energy and enthusiasm which it was argued also benefited the individual's own school.

#### 4.5 Legacy activities: discussion

It is evident that a considerable proportion of the current arrangements and structures for school improvement, both nationally, and in each area, can be seen as a legacy of the Challenge programmes. The ways of working developed through the Challenge have changed the ways in which professional development activity takes place, and schools try to improve.

However, it is important to note that LAs are still key players, because they have a statutory responsibility in relation to schools in Ofsted categories. Currently, with ongoing cuts in LA funding, LA provision of school improvement services is very variable. While some LAs have retained the majority of their school improvement teams, and are still the key organisation to which schools turn when they need support, in other LAs the school improvement service has been drastically cut. In some cases LA officers are still able to advise schools about where they might access the support they need, in other authorities our interviews indicated that this is not happening.

As well as LAs, there are numerous consultants and companies offering services to schools, as well as Teaching School Alliances, NLEs and other Challenge legacy structures. David Hargreaves (2013) referred to this as an 'emerging chaotic structure'. The interviews carried out for this research have given us some notion of how all of this appears to headteachers. Here we consider the strengths and limitations of the Challenge legacy activities in the wider context of the move to a marketised system of school improvement. This section draws on interviews with stakeholders across the City Challenge areas. Inevitably, the reports given by individual headteachers varied widely, and the small scale of this research means that we cannot say how representative any of them were.

The strength of all the legacy activities is that they foster school-to-school collaborative activity, and ensure that the talents of the best school leaders are used for the benefit of other schools (the moral purpose of education). It was widely agreed that learning from other schools was a successful strategy for school improvement. However, it was clear from the interviews we conducted that, while there are many effective activities going on, there are also some limitations and gaps.

A key concern is that **the various activities and organisations are very fragmented**, and there is no overall coordination or oversight of what is happening. Greater Manchester has made a particular effort to organise a 'joined-up' system, using the Partnership Board to bring together the work of the LAs, Teaching Schools Alliances, NLEs and LLEs and By Schools for Schools. However, interviewees commented that the success of this relies very much on the individuals who are centrally concerned, and is therefore fragile. In London, it has proved more difficult to create a joined up system. At the time of writing, the LLS deploys NLEs to the most vulnerable primary schools, with funding from the National College, but does not do this for secondary schools. An LLS interviewee commented on their difficulties in trying to establish working links with primary Teaching School Alliances. This fragmentation has a number of consequences.

There may be **duplication of effort** among the various organisations and individuals trying to arrange support. Some interviewees in legacy organisations expressed concern at their lack of knowledge of what else is out there. While some key individuals are involved in a number of different organisations, and are therefore able to share their knowledge, there are no formal structures for doing this (with the exception of the Greater Manchester Partnership Board).

Many interviewees pointed out that it is inevitable that **some schools will not receive the support they need**. The City Challenge evaluation found that the leaders of the most vulnerable schools (particularly in the primary sector) often have very limited ideas about what is needed to improve the school. In some cases, they were initially surprised by their Challenge Advisor's recommendations, and did not see how they would benefit the school, though once they had implemented the action plan, they were able to understand the rationale. The process of working

with an Advisor thus acted as a very effective way of coaching headteachers so that they were able to lead school improvement in the future. This point has emphasised in recent interviews. A Greater Manchester interviewee said: *'One of our worries is that vulnerable schools don't always realise they need support and don't recognise the importance of investing in staff development.'* Another deplored the current *'market economy'* in school improvement, and said that this *'ignores the obvious learning point from the Challenge that the weaker schools haven't got a clue about what they need and how to access support.'*

Thus a crucial issue going forward is the need to ensure that every school needing support gets it, and that the nature of the support is determined by experts working with the head of the supported school, and not by the head alone.

One interviewee said that the greatest loss from the end of the London Challenge is that *'there is **no central brokering and commissioning agency** à la London Challenge.'* It was widely noted that the *'paid set of officials that coordinated the work'* in each area played a vital role. This included the Advisors, discussed above, and civil servants and administrators who brokered school-to-school support, allocated funding, monitored activity, etc. While headteachers (NLEs and LLEs) are taking on some aspects of the Advisor role, it is unreasonable to expect them to spend their time in brokerage and administration, though clearly this needs to be done. The Primary LLS is run by headteachers who report that they have no administrative support. Yet they are brokering NLE support and running a successful programme across London and in other areas.

A particularly important aspect of the Challenge, according to many interviewees, was **the process of reviewing schools** in each LA and deciding where support was needed. This is not simply a matter of identifying schools with low attainment outcomes; it was pointed out that a school with poor attainment may have a new head who is well able to lead the school improvement process. It was argued that it is crucial that in the review process local knowledge is used and decisions are not made simply on the basis of data alone.

A linked issue is the **loss of the role of Challenge Advisor**. A stakeholder told us, *'It's only when they're not there that you realise that those Challenge Advisors were really the people who oiled the wheels and cut through things and made things happen quickly.'* The Advisors were all highly experienced education professionals with experience across a wide range of schools, and thus they were perhaps better placed than NLEs to diagnose the problems in the most vulnerable schools and to design bespoke solutions. Moreover, they had more time available than NLEs to address issues as they arose, and they could be more flexible in their use of time. There is no doubt that NLEs are playing a very important role, but it is, and always was, a different role from that of the Advisors. Also crucial were the **Chief Advisors** in each area; their deep understanding of school improvement and their vision underpinned the Challenge in each area, and they worked tirelessly to bring together all the relevant parties (Advisors, LA officers, civil servants, school leaders, and other stakeholders such as local universities and businesses).

