

the state of the nation report

educational failure

December 2006

## About the Social Justice Policy Group

David Cameron established the Social Justice Policy Group on his first full day as leader of the Conservative Party. The Policy Group will make policy recommendations to the Conservative Party in July 2007 on issues of social justice.

Its chairman is Iain Duncan Smith and the Centre for Social Justice is hosting its secretariat.

The Social Justice Policy Group will study:

- the nature and extent of social breakdown and poverty in Britain today
- the causes of poverty
- the policy solutions to the social breakdown and exclusion

The group will look at a number of different factors which contribute to poverty and have identified five key “paths to poverty:”

- family breakdown
- educational failure
- economic dependence
- addictions
- indebtedness

The Social Justice Policy Group will also study a fifth aspect of the new Conservative poverty-fighting agenda – increasing the role of the voluntary sector in fight against poverty.

## About the Educational Failure Working Group

The group is formed from members of the public, private and voluntary sectors and, alongside undertaking its own research, has received submissions from a large number of policy makers, practitioners and pupils. In addition, together with YouGov, it has conducted polling of over 2,000 respondents of which over 600 were identified as having experienced educational failure.

The group’s work has been organised in three stages. This State of the Nation Report contains the conclusions of stage one, an analysis of the extent and effect of educational failure and stage two, a diagnosis of the reasons for this failure.

Following publication of the State of the Nation Report, the group will begin work on a series of policy recommendations to the Conservative Party which will be published in the middle of next year.

### SCOPE

To date, the Educational Failure Working Group has examined the nature and extent of educational failure for the most disadvantaged children in our country.

It has explored the wider impact of this failure on society, in particular the link between educational failure, poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, and crime among young people.

The group has investigated the impact of recent education policy and its funding upon inequality and, in particular, social mobility in a UK and international context.

The group recognises that education is not just about schools but also about homes and communities. In order to address educational inequality, government needs to appreciate and address the social factors linked with educational failure. The group has thus considered a wide range of issues which contribute to the failure of the educational system to address the needs of the disadvantaged.

These include:

- Government policy and funding
- Lack of parental involvement
- Unmet material needs
- Social and cultural influences
- The curriculum and structure of schooling
- Poor Pupil Behaviour
- Lack of School leadership

The report contains a number of key themes which it considers important to the debate on educational failure.

These include:

- The use and impact of increased educational resources
- The links between educational failure and unemployment, family breakdown, substance abuse and crime,
- The ‘one size fits all’ approach of the current system
- The role of the voluntary sector

Although the report is necessarily focussed on the inadequacies of the current system, the group has found many inspiring examples of practitioners who are devoted to disadvantaged children and achieving tremendous results. The group is optimistic about the potential solutions to the problems highlighted by this report and looks forward to entering the policy stage of its work.

#### THE WAY AHEAD

The group will begin to develop policy solutions to unlock the cycle of educational failure.

The group will explore policy areas including;

- The role of the voluntary sector
- School and pupil funding
- Parent / teacher expectations and responsibilities
- Specialist provision
- Teacher incentives and training
- Reforming the structure of schooling
- The interaction of community agencies

The group will take evidence from a broad range of relevant organisations in hearings before releasing phase three in mid 2007.

If you would like to meet with the Educational Failure Working Group to present evidence, please contact [tom.stancliffe@socialjusticechallenge.com](mailto:tom.stancliffe@socialjusticechallenge.com), or visit [www.povertydebate.com](http://www.povertydebate.com) for additional information.

#### EDUCATIONAL FAILURE WORKING GROUP

##### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**Ryan Robson** (Chairman), Partner of Sovereign Capital and former Wandsworth Councillor

**Cecil Knight OBE** (Deputy Chairman), Former headmaster of Small Heath School, Birmingham

**Cllr Merrick Cockell**, Leader of Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

**Stephen Brookes**, Franchise Development Manager, National Black Boys Can Association

**Ivor Frank, LLB LLM**, International Human Rights Barrister and Trustee of the Frank Buttle Trust

**Robert Halfon**, Chairman Conservative Friends of Israel

**Simon Howlett**, Education Consultant specializing in Engagement Mentoring programmes for young people and vulnerable adults

**Mike Royal**, National Director, TLG (The Lighthouse Group)

#### EDUCATIONAL FAILURE WORKING GROUP

##### SECRETARIAT MEMBERS

**Tom Stancliffe**, Secretary to the Social Justice Policy Group

**Lindsey Morgan**, Senior Researcher

**Jo Birks**

**Charlotte De Rivaz**

**Nick Hoile**

**Jack Langdon**

**Leah Morgan**

**Sam Sheerer**

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## Foreword by Iain Duncan Smith

This Report highlights the failure of our education system to ensure all children have equality of opportunity. The under-achievement of poor white and Black- Caribbean children and the dire educational outcomes for children in care are deeply distressing. The UK now has one of the lowest levels of social mobility and one of the highest levels of educational inequality in the Western World.

The debate on education has been presented largely in funding terms by New Labour, yet family background is the critical factor in determining poor educational outcomes for so many children. Many children grow up in broken homes, with high levels of drug and alcohol abuse where their lives are characterized by deep instability and little value is placed on education by their parents. This instability of family life is often matched by a near paralysis of leadership in so many difficult schools. The challenge is clear; governments can no longer tolerate the under- achievement of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

My thanks to Ryan Robson and his committee, all of whom have worked incredibly hard to speak to as wide a range of individuals and organisations as possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Iain Duncan Smith', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP

## Foreword by Ryan Robson

The failure of our educational system to meet the needs of our nation's most disadvantaged children is disturbing. Despite Britain's international reputation as a home of educational excellence and our economy's global significance, our nation has one of the highest levels of educational inequality in the Western world.

The Educational Failure Working Group has examined why huge investment in education has failed to reverse declining social mobility and the persistent underachievement of disadvantaged children.

The members of the group are experienced practitioners from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Their practical knowledge and understanding of the challenges faced by disadvantaged children, families and communities has been invaluable. In particular, I would like to thank my Deputy Chairmen: Cecil Knight OBE for the academic rigour he has brought to our discussions and Ray Lewis of the Eastside Young Leader's Academy for his no nonsense inspiration. Mike Royal of the Lighthouse Group, Stephen Brookes of Black Boys Can and Simon Howlett have been instrumental in helping the group to properly examine the wider social, economic and cultural environment of disadvantaged children and the role of the voluntary sector in solving their problems. Merrick Cockell and Robert Halfon have kept us in touch with the policy background and political realities of educational failure. Finally, Ivor Frank has contributed greatly to our

work on Looked After Children based on his own experience as a young person in care and as a human rights barrister.

The group has been aided by a dedicated team of researchers from the Secretariat of the Centre for Social Justice. Much of the 'heavy lifting' has been done by Tom Stancliffe who deserves special thanks as does Lindsey Morgan, not least for making our public hearings such a success.

The Educational Failure Working Group has received submissions from a large number of policy makers, practitioners and pupils. I should like to thank all those organisations and individuals involved, your evidence has been revealing and your commitment to your work inspiring.

Powerful personal testimony and evidence from our polling has confirmed our research which shows that almost every aspect of social breakdown – crime, substance abuse and unemployment is linked to educational failure. Unlike the Government, we argue that the answer to these problems is not simply putting more money into the system or taking more and more responsibility away from families. We believe we need to tackle the root causes of educational failure and recapture the reforming spirit of the founders of our educational system.

The challenge to the Conservative Party is clear – we can no longer tolerate the underachievement and frustrated potential of disadvantaged children.

## Special Thanks

The Educational Failure Working Group would like to thank all those who contributed to this report by submitting evidence both written and oral including:

Adrienne Katz – Young Voice  
 Amanda Spielman – ARK Schools  
 Andrea Warman – BAAF (British Association of Adoption and Fostering)  
 Andrew Haldenby – Reform Think Tank  
 Andrew Mawson OBE – The Bromley-by-Bow Centre  
 Angel- A former care leaver  
 Betel Amare – A Care Leaver from Tower Hamlets  
 Bob Thornton – Withywood Community Secondary School  
 Camilla Findlay – St Elizabeth’s Primary School, Tower Hamlets  
 Caroline Abraham – End Child Poverty  
 Clare Makepeace – UNICEF  
 Darrell Gilbert – A Care Leaver from Ealing  
 Dr Gillian Evans – Brunel University  
 Emily Arkell – NSPCC  
 Gerri McAndrew – The Frank Buttle Trust  
 Graham Lane – Teachers Employers Chair of National Employers Engineering  
 Harriet Sergeant – Centre for Policy Studies  
 Hilary Fisher – End Child Poverty  
 James O’Shaughnessy – Policy Exchange  
 James Stanfield – Newcastle University  
 Jan Tallis – School-Home Support Service  
 Joe Woodyatt – TLG (The Lighthouse Group)  
 John Hill – What Makes the Difference Project  
 Jonathan Stanley – The National Centre for Excellence in Residential Care  
 Kate Green – Child Poverty Action Group  
 Katherine Sullivan – The Children’s Society  
 Keith Reid – Youth Worker  
 Kevin Coutinho - Windsor Fellowship

Liz Stead – Measham Primary School  
 Marc Barker – A Care leaver  
 Mark Logan – Edison Schools UK  
 Matt Huggins – Care and Health Organisation  
 Modi Abdoul – What Makes The Difference Project  
 Nat Wei – Future Leaders  
 Neil McClelland – The Literacy Trust  
 Nick Seaton – Campaign for Real Education  
 Pam Hibbert – Barnardos  
 Paul Brett - Alpha Plus Group  
 Paul Ennals – National Children’s Bureau  
 Paul Obinna Wilson-Eme- Educational Consultant specialising in cultural engagement  
 Peter Slough – Small Heath School  
 Philip Parkin – Professional Teachers Association  
 Professor Tooley - University of Newcastle  
 Ruth Dwyer – Shine  
 Ruth Girardet – Shine  
 Sarah Richardson – What Makes the Difference Project  
 Seth Cumming - Reform Think Tank  
 Sir Cyril Taylor- Advisor to the Secretary of State on Specialist Schools and Academies  
 Sir Robert Balchin  
 Susan Blishen – The Paul Hamlyn Foundation  
 Susanna Cheal – The Who Cares? Trust  
 Susie Dye – Teach First  
 Toby Collis - Believe  
 The head of Service within specialist services in Birmingham  
 A manager within the Criminal Justice System  
 A number of other pupils, teachers and head teachers who preferred their names not to be mentioned in the report.

The Educational Failure Working Group will continue to hold hearings throughout the first half of 2007. If you are interested in presenting evidence, and for further information, please visit [www.povertydebate.com](http://www.povertydebate.com).

## Executive Summary

### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Our country is proud of its status as one of the best educators in the world. Our ancient and modern universities continue to attract the brightest and the best from across the globe while our unique approach has long been admired internationally. From the earliest reformers, Wilberforce and Shaftesbury, to Forster, Chamberlain and Butler, the architects of the modern education system, this country has always been at the forefront of reform.
2. While we spread our language and values to the fast growing economies of developing countries, our own economy, the fifth largest in the world, spends over £61 billion a year educating our citizens. This is over 50 per cent more than 10 years ago<sup>1</sup>.
3. During those 10 years, most of the debate about education conducted in the media has concerned exam results. This paper focuses upon those who do not make the column inches. Government targets, such as the numbers attaining 5 A\* - C at GCSE and gaining university entrance, ignore our country's most disadvantaged pupils.
5. These children leave our schools without a single GCSE. They have little prospect of meaningful employment and lack the basic life skills necessary to hold down a job if they do get one. They are unlikely to lead fulfilling lives or be engaged citizens in our society.
6. The British state is responsible for educating these children for 11 years of their life, yet nearly five per cent, over 26,000, pupils leave school without any GCSEs and more than one in six, over 75,000, fifteen year olds have a low level of literacy. Their experience of education is one of frustration, disappointment and despair. They have been set up to fail.
7. Several key groups of children are being let down by the educational system. Unless children from poor households, children in disadvantaged areas, certain ethnic groups, children with Special Educational Needs and children in care are identified and helped by our education system they will be lost by our country as citizens who can contribute to our society.
8. The costs of this situation are severely damaging to the individual and our communities. Our polling and research shows, almost every aspect of social breakdown – crime, drugs, alcohol, unemployment – is connected with educational failure.
9. Moreover, while education can transfer opportunity and wealth across our society and between genera-

tions, our most disadvantaged children are being left further behind. It is less likely that a child of parents in a low income bracket will rise to the top-income bracket in 2006 than it was in 1970.

10. This paper examines why huge investment in education has failed to reverse declining social mobility and the persistent under-achievement of disadvantaged children. It questions the claim that we live in a society of opportunity.
11. We need to re-capture the reforming spirit and founding principles of our education system: a belief in equality of opportunity and ladders of opportunity and to renew our belief that education is a solution to the social problems in our society.

### CHAPTER 2: LOST IN LEAGUE TABLES

1. *Despite huge increases in government spending, this country has one of the lowest levels of educational equality in the Western world and the attainment of our worst performers has not improved significantly since 1998.*
2. *Media friendly statistics which highlight the “average attainment” of pupils conceal very real failure at the bottom of the system.* Emphasis on “average attainment” means there is less focus placed upon the most disadvantaged children who are falling furthest behind. Schools have more incentives to help the children closest to a given hurdle, for example 5 A\* - C GCSEs, over it, than helping those farthest away.
3. *The Government has made little progress in tackling the worst failings within our education system.* No significant progress has been made in reducing the number of children with no GCSEs in the last eight years, 12% of 16-year olds failing even to gain basic accreditation in English and Maths. New Labour's strategy is good for middle class, but it is bad for society. There has been very little done to tackle the most ingrained forms of educational failure.
4. *Our education system which seeks to drive up standards through central targets, testing and a “one size fits all” approach, is systemically failing the most disadvantaged pupils.* Children arrive at school with different backgrounds and they need to be supported by different types of schooling. Our poorest pupils suffer disproportionately because their families have little choice but to accept the pitfalls of the current system. They cannot buy a house in the best catchment areas or supplement tuition.



5. *Resources alone are not the answer.* International comparisons show that there is little correlation between spending and results, yet policy is presented largely in terms of funding. In the last Budget the Chancellor pledged to increase funding to the levels of the independent sector.
6. *Increases in educational expenditure have not helped reduce the proportion of the lowest achievers.* Over the last 10 years the education budget has increased by 52% in real terms. However, the period of greatest improvement in tackling educational failure in the education system came between 1994 and 1998.
7. *The principal drivers of educational inequality are social.* If we want to tackle the most acute problems then we need to develop serious long-term solutions to the deep-rooted social causes of educational inequality. This means well considered holistic reform not piece-meal, short-term policy initiatives.

### CHAPTER 3: THE ESCALATOR IS OUT OF ORDER

1. *Educational inequality matters.* Our education system should be a social escalator helping those from disadvantaged backgrounds to a better life. Yet, there has been little recent progress towards an opportunity society – educational inequality is higher in the UK than almost anywhere else in the Western world.
2. Social mobility is declining and lower today than it was thirty years ago. It is less likely that child of parents in a low-income bracket will rise to the top-income bracket in 2006 than it was in 1970. Poor children become poor adults who in turn have poor children. The vicious cycle of inter-generational poverty can only be broken by reducing educational inequality
3. *Educational inequality threatens economic productivity.* Employers cannot find the skills they need, while the victims of this educational failure find it difficult to sustain meaningful employment. As we face increased competition from India and China, Britain's ability to compete in a global economy hinges upon preparing a well- educated, skilled workforce. Yet children are leaving our schools without the basic skills to get and maintain a steady job.
4. *Educational inequality and low social mobility have devastating costs to individuals and communities within our country:*
  - **Crime:** Nearly three quarters of young offenders describe their educational attainment as nil
  - **Unemployment:** one in five care leavers will be unemployed by the September after they leave school

- **Health:** One in three young people who have been excluded from school have been involved with drug dealing

5. *Equality of opportunity does not mean lower standards;* many other nations far outperform our own in terms of attainment and equity, yet spend less.

### CHAPTER 4: THE LOST CHILDREN

1. *Several key groups of children are being neglected by the educational system.* Unless children from poor households, children in disadvantaged areas, certain ethnic groups, children with Special Educational Needs and children in care are identified and helped, they will be lost by our nation as citizens who can contribute to our society.
2. *Several key cohorts of children suffer from an attainment gap* and many have more than one of the above characteristics making it difficult to establish cause and effect with absolute precision. However, there is enough data to reach some broad conclusions about who is being failed.
3. *It is certain however, that the Government has not properly measured or addressed inequality in the UK,* resulting in key cohorts of children under- performing and being neglected by reforms. A more accurate picture will require significantly more data and analysis of the impact of economic, ethnic and social factors in determining educational failure.
4. *Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are five times more likely to fail academically compared with their peers.* This conclusion is supported by several indices of economic deprivation, including eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) and ACORN household classifications.
5. *Schools with a high proportion of pupils eligible for FSM are 2.7 times more likely to be considered under-performing* by Ofsted. These schools are usually, though not always, in more disadvantaged areas. Compared with schools nationally, almost twice as many pupils from disadvantaged areas leave without any GCSE grades A\*-G at all.
6. *The most under-achieving group is white children from disadvantaged backgrounds* - just 17% of disadvantaged white boys attain 5A\*- C at GCSE. Certain ethnic minorities, including Indian and Chinese children, perform notably better than the rest of the population. In comparison, Black Caribbean children perform well below the national average with just 24% of these children attaining 5 A\*- C.
7. *Pupils with Special Educational Needs under-perform in comparison to their peers.* Less than 20% of all children with SEN achieve 5 A\*- C GCSEs and 77 per cent

of teachers believe SEN pupils to be particularly disadvantaged, ahead of ethnic minorities and boys. The term SEN now incorporates 18 % of all children including those with learning difficulties as well as Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). Indeed SEBD is, along with autism, the fastest growing category of SEN.

8. *The educational attainment of the 60,000 children in local authority care and the 90,000 passing through the care system each year is shockingly poor.* Just 11% achieve 5 A\*-C grades at GCSE compared to 56% of all children. This is despite the near £1 billion spent in this area over the last eight years. Chapter 8 concentrates solely on children in care; their plight demonstrates the wider findings of this paper.

#### CHAPTER 5: EVERY PARENT MATTERS

1. *Educational inequality is driven principally by domestic factors* including the home environment, parental involvement and the impact of peer pressure. If parental attitudes are not actively supportive of learning then schools find it difficult to compensate.
2. *Inequality starts early:* By the age of 22 months, the intellectual development of disadvantaged children is already well-behind their peers and this attainment gap increases throughout the education system.
3. *Social and cultural factors are very important* in explaining educational attainment. This helps to explain why children from certain ethnic groups, which attach great importance to study, such as Indian and Chinese communities, perform very well while other children, notably disadvantaged White and Black Caribbean pupils, perform very poorly.
4. *There are a number of material obstacles to children participating well in education,* including poor diet and overcrowded housing. If children do not eat enough good food to feed their minds and have a good night's sleep, they are not in a fit state to learn when they arrive at the school gate.
5. *Many children face enormous emotional turmoil at home.* Approximately 1.5 million children in the UK are affected by parental alcohol problems, and 250-350,000 are living with parents who misuse drugs. Nearly one million children in the UK face domestic violence. The UK also has the highest divorce rates in the Western world. This paper describes how chaotic and uncertain family styles have profound effects on a child's education. Yet our educational system has yet to develop consistent ways to identify such problems and give better support to children whose lives are troubled at home.
6. *Children's attainment is also greatly affected by peer pressure and the lack of positive role models.* It is clear

that in our most deprived areas it is "not cool to study" and learning can lead to exclusion from friendships. Schools must work with children and not against them, striving to engage even those for whom school life and learning is often a very alien culture.

7. *Government must focus on the role of parents and not attempt to take over more of their responsibilities.* Government policy should address the cultural reasons why certain children under-achieve in schools, encouraging parental involvement in education and ensuring shared expectations between teachers and parents. Rather than trying to become a bigger corporate parent, Government should encourage some parents to understand that helping their children to learn is as important to their future as feeding and clothing them. It is not so much "Every Child Matters" as "Every Parent Matters."

#### CHAPTER 6: LACK OF LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS

1. *Leadership and quality teaching are central to school success.* Good head teachers play a pivotal role in addressing both the social and educational factors leading to educational inequality. Our group has found many inspiring examples of gifted leaders turning schools around. Yet at a time when leadership has never been more important, more than 500,000 pupils are being taught in leaderless schools because of a severe head teacher recruitment crisis.
2. *Furthermore, only one in twenty teachers wants to become a head teacher.* It seems incredible in comparison to other professions and the commercial sector that so few want the top job. This reflects the fact that teachers no longer view head teaching as an attractive position.
3. *This is at a time when the talent pool from which leaders are selected is getting smaller.* While there has been some success in recruiting new teachers to the profession, these advances have not kept pace with the worrying trends in teacher retention because of an ageing workforce and large number of teachers leaving the profession. For example, in the last five years 29% of all full-time and part-time teachers left the profession and within the next 10 years, 50% of the current workforce will have retired.
4. *The problems facing the teaching profession cannot be solved by more money alone.* After all, spending on teachers increased by 53% between 1997 and 2006 and pay rates are similar to the independent sector which has none of these problems.
5. *It is time the Government addressed the reasons why heads are leaving teaching* and few teachers wish to replace them. One in four heads said they would con-

sider leaving their jobs if the ‘*culture of excessive hours*’ in schools continued. Some studies have concluded that the number of hours worked has not materially increased. But the content of these working hours has changed. Heads complain about increased bureaucracy, too much interaction with outside agencies and initiative overload. They argue that a short term target-driven culture takes them away from the classroom at a time when the challenges within it are enormous.

6. *The stress levels endured by teachers are immense.* Much of this stress is caused by dealing with the social, emotional and behavioural problems of the pupils and their families described in this paper. Poor pupil behaviour is a major reason for teachers leaving the profession and unless this is addressed in disadvantaged schools, teachers will continue to shy away from them, thus compounding underachievement.
7. *The problems surrounding the recruitment and retention of teachers and head teachers are particularly acute in difficult schools.* More than 1,200 schools are without permanent heads and this goes some way to explain why schools in disadvantaged areas are so often under-performing. These schools have more vacant teaching and leadership posts than other schools. Children find themselves being taught by a bewildering succession of supply teachers in directionless schools, and thus lose the benefits of long-term leadership, mentoring, care and ongoing development.

#### CHAPTER 7: POOR PUPIL BEHAVIOUR

1. *Poor pupil behaviour produces enormous challenges for schools.* A recent survey found that 64% of parents think discipline is the single biggest cause of educational failure.
2. *Discipline is getting worse despite investment in tackling poor attendance and challenging behaviour.* This is supported by evidence we have heard from teachers, pupils and the voluntary sector.
3. *Discipline problems from a minority of pupils can make learning impossible,* while at the same time demoralising teachers, driving down expectations and standards for all pupils.
4. *Schools need to develop clear boundaries and shared expectations between teachers, parents and children.* However, in order to tackle these problems we also need to address the root social causes of bad behaviour.
5. *Poor discipline and low individual attainment go hand in hand.* A lack of engagement with the curriculum and educational failure often leads children to

become detached from school life, leading to poor discipline. The key challenge for the education system is to ensure all pupils are engaged in the classroom and able to participate constructively.

