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DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Improving poorly performing schools in England

Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General
Improving poorly performing schools in England

CORRECTION

Executive Summary, paragraph 37, 3rd sentence

Text reads

"In 2004-05, 28 per cent of primary and 20 per cent of secondary schools had headteacher vacancies."

Text should read

"In 2004-05, around 11 per cent of all maintained schools advertised a headteacher post.[1] In a follow up survey of schools placing advertisements, 28 per cent of primary and 20 per cent of secondary schools responding reported that they had not made a permanent appointment."

Paragraph 3.27 (page 54)

Text reads

"Figure 35 shows that a large minority of schools are without a permanent headteacher or deputy."

Text should read

"Survey data in Figure 35 shows that a large minority of schools advertising for a new headteacher or deputy had not made a permanent appointment."

Figure 35 (page 54)

Title reads

"School leadership vacancy rates, 2004-05 school year"

Title should read

"Rates of unfilled school leadership vacancies, 2004-05 school year"

Y axis label reads

"Percentage of posts vacant"

Y axis label should read

"Percentage of advertised posts vacant"

Byline reads

"School leadership vacancy rates are high."

Byline should read

"Rates of unfilled school leadership vacancies are high.[2]"

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1   Additional contextual information provided by the Department for Education and Skills.
2   The full report on which Figure 35 is based is available at www.educationdatasurveys.org.uk/NAHT-SHA2005.pdf.

CONTENTS

Photographs courtesy of John Walmsley - www.educationphotos.co.uk and ©1999 Photodisc

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1   All children and young people need to develop the skills, knowledge and personal qualities to lead happy and successful lives. Their chances of doing so are strongly influenced by the standard of their school education. Failure to achieve sufficient GCSE passes, vocational qualifications, or proficiency in literacy and numeracy reduces the likelihood of going on to further and higher education and limits job opportunities.

2   A large proportion of schools provide high standards of education. GCSE and equivalent performance in England has improved, with 56 per cent of pupils achieving the benchmark five or more A* to C grades in 2005.[1] And primary schools are preparing more of their pupils with the basic literacy and numeracy skills that the pupils will need for their secondary education – in 2005, 79 per cent of pupils achieved the national target level in English and 75 per cent achieved it in mathematics. These achievements reflect the hard work of pupils, teachers and school leaders.

3   Nevertheless, a sizeable number of schools encounter problems that put children's education at risk, and some of these schools do not provide good value for money. In 2004-05, around £837 million was spent in England through a range of national programmes to help improve schools that were failing or at risk of failing **(Figure 1 overleaf)**. In addition, five new academies opened in 2004-05, with an estimated total development cost of around £160 million. This report focuses on whether:

- enough is being done to identify and support schools that show signs of deteriorating performance;

- effective measures are being taken to address poor performance; and

- 'recovered' schools continue to improve and do not start to fail again.

4   We assess the success of national initiatives and local action, and highlight good practice from which all schools can learn. Our findings are based on an analysis of financial data covering all the 23,000 maintained schools in England and performance data for poorly performing schools, supplemented by a survey of headteachers, visits to 14 schools and consultations with school advisers and school governors (Appendix 1).

Responsibilities for school performance

5   Key responsibilities for standards of education and school performance are as follows (and in **Figure 2 on page 3)**:

- **Schools** are responsible for educating their pupils, whose collective performance represents the performance of the school. Good schools are fully aware of their strengths and weaknesses and pursue continuous improvement. In particular, schools need an effective leadership team and good teachers. In 2004-05, schools in England received around £25 billion to spend on education and related activities.

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[1]   All references to GCSEs in this report include equivalent qualifications (including General National Vocational Qualifications). The performance for 2005 is based on provisional figures.

1	National programmes to improve schools, 2004-05	
Excellence in Cities aims to raise educational standards and promote social inclusion in deprived areas. Much of the funding is focused on improving teaching and learning and school leadership. Schools included in Excellence in Cities are also eligible to receive Leadership Incentive Grant. These schools receive per pupil around £322 more funding than the national average.		£352 million
Leadership Incentive Grant started in April 2003 to support secondary schools in deprived areas (and included in Excellence in Cities) or facing challenging circumstances, with a focus on collaboration between schools so as to strengthen leadership. Each school receives £125,000 a year for three years, and benefits from around £269 more funding per pupil than the national average.		£196 million
The Primary National Strategy assists low achieving primary schools and supports primary school leaders to promote high quality teaching across a broad curriculum through consultancy support. The Strategy includes the Primary Leadership Programme and the Intensifying Support Programme.		£130 million
The Key Stage 3 National Strategy focuses on under-performance of pupils between the ages of 11 and 14, aiming to raise attainment in core subjects. The Strategy provides consultancy support and training for schools as well as teaching materials and guidance. The Strategy extended in 2005 to become the Secondary National Strategy for School Improvement covering the 11 to 16 age range.		£123 million
Fresh Start and **Collaborative Restart** involve closing and re-opening a poorly performing school on the same site with a new name, mostly new staff and a new governing body. The Department for Education and Skills (the Department) provides additional revenue and capital funding for three years, with the revenue funding amounting to around £387 extra per pupil per year.		£23 million (including £15 million capital funding)
Secondary Performance Project involves over 500 under-performing schools, identified by the Department, that work in **collaboratives** with support from consultants or with support from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.		£8 million
Federations are groups of two or more schools with a formal agreement to work together to raise standards. The Department provides additional revenue funding to the 37 pilot federations which involve 192 schools.		£5 million
Academies are new schools that replace poorly performing schools in deprived areas. By September 2005, there were 27 academies open as autonomous schools, each backed by a private sponsor who works with the Department and local education partners. The capital cost of a 1,300 pupil academy is estimated at around £27 million, but their operating grants are broadly equivalent to other schools in similar circumstances.		Not applicable
Total		£837 million

Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from the Department

NOTE

In addition to these programmes, other national programmes such as the Behaviour Improvement Programme are used to improve schools. In 2004-05, local authorities were allocated around £325 million for school improvement advice and support.

- **Governing bodies** support school leadership teams and manage their performance, providing accountability to the local community. Each school has a governing body with extensive responsibilities, including budget and target setting and appointment of the headteacher. Governors are volunteers.

- **Local authorities** are responsible for the strategic leadership of schools in their areas. They provide central services, such as education welfare services, including additional support for schools whose performance is weak. Local authorities have statutory powers to enforce change in poorly performing schools. In addition to the £25 billion of spending that they delegated to schools, local authorities spent around £8 billion on schools and youth-related activities in 2004-05. Including the funding provided to schools, local authorities spent between £2,803 and £4,717 per pupil in 2004-05.

- **Ofsted** carries out independent inspections of all schools in England. Where Ofsted finds serious problems at a school, it puts the school into a category: Special Measures (for schools with the worst performance) or Notice to Improve.[2] Ofsted then monitors the progress of a school in Special Measures and reinspects it two years after recovery, and it reinspects schools with a Notice to Improve a year

2   Schools inspected before August 2005 that were weak but not needing Special Measures were put in the Serious Weaknesses or Underachieving categories.

2   Roles of the Department, Ofsted and local authorities

The Department:

- Advises on and implements legislation
- Allocates funding to local authorities
- Determines priorities
- Designs policies and implements initiatives
- Conducts research
- Provides guidance
- Monitors performance

Local authorities:

- Allocate funding
- Provide advisory support
- Set up collaboration between schools
- Monitor local performance
- Provide intensive assistance for poorly performing schools

School improvement

Ofsted:

- Provides the school self-evaluation form
- Provides school performance information
- Inspects schools
- Reviews performance of local authorities (with other inspectorates)
- Monitors progress of poorly performing schools
- Conducts research

Source: National Audit Office

NOTE

150 local authorities have responsibility for schools. Where there is a two-tier local authority structure (for example, county councils and district councils), the higher tier is responsible for schools.

after the original inspection. In 2004-05, the direct cost of Ofsted inspections of schools was around £60 million, with monitoring visits to schools in Special Measures costing an additional £2.5 million.

- **Department for Education and Skills (the Department)** has overall responsibility for the quality of school education in England. The Department provides direction to the schools sector, including through its National Strategies, and allocates funding to local authorities and, in certain circumstances, directly to schools.

6   In addition, the **National College for School Leadership** aims to be a driving force for better school leadership. It provides training and development for school leaders and works with the wider education community.

7   The Schools White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All* (October 2005) sets out changes that are intended to improve standards in schools. The proposals

are wide ranging and particularly emphasise enabling parents to exercise choice, changing the role of local authorities, and adopting stronger measures for tackling poorly performing schools **(Figure 3 overleaf)**.

Over 1,500 schools are performing poorly, but numbers are falling

8   Schools with weak leadership teams generally fail to recognise their weaknesses and are unable to tackle them when they do. Problems such as falling teaching standards or disruptive pupil behaviour may not be dealt with effectively, and pupil attainment will decline. **Figure 4 overleaf** shows the indicators of a school that is likely to fail an Ofsted inspection and be put into Special Measures or given a Notice to Improve. Not all schools that show some of these indicators are performing poorly. In particular, some schools in deprived areas are good schools where pupils make good progress despite low prior attainment.

3   Summary of the White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All*

The White Paper envisages:

a   A new school system

Schools will be encouraged to become 'trust' schools or 'foundation' schools with greater independence and freedom to appoint members of their governing body, manage finances, and control admissions. An Office of the National Schools Commissioner will be created to drive the changes, to match schools to 'partners' and to promote parental choice.

b   More engagement of parents

Parents will receive information about local schools and their performance. Parents will be able to request Ofsted action or even closure of a school. The Department will also provide funding to enable parents to set up new schools.

c   A changed role for local authorities

Local authorities will take on a more strategic role; commissioning rather than providing education. They will work with the Schools Commissioner to promote choice, diversity and fair access in

schools. They will have new powers to act where schools are performing poorly, for example by enforcing collaboration or closing schools.

d   Stronger measures to tackle poor performance of schools

Where a school enters Special Measures, the local authority must consider a range of options including closure and replacement of the school. If the school makes no progress in a year, the local authority must again consider closure. Schools given a Notice to Improve will be put into Special Measures where they fail to make progress over the following year.

e   A lighter touch for good schools

Ofsted will consult on whether to adopt a 'lighter touch' inspection system for good schools. The best specialist schools will be able to apply for more specialisms and teacher training provision. Good schools will be able to expand and form federations more easily.

Source: National Audit Office summary of the Schools White Paper 2005

4   Indicators of a poorly performing school

Unfilled places

School rolls falling as a result of school reputation

Weak leadership

Poor understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and its capacity to improve

Weak governance

Lack of support and challenge for the school leadership

Poor standard of teaching

Lack of skills and motivation of teaching staff; lack of engagement by pupils

Lack of parental engagment

Limited support for school and low aspirations of pupils and parents

Poorly performing school

Unfilled staff vacancies

High staff turnover and difficulty finding replacements

Environment

Dirty, untidy or cold classrooms; buildings in a state of disrepair

High rates of pupil absence

Authorised or unauthorised absence disrupting learning

Poor pupil behaviour

Disruption in the classroom, bullying or even violence; may be accompanied by high numbers of exclusions

Low pupil attainment

In absolute terms and/or after adjusted for context

Source: National Audit Office

9   Until the 2005-06 school year, Ofsted inspected each school every six years. There is always a risk that schools inspected some time ago may have lapsed into poor performance without being identified. Ofsted's new, shorter inspection cycle, under which schools will be inspected at least once every three to four years, will reduce this risk.

10   The Department analyses school performance data to identify schools that, although not currently in Ofsted categories, are performing poorly. It calls these schools 'low-attaining' or 'under-performing'. Low-attaining schools fall below the government's minimum, or 'floor' target for Key Stage 2 or GCSE results.[3] Under-performing schools are performing inadequately once their circumstances are taken into account: their results can be above average, but their circumstances mean that the results should be even better. The Department identifies under-performing secondary schools in order to give them additional support. It has begun the process of identifying under-performing primary schools, and has advised local authorities to use their own data to identify primary schools that perform worse than expected and may need additional support. For the remainder of this report, we use the term 'poorly performing' to refer to all such schools identified by Ofsted and 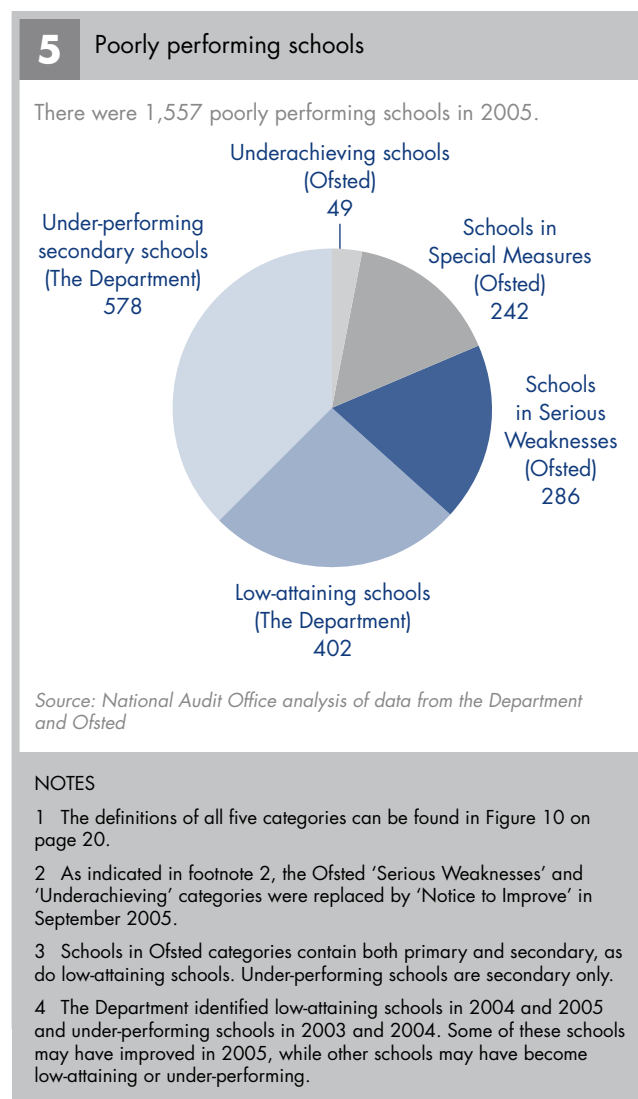the Department **(Figure 5)**, although it should be noted that the different categories of 'poorly performing' school are likely to require different types of support or intervention according to their situation.

11   As at July 2005, there were 1,557 poorly performing schools in England, which represented around 4 per cent of primary schools and 23 per cent of secondary schools. The percentage of secondary schools classed as poorly performing is much higher than the percentage of primary schools, largely because only the secondary schools total includes under-performing schools. We estimate that these 1,557 schools educate around 980,000 pupils, or 13 per cent of the school population. They comprised 577 (primary, secondary, special and pupil referral unit) schools in an Ofsted category, 402 (primary and secondary) low-attaining schools, and 578 (secondary) under-performing schools.

5   Poorly performing schools

There were 1,557 poorly performing schools in 2005.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from the Department and Ofsted

NOTES

1 The definitions of all five categories can be found in Figure 10 on page 20.

2 As indicated in footnote 2, the Ofsted 'Serious Weaknesses' and 'Underachieving' categories were replaced by 'Notice to Improve' in September 2005.

3 Schools in Ofsted categories contain both primary and secondary, as do low-attaining schools. Under-performing schools are secondary only.

4 The Department identified low-attaining schools in 2004 and 2005 and under-performing schools in 2003 and 2004. Some of these schools may have improved in 2005, while other schools may have become low-attaining or under-performing.

12   The 242 schools in Special Measures in July 2005 comprised 123 primary schools, 90 secondary schools and 29 special schools. Of these schools in Special Measures, **Figure 6 overleaf** shows that Outer London had the highest proportion (1.5 per cent) of its schools in Special Measures while the North East of England had the lowest (0.4 per cent). We found no clear reason for the strong performance of schools in the North East. However, part of the explanation may lie in the performance of local authorities in the region, which are, on average, assessed by the Audit Commission and Ofsted as better performing than the average for authorities in England.

3   The Department also sets floor targets for the performance of 14 year-olds (Key Stage 3) and monitors the performance of secondary schools against these targets.

