

Twelve outstanding secondary schools

Excelling against the odds





This report was produced by Ofsted with Dr Peter Matthews, consultant and former Her Majesty's Inspector.

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Foreword

Why do some schools succeed brilliantly against all the odds while others in more favourable circumstances struggle?

This report provides some evidence-based answers to this question. It draws from the practice, experience and ambition of 12 consistently outstanding schools to identify how they:

- achieved excellence
- sustain excellence
- share excellence.

The schools are chosen from the small number that have been judged outstanding in two or more inspections, which serve disadvantaged communities and which have exceptionally good results. Some of the schools – and their headteachers – are well known; others less so. They are straightforward maintained schools, included on merit, without any evident advantages except the quality of their leadership, their staff, and the teaching and learning provided in them.

Although there has been some improvement in the last year, two secondary schools out of five are still judged to be no better than satisfactory. I commend this report to those who lead and govern these schools, as well as to the many good schools that aspire to become outstanding. Every child deserves an excellent education. The schools described here show that excellence does not happen by chance. It is found in schools which have leaders of vision, courage and conviction, and the ability to create and inspire teams whose members work consistently for each other, as well as for the students and communities they serve. No effort is

spared in the search for ways of doing things better. There is passionate belief that all young people can be helped to fulfil their potential and become successful. No challenges are regarded as insurmountable; indeed, they generate innovative and effective responses. Staff are trusted and supported. They are highly motivated, enjoy their work and have access to a wealth of opportunities to develop as professionals. The schools have the hard-won respect and confidence of their communities. Most importantly, students emerge as confident and capable young people, well equipped for the next stage of their lives and highly unlikely to join the ranks of those not in education, employment or training.

I hope that the example shown by these schools will be the subject of considered reflection and discussion by leaders and staff within other secondary schools. Much of what they do may be widespread practice but, in each of these schools, they do everything very well. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. They would all claim that they learn much from other schools. They do not see themselves as elite or exceptional islands, but as professional providers of a high-quality service to their communities.



Christine Gilbert
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Characteristics of outstanding secondary schools in challenging circumstances



Characteristics of outstanding secondary schools in challenging circumstances

This report continues a tradition of publications by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) that attempt to capture and disseminate the features of highly effective educational practice. It focuses on 12 schools which are unquestionably outstanding, but which excel against the odds.

1 The 1977 HMI report, *Ten good schools*, depicted a range of maintained and independent schools chosen mainly for their unqualified excellence rather than the contexts in which they worked.¹ The report highlighted the prime contribution of leadership and management, together with a number of other features, to the success of each of these schools. HMI evidence of the characteristics of effective schools formed the basis for the criteria set out in the first and subsequent inspection frameworks and handbooks, corroborated by a research review, *Key characteristics of effective schools*, commissioned by the former Ofsted in its infancy.²

2 *Improving city schools* was a landmark report.³ It focused on schools serving severely disadvantaged areas which nevertheless were improving, often at a greater rate than schools overall. The report illustrated what schools can do to improve standards 'within their own expertise and other resources'. It highlighted the need for the number of such schools to grow rapidly 'to cut the long tail of underachievement with which the education service in disadvantaged areas is marked'. Ofsted's report on London Challenge showed the impact of a strategy focused on improving London's secondary schools, which resulted in London schools outperforming those in the rest of the country for the first time.⁴ London Challenge has

'road-tested' approaches to school improvement which have been scaled up through the City Challenges and the National Challenge. Recent reports on aspects of provision in challenging circumstances have focused on re-engaging disaffected students⁵, looked after children⁶ and white boys from low-income backgrounds.⁷

3 For many years, Ofsted has recognised and publicised improving and outstanding schools through the annual reports of successive Chief Inspectors. The system of school inspections has reached a point at which it is possible to identify schools that have not only become outstanding but that have also continued to improve. The problem with disseminating characteristics of excellent schools is that it is seen either as daunting: 'That school is so good that we could never do as well', that is to say, the gulf is perceived as being too wide; or as unrealistic: 'That school doesn't have the challenges we face!' This report therefore sets out to show something of the journey the schools in the sample have travelled: how they achieved success in the first instance, how they have sustained and capitalised on it, and to what extent they share their knowledge and practice with other schools. The schools in the sample serve some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country, but they have worked with those communities to raise their hopes and aspirations along with the achievements of their young people. These schools refuse to accept a challenging context as a barrier to success; indeed, it gives them additional motivation and purpose.

4 Ofsted and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) have previously drawn attention to the challenge of reducing the gap in opportunities and outcomes between the majority of young people and those who continue to lag behind, often because they live in disadvantaged areas. This gap is illustrated in Figure 1.

¹ *Ten good schools*, Department for Education and Science, 1977.

² P Sammons, J Hillman and P Mortimore, *Key characteristics of effective schools: a review of school effectiveness research*, Office for Standards in Education and the Institute of Education, 1995.

³ *Improving city schools* (HMI 222), Ofsted, 2000.

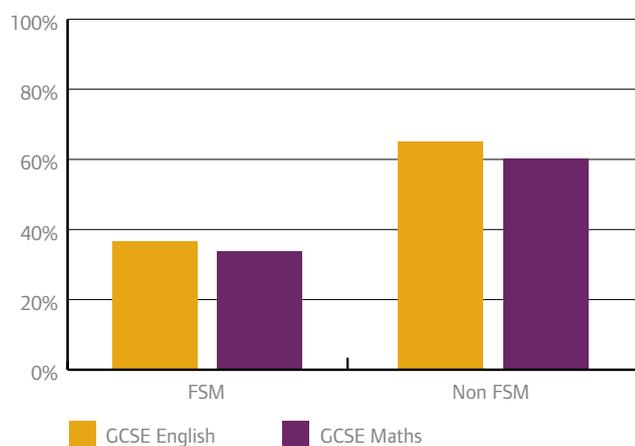
⁴ *Improvements in London schools* (HMI 2509), Ofsted, 2006.

⁵ *Good practice in re-engaging disaffected and reluctant students in secondary schools* (070255), Ofsted, 2008.

⁶ *Looked after children – good practice in schools* (070172), Ofsted, 2008.

⁷ *White boys from low-income backgrounds: good practice in schools* (070220), Ofsted, 2008.

Figure 1: GCSE results at grade C or above related to eligibility for free school meals (2007 data)



5 The 12 outstanding schools studied in this report defy the association of poverty with outcomes; they enable such young people to succeed and reduce their disadvantage. The scale of challenge faced, to different degrees, by these schools is considerable. A higher than average proportion of students in these schools come from poor or disturbed home backgrounds, where support for their learning and expectations of their achievement can be low. Many students are subject to emotional and psychological tensions, owing to their circumstances. Regular attendance at school is a problem for many. The areas in which they live are subject to some of the urban ills that often characterise poorer communities. These come not only from the ready availability of drugs and alcohol, but the peer pressures of gangs and fashions, and overt racism, all of which tend to attract behaviour which ranges from anti-social to violent. Getting these students ready and willing to learn is a constant challenge, which the schools strive to meet by providing a better daytime alternative to being at home or on the streets.

6 This report sets out to portray the reasons for the success of schools that defy the circumstances of the students and families they serve and overcome the challenges they face. It aims to do this in enough detail to inform other schools, with sufficient of interest to inspire them, and sufficient clarity to encourage them.

The scale of the challenge

7 Experts can make the difficult appear easy; to a visitor, the outstanding school may not appear a challenge. Such schools seem to run like clockwork: oases of calm purpose, highly focused on learning, with well-turned-out students and staff. Appearances are deceptive. These schools are extraordinary communities, exceptionally well-led and managed. They have to be. Schools in challenging circumstances work with many young people with complex personal histories, dysfunctional families, students who are cared for or who are themselves young carers, and communities that may not appreciate the efforts the school makes to provide a better life for their young people.

8 All the schools have a higher than average proportion of students in receipt of free school meals. In general, they also serve communities where few of the population have had an education beyond school; many remember their school days without much affection and there are often low parental aspirations. The exceptions tend to be in some, but not all, minority ethnic British groups within communities who place a higher value on education, particularly those immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers who, as one headteacher said, 'have come to Britain to seek a better life for their families'.

Great schools are more than the sum of their parts.

Characteristics of outstanding secondary schools in challenging circumstances continued

9 The outstanding schools in the sample succeed for the following reasons.

- They excel at what they do, not just occasionally but for a high proportion of the time.
- They prove constantly that disadvantage need not be a barrier to achievement, that speaking English as an additional language can support academic success and that schools really can be learning communities.
- They put students first, invest in their staff and nurture their communities.
- They have strong values and high expectations that are applied consistently and never relaxed.
- They fulfil individual potential through providing outstanding teaching, rich opportunities for learning, and encouragement and support for each student.
- They are highly inclusive, having complete regard for the educational progress, personal development and well-being of every student.
- Their achievements do not happen by chance, but by highly reflective, carefully planned and implemented strategies which serve these schools well in meeting the many challenges which obstruct the path to success.
- They operate with a very high degree of internal consistency.
- They are constantly looking for ways to improve further.
- They have outstanding and well-distributed leadership.

10 Other schools can adopt these strategies, but they will succeed only if they are born of a deep sense of purpose and commitment, courage and ambition, stemming from the leadership of the school. Great schools are more than the sum of their parts, but their parts must function well and work together consistently if the school is to aspire to greatness.

Choice of outstanding schools

11 There are more outstanding secondary schools in England now than at any time since the system of inspection began. Of those that have been outstanding (or the equivalent) in two or more inspections, fewer than one in four have free school meals above the 2006/07 average of 14.4% (Figure 2).

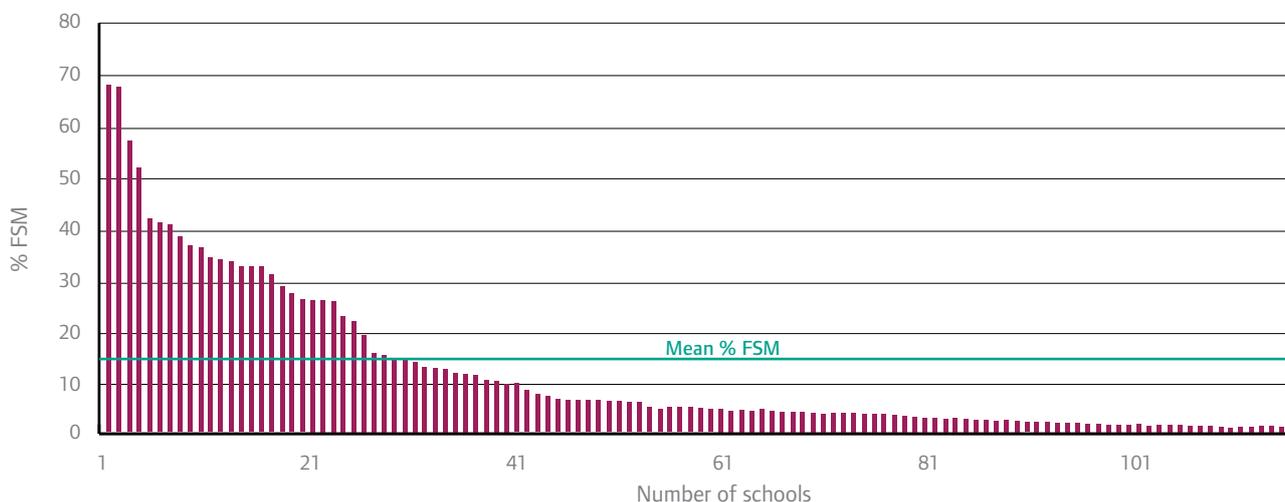
12 Twelve of these schools which have remained outstanding against the odds were chosen in order to identify how they have succeeded and sustained their success. The sample deliberately included no more than one school from any one local authority; selective and faith schools and academies were excluded.

13 The following five criteria were used to identify the small sample of schools in challenging circumstances that have proved remarkably successful over a period of time:

- at least two inspection reports in the last three inspections in which the school was judged outstanding⁸
- an above-average proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals
- outstanding grades for teaching and learning, leadership and the school overall in the most recent inspection
- high standards and a sustained trajectory of improved attainment to 2007
- a pattern of high contextual value-added (CVA) scores from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4.

14 Eighteen schools met the criteria. Ten mixed schools were chosen, after their detailed inspection grades and geographical distribution were considered, as well as two single-sex schools. The geographical criterion meant that some well-qualified schools from London (an area which would have been over-represented) and elsewhere have not been included. Academies have not been in existence long enough to demonstrate sustained excellence in terms of inspection findings and their results. Some outstanding faith schools met the criteria but they are not normally accessible by all families. Grammar and independent schools were not considered.

Figure 2: Distribution of schools having two or more outstanding or equivalent inspection reports according to the free school meals (FSM) indicator (2007)



15 The 12 outstanding schools in this report are listed below.

Their student profiles range from almost entirely White British to almost entirely minority ethnic students. The common factors are the sustained excellence of the school and their intakes' above-average levels of economic and social disadvantage.

Bartley Green School (11–16)

A specialist technology and sports college in Birmingham

Challney High School for Boys and Community College (11–16)

A specialist science and mathematics college in Luton

Greenwood Dale School (11–18)

A specialist technology and arts college in the City of Nottingham

Harton Technology College (11–16)

A specialist technology, languages and applied learning school in South Tyneside

Lampton School (11–18)

A specialist humanities college in Hounslow

Middleton Technology School (11–18)

A specialist technology and applied learning school in Rochdale

Morpeth School (11–16)

A specialist arts college in Tower Hamlets

Plasht School (11–16)

A girls' specialist science college in Newham

Robert Clack School (11–18)

A specialist science, mathematics and computing college in Barking and Dagenham

Rushey Mead School (11–16)

A specialist sports and science college in Leicester

Seven Kings High School (11–18)

A specialist science, technology and language college in Redbridge

Wood Green High School (11–18)

A specialist sport, mathematics and computing college in Sandwell

Characteristics of outstanding secondary schools in challenging circumstances continued

Reasons for success

16 The evidence used for this report includes published, current and, where applicable, previous inspection reports and surveys involving the schools, and performance data, including RAISEonline. The schools were asked to identify the features they considered central to their success in becoming and remaining outstanding. HMI visited these schools, each of which had prepared a day's programme of meetings with key members of the school community. They explained and displayed, in effect, the 'secrets' of their school's success. The themes in this study therefore represent neither the products of research into school effectiveness nor the structure of Ofsted's inspection frameworks. They reflect only the features that the schools have identified as important ingredients of their achievements, and are illustrated by short case studies.

17 It is not surprising that a number of themes emerged which were common to most or all of the schools. These included, for example, attention to the quality of teaching and learning; the assessment and tracking of students' progress; target-setting, support and intervention; attracting teachers and growing leaders.

18 It is important to stress that the success of these schools is due not simply to what they do but the fact that it is rigorously distilled and applied good practice, cleverly selected and modified to fit the needs of the school. The schools do not value innovation for its own sake, but only when it adds something extra. The practices described in this report are not 'off the peg' tricks; they mesh together and work synchronously.

How to use this report

19 This report is intended as a discussion document for leaders in secondary schools.

20 The majority of secondary schools now are at least good. For these good schools, some of which already have very good or outstanding features, the aim must be to enable every student to succeed. Schools which do this consistently are great schools. The obstacles on such a journey are not insuperable for good schools. Those who work in such schools now will identify with many of the approaches featured in this document.

21 This document, however, is meant to challenge those who are not in good schools to improve them urgently. The fact that 43% of secondary schools inspected in 2007/08 were judged to be no better than satisfactory, although a marked reduction on the previous year, shows there is still much to be done. Most of these schools have some good features on which to build. This document should be used by leaders in these schools to analyse what makes the difference between their school and those described here. Is it, for example:

- a matter of being more consistent?
- the need for more rigorous tracking of progress and the injection of timely support?

- that teaching is not yet consistently good?
- that the school has not asked students how it could do a better job for them?
- that the school has limited ambitions?

22 The challenge for school leaders is not only to be curious about the schools featured here, but also to give their own practice and approaches more reflective consideration – or critical analysis, perhaps starting with the questions above. The text might be considered in sections through a structured approach, perhaps as themes for senior leadership team meetings. New members of staff could be asked to audit the school in terms of this report. It could be reproduced for all staff and elements used to inform or support the school's improvement programme. It should be brought to the attention of governors. Schools are challenged to use the document in whichever way will have the greatest effect, but at least to do something with it.

23 If the reader's school is outstanding, the text will hold few surprises. It celebrates the work of other excellent schools. The challenge for outstanding schools is how to sustain their excellence and improve further on it. There may be ideas here that will help.

Structure of this report

24 An analysis of consistently outstanding schools raises three questions:

- How did they do it?
- How do they keep it up?
- Where do they go from here?

25 This publication, therefore, is arranged so as to explore and provide some answers to these questions, using specific examples drawn from the 12 schools to illustrate wider generalisations. The main sections explore the three themes of *achieving* excellence, *sustaining* excellence and *sharing* excellence.

Brief portraits of the 12 outstanding secondary schools can be found at the end of the report. These are intended to represent the character of the schools, a little of their history and some striking features, as well as giving their key statistics, including 2008 GCSE results. They do not reproduce the most recent inspection reports, since these are readily available on Ofsted's website.⁹

26 For other secondary schools, to which this report is primarily addressed, there is a fourth question to supplement the three above: How can we emulate these outstanding schools?

Features of schools which achieve, sustain and share excellence, drawn from the 12 outstanding schools

Achieving excellence

Having vision, values and high expectations

Attracting, recruiting, retaining and developing staff

Establishing disciplined learning and consistent staff behaviour

Assuring the quality of teaching and learning

Leading, and building leadership capacity

Providing a relevant and attractive curriculum

Assessment, progress-tracking and target-setting

Inclusion: students as individuals

Sustaining excellence

Continuity of leadership

Maintaining a strong team culture

Continually developing teaching and learning

Developing leaders

Enriching the curriculum

Improving literacy

Building relationships with students, parents and the community

No student left behind

Sharing excellence

System leadership

Partnering another school facing difficulties and improving it

Acting as community leader to broker relationships across other schools

Developing and leading a successful school improvement partnership

Working as a change agent or expert leader: National Leaders of Education

⁹ www.ofsted.gov.uk

Achieving excellence

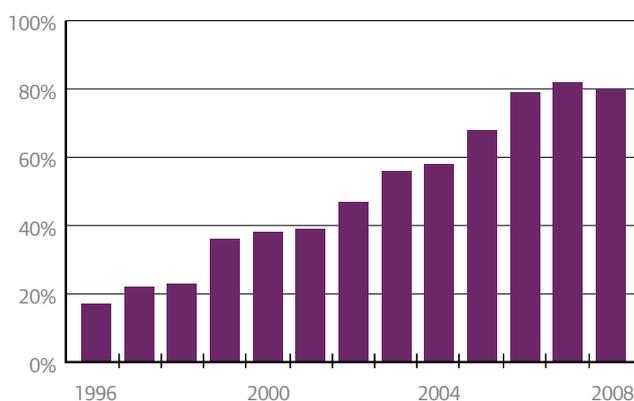
Achieving excellence

Few of the schools featured here were born great; they had to achieve greatness. This narrative starts in the early nineties. This was the time when many of the headteachers took up their posts, drawn to challenges which others eschewed.

27 These headteachers were determined to transform the schools they took on, had the highest expectations and aspirations for students, and wanted to do something for what were disadvantaged and often complex, fractured or dysfunctional communities. They welcomed the accountability posed by rigorous inspection and – to some extent – the publication of results, and turned these policies to their advantage, for example by drawing from the inspection methodology and handbooks to develop approaches to internal evaluation and quality assurance.