7. *There is a close correlation between discipline problems, such as truancy and exclusion, and substance abuse among young people.* More and more people are taking drugs at an increasingly young age. This is having a serious effect on concentration levels, emotional stability and capacity to participate in formal education.
8. *There is a link between low educational attainment and crime.* Over two thirds of the prison population have no educational qualifications and had been expelled from school or truanted from a young age.
9. *The curriculum is too rigid and too inflexible* to meet the needs of our most disadvantaged children. This means under-achieving pupils struggle to engage with the curriculum and fall behind their peers.
10. *There is insufficient provision to ensure the children left behind can catch up with their peers.* In this regard, other countries are far better at monitoring progress and ensuring that early gaps in knowledge are remedied before they prevent engagement with the curriculum.
11. *There is insufficient emphasis on vocational training and alternative qualifications for children.* These might help children at risk of social exclusion gain vital qualifications to prepare them for work and help to promote their self-esteem and confidence.

#### CHAPTER 8 - CHILDREN IN CARE

1. *We have chosen to look in detail at the dire educational plight of children in care because while it is a unique example of government failure, it also exemplifies many of the issues discussed in this report.*
2. *Government initiatives have created a patchwork of confusion, as each one has promised change and improvement to a different area of the care system.* In reality, the achievement gap between children in care and all other children has widened every year. Although the government claims to be a ‘corporate parent’ for these children, evidence reveals that it’s record is shocking.
3. *Looked after children under-perform their peers throughout school.* They have lower ‘staying on’ rates and very few study at university.
4. *These results represent not only short term failure but also long term costs for the whole of society* unemployment, crime rates, teenage pregnancy and homelessness rates are far higher for those who have spent time in care.
5. *Government has failed to provide sufficient support and stability for looked after children* to enable them to ful-

fil their potential. Children in care are usually placed in the worst schools and are forced to move around numerous times during their education, causing great instability.

6. *Looked after children are one of the groups most vulnerable to the educational issues discussed in this paper – low expectations, discipline problems and lack of parental involvement.*
7. *Promises have been made again and again, yet year after year the children are failed. As children from care are 66 times more likely to have their children taken into care, the false promises must stop and genuine action must be taken for this cycle to be broken.*

## CHAPTER 9 THE WAY AHEAD

- 1 The education system is not well designed to identify and turnaround the under-achievement of the most disadvantaged children. Children have a variety of backgrounds and different strengths and weaknesses, these need to be appreciated by and mirrored in the schooling system.
2. *There is a huge variety and innovation in tackling the problems that exists today – but outside the framework of mainstream state schooling.* We have been constantly struck by the way that, for almost every issue, there is a voluntary sector organization with a tailored solution. These problems are not impossible to overcome, but they are complex, difficult and long-term; they need creativity and freedom and they need to be solved.
3. Educational inequality matters. We believe that a change in approach is needed. Government needs to place far more emphasis on the most under-achieving pupils in our education system. Firstly, the current approach fails to identify adequately those children who are being left

behind. Secondly, we need to ensure that redressing educational inequalities is a primary objective of the education system. This means an overhaul of the current “targets and testing” system, a re-structuring the curriculum and the approach of schools to improve standards for all children.

4Every Parent matters. Government policy should address the cultural reasons why certain children under-achieve in schools, encouraging parental involvement in education and ensuring shared expectations between children, teachers and parents. Government must focus on the role of parents and not attempt to take over more of their responsibilities. Rather than trying to become a bigger corporate parent, Government should encourage some parents to understand that helping their children to learn is as important to their future as feeding and clothing them. It is not so much “Every Child Matters” as “Every Parent Matters”.

5Better Leadership in Schools. Reform is needed to ensure the steady supply of high quality teachers and head teachers. We will need to address the fundamental reasons why so many of these professionals do not even consider working in under-performing schools. If we do not do so then the absence of good leaders and role models in failing schools will only make educational inequality worse.

We believe that schools should help provide a sanctuary for disadvantaged children with turbulent home lives and offer a clear route out of poverty. If we do not act now then lack of social mobility and its high social costs will continue to undermine our economy and our communities.

**The challenge for the Conservative Party is clear; we can no longer tolerate the under-achievement and frustrated potential of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.**



## Chapter 1: Introduction

Our country is proud of its status as one of the best educators in the world. Our universities attract the brightest and the best from across the globe and we have always been at the forefront of education thanks to reformers like Wilberforce, Shaftesbury and Butler, the Conservative architects of the modern education system.

Today, educational policy is largely presented in terms of funding and the media is focussed on exam results. This paper concerns those children who don't make the column inches and whose lives have been untouched by large increases in Government spending.

The Government spends £61 billion on educating our citizens each year and this has grown by over 50% over the last ten years. Despite these huge increases, this country has one of the highest levels of educational inequality in the Western world and the attainment of our lowest achievers has not improved significantly since 1998:

- 5% of children (26,000) leave school each year with no GCSEs.
- 12% of 16-year olds (75,000) last year failed to achieve 5 GCSEs at any grade including the most basic standards of English and Mathematics<sup>1</sup>.
- 4% of 15-year olds (25,000) failed to reach the most basic level of literacy. This means that they will have “serious difficulty in using reading literacy as an effective tool to extend their knowledge and skills in other areas.”<sup>2</sup>

Media friendly statistics which highlight the “average attainment” of pupils often conceal the very real failure at the bottom of system. Chapter 2 of this report shows how emphasis on “average attainment” means there is less focus placed upon the most disadvantaged children who are falling further behind.

Schools have more incentives to help more of the children closest to a given hurdle, for example 5 A\*-C GCSEs, over it; than helping those farthest away. New Labour's strategy may be good for middle class children, but it is bad for society; there has been very little done to tackle the most ingrained forms of educational failure.

This report examines why huge investment in education has not reversed declining social mobility and the

persistent under-achievement of disadvantaged children. It argues that we need to re-capture the reforming spirit of the past, to remember the founding principles of our education system; a belief in equality of opportunity and ladders of opportunity and to see education as a solution to the social problems in our country.

### THE CHILDREN LOST IN LEAGUE TABLES

Chapter 4 of this report identifies the following groups of children being failed by our education system:

- **Children from poor families** are five times more likely to fail academically compared with their peers.
- **Children in disadvantaged areas;** Schools with many pupils eligible for free school meals are 2.7 times more likely to be considered under-performing by Ofsted.
- **Children from white working-class backgrounds** are the most under-achieving ethnic group; just 17% of disadvantaged white boys attain 5 A\*-Cs at GCSE compared to a 56% national average. Black Caribbean boys also perform well below the national average with just 19% of those eligible for free school meals obtaining 5 A\*-C.
- **Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN):** Less than 20% of all children with special needs achieve 5 A\*-C and 77% of teachers believe SEN pupils to be severely disadvantaged.
- **Children in Care** are the lowest achieving social group and despite almost £1 billion being spent on them in the last eight years, only 11% attain 5 good GCSEs.

The British state is responsible for educating these children for 11 years of their lives. But these children's experience of education is one of frustration, disappointment and despair. They have been set up to fail.

The Government has not measured properly or addressed educational inequality in the UK, resulting in key cohorts of children under-performing and being neglected by reforms. Unless these children are identified and helped by our education system they will be lost by our society as citizens capable of making a contribution.

Moreover, while education can transfer opportunity and wealth across our society and between generations,

1 [www.dfes.co.uk](http://www.dfes.co.uk)

2 [www.pisa.oecd.org](http://www.pisa.oecd.org)

Chapter 3 of this report shows how our most disadvantaged children are being left further behind. It is less likely that a child of parents in a low-income bracket will rise to the top-income bracket in 2006 than it was in 1970.<sup>3</sup>

Education spokesmen for both major political parties in the UK agree with this diagnosis:

*Despite our successes, it is actually getting harder for people to escape poverty and leave the income group, professional banding or social circle of their parents. In fact, it's currently harder to escape the shackles of a poor upbringing in Britain than anywhere else in Europe.<sup>4</sup>*

Alan Johnson speech to Social Market Foundation, September 2006

*... .What your parents earn has actually become more important in determining what you earn. We are heading in the wrong direction. Britain is indeed becoming less socially mobile.<sup>5</sup>*

David Willetts, speech on Social Mobility, 12 May 2006

Our education system has failed to ensure that children from all backgrounds have equality of opportunity and we have a socially mobile nation. A healthy country is not one in which one's educational prospects are determined by the education of one's parents. We do not live in an opportunity society.

### EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION

Tony Blair's diagnosis – "Education, education, education" – was right but, for all its achievements, the Government has failed to remedy the most acute educational failure. New Labour policies have sought to drive up standards, creating a "one size fits all" education system and a centralised target and testing regime. These reforms have been accompanied by an enormous increase in funding, with Whitehall taking more and more responsibility for the provision of education. However, after a decade of legislation, the education system offers little choice and opportunity for the most disadvantaged children in society.

Our economy is the fifth largest in the world. In 2005 our GDP exceeded two trillion, greater than that of China, France and Canada. This wealth has enabled us to build one of the wealthiest and most sophisticated education systems on the planet. Here are the vital statistics:

#### £61 billion<sup>6</sup> Annual expenditure of DfES

£3,620 <sup>15</sup>	The amount of money spent per child in secondary schools p.a.
£2,810 <sup>16</sup>	The amount of money spent per pupil in primary school p.a.
5,000 <sup>17</sup>	The number of people working for the Department for Education
3,000 <sup>18</sup>	The number of people working for Ofsted to inspect schools
450,100 <sup>19</sup>	The number of teachers working in UK schools
7,000,000	The number of children in primary and secondary education

Yet, after 10 years of reform, a 52% increase in investment in education<sup>7</sup> and over 60 years after the Education Act of 1944, near the Square mile's financial powerhouses, children grow up in homes without books, unable to read a newspaper, or use a computer and totally ill equipped for life and work. As one pupil explained:

*School left me ill prepared for adult life. They never cared nor encouraged me, and I left school with poor qualifications. For many years this was a serious issue as I was unable to get any sort of unemployment<sup>8</sup>*

The wasted potential and frustrated ambitions of these individuals have huge costs to our country. Almost every facet of social breakdown – crime, drugs, alcohol, unemployment – is connected with educational failure:

- **Crime:** 73% of young offenders described their educational attainment as nil.<sup>9</sup>
- **Unemployment:** 22% of children in care are unemployed in the September after they leave school.<sup>10</sup>
- **Health:** 32% of young people who have been excluded from school have been involved with drug dealing.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, educational failure damages economic productivity. As we face increased competition from India and

3 Jo Blanden, Paul Gregg, Stephen Machin, Changes in Educational Inequality (2004)

4 The Telegraph, 14 September 2006

5 www.conservatives.com, 12 May 2006

6 www.dfes.gov.uk

7 Mark Nicholson, Policy Brief from the Bow Group, "A for Effort, D for Results: The Misdirection of Education Spending"

8 YouGov policy Group polling

9 A Review of Education and Supporting Arrangements within Units for Juveniles managed by HM Prison Service, 2002, www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hminprisons/thematic-reports,

10 NCVCCO 2004 National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations p4

11 Ruth Kitching, Violence, Truancy and School Exclusion in France and Britain, 2001

China, Britain's ability to compete in a global economy hinges upon preparing a well-educated and skilled workforce. Yet children are leaving our education system without the basic skills to obtain and hold down a steady job.

The UK spends billions on sustaining a welfare system to support the casualties of this educational failure. Why are we only dealing with the results of educational failure rather than its root causes?

### MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

Funding alone is not the answer. International comparisons show just increasing resources does not have the desired impact on tackling educational failure. There is little correlation between spend and results.

Britain's experience also shows that big increases in educational expenditure have not helped reduce the proportion of the lowest achievers. Over the last 10 years the education budget has increased by 52% in real terms. However, the period of greatest improvement in tackling educational failure came between 1994 and 1998.

### EVERY PARENT MATTERS

Educational inequality is principally driven by social factors including the home environment, parental involvement and the impact of peer pressure. If parental attitudes are not actively supportive of learning then schools find it hard to compensate. Chapter 5 shows how these social factors impact the educational experience of young people and argues that rather than taking over more responsibilities from parents, government needs to enter a new dialogue with them.

As Andrew Mawson OBE, said:

*In very poor areas, poverty is very complex, unless you deal with the whole family and the whole person you will only tick one box, say education. A more holistic approach is needed to deal with the whole family and the whole person in their context otherwise the problem will not be solved... if Governments and politicians want us to take them seriously, we need longer term engagement...not another fleeting visit or a three-year programme. Politicians need to back successful projects and grow what works. They need to ask themselves who are we trying to be fair to, the provider of the service or the customer?The answer to this question then provokes the appropriate response. Back success.*

### LACK OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Chapter 6 shows how the failure to identify and address these social factors presents the teaching profession with immense difficulties and has contributed to the current recruitment and retention crisis.

The problems surrounding the recruitment and retention of teachers and head teachers are particularly acute in difficult schools. Over 1,200<sup>12</sup> schools are without a permanent head and this often explains why schools in disadvantaged areas are under-performing. These schools have more vacant teaching and leadership posts than other schools. As a result, children find themselves being taught by a bewildering succession of supply teachers in directionless schools, and lose the benefits of long-term mentoring, care and ongoing development.

It is time the Government addressed the reasons why heads are leaving teaching and few wish to replace them. This report identifies as key causes the changing nature of the head teacher's role with its initiative overload and increased bureaucracy, together with poor pupil behaviour.

### POOR PUPIL BEHAVIOUR

Chapter 7 demonstrates how, despite almost a billion pounds spent on improving discipline in schools a dire situation remains: permanent exclusions have risen by 20% since 2000,<sup>13</sup> and over 55,000 pupils miss school without permission every day. A recent survey found that 64% of parents thought poor discipline was the biggest cause of education failure.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, there is a clear link between low educational attainment and wider antisocial behaviour and crime. Pupils who have been excluded are six times more likely to be regular drug users and over two thirds of the prison population have no educational qualifications and had been expelled from school or truanted from a young age.

These statistics cannot begin to show the huge disruption caused by poor discipline, demoralising teachers, and driving down expectations and standards for all pupils.

A lack of engagement with the curriculum and educational failure often leads children to become detached from school life, leading to poor discipline. The key challenge for the education system is to ensure all pupils are engaged in the classroom and able to participate constructively.

12 NAHT (National Association of Head Teachers) Education data surveys, John Howson

13 [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk)

14 YouGov Polling

## CHILDREN IN CARE

We have chosen to devote Chapter 8 to Children in Care because they have the lowest academic achievement in society and they also reflect many of the findings made in this report.

In the last eight years there have been 10 Government initiatives and Acts, each one promising change and improvement to a different area of the care system. In reality, the achievement gap between children in care and all other children has widened year upon year.

These initiatives have been expensive. Since 1997 almost a billion pounds has been invested.<sup>15</sup> The Government recognises that there is a problem, yet the regular publishing of guidelines, restatement of aims and constant changes to the system seem to have had little sustained and dramatic effect.

Promises have been made again and again, yet year after year our children are failed. If indeed children from care are 66 times more likely to have their own children taken into care, the false promises must stop and genuine action must be taken for this cycle to be broken.

## NATURAL TORY GROUND

The Conservative Party has always been at the forefront

of the reform of our education system. It is the party of Shaftesbury, the defender of poor children of the factories, the friend of the homeless and the founder of the Ragged Schools; Wilberforce, who set out to “renew society” by providing all children with regular education in reading, personal hygiene and religion and Butler whose Education Act of 1944 provided that school should be free for all children regardless of parents’ ability to pay.

The principal goal of the 1944 Act - free education for all - has long since been achieved. However, the legislation was about more than the State simply guaranteeing an education for all children. Part II 7 states –

*“it shall be the duty of the local education authority for every area, so far as their powers extend, to continue towards the spiritual, mental and physical developments of the community”*

We need to re-capture this reforming spirit, remember the founding principles of our education system; a belief in equality of opportunity and ladders of opportunity and to see education as a solution to the social problems in our nation.



## Chapter 2: Lost in League Tables

*Despite huge increases in government spending, this country has one of the highest levels of educational inequality in the Western world and the attainment of our lowest achievers has not improved significantly since 1998. Simply throwing money at these problems will not address this educational failure unless we deal with the social causes of educational inequality.*

*We now have the best ever GCSE and A Level results. 2005 saw the best ever primary school results. 80,000 more youngsters are now attaining the basic standard in English, and 90,000 more each year in Maths.<sup>16</sup>*

Tony Blair, 11 October 2005

For the last ten years, the British public has been showered with statistics by New Labour concerning improving examination results and vastly increased public expenditure on schools. Most long-term trends in education do show improving standards. However, the principal beneficiaries of this improvement have been the middle classes with the most disadvantaged remaining a very poor second.

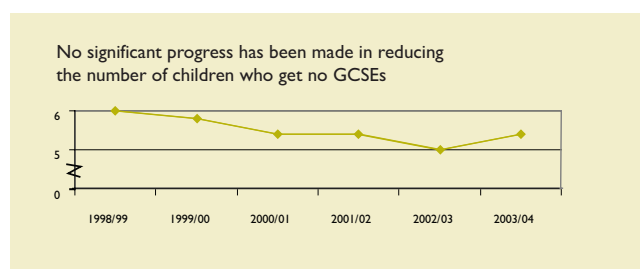
Firstly, a significant proportion of children are not reaching the Government's own targets:

Last year:

- 12% of sixteen year olds (75,000) failed to achieve 5 GCSEs with basic accreditation in English and Maths.<sup>17</sup>
- 21% of eleven year olds (120,000) failed to achieve the Government's targets in English.<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, the Government has made little progress in tackling the worst failings within our schools.

There has been little significant progress in the past eight years in reducing the number of children who are leaving education with no GCSEs<sup>19</sup>, as the following chart shows:



Why have improvements in our education system failed to address the performance of the most disadvantaged children?

### TARGET TYRANNY

The whole structure of our targets and testing regime conceals very real failure at the bottom of our education system.

The Government publishes annual “League Tables” which compare schools across the nation. These produce media-friendly statistics since they concentrate on “average attainment” but this means there is much less focus on those falling behind.

In this context, the need to help the lowest achievers inevitably becomes subordinated to the urge to improve performance at key threshold levels.

Simply put, if a school is targeted to get a particular result, say 5 A\*–C at GCSE for a certain percentage of children, it will focus resources on the children closest to reaching that target, those who represent the best chance of passing it in the future. The current system does not encourage teachers to direct attention to the pupils right at the bottom of the attainment spectrum.

As The Literacy Trust paraphrased a report<sup>20</sup> by Peter Robinson of the LSE as far back as 1997:

*He argues what teachers on the ground have already discovered: resources allocated to those in most need do not pay off in terms of league-table gains. Thus, if you are a primary school with average results (i.e. 42% of your eleven-year-olds failed to reach the standard expected in English) you are liable to gain most in*

<sup>16</sup> www.number-10.gov.uk, 11 October 2005

<sup>17</sup> www.dfes.gov.uk, KS2 Examination Results for 2005

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Dr Peter Robinson, Centre for Economic Performance, LSE, ‘Literacy, Numeracy and Economic Performance,’ January 1997

league table terms if you concentrate on the 30% who are closest to the standard being aimed at, rather than worrying about the 12% with the greatest literacy problems.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, one head teacher commented in rather more direct terms:

*'Improvement' is incredibly dependent on a small number of children at the .... threshold of performance. So it's the silliest measure anybody ever came up with.*<sup>22</sup>

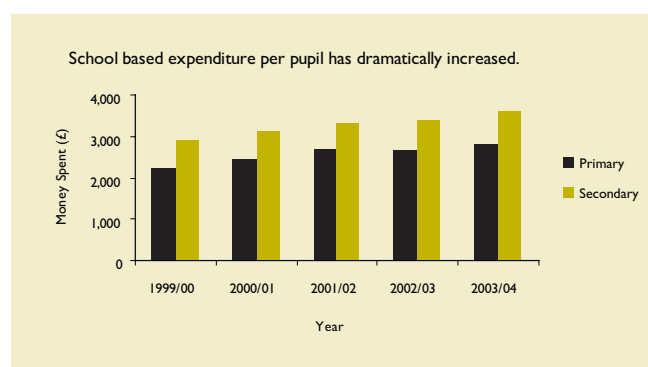
In other words, resources are being directed not at the most in need, but at the borderline successful candidates.

It is not hard to see why a system with a sustained policy like this results in a long tail of serious failure. It leaves the most disadvantaged students farthest behind. Schools, which are managed and judged on a year-to-year basis do not have the incentive to invest time and resources in the students that need it most.

As this report will demonstrate, the consequences of these disincentives to tackle educational inequality make this issue a much higher priority than under the current system.

## MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

Despite a 25% increase in school-based expenditure<sup>23</sup> per pupil since 1999, improvement appears to have stalled in recent years. The following chart illustrates the huge increases in spending per pupil in real terms:<sup>24</sup>



Examination results have only improved modestly and disproportionately to the investment made in our education system. In the last six years since 2000, the num-

ber of children aged 11 achieving government targets in English has hardly budged, edging up by only 4% from 75% to 79%.<sup>25</sup>

Yet the Government continues to present policy largely in terms of funding. For example, Gordon Brown's 2006 budget contained a pledge to improve education with a commitment to increase funding to the levels of the independent sector:

*"we should agree an objective for our country that ... we raise average investment per pupil to today's private school level."*<sup>26</sup>

Will spending alone ever address the problems facing our most disadvantaged children?

## INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON ON SPENDING

Analysis of international educational standards reveals that the improvement of educational attainment will require more than financial resources. There are educational systems which far outperform the UK in terms of overall attainment and equity, yet benefit from equivalent or lower funding levels. Some of the highest spending countries are also the worst performing. A recent report has analysed the correlation between spending on education and educational outcomes:

*The PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) studies run by the OECD in 2000 and 2003 provide an objective snapshot of different countries' educational performance, measuring performance at age 15 in the fundamental (and relatively culturally neutral) disciplines of reading and maths. Against performance in the PISA studies, I have plotted the amount spent on education in each country, adjusting for the number of children under 15 in each state and comparing amounts spent in terms of purchasing power parity. This last eliminates any differences caused by differing teacher salary levels or varying cost of educational resources in each country.*<sup>27</sup>

This is illustrated by the following chart in which the educational spending per child of different countries is plotted against average attainment in those countries. The chart shows that those countries with the highest spending on education (shown along the along the x-axis) do not, in fact, have the highest scores in reading (shown along the y-axis);

21 [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk), August 2006

22 "What gets measured gets done": A head teachers response to the English Secondary School Performance Management System, Deborah Wilson, Bronwyn Crosson and Adele Atkinson, August 2004

23 Mark Nicholson, Policy Brief from the Bow Group, "A for Effort, D for Results: The Misdirection of Education Spending"

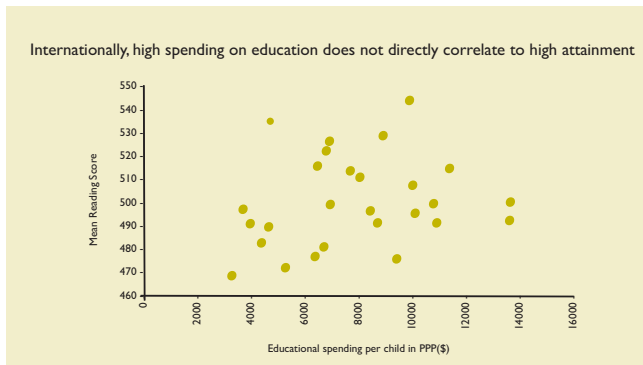
24 Table 2.2, Expenditure on Schools', Education Section, Office of National Statistics Website, July 2006.

