FULLY UPDATED

Oxford School Improvement

Closing the Gap

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Success for every child

> *The aim is to help you to focus on any gaps you have identified in your own school.*

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The purpose of this report

The theme of this report is ensuring that all children do as well as possible, whatever their backgrounds, special needs or disabilities. It's about closing the gaps in performance.

The report also looks at what Ofsted says in its inspection framework about inspecting the achievement of different groups, including children eligible for the Pupil Premium, boys, children who are learning English as an additional language, those who have special educational needs, children from minority ethnic backgrounds, and others.

Identifying exactly what children need, providing high-quality teaching, and giving effective support as early as possible will make a real difference to individual children. This report describes work in three schools that have specific successes to share in terms of teaching and learning in maths and English, the curriculum, assessment, and leadership and management. It looks at how the three schools have been 'closing the gap' between different groups of pupils.

You could use the action points with middle leaders, reading managers, at a staff meeting or a professional development day. You might feel that what is described would not suit your children or your school, but the examples are there simply as a prompt for discussion and reflection. The aim is to help you to focus on any gaps you have identified in your own school.

The most important question, however, is what you might do to improve teaching and learning at the earliest stages so that interventions are needed less and less. Have you done all you can, from the very beginning, so that every child has the best possible chance of success?

School inspection

The current inspection framework, with its various revisions, has been in place since the start of January 2012. As the White Paper *The importance of teaching* indicated in 2010, the inspectors now look more deeply at teaching and learning, and there are other, more recent, changes, too, such as inspectors' evaluation of schools' use of the Pupil Premium. You may well be asking these questions in the context of inspection and 'closing the gap':

- What will observations of teaching and learning tell inspectors, especially about intervention and support for children who are struggling?
- How will the judgements on schools in disadvantaged circumstances be fair?
- What will inspectors look for when they evaluate the "difference in achievement between those for whom the Pupil Premium provides support and other pupils in the school"?

This report suggests some answers to those questions through the descriptions of the three schools and what they were doing for their children.

ACTION POINT

You should also read: *The Pupil Premium, Making it work in your school.*

ABOUT THE **AUTHOR**

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The reality behind the numbers

What they tell us...

We know that schools need to start making a difference from the very beginning.

"The attainment gap between **rich and poor** opens up before children start school, is visible during the infant years and increases over time."
White Paper, *The importance of teaching, 2010.*

"Young children who are in the bottom 20% of attainment in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile are six times more likely to be in the bottom 20% at key stage 1 than their peers; pupils entitled to **Free School Meals** are only half as likely to achieve five good GCSEs as their peers."
The importance of teaching.

We know that some groups of children fail dramatically. As at March 2013, there were 68,110 children who are Looked After in England (an increase of 2% from 2012 and 12% since 2009).[1]

"32 per cent of **looked-after children** do not get any GCSEs and a further 24 per cent achieve fewer than five GCSEs. Though the proportion of looked-after children failing to get five or more GCSEs has been steadily falling, it is around seven times higher than that for children on average."
Monitoring poverty and social exclusion 2010, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2010.

And what happens to children who are Looked After later on is clear in the DfE's most recent data:

The number of children now aged 19 years who were Looked After when aged 16 years is 6,930. Of these young people, 2,360 (34 per cent) are **not in education, employment or training**.
Children Looked After in England (including adoption and care leavers) - year ending 31 March 2013, DfE, 2013.

It is critical that you know your children who are Looked After very well and do everything you can to make sure they succeed. They are one of the two groups **eligible for support from the Pupil Premium**.

A further particularly vulnerable group is children who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), especially white British boys:

In 2013, 53% of **white British boys known to be eligible for FSM** achieved the expected level in all of reading, writing and mathematics compared with the national average of 75% of pupils. This is a 23 percentage point attainment gap. This gap has narrowed by 1 percentage point since 2012.[2]

The widest gap is in the new grammar, punctuation and spelling with a gap of 18 percentage points. 59% of pupils known to be eligible for FSM achieved the expected level compared with 77% of all other pupils. The attainment gap for writing has remained constant since 2012 with a gap of 16 percentage points. 70% of pupils known to be eligible for FSM achieved the expected level compared with 86% of all other pupils.
SFR: *National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2 in England 2013 (revised)*, DfE, 2013.

Schools cannot reverse poverty directly, but they *can* reduce its impact on children's life chances.

In April 2011, the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) published a joint report on tackling child poverty. It takes a much longer-term view than simply one of meeting targets at the end of key stage 2 or at GCSE.

Many of today's young people will be parents in 2020 – improving life chances for these people is not only important for **breaking the cycle of poverty** but could also reduce the likelihood of their children being in poverty in 2020.
A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families' Lives, DWP/DfE, April 2011.

The children who were in Reception classes in 1998 when the National Literacy Strategy began have now grown up. They may be in post-graduate study, work or training but they may also be NEET (not in education, employment or training). It is easy to see why the DfE and the DWP wrote a joint report.