28 There should be no misconceptions: turning around the fortunes of a flagging school in challenging circumstances is very hard work and requires unwavering self-belief and perseverance. Improved results do not come easily and there can be setbacks.

Figure 3: Percentage of pupils achieving five or more grade A* to C GCSE results at Robert Clack School over 14 years



29 The succession of results represented in Figure 3 shows an unusually sustained upward trajectory from a very low base to high academic success. The school serves an area containing significant deprivation, drawing its intake of White British with a significant minority of Black British students from two of the most disadvantaged wards in the country. Higher than average proportions of students are eligible for free school meals or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Not short of ambition, the school is a specialist college in mathematics and computing, as well as science.

30 Specialist status, leadership incentive grants and the funding streams that accompanied other government initiatives enhanced opportunities for the creative use of resources. Several of the schools featured here engaged strongly with initial teacher training. They embarked on a range of partnerships, particularly with other schools. They were at pains to understand and work with their communities and, above all, they built a climate in which high expectations of students and ambitions for the school were matched by trust in and support for the staff.

31 These schools, on the whole, do not occupy particularly favourable sites. Typically, and like many other schools, they comprise a mixture of buildings, including some that are old and in need of replacement. At the time of visiting, few had benefited from the Building Schools for the Future funding programme. However, all were committed to creating a pleasant and positive environment, with prominent displays of work and overt celebrations of students' achievements. Displays are also frequently used to reinforce the schools' key values, messages and priorities.

32 While the schools have very strong links with their communities, they also work hard to create a safe, harmonious school environment that leaves the community's problems and tensions outside. The culture and norms inside the school can often be very different to those outside; as one headteacher put it: 'The street stops at the gate.'

Starting the journey to excellence

33 Where a school is dysfunctional, the direction in the pre-academy nineties was towards improvement or closure. This was the case at Greenwood Dale School. When the headteacher arrived in 1992, the roll was 500 students and falling. He describes the school as a 'total mess, with staff smoking in lessons, discipline non-existent and standards abysmally low. It was regarded as a racist school by the local, largely Muslim community'. Decisions were tough and progress slow, but they typify issues commonly faced in turning failing schools around.

Transforming a dysfunctional school

The school had a £200,000 deficit budget and a quarter of the staff were made redundant in the first term of the new headteacher's leadership. The examination results were transformed in two years, rising from 12% to 30% of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, after which results plateaued for several years. The headteacher introduced a range of 'short-term fixes', such as establishing systems and procedures and insisting on professionalism, but found it took more time and a lot of work for the school to become good. This involved attracting and retaining staff, beginning to build bridges with the community, and focusing on the things that matter most:

- discipline
- teaching and learning
- the curriculum.

34 Staff turbulence was a common feature of the schools, particularly but not only in London. In Luton, for example, when the headteacher took over Challney High School for Boys in 1990, there was little doubt as to the challenges.

Staffing challenges

The school served a community consisting almost entirely (96%) of immigrant and refugee families, a high proportion of whom did not speak English at home, if at all. Ninety per cent of staff were male; the headteacher wanted a better balance and female staff are now in the majority. Standards were low and the learning environment poor, with many classes housed in temporary huts. It was extremely difficult to recruit staff and nearly as hard to retain them. Solving this problem of staff turbulence was the key to the school's subsequent success. There was also much disillusionment among the staff; the first stage was convincing them that they could rise to the challenge.

35 The evidence from this and the other outstanding schools with similar backgrounds suggests that the quality of leadership is paramount and that no problem is insurmountable.

Turning around a flagging school requires self-belief and perseverance.

Achieving excellence continued

36 The headteachers in this sample are not, by and large, iconic – although some have earned national respect, acclaim and recognition; they have taken on challenging schools out of a deep commitment to improving the lot of their students and communities. Moral purpose may be at the heart of it, but successful headteachers need a range of other attributes and skills if they are to succeed in dealing with the challenges presented by turbulent and complex communities.

37 Such headteachers have a number of particular qualities which have been captured in inspection reports. What stands out in the headteachers of the outstanding schools, and is reflected by their colleagues and students, are characteristics such as:

- clear and unshakeable principles and sense of purpose
- vigilance and visibility
- courage and conviction
- predisposition to immediate action, letting nothing slip
- insistence on consistency of approach, individually and across the organisation
- drive and determination
- belief in people
- an ability to communicate
- leadership by example
- emotional intelligence
- tireless energy.

38 Together, these characteristics are evident in each school's values and ethos. The headteachers live the vision and model good practice. Their approach is infectious, starting with the senior leadership team. In time the values become central to the school's ethos, underpinning everything it stands for and does. Achieving excellence, however, starts with getting eight fundamentals right.

Having vision, values and high expectations

39 The headteachers of outstanding schools are impressive people who are, literally, following their vocation. They know why they are there and what they want to achieve. Their purpose is often simply expressed in terms of ensuring that the school does its utmost to help every young person achieve as much as he or she can. This can be seen as a moral purpose inasmuch as it is not just a goal but is seen as a duty. These headteachers would view themselves as failing if they were not striving to help all their students to achieve the greatest possible success. They also have a vision of how this can be achieved and what the school could become. Their ambitions are principally for the students and the school, but often also for the community, which is, for them, not something that has to be accommodated or related to: it is the reason for the school's existence.

The importance of common values

A key aspect of Morpeth School's success is a very high level of shared, common values and beliefs. As the headteacher says: 'It's often in schools in pockets, but it is at an unusually high level here.' Staff share a strong moral commitment to improving opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and a strong belief in what they can achieve. These values are seen as 'partly held, partly developed'. They form part of the selection process when staff are recruited, but are also reinforced by the strong culture of the school. As one teacher said: 'You just get on the train that is going at 100 miles per hour.'

40 For a headteacher new to the school, the search starts on day one for like-minded people who share a philosophy and values. Reaching the level of shared understanding reflected in schools like that illustrated above takes time and a lot of discussion, energy and modelling.

41 Greenwood Dale School provides a fine example of a school with an unmistakable operational culture.

Values to the fore

The school lives its values. Everyone matters; the headteacher knows every student, but it is clear that they all – students and staff – have responsibilities as well as rights. They feel trusted and respond to this. The culture encourages innovation and experimentation but never allocates blame. If something does not work out or targets are not met, the leadership seeks to know how they could have supported the person better. The result is a staff that works extremely hard in an appreciative and encouraging environment and students who understand exactly what is expected of them at school. Small things matter; staff are smartly dressed as professionals, and students reflect as well as respect this. Everything is done to the highest possible standard, consistently, relentlessly and simply, but in a civilised way and without the tensions that would arise if the regime was externally imposed rather than stemming from the self-belief and professionalism of all who work in the school.

42 Both these schools use highly effective, usually indirect, ways of encouraging people to give their best. They provide an atmosphere in which staff feel encouraged to take on initiatives as long as they are well considered and properly planned. Staff are occasionally surprised that the headteachers agree so readily to new proposals and projects. The headteachers know that such a stance helps motivate staff and that there is usually little real risk.

Attracting, recruiting, retaining and developing staff

43 These schools now tend to have very stable staffing. One reason is that teachers are reluctant to leave because teaching is enjoyable, the ethos is positive and interesting things happen. There are constant opportunities for professional development. However, the schools also actively engineer this stability. Their approach runs counter to the orthodox view held in many schools that it is good

for staff to gain experience and move on. If teachers are good, the headteachers seek to retain them, giving new challenges, responsibilities and experience within the school. This high level of stability has a number of benefits.

- It reduces the turbulence in staffing that many schools experience (which often leads to temporary or supply teachers filling gaps while new appointments are made).
- Teachers are strongly versed in the school's culture, values and norms.
- Teachers are also schooled in the school's practices and policies. This helps to support consistent practice.
- Students know the teachers well. They do not have to spend time getting to know too many new teachers. This continuity is particularly valued by many vulnerable students, who can find changes of staff unsettling.
- It supports the development of a strong corporate, team-based culture.

44 High staff turnover, the scourge of many urban schools, can be one of the biggest disruptive influences on developing a positive school culture. Often, though, the problems are more immediate, such as procuring mathematics teachers or even simply putting qualified teachers in front of classes. The more successful the school, however, the less acute is the problem. The schools give high priority and put a great deal of energy into recruitment – and worldwide recruitment is not uncommon. As schools build up a cadre of highly effective staff, they become determined not to compromise for the sake of expediency. Several of the schools would rather not appoint in the absence of a strong candidate for a post but, equally, would appoint two to a single vacancy if there were two outstanding candidates.

45 These schools train many of their own teachers. They are, typically, heavily involved in initial teacher training, some as 'training schools'.¹⁰ Such involvement puts these schools in a good position to see a lot of trainees and to pick the best. More than this, leaders also see the benefits of being able to train and mould their teachers from the beginning, ensuring that they share their values and teach in a way that suits the needs of their school. As one headteacher put it: 'If you've been trained here, you are

¹⁰ Further information on training schools can be found at: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/trainingschools/>

Achieving excellence continued

already imbued with the culture and ethos.’ These schools often use graduate or employment-based initial teacher training (EBITT) or school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) schemes to train people from the local area, ensuring that their staffing profile reflects that of the local community.

46 Staff shortages were an endemic problem when Vic Galyer became headteacher of Challney High School for Boys in Luton. His radical solution was to develop the Chiltern Training Group (CTG) – a centre to train not only staff for his school but for the whole of Luton.

Chiltern Training Group

The headteacher arrived in 1990. Within two years he had established SCITT provision, the CTG, working with other schools in Luton. This began a development that continues to go from strength to strength in broadening and deepening its training provision. Many benefits accrued. It provided a supply of newly qualified teachers already attuned to the school’s ethos, practices and expectations. It involved every established member of staff in a mentoring role, inducing them to engage in evaluating lessons and assessing proficiency. It led to a new staff profile with a balance of gender and ethnicity, and it reduced staff turnover from a turbulent flood to a healthy trickle. It provides an accelerated route to professional cohesion and consistent practice. The CTG has now trained over 1,000 teachers and many more teaching and learning support assistants.

47 The CTG has trained 50% of its own school’s staff and about 15% of the total teaching force of Luton. Over 30% of the CTG cohort is drawn from minority ethnic groups, helping to build staffing which is more representative of the demography of Luton.

48 The quality and extent of professional development are not only key to school improvement but also a

significant factor in retaining staff. The first step in taking over an underperforming school may be to embark on a process best termed ‘re-professionalisation’. One headteacher speaks of ‘professionalising staff so as to develop a community that focuses on the core issues: teaching and learning, and achievement and attainment’.

Recruitment and professional development at Plashet School

The best contenders for middle leader posts have often proved to be internal candidates. They have benefited from the school’s extensive programme of in-service training, from the experience gained through mentoring newly qualified or trainee teachers and modelling good practice to their colleagues and visiting teachers. Plashet’s finely tuned systems of planning, performance management and professional development, including Chartered Teacher status, give staff what one described as ‘a natural idea of where they’re going next’. This meets many of the school’s priorities for succession planning, although care is taken to ensure that there is also a regular infusion of fresh talent from outside.

The large departments give scope for more junior members to be trained for and take on additional responsibilities. The focus is on practice rather than abstruse theory. Arrangements are continually reviewed and improved. When it was determined that regular Monday evening working parties had lost momentum and impact, these sessions were consolidated into whole-staff sessions spread across the year. Out of these have come cross-curricular strategies and new approaches to teaching and learning, sometimes presented as booklets. They have changed attitudes; there has been a move away from a view of ‘each teacher as a one-man band’ towards acceptance that what individuals do in the classroom is part of the whole-school pedagogy, has value and should be shared.

49 Wood Green High School recognises the value of engaging in initial teacher training to the school's existing staff.

Professional development benefits from hosting trainee teachers

The school appointed a professional development manager, who had experience of mentoring. She was able to sharpen and update the professional skills of the staff and establish a culture of in-house debate about teaching. All the departments are now expected to work regularly with initial teacher training students. This, the school's leaders believe, constantly refreshes the overall style and quality of teaching by bringing in new thinking, maintaining enthusiasm and providing a continually renewed pool for recruitment. In some departments, all teachers are now trained mentors, well qualified to support young teachers and well practised in professional debate and evaluation.

50 The associated impact of all this was noted in the 2002 inspection report. 'Much of the teaching is outstandingly good and students learn far more than is usually expected.'

Establishing disciplined learning and consistent staff behaviour

51 All the schools place a very strong emphasis on the school as a workplace. Its business is learning and everyone is there to learn and help others to learn. Establishing this as the indigenous culture of the school takes time. When improving most schools, the initial emphasis is placed strongly on behaviour. A common response to the behavioural challenges is to specify exactly what the school will and will not stand for. All the schools inculcate a strong work ethic. Students, in the main, know they are there to learn and therefore expect an interesting curriculum and expert teaching. Middleton Technology School, for example, which describes its catchment area as being 'beset with alcohol and drugs in one direction and gangs in the other', will not include students who have

shaven heads or emblematic patterns in their hair, trainers which bear brand marks and conspicuous designs and other manifestations of group or gang culture. In the schools generally, complete prohibitions on knives, alcohol and drugs are automatic. A police officer is linked with several of these schools, in some cases based on the premises.

Sorting out behaviour

Ask the students at Robert Clack why the school is so successful and they will tell you: 'because staff enforce the rules'. They appreciate the fact that behaviour is excellent and disruption rare. It wasn't always like that. When Paul Grant took over as headteacher, behaviour was appalling. In his own words, he began by 'stirring up the hornets' nest', doing 300 fixed-term exclusions in the first week. He made a point of seeing the parents of every excluded child, sometimes at 06.00 or 23.00. In many cases, parents were initially aggressive and abusive. As he says, however, what people in communities such as Dagenham say they don't have enough of is time. He invested a considerable amount of time with parents and their children, targeting the most difficult and disillusioned, and working to find solutions. He knew that he couldn't win every battle and had to permanently exclude 11 students in his first year. In the past seven years, however, only two students have been excluded.

The headteacher felt that formal assemblies were vital, and began touring classrooms to explain to students how he expected them to behave. The first students to challenge those expectations were dealt with swiftly and severely so that other students gained confidence and became less fearful. He also introduced the concept of the governing body 'as a kind of mystery power'. The students were told: 'The governing body is giving me clear instructions that there will be no slippage on behaviour. They have instructed me to take all necessary actions.' He also used assemblies to send positive messages home: 'Tell your mums and dads it's changing. Thank them for their support.'

Achieving excellence continued

52 Although behaviour is now excellent, school leaders are wary of the slightest complacency. The importance of supervision is stressed and teachers are expected to turn up very promptly for all duties. Along with his senior colleagues, the headteacher spends most of his time in corridors or lessons. Lesson changes are meticulously managed. One recent innovation is the introduction of two social inclusion managers – one at each of the school's two sites. Although they are both teachers (and ex-heads of year), they have virtually no teaching commitments. Instead, they spend their time around the corridors or dropping into lessons. Many schools have members of staff 'on call' for particular lessons, but the difference here is that there is continuity, with the social inclusion managers able to follow issues through and no gaps during lesson changes. They also link closely to the strong system of year heads.

53 The outstanding schools manage behaviour issues very well without instilling an oppressive atmosphere. They have incentive and reward schemes, and supportive and celebratory cultures, as shown in Bartley Green School.

Balancing discipline with encouragement

Alongside the discipline must run a strong current of care and encouragement, both for students and for staff. Chris Owen, the headteacher of Bartley Green School, believes strongly in what she calls 'the healing and invigorating power of praise and celebration'. Over the years, she has noticed a change of culture from the days when students simply would not stand up in assembly to be given a prize to their eagerness now to win recognition. Care is taken to ensure that boys and girls are represented equally when awards are handed out. The headteacher also takes care to thank members of staff for going the extra mile in any way and organises protected time for planning and preparation before a challenging initiative, punctuated by 'moments of celebration'.

54 In the outstanding schools, students are typically very positive about their relationships with teachers and with each other. Staff also feel strongly supported, but know that their headteachers do not want to see standards slip.

55 Most of the schools see permanent exclusions as a last resort, but do occasionally resort to them. A notable exception is Challney High School, which has had as much reason to exclude as any. The school has not permanently excluded a student for 13 years. It always seeks and finds alternative solutions. The retiring headteacher rationalises his determination thus: 'You have to change the culture in which exclusion remains as one of the sanctions. If we were to exclude, I estimate that over 60 students would have been excluded during this period. If you exclude one boy, another will pop up. It is far better – and more consistent with our culture – to use our huge investment in pastoral support, with many skilled non-teaching support staff, and our ability to personalise learning, to address the problem.' 'No permanent exclusions' is spreading as a local-authority-wide objective, for which Leicester is an example.

56 Challney High School believes that many problems of extreme behaviour arise because of students' difficulty in accessing the curriculum which, in turn, can be linked to inadequate literacy and lack of success. It has responded with a focus on literacy, providing intervention through Reading Recovery for the poorest readers and other support in the curriculum. The school's principles dictate that: 'Where parents have difficulties with a child, they expect the school to support them through the problem. Exclusion can make the situation impossible and cause the family to become dysfunctional.'

57 If there are serious problems with a student, parents are brought in immediately, whether early in the morning, or during or after school. The school will have a professional conversation with parents, who generally express their confidence in the school's ability to handle the matter in the best way possible for their son. The school has a very strong commitment to being there to support families.

58 Many schools are let down by a lack of consistency by staff. This can show itself in the way staff speak to students, their response to behaviours which some tolerate while others turn a blind eye, speed of response to situations, dealing with an issue that has arisen or not dealing with it 'because it is not my responsibility'; the examples are numerous. One of the hallmarks of very good or outstanding schools is a high degree of consistency in approaches and responses, regardless of which staff member is involved.

Staff consistency

Greenwood Dale School expects all staff to offer a consistent approach to attitudes, behaviour and discipline in the school, including matters ranging from jewellery and chewing gum to staff dress. The headteacher, Barry Day, leaves staff in no doubt at the beginning of the school year: 'I see the maintenance of good discipline as my prime responsibility and I take that responsibility very seriously.' The reason for consistency at Greenwood Dale is put like this: 'It is essential to remember that, if a member of staff lets an incident go or has low expectations, it makes it more difficult for the rest of us. Our students can be challenging, but we have shown that most can be supported to achieve success.' Not for nothing are the student code of conduct, mission statement and school aims displayed in every classroom in the school. Tutors are asked to go through them with their tutor groups.

59 Consistency of approach is a characteristic shared by all 12 schools. They are truly corporate cultures, with staff and usually students working for each other sensitively and cooperatively. Students do not receive mixed messages or perceive staff to have vastly different values. They see common purpose: adults who are working in students' interests, who like being in the school, who care for it and are ambitious for its future.

Assuring the quality of teaching and learning

60 Monitoring and evaluation are seen as crucial to assuring the quality of teaching and learning. Challney High School introduced a rigorous approach to self-evaluation in the mid-nineties, based on Ofsted's inspection framework. In Bartley Green School, members of the senior leadership team do 'drop in' classroom visits every day, which both support staff and ensure that teaching and learning are of the expected standard. Time is ring-fenced for staff to work in teams: engaging in productive discussion about pedagogy, planning lessons that inspire students to become independent and effective learners, and being reflective rather than simply dealing with administration. Teachers are expected to make good practice visits to other schools and disseminate their findings on their return. They undertake peer observations across departments so that good practice is widely shared and inter-disciplinary collaboration fostered. Morale is clearly high; teachers and support staff speak with evangelical zeal about the challenges and rewards of life at the school, illustrating the point being made by the headteacher: 'We attract staff with moral purpose.'