25 [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk), Expenditure on Schools

26 [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), 22 March 2006

27 Mark Nicholson, Policy Brief from the Bow Group, "A for Effort, D for Results: The Misdirection

high spending on education does not directly correlate to high attainment<sup>29</sup>



There is no direct international link between high spending on education and better outcomes. This does not mean that resources are not an ingredient of a healthy education system but significant and additional expenditure has not made a deep and lasting impact upon the most disadvantaged. Increased funding alone will not turn around educational fortunes of these children.

## THE PRINCIPAL DRIVERS OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY ARE SOCIAL

This report will demonstrate that one of the reasons why increased resources have not led to better results for disadvantaged children is because the underlying causes of educational failure are social. Schools remain ill-equipped to identify and deal with these problems despite bigger budgets.

The solution does not lie solely in the pupil-teacher ratio, the number of computers in schools, or higher teachers' salaries, but in addressing the root causes of under-achievement in children's backgrounds.

Pupils arrive at school with different backgrounds, advantages and disadvantages. They need to be supported by different types of schooling. Our poorest children suffer disproportionately because their families have little choice but to accept the pitfalls of the current system. They cannot buy a house in the best catchment areas or supplement tuition.

One size does not fit all and we need to develop serious long-term solutions to educational inequality. This means well-considered holistic reform not piece-meal policy initiatives designed to meet short-term political targets.

## Chapter 3: The escalator is out of order

*Educational inequality matters. Our education system should be a social escalator helping those from disadvantaged backgrounds to a better life, yet there has been little recent progress towards an opportunity society – educational inequality is higher in the UK than almost anywhere else in Western world.*

### EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY MATTERS

*The truth about the country is that for almost 30 years social mobility has stayed relatively constant.*<sup>29</sup>

Tony Blair, 11 October 2004

The central aim of social justice is to create a genuine society of opportunity in which all children can fulfil their potential. Our education system should play a significant role in creating an environment in which all children have the opportunity to excel and are supported in realising their ambitions.

This report shows that our schools continue to fail to substantially improve the fortunes of our most disadvantaged children. This chapter deals with the social and economic consequences of this failure.

### DECLINING SOCIAL MOBILITY

The UK's social mobility has actually fallen in the last thirty years and children are more likely than ever to remain trapped in a cycle of poverty.<sup>30</sup> It is less likely that a child of parents in a low-income bracket will rise to the top-income bracket in 2006 than it was in 1970.<sup>31</sup>

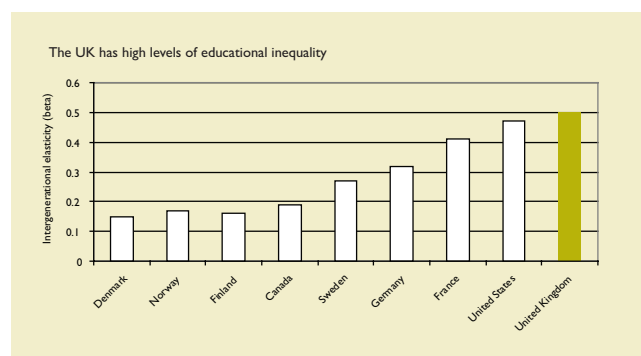
Social mobility can be defined as the extent to which an individual's income in one generation is dependent on parent's income in the previous generation. It is an extremely powerful measure in the context of assessing our educational system. It is at the heart of a healthy economy and society and is a more revealing indicator of well-being than equality of income.

Low social mobility means individuals are left unable to improve their prospects and lack sufficient opportunities in society. Furthermore, from a purely economic perspective, low social mobility means wasted talent and lower productivity.

There is worrying evidence from numerous studies that the UK has one of the lowest levels of social mobility in the Western world. Our society remains one in which the shackles that hold back children from disadvantaged backgrounds have not been removed. The gap between New Labour's rhetoric and reality could not be starker.

*"A modern welfare state is central to our vision of a society where nobody is held back by disadvantage or lack of opportunity."*<sup>32</sup>

Our country's performance varies across studies between being bottom or near the bottom of the league in international comparisons but, unlike our economy, we are never in the premier league. One international comparison of social mobility shows the UK is even worse than the US<sup>33</sup>:



This research gives profound cause for concern. It does not reconcile with the image of the UK as one of the most deregulated and fast growing economies in Europe.

So what is driving the the nation's low social mobility?

### MIND THE GAP

Most sociologists and economists agree that one of the major drivers of low social mobility is a high degree of "educational inequality" defined as a significant "attainment gap" between children of high and low-income families. Children of low-income parents under-achieve, which means they are prevented from accessing opportunities and are trapped. Poor children become poor adults, who in turn have poor children. This vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty can only be broken by closing

29 [www.labour.org.uk](http://www.labour.org.uk), 11 October 2004

30 Jo Blanden, Paul Gregg, Stephen Machin, Changes in Educational Inequality (2004)

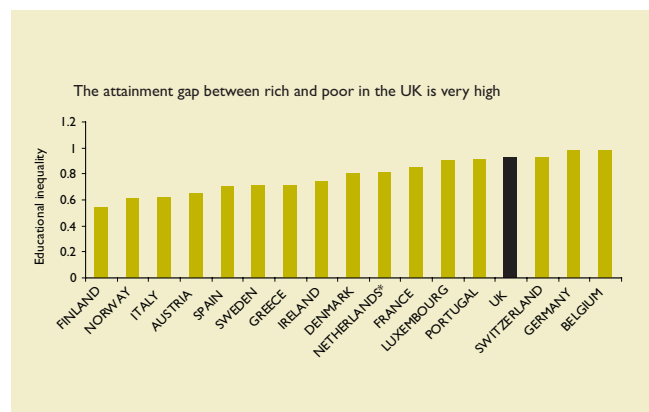
31 Ibid

32 The Labour Party website, [www.labour.org.uk](http://www.labour.org.uk)

33 Corak, M. (2004a), Do poor children become poor adults? lessons for public policy from a cross country comparison of generational earnings mobility. Paper presented at Workshop on child poverty, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

the “attainment gap” between rich and poor children.

Set within an international context, the high degree of educational inequality in the UK would appear to be a major cause of our low social mobility. The following chart shows that the educational attainment gap between the richest and poorest children is greater in Britain than in most other countries.<sup>34</sup>



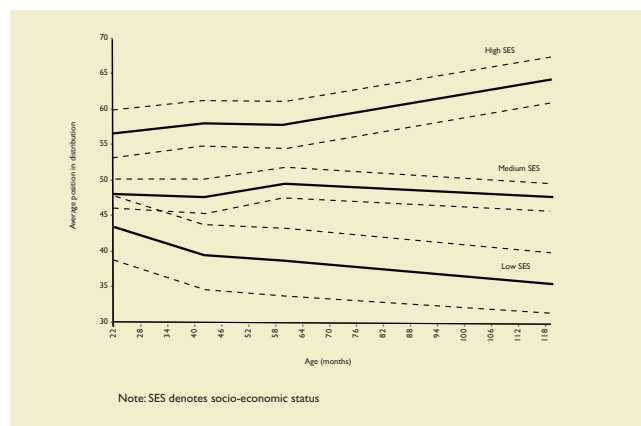
Vastly increased expenditure and decades of reform have failed to remedy the chronic under-achievement of disadvantaged children.

### EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY DOES NOT MEAN “DUMBING DOWN”

Addressing educational inequality does not mean “dumbing down” or reducing overall attainment standards. The evidence from other countries shows that high social mobility, low educational inequality and high overall attainment can be co-terminus aims.

Other countries have less educational inequality, as well as a high overall attainment, whilst spending less on education than the UK. Furthermore, the large increase in UK school spending since 1997 has not resulted in a correspondingly significant improvement in equity.

The following chart shows that countries with high levels of educational equality, such as Norway, Finland and Sweden, also have high levels of social mobility:<sup>35</sup>



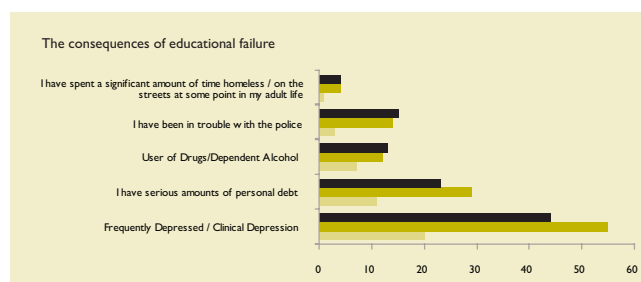
These nations far outperform our own in terms of attainment and equity but don’t invest more.

### EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY AND LOW SOCIAL MOBILITY HAVE DEVASTATING COSTS TO THE INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY

The costs of educational failure are severely damaging to the individual and our communities. Almost every aspect of social breakdown – crime, substance abuse, unemployment – is connected with educational failure:

- **Crime:** 73% of young offenders described their educational attainment as nil<sup>36</sup>
- **Health:** 32% of young people who have been excluded from school have been involved with **drug dealing**<sup>37</sup>
- **Unemployment:** 22% of care leavers will be **unemployed** by the September after they leave school<sup>38</sup>

Our own polling evidence demonstrates that those who have experienced educational failure are more likely to have other significant problems:



34 The International Socio-economic Index of Occupational Status is used to calculate the socio-economic status of the household. According to this measurement, parents’ socio-economic status has a greater impact on educational attainment than in most of Europe

35 While the following chart has to be taken with many caveats - primarily different time periods used to observe mobility and educational inequality, the small number of points etc. - it does not contradict the general hypothesis that educational inequality in socio-economic terms is a driver of low social mobility. Social mobility metric from Corak, M. (2004), Do poor children become poor adults? lessons for public policy from a cross country comparison of generational earnings mobility. Paper presented at Workshop on child poverty, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre; Educational inequality metric from European Group of Research on Equity of the Educational Systems, "Equity of the European Educational Systems: A set of indicators"

36 www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hminprisons/thematic-reports, A Review of Education and Supporting Arrangements within Units for Juveniles managed by HM Prison Service, 2002

37 Ruth Kitching, Violence, Truancy and School Exclusion in France and Britain, 2001

38 NCVCCO National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations p4

## THE ECONOMIC COSTS OF EDUCATIONAL FAILURE

Educational failure damages economic productivity. Employers find it hard to obtain the skills they need, while the victims of this educational failure find it difficult to sustain meaningful employment.

CBI survey figures reveal that:

- four out of five businesses (79%) believe the number one priority for the education system should be to improve basic literacy and numeracy levels
- skills shortages have had a serious business impact on almost a quarter (24%) of employers
- low basic skills cost the whole economy £10bn a year.

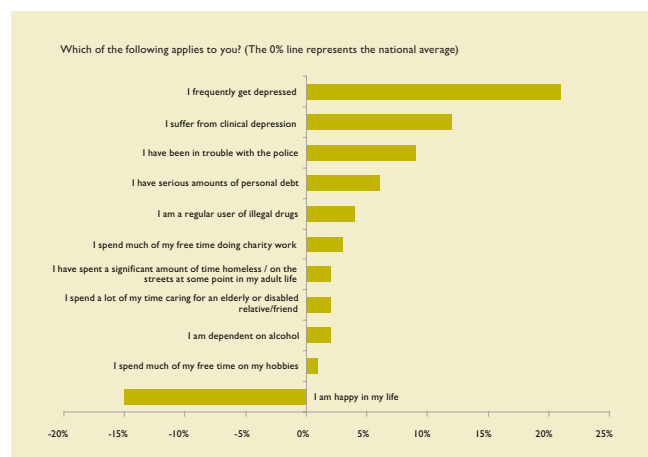
Our polling shows that over 30% of respondents felt they left school without sufficient qualifications to get a job<sup>39</sup>.

As we face increased competition from India and China, Britain's ability to compete in a global economy hinges upon preparing a well- educated, skilled workforce. Yet young people leave schools without the basic skills to get and hold down a steady job.

## THE HUMAN COSTS OF EDUCATIONAL FAILURE

Our polling indicates that there is a deep well of unhappiness and frustration caused by educational failure.

Respondents suffering from Educational Failure were asked the following:



## The costs of failure

### Case Study: Manager in the Criminal Justice System

We spoke to a manager within the Criminal Justice System who has been working for many years with offenders and was keen to share his experience.

"I see disorder and social breakdown on the streets and I try to deal with the aftermath at work.. I see a lot of illiteracy, innumeracy, mental illness, family breakdown, welfare dependency, drug use et al in prisons. Most of this is firmly established in the person before they come to prison and consequently it is very difficult to fix them. A lot of time and effort is spent on trying to tackle these problems, but with depressingly little effect. It's also depressing to consider the financial cost to the country of all crime committed – something like £60 billion pa ... We need to do more before and after ... Restoring discipline and respect for authority and other people would start in the family and be reinforced by more rigorous discipline in schools. If people were better educated- that is they had an education that enriched their lives, they would be able to apply reason to their thought. Too many prisoners have no concept of their place in the world- ignorance of history, geography, current affairs, particularly amongst young prisoners is astonishing. For many their only reading material is the Star newspaper. We should provide better role models for young people- I'm not being sexist- but young men in particular could do with more male teachers, more competitive sport and to have vocational training put on the same footing as traditional academic education. Some of the success we do have in prisons is when we teach young men how to lay bricks, or clean floors properly or fix cars."

They were 22% more likely to feel depressed, 8% more likely to be in trouble with the police and experience clinical depression.

When we consider the billions spent on sustaining a welfare system to support disadvantaged children and the billions spent modernising our Criminal Justice System and the NHS to cope with the consequences of our fractured society, tackling educational failure is a worthwhile investment for everyone in society.



## Chapter 4: The Lost Children

*Several key groups of children are being failed by the educational system. Unless children from poor households, children in disadvantaged areas, certain ethnic groups, children with Special Educational Needs and children in care are identified and helped by our schools, they will be lost as citizens who can contribute to our society.*

The following pupils are failing to achieve their potential:

- Poor children, most easily identified by eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) and ACORN household classifications
- Children in disadvantaged areas
- Certain ethnic groups
- Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Children in care

These children suffer from an attainment gap and as many have more than one of the above characteristics making it difficult to establish cause and effect with absolute precision. For example, children from different ethnic backgrounds living within the same area have significantly diverse levels of attainment. The significance of ethnicity has to be qualified by the fact that many minority ethnic groups also have low incomes. This makes it hard to see the extent to which ethnicity as opposed to income, is responsible for explaining a given attainment gap.

As this chapter will show, the Government has failed to properly measure or address educational inequality in the UK, resulting in key cohorts of children under-performing and being neglected by reforms. A more accurate picture will require significantly more data and analysis of the impact of economic, ethnic and social factors in determining educational failure.

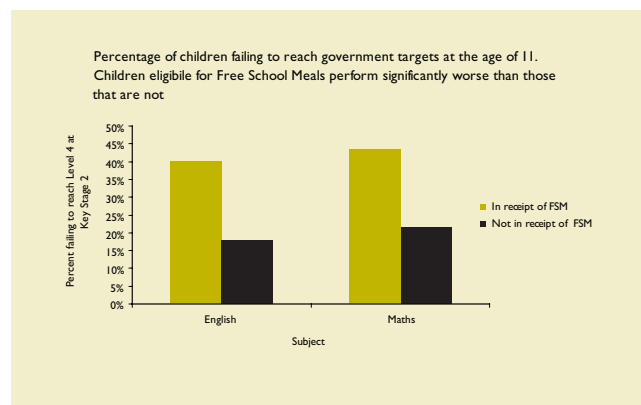
However, there is enough data to reach some broad conclusions about which pupils are being failed.

### DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

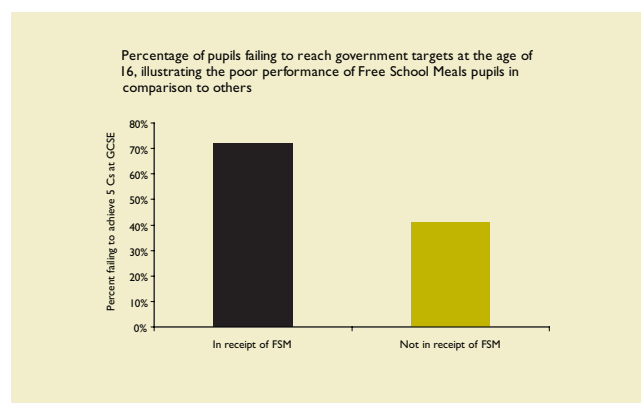
Pupils from the poorest backgrounds feature prominently in the statistics showing educational under-achievement. Our most disadvantaged children, in some of the poorest areas of the country, are simply not receiving support.

Currently the only accessible way of measuring the attainment gap between children from low and high income families is by using eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) as an indicator of poverty.

Firstly, Children eligible for FSM perform significantly worse than other children at age 11 (Key Stage 2):<sup>40</sup>



They also under-perform their peers at 16 (GCSE):<sup>41</sup>



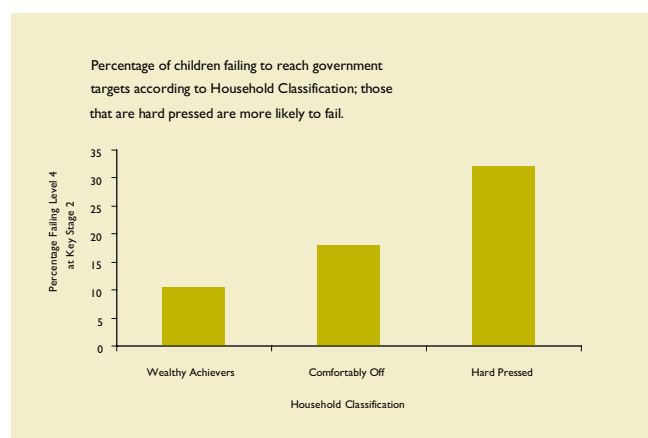
The FSM method of delineation is not without its flaws. For example, a number of families eligible for Free School Meals do not choose to take up the benefit and the FSM measure is only an indicator of household income and not a measure of relative economic well-being.

We have therefore examined a number of other measures of economic deprivation together with FSM, including the more subtle ACORN household classifications and international measures such as PISA. All of these indicators clearly demonstrate the under-achievement of disadvantaged children.

40 [www.dfes.co.uk](http://www.dfes.co.uk): 2005 KS 2 results by eligibility for FSM

41 [www.dfes.co.uk](http://www.dfes.co.uk): 2005 GCSE results by eligibility for FSM

As the chart below demonstrates, the ACORN measure indicates that only 11% of “wealthy achievers” fail to achieve required standards at 11, whereas “hard pressed”<sup>42</sup> children are three times more likely to fail<sup>43</sup>



Educational inequality is particularly bad in the UK in comparison with other countries. The PISA programme, run by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), provides a useful breakdown of international proficiency scores according to the socio-economic status of parents. It measures the gap between the lowest status 25% and the highest 25%.

Given the data presented earlier, it is not surprising that the UK performs rather poorly using this measure too.<sup>44</sup>



As the chart above shows, only Switzerland, Germany and Belgium perform worse than the UK using this measure of educational inequality.

Together these statistics show a significant and unacceptable gap between the achievements of children from high and low income families.

## A POVERTY OF RICH DATA

It is alarming that after huge investment in research at the Department for Education and Skills the Government has recently acknowledged the paucity of accurate statistics to give a reliable analysis of this most pressing challenge:

*“Current measures of social class attainment gaps are inadequate and prevent clarity of focus.”<sup>45</sup>*

Department for Education, April 2006

FSM eligibility affects maybe the poorest 15-20% of the population, and the attainment gap is large. It is impossible to determine how large that gap would be for the poorest 25-30%, for example (except using ACORN as a proxy), still less break down the FSM population further.

There are alternatives to be explored. Results split by parental income, for example, could be gathered through a survey approach similar to the Family Expenditure Survey conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

More extensive surveying of children and their backgrounds in conjunction with their educational attainment would help to determine more precisely exactly who is at risk.

**Schools with a high proportion of children eligible for FSM show a higher incidence of failure**

*We must do better to tackle the pockets of deep educational disadvantage*

Tony Blair, 24 October 2005

There has been much recent debate about which schools are failing and their location. Under-achieving schools are often found in deprived areas and have a high proportion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. We are keen however to acknowledge that there are outstanding schools in disadvantaged areas and that poor schools have been identified in unexpected places.

The following data is significant:

- Schools with the highest proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals are on average 2.7 times more likely to be judged as under-performing by Ofsted.<sup>46</sup>
- Nearly a third of failing schools are in the most deprived 20% of communities.<sup>47</sup>

42 This is defined as low- income families who live in council housing

43 [www.pisa.oecd.org](http://www.pisa.oecd.org)

44 Social Mobility: Narrowing Social Class Educational Attainment Gaps, published by the Dfes in April 2006

45 National Audit Office, Improving Poorly Performing Schools in England, (2006)

46 National Audit Office, Improving Poorly Performing Schools in England, (2006)

47 Ibid



- Compared with schools nationally, almost twice as many pupils from disadvantaged areas leave without any GCSE grades A\*-G at all.<sup>48</sup>

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be in the same schools and these schools are much more likely to be failing.

While educational failure is clearly a very big problem for a number of inner-city areas, it must not be presented as an exclusively urban issue. Government funding is usually targeted at inner-city areas, meaning struggling schools in non-urban contexts are often left unable to access the support and resources they need.

