



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Library Service Briefing Paper

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# Scoping a Possible Committee Inquiry into ‘Successful Secondary Schools – which have succeeded in raising standards and/or maintaining good standards in the face of social and/or economic deprivation’

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## 1: Introduction

This Briefing Paper is a scoping exercise to inform the Education Committee of a range of issues around educational attainment including:

- the policies the Department of Education (“the Department”) has in place to improve levels of attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy in post-primary schools.
- the criteria for assessment by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and the procedure that must be followed when a school is assessed as not performing to an acceptable standard.
- additional material for Members’ reference is contained in Annexes to this paper. These include a literature review of research conducted in Northern Ireland and England; policies to address educational attainment and examples of ‘good practice’; and the criteria used by ETI when conducting a school inspection.

## 2. Background

A CBI report looked at the impact in the workplace of poor levels of literacy. Of employers surveyed, 72% expressed a major concern about the quality of written English, particularly in relation to spelling and grammar. This applied to graduates as well as school leavers<sup>1</sup>.

A report by the National Literacy Trust (September 2008)<sup>2</sup> focused on existing research that established a relationship between literacy and five areas of life: economic status, aspirations, family life, health and civic/cultural engagement. The research shows that in addition to the socio-economic impact, low levels of literacy also affect life chances and lead to exclusion from participating fully in society<sup>3</sup>.

Levels of literacy and numeracy are key measures of educational success yet there is no official definition of what constitutes a basic level of literacy. However, figures from the Department show that 4,500 children in Northern Ireland leave primary school without adequate literacy and numeracy skills. Almost half (47%) of young people are unable to attain a grade-C or above at GCSE level including English and maths, leading to underemployment and an increased risk of turning to crime<sup>4</sup>.

Reports in 2006 from the Public Accounts Committee<sup>5</sup> and the Northern Ireland Audit Office<sup>6</sup> identified a failing of the Department to improve literacy and numeracy

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<sup>1</sup> ‘A Vision for Scotland: The Report and Final Recommendations of the Literacy Commission’ (December 2009) available at: [http://www.sptc.info/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=7075416:literacy-commission-qa-vision-for-scotland&catid=2:news&Itemid=6](http://www.sptc.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7075416:literacy-commission-qa-vision-for-scotland&catid=2:news&Itemid=6)

<sup>2</sup> Cited in ‘A Vision for Scotland: The Report and Final Recommendations of the Literacy Commission’ (December 2009).

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> DENI website at: <http://www.deni.gov.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts: *Improving literacy and numeracy in schools (Northern Ireland)*, Second Report of Session 2006-07 available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmpubacc/108/108.pdf>

standards, particularly in the areas of strategic leadership and target setting. Particular areas of concern included the under-achievement of boys, significant differences between Protestant and Catholic children in socio-economically deprived areas at GCSE level in English and Maths and the extent of the gap between the best and poorest performing schools<sup>7</sup>.

Their findings were endorsed by Research conducted in Northern Ireland on literacy and numeracy by Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC)<sup>8</sup> where it was reported that empirical evidence showed clusters of under performance, firstly in schools in Belfast and secondly in the controlled sector. However, PwC cautioned that care should be taken in drawing conclusions from these high-level observations as the factors that impact on attainment are complex and interact with each other<sup>9</sup>.

### 3. Department Policy

The Department published *Every School A Good School: A policy for School Improvement*<sup>10</sup> in April 2009. This document is the Department's overall policy for school improvement in Northern Ireland and is based on a consultation exercise that ran from 21 January to 31 March 2008.

A separate consultation was launched that focused on literacy and numeracy; *Every School a Good School: A strategy for raising achievement in literacy and numeracy*<sup>11</sup> was launched on 23 June and ran until 30 November 2008. The Minister had established a Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce in February 2008 with a remit to finalise the revised literacy and numeracy strategy and ensure that it complimented the Department's overall school improvement policy<sup>12</sup>. Among the recommendations from the PwC research in Northern Ireland<sup>13</sup> had been the need for greater clarity about the role, scope and powers of the Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce. The Taskforce published its initial report<sup>14</sup> in February 2009, but the Department's finalised strategy for improving literacy and numeracy is still awaited<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Northern Ireland Audit Office Report: *Improving literacy and numeracy in schools* (March 2006) available at: <http://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/pubs/onereport.asp?arc=True&id=180&dm=0&dy=0>

<sup>7</sup> DENI Circular 2007/11: *Literacy/Numeracy – Lessons From Northern Ireland (NIAO) And Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Reports* (March 2007) available at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/final\\_version\\_-\\_30-03-07.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/final_version_-_30-03-07.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> *Literacy and Numeracy of Pupils in Northern Ireland* (2008) Report No 49: PwC available at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/no\\_49-2.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/no_49-2.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> See Annex A of this paper for the findings of the PwC research in NI.