Teaching and learning

Lessons at Bartley Green School demonstrate consistent good practice, evidence of continuing professional development and rigorous performance management. The rapport between teachers and students is very positive; the pace is brisk and activities varied; and students respond promptly and confidently to opportunities to collaborate, solve problems and present ideas to their peers. There are clear and non-negotiable expectations about appropriate behaviour, which are calmly and firmly insisted upon.

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61 Some of the schools have also identified very clearly what they expect to see in all lessons. One headteacher has expressed surprise that, as a headteacher, a learning and teaching policy was one of the few that he was not required to write. At Seven Kings High School, a policy has been in place for many years and is seen as key to the school's improvement. It is frequently held up in staff meetings and referred to as the single most important policy document in the school.

A learning and teaching policy

The policy shapes school practice and is rigorously enforced. It is clear, sharp and overtly prescriptive: the word 'must' is continually used. An accompanying appendix of good practice provides a rich array of ideas, but the main purpose of the policy is to set down very clear expectations about what will happen in every classroom. In many cases, this is at a very detailed level: for example, teachers are told that they must decide where students will sit and that homework must be set in the first quarter of the lesson. Teachers are also told very clearly that they are not to spend the first lessons of the year on the type of routine activities common in schools at this point. They are told that their job is to 'light fires' and excite students about learning at the school.

Leading, and building leadership capacity

62 There is no disguising the role and importance of these headteachers in driving forward the improvement of all 12 schools. Inspection and research have both shown that the quality of leadership is second only to the quality of teaching in terms of the school's impact on students' achievements. This report catches the schools at a time when most of the long-standing headteachers are still leading their schools, a few of the heads have been there for a relatively short period and two leaders are new to headship. All the schools have strong leadership teams and a large measure of distributed leadership. All the headteachers place a strong emphasis on creating effective leadership at all levels through their schools.

63 The process of building leadership capacity starts from the headteacher's first day in a new school when, usually, a group of senior staff is inherited. They may be disciples of a culture and values that need to be sustained and nourished, with clear roles, a corporate sense of identity and good distribution of leadership. Alternatively, the leadership team may be a more disparate body in terms of skills, values and commitment or, occasionally, one which is not effectively taking responsibility or being accountable, possibly because it has never been asked to. The headteachers of outstanding schools realise the importance of building a capable and committed team, taking any necessary steps to achieve this. The outstanding schools featured here have teams, not just at senior but also at other levels, whose members know they each have a crucial role in ensuring that the school remains highly successful. The following example shows, perhaps typically, the situation that one of the headteachers found when appointed to the headship of the current school.

A change for the better

Before the change of headteacher, the school:

- was comfortable and happy
- had a strong pastoral system, though this was heavily reliant on personalities of postholders rather than systems
- had little culture of change and improvement
- had a questionable work ethic, for example a head of faculty working too hard made staff feel guilty and disapproved of by their line manager
- set expectations around happy, well-adjusted students, with little discussion of whether they should also achieve higher academic levels
- had a well-liked headteacher who was very easygoing, genial and supportive, but not challenging, often absent, and who allowed poor staff to remain in post.

The new headteacher:

- faced initial staff resentment; belief that the school was happy and successful and did not need to change
- gradually changed the culture over a few years; did not do too much too soon
- retained what was good
- maintained a relentlessly positive attitude; showed incredible energy
- was a lateral thinker; prepared to take a gamble
- had a very 'can do' attitude: said 'yes' wherever possible
- was prepared to tackle difficult issues, for example weeding out poor staff
- trusted and motivated staff
- was approachable and relaxed
- made good use of promotion to bring alienated staff onside
- used the wider senior leadership team to involve more staff as leaders.

Achieving excellence continued

64 Most of the schools have large senior leadership teams with a flat structure, although individual structures vary considerably. One school has four deputies, but two have none. By making all assistant headteachers equivalent, these two schools are signalling the importance and interchangeability of their roles. They gain the experience which, to some extent, is denied them by having deputies, particularly long-serving deputies who do not aspire to headship.

65 The outstanding schools have embraced the concept of distributed leadership, with the caveat that many of the headteachers remain very 'hands on'. They cannot resist getting engaged. This is one reason why they teach, are a presence in the school at all hours of the day, and prefer to be out in the school than in their office: 'management by walking about'. The other reason is that they are demonstrating the practice they wish to see adopted by their leaders and future leaders. At Morpeth School, leaders are not simply modelling leadership but also the professional culture and values of the school.

Leaders as professional examples

The senior leadership team is strong and very stable. Senior leaders provide role models for the behaviours and values that they want to see in the school, for example they all have a significant teaching commitment (which they take very seriously) and carefully demonstrate the way they want staff to relate to students and to each other. The headteacher's view is that driving improvement through accountability is not sustainable in the long term: the school's performance can quickly decline if there is any let-up. He acknowledges, however, that struggling schools now feel forced into adopting this strategy, as they are expected to make very rapid improvements. Generating the conditions which encourage the commitment and effort of the staff is, in his opinion, more productive and more sustainable than formal performance management.

66 If the first two principles are: get the leadership team you want, and ensure that leaders are role models, the third is to build leadership capacity. This is done not only by developing existing leaders but by growing new ones. All the schools invest strongly in this.

Leadership development

The headteacher recognises that building strength in middle managers as well as senior management and ensuring that succession planning is well grounded are crucial to Bartley Green School's continuing success. She reflects on her own learning journey: 'I've had to grow in terms of leadership style – from being a one-man band to working collaboratively.' Developing a resilient network of distributed leadership has been a challenge, balancing the benefits of teamwork against the need, she feels, schools like Bartley Green have for strong leadership. 'A challenging school can't survive OK leadership.' She is confident that she has appointed or 'grown' a high-calibre senior team and that the school's middle management is steadily strengthening.

Providing a relevant and attractive curriculum

67 Many of the headteachers subscribe to a widely held belief that a good curriculum, well taught, does much to reduce behaviour problems. They have sought to develop the curriculum in ways that engage their students and support their drive for improvement. Each school, however, has a slightly different approach to the curriculum and timetabling, with five- and 10-day timetabling both in evidence. From Year 7, several of the schools are providing a more skills-based curriculum, ranging from literacy and numeracy to practical and thinking skills, delivered through approaches which range from Reading Recovery to out-of-classroom research, and from subject-focused to thematic approaches.

68 The schools have generally not been rushing into diplomas, although this is likely to change as several are developing sixth form provision for the first time, generally in partnership with other schools. In some cases, schools

have concentrated in particular on finding an appropriate curriculum for those students who find learning in the traditional subjects difficult, or personalising the curriculum to provide as much choice as possible. There are few signs of the schools using the applied curriculum as a device simply to maximise examination results at the end of Year 11. Indeed, one or two have pulled back from the four-GCSE equivalent provision they had been offering. Personalisation has become something of an obsession at Harton Technology College.

Curriculum of choice

Harton Technology College has three specialisms: technology, modern foreign languages and applied learning (vocational courses), and is pursuing permission to establish a sixth form as a high-performing specialist school. The school refuses to go down the route of multiple vocational GCSEs. The curriculum is based on a strong core packed into a 10-day, 50-hour timetable. There are four option blocks: technical; vocational (applied learning); modern foreign languages; and a free options block. The assistant headteacher responsible for the curriculum and timetabling goes to extraordinary lengths to meet students' choices. The key pressure is accommodating several languages, partially solved by providing a basic information and communication technology (ICT) qualification in Year 9 and reducing mathematics for the more able from nine hours to eight. Statistics is strong and taken in Year 10, owing to considerable overlap with mathematics, particularly in data-handling. The curriculum is based on the 'maggie principle', gathering subjects when possible. Graphics, for example, is also started in Year 9. There is banding in Key Stage 4, where the technology band contains slimmed-down language options which include language for business. The work-related band has 10 hours each fortnight at the further education college, taking catering, hairdressing, or engineering. There is considerable personalisation of the curriculum, and the options form for students encourages them to 'indicate anything else'.

69 Extra-curricular provision is typically rich, and many schools have comprehensive programmes which involve substantial learning outside the classroom.¹¹ Some organise well over 100 visits each year. All feel the gains in learning are well worth the effort and justify the time spent on such activity. Specialist status has also made a considerable impact in extending pupils' horizons and enhancing the quality and effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment.

Achieving through a specialism

Closely linked to improving behaviour was the development of a curriculum and an approach to teaching and learning that could engage a very diverse community of students and raise attainment. Bartley Green School's first specialism – technology – was chosen because it covered four key subject areas and could involve and challenge students of all abilities and aspirations. The additional funding was invested in a substantial upgrading of the school's ICT resources. Most departments now have dedicated computer suites and many teaching rooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards. 'We've really used money well. And we spend it all. Good learning is good learning for everybody.' The problem-solving and self-evaluation essential to design and technology have percolated through the whole curriculum. The school has developed detailed, accessible and reliable systems for collating and analysing data to inform the high level of academic and pastoral guidance given to students.

¹¹ See *Learning outside the classroom: how far should you go?* (070219), Ofsted, 2008.

Achieving excellence continued

70 In many cases, specialist status had been used to trigger further development, with schools taking up additional specialisms. The schools, however, have used their specialist status in very different ways. At Lampton School, for example, specialist status in the humanities has been used to drive the way the school promotes and celebrates diversity – something it regards as central to developing its strong ethos. Robert Clack School initially became a science college, and recently added a mathematics and computing specialism. The headteacher’s aim was to choose what he saw as tough, difficult subjects that would challenge the school and its students. At Wood Green High School, specialist status as a sports college has been central to its continued development.

Driving forward with sport

The Director of Sport is evangelical about the impact of specialist status on his department, the school as a whole and the wider community. It has raised the aspirations of students, reflected both in greatly improved GCSE results and in the level of participation in extra-curricular activities. The department’s development of assessment for learning and pathway planning has been recognised nationally and adopted by other schools and colleges. All students are involved, whatever their level of skill or area of particular interest. There is extensive outreach through the School Sports Partnership, as well as through Wood Green’s own family of schools and community clubs. The list of the sports college’s activities is long, impressive and still expanding. Many of the school’s students gain valuable experience through the Young Sports Leaders programme; many others delight in the opportunities to train with professional coaches in high profile places.

Assessment, progress-tracking and target-setting

71 One common feature of strategies for raising achievement in all the schools is the intelligent use of assessment data, progress-tracking, target-setting and support for students slipping behind. National assessment and test data are used alongside assessment data generated in the school to predict the target grades for each student at GCSE. Periodically, the data are updated and progress towards the target estimated. Targets are set in discussion with students. Parents are also involved.

72 The schools are rigorous in the way that they use target-setting, assessment and tracking to raise achievement. All have developed information and data systems that suit the needs of their school, either by modifying commercial systems or by developing their own. They continue to refine them, ensuring that data are simple, accessible, easy to understand and manageable. They are careful not to ‘drown in spreadsheets’. The schools also realise that assessment information is useless if it is not highly accurate and they have worked hard to ensure that teachers are able to estimate students’ attainment very precisely. Lampton School’s GCSE predictions, for example, were within 1% for all the major outcome indicators last year. The system at Challney High School has been progressively refined.

The schools are rigorous in the use of target-setting, assessment and tracking to raise achievement.

Emark

Emark is a spreadsheet developed by the school's data manager as a fine-meshed, flexible and accessible medium to track the progress of groups and individuals and to ensure that no student becomes 'invisible'. Work is in progress to extend Emark as a web-based system, accessible by staff and students and their families when off-site.

Emark strongly supports the school's main business of teaching and learning. It serves as an electronic mark book for teachers, with each department able to log on to its own area. Subject leaders are expected to monitor students' progress and respond quickly to indications of stalling or erratic performance. Some departments have adapted their area to meet specific priorities, for example tracking of coursework in English. The system can identify 'threshold' students and so trigger targeted interventions. Teachers record progress as points linked to National Curriculum levels or predicted GCSE grades. Using red, amber and green to indicate 'actual' against 'expected' levels of progress and attainment is clear and easy to grasp, which is useful in discussions with parents. Students have a

regularly updated grid in their planners, downloaded from the system, indicating their current attainment and personal targets. Transparency is important and is valued by students and staff. The regularly updated cohort lists posted near the school canteen, showing students' current levels, generate constructive discussion rather than unease.

The system is highly flexible. Data can be retrieved in many combinations and at any time, which makes Emark a valuable management tool, for example in reviewing the impact of provision for gifted and talented students or those with English as an additional language. The effectiveness of the school's large management team owes much to the scope and accuracy of the data accessible through Emark; information is reliably shared, the impact of interventions easily tracked and emerging challenges quickly identified. Most importantly, Emark is seen to inform but not replace discussion. As one of the leadership team remarked: 'All data are useless unless they bring people together for a conversation.'

Achieving excellence continued

73 Middleton Technology School has adapted a commercial monitoring and tracking system to produce something close to an expert system.

Assessment, progress-tracking and target-setting at Middleton Technology School

An assistant headteacher is responsible for raising expectations and standards through the use of data. She is assisted by two teachers with a particular interest in developing the tracking system. Refined approaches to progress-tracking and target-setting are found in all the outstanding schools, supported by at least two main providers of education software. The system at Middleton is constantly being developed to extend and refine its usefulness. Its main components are shown below.

Building blocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assessment calendar in the school development plan ■ Reporting calendar ■ Progress monitoring milestones ■ 'SMART' targeting ■ Mentoring of students
Familiarisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Train middle leaders to understand and use the data ■ Brief the 'progress and learning coordinators' (heads of year)
Roll out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All staff have access to electronic assessment and progress-tracking system ■ Data on performance in Years 9 and 11 have priority
Fundamental tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Home page for each teacher ■ Individual, subject and class data presented ■ Targets generated automatically
Output: performance data for all staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ GCSE A* to C grade predictions ■ GCSE A* to G grade predictions ■ End of Year 7 and end of Year 8 levels ■ Key Stage 3 levels ■ Key Stage 2 to 4 data and GCSE predictions (used to help create curriculum pathways)
Data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Minimum of three formal assessments and a teacher assessment each year
Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Two interim and one full report (with parents' evening) during the school year
Developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assessment tracker and electronic marker being integrated to produce automatic targets and generate priorities for students to work on ■ Homework sheet and reward scheme to be included

74 The assessment system helps identify individual students who are slipping behind. Follow-up arrangements are differentiated in proportion to the extent of slippage. If students are making:

- insufficient progress in one subject, the form tutor follows up
- insufficient progress in more subjects, subject leaders follow up with individual students
- insufficient progress in five to 10 subjects, the student is monitored and supported by the senior management team and a senior leader follows up.

Inclusion: students as individuals

75 All the outstanding schools have high regard for the needs, interests and concerns of each individual student. They are highly inclusive schools. They talk to students individually and collectively, listen to their points of view and consult them constantly. The student voice is universally seen as very important and students' views are valued. Seven Kings High School is also concerned to ensure that conversations about learning happen with all students. In the early nineties they became anxious about 'ghost children' who passed through their school career without notice. The school introduced a system of regular interviews with a senior leader or head of year for every child; these continue to this day. The focus is on their learning and progress, and also on their experiences in lessons. In Greenwood Dale School, the headteacher interviews all Year 11 students at the beginning of the year. Similar practices occur in the other schools featured in this report.

76 Underachieving students tend to have problems related either to their attendance or to their circumstances, such as difficulties at home, the wrong curriculum or peer group tensions. Some of the problems with behaviour that surface in schools are undoubtedly due to poor teaching and learning. At Middleton Technology School, inclusion is led by an assistant headteacher with the help of a learning and progress coordinator (head of year) and learning and progress mentors in each year. The coordinator focuses on academic issues, the mentor on behavioural issues. There is also an inclusion unit staffed by two behaviour

support workers. Support staff engage in a great deal of training on behavioural issues, covering such aspects as social and emotional literacy and anger management. Others, Middleton finds, stem from domestic and social circumstances. The main catalysts are reported to be so-called 'gang' cultures, anti-social behaviour and alcohol. The school-based police officer and close links with the youth service help to deal with these challenges. The school caters for a considerable group of children who are looked after, and some of its students are themselves young carers, for whom there is a school-based young carers' society. Support agencies are welcomed into the school, where they have shared use of an office.

Inclusion in practice

Inclusion at Harton Technology College and other schools in the group centres on reducing or removing barriers to learning. This is the main role of the learning support mentors, who maintain contact with targeted parents and carers, supporting their children who are students at the school, letting them know about events that relate to them, and trying to draw them into the school community.

Middleton Technology School takes its responsibility for looked after children very seriously, linking closely with the achievement officer responsible for looked after children in Rochdale. The school's learning support unit deals effectively with internal exclusions. A breakfast club, open from 07.30, a range of after-school activities, including a homework club, and some weekend courses form part of a comprehensive range of provision. The other challenge is attendance, which is a constant focus. Persistent absentees and their parents are telephoned. These calls are supported by home visits and legal action remains a last resort. The school is reducing its fixed-term exclusions, and good inter-school arrangements exist for temporary placements in another school. The school's attendance target is an ambitious 96%.

Achieving excellence continued

From good to great

77 Many schools make improvements and achieve an outstanding inspection judgement, only for their effectiveness to decline in the following years. The schools in this sample have managed to become, and to remain, outstanding. The next section turns to the difficult (and possibly greater) challenge of sustaining and building on the excellence they have achieved.

Great schools maintain rigour and consistency while continuing to innovate and develop.

Sustaining excellence

Sustaining excellence

For schools to sustain excellence, more than anything else they need to focus on the things that made them excellent in the first place: maintaining the right ethos and culture; ensuring that teaching is of a consistently high standard; and ensuring that behaviour is well managed and the school calm and orderly.

78 Characteristically, these schools are able to maintain a sharp focus on rigour and consistency in the basics, while innovating and developing their provision further to bring new gains in students' learning and achievement. They do not overstretch themselves and are careful not to jump on bandwagons. Senior leaders have a thorough understanding of which developments are right for their school and which are not. They scrutinise new ideas and developments and ask hard questions about what value they will have for students' learning and achievement. Crucially, these leaders also understand how much capacity the school has to support innovation and development (and they actively work to strengthen it). While the schools are not afraid to take risks, the risks that they do take are careful, calculated and considered. Anything that is done is carefully planned and meticulously implemented.

79 Senior leaders are typically modest about what has been achieved and recognise the scope for further improvement. At Seven Kings High School, for example, results have soared over the past 15 years, but there is a distinct lack of self-congratulation, and complacency is actively challenged by senior leaders. When 80% of the school's pupils gained five or more A* to C grades at GCSE a few years ago, there was little pause for celebration. A talk from Sir Michael Barber¹² focused on 'no ceiling to achievement' and the message was 'one fifth of our students failed to meet the national standard'. Last year's results are seen very much as 'last year's results'.

80 Each school has found its own way to maintain excellence and continue its improvement. Importantly,

leaders have been able to develop their schools in ways that fit their own mixture of contextual factors, circumstances and needs. There is no single template. However, a number of common themes run through all the schools.

Continuity of leadership

81 What happens in these schools when there is a change of leadership? One of the crucial keys to the success of consistently outstanding schools is undoubtedly the culture and values of the school. These take time to establish and require constant nurturing but – once embedded – they provide the sense of purpose, direction and self-belief that will ensure continuous improvement and see the school through any unpredicted challenges.

82 The options and challenges for governors in appointing the successor to an outstanding headteacher are clear. First, if they appoint from within, so as to secure the succession and have a seamless transition, they risk losing the momentum, new ideas and energy that an external appointment can bring. There was little chance of this happening at Seven Kings High School.