## THE IMPACT OF ETHNICITY

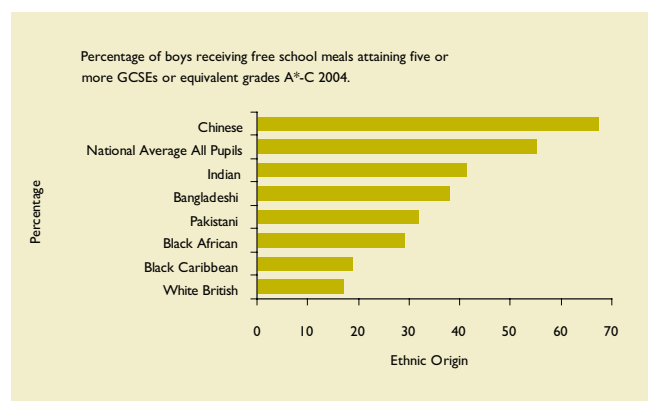
*The English schooling system has produced dismal academic results for a high percentage of black pupils for the best part of 50 years.*

LDA Education Commission, March 2005

There has been much recent debate about the poor educational attainment of children from some ethnic minorities. The available data appears to show that children from different ethnic backgrounds have very different educational attainment “on average”.

Different ethnic groups have very different average incomes, and more importantly income distributions, making it difficult to determine the extent to which observed differences in attainment between groups may be due to income as opposed to ethnicity.

One way of minimising the impact of income is to restrict the comparison to children eligible for Free School Meals.<sup>49</sup> The following chart illustrates these findings:<sup>50</sup>



- This shows a remarkably wide range of attainment between different ethnic groups:
- The disadvantaged Chinese (69%) are actually outperforming disadvantaged White children who are not eligible for Free School Meals (51.3%).
- The most underperforming ethnic group within the population is not an ethnic minority at all – disadvantaged White children are well behind disadvantaged Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani children.
- Disadvantaged white British children are the most under-performing group, with just 17% of working class white children attaining 5A-C at GCSE. Black Caribbean boys are similarly under-performing, with just 19% of these children attaining 5 A-C.

The attainment gap is thus particularly acute for children from the White British and Black Caribbean populations. Chapter 5 discusses the social and cultural reasons for differences in attainment.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS (SEN)

There is not sufficient provision within the curriculum for children who suffer, for example, from Dyslexia. One individual, Alistair, recalls how there was little attempt to diagnose his dyslexic problem at school, "You were just put in a class for those considered to have learning difficulties, and thought of as stupid." Dyslexia is in no way a reflection of intelligence or capability, and Alistair firmly believes that opportunities should be available to all children equally: "Give them the opportunity and the help, so many dyslexics suffer and end up in dead end jobs because the help is not there." He expresses a wish for more hands-on, practical learning, believing that if somebody wants to be a doctor or a lawyer, having dyslexia should not be an obstacle.

The term Special Educational Needs (SEN) covers a broad range of children, incorporating those who have learning based difficulties, as well as emotional, social and behavioural problems. Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) is, along with autism, the fastest growing category of SEN.<sup>51</sup>

There are about 1.45 million children with SEN, which is about 18 per cent of all pupils. About 2.9 per cent of all

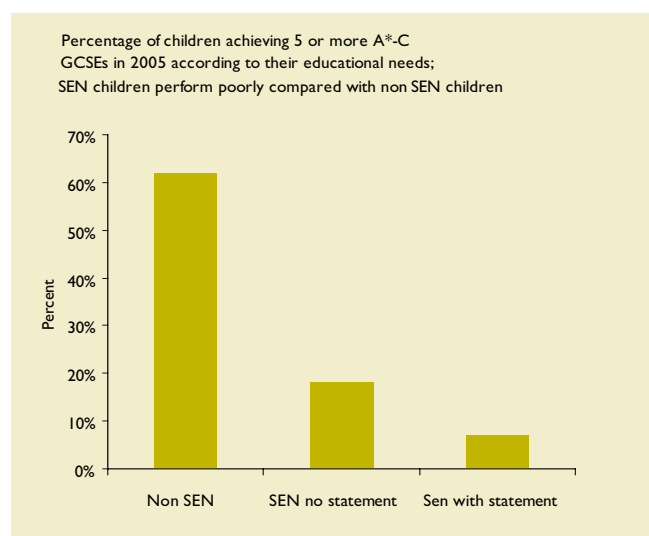
48 Ibid

49 Even this does not solve the problem completely. There is a relatively wide income distribution within the Free School Meal-eligible population

50 www.dfes.gov.uk, KS4 results by ethnicity and eligibility for FSM, 2004

51 The concept of Special Educational Needs was initially introduced in order to demonstrate that disabled children are not a race apart, and that many of them were capable of being educated in the mainstream. As the educational skills committee report points out, it is important to remember that there is considerable overlap between SEN and disability, as not all children with disabilities are defined as having SEN, and not all children with SEN have a disability.

pupils are categorised as having statements of SEN.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, in 2005 there were just over 90,000 pupils attending special schools.<sup>53</sup> This is about 1 per cent, and about one third of all children with statements.



A survey carried out by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers in August 2006, asked class teachers if there were groups which they felt were particularly disadvantaged by the national curriculum. 77 per cent believed SEN pupils to be particularly disadvantaged, ahead of ethnic minorities and boys.<sup>54</sup>

### CHILDREN IN CARE

In England today there are 60,000 looked after children and 90,000 will pass through the care system during the course of this year.<sup>55</sup>

Although Local Authorities have taken on the role of a 'corporate parent', the educational achievement of chil-

'I had difficulties at school and it wasn't until this year at the age of 29 that I was diagnosed with have dyslexia and Irlen syndrome. I was always in top sets at school until I started my GCSE's and I suddenly found it very very hard. But they wouldn't help and just said that I was being lazy and attention seeking when in actual fact I was experiencing great difficulty with my studies.'

'I went to a really run down comprehensive school in the West End of Newcastle. I hated everything about the place. The morale and inspiration of the teachers was non-existent. I played truant on a regular basis, especially towards the end of my time there. I like to think I am reasonably intelligent if I apply myself, yet I left the school at the age of 16. Having left school without any qualifications, I had trouble getting any job.'

dren in care is far below that of any other vulnerable group in society.

For a group of children who have had almost one billion pounds<sup>56</sup> spent on them in the last 8 years, the results are startling. Only 11 per cent of children in public care are achieving the Government's 5 A\*-C GCSE target, compared to 56 per cent of all children.<sup>57</sup>

Chapter 8 concentrates solely on children in care, as their plight demonstrates the wider findings of this report.

52 House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, Special Educational Needs, Third Report of Session 2005-06

53 Ibid

54 www.askatl.org.uk, August 2006

55 As of the 31st of March 2005, there were 60,900 looked after children in England, 4,668 in Wales, over 12,000 in Scotland and 2,531 in Northern Ireland; a total of 80,105 in the United Kingdom. The statistics on achievement in this paper focus on England due to availability of data.

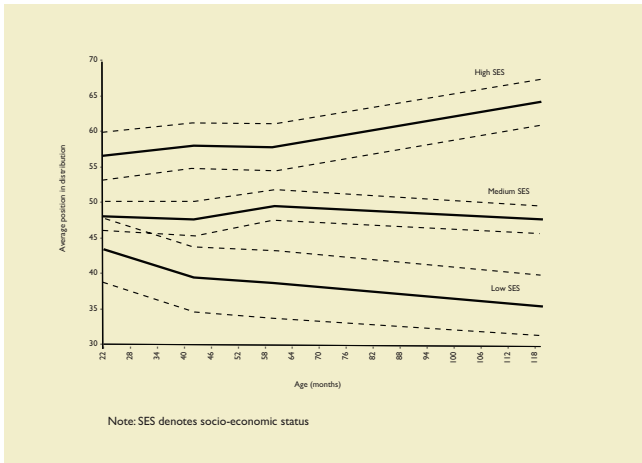
56 Alan Johnson, Children in care statement, House of Commons, 9th October 2006.

57 Department of Education and Skills, Outcome Indicators for Looked After Children: Twelve Months to 30 September 2005, England www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR

## Chapter 5: Every Parent Matters

*Educational inequality is driven principally by social and cultural factors. Parental attitudes to education and the impact of peer pressure are not peripheral issues in explaining educational inequality; these are the key causes of educational inequality.*

It is well documented that the attainment gap between children begins to emerge at the pre-school stage. The following chart shows that the broad contours of educational inequality are well-defined when a child is 22 months old. “Low socio-economic status” children (bottom line) have a much slower early development than children with medium (middle line) or high (top line) “socio-economic status”.<sup>58</sup>



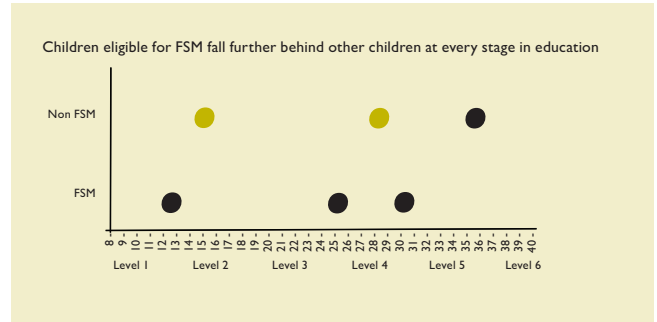
Research has shown that – based on the socio-economic background of children – a child’s developmental score at 22 months can serve accurately to predict educational outcomes at the age of 26 years.<sup>59</sup>

**This highlights the importance of early- years learning. Children fall behind before they have even reached primary school.**

This trend continues to accelerate throughout the course of primary education and increases significantly by the age of 10. Like a race, certain children start first and have every opportunity to catch up if they fall behind, while disadvantaged children start well behind the rest of the field and have few opportunities to catch up.

Even if a pupil from a disadvantaged background starts

ahead, he or she is more likely to fall behind eventually. The following chart demonstrates that children from disadvantaged backgrounds continue to fall behind other pupils as they progress through school.<sup>60</sup>

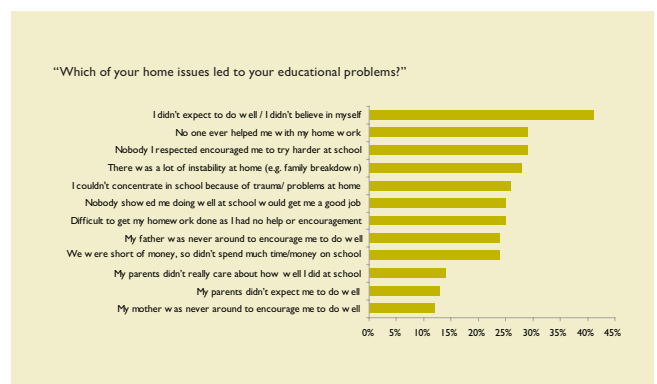


This conclusion is supported by our polling which surveyed adults who had failed at school and over a quarter of these said that their problems started before they were eight and a further 30 per cent said that their problems started between the ages of eight and twelve.<sup>61</sup>

**From a policy perspective, this clearly highlights the importance of sustained intervention throughout primary school to help disadvantaged children catch up and prepare them properly for secondary school.**

Social factors continue to be important whilst a child is in schooling. The support provided by families in encouraging punctuality and attendance, helping with homework and working with teachers is vital.

Indeed, our polling shows that one in three people who failed at school reported that they had no encouragement from home and were never supported in their school studies:

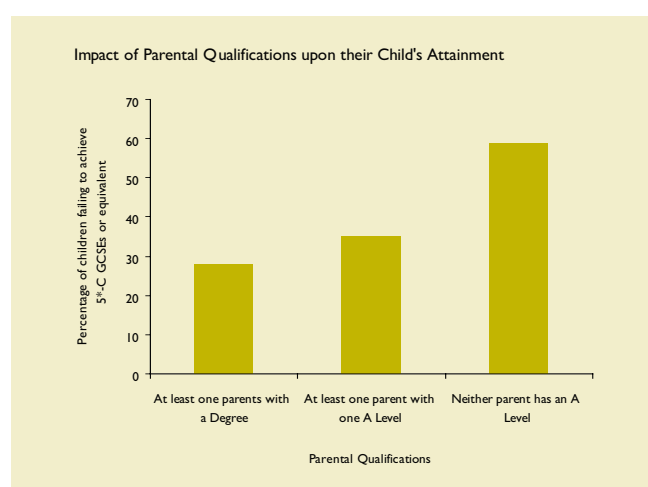


58 Social Mobility: Narrowing Social Class Educational Attainment Gaps, published by the dfes, April 2006  
 59 Feinstein, Leon, 'Very early evidence: How early can we predict future educational achievement?', August 2006  
 60 Social Mobility: Narrowing Social Class Educational Attainment Gaps, published by the DfEs, April 2006  
 61 YouGov, Social Justice Policy Group Polling, October 2006

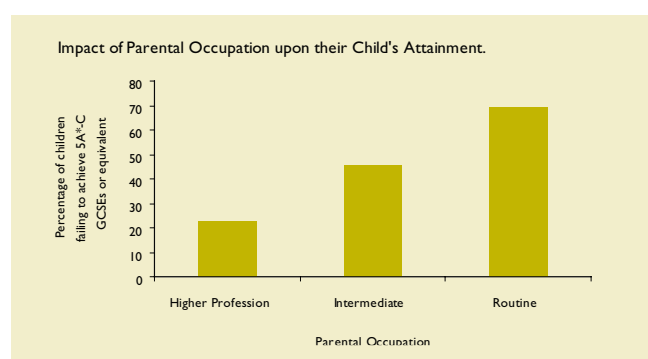
## IMPORTANCE OF PARENTAL EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL STATUS

Both the professional status and level of educational qualifications of parents are key factors in explaining educational attainment of children. The most obvious parental characteristic which impacts a child's attainment is the educational attainment of his or her parents. Parents who were more successful at school are more likely to encourage their children to work hard. This is a particularly critical issue because of the degree to which it transmits educational success failure from one generation to the next..

The following table shows how parental qualifications are strongly correlated with children attaining good results:<sup>62</sup>



Another significant factor in explaining the educational attainment of children is the occupational status of parents. A recent study has further shown that 77% of children with parents in higher professional occupations obtained five or more A\*-C, which was double the proportion of children of parents with manual occupations:<sup>63</sup>



However, the broad correlations between attainment and social and occupational status do not in themselves explain the "attainment gap." Further analysis reveals a diverse range of factors.

## PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

*"Having uneducated working class parents who didn't encourage me to do well at school caused me to leave school with hardly any education."<sup>64</sup>*

Recent research looking at the effective provision of pre-school learning has shown that the range of activities undertaken by parents and carers with children has a very significant effect on their development:

*Reading with the child, teaching songs and nursery rhymes, painting and drawing, playing with letters and numbers, visiting the library, teaching the alphabet and numbers, taking children on visits and creating regular opportunities for them to play with their friends at home, were all associated with higher intellectual and behavioural scores.<sup>65</sup>*

Educational Failure and White Working Class Children.  
Dr Gillian Evans

*These simple games and tasks are not simply a means of keeping a child amused but tried and tested means of acquiring core literacy and numeracy skills. Children who have not benefited from close parental involvement in their early years learning enter formal education at a real disadvantage.*

*When you grew up, you were read to, had lots of books, meals around the table, discussed ideas, constantly challenged, made to find out about things... by the time these children reach the age of 5, they have an extraordinary advantage over children who are not brought up this way.*

Bob Thornton, Head Teacher of Withywood School

Schooling requires a particular form of participation from children involving, for example, explicit task-oriented instruction, skills training, self-research and study, in a highly specific and institutionalised social environment.

This form of participation is much more accessible to

62 Youth Cohort Study, Cohort 12, Sweep 1. SFR 04/2005 (Coverage: England & Wales, maintained and independent mainstream schools)

63 Youth Cohort Study, Cohort 12, Sweep 1. SFR 04/2005 (Coverage: England & Wales, maintained and independent mainstream schools)

64 YouGov polling 2006

65 Dr Gillian Evans, Educational Failure and White Working Class Children, 2006

children for whom informal participation is an accepted element of the home environment.

### SUSTAINED PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

During the years of a child's formal schooling "good parenting" acquires an extra dimension.

One inner-city head teacher commented that:

*"... parental interest in a child's schooling is the single most important factor in determining educational attainment. Sociology studies will show it time and time again."*

An obvious example of where co-operation between school and family is necessary is homework. It is important that parents recognise that school makes demands upon a child's time even while they are at home. Children whose parents supervise and help them with their homework will do it more regularly and thus a better standard, and are better prepared for the next lesson.

**In contrast, our poll found that over a third of those who have experienced educational failure had no one helping them with their homework.**

### CREATING A LOVE OF LEARNING

Parents who acknowledge the importance of education and the opportunities it provides will be in turn more likely to support their child's homework activities in a positive fashion.

*"I think family is important because your family supports you in your homework and they teach you how to add takeaway and divide ... they have been taught to teach you how the world was brought up."*<sup>66</sup>

The experience for many children is very different. One inner-city teacher commented that:

*Some parents are very supportive, both in terms of monitoring behaviour and academically. However, many are disaffected by education themselves and do not have any aspirations for their own children. For example, parents say things like 'I never passed any exams and I'm alright, so X will be fine too... sometimes it feels as if aspirations I put into children during the day can be undone at home.*

Parents have a central role in creating the love of learning and the intellectual curiosity vital to success at school. This attitude, underpinning education as a cen-

tral element of a child's upbringing, is important throughout a child's educational career. Parents who manage to instil respect for education and place value on it will generally see their children perform better at all levels.

Our polling shows that those who have experienced educational failure are more likely to come from backgrounds where nobody encouraged them to try harder at school or cared how well they did.

### CULTURAL FACTORS AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND

As was shown in Chapter 4, there are large differences in the academic performance of different ethnic groups. For example, many minority ethnic groups – such as Bangladeshi, Chinese and Indian children<sup>67</sup> – out-perform white British children:

- The highest performing minority ethnic groups are Chinese and Indian, with 76% and 68% respectively attaining five A\*-C GCSEs. This compares favourably to the 56% of White British children attaining this level.
- 40% of disadvantaged Bangladeshi boys get 5 good GCSEs compared to 17% for their disadvantaged White British boys.
- The most under-achieving cohorts of children are disadvantaged white children and disadvantaged Black Caribbean boys, with just 17% and 19% respectively attaining 5 good GCSE grades.

The relative attainment of different ethnic groups is illuminated by the "parental attitudes" of those groups. Commentators suggest that one of the reasons for the better performance of children in some minority communities compared to children from White British families is their parents' conviction that a British education provides crucial opportunities for advancement which were denied to them.

This applies even in families where little English is spoken and parents have had minimal access to education.

The Department for Education and Skills agrees that the different importance placed on education by families plays a significant role in explaining different educational attainment of different ethnic groups:

*Differences in social mobility between ethnic groups (especially Chinese and Indian) show that some minority ethnic groups are more likely to be upwardly mobile than their white counterparts*

66 An eight year old pupil in and East End school

67 www.dfes.gov.uk, KS4 Results by ethnicity, 2004



– in part due to parental aspirations, support and the value placed on education<sup>68</sup>

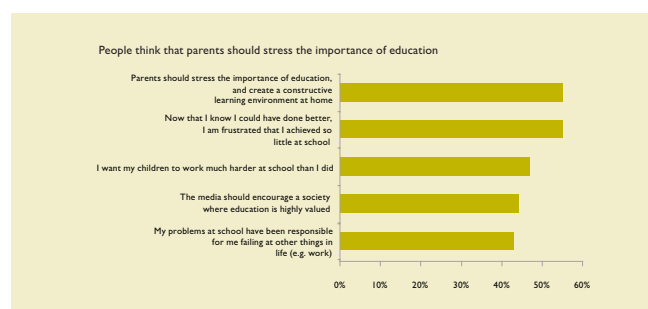
Similarly, in a detailed study of four schools Dr Ruth Lupton argued that:

*Teachers in white working class areas also alluded specifically and frequently to negative or indifferent attitudes towards learning and towards school, among both children and parents. This disinterest in school was seen as stemming largely from parents, who did not share the school's orientation towards learning and in some cases were seen as giving clear messages to 15 children that their schools work was unimportant.... However, there were other staff who offered more structural explanations, noting that white working class areas contained many families whose expectations of social mobility through education were small, conditioned by their own experiences over several generations.<sup>69</sup>*

This accords with our polling in which those who had experienced educational failure were keen to express the importance of attitudes to education.

## MATERIAL NEEDS

There are a number of material obstacles to children participating well in education, including overcrowded housing and poor diet. If children do not eat the right food to feed their minds and have a good night's sleep, they are not in a fit state to learn when they arrive at the school gate. Basic material needs prevent disadvantaged children reaching their full potential.



*“We still have a significant number of children with emotional and social needs which display themselves at times. We manage these occasional incidents well, allowing children time to eat, sleep, wind down, talk about their anxieties. We strive to listen to children and encouraging them to discuss feelings<sup>70</sup>.”*

Home should provide pupils with a appropriate physical environment for study outside of school and a chance to relax and rest before the next day at school. However, the reality for many of our disadvantaged children is very different. Shelter has recently argued that the number of children who could be losing out on a proper education because they live in bad housing would fill 33,000 classrooms.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, according to new research by the Housing Corporation,<sup>72</sup> over one quarter (27 per cent) of UK school children lack space at home in which to concentrate on homework. This often means they start the next school day failing.

The group has heard representations from a number of voluntary sector organizations that work closely with children and families who explained the obstacles and problems faced by the most disadvantaged children.

Key issues identified included:

- Not wanting to take up entitlements to FSM for fear of stigma.
- Not eating a healthy, balanced diet.
- Not owning the right clothes for P.E. and therefore playing truant.
- Not having enough money to go on school trips.

*Children from low-income families can be extremely self-conscious about their appearance and being labelled as poor by their peers – children will often play truant rather than go to school in shoes that they may be teased about, or miss a school trip they feel their parents can't afford.<sup>73</sup>*

One teacher reported that:

*One young boy was excluded from breakfast club because he would come in and steal other kids' food. He looks like a class bully and he gets punished for it, but the truth is if you look deeper at the situation, he is just hungry and being punished for being hungry.*

While it is not the remit of this Group to address the reasons why children lack the basic material needs to succeed at school, it has become clear to us that often schools are unaware of the domestic circumstances of their pupils and there is a lack of coordination between the key agencies who are aware and schools. Moreover, as we shall show in

68 Social Mobility: Narrowing Social Class Educational Attainment Gaps, published by the dfes, April 2006

69 Dr Ruth Lupton, "Schools in Disadvantaged Areas: recognising context and raising quality", January 2004

70 Liz Stead, head teacher Measham Primary School

71 Housing's impact on children's education. (2006). Shelter. <http://england.shelter.org.uk/howtohelp/howtohelp-1427.cfm>

72 "No homework space for the MySpace generation. (16 October 2006). Housing Corporation news release. <http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.8754>

873 [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), 12 August 2002

Chapter 7 schools are often ill equipped to deal with poor pupil behaviour resulting from domestic deprivation.

It is too easy for society to dismiss these problems as being extraneous to educational attainment. In fact they remain key barriers to it.

### EMOTIONAL TURMOIL AT HOME

Disadvantaged children often have to cope with trauma at home including family breakdown, domestic violence and parental substance abuse.

Teachers and voluntary organisations have reported to us that many children enter schools with serious emotional problems. These problems frequently translate into disruptive and aggressive behaviour and low personal expectations of achievement at school.