<sup>10</sup> Policy document available on the DENI website at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/03-schools\\_impvt\\_prog\\_pg/03-every-school-a-good-school-a-policy-for-school-improvement.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/03-schools_impvt_prog_pg/03-every-school-a-good-school-a-policy-for-school-improvement.htm)

<sup>11</sup> Consultation document available on the DENI website at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/literacy\\_and\\_numeracy\\_strategy\\_-\\_english.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/literacy_and_numeracy_strategy_-_english.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> *Every School A Good School: A Policy for School Improvement* (April 2009)

<sup>13</sup> *Literacy and Numeracy of Pupils in Northern Ireland* (2008) Report No 49: PwC available at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/no\\_49-2.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/no_49-2.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Taskforce report available on DENI website at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/literacy\\_and\\_numeracy\\_taskforce\\_report\\_2008-2010.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/literacy_and_numeracy_taskforce_report_2008-2010.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> As of April 2010.

The Taskforce identified the following key issues<sup>16</sup>:

- The need for a baseline database covering all schools to benchmark performance taking into account the context of the school and making it eventually possible for schools to set targets for individual pupils;
- A common data bank to identify 'good practice', allowing schools to work together in 'statistical pairs'<sup>17</sup>;
- A need for the Department or the ESA to ensure that a 'literacy/numeracy thread' runs through all initiatives so that literacy and numeracy are seen as a common priority with training for school Governors emphasising its importance;
- Working in partnership with parents, community organisations and educational charities is potentially a huge area for development;
- Initial teacher training that ensures teachers have adequate literacy and numeracy training and are competent in data analysis;
- The introduction of the ESA is crucial to ensuring that literacy and numeracy is given priority and that there is consistency across all schools with monitoring of performance and challenges to under-performing schools; and
- More consideration should be given to 'targeted funding'.

The Minister stated in mid-March 2010, that:

*The revised Literacy and Numeracy Strategy is currently being finalised and will be released shortly. It is important that we take the time to get this strategy right and to ensure that it flows from, and is connected to, wider work on school improvement and on assessment arrangements to support the revised curriculum<sup>18</sup>.*

In Assembly questions on attainment levels, the Minister identified inter-connected policies to address under-achievement in addition to the revised Literacy and Numeracy Strategy as; 'Every School a Good School', 'Transfer 2010', the 'SEN and Inclusion Review', ESA, the 'Early Years Strategy' and 'Achieving Belfast and Derry'. The Minister stated that these were all *"aimed at improving outcomes for our young people and making sure they leave school with the literacy and numeracy skills they need"*<sup>19</sup>.

The Department's school improvement policy is centred on six key areas<sup>20</sup>:

- (i) effective leadership and an ethos of aspiration and high achievement;
- (ii) high quality teaching and learning;
- (iii) tackling the barriers to learning that many young people face;

<sup>16</sup> Presentation to the Education Committee 17 February 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Pairing poorly performing schools with high performing schools to share good practice.

<sup>18</sup> Written Assembly Question on 19/03/2010; AQW 5815/10.

<sup>19</sup> Written Assembly Question on 19/01/2010; AQW 4038/10.

<sup>20</sup> *Every School A Good School: A Policy for School Improvement* (April 2009), Chapter 5.

- (iv) embedding a culture of self-evaluation and self-assessment and of using performance and other information to effect improvement;
- (v) focusing clearly on support to help schools improve – with clarity about the place of more formal interventions where there is a risk that the quality of education offered in school is not as high as it should be; and
- (vi) increasing engagement between schools, parents and families, recognising the powerful influence they and local communities exercise on educational outcomes.

#### 4. Setting Targets in Schools

The Department website instructs schools to set their own 'realistic but challenging targets'<sup>21</sup> in line with their School Development Plan<sup>22</sup>. Targets are based on the individual school's current performance trends, their plans for improvement and the following range of factors:

- Trends in performance by the school over previous years;
- The prior attainment of each year group;
- The context within which the school is operating and how it compares to schools in similar circumstances;
- The priorities set in the School Development Plan.

General benchmarking data is sent to schools each year to allow them to compare their performance with other schools in similar circumstances. Similar circumstances refer to enrolment bands and proportions of pupils with free school meal entitlement (FSME).

The most recent *School Development Planning and Target Setting* circular<sup>23</sup> was issued to schools in June 2009. The circular's annex contains the Public Service Agreement (PSA) performance targets that the Department are legally obliged to set as part of their financial settlement for 2008 – 2011. Current performance for 2007/08 and a baseline from 2005/06 examination results are included for 5+ GCSE at A\*-C including English and maths for all pupils and for FMSE pupils only.

The Department's policy document lists the characteristics of a successful school as having child-centred provision, high quality teaching and learning, effective leadership and being connected to its local community<sup>24</sup>. These are the key characteristics the Department states will be used during school inspections and by ESA in determining support services required to help schools to raise standards.

<sup>21</sup> *Every School a Good School – School Development Planning and Target Setting* on DENI Website [http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/03-schools\\_impvt\\_prog\\_pg/03-schools\\_school\\_improvement\\_programme-target-setting\\_pg.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/03-schools_impvt_prog_pg/03-schools_school_improvement_programme-target-setting_pg.htm)

<sup>22</sup> The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

<sup>23</sup> Circular 2009/10 at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/school\\_development\\_planning\\_target-setting\\_circular\\_10\\_of\\_2009\\_-\\_june\\_2009-2.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/school_development_planning_target-setting_circular_10_of_2009_-_june_2009-2.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> *Every School A Good School: A Policy for School Improvement* (April 2009), Chapter 4.