Keeping up the challenge

Taking over as headteacher of Seven Kings High School could have been a daunting prospect, following one of Britain's best-known headteachers. Tracy Smith spent 12 years in the school before becoming headteacher in September 2008. She is impressively undaunted by the challenges of her new job. She sees the opportunities to achieve even more and staff are enthusiastic and optimistic about the future under her leadership. Although, inevitably, she is doing things differently, the sharp focus on what really matters that her predecessor brought to the school remains. When she took over in September, senior leaders arrived at their first meeting to find notes pinned to the table saying: 'What have you done this week to improve teaching and learning? What have you done to improve leadership? What have you done to improve the lives and experiences of students?'

83 If, on the other hand, there is an external appointment, the governors need to be assured that the incoming headteacher really understands how the school works, as well as trying to match or exceed the quality of the previous headteacher. When appointed to Rushey Mead School, the incoming headteacher knew some key members of staff, particularly the deputy who had been acting headteacher for a while. Nevertheless, there was no time to relax.

Overcoming complacency

The headteacher took over a good and happy school that had a strong ethos and values but was a little complacent. The long-standing deputy – and for a time acting – headteacher wanted change. She later became co-headteacher. The headteacher started with a residential event for the leadership team and asked each member one question about their values. Some were quite defensive of the way they were doing things. It was and remains a very stable staff and the prevailing response to change was: ‘If it isn’t broken, don’t fix it!’ An Ofsted report soon after taking up post strengthened her hand.

She enlarged the leadership team to 13, bringing in staff with pronounced leadership qualities, creating joint leaders of key subjects, and later re-badged the deputy’s role as co-headteacher. Quite apart from sharing responsibilities and distributing workload, the model reflects her belief that the school should not be ‘defined’ by just one person. The co-headship has worked well but will be reviewed when the deputy retires. It is described by both as a powerful model. There is no common pattern to their working practices; they share all duties. The dual leadership model is also used successfully in the science, mathematics, modern languages and sports faculties. Even though staff turnover is low, the headteacher and governors have no hesitation in appointing two staff to a single vacancy at any level if they have more than one outstanding candidate. This strategy contributes strongly to succession planning in key aspects of the school’s work.

84 There was also no loss of momentum at Wood Green High School when a new headteacher took over.

Seamless transition

Wood Green High School leapt forward in its journey to excellence 10 years ago, according to long-serving teachers and support staff, when Enid, now Dame, Bibby, took up the headship. One of the senior leadership team was emphatic about the key to her success: ‘Emotional intelligence – not many people have it!’ She clearly had the gift of making everyone feel valued but also accountable. The Ofsted report of 2002 noted that examination results had shot up since 1997, largely due to the excellent leadership of the headteacher and her leadership team in setting challenging targets and embedding good practice in teaching and learning. Gaining specialist status as a sports college in 1998 added further impetus.

Since his appointment in 2006, the new headteacher, Pank Patel, has extended and strengthened the network of distributed management. The 2006 Ofsted report noted that members of the senior leadership team were ‘highly focused and driven’, with ‘an exceptionally strong shared understanding of what they want the school to achieve’. That is true today. There are four deputy headteachers or directors: the Director of Curriculum, Director of Sport, Director of Student Achievement and Welfare, and Director of the Leading Edge Partnership, each with a considerable degree of autonomy in their area of responsibility, including budget management.

Sustaining excellence continued

Maintaining a strong team culture

85 These schools have a very strong team culture, so powerful that new staff are quickly assimilated into it. Every school has its version of this: 'being Lamptonised' or fitting into 'the Robert Clack way', for example. It is typically a positive and highly supportive culture, but also one that sets high expectations for any new teacher. In one of the schools, a teacher described it as a mixture of 'encouragement, high expectations and a respect for the professionalism of the teacher'. This strong culture provides an intrinsic, self-perpetuating drive for continual improvement. Staff feel that they are 'in it together', with a strong, shared commitment to the students, the school and to its strong history of improvement. There is often some useful, friendly competition between departments. While these schools typically have strong and rigorous systems for evaluation and accountability, the powerful collective drive for improvement engendered by this kind of culture is irresistible. This is certainly the case at Morpeth School.

Sustaining a positive culture

The assertive leadership style often seen in schools, with very strong accountability and a willingness to move quickly to capability procedures for ineffective staff, is not a feature of Morpeth School. While there are processes for line management and accountability, the headteacher describes them as 'supportive rather than hard-edged'. He frequently refers to his leadership style as 'collective'. His view is that good staff morale is crucial in a challenging school: 'Everyone is capable of doing a better job than they currently are, but I don't believe that there are huge numbers of very weak teachers in the system. Staff are very collegiate in schools like this. If you simply "pick off" the weakest department, they will all fear that they are next. This could easily alienate staff and damage morale.'

86 The school is seen as a joint venture which is as strong as the weakest link. Weaker areas are viewed simply as requiring more help and support, but are trusted to make the improvements themselves. To illustrate this, the headteacher uses the example of the science department. Results had been disappointing, but a strong drive for improvement came from within the team. The department voluntarily did things that could not have been asked of it, for example running regular weekend revision sessions that involved every teacher. Results improved sharply.

87 Many headteachers stress the importance of communication (both its quality and quantity) in maintaining this kind of culture. Secondary schools are large, complex organisations that often suffer from weaknesses or failures in communication. These schools have strong systems to support effective communication. Their leaders emphasise the importance of repeating, rewording and reinforcing the key messages and priorities at every opportunity. They also work hard to avoid the kinds of grumbles that can damage morale.

Communications at Lampton School

Sue John, the headteacher, stresses the importance of communication, both in quality and quantity. Staff are encouraged to be open and honest with each other and with senior leaders. There is a regular staff forum where staff are encouraged to talk frankly about things that are bothering them. As the headteacher says: 'It can be challenging for senior leaders, but it deals with any developing concerns before they have a chance to fester.' There is a strong emphasis on regular face-to-face contact. Breakfast meetings are common. Weekly staff meetings are 'very full and always focused on the major issues that we are working on'. The headteacher feels that the openness of the culture and the willingness to communicate honestly is key to the wide range of initiatives that the school is involved in. While a lot is happening, any new idea is given a full airing first and people will often challenge it and say 'Why are we doing this and what are we trying to achieve?' In many cases, this has led to the school not taking up initiatives or moulding them radically to fit their needs.

Continually developing teaching and learning

88 It will not come as a surprise to hear that all the schools in this study regard the continual improvement of learning, teaching and pedagogy as their most important activity. Senior leaders acknowledge the importance of leading by example. It is seen as very important that senior staff (in most cases including the headteacher) teach, that they are seen to teach well, and that they are included in the usual arrangements for lesson observation, monitoring and evaluation.

89 These schools focus very hard on ensuring (as a minimum) that all, or at least almost all, lessons continue to be at least good. They understand how powerful it is for learning, achievement, motivation and enjoyment if students experience very little satisfactory or inadequate teaching. The monitoring of lessons is extensive and rigorous, and leaders can identify very accurately how good individual teachers are and what they need to do to improve further. All new teachers are observed from a very early stage and, where their teaching is not at least good, focused additional support is quickly put in place. Most of the schools provided structured professional development for teachers during the early stages of their careers.¹³

All the schools regard the continual improvement of learning and teaching as of prime importance.

'Cradle to grave' training

Several schools describe their training as a continuum with no gaps. Alongside one school's work with trainee teachers, for example, a comprehensive programme is in place for teachers who are new to the profession.

- Newly qualified teachers (NQTs) receive a tailored training programme. In addition to a subject mentor and professional mentor, they also have a personal coach, usually someone in their third year of teaching.
- Teachers in their second year (RQTs or recently qualified teachers) also have their own training programme, heavily based on action research into their own teaching. As well as being coached themselves, they are also trained as coaches and begin to coach each other.
- The programme for third year teachers (3YTs) is increasingly tailored to the progress, needs and aspirations of individual staff. In many cases, they work as coaches for NQTs or as buddies for new teachers.

As a result, teachers joining the school are very well trained, but also highly accustomed to working with each other and able to talk about learning and pedagogy.

90 These schools also actively promote and foster discussion about teaching and learning. As one young teacher put it: 'I chose to come here because of the conversations about learning that I heard in the staffroom.' Involvement in initial teacher training is seen as vital in giving teachers the skills to talk about and analyse their teaching. There is also a strong culture of developmental lesson observation across the school, with teachers routinely observing each other, often informally. The sensitivity around lesson observation that still prevails in many schools is absent: teachers are open to observing each other and being observed and, in general, they welcome it.

¹³ *The logical chain: continuing professional development in effective schools* (HMI 2639), Ofsted, 2006.

Sustaining excellence continued

Working together to improve teaching

A strong focus at Lampton School is on teachers working together to develop their teaching. There are various strands to this work, a number emerging from the school's involvement with London Challenge. In one, teachers work together in groups of three, each from a different department. Groups work together to co-plan three lessons, teaching one and observing two. This arrangement breaks the subject link, helping staff to focus on pedagogy rather than content. Having two observers allows them to watch different parts of the classroom and improves the quality of discussion after the lesson. The time for discussion is generous (an hour), but the focus is only on two things: what went well, and 'it would be even better if' – nothing else is discussed. At the end of the discussion, the three must negotiate the one most important 'even better if'. This approach sharpens the feedback and discussion, and reduces the tendency to ask: 'Did you think of doing it like this?'

Another project focuses on helping move very good teaching to outstanding. Again, staff work in threes, this time with a facilitator who constantly challenges their thinking about what it really means to be an outstanding teacher. Lessons are planned collaboratively, but teachers teach one that is not in their subject. This helps to move teachers away from thinking about their subject onto really reflecting critically about what students are learning and whether they are all being suitably challenged. Lampton staff have now been trained as facilitators and the school is rolling out the programme to a larger group of teachers.

91 These schools are always looking for new ways to develop teaching, help teachers to reflect on their practice, and create new approaches to learning. Different strategies are used to develop practice across the school and share good ideas between staff.

Developing learning

Morpeth School is always seeking to develop and improve students' learning; considerable time is made available to staff to enable them to develop the quality of lessons. Examples include:

- Departmental development time. Two members of staff from each department have two identified timetable periods together. This time is used for focused departmental developments, based on school priorities and the department's development plan. The opportunity is rotated each year so that all staff can be involved.
- Learning coordinators. The school used money from the Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG) to appoint two learning coordinators. Their teaching commitment was halved and they spent the rest of the time developing particular aspects of teaching and learning across the school. External consultants were involved in the project to bring rigour and an external perspective. To develop this work further, the school has now appointed a team of learning coordinators, one from each department. The coordinators each have two identified timetable periods and work closely together. A meeting of the whole staff was used to decide what the learning coordinators would work on and what their job descriptions would be.

92 At Seven Kings High School, ideas for different aspects of teaching and learning are documented for the use of all staff. One example, questioning, is shown in the table below.

Sharing good practice – strategies for questioning	
Strategy	Benefits/Gains
Waiting for a student to think through an answer before breaking the silence	Prompts depth of thought and increases levels of challenge
Using a planned mix of ‘conscripts’ and ‘volunteers’	Enhances engagement and challenge for all
‘Phone a friend’	Encourages whole-class listening
‘Hot-seating’	Encourages listening for detail and provides challenge
Previewing a question in advance	Signals the big concepts and learning of the lesson
Pair rehearsal (of an answer or a question)	Encourages interaction, engagement and depth
Eavesdropping and deploying specific targeted questions	Facilitates informed differentiation
‘You are not allowed to answer this in fewer than 15 words’	Develops speaking and reasoning skills
Deliberately asking a child who you know will provide only a partly formed answer (when asking difficult whole-class questions)	Builds understanding from student-based language
Staging or sequencing questions with increasing levels of challenge	Moves students from existing knowledge or experience (often unsorted or unordered knowledge) to organised understanding, where patterns and meaning have been established
Using the ‘no hands up’ rule	Improves engagement and challenges all students to think
Providing signals to students about the kind of answer that would best fit the question being asked	Helps students to recognise the range of possible responses and to select appropriately
Snowballing (asking another student to respond to the answer of the previous student)	Checks understanding; builds on previous answer; promotes active listening skills; encourages whole-class involvement
Computer-based decision-making exercises: students have to make key decisions about actions, all of which have consequences	Promotes reflection if the students select the wrong answer

93 As standards rise, there is also a subtle shift from focusing more on students’ achievement to focusing even more explicitly on their learning and on ways to improve it. While success in examinations is still considered important, increasingly it is viewed as the secondary result of excellent learning. Many of the schools have developed assessment for learning to drive this focus. This was certainly the case at Seven Kings High School. Here, students were very closely involved in developing the work in school and they

led sessions for the staff. The school attributes gains in examination results to the introduction of assessment for learning. As with other aspects of teaching and learning at the school, practice is consistently reinforced by the explicit nature of the school’s policy. For example, teachers are told that they must use peer and self-assessment at least once a term with each of their classes. The development of assessment for learning has also been pivotal at Rushey Mead School.

Sustaining excellence continued

Assessment for learning at Rushey Mead School	
Characteristics of assessment for learning	Examples of practice
<p>1. Sharing learning objectives with students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ gives students a clear understanding of what they are going to learn. 	<p>All faculties share learning objectives. These are presented in varied ways, including orally, written on a board or outlined in the starter activity.</p>
<p>2. Helping students to recognise the standards they are aiming for enables them to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ gain a clear understanding of the standards they need to reach ■ recognise features of good work. 	<p>In religious education (RE), writing frameworks are used for written assessments which contain student-friendly guidelines, together with suggestions for completing each part of the assessment. Students are shown clearly how to attain each level for a particular piece of work before they complete it.</p>
<p>3. Peer and self-assessment helps students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ assess the progress they have made ■ identify how to improve their work ■ act as critical friends. 	<p>In physical education (PE), student demonstrations within a group help to show the progression of skills required for each level. Students are encouraged to identify the next steps in learning for themselves and others.</p> <p>Science uses exemplar answers to help students assess the levels achieved in their own and others' work.</p>
<p>4. Providing feedback enables students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ recognise their next steps and how to take them ■ discuss next steps with each other ■ learn from each other in whole-class discussions. 	<p>In modern foreign languages, students are given a first draft feedback sheet for their assessed writing with advice for improvement in 13 key areas. Whole-class feedback is used as a basis for discussion. In history and geography, feedback on written assessments is given on tick sheets, outlining the level reached and a description for each level so that students are clear about how to get to the next level.</p>
<p>5. Involving both teacher and student in reflecting on assessment allows students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ measure their own progress and that of their peers ■ focus on learning objectives and success criteria ■ take responsibility for their learning ■ perform to high standards and make progress. 	<p>In English, students are encouraged to mark model answers against explained criteria so that they can understand how to assess their own progress.</p> <p>In design and technology, students are asked to produce a mark scheme for a particular piece of work. They then put the class's work into rank order using Post-it notes. The final order is agreed as a class to be discussed with the teacher.</p>

94 There is also, commonly, more of a focus on improving teaching and learning than on developing the curriculum. While some of the schools have extensive vocational or alternative provision, not all of them do, and in some cases the curriculum was described by the schools as ‘fairly traditional’. Even where there is more radical curriculum innovation, this is seen as secondary to establishing and maintaining high-quality teaching. As one school put it: ‘If you can get the teaching right, you can teach anything to anybody.’

Developing leaders

95 These schools all have excellent headteachers and senior managers, but they also strive to develop and strengthen leadership across the school. They also work hard to grow their own leaders. Saqib’s story is typical.

‘I initially only came to Lampton to observe a few lessons, but was quickly signed up as a trainee teacher, given a permanent contract and trained to be deputy subject leader in ICT (and associate head of year) in my NQT year. I am also interested in the future leaders programme.’

96 A very high proportion of these schools’ middle leaders are not only recruited internally, but trained or began their careers in the school. Many of their senior leaders and headteachers were also promoted internally. At one time this may have been because the schools had little choice. Now it is because they manage succession planning carefully, actively choosing to develop and recruit many of their leaders from their own ranks. In some of the schools, all promotions to middle leadership are from within the staff. These schools are able to identify and develop leadership skills from an early stage in a new teacher’s career and they give young staff opportunities from the start. As one headteacher put it: ‘It’s a flat leadership model here. We aren’t precious about hierarchy.’ At Lampton School, there is an attempt to capitalise on the particular interests and enthusiasms of the staff. If a member of staff wants to do something, they will rarely

be refused: teachers talk about the ‘barriers being low’. As the deputy headteacher explains: ‘We look for people’s passions, channel them and align them to where the school needs to go. It’s messy, but it works.’

97 These schools also develop teachers’ leadership skills through rigorous training programmes.

Developing learning

At Lampton School, there is a strong focus on leadership development from an early stage in a teacher’s career. The aim is to identify and develop the school’s future middle and senior leaders in-house. Induction is taken very seriously, the career entry profile is completed rigorously and there is a lot of discussion about careers and an attempt to ‘put the right staff into the right slots’. Senior leaders know the skills that they are looking for. They spot them in staff at an early stage and develop them in a variety of ways, including through:

- planned support, development and coaching
- a large number of shadowing opportunities
- a wide range of training, including study groups, individual learning support, National College for School Leadership courses and opportunities to study for MAs
- opportunities for all staff, including NQTs and trainees, to lead training in the school
- an emphasis on encouraging and enabling staff to make presentations to colleagues and the school community from an early stage in their careers
- opportunities for all staff to support and work with other schools.

Sustaining excellence continued

98 At Seven Kings High School, training for middle leadership is also a high priority.

Middle leadership development

When senior staff at Seven Kings High School judge them to be ready, teachers at the school can join the school's aspiring leaders programme. This is an intensive and rigorous programme. The participants are continually assessed and evaluated, receiving one-to-one feedback on their participation, contribution and leadership skills. As the headteacher says: 'Our aim is to make them take responsibility for their leadership development and encourage the idea that they are not passive consumers of training, but have a responsibility to engage if they are looking to be future leaders.' New middle leaders also have their own training programme and a personal coach. The middle leadership team has an annual leadership residential conference with a strong focus on training and development.

99 As a result, when internal staff come forward for interview, they are often the best candidates. They fit the school's context and needs. Consistency of practice amongst middle leaders (something of a 'holy grail' in secondary schools) is easier to achieve, because the new middle leader has been trained to the school's model and is very familiar with the culture of the school and the way the school works. As one headteacher put it: 'Internal appointments sustain the ethos of the school, its work ethic, value and discipline, all of which need to be inculcated in new staff.' Where there are suitable candidates for middle and senior leadership posts, their promotion is also favoured by the majority of these schools because they contribute to leadership development and succession planning strategies. The disadvantage could be that too many internal promotions could be considered insular, missing the opportunity to bring new knowledge and different experience into the school.

Enriching the curriculum

100 Whatever the curriculum model, every school emphasises the importance of the core curriculum and standards in the core subjects. Each has a clear rationale for why their school's curriculum is as it is. This is based on a thorough understanding of what kind of school it is and what the students need. These outstanding schools are always looking for ways to improve their curriculum. They consider and plan proposed changes very carefully and only pursue them if there is a clear indication that they will support further gains in students' learning, motivation, enjoyment or achievement.

101 Some schools have adopted a more radical and innovative approach to curriculum structure, in some cases working creatively to develop appropriate accreditation. Plashet School, for example, is working with the Assessment and Qualifications Authority (AQA), the UK awarding body for examinations, piloting accreditation for the work that is being done in its learning support unit. These students work with a coordinator; they have an action plan and personal targets – such as reliably turning up to appointments – and regular assessment to show how well these targets have been met.

Outstanding schools are always looking for ways to improve their curriculum.