#### Case Study:

#### School-Home Support Service (UK)

School Home Support Service has worked with over 37,000 families and children in the last year building bridges between home and school to ensure that basic material needs for school attendance are met. Experienced workers and mentors work with young people and parents to enable them to make the most of educational opportunities.

Jan Tallis, Director of School- Home Support Service, commented that “Parents involvement in the education of their children is the single most important factor contributing to success at school....We work to empower parents to make a difference for their children, helping them find strategies for how they can do better... We try to find ways to help the child directly, like alarm clock clubs, matching them with children walking the same way to school or helping them plan a route to school for children whose parents are not able to support the child properly.” By identifying the issues behind a child’s absence, the appropriate intervention can be made to improve educational outcomes.

### FAMILY BREAKDOWN

*I was doing well at school with good grades. But it changed when my parents split*

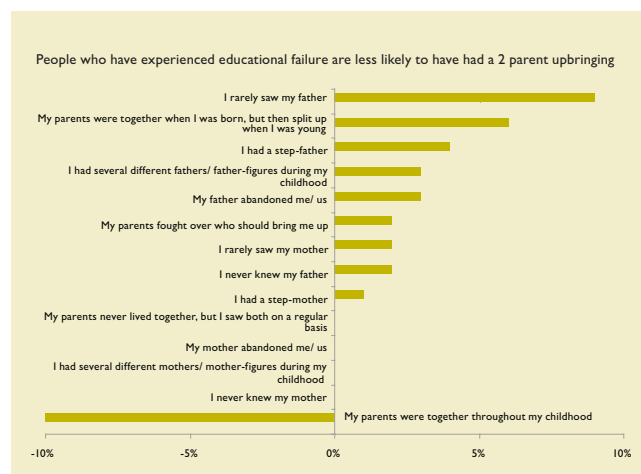
YMCA tenant

*‘My parents marriage breakdown at age 13 had a disastrous affect on school - went from top of the class to bottom and played truant for almost a whole year - left school with poor qualifications’*

One in three children nowadays will experience parental divorce or separation before the age of 16.<sup>74</sup> Research shows that this can have both immediate and longer term effects<sup>75</sup>. Family breakdown has a huge impact upon educational prospects of pupils yet schools are ill-equipped and trained to help children through difficult times at home.

Our polling shows that educational failure respondents were less likely to have had a two parent upbringing.

Moreover among those who experienced educational failure, not having a father around encouraging them to do well had a significant impact:



The following testimony illustrates the damage that can be caused by family breakdown:

*“My mum and dad splitting up when i was seven confused me as my mum suddenly moved me and my younger brother and sisters to another town and we moved schools more or less overnight without the chance to say goodbye to our friends and we wernt allowed to see our dad or relatives on his side of the family for ages... i spent alot of time in my room on my own then i started being badly behaved at school then me and my sister got in with the wrong crowd and i started relying on alcohol more and more and tried a few drugs, my mum blamed me 4 my sisters involvement etc and things got worse at home and so this made my behaviour worse at school, which made more people not like me and it became a vicious circle.”*

This testimony is supported by research from the US that shows a strong link between family breakdown and low educational attainment.<sup>76</sup> Children from divorced, single parent families or co-habiting couples are almost twice as likely to fail and have to repeat a year, and far more likely to be excluded from school. Children of co-habiting par-

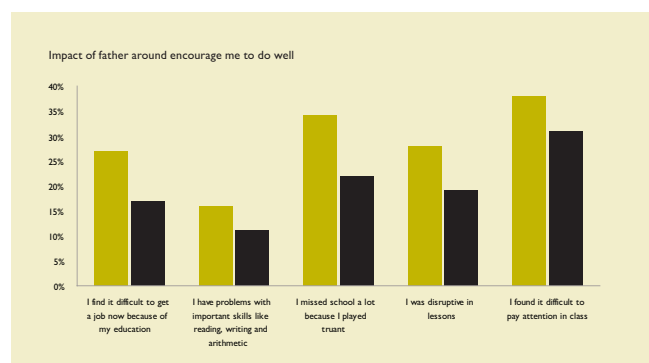
74 State of the Nation, Family Breakdown Committee of the Social Justice Policy Group, December 2006 [www.povertydebate.com](http://www.povertydebate.com)

75 See Social Justice Policy Group report on family breakdown

76 Social Justice Policy Group report on Family Breakdown 2006

ents under-achieve even when compared to those of married couples of the same socio-economic background.

This report describes how family breakdown has profound effects on a child's education. Yet our educational system has yet to develop consistent ways to identify such problems and give better support to children whose lives are troubled at home.



Our polling data reveals that children who have experienced family breakdown are up to 75 per cent more likely to suffer educational failure than children of two-parent families

#### PARENTAL DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE

*I smoke cannabis everyday, do cocaine every few days, regularly do ketamine, and i'm on and off heroin. Started while i was at school, caused by school and people there. And i think it is getting very very serious.... 2 of my children also have learning difficulties, and a find it very hard trying to help them. I wouldn't be able to do a job that required accurate reading or writing or a lot of either.*

It is estimated that 1.5 million children in the UK are affected by parental alcohol problems and between 250,000 and 350,000 are living with parents who misuse drugs.<sup>77</sup> We have received serial submissions describing how family life with a substance-abusing parent is characterised by chaos, uncertainty, and lack of routine, which severely disrupt a child's education.

One teacher described one such pupil:

*Some days she is obviously upset coming into school and does little work those days. She is an able, bright child who is not realising her full potential. She is bringing a lot of baggage to school*

*with her, which is causing concentration problems.*

"My dad walked out when I was 5 & my brother 3. He had minimal contact for a short time before stopping contact altogether. My mum had a number of boyfriends one of which was verbally and physically abusive. When they finally split I was glad to have my mum back but she very quickly met someone else and that's really when my problems started. I rebelled against them and was put into care for a while. I returned home but my behaviour became more out of control; I continuously ran away, drank, took drugs and truanted from school. I also made suicide attempts for which I was hospitalised."

A recent US study shows that children of addicts have high rates of absenteeism, late attendance and academic difficulties. Overall educational performance is severely affected: 41 per cent of children of drug addicts had repeated a year, 19 per cent had truanted and 30 per cent had been suspended at an average age of 12.<sup>78</sup>

While some may view school as a safe haven to escape the chaos and dangers of home, others remain at home instead of being at school for fear of what might happen to their parents during the day. One UK study reported the following evidence from a child:

*And just I used to stay off tae make sure my Ma didnae get drugs and all that... 'cause I hate it... I'd follow her and not let her do it... like I would make sure she stayed in the house with me.<sup>79</sup>*

One eight year old girl in East London observed how instability in home life can affect attainment in schools:

*My picture shows a family that are drug takers and drink too much. Their child is left alone in her room because her family doesn't look after her properly. I think this is the most important to change because its not nice to always be alone<sup>80</sup>.*

Instability at home can have very dangerous effects on educational attainment and society must find effective

77 This is an approximation; some sources state 1.3 million while others suggest 2 million. - 1.3 million children suffering in silence - Government must act on parental alcohol misuse. (18 May 2006). <http://www.turning-point.co.uk/> - Bancroft, Angus, et al. (2004). Parental drug and alcohol misuse: Resilience and transition among young people. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. - SCIE Research briefing 6: Parenting capacity and substance misuse. (August 2005). <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/briefings/briefing06/index.asp>

78 Kolar, Brown, Haertzen, Michaelson, Children of substance abusers: The life experiences of children of opiate addicts in methadone maintenance, 1994

79 'Hidden Harm - Responding to the needs of children of problem drug users.' (March 2003). Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs.

80 Evidence collected during Social Justice Policy Group school visit



mechanisms for identifying these problems and supporting children through school at difficult times.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Widespread domestic violence has a damaging effect on children.

*I in fact 'parented' my own parents because of my father's violence & drinking. I paid no attention at school as I was always concerned what was happening at home.*

Nearly one million children in the UK experience domestic violence and research also shows that up to 1 in 14 children could have poor exam results as a consequence.<sup>81</sup>

Our own polling evidence reveals that one in eight who failed at school suffered abuse as a child and one in ten children had witnessed domestic violence while growing up.<sup>82</sup>

Maltreated children perform less well academically.<sup>83</sup> They are more likely to have behavioural problems and commit crime. In common with children of substance-abusing parents, they are more likely to suffer from bullying at school.

A report from the United States explains that children who had been exposed to high levels of domestic violence had IQs that were eight points lower than the 100 average of the general population. Karenstan Koenen, of the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Boston, said, "This finding is important because low IQ at age five is a risk factor for negative outcomes such as school failure, and later, juvenile delinquency."<sup>84</sup>

*"My mother left home when I was young, my father would not allow me to see her, my father physically abused me, I lost my confidence, I was bullied at and lost interest in school, I left with poor qualifications and poor social skills, I took/take drugs to cheer me up."*

## PEER PRESSURE AND LACK OF POSITIVE ROLE MODELS

Alongside exposure to challenging home environments, children's absorption of damaging cultural influences has a big impact on educational development.

Pupils in high status social settings with parents who had

positive educational experiences encounter a range of powerful role models who promote learning and schooling.

Pupils in areas of social disadvantage are likely to encounter far less positive role models.

*"Growing up without a father figure, bullying at school, being gay, my mothers illness, dependency on cannabis, cant get a job, live away from my family and friends who I miss a lot, use cannabis to relieve boredom/depression."*

Given the impact of family breakdown on educational attainment and the lack of male role models in the homes of many disadvantaged children, it is concerning that there is a distinct male /female imbalance in the classroom. A recent report by Professor John Howson of Education Data Surveys described how male teachers only account for 13% of all primary post and 41% of secondary posts compared to 23% and 50% in 1980. This disturbing exodus looks set to continue when men form only 10% of new primary school applicants and 30% of secondary candidates. This means many of our disadvantaged children grow up with few positive male influences in their life.

Over 30% of our poll of those who had experienced educational failure said that more male teachers in schools would have helped them.

Submissions to our hearings, particularly from leaders of the Black- Caribbean community cite the lack of inspirational role models – or more importantly, of children's awareness of them – as a major factor in their children's low overall attainment.

The problem of peer pressure creating an anti-learning attitude in schools is highlighted in a recent review;<sup>85</sup> it was found that pupils' willingness to learn was most strongly influenced by the attitudes of their friends and the perceived usefulness of the subject matter.

While we will explore the issue of relevance of the curriculum later in this report, it is clear that for some groups in schools it is "not cool to study." In many deprived areas, to be studious means to be an outsider and excluded by peers. This conflict between the "cultures" of learning and the street is one of the greatest challenges facing many school leaders.

81 1m children' face home violence: Nearly one million children in the UK could be living with domestic violence, according to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund, Unicef. 15/08/2006.

82 YouGov Polling for Social Justice Policy Group, October 2006

83 Mills, Chris. (December 2004). *Problems at home, problems in school: The effects of maltreatment in the home on children's functioning at school: An overview of recent research.*

84 Violence at home 'hits children's IQ:' Violence between parents can reduce young children's IQ levels, researchers say. 11/06/2003. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/ft/-/1/hi/education/2981312.stm>

85 Review carried out for the institute's Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) by researchers at Glasgow University - Who did this?

Our own polling found that:

- Over 20% thought that studying or making an effort wasn't cool
- More than 20% felt their friends didn't care about schooling
- Over 25% believe their school didn't stress the importance of education

We have had evidence from practitioners who have been successful by recognising the power of “street culture” and vigorously challenging it, using positive strategies to bring out changes in attitudes.

These have included mentoring, confidence building and aspiration raising activities, usually led or supported by positive role models.

#### GOVERNMENT MUST FOCUS ON THE ROLE OF PARENTS

Recent findings have shown that parental involvement and engagement is the single biggest factor in explaining the educational attainment of children;<sup>86</sup>

This work resonates with the findings of the social anthropologist Annette Lareau in her 2003 book “Unequal Childhoods”. This describes the impact of different child raising and learning methods on poor and middle class children. It concludes that although material

obstacles do lie in the way of poor children, the way in which they are encouraged to learn is fundamental.

#### Case Study: Amanda Spielman, ARK schools

ARK schools was founded in 2004 to set up new schools and replace failing schools to ensure all children have access to a good education. By seeking to develop a new educational model, they aim to establish a formula of good practice that affects education beyond the ARK network.

‘We need to ensure parents know what the school is trying to do, where and why it is different from other schools, what we are hoping to achieve, and as explicitly as we can what the expectations will be of their children – and what we will need from parents to make sure their children succeed, from doing homework to getting into school on time. The organisation has also established a sub-group of governors to work with families that might have particular difficulties and the greatest problems.’

Other US work from Professor Jeanne Brooks-Gunn of Teachers College and Martha Farah from the University of Pennsylvania draws one to the same conclusion – poverty is important but child rearing is crucial.

#### Case Study: Sure Start

As a result of the extensive research on the importance of early childhood education, the Government developed the Sure Start programme “to work with parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual, and social development of pre-school children, particularly those who are disadvantaged, to ensure that they are ready to thrive when they get to school.” A similar programme in the United States, known as Head Start, has shown some positive effects over the past few decades. While children entering with lower levels of knowledge and skill still fall below national averages after the programme, they do show vast improvement both academically and socially.

The programme looks at the effects of certain familial environmental risk factors, such as parental depression, exposure to domestic violence, substance use, etc., and findings suggest that Head Start may, in fact, “play an important role in protecting families and children from the challenges that low-income families face.”<sup>92</sup>

However, other studies conclude that these gains made early in life tend to disappear after just a few years.<sup>93</sup> Sure Start has only been around since 1997, yet the most recent programme evaluation already shows “beneficial effects on the least socially deprived families and adverse effects on the most disadvantaged families.” In fact, it reported that “children of teenage mothers and unemployed or lone parents did worse in Sure Start areas than those in similarly deprived communities elsewhere.”<sup>94</sup> This initiative is failing to reach the most disadvantaged: the very group the programme was designed to help in the first place. As seen with many new government initiatives, one previous Sure Start worker reflected, “Sure Start sounds like a good idea in theory, but in fact it is a huge waste of money for the small amount it benefits the children. Surely there is another way.”<sup>95</sup>

It is our view that Government needs to focus much more on the role of parents. This is supported by a recent YouGov survey of adults who had experienced educational failure. Over 55 per cent said that “Parents should stress the importance of education, and create a constructive learning environment at home.”

This Government has formed much policy around a child - centred agenda using our education system as an emergency service to tackle the social problems described in this report. This approach looks likely to persist with the growth of extended schools despite the reservations of teachers. A recent survey found only 11% of heads fully in favour of this policy and a third had serious reservations.<sup>87</sup>

It is vital that parents play a key role in supporting school – monitoring children’s progress, setting expectations, getting involved and staying engaged with the schooling process. A good relationship between school and parents, reinforcing the important role that parents need to play, must be the starting point of school policy. And it is important to engage parents and develop partnerships early on. Parents are the most important influence on a child, and their ability to encourage a child to get the most out of schooling is unparalleled. Setting expectations for a child, rewarding a child for good results and supporting them through bad ones, are all extremely significant contributions to schooling.

Schools must be able to rely upon parents as the “ultimate sanction” for study and behaviour – parental involvement and engagement is what makes both, school progress reports and teachers’ discipline, effective.

One head teacher commented:

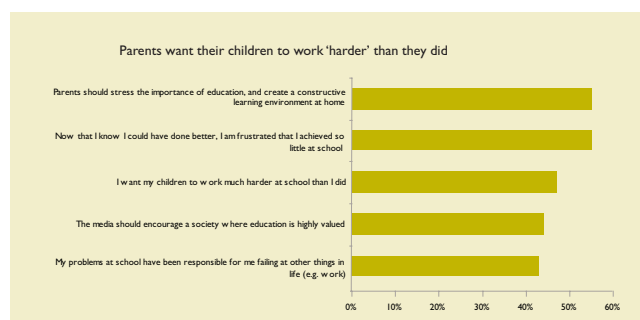
*‘Inappropriate behaviour of children or parents is not accepted.’ All parties are aware of expected behaviour in school. Central to this is good relationships between staff, children and parents. Communications between senior members of staff and children/parents is good and valued to ensure immediate action. We have seen many examples of schools who are explicit about parental responsibilities and the need to put learning at the top of their agenda.*

*‘Quite simply I don’t believe I ever read a book or studied for anything because I saw it as pointless ... If I had the choice now to go back I would work harder and possibly enjoy my school life.’*

## Case Study: Extended Schools

Children’s Minister Beverley Hughes acknowledges that in light of recent research, “We need to do more to reach the very most disadvantaged children.”<sup>88</sup> The Government plans to have all schools offering extended services, including ‘wrap-around’ childcare from 8am – 6pm all year round, parenting and family support, homework, music and sports clubs, and specialists like speech therapists, by 2010. While teachers unions have been assured that the programme will not lead to any increase in their workloads, Mick Brookes, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers asserts that these schools could become “a national babysitting service.”<sup>89</sup> This would mean a 50-hour school week for some children, who would spend more time at school than at home with their families. Some view this as allowing parents to ‘wash their hands of parental responsibility.’ Schools are to work with parents in order to create a package of services that will best meet the needs of their community and encourage their participation. However, one must wonder how schools are to deliver much benefit to the 30,000 children who regularly truant, and furthermore, how they are to engage with parents who themselves had a negative experience of school and are unlikely to want to work with such extended provision in the first place?

Our survey found that nearly half of parents who had experienced educational failure want their children to work “much harder” than they did.



Some parents do not realise that they have such a major role in determining the academic fortunes of their children, or know how they can help. The issue was explored in a detailed analysis of educational attainment in Bermondsey by Dr Gillian Evans.<sup>90</sup> Dr Evans looked at the varying expectations and aspirations of parents from different social, ethnic and economic backgrounds. She dispels the myth that “working

87 Witness at Social Justice Policy Group hearing

88 Children’s Minister Beverley Hughes, live online at 4.30 pm on Thursday October 12. Guardian Unlimited. <http://educationtalk.guardian.co.uk/WebX?128@659.GXzCIIIOYUJ.8@.7759d922>.

89 Garner, Richard. (2 May 2006). Headteachers hit out at new ‘babysitting’ role. The Independent (Limited Source: Financial Times Information Limited).

90 Evans, Gillian. (2006). Educational Failure and Working Class White Children in Britain.

class” parents do not care about their children or neglect their needs. Dr Evans instead argues that “working class” parents have a deep concern for family well-being but this does not necessarily translate to an appreciation of the value of formal learning. She explains how long-standing and negative attitudes to education, often formed by generations of low social mobility, can prevent parents from directly encouraging participation in formal education. The following excerpt describes the attitude of one mother, Sharon, to her daughter’s education:

*Sharon emphasised that it doesn’t matter to her that Sophie left school at 13, as she herself had done also, because this is the only evidence to her that Sophie wasn’t happy and couldn’t get on at school. I asked Sophie whether she had any regrets about leaving school so early and she says “as long as I enjoy my life I don’t mind what job I do.”<sup>91</sup>*

This lack of appreciation of the positive impact that an early love of learning can have upon prospects is a fundamental reason why the attainment gap exists in this country. It explains why schools in difficult areas have a very hard job engaging parents who do not have the same fond memories of school as more affluent parents.

One inner city head teacher said to us that:

*It’s all about people... many schools say that they have close partnerships with parents but in reality they don’t. We’ve tried hard to bring parents into the school – many parents were almost reluctant to come into school because of their education, their background, but we’ve spent time with the parents in information evenings and other activities.*

## WINNING THE BATTLE FOR LEARNING

Our group has encountered many examples of practitioners winning the battle for learning and is optimistic about the opportunity to put learning at the heart of our disadvantaged communities.

Here are a couple of examples of initiatives which break down the cultural barriers described in this report:

One head teacher has abandoned traditional parent evenings and encouraged parents to form a direct relationship with their child’s tutor. This guarantees a 100 % turnout because tutors will go to their houses to speak to them if they do not attend meetings. He commented that; “There is a clarity of vision in the leadership team, they know exactly where we’re going and that sort of clarity makes sure everything goes together, including the pupils and parents, and it’s important in the ethos of nurturing, learning and loving learning.”

One school has recognised the significance of ethnicity and culture engaging mothers from immigrant Muslim communities. It understood it needed to explain “How the system works,” and encourage appropriate involvement where possible. **The head teacher commented that:** “For their last open day, more than twice as many parents came than previously as they had sent out invites saying the school was performing a concert... all parents love to see their children perform. The thing is about schools in inner cities is that they need to respond differently to those in more middle class, suburban or rural schools. Getting parents into schools under any pretence is important... use every device you can...”

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that the material needs and emotional turmoil of many disadvantaged children are high barriers to climb. However, as important as these issues are, attainment is also greatly affected by peer pressure and a lack of positive role models. It is clear that in our most deprived areas it is “not cool to study” and learning can lead to exclusion from friendships. Schools must work with children and not against them, striving to engage even those for whom school life and learning is often a very alien culture.

Parents are key allies in winning the battle for learning. Government must focus on the role of parents and not attempt to take over more of their responsibilities. Government policy should address the cultural reasons

91 Evans, Gillian. (2006). Educational Failure and Working Class White Children in Britain

92 Head Start performance measures center family and child experiences survey (FACES 2000) Technical Report. (February 2006). US Department of Health and Human Services.

93 Ball, Christopher. (March 1994). Start Right: The importance of early learning. Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.

94 Sure Start sets back the worst placed youngsters, study finds. (1 December 2005). The Guardian.

95 Former Sure Start worker.

why certain children under-achieve in schools, encouraging parental involvement in education and ensuring shared expectations between children, teachers and parents. Rather than trying to become a bigger corporate parent, Government should encourage some parents to understand that helping their children to learn is as

important to their future as feeding and clothing them. It is not so much “Every Child Matters” as “Every Parent Matters.”

There is overwhelming evidence that the leadership of schools is of paramount importance in improving schools. OFSTED recognises this:

## Chapter 6: Leadership of schools

*“We know that head teachers make a difference. Inspection evidence shows the clear link between the quality of leadership, the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils. Good heads enable teachers to teach well.”<sup>96</sup>*

This message is echoed by our polling in which nearly half of those questioned said that our schools need better leadership.

One of the most significant reasons for the failure of certain schools in deprived areas is the shortage of good quality heads willing to teach in such neighbourhoods.

The following key statistics arise:

- More than 500,000 pupils are being taught in leaderless schools because of the head teacher recruitment and retention crisis.<sup>97</sup>
- More than 1,200 state schools were operating without a full time head.
- Less than one in twenty teachers wants to lead a school.

This chapter focuses on the key reasons why there is a reluctance to lead in our most difficult schools and challenges the Government to address the underlying causes of the school leadership crisis.

### WHY IS GOOD LEADERSHIP SO IMPORTANT?

Three key functions of a head teacher illustrate the impact of the shortage of head teachers:

- Developing a shared ethos
- Leading the staff team
- Involving the community

### DEVELOPING A SHARED ETHOS

One of the key roles of head teachers is to articulate a clear and consistent vision and ethos for the school that unifies parents, teachers and pupils. Furthermore, this vision needs to be communicated effectively and consistently to each of these groups.

