Challenging disadvantage together

How are school leaders tackling educational inequality across the UK?
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Teach First works closely with headteachers across the country to tackle inequality in education. We know there are a range of challenges that schools currently face – some determined by regional geography, and others that are common to all.

To mark our 15th anniversary, we asked school leaders from our partner schools, who form our National Schools Forum, to write about the key challenges they face in their schools and communities; the innovative solutions that they have implemented, in collaboration with others, to address these challenges; and to offer thoughts on what more needs to change to ensure that the children from the least advantaged communities have the best possible education.

Whilst these essays may not represent Teach First policy positions, we think it is vital to hear from school leaders on the front line to provoke discussion and debate so that, as a nation, we can come together to find the best ways to address arguably the most important social issue of our time: educational inequality.
Challenging disadvantage together

Foreword

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to introduce this collection of case studies from school leaders across the country.

Over the last 15 years, since Teach First was founded, the education landscape, like the world around us, has changed in ways that we could not have foreseen. The biggest education transformation has been in inner London, where the vast majority of schools now provide their pupils with a fantastic level of education. Other areas of the country have also seen great progress, whilst many have struggled.

Against a backdrop of rapid and substantial changes to policy and practise, dedicated teachers and leaders remain focused on ensuring that all children have the chance to reach their goals and fulfil their aspirations, regardless of their background.

The challenges in achieving this are varied, and look and feel different in different regions of the country. Entrenched barriers that have deep historical roots, such as the loss of a particular industry in an area, can have repercussions that last for generations.

Research has shown that children across the country have no shortage of aspirations and dreams of doing great things – what they often lack is knowledge of how to achieve those dreams. Their surrounding environments may not offer opportunities to learn first-hand about options that are open to them.

One of the themes that really stands out to me from these case studies is the importance of collaboration – one of Teach First’s core values. I am delighted that there are so many success stories to learn from – collaboration between different schools, businesses, councils, charities and communities.

I am particularly pleased to see collaboration between businesses - from local to multinational - and schools - from rural to urban - that have been formed based on the mutual benefits such a partnership can bring.

Businesses have traditionally been based in urban areas and their outreach programmes have often focused on schools in those areas. Schools, on the other hand, have not always had the capacity to spend time seeking out meaningful work experience and business interactions for their pupils beyond their immediate localities.

Teach First works with a variety of partner organisations, and supports new innovative social enterprises to scale up exactly for this reason – we know that no single organisation can achieve what we want and need to achieve alone.

By 2022, Teach First want all schools to have achieved the Fair Education Impact Goals – to narrow the achievement and progression gaps between pupils from low-income communities and their peers. In order to do this, leaders across society, including from schools and businesses, need to come together and, with one voice, make it clear that we, as a country, need to prioritise a fair education for all.

The following case studies from a range of school leaders set out how they are overcoming some of the barriers and challenges that they and their communities face and what they believe needs to change to ensure that all children have an equal chance in life, regardless of where they are from. I hope that their views and insights further fuel the vital debate about how we improve outcomes for children from the poorest backgrounds. Only by maintaining a national focus and by developing an even better understanding of local variation and complexity will we ever see the gaps closed between the most and least advantaged young people in this country.

Paul Drechsler CBE, Chair of the Board of Trustees at Teach First, President of the Confederation of British Industry
Introduction

The National Schools Forum is directed by a board of 13 school leaders from primary, secondary and all-through schools and academies. Each works closely with Teach First to improve educational outcomes and social mobility for the most disadvantaged children and young people across the UK. Together we are tackling inequality through education at a stage of life when timely intervention can make the biggest difference – when pupils are growing up.

Qualifications and personal achievements are a set of keys that unlock future doors. As Michelle Obama said: "With an education you have everything you need to rise above all the noise and fulfil every last one of your dreams." Great leaders of social change like her recognise the power of education to transform lives. Schools and academies across the UK that belong to Teach First’s National Schools Forum have this belief at the core of our work. Each day we relentlessly pursue high standards for all – and a particular concern that children and young people should not be disadvantaged by their social and financial circumstances.

Disadvantage brings challenges of many kinds to the classroom. Schools deal constantly with its impact, and context or ‘place’ is hugely significant in this. Local industry, employment, community stability and economy all have a deep effect on the lives of children. We see this play out across the UK where communities have been affected by the collapse of local industries such as mining, seaside tourism or steel – or in the adrenalin-fuelled inner cities, where there are pockets of child poverty and social exclusion. Great schooling in these areas can be achieved, as demonstrated by members of our National Schools Forum – but social and financial disadvantage make it much harder.

Often the voices heard more prominently in the debate about social disadvantage and its effect on schools have been from London, with other regions largely overlooked. This publication is different. It profiles schools and their leaders from across the country. It picks up regional context and makes clear the patchwork nature of disadvantage in the UK, as well as the difference in character that it has, depending on locality.

Each article in this publication forms a case study of one school leader’s approach to tackling a key challenge for their school within a regional setting. Leaders have been given the freedom to choose their topic and to set out their response to the situation they are in. What emerges is an authentic picture of the interplay for schools between regional context, policy and practice. Better teacher recruitment, a qualifications system that rewards achievement, greater collaboration between schools, improved community cohesion and enhanced funding for enrichment all feature amongst the articles, as well as academic selection, partnership with employers, curriculum and leadership. Whether you are an employer, a policy-maker, a philanthropist or teacher, we hope these case studies provide material for reflection, interest and inspiration – and that you will join us in our work to ensure no child is left behind.
1. The importance of education and place

Dr Vanessa Ogden, CEO, Mulberry Schools Trust, Tower Hamlets, East London

Education has an intricate relationship with place. A school influences and is influenced by its community. Good schools enrich their communities and can have a regenerative effect. The relationship of schools with their ‘place’ and the job of school leadership that this entails is explored in this article.
1. The importance of education and place

My place is Shadwell in Tower Hamlets, London. I took the photograph on the previous page from the top of a disused warehouse just over the Highway in Shadwell, which I was visiting with some colleagues following an illegal rave. Canisters of nitrous oxide, dirty needles, empty beer cans, condoms and other remnants of the party lay strewn thickly across the building. Scrawled graffiti proclaimed obscenities and misogynist declarations.

The photo shows the end of the rainbow with its mythical pot of gold right in the City of London. To the right is one of the tower blocks of Shadwell where pupils in the area live – one of many similar blocks with overcrowding and damp, where people have little personal space, privacy or money. The picture shows that despite the wealth elsewhere in London, the streets are not paved with gold for everyone.

Where a school is located has a profound, multi-layered effect on its character and the challenges it faces. Schools have an intricate relationship with the areas they serve, but many of the dynamics of this relationship are invisible. Local industry, employment, community stability and local resources have a deep effect on the lives of children. We see this play out across the country in communities devastated by the collapse of mining, seaside tourism or steel.

Shadwell is no exception. Sandwiched between the City of London and Canary Wharf – among the wealthiest areas in the country – it is surrounded by rich resources. Yet Shadwell has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the country. Housing is overcrowded and more than half of all residents live in social housing. Life expectancy is lower and crime rates and substance abuse are comparatively high. On average, more than two thirds (69%) of our pupils are entitled to Pupil Premium funding.

A deep understanding of place is therefore at the heart of the work of The Mulberry Schools Trust. The effects of disadvantage on pupils’ learning are often invisible, and we have to be prepared to put in the time to overcome its impact. Not every child is equally affected, or affected in the same way by disadvantage, so a personalised approach is essential. The job starts at the top with the school’s leadership group – trustees, governors and senior leaders. And it starts with a set of principles.

Education is a public good. The chance to be educated is a human right and state schools should provide a high quality education for every child regardless of the barriers. An education should provide rich intellectual and personal development for individuals and communities. And it should equip young people for employment, making a contribution to the economy as well as enabling them to sustain themselves financially.

“Education is a public good. The chance to be educated is a human right and state schools should provide a high quality education for every child regardless of the barriers.”

Doing all these things requires trustees, governors and staff to think beyond the walls of the school – to have a vision of the future and of what a ‘Mulberry education’ needs to achieve given the challenges of place. It leads to three sets of leadership actions.

The first action requires an understanding of context and the need to build a vision of possibility. Developing a deep knowledge of context helps to plan provisions that are bespoke to the community we serve. I have already described the quality of life issues for which we have to account. It would be easy to fall into the trap of creating a deficit view of a community that experiences such challenges. But this neither supports aspiration nor drives ambition. It can lead to stasis for everyone while we all feel very sorry about the situation. Whilst in Shadwell the streets may not be paved with gold, this does not mean consignment to the shadows. Developing a vision for schools in this context that is both aspirational and achievable is a sensitive and challenging piece of work – but it is absolutely crucial.
Articulating a compelling vision of what education can do – for the life of a pupil and his or her family – is essential. Bringing imagination to bear on what resources there are locally – on the pride in our community and on what is special about the place – is energising for staff, pupils and families.

One of our biggest assets is the rich religious, racial and cultural heritage of our families. Our 50th anniversary community opera was composed and performed by staff, parents and pupils and was based on the life story of Pamela Uddin, one of our cleaners who was one of the first white British East Enders to fall in love with and marry a young Muslim man from Bangladesh in the 1960’s.

Creating a sense of identity – what ‘a Mulberry girl or boy’ is and what they can do to enrich their own life, their family and their community – is a constant theme of conversations with pupils. What special contribution of their own will they make to this world that will leave it a better place? What will their legacy be?

“Mulberry will be the reason for us becoming the leaders of tomorrow.”
Promee Reza, Mulberry pupil.

The next leadership action should help to create a rich academic and technical learning offer for pupils. It is an unfortunate fact of life that disadvantaged children nationally under-perform compared to their more advantaged peers. Yet we need our pupils at Mulberry to leave school with the confidence and ambition to compete equally, even though their starting point might be further back. Using data on pupils’ progress to understand exactly how much further back, and planning appropriate interventions, is essential. Three years ago we introduced a model of compulsory ‘Prep’ for targeted pupils, borrowed directly from the independent school model and refined to suit our particular context. The impact has been considerable.

We have developed a bespoke pedagogy for Mulberry which has seen the quality of subject teaching go from strength to strength. ‘Every minute, every lesson, every day’ marks the importance of each learning moment for pupils. The ability to write well and to articulate yourself using higher order language and syntax opens up opportunities of all kinds.

‘Fetch Me a Pen, I Need to Think’ is our academic voice programme that explicitly teaches writing underpinned by internal voice. It has seen the number of higher grades gained across subject areas by pupils increase significantly at GCSE and A Level.

Finally, work on inclusion and pastoral care is fundamental. Pupils need to come to class ready to learn. The adrenalin of the inner city fuels the East End’s vibrancy but it also creates tension and makes it easy to fall into life on the street. The drugs economy, related sexual exploitation, and gang culture are very real pitfalls for an isolated, insecure or troubled child. The quality of pastoral care and its capacity to create stability and security for youngsters is central to our provision at Mulberry.

Planned, thoughtful, caring and respectful input using a multi-agency approach is essential. The work of our School Social Worker, Counsellor, Attendance and Welfare Officers, together with our Police Liaison Officer and our Learning Mentors, has helped many pupils to resolve problems that have interfered with their learning. And something important about all these people is that they have direct experience of our ‘place’; most are members of the local community.