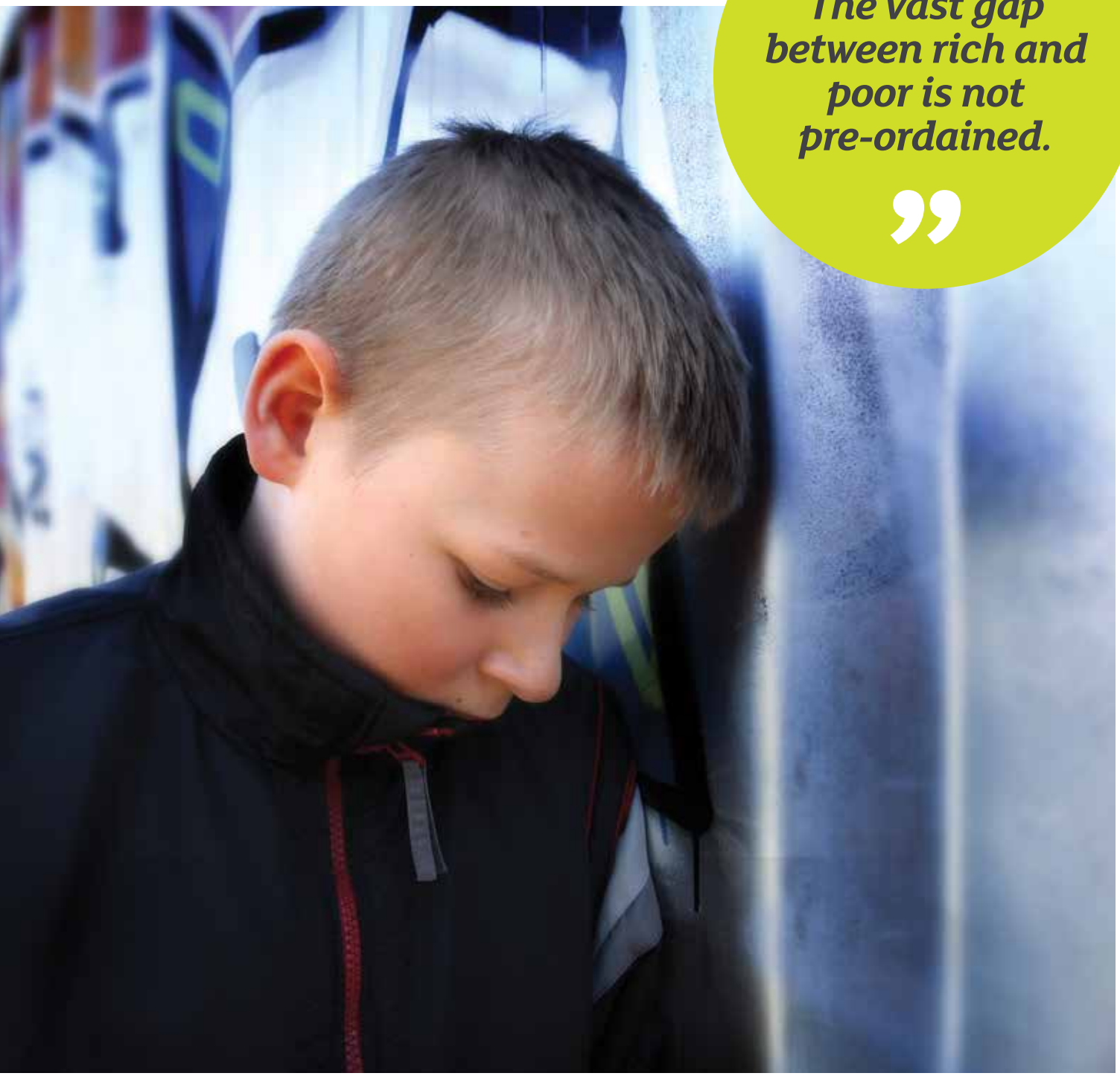
"It is estimated that one NEET cohort alone costs the taxpayer £13 billion in public finance costs over their lifetimes."
A radical plan to tackle Britain's 'NEET' crisis through mentoring, Centre for Social Justice, 2014.

And although recent statistics are difficult to find, the relationship between low educational attainment and crime is well-known:

> "There is a proven correlation between **illiteracy, innumeracy and offending** ...Before custody 52% of male offenders and 71% of female offenders have no qualifications whatsoever." *Factsheet: Education in Prisons,* Civitas: Institute for the Study of Civil Society, 2010.

This report is written against the background of that small selection of grim statistics. It is entirely possible to make a difference. The examples later in this report show that this is not rhetoric: poverty, ethnicity, gender and even special educational needs are not inextricably linked to low attainment. Schools need to do two things: ideally, get it right from the very beginning; if not, have clear strategies so that children who are falling behind can catch up. The "vast gap between rich and poor is not pre-ordained," said the White Paper.

> ***"The vast gap between rich and poor is not pre-ordained."***



Poverty and language

The influence of parents' talk

Developing children's language from the earliest possible moment is the most significant of all interventions in closing the gap.

Important research in the United States in the 1990s showed the massive gap between the vocabulary of children from low-income backgrounds and others. Hart and Risley recorded and counted vocabulary and the quality of the talk between 42 children and their parents during their first three years:

> "We saw that the time and amount of talking that went on in the family did not vary systematically with the gender of the child, the ethnic background of the family, the birth of a new baby, or if both parents were working. But time and talk were associated with the socio-economic status of the family."

Children from the 'welfare families' not only knew fewer words but were also adding words more slowly to their vocabulary.

Building vocabulary through books and reading – the role of parents

Unsurprisingly, reading and being read to develop vocabulary. A child who listens to stories and learns to read independently learns new words, including synonyms for known words, feeding the vocabulary that can be drawn on for writing.

Research published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2011 showed that the 15-year-olds in the PISA 2009 study whose parents had often read with them during the first year in primary school showed 'markedly higher scores' than those whose parents did so 'infrequently or not at all'.[4] Across the 14 countries for which the OECD had data, the difference averaged 25 score points – well over half a school year.

This partly reflected socio-economic differences. However, when the researchers compared pupils from similar backgrounds, pupils whose parents had read to them regularly scored, on average, 14 points higher than those whose parents had not.