As our research has shown the absence of shared vision can cripple a school. One head said

*Expectations were far too low on behalf of the staff and the government. The school had been absolutely panned in the media... people were demoralised. The previous head had left a year before, and the deputy head in the area was inexperienced. The school had sort of drifted.*

### LEADING THE STAFF TEAM

Having established the direction of travel, it's crucial to get the right people in the right roles and travelling in the same direction.

Submissions to our hearings have demonstrated the corrosive effect of a dysfunctional team upon school performance.

### INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

Considering the impact of the domestic and wider cultural setting on educational attainment we have reviewed in Chapter 5, it is important that heads involve the local community in championing learning.

One head stated to us: ‘it just took for ever to get rid of the wrong people, personnel procedures were far too slow and this makes life harder for the good members of staff who are trying to turn things around with unsatisfactory staff. In the meantime kids were being taught by a changing roll of unsatisfactory supply teachers and were being let down

In the words of one report:

*“head teachers have an important role in building positive relationships with parents and the wider school community in order to mediate the effect of external factors on student outcomes.”<sup>98</sup>*

The following case study illustrates these roles in action:

### THE PROBLEM IS WORST IN FAILING SCHOOLS

Unsurprisingly there are more vacant headships in our poorest performing schools than others. When a recent General Teaching Council survey found that less than one

96 Ofsted publication, Leadership of Schools, National College of School Leadership, [www.ncsl.org.uk/media/ECE/65/leadership-in-schools.pdf](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/media/ECE/65/leadership-in-schools.pdf).

97 National Association of Head Teachers survey, April 2006

98 [http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/EPPiWebContent/reel/review\\_groups/leadership/lea\\_rv1/lea\\_rv1.pdf](http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/EPPiWebContent/reel/review_groups/leadership/lea_rv1/lea_rv1.pdf)



### Case Study: Peter Slough, Head teacher, Small Heath School

'Our aim is simple. To do the best we can for our children.'

*Small Heath School is a secondary school in an hugely deprived inner-city area of Birmingham. The high levels of unemployment and infant mortality have left the community with very low self esteem and Peter Slough recognises, "it is a tough environment." Over half of the pupils are on Free School Meals yet their examination results were superb last year: with over 57 percent of grades at A\*- C. Their success was built on strengthening links with the community, involving parents and engaging parents, teachers and children in a shared ethos.*

**Shared Ethos:** the uniqueness of Small Heath School lies in their discipline values and school aims which they themselves have developed. The pupils are given input into what makes a good teacher and a good pupil so the whole school might be part of the vision and values.

**Leading the staff team:** "Like good parents, staff have a genuine affection for pupils but are 'tough' in expecting hard work, good manners, respect and consideration for others."

**Leading the community:** of the local community, about 94% are Asian and 5 % Arabic; in cultures such as these there are strong family values "built on respect and love." The school leadership decided to build on these values by fostering a family ethos within the school, ensuring pupils and teachers alike share the same vision for the purpose and direction of the school, "that has created a really passionate ethos so that when the children walk in our doors they feel like we want them."

in twenty teachers was attracted to the role of head, the schools most in need of leadership have to compete for fewer leaders. They have little to offer but a challenge. Well publicised problems of low morale, poor behaviour and media pressure will attract only the most dedicated and resilient of heads. As this chapter will show it is unlikely that this trend will be reversed without direct action due to the wider problems in general teaching recruitment and retention.

### RELUCTANCE TO LEAD

Something must be wrong if just 4% of a profession would even consider going for the top job?

One of the fundamental reasons for poor supply of head teachers in difficult schools is the nature of the fierce target driven culture and initiative overload of this Government. A recent example of the pressures has come from OFSTED's report (Improving Pupil Behaviour) which found that many heads were too distracted by developing bids and planning new buildings to focus on improving behaviour.

In addition, annual publication of league tables for every school can have a very demoralising effect on schools and teachers. Results are reported in less than sophisticated ways, with the focus on the overall results, rather than the Value-Added measures, or even the year-on-year changes. This means that head teachers working very hard to turn around under-performing schools will often have their efforts criticised despite huge improvements.

Is it any surprise that head teachers are wary of taking on a job where their efforts will not be recognised?

As one report put it, "the school leaders' love of their job is matched with a sense of frustration that many of the successes of London schools and their students are underrated, diminished by the ways in which data about school performance is presented."<sup>99</sup>

One head teacher was even more blunt, "I know that our achievements are fantastic but there is a lack of understanding in the shires and beyond of what we have to do."<sup>100</sup>

Add in to the mix numerous external pressures – including family breakdown and crime and it is not hard to see why there is an acute shortage of talented individuals willing to fill such posts in our more difficult schools.

A report tells of a head teacher in Tower Hamlet's comparing notes with a friend in a less disadvantaged outer London borough:

*I have six or seven meetings a week with other agencies" he commented, "He has one a term."<sup>101</sup>*

There is a perception that being a head teacher has become a bureaucratic job. One Deputy head teacher commented that he would not even consider becoming a head teacher because of the paperwork involved in running a school. Similarly, one report goes on to document another head's feelings about his "external" duties in a similar fashion:

99 National College of School Leadership, 'Educational Leadership in London', 2004 <http://ncsl.org.uk/mediastore/image2/jwb-leadershipinlondon-012004.pdf>

100 Ibid

101 National College of School Leadership, 'Educational Leadership in London', 2004 <http://ncsl.org.uk/mediastore/image2/jwb-leadershipinlondon-012004.pdf>

*We are asked to go with families to the Housing Office, or to get them registered with a GP. Where people feel disempowered they go for help to the most available people in authority, and that means us. Because we smile at them at the beginning of the day they hope that we can help with all their wider problems.*<sup>102</sup>

The extent to which higher pay alone would help with recruitment and retention is unclear. Leading a difficult school in a disadvantaged area currently has too many drawbacks to be attractive as a career for many people. A good supply of high quality leaders will require a combination of better pay, fairer evaluation of performance, as well as solutions to some of the “external” pressures faced by heads in these areas.

### THE GATHERING STORM

The head teacher personnel crisis is a subset, but a crucial one, of a wider crisis in general teacher recruitment and retention in our country.

*There was a time when we could assume that the brightest and best of each generation would want to join the public sector. But that is an assumption that we can no longer make, particularly when the financial rewards at the top of the private sector are so great, and too often public sector workers are weighed down by bureaucracy and silly rules.*<sup>2103</sup>

Tony Blair, speech on modernising public services, January 1999

A good education system requires good teachers and they will only enter and stay in a profession which offers satisfaction and prospects.

The inability of schools to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of teachers is both a cause and a symptom of its wider failings. Almost every head teacher turning around a poorly performing school has highlighted to us the importance of attracting good teachers into schools. In the following case study, the head teacher of an improving school in Leicestershire stresses the important role that teachers have to play:

### Case Study

Liz Stead is a Head Teacher of Measham School, Leicestershire, **the school** was placed in Serious Weaknesses in January 2004, and subsequently in Special Measures in September of the same year. As a result of Liz and her team’s efforts, Measham Primary School was taken out of Special Measures in May 2006 and is now a “lead school” for Leicestershire in managing behaviour, and implementing the DfES initiative-Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning.

In describing the problems and obstacles to turning around a failing school, Liz cited the following ‘factors that hindered change’;

- Difficulty in staff appointments
- Many “unsatisfactory” supply teachers
- Slow rates of personnel procedures with unsatisfactory staff

In order to improve outcomes, staff training was set up to aid their understanding of why children behaved in certain ways. Significant actions believed to have played a key role in the school’s improvement are; modelling active listening as a means of solving disputes, a fairer, more consistent approach to dealing with unwanted behaviour and in rewarding desired behaviour, new learning and teaching approaches, and improved school environment.

All these changes were driven through by a senior management team led by the head teacher who found that tackling the root causes of behaviour difficulties also solved the manifestation of them. Liz Stead believes “the significant change to our school is the ethos” and by effective leadership working together with pupils and staff, behaviour, learning and outcomes have dramatically improved.

The scale of the teacher recruitment and retention problem facing our schools is staggering:

### AGEING WORKFORCE

It is predicted that the difficulties recruiting and retaining teachers will get worse as within the next 10 years 50% of the current workforce will have retired.<sup>104</sup> The following chart shows the age distribution of teachers, and the large number of teacher who are nearing retirement age.<sup>105</sup>

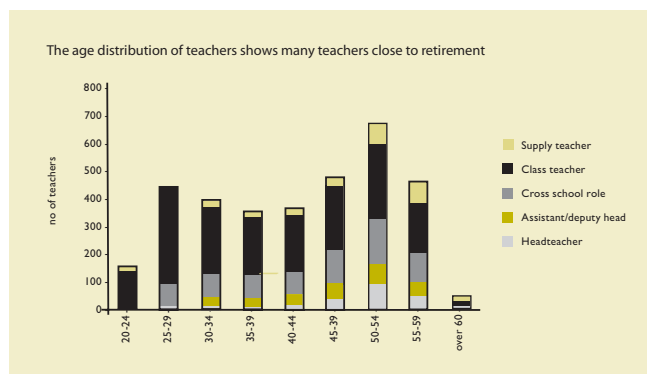
102 Ibid

103 <http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/Page1273.asp>

104 Centre for Economic Performance, Autumn 2004

105 Professor John Howson, ‘Education Data Surveys Expert Analysis & Commentary on Education Issues’, September 2005 [www.educationdatasurveys.org.uk](http://www.educationdatasurveys.org.uk)





A considerable proportion of those who currently have leadership roles are older teachers. The impending retirement of so many teachers greatly affects the problem of teacher recruitment, and therefore leadership of schools. It is estimated that the number of school leader retirements is likely to rise from 2,250 in 2004 to a peak of nearly 3,500 in 2009.<sup>106</sup> Initial analysis of recruitment pressures suggests that we will require an increase, on 2004 figures, of 15- 20% in the recruitment of school leaders by 2009.<sup>107</sup>

#### POOR TEACHER RETENTION

Compounding this recruitment problem are the huge numbers of teachers leaving the profession shortly after entry. One survey in 2003 found that of 100 trainee teachers 88 passed their final examinations, but only 59 were still teaching a year later. This number fell to 53 after three years.<sup>108</sup> Just as there are shortages of teachers within specific subject fields, teachers within specific subject fields (IT, languages, and English) are more likely to resign.<sup>109</sup>

It is important to highlight the scale of the problem; the number of full-time and part-time teachers who left teaching in the five years September 1999 – August 2004 was 91,580 and 29,150 respectively. This amounts to 29% of all full-time and part-time teachers.<sup>110</sup>

The problem of teachers leaving the profession does not have much prospect of improving in the future. A recent survey, asked teachers whether they envisaged leaving teaching within the next five years. Over 21% indicated

that they would take up one or more of five options that involved moving out of state school teaching in England, and a further 17% that it was likely that they would do so. In other words, over 38% of teachers were at risk of leaving the profession in the next five years.<sup>111</sup> This clearly bodes badly for the future of the teaching profession. It is important, therefore, both to look at the retention of teachers and to find innovative new ways of attracting people into teaching.

#### LACK OF MALE TEACHERS

The Department for Education and Skills found that as long ago as 2003, only 26,200 primary school teachers were male, compared to 141,000 female, a figure of just 15.7 per cent.<sup>112</sup> Despite efforts to recruit more male teachers, Professor John Howson's 2006 study indicates that this is now 13%.

Findings also indicate that almost half of children aged 5-11 do not have contact with a male teacher.<sup>113</sup> It is vital that teachers are not only representative of the communities in which they teach, but that children are used to interacting with both men and women, and have positive role models from both sexes. The findings of the survey were that:

- 26 per cent of parents were worried that their child may lack a male perspective on life
- 22 per cent are concerned that their child does not have enough positive male role models
- 61 per cent interviewed believed that male teachers had a crucial role to play in helping children to feel more confident with men.<sup>114</sup>

As one primary school teacher comments:

*I am a male primary school teacher. I have had many parents approach me at the beginning of each school year and express their happiness that their child is being taught by a male teacher. Many children do not have male role models in their lives and I fully support the drive to recruit more male teachers. I have worked in four schools. This school is the only one where I have not been the only male member of staff<sup>115</sup>*

106 Ibid

107 Professor John Howson, 'Education Data Surveys Expert Analysis & Commentary on Education Issues', September 2005 [www.educationdatasurveys.org.uk](http://www.educationdatasurveys.org.uk)

108 Alan Smithers and Pamela Robinson, Brief of Factors Affecting Teachers Decisions to Leave the Profession, 2003

109 Ibid.

110 General Teaching Council, Survey of 3,665 teachers, April 2006

112 Ibid

113 Training and Development Agency for Schools survey, 2005

114 Training and Development Agency for Schools survey, Graham Holley, TDA executive director, believes "We need more men to become primary school teachers to redress the current gender imbalance."

115 <http://www.tda.gov.uk/about/mediarelations/2005/20051013.aspx>

116 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4336092.stm>

Over 30% of those polled in our survey of educational underachievers said that more male teachers in schools would have helped them.

### THE MONEY GO ROUND

Over the past ten years, the Government has invested huge sums of money into recruiting and retaining teachers. Indeed, a vast proportion of increased public expenditure on education has been directed towards teaching, with spending on teacher salaries and improving teacher-pupil ratios increasing by 53 per cent between 1997 and 2006.

Coupled with this increased expenditure, there have been a number of programmes and initiatives designed to get the brightest and best into teaching, and more importantly, to remain within the profession:

- School science was at the top of the agenda in the budget, with money provided to recruit 3,000 science teachers.<sup>116</sup>
- The Teacher Recruitment and Retention Unit was created in April 2002 to provide assistance to London local education authorities in interpreting and implementing government policies with regards to the retention of teachers.<sup>117</sup>
- The National Retention Forum was set up in April 2002 to look at the issue of retaining teachers and ensure spread of good practice across different LEA's.

Graham Lane of the Local Government Association believes that money is neither the fundamental problem nor the answer:

*“The biggest problem with the profession is turnover and I discovered that more teachers left in their first five years teaching than any other time than retirement. Sometimes they left because of salaries or more interesting careers, of course. But now, teaching salaries in London, an ordinary teacher is on 30- 35 grand within 5 years... first track teachers get very quickly promoted, can get up to 45 grand, which is a very competitive salary.”*

**So why have pay increases and recruitment initiatives been relatively unsuccessful in bucking the trends?**

### POOR PUPIL BEHAVIOUR AND TEACHING

*Reports repeatedly show that poor pupil behaviour is a major reason teachers leave the profession, so it is natural*

*that retention should be harder for schools with discipline problems. In many schools there is a constant battle against an undercurrent of low level disruption – such as chatting in class and not paying attention. The drain on teachers’ energy and frustration at having to take time to deal with discipline issues often drives good teachers away from challenging schools or out of the profession.<sup>118</sup>*

In schools with a significant number of pupils who are unable to engage in the educational process, teachers are finding it very difficult to maintain control in the classroom:

*As soon as I look down at someone’s work I am hit with a flying ruler... I am moving towards the wall for safety when a girl who is considerably bigger than I am does a shoulder tackle then addresses me a ‘stupid f\*\*\*\*\* little old lady.*

A teacher’s diary, children age 13-14

### Case Study:

#### Inner- City Teacher in an East End School

The amount of work a teacher is expected to cover within the curriculum is immense, “if you are working in an area in which children want to learn, are well behaved and speak English as their first language, then the task although challenging, feels possible.” However, the situation in an inner city school is more complex, as a higher proportion of children have no interest in learning, exhibit extreme behaviour due to issues which arise externally to school, and for many of whom English is not their first language, “where I work, a quarter of the children speak English as their second or third language.” Trying to keep these children engaged in class activities when they have no extra help is very difficult. Within inner city school there also has to be more focus on the hidden curriculum, as many of the children need to be taught life skills which are learnt at home in many other areas of the country. “For example, we have to teach children how to sit on chair, how to eat with a knife and fork, how to relate to each-other without using shouting or violence.” In this sense therefore a teacher’s role is extended beyond the normal boundaries, to that of a parent or social worker. Due to the structure of the curriculum being so tight, the content of certain subjects such as P.E is reduced, meaning children do not have a channel for excess energies or worries, which then manifest themselves in misbehaviour.

116 [http://findoutmore.dfes.gov.uk/2006/03/budget\\_boost\\_fo.html](http://findoutmore.dfes.gov.uk/2006/03/budget_boost_fo.html)

117 [http://www.gos.gov.uk/gol/Education\\_skills/Education/Teacher\\_recruitment/](http://www.gos.gov.uk/gol/Education_skills/Education/Teacher_recruitment/)

118 Stuart Herdson President of ATL

The stress levels endured by teachers in the classroom are immense. Chapter 7 deals with the impact of poor pupil behaviour. Unless these are addressed in disadvantaged schools, teachers will continue to shy away from them, thus compounding underachievement.

### POOR JOB SATISFACTION

While there has been considerable investment in ensuring that teacher salaries are high in inner-city schools to compensate for the extra cost of living in these areas, there are questions as to whether this is ever going to be sufficient. Teachers in difficult schools are forced to deal with a range of external problems and a number of teachers have commented to us that they find it impossible to teach since so much of their time is taken up with other duties. This

means that teachers genuinely find it hard to “teach” in difficult schools and they need to be given the freedom to actually do their job.

**From a policy perspective, it is vital that teachers are not overwhelmed by bureaucracy and wide ranging responsibilities in schools and are freed up to get on with educating.**

Furthermore, more radical improvement to the proposition of teaching as a career, is necessary to target the low morale that affects the teaching profession. The working group has heard in some detail, both from private sector providers and teachers, that financial incentives, a better teaching environment and better opportunities for advancement might improve teacher performance. Our policy recommendations will ultimately include these elements.

### Case Study: Teach First

Teach First’s aim is to “address educational disadvantage by transforming exceptional graduates into effective inspirational teachers and leaders in all fields” and since its establishment in 2002 has placed more than 700 teachers in 100 of London’s and Greater Manchester’s most challenging secondary schools.

“It’s a big challenge getting teachers into some schools, but not just that, it’s about getting good teachers who want to be in challenging, complex schools and will appreciate the challenges”. By using the demanding nature of inner-city teaching as

one of the selling points of the scheme, Teach First successfully presents teaching as a positive career option. Recent graduates often show great “passion and enthusiasm” for their subject which they can transmit in the classroom. Although they only receive six weeks intensive training, they are supported throughout their first year by a professional mentor, a subject mentor in school and a professional tutor. The outcomes for teach first are excellent, over 90% of graduates complete at least five years in the classroom, compared to 65% with the PGCE. This is clearly a very successful model, which shows us that a new approach is needed in order to improve teacher retention and reverse the increasing numbers leaving the profession.

## Chapter 7: Poor Pupil Behaviour

Politicians are too willing to “talk tough” about school discipline without demonstrating a firm commitment to addressing its causes. This chapter explores the costs and causes of poor pupil behaviour. Poor pupil behaviour and school discipline provoke strong feelings. A recent survey found that 64% of parents thought it was the biggest single cause of educational failure.

This view resonates with our own polling of those who failed at school where over 40% said they were bullied and more than 30% found it difficult to pay attention in class.

### ‘STATE OF THE NATION’

Almost £1 billion has been spent directly on tackling poor attendance and challenging behaviour in schools<sup>119</sup> yet rates of unauthorised absence and permanent exclusions have risen in recent years:

- **Permanent exclusions** have risen by 20% since 2000.<sup>120</sup> Of the 10,000 permanent exclusions every year, almost 30% are due to persistent disruptive behaviour, over 20% involve threatening abuse against an adult and 20% involve physical abuse against another pupils.
- **Period exclusions:** There are 389,500 fixed period exclusions every year.
- **Truancy:** It is estimated that 55,000 pupils miss school without permission every day.<sup>121</sup>
- **“Missing Pupils”:** a recently identified category of school absence is that of ‘missing’ pupils. An estimate from Nacro, the crime reduction charity, places the number of missing pupils at 100,000 on any given day.<sup>122</sup>

These statistics do not begin to describe the impact of low- level disruption and general poor behaviour in a classroom. Submissions to our work from head teachers and teachers have repeatedly described the daily pressure of trying to manage poor pupil behaviour and in some failing schools the situation is almost out of control.

Pupils are also crying out for help with nearly one in two of our survey saying that their schools did not deal

effectively with bullying and a quarter believing that their schools couldn’t cope with disruptive pupils.

### EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

The correlation between individual low attainment and poor discipline is striking. Over two thirds of pupils who have been excluded from school have reading ages two or three years below their chronological age when they begin secondary school, and struggle to read, write and comprehend material in lessons. Furthermore, a recent study by Ofsted has shown that a significant proportion of pupils with challenging behaviour have poor language and social skills and limited concentration spans.<sup>123</sup> However, this should not be read to mean that poor discipline causes low standards: in fact, low educational attainment is also one of the key drivers of poor discipline.

Discipline problems are compounded by other failings within the education system. A schooling approach that fails to engage pupils of all abilities means that a significant proportion of the school population are increasingly alienated from the culture of learning within the classroom. Young people are angry and frustrated at spending their time in an environment that highlights, rather than addresses, their problems. We too often imagine that “if only they’d behave, they’d learn”. In reality, they do not behave largely because they are unable to engage in the curriculum, and thus cannot learn from it. By seeking to understand poor behaviour, at least in part, as a response to the failings of the education system, we may find it easier to break the vicious cycle of underachievement leading to discipline problems, and further underachievement.

### TYRANNY OF THE MINORITY?

Poor discipline in a classroom makes learning impossible for everyone – once a critical mass of disruption has been achieved, all students will suffer.

As one teacher in an inner city school put it:

*Disruptive pupils can single-handedly ruin lessons, even whole subjects, for their fellow students. Particularly during the early years of secondary school it becomes almost fashionable to argue*

119 [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk)

120 [ww.dfes.gov.uk](http://ww.dfes.gov.uk)

121 DFES National Statistics, Pupil Absence in Schools in England 2004/05, 21st September 2005

122 Nacro, Missing Out, 2003

123 Ofsted, Managing Challenging Behaviour,

*with the teacher, purposefully refuse to follow instructions and disrupt lessons as much as possible. Once they see that they can get away with this sort of behaviour the problem escalates and becomes far harder to overcome.*

This message is central to understanding why failing schools are particularly affected by discipline problems. Even the less disruptive children suffer the consequences of the early educational failure of the most disruptive. It is unjust that the majority should have their education blighted by a troublesome minority.

The impact of this poor behaviour was voiced in our survey which found that it had impaired the educational attainment of the respondents.

The effect of this disruption extends beyond pupils to teachers. According to a recent survey, one third of teachers who said they are leaving the profession are doing so because of disobedience in the classroom while 56 per cent said that their morale was lower than when they had started teaching.<sup>124</sup> Given that on average, a teacher is assaulted every seven minutes of each school day, it is easy to see why teachers are unable to cope with children and find it increasingly difficult to do their job.