The **lack of funding** is also a key issue. Vulnerable schools often have budget problems and may not have the money available to buy the support they need. While Greater Manchester is so far managing to subsidise support to such schools, this funding is not sustainable. A key strength of the Challenge was that funding was available to support the improvement of vulnerable schools.

Another concern is that in an entirely marketised system, **headteachers need to identify the most appropriate support for their school**, and this can be both time-consuming and challenging. One head said it was difficult because *'there's not a systematic approach to being able to find information.'* If heads were to search through and weigh up all the available possibilities, one can envisage that they might spend a great deal of time on-line, researching what is out there. Since this is clearly not feasible, those interviewed said they relied on word of mouth. Secondary heads said they found out what was available at Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) events. Some primary interviewees relied largely on their LAs to provide them with information and suggest particular schools, consultants or other organisations that could meet their needs. Others used contacts they had made through the Challenge. Headteachers interviewed were often not aware of the Challenge legacy activities in their areas; for example, the London headteachers interviewed had limited or no awareness of the London Leadership Strategy and had not turned to them. (This of course reflects the fact that the LLS does little marketing because their activities are already over-subscribed.) Despite the range of possibilities out there, headteachers did not always know how to access support; for example, one primary head reported that he would like his teachers to be able to *'go somewhere and see what Outstanding looks like'*, as they had done during the Challenge, but he clearly did not know how to organise this.

Several of the headteachers interviewed had **no arrangements to work with any other school**. While some schools had, as outlined above, transformed school groupings formed in the Challenge into arrangements in the new school improvement structures, we found that other schools had maintained friendly contact with schools they had worked with, but the working partnership no longer existed. Moreover, some heads seemed unaware of how to form new partnerships, even when they had argued how useful those experienced during the Challenge had been.

While the notion of one school supporting another is now widespread and generally accepted, there seemed to be relatively few arrangements through which **schools worked together for a shared aim**; an exception to this was the arrangement within United Learning described above. While the Challenge was in operation, there were a number of successful arrangements of this sort.

**Teaching school alliances, NLEs and LLEs are designated on the basis of their applications and their strengths, rather than on any notion of geographical distribution.** This means that some parts of the country have no Teaching School Alliances, whereas others have many, and they are in some senses competing for work. For example, in Sandwell in the Black Country, and in Oldham in Greater Manchester, approximately one in 17 schools is a Teaching School, whereas in many other LAs there are over 100 schools for every Teaching School. Clearly the intention is not that Teaching Schools should confine their activities to schools within the same LA, but interviewees pointed out that approaching a school that appears to be vulnerable may be perceived as *'predatory'* behaviour. Moreover, interviewees commented that the tendency is to work with other schools with which one has had some previous contact, rather than to approach random, more distant schools.

Similarly, it was widely reported in all three areas that **NLEs are under-used**. This is both a waste of a resource of potential benefit to many school, and a personal disappointment for those achieving NLE status. It appeared that the brokering arrangements are not adequate. In Greater Manchester, By

Schools for Schools has taken on this role, as has the primary London Leadership Strategy, but there is undoubtedly a need for a more effective system of deployment.

Some **headteachers are so involved in a range of school-to-school support activities, that they have little time for their own schools.** The City Challenge evaluation identified a range of benefits for staff and pupils in the supporting school (such as teachers reflecting on and further developing their own practice when they explain it to others), but it is less clear that schools benefit from headteachers taking on coordinating and administrative roles in organisations brokering support.

At the other extreme, it was argued that **some schools are reluctant to release staff to work in other schools as SLEs.** This is partly because the work is intermittent and although schools receive funding for cover when their SLEs are deployed elsewhere, this can be very disruptive for pupils, and may have an adverse effect on the school's attainment and inspection outcomes.

Finally in this section, we consider the **strengths and limitations of sponsored academies;** these can be seen as a Challenge legacy in that the creation of some academies was one aspect of the original London Challenge. The current government has identified creation of sponsored academies as a key strategy for schools 'which are seriously failing, or unable to improve their results' (DfE, 2010). This now includes primary schools as well as secondary schools. One of the original aspects of the academies programme was an aspiration to re-brand schools which had previously been seen as 'sink' schools, by providing new or refurbished buildings and a new image which would restore parents' faith in the school. It seems ironic that currently some parents of primary pupils are resisting the plans to turn their children's schools into academies because they are satisfied with the education currently provided.

The impact of academies on attainment was discussed in Section 2.3. Here we consider their strengths and weaknesses in school improvement. Hill et al. (2012) show that sponsored academies in chains of three or more academies have generally improved more than stand-alone sponsored academies, or pairs of schools. However, chains are not all equally successful; while some chains, such as Harris and ARK, have a good record of improving attainment, others have less good records, or have been identified as having weaknesses in relation to school improvement. Ofsted (2013: 5) reported that in a primary academy, the sponsors, the Academies Enterprise Trust, had 'provided much-needed challenge to the school's leaders', but added that there had 'not been enough practical support, guidance and resources to improve the quality of teaching and learning at the academy.' The weaknesses of some academy chains must be a considerable concern, when the creation of sponsored academies is currently the key strategy to improve under-performing schools.