102 Greenwood Dale School has introduced major changes to the curriculum to meet the needs of a particular group of students.

A specific curriculum programme

Provision for a group of potentially disaffected and challenging students contributed to the jump in results at Greenwood Dale School in 2008. A new programme was trialled which offered:

Qualification	GCSE equivalence
OCR sport national ¹⁴	OCR sport national
OCR ICT	1
BTEC construction (or fashion or childcare)	2 (certificate) 4 (diploma)
Adult literacy and numeracy	1 (grade F for Level 1, grade B for Level 2)

Students have a personalised timetable, which is arranged collaboratively with parents. Courses are applied; for example, a student training in sports coaching will practise with a Year 7 class. The timetable caters for vocational provision on a Thursday (Year 10) or Friday (Year 11). Curriculum enrichment includes outward bound opportunities, with 50 students at the climbing centre at Nottingham, as well as more traditional PE. Residential events make use of PGL,¹⁵ where all the activities are on-site. The school has adopted the Duke of Edinburgh Award; 21 students did bronze last year and one gold. Clubs include visio-robotics and cookery. The aim is to encourage commitment and fulfil expectations. There is a real impact on the students, who are better organised, know what they want to do before they go, and develop self-esteem. The aim is that every student each year will have the opportunity to go on a course away from school.

103 Some of the schools also use acceleration, with students taking national tests or examinations early. At Bartley Green School, many students take GCSE examinations in Year 9 and then move on to AS studies, or expand their curriculum range with, for example, an additional modern language. Greenwood Dale School also enables students to take examinations early and is looking to extend this work further.

Shifting the boundaries

While the GCSE results at Greenwood Dale School are outstanding, the school considers the A level results to be only good. The school believes that many students find the transition into the sixth form and adjustment to more self-directed learning difficult. There are several reasons for this, the main ones being related to learning styles in the main school, as well as low parental expectations and understanding of what is involved. Typically, the student is the first in the family to undertake formal education beyond 16 years.

The school is now looking to extend the period of A level study – downwards. The school has experience of accelerated courses in which students take GCSEs early and AS examinations in Year 11. It also has considerable evidence that students slide back at Year 7. By completing Key Stage 3 in Year 8 and GCSEs in Year 10 (within the proposed all-through school), the falling back that occurs at Year 7 can be avoided and GCSEs taken early. The school believes that 80% of students will be ready for this acceleration, which will use the perceived benefits of the proposed 3–19 school, and will allow more nurturing in class-based work for Years 7, 8 and 9. These arrangements will allow a three-year sixth form programme leading to Level 3 qualifications by the age of 18.

¹⁴ OCR: Oxford, Cambridge and RSA examinations.

¹⁵ Named after the company's founder, Peter Gordon Laurence.

Sustaining excellence continued

104 Some schools mix approaches. Wood Green High School, for example, accommodates accelerated progress through Key Stage 3 and GCSEs to AS and A level qualifications, and has an extensive vocational curriculum, but has decided to maintain a traditional approach in Years 7 and 8, with a programme of discrete, well-established subjects taught by subject specialists. Morpeth School is one of the schools that describes its curriculum as ‘fairly traditional’ at Key Stage 4, but has made more significant changes to the structure of the Key Stage 3 curriculum.

Extended learning time

A change to the Year 8 curriculum at Morpeth School followed discussions with a visiting group of Danish teachers. The aim was to improve students’ motivation and teamwork skills by allowing them to work for extended periods on an open-ended project. Almost one day each fortnight is now given over to work on a project which individual students select. Topics offered are very varied and include film-making, forensic science and a ‘rock factory’ (the sugary kind). Common themes, developed originally from Learn to Learn (L2L) materials, run across each project, ensuring that they all provide similar opportunities for students to develop collaborative and teamwork skills. Opportunities capitalise on the skills and interests of the staff, but also involve experts from outside where necessary. Each of the two projects per year culminates in a major event which enables students to provide a showcase for and celebration of their work.

105 These schools typically offer an impressive range of enrichment opportunities, trips and visits. This is usually a deliberate strategy with four main aims.

- First, it provides cultural, artistic and sporting experiences that students are unlikely to encounter at home or in the community, heightening their aspirations and expectations. The headteacher of Bartley Green School explains: ‘We’re trying to be like a middle-class family for these kids – taking them to museums and art galleries, showing them what theatre can be like.’ Bartley Green organises 135 trips and expeditions each.

- Second, it provides opportunities for students to develop greater self-confidence.
- Third, it motivates students and helps to ensure that they are well disposed towards school. The headteacher of Morpeth School explains it like this: ‘Helping students to gain qualifications can be seen as our “core business”. Opportunities like these make it more likely that the students will buy in.’
- Finally, enrichment is used to demonstrate excellence, raising students’ sights. As the headteacher says: ‘Many of our students don’t experience excellence in their daily lives. If everything is mediocre, you never aspire. It is great for students from our school to see that we can achieve excellence.’

106 This approach often means that students regularly miss lessons for trips and events. This does bring tensions, as some staff inevitably become concerned about the impact of this on their results, but the benefits are seen to far outweigh the problems. An extraordinary range of opportunities is available at Morpeth School, not least in music.

Music at Morpeth School

Few secondary schools have a quarter of their students taking music at GCSE level, provide free instrumental tuition for all who want it and give tangible support to this in their feeder primary schools. But this is just the beginning. In Year 9, music is based on Musical Futures, providing more choice and encouraging independent learning. World music is taught both in and beyond the classroom, and includes Asian singing, tabla and dhol lessons, steelpan, DJing and music production which are all fused with traditional western styles of music in performances. At Key Stage 4, all students learn about a range of musical styles, take part in gamelan and salsa workshops and attend concerts. A new Brazilian drumming ensemble plays in conjunction with Barbican Education and Queen Mary University. The extent of extra-curricular activity which supports the music curriculum and the wider development of students is remarkable (below).

The range of musical opportunities at Morpeth School

- Year 7 preparing to give a concert at the O2 Arena
- Year 8 Rock Factory sessions and Battle of the Bands
- Thames Talent, linked with Tower Hamlets music service
- Primary school projects and 'Junkestra' workshops
- Brass and string workshops for Key Stage 3 with Guildhall School of Music and Drama
- Lunchtime recitals throughout the year by students learning instruments at school
- Globetown Music Festival
- Concert band performance at the Royal Festival Hall
- Indian music workshops for Key Stages 3 and 4
- 'Ready Steady Blow' (Barbican Main Stage Concert with Guildhall and Connect)
- Performances at local care homes for the elderly by both brass and wind ensembles
- BBC Symphony Orchestra 'Play it Again' scheme/workshops
- Borough Music Festival
- Concert band tour to Liverpool (links with Sefton Arts College and King David School)
- Indian/Bangladeshi/bhangra music workshops
- City Sings project with Barbican and City banks
- Brazilian drumming ensemble
- Dartington summer schools for gifted and talented students
- Year 11 minimalism workshops with John Cage and Robert Worsby – performed at the Barbican
- 'Sing4Summer' – transition concert for primary schools

This rich menu is reinforced by a web of international links and exchanges, ranging from the British Council School in Madrid to schools in Iceland and performances throughout Europe. The school is fortunate in having the musical resources of London on its doorstep and the interest of sponsors, but the stream of initiatives flow from the music staff. The level of belief in the value of this provision and trust in staff across the school are such that, as the headteacher says: 'If teachers come up with an exciting or innovative idea we always try to find a way of backing it.'

Sustaining excellence continued

Improving literacy

107 Often poor reading skills on entry are a particular barrier to effective learning, making it very difficult for some students to access the curriculum and make progress. These schools have developed a range of strategies to tackle the problem, from the highly individual Reading Recovery to effective cross-school approaches to literacy.

Targeting literacy

At Challney High School, staff have worked hard to improve students' literacy. There are a number of strands to their work.

- Clarity and leadership from the English department, which promote staff understanding about literacy developments across the curriculum. This is reinforced by cross-school materials such as 'stickers' and 'slides' which the other departments adapt to their use.
- A focus on examination literacy, in which students analyse the mock GCSE examination papers for words that they do not understand. All departments take part. The lists are made up into booklets in which all the difficult words are defined and learnt.
- The production of subject-specific 'literacy place mats'.
- 'How to' guidance on translucent strips, for example 'how to analyse text'.
- A common approach to marking for literacy across all departments, with comments such as: PEE – point, evidence, explain
PECS – 'give us some muscle in your writing'!

108 At Greenwood Dale School, the teachers were concerned about literacy and employed staff to work with pupils in their feeder primary schools. While this helped to improve students' levels of literacy on entry, they felt that more was needed to help students to become better readers and to develop the necessary interpretation skills to access the curriculum fully. A year ago, the school decided to set up a separate department for literacy, and to teach it as a discrete timetabled subject.

Timetabling literacy

The school timetables literacy lessons for Years 8, 9, 10 and 11: two lessons per week for the younger students and three per week at Key Stage 4. Class sizes are a maximum of 15, with two to three adults in each class – a teacher and one or two literacy teaching assistants. Activities include reading in the group, play scripts and other materials. In Year 7, there is some one-to-one intensive reading work with learning mentors.

The school has encouraged further reading in class across subjects and reading for fun. This is sponsored by Nottingham Forest football club, which offers a tour of the ground and free tickets to a match for students who have read 100 titles.

Building relationships with students, parents and the community

109 All these schools see the importance of very good relationships between staff and students as one of the most important factors in their continued success. While tight systems may be in place to support the effective management of behaviour, there is also an emphasis on sustaining the kind of close, positive relationships that mean that such systems need to be used only sparingly. These schools place a premium on knowing all students as individuals. If you ask students why their schools are so good, they will commonly reply 'because teachers really care'. Again, the powerful 'norming' effect of a school's culture is important in ensuring that all staff relate to students in similar ways. One headteacher commented on how both staff and students were troubled when a new teacher dealt with students in a way that was at odds with the school's culture, by controlling behaviour very rigidly and shouting at students.

110 There is also an emphasis on listening very closely to what students have to say. In many of the schools, a strong student council is in place and has made a tangible difference to the school's direction and development. However, it goes well beyond this. These schools use a range of strategies to provide students with the skills they

need to talk about their own learning and experience of education. They listen very carefully to what the students have to say and use such feedback to improve teaching. In some cases, this is about students' general experience of learning, but the schools are not afraid to use student observers or other techniques to gather feedback about what individual teachers are doing well, what they could do to improve and how they could modify their teaching to match students' needs more closely. As well as, arguably, providing the most useful feedback that a teacher can receive, this is also highly motivating for students. Apart from the fact that it leads to better lessons, the students feel that they are in a genuine partnership with the school and that their views are valued. The message is very clear: 'We are here to enable you to learn and we are committed to doing it as well as we possibly can.'

111 This has been a strong area of work at Seven Kings High School.

Listening to the students

At Seven Kings High School, staff focus on listening to students in as many ways as possible, including by talking to them in queues to ask them what they are learning and how much they are enjoying it. They value and use their feedback. Student observers are well established and describe how eager teachers are to hear what they have to say about how they could improve their lessons. Teachers also regularly give students Post-its at the end of the lesson, ask them to write what went well and what could have been better, and stick them on the door on the way out.

At one student voice conference 80 students decided that they would review the school's learning and teaching policy. They felt that they should write a pledge of what students would do to match the school's pledge to students. This now appears in the school's student handbook as a promise that students will:

- be more involved in their learning objectives
- take the initiative to find out what the success criteria are and ensure their work meets them.

112 The outstanding schools are equally persistent at forging links with parents and the community. One of the challenges is to raise parental aspirations and ambitions for their children and themselves.¹⁶ Challney High School addresses this directly through an extended timetable and evening sessions, which provide educational opportunities for both students and the community, often in the same classes.

Community engagement

Robert Clack School serves a challenging area of Dagenham and the headteacher considers it vital to build close links between the community and the school. The school has worked hard to develop a partnership with the community and looks for every opportunity to strengthen it. In some cases, little things count for a lot: the headteacher describes the positive effect on the school's relationship with one family when he signed the whole family's passport applications. Thirty parents now work in the school in some capacity. Twelve years ago, no teachers came from the local community; thanks to the school's graduate teacher training programme there are now 10. It is noticeable how many teachers were themselves students at the school. This helps to give the school credibility in the eyes of students and ensures that they see for themselves that young people from Dagenham can do well. The teaching staff is also intentionally ethnically diverse, giving the school a strong international feel. This is seen as important, as Dagenham is one of the few places in Britain with British National Party councillors and, despite an increase in the ethnic diversity of the school population, most students are still White British.

¹⁶ See, for example, *The extra mile: how schools succeed in raising aspirations in deprived communities* (DCSF-00447-2008), DCSF, 2008.

Sustaining excellence continued

113 Lampton School provides an example of engaging a minority group of parents more closely in supporting their children.

Overcoming language and cultural hurdles

Lampton School had recognised underachievement in one group and identified a key reason as the difference between parents' involvement in their children's education here and in Somalia. They worked very closely with the Somali community, setting up a parents' group and employing translators to improve links with the community in order to reach a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the underachievement. This helped to strengthen the school's partnership with its Somali parents and led to the development of a range of strategies by which parents could support the learning of their children. These had a significant impact on progress.

No student left behind

114 For schools that sustain their excellence, an absolute focus on the progress of every student means that none is overlooked and everyone who needs support is given it. Assessment and target-setting data are used with increasing precision to motivate students through engaging them in the formative assessment and target-setting process, ensuring that they have very clear information about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Rigorous analysis of data identifies the underachievement of individuals or groups of students at an early stage. This information feeds into the school's systems for accountability, ensuring that teachers and departments are challenged and supported to take any necessary action. It also enables the school to intervene directly. At Greenwood Dale School, for example, Key Stage 4 students are placed in groups; the school works with each group differently.

Targeting groups

Early in Year 10, the headteacher reads every report and holds a 15-minute interview with each of the 220 students. The school then identifies four groups of students and works with them in different ways.

- Group 1: students who will certainly achieve five or more good GCSEs, including English and mathematics.
- Group 2: 'OK but need impetus.' They become the responsibility of the head of year.
- Group 3: considered to be capable of five GCSE passes at grades A* to C but for particular reasons, such as poor behaviour or attendance, which may derive from their home circumstances, are not likely to achieve this target. They are allocated to directors of achievement with the objective of achieving eight A* to C grade passes, including English and mathematics. They are monitored weekly by the year group directors of achievement, each of whom has a team of learning mentors. Their work is focused on action and early intervention. The senior leadership team checks the progress of all these students with the directors of learning (heads of department) each half term. School targets are updated each week. The particular focus is on students who are likely to 'pass' English or mathematics but not both, to understand the reasons, and focus attention on the weaker subject.
- Group 4: a small group of disaffected students at risk of underachievement. They have an alternative curriculum and are monitored directly by the staff who work with them.

115 While there is inevitably a particular focus on Year 9 upwards, these schools commonly use assessment data to guide action and intervention in Years 7 and 8 too. At Lampton School, staff identify underachievement at an early stage and intervene to reverse it.

Intervening early

At Lampton School, all internal examinations and assessments are analysed in great depth and the achievement of different groups is monitored carefully. This is combined with analysis of behaviour patterns using the school's 'Sleuth' system. Heads of year are frequently put in front of staff and governors to talk in great detail about their year group, the students and possible strategies to raise their achievement. The resulting actions are then very sharp. They also begin early. For example, analysis of Year 7 assessments revealed that a particular group of boys was underachieving in RE. Discussions with teachers followed and a range of strategies was put in place.

116 These schools work hard to ensure that their strategies for intervention reflect, and are sensitive to, the contexts in which they work. Both Lampton School and Plashet School have very ethnically diverse intakes. To be successful, the schools need to understand the diverse needs of different groups. They track the progress of different ethnic groups carefully but, if they are to intervene successfully, they must also be able to analyse the sometimes complex reasons behind any underachievement; they must also be able to provide effective and well-targeted support for students with English as an additional language. Close partnership with the community is vital too.

117 Another characteristic of all the schools is their willingness to go the extra mile in providing opportunities for all to succeed. They never give up on individual students. As one headteacher said: 'Our job is to promote learning, not process underachievement.' All the schools put in a considerable range of additional support to ensure that everyone is able to succeed.

Focused intervention

At Plashet School, provision for students with limited English skills is well developed. If two months' cross-curricular monitoring in their first term indicates underachievement, then a first language, ICT-based assessment is used to establish the level and focus of the support needed. Well-established strategies include a joint English as an additional language–special educational needs programme focusing on phonics. An AQA adult literacy course is offered as an option in Years 10 and 11. Students who enter the school in Year 10 may follow an accredited course in their community language. Members of the EAL department monitor Year 7 for two weeks at the start of the year, then feed their observations into the next school development meeting to inform decisions about planning. They introduce teachers to the relevant data and give very direct and personal feedback about students' capabilities and particular needs.

118 Students at these schools often find it difficult to study at home and many parents are not in a position to support them. The schools overcome this barrier by investing additional time in teaching and learning. Staff are generous with their time, typically running sessions at lunchtime, after school, during weekends and in their holidays. One headteacher said: 'It's a relentless struggle.' These students receive a significant amount of individual help and attention. This also reinforces the positive relationships that exist between students and staff, because students see that teachers 'really care'. There is no doubt that this approach is extremely demanding of teachers' time and goodwill. Some schools are creative in harnessing additional support. The mathematics department at Morpeth School has used considerable ingenuity, together with the capacity of the head of department for networking with former students, to provide what could best be described as wall-to-wall support for progress in the subject.

Sustaining excellence continued

Widening support

Support for learning in mathematics takes place before and after school, in classes and through a Saturday class. Much of the support is provided by former students, now higher education students but still living in the neighbourhood, who commit time to return to school and support students, in the classroom or on one of the extended day or Saturday sessions. These student helpers are paid an hourly rate that is higher than that offered by local supermarkets.

119 While practice differs markedly, each of these schools has a very broad package to support students' learning and ensure that any social, emotional or other barriers to learning are alleviated. Many of the schools, for example, provide mentoring for particular students.

Much support for learning mathematics comes from former students.

Intensive mentoring

At Greenwood Dale School, the Director of Achievement selects underachieving students at the end of Year 9, focusing on mathematics and English. She and a learning mentor then mentor 40 students between them and diagnose issues related to their learning. The main aim of the support is to ensure that all Year 10 students are fully up to date with their course work by the end of the year. One-to-one interviews help to identify problems in particular subjects, and staff can then decide what action to take. They involve parents, where appropriate, and have parents' mobile numbers for ease of contact. Every student is treated individually. Unorthodox solutions are used, such as an arrangement where a student with a very poor and long-standing attendance problem was given a reduced timetable requiring one day fewer in school, provided that, first, the student attended every day for two weeks. The emphasis for all interventions is on achieving success and on the pride that accompanies it. Where sanctions are needed, there is a very good email system, so that when a teacher has a problem, the information is shared. No stigma is attached to having a learning mentor. One of the students who refused at first changed his mind and asked for one after seeing the enthusiasm of his peers. New mentors are well briefed, then tutored by an experienced mentor. Mentoring is focused on academic support; they have a clear brief but may work in different styles, as long as they do not become over-sympathetic. They represent the diversity of the school.

120 In some cases, as at Bartley Green School, mentoring is provided by students. Here, student mentors also work with pupils in Year 6 to ease transition to secondary school.

Young mentors

Students from Year 8 upwards act as ‘buddies’ for newcomers and the vulnerable. Their engagement extends into the wider community. Students from Years 8 to 10 establish contact with Year 6 students in local primary schools as ‘virtual mentors’. They respond to common concerns about transfer to secondary school – about rules, clubs and uniform, for example. The question they find hardest is ‘Will I have friends?’ but they tackle the challenge confidently after their two weeks’ training and in the knowledge that they have immediate staff support if something unmanageable occurs.