## DISCIPLINE AND CRIME

Analysis of our prison population highlights the predictable destiny for many children who fail within our education system.

The majority of prisoners in this country have few educational qualifications, most have a long history of discipline and learning problems, often starting at a very young age.

The links between poor discipline and crime are clear. In 2002, a study of young people within the Prison Service found that:<sup>125</sup>

- 84% of young people had been excluded from school.
- 86% had truanted from school.
- 29% had left school at 13 or younger.
- 73% described their educational attainment as nil.

A failure to target the root causes of crime and discipline problems leads to a vicious cycle of re-offending. Almost two thirds of prisoners re-offend, in part because they lack the necessary skills to get a job and sustain life outside prison.

Effective strategies to address discipline problems in schools are crucial not least because the long-term costs of

educational failure are immense. One report estimated that the cost to society of dealing with the causes of crime is £60 billion per year.

In the face of a prison service operating at capacity we cannot have a disjointed approach to the social and educational problems faced by young people.

The following case study highlights the importance of education and mentoring of children to prevent them falling into criminality. The charity, Believe, aims to address the causes of crime, such as poor education, problems at home and lack of self-esteem:

### Case Study: Believe

Believe is a charity committed to creating safer communities by preventing crime and tackling the root causes of re-offending. As well as their programmes to assist prisoners to improve their outcomes and reintegration into society, they have also recognised the value of tackling the causes of crime. Their recently piloted coaching and mentoring package, 'begin' is aimed at young people in years 9, 10 and 11 at risk of exclusion.

'There are profound consequences for excluded pupils as they face a higher risk of long-term unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, criminal activity and sometimes imprisonment.' Their vast experience has taught them the value of raising young people's aspirations and to "equip them with the skills and confidence to re-engage in education...Young offenders typically have low self esteem and low self confidence as well as poor literacy levels and few or no qualifications." Their programmes aim to increase confidence, self-esteem and teamwork. Believe recognise the vital importance of support networks for a child's successful education. Unfortunately, when a child is excluded from school, they lose that school's support, if they suffer problems such as abuse at home, they lack family support so often the only support some young people have is that of their friends, which may be misguided. "This situation has led to a cycle of offending behaviour and Believe's experience of working with this client group has shown us that peer pressure is a significant contributor to offending behaviour." Believe strongly emphasise the importance of working in partnership with existing systems such as the probation service and state that parents are a 'vital part of the equation.'

124 General Teaching Council for England Commissioned by MORI, 2003

125 [www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hminprisons/thematic-reports](http://www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hminprisons/thematic-reports), A Review of Education and Supporting Arrangements within Units for Juveniles managed by HM Prison Service, 2002



Pupils need support as early as possible to prevent problems from spiralling. Research shows the damaging effects of truancy and exclusion. Both are associated with lower educational attainment, poor job prospects, poor health, crime and imprisonment. For instance, persistent truants are over 6 times more likely to obtain no qualifications on leaving school.<sup>126</sup> These negative outcomes are damaging for both the individuals involved and society in general.

#### DISCIPLINE AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The Addictions Working Group report describes the huge increase in drug and alcohol abuse among young people in the UK. The prevalence of drug use within our country is steadily rising among young people, with one in ten 11-15 year olds having taken drugs in the last month and one in five in the last year.<sup>127</sup> Research shows that drug taking can have serious short term implications for a child's educational attainment.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, drug abuse has long term effects as it is directly linked to mental health disorders.<sup>129</sup> It is not hard to understand why children taking drugs find it hard to engage in school life and fall behind their peers.

"I have suffered with depression since the age of 15. I used to self harm and I suffer from a lack of self esteem and confidence. I got into trouble from about the age of 13. I played truant from school and started drinking and taking cannabis about 14yrs old. I underachieved at school as a result. At the age of 21 I began taking drugs and drinking heavily. I used heavier drugs and became addicted to crack cocaine."

There is a very strong and worrying correlation between adolescent drug and alcohol abuse and educational failure. A recent survey<sup>130</sup> found that 43 per cent of pupils who had truanted in the last 12 months had smoked in the last week, compared with 7% who had never stayed away from school; similarly 37 per cent of those who had truanted in the last year had taken drugs in the last month, compared with 6 per cent of

those who had never truanted. Among pupils who had ever truanted or been excluded, frequent drug use was more common. 17 per cent of these pupils said they took drugs at least once a month, compared with 2 per cent of pupils who had neither truanted nor been excluded.

It is no coincidence that the very same children who are struggling at school – the most vulnerable members of our society – are also more likely to be involved in substance abuse. If the Government wants to address educational failure and poor discipline then it is imperative to address the growing problem of children taking drugs.

#### DISCIPLINE AND SEN

Pupils with Special Educational Needs are disproportionately excluded in comparison to the school population. DfES statistics for 2004/2005 illustrate that pupils with Statements of SEN were three times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than the rest of the school population.<sup>131</sup> Some teachers believe that bad behaviour amongst SEN pupils is often the result of frustration at not being able to engage with the lesson as well as others. The educational skills committee report illustrates the way in which failure to meet SEN can lead not only to exclusion and crime. For example the proportion of individuals in young offenders institutions with SEN is high, with 15 per cent having statements of SEN in comparison to 3 per cent of the total school population.

#### DISCIPLINE: WHAT WORKS?

Our Group has heard evidence from over 70 organisations and individuals and the evidence collected emphasises the importance of setting boundaries and clear lines between rights and responsibilities for parents, teachers and children. At the same time, there is a requirement to address the underlying causes of poor discipline and tackle the origins of social exclusion to protect children at risk of spiralling into a life of crime or drug abuse.

There has been a great deal of progress in the delivery of intervention by voluntary organisations to help with poor pupil behaviour. At a time when teachers are increasingly burdened with impossible tasks in schools trying to disci-

126 Emilie Goodall, *Truancy and Exclusion: School's Out?* September 2005

127 [www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/youngpeopledruguse-smoking-drinking2005](http://www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/youngpeopledruguse-smoking-drinking2005)

128 BRITISH JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY (2006), 188, 148-153, 1, 1 53 BRIT RNAL Cannabis use and mental health in secondary school children; Findings from a Dutch survey

129 See Cannabis Harms, Mary Brett Justice Challenge Website...

130 National Centre for Social Research and the National Foundation for Educational Research, *Drug use, smoking and drinking among young people in England in 2005, 2006*

131 [www.dfes.gov.uk Permanent Exclusions in Schools 2004/5; http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000662/SFR24-2006.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk Permanent Exclusions in Schools 2004/5; http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000662/SFR24-2006.pdf)



pline children, a number of hugely innovative, dynamic groups up and down the country work with children at risk of social exclusion. A number of schools have stressed the importance in extreme cases of poor discipline of bringing external support into the school:

*With particularly violent children, you often need someone from outside the education system to talk through the behaviour issues. I have one student who is actually statemented, so he has help with him all the time, and that person can help with the other 4 or 5 children that have special needs.*

Inner City Teacher

### Case Study:

#### Stephen Brooks, Director, National Black Boys Can

This community led organisation recognised the need for positive role models for young people in order to raise their social and academic aspirations. Their one to one programme for boys aged 9-16 is proactive and action-orientated to provide black boys with educational opportunity, valuable life skills, and the self-esteem, confidence and determination to succeed.

Stephen Brooks, Director of National Black Boys Can, commented that “Black Boys Can focuses on behaviour, personal development and misunderstanding of identity of children. We try to connect on a personal level with children and have had a marked effect by engaging with the identity of children. The key issues are trust and the relationship with children and forging an ongoing relationship with both pupils and parents. The organisation can bridge the gap between students, schools and parents and we do not operate solely in schools but adopt a holistic approach which considers the physical, emotional and spiritual. The organisation focuses on “baking time” ensuring that a meeting is followed up by visits and phone calls.”

These groups are often able to respond to the particular circumstances and problems faced by children at risk of exclusio by working through the problems with parents, children and schools ensuring children are able to participate fully in mainstream education. In particular, their localized approach to addressing problems can often provide the most effective, flexible solutions to address the

underlying causes of the problems leading to poor discipline. The involvement of external groups can alleviate pressure on teaching staff, enabling them to concentrate on their core work.

### ENGAGING ALL PUPILS

**One of the key reasons for poor pupil behaviour is the perceived irrelevance of the curriculum and the schooling system.**

*“My school didn’t cater for individuals, but tried to create sheep-like followers. I was bored, under-stimulated, and consequently badly behaved.”*

*“... I’ve been unemployed for nearly all of my working adult life, i enjoy having the time to do what i like to do best, money isnt everything to me, sure its nice when i have it but it isnt a nacency, i truented alot at school, i didnt feel it was intresting enough to make me want to go, alot of the subject our pointless in this day and age, my debt is down to my self and me not taking control of it.”*

The Group has heard submissions from pupils and practitioners that the current curriculum struggles to engage all pupils. When the National Curriculum was introduced in 1988, many commentators stressed the importance of a curriculum that is “broad, balanced and relevant.” The curriculum might well be broad, it might even be balanced, but it is not relevant. A recent poll has found that over 50% of people that experienced educational failure found school “boring”.<sup>132</sup>

The Government has acknowledged this issue and is making attempts to reform the system but the problem is widespread with 66% of teachers in a recent TES survey saying the curriculum is too prescriptive.

In this context, greater use of vocational subjects has been found to help the situation greatly. The government has acknowledged these have greater credibility (and more immediate perceived value) for many of our most disadvantaged pupils, as well as being delivered through a curriculum less dependent on the formal academic skills they may lack. Vocational education need not come at the expense of vital basic skills but must incorporate aspects of formal learning as part of a hugely relevant and important life skill.

For example, Suzannah Wallace (Alter Ego) works with disadvantaged children at risk of exclusion and tries to

incorporate formal learning exercises, such as literacy and numeracy, into vocational training. This allows children to improve their basic skills while also equipping them with the vocational skills that will allow them to prosper in adult life. This is a clear example of how projects which aim to improve literacy need more innovation and dynamic techniques to engage pupils.

### **Case Study: Simon Howlett**

Simon Howlett works for a number of charities and has done considerable work with socially excluded young children in Bristol and across the country.

For many schools in disadvantaged communities are required to deliver teaching structures and curriculum that for many young people seem to have very little relevance to the realities of their lives. They struggle to understand how the attainment of accreditations such as GCSEs or even the subjects themselves are beneficial to them and worth their attention. Especially if they perceive that the lives of their parents and grandparents have not been impeded by the lack of qualifications.

If it is believed that there is no possible advancement, self-esteem and status through the mainstream channels of education there is a tendency for young people to turn to the alternative routes of the street.

The 'one size fits all' approach to education has not worked within these disadvantaged communities / areas as it does not provide the sensitivity and flexibility to meet the specific needs and issues of each individual community.'

Currently, many children are being forced through a broad and relatively challenging curriculum without the skills necessary to engage with it. Whilst undoubtedly appropriate for the majority, this approach fails the disadvantaged. The basic assumption of the whole education system is that all students enter the system at the same level yet we have already established that this is not the case. With fewer educational "life-lines" at home or in the community, disadvantaged children find that, once they've "fallen off" the production line, nobody is able to help them back on.

### **A SECOND CHANCE**

The UK System also puts a child's short-term well being ahead of his or her long-term well-being; you move with your year group regardless. We are one of the most inflexible countries in the world on this front as it is generally

accepted to keep a child with their exact peers rather than moving them through the system a year or two later even though they might achieve more. Linked to this problem is the UK's approach to helping children catch up at school, which tends to exacerbate educational inequality to the extreme. Whereas many other educational systems encourage pupils to re-sit years until the required standards for progression are met, the UK has a fundamentally age-based approach rather than a needs-related approach.

### **Case Study: The Lighthouse Group, Bradford**

The Lighthouse Group is a charity that works with young people who have been excluded, or are at risk of exclusion from mainstream education. Their aim is to tackle the underlying issues which drive behavioural difficulties in order to help these young people to develop new skills, thereby replacing the missed opportunities in mainstream education. Their emphasis is on ensuring that there is a curriculum which enables all children to succeed and allows them to engage all children, they say the charity exists to give all young people a second chance, no matter what circumstances they find themselves in. The charity uses ASDAN qualifications, which offer up to a GCSE B –Grade programme, to help engage all pupils. Joe Woodyatt, Training Base Director, commented that "we adapt our model appropriately depending on the circumstances of the excluded pupil to ensure he can re-enter mainstream education." Mike Royal, National Director stated that "by attending The Lighthouse Group and more often than not, the school part time, the aim is to address the behavioural difficulties the child is experiencing; support the family; engage the young person in attaining a qualification; and see them fully reintergrated back into school, with long term ongoing relational support". The Lighthouse Group state that their emphasis is not merely on education, but on using education in order to transform lives. The work that the Lighthouse Group does is assuredly invaluable; (however, children and young people should not have to depend on a charity organisation for education and support. The tactics and strategies used by the Lighthouse Group should be transferable to mainstream education, in the same way that the organisation's attitude of compassion and understanding should extend to mainstream education.

By comparison, the following summary of international practice highlights the extent to which we are unusual in our approach in this country. In France, Spain, Germany, Italy and Hungary, there are provisions for children repeating the year if they fall behind:

The UK approach is one that suits most children well – temporary underperformance can be effectively met with the help of parents and others – but the most disadvantaged children, who cannot utilise these resources, are left behind.

"I feel my school let me down with education as I was away a lot due to illness and was not offered the chance to catch up properly. My family life was not always stable with arguments in the house."

### **Case Study:**

#### **'International systems' provision for children falling behind**

France: Decisions about pupils (repeating years, moving up to a higher class, changing course) are taken through a procedure involving a dialogue between the school (teachers, administrative and ancillary staff) and the families and pupils.

Germany: In most of the German states, a student who fails more than two subjects will have to repeat the whole school year. However, he or she cannot repeat the same grade twice. The student is then required to change schools.

Italy: Pupils gain admission (promosso) to the next year's class only after attaining a satisfactory level in all subjects at the end of the academic year. Pupils who fail (bocciare) to reach the required standard in a particular subject carry forward an educational debit (debito formativo), which must be made up either through extra tuition during the summer holidays or by attending extra classes during the following academic year.

Hungary: In Hungary there is a split first year of primary school; children will start at the same age, but children who might seem at risk for needing to repeat get put in a second year programme before moving on to the rest of the curriculum. This way, when these children meet up with the others, they are prepared to succeed in the rest of the curriculum because of this foundation.

## Chapter 8: Looked-after children

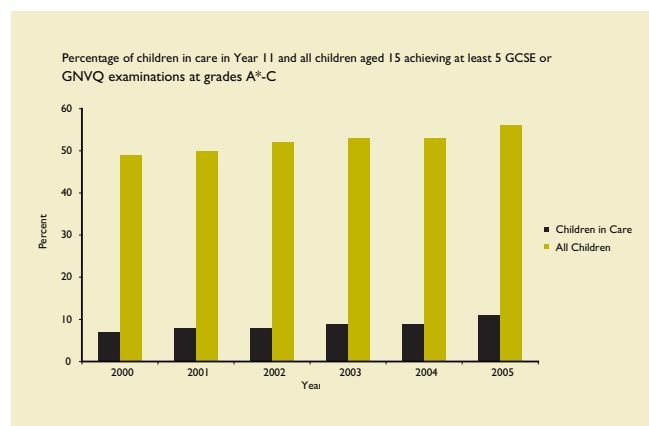
*I was never read a bedtime story. And kids deserve that growing up. A bedtime story, a cuddle from their mum. You need that love and closeness with your family so that you can go into school without anything else on your mind. Those from care who do go to school don't give a damn anyway because they've got so much on their mind they can't focus on what they should be focusing on.*

A Care Leaver

The plight of the 60,000<sup>133</sup> children in care<sup>134</sup> within our education system is shocking. Whilst their unmet needs are a particularly worrying example of Government failure, their situation also reflects the wider issues discussed in this report with results not matching rhetoric, poor returns on significant investment, and a lack of co-ordination and responsibility.

Looked after children under achieve in comparison to their peers at every stage of education:

- At age eleven, only 44% achieve Government targets compared with 80% of all children.
- At GCSE level, just 11% of looked after children left school with five good GCSEs last year compared with 56% of all children.
- Only 64% were even entered for a GCSE exam.<sup>135</sup>



The Government says that it has improved achievement over the last six years. Absolute levels of achievement have indeed improved marginally as the chart shows.

However, the gap between the outcomes of looked after children and all other children is widening year after year and the improvements in absolute attainment have been pitiful.

### THE GOVERNMENT'S TRACK RECORD

As long ago as 1999, Tony Blair promised to put education at the heart of government policy because, "the best defence against social exclusion is having a job and the best way to get a job is to have a good education with the right training and experience."<sup>136</sup>

Children in care remain one of the most socially excluded groups in society as the following examples reveal:

- **Unemployment:** 22% of care leavers will be unemployed by the September after they leave school, compared with just 7% of all school leavers.<sup>137</sup>
- **Crime:** 9% of looked after children over 10 have been cautioned for an offence and 27% of the prison population have a background in care.<sup>138</sup>
- **Teenage pregnancy:** 15-17 year old girls from care are three times more likely to become teenage mothers.<sup>139</sup>
- **Homelessness:** One third of those living on the streets are from a care background and 80% of Big Issue sellers have spent some time in care.<sup>140</sup>

Given these poor outcomes have huge costs for individuals and society and the Government clearly recognises this, what has the Government been doing for these children?

### ACTS AND INACTION

In 1999, the Government acknowledged that, "a good edu-

133 As of the 31st of March 2005, there were 60,900 looked after children in England, 4,668 in Wales, over 12,000 in Scotland and 2,531 in Northern Ireland; a total of 80,105 in the United Kingdom. The statistics on achievement in this paper focus on England due to availability of data.

134 'Children in care' and 'looked after children' are the titles used in this document to refer to all children looked after by a local authority.

135 These results represent a national average; there is regional variation between 16% and 83% attainment of one GCSE.

136 Tony Blair, Foreword to Bridging the Gap, (SEU, 1999).

137 NCVCCO 2004 National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations p4

138 Social Exclusion Unit, Reducing Re-offending by ex-prisoners, 2002.

139 DfES, Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care p.14, October 2006.

140 John Bird, MBE, Big Issue Foundation.

141 Foster care in crisis', published by the National Foster Care Association in 1997.

cation is critical to looked after children making a successful transition to adulthood, and to ensuring that the cycle of disadvantage and deprivation is broken.”<sup>142</sup> Since then the following legislation and initiatives have been enacted:

- **The Quality Protects Programme April 1999 to March 2004.** This five year programme claimed to target an improvement in management and delivery of Social Services focusing particularly on improving the lives of children in care. Through guidance provided by a team of advisors to Social Services and foster carers, they aimed to provide “consistent educational support” to looked after children across the country.
- **The Education of Children in Public Care 2000.** A set of quality guidelines established jointly by the DfES and the Department of Health.
- **The Care Standards Act 2000.** Another set of guidelines for all care providers stating the minimum standards they were required to meet.
- **The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.** The ‘Government Objectives for Children’s Social Services’ were set out to include the following aims: To ensure that children in need gain maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health care and social care, and to ensure that young people leaving care, as they enter adulthood are not isolated and participate socially and economically as citizens.
- **Choice Protects 2002.** The Government’s review of placement services for looked after children, was launched in March 2002. The review aimed to improve outcomes for looked after children through improving placement choice and placement matching.
- **‘A better education for Children in Care 2003’:** In this report by the Social Exclusion Unit written at the request of the Prime Minister, recommendations are set out for how to drive up the achievement of children in care. Tony Blair stated that, “the Government is committed to giving children in care all the same life chances any parent would give their child, and none is more important than a good education which is crucial to a brighter future.”
- **Public Service Agreement 2003.** This agreement between agencies receiving Treasury funding and

the Treasury, set a target that at least 15% of young people in care would have 5 good GCSEs by 2006

- **The Adoption and Children Act 2002.** The most radical reform of Adoption Law for 26 years, this Act sought to increase the number of children adopted yet the focus was on reaching targets rather than support for adoptive parents.
- **The Children Act 2004.** This Act laid out the explicit duty of local authorities to promote the educational outcomes of children in care and to “Encourage integrated planning, commissioning and delivery of services as well as improve multi-disciplinary working, remove duplication, increase accountability and improve the coordination of individual and joint inspections in local authorities”. The guidelines are “enabling rather than prescriptive,” giving local authorities the flexibility with their budgets.

#### GOVERNMENT SPENDING

These initiatives have been expensive, and since 1997, almost a billion pounds has been spent on trying to improve the outcomes of children in care.

It is argued that one of the reasons why looked after children continue to underachieve is poverty. Yet the Government spends £40,000<sup>143</sup> per year on each child in care and the academic performance of looked after children is worse than those all those children from deprived backgrounds who are entitled to Free School Meals<sup>144</sup>.

The substantial spending in this area and the regular publishing of guidelines, restatement of aims and constant changes to the system seem to have had little positive effect. As Alan Johnson, Minister of Education, himself admitted, “it has clearly not been enough.”<sup>145</sup>

The Government’s approach has culminated a new Green Paper which states:

*Our goals for children in care should be exactly the same as our goals for our own children: we want their childhoods to be secure, healthy and enjoyable - rich and valuable in themselves as well as providing stable foundations for the rest of their lives. Unfortunately at the moment our care system fails to enable most children who enter it to achieve these aspirations.*<sup>146</sup>

Green Paper, Care Matters, DfES September 2006

142 DH and DfES, Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care, May 2000.

143 Harriet Sergeant, CYPS, Handle with Care, 2006

144 DfES, Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care p.14, October 2006.

145 Alan Johnson, Children in care statement, House of Commons, 9th October 2006.

146 DfES, Green Paper Care Matters, September 2006.



This group has doubts that this latest positioning will have any more dramatic and sustained impact on educational outcomes for children in care than the previous acts for the following reasons:

#### ‘THE STATE MAKES A ROTTEN PARENT’

When a child enters the care system, which 96%<sup>147</sup> do through no fault of their own, the local authority takes on “a legal and moral duty to provide the kind of loyal support that any good parents would provide for their own children.”<sup>148</sup>

Despite the fact politicians so routinely use the phrase “corporate parent,” the responsibilities which a term carries seem poorly understood- **How would any parent feel if they had 5 children, 3 of whom left school with no qualifications, one ended up homeless and another in prison?** Yet these are the outcomes for children in care and the conclusion is clear, “*the state makes a rotten parent*” (Harriet Sergeant-Centre for Policy Studies)

Earlier in this report we suggested that the Government’s approach of taking more responsibilities away from parents was contributing to educational failure. In the care of looked after children it is striking that no one person or body in Government is responsible for improving and monitoring the lives of these children as a whole as a true parent would.

This dislocation was demonstrated to us by the resources required to bring the data for this report together from disparate Government departments and agencies.