Cracking the alphabetic code

Children who struggle with reading are likely to continue to struggle – unless someone intervenes swiftly. This is what Keith Stanovich called, in a well-known phrase, the 'Matthew effect': the "rich-get-richer and poor-get-poorer patterns of reading achievement".[5] So, although children need to listen to and talk about lots of stories, it is vital, particularly for children in areas of deprivation, that they crack the alphabetic code (phonics), so that they learn to read – and do read – for themselves. The National Curriculum 2014 emphasises the importance of both these aspects.

> ***"Children from the 'welfare families' not only knew fewer words but were also adding words more slowly to their vocabulary."***

> ***"In the 30% most deprived areas only 44% of the children achieved a 'good level of development'."***

Socio-economic group	Child's average recorded vocabulary at 30 months	Number of new words being added, on average, between the ages of 30 – 36 months
Children from welfare families	357 words	168 words
Children from professional families	766 words	350 words

Data from Hart & Risley's research[3]

Intervening early

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) profile scores for 2012/13 showed that in the 30% most deprived areas[6] only 44% of the children achieved a 'good level of development'.[7] In the other areas, 56% of children achieved this – a gap of 12 percentage points by the end of Reception.

If the gap is to be closed, one of the ways to do this is to identify, very clearly, the children who have still not grasped phonic decoding before the end of Year 1 – hence the phonics screening check. The DfE undoubtedly intends this to act as a lever – because we know that intervening early makes a difference.

But action can start sooner. The DfE's analysis of the 2012 screening check results showed that a pupil who had been working securely within 'linking sounds and letters' (on the 2011 EYFS Profile) was two and a half times more likely to meet the threshold than a pupil with the same characteristics who was not. A pupil who was working securely within the 'writing' scale was three times more likely to meet the threshold. A pupil's first language made very little difference as to whether they met the threshold or not.[8]

Reading and inspection

The *School inspection handbook* refers specifically to "pupils' writing and communication skills, as well as their reading skills". It says that inspectors "should also consider the extent to which the school intervenes to provide support for pupils, especially those that are at risk of underachieving". Inspectors might therefore ask what you have done to support the children who come up from Reception with low profile scores in communication, and in language and literacy.

Inspectors will consider the results of the phonics screening check and will look closely at the quality of the teaching of reading (including phonics). They will also listen to lower-attaining pupils read.

Children who have not met the threshold in the check in Year 1 will do it again in Year 2. Inspectors will therefore want to track the progress of those children from Year 1 into Year 2.

ACTION POINTS

1. Analyse the EYFS profile scores of children entering Year 1 by group as well as by performance. For example, what are the scores for the children eligible for the Pupil Premium, for white British boys and for summer-born children? Are there other groups about whom you need information?
2. What additional teaching or interventions have you put in place – and how quickly – for the children with the lowest scores? What was the impact? For instance, is it reflected in their scores on the screening check?
3. Evaluate how much *extra* time you give to talk and story-reading for the children from language-deprived backgrounds.
4. Read *Phonics: Getting the best results* (in the Oxford School Improvement series), particularly Step 3 and the action points.
5. Use the screening check results to pinpoint any GPCs that children found particularly difficult. Review when and how teachers are teaching these in the light of the National Curriculum 2014 programmes of study.
6. Compare the screening check results with each child's EYFS profile scores. What is the picture in your school? Do you need to intervene for any group(s) earlier?

Three schools close the gap

‘Ambassadors’ provide support for maths

Lord Scudamore Academy is a very large primary school in Hereford with over 620 children. It became an Academy on 1 June 2011.

It continues to be the lead school in a federation that now includes six other schools. When this case study was written, the school had two headteachers; it now has a third.

Identifying the problem

Led by the first two headteachers, the school had used staff research groups across the federation since 2009. During 2010/2011, the mathematics research group wanted to improve the performance of children who were working only at Level 2C at the end of key stage 1. The group identified around six common difficulties, including number bonds beyond ten, understanding equivalence, as well as multiplication and division.

Action taken

Children across the eight local schools were invited to reply to an advertisement to be a ‘maths ambassador’. The plan was that these older children (Years 5 and 6) worked with children in Years 2 and 3 who had been identified as needing help.

Lord Scudamore School recruited 12 maths ambassadors (eight boys, four girls). Workshops, led by teachers from each of the eight schools involved, were used to train the potential ambassadors and to use the structural apparatus, *Numicon*, to support them.

The first programme ran for six weeks, during which the ambassadors worked one-to-one with a younger child for three thirty-minute sessions a week. All in all, the ambassadors and their buddies spent around nine hours over the six weeks out of their own classroom. Sessions were held at the beginning of the day to minimise the impact on other learning.

Evaluating impact

At the end of the programme (December 2010), the research group met to assess the results, both in terms of the development of maths and more generally.

The detailed tracking showed that, in two terms, both buddies and ambassadors had made progress. All 24 Year 3 buddies had made progress: one made five sub-levels’ progress; 14 made two sub-levels’ progress, and nine made one sub-level’s progress. Three ambassadors had made three sub-levels’ progress; two made two sub-levels’ progress; five made one sub-level’s progress. Only two had made no progress, (one of whom had suffered a family trauma).

There were other gains, too, for both ambassadors and buddies.

The ambassadors had had to be very secure in their own knowledge. By the end of the programme, they believed they were good at maths and had developed the personal skills to explain their understanding and teach others. The importance of talk as part of embedding key mathematical concepts was clear. They were able to teach successfully, because they had already understood the work themselves. The buddies benefited from extra attention as well as additional support in aspects of maths that, if not understood, lead to underachievement.