#### **4.6 City Challenge legacy: summary**

The Challenge has had a very wide range of legacies. Nationally, these include Teaching Schools and National and Local Leaders of Education. In each Challenge area organisations have been created to take forward the Challenge approaches; these all have a strong focus on schools learning from each other. In London and Greater Manchester they are led by groups of headteachers. Other organisations have also adopted aspects of the Challenge approach to school improvement; these include LAs, a Catholic diocese, an academy chain and private businesses. In schools in Challenge areas, the legacy included adopting a more outward looking approach; having more effective

processes and strategies in place; having higher expectations of pupils; stronger coaching skills among middle and senior leaders; and a greater awareness of what to do to improve further.

While this is a substantial legacy, interviewees argued that current arrangements and structures for school improvement have considerable limitations. Most important among these is fragmentation and lack of structure, which may result in the most vulnerable schools not getting the support they need.

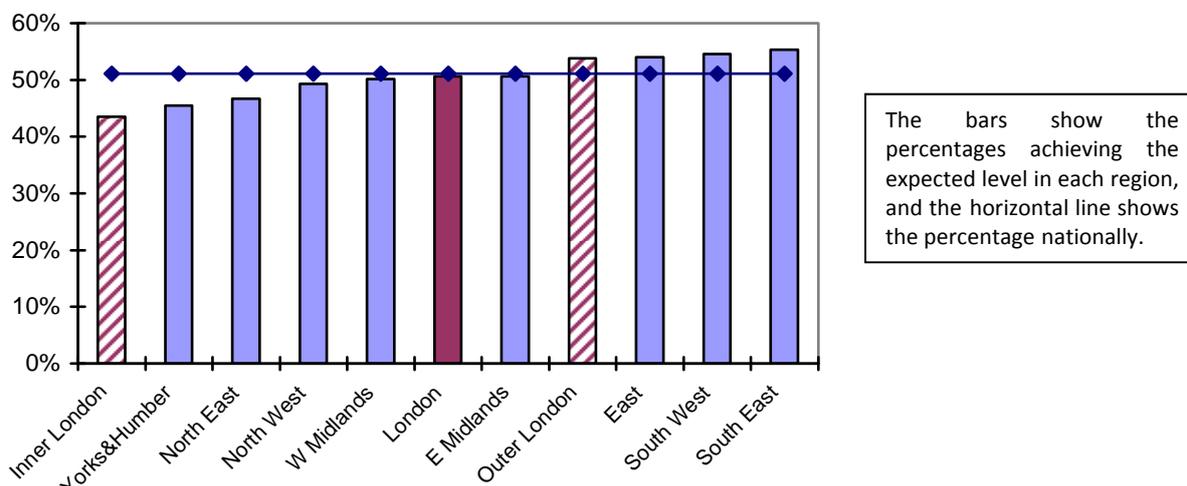
## 5 London's improvement

Ofsted asked specifically about the improvement that has taken place in London, and the factors that may have contributed to it, such as economic or demographic changes. This section starts by reviewing the attainment data for London secondary schools in order to demonstrate that while London schools have often been labelled as poor, and this was one of the concerns that led to the creation of the London Challenge, they have for many years been more successful in teaching the most disadvantaged children than any other part of the country. It then discusses the various factors that may have contributed to London's high attainment.

### 5.1 Attainment in London

In 2003, before the London Challenge started, Inner London was the lowest attaining region at secondary level, and despite Outer London's better performance, attainment in London as a whole was just below the national level (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Percentage of secondary pupils achieving the expected level<sup>17</sup>, London compared with other areas, 2003**



Source: DfES (2004)

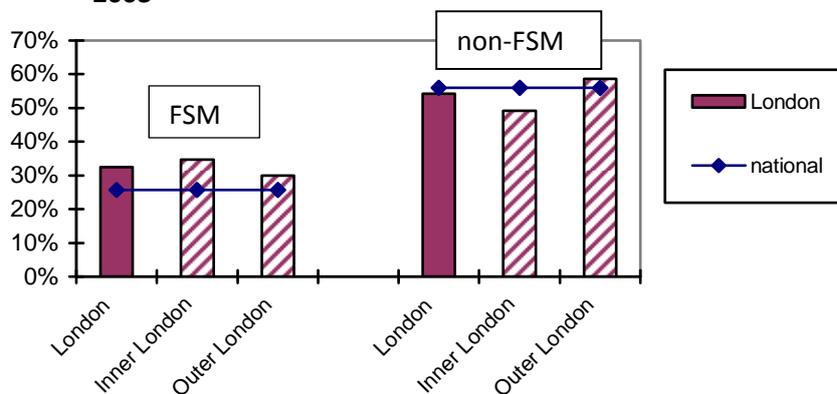
A more detailed examination of the data shows that this was very strongly related to the high levels of disadvantage in London, and particularly Inner London. As Section 3.2 showed, there is a

<sup>17</sup> The expected level in 2003 was five A\*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent

considerable attainment gap between pupils eligible for FSM and those that are not. The percentage of FSM pupils in Inner London in 2003 (38%) was higher than that in any other region (national figure, 14%)<sup>18</sup>. Thus the results for these pupils had a negative effect on the overall percentage of pupils attaining the expected level.

This was despite the fact that Inner London FSM pupils achieved *better* than their counterparts in other regions. Figure 7 shows that in 2003, 9% more of Inner London’s FSM pupils reached the expected level than was the case nationally. Outer London was 4% above the national level. However, Inner London pupils *not* eligible for FSM were attaining 7% below the national level. Thus overall London’s attainment was 0.5% below the national figure, as Figure 6 showed.