The ragged patchwork of legislation over the last eight years has had little impact on improving educational performance for children in care. Submissions to our group from practitioners and young people highlight the following reasons-

- Systemic failure
- Lack of support
- Instability
- Low expectations

#### SYSTEMIC FAILURE

Despite the establishment of Government Guidelines in 2000, only 25% of care homes today meet 90% or more of the minimum standards and over a third of foster settings fail to meet the minimum requirements of the Care Standards Act.<sup>149</sup> Not only are the settings inappropriate, but

23% of staff in care homes and 25% of foster carers are not qualified to minimum government qualifications.<sup>150</sup>

What purpose do these standards serve if they are never met? In addition to the shocking statistics presented in this chapter, the young people in care to whom we spoke were unanimous in their criticism of their treatment. They feel let down by broken promises, missed appointments and those just ‘ticking the right boxes’ rather than providing genuine care.

Local authorities also feel stretched and mentioned the difficulty in recruiting and retaining sufficient and good quality foster carers and social workers. There are early signs of change – as one local authority manager said “people are waking up to their responsibility now and holding people accountable,” but much needs to be achieved

#### Case Study:

##### Angel

‘My birth mother staged a hunger strike outside the Social Services building and gained publicity from two local newspapers, a radio station and the television news programme Meridian Tonight. During which, Social Services failed to take any steps to prevent this publicity and a (I assume) service manager gave a statement to Meridian Tonight. By doing so, Social Services actively participated in helping my birth mother to break the law, as she had given an undertaking to the court not to contact me or attempt to contact me. For breaking the law, my birth mother received an injunction. For breaking the law, the corporate parent that is Social Services received nothing, continues to receive nothing and has not provided any form of compensation. In addition, any casual look through my complaint and files, will surely demonstrate that Social Services neglected, failed to protect, failed to assist with my education and emotionally abused me. Any parent or carer could be subject to procedures for this. Once again, the corporate parent received nothing. I think that for Social Services to fulfill its role as a parent, demonstrate good will and seriousness to this role, and take full responsibility it should be subject to the same laws and as accountable as any another parent. What this could mean, specifically in terms of the subject of education, is that if Social Services fails to have it’s children in full time education like any other parent it could be subject to procedures and taken to court. I imagine that if this happened, the attendance and success rate of LAC in education would dramatically increase!’

147 Susanna Cheal, the Who Cares? Trust

148 DfES, Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care, October 2006.

149 DfES, Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care p.108, October 2006.

150 DfES, Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care p.108, October 2006.



## LACK OF SUPPORT

*What would make your child succeed in school? It's the consistency of parental support*

Susanna Cheal- The Who Cares? Trust

Children in care have inadequate support at school. Nearly two thirds of children come into care as a result of abuse or neglect<sup>151</sup> and as our polling of those experiencing educational failure demonstrates this has a huge impact on their ability to learn.

Furthermore, over half the children in care surveyed by Barnardos reported they had been bullied due to the stigma attached to being in care, which only adds to the trauma they have suffered at home.<sup>152</sup>

Unfortunately, teachers are given little or no training on how to cope with these issues, leaving schools unequipped to manage and support looked after children. Despite guidance from the DfES (2000) that every school should have a designated teacher wholly responsible for the welfare of its looked after children, many schools have not fulfilled this requirement and publicised the person and the role to children it is supposed to benefit. In the Barnardos study, looked after children had no idea of any teacher responsible for them.

The study also revealed that 39% of young people said that no one had attended their parents evening and 48% said no one had been to their sports day. The same survey was done of 500 parents outside the care system, of whom only 4% did not attend parent's evenings and 38% missed sports days. If the Local Authority is taking on the role of corporate parent, should they not be showing more interest in their children?

*"There is nothing more dispiriting for young people trying to lead independent lives than to feel they have not been given a chance to find out what they could do, or to do what they know they could do, with the right backing."*

Susanna Cheal- the Who Cares? Trust

A recent OFSTED CSCI Report revealed that 3,000 children in care don't even have a social worker.

Looked after children have among the lowest rates of attendance at school. In 2005, one in five children missed 25 days or more of school and children in care are nine

times more likely to be permanently excluded. The links between truancy and negative social effects such as crime and addictions are clear so why is the corporate parent not ensuring better attendance at school.

## INSTABILITY

*I was living in a bubble of confusion; I never knew what was going to happen next*

A former child from care

Stable relationships are vital to any child's upbringing whether it be with a parent, a carer, a teacher or a social worker, as they provide the emotional and practical support necessary for the child to succeed. A child entering the care system may be forced to move numerous times, initially out of the family home and between children's homes and foster families. This often also leads to a change in school and has a dramatic impact on the educational outcomes of pupils:

- Children in care are five times more likely to be moved at key times such as their GCSE years.
- An NFER report found that 29% of children had 3 or more placements during secondary school and 25% had 6 or more placements.

The Government recognises that such upheaval at crucial times in a child's life is a "barrier to educational achievement," but currently "there's too much corporate, not enough parenting"<sup>153</sup>

Although a placement change can be a great upheaval for a child, they are rarely consulted about moving, and 150 looked after children surveyed by Barnardos stated they viewed "moving around too much" as the main barrier to achievement. The next relevant barrier mentioned was, "not having enough say in educational choices.

This is not surprising when, despite local authority claims to be a "corporate parent", it seems unclear who within them is taking on the role of parent for each child. One child may have several social workers responsible for them at any one time and this may change regularly. According to an NFER report<sup>154</sup>, Social Services across 12 Local Authorities and 377 children were only able to provide a complete record of attainment for one of the chil-

151 DfES, Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care p.108, October 2006.

152 Barnardos, Failed by the System 2006

153 Ivor Frank, Trustee of the Frank Buttle Trust

154 F.Fletcher-Campbell and T Archer, Achievement at Key Stage Four of Young People in Public Care, NFER 2003

dren in their care. Who then is taking responsibility for these children?

## LOW EXPECTATIONS

Parents want their children to achieve the best that they can, so why are the Government's education targets for looked after children and the general expectations of teachers, carers and social workers so low?

*I think what contributed to me not getting the education I was supposed to was firstly because of my social worker who didn't have any expectations of me doing well whatsoever.*

Angel, care leaver

This disparity in expectation is revealed in the Public Service Agreement 2003, setting the target of 15% of looked after children gaining 5 good GCSEs, contrasted with the PSA 2004 target of 60% for all children by 2008.

In the Who Cares? Trust survey, 'It's your future'<sup>155</sup>, 2,000 children and young people in care were asked their views on school and education; and the majority of them were unable to answer when asked what they saw themselves doing in 5 years time. How can these children aspire highly when those around them expect so little of them?

The Government has recently acknowledged the dangers of low expectations in a strong letter from Lord Adonis to local authorities which said<sup>156</sup>, there are still too many schools where expectations are unacceptably low which let down the pupils that attend them." (TES 3/11/2006).

The situation for children looked after is even worse. The message that children in care need additional support has not got through to some schools who still discriminate against them and are ill equipped to deal with their needs. A recent report by the schools adjudicator showed that the number of schools failing to give spaces to children in care had risen by 75%.

*Too often children in care feel that the system spits them out on their 16th birthday<sup>156</sup>*

Alan Johnson, Minister for Education

Harriet Sergeant points out in her report, "Handle with Care" that it is cheaper to send a young person to prison than to send them to university. The Government's target is to get 50% of all young people into University but only 6% of care leavers go to University compared with 38% of

## Case Study:

### Marc

In children's homes since the age of 4 and now 23, Marc has had only 2 years of schooling. When he did go to school, he felt lost in the classrooms as he felt no one was looking out for his needs. Because of this he started to behave badly and was excluded. "That's why I kept getting excluded 'cause I couldn't do it [the work] so I felt bad within myself. ... The kids from care homes aren't bad kids...the social workers just put them somewhere that's why"

He was sent to special schools for his behaviour but felt frustrated, as he knew he only misbehaved out of anger for not being able to keep up with the other children.

Marc was moved around numerous times between care homes and Foster families and was left feeling he could not trust anyone. When asked whether he was consulted before moves he replied, "They just tell you to pack your bags...you don't get any notice. Most of them don't give a \*\*\*\* anyway," Although there were never very many children in the homes, there were even fewer workers and (check) "most kids don't talk to their social workers about anything because they don't get enough time to with them to develop that relationship and trust." Marc doesn't remember ever being read a bedtime story. His poor education, lack of support and stable relationships left him feeling he had no hope for the future, "When you're in the children's home you don't think about the future because of the way you've been treated." He was called "thick and dumb" and told he'd just end up in prison.

After he became part of the wrong crowd he did end up in prison at the age of 16. In prison, he was never asked if he had been in care and was given no support when he left prison other than £20 and a rail ticket. Despite the fact that prisons are meant for rehabilitation, Marc was still unable to receive proper education: "prison is like the care system; you get shipped all over the place. You can't actually sit down and try to concentrate on reading because you don't know if you'll get shipped today or tomorrow."

When asked what changes he would make to a care home: "I would change the whole business. More staff working in the homes so they can build one to one relationships with the kids. Make sure the kids eat at least 2 or 3 meals a day. I'd give them the love that they need".

155 'It's your future,' conducted by the Social Exclusion Unit and the Who Cares? Trust, 2000.

156 Alan Johnson, Minister for Education, 9th October 2006.

all 19 year olds.<sup>157, 158</sup> Care leavers become independent very early on in life and 28% of them are just 16 when they leave care and so may not be fully prepared. This makes the transition into adult life more difficult, and the cost of ongoing education is often too much for most of them. It is immensely difficult for a young person to qualify for financial support whilst at college and on top of the great financial burden, who is providing the practical and emotional support to help young people land on their feet?

In 2005, the Frank Buttle Trust released a research report entitled “going to University from Care” detailing the huge barriers care leavers face in the further education system.<sup>159</sup> They found that if young people are given the right intervention and support, they were more than able to achieve their full potential. They have since established a quality mark which is awarded to institutions that do provide the necessary extra support to care leavers. This is an excellent example of proactive voluntary sector intervention, helping children to succeed where the care system fails.

The following case study offers one example of the way in which intervention can make a real difference. In this case, as in many, the support was provided through a voluntary sector organization.

This Government recognises that its failure to look after the children in its care is a “scandal,”<sup>160</sup> but it must be questioned whether it is prepared to offer realistic solutions and drive through necessary change. Unusually, the message from corporate parents and young people alike is clear: more funding is not the answer.

As one care leaver said, “you don’t need money to care.” The Green paper reflects many of the recommendations of the young people and organisations in the

### **Case Study: A success story**

Expelled several times with a one year gap in year ten as no school would accept her, one young care leaver appeared to be losing out on education. She was disruptive at school and bullied others. When asked why she behaved badly at school, “I just wanted someone to talk to, that was it.” It wasn’t until the Pupil Referral Unit that people started to listen to her. She talks of how there were always people there to support her, “it only takes 10 minutes to make [someone] feel good about themselves.”

“When I was 16, Tower Hamlets Leaving Care Service came looking for me and everything changed ‘cause I knew I had support whereas I’d given up on social services. I was given a Personal Advisor who showed me how to change my status which meant I could get my own place and advised me on how to go into further education (otherwise I would have stayed on jobseekers allowance) Since then I’ve gone to College and developed faith in myself as I know that I can do something. An hour to a young person is a lot of time. Having her to support me has made me who I am today”

sector but so did previous Acts. One must question how serious the intentions of a Government are that has suggested a set of guidelines with no budget to provide for what is essentially a complete reshaping of the system. Promises have been made again and again, yet year after year our children are failed. As children from care are 66 times more likely to have their own children taken into care, the false promises must stop and genuine action must be taken for this cycle to be broken.

157 DfES, Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care p.68, October 2006.

158 DfES, Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care p.18, October 2006.

159 Sonia Jackson, Sarah Ajayi and Margaret Quigley, Going to University from Care, 2005.

160 Tony Blair, speech on social exclusion, August 2006.

## Chapter 9: The way ahead

### DESIGN FAILURE

This report illustrates how the education system is not well designed to identify and turnaround the under-achievement of the most disadvantaged children in our country.

New Labour policies have sought to drive up standards, by creating a “one size fits all” education system and a centralised target and testing regime. But children come from a variety of backgrounds and have different strengths and weaknesses. This individuality needs to be appreciated and mirrored by the schooling system. The curriculum is too rigid and too inflexible to meet the needs of our most disadvantaged children and this causes them to struggle and fall behind their peers.

There is a huge variety and innovation in tackling the problems that exist today – but outside the framework of mainstream state schooling. We have been constantly struck by the way that voluntary sector organizations have developed tailored local solutions. These problems are not impossible to overcome. But they are complex, difficult and, long-term; they need creativity and freedom to be solved.

### POLICY DIRECTION

The answer to the problems described in this report is not simply to put more money into the system or to continue to focus on average attainment.

It is now clear that New Labour’s strategy has not addressed the problems facing many disadvantaged children in society. The failure to address these problems has led to persistent and deep-rooted educational inequality in the UK. As a result, the UK has very low social mobility and one of the highest levels of educational inequality in the Western World.

**Educational Inequality Matters.** We believe that a change in approach is needed. Government needs to place far more emphasis on the most under-achieving pupils in our education system. Firstly, the current approach fails to identify adequately those children who are being left behind. Secondly, we need to ensure that redressing educational inequalities is a primary objective of the education system. This means an overhaul of the current “tar-

gets and testing” system, a re-structuring the curriculum and the approach of schools to improve standards for all children.

**Every Parent Matters.** Government policy should address the cultural reasons why certain children under-achieve in schools, encouraging parental involvement in education and ensuring shared expectations between children, teachers and parents. Government must focus on the role of parents and not attempt to take over more of their responsibilities. Rather than trying to become a bigger corporate parent, Government should encourage some parents to understand that helping their children to learn is as important to their future as feeding and clothing them. It is not so much “Every Child Matters” as “Every Parent Matters”.

**Winning the battle for learning.** Encouraging parental engagement in the education of disadvantaged children is part of a wider battle to place a love of learning at the centre of disadvantaged communities. The anti-schooling culture of some of our poorest streets can be challenged and defeated. Disadvantaged children must have the opportunity to engage with positive role models and be taught with relevant methods which recognise the demands their backgrounds place upon them and work with them to enhance their prospects.

**Better Leadership in Schools.** Reform is needed to ensure the steady supply of high quality teachers and head teachers. We will need to address the fundamental reasons why so many of these professionals do not even consider working in under-performing schools. If we do not do so then the absence of good leaders and role models in failing schools will only make educational inequality worse.

We believe that schools should help provide a sanctuary for disadvantaged children with turbulent home lives and offer a clear route out of poverty. If we do not act now then lack of social mobility and its high costs will continue to undermine our economy and our.

**The challenge for the Conservative Party is clear; we can no longer tolerate the under-achievement and frustrated potential of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.**

## Appendix 1: List of Committee Members

The Educational Failure Working Group is chaired by Ryan Robson and its members include:

**Ryan Robson** (Chairman) is a Partner of Sovereign Capital, an investment fund which supports the growth of education and social care groups. He has served as a Non-Executive Director of Education and Training organisations including Alpha Plus, a group of 20 independent schools and colleges, The SENAD Group which educates children with special educational needs and supports them into adulthood and Sencia, which helps disadvantaged people improve their skills to help them find and sustain work. Ryan is a Governor of The Alton School in Wandsworth and was a Councillor for the London Borough 2002-2006 and Chairman of its Education Performance and Standards Committee.

**Cecil Knight CBE** (Deputy Chairman) formerly Head of Small Heath School and Sixth Form Centre, a leading specialist technology college situated in Birmingham's 'Inner Ring' and Chair of the Grant Maintained Schools Advisory Committee.

**Ray Lewis** (Deputy Chairman) runs Eastside Young Leaders Academy (EYLA) – a project in Newham harnessing the leadership potential of black boys at risk of social exclusion. Rather than aspiring to become footballers or urban music stars, Ray encourages his charges to aim to succeed in fields such as law, investment banking and business. EYLA gives the boys the academic help, teamwork skills and self-discipline vital to do this. Ray resolved to do something to help black boys when, as governor of a young offenders institution, he saw the large numbers of black teenagers ending up in custody.

**Stephen Brookes** is the Franchise Development Manager of the National Black Boys Can Association. He works to develop projects for young people as well as strategies for a network so that training, support and development can take place in the community through a franchise structure. He also works extensively with schools providing support for black boys in a classroom setting. He has a background in developing sustainable social enterprises and is a Director/Trustee on several successful social enterprises throughout the country.

**Ivor Frank L.L.B., L.L.M.** is a human rights barrister as well as a Trustee of the Frank Buttle Trust, a charity pro-

viding grant aid to children and young people in need. He is also a member of the Associate Parliamentary group for children in care and has personal experience of the care system as he himself was brought up in residential care from the age of three.

**Merrick Cockell**, was first elected Leader of the Council of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in April 2000. First elected to the Council in 1986, Councillor Cockell has held a variety of senior jobs including Chairman of the Education and Libraries Committee and Chief Whip of the Conservative Majority on the Council. As a ward councillor he has served the people of Stanley Ward in Chelsea since being first elected to the Council in 1986. Prior to becoming leader Councillor Cockell was a long-time Chairman of the Portobello Business Centre, which provides training and professional advice to start-up and small businesses and also the Chelsea Centre, a theatre and arts charity.

**Robert Halfon**, Robert is an adviser to a number of Conservative organizations and is currently Political Director of Conservative Friends of Israel. He has previously worked as Chief of Staff to Oliver Letwin and as a consultant to business. Robert is also an author having written essays for books and articles on subjects as diverse as Social Justice, Russia, Conservatism, and Corporate Responsibility. Robert is passionate about social justice and how volunteers and charities can transform people's lives for the better. He is currently the parliamentary PPC for Harlow. At the 2005 election, Robert lost by just 97 votes after three recounts.

**Simon Howlett** is an Education Consultant and Coach specialising in Engagement and Mentoring programmes for young people and venerable adults at risk of social exclusion. For more than 10 years Simon has worked with schools, training providers, PRUs, Connexions, distension facilities, sports organisations and charities to devise, develop and deliver educational and social engagement programmes and partnerships.

**Mike Royal** is the National Director of the Lighthouse Group (TLG) a charity working with excluded young people and young people at risk of exclusion from school. Mike also works with marginalised young people caught up in gang culture in an urban context. Mike has an academic background comes from an urban studies and applied theology.



## Appendix 2 : Key Statistics

### EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION

- 41.9% of children failed to attain 5A\*-C Grades in GCSEs in 2005/06
- 20% of 11 year olds failed to reach the government target in England in 2005
- 12% of 16 year olds failed to achieve 5GCSEs at any grade including the most basic standards of English and Mathematics
- 73% of young offenders described their educational attainment as nil
- 37% of adult prisoners have the reading skills under those of an 11 year old

### THE ESCALATOR IS OUT OF ORDER

- Nearly 5 million (16%) of the 30.6 million adults of working age in England have no qualifications
- 16% of the adult workforce is illiterate
- 22% of care leavers will be unemployed by the September after they leave school
- 32% of young people who have been excluded from school have been involved with the selling of illegal drugs.
- The number of children who could be losing out on a proper education because they live in bad housing would fill 33,000 classrooms
- More than 27% of UK school children lack a space at home they can concentrate in to do their homework, according to new research by The Housing Corporation.
- Research has shown that – based on the socio-economic background of children – the child’s developmental score at 22 months will allow you to accurately predict that child’s educational qualifications at the age of 26 years.
- Only 64% of looked after children are even entered for a GCSE
- 22% of care leavers will be unemployed by the September after they leave school, compared with just 6% of all school leavers.
- One third of those living on the streets are from a care background and 80% of Big Issue sellers have spent some time in care
- Children from Care are 66 times more likely to have children of their own who are taken into care

### THE LOST CHILDREN

- 69% of the FSM-eligible Chinese population gain 5A\*-C at GCSE
- 40% of FSM-eligible Bangladeshi boys get 5 good GCSEs
- The most underachieving cohorts of children are disadvantaged white boys and disadvantaged black Caribbean boys, with just 17% and 19% respectively attaining 5 good GCSE grades.
- In 2005, one in five children missed 35 days or more of school and 0.9% of children in care were permanently excluded in 2004/05 compared with

### “EVERY PARENT MATTERS”

- It is estimated that 1.5 million children in the UK are affected by parental alcohol problems
- Between 250,000 and 350,000 children are living with parents who misuse drugs
- 41% of children of drug addicts had repeated a year at school, 19% had truanted and 30% had been suspended at an average age of 12
- According to Unicef, nearly one million children in the UK face domestic violence and 1 in 14 children could have poor exam results as a result
- A recent study has shown that 77% of children with parents in higher professional occupations obtained five or more A\*-C GCSE, which was double the proportion of children of parents with manual occupations

### LACK OF LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS

- Spending on teachers increased by 53% between 1997 and 2006
- More than 500,000 pupils are being taught in leaderless schools because of the head teacher recruitment crisis
- A survey by the NAHT showed that more than 1,200 state schools were operating without a full time head, and one in four heads said they would consider leaving their jobs if the ‘culture of excessive hours’ in schools continued
- It is predicted that these difficulties recruiting and retaining teachers will get worse rather than improve, as within the next 10 years, 50% of the current workforce will have retired.
- One survey in 2003 found that of 100 trainee teachers, 88 passed their final examinations, but only 59



were still teaching a year later. This number fell to 53 after three years.

- Drawing on the DfES (2006) statistics, the full-time and part-time teachers who left teaching in the five years September 1999 – August 2004 is 91,580 and 29,150 respectively. This amounts to 29% of all full-time and part-time teachers.
- Permanent exclusions have risen by 20% since 2000.
- It is estimated that 55,000 pupils miss school without permission every day
- Persistent truants are over 6 times more likely to obtain no qualifications on leaving school.
- A third of teachers who said they are leaving the profession are doing so because of disobedience in the classroom, while 56% said that their morale was lower than when they had started teaching.
- On average, a teacher is assaulted every seven minutes of each school day
- In 2002, a study of young people within the Prison Service found that 84% had been excluded from school, 86% had truanted, 52% had left school at 14 or younger
- 53% of male prisoners have no formal qualifications
- 71% of female prisoners have no formal qualifications

- 36% of prisoners have the reading skills of a child under the age of 11
- One in ten 11-15 year olds have taken drugs in the last month and one in five in the last year
- 65% of prison population is illiterate

#### CHILDREN IN CARE

- The percentage of children in public care achieving the Government's target of 5A\*-C GCSE grades is low: just 11% compared with 56% of all children
- Only 27% of looked after children achieved a least a level 5 at Key Stage 3 compared with 73% of all children
- 39% of looked after children leave education at 16, compared with 77% of all children who remain at school
- Only 6% of Care leavers go to University (compared with 38% of all 19 year olds)
- One third of those living on the streets are from a care background and 80% of big issue sellers have spent some time in care
- 15-17 year old girls from care are three times more likely to become teenage mothers
- Children from Care are 66 times more likely to have children of their own who are taken into care.