I am pleased to say that the final leadership action is based firmly around families and friends. Combating disadvantage in education must involve working alongside families. Soon after I joined in 2007, attendance dipped unaccountably in the autumn term. We started a programme of family and community learning and enrichment, including classes, university visits, and information sessions. Parents were very reluctant until recently to allow their daughters to leave home to go to university. It was not until after the visit to Cambridge University that one of the reasons why became apparent.

If you have never seen inside a Cambridge College, it does not necessarily occur to you that your daughter will not have to share a bedroom with a member of the opposite sex – if she has to share at all. Nor would you think that the standards of accommodation and security for your daughter might be higher than at home.

‘Friends’ to Mulberry are also very important. Schools can find people who believe in the importance of what they are doing; who will open doors to spaces from which pupils are currently excluded. These friends might be employers, leaders, mentors or project partners. I am enormously grateful to the people who support us and have been a boundless source of inspiration to my pupils.
1. The importance of education and place

“We have all been given life-changing, wonderful opportunities that have changed us into strong and capable individuals.”
Diana Anton, Mulberry pupil.

However, this doesn’t happen by magic. We make sure that every opportunity we are offered by someone is never, ever taken for granted. We also make sure that every one of those opportunities is to benefit the pupils rather than anyone else.

You can see the impact of the work we have done in the outcomes for pupils at Mulberry. Compared to disadvantaged pupils nationally at GCSE, pupils at Mulberry in 2016 outperformed them. In fact, they also performed above their more advantaged peers.

Going back to the photograph I took, there is a rainbow over the ward of Shadwell. The rainbow marks out what is possible for the pupils who live within ‘my place’ – and all that can be done through education to shatter the barriers and ensure their share of that pot of gold. A rainbow is also about hope and education is all about hope. It is about improvement of the human condition. The Mulberry Schools Trust has an unconditional commitment to this and to what is possible for all children who come within its reach.

We have all looked at this hard in the eye – trustees, staff, pupils, families, and friends – and together we will continue to be up for the challenge.
2. Incentivising collaboration in a competitive system

My life in education has been varied – starting out as an English teacher in South Africa, I have also worked for extended periods outside of education, in the travel industry. Awareness of the challenges that face many young people in achieving their potential has never been higher, but we are at a point where the resources available to meet those challenges seem to be depleting. There are no excuses, but there is a changing landscape that we need to learn to navigate together.
2. Incentivising collaboration in a competitive system

The North East of England stretches from the Tees in the south to the Tweed in the North. Famed for its industrial heritage (mining, ship-building, glass-making, steel, railways), in recent decades those industries have declined and the region has struggled to find a new identity. The region is fiercely proud of its heritage and celebrates this with considerable verve; one only has to be part of Durham’s Miners’ Gala to experience that. However, it is not always in the traditional that young people find cause to celebrate. What they are proud of is their communities, their families and the aspects that make them different from the rest of the country, including their dialect. The region’s sporting prowess is also a source of great pride, with three teams in the top tiers of football, a ranking cricket team, and a premiership rugby team.

The region’s schools have changed considerably in the last five years. More schools have academised and there are a growing number of multi-academy trusts within the region. The advent of the Regional Schools Commissioners has seen a steady development in that process and significant groups have been established. However, the North East has also struggled to attract sponsors, as the region is perceived to be an under-performing area. It is non-selective and education is often strong in urban centres, whilst the east and west ends of Newcastle, for example, have mixed success. The sparsity of population means that the region has a larger proportion of small, rural schools than most.

Primary education in the North East is perceived to be strong, but this is not reflected in secondary education to the same extent. In some parts of the region a significant proportion of the secondary schools have been judged as Requires Improvement or Inadequate by Ofsted. The contrast within the region of those schools serving suburban communities and those serving more economically disadvantaged communities is quite stark, although there are outliers bucking the trend. As with all parts of the country, there are pockets of amazing practice and outliers who are succeeding in spite of challenging circumstances. However, the decline of both budgets and capacity for Local Authorities has created a vacuum of organisations able to coordinate the coming together of schools.

Incentives for collaboration abound. If we are to make a difference to the life chances of our young people, collaboration and interaction between schools to share best practice is the first imperative. For too long and for a variety of complex reasons, schools have worked in silos to try to deliver better outcomes. London Challenge led the way on collaborative practice and had a significant impact on improving outcomes for pupils in London, making London the best-performing region in England.

“Incentives for collaboration abound. If we are to make a difference to the life chances of our young people, collaboration and interaction between schools to share best practice is the first imperative.”

- Northumberland CofE Academy is an all-through school, with over 2500 pupils from 3-19
- 31% of pupils are on Free School Meals and 86% of pupils are in the lowest 30% of the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)
- The population of the region called the ‘North East’ is 2.6 million
- The North East as a region is significantly deprived: the infant mortality rate is higher than the national average (10.79 births per 1000 compared to 9.67 nationally), and the number of children on protection plans is significantly higher than the national average (74.35 per 10,000 children compared to 59.07 nationally)
- The % of pupils that end up not employed, in education or training (NEET) is 10% - against a national average of 7.7%.
2. Incentivising collaboration in a competitive system

Much of the success in London must be attributed to a group of school leaders who intentionally came together to work collaboratively in the interests of the children they served. It is therefore at leadership level where this imperative for collaboration becomes most important. Leaders have to clear the path and facilitate the opportunities for collaborative work to occur.

The good news is that things are changing: Heads’ groups meet regularly, TeachMeets share best practice, and networking meetings occur (often arranged by national organisations such as Teach First and Ambition School Leadership). We have also set up a fantastic regional organisation called Schools Northeast - established for schools, by schools. The objective of this organisation is to help schools address some of the most pressing topical issues, such as mental health, and SEND. The commonality in these is absence of the traditional ‘middle tier’ of the educational landscape – independent national organisations or school-led networks are taking responsibility for what once would have mainly rested with local government or national government-run bodies. This will become more and more the norm.

Particular examples of collaborative practice within the Teach First family of schools include initiatives to retain Teach First ambassadors through third year school placements; leadership development opportunities through a sponsored internship programme; the formation of the regional Teach First School Strategy Board that puts schools’ input and feedback at the heart of decision-making; facilitated collaboration between schools; and Teach First collaboration with some of the MATs.

More widely, there have been some, albeit few, opportunities for schools to engage within the regional business and industrial development agenda, and with local enterprise initiatives. This is a seemingly key area for development, especially to ensure schools are able to provide high-quality careers guidance and work experience, and to support schools with their pupils’ developing ambitions and aspirations.

At the heart of addressing disadvantage and inspiring young people to see beyond the apparent boundaries of their demography, there needs to be a sense of hope and concept of what human flourishing could look like for all. Most teachers would say that was our core purpose, but they are often frustrated in that purpose by workload, accountability and opportunity. So how does leadership enable that to happen? How do we resource opportunity?

“At the heart of addressing disadvantage and inspiring young people to see beyond the apparent boundaries of their demography, there needs to be a sense of hope and concept of what human flourishing could look like for all.”

In these rather austere times, resourcing for collaborative practice that enhances learning outcomes and achievement does not become any less important. It is vital that all partners should coalesce around building collaborative practice that identifies, funds and grows the learning opportunities for all young people. This will ensure learning opportunities are developed, social mobility is increased and we can build social capital.

This latter point is of particular importance for disadvantaged children, who have a range of issues that preclude them from gaining the social capital required to compete equitably with their more affluent peers. From exposure to institutions such as theatres and museums, to more subtle inequalities such as a lack of access to any sorts of books, not just in homes but because of a lack of local libraries or other book-lending schemes; the impact this has on children’s development is marked.

These distortions are apparent in literacy and numeracy development as early as age two. As they progress, a lack of role models, internships, work experience and mentoring may preclude many young people from even considering pursuing careers open to those from wealthier backgrounds. Here at Northumberland CoE Academy, we are always having to think creatively about how we best utilise not just our budget, but our local and national networks to provide these essential experiences for our pupils.
What I want to see from the government by 2022 is funding for schools that enables us to be the best we can be. When we are looking to international league tables, we need to be looking at what really happens in the jurisdictions with high levels of success — not just in the schools themselves but how these schools are enabled to access opportunities around them. Businesses should be encouraged, via both incentives and policy, to forge partnerships with schools to assist in mentoring, apprenticing, funding, and growing young people into the world of work. School leaders need to be afforded time and resources to address socio-economic disadvantage through effective partnerships that address educational under-achievement and access to opportunity for social capital development.

“All young people need the opportunities to build social capital and to experience and learn from the world, regardless of their background. This has to be fostered and supported through excellent teaching, and funding that allows first-rate learning to occur in every school, in every context, and in every part of the country. No child or young person should ever be deprived of learning opportunities because their postcode determines their life chances and options.”
3. Inclusion in a changing education landscape

“A society will be judged on the basis of how it treats its weakest members”. Gandhi said that, as did Lincoln and Paine, and more recently Pope John Paul II. I believe that a school system should be judged on how far it supports the most vulnerable, and in a changing education system, inclusion is our most important shared responsibility that we must get right. This article explores the challenges to and opportunities for inclusion within schools.
In 2003 I was part of the first cohort of Teach First teachers placed in schools around London. My first lesson was a group of Year 11s who were not on track to lives of choice and opportunity. As I got to know them throughout the year, I realised they were every bit as capable as the privileged minority I had been studying alongside at the University of Cambridge a few months before.

Fast-forward fourteen years and I am fortunate to be one of a community of headteachers still working with Teach First. I became a headteacher in 2012 when, with fellow Teach First alumna Rebecca Cramer, we opened Reach Academy Feltham in the borough of Hounslow in West London. In Summer 2017 our first cohort of pupils completed their GCSEs, in 2019 our first Reception cohort will graduate into Year 7.

Feltham is an increasingly diverse community; a long-standing white British community mixed with recent immigrants and young professionals, all taking advantage of the great transport links into central London. It is a community which has not had the investment and support that inner London boroughs have benefited from.

Our ward, Feltham West, is one of very few London wards to be in the lowest quintile nationally for successful progression to Higher Education. The shape of Hounslow and Feltham’s position on the edge of the borough means that it is also in the 10% most deprived nationally in terms of access to services.

Despite these challenges, young people get a good education in Hounslow. At GCSE the borough outperforms London consistently, with 37% achieving the English Baccalaureate in 2016 and a Progress 8 score of 0.29 (ranked 8th of 152 Local Authorities).

The most important area of collaboration is around inclusion. Schools in Hounslow work closely together to ensure that we co-ordinate our approach and share responsibility of supporting the most vulnerable.

Budgets are tight and unfortunately vulnerable pupils are more expensive to educate well. They need support to realise their potential and, even when they have a plan that provides funding, schools are still expected to cover a significant proportion of their costs from other sources. Headteachers would be forgiven for seeing the current funding crisis and concluding that they simply do not have the money to meet the additional needs of these pupils.
At the same time, the pressure on headteachers to get results is acute. Several colleagues have compared it to football management, where if the results are not improving and meeting expectations, they can face the sack. Again, in the face of this pressure and further scrutiny from Ofsted, the temptation is to avoid taking pupils who will need additional support and who may be less likely than others to excel academically.

Despite these twin pressures, schools in Hounslow continue to work together. This long-standing commitment to serving the most vulnerable was one I was delighted to sign up to when our school opened in 2012 and we have seen great successes.