121 Some schools, for example Plashet, have set up a separate learning support unit (LSU) to provide intensive support to students who require it. At Plashet, the LSU does not focus entirely on those at odds with school expectations, although its courses – in anger management, for example – and its monitoring of attendance are well targeted and effective. The LSU also trains Year 9 students as conflict mediators.

122 Whatever the package of support, it is shaped to ensure that it fits the students’ needs and the school’s context. Globetown Learning Community emerged from Morpeth School’s work as part of the local Education Action Zone and is now a registered charity. Located next to the school, its main aim is to ‘improve life chances through education’ for members of the local community. One of its key projects is to raise the aspirations of young people, so that more enter further or higher education. The project’s coordinator is very skilled at working with the students’ parents, many of whom could be seen as traditionally ‘hard to reach’. She begins by telling parents: ‘These tests show that your child is bright. They must have got it from you. It’s not your fault that you didn’t have the educational opportunities, so how can we work together to stop that happening for your child?’

Globetown Learning Community

In the first year, the project worked with 35 Year 10 students. They were bright, with high cognitive ability test (CAT) scores, but were underachieving and becoming disaffected. They all came from families with no history of staying on in education. The students were provided with university visits, residential trips, group revision sessions and individual support from staff who knew them well. The project coordinator also arranged university visits for the parents so that they could understand what university involves, so lifting aspirations and expectations. As one parent said: ‘Sometimes we encourage our children to do things that we are told will be good for them, but we have never experienced them ourselves. Now I can say that I want my children to go to university and I know why.’ Staff liaised with other agencies if they needed to and provided a range of support, often helping the young people to overcome enormous barriers in their personal lives. However, the focus remained sharply on helping them to gain good GCSE and post-16 qualifications.

At the end of Year 11, 25 of the 35 students joined local colleges or school sixth forms. After a few weeks, 18 were struggling. However, staff continued to work with the students. They liaised with the schools and colleges, in some cases helping students to change course or receive additional support. As the coordinator said: ‘I never know when to let go.’ Eventually, 22 students progressed to university. The scheme has now been running successfully for eight years and continues to develop. For example, life coaches are now employed to work with the students.

Sustaining excellence continued

Where next?

123 Consistently outstanding schools constantly aspire to greater heights of achievement and depths of provision. Their motivation can be both intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic aspirations include providing more effectively for each member of the school community, seeking to make each lesson better than the last, helping every student become a self-sufficient learner and ensuring that none leaves school without essential qualifications and lifelong interests.

124 Extrinsic motivation is often associated with the ambition for the school to excel. This may mean aspiring to the realms of 'beyond outstanding' – reflected by some schools in London becoming 'world class', or demonstrating through CVA that their pupils make better progress than any others. The strategies that give substance to such aspirations are invariably centred on doing things better, building capacity, succession planning and importing new knowledge into the school community. These schools are interested in what the best looks like – worldwide. They are also willing to share with other schools the strategies and processes that work so well for them. In short, they not only sustain excellence but share it.

Sharing excellence

Sharing excellence

Outstanding schools have much to offer other schools by way of systems, practices, knowledge and experience. Several of the schools remarked on excellence bringing with it an extra burden of responsibility. This takes many forms.

125 National recognition puts the schools under the spotlight and makes many demands on the headteacher: the DCSF seeks them out as examples of outstanding practice; local authorities are increasingly likely to ask the schools to help in their improvement strategies; other schools beat a path to their door; and researchers and evaluators seek interviews and discussions.

System leadership

126 All the headteachers in the sample of outstanding schools are ready to share their expertise freely, and do so in one way or another. Some go out of their way to support other schools; others are more reticent, willing to help if asked but otherwise predisposed to focus their attention on their own school. The 'Beacon school' concept, although discontinued as national policy, applies to some extent to all 12 of the outstanding schools.

Support across a broad canvas

Robert Clack School hosts around 200 visits per year and has supported a number of other schools. The school has, for example, helped two local schools out of special measures. It is also a Specialist Schools and Academies Trust mentor school for a school in Birmingham. The headteacher has spoken at many conferences and sits on a number of national bodies. He is very clear that any support work does not undermine the progress of a school with nearly 2,000 students and 200 staff and carefully limits his time out of school to about one in seven school days.

127 The outstanding schools include examples of headteachers and schools who see the process of lending expertise and support to other schools and pupils not only as a moral purpose, something which brings the stimulus and satisfaction of new professional challenge, but as a strategy for developing staff and bringing new knowledge and ideas into the school. A growing body of research into the work of consultant leaders¹⁷ in contributing to the success of London Challenge¹⁸ and National Leaders of Education¹⁹ finds that such outreach work is almost always mutually beneficial, however great the disparity in the effectiveness of the two schools. System leaders have been defined as 'those headteachers who are willing to shoulder system-wide roles in order to support the improvement of other schools as well as their own'. Research into so-called 'system leadership' has identified five key system leadership roles:²⁰

- choosing to lead a school in very challenging circumstances and then sustaining it as a high value-added institution over a significant period of time
- partnering another school facing difficulties and helping to improve it
- acting as a community leader to broker and shape partnerships or networks of wider relationships across local communities to support children's welfare and potential
- developing and leading a successful school improvement partnership across local communities in order to support welfare and potential
- working as change agents or expert leaders.

128 All the headteachers represented here fulfil the first role described above. The sustained success of their schools is due in large measure to their leadership of what has been termed a 'complex school', that is, a school in challenging circumstances. The factors in the success of this role were explored in the two earlier sections of this report.

¹⁷ P Matthews, P Sammons, C Day, Q Gu, and P Smith, *Supporting leadership and securing quality: an evaluation of aspects of the London Leadership Strategy*, School of Education, University of Nottingham for the London Leadership Strategy/NCSL, 2006.

¹⁸ *Improvements in London schools* (HMI 2509), Ofsted, 2006.

¹⁹ R Hill and P Matthews, *Schools leading schools: the power and potential of National Leaders of Education*, National College for School Leadership, 2008.

²⁰ D Hopkins and R Higham, 'System leadership: mapping the landscape', *School Leadership and Management*, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp 147–162, Routledge, 2007.

Balancing commitments

Like many headteachers of very successful schools, the headteacher of one of the schools is committed to the wider community of schools but has not provided intensive support to a school facing difficulties beyond mentoring the headteachers. Understandably, he feels that leading a successful but very complex school is a sufficient challenge and worries about being side-tracked. That doesn't mean that the school is isolationist. It is currently in the process of setting up a joint sixth form with two other schools, all three of which offer different specialisms. It also contributes in many other ways and the headteacher sits on a number of national committees. The school is highly active in the local community and hosts many international visits.

Partnering another school facing difficulties and improving it

129 Several of the school leaders have worked to support other schools, either individually or in a deeper partnership which involves other staff in their schools. One example of the latter is Greenwood Dale School, which was asked to support a secondary school in special measures.

Executive headteacher

The school partnership lasted for seven months and made a significant difference. One of the staff of Greenwood Dale School became associate headteacher of the supported school with oversight from the headteacher of Greenwood Dale, who acted as executive headteacher for both schools. Results rose in 2007 from 23% to 44% (five or more GCSE grades A* to C), and from 4% to 14% including English and mathematics, and there was a positive independent exit report. When a substantive headteacher was appointed, the local authority asked Greenwood Dale School to discontinue its support. This left insufficient time to complete the work of building capacity in the school in order to sustain improvement.

130 Once schools have embarked on school partnerships and gained expertise in helping to turn around other schools, they tend to continue applying this expertise. Serial partnerships are not uncommon. In the case of Greenwood Dale School, for example, the school started to work with Elliot Durham School, with a brief for 'light touch' support in the last academic year, whereupon another member of Greenwood Dale School's senior leadership team took over as acting headteacher and the executive headteacher spends two days per week there.

131 The opportunities for headteachers and their most effective colleagues to develop, broaden their knowledge and expand their spheres of influence beyond the school have never been more prolific. Many of the schools have multiple engagements with other schools. Plaset is one example. While the headteacher sets a brisk pace as an influential figure nationally, the school's senior and middle leaders take on a range of projects as trainers and mentors.

Wider spheres of influence

Plaset School became a Leading Edge school in 2004, having been a Beacon school between 2000 and 2004. Projects have included setting up teaching for community languages; auditing the curriculum for the celebration and recognition of different cultures; and researching underachievement among Bangladeshi heritage students, then acting upon the findings to make provision more responsive to these students' needs. Senior managers and heads of department act as consultants to strengthen systems and structures and promote achievement in other schools, and they assist with planning. They guide new heads of department in their middle management role. In addition to her work as a school improvement partner, the headteacher mentors new headteachers and gives presentations on raising the achievement of minority ethnic students to teachers and parents.

132 Sometimes, despite its readiness to contribute, a school is not able to help others as much as it would like. Sometimes this is difficult within a school's own authority, particularly if it is small and closely knit.

Sharing excellence continued

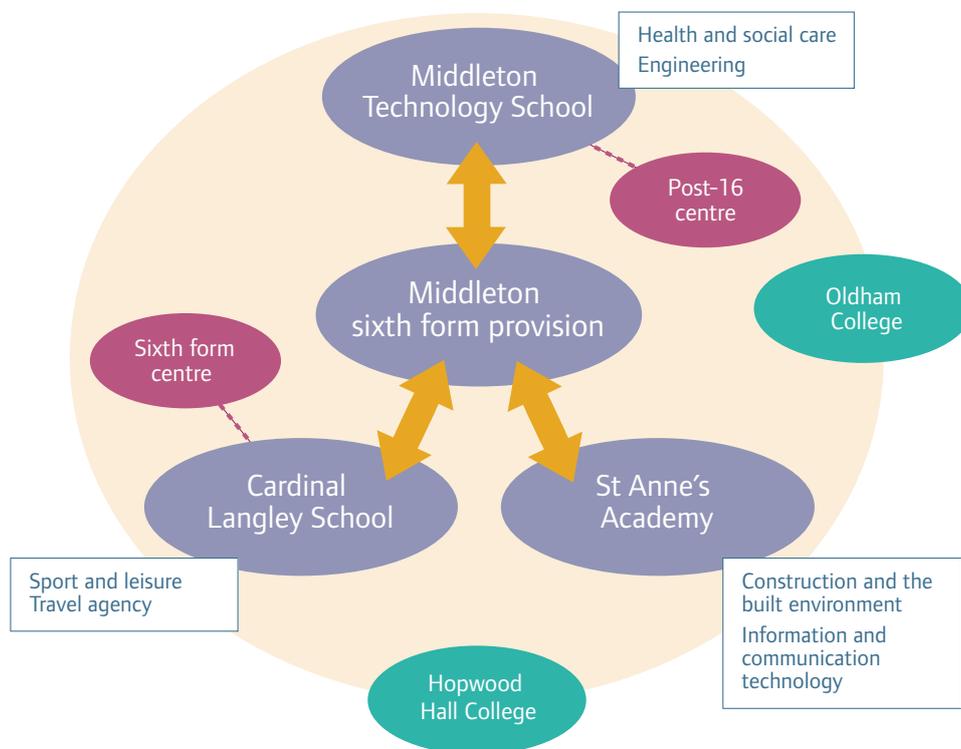
Sharing excellence

The school's five advanced skills teachers provide capacity for outreach work which finds expression in a range of supportive functions, from technology in feeder primary schools to providing lead teachers across the authority in a number of subjects. Languages are taught in primary schools by the school's staff as part of the community dimension of the languages specialism. The headteacher mentors other new headteachers but there is some reluctance by other schools in the authority to capitalise on the school's readiness to provide support and advice. Plans are well advanced, however, for the construction of a sixth form centre for the school under the 'presumption' funding which, together with the imminent Building Schools for the Future programme, will transform the school.

Acting as a community leader to broker relationships across other schools

133 With the focus on 14–19, several of the 11–16 schools in this group are developing sixth forms, either individually or in partnership with other schools. The Middleton Sixth Form Partnership is one such example. Originally the schools jointly appointed a senior leader at assistant headteacher level, now the deputy headteacher at Middleton, as partnership coordinator. He chairs the 14–19 partnership steering group which represents the school and two other partner schools. A post-16 centre has been constructed on the Middleton site, and provision for Middleton is shown in Figure 4. Figure 4 also shows the network of providers and the vocational specialisms offered by the three schools. Two further education colleges are also part of the Partnership.

Figure 4: The Middleton Sixth Form Partnership



134 The Partnership is a model of organisation and cooperation. The capital programme is well advanced; diploma courses have been assigned and there will be a wide range of A level courses. Progression routes have been delineated; common block timetabling has been agreed across the three schools; transport will be provided; catering facilities are available at all the sites and modern wireless technologies will support learning across the area.

135 A similar partnership is planned for Tower Hamlets, where Morpeth School is one of a partnership of equals with two other specialist schools that have acquired a sixth form centre building between them and will offer a full range of A level courses and diplomas relating to their existing specialisms. Harton Technology College has been awarded presumption to develop a sixth form, adding to the range of provision within South Tyneside, and the Greenwood Dale site is intended to become the post-16 centre for the Nottingham East Academy. These are all examples of success attracting investment and breeding success. They require skills not only of leadership but, more subtly, leadership from within partnerships.

Highly effective schools are increasingly forging partnerships with other schools.

Developing and leading a successful school improvement partnership

136 Highly effective schools are increasingly forging partnerships with other schools through federations (informal or formal) and trusts which are more comprehensive than the 14–19 consortium arrangements illustrated above. This is illustrated through a further twist in the Greenwood Dale story.

137 Owing to its success, Greenwood Dale School has received the go-ahead to sponsor its own academy. Plans are well advanced for a 3–19 Academy Trust sponsored by Greenwood Dale School and embracing Jessie Boot Primary School, Elliott Durham and Greenwood Dale schools. The Trust will cater for around 3,700 children and young people. The Academy will have three sites and three heads of school, with the executive principal managing all the services needed to support learning across the campus. The reorganisation has huge implications for the curriculum and standards. The ambition is to accelerate learning by capitalising on the efficiencies gained from a 3–19 all-through system. It is expected that there will be much better curriculum continuity and progression than in separate schools. In view of this, it is proposed that there will be two schools catering for children from Nursery to Year 10, providing for the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 to 4, with a three-year sixth form on the Greenwood Dale site. This builds on the accelerated learning already established at Greenwood Dale School, where, in any case, a significant number of students take one and a half A levels by the end of Year 11.

138 A frank, independent review of the proposal reveals the boldness of vision which underpins this innovation.

‘If you were to write the risk register for this project, you would abandon it after the first three headings: super-size; all-age; split site. To establish the largest school in England, for a 3–19 age range, across three sites, in a socio-economically deprived area of one of our most challenging cities would appear to present a collation of fundamental risks that would make such a project unthinkable. But my analysis is that, given a fair head of wind the success of this project

Sharing excellence continued

is not only possible but has the potential to expose the youngsters of East Nottingham to educational opportunities they have not accessed in a generation.

The main reason I have reached this counter-intuitive conclusion is the level of enthusiasm and sign-up for the project. During my fieldwork, everyone I met and interviewed was in favour of the proposal as it now stands: Parliamentary and City Council elected members and officers; governors, headteachers, leadership teams and staff of all three schools; and pupils and parents in all three schools. Such unanimity of purpose and motivation to succeed is rare in academy projects and remarkable in such an ambitious one. With such levels of support, the counter question is: why wouldn't you?'²¹

National Leaders of Education and their schools play a powerful role in helping weak schools improve.

Working as a change agent or expert leader: National Leaders of Education

139 There is increasing evidence from both this country²² and overseas²³ that shows that pairing high-performing schools and their leaders with weaker ones can be a significant and positive force for improvement. Acting on this evidence and the advice of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), in autumn 2005 the Government formalised the role of excellent school leaders and their schools in driving school improvement by commissioning the NCSL to establish a programme of National Leaders of Education (NLEs) and National Support Schools (NSSs).

'NLEs, supported by key staff in their school, are now a growing and powerful force for improvement in the school system. Their numbers are increasing and the use of them is spreading. The first 68 NLEs were identified in October 2006. Those designated were required to be very good or outstanding leaders of schools, and had to show that their school had a good track record of supporting other schools in difficulty. By July 2008, the first group of NLEs had helped 19 schools either out of special measures or in having a notice to improve withdrawn. Reports by Ofsted on schools that are in these categories highlight the powerful role that NLEs and NSSs are increasingly playing in helping inadequate schools to improve. Moreover, key stage and GCSE examination results in 2008 show a marked improvement in the great majority of schools with which phase one NLEs have worked for a year or more.'²⁴

²¹ M J Smith, *Review of the proposals for the Nottingham Academy in Nottingham East, Greenwood Dale School*, 2008.

²² For example, from the use of consultant leaders in London Challenge and the experience of many federations of schools.

²³ B Pont, D Nusche and H Moorman, *Improving school leadership, policy and practice*, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2008.

²⁴ R Hill and P Matthews, *Schools leading schools: the power and potential of National Leaders of Education*, NCSL, 2008.

140 The executive headteachers of Greenwood Dale and Challney High schools and the headteachers of Lampton, Bartley Green, Rushey Mead and Middleton schools are among the cadre of about 200 NLEs. For the headteacher of Lampton School, the role is a development of her work as a London Challenge consultant leader and support consultant. Her work as a system leader can be summarised as follows.

Local and national leadership of education

In 2004, the headteacher was encouraged by the London Leadership Strategy coordinator to apply to be a consultant leader. She was then drawn into small contributions before being assigned a 'challenging' consultancy with a school in Lambeth. This was (and is) a school which is very hard to lead, serving a highly disadvantaged and very diverse community, largely composed of Black African and Caribbean families with growing numbers of Somali and other refugee groups. She became consultant to a highly capable and thought-provoking headteacher, in the role of a critical friend. Her role was to provide an opportunity for professional dialogue with someone outside the locality whom he could trust. She subsequently became a support consultant, and then Director of Secondary programmes in London Challenge and has since worked with two schools in Hillingdon and Richmond, both in Ofsted categories of concern. This involved chairing an Interim Executive Board, coordinating support from various sources and – through her school – providing intensive professional development using 'improving teacher' and 'outstanding teacher' programmes developed by Ravens Wood School. As a measure of school improvement, Abbotsfield School in Hillingdon moved directly from having a notice to improve to being a good school when inspected.

141 Lampton School is one of the first four 'teaching schools'²⁵ in London, providing a range of extended development programmes on improving teaching and learning to which other schools send staff, in groups of three. Many Lampton staff support other schools directly. They and the headteacher argue strongly that this work does not impair the quality of provision at Lampton; on the contrary, the outreach work is challenging and productive professional development, bringing new ideas into the school. Lampton, Plashet and some of the other schools also have very good links with university education departments and have well-developed professional development programmes for their own staff, trainee teachers and teachers in other schools.

142 Coda: It is striking that outstanding schools and their leaders, where possible, are predisposed to contribute to the improvement of other schools however they can. They are driven by moral purpose, wanting to see other students succeed as well as their own. They would not deny their schools the satisfaction of wider recognition, although they do not need this in order to flourish. Increasingly, their schools are investing more in top leadership, by appointing associate headteachers to support the executive headteacher, co-headteachers to share the role, and strengthened leadership teams to whom responsibility and accountability can be distributed. As the proportion of outstanding schools increases and their circles of influence widen, they can make a powerful contribution to the 'National Challenge'²⁶ drive to ensure that every secondary school is at least a good school.