**Figure 7: Percentage of London secondary pupils achieving the expected level by FSM eligibility, 2003**



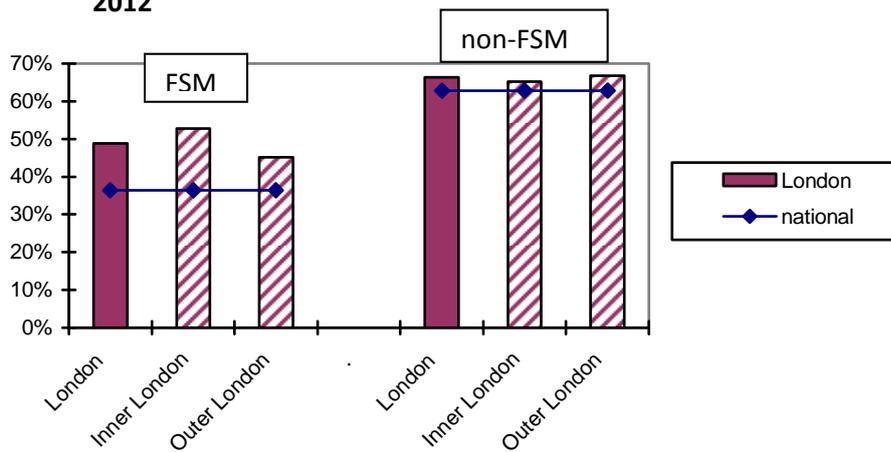
Source: National Pupil Database

Figure 8 shows the equivalent data for 2012. What has changed over the last ten years is that in London (and particularly Inner London), the proportion of non-FSM pupils achieving the expected level has overtaken the figures for other regions, and in 2012, was two percentage points above the national level. In addition, the percentage of FSM pupils achieving the expected level has improved more in London than it has elsewhere, and in Inner London, was more than 16 percentage points above the national level. In Inner and Outer London, both FSM and non-FSM pupils have attainment higher than they do in any other region. Consequently, in 2012, overall secondary attainment in both Inner and Outer London was above that in any other region (Figure 9).

It is also worth noting that pupils from each ethnic group in London achieve better than their counterparts outside London, as Table 2 showed.

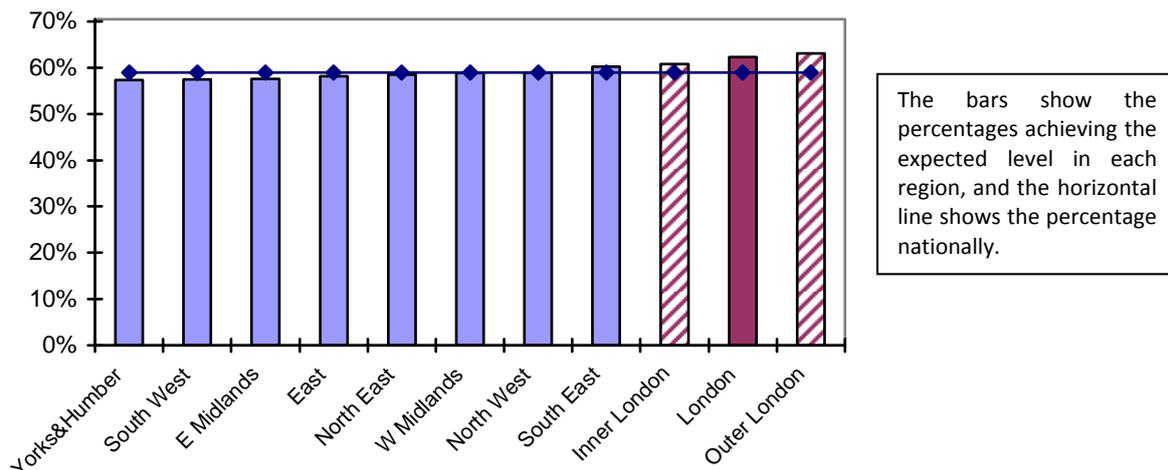
<sup>18</sup> These figures are the percentages of 15 year old pupils taking GCSE, rather than of the whole population of pupils.

**Figure 8: Percentage of London secondary pupils achieving the expected level<sup>19</sup> by FSM eligibility, 2012**



Source: National Pupil Database

**Figure 9: Percentage of secondary pupils achieving the expected level, London compared with other areas, 2012**



Source: DfES (2013c)