We have made use of a highly effective Interim Education Centre, funded by all of the secondary schools together. This gives pupils space and a change of scene, after which they have come back to Reach and been very successful. In August we will have two pupils getting their GCSE results at Reach having come to us through a managed move protocol where they were at risk of permanent exclusion. This system, supported by all schools, ensures that wherever possible, pupils remain in mainstream schools. It is rewarding to see the success of this in action, with both pupils predicted to do very well in their GCSEs.

This system works because all schools have signed up to it, and there is total transparency. It comes from a commitment to serving the needs of every child and will drive Hounslow schools’ collaboration into the future, regardless of the changing policy climate.

I started work straight away. Although our school would not open for another eight weeks, Kay, our Family Support Worker visited Mum. We invested £100 in toys and books, and spent an afternoon a week modelling playing with the toys. Mustafa started school and this term, after four-and-a-half years, has met the expected standard in maths, and is close in reading and writing. He has had a huge amount of intervention to get him there.

The point of this story though is his sister, who I will call Akshara. Meeting her when she was 18-months-old gave us more time to make a bigger difference. We accompanied Mum to stay-and-plays, and supported her to attend a course, identifying one where childcare was provided. Our Nursery opened in time for her to attend, and last year Akshara exceeded all of the Early Learning Goals. She is now one of the best readers and writers in Year 1, and we are convinced of the power of early intervention.

A half-hour visit to our Nursery clearly shows that the achievement gap is a reality at age three. We aim to do more to support families at an earlier stage; taking eligible two-year-olds into our Nursery, offering Family Links courses, and setting up a Children’s Hub to work with pregnant mothers all the way through.

From there we aim to provide a rich learning environment for Mustafa, Akshara and all of our pupils to stay at Reach throughout their schooling until their A levels. We believe that this continuity, allied to a supportive, collaborative family of schools, will enable our pupils to go on to lives of choice and opportunity.

At a time of uncertainty nationally and globally, what is beyond doubt is that the most vulnerable in our society are the ones most in need of an excellent education. It is the responsibility of schools to collaborate and innovate to make sure that they get the education that they deserve.
3. Inclusion in a changing education landscape
4. Business engagement with schools

Children in Wellingborough don’t lack aspiration, but they often lack the opportunities to realise those aspirations. This essay considers how, in a town only an hour from London by train, we can still struggle to engage businesses in the education of our future workforce.
4. Business engagement with schools

Wellingborough is a market town situated in Northamptonshire. There are four secondary schools serving the town with ours, Sir Christopher Hatton Academy, having more than 1100 pupils.

Like most places, Wellingborough is a community of many faces. Many local industries have flourished in recent years, and the evidence attests to the strength of the overall economy. The three percent unemployment rate is slightly below the national average. Just 3.6% of pupils in the area don’t go on to any form of education, employment or training (NEET) compared to 7.7% nationally.

However, there are other, less positive, statistics – and educational disadvantage remains an issue in the area. Fewer than 4% of disadvantaged pupils progress to top universities, compared to more than 11% of all pupils.

And whilst Wellingborough has been the focus of much regeneration over the past few decades, it has not attracted the attention of any major multi-national companies, either in terms of looking for a permanent base, or even in looking to work with our schools and young people.

Our children do not lack aspiration – they dream of and aspire to the same goals as all other young people across the country. We work hard to ensure their goals are achievable and that our children have access to the real world experiences, and the best businesses, to help them realise their dreams. What this means in practice is a great deal of staff time and capacity.

Research shows that contact with businesses while at school has a large impact on later earnings in life. Young people who experience good quality school-mediated business engagement are likely to earn more in later life, and less likely to be NEET after leaving school. But the same research also found that those who need it most (disadvantaged pupils) are least likely to get it.3

“Wealthy people who experience good quality school-mediated business engagement are likely to earn more in later life, and less likely to be NEET after leaving school.”

We currently work very hard in school to make links with businesses ourselves – we take advantage of personal connections, such as friends and ex-colleagues, to bring in local businesses to work with children and to source work-experience placements.

We have also made links with external organisations and networks, such as the Enterprise Advisors Partnership, who can help us develop relationships and connections with a variety of businesses, and the NHS, with whom we have managed to build a partnership through one of our contacts.

We are lucky in a couple of respects. Firstly, that our staff have the capacity to do this. There are undoubtedly many schools where it is just not possible to use precious staffing resources in this way, which is not ideal for a number of reasons. As well as the capacity issue, whilst we can tell children what to expect from the world of work, nothing beats experiencing it first-hand. For many of us at the school, our career experience is mainly school-based, and we are not always best placed to tell pupils about other sectors and industries.

“Whilst we can tell children what to expect from the world of work, nothing beats experiencing it first-hand.”

3 Contemporary transitions: Young Britons reflect on life after secondary school and college by Dr Anthony Mann, Dr Elnaz T. Kashefpakdel, Jordan Rehill and Professor Prue Huddleston for Education and Employers
Secondly, we are incredibly fortunate that we have local businesses that are willing and able to give up their time to support our pupils’ education. They are passionate, entrepreneurial and incredibly inspiring. They are also very aware of what we all know – that it is in the interests of businesses to engage with pupils, and to get them interested in learning the requisite skills our economy needs and, potentially, in taking up apprenticeships with them.

“We're fortunate that we have local businesses willing and able to support our pupils’ education. They are passionate, entrepreneurial and inspiring. They understand the importance of engaging with pupils to ensure they are interested in learning the skills our economy needs.”

However, we also only have a limited number of local businesses we can draw upon and we are aware that they have limited capacity. For children in larger towns and cities with easy access to big businesses that have the capacity to provide support in a variety of different ways, the advantage they receive is huge. I would like to see a commitment from large businesses to spend time in non-London schools in ways that add real value, are sustained and meaningful, rather than just one-offs.

We would love to work with businesses to get this right. We would love them to understand more about the inherent rigidity we have in the school system, that we need to plan well in advance and cannot turn around requests with the speed they might expect or hope for.

We want to work with them to help them understand the best ways to work with young people, how to approach them and talk to them to get them motivated. In this way, schools and businesses would be pooling and sharing their relevant areas of expertise to make the activities we undertake as effective as possible.

There are some concrete steps we can take to closing the advantage gap that currently exists in this field. Having seen the positive effect of things like Young Enterprise, and the buzz that it can create in classrooms, I would like to see more of this happening, with the requisite and necessary funding prioritised for it too.

We need an education system that prioritises a number of things our pupils need to flourish in the world of work. Young people can take great inspiration from engagement with business, meeting those that have been successful, and learning about how to turn a dream or idea into a thriving business. It can teach them important lessons about resilience – how not to give up in the face of adversity. Learning not just what makes businesses successful but how business leaders have learned from the set-backs they faced along the way.

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The opportunity to be able to shadow professionals and to be immersed in the working world for a time is an invaluable experience. How do bakers actually bake, how do lawyers really prepare for court, how do accountants go about balancing the books? These sorts of experiences help children to see where their interests align to real-life careers.

Wouldn’t it be amazing to live in a world where children from less affluent families have the same access to businesses, and opportunities to learn from businesses, as their peers from more advantaged backgrounds? I hope that, over the next five years, we can find a way for businesses and schools to work together in a way that helps all children reach a level playing field. By working together, we can create this equality.
4. Business engagement with schools
Schools are an integral part of any community. The opportunities and challenges that come with serving a diverse community are central to their success. This article argues that schools need to take a proactive role in fostering social integration and cohesion if they are to thrive at the centre of a diverse community.
5. Community cohesion and social integration

Our school is located in Sparkhill, Birmingham. A mile-and-a-half from the city centre, the area is known and loved for its diversity and pluralism. Sparkhill neighbours Kings Heath and Moseley, affluent areas of Birmingham.

Sparkhill’s economy consists mainly of retail, restaurants and taxi businesses. The Stratford Road is a vibrant bustling shopping street full of clothes shops, Halal butchers, fabric shops, restaurants and food takeaways. We have 35 languages spoken here, mainly Urdu, Bengali, Panjabi, Roma Gypsy and Pashto.

Religious focus and learning to read the Qur’an are important aspects of many families’ lives and most attend mosque daily. Families are proud of their culture and the extended family ethos of Sparkhill. Parents are very proud of academic success too, and have aspirations for places at one of the few grammar schools in Birmingham, with many children receiving tuition for the 11+ exams.

Anderton Park is an urban primary school maintained by the Local Authority. At three-and-a-half times the size of an average primary, it is a large school. Our Year 6 children progress to 15 different secondary schools, and parents are discerning about their choice of secondary school. Each year four or five children attend a grammar school, and with the arrival of new free schools, several pupils now also go to a new Islamic Free School that has opened locally.

Disadvantage at Anderton Park is high, although the too-simple measure of Free School Meals (FSM) masks the true extent of socio-economic deprivation. For example, none of our Romanian children are entitled to FSM because their parents do not have the same access to benefits, yet many of them speak little English and have no previous schooling. Their children have less support at home than others because of this. Many families earn just over the threshold for benefits but are not well off at all. Neighbouring areas can be quite different: in the same way as elsewhere across the country, the ‘postcode effect’ plays out here, with more affluent families flocking to particular schools thereby polarising the region socially. Poverty is a key challenge for us – one that we work hard to overcome.

However, more recently another challenge has emerged for Anderton Park. In the last three years, the ethnic representation of families in our area has begun to change, particularly at our school. For around a decade the population remained quite stable. When I came to the school in 2007, only one child out of more than seven hundred was not of Muslim, Pakistani heritage. In 2011 – at the time of the last census - 99% of our children were Muslim. However, three or four years ago, a number of Roma Gypsy families moved into the area. Subsequently, over the last two-and-a-half-years, more than 100 Romanian children have been welcomed into our school.

In 2017, it is still the case that the majority (85%) of our children are Muslim, but we also now have a significant number of Roma Gypsy and Eastern European children, and a small but growing number of white British children.

We love the diverse nature of our school and enthusiastically embrace differences, but whilst this shift in local demographics creates welcome opportunities for social cohesion, it has led to difficulties for us in the community we serve. Those difficulties are related to racial intolerance and conflict.

We see racial intolerance exposed in wider society everywhere at times of political and social turbulence, such as Brexit. As a school leader working in the heart of a diverse community, I argue that it is essential for schools like Anderton Park to understand the root of racial division and to tackle it head on.

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5. Community cohesion and social integration

To understand what dealing directly with racial division is like in primary schools, it helps to have an example. It starts with stereotyping and prejudice, exposed through questions and comments from pupils about those who are different from them. When our first white family started in 2012, questions about alcohol or family breakdown were not of malicious intent but they revealed preconception and judgement. When our Romanian children started, they were not asked questions but faced taunts and jeering, characterised by references to begging and theft.

Brexit fuelled the situation and in March 2017, a Romanian girl aged 15 was attacked by a group of secondary age girls on the main road outside our school. One of my teachers stopped, intervened and called the police. Over a five-year period, locally we have seen initial prejudice develop into open racial tension and hate crime, perpetrated and experienced by all communities. Islamophobia, alienation and associated radicalisation, and misogyny are just some of the ways in which this plays out around us and all are affected.