The Committee may find it useful to ask the Department to break down the statistics to show GCSE attainment levels in non-selective secondary schools and maintained comprehensive (all ability) schools separately? PwC research<sup>25</sup> found that at KS2 English and Maths, proportionately four times as many controlled schools compared to maintained schools are underperforming.

## 5. School Inspections

Standard school inspections in post-primary schools focus on the quality of:

- Leadership and management at all levels;
- The provision for pastoral care and child protection;
- The overall educational provision, particularly in the identified subjects/ areas; and
- The school's self-evaluation process<sup>26</sup>.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) has found considerable variations in practice both between and within schools. However, based on observed practice in schools, indicators have been identified in practice and provision that lead to outcomes that have been assessed as either 'good' or 'not good enough'.

Indicators rated as (A) 'good' or as (B) 'not good enough' are grouped under three inter-related headings:

- a) the ethos of the school;
- b) the quality of teaching and learning;
- c) the quality of management<sup>27</sup>.

## 6. Suggested Terms of Reference

The Committee may wish to look at the following issues during a Committee Inquiry:

- The role and importance of effective leadership in successful secondary schools
- Differences in attainment levels between secondary schools in different sectors;
- How parental involvement is encouraged in better performing secondary schools;
- Teaching methods in successful secondary schools;
- Leadership and ethos in successful secondary schools
- How the Department has incorporated recommendations of the Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce and PwC Reports in recent policies.

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<sup>25</sup> *Literacy and Numeracy of Pupils in Northern Ireland* (2008) Report No 49: PwC available at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/no\\_49-2.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/no_49-2.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Standard Inspection Guidance available on the ETI website at: [http://www.etini.gov.uk/guidance\\_for\\_new\\_model\\_post\\_primary.pdf](http://www.etini.gov.uk/guidance_for_new_model_post_primary.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> *Evaluating Schools* (Revised Edition 1999) ETI on the ETI website at: [http://www.etini.gov.uk/evaluate\\_school.pdf](http://www.etini.gov.uk/evaluate_school.pdf)

## Literature Review

**A study surveying existing research and analysing data for England has reported that evidence suggests a school's performance contributes to as little as 14% of the variation in pupils' attainment. The key influencing factor was found to be family background and household income<sup>28</sup>.**

## Annex A - Research and Policy in Northern Ireland

Two reports from the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC)<sup>29</sup> and the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)<sup>30</sup> highlighting the fact that 20% of children in Northern Ireland left primary school without achieving an appropriate level of performance in literacy and numeracy. Furthermore, just under 50% of pupils fail to reach grades A – C in English and Maths at GCSE. Particular areas of concern were:

- The under-achievement of boys;
- The significant differences between Protestant and Catholic children in socio-economically deprived areas at GCSE English and maths and in comparison to their peers in Glasgow; and
- The extent of the gap between the poorest and best performing schools.

The Chief Inspector's Report 2006 - 2008<sup>31</sup> highlighted the findings of the PAC and independent research commissioned by DENI that protestant children, particularly boys, are significantly under-achieving in non-selective post-primary schools when compared to their Catholic counterparts in socially deprived areas.

In 2008 Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) published reports on the findings of two pieces of research commissioned by DENI. The first reported on literacy and numeracy levels in Northern Ireland<sup>32</sup> and the second identified examples of good practice in other jurisdictions where the circumstances are similar, or worse than in Belfast<sup>33</sup>.

The PwC report<sup>34</sup> included the following outcomes from a cluster of under-performing schools in Belfast based on FSM entitlement:

<sup>28</sup> Cassen, R. and Kingdon, G. (2007) *Tackling low educational achievement* York: JRF

<sup>29</sup> House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts: *Improving literacy and numeracy in schools (Northern Ireland)*, Second Report of Session 2006-07 available at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmpubacc/108/108.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Northern Ireland Audit Office Report: *Improving literacy and numeracy in schools* (March 2006 available at:

<http://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/pubs/onereport.asp?arc=True&id=180&dm=0&dy=0>

<sup>31</sup> The Education and Training Inspectorate: Chief Inspector's Report 2006 – 2008: ETI available at:

[http://www.etini.gov.uk/cj\\_report.pdf](http://www.etini.gov.uk/cj_report.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> *Literacy and Numeracy of Pupils in Northern Ireland* (2008) Report No 49: PwC available at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/no\\_49-2.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/no_49-2.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> *Good Practice in Literacy and Numeracy in British and Irish Cities where the level of Social Deprivation is comparable to, or worse than, Belfast* (2008) Report No 50: PwC available at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/no\\_50-3.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/no_50-3.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> *Literacy and Numeracy of Pupils in Northern Ireland* (2008) Report No 49: PwC.

- At KS2 English and Maths, proportionately four times as many controlled as maintained schools were under-performing; 11% compared to 3% in English and 8% compared to 2% in Maths;
- At KS3 English, almost 25% of maintained schools were classified as performing better than expected, compared to 2% of controlled schools. However, a larger proportion (8% compared to 2%) of maintained schools compared to controlled schools were under-performing;
- At GCSE English and Maths, 14% of controlled schools were underperforming compared to 4% of maintained schools; and
- Of maintained schools, 25% are performing better than would be expected at GCSE English and 20% at GCSE Maths, according to the definitions used, but there were no controlled schools in the over-performing schools.