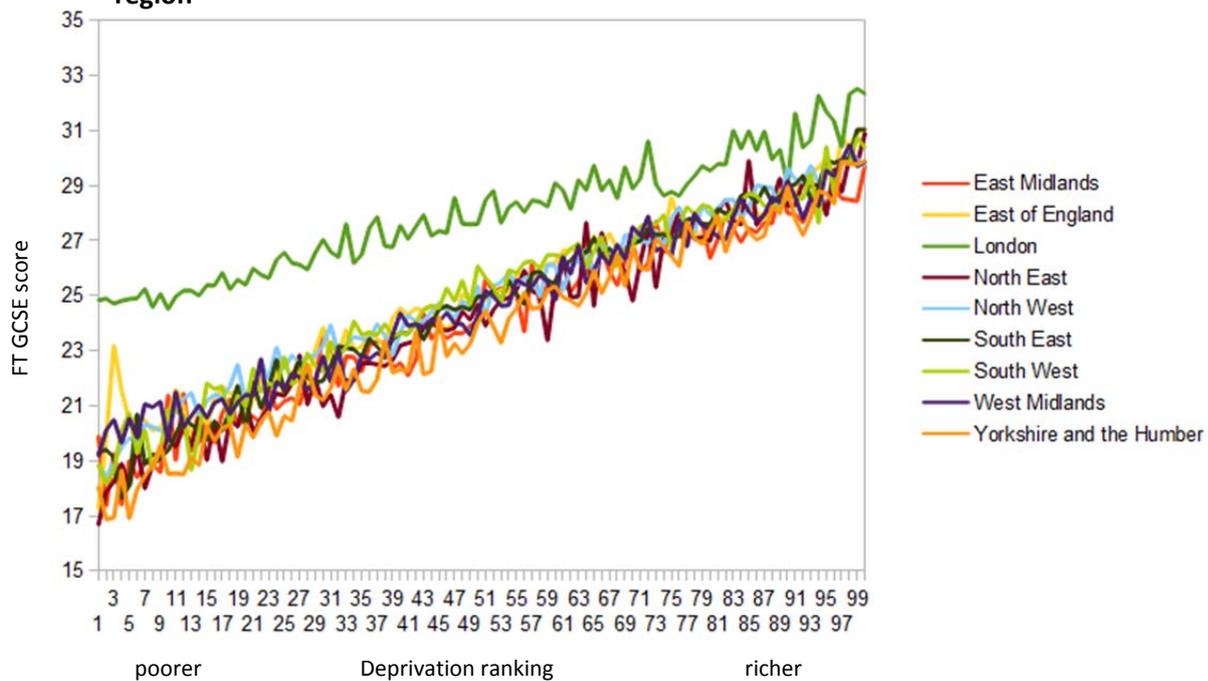
This explanation of London attainment above uses the binaries of FSM/non-FSM and achieved/did not achieve the expected level. The use of FSM to represent disadvantage can be criticised on the grounds that not all those who are poor are identified as eligible for FSM, and that both the FSM and non-FSM groups include a vast range of levels of affluence. Chris Cook of the *Financial Times* has explored changes in London’s attainment using a different approach. He has developed a scale for GCSE achievements (A\* = 8 down to G = 1) and awards each pupil points for English, mathematics and their best three other subjects. Rather than using FSM as the measure of deprivation, he has

<sup>19</sup> In 2012, the ‘expected level’ was five A\*-C grades including English and mathematics. Thus the percentages of pupils shown for 2003 and 2012 are not comparable. However, the interest here is in the position of London relative to other regions in each year.

used IDACI, an index of poverty based on the neighbourhood in which the pupil lives. Obviously this measure is also open to criticism, in that some affluent families live in poor neighbourhoods. However, what is important is that Cook's analysis shows a similar pattern to that shown using FSM data.

Figure 10, taken from a recent presentation by Cook, shows that using this approach, London pupils' attainment is well above that of any other region, particularly for the most deprived children.

**Figure 10: Attainment at GCSE 2012, using the FT GCSE score and IDACI deprivation ranking, by region**

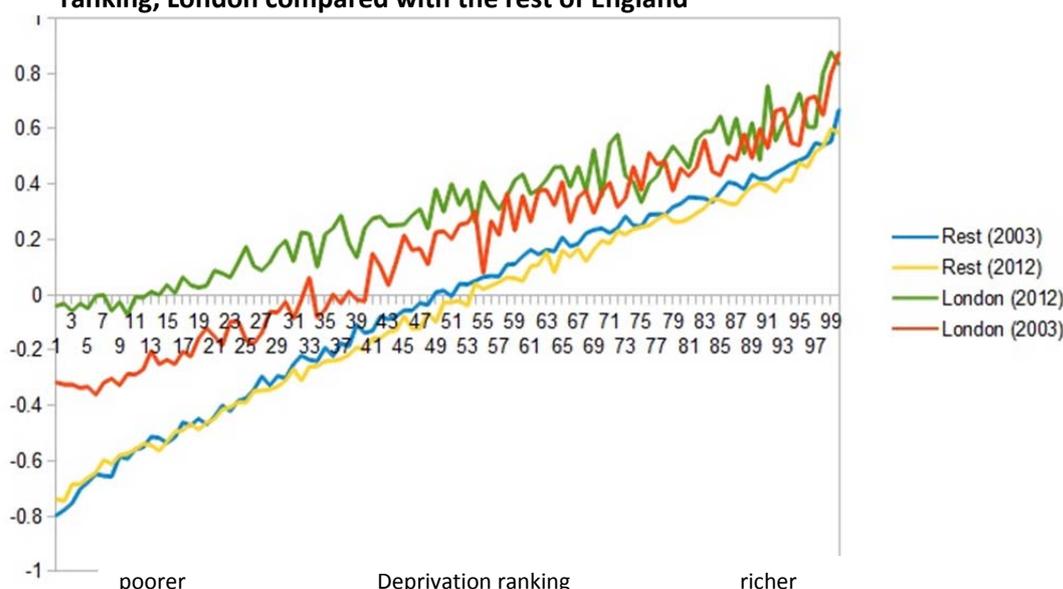


Source: Cook (2013)

Using a regression analysis to control for ethnicity, poverty, gender, etc., this analysis shows that in comparison to pupils elsewhere, those in London on average achieve one grade higher in three GCSE subjects (out of the five included in the analysis).

Cook has also examined the change that took place between 2003 and 2012. Figure 11 has adjusted the FT score scale to account for grade inflation, and shows that London already had higher attainment in 2003 (particularly for the most deprived children), and by 2012 has pulled away further from the rest. In addition, the less steep angle of the London 2012 line on the graph shows that the attainment gap between more and less affluent pupils is less in London than it is elsewhere, and has narrowed between 2003 and 2012.