6 Schools in Special Measures, by region of England, July 2005

Number of schools in Special Measures as a percentage of all schools within each region
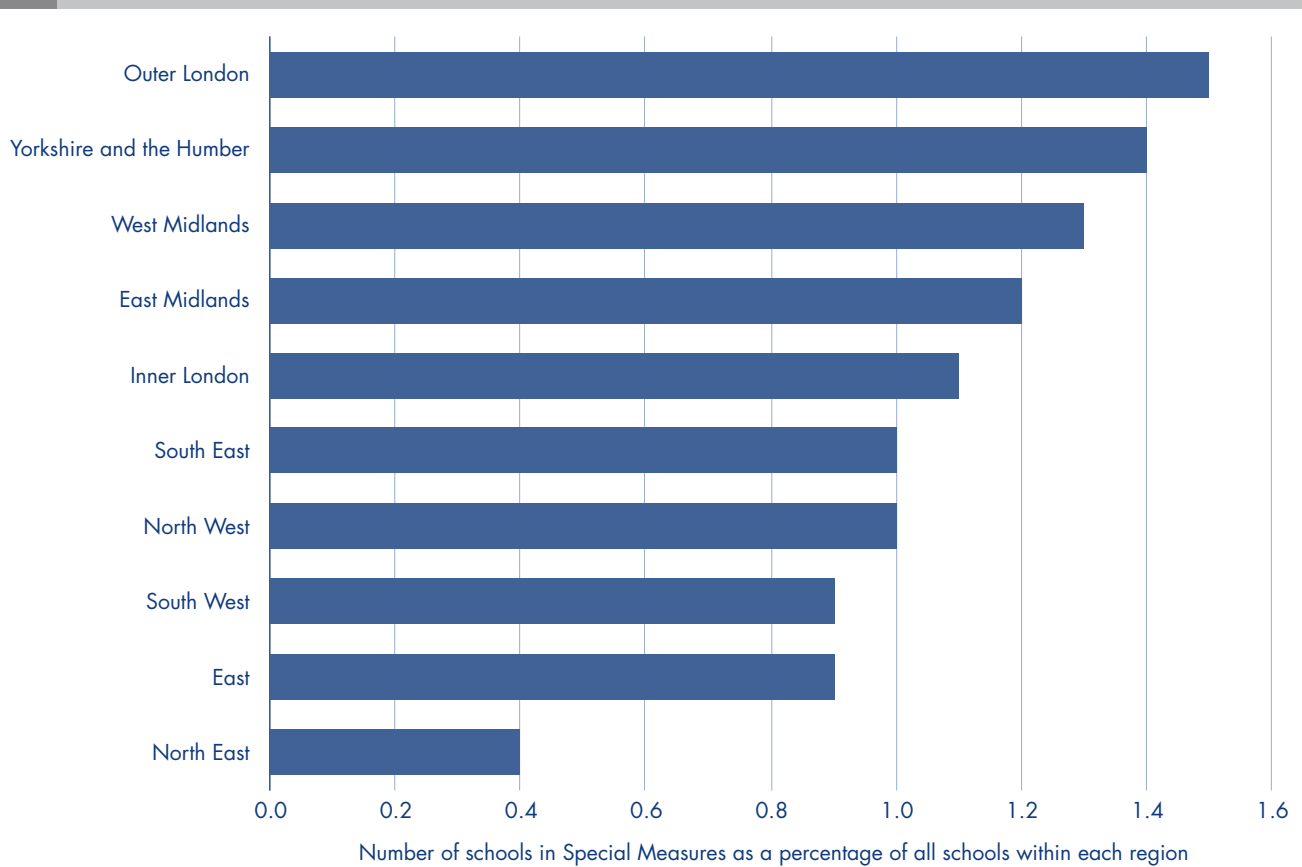
Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from Ofsted

13 Our analysis of the available information on trends shows that the number of schools in Special Measures declined by half between 1998 and 2005; the number of low-attaining secondary schools (where more than 80 per cent of GCSE pupils fail to achieve five passes at grade C or above) declined by over three-quarters between 1998 and 2004 **(Figure 7)**, and the number of persistently low-attaining primary schools fell from 430 in 2004 to 349 in 2005.[4]

14 The number of schools in an Ofsted category is influenced by the frequency of inspections and changes to the inspection framework. More frequent inspections, introduced in September 2005, could lead to a modest increase in schools in Ofsted categories, but by spotting signs of trouble earlier, the schools may be able to recover more quickly. Ofsted acknowledges that it has been less effective in giving sufficient attention to under-performing schools, compared with schools that are performing very poorly. It is aiming to make a greater contribution to improvements in under-performing schools through the shorter inspection cycle and by focusing its inspections more intensively on improvement and schools' capacity to improve.[5]

4   This group of low-attaining primary schools are those schools whose results have, over a four-year period, been persistently below the Department's 65 per cent targets for either English or mathematics (or both) at Key Stage 2. Due to fluctuating results with small cohorts of pupils, there are many more than this group of low-attaining primary schools below the floor target in each year, although the number has fallen from 5,240 in 2001 to 3,233 in 2005. The Department also has a 2008 target to reduce by 40 per cent the proportion of primary schools in which fewer than 65 per cent of pupils reach the expected level. In 2005, 14 per cent of primary schools were below the floor target in English and 21 per cent were below in mathematics.
5   *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2004-05,* Ofsted 2005.

7 Trends in the numbers of poorly performing schools, 1998 to 2005

There is a downward trend in the numbers of schools in Ofsted categories or with low attainment.

Serious Weaknesses (Ofsted category)

Special Measures (Ofsted category)

Low attainment – Primary

Low attainment – Secondary

Underachieving (Ofsted category)
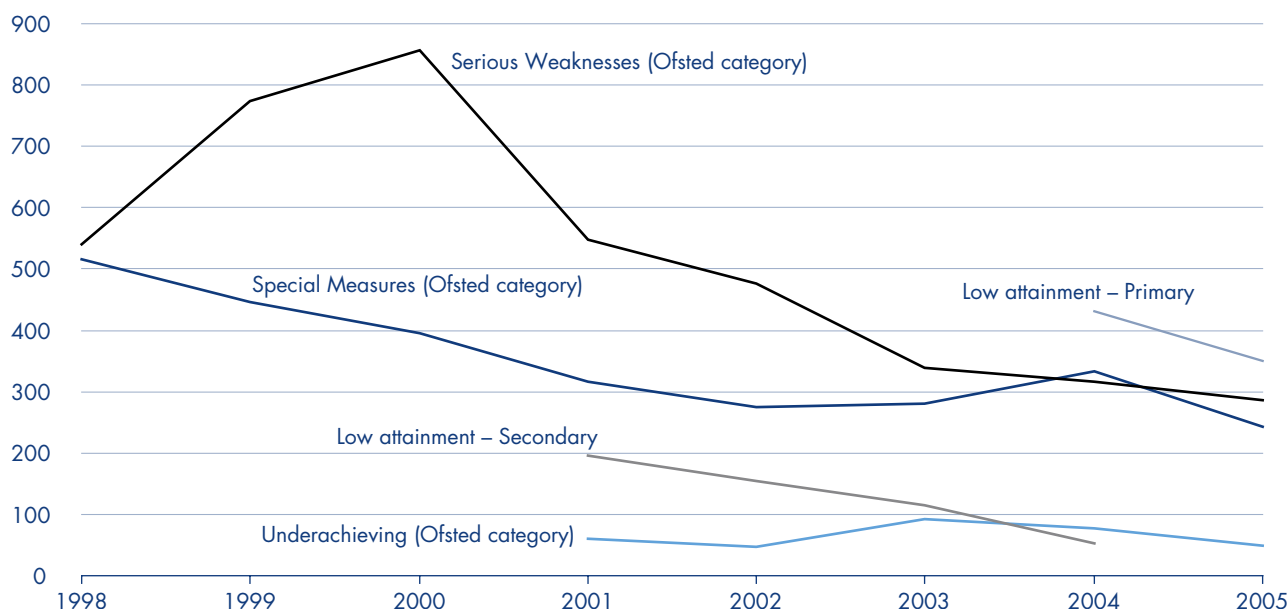
Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from the Department and Ofsted

NOTE

Data for Ofsted categories is as at the end of the summer term and includes primary and secondary schools. Trend data is not available for under-performing schools.

15 An inspection cycle that focused more on vulnerable schools and initiated improvement before decline set in could be even more effective. Following the recent White Paper[6], Ofsted is to consult on whether to move to a 'proportionate' inspection system from September 2006, with minimal inspection of high-performing schools and more frequent inspections of poorly performing schools. Such a system could take account of any representations made by parents.

Turning a school around takes time and can be expensive

16 If there is a delay in turning around a poorly performing school, not only do its pupils suffer a poor education for longer, but the damage to the school's reputation makes recovery even more difficult. Until October 2005, Ofsted generally allowed schools two years to improve their performance sufficiently to remove them from Special Measures. Around 85 per cent of schools recover, most within two years, but some take

four years or more. Ofsted's regular monitoring of their progress provides schools with an imperative to improve and helps them to develop their skills in self-evaluation and improvement planning. A minority of schools close after emerging from Special Measures: our analysis indicates that 40 per cent of schools that recovered in the mid-1990s have since closed and about 5 per cent of more recently recovered schools closed soon after recovery.

17 The 2005 White Paper proposes new arrangements in which schools requiring Special Measures will be given 12 months to demonstrate real progress or be considered for closure and replacement. Of the schools that do not close soon after going in to Special Measures, currently less than 10 per cent make a full recovery within 12 months, although around two-thirds of the schools make at least reasonable progress over the first 12 months. Ofsted will need to be fair and rigorous in collecting and assessing evidence of improvement, and schools will need more effective support, otherwise more schools will have to be closed or replaced.

6   *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All – More Choice for Parents and Pupils,* Department for Education and Skills, October 2005; Figure 3 on page 4.

18   When schools recover from an Ofsted category, it is usually by enhancing the capacity of staff, through training and advice provided for the school and individual staff members. Staff who are unable to improve have to be replaced which can be expensive, particularly in the case of school leaders who are entitled to substantial severance payments. Financial information is not available nationally for the cost of recovery from an Ofsted category. Costs vary substantially depending on the circumstance and size of the school. A straightforward case of weakness in a small primary school can sometimes be turned around at little cost, whereas a large secondary school with complex problems within both the school and its local community, together with a long record of poor performance, can cost £500,000 or more to turn around.

19   The most expensive option for school recovery is closing the school and replacing it with a new school with a new name. The Department has two school renewal programmes, Fresh Start and the Academies Programme, that fund this approach for turning around schools in the most difficult circumstances. Fresh Start schools re-open with refurbished facilities and major changes or additions to staff. Establishing a Fresh Start school costs on average around £2.2 million (a mixture of capital and revenue costs). A poorly performing school enters one of these programmes only after the proposal, either from or involving the local authority, is approved by the Secretary of State.

20   Academies usually open in new buildings, and therefore involve substantially more expenditure. The Department estimates that the capital cost of a new-build 1,300 pupil academy built under the current academies funding model is around £27 million, and that academies cost around £4 million more than similar-sized secondary schools that will be built under its Building Schools for the Future programme.[7] Academies have been relatively expensive in part because single-school procurements do not achieve the efficiencies that can be obtained through a multi-school procurement strategy. In addition, the cost of the first academies reflected enhancements of facilities beyond recommended standards, and they were often in difficult locations in high cost areas. Academies have other key features, such as the involvement of a sponsor, independence from local authorities and flexibility over the curriculum.

21   The two school renewal programmes show signs of achieving improved school performance, with particularly good evidence from the Fresh Start programme which began in 1997, but it takes much more than a year before GCSE performance improves to satisfactory levels. For example, on average Fresh Start schools take three years to exceed the Department's current floor target for GCSE performance, and five years to exceed the Department's GCSE target for 2008.[8]

22   The Academies Programme started more recently, with the first three academies opening in September 2002 and 27 open by September 2005. The Department plans to have 200 academies open or in development by 2010. The programme represents a radical approach to dealing with the challenging problem of poorly performing schools in the most deprived areas. An early evaluation was broadly positive about progress, but it is too early to be clear on whether the programme will be good value for money.[9] There have been difficulties at some academies (in particular, the Unity City Academy in Middlesbrough is in Special Measures), while others have achieved considerable improvements. Evaluation of the programme is continuing.

23   GCSE results for schools that have recovered (whether from the Special Measures category, benefiting from Fresh Start or being turned into an Academy) generally do improve. **Figure 8** shows GCSE results over time for these types of recovered schools. Schools recovered from Special Measures show some improvement during and after their time in the category. Fresh Start schools show a steady and continuing improvement trend. Academy predecessor schools show a similar result in the years leading up to becoming an academy, and most sustain the improvement trend in the first year immediately after the academy has opened.

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7   The Department also expects that costs will vary greatly across the country, and will be substantially higher in some locations.
8   The 'floor' targets for GCSEs and equivalent are: by 2004, no secondary schools have less than 20 per cent of pupils achieving five passes at grades A* to C, by 2006 no less than 25 per cent, and by 2008 no less than 30 per cent.
9   The Department commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers to evaluate the programme over five years, and the *Academies evaluation: second annual report* was published in June 2005.

8	GCSE performance of turned around secondary schools

Percentage of pupils achieving 5 GCSEs A* to C

Schools recovered from Special Measures (2002-03)

Academies (and their predecessor schools)

Fresh Start schools (and their predecessors)

Years before and after action
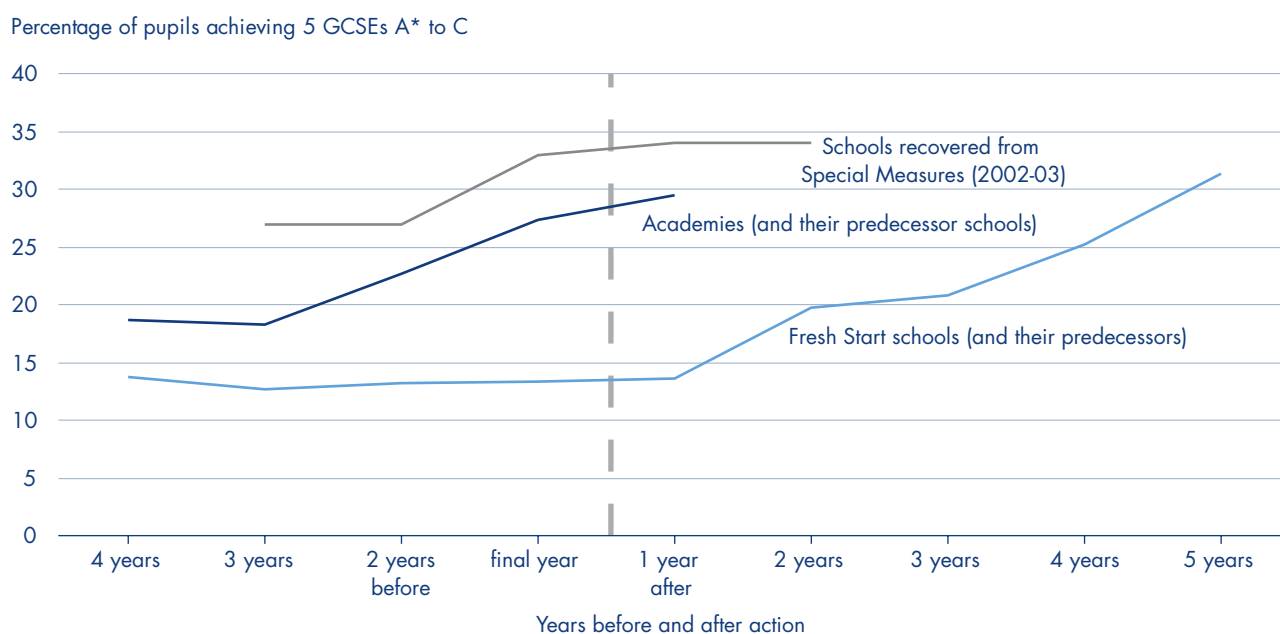
Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from the Department and Ofsted

NOTE

The 'final year' figure represents the results of the last year of the predecessor of the academy or Fresh Start school and the last results achieved before the Special Measures school was removed from the category (a school would typically be in Special Measures for two to three years). By comparison, schools in 2000 where no more than 40 per cent of pupils achieved five A* to C grade GCSEs then achieved, on average, an improvement of two percentage points each year until 2003.

Certain problems are common to many poorly performing schools

24   We identified five main reasons for a school falling below acceptable standards. These reasons are often connected, and weak leadership is nearly always present. A school with these problems tends to have a low reputation, making it less attractive to parents with high expectations for their children.

■   **Ineffective leadership** – Without an effective headteacher, a school is unlikely to have a culture of high expectations, or strive for continuous improvement. It will probably not undertake the kind of honest self-evaluation that would help it to identify and tackle emerging problems. Schools are vulnerable where a formerly good headteacher becomes less effective over time, or where a strong headteacher leaves the school without having developed a confident and effective leadership team that can lead the school while a new headteacher is recruited and settles in.

■   **Weak governance** – School governors must balance the twin demands of supporting the school leadership and challenging it where necessary. Though they are volunteers, they have major responsibilities, including appointing and managing the performance of the headteacher, managing the school budget and providing local accountability. Most poorly performing schools have weak governing bodies, although a school with a very good leadership team can still succeed in spite of a weak governing body.

■   **Poor standards of teaching** – Most poorly performing schools suffer from poor standards of teaching and a consequent lack of progress in pupil learning. Ofsted reported in 2005 that while three-quarters of teaching in secondary schools is 'good' or better, in 10 per cent it is 'unsatisfactory' or worse. Schools with ineffective leaders typically do not address weaknesses in teaching.