**Reasons identified by various studies for the underperformance in boys** included<sup>35</sup>:

- Perceptions of literacy as ‘female’;
- Gender stereotyping on the part of teachers;
- A greater vulnerability of boys to poor teaching;
- A greater likelihood that boys may be less ready to begin formal schooling;
- A greater proportion of learning activities that require a prolonged attention span;
- Changing patterns of employment and higher expectations of girls;
- Peer group culture;
- The greater incidence of behavioural problems such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) among boys; and
- A lack of male role models including fathers and male teachers.

**Strategies adopted to counteract the under-performance of boys** were:

- Individualised – target setting and mentoring;
- Pedagogical – since poor teaching has a greater impact on boys;
- Whole school – all teachers involved in literacy, effective use of data, school leadership and ethos, single sex grouping and parental involvement.
- System level – early intervention, professional development of teachers, the role of the inspectorate and the dissemination of ‘best practice’<sup>36</sup>.

It was concluded that boys from socio-economically deprived areas, visible minorities and boys with learning disabilities are most at risk of educational failure. Therefore, small pockets of under-achievement can skew the data for all pupils in Northern Ireland and for boys in particular. Nevertheless, attitudes to learning in certain communities

<sup>35</sup> *Literacy and Numeracy of Pupils in Northern Ireland* (2008) Report No 49: PwC.

<sup>36</sup> The PwC Report included key findings from previous research on under-achievement, focussing on the under-performance of working class boys.



and a lack of parental involvement are key issues and schools in deprived Protestant areas were thought to experience these difficulties.

Problems of under-achievement could not be addressed by schools alone. Therefore some schools had strategies for parental and community group involvement and there were lessons to be learned from the maintained sector in terms of the 'critical support and challenge' provided to school leaders<sup>37</sup>.

**The main factors leading to the long tail of underachievement in Northern Ireland** were identified by key stakeholders as:

- A lack of parental involvement in their children's education;
- A perceived lack of value placed on education in certain areas, particularly deprived protestant areas;
- A shortage of positive role models;
- The impact of 'The Troubles';
- A decline in the readiness for schooling of pupils entering primary schools in recent years (eg in terms of behaviour, linguistic development etc.);
- The lack of baseline data on young children, hindering early intervention in schools;
- The transition between pre-school and primary and between primary and post-primary schools; and
- A lack of strategic direction and consistency of approach at the system level.

PwC's comparative report on schools in British and Irish cities<sup>38</sup> raised concerns about Initial Teacher Training in literacy and numeracy, particularly among teachers for the post-primary sector. In comparative cities the most effective Continuing Professional Development was in areas where schools and staff were offered tailored support that included "*modelling of lessons, opportunities to observe good practice, and assistance with lesson planning and assessment over an extended period of time*"<sup>39</sup>.

A research project carried out in Chicago achieved improvements in literacy through increasing the time spent on instruction for literacy, focusing on literacy and focusing on professional development.

Throughout PwC's study of successful schools in comparator cities, respondents emphasised that 'one size does not fit all' and that schools and local authorities that had shown success had cherry picked aspects of national strategies that best suited their circumstances. However, PwC found contradictory evidence in existing literature that a faithful adherence to the implementation of improvement initiatives was linked to

<sup>37</sup> *Literacy and Numeracy of Pupils in Northern Ireland* (2008) Report No 49: PwC.

<sup>38</sup> *Good Practice in Literacy and Numeracy in British and Irish Cities where the level of Social Deprivation is comparable to, or worse than, Belfast* Research Report No 50 (2008): PwC. Key findings document available on DE website at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/rb3\\_2008-2.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/rb3_2008-2.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> *Good Practice in Literacy and Numeracy in British and Irish Cities where the level of Social Deprivation is comparable to, or worse than, Belfast* Research Report No 50 (2008): PwC.

successful outcomes. **Their report therefore recommended further evaluation before any specific strategies would be implemented in Belfast<sup>40</sup>.**

The issue of context is raised by research findings in a paper suggesting that not only is educational attainment lower, but the quality of schools is also lower in disadvantaged areas<sup>41</sup>. The paper argues that the context of disadvantage impacts on the organisation and processes of schools with school managers adapting organisational processes to cope with the impacts of socio-economic deprivation in their area. However, they are constrained in their responses by limited and short term funding, a lack of evidence of good practice in specific contexts and a lack of flexibility in organisation design and curriculum. The reports author argues that school improvement in disadvantaged areas will not be achieved by generic measures, but by **policies tailored to disadvantaged areas<sup>42</sup>.**

An ETI evaluation<sup>43</sup> of 34 primary and post-primary schools in November 2007 and January 2008 found important common characteristics in the most successful schools. These factors contribute to overcoming barriers to learning that the pupils have experienced and, more importantly, **the characteristics were found to be wholly or partly absent in the schools where pupils were continuing to underachieve.**

Characteristics were seen to have a positive effect despite significant levels of social and economic deprivation and irrespective of whether the school was single gender or co-educational. **The 'whole school' factors relating to literacy and numeracy that have been shown to improve standards are as follows:**

- The pupils are active learners with open questions used to encourage thinking skills and high standards in talking and listening;
- Collaborative learning is promoted through independent, paired and group work;
- Learning is set in contexts that make it relevant, enjoyable and interesting;
- Strategies for formative assessment are well embedded;
- The needs of children who require additional help are met effectively;
- There are close links with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and class teacher leading to early identification of additional needs, effective monitoring of progress and a regular review of arrangements;
- The Principal and Senior Management Team have a strong vision that focuses on school improvement, particularly literacy and numeracy;

<sup>40</sup> *Good Practice in Literacy and Numeracy in British and Irish Cities where the level of Social Deprivation is comparable to, or worse than, Belfast* Research Report No 50 (2008): PwC.