> “*Embed concepts by talking about them.*”

> “*All 24 Year 3 buddies made progress.*”

Next steps

Following the evaluation, the same ambassadors, along with teaching assistants, attended an extra training day. This time, a teaching assistant used a session to go through the lesson plan first. The ambassadors were then responsible for planning and for providing feedback to their buddies and the class teachers. They saw themselves as teachers and were astute in describing the best and worst aspects of the role. The most difficult aspect was keeping the attention of their buddies. Their advice to future ambassadors was, "Don't be too nice too soon". Essentially they described what makes a good teacher – and the challenges.

Building on success

The ambassadors programme represented good value for money, with benefits for both ambassadors and buddies, and there are now ambassadors for literacy, too.

The two headteachers involved, Peter Box and Paul Whitcombe, felt that confidence and self-belief were the keys to success, characteristics that underpinned this programme.

ACTION POINTS

1. Set up a group of teachers – and maybe teaching assistants, too – to identify a small number of common difficulties that are holding back children who are still underperforming in maths by the end of key stage 1. Are these conceptual difficulties (e.g. about place value), about recording or about recalling number facts?

2. Ask a governor to talk to small groups of children about their confidence in maths. Try to pin down (i) where they feel secure (ii) where they feel they get stuck (iii) what sort of help might make a difference. Ask your maths coordinator to brief the governor.

3. Observe a selection of maths lessons. In each lesson, really focus on finding answers to the following questions:

   - How much time do the children have to talk about maths *to each other,* for instance by working *as a group* to solve problems (rather than simply answering the teacher's questions)?
   - How well does the teacher probe and build on children's answers?
   - What new mathematical vocabulary is introduced – and how well? Check children's understanding by asking questions towards the end of the lesson.
   - How flexible are teachers in moving away from their planned content to talk about misconceptions and secure key learning?
   - If teaching assistants are supporting individuals or groups, what is the quality of their talk?
   - Ask a few pupils in each class to solve a problem that you know they did some weeks earlier. Can they solve it again and, importantly, can they tell you how they did it?
   - Add your own questions, but focus on *talk*.

4. Are there times when you could fit in extra teaching? Could children teach other children in your own version of an 'ambassadors' scheme? This would also increase opportunities for talk about maths – or, indeed, other subjects.

5. Read Ofsted's maths report: *Good practice in primary mathematics: evidence from 20 successful schools* (2011).[9] In particular, read the illustrations at paragraphs 26 and 37 that involve pupils' talk.

6. Whatever the intervention or support, is it value for money in terms of the progress the children make compared to the time and staffing you allocate to it?

Teaching, assessment and intervention in maths

Thomas Jones Primary School in the London borough of Kensington and Chelsea is a one-form entry school with its own nursery. When this case study was written, eligibility ligibility for Free School Meals was 52% and around 80% of the children were learning English as an additional language. Over 95% of the 235 children come from the high-density housing of Ladbroke West, just yards away.

Making the most of teaching time

Maximising the effectiveness of teaching time is fundamental at Thomas Jones. It is there for the teacher and the children to be engaged together. James Clements, one of the school's two assistant headteachers when this was written, was emphatic that "every child has to learn everything" and that the way to high standards is to find out "what the child does not know and teach it. ...If we don't teach it to them, they won't learn it."

The focus in mathematics is on accuracy and depth rather than coverage: "learn a few things but actually learn them" – so, less an emphasis on steady improvement and more on being sure that every child has mastered key learning before moving on. The teaching distinguishes between what has to be learnt now (a sense of division, for instance) and what can reasonably be left until later (how to measure a pencil).

Maths lessons "are not used for working through a page of sums". Once the teacher is confident about the children's understanding, they might do two or three problems and complete the rest at home. Judicious groupings allow strugglers to catch up. Planning is done for just two days ahead, so that teaching can be adjusted quickly. The three-part structure – "starter, main course and dessert," as James described it – is replaced by 'sushi teaching', a menu of small, motivating items, presented so that the children want to learn.

> ***"The levels are used to pin down what children can and cannot do and then the right teaching follows."***

> ***"If we don't teach it to them, they won't learn it."***

Trackers record, in detail, what every single child really does and doesn't know. Although based on the QCDA's Assessing Pupils' Progress, the school has made the trackers its own. A statement is highlighted as 'achieved' only when the child can demonstrate mastery in three different ways: in the abstract, through applying the learning, and 'as if in a test'. Tracking is not used to 'produce' a level for monitoring – it works the other way around: the levels are used to pin down what children can and cannot do and then the right teaching follows.

> ***"Learn a few things but actually learn them."***

Intervention and support

Interventions and other support are vital, whether for an individual with severe special needs or for anyone who needs additional support. In Year 6 – and sometimes in Year 5 – after-school booster classes for no more than four children run for those who need 'a prod and a push' – in English as well as maths. One-hour optional booster classes run in Year 6: the topic is announced on the Monday for the following Wednesday. Out of the 30 Year 6 pupils, around 26 or 27 attend every week. Booster classes run for five days during the Easter holidays from 8.30am to 1.30pm. This provision sends out a serious message: in giving up holiday time, the teachers want the children to succeed.

For younger children, there's one-to-one support and intervention. For instance, Edi (not his real name) was learning English as an additional language. By the end of Year 1, he had a statement of special educational needs for his learning and behaviour and was still working towards Level 1 in maths. Break-times, lunch-times and other curriculum time, when it was needed, were all used to make sure he was learning. He left Year 6 at Level 5 in maths.