■ **Lack of external support** – Schools benefit from external support, particularly from their local authority, and its support services, and neighbouring schools. Schools are at risk should their local authority not give funding or advice that fully reflects their circumstances.

■ **Challenging circumstances** – Some schools have high proportions of pupils receiving free school meals (an indicator of socio-economic deprivation), pupils whose first language is not English, and pupils who regularly change school. These schools receive additional funding, but they still face the biggest challenges to raise pupils' attainment, and are at more risk of performing poorly than schools in less deprived circumstances. In January 2005, 29 per cent of all schools in Special Measures were located in the most deprived 20 per cent of communities.

25   In addition to these generic factors, some secondary schools face challenges where many of their new pupils did not reach basic numeracy and literacy standards while at primary school.

Better information is now available to identify poorly performing schools

26   The Department has built a National Pupil Database that allows pupil progress to be measured over time and linked to various characteristics collected in the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census. Analysis of this data, undertaken by the Fischer Family Trust,[10] identifies schools with lower than predicted performance, and is provided to local authorities. Ofsted also analyses school performance and shares the results with schools through its Performance and Assessment reports and during inspections.

27   Schools monitor the progress of individual pupils, and produce and monitor their own information on the quality of teaching and learning.[11] Their analysis informs their self-evaluation, helping to identify weaknesses and monitor improvement.

Some local authorities give insufficient support to schools at risk

28   Local authorities should maintain close links with schools, and provide extra funding and support for vulnerable schools. They should monitor all schools' performance and step in when a school shows signs of deteriorating. They can increase schools' capacity to deal effectively with problems as they emerge, for example by providing training for governors in managing the headteacher's performance or selecting a new headteacher. Where a school performs poorly this represents, in part, a failure of the local authority.

29   Each local authority's support for schools is inspected or independently reviewed each year.[12] In the 2003-04 school year, Ofsted's inspections of local authorities found that 56 per cent of the 29 local authorities it inspected were providing school improvement services that were 'good' or better, while the services of 13 per cent were 'unsatisfactory'. We examined the numbers of primary and secondary schools in Special Measures in July 2005 in each local authority, and found that 94 (63 per cent) of the 150 authorities had at least one school in Special Measures, including nine (6 per cent) with six or more schools in Special Measures. Many headteachers consider that local authorities give sufficient support to vulnerable schools only after they have been put into an Ofsted category.

30   **Figure 9** illustrates the process of a school declining, entering Special Measures and subsequently recovering, and shows the support that the Department, Ofsted and local authority typically provide at various stages. In this example, the local authority does not identify and tackle the school's weaknesses, and provides the support the school needs only after an unfavourable Ofsted inspection report. In some cases, the local authority is aware of problems but the school is unable or unwilling to cooperate. Local authorities have statutory powers to enforce change but rarely use them.

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10   The Fischer Family Trust is an independent, not-for-profit organisation which is mainly involved in projects that address the development of education in the UK.

11   Teaching is the role performed by teachers and their classroom assistants. Learning is the engagement, and acquiring of skills and knowledge, by pupils.

12   Since September 2005, 'joint area reviews' of children's services have been carried out by integrated teams involving representatives from up to ten inspectorates and commissions, including Ofsted. Prior to that, inspections of school support services were conducted by Ofsted and the Audit Commission.

31   The Department has recognised the need to improve the challenge and support that local authorities give to schools. In September 2005 it began the introduction of School Improvement Partners – often people with current or recent headship experience – who will liaise between central government, the local authority and the school.[13] The Partner's role is to help a school set priorities and advise governors on managing the headteacher's performance. There is an overlap between the functions of the Partners and local authority school advisers, and it is important that these functions are developed and co-ordinated to provide more effective support for schools.

9	Support for a poorly performing school, from decline to recovery

Passage of time

Initial strategy → Response → Recovery →

School

Weak leadership and governance fails to address low attainment, poor teaching and learning and bad behaviour

Schools can:
- Change or improve governance, leadership and management
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning
- Create a positive culture and ethos
- Monitor and support individual pupil performance

Local Authority

Failure to identify and tackle emerging problems

Additional local authority support can:
- Help produce an action plan for recovery
- Replace part of the school's management
- Provide additional resources
- Improve monitoring of progress
- Involve other options such as federation, academy or closure

Department

May contact local authority about declining attainment or under-performance

May suggest more radical option if recovery not achieved: closure, Fresh Start or academy

Ofsted

School fails inspection; enters Special Measures

Monitoring: Ofsted makes termly visits to check progress against action plan

Removal from Special Measures, typically after two years

Source: National Audit Office

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13   The first School Improvement Partners started in September 2005. Within two years, they will be providing advice to all schools and their governors to help raise standards.

Lessons can be learned from schools that have been turned around

32 A poor Ofsted inspection report can be a catalyst to turning around a poorly performing school. While there are often detrimental effects on staff morale, recruitment and retention, and the school's reputation suffers, the benefits include support from the local authority, better awareness of the key issues facing the school and how to deal with them, and improvements in governance.

33 Developing and sustaining a culture of continuous improvement is crucial to school recovery. In addition, we identified five specific actions that have proved most successful in turning around poorly performing schools.

■ **Improving school leadership** – Around two-thirds of schools that recover from Ofsted categories change their headteacher, and many schools change other members of the leadership team. Governing bodies can also improve school leadership by managing leaders' performance more effectively.

■ **Improving teaching standards** – Teaching and learning are the basic school activities, and the Department has sought to raise standards through the National Strategies. Teaching quality can be improved by providing better assessment (through classroom observation) and coaching of teachers, but sometimes weak teachers have to leave. Standards in teaching and learning should be assessed through regular monitoring of the progress of pupils in all subjects.

■ **Better management of pupil behaviour** – Most headteachers of recovered schools believe that initiatives to improve behaviour contributed to their school's recovery. A clear, consistently enforced behaviour policy reduces disruption that is likely to inhibit learning.

■ **Collaboration with other schools** – School collaboration can include sharing staff and facilities and each school helping with each other's problems. Around half of schools in our survey benefited from the support of nearby schools, and some others would have liked support. The Schools White Paper

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Improving school leadership: The Heartlands High School, Birmingham

After the school went into Special Measures in March 2003, the local authority seconded a deputy headteacher with experience of working in schools in challenging circumstances. As a secondee, the new headteacher was supported by a retired headteacher who had herself improved a school dramatically. The governing body was also strengthened. The new headteacher communicated a positive vision to staff and pupils and had a strong focus on improving the areas that Ofsted had listed as a priority. She quickly introduced new systems for monitoring teaching, and piloted them in the summer term so that any problems could be resolved before the new systems came into operation at the beginning of the school year. The school came out of Special Measures in May 2004.

Improving teaching standards: Onslow St Audrey's School, Hatfield

This secondary school was in Special Measures from 2001 until 2004. The headteacher placed particular emphasis on improving standards of teaching and learning. He made it clear that the weaker teachers must improve or leave, and introduced a staff development policy to help improve teaching standards. With the agreement of Ofsted, he recruited very able Newly Qualified Teachers and took a personal interest in their development. The school has developed a good reputation for staff development. Ofsted inspectors reported in 2004 that teaching was 'good' or better than 'good' in two-thirds of lessons.

Better management of pupil behaviour: King George V School, South Shields

Ofsted placed this secondary school in Special Measures in March 2003 and it had recovered by December 2004. It needed to improve the poor behaviour of its pupils. Additional funding from the Department released the deputy headteacher from teaching so that she could set up a new behaviour management policy. Ofsted inspectors trained the school leaders in how to collate and interpret information on behaviour. Ofsted inspectors subsequently observed 'good' behaviour in most lessons.

Collaboration with other schools: Cardinal Hinsley High School, Brent

This secondary school for boys went into Special Measures in 2002. The local authority and the Diocese organised a federation with a nearby Catholic school for girls. The headteacher of the girls' school became executive headteacher of the federation and spent much of her time turning around Cardinal Hinsley, drawing in resources from the other school. Becoming a federation brought additional funding from the Department. Ofsted inspectors considered that the federation contributed powerfully to the school's rapid progress and took it out of Special Measures in 2004.

Fresh Start: The King's Church of England School, Wolverhampton

The Regis School was a poorly performing and rundown secondary school for a number of years before it was closed in 1998. Under Fresh Start, the school was re-opened as The King's Church of England School. The new school had refurbished buildings and better sports and music facilities. The restart created a new identity and the school built an ethos that encouraged pupils to raise their expectations. It also resolved some of the staffing difficulties that the Regis School had faced.

raises the expectation that local authorities should organise collaboration to help turn around a poorly performing school.

- **Fresh Start** – As well as getting extra funding from the Department, under this programme schools have changed their identity, their governing body and some or all staff. The Department encourages schools entering the programme to collaborate with other schools.

Parents and the local community also have an important role in supporting schools and helping them to recover, with most headteachers considering that strengthening links with parents had contributed to the recovery of their school.

More targeted effort is needed to sustain recovered schools

34 A second Ofsted failure can severely damage a school's reputation. Most schools perform well in the two years following their emergence from Special Measures, and almost all headteachers of recovered schools who responded to our survey are confident that their school will sustain improvement. Headteachers whom we met considered that being in Special Measures had greatly improved their leadership skills and the schools' governance capacity, monitoring and observation, and teaching and learning. Only five per cent of schools that recover from Special Measures are assessed by Ofsted as 'unsatisfactory' or worse two years later, while 60 per cent of them are assessed as good or better. But there is limited evidence available about the performance of recovered schools in the longer term, and our review of schools that came out of Special Measures between April 1995 and March 1997 showed that ten years later around 40 per cent of the schools had closed. However, these schools were among the first to recover from Special Measures and their characteristics, and the way that they were turned around, could be different from schools that recovered more recently. And, by the end of the 2004-05 school year, just 44 schools had been subject to Special Measures for a second time.[14]

35 Schools that sustain their recovery are generally those that seek to address key risks by:

- **conducting regular, honest self-evaluation,** and acknowledging and responding to weaknesses: all schools develop weaknesses from time to time; poorly performing schools often do not acknowledge and deal with them;

- **continuously assessing risks,** such as possible departure of key staff: poorly performing schools often do not have robust systems and procedures that their staff can continue to operate after key people have moved on; and

- **maintaining good relations** with parents, the local authority and other schools: poorly performing schools are often slow to organise or even to take up the offer of outside support and expertise.

36 The Department and local authorities can provide an environment in which improvement is more likely to be sustained by:

- **helping schools to recruit good teachers,** especially where there are teacher shortages in some areas and subjects;

- **improving information and certainty about future funding:** new school funding arrangements from 2006-07 will simplify funding streams, though there will still need to be flexibility to provide special support to vulnerable schools;

- **helping schools to identify and manage their many responsibilities** and requirements placed on them: including help with providing better information to parents, and dealing with parental choice, school admissions procedures, (in many areas) falling school rolls, the need to find school places for 'hard to place' pupils and increases in the autonomy of individual schools; and

- **building capacity of governing bodies** by helping with governor recruitment and training, especially in areas where few suitable volunteers are available.

37 The headteacher is key to sustaining performance and improvement in any school. However, the numbers of appropriately experienced people applying for headteacher posts are generally falling, despite salary increases and the introduction of the National Professional Qualification for Headship, and there are concerns that it could be difficult to replace the large numbers of headteachers approaching retirement over the next five to ten years. In 2004-05, 28 per cent of primary and 20 per cent of secondary schools had headteacher vacancies. In some places, headteachers have been asked to act as 'executive headteachers' and lead more than one school. This approach works in some cases and can help poorer schools by linking them with good schools, but it can also be risky given the challenges of school leadership and the importance of the personal presence of the leader.

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14   *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2004-05,* Ofsted 2005.

RECOMMENDATIONS

38 Because of the adverse impact of poor performance on pupils and the high costs of continued failure, good value for money is achieved through increased emphasis on prevention and speedy recovery where failure does occur. The schools sector is making progress in that the combined efforts of school leaders and teachers, local authorities and the Department have contributed to a reduction in the number of poorly performing schools. However, more can and should be done to reduce poorly performing schools still further, and to support poorly performing schools in turning their performance around quickly and in sustaining their recovery. The following recommendations set out the main areas where action is both possible and required.

a **The Department and local authorities need to combine their efforts to identify schools at risk and intervene before they fail.**

Fewer schools would fail if their symptoms were identified much sooner so that effective remedial action could be taken quickly. The main indicators that a school is experiencing problems are: lower than expected pupil attainment and progress; ineffective leadership; poor standard of teaching; increasing problems with pupil behaviour; and declining applications for school places.

The Department should:

■ provide to local authorities, through its website and personal contact, a national perspective that draws on knowledge of warning signs and recovery operations in schools throughout England;

■ share its analysis of primary and secondary school performance data with local authorities and School Improvement Partners to help them identify the schools at risk; and

■ maintain regular formal contact with all local authorities, and challenge those that do not take effective action to support and improve vulnerable schools.

The local authorities should:

■ provide sufficient training for governing bodies so that they can be effective in appointing headteachers and managing their performance;

■ work with School Improvement Partners to analyse, monitor and better understand school performance;

■ provide speedy extra support (and funding if necessary) to all identified vulnerable schools and monitor their progress closely; and

■ be prepared to use their statutory powers to enforce changes in vulnerable schools that will not cooperate in accepting support.

Although the Department and local authorities will incur some additional costs if they implement this recommendation, these actions are aimed mainly at making existing practices more effective and should produce savings from preventing schools from failing.

b   To recover quickly, poorly performing schools need to give priority to improving school leadership and establishing a positive culture centred on teaching and learning.

Schools that perform poorly fail to put teaching and learning at the centre of their strategy for recovery. Most recovered schools find that the greatest contribution to recovery comes from initiatives to improve their teaching and learning, and their school leadership.

Schools should:

■   put teaching at the heart of the school's self-evaluation: including, for example, commitment to regular curriculum reviews and assessment of teaching quality;

■   build effective leadership teams that provide collective leadership and responsibility, based on mutual trust and the high expectations of all staff and pupils that they will fulfil their potential; and

■   seek external support for school improvement, particularly from their local authority services and neighbouring schools.

School governing bodies should:

■   be ready to take any hard decisions necessary to maintain the performance of the school; this includes helping the headteacher to take such decisions.

Any costs of implementing this recommendation should be seen as core costs, not additional, because the actions are crucial to the school's recovery.

c   Poorly performing schools need an assessment of their potential to improve and a plan that minimises the number of 'pupil years' lost to a poor education.

Where a school is performing poorly, getting it to improve quickly – or closing it where it cannot – means fewer pupils miss out on a good education, and for a shorter period. Currently very few schools placed in Special Measures recover within 12 months, though most do so within two years. It is totally unacceptable for a school to go on providing a poor education beyond two years, or to improve only to fail again.

Local authorities should:

■   in conjunction with Ofsted, assess the potential of a poorly performing school to recover quickly. Where this is unlikely, they should take fast and effective action to replace the leadership team or close the school;

RECOMMENDATIONS CONTINUED

■ challenge the school to recover quickly and support it as necessary, for example by helping it with action planning and self-evaluation, by getting it to bring in new systems that it needs to secure its recovery, by recruiting effective governors, and by organising collaboration with other schools; and

■ support the school in addressing issues such as falling rolls and the relatively large numbers of vulnerable pupils that these schools often have, who may require relatively intensive support.

The Department and Ofsted should:

■ measure the performance of local authorities in turning around schools.

Costs of implementing this recommendation would not be substantial because good local authorities are already doing these things and the Department and Ofsted already have some information on the performance of local authorities. By comparison, the average revenue cost of school education in 2004-05 was £3,180 per pupil, and this sum is not used effectively where schools perform poorly and their pupils do not make progress.

d Ofsted should introduce a risk-based approach to selecting schools for inspection and for following up the progress of schools in Special Measures or with a Notice to Improve.

While inspections focus on areas of risk, Ofsted does not inspect schools more often if they are at risk: it inspects all schools with the same frequency. The shorter inspection cycle from September 2005 will help identify some poorly performing schools earlier, but there is still a risk that schools will have been performing poorly for up to three years before being identified through inspection.

Ofsted should:

■ inspect vulnerable or poorly performing schools more frequently than it inspects schools that have demonstrated a strong culture of continuous improvement and capable self-evaluation;

■ encourage local authorities to notify Ofsted where they consider that the inspection of a school in decline should be brought forward;

■ clarify its assessments of schools' 'capacity to improve', to help identify those that are on a path to improvement but not yet good enough to leave Special Measures; and

■ offer schools in Special Measures and with a Notice to Improve more extensive support and expertise from inspectors, building on support already given at its school improvement seminars.

Ofsted should not incur additional costs from implementing this recommendation, because it should aim to offset its extra work with poorly performing schools with reductions in the time spent in inspecting more capable schools. It could measure the effect of the changes as part of ongoing work to measure the impact of inspections.

e   More needs to be done to identify and tackle the barriers that discourage potentially suitable candidates from becoming headteachers.