<sup>41</sup> *Schools in Disadvantaged Areas: Recognising context and raising quality* Ruth Lupton, January 2004. Full paper available at: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/CASEpaper76.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*

<sup>43</sup> *An Evaluation of Literacy and Numeracy in Primary and Post-Primary Schools: Characteristics that Determine Effective Provision* (2008); ETI available at: [http://www.etini.gov.uk/literacy\\_numeracy\\_update.pdf](http://www.etini.gov.uk/literacy_numeracy_update.pdf)

- There is a collegial approach to ‘whole-school’ monitoring, evaluation and review, including self-evaluation and self-improvement; and
- The School Development Plan is central to whole school improvement with priority given to literacy and numeracy<sup>44</sup>.

### **PwC key recommendations**

Key recommendations based on the PwC research conducted in Northern Ireland included the need for a more joined up approach across the Executive, Assembly and Committees to ensure that all departments and agencies are aware of the need to work towards improving literacy and numeracy attainment in Northern Ireland. The Assembly should also consider whether the budget available was sufficient to address the challenge of low attainment in literacy and numeracy.

The need for clarity and strong leadership was highlighted, particularly during a period of change within the Department and the ESA, to address some of the long standing issues that had been identified in the research. The Entitlement Framework<sup>45</sup> addresses the recommendation that the Department should consider ways of working between schools and removing barriers to collaboration.

The Department should consider the need for clearer and simplified performance management policies and support mechanisms to help head teachers to manage under-performing teachers. There should also be a review of the ‘support and challenge’ mechanisms for head teachers and a greater focus on the leadership of literacy and numeracy in the Professional Qualification for Headship. It was also recommended that there be a greater focus on literacy and numeracy in Initial Teacher Training and that the Department should phase in mandatory professional modules on literacy for all teachers from KS1.

The Department should also provide information on the effective use of data and its interpretation for head teachers. This would allow them to measure progress, with the possibility of value-added data, along with case studies of best practice in parental and community involvement in schools. PwC also recommended that the Department ask the ESA to give urgent consideration to the supply and resourcing of educational psychologists and psychology support for schools.

Based on the evidence on how boys’ attainment can be improved, PwC<sup>46</sup> concludes that a successful approach is likely to be based on initiatives delivered at an individual level. Table 1 below provides some examples of strategies.

<sup>44</sup> *An Evaluation of Literacy and Numeracy in Primary and Post-Primary Schools: Characteristics that Determine Effective Provision* (2008); ETI available at: [http://www.etini.gov.uk/literacy\\_numeracy\\_update.pdf](http://www.etini.gov.uk/literacy_numeracy_update.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> Delivering the Entitlement Framework (October 2006) available on DENI website at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/22-ppa-delivering\\_the\\_entitlement\\_framework\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/22-ppa-delivering_the_entitlement_framework_guidance.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*

**Table 1: Individual level approaches to improve boys' performance.**

<b>Evidence on good practice from international literature</b>	
<b>Individual approaches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Individual target-setting; and</li> <li>▪ Mentoring (older boys, adults in school or wider community).</li> </ul>
<b>Pedagogical approaches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Flexing style to meet needs of individual;</li> <li>▪ Setting aims, objectives and targets, building on previous learning;</li> <li>▪ Using a variety of activities, including practical work, use of ICT (including interactive whiteboards) and 'real situations';</li> <li>▪ Use of texts (fiction and non-fiction) that appeals to boys; and</li> <li>▪ Positive and forward-looking feedback.</li> </ul>
<b>Whole-school approaches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All teachers acting as literacy leaders;</li> <li>▪ Roles and responsibilities of school leadership;</li> <li>▪ Ethos of high expectations;</li> <li>▪ The effective use of data;</li> <li>▪ Single-sex groupings for some subjects; and</li> <li>▪ Strategies for parental involvement.</li> </ul>
<b>System-wide approaches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Early intervention;</li> <li>▪ Professional development;</li> <li>▪ The role of the inspectorate in disseminating best practice;</li> <li>▪ and</li> <li>▪ The dissemination of best practice.</li> </ul>

Source: PwC

## ETI Inspections

Table 2 below shows the six levels of reports that schools receive which they must then take action on, depending on the outcome.