**Figure 11: Attainment at GCSE 2003 and 2012, using the FT GCSE score and IDACI deprivation ranking, London compared with the rest of England**



Source: Cook (2013)

Further details of this analysis can be found in Cook’s blogs on the *Financial Times* website.

## 5.2 Factors responsible for London’s improvement

The City Challenge evaluation demonstrated that the London Challenge played a key role in the rapid improvement in attainment over the last decade. A number of other factors have been suggested that may have played a part in London’s long-term success, particularly with disadvantaged pupils.

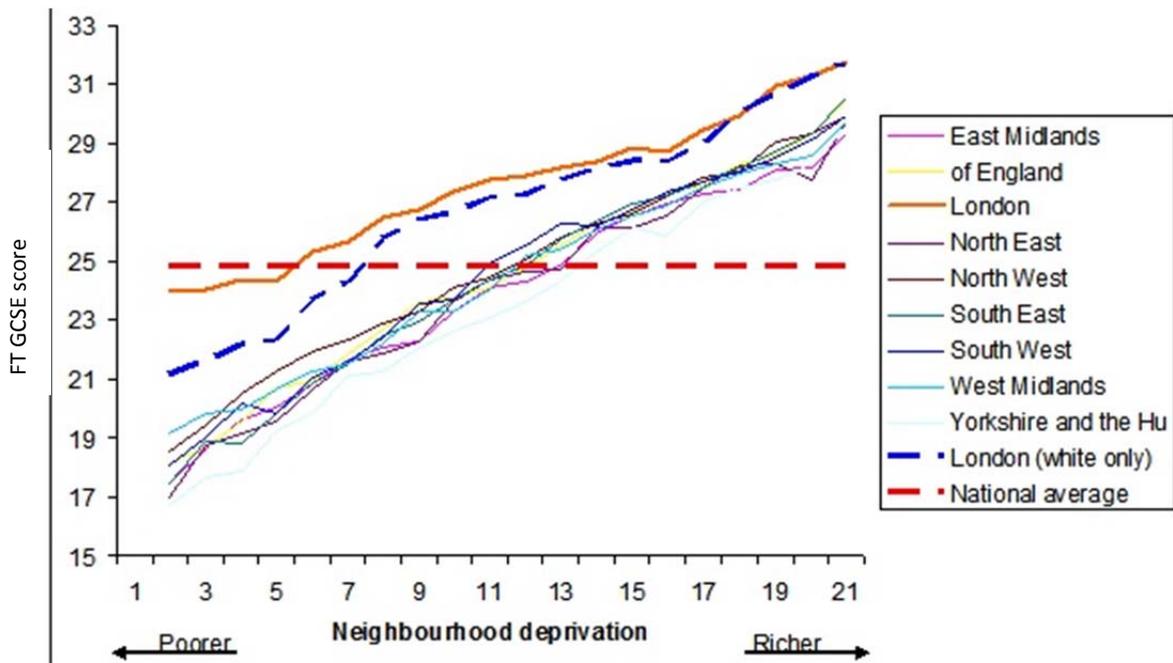
### 5.2.1 Possible factors in London’s success with disadvantaged pupils

#### *Pupils*

It has been suggested that **London pupils might be more ambitious** than those elsewhere because they live in a thriving area. We have found no research evidence that this is the case, and interviewees pointed out that some children remain largely isolated from the ‘buzz’ of central London and the City, and know little of the cultural resources that London has to offer. However, it seems likely that there is some truth in this suggestion, and it may have contributed to the long-term London advantage.

The high proportion of **minority ethnic pupils** in London is often cited as a possible factor in London’s higher attainment. As we showed, Lupton’s research (2004) suggested that some migrant parents believe that education can bring about social mobility, while this is less often the case among the white working class. Cook (2012a) analysed the contribution of pupils from minority ethnic group to London’s overall attainment, and showed that they do slightly raise London’s attainment, particularly among the most deprived pupils. However, if only white pupils are considered, London still achieves consistently much better than any other region (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Attainment at GCSE using the FT GCSE score and IDACI deprivation ranking, by region, showing attainment of London white pupils**



Source: Cook (2012a)

### Teaching

Interviews conducted as part of this research suggested that a key factor in London's higher attainment is the fact that teachers are working in classrooms with high percentages of pupils from deprived backgrounds, pupils from minority ethnic groups and pupils with a home language other than English. It was argued that in such classes, teachers have to focus on individual pupils and their learning needs, and cannot treat the class as an undifferentiated group. Interviewees also claimed that, when teaching in a multilingual classroom, teachers pay much more attention to the language they use and the language in which the curriculum is presented, and this has a positive impact on the attainment of *all* pupils.

A further factor that may have some impact relates to teaching assistants. Blatchford et al. (2012) showed disadvantaged and EAL pupils may be taught largely by teaching assistants, and are often separated from the teacher and the mainstream curriculum. They found that this had a negative impact on their attainment. Arguably, in London, where the proportions of disadvantaged and EAL pupils are very much higher than elsewhere, such pupils may be more often taught by teachers.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> In London there are slightly more teaching assistants in relation to the total number of pupils than elsewhere in the country (London, one TA for every 38 pupils; elsewhere one TA for 42 pupils). The number of SEN pupils per TA is slightly higher in London than elsewhere. However, compared with the rest of the country, in London there are approximately one and a half times as many FSM pupils per teaching assistant, and over four times as many EAL pupils (estimates made from DFE statistics).