Impact

In the 2011 tests, 100% of children gained Level 4 and 57% Level 5. All the children also gained Level 4 in English, with 40% at Level 5. In the most recent tests (2013), all the children gained Level 4 in maths and 100% of disadvantaged pupils made the 'expected progress'; 57% of these pupils gained Level 5 or above in reading, writing and maths.

ACTION POINTS

1. Review your planning in the light of the work described here. What scope is there for adjustments that genuinely reflect assessments made during the week?
2. Ofsted's *School inspection handbook* refers to leaders' and managers' "deep and accurate understanding of the school's performance and of staff and pupils' skills and attributes." Select a small number of children who are shown on your tracking data to be making too little progress in maths. Find out from their class teacher(s) each child's specific difficulties. What do you put in place for any child who is struggling in maths so that the foundations are absolutely secure?
3. Use the descriptions of good and outstanding primary maths teaching (paragraphs 63 to 84) in Ofsted's 2012 report, *Mathematics: made to measure* to support some closely-focused observations.
4. Download Ofsted's 2009 booklet on primary maths: *Understanding the score*. Present pages 5 and 6 at a staff meeting with most of the descriptions in the 'good' column blanked out. (Leave in one or two as examples.) Ask staff to write their own descriptions and then compare them with the originals.
5. Are you clear – for all children – about what learning might reasonably be left until later and what needs to be taught because it underpins the next step(s) in learning?
6. Be clear about homework. Ofsted's *School inspection handbook* refers to it as follows: "Teaching should be understood to include teachers' planning and implementing of learning activities, including the setting of appropriate homework across the whole curriculum, as well as marking, assessment and feedback". Plan to use a staff meeting to consider what role you really want homework to play and what your website says about it.
7. Take a sample of lesson observations that senior leaders have done over the last few months, not just in maths. How many of them mention homework being used?
8. Read the descriptions of diagnosis and intervention on pages 81 to 97 of Ofsted's report, *Mathematics: made to measure*. Use them to evaluate your own approaches.

"All different. All equal": literacy for boys in Year 6

Temple Primary School is one of the largest schools in Manchester. Its 560 children come from a range of ethnic backgrounds: Asian Pakistani, in the main, but there are also Arab and Somali children. When this case study was written, over 90% of the children spoke a language other than English at home – mostly Urdu, Punjabi or Arabic – and, for some, English was their third language. Eligibility for Free School Meals was over 34%. The school is heavily over-subscribed.

Identifying the problem

One of the distinctive features of Temple Primary School's approach to literacy was the single-sex teaching for English in Year 6. "All different. All equal" is the school's motto.

In the tests in summer 2007, the boys' performance at Level 4+ was 13% points below that of the girls and 11% points below that of boys nationally. This was not a problem for Temple alone – the national gap at Level 4+ between boys and girls at the time was 9% points. The headteacher, Vicky Morton, and the assistant headteacher, Shaghafta Talib, decided to take grouping in Year 6 one step further. There had always been setting for English and mathematics and now, as an experiment, they decided to teach the boys and girls separately as a way of closing the gap.

'Pupil voice' surveys had also revealed the boys' low self-esteem and limited interest in reading and writing.

Action taken

The curriculum was designed to motivate the boys, improve their attitudes and raise expectations about what they could achieve. Although it is not the only thing that engages them, sport has a high priority and Manchester United has featured regularly. One year, the school borrowed hand-held devices and the boys used these as cameras. They toured Manchester United's grounds, made a video-recording of themselves, and developed their speaking and listening skills. In sessions at Manchester's City Learning Centre, they used their photographs and video material, together with text they had written, to create their own website which was then linked to the school's website.

The boys were also finding narrative writing very difficult, not least lengthy transcription. Using technology helped them to focus on important aspects of composition, especially structure and sequence. With commercial software, they built up frames that they could then fill in with text on screen.

Differences in planning for the two single-sex groups lie more in tailoring the content to meet needs. For example, the boys were hooked by a father's descriptions of his schooling in Somalia, including family life, the climate and walking barefoot.

Evaluating impact

An unexpected outcome of the experiment was the support boys gave each other. "We started to see them in a different light," said Shaghafta. "Friends did not seem to matter, as long as it was a boy they were helping." "We used to have fights," said one boy, "but now we help each other."

In the tests the next year (2008), the proportion of boys achieving Level 4+ rose dramatically from 65% in 2007 to 91%. This was 14% points above the national figure for boys at Level 4+ and also above that of the girls in the school (82%). Again in 2009, the boys' attainment of 85% at Level 4+ was above that of the girls (73%) and also 10% points above that of boys nationally.

The arrangements also had a positive impact on the boys' behaviour and they settled to work more quickly. "If girls were there, it's always a problem who to sit next to; it wastes time"; "We spend more time arguing with girls and less time working". They enjoyed being with one another, too, and grew in confidence. "Boys correct each other without laughing"; "We did drama to Year 3 – wouldn't have done this with girls"; "I feel more confident to speak when girls aren't there."