As children's and young people's chances in life depend on the effectiveness of their school, headteachers have a challenging and vital role in leading their school and, for some, in turning around a poorly performing school. Headteachers have come under increasing pressure in recent years from extended responsibilities and external scrutiny, and recent surveys of headteacher recruitment have indicated that there are growing shortages of headteachers.

The Department should:

■   commission research to determine, in more depth than currently known, the barriers that discourage experienced teachers from developing into a managerial role, and experienced managers from becoming headteachers;

■   commission research to identify the critical success factors associated with executive headteachers;

■   do more to encourage school managers to consider undertaking the National Professional Qualification for Headship; and

■   develop the role of federations of schools and School Improvement Partners in enhancing the support provided to school leaders to strengthen their skills and performance.

The National College for School Leadership should:

■   extend training to develop among headteachers the particular skills required to turn around a poorly performing or declining school.

The Department considers that the recommendation could be implemented without it incurring any additional costs. The impact could be seen in improvements to leadership, as measured by Ofsted inspections, and reductions in the number of poorly performing schools.

PART ONE
Identifying poor performance and supporting schools at risk
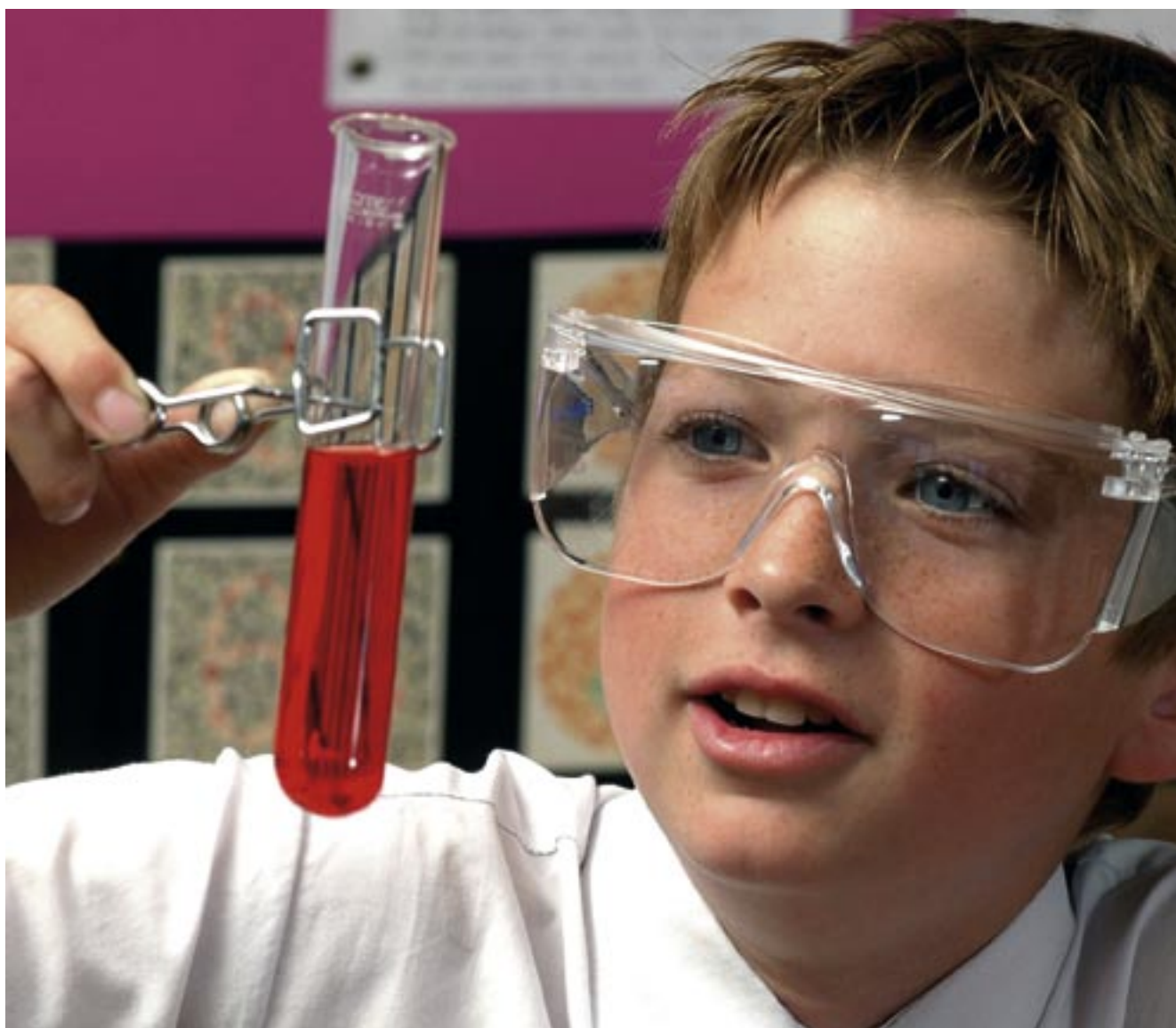
1.1   Children's and young people's chances in life are strongly influenced by the standard of their school education. All children and young people need to develop and equip themselves with the skills, knowledge and personal qualities required for life and work. It is crucial that pupils are not deprived of these opportunities by schools failing to provide adequate standards of education. A key focus of the education system in England must be to prevent schools from performing poorly and to identify those that are declining and need to be turned around.

1.2   Schooling should prepare children and young people for adult life so that they leave school with well developed social skills, moral and cultural awareness, and the best possible academic attainment and skills. As measured by GCSE performance, education in England has improved in the last few years, with around 56 per cent of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C in 2005, compared with 50 per cent in 2001.[15] However, individual school performance against this measure ranges from 6 per cent to 100 per cent of pupils. Even after adjusting for a number of important external influences – used to measure the 'added value' of the education provided by the school – there remain considerable differences between high and low performing schools.[16] Some pupils are disadvantaged by unsatisfactory standards of education, contributing to them attaining less than they could have done.

1.3   In this part of our report we examine:

■   the various definitions of poorly performing schools, and trends in the number of schools in each category;

■   how schools, local authorities and the Department are placed to judge school performance, and the data available to them;

■   the record of local authorities in detecting and helping schools in decline; and

■   how schools' relative risk of decline is taken into account in allocating resources to schools.

Defining a poorly performing school is not straightforward

1.4   There is no single definition of a poorly performing school. **Figure 10 overleaf** sets out the various definitions that Ofsted and the Department use and the numbers of schools in each category. Currently 1,557 schools fall within these definitions.

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15   Although it should be noted that the definitions have changed in this period, in particular through extensions of the range of qualifications that count.
16   *Making a Difference: Performance of Maintained Secondary Schools in England,* HC 1332, Session 2002-03.

10   Defining a poorly performing school

Definition	Number of schools			
	Primary	Secondary	Other	Total
Ofsted defines poorly performing schools[1] as:				
■ **Special Measures** – failing to provide an acceptable standard of education and with leaders who have not demonstrated capacity to make improvements;	123	90	29	242
■ **Serious Weaknesses** – with inadequate overall effectiveness, or an unacceptable standard of education but with leaders with demonstrated capacity to make improvements; or	214	45	27	286
■ **Underachieving** – schools that perform significantly less well than others in similar contexts.	38	11	0	49
(Since September 2005, schools are no longer put into the Serious Weaknesses or Underachieving categories but are classified as needing **Significant Improvement** and are given a Notice to Improve).				
In addition, the Department focuses additional support on poorly performing schools that are:				
■ **Low-attaining**[2] – failing to achieve adequate levels of attainment for their pupils as measured by Key Stage 2 or GCSE results; or	349	53	Not calculated	402
■ **Under-performing**[3] – not achieving adequate levels of attainment once their circumstances have been taken into account (the 'added value' measure).	Not calculated	578	Not calculated	578
Total	**724**	**777**	**56**	**1,557**

Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from the Department and Ofsted

NOTES

1   As at July 2005, and with 'other' schools being special schools and Pupil Referral Units.

2   Excludes schools already counted under Ofsted definitions. Levels of attainment are explained in paragraphs 1.9 and 1.10.

3   Based on the Department's analysis of secondary school performance in 2003 and 2004. It excludes schools counted in Ofsted definitions or as low-attaining or receiving Excellence in Cities funding. The Department is in the process of applying a similar analysis to primary schools.

1.5   We estimate that around 980,000 pupils (13 per cent of the 7.4 million pupils in maintained schools in England) are, in 2005, receiving an unsatisfactory education.[17] A small number of the secondary schools defined as low-attaining have been found to be good by Ofsted. Our analysis of Ofsted 'overall effectiveness' scores for low-attaining secondary schools (less than 20 per cent of GCSE pupils obtaining five A* to C grades) showed that around 10 per cent were graded 'good' or equivalent in their most recent inspection. This apparent anomaly can arise in a very deprived area because a high proportion of pupils may find it hard to attain good levels of examination success even if teaching is good. Alternatively, or in addition, the school's current examination results may reflect weak leadership or teaching in the past.

The number of schools found by Ofsted to be performing poorly is reducing, but some may have been performing poorly for a number of years

1.6   The time between Ofsted inspections means that a school entering into an Ofsted category (Figure 10) may have been providing an unsatisfactory education for a number of years. In the late 1990s the interval between inspections was increased from four to six years. From September 2005 major changes in the arrangements for Ofsted inspections brought the interval back to three to four years **(Figure 11)**. The inspections also make greater use of schools' own evaluations of their performance,

17   The figure includes pupils in schools in Ofsted categories as at July 2005, low-attaining primary and secondary schools as at 2004 and under-performing schools from 2003-04; the overall school population excludes pupils in nursery schools.

11 Changes to Ofsted's school inspections, September 2005

Previous system (until July 2005)	Current system (since September 2005)
Cyclical inspection at least once every six years	Cyclical inspection at least once every three to four years
6-10 weeks' notice before an inspection	0-5 days' notice before an inspection
A large team of inspectors visits the school for up to a week	A small team of inspectors visits the school for one to two days
Inspection conducted by Ofsted appointed contractors	Inspection conducted by mixed contractor-Ofsted teams. (Most secondary school inspections led by Ofsted inspectors).
School assessed using extensive lesson observation and interviews with key staff members as well as some self-evaluation	School self-evaluation evidence forms the basis of the inspection. Some lesson observations and interviews
Wide-ranging focus of inspections, with particular emphasis on standards of teaching	Inspection focuses more on leadership and management
Detailed report published within 40 days of inspection	Shortened draft report shown to the school soon after inspection and published within three calendar weeks
Grading of school on a seven point scale	Grading of school on a four point scale
School drafts a separate post-inspection action plan	School adapts existing school development plan to reflect feedback from the inspection
Assessment of leadership and management as part of the overall framework	More emphasis on leadership and management to demonstrate performance improvement

Source: National Audit Office

and are shorter, with less notice given to schools. Ofsted will continue to carry out additional inspection visits to specific types of school, such as Fresh Start schools, academies, and schools receiving Leadership Incentive Grant (Appendix 2), and conducts 'thematic' reviews into areas of the curriculum.

1.7 The number of schools identified as requiring Special Measures has been declining over time (**Figure 12 and Figure 13 overleaf** and Figure 7 on page 7). However, as a proportion of inspections for each year from 1997-98 to 2003-04, between 3.0 and 4.9 per cent of inspections resulted in schools entering Special Measures, with no clear trend. The changes in the frequency of inspections may have reduced the numbers of schools in Special Measures: the number of Ofsted inspections fell from 7,440 in the 1997-98 school year to between 3,840 and 4,800 in subsequent years. Because inspections were not targeted according to risk, the likely consequence of the reduction in inspections was that poorly performing schools were identified less quickly by Ofsted (or not at all, if the schools recovered before they were inspected). The number of schools in Special Measures rose during the 2003-04 school year, but this rise is thought very likely to be related to a tightening of Ofsted inspection standards that year.

1.8 The increase in frequency of inspections from September 2005 may lead to a rise in the number of schools placed in Special Measures. This will be a positive outcome if it reflects poorly performing schools being identified sooner, rather than an underlying increase in poorly performing schools. The new cycle is expected to be completed by spring 2009, by which time all schools will have been inspected under the new regime.[18]

The number of other poorly performing schools is also reducing

1.9 The number of secondary schools below the GCSE floor target levels has fallen, but 71 schools still had less than 20 per cent of their GCSE pupils gaining five A to C* grade passes in 2004 **(Figure 14 overleaf)**. Good progress has been made in reducing the number of schools below the more challenging floor target of no less than 25 per cent of pupils obtaining these results in 2006, but it will be very challenging for every school to meet this target given the existence currently of schools still not meeting 20 per cent.

18   Ofsted had planned to use a three-year inspection cycle, but has extended the first cycle so that all schools should be inspected by spring 2009. It extended the cycle to enable it to continue to carry out other types of inspection.

12 Number of schools entering Special Measures, 1997-2005

The number of schools identified as requiring Special Measures has decreased.

Schools entering Special Measures

Autumn term
Spring term
Summer term
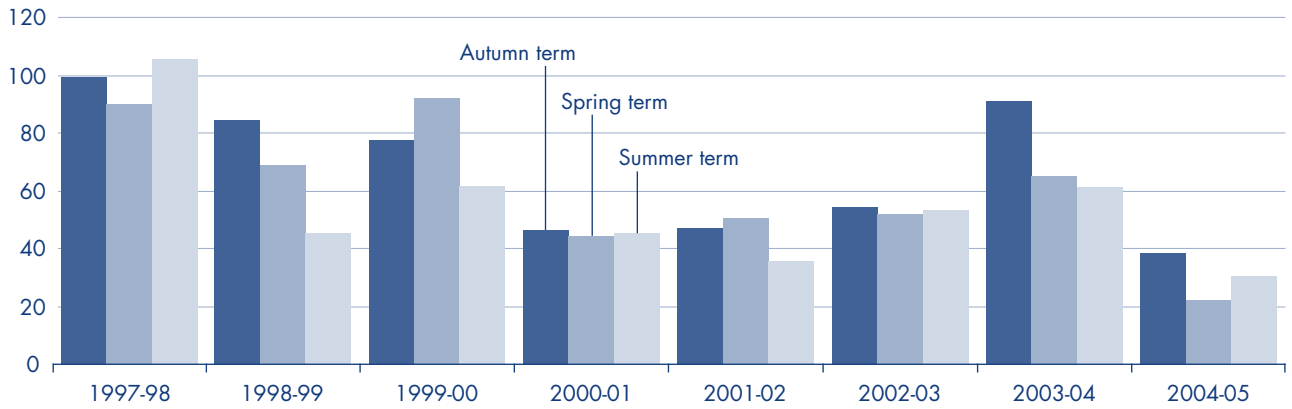
Source: National Audit Office analysis of Ofsted data

13 Number of schools in Special Measures, 1998-2005

The number of schools in Special Measures has been on a downward trend since 1998.

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
	515	446	395	316	274	280	333	242
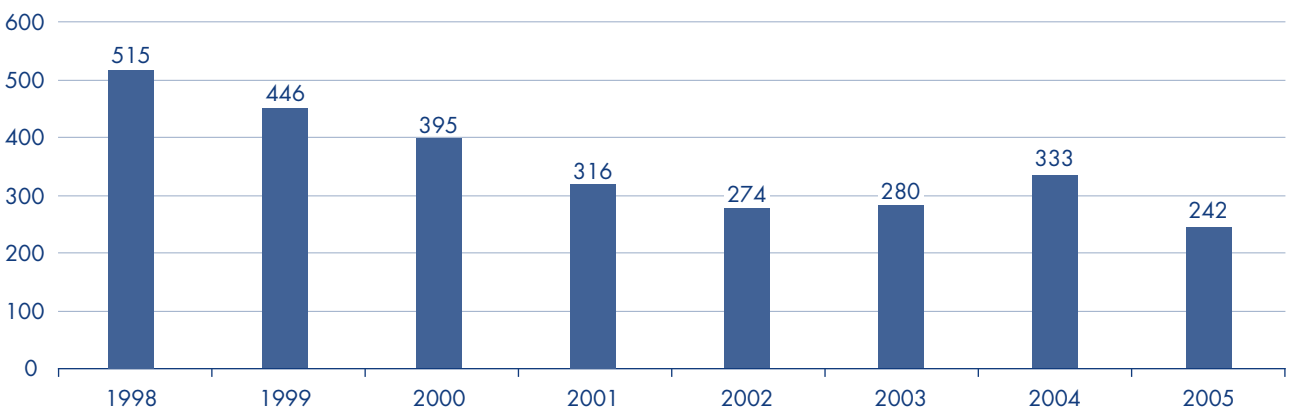
Source: Department for Education and Skills

NOTE

Numbers measured as at the end of the summer term in each year.

1.10 The number of low-attaining primary schools is falling: **Figure 15** shows that the number of schools performing below the Department's Key Stage 2 floor target in either English or mathematics[19] fell from 5,240 in 2001 to 3,233 in 2005 (a 38 per cent reduction). Because primary schools generally have much smaller year groups than secondary schools, their results are relatively more sensitive to statistical variation. We have therefore defined low-attaining primary schools as those persistently below the floor target for the previous four years; for the period 2002 to 2005, 349 schools were below the Key Stage 2 target (Figure 10).