²⁵ Not to be mistaken for training schools; the name is coined by analogy with 'teaching hospitals'.

²⁶ A national programme, introduced in 2008, to ensure that all secondary schools exceed 'floor target' outcomes.

Roads to success: the outstanding schools

The portraits of the 12 schools set out in the following pages provide a brief picture of each school and its journey towards greatness.

The portraits are unapologetically impressionistic, compiled after visiting the schools and meeting their headteachers and other key players. The narratives give a flavour of some of the values as well as the strategies found in these schools. They inevitably feature the headteachers, whose leadership is an important part of each story, although there is extensive distribution of leadership in all the schools and collegiate teamworking is pre-eminent.

The portraits do not seek to reproduce the schools' latest inspection reports or their own web pages and documentation, for these can be accessed readily.

It should be stressed that although the 12 headteachers have approved the profiles of their own schools, they did not choose or seek to influence their contents.

Bartley Green School, Birmingham

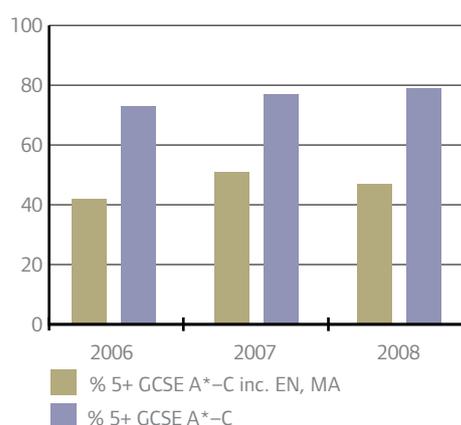
'At Bartley Green, we serve one of the most deprived wards in the city. Many of our pupils have never visited the countryside, an art gallery or even, in some cases, Birmingham city centre.' For these pupils, the Bartley Green School invests heavily in providing resources and activities so as to raise their aspirations and engage their learning. The headteacher, Mrs Chris Owen OBE, who has led the school for nearly 15 years, identified her first priority on arrival as supporting the teachers by establishing and maintaining good discipline. In this neighbourhood, with high levels of social and economic deprivation, getting a critical mass of parents on side was a considerable challenge. 'You have to be brave!' She was determined that staff and pupils should know and come to appreciate that the school would not be bullied or diverted by antagonistic elements in the predominantly White British community, which lacked a positive and authoritative community ethos. When the headteacher arrived, only 9% of the pupils achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C. Over the past 15 years, Bartley Green School has almost doubled in size and is heavily oversubscribed.

The headteacher inherited a long-established staff when she arrived; changing the school culture and the collective mind-set was a priority. 'Our kinds of kids don't...' became a heresy. Setting challenging targets and expecting them to be achieved have been key to success. This can be seen, for example, in the progress

made by pupils with communication and language difficulties, a third of whom recently achieved five or more A* to C GCSE grades. An additional tutor group was introduced to allow for small-group teaching for pupils struggling to clear academic hurdles. The most skilled teachers work across the academic spectrum. All members of the senior leadership team now teach at least one GCSE/BTEC group so that they too are working to personal targets and are as accountable for the school's success rate as others. Regular external monitoring complements the school's self-evaluation. This provides an objective view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and helps leaders develop strategies to deal with persistent concerns. From the moment pupils arrive in Year 7, they are encouraged to think about pathways to future careers. Fifteen years ago, only 33% of pupils went on to further or higher education; now almost all of them do.

Clear and practical principles are consistently applied within the school and wherever the school connects with the surrounding community. Alongside the discipline runs a strong current of care and encouragement, for pupils and staff. It comes as no surprise to see that expectations and academic standards have risen and that the upward trend at GCSE continues in this wide ability school. In 2006 and 2007, the school's relative attainment and CVA progress measures were in the highest 1%.

School data



2007 data		Student profile
Roll:	865	83% White British
Age:	11-16	8% White and African Caribbean
CVA:	1,078.7	
FSM:	36.50%	
Inspection judgements and quote (Sep. 2007)		
25	Outstanding	'An outstanding school that is very well placed to improve further... a sustained history of continuous improvement.'
1	Good	
0	Satisfactory	
0	Inadequate	

Challney High School for Boys and Community College, Luton

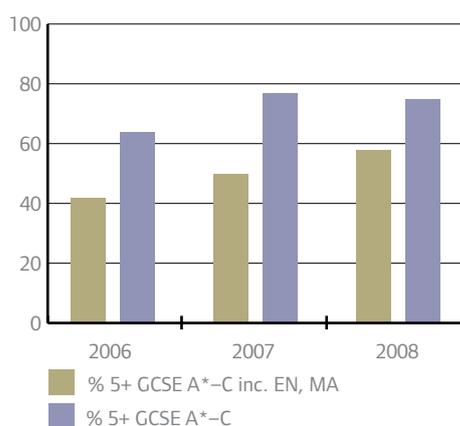
Challney High School for Boys radiates unforced, cheerful confidence. The single-storey buildings are not new, but they are attractively presented, graffiti-free, well resourced and welcoming. Despite the pressures of an expanding curriculum, important spaces have been created to celebrate pupils' successes and support individual needs and interests. The history garden in one of the inner courtyards, for example, not only gives pupils a feel for aspects of the English medieval monastic tradition, but also provides a haven during recreation times for anyone wanting to be both quiet and busy. The school's self-confidence is shaped and supported by a network of carefully developed systems. The long-serving headteacher, Vic Galyer OBE, showed great skill in foreseeing and pre-empting problems, investing in the people and resources needed to tackle issues such as attendance and behaviour. The appointment of a trilingual member of staff, for example, to work with the Kashmiri, Pakistani and Bangladeshi families who make up a large proportion of the school community, has dramatically strengthened school-home communication and led to an impressive degree of parental involvement. The successful headteacher of Denbigh High School, Dame Yasmin Bevan, has been executive headteacher of Challney High School since September 2008.

To a visitor, it is at first a little startling that charts are displayed recording the progress of each pupil against

his or her personal targets. The traffic light system to identify rates of progress works well. It is not seen as punitive; pupils recognise that even the most able and ambitious among them is likely to start off a phase as 'red', with challenging targets to reach. The imperative shared by all pupils, whatever their abilities, is not to remain 'red'. These regularly updated charts come from a school-devised spreadsheet called 'Emark' that gives teaching and pastoral staff a detailed view of how individuals and groups are progressing and helps account for steadily rising levels of achievement. A 'single conversation team' for each year group brings together all those concerned with these pupils' academic progress and personal development. Potentially vulnerable or disaffected boys are kept positively engaged; there have been no permanent exclusions for 13 years.

Pupils' interest in their personal learning and achievement is matched by the commitment of staff to professional development and debate. This is fostered by Challney High School's role as the founder member and driving force of the Chiltern Learning Group, the oldest school-based teacher training organisation in England. The focus on local recruitment and continuing professional development has built a 'home-grown' team of staff, exceptionally well attuned to the needs and priorities of the community it serves.

School data



2007 data		Student profile
Roll:	804	54% Asian British, Pakistani
Age:	11-16	9% Asian British, Bangladeshi
CVA:	1,047.3	33% Asian British, Kashmiri; many other backgrounds
FSM:	33.20%	
Inspection judgements and quote (Jan. 2007)		
24	Outstanding	'An outstanding school... the ethos is centred on achievement and the quality of the students' learning experiences.'
2	Good	
0	Satisfactory	
0	Inadequate	

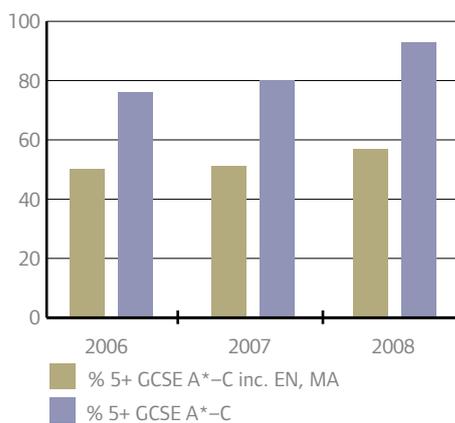
Greenwood Dale School, Nottingham

This school is remarkable among remarkable schools in having the highest running-average CVA score since the measure was introduced. The results at Greenwood Dale School, which stood at 80% five or more higher grade GCSE passes in 2007, 51% with English and mathematics, might have dwelled for a time around this high point or inched upward; instead they leapt to 93% and 57%, respectively, in 2008. The school exists for learning and trumps its own achievements year on year. It is hugely oversubscribed but serves, first and foremost, an underprivileged and very mixed community, with a large Muslim Asian population, eastern European immigrants and working-class White British among the many groups represented. This is a challenging area. The school rises above these tensions, bringing the young people from this complex and challenging community together in a way that breeds hope for future generations, gradually raising aspirations and delivering on its promises. The school is trusted where much else is not.

The school's success has been hard won. It is hard to believe that when the current headteacher, Barry Day OBE, arrived 17 years ago, the school was despised for its perceived racism, undersubscribed and virtually out of control. Attendance stood at 70% and it was hard to attract staff. There was a huge budget deficit which meant that one quarter of all staff had to be made redundant in the first two terms.

Over the years the school has been utterly transformed. At the root of this change lies certainty of vision, consistency of purpose and a belief that everyone, students and staff alike, can achieve more than they thought possible, given the right conditions and encouragement. The result is an organisation that is secure in what it does. It takes on ambitious commitments but leaves nothing to chance. It innovates and experiments but at little risk. It achieves the near impossible, for example by squeezing 1,300 students into a constricted hill-top site designed for half that number. Not only does the school continue to improve, but it also takes other schools under its wing and turns them around. All this is done in a modest, matter-of-fact way which belies the underlying confidence, courage and commitment of its leadership. The school provides educational excellence, human warmth and moral authority. Little wonder that, having transformed the school from one of the worst to one of the very best, the headteacher – now executive principal – and staff can now take any challenge in their stride.

School data



2007 data		Student profile
Roll:	1,259	55.4% White British
Age:	11–16	23% Asian British, Pakistani
CVA:	1,068.6	7% White and African Caribbean
FSM:	33.70%	3% White and Black African
Inspection judgements and quote (Sep. 2007)		
25	Outstanding	‘Turns out high-achieving, well-rounded, ambitious young people, equipped in all respects for a modern, diverse society.’
1	Good	
0	Satisfactory	
0	Inadequate	

Harton Technology College, South Tyneside

Harton Technology College is centred on what used to be a boys' grammar school. Tradition has been preserved, not only in the varnished front doors, panelled corridors and large assembly hall of the original building, but in the guiding principles of the headteacher: 'Tradition, Innovation and Excellence'. The school lives up to this credo, providing a beacon of hope and expectation in a largely disadvantaged community of white working-class families.

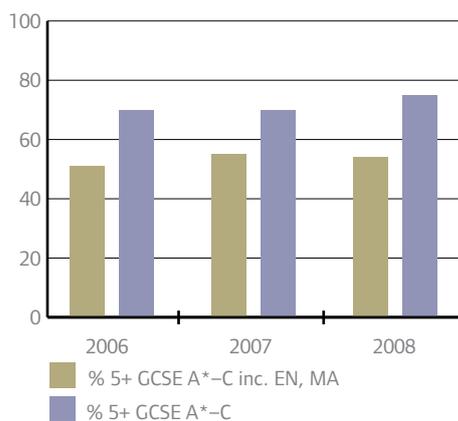
The school has avoided any of the complacency that could envelop a very stable staff, a core of whom have served in the school for most or all their careers. Ken Gibson, the headteacher, is one of these, appointed to this post five years ago having held a range of other posts in the school before becoming a deputy headteacher. He has three natural advantages: he knows the community as well as anyone, having been brought up in it; he is an inspiring leader; and he excels as a teacher. In every sense, he leads by example. His involvement, drive and vision are admired by staff, who strive to emulate these attributes. He and the governors have built a team of staff that espouse the core values and high ambitions of the school. It was already very good when Ken Gibson took over, but he has built on success by continuing to raise standards through a range of strategies, including the refined use of performance data and targets, diligent quality assurance and ensuring that the progress of all pupils is maximised and their

well-being assured. Parents flock to open evenings and the school is heavily oversubscribed.

The school has added modern foreign languages and applied learning to its original technology specialism. It has manipulated the curriculum and timetable skilfully to provide personalised provision for a high proportion of pupils while maintaining a strong group of core subjects. Rigorous internal evaluation, monitoring and improvement planning sustain the school's momentum, while some excellent strategic appointments have reinforced the focus on teaching, learning and cooperative planning. Plans are well advanced for the construction of a sixth form centre which, together with the imminent Building Schools for the Future programme, will transform the school site.

The school's five advanced skills teachers provide capacity for outreach work which finds expression in a range of supportive functions, from teaching technology in feeder primary schools to providing lead teachers across the borough in a number of subjects. The headteacher also mentors other new headteachers in the area.

School data



2007 data		Student profile
Roll:	1,365	95% White British
Age:	11-16	
CVA:	1,025	
FSM:	27.20%	
Inspection judgements and quote (Sep. 2007)		
23	Outstanding	'The headteacher and strong senior team have created very effective systems and structures for raising standards.'
3	Good	
0	Satisfactory	
0	Inadequate	

Lampton School, Hounslow

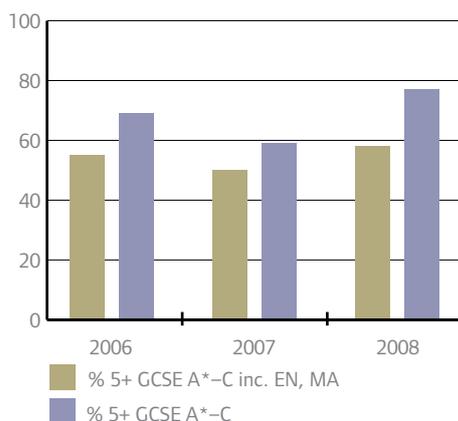
When Sue John joined Lampton School as deputy headteacher she described it as ‘a comfortable place, but not achieving’. Relationships were good, but there was not a sharp focus on raising standards. When she became headteacher, Sue knew what needed to be done and was eager to get on with it. Taking over was challenging: the school was unpopular, standards were low and there was a £280,000 deficit on a £2.5m budget. She has dealt with these problems while successfully maintaining and improving the relationships that underpin the school’s success, and the focus now is much more on learning. She identified the staff who could contribute and those who could not, and created a climate of expectation and accountability which caused most in the second group to leave. She recognised and developed talent, often promoting relatively inexperienced members of staff.

When asked what makes the school so good, the headteacher is clear: ‘Focusing on teaching and learning, having excellent relationships and making sure that parents feel happy to come into the school.’ Much time is spent ensuring that lessons are consistently good or better. The school sees its work as a training school as a way of giving teachers the skills they need to analyse and discuss their own teaching. Consistency in lessons is seen as key: teachers work to a common lesson format, and collaboratively produced, high-quality teaching plans and materials are on the school’s intranet.

When students are asked why the school is so good, they recognise the importance of friendly competition between staff: ‘Departments have standards that they want to achieve. If the results of one department go up, the others will want to work very hard to catch up.’ Weaker departments acknowledge their faults, but have a powerful internal drive to improve. There is a strong prevailing culture and new teachers are expected to fit in. Staff speak of new teachers being ‘Lamptonised’. Almost 60% of teachers trained here or joined as NQTs. Teachers are involved in an immense amount of activity. ‘It is chaotic at times, people do a lot, but it creates an energy which goes through the system.’

The headteacher sets a clear tone for relationships. Staff see her as approachable and ‘incredibly encouraging’. They also see her as very forward-looking and able to ‘pick things up on the radar’. She also has a refreshing humility. When the school received its recent judgement of ‘outstanding’ from Ofsted, she was pleased, but told staff very clearly: ‘We are outstanding given our context at one particular point in time.’

School data



2007 data		Student profile
Roll:	1,382	37% Asian British, Indian
Age:	11–18	19% White British
CVA:	1,016	11% Asian British, Pakistani
FSM:	21.90%	7% Black African, British
Inspection judgements and quote (May 2007)		
24	Outstanding	‘At the heart of its success is an unrelenting determination by everyone in the school community to do the best for all.’
2	Good	
0	Satisfactory	
0	Inadequate	

Middleton Technology School, Rochdale

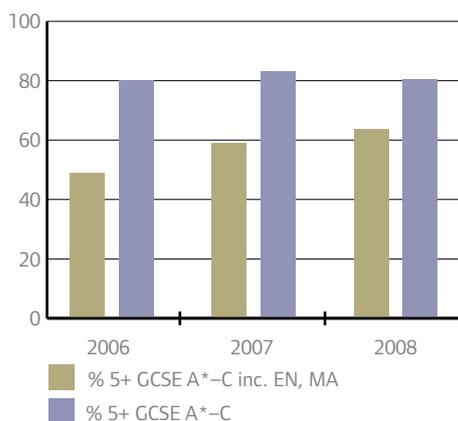
Middleton is a school that started its journey to outstanding with 9% of students achieving five or more grade A* to C GCSE passes. It is now a school brimming with purpose and initiative, which has seen a number of transformations but only four headteachers since it opened in 1955. It has been led by Allison Crompton since 2004 and rated outstanding after two years of her leadership, sustaining the previous very good inspection report. About a fifth of the staff left in the first two years of her headship. The school is ambitious and has very high expectations of students and staff alike. Its multiple specialist school designations include technology, applied learning and 'Raising Achievement/Transforming Learning' (RATL), for which it receives funding for outreach work from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. The school serves an unprosperous white working-class community described as having low aspirations for its children, together with a few pockets of greater affluence. Noted for its success in raising the relative performance of boys, the school is highly tuned to maximise the achievement of each individual student.

Like the other schools in this report, Middleton sets great store in providing an environment in which the street culture is left behind. Pupils come to school with high standards of dress, a school bag and equipment, a standard haircut and no emblems of group allegiances. They know what the ethos is and the expectation that all will achieve. There is also a clear staff dress code.

The emphasis in lessons is on pace and challenge; progress tracking is highly refined. The senior and middle leaders thrive despite – or perhaps because of – demanding performance objectives and the spotlight of accountability. The school is very performance orientated. Performance management is a strong feature; for example, staff are never given anything less than stretching (upper quartile) targets. Everyone has five performance targets which typically include Year 9, Year 11, departmental, whole-school improvement and personal targets. The whole-school target is a key improvement area which changes from year to year. In one year there was a focus on text skeletons to support writing across the curriculum; in the next, an expectation that 'everybody reads in class'. Teachers are strongly supported and well developed as school leaders through 'motivational leadership progression' within the school.

The school is also a National Support School and is supporting two other schools in some depth. The school is much visited, recently hosting visits from Swiss leaders and five Leicestershire headteachers, and the headteacher undertakes outreach work with headteachers in Cumbria and Tameside.