> ***"An unexpected outcome of the boys-only group was the support that they gave each other. "We used to have fights but now we help each other."***

> ***"'Pupil voice' surveys revealed the boys' low self-esteem and limited interest in reading and writing."***

ACTION POINTS

1. Although you will know about the *achievement* and *attainment* of boys and girls in your school, what about boys' attitudes to and confidence in reading and writing? Consider conducting separate boy/girl attitudinal analyses.
2. Take a 'boys-only' sample of English/literacy books and look at the marking. Is it precise about what has been done well; clear about what needs to be done better; does it give the boys clear, focused targets for the next piece of work? Do you give them time to respond to and act on what you say?
3. Observe and record the interactions between boys and girls in Years 5 and 6 during a few English lessons. Think about giving this task to a trainee teacher or a governor and asking them to report back to you.
4. Do you often try deliberately to have mixed-sex groups? Consider providing opportunities for boys to work in pairs, groups or a team together.
5. Experiment with single-sex groupings (see above). You could ask children to evaluate this as an activity. Ask a male and a female governor to lead the discussions with separate groups of boys and girls and appoint pupils as note-takers. Ask the two note-takers to report back to their group and then to the whole class.
6. What is the balance of male and female visitors/speakers at key stage 2? If men are under-represented, could you invite more? Ask the boys whom they would like to listen to (within reason!).

The girls, however, benefited, too. 'Pupil voice' surveys revealed that they liked a classroom without boys.

In 2011, girls' attainment at Level 4+ (90%) was better than that of the boys (68%). At Level 5, the performance of both boys (26%) and girls (45%) was better than the national figures (23%, 35%). In terms of progress from key stage 1 to key stage 2, 90% of the boys and 91% of the girls in the 2011 cohort made the 'expected progress' compared to 81% of boys and 86% of girls nationally.

Parents' views

Parents were positive about the arrangements – particularly when they saw the progress their sons were making. The school was keen to point out to parents, however, that the single-sex groupings were not about reflecting Islamic culture, a real possibility in a school where the majority of the children were Muslim.

Impact

The school's 2013 inspection report said: "The school is strongly committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils and is successful in narrowing the gap between the performance of different groups, such as the gap between the achievement of girls and boys. Leaders correctly identified that this was an issue and took swift and very effective action to boost the performance of boys. As a result, boys outperformed girls for the first time in this year's statutory assessment tests."

> ***"I feel more confident to speak when girls aren't there."***

What can we learn

> *The inspectors used the same information that the school itself had but which it had not scrutinised closely enough to pinpoint underachievement.*

In their different ways, the three schools all show that it is possible to close the gap. This section of the report looks at the four key judgements in the inspection framework – achievement, quality of teaching, behaviour and safety, leadership and management – against the background of the work of the three schools and the theme of 'closing the gap'.

Achievement

Each school illustrates practical strategies, of very different sorts, to close or narrow the gap. But the work also exemplifies the high quality leadership that the headteachers and other senior staff exercised in "creating a culture that fosters improvements in the school… meet[ing] the needs of a diverse pupil population, enabling all pupils to overcome specific barriers to learning" – as Ofsted's inspection handbook puts it.

The headteachers and their staff knew where they had to act to make a difference, whether it was in improving language in the Nursery, helping those struggling with maths to catch up or re-engaging boys in their learning. Not only did they use their data intelligently, but they also knew what difference their interventions had made to particular groups.

A report by Ofsted, published in January 2011, *Removing barriers to literacy*, includes a salutary tale about knowing your own school's data well. Inspectors commented:

> "The schools visited were not always sufficiently aware of differences in the effectiveness of their provision for various groups of pupils and the reasons for the differences. Senior staff did not always analyse data on pupils' progress sharply enough. For example, one of the primary schools visited had been judged to be outstanding at its previous section 5 inspection. However, standards in English following the inspection were declining. Although the headteacher and senior leaders said that this decline had been predicted, they were unable to identify the reasons for it and so were not arresting the problem. The senior staff had not recognised that the achievement of the White British pupils, who were in a minority in the school, was particularly poor."

The inspectors used the same information that the school itself had but which it had not scrutinised closely enough to pinpoint underachievement.

That report was published at a time when contextual value-added data was still being used in inspections. Possibly as a result of that, the inspectors found that "even in the very effective schools visited, although their disadvantaged pupils overall achieved well compared with similar groups of pupils nationally, high attainment did not follow universally." This was because, as the report put it, "headteachers sometimes limited their ambition for pupils because they measured success against the average for the pupil group rather than against the national average for all pupils." It hardly needs to be said that schools are less likely to succeed in closing the attainment gap if they set lower targets for pupils from low-income families – in other words, if they have lower expectations – than for other groups of children.

> ***Economic disadvantage in itself is not an insurmountable barrier to educational success.***

Inspectors will dig beneath the headline figures, using RAISEonline but also any other data you provide. You need to know how well your different groups of children are doing against the national figures *for all pupils* – and to interrogate your data with that in mind.

Unseen children

The theme of hidden minorities in schools was revisited when Ofsted published *Unseen children: Access and achievement twenty years on* in June 2013. It said: "It is too easy to lose sight of pupils from low income backgrounds in schools where they make up a smaller proportion of the total number of pupils on roll. In these schools, the stronger performance of the majority of pupils can mask weaker performance of those pupils eligible for Free School Meals."

It commented: "economic disadvantage in itself is not an insurmountable barrier to educational success. Some schools with high proportions of pupils eligible for Free School Meals do very well for this group, while others in the same geographical location do not."[10]

ACTION POINTS

Reading task

Read the lecture by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector that launched the *Unseen children* report. You can download it at: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/unseen-children-hmci-speech

What are the answers to these questions in your school?

1. What is the make-up of the different groups in your school? Remember, circumstances may mean that you have sizeable groups of children who are not represented by data in RAISEonline.
2. Does good achievement overall in your school hide underachievement by particular groups?
3. Which groups of children make the least progress in relation to their starting points?
4. What have you done so far to close any gaps?
5. How well are specific groups of children doing in relation to national expectations for all children?
6. What is the impact of your provision for your children who are eligible for the Pupil Premium?