In serving our local community, the situation which Anderton Park has to deal with as a school is very difficult. Hate crime and racist attitudes are unacceptable. As a school, we pride ourselves on our unbending work on all aspects of equality legislation. Perhaps even more significantly, we believe passionately in the importance of service to our local community, and so we have to act in its interests. We have to be the change we want to see in the world around us. We need to speak out passionately against hate. We need to challenge discriminatory thoughts, actions and language every time we encounter them. We must not allow any sense of insult or put down to others.

“We have to be the change we want to see in the world around us. We need to speak out passionately against hate. We need to challenge discriminatory thoughts, actions and language every time we encounter them.”

There are a number of things that we do to influence change at Anderton Park:

1. It is our responsibility to know equality legislation, and in particular the Equality Act 2010, inside out. All of our policies right across the school reflect the creation of a fair, just and tolerant society, with equality and respect for difference at their heart. This includes policies relating to staff or pupil behaviour, right through to the home-school agreement.

2. The school’s ethos and mission statement, together with the curriculum and all that we teach are written and delivered in a way that promotes respect for others. We ensure that pupils receive an education that will help to overcome social division. We seek to take away fear of ‘the other’ in all that we do with our children. All children should feel they belong – and we make sure that they do.

3. We ensure that all pupils make excellent progress. Our Romanian children (so recently the subject of extreme antagonism) love school, have excellent attendance and make phenomenal progress. Happiness, a sense of security and great progress are the foundations of confidence that help children and their families to feel part of society and to prosper and do well. This is part of the much-needed solution to establishing an inclusive and tolerant society – a feeling that success is available to everyone and that the benefits of good schools are shared widely and fairly.

4. We challenge pupils, parents and also staff – if necessary with discipline – to uphold equality law and respect for others.

5. We hold events that bring local stakeholders together in support of those who find themselves subject to racial intolerance. For example, following the attack in March on the 15-year-old Romanian girl, we held a joint event with police, secondary schools, Birmingham City Council and all our parents to show support for our Romanian families and to make it clear we would do anything to help.
But schools and school leaders can only do so much on their own. We need support and resources from government to help us in this work, which extends beyond the classroom. Families should no longer feel afraid, safe in the knowledge that they are protected and valued by everyone. This means the whole community must come together in mutual support, challenging any stereotypical language or racism when they encounter it. And we need to challenge misogyny and make sure it is a thing of the past. I believe that PSHE, RE & SRE should be compulsory, without the right for parents to withdraw children from these lessons as it is in the safe spaces of our classrooms, mediated by expertly trained teachers, where sensitive and controversial issues can be discussed and prejudice eradicated.

“It is in the safe spaces of our classrooms, mediated by expertly trained teachers, where sensitive and controversial issues can be discussed and prejudice eradicated.”

It is essential that all parents are able to engage in their children’s education fully. This includes the provision of English classes to all parents who are not yet fluent. And schools need to be given the budget, personnel and resources to work far closer with parents to eliminate hate.

I would also like to see a change in the criteria for Pupil Premium to reflect changing levels of need – none of our Romanian children receive Free School Meals and therefore we do not receive Pupil Premium funding, despite these children needing extra support.

We all have a duty to take social integration seriously, not just as a set of good intentions, but as a programme of work. In a report on social integration, commissioned by the coalition government, Dame Louise Casey said “the problem has not been a lack of knowledge but a failure of collective, consistent and persistent will to do something about it or give it the priority it deserves at both a national and local level”. By failing to understand and challenge these issues, we risk intolerance, hate and stereotypical views becoming dangerous – destructive of society. It does not have to be that way and Anderton Park is just one of many schools on its frontline – but we need government to have our backs.

“We all have a duty to take social integration seriously, not just as a set of good intentions, but as a programme of work.”
Having been in education for over 20 years, I have seen innumerable changes to our education system. It is, however, over the last six years that we have witnessed change on an unprecedented scale, with reforms of the curriculum, accountability measures and school structures.

This has presented new and unique challenges for the teaching profession where the delivery of high expectations and outcomes are required. This case study will investigate our national fixation with the school curriculum and why tensions have existed between vocational learning and academic learning.
Hampshire is the largest local authority in Southern England, and one of the ten largest counties in the UK. With 85% of Hampshire defined as rural, and one-third of the county within National Parks or areas of outstanding natural beauty, tourism accounts for £3 billion annually from 4.5 million staying visitors, and 52 million day trippers.

The area has a strong industrial and engineering background, with Portsmouth dominated by its military dockyard – home of the Royal Navy, and Southampton a national leader in the cruise ship industry. Both city ports play significant roles in the global ambition of the UK with Portsmouth focussed on defence and Southampton on trade.

Schools in Hampshire have been subject to a number of recent changes. Academies have become much more common; with 62% of schools as recognised academies, the region has one of the largest number of academies in the country. And with projected increases to pupil numbers of 13% for primaries and 10% for secondaries by 2018-19, schools in the area are constantly having to adapt to change.

The school curriculum has consistently been at the centre of public debate since 1950. Until 2011 the debate had focussed around continuing themes of equal opportunity, the organisation and selection of pupils for secondary education, and the curriculum content itself.

In the 1960s, the individual headteacher of a school largely decided the school curriculum with complete autonomy – the only legal curriculum requirement was for each school to deliver physical and religious education. In the post-war era, curriculum design centred around grammar schools, technical colleges and secondary moderns with academic selection at age 11 (a three-tier system based on ability). Technical colleges and schools did offer vocational training, although the quality of the teaching was largely seen as ineffective, resulting in technical learning becoming the ‘poor relation’ to academic learning.

A national curriculum was introduced in 1988, partly because the school curricula at that time was not responsive to the needs of commerce and industry. But prior to this, the TVEI (Technical and Vocational Education Initiative) introduced in 1983 attempted to vocationalise the curriculum, as the government became increasingly concerned about the lack of employment for those pupils who had no formal qualifications when they left school. The intention of TVEI was right, but it did not effectively address the skills deficit, having been largely based in schools with limited facilities, and with insufficient links to colleges and industry. The failure of TVEI was not because there was no market for it, but rather due to poor execution.

Over the past two decades, vocational courses have started to re-emerge. These courses were equivalent to academic GCSEs, even though examined content and assessment was significantly different. However, the revival of vocational courses abruptly ended recently because the system made them more valuable to schools with a BTEC equating to four GCSE grades when compared to the one grade for GCSE History. It led to over-use of the BTEC and to allegations that some schools were ‘gaming’ the system. It also contributed to vocational learning being labelled as a low expectation choice yet again.
When I first entered teaching some 23 years ago, I remember a twilight session with an old-fashioned Deputy Headteacher. He said something about the curriculum that still resonates today – “all birds have wings, but not all birds can fly”. The argument is simple, the curriculum needs to be broad enough to allow all pupils to play to their strengths. Vocational education clearly has a significant role to play in offering a wide choice of courses alongside a more traditional academic provision that will suit and support the wide-ranging talents, capabilities and ambitions of all pupils in our schools.

For too long, vocational learning has been directly linked to low expectations and its status and value questioned by society as a whole. If anything, we need to ensure that vocational learning and its delivery becomes an essential component of our economic development as a nation.

In Southampton there is a significant shortage of bricklayers, who are needed to support the rapid development of offices, infrastructure and business locations. Yet after the Wolf Report in 2011, the Level 2 Construction qualification was relegated to a Level 1 course by its content. The difference was that the new Level 2 course was ‘theoretical’ and had the content of the practical element – hands-on learning – reduced significantly. The Level 1 course boosted practical experience, yet accounted for little in the performance measures. Some pupils were encouraged to undertake the Level 1 course – right for them, not so good for school performance outcome data.

The development of Progress 8 and its insistence of the 5 Ebacc subjects is evidence of the tightening of the curriculum, through accountability measures and further scope for the final three subjects to be limited to DfE and Ofqual approved courses. Linking the curriculum closely to a specific set of subjects has meant less choice for pupils and schools feeling obliged to offer courses for the benefit of performance rather than to meet the needs of its pupils.

The shift to a tighter curriculum has not prevented criticism from businesses about the ‘work-readiness’ of young people. However, it is encouraging to see that vocational learning is slowly being replaced by a new breed of technical awards offering a mixture of examined content, controlled assessment and practical application. It is right that these awards should count as one GCSE grade, as it finally gives an equal parity to traditional GCSEs such as the Ebacc subjects.

The challenge is how we can make effective changes to the curriculum that provide the most positive impact for pupils. Headteachers, school leadership teams and governing bodies should be trusted to offer the right range of suitable qualifications for each school cohort. By the same token, Ofsted should continue its focus on the school curriculum, pathway and option choices to ensure that schools use qualifications appropriate for their cohorts, and not merely as a vehicle to boost league table positions.

“Ofsted should continue its focus on the school curriculum, pathway and option choices to ensure that schools use qualifications appropriate for their cohorts, and not merely as a vehicle to boost league table positions.”

Curriculum pathways should be recognised as a key solution to social mobility in English schools, with content designed to meet pupil needs using a range of academic, vocational and mixed pathways. Level 1 qualifications, given their increased practical element, should be promoted without penalising schools for doing so. Likewise, new technical qualifications should be developed with support from the private sector and teaching profession, to narrow the skills gap.

“Curriculum pathways should be recognised as a key solution to social mobility in English schools, with content designed to meet pupil needs using a range of academic, vocational and mixed pathways.”
A cross-party group of MPs, unions, school leaders and industry experts need to agree the purpose of an education, so the range of subjects, courses and content meet the clear economic needs of the UK. This would include a review of the legal age to undertake apprenticeships and work experience, so schools can provide a core education but selected pupils are able to have time out of school to undertake ‘on the job’ training or work experience. Cross-party consensus would take politics out of the debate and give schools continuity to plan and deliver more effectively.

All children are different and they deserve the opportunity to be literate and numerate when they leave school at 16. However, the school curriculum and the relevant courses and content offered must be designed with a full range of academic, vocational and technical courses in mind. This will allow all pupils to play to their strengths and only then can we seek to gain parity between an academic and technical curriculum. Potentially, the positive impact of this ambition will lead to improved behaviour, a sizeable reduction in exclusions, increased attendance and a continuing reduction in the NEET figures nationally.

Whilst there is still more to do, the removal of the ‘more than two vocational qualifications cap’ in Progress 8 and the development of exciting new technical awards proves we are moving in the right direction, and we should celebrate this. Let us hope that the profession continues to support and drive this progress.
This article examines the impact of grammar schools on the educational outcomes of disadvantaged pupils, focusing specifically on coastal areas like Thanet in Kent. It will also present the challenges and potential solutions to achieving the full potential of all children within this system regardless of socio-economic circumstances.
Challenging disadvantage together

7. Selective education and school reform

The South East is an economically and demographically diverse area that incorporates the many commuter towns on the London belt, as well as the more deprived coastal fringes. My school, Newington Community Primary, is situated in Thanet which is an island made up of the towns of Ramsgate, Margate and Broadstairs.

Coastal towns generally have high levels of physical and social isolation. An ageing population is twinned with higher levels of outward migration among young people. Low-wage, low-skill economies and seasonal employment are common, with frequent dependency on a single industry.

There is a high incidence of poor housing conditions, and a high proportion of private rented homes. Coastal towns account for a disproportionately high percentage of England’s deprived areas. Government data shows that 21 of the 88 most deprived authorities are in coastal areas.