<b>CONCLUSIONS USED IN A REPORT</b>	<b>RESPONSE AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY</b>
(1) In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided is <u>outstanding</u> .	Acknowledgement by the BoG/Management Committee of the inspection, the receipt and distribution of the report.
(2) In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is <u>very good</u> .	Acknowledgement by the BoG/Management Committee of the inspection, the receipt and distribution of the report.
(3) In the areas inspected the quality of education being provided is <u>good</u> . The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. ETI will monitor the school's progress in these areas.	Acknowledgement by the BoG/Management Committee of the inspection, the receipt and distribution of the report. An action plan addressing the areas for improvement. The action plan will form the basis for discussions during the follow-up process.
(4) In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this school is <u>satisfactory</u> ; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in achievements and standards, learning and teaching, leadership and management that need to be addressed. ETI will monitor and report on progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12 – 24 month period.	Acknowledgement by the BoGs/Management Committee of the inspection, the receipt and distribution of the report. Action plan forwarded to Inspection Services Branch within 30 days of receiving a letter from the DE's Standards and Improvement team detailing the follow-up action required. The Action Plan will form the basis for the follow – up interim visits and inspection.

<p>(5) In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the organisation is <u>inadequate</u>; the areas for improvement significantly outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified major areas for improvement in achievements and standards, learning and teaching. Leadership and management need to be addressed urgently if the organisation is to meet effectively the needs of all the learners. The Education and Training inspectorate will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12 – 18 month period.</p>	<p>Follow-up actions include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) an initial response from the BoG/Management Committee; and</li> <li>(2) the preparation of an Action Plan addressing the areas for improvement agreed with the ELB/ESA. The Action Plan will be the basis of the follow-up process of interim follow-up visits and inspections within 12 – 18 months. If a second follow-up inspection is required it will take place within 12 months.</li> </ol>
<p>(6) In the area inspected the quality of education provided by the school is <u>unsatisfactory</u>; the areas for improvement significantly outweigh the strengths in provision. The inspection has identified major areas for improvement in achievements and standards, learning and teaching, leadership and management which need to be addressed urgently if the organisation is to meet effectively the needs of all its learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12 – 18 month period.</p>	<p>Follow-up actions include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) an initial response from the BoG/Management Committee; and</li> <li>(2) the preparation of an Action Plan addressing the areas for improvement agreed with the ELB/ESA. The Action Plan will be the basis of the follow-up process of interim follow-up visits and inspections within 12 – 18 months. If a second follow-up inspection is required it will take place within 12 months.</li> </ol>

Source: ETI

Table 3 shows analysis of ETI reports carried out by PwC<sup>47</sup>. It highlights areas for improvement in schools that were judged as underperforming following inspection.

**Table 3: PwC analysis of ETI reports on underperforming schools**

Areas for improvement in underperforming schools: an analysis of ETI reports	
<b>School leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The need for more strategic management and stronger leadership;</li> <li>▪ More rigorous whole-school monitoring and effective use of performance data;</li> <li>▪ Improving communication within the school; and</li> <li>▪ The development of middle management.</li> </ul>
<b>Teaching quality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rigorous reflection on current classroom practice;</li> <li>▪ Promoting the use of ICT across the curriculum;</li> <li>▪ The need to increase the level of challenge for pupils;</li> <li>▪ Teaching across the entire ability range using a broader variety teaching and learning strategies;</li> <li>▪ Identification of the particular learning needs of individual pupils;</li> <li>▪ Determining pupil understanding of what they have been taught; and</li> <li>▪ Improved planning at individual teacher level.</li> </ul>
<b>Whole-school issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Implementation and evaluation of strategies to improve behaviour;</li> <li>▪ Increasing attendance rates;</li> <li>▪ Strategies to improve literacy and numeracy across the curriculum; the development of vocational and occupational curricular programmes;</li> </ul>

<sup>47</sup> *Literacy and Numeracy of Pupils in Northern Ireland (2008) Report No 49: PwC.*

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Disseminating good practice in learning and teaching strategies; and</li><li>▪ A sharper focus on standards and outcomes.</li></ul>
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Source: PwC

### Future Proposed Actions

The Department's policy for school improvement<sup>48</sup> sets out the procedure where a school has failed to improve, or has improved, but regressed over a two-year period following an unsatisfactory ETI inspection. In these circumstances DENI will meet with ESA, ETI and the school's Board of Governors and discuss alternative actions that will include:

- The restructuring of the governance, leadership and management within the school;
- Merging the school with a neighbouring school;
- Closing the school and re-opening after a period with a new management team – “fresh start”; or
- Closure of the school, with pupils transferring to other nearby schools

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<sup>48</sup> *Every School a Good School: A Policy for School Improvement* (April 2009)

## ANNEX B - Research and Policy in England

In a series of reports published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on poverty and educational disadvantage, a note of caution about focusing only on socio-economic disadvantage was introduced. A study analysing existing research and analysing national data for England pointed out that although the majority of under-achievers are white British boys from disadvantaged backgrounds, many students from the same backgrounds succeed. *“The girls come from the same families and mostly go to the same schools, but do much better.”*<sup>49</sup>

While FSME was strongly linked with low achievement, this was found to apply more to white British pupils than other ethnic groups. Other indicators of disadvantage in the immediate area around a pupil’s home that are statistically associated with low achievement were identified as:

- The neighbourhood unemployment rate;
- The percentage of single parent households; and
- The proportion of parents with low educational achievement<sup>50</sup>.