Quality of teaching

Look at the grade descriptor for ‘outstanding’ in the *School inspection handbook* and then re-read the accounts of the work of the three schools.

“Teachers [who] use well-judged and often imaginative teaching strategies” are just what you might see if you were at Temple Primary in terms of the boys’ participation or at Thomas Jones in terms of children’s involvement in additional learning.

At Lord Scudamore, “clearly directed and timely support and intervention, match[ing] individual needs accurately” is a very good description of the maths ambassadors project while “setting appropriate homework” is a key element of the maths work at Thomas Jones. The children in all three of the schools would be eloquent ambassadors, too, for the quality of the teaching.

Remember that, if you are using the grade descriptors to evaluate teaching in your school, “they are not designed to be used to judge individual lessons”. You need to think about teaching more widely, especially about how well children make progress *over time* as a result of that teaching. The senior staff in each of the three schools were able to describe very tellingly how teaching had made a difference – and the impact was clear from their data.

ACTION POINTS

1. Identify specific aspects of teaching or the curriculum that have made a difference in terms of closing the attainment gap in either English or maths. Be specific about what those aspects were and the impact they had. How accurately can you quantify that impact?
2. Read Ofsted’s short guidance note: *Why do Ofsted inspectors observe individual lessons and how do they evaluate teaching in schools?* (140050), 2014.

Behaviour and safety

Attitudes and conduct

In terms of behaviour and safety, the judgement on "pupils' attitudes to learning and conduct in lessons and around the school" is closely linked to the one on teaching. Cooperative attitudes start early. Look at the contrasting descriptions below.

"Teachers report to me that a growing number of children cannot form letters or even hold a pencil. Many cannot sit and listen. Many can scarcely communicate orally, let alone frame a question. Many cannot use a knife and fork". *Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education, in a speech at the Durand Academy, 1 September 2011.*

At lunchtimes in the Nursery at Thomas Jones Primary, around six children sit at each table, with an adult. Their teacher, one of the two assistant heads, is one of them. The tables have gingham tablecloths, knives, forks and spoons, and proper plates. There are glasses and jugs of water. Almost all the children eat a school meal. The school's chef sends the food to the Nursery in containers so that the adults can serve the children, ask them what they'd like and talk about the various foods. They explain that Yorkshire pudding is not a cake and needs to be eaten with a knife and fork. Conversation is encouraged; 'please' and 'thank you' are emphasised. This is how behaviour and vocabulary are taught and learnt.

You can see how the daily routine described here could feed into a judgement about children's "respect, courtesy and good manners towards each other and adults", as well as contributing to the inspectors' judgement on the 'social' element of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Attendance

From January 2012, inspectors have judged attendance and punctuality – at school and in lessons – under 'Behaviour and safety'. In thinking about groups of children and the effects of absence on achievement and attainment, the following groups need particular attention: persistent absentees; young carers; children and young people who are simply 'missing'; children who are absent abroad, perhaps on extended holidays in India or Pakistan; Gypsy and Traveller children; parents who take their children out of school for holidays in term-time; excluded pupils. You should add children who are Looked After to that list.

Remember that one of the inspectors' questions will be about "enabling all pupils to overcome specific barriers to learning". Absence is certainly a barrier; if children aren't there, they can't learn. What is the quality of 'catching-up' when children return, whether they've been away for a day or a whole term? This is particularly important when learning builds so much on what has gone before. Imagine the learning a child in Year 1 would miss in phonics if she or he were absent even for just a week.

Case studies

In the guidance for 'behaviour and safety' in the *School inspection handbook*, there's a reference to inspectors "look[ing] at a small sample of case studies in order to evaluate the experience of particular individuals and groups, such as disabled pupils and those who have special education needs, Looked After children and those with mental health needs."

Don't wait for inspectors to do case studies. Choose a child in your school like Edi (see page 11) and investigate what his or her experience has been so far. Focus on the range of interventions and support that you have provided – and what their impact has been for that particular child. Draw together all the data and other information you have, taking care with anything that is confidential. What conclusions can you draw?

ACTION POINT

In June, look back at the attendance of all the children who did not meet the threshold on the phonics screening check. Is there any relationship between attendance and their score on the screening check?

> ***"Teachers report to me that a growing number of children cannot form letters or even hold a pencil."***
>
> Secretary of State for Education

Leadership and management

A vision for excellence

“High performing leaders of teaching were visible in classrooms. As credible teachers themselves, they were a source of advice and inspiration for others. Moreover, this helped to achieve a high degree of consistency in the quality of teaching across the school.”[11]
The report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills 2012/13, Ofsted.

The *School inspection handbook* says that inspectors should (among other things) consider: “…how well leaders, managers and governors pursue excellence, modelling professional standards in all of their work, for example through: the creation of a culture of high expectations and aspirations, academically and socially”.

Since you no longer have to complete Ofsted’s self-evaluation form, use the flexibility this gives you to monitor, evaluate and present your school’s work in the way that suits you and your circumstances best.

The headteacher of Thomas Jones Primary School, talking about his school for this report, said, “When children come through the gate, they’re not Somali children or Pakistani children; they’re Thomas Jones children”. He continued, “There isn’t a ceiling; there’s only the ceiling we impose.”

ACTION POINT

Re-read Ofsted’s 2009 report, *Twenty outstanding primary schools: excelling against the odds*. Use it as a prompt for self-evaluation, particularly the brief questions in the introduction relating to consistency, tracking and support, teaching and learning, children’s views, and leadership. If you were visited by the inspectors who wrote *Twenty outstanding primary schools*, what initiatives would you showcase in terms of closing the gap in your school?