Efforts have been made to bring about economic regeneration. The main road artery into the area has been extended and converted to a dual carriageway. High speed trains now link Thanet to central London in as little as 76 minutes. A new university campus has been built to take higher education to the people in low areas of participation.

But infrastructure is not solely the problem. There can be an inward-looking approach to life, with most needs met in the local area. A well-paid job is required to be able to afford to commute to Canterbury or London, and obtaining one of those requires a good standard of education.

Kent is a wholly selective authority whereby a test is taken by children at the beginning of Year 6. The outcomes of the test will determine the children’s educational pathway from Year 7 onwards, either through the grammar or secondary modern route. In Thanet there are eight secondary schools, two of which are grammar schools.

Pupils eligible for Free School Meals make up 13% of the state-funded secondary school population nationally. Yet, in grammar schools, only 2.5% of pupils are eligible. While grammar schools tend to be located in more affluent areas, FSM pupils still make up 9% of the secondary-aged population in wholly-selective areas. Geographical location is not solely to blame for this lack of representation.

- Thanet has suffered from long-term economic and social problems and is the most deprived local authority area in Kent
- Thanet is ranked 65th out of 354 local authorities in England for levels of deprivation
- The larger seaside towns of Hastings, Folkestone and Thanet generally have greater levels of their population in the most deprived group than average in 2010 – 26.9% compared with a national average of 20%.

Even when we take into account that around 6% of disadvantaged pupils achieve a level of attainment on par with the grammar school entrance requirements, they are still under-represented as less than half of that proportion actually attend a grammar school.

It is not just selective areas that experience social divides. In non-selective Eastbourne, which contains wards with some of the highest deprivation indicators in the South East as well as some very affluent areas, the schools frequently reflect the immediate local population. Neighbouring schools contain cohorts that are as different in prior attainment as is possible to find in a selective system.

But research for the Sutton Trust in 2008 looking at the ‘social selectivity’ of secondary schools found that grammars were more socially selective than other schools. Grammars schools were listed as 17 of the top 100 most socially selective secondary schools in England and yet grammar schools make up only 5% of all secondary schools in the country.

The Sutton Trust also examined the relationship between the economic background of pupils and the rating received by the school. It found that primary schools rated Outstanding were much more likely to have pupils from a higher economic background. The report also stresses that one did not necessarily cause the other.
A report by the National Association of Secondary Moderns found that a grammar school is six times more likely to be judged to be Outstanding compared to a secondary modern. Secondary schools in areas where the brightest pupils are selected for grammar schools are more likely to be classed as ‘coasting’.

There is also a pupil attainment gap between selective and non-selective local authorities. In non-selective local authorities, the gap between pupils on Free School Meals (FSM) and all other pupils is 28% (as measured by the proportion achieving five or more A*-C GCSEs, including English and Maths). But in wholly selective authorities, the gap rises to 34%. In non-selective local authorities, 33% of disadvantaged pupils achieve five A*-C GCSEs but, in wholly selective areas, this falls to just 30%.

There are also implications on teacher recruitment for non-selective schools in selective areas. Sir Michael Wilshaw, when he was head of Ofsted, suggested that good and experienced teachers in selective areas are more likely to want to teach at grammars, citing research by Education Datalab.

So, how can we maximise the potential of all pupils in a selective system? If grammar schools are going to remain part of our educational landscape, we need to ensure that all children, regardless of academic ability or home background, thrive in whichever school they attend.

We should concentrate on ensuring that all children receive an outstanding education, regardless of their attainment at the age of 11. The DfE should put in place incentives to ensure that the best headteachers are recruited to lead in the most challenging schools. It is equally important to focus on training and recruitment of new teachers. We need to ensure, through the Teach First model, that our brightest and socially motivated graduates are inspired to teach in our most challenging schools.

"We should concentrate on ensuring that all children receive an outstanding education, regardless of their attainment at the age of 11."

Pupil selection needs to be more transparent. There needs to be a genuinely ‘tutor-proof’ test to ensure that selection is based on genuine ability, or potential, and not something that can be crammed into the head of a child with greater financial means.

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There should be a stronger collective approach between selective and non-selective schools. Every grammar school could work in a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) with at least two non-selective schools, and the MAT’s combined performance data be used as a progress measure. And there could be a fluid and flexible movement of staff between the schools in the MAT to ensure that all children are taught by the best and most qualified teachers.

We need grammar schools to get better at sharing their existing expertise. Grammar schools could deliver outreach programmes in other schools with disadvantaged cohorts to inspire children. This could include after-school classes in English and Maths, mentoring and preparation (not tutoring) for pupils in Years 4-6, involving the most academically able pupils in receipt of Pupil Premium funding.

There should be a ‘gifted and talented’ network within every MAT and especially in STEM subjects. This would be led by grammars and open to all schools. All grammar school governors should also govern in a non-selective school to ensure they have a broad and balanced view of the educational landscape.
There is a heavy political influence on the direction that education takes in Kent, and it is important to ensure that every child has the entitlement and the opportunity to experience an excellent education. To ensure that no child is left-behind, there should be three main aims for education.

Firstly, to make sure that every school is outstanding regardless of whether or not it is selective. Secondly, to make sure that a child’s background is not a barrier to being offered a place at a grammar school. Finally, grammar schools should be encouraged to take a shared moral and social responsibility for the education of every child within their neighbourhood.

“Grammar schools should be encouraged to take a shared moral and social responsibility for the education of every child within their neighbourhood.”

It is important to mitigate against a system that is socially divisive at the age of eleven. I would only hope that some of these solutions are taken up, so that every child will achieve their very best in Kent schools.
8. School partnership in a competitive system

Having been a headteacher for over a decade, and having started my career in inner London over 30 years ago, I’ve seen my fair share of changes and developments to the way we educate our children. And I have embraced all the opportunities and challenges these have brought about.

However, recent developments have brought about an increasingly complex school system with schools located geographically close to each other having very different ways of working, priorities and approaches. This system, in conjunction with the current accountability measures, is in danger of driving a wedge between previously collaborative colleagues at a time when collaboration is more important than ever.
I’m headteacher of Halifax Primary School in Ipswich, Suffolk. Large parts of the county are rural, with farming the main industry. But there are also areas of dense urban population, including Ipswich. Suffolk is very mixed in terms of cultural and economic diversity. Parts of the county are largely mono-cultural, whilst other areas are very mixed. Ipswich has the largest Roma population of anywhere outside of London.

There are beautiful coastal villages and small towns almost exclusively populated by second home owners. This is in stark contrast to areas of significant deprivation in towns like Ipswich, Lowestoft and Haverhill.

Suffolk has poor infrastructure, with limited fast road links and public transport. This has caused difficulties for some academy chains which have schools in different parts of the county; they knew about the distances involved but not the travel time.

There is great variety in the schools across Suffolk. This includes large numbers of small village schools, and these are often church schools. Larger schools are found within towns and more urban areas. There are no selective maintained schools, but there are a number of relatively high-profile independent schools.

Schools within Ipswich have historically worked well together around school-based ‘pyramids’, which provided a natural structure. But the make-up of schools across Suffolk is changing. Ipswich now has several schools that form part of large, national academy chains (ALT, REAch2, Bright Tribe, Paradigm), schools that are part of locally formed Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), Church schools (largely one form entry) in the local Diocesan MAT, and some Local Authority maintained schools.

Changes to governance and organisation structures are starting to make it more challenging for schools to work collaboratively. For example, we have a local cluster of schools that is made up of two high schools and seven feeder primaries. Each of the high schools is with a different national sponsor. Six of the primaries are also academies, leaving one as a Local Authority maintained school. The six primary academies represent four different academy arrangements – two national chains and two locally formed MATs.

Recruitment of high-quality staff has always been a challenge. However, competition for teachers has become intense in an environment where staffing is already difficult. The use of consultants with targets for recruitment is becoming common. Teachers have been individually targeted, offered rapid promotion, improved salaries and the opportunity to write their own job description.

There is a growing culture of protectionism too. Because staffing is difficult, sometimes it seems that trainees are not being placed fairly across the region or that trainees are discouraged from applying to other schools.

This perpetuates the cycle of schools who are already performing well having access to and appointing high-quality trainees and thus sustaining their staffing. Meanwhile schools in challenging circumstances who need the very best teachers face continuing struggles to recruit. We are in a system that is creating competition between schools, rather than ensuring schools collaborate so they have what they need to succeed.
8. School partnership in a competitive system

“We are in a system that is creating competition between schools, rather than ensuring schools collaborate so they have what they need to succeed.”

In addition to recruitment challenges, we also see admissions criteria stoking competition. In larger urban areas, parents often have more choice with a large range of schools within a relatively small distance. Certain schools enjoy a particular reputation, and housing within their catchment area is in high demand. Parents are known to move to a certain catchment area, or temporarily rent a house to have the right address to put on their application form.

These schools become oversubscribed and are not in a position to take pupils who are seeking a place because of permanent exclusion, a managed move request, or who have recently moved into the area.

It means that those schools which are not full end up taking all of these pupils and gradually, over a period of time, their intake shifts and changes. They have higher levels of pupils with additional needs, which makes it increasingly challenging to provide resources to meet these needs.

This leads to poorer outcomes, which negatively impacts on reputation leading to fewer first choice preferences from parents. Historically, 95% of the pupils from my school would go to the local high school. This year that figure is down to 65%.

And the proportion of children who will be getting on the bus to take them out of Ipswich will go up. Many of the parents who can afford the money for the bus fares are those whose children are already doing well academically. So the local high school ends up with an unbalanced intake. Yet all schools are held to the same accountability measures with the same resources and funding. The situation does not foster an atmosphere of collaboration.

We are finding ways to ensure the local schools are populated by their immediate communities. As a group of school leaders, we have come up with a number of ideas that could be implemented anywhere in the country.

We work on whole-school projects together, hold events in each other’s schools, and portray a united front (e.g. at local meetings). A recent ‘Raising Aspirations’ event was a great success; we secured sufficient funding to produce a video and website telling the stories of people who had been educated in our local area and gone on to be doctors, school leaders, journalists, PhD pupils, sports coaches, musicians and more.

We have printed copies of the booklets for local children’s centres, school libraries, public libraries and other community spaces. We even had adverts on the backs of buses that serve the local area. By doing this, we hope we are getting across the message that local schools have as much to offer as the more high-profile schools outside of the area.

But a marketing campaign is not enough on its own. Every school needs to have the capacity to meet the needs of the local community. We need to ensure schools are not having to fight for staff, by improving the recruitment and retention of teachers and leaders.

We need a funding formula that recognises the reality of the levels of deprivation in counties like Suffolk; it too often goes unnoticed as it is masked by the more affluent parts of the county.

We need an admissions process that does not pit schools against each other or favour children from families who can pay for bus fares or a rented address. And, above all, we need to ensure schools that serve the same or neighbouring communities are able to work together to find the solutions to their specific needs and challenges.

As a school leader, by 2022, I want every child in Ipswich and the surrounding area to attend a school that provides them with the very best education, and leaves them ready for the next stage in the academic career, no matter what that might be.