1.11 The Department analyses data on secondary schools' performance adjusted for their circumstances; the method draws on statistical techniques undertaken by the Fischer Family Trust, which adjusts schools' GCSE performance for the social context and prior attainment of their pupils at Key Stage 2 (age 11). Schools are ranked according to their adjusted scores, and schools where value-added scores are significantly below those expected are identified as under-performing. Using 2003 GCSE results, the Department identified 469 secondary schools as under-performing (but with over 30 per cent of pupils attaining five A* to C grade GCSEs), and invited them to participate in its Secondary Performance Project. The Department then added a further 109 based on analysis of the 2004 GCSE results. (Combined, these are the 578 schools shown in Figure 10). The Department excluded low-attaining schools and those in Ofsted categories because they were already receiving attention. The under-performing schools are therefore those schools where their value-added ranking is in the lowest 25 per cent of schools and are not already in one of other poorly performing categories.

1.12 There is currently limited trend data for the under-performing category of schools, though GCSE results for the first wave of these schools improved by 2.3 percentage points between 2003 and 2004, compared with a national improvement of 0.8 percentage points. Within this category, on average, those schools that belonged to Collaboratives (Figure 1 on page 2) improved by 3.4 percentage points, those supported by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust improved by 2.3 percentage points, and the remainder improved by 1.7 percentage points. It should be noted that we would expect these schools to improve faster than the national average, because they have more scope for improvement. (Appendix 2 gives details of the Department's improvement programmes).

19   65 per cent of pupils achieving level 4 in English and mathematics.

14 Secondary schools below GCSE floor targets, 2001 to 2004

Fewer secondary schools are performing below the Department's floor targets, but 71 schools did not meet the 2004 target of no less than 20 per cent of pupils achieving at least five GCSEs A* to C.

Number of schools

Percentage of pupils getting five GCSEs at A* to C:
25% - 30%   20% - 25%   Below 20%
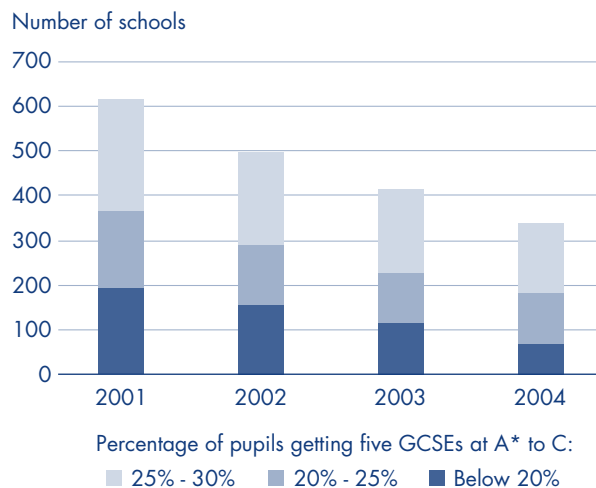
Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from the Department

15 Primary schools below Key Stage 2 floor targets in either English or mathematics, 2001 to 2005

Number of schools below Key Stage 2 target in either English or mathematics or both
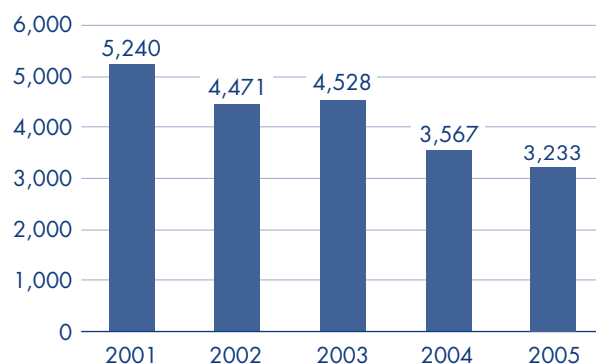
Source: Department for Education and Skills

NOTE

Because primary schools generally have much smaller year groups than secondary schools, their results are more sensitive to statistical variation. The number of primary schools consistently below the Key Stage 2 target for the previous four years is 349 (excluding schools in Ofsted categories in July 2005).

A range of data can help to identify schools at most risk of poor performance

1.13 Increasingly good quality data at the pupil level allows schools to monitor and track individual pupils so that they are able to address specific weaknesses as well as support strengths. At school and area level, the data gives schools, local authorities and the Department the opportunity to identify and address schools performing unsatisfactorily, for example by monitoring trends in different parts of the curriculum. By providing a detailed picture of how schools perform, the information also supports better focused inspections, and would support a risk-based approach to selecting schools for inspection. From February 2006, the Department is introducing School Profiles for all schools, which will provide parents and communities key information about schools' priorities, characteristics and performance.

1.14 Statistical analysis of data on the characteristics of schools and their context can help to measure the vulnerability of schools to becoming poorly performing. Although some key factors, such as the effectiveness of a school's current leadership team, are not available, we used quantified information that we had identified in our previous reports as having a statistically significant relationship to school performance. **Figure 16** shows that secondary schools, schools with high percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals, and schools with high percentages of pupils with Special Educational Needs are relatively vulnerable to going into an Ofsted category. A secondary school with high levels of pupils with free school meals and Special Educational Needs is around six times as likely to be in Special Measures than a school with low levels of pupils with free schools meals and special needs. We did not observe a significant relationship – either positive or negative – between other measured factors and the likelihood of the schools concerned being in an Ofsted category.

1.15 Pupils in deprived areas tend to have lower than average performance at GCSE. Our previous work has shown that higher levels of socio-economic deprivation, as measured by the proportion of pupils receiving free school meals, is closely associated with lower GCSE attainment.[20] And, according to analysis by the Department, 29 per cent of all schools in Special Measures in January 2005 were located in the most deprived 20 per cent of communities.

16	The relationship between a school's context and the likelihood of being in an Ofsted category

Factor	Statistically significant relationship?	Commentary
Phase of school (primary or secondary)	Yes	A secondary school is, on average, 4 times as likely to be in an Ofsted category than a primary school
Pupils eligible for free school meals (%)	Yes	A school with a high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is, on average, 2.7 times as likely to be in an Ofsted category as one with a low proportion
Pupils with Special Educational Needs (%)	Yes	A school with a high proportion of pupils with Special Educational Needs is, on average, 2.3 times as likely to be in an Ofsted category as one with a low proportion
Size of school	No	
Whether the school is boys only, girls only or mixed	No	
Whether the school is a faith school or not	No	
Pupils who are not of white British ethnicity (%)	No	
Pupils whose first language is not English (%)	No	

Source: National Audit Office

NOTE

This figure is based on logistic regression analysis of all schools in July 2005. Further details of the methodology are at Appendix 1.

20   *Making a Difference: Performance of Maintained Secondary Schools in England,* HC 1332, Session 2002-03, para 2.29 on page 22.

1.16 Factors commonly associated with deprivation can make a school vulnerable, including high proportions of pupils joining the school later than the usual school entry time ('pupil mobility'), relatively high numbers of pupils and families with low aspirations, low commitment to education and low levels of prior achievement of pupils in local primary schools. None of these factors suggest that a school is providing an unsatisfactory education for its pupils, but they are an important means of identifying vulnerable schools, and for schools to know the challenges they face. Good schools are aware of their circumstances, know what might make them vulnerable, and develop key aspects of the school – leadership, curriculum and teaching – accordingly. Some schools also do what they can to change their circumstances.

Good schools are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and take responsibility for improvement

1.17 Schools have a certain level of autonomy, exercised with the support of the school's governing body, which includes responsibility for resource management, budgeting, staff numbers and recruitment. Schools also have the responsibility to conduct self-evaluations to identify areas of strength and weakness. During our visits to schools, one of the main reasons cited for entering Special Measures was a lack of effective monitoring of the schools' own performance. In our survey of schools that had recovered from Ofsted categories (Special Measures or Serious Weaknesses), 62 per cent of headteachers stated that before their Ofsted inspection the school had not expected a negative outcome. Those who did expect it considered they owed their awareness to self-evaluation being undertaken in the school. School advisers we consulted considered that if a school evaluated itself effectively, it was much less likely to be placed in an Ofsted category.

1.18 Some schools have used self-evaluation to improve their performance for a number of years. As part of the recent changes in school inspections (Figure 11 on page 21), Ofsted has developed a new self-evaluation framework that all schools are expected to follow. The self-evaluation form has two purposes:

■ to assist in promoting continuous improvement by identifying strengths and weaknesses; and

■ to provide information about school performance to the local authority and Ofsted.

Governors have an important role in helping schools improve

1.19 A governing body is a group of volunteers responsible to parents and the community for ensuring a school provides a good quality education. The body comprises parents, school staff, local authority representatives, the local community and (in certain types of schools) foundation or sponsor representatives. They have a number of responsibilities, which include setting and publishing of appropriate targets, managing the school budget and appointment of the headteacher and deputy. The governing body should have a close, supportive working relationship with the headteacher, but also be able to challenge senior management on important decisions. The challenge that governors need to provide to the headteacher and staff is crucial when the school faces difficulties that make it all the more important to evaluate its performance honestly and objectively.

1.20 One of the greatest responsibilities that governors have is the appointment of a new headteacher. Given the importance of leadership and management to a school this decision is vital and can have far reaching and potentially damaging ramifications if an unsuitable candidate is selected; in our focus groups this concern was strongly expressed by a number of local authority school advisers.

1.21 Problems with the recruitment and retention of suitable governor candidates coupled with a substantial time commitment mean that schools may not always receive the kind of support they need. 86 per cent of headteachers responding to our survey thought that weaknesses in governance had contributed to their school's difficulties. There was a suggestion from our focus group of school advisers that governors are more at home with the practical aspects of school management, rather than in providing a strategic challenge and closely monitoring and questioning performance information. School advisers also considered that the responsibilities carried by governors were unreasonable considering their volunteer status.

1.22 Most governors we interviewed considered that being put in an Ofsted category had galvanised them into fulfilling their role more effectively. Over three-quarters of headteachers who responded to our survey considered that being placed in a category had a beneficial effect on the governance of a school.

School performance data can help to identify weaknesses and track improvement

1.23 Schools use a range of data on performance. **Figure 17** shows the main sources of performance data and headteachers' views on their usefulness. All schools said they were using internally generated statistics such as predicted grades for pupils. In our survey almost all schools (98 per cent) found that this type of internally generated data was useful or very useful. One deputy headteacher told us that hard work by the school's data manager and headteacher had paid off by providing important information and evidence to identify and guide the right actions to improve the school.

1.24 Ninety-two per cent of headteachers considered that contextual value-added data was very or fairly useful, with a similar score – 88 per cent – for Ofsted's Performance and Assessment (PANDA) report **(Case study 1)**.

CASE STUDY 1

Using data to help behaviour management – King George V School, South Shields

King George V School entered into Special Measures in March 2003 and came out in December 2004. The school put in place a new behaviour policy, and was helped by the Ofsted inspector who gave a training session on data management of behaviour statistics, which allowed monitoring of problems and progress. The electronic system identifies which particular pupils are misbehaving, in which classrooms and at what times of the day. The detail and immediacy of the data meant that the behaviour policy is focused very closely on where problems are arising.

17	Performance data available to schools and headteachers' views on its usefulness				
Data	**Description**	**Very useful %**	**Fairly useful %**	**Not very useful %**	**Not used %**
Internally generated data e.g. predicted scores	Results of internal examinations tests, collated by schools.	88	10	2	0
Contextual value-added scores	Comparative analyses of school performance, using sophisticated statistical techniques to adjust for contextual social factors and prior attainment of pupils. Prepared by the Fischer Family Trust and supplied to all local authorities by the Department.	60	32	5	3
Performance and Assessment (PANDA) data	Ofsted's in-depth comparison of the attainment of pupils with that of pupils in similar schools (grouped by the prior attainment of pupils, and by the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals).	57	31	10	2
National Pupil Level Database	The Database includes attainment and other information at the pupil level. Schools may use the data that they collect for input to the Database.	33	39	11	17
Achievement and Attainment Tables	The Department publishes individual primary and secondary school performance information, including raw test data, examination results and measures of 'value-added'.	5	13	61	21

Source: National Audit Office survey of recovered schools

1.25 Most schools recognised that performance data can indicate areas for further investigation, but that data cannot identify poor performance on its own. The Department publishes Achievement and Attainment Tables (previously known as performance tables), and this data is reproduced by the media in the form of ranked 'league tables' of schools. The Tables enable parents and communities to look at performance data, both raw and adjusted for pupils' prior attainment, for all their local schools. The Department added the adjusted performance data in 2002 to give a fairer indication of a school's performance. Some headteachers, as well as other education professionals, have doubts about the value of even this adjusted measure, while recognising the quality of data has improved markedly in recent years – 61 per cent of headteachers who responded to our survey found Achievement and Attainment Tables not very useful; rising to 75 per cent for secondary school headteachers only. The Department is looking to improve the Achievement and Attainment Tables in 2006 by including other influencing factors such as gender, pupil mobility and levels of deprivation. In contrast with England, there are no published school performance tables in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, but individual school or local schools' performance data may be made available to parents.

1.26 The Department and some local authorities have an increasingly strong analytical capacity to assess school performance across a range of dimensions that can also raise danger signals when most or all of the data points towards school failure. Long-term trends are especially important, and the various sets of data become more powerful as years go by. At present, formal communication between the Department and local authorities takes place through annual meetings when the most recent performance data is discussed and strategies for addressing poorly performing schools are agreed, including the support available through National Strategy programmes. The Department maintains informal contact throughout the year through Children's Services Improvement Advisers for Education and the National Strategies field-force, who monitor progress and advise local authorities on the support available to improve poorly performing schools. Whilst more intensive contact also takes place when a high number of schools in a particular authority enter Special Measures, a system of regular formal contacts could help reduce the numbers of schools slipping through the 'net' of continuous monitoring and being put into an Ofsted category after an inspection.

Schools can get support from a number of sources

1.27 Schools are able to draw support from a variety of sources, including the Department, local authorities, governors, parents, local businesses and other schools **(Figure 18 overleaf)**. Often these external sources of support can help prevent schools from performing in an unsatisfactory manner. Parents and governors should strike a balance between support and challenge in order to make sure that schools remain accountable, while the local authority must maintain regular contact with a school in order to monitor performance, as well as provide advisers and consultants to improve specific subject areas and wider issues such as behaviour management. Other schools, community groups and local businesses can help by providing a neighbourhood dimension, so that schools really know their community, can build strong community links, and can share any challenges with other schools facing similar difficulties.
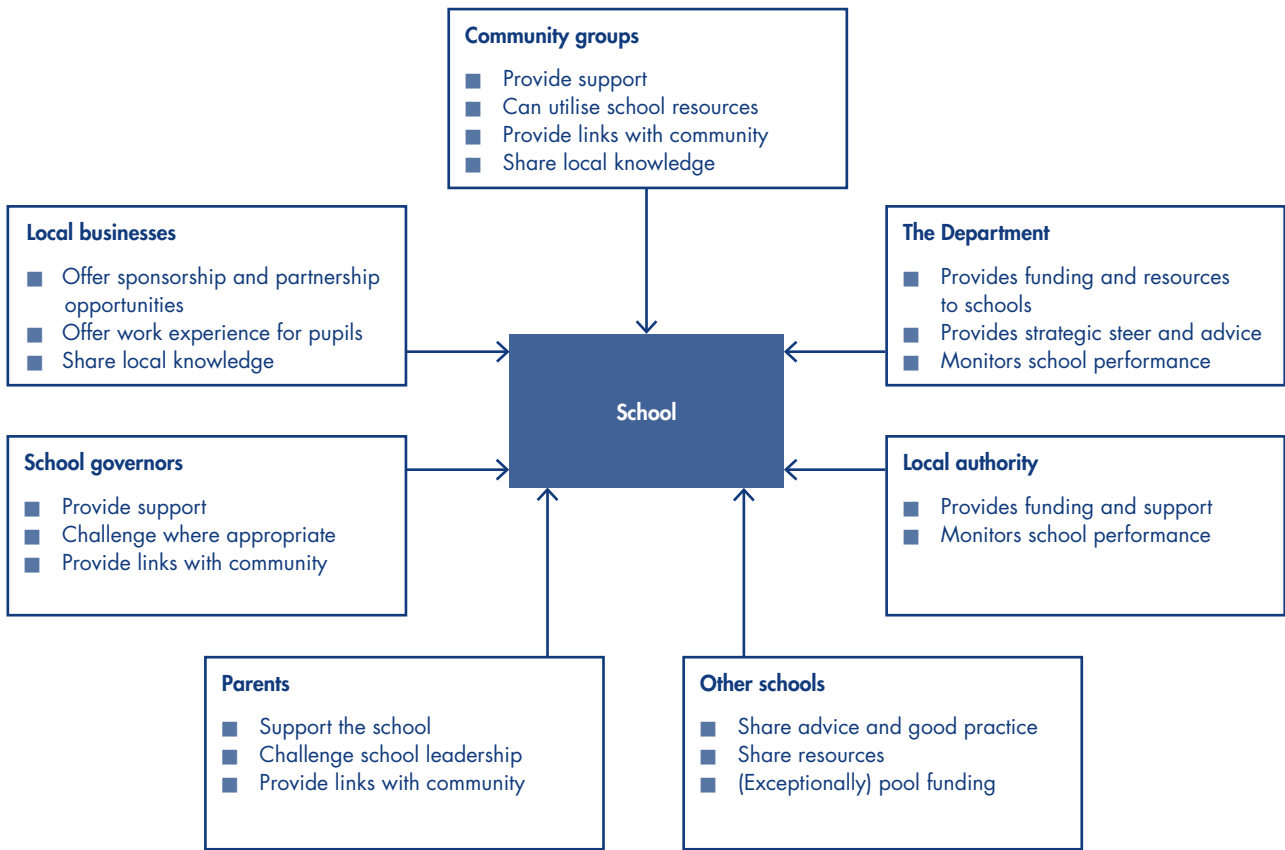
Some local authorities do not prevent school decline

1.28 Analysis of the number of primary and secondary schools in Special Measures in July 2005 by local authority shows that some are better at preventing school decline than others. A large minority of authorities (56 out of 150 with responsibility for education) have no schools in Special Measures, but nine have six or more schools in Special Measures **(Figure 19 overleaf)**.[21] As explained in paragraph 1.16, external factors such as deprivation make it more likely that schools will get into difficulty and also more of a challenge for local authorities in deprived areas to keep all of their schools out of Special Measures.