ENDNOTES

1 Statistical First Release: *Children Looked After in England (including adoption and care leavers) - year ending 31 March 2013,* DfE, 26 September 2013.

2 Statistical First Release: *National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2 in England 2013 (revised),* DfE, 12 December 2013.

3 *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*, Betty Hart & Todd R Risley, Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co, 1995, page 164.

4 *PISA in focus 10: What can parents do to help their children succeed in school*? OECD, 2011.

5 Keith Stanovich, ‘Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy,’ *Reading Research Quarterly,* Fall 1986, XXI/4.

6 Children living in the 30% most disadvantaged areas are identified by their postcodes collected via the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. The “measure of deprivation used is the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2010 constructed by the Social Disadvantage Research Centre at the University of Oxford. The Index is constructed using measurements of the Income, Employment, Health, Education and Skills, Housing, Crime and Living Environment characteristics of a given area.” *Early Years Foundation Stage Results in England: 2012/13. Methodology document*, DfE, October 2013.

7 “Children will be defined as having reached a ‘good level of development’ at the end of the EYFS if they achieve at least the expected level in: the early learning goals in the prime areas of learning (personal, social and emotional development; physical development; and communication and language) and; the early learning goals in the specific areas of mathematics and literacy.” *Early Years Foundation Stage Results in England: 2012/13. Methodology document,* DfE, October 2013.

8 *Topic note: 2012 phonics screening check. Research report* (DFE-RR287), DfE, 2013.

9 *Good practice in primary mathematics: evidence from 20 successful schools* (110140), Ofsted, 2011.

10 *Unseen children: Access and achievement twenty years on* (130155), Ofsted, 2013.

11 *The report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills 2012/13* (130236), Ofsted, 2013.

The references to inspection in this report apply only to England.

Helping you to close the gap

Questions to ask to help you support all children's learning and progress in school

Oxford School Improvement

YOUR QUESTIONS	LITERACY	MATHS
How can I improve learning at the earliest stages to reduce the need for intervention later on?	Ruth Miskin's *Read Write Inc. Phonics* is a systematic literacy programme rooted in phonics. Thorough initial assessment ensures children work at the right level and so experience success from the start. *Floppy's Phonics Sounds and Letters* is a systematic, synthetic phonics teaching programme developed by Debbie Hepplewhite. It builds the strongest foundation for early reading through rigorous phonics teaching, practice and consolidation. *Project X Origins* hooks children in to reading right from the very start. It combines careful levelling and phonic progression with action-packed stories, exciting 3D illustration, a continuous character adventure, and fascinating non-fiction.	Using *Numicon*, children investigate mathematical ideas through the use of structured apparatus and conversation right from the Foundation Stage. This provides a firm foundation for their understanding of number and number relationships, reducing the likelihood for confusion later on. *MyMaths* presents and revises concepts and methods, providing opportunities from the early stages for practice and consolidation of maths knowledge. *Maths Makes Sense*, developed by Richard Dunne, uses concrete objects, talk and action to teach children mathematical concepts from the start, helping them to develop a deep understanding at the earliest stage, and make connections to new learning with confidence.
Am I catching every child the moment they fall behind?	The *Read Write Inc. One-to-one Phonics Tutoring Kit* provides daily assessment and effective tutoring to ensure no child slips through the net and that every child can read by age six. *Read Write Inc. Fresh Start* is a highly effective phonics-based literacy programme for children who have not learned to read the first time around. *Project X Code* is the first reading intervention to embed systematic, synthetic phonics within a highly motivational 3D adventure series.	*Numicon* assessment signposts alert the teacher to areas that may need further reinforcement. For children who have fallen behind, *Numicon Closing the Gap* and *The Numicon Intervention Programme* are effective programmes for catch-up and intervention. *MyMaths* offers a powerful assessment manager system that allows teachers to monitor progress of individual children and see easily, at a glance, how each child is performing. *Maths Makes Sense* provides a dynamic cycle of daily teaching and ongoing assessment, with built-in tools to help monitor the progress of every child and ensure none are left behind.
Have I put specific strategies in place for focusing on boys' achievement and motivation, and similarly for girls?	*Project X* is a whole-school reading and writing programme that is built to motivate 21st century children, especially boys.	*Numicon's* use of structured imagery supports mathematical communication – written and spoken – which increases achievement in both boys and girls. *With MyMaths*, children learn through carefully designed lessons, homework, games and tools that both challenge and entertain – and always stay focused on the maths. *Maths Makes Sense* enables all children to become confident with maths. This leads to motivation and enjoyment for boys and girls alike.
Are my teachers as effective as they can possibly be?	Leading literacy experts including **Ruth Miskin, Debbie Hepplewhite, Gary Wilson, Nikki Gamble, Sue Palmer** and **Ros Wilson** can provide a range of inspiring professional development solutions including training and free online videos. Find out more at **www.oxfordprimary.co.uk**	*Richard Dunne Maths* offers professional development to support the whole school. *Numicon* provides a range of professional development options tailored for your school's particular maths development needs. Find out more at **www.oxfordprimary.co.uk**
Are my parents fully involved in helping support their child's progress?	*Oxford Owl* is a FREE website which helps parents to support their child with reading and maths. It includes over 250 free eBooks, advice and engaging activities. Visit **www.oxfordowl.co.uk**	

Closing the Gap

Giving every child the chance to succeed

Available to download at
www.oxfordprimary.co.uk

For further support please call
our customer care line on **01536 452610.**

Oxford University Press is grateful to the headteachers and staff of those schools referenced in the case studies.

Please note: The photographs of children in this report are for illustration purposes only. They do not show children from the schools featured.

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