We need a firm commitment and acknowledgment from all schools that we all have to work together to change things – it cannot be left solely to the schools who have disadvantaged pupils within their community to ensure our region has good social mobility. In times of complexity and challenge, it is only by working collaboratively that we can bring about that change.
8. School partnership in a competitive system

“We all have to work together to change things – it cannot be left solely to the schools who have disadvantaged pupils within their community to ensure our region has good social mobility.”
9. School funding

Co-written for the South West region by:

Peter Elliott, CEO, Bridgwater College Academy, Bridgwater

Peter Knight, Principal, Oasis Academy Brislington, Bristol

In the following case study, we will explore how the issues of education finance and funding interplay with other factors affecting social mobility for pupils in largely rural West Somerset, a new area of work for Teach First and where we are both school leaders.
The South West of England covers a large geographical area, from the most southerly tip of Cornwall all the way through to the eastern edges of Wiltshire. From the urban liberalism of Bristol to more traditionally conservative rural areas such as Exmoor. The South West, as a mix of habitations, people and politics, is a microcosm of the country as a whole.

Unemployment rates are largely in-line with national averages, as are birth rates and life expectancy. And, like the rest of the country, we face issues with ensuring disadvantaged children are able to fulfil their potential as readily as their better off peers.

West Somerset was, for many years, a predominantly agricultural region, which was reflected in both its economy and many aspects of its culture. Alongside this, tourism has traditionally played a very large role in the local economy too. However in recent decades new industries have flourished in the South West; specifically aeronautical engineering, as well as nuclear energy and the associated engineering required to make this happen.

These industries are not subject to the seasonal highs and lows of agriculture and tourism, and provide a more stable addition to the portfolio of jobs available in the area. These jobs, however, require highly skilled workers, with high-quality vocational experience and qualifications. Unfortunately, opportunities to develop these capabilities are not easily accessible for many children in rural West Somerset.

In terms of education, the South West has not been shielded or isolated from national trends and, in certain areas, has been an enthusiastic adopter of the academies programme. There are a number and variety of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) operating in the region committed to the best outcomes for all pupils.

However, attainment and progression figures show an area that is struggling to serve its disadvantaged pupils. For example, just 31% of disadvantaged pupils in the South West reach expected levels in reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 2, compared to a national average of 62% for non-disadvantaged pupils. The government’s designation of West Somerset as an ‘Opportunity Area’ is recognition of this situation.

There is no lack of aspiration in the area. In our increasingly connected world, being geographically isolated does not stop children seeing and knowing what opportunities are out there for them. They have the same hopes and dreams for their futures as any other child. Where the difference lies is in knowing how best to reach their goals and in having the facilities that will allow them to realise their ambitions.

In the 350 square miles that make up West Somerset, there are no University Technical Colleges or other specialist schools or institutions from which pupils can choose the qualifications that will most help them achieve their dreams. There is a lack of choice, which results in a lack of opportunity. The amazing engineering opportunities mentioned before become unrealistic and out-of-reach.

This leads us onto the issue of finance and funding. Until recently, schools in West Somerset had not experienced the same reduction in ‘real terms’ income that schools in other parts of the country had seen. This year, however, has seen the onset of a perfect storm of factors that have contributed to a very real reduction in school budgets and, thus, in what schools are able to do with and for their pupils.
9. School Funding

It is true that the amount of money being spent on education is the highest it has ever been – however, what is made less clear is the vastly increased number of outgoings schools now face. A rise in pension and National Insurance contributions, the apprenticeship levy, needing to fund services that were previously paid for by Local Authorities, etc. – all of these things place an unprecedented burden on school budgets that negate any ‘increase’ in the overall education budget.

Pupils in our region are already greatly affected by a lack of choice in provision – the cuts in finance and funding exacerbate this problem and perpetuate an unfairness that is disproportionately felt by those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. A prime example of this is where schools become less able to finance enrichment activities for their pupils; for families who are unable to directly fund such activities, it now means just ‘going without’ for these children. This will be the reality for a great number of families in our community, including those not traditionally labelled as disadvantaged and now referred to as ‘just about managing’. These families do not have the extra income to make up the shortfall now felt by schools.

In terms of specific schemes that have been designed to combat the barriers to social mobility, high-profile initiatives like the Opportunity Areas programme are a step in the right direction. We need a commitment to social mobility programmes that operate for more than just one, two or even three years. Social mobility is an inter-generational challenge, and the schemes that are designed to counteract it need to reflect this, working with schools and communities over longer periods of time and in a sustainable way.

“We need a conscious effort to recruit and to appropriately remunerate the best people, and to counteract the hyper-accountability and huge workloads that schools, and individuals in schools, face on a daily basis.”

From government a commitment is needed to focus finance and funding on the two things that we know create great schools: high-quality leaders and high-quality teachers. We need a conscious effort to recruit and to appropriately remunerate the best people, and to counteract the hyper-accountability and huge workloads that schools, and individuals in schools, face on a daily basis.

From the business world a commitment to provide meaningful workplace experiences would really help, working with schools to create the vocational provision that will engage and inspire young people. The voice of businesses and the voice of schools would be more powerful and influential if it was truly joined up in asking for more value to be placed on vocational routes and qualifications.

From education leaders and teachers, we need a commitment to upskill and educate ourselves in the reality of the working world that we are preparing our pupils for. If we spend 20-year careers solely in schools, does that really make us experts in the world that awaits our pupils? We, as much as the pupils, need to get into the factories, start-ups and industrial complexes to better understand the realities of working in these places. In doing so, we can ensure our pupils are as well-informed as possible.

We hope that, by 2022, all pupils feel able to pursue and realise their goals, and this means their goals as determined by their true aspirations and real potential. Not goals that have been inhibited by a child’s socio-economic circumstances or by their geographical location, and definitely not goals that have been curtailed because of a lack of fair funding. For the continued success of the South West as a creative, innovative and productive region, it is vital we create the educational environment that enables this.

“Social mobility is an inter-generational challenge, and the schemes that are designed to counteract it need to reflect this, working with schools and communities over longer periods of time and in a sustainable way.”

We all play a part in creating the educational environment we want to see and that we know will help all our pupils to fulfil their potential. And we need commitments from all the key players.
Tackling educational inequality means getting great teachers to the schools that need them – and it also means keeping them there. This means we need to be ‘in it for the long term’, instead of relying on high-pressure, high-stakes tactics to improve struggling schools overnight.
Yorkshire is a region of lively cities, pretty villages, rolling countryside and grand coastlines. Cities like York, Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield and Hull - this year’s City of Culture - have a national reputation for the arts, retail and business innovation.

Yorkshire people are proud of their northern roots and famous for their straight-talking, ‘down to earth’ and friendly personae. Communities are close-knit, but also diverse and a true reflection of ‘modern England’.

Like modern England, while there are areas of affluence, the region also contains very deprived areas. Places like Hull, Bradford, Doncaster and North-east Lincolnshire all experience significant issues associated with socio-economic deprivation. In these areas, the infant mortality rate, unemployment and the number of child protection plans is significantly higher than the national average.

Yorkshire and the Humber has the lowest proportion of pupils in a Good or Outstanding primary school in the country, with one in five schools (21%) classed as ‘underperforming’. The region has some of the lowest levels in reading, writing and maths at KS1 in the country.

It was the second-weakest region at GCSE level in 2016 with 60.4% of pupils gaining GCSE English and maths at A*-C and a Progress 8 score below the national average (-0.04 in 2016). The Government has identified three local areas as ‘Opportunity Areas’ – Bradford, Doncaster and Scarborough – due to poor educational performance and significant levels of disadvantage.

Headteachers have been reporting a national recruitment crisis for some time. A recent survey of school leaders by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) revealed that schools are unable to recruit at all in an average 17% of advertised posts. This rises to 23% for SENCO vacancies. The problem is even more acute for schools serving disadvantaged communities, particularly those outside London or other big cities, which struggle to attract teachers to work in the area.

The problem is exacerbated by a simultaneous retention crisis. Department for Education (DfE) figures show that in the 12 months to November 2016, over 50,000 qualified teachers in England left the state sector. This equates to one in ten teachers leaving the profession, and is the highest number of teachers to leave education in the last decade at a time when the number of pupils is increasing. In July 2016, the DfE reported that the number of children enrolled in state schools would increase by almost one million within the next decade.

The recruitment and retention crisis is very evident in Yorkshire and the Humber. Secondary schools report the greatest problem areas to be in maths, science and English. There are also difficulties in recruiting specialists in geography and languages.

This means that whilst schools are struggling to fill vacancies, more and more pupils are being taught by teachers who do not have a relevant degree in the subject. Taking Bradford as an example, schools are frequently using PE teachers to teach English if they have an A-level in the subject. Of course, there are many excellent teachers that don’t have a degree in the subject they are teaching, but pulling in teachers from other subjects to plug holes is not a sustainable way forward.

In primaries, schools are struggling to recruit at all levels and this is often compounded by geography. For example, schools in Grimsby – a coastal town – are experiencing difficulties in attracting teachers from outside the area and struggle to recruit from an ever-diminishing local pool of practitioners.
As a result, headteachers are frequently forced to employ unqualified teachers. In November 2015, the DfE reported that there were 300 fewer qualified teachers in service and 2,200 more teachers without qualified teacher status than the year before.

Poor quality of applicants is also widely reported throughout the region. Headteachers are reluctantly employing teachers that they would not normally select. A lack of continuity for teachers as they enter and leave the profession, and the need to constantly develop new teachers without ever securing a cohort of staff who are consistently effective, leads to a lack of progress and weaker outcomes for pupils.

Schools in the region have tried multiple approaches to improve teacher retention and recruitment, some of which are innovative and many which provide practical assistance. In Doncaster, schools are offering numerous incentives such as private healthcare, childcare vouchers and salary sacrifice schemes.

In Bradford, one headteacher has focused on developing a core coaching and Continuous Professional Development offer, and the cultivation of a strong school culture ‘where teachers can just teach’. In Grimsby, the promise of rapid progression to leadership positions has brought some success in the retention of existing staff. All schools report spending considerably more time and money on direct marketing than ever before, and this comes at a time when budgets are increasingly being cut.

But beyond these relatively small-scale innovations, headteachers in the region believe there needs to be a sea-change in the way that the teaching profession is perceived to avert the current recruitment crisis. Greater celebration and promotion of the ‘moral purpose’ of teaching in areas of educational and social disadvantage away from London would help to attract applicants.

The DfE has gone some way to address regional ‘cold spots’ through local Opportunity Areas, but this needs to be rapidly expanded beyond the twelve already identified, to address the urgent problems that many other areas are facing. Other national organisations could do more to focus exclusively on areas of greatest need – both in terms of disadvantage and recruitment.

There must be urgent action to address workload issues, including increasingly wide-ranging accountability measures, and an emerging pay gap with the majority of other graduate professions. And headteachers are concerned that the introduction of the National Funding Formula will mean further income reductions in areas of disadvantage, resulting in cuts to what are now essential recruitment marketing strategies.

“Greater celebration and promotion of the ‘moral purpose’ of teaching in areas of educational and social disadvantage away from London would help to attract applicants.”

All children should have equal opportunities to succeed in education and throughout their lives. High-performing non-selective schools in areas of disadvantage must be given every encouragement to succeed and share best practice with neighbouring schools. School-to-school support - within and between all types of maintained schools, MATs and SATs5 – should be promoted, with competition and selection avoided if schools are to give all pupils a chance to succeed and secure the very best outcomes. To support schools in areas of high deprivation and low aspiration, more needs to be done to reduce the punitive use of accountability measures that makes the challenge too great and daunting for many teachers and leaders. While accountability is necessary, using measures to publicly castigate teachers and school leaders can make the risk too high for some to work in areas of disadvantage, where there are so many external variables that affect pupil outcomes in addition to the quality of teaching.