1.29 Local authorities have a crucial role in detecting and preventing school decline. Where a school enters Special Measures, many people working in education would agree that the local authority has failed in one of its most important responsibilities to the school and its pupils. Results from our survey of headteachers indicate that approximately half of schools did not receive advisory support from the local authority before they were placed into an Ofsted category, implying that the local authority was not assisting the school as it should. Some headteachers also considered that local authorities lacked understanding of the challenges facing schools before they enter an Ofsted category **(Figure 20 overleaf)**.

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21 The local authorities with six or more schools in Special Measures were Birmingham City Council, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, Essex County Council, Kent County Council, Kirklees Metropolitan Council, Lincolnshire County Council, Northamptonshire County Council, Staffordshire County Council, and Surrey County Council.

18 Sources and types of support for schools

Community groups

■ Provide support
■ Can utilise school resources
■ Provide links with community
■ Share local knowledge

Local businesses

■ Offer sponsorship and partnership opportunities
■ Offer work experience for pupils
■ Share local knowledge

The Department

■ Provides funding and resources to schools
■ Provides strategic steer and advice
■ Monitors school performance

School

School governors

■ Provide support
■ Challenge where appropriate
■ Provide links with community

Local authority

■ Provides funding and support
■ Monitors school performance

Parents

■ Support the school
■ Challenge school leadership
■ Provide links with community

Other schools

■ Share advice and good practice
■ Share resources
■ (Exceptionally) pool funding
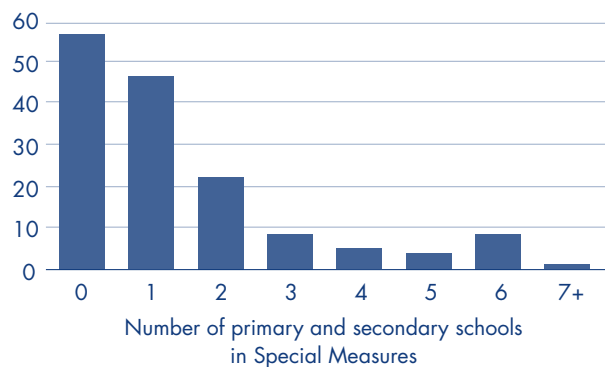
Source: National Audit Office

1.30 Equally, some schools can be 'in denial' about the problems they have before the inspection and make it difficult for the local authority to support and intervene. Although local authorities have formal powers to intervene these are rarely used: only when there are clear signs of failure coupled with very uncooperative school leadership. Some local authorities have wanted schools to be put into a category by Ofsted in order to help them intervene, but in some cases this has not happened. Where Ofsted and a local authority differ – in either direction – over the judgement of a school, we found little evidence that the inspectors and local authority staff take time to discuss their respective views and analyse the reasons for differences.

1.31 Local authorities have to provide much more support once a school is put into a category, and headteachers considered the authority then developed a better understanding of the school – which a more effective local authority might be expected to have in the first place, as part of its strategy to avoid school decline (Figure 20).

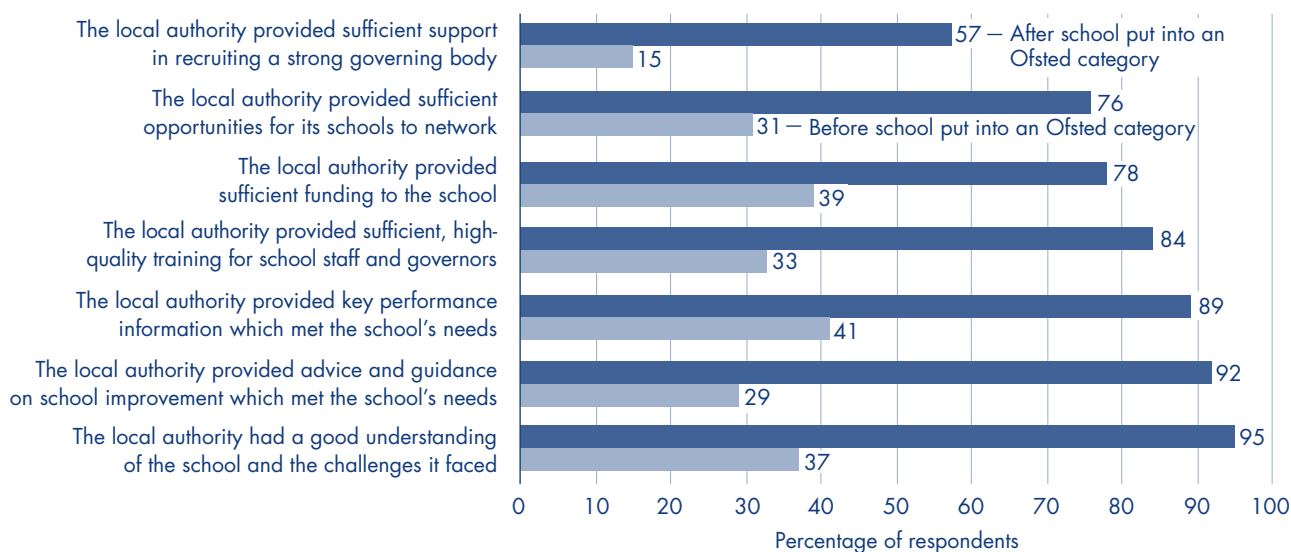**19** Local authorities by number of schools in Special Measures, July 2005

More than one third of local authorities with responsibility for education have no schools in Special Measures.

Number of local authorities

Number of primary and secondary schools in Special Measures

Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from the Department

20 Effect of poor inspection results on local authority support for schools

The local authority provided sufficient support in recruiting a strong governing body	57 — After school put into an Ofsted category / 15
The local authority provided sufficient opportunities for its schools to network	76 / 31 — Before school put into an Ofsted category
The local authority provided sufficient funding to the school	78 / 39
The local authority provided sufficient, high-quality training for school staff and governors	84 / 33
The local authority provided key performance information which met the school's needs	89 / 41
The local authority provided advice and guidance on school improvement which met the school's needs	92 / 29
The local authority had a good understanding of the school and the challenges it faced	95 / 37

Percentage of respondents

Source: National Audit Office survey of recovered schools

1.32 Ofsted reported that in 2003-04, 20 of the 30 local authorities it inspected had maintained or improved their effectiveness in supporting their schools and pupils.[22] However, Ofsted was concerned about variation in the effectiveness of local authorities' school advisers, particularly at secondary level. **Figure 21 overleaf** illustrates some of the qualities of a good local authority.

1.33 To strengthen the support available to schools the Department has recently introduced the role of School Improvement Partner, to provide a conduit between central government, the local authority and the school. The School Improvement Partners are experienced individuals, will help set targets and priorities and identify support needed, and will advise governors on performance management of headteachers. The first School Improvement Partners started work in September 2005 and the Department intends that all secondary schools will have one by September 2006, and all primary schools by September 2007. They are responsible to the local authority, though they have a direct link to central government through the Department's National Strategies contractor, Capita SCS. Some local authority school advisers have reservations about the role, which they feel could duplicate their work and

make it more difficult for the school advisers to spend enough time with schools to get a good overview of school performance. To avoid inefficiency and reduced effectiveness, the Department will need to oversee the implementation of this role to guard against possible duplication and to respond to the concerns of local authorities.

In allocating resources to schools, local authorities and the Department take account of the risks and challenges schools face
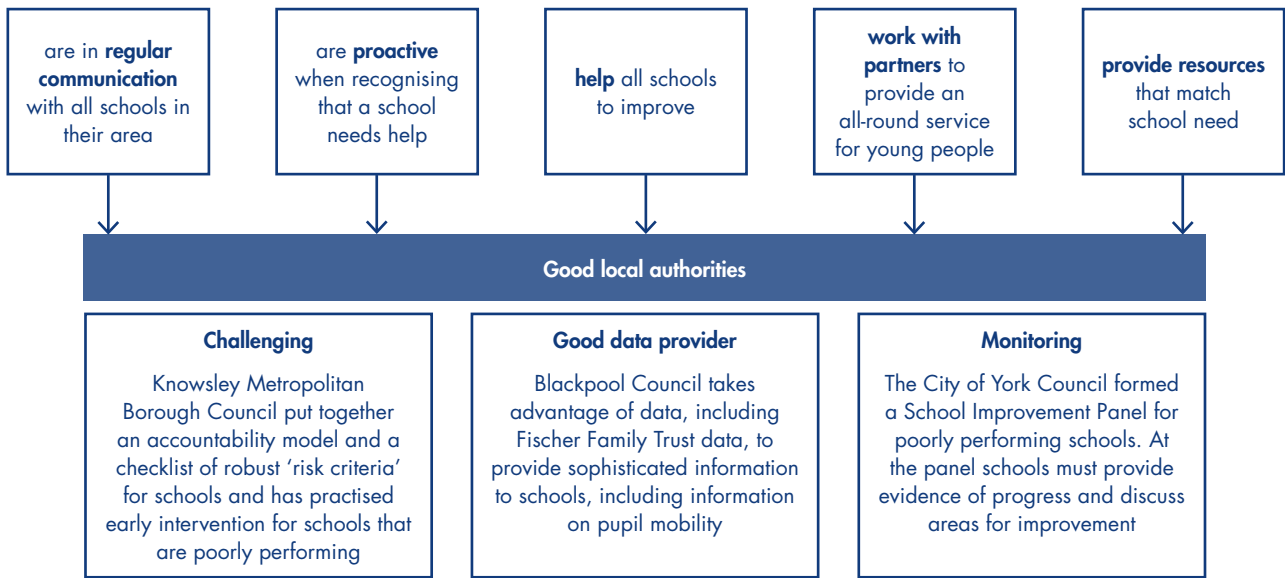
1.34 Preventing a school from becoming poorly performing is preferable to helping it to recover, both from a human and financial perspective. Accordingly, funding is weighted towards schools in deprived areas. The Department funds local authorities based on pupil numbers adjusted for socio-economic factors.[23] Local authorities set their own funding formulae for distributing resources to individual schools in line with guidance from the Department. A joint report by the Audit Commission and Ofsted in 2003[24] concluded that over-simplified

22   *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, 2003-2004.*
23   Funding per pupil ranged from £2,803 in Shropshire to £4,717 in Tower Hamlets in 2004–05. (Funding in the Isles of Scilly and the City of London is higher but both have unusual circumstances).
24   *School Funding: strategies adopted by local education authorities,* HMI 1629, Ofsted/Audit Commission, 2003.

21   Qualities of a good local authority in terms of avoiding school decline

are in **regular communication** with all schools in their area	are **proactive** when recognising that a school needs help	**help** all schools to improve	**work with partners** to provide an all-round service for young people	**provide resources** that match school need

Good local authorities

Challenging	**Good data provider**	**Monitoring**
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council put together an accountability model and a checklist of robust 'risk criteria' for schools and has practised early intervention for schools that are poorly performing	Blackpool Council takes advantage of data, including Fischer Family Trust data, to provide sophisticated information to schools, including information on pupil mobility	The City of York Council formed a School Improvement Panel for poorly performing schools. At the panel schools must provide evidence of progress and discuss areas for improvement

Source: National Audit Office

local formulae were failing to adjust adequately for socio-economic factors. This view was shared by some headteachers we met, who considered that funding did not take full account of the complexities of their individual school's situation. At the same time, over-complex arrangements run the risk of undue bureaucracy and there is a lack of transparency of funding because it is so complex. So the Department and local authorities need to steer a careful course between these conflicting pressures.

1.35 In addition to core funding, the Department allocates specific grants to schools, the two largest being Excellence in Cities and the Leadership Incentive Grant. The amounts can be substantial: Leadership Incentive Grant is £375,000 over three years; and Excellence in Cities is typically about £30,000 a year for primary schools and £128,000 a year for secondary schools.[25] The grants are essentially preventive, and given to schools likely to be in relatively greater need. However, Leadership Incentive Grant is

partly allocated on the basis of geographical location,[26] and in 2004-05 around £55 million of Leadership Incentive Grant funding went to schools with less than the national average of 15.6 per cent of their pupils receiving free school meals but located within areas of deprivation **(Figure 22)**.

1.36 Including their core funding (which involves an allocation for deprivation), schools that get both Leadership Incentive Grant and Excellence in Cities support receive around £322 per pupil more funding than the average secondary school.[27] Schools in Special Measures and Serious Weaknesses also receive more funding than average: £407 per pupil more for a school in Special Measures **(Figure 23)**. Schools in these categories also receive support and resources from local authorities, not necessarily in the form of funding.

25   National Audit Office analysis of the Department's data; Leadership Incentive Grant applies only to secondary schools.
26   Schools also receive Leadership Incentive Grant if they have less than 30 per cent of pupils achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE or more than 35 per cent of their pupils eligible for free school meals.
27   Average resources per pupil for all secondary schools are £3,463, compared with schools that receive both Leadership Incentive Grant and Excellence in Cities, which get per-pupil resources of £3,785.

22 Schools receiving Leadership Incentive Grant analysed by proportion of pupils receiving Free School Meals, 2004

439 secondary schools receive Leadership Incentive Grant funding though they have less than the national average proportion (15.6 per cent) of pupils eligible for free school meals.

Number of schools
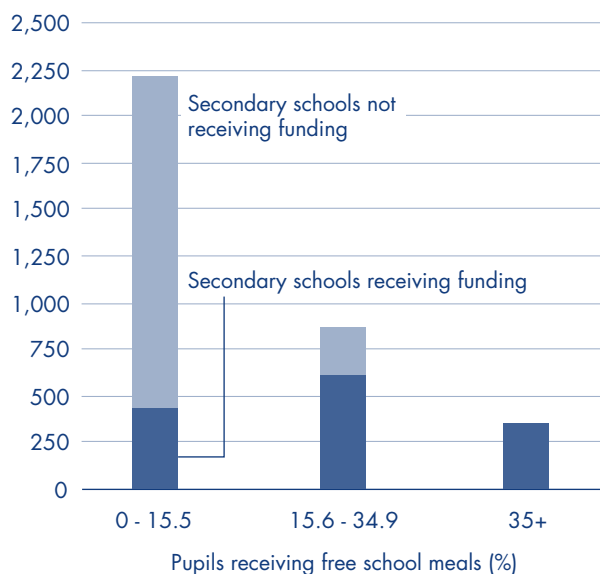
Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from the Department

23 Funding of schools in Ofsted categories, 2004-05

Ofsted category (August 2004)	Number of schools	Average funding per pupil (£)
All schools	22,346	3,180
Serious Weaknesses	308	3,260
Special Measures	313	3,587

Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from the Department (Section 52 Budget Statement) and Ofsted

NOTE

Funding includes all formula funding and grants allocated to schools for 2004-05. Figures include the £25 billion devolved to schools only and not the £8 billion retained by local authorities. Schools in Ofsted categories exclude Pupil Referral Units.

1.37 A 2003 Ofsted evaluation of the effectiveness of the Excellence in Cities initiative found that it was making an important difference to schools in disadvantaged areas.[28] The greatest impact has been in primary schools where the standards among 7-year olds and 11-year olds in English and mathematics have risen faster than the national average. However, at secondary level there remained a wide gap between attainment in these schools and the national average.

