

60-SECOND SUMMARY

There is growing recognition that improving schools is a crucial component of efforts to create a 'northern powerhouse'. Our analysis of education data reveals why northern schools are falling behind those in London:

- The divide between London and the north of England starts before children reach school age. The 'early years gap' between children from poorer and wealthier homes is almost twice as large in the North as it is in London.
- The North performs reasonably well on primary school attainment. Places like Redcar and Cleveland, Trafford and Warrington all have results that would be the envy of most London boroughs.
- Secondary school attainment in some parts of the North is a big cause for concern, and is the stage where educational inequalities widen sharply.
- Focusing on failing schools is important but will not be sufficient to eradicate educational inequality. Even good and outstanding schools have attainment gaps.
- Educational inequality is not just a problem for satellite and coastal towns: some major northern cities such as Liverpool, Leeds and Sheffield also struggle to raise attainment among disadvantaged pupils.
- Inputs matter: schools in the North receive significantly less money per pupil than those in London, and can struggle to attract and retain high-quality teachers and leaders.

The North has the potential to build on its burgeoning economic strengths, generating prosperity that will benefit the whole of the country. Addressing educational disadvantage must be at the heart of this transformation.

There has been a concerted effort to renew the economy in the north of England,¹ as part of the chancellor's 'northern powerhouse' agenda. And there is a growing recognition that education and skills need to be at the heart of this project. As Sir Michael Wilshaw argued recently: 'the northern powerhouse will splutter and die if their youngsters lack the skills to sustain it'.

Given the importance of education for building a stronger economy and society, educational outcomes in the North are a cause for concern. In simple terms, there is a gap in attainment between the north of England and the 'southern powerhouse' that is London – whose schools are a success story. This is particularly acute when looking at measures of educational inequality. If the north of England is to maximise its potential, it must improve its educational performance, especially for those children from poorer families. London's success is not an accident – results for disadvantaged pupils there have increased dramatically over the last decade. With

investment, collaboration and strong leadership, London has shown that success is possible.

Statistics for the whole of the North, however, obscure important differences about school performance. Our analysis of education data reveals a more complicated story about why northern schools are falling behind and the role that policy should play in addressing this issue.

KEY LESSONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

1. The divide between London and the North starts before children reach school age

In London, 59 per cent of children who are eligible for free school meals achieve a 'good level of development' when they complete reception class at age five. Meanwhile in the north of England only 49 per cent of similar pupils do so. What's more, the 'early years gap' between children from poorer and wealthier homes is almost twice as large in the North as it is in London. Given the strong correlation between early education and outcomes later in life, any efforts to tackle educational inequality in the North must start before children have reached school age.

¹ Throughout this report we use the north of England (or 'the North') to refer to the ONS regions of North West, North East and Yorkshire and the Humber.

2. The North performs reasonably well on primary school attainment, and high-performing local authorities are a source of expertise in the system

At the end of primary school, 80 per cent of pupils in the North achieve level 4 or above in reading, mathematics and writing – the same proportion as across England. What's more, the performance of disadvantaged pupils is higher in the North East and North West than it is in the rest of the country, with 67 per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals achieving level 4 or above, compared to a national average of 66 per cent. At a local authority level, around half of the North's local authorities outperform the national average. Redcar and Cleveland, Trafford and Warrington all have results that would be the envy of most London boroughs. It is important that the expertise of these local authorities is not lost as more schools become academies.

3. Secondary school attainment is a big cause for concern, and should be the policy focus

Secondary school attainment in the north of England lags behind that in London. This is also the stage where educational inequalities widen sharply. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in northern local authorities are rarely above the national average of 36.7 per cent, and less than 3 per cent of schools in the North have managed to eradicate the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their wealthier peers. School improvement policies and activities in the North should be focused towards the secondary stage.

4. Focusing on failing schools is not enough – even good and outstanding schools have attainment gaps

Tackling failing schools is a necessary but not sufficient measure to address educational inequality: even schools which are performing well still exhibit attainment gaps between wealthier and poorer pupils. In northern schools that are rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted there is a gap of 22 percentage points between pupils on free school meals and their better-off peers. This suggests that policymakers should focus on tackling the variation in performance that occurs within each school, for example by ensuring that schools spend their pupil premium resources effectively.

5. Educational inequality is not just a problem for satellite and coastal towns

Many commentators have focused on the difficulties

facing deprived coastal towns and satellite towns, such as Blackpool and Oldham. It is right to highlight the poor performance of these areas, but this should not obscure the fact that some major cities also struggle to raise attainment among disadvantaged pupils at secondary school age. In Liverpool, Sheffield and Leeds, less than a third of disadvantaged pupils achieve five good GCSEs including English and maths. This is a reminder that policymakers should not take their eye off the ball when it comes to school improvement in big cities.

6. Northern schools have a harder job, and should be compensated for this

Once school intake has been controlled for, the North East and North West come out as two of the highest-performing regions in the country (alongside London). Contextual value-added scores should not be used to make an 'excuse' for low overall attainment: raw results are hugely important for the individual pupils concerned. Rather, they should be used to show that schools in the north of England may actually have a harder job than those in other parts of the country, due to their more challenging intake, and need to be adequately compensated for this.

7. Schools in the North receive fewer resources than those in London

Despite often operating in harder contexts, schools in the north of England do not receive the same level of inputs as those in London. On average, northern primary schools receive £4,600 per pupil, which is £900 less than in London; northern secondary schools receive £5,700 per pupil, which is £1,300 less than in London. Some areas of the North can also find it particularly difficult to recruit and retain teachers, and there are more 'cold spots' without access to support from teaching schools. This suggests that the government should use its forthcoming review of the national funding formula to actively weight funding more heavily towards areas of the country which have high levels of disadvantage and which find it difficult to recruit teachers. It should also find ways to target teaching and leadership support to these cold spots – for example, by establishing professional development programmes or introducing student loan write-offs for those working in challenging contexts, and embedding programmes such as the National Teaching Service and Teach First, which are already geographically targeted.

For the full report, including all references, data sources and notes on methodology, see:
<http://www.ippr.org/publications/northern-schools-putting-education-at-the-heart-of-the-northern-powerhouse>

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