“Greater celebration and promotion of the ‘moral purpose’ of teaching in areas of educational and social disadvantage away from London would help to attract applicants.”

5 MATs (Multi Academy Trusts), SATs (Single Academy Trusts).
“To support schools in areas of high deprivation and low aspiration, more needs to be done to reduce the punitive use of accountability measures that makes the challenge too great and daunting for many teachers and leaders.”

The profession will not attract and retain good leaders and teachers if the rewards are overshadowed in this way. It is simply unrealistic to expect decades of deprivation and disadvantage to be reversed in a couple of years, and where failure to do this threatens job security, teachers and leaders will be reluctant to go there.

The Education Select Committee has recently published the findings from its teacher retention and recruitment enquiry. The Committee reports that the Government lacks a long-term plan to address teacher shortages. Without this, the profession and education system as a whole is, as one headteacher commented, “at serious risk of imploding”. If we’re to avoid this, urgent action needs to be taken to reverse the recruitment and retention crisis.
Whilst performance data is a crucial measure of success for schools and pupils alike, it doesn’t always tell the whole story. This article investigates the importance of appropriate performance measures and curriculum provision to accurately reflect the needs of all pupils and communities.
11. Breadth and balance in the curriculum

Carshalton Boys Sports College is a non-selective school in a selective borough in South East London (Sutton Local Authority). Overall deprivation levels in Sutton are below the national average, however, Carshalton Boys is in one of the most deprived wards (St. Helier/Wandlde).

There are 14 secondary schools in Sutton, including five selective grammar schools, two faith schools and seven comprehensives. A number of the schools are part of Multi Academy Trusts, some locally and some regionally. There is a strong partnership and sharing of good practice across all secondary schools in Sutton, and at their last Ofsted inspection every one of the 14 schools was rated either Good or Outstanding.

Outcomes at KS4 in Sutton are well above national average, with most schools achieving Attainment 8 scores above 50 and progress scores above zero in 2016. Despite this, disadvantaged pupils in Sutton still lag behind their more advantaged peers.

In our area in 2014, the percentage point gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers was 33%, well above the England average of 28%. By 2016 this gap had reduced to 14% predominantly as a result of improved outcomes in non-selective schools.

On GCSE results day in 2016, we were delighted to have some of our highest ever results, with our boys achieving above the national average despite below average prior attainment. In contrast, when we looked at our Progress 8 score we were faced with being classed as a “coasting school” due to the rules around first and best entry, and the qualifications included in the measure.

The introduction of new accountability measures in 2016 were “designed to encourage schools to offer a broad and balanced curriculum with a focus on an academic core at Key Stage 4, and reward schools for the teaching of all their pupils, measuring performance across 8 qualifications” (Department for Education, January 2017).

The only floor standard currently is a Progress 8 score of -0.5. Schools falling below this figure “may come under scrutiny through inspection” (DfE, January 2017). However, the emphasis in the ‘English Baccalaureate’ qualifications – with 70% of Progress 8 measured against these subjects - means that there could be a temptation for schools to narrow the curriculum to focus on these areas. This would impact most on low-ability pupils who are more likely to be disadvantaged than their high-ability peers.

- Unemployment in Sutton is in line with national average at 4%
- Other deprivation indicators such as infant mortality and the number of children on CP plans are below the national average
- The proportion of black, Asian and ethnic minority people living in Sutton has doubled each decade since 1991 and is currently 70.9% White
- In Sutton LA selective schools in 2016, 7% of the Year 11 population was classified as being on free school meals, compared to 22% in the non-selective school group. These represent above national average proportions in each of these school types.

The perception of a school in the local area is critical. Parents often have limited access to information in advance of choosing a secondary school, and published performance data and Ofsted reports can be influential tools to help with these tough choices.

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Good and Outstanding schools are judged using a greater range of criteria and outcomes. Performance data, although crucial, does not tell the whole story. I believe there are five main discrepancies that exist with the current performance measures used in schools.

Firstly, performance measures are currently calculated using whole school figures. Unfortunately this macro approach doesn’t accurately reflect differences between individuals or pupil groups, for example the differences in outcomes between boys and girls in GCSE English.
11. Breadth and balance in the curriculum

Equally, the subjects included in Progress 8 are disproportionately weighted towards more traditionally ‘academic’ subjects, with 70% of scores calculated from GCSE English, Maths, Science, History, Geography and Languages. This impacts most upon learners at the lower end of the ability spectrum, or those who favour other subjects.

The whole school attainment levels used can also produce misleading figures, with the Key Stage 2 ‘baseline’ capped at 5.8 points. Pupils whose prior attainment is above this level at the end of KS2 are all included in the same attainment group, yet many of these will make greater progress as their starting point would have been higher than the baseline.

The current performance measures also don’t take full account of ‘outlier’ pupils. This group includes pupils who drop out of education before completing GCSEs, or who significantly underperform as a result of social, emotional or attendance issues. Outlier pupils are consistently from disadvantaged backgrounds, and can have a hugely significant impact on a school’s overall Progress 8 score, and in particular the progress score of the disadvantaged group.

Finally, the current accountability system means that schools at risk of losing their Ofsted Good or Outstanding ratings due to low Progress 8 scores may be tempted to make curriculum decisions that are not in the best interests of their pupils. As a consequence pupils may not progress on to the most appropriate courses or destinations between the ages of 16-19.

So what is the solution? There is unfortunately no silver bullet here, but modifications to the way that schools are assessed could help to ensure that all learners benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum that truly meets their needs. This would provide an excellent framework for progression to the next stage of their education and training, improving their chances of independence and social mobility.

For the new accountability measures to truly reflect the strengths of all schools, the scores should be contextualised and weighted to take account of local socio-economic and deprivation factors, and include a ‘success factor’ which incorporates the destinations success rate within any calculations.

The impact of ‘outliers’ could also be negated by removing them from the overall calculation – perhaps by taking off the top and bottom 5% of scores in all schools. This would also reduce the impact of the ‘cap’ on KS2 points.

The attainment/progress measure could be widened to include other high-quality GCSE subjects in the ‘EBacc’ slot – for example Music, Art and Religious Studies. This would be more inclusive in terms of providing opportunities for all pupils to demonstrate academic success, and would remove the incentive on schools to reduce the curriculum offer in attempts to boost performance table scores.

As school leaders, it is vital in the current climate to measure what we value, not value what we measure. This means looking carefully at curriculum provision to ensure that it meets the needs of all learners, and then explore other ways to demonstrate this. The use of Attainment 8 and Progress 8 values is one way of measuring performance, however we should ensure that these are adapted to make them truly representational of the attainment and progress of all groups of learners.

“As school leaders, it is vital in the current climate to measure what we value, not value what we measure. This means looking carefully at curriculum provision to ensure that it meets the needs of all learners, and then explore other ways to demonstrate this.”
11. Breadth and balance in the curriculum
The quality of leadership is without doubt a key determinant in how well any school serves its young people. When good leaders are hard to come by, as is currently the case, it is young people that suffer the most. In recent years we have had to find creative solutions to ensure we have the leadership our schools need.
I’ve worked in teaching since 1994, and joined what was Edgware School in 2002, initially for one term for two days a week to support the leadership and development of the Sixth Form. Fifteen years later, I am still here and still love serving this diverse and vibrant community.

London Academy is a large all-through school in Barnet, North West London. We have a highly diverse population with over 50 different first languages. It is an increasingly mobile community, with families moving into the area from inner London and out of the area into Hertfordshire. Nevertheless, for the majority of the community, their children have attended the academy for generations.

In a school with a higher than average proportion of disadvantaged young people, high-quality leadership at every level and across all functions is critical. Building strong relationships between senior leaders and individual children – with the core belief that ability is not fixed and no barrier cannot be overcome – has to be lived every day and in each interaction.

"Building strong relationships between senior leaders and individual children – with the core belief that ability is not fixed and no barrier cannot be overcome – has to be lived every day and in each interaction."

Building relationships with families where there is a shared memory and understanding of the family’s context takes time. Leaders need to stick around for a few years if they are to be trusted and have an impact on a young person or family. Indeed, leaders need to be around for many years to provide the stability and consistency required for strong effective relationships with the most vulnerable families we serve.

"Leaders need to be around for many years to provide the stability and consistency required for strong effective relationships with the most vulnerable families we serve."

Excellent leaders ensure excellent teaching, which improves outcomes for all children but especially for those disadvantaged pupils who join us already behind their peers in reading, writing and mathematics. My priority when I became Principal in 2007, was to ensure the Academy recruited strong effective leaders with a focus on ensuring excellent teaching. But they also had to be capable of working to break down any barriers to a child’s progress, be these in or outside of school.

Traditional recruitment campaigns to attract leaders from outside London Academy were often unsuccessful in this regard. Therefore, my immediate solution to finding the leadership I needed was to look for talent from within. London Academy had been working with Teach First since 2003 and we had steadily increased the number of Teach First teachers from 2003 onwards. A key element within Teach First philosophy is that teachers deliver high quality teaching but also offer more to their school in extra-curricular opportunities – which fitted perfectly with our needs.

"My immediate solution to finding the leadership I needed was to look for talent from within."

• There are six areas within the borough of Barnet with levels of deprivation that place them in the top 10% of the country
• The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015 places London Academy as situated within the top 10% most deprived Lower Super Output Area in the country, a fact that hasn’t changed in the fifteen years I have served this community
• 62% of our young people attending London Academy are eligible for pupil premium
• A high proportion of the remaining 38% come from households where they qualify for working tax credits.
12. Leader recruitment and retention

We also offered financial incentives available to all teachers if they delivered a project or led an initiative that supported the Academy’s strategic priorities. This enabled myself and other senior leaders to spot potential leaders for middle leadership positions, resulting in rapid promotion despite their apparent lack of experience in terms of years. We sought coaching and support for fledgling middle leaders from external sources and we had participants in both the Teaching Leaders and Future Leaders programmes from 2008 onwards.

Through the local Teaching School we have partnered with Teaching Leaders and the Institute of Education to deliver middle and senior leadership programmes for London Academy, and also for several other local secondary and primary schools. My explicit intention was that this would help us retain young leaders within this area of Barnet. The growth of geographically clustered multi-academy trusts also creates opportunities for sharing leadership, secondments and transfers, meaning we can retain talented young leaders within a hub family of schools.

It is not just recruitment, but also retention of effective leaders that is critical for sustainable improvement. This can be problematic for a number of reasons, some of which are pertinent locally, others nationally. The first issue is the difference between the inner versus outer London allowance. This can mean a considerable hike in salary simply by working a few stops further down the tube line. The second issue is London salaries versus international salaries. We are seeing increasing numbers of young, potential senior leaders leaving to work abroad.

The third issue and perhaps the main motivation for young leaders in their late-twenties to leave is their inability to get on the housing ladder. In Barnet the average price of a semi-detached house is £800,000. A Deputy Head in a large secondary school will earn between £60-70,000. This clearly makes buying property in Barnet an impossibility for most young leaders. Their choice is either to leave teaching, to move to a region where housing is cheaper, or to teach and lead in a school abroad.