School data



2007 data		Student profile
Roll:	1,043	90% White British
Age:	11-16	
CVA:	1,048	
FSM:	15.10%	
Inspection judgements and quote (Sep. 2007)		
24	Outstanding	'An atmosphere of purposeful enthusiasm has been created... which characterises all aspects of its work.'
2	Good	
0	Satisfactory	
0	Inadequate	

Morpeth School, Tower Hamlets

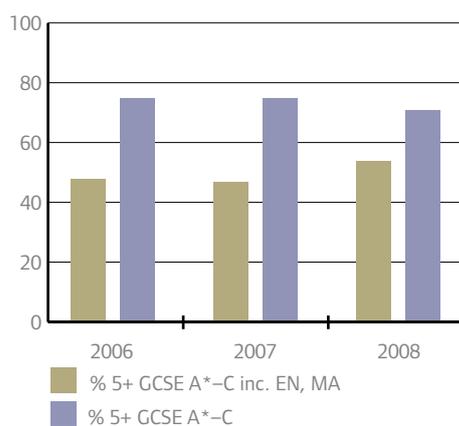
In 1992 standards at Morpeth School were low, with only 11% of students achieving five or more higher grade GCSEs. Since then, with Sir Alasdair Macdonald as headteacher, standards have risen considerably. Despite the high levels of social disadvantage in the local area and students' low levels of attainment on entry, 75% now achieve five or more higher GCSE grades; the proportion achieving five higher grades including English and mathematics is also above the national average. When the school was inspected in 2004, it was judged to be very good, with outstanding features. The 2007 inspection judged all aspects of the school's work to be outstanding. The first few lines of the report sum the school up well. 'Morpeth is an outstanding school, providing an orderly and purposeful environment within which pupils thrive. The tone is set by the school's outstanding headteacher and leadership team: staff are trusted and valued, expectations of all pupils' social and academic achievement are high and the school is deeply embedded in the life of the area it serves.'

Key to maintaining the school's excellence is a powerful culture and ethos, based on a strong, shared commitment to meeting students' often complex needs. Students recognise that their teachers are very skilled and also willing to give them whatever help and support they need. Unsurprisingly, this strong sense of commitment begins with the headteacher. When asked about his strengths, staff frequently cite 'moral purpose',

'integrity' and 'trust'. The emphasis is on developing and sustaining the right climate, and then trusting staff to do the right thing. It probably helps that the headteacher has appointed all but two of the teachers and that staffing is very stable. It is also notable that, while staff are enthusiastic about what they do, they are typically modest about their achievements. The headteacher frequently describes the school as doing something 'quite well' when the practice is actually exceptional. He is the first to acknowledge that more is still possible. Modesty is combined with a very reflective approach. Asking 'Where are we now and what more can we do next?' is part of the school's normal culture, rather than a dry, bureaucratic process.

The school's approach to development planning is simple and focused. The staff have a day together to review the previous year's plan and produce the next plan in outline. There is no huge document: everything is on a single side of paper, displayed everywhere (including the back of toilet doors). Everyone knows what the school's priorities are.

School data



2007 data		Student profile
Roll:	1,165	54% Asian British, Bangladeshi
Age:	11-16	26% White British
CVA:	1,048.4	5% Black African British
FSM:	67.40%	4% African Caribbean British
Inspection judgements and quote (Sep. 2007)		
24	Outstanding	'Morpeth is an outstanding school, providing an orderly and purposeful environment within which pupils thrive.'
2	Good	
0	Satisfactory	
0	Inadequate	

Plashet School, Newham

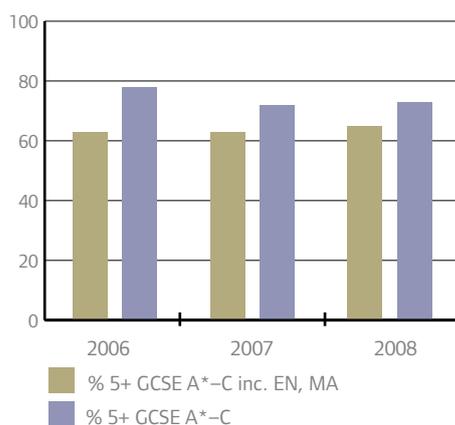
Bushra Nasir CBE joined Plashet School in 1990 as a deputy headteacher and took on the headship three years later. Working with a small leadership team whose members she had appointed, she had first to change the mind-set of some staff and then to establish the 'certain systems' that she sees as crucial to the school's success. Her approach was to identify and engage a few key individuals, using them as leverage for more general change.

The ethos built up over years at Plashet School is all-pervasive, powerful and highly productive. Rather than the more passive virtue of tolerance, this cohesive community fosters mutual respect based on knowledge and self-confidence. 'We celebrate diversity together. The school helps us do that.' The students have firm beliefs, rooted in their own cultures and faiths; they also have open minds and a zest for questioning and debate. 'To question your faith often strengthens your faith.' The school's diversity is clear to see and hear. It mirrors the busy East London community in which Plashet sits. Most students come from Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi backgrounds; a significant proportion have African or Caribbean heritage. Many are Muslim, some are Hindu, Sikh or Christian. In this school, questions of faith are taken very seriously but without bigotry or conflict. For over 90%, English is an additional language. Over 30% are eligible for free school meals. Yet the overwhelming impression the school creates is of confidence, purposefulness and cohesiveness.

'Plashet? It's a land of opportunities!' There was no hint of irony in this answer from a Year 11 girl to the question, 'What's special about your school?' Around her, others nodded emphatically. 'Teachers look for the best opportunities for every student. Whatever help you need, they're always there.' 'It's an honour to be in Plashet School. All the problems I've faced, I can give credit to teachers for sorting them out.'

The headteacher is a strong and persuasive role model. She points out to her pupils that she's a local girl made good and what she did, they can do. Her confidence is justified by the upward trend over eight years of the school's results in national tests. Ever since 2000, Plashet's results have surpassed national and Newham borough averages. The headteacher is clear about the chief pillars on which Plashet's achievement depends: leadership and management, the continuing professional development of staff, inclusion and a strong ethos.

School data



2007 data		Student profile
Roll:	1,352 girls	33% Asian British, Pakistani
Age:	11-16	24% Asian British, Bangladeshi
CVA:	1,019	23% Asian British, Indian
FSM:	32.40%	6% African Caribbean, British
Inspection judgements and quote (Mar. 2008)		
23	Outstanding	'Outstanding school' where 'students enter with slightly below average standards' and 'GCSE results are very high.'
3	Good	
0	Satisfactory	
0	Inadequate	

Robert Clack School, Barking and Dagenham

Appointing Paul Grant as the headteacher of Robert Clack School was a bold move. The Head of Humanities at the school, he beat a field of deputy and existing headteachers to the job. Crucially, his department was a beacon of success in the midst of poor standards and atrocious behaviour. At the time, he describes the entrance to his department as 'like the Brandenburg Gate. When students crossed the line, everything changed'. It may have been a bold appointment, but it has certainly been a successful one. The school is now a calm, very positive environment, where students' examination results are considerably above average.

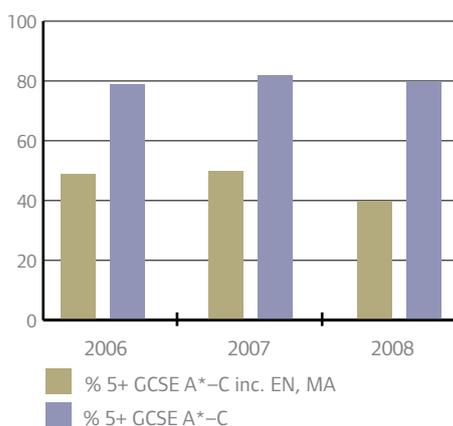
The school's reputation was at rock bottom, so the headteacher sent a very clear message that any problems would be dealt with. When a student was creating havoc at Barking Hospital, he went himself to sort it out. Concerned about the school's 70% attendance level, he drove the school minibus around Dagenham, looking for truants. He worked hard to deal with the worst behaviour and then turned his attention to the teaching. He has some very clear advice to new headteachers in similar circumstances: 'Make use of the honeymoon period. Use a crystal ball and tell the staff what's coming.' He gathered the staff together on day one and as well as offering support stated that routine lesson observation was now essential; the Robert Clack lesson was now

essential; tighter duties were essential, and so on. The weaker ones were moved on and he began to work with the others, forming links with initial teacher education providers to help recruitment.

For six months the headteacher did little apart from tour the site, visit classrooms, discipline students and see parents. While the school is now a calm and very pleasant environment, he never forgets (or lets others forget) that it was once very different. Nothing is left to chance and he works assiduously to protect the school's enormous gains.

He is very clear that, for the headteacher, making and sustaining this kind of improvement in these circumstances is extremely challenging, and that the job has to be a vocation. He has a very strong presence in the school, routinely walking into classrooms to talk to teachers and question students. He knows the staff and the students very well and interacts with them personally at every opportunity. They appreciate his presence around the school, because he takes the time to talk to them and get to know them. As one student said, 'He makes us feel special.' There is no doubt, however, that it also keeps students and staff on their toes.

School data



2007 data		Student profile
Roll:	1,819	78% White British
Age:	11-18	7.3% Black African, British
CVA:	1,034	3.3% Other Black British
FSM:	30.00%	
Inspection judgements and quote (Dec. 2007)		
24	Outstanding	'Students make outstanding progress. The school strives and is ambitious for their success.'
2	Good	
0	Satisfactory	
0	Inadequate	

Rushey Mead School, Leicester

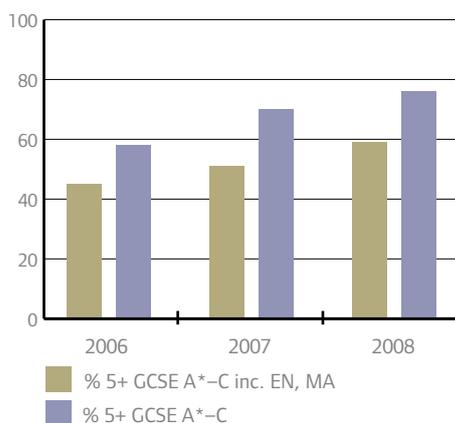
Two heads are better than one, it appears, in this school which is led by the headteacher, appointed five years ago, and a co-headteacher who was a long-standing and capable deputy. The approach works well, largely because the two individuals share a common philosophy, vision and values. The rationale is pragmatic and forward-looking. The school is a sophisticated and dynamic organisation; it is complex to lead and has a key regeneration role as a leading school within Leicester. To make demands on headship manageable, the headteacher and co-headteacher share the role. The headteacher takes the lead on school improvement work beyond the school and across the local authority, while the co-headteacher ensures that the school operates smoothly and effectively. In practice, the collaboration is seamless; there is no stark separation of roles and both are very close to staff and students, governors and parents. Extending this practice, co-heads of department also lead the modern languages and English faculties, as well as the mathematics, science and sports faculties which are the school's current specialisms.

Together, the co-headteachers have taken the school to new heights. Results continue to rise and students of all capabilities achieve worthwhile qualifications. Distributed leadership is endemic; lessons, regarded by students as highly enjoyable, are seldom less than excellent, and the school is highly inclusive.

The school is a vibrant and highly successful learning community, providing for a very mixed community with a majority of families from an Indian Hindu background, with Muslim Asian, some African Caribbean and very few White British students. Over 30 home languages are spoken and English is an additional language for most. Not surprisingly, students show a facility with languages on which the school capitalises by including a modern foreign language within the core subjects for all students to 16 years.

Like some others featured in this report, the school is housed in an unprepossessing assortment of buildings, awaiting its turn for Building Schools for the Future money. Successful science education takes place in the tatty laboratories, and staff make light of such inadequacies. The school has a number of intelligent and exploratory approaches to learning, geared to the needs of learners. It successfully moulds teaching and learning and the curriculum so that they fit the needs of individual students very closely. This is accompanied by a philosophy of nurture that contributes to effective learning through assuring students' well-being and developing their self-confidence.

School data



2007 data		Student profile
Roll:	1,352	79% Asian British, Indian
Age:	11-16	8% Other Asian British
CVA:	1,022	5.5% White British
FSM:	18.90%	
Inspection judgements and quote (Sep. 2007)		
23	Outstanding	‘An outstanding school of which students are rightly proud and make outstanding progress.’
3	Good	
0	Satisfactory	
0	Inadequate	

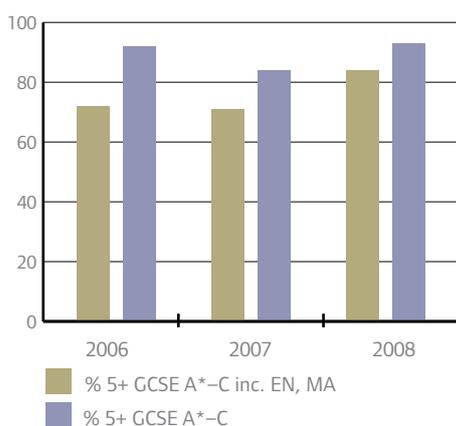
Seven Kings High School, Redbridge

Taking over as headteacher of Seven Kings High School could have been a daunting prospect for Tracy Smith, who became headteacher in September 2008 after spending 12 years in the school, succeeding Sir Alan Steer who is now the Government's 'behaviour tsar'. Despite the school's average intake, all but 17% of students achieved five or more higher grades with English and mathematics last year. Tracy Smith is impressively undaunted by the challenges of her new job. She sees the opportunities to achieve even more and staff are enthusiastic and optimistic about the future under her leadership. The internal appointment allows her to sustain the momentum and ethos of the school while adding her own drive, ideas and challenges.

In the early days, there was a strong focus on consistency and compliance, fairly unusual in the eighties. Sir Alan is on record as describing consistency as 'sexy'. Some teachers resisted, feeling that they could not be given such strong direction; they were told very clearly that they could be. Sir Alan describes 'we've got to take everybody with us' as 'the most depressing sentence in education. It means you're not going to do anything'. There was, and still is, a strong focus on everyone following policy very closely. As the newly appointed assistant headteacher says: 'The difference is that in this school they say the same things, but do them.'

Everyone is clear that the key to the school's success is a combination of excellent relationships and a sharp focus on learning. 'We've tried to intellectualise learning and teaching. We're not embarrassed to talk about pedagogy.' In the early days, there were very clear messages about how staff should relate to students. Staff are still told during their induction that, when on duty, they must speak to at least six students. Shouting is actively discouraged and it is very noticeable how often you see students and teachers chatting in the corridors. Each new member of staff has two student buddies, who look after them and introduce them to other students. There is also a strong focus on not giving up on individuals. The students say that 'you can't hide at Seven Kings'. Strong pastoral care and a pleasant physical environment are seen as vitally important. The site is very open and students are allowed easy access to rooms. One member of staff said: 'Here the children own the school. What message would it send if we locked them out?' Although results have soared in the past 15 years, there is a distinct lack of self-congratulation, and complacency is actively challenged by senior leaders.

School data



2007 data		Student profile
Roll:	1,401	38% Asian British, Indian
Age:	11-18	15% Asian British, Pakistani
CVA:	1,023	8.3% Asian British, Bangadeshi
FSM:	15.90%	8.7% other Asian British
Inspection judgements and quote (Feb. 2007)		
26	Outstanding	'It is a striving school where there is a shared sense of ambition for all students.'
0	Good	
0	Satisfactory	
0	Inadequate	

Wood Green High School, Sandwell

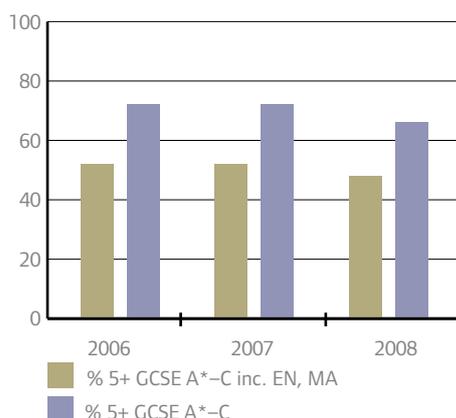
Wood Green High School was formed from the amalgamation of two schools separated by a quiet street. While some buildings are showing their age a little, they still have the solidity and style of long-established grammar schools – most strikingly in the high, barrel-vaulted ceiling and ornamental plasterwork of one of the halls. Displays on the walls and the trophy cabinets communicate the school's competitive spirit and celebration of success in an eye-catching and engaging way. The newest classroom block, opened in October 2007, is designed to support a flexible approach to teaching and learning; for example, partitions enable some classrooms to be opened up to create large teaching areas for teamwork and presentations.

Ofsted's report of 2002 noted that examination results had shot up since 1997, largely due to the excellent leadership of the then headteacher, Dame Enid Bibby, and her leadership team in setting challenging targets and embedding good practice in teaching and learning. Gaining specialist status as a sports college in 1998 added further impetus, raising the profile of the school locally, strengthening the self-esteem of staff and students, and bringing funding that supported cross-curricular initiatives and community projects. Wood Green is now securely established as a centre of excellence for sport within the community, sharing its facilities, providing training for coaches, players and referees, and setting up opportunities to participate

and compete in a broad range of team and individual activities. Great pride is taken in the spacious and impressively resourced sports centre, with its two large sports halls and fitness centre. The school's work as a sports college has been followed by the establishment of a second specialism, mathematics and computing – still at the 'green shoots' stage. 'Success breeds success' is part of the school's creed and is reflected in its continuing development.

Dame Enid's emphasis on personal worth and personal accountability continues with her successor. Since his appointment in 2006, the headteacher, Pank Patel, has extended and strengthened the network of distributed leadership and management that runs across the school. The 2006 Ofsted report noted that members of the senior leadership team were 'highly focused and driven', with 'an exceptionally strong shared understanding of what they want the school to achieve'. That is still true today.

School data



2007 data		Student profile
Roll:	1,253	76% White British
Age:	11-18	10.6% Asian British, Indian
CVA:	1,044	5.7% Asian British, Bangladeshi
FSM:	34.90%	
Inspection judgements and quote (Sep. 2007)		
24	Outstanding	'A drive for continuous improvement by an outstandingly effective leadership group and staff team.'
2	Good	
0	Satisfactory	
0	Inadequate	

Further reading



Further reading

Ofsted publishes a wide range of reports on subjects and aspects of education. The following list features a selection of reports published since September 2005.

An evaluation of National Strategy intervention programmes (070256), January 2009

Assessment for learning: the impact of National Strategy support (070244), October 2008

Attendance in secondary schools (070014), September 2007

Best practice in self-evaluation: a survey of schools, colleges and local authorities (HMI 2533), July 2006

Curriculum innovation in schools (070097), October 2008

Developing enterprising young people: features of the successful implementation of enterprise education at Key Stage 4 (HMI 2460), November 2005

Developing social, emotional and behavioural skills in secondary schools (070048), July 2007

Embedding ICT in schools – a dual evaluation exercise (HMI 2391), December 2005

Evaluation of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies 2005–07 (070033), February 2008

Excellence in cities: managing associated initiatives to raise standards (HMI 2595), November 2005

Good practice in re-engaging disaffected and reluctant students in secondary schools (070255), October 2008

Improving behaviour: lessons learned from HMI monitoring of secondary schools where behaviour had been judged unsatisfactory (HMI 2377), November 2006

Learning outside the classroom: how far should you go? (070219), October 2008

Looked after children – good practice in schools (070172), May 2008

Mathematics: understanding the score (070063), September 2008

Parents, carers and schools (070018), July 2007

Race equality in education: good practice in schools and local education authorities (HMI 589), November 2005

Reducing exclusions of black pupils from secondary schools: examples of good practice (070240), March 2008

Safeguarding children: the third joint chief inspectors' report on arrangements to safeguard children (080063), July 2008, <http://www.safeguardingchildren.org.uk>

Sustaining improvement: the journey from special measures (070221), June 2008

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2005/06 (HMI 20060008), November 2006

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2006/07 (20070035), October 2007

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08 (080196), November 2008

The Key Stage 4 curriculum: increased flexibility and work-related learning (070113), May 2007

The Key Stage 4 curriculum: increased flexibility, work-related learning and Young Apprenticeship Programmes (HMI 2478), November 2005

The logical chain: continuing professional development in effective schools (HMI 2639), July 2006

Towards consensus? Citizenship in secondary schools (HMI 2666), September 2006

Using data, improving schools (070260), August 2008

White boys from low-income backgrounds: good practice in schools (070220), July 2008

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