While the study found that schools do make a difference to outcomes, about 14% of the incidence of low achievement is attributable to school quality<sup>51</sup>. The report found that many children made a good start at school, but fell behind at secondary school level. It was found that those from disadvantaged backgrounds were likely to attend the worst performing schools and that where schools had the opportunity to select their pupils, it tended to be to the detriment of disadvantaged pupils. Where resources can make a difference, government programmes have been found to be successful including an agenda to give students more chance to participate in school management and practice. **Charitable programmes such as the Prince’s Trust and Foyer, both of which operate in NI, were found to be effective in helping teenagers with low educational achievement**<sup>52</sup>.

Research on the effects of socio-economic disadvantage commonly highlights the impact of parental involvement in the attainment levels of children. Research that focused specifically on this issue<sup>53</sup> found that parental involvement can have a lasting impact by signalling to a child whether their future attainment levels are valued.

A longitudinal study<sup>54</sup> of children born in Britain in 1958 found that in a sample of socially disadvantaged children raised in two parent families, parental involvement did

<sup>49</sup> *Tackling low educational achievement* (June 2007) available on the JRF website at: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/tackling-low-educational-achievement>

<sup>50</sup> *Tackling low educational achievement* (June 2007)

<sup>51</sup> *Tackling low educational achievement* (June 2007)

<sup>52</sup> *Tackling low educational achievement* (June 2007)

<sup>53</sup> Hango, D. (May 2005) *Parental Investment in Childhood and Later Adult Well-Being: Can More Involved Parents Offset the Effects of Socioeconomic Disadvantage?* Full paper available at: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/CASEpaper98.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> National Child Development Study.

matter, but depended on when both it and poverty are measured, the type of parental involvement and the gender of the parent. A father taking an interest in the child's education had the most impact on counteracting the effects of socio-economic disadvantage around the age of eleven. However the involvement of both parents was found to have the most impact on educational attainment around the age of sixteen. **The highest overall impact on reducing the socio-economic effect on education was found to be the involvement of the father.**

The Committee may wish to consider what implications these findings have for the conclusion from the PwC Report that protestant working-class boys in Northern Ireland are among the lowest achievers in literacy and numeracy<sup>55</sup>.

In a study researching the link between poverty and literacy<sup>56</sup>, two groups of 11 year olds were trained to interview children in their schools about aspects of literacy that were important to them. Two primary schools were involved, one in an area of socio-economic disadvantage and the other in an area of advantage. This allowed differences to emerge in the amount of support children were given at home.

Key research findings showed that children from affluent backgrounds showed confidence in their reading and writing skills that came from:

- Routine support for homework;
- Parental help and conversation;
- Favourable 'private' environments for reading and writing;
- Absence of distractions while doing homework; and
- Opportunities to talk about literacy.

**Homework clubs are described as a possible 'lifeline' for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds which has implications for the Extended Schools programme** with homework clubs being offered more widely. However, the report cautions that the Extended Schools programme must avoid being seen as a lengthening of the school day. In order for homework clubs to be effective, they need to offer adult expertise and reading opportunities that allow for 'private confidence building'<sup>57</sup>.

An evaluation of the New Deal for Communities<sup>58</sup> (NDC) in England centred on interventions in educational attainment for NDCs. The evaluation showed that school-based interventions were not the most effective means of improving attainment levels. It was found that where NDCs could add value was in supporting increased involvement of parents, particularly supporting learning in the home. Also NDCs should

<sup>55</sup> PwC Report No 49 (2008) *Literacy and Numeracy of Pupils in Northern Ireland* available at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/no\\_49-2.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/no_49-2.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> *Children researching links between poverty and literacy* (September 2007) available on the JRF website at: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/children-researching-links-between-poverty-and-literacy>

<sup>57</sup> *Children researching links between poverty and literacy* (September 2007); JRF

<sup>58</sup> *Improving attainment? Interventions in education by the New Deal for Communities Programme* (February 2010) available at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1462891.pdf>



focus more resources on out of school activities as evidence suggests these are vital for children's learning.

Evidence in the report suggests that supporting school based interventions are not necessarily the most efficient way of improving the attainment levels of children in the area. Where a greater contribution can be made is in supporting increased and enhanced involvement of parents both in the school and at home and focussing resources on out of school activities. **Funding for 'After Schools Club' projects administered by Playboard in NI ceased at the end of March 2010**<sup>59</sup>.

A review<sup>60</sup> of policy interventions in England suggested *"that policy needs simultaneously to address a whole series of factors at different levels if it is to have any meaningful impact. It needs to have an overarching vision of how various interventions fit together and for what purposes."*

The researchers concluded that the most fundamental issues facing educational policy-makers are that there are multiple factors implicated in the low attainment levels of socio-economically disadvantaged pupils. These are at the individual, immediate social and broader societal levels. Interventions need to address the full range of factors operating at all three levels.