A local solution we are increasingly employing is growing our own leaders from within the Academy’s pupil body. An idea unashamedly poached from The Cabot Federation is “Teachers for Tomorrow” where our sixth form pupils work with younger pupils. The aim is to give them some experience of teaching with the hope that, after university, they will come back and train with us to become teachers.

We have several teachers who are former pupils within the last ten years, and some of whom now have leadership responsibilities. Several other support staff also studied with us previously – this again ensures the thread of knowledge about families and past experiences is kept alive within the academy.

However, developing our own leaders, offering incentives such as high-quality professional development, and ensuring we offer competitive salaries is increasingly challenging as we face budgetary pressures. This year we have two leaders retiring and one moving on. They can’t be replaced.

It is difficult to evidence the impact this will have in the long-term. In the short-term, the physical absence of the senior leaders will mean fewer people able to monitor standards, develop teachers, apply rules consistently and continuously, to check on vulnerable children, and to spot the child who needs talking to immediately – something they can identify at a glance because they know the children so well.

Fewer leaders means fewer adults available for children to trust and to disclose serious worries to. Senior leaders also have strong oversight of the whole school. They can spot trends and issues within the community to quickly make sense of what may otherwise appear to be an isolated incident or event.

“Senior leaders also have strong oversight of the whole school. They can spot trends and issues within the community to quickly make sense of what may otherwise appear to be an isolated incident or event.”
Another concern is the shortage of young leaders available or willing to step into headship. This can be linked directly to the perception that headteachers can and should bring about transformational change in a school within a very short time frame. Changes to Ofsted criteria that allow more time for this are not enough on their own.

Headteachers often cite the isolation and lack of support immediately available to them as a major issue when trying to raise standards. Transformational change is not a sprint, but a never-ending marathon which requires resilience, determination and - most importantly - support when we have to take risks.

“Transformational change is not a sprint, but a never-ending marathon which requires resilience, determination and – most importantly – support when we have to take risks.”

Increasingly it seems that schools are in competition with each other - competition for children, competition to recruit the best teachers, competition to get the best results. Real partnership and collaboration between schools is becoming increasingly rare. Becoming a senior leader is a far more attractive proposition when leaders work together across schools within local clusters.

For headteachers to truly transform the life chances of young people from every type of background, there has to be a radical change in the way in which all services work and lead together. Joined-up services located in small local hubs are accountable for every aspect of a child’s life – health, education, housing, social care, police – and can have an enormous impact on their development. Any barriers to effective communication between these agencies and professions – whether imposed by protocols, professional boundaries or ethics – need to reworked to put the needs of the child first.

High-performing leadership at every level of our schools and education system has never been more important. We are in uncertain times. What is predictable is that the teaching workforce will need to be highly skilled and adaptable. Now is the time to think innovatively, even radically, about how all services that reach our most disadvantaged families and young people work together to ensure that every child can fully realise their potential.

“High-performing leadership at every level of our schools and education system has never been more important. We are in uncertain times. What is predictable is that the teaching workforce will need to be highly skilled and adaptable.”
Since starting out as a PE teacher in Cheltenham, my aim has always been to provide the best education for the children in my care, whatever the political, economic and wider context we have to work with.

One of the recent developments that has been hardest to navigate is the wide-scale reform of the assessment system – the changes made have undoubtedly been disorientating for schools. Within this current picture, schools face unparalleled change, and as a direct result, unparalleled uncertainty. We have grappled with developing or coming to terms with new assessment systems and the sheer scope of increased demand and content. Here, I will explain how increased coherence and a period of stability would help us to help our children.
Having worked in Accrington for the last 15 years, it is clear that residents have a deep sense of community pride. This is further compartmentalised by the distinct nature of local townships. Uniformly, however, pride is keenly forged by a number of key cultural and economic factors. The pride of town residents is highlighted in the ‘Nori’ brick that is the foundation of the Empire State Building. The brick industry, until recently, remained a prominent employer. At a recent awards evening for academy schools a prominent businessman spoke to pupils of “an endearing desire and pride to know that his roots were as strong as the brick on which the town’s history was shaped.” Similarly being one of the 12 founding football league teams, Accrington Stanley have a long and proud history in the picture of British football.

Educationally speaking, Accrington Academy is one of six schools in Hyndburn. Operationally the Hyndburn schools are part of a larger amalgamation known as Hyndburn, Rossendale and Ribble Valley (HRRV). The area has seen a diverse picture of educational provision that to some degree marries its mixed economic and geographical structure. Within the HRRV partnership we see a mix of faith schools, a selective grammar school, local authority schools, and academies. There are 35 primary schools, two sixth form school providers and one college. Currently United Learning are the only large sponsor chain in the area, although there is an emerging pattern of geographically clustered smaller MATS.

The current mixed nature of schools is also matched by a mixed picture of Ofsted gradings and outcomes for pupils. Whilst outcomes have strengthened, Hyndburn is currently below national and Lancashire averages based on the core indicators for advantaged and less advantaged pupils.

One challenge all schools in the area have faced is wide-scale reforms at every key stage of education. The removal of levels at Key Stages 2 and 3, the advent of Progress 8, and new linear A levels have all spawned numerous conversations. These commonly consider how we can be sure children are ‘secondary-ready’ and what this looks like in grades and numbers.

UNESCO states that there is an “ever-rising importance of assessment to hold systems and their key actors (notably teachers) accountable for education outcomes”. How schools address and meet the changes wrought by these reforms is critical. ‘High stakes’ assessment determines whether they and their pupils have met the required outcomes and will decide the future of a school. These are what they are held to account for.

“UNESCO states that there is an “ever-rising importance of assessment to hold systems and their key actors (notably teachers) accountable for education outcomes”. How schools address and meet the changes wrought by these reforms is critical.”
13. Assessment and transition between key stages

The sprint to cover content and prepare for the assessment is keenly felt in all schools. Within this picture there is an understandable and overwhelming concentration on preparing for, or trying to understand, exit points. ‘What does a grade 5 look like? And will a 4 provide a solid platform for A level study?’

We know already that transition poses a series of well-documented potential and additional barriers to progress. Previous research consistently shows that a proportion of pupils in their first year of post-primary school show little or no progress in their learning with some pupils even regressing.6

In the current picture, strong local collaboration exists between primary and secondary colleagues in a number of networks. In addition to the simple transfer of scores, conversation often aims to extend understanding, and the sharing of practical examples of standardisation, moderation and transition leads to pockets of strong practice. It is, however, unsurprising that currently in this picture the conversation is overwhelmingly focused on understanding of exit point standards.

So what would support schools in transition in a complex assessment landscape? Fundamentally I believe a conversation shift needs to occur if we are to move towards a coherent curriculum experience, with pupils not being taught content and skills more than once or in contradictory ways.

“A conversation shift needs to occur if we are to move towards a coherent curriculum experience, with pupils not being taught content and skills more than once or in contradictory ways.”

In addition to the volumes of work on transition and assessment, I believe schools and their pupils would benefit from considering a clear progression model. Primary and secondary colleagues should be afforded the time to consider ‘bottoming out’ a model that considers several key areas:

Firstly, we should aim to be explicit about what subject concepts our pupils need to know in a rich curriculum. Mapping back this journey from A-level, we have the potential to create CPD that moves beyond key stages but views the acquisition of knowledge as a progression. In this case, the offering of joint subject CPD would allow focused conversation on progression in learning.

“We should aim to be explicit about what subject concepts our pupils need to know in a rich curriculum.”

Secondly, we should aim for assessment coherence. Christodoulou’s progression model7 promotes formative and summative banks and tasks backed by comparative judgments and exemplar tasks. It would appear to make sense that a good use of local conversation and collaboration would focus on developing workable assessment coherence into practice.

Thirdly, much research points to a lack of understanding of the different sectors. The development of teacher expertise should (in whatever guise) actively immerse its participants in primary and secondary sectors. This must, however, move beyond superficial and into curriculum and assessment development. The advent of technology makes this element more ‘doable’ and collaborative than ever before. The practical shackles of collaboration can be released.

Fourthly, many schools have developed great work around transition content and programmes. Where this exists the development of a transition intervention framework8 would also pose some real merit. Delivery would be supported by a collaborative intervention approach that spans learning as opposed to key stage. This would: create specific areas of subject knowledge and understanding; maintain primary teaching approaches into Years 7 and 8; and facilitate cross-phase and key stage peer or mentoring support.

Finally, we should consider how we alter our conversations with parents. If the picture is confusing for professionals, how must it feel for the majority of parents? We should aim for clarity in how we can involve parents into the development of key concepts.

13. Assessment and transition between key stages

“We should consider how we alter our conversations with parents. If the picture is confusing for professionals, how must it feel for the majority of parents?”

The next few years will continue to see schools and teachers spend huge amounts of time trying to define the standards and meet the demands of the system that determines the fate of its pupils. I would now hope for a period of stability, giving schools the chance to develop an experience for their pupils that is both challenging and enriching without being subject to further ebb and flow in assessment and standards.

For everyone’s sake, giving the system the chance to breathe and focus on progress linked within a curriculum – not just the accountability of its outcomes – would be a breath of fresh air.

“I would now hope for a period of stability, giving schools the chance to develop an experience for their pupils that is both challenging and enriching without being subject to further ebb and flow in assessment and standards.”
CONCLUSION
One can see from the case studies presented that school leadership is both a privilege and a responsibility. It is also tremendously rewarding. No matter in which part of our complex and multi-faceted education system you sit as a school leader, what is clear from these case studies is that together with Teach First we all share a commitment to our work that places the child at the heart.

The scope of a head’s job is extensive and the intellectual and practical challenges of the role are a source of energy; your school is a ‘labour of love’. Leading staff and pupils in the journey of ongoing school improvement means that you deal in ideals – in vision, values and ethos. When you encounter problems, you bring all your powers to bear on them in the interests of the pupils and families you serve.

Within these articles, there are accounts of courage in leadership as well as creativity and innovation. Leaders within the National Schools Forum find solutions to all kinds of knotty problems and tensions in education and the policy environment, as they impact upon matters of recruitment, retention, pupils’ achievement and its measurement, curriculum and community cohesion.

This publication contains a rich seam of material from which to draw insights on leadership, on regional difference, and on what it means to build a learning community that fits the needs and aspirations of an area where a school is placed. We hope the case studies have stimulated for you debate, reflection and conversation with others. Perhaps they have even inspired you to join our profession. We hope so; we need more good people.

Great schools were never more important than now. As we all deal with the impact of austerity measures, Brexit, global issues of war and poverty, and the re-imagining of ourselves as a nation, there has rarely been a more challenging moment in which to practice the craft of teaching and the art of school leadership. However, challenges bring opportunities for re-thinking and refreshment – for instilling new hope. This is where schools come in.

Civilisations are built in schools. Schools work to create human flourishing and the means of economic prosperity for all. Schools ensure children and young people gain the qualifications, personal attributes and skills they need to live successful, happy and enriched lives. Schools work day in and day out to reduce the effects of inequality, to open up access to opportunity, and to promote social harmony. In the National Schools Forum, alongside Teach First, this is our unswerving commitment. And we need you – as teachers, as leaders, as governors, as support staff, and as volunteers. We hope that you will join us in whatever capacity you can to tackle disadvantage together - so that when we look back we can say we did everything we could. Our nation’s children deserve no less.