1.38 The Department decided not to carry out a formal evaluation of the Leadership Incentive Grant programme in order to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy (though some schools in receipt of the Leadership Incentive Grant have been monitored by Ofsted). The Department scrutinises allocated funding, and if not satisfied with the spending of the grant by a particular school then it withholds the following year's funding. Evaluation includes two peer assessments. Headteachers of recovered schools told us that extra funding supplied via the Leadership Incentive Grant and the Excellence in Cities programmes had helped their school to face the challenges of their area. Several indicated that if they had received Leadership Incentive Grant earlier than its starting date of 2003-04, their school might not have got into such difficulties.

28   *Excellence in Cities and Education Action Zones: Impact and management,* Ofsted, 2003.

PART TWO
Turning around poorly performing schools

2.1 Where a school has been identified as poorly performing it is vital that it makes a speedy recovery, so that pupils are disadvantaged for as little time as possible. In addition, the longer a school is poorly performing, the more difficult it can be to turn around the school. This part of the report examines:
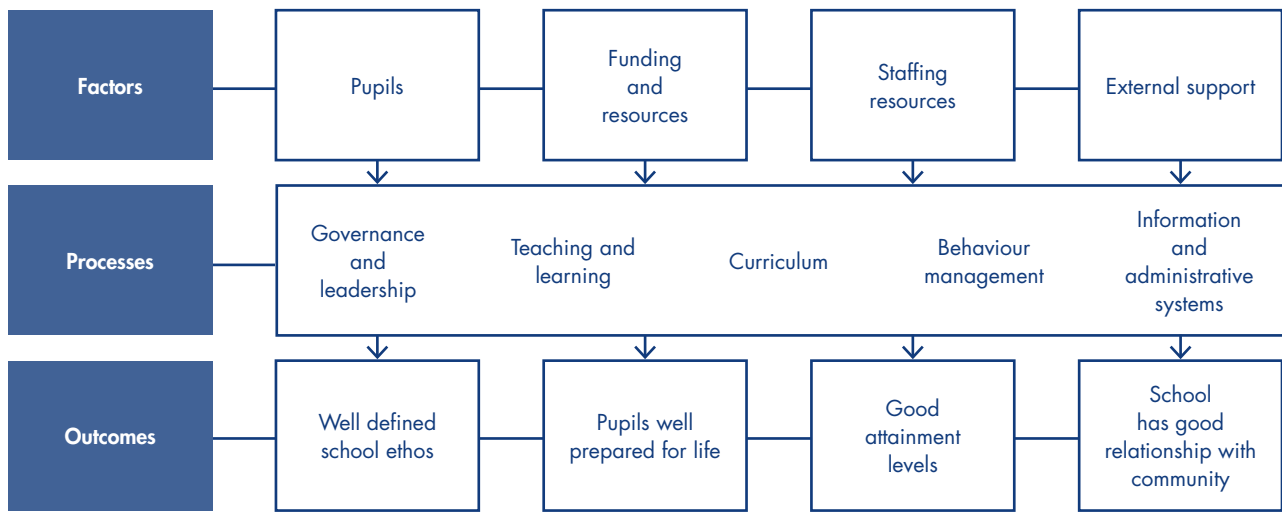
■ factors that contribute to school performance;

■ improving leadership and management, teaching and learning, and pupil behaviour;

■ positive and negative effects on a school entering an Ofsted category;

■ the recovery rate of schools entering an Ofsted category;

■ the support that such schools receive from Ofsted, local authorities, parents and the community, and from other schools;

■ improving school buildings;

■ national programmes to replace schools with long-term poor performance; and

■ national programmes to improve low-attaining primary schools.

Many different factors contribute to school performance

2.2 A school's performance is largely determined by its pupils, the funding it receives, the headteacher, teaching and other staff, and support received from outside the school. Some of these factors cannot be directly controlled by schools, but they can be influenced **(Figure 24 overleaf)**.

2.3 Schools perform poorly when their processes, such as behaviour management or curriculum content, are not well established or capable of making the best use of the school's resources. School leadership is vital in guiding the strategic direction and ethos of the school, including setting high expectations for pupils and staff. The quality of teaching has a direct influence on pupil attainment and social development. Designing an appropriate curriculum is important; for example, providing vocational courses for pupils who engage more effectively with these than with academic courses. Schools need to manage pupil behaviour, so that teaching and learning can be effective. And all schools need to be supported by efficient administration. **Case study 2 overleaf** illustrates how one school methodically tackled all these aspects of its performance to come out of a period of failure.

24 Factors and processes influencing school performance

Factors	Pupils	Funding and resources	Staffing resources	External support
Processes	Governance and leadership	Teaching and learning	Curriculum	Behaviour management	Information and administrative systems
Outcomes	Well defined school ethos	Pupils well prepared for life	Good attainment levels	School has good relationship with community

Source: National Audit Office

CASE STUDY 2

Using a comprehensive approach in tackling medium term weakness – The Heartlands High School, Birmingham

An Ofsted monitoring visit in March 2003 showed that the school, already in Serious Weaknesses, had not made reasonable progress. It was placed in Special Measures.

Fourteen months later, in May 2004, the school had made sufficient progress to come out of Special Measures. It had improved:

Governance and leadership

The school recruited a new headteacher, experienced in leading improvement in other schools, together with an experienced governor who had previously worked with her in turning around another school. Two new parent governors were influential within the local community.

Teaching and learning

The headteacher was resourceful in recruiting good staff and tapping into available initiatives; she strengthened the teaching and management structure so that its priority was the time available to teachers to spend on teaching.

Curriculum

An alternative curriculum was developed, which helped to motivate pupils who had not engaged well with academic subjects.

Behaviour

A positive vision for the school, shared by teachers and pupils, helped pupils to understand what the school expected of them, particularly in relation to their behaviour.

Information and administration

Support staff took on more of the administrative tasks, and the school introduced a monitoring system to measure progress in all areas.

School recovery always requires some improvement to leadership and management

2.4 **Figure 25** shows the top 12 (out of 29) key areas contributing to the recovery of schools in Special Measures or Serious Weaknesses, in order of importance as stated by headteachers of recovered schools. Factors concerning management and leadership feature highly: initiatives to improve teaching and learning; changes to the management team; initiatives to improve performance monitoring and the quality of existing leadership and management; changes to the headteacher; and changes to the governing body.

25 Key areas contributing to the recovery of schools from Special Measures or Serious Weaknesses

Improvements across a wide range of aspects contribute to school improvement.
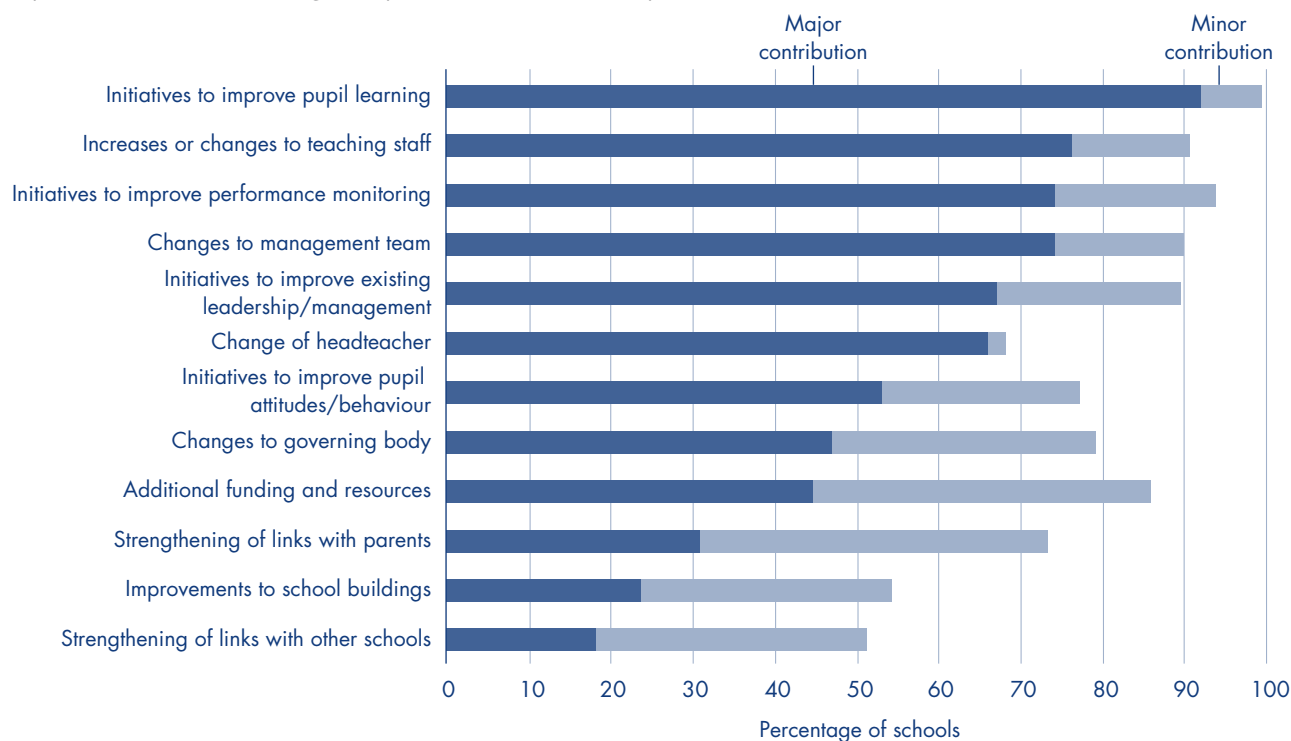
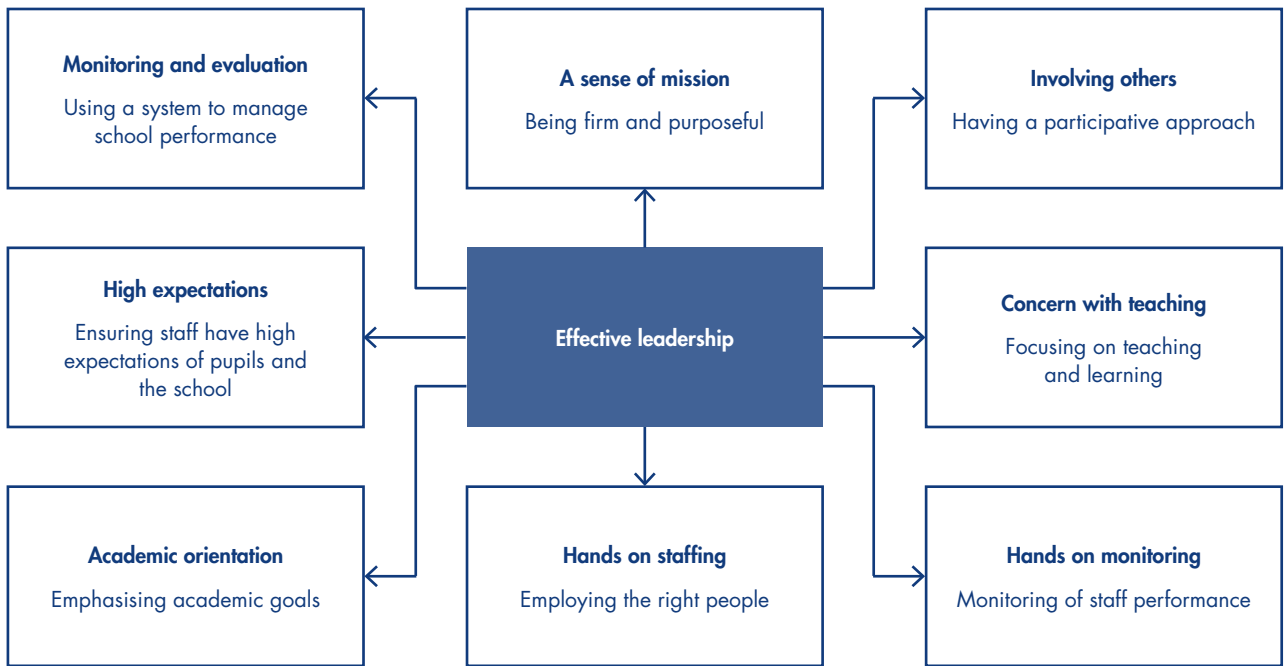Source: National Audit Office survey of recovered schools

2.5   Figure 26 overleaf shows the qualities of effective leadership and management according to the National College for School Leadership. The headteacher has a particularly demanding role, as the figurehead of the school and the person with ultimate responsibility for the school's performance. The role requires a high degree of commitment – the School Teachers' Review Body reported that in March 2005 headteachers of primary schools worked an average of 53 hours per week and headteachers of secondary schools averaged over 62 hours a week. In addition, the role of headteacher is growing and diversifying. For example, in implementing the Department's *Every Child Matters* strategy, schools are encouraged to offer a range of extended services to help improve the well-being of children and young people. This will place extra responsibilities on some headteachers, although the Department considers that the impact will be minimised by the provision of additional support from the Department and local authorities.

2.6   The range of leadership tasks in Figure 26 cannot be done successfully by the headteacher alone. The National College promotes 'distributed leadership', where the management and leadership of the school are shared among a mutually supportive and collaborative team of people, guided by the headteacher. Especially in larger schools, having a wider team responsible for developing a positive culture and ethos for learning helps build expectations of teachers and pupils throughout the school more readily than if the responsibility is vested mainly in the headteacher and deputy. A school with distributed leadership is also less vulnerable to the departure of its headteacher.

"One of the things that really struck me about 'good' schools is that they have a learning culture which is totally shared amongst all the staff and promoted by the whole leadership team."

School adviser

26 Qualities of effective school leadership

Monitoring and evaluation	A sense of mission	Involving others
Using a system to manage school performance	Being firm and purposeful	Having a participative approach

High expectations		Concern with teaching
Ensuring staff have high expectations of pupils and the school	**Effective leadership**	Focusing on teaching and learning

Academic orientation	Hands on staffing	Hands on monitoring
Emphasising academic goals	Employing the right people	Monitoring of staff performance

Source: National College for School Leadership/Professor David Reynolds

2.7 A headteacher who leads the recovery of a school in challenging circumstances requires some very special characteristics. They are likely to need considerable personal presence and strength of mind. At the same time, they need to have a flexible leadership style that helps all other staff to grow in strength so that they, too, can contribute fully to the recovery of the school.

2.8 Three-quarters of headteachers responding to our survey considered that problems with school leadership had been a major contributor to the school's earlier difficulties. And two-thirds considered that a change of headteacher had made a major contribution to their school's recovery. Recognising that these views may be subjective, we tested them during school visits and focus groups and concluded that the critical importance of the headteacher's leadership and management to the success of a school is beyond doubt.

2.9 It is the governing body that appoints the headteacher and, in our view, this is the most important responsibility that the governing body has. In particular, if a school is in trouble, it will need a headteacher who can manage the situation and turn it round. In our focus

groups, local authority school advisers expressed concern that, even faced with a serious situation, some governing bodies would still appoint the candidate they were most comfortable with, rather than one who might 'ruffle a few feathers' but be just what the school needed to put it on the path to improvement. Recruitment and selection requires skill and experience, so it is important that governors get good training and support, and that they take seriously the advice they are given.

Improvements in teaching and learning are essential to school recovery

2.10 Poorly performing schools can become distracted by serious difficulties with pupil behaviour, funding and the condition of school buildings, and the management team can lose sight of the basics – the teaching and learning – that the school is there to provide. This helps explain why over 90 per cent of headteachers of recovered schools considered that the quality of teaching and of pupil learning were central to their school's recovery (Figure 25).

2.11 Headteachers and others in recovered schools spoke of the focus needing to 'go right into the classroom' to make sure everything possible is being done to enable pupils to learn. Teaching quality may be improved by providing teachers with more assessment and coaching. Trust and a supportive approach are important, so that headteachers and others can observe classes in the spirit of teacher improvement, rather than their presence being seen as a threat. In some cases, however, teachers will need to be replaced if they remain unable to improve the quality of their teaching.

2.12 Improvements in teaching need to be accompanied by good, properly used systems to support pupil learning. Individual pupils' performance needs to be continuously monitored to track their progress and assess their strengths and weaknesses, so that help can be provided where progress is less than expected.

A positive ethos and improvements in teaching and learning contribute most to better pupil behaviour

2.13 Most headteachers indicated that improved teaching and learning, and high expectations, had a positive impact on pupil behaviour. More than half of surveyed headteachers also believed that specific initiatives to improve behaviour had contributed to their school's recovery – they often put in place a new behaviour policy soon after arriving at a poorly performing school. Pupils told us that they were pleased to see poor behaviour being addressed – they could concentrate better and learn more because there were fewer distractions from 'messing about'. **Case study 3** illustrates one example of how improved behaviour management makes a school much more effective.

There is a high recovery rate for schools put into Special Measures

2.14 Before the 2005 Schools White Paper, schools put into Special Measures have been aware that they might face closure if they did not improve within about two years. Around 85 per cent of schools in Special Measures remain open and emerge successfully **(Figure 27 overleaf)**. Primary schools have the highest recovery rate, which may be because they are smaller and less complex organisations than secondary schools. Some schools that close are later

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CASE STUDY 3

Tackling poor behaviour – Cardinal Hinsley High School, Brent

Cardinal Hinsley High School is a relatively small Catholic secondary school, located in a very deprived urban area but also taking pupils from neighbouring areas.