## 5.2.2 Possible factors in London's improvement in the last decade

The London Challenge was central to London schools' improvement in the last decade. Some writers have identified the factors below as making a contribution distinct from that of the Challenge, it should be noted that the London Challenge was wide-ranging, and was involved in most of them.

### *Funding*

London schools are better funded than schools elsewhere. However, this additional sum is needed to pay staff salaries, which are higher in London than elsewhere (Allen, 2012).

### *Academies*

Michael Gove (2012) identified the creation of sponsored academies as one of the three most important elements of the London Challenge. There are more sponsored academies in London than elsewhere in the country, and more of them are in the most successful academy chains, such as Harris and ARK. Some have had spectacular success in raising attainment (e.g. Mossbourne Academy), while others remain below the floor target; for example, City of London Academy Islington, which in 2012, after it had been an academy for four years, was seven percentage points below the floor target, and had fewer pupils reaching the expected level than its predecessor school.

As Section 2.3 indicated, the evidence about the success of academies varies. Cook's analysis indicates that sponsored academies have made a very small contribution to London's improved attainment, partly because their numbers are relatively small; in 2012, just 14% of London's secondary schools were sponsored academies.

### *Teachers*

**Pay levels:** Teachers in London are paid on different scales from those in other parts of the country in recognition of the higher living costs in London. This is probably not a factor in London's higher attainment; Allen et al. (2012) shows that when living costs are taken into account, teachers in the capital are worse paid than their counterparts outside London. Cook (2012b) also shows that London teachers are less well paid in comparison to the local graduate labour market than is the case elsewhere in the country.

**Teacher age:** It has been suggested that teachers in London tend to be younger than those elsewhere (as a result of the tendency to leave London for cheaper areas when they want to buy property), and so they may also be more energetic and enthusiastic. Day et al. (2006), researching the effectiveness, motivation and commitment of teachers in England, offer some support for the theory that a minority of older teachers may be less enthusiastic than their younger colleagues. They reported that a small minority of teachers lose motivation and effectiveness later in their careers; this was more frequent among secondary teachers. Research evidence from the USA suggests that teachers become more effective over the first three years of their careers, but that there is little change in effectiveness after this (e.g. Kane et al., 2006; Clotfelter et al., 2007).

However, it is worth noting that the age differences between London teachers and those outside London are not as stark as they are often made out to be; just 25% of teachers in London schools are under age 30, compared to 19% outside London. There are no significant differences in the mean ages of headteachers in London and elsewhere (Allen et al., 2012).

Before the London Challenge began, there was a severe teacher shortage in London. There were more vacancies and temporarily filled posts than elsewhere in the country, and extensive use of supply teachers. At that time, London teachers were younger than those elsewhere, and tended to leave London when they wanted to buy a home. Research highlighted the very poor reputation of London schools, which deterred teachers from coming to work in London (Hutchings et al., 2000; McCreith et al., 2001). The need to attract and retain teachers in London was a key issue addressed in the early days of the London Challenge (as explained in Section 2.3). Thus the more balanced age profile of London teachers in 2012, and the improved reputation of London schools can both be seen as factors in London's improved attainment over the last decade, and in both cases, outcomes from the London Challenge.

**Leadership posts:** The research on London's teacher shortage (Hutchings et al., 2000; McCreith et al., 2001) showed that the younger age profile of teachers in London was related to a shortage of candidates for leadership posts. This has improved considerably as the reputation of London schools has improved. The London Challenge evaluation interviews showed that some school leaders had been attracted to work in London by the existence of the Challenge. One headteacher who had come from a post outside London explained that he had chosen to work in a disadvantaged London school partly because he was aware of the support offered by the Challenge. Thus the Challenge has also improved the number of candidates for leadership posts.

However, more recent data from ongoing research suggests that taking on the leadership of a challenging school can become a long-term career risk. Those who do not succeed in improving the school fast enough may find their careers in leadership are blighted by a poor Ofsted report, or end when schools become sponsored academies (Edge, 2013). This poses a risk for future efforts to bring about sustained school improvement in disadvantaged areas.

**Teach First:** Michael Gove (2012) identified Teach First as making a key contribution to London schools. Like the other factors mentioned here, it probably played a small part. The Teach First evaluation commissioned by the Teacher Training Agency (Hutchings et al., 2006) showed that the professional and hard-working approach of Teach First teachers had some impact on the way that other teachers worked. More recently, Muijs et al. (2010) reported more positive pupil outcomes in Teach First schools compared to comparator schools. However, it was unclear whether this reflected the input of the Teach First teachers or the culture of the school that had requested Teach First teachers (the request arguably demonstrating a commitment to school improvement).

### 5.3 Summary: London's high attainment

While London has frequently been identified as having poor schools and low pupil attainment, for many years the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in London has been higher than elsewhere in the country. In the last decade, while the London Challenge has been in operation, the gap between FSM pupils in London and those elsewhere has widened considerably, and in 2012, attainment in London for non-FSM pupils was also higher than anywhere else in the country.