Policies need to be coherent with policy makers developing theories of change for how interventions will work and carefully monitor their impact. From a social perspective, policies will be *"ineffective if underlying inequalities reproduce these problems in other forms."*<sup>61</sup>

## Policy and Practice

The first in a series of documents from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DfCSF) *'Breaking the Link between disadvantage and low attainment: Everyone's Business'* (March 2009)<sup>62</sup> discusses the findings that in England over the last decade the standard of educational attainment has risen. Interestingly, schools in the areas of highest deprivation have made the most significant improvements, measured using the proportion of children entitled to free school meals.

National policies the Government has put in place to support 'breaking the link' are set out in the *Schools White Paper*<sup>63</sup>. The reforms described in the White Paper include 'Pupil and Parent Guarantees' that outline changes to the curriculum, school partnerships, leadership and responsibilities. Most of the developments in the White

<sup>59</sup> Telephone conversation with CEO of Playboard, 23 March 2010.

<sup>60</sup> *A review of research on the links between education and poverty* (September 2007) JRF

<sup>61</sup> *A review of research on the links between education and poverty* (September 2007) JRF

<sup>62</sup> *Breaking The Link between disadvantage and low attainment: Everyone's Business* (March 2009) available at: <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00357-2009&>

<sup>63</sup> *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21<sup>st</sup> century schools system* (2009) document available on the DfCSF website at: <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=Cm+7588>

Paper, it is claimed, will directly benefit FSME children. Pupil and Parent Guarantees are proposed to guarantee excellent personalised education that will include catch-up in primary schools; one-to-one tuition for any child behind at KS2 or at the start of secondary school; schools working in partnership through Accredited School Groups; and a revised accountability system that values schools with a wider set of pupil outcomes that includes narrowing the gap for FSM pupils<sup>64</sup>.

The conclusion following an assessment of 'Breaking the Link' incentives after the first year is:

*After prior attainment, poverty is the single strongest predictor of a child's school attainment. The gaps are still too large, but the evidence shows that they can be narrowed by practical action. Unless we continue to do so it will be almost impossible to improve national outcomes to world-class standards. Further progress towards breaking the link is essential for social cohesion and economic prosperity. And it is a clear moral imperative that these pupils should be supported so that they achieve their full potential<sup>65</sup>.*

An assessment of the 'Breaking the Link' interventions one year on<sup>66</sup>, discusses the success to date of a project begun in 2008. The Extra Mile project involves 23 secondary schools that decided they would 'go the extra mile' for their most disadvantaged pupils to raise aspirations, boost attainment and involve them in their learning. At the end of the pilot year all 23 schools reported significant positive impacts in attendance, behaviour, aspirations and attainment of the target groups. Phase two of the project has expanded to include another 48 secondary schools, with a primary school version of the project being added to the pilot. The Extra Mile project has been introduced into National and City Challenge areas and it is intended that phase three will look at ways to disseminate effective practice through Inside Knowledge school-to-school learning visits.

## Twelve outstanding secondary schools

The DfCSF paper cites the example of twelve secondary schools that have broken the link between deprivation and poor educational attainment. Discussing their success, it is pointed out that **schools in areas of deprivation cannot succeed alone, but require, in addition to financial support, the support of the whole range of local children's services**. In 72% of schools in England access to extended services are offered to families and all schools are expected to do so by 2010.

<sup>64</sup> *Breaking The Link between disadvantage and low attainment: Everyone's Business - One year on: attainment gaps for disadvantaged children continue to narrow* (2010): <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/00293-2010LEF-EN.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> *Breaking The Link between disadvantage and low attainment: Everyone's Business - One year on: attainment gaps for disadvantaged children continue to narrow* (2010)

<sup>66</sup> *One year on: attainment gaps for disadvantaged children continue to narrow* (March 2009) available at: <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/00293-2010LEF-EN.pdf>

An Ofsted<sup>67</sup> evidence based report published in February 2009<sup>68</sup> examines the twelve secondary schools that have succeeded against the odds and been assessed as 'outstanding' in two or more Ofsted inspections. This is despite the fact that they serve disadvantaged communities. The report identifies how the schools achieved excellence; sustained excellence; and shared excellence with the purpose of provoking discussion among leaders and staff in other secondary schools.

The report points out that **there is no 'quick fix' solution in raising standards in areas where the students are disadvantaged by their socio-economic and family backgrounds**. The story began for these schools in the early nineties and their progression was achieved through consistently high standards and expectations.

Reasons cited for their success are:

- Excelling not just for periods of time, but for a high proportion of the time;
- Constantly proving that disadvantage does not have to be a barrier to learning, that English as an additional language can support academic success and that schools can be learning communities;
- Putting their students first, investing in their staff and nurturing their communities;
- Having strong values and high expectations and applying them consistently;
- Fulfilling individual potential by providing outstanding teaching, rich opportunities for learning and encouragement and support for each student;
- Being highly inclusive and having complete regard for the educational progress, personal development and well-being of every student;
- Having achievements that are highly reflective and carefully planned in order to implement strategies that serve the schools in meeting the many challenges they face;
- Operating with a high degree of internal consistency;
- Constantly looking for ways to improve further; and
- Outstanding and well-distributed leadership.

**May 2010**

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<sup>67</sup> Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).

<sup>68</sup> *Twelve outstanding secondary schools: Excelling against the odds* (February 2009) Ofsted full report available at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Twelve-outstanding-secondary-schools-Excelling-against-the-odds>