A number of explanations of London's high attainment have been suggested. Factors that may have contributed include the high proportion of minority ethnic pupils; and higher aspirations resulting from the more dynamic economy of London. Interviewees in this research also argued that London

teachers have to adapt their teaching styles to classes of disadvantaged, minority ethnic and EAL pupils, and this may be beneficial for all pupils. However, the main factor responsible for the improvement in attainment in London over the last decade is the London Challenge. As well as working directly with schools and LAs to bring about improvement, the London Challenge was involved in the early start to the academies programme in London; bringing about changes to pay structures and housing schemes which encouraged more young teachers to remain in London and take leadership posts, and the introduction of Teach First. Together these strategies resulted in an improved reputation of London schools; improved teacher recruitment and retention, and a better supply of school leaders.

## **6 The potential for future adoption of aspects of the Challenge strategy**

This report has shown that many aspects of the London Challenge and City Challenge have already been adopted more widely. These centre around the notion of school-to school support as a key element in school improvement, and include Teaching Schools, NLEs and LLEs. Other elements that were part of the original London Challenge have also been used more widely, such as replacing a ‘failing’ school with a sponsored academy, and the Teach First programme.

However, there are a number of key elements of the Challenge approach which are missing from the current school improvement arrangements. The Challenges were comprehensive area-based initiatives that tackled all elements of schooling. It cannot be assumed that taking certain elements in isolation will be as effective as the combination of elements.

Thus, while the Challenge has left a substantial legacy at national, area and school levels, the implementation of selected aspects of the Challenge, together with the loss of some LA funding, has resulted in a school improvement environment that has been described as ‘chaotic’. There appear to be no adequate systems to ensure that vulnerable schools receive the support they need at an early stage. The Schools White Paper (2010) explicitly stated that advisors would be appointed to undertake this role:

We will work with and fund local authorities to identify an experienced and effective education professional – typically a serving or recent head teacher – to act as lead adviser. That individual will provide support and challenge, and make recommendations about the level of support a school will need in order to implement its improvement plan. (para. 7.17)

However, this key aspect of school improvement that is not taking place. The current strategy to improve the weakest schools is to turn them into sponsored academies. While this may be an appropriate way forward in some circumstances, it is expensive. Moreover, impending academy status can demoralise teachers, and may result in some experienced teachers and leaders leaving the profession, which is wasteful. Currently in some schools there is considerable opposition among both teachers and parents to the change in status. Keys to Success offered a cheaper alternative through which schools were enabled to improve through bespoke support and coaching.

Interviewees critiqued the notion of a 'self-improving' school system (DfE, 2010) on the grounds that leaders of vulnerable schools are often not able to identify what support is needed or find out what is available, and that a system needs some structure. It was argued that an LA or an academy chain or a Challenge area can be a self-improving system, because in each case there is some structure and oversight, but that this cannot work for the whole country.

It was also argued that the some aspects of the legacy were vulnerable because to a large extent they depended on the expertise and good will of individuals who had been involved in the Challenges, but who would inevitably move on or retire in due course.

The key things that interviewees argued are needed to complement current arrangements are:

- **Coordinators/coordination** (in regions or areas) to have an overview of school improvement activity in that area, and to ensure that different agencies involved in school improvement communicate, and where feasible, work in complementary ways to ensure that all schools' needs are met. The Greater Manchester Partnership Board is one possible model.
- Central **administration** (in regions or smaller areas) so that serving headteachers (NLEs and LLEs) are able to focus on supporting other schools, rather than spending time on administration of support structures.
- **A rigorous process of regular review** of each school's needs, based on Ofsted reports, attainment data and local knowledge; this could be carried out jointly by LA officers and school improvement experts. This would identify the schools with the greatest needs, and then appropriate support could be commissioned to meet those needs from Teaching Schools, NLEs, LLEs and other organisations.
- **Some Advisors and some funding to support the most vulnerable schools.** Some interviewees argued that HMIs' experience could be very useful in an improvement role. However, they stressed the importance of the role of school improvement Advisor being distinct from the role of inspector.
- Wider adoption of some of the **Challenge approaches to improving schools judged to be Satisfactory or Require Improvement, or Good.** The LLS reported overwhelming demand for their programmes targeted at such schools.
- **Improved information about the school improvement initiatives** that are available. This could involve the creation of a single source within each area or region from which school leaders could obtain information. This would be helpful to all leaders, but is perhaps most important for those in vulnerable schools who tend to lack awareness of what is available.
- The **geographical distribution of Teaching Schools and NLEs** across regions and LAs to be taken into account in decisions about the next round of applications;
- **Reviewing the balance between competition and collaboration:** it was argued that promotion of a more collaborative ethos might encourage schools to support other schools. Specific suggestions included:
  - School inspection should take into account the work some schools do in supporting or collaborating with other schools. Interviewees reported that some schools are reluctant to

release members of staff to work in other schools because they fear that this may impact negatively in inspection.

- School inspection could also consider whether provision for pupils across a locality or neighbourhood is of a good standard, rather than simply focusing on the individual school as a unit. Some interviewees argued that the current system can encourage schools to compete by, for example, manipulating the admissions process.
- **Recognising that school improvement is a long-term process.** Requiring immediate improvements to school attainment figures can have the perverse effect of focusing attention on the pupils taking exams or national tests, and therefore reduce the effort put into reforming structures and improving the quality of teaching.
- A stronger recognition of the **importance of an ethos in which schools are supported and encouraged.** Hutchings et al. (2012) concluded that this was a key element of the Challenge's success.

Finally, interviewees drew attention to **the links between poverty and low attainment.** In the current economic climate, the IFS have forecast that the number of children in poverty will increase considerably. This is likely to impact negatively on school attainment. Therefore tackling child poverty must be a key element in the drive to improve attainment.

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