After the school went into Special Measures in February 2002, the new management team set about improving behaviour. They devised a clear policy that applied 'zero tolerance' to poor behaviour, while also recognising good behaviour.

Teachers had previously felt unable to teach well because of poor behaviour in the classroom so they were advised on how to deal consistently with difficult pupils. Improvements in behaviour made better teaching possible, starting a 'virtuous circle'. A police officer visited the school and spoke to pupils about good citizenship. Pupils told us that they felt safer walking along school corridors and enjoyed lessons more 'because there wasn't lots of fighting and messing about'.

The most recent Ofsted report stated that 'the pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good overall'. Some pupils are still excluded, but the rate of exclusion has more than halved. The school came out of Special Measures in June 2004. The Inspector considered that improvements to these processes were now embedded in the school.

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re-opened as a new school on the same site. In some cases, closure is in part a response to demographic changes that reduce the need for school places in the area. Occasionally schools have been removed from Special Measures but remained a cause of concern for Ofsted; these were put into the Serious Weaknesses category.

2.15 Some schools do close immediately after coming out of Special Measures, but the data does not allow us to quantify closures and these schools are counted as recovered. By analysing our recovered schools survey sample we estimate that between 4 per cent and 8 per cent of schools close shortly after emerging from Special Measures, reducing the actual recovery rate to around four-fifths.

2.16 A delay in the recovery of a school means that entire year groups of pupils can spend a large part of their school careers receiving an unsatisfactory education. A school's reputation can be damaged, making it difficult for the school to retain existing pupils and staff and attract new ones. Pupils told us they were ashamed that their school had been labelled as 'failing' and they felt loyalty and pride in their school when it came out of an Ofsted category.

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27 Outcomes for schools entering Special Measures, 1993-2003

Primary schools are the most likely to recover from Special Measures.
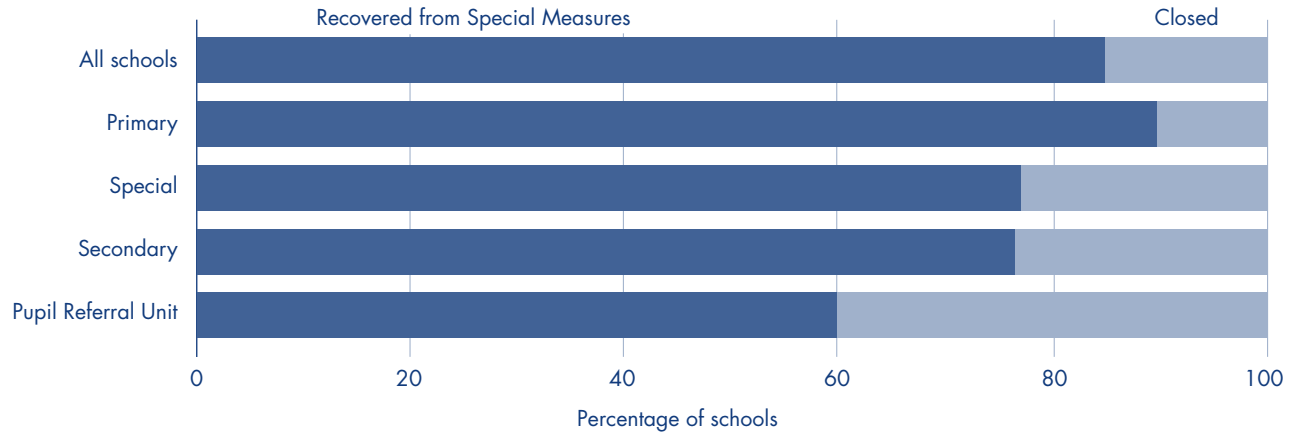
Source: Improvement through inspection, Ofsted, 2004

2.17 From our survey of recovered schools, we analysed how long schools took to come out of Ofsted categories. **Figure 28** shows that most schools came out of Special Measures after four to six school terms, while a minority recovered within one year (one to three terms). Recovery from Serious Weaknesses generally took between six and seven terms, this timeframe arising from Ofsted's re-inspection which occurred two years after the original inspection; some schools may have actually improved earlier. Overall, 19 per cent of schools that responded to the survey remained in a category for seven terms or more. While these are a small minority of schools, their pupils miss out on a good education for more than two years and, for some, their whole time at that school.

2.18 Most headteachers (82 per cent) responding to our survey considered that their schools could not have recovered more quickly, while 15 per cent considered that they could have recovered one term earlier. The Department is concerned that some schools are taking too long to recover. As set out in the 2005 White Paper, new legislation will require local authorities to consider all options for a school when it goes into Special Measures, including closure. If the school remains open but has not demonstrated improvement after a year, the local authority will have to reconsider the options, with a presumption of closure if progress is inadequate. Only 10 per cent of schools in our survey recovered from Special Measures within a year (Figure 28). Ofsted

information on schools that went into Special Measures in autumn 2003 indicates that around 68 per cent of schools made at least reasonable progress in the first year; so these proposed changes could have substantial implications for many schools that enter Special Measures. The changes will also require Ofsted to ensure that it is fair and rigorous in collecting and assessing evidence of improvement and in assessing school leaders' 'capacity to improve'. Ofsted intends to make this assessment based on the school's self-evaluation and the leadership's track record of securing improvement in the school. Without a careful assessment and effective external support, there is a risk that schools that do not yet have sufficient evidence of actual improvements will be closed.

Most schools placed in an Ofsted category benefit in the long term though there are some negative effects

2.19 When a school goes into Special Measures or is categorised as having Serious Weaknesses after an Ofsted inspection, the impact is substantial. In most cases, Ofsted's verdict comes as a shock: our survey of recovered schools suggested that only 38 per cent of school leaders had expected the verdict. So not only do many schools have to deal with newly revealed problems (and the blow to their confidence), but they must also do so in the public eye because the inspection results are published.

28 Length of time schools spend in an Ofsted category

Most schools in our survey took between four and six terms to recover.
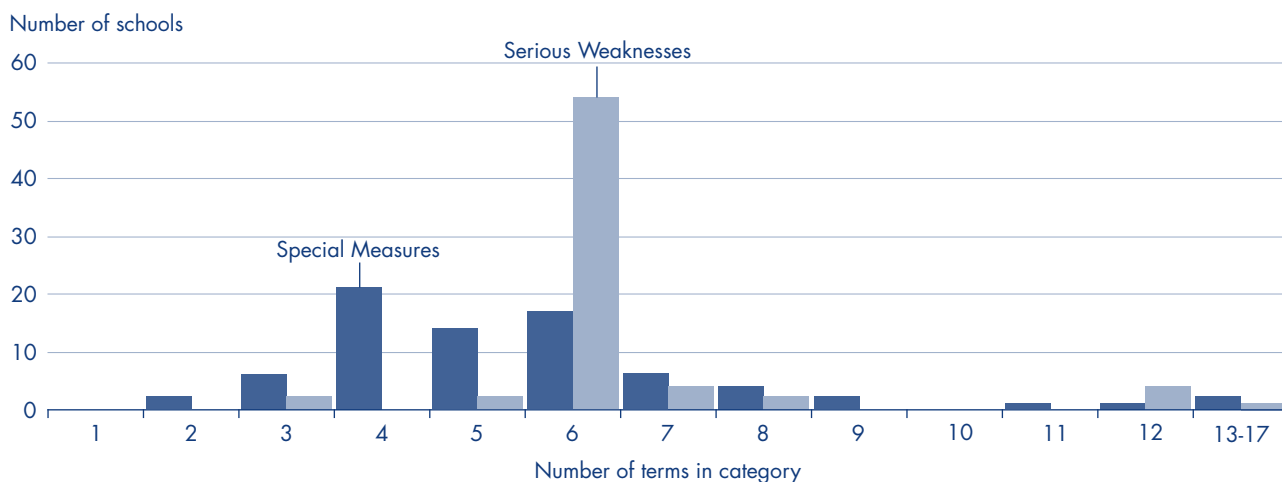
Source: National Audit Office survey of recovered schools

NOTE

The time schools spent in Serious Weaknesses was affected by the timing of monitoring visits, which gave schools the opportunity to demonstrate improvement after six to eight months or two years.

"Oh, it was an awful experience; it was an awful feeling, sitting there, because they come and actually read the report out to you and tell you that they're putting the school in Special Measures. It was horrible. You feel sick and then the school was just like… gloom."

School governor

"Within 18 months it was up again and people saying, 'Oh, your school's turned around, hasn't it?' I've got stopped by a lot of people saying it's done well…I think it possibly was a necessary evil. I really wouldn't like to go through it again but I think maybe it pushed us more in the right direction and it made everything happen quicker because it had to happen."

School governor

2.20 Many headteachers are concerned about the detrimental effect of their school going into an Ofsted category, particularly for its effect on staff morale (75 per cent of headteachers), on the school's reputation (60 per cent) and on recruitment and retention (51 per cent), often with consequent effects on the school roll **(Figure 29 overleaf)**. Research into the impact of Ofsted inspections has shown that staff and governors of schools put into Special Measures can suffer from shock, depression and disillusionment. A 1999 report by the National Foundation for Educational Research found that schools considered the period after going into Special Measures to be traumatic and staff suffered from stress and declining morale.[29]

2.21 However, headteachers also consider there to be strongly beneficial effects of entering an Ofsted category, for example on schools' governance and management, the increased support from the local authority and the powerful imperative for improvement (Figure 29).

2.22 Some headteachers have concerns about the new Ofsted inspection framework (Figure 11 on page 21). In particular, a poorly performing school that had installed new management shortly before its inspection would not have had sufficient time to demonstrate to inspectors that there was the 'capacity to improve'. Such a school might therefore be placed in Special Measures rather than receive a Notice to Improve (which replaced the Serious Weaknesses category from September 2005).

29   *The Impact of Ofsted Inspections*, NFER, 1999.

29	The effects of being placed in an Ofsted category		
	Beneficial effect %	**No effect %**	**Detrimental effect %**
Advice and support from local authority	94	5	1
Management awareness of key issues faced by school	88	12	0
Management ability to deal with key issues	84	13	3
Governance	77	16	7
Funding from local authority	63	35	2
Links with other schools	36	61	3
Involvement of parents and community	33	49	18
Staff morale	22	3	75
Recruitment and retention of staff	19	30	51
School's reputation (and effect on school roll)	15	25	60

Source: National Audit Office survey of recovered schools

Schools in Ofsted categories receive good support to help them recover

2.23 Figure 18 on page 28 showed the various sources and types of support for schools. When a school enters an Ofsted category, support is triggered to improve the school involving a range of people, but particularly Ofsted and the local authority responsible for the school.

■ The school should address the areas for improvement highlighted by the inspection team in the school's development plan.

■ The local authority is invited to produce its own statement of action, including details of the support that it will give the school.

■ The school is encouraged to send Ofsted periodic self-evaluations, assessing its progress against the plan.

■ For a school in Special Measures, Ofsted's inspectors visit regularly to assess progress and provide feedback to the school and local authority. Once progress is good enough, Ofsted will remove the school from the category.

Ofsted could give more advice

2.24 In 2004, Ofsted reported on the impact of its school inspections over the first ten years of its existence.[30] The report drew on a range of evidence and concluded that Ofsted has made a strong contribution to school improvement, in particular by providing the evaluation and diagnosis that helps schools understand how effective they are, and what they need to do to improve. It reported that the schools that benefited most were the most effective schools, because they were good at following up inspection findings. But the other category to get the most benefit was the weakest schools (those requiring Special Measures), partly because of the resulting exposure and pressure to improve.

2.25 Our survey of headteachers of recovered schools showed more positive than negative views about Ofsted inspection reports:

■ 82 per cent considered that report findings were easy to understand;

■ 73 per cent considered that report findings were well founded; and

■ 70 per cent considered that recommendations were constructive and relevant.

2.26 These views are in keeping with the results of post-inspection surveys that Ofsted sends to all headteachers. Overall, the surveys completed in 2004-05 showed the vast majority (90 per cent) of headteachers reported they were satisfied the inspection would move the school forward. A similarly high proportion was satisfied with the work of the inspection team. Only 17 per cent considered that the negative effects of inspections outweighed the benefits.

2.27 There is much respect in schools for Ofsted inspectors, although some headteachers consider that they could give more advice to schools. However, Ofsted takes a relatively 'pure' approach to maintaining its independence, and does not allow inspectors to give formal advice to schools, but only to make assessments. In practice, a certain amount of advice is occasionally provided informally, but there is frustration among some headteachers that the advice cannot be more explicit. Of the 43 per cent of headteachers who considered Ofsted could have done more to help their schools to recover, most wanted more advice and guidance about school

30 *Improvement through inspection*, Ofsted, July 2004, prepared with the assistance of the Institute of Education at the University of London.

improvement. Inspectors could, for example, share their knowledge of where good practice exists in schools in similar circumstances.

"The knowledge that Inspectors have got is massive ... and I think that somebody in my position could really do with something like: 'forget about that but this is what you need to do'. That would be so helpful".

Teacher at a school that was in Special Measures

2.28 Ofsted works with the Adult Learning Inspectorate, which is responsible for inspection of providers of training for adults, when the two jointly inspect further education colleges that provide education from age 14 or 16. The Adult Learning Inspectorate uses inspection as the first step towards quality improvement and places emphasis on the identification and dissemination of good practice. Inspection reports emphasise examples of good practice as well as identifying areas of weakness, and the Inspectorate generally provides advice on demand. This advice may be given before, during and after inspections and, in particular, leading up to and during monitoring visits when the Inspectors check whether suggested improvements have been made. Through its website, the Inspectorate also provides a database of good practice – 'Excalibur' – which takes real-life examples from inspections that training providers can use as a resource to improve the quality of their provision. Although not all of this approach may be suitable for Ofsted, we believe that Ofsted could offer more advice on school improvement without compromising any of the principles of inspection of public services that have been set out by the Cabinet Office.[31]

2.29 Ofsted is aware of the need to improve its monitoring of the impact of inspections and that, as part of the improvement, it may need to make its advice on good practice more explicit. It has started work to improve impact monitoring, overseen by a steering group that includes us, its external auditors, as observers providing advice from our own experience of securing and measuring impacts through our audits. The Adult Learning Inspectorate has also been invited to join the group.

Some local authorities could provide more support

2.30 Local authorities are required to assist schools in Ofsted categories, and they do so in a variety of ways, such as helping in improvement planning, providing training for staff and governors, or providing additional resources, human or financial. Our survey of headteachers showed that the majority of schools in Ofsted categories were satisfied with this support: 78 per cent of headteachers considered local authority funding to be sufficient and 84 per cent considered training to be sufficient and of high quality (Figure 20 on page 29).

2.31 Local authorities have powers to appoint additional governors or suspend a school's delegated budget (with the effect of taking away the school's control of its finances). If a headteacher is refusing to acknowledge or respond effectively to problems identified, then a local authority might choose to use its powers. There is no central record of local authorities' use of powers in respect of schools, and school advisers told us that they are rarely used. In its inspection reports, Ofsted occasionally mentions exercise of powers to facilitate school improvement. For example, in 2002 in relation to Birmingham City Council, Ofsted noted a firmer approach, including appropriate use of statutory powers to issue a formal warning to the school, and use, when necessary, of competency procedures (a formal process intended to either improve or dismiss weak teachers), as first steps towards improving a school.[32]

2.32 Local authorities could provide more emotional support in schools that have received a poor inspection result. Most authorities already employ psychologists, mainly to assist pupils with special needs and their teachers. But similar support could also help school staff to accept and deal with adverse inspection findings, particularly where the findings are unexpected and the staff, if well supported, have the capacity to improve.

31   *The Government's Policy on Inspection of Public Services*, Cabinet Office, 2005.
32   *Inspection of Birmingham Local Education Authority*, Ofsted, 2002.

Parents and the local community have an important role

2.33 Parents and the local community have a role in supporting schools and helping them to recover. Nearly two-thirds of headteachers considered that strengthening links with parents made some contribution to a school's recovery. Some described the 'battles' they faced in convincing parents that the school was a worthwhile place to send their children. Some emphasised the importance of making a good impression on parents, not just in their capacity as carers but also as representatives of the local community. Schools perceived they had 'turned the corner' once parents started positively to want their children to attend the school.

2.34 In the course of the Audit Commission's current study of schools' relationships with their local communities and the impact of wider council policies (Appendix 1, paragraph 2), it identified examples of schools with strategies to engage both parents and the wider community in the work of the school. For example, some schools ran schemes aimed at raising parental aspirations and support for their children by developing parents' own basic skills and encouraging them to get more involved in their children's learning. And some schools were working closely with council departments other than education to ensure, for example, that educational improvement was at the centre of regeneration initiatives for an area.

2.35 Faith schools have access to additional support, advice and encouragement from their diocese. Faith schools that we visited considered that their religious character gave them a stronger and more defined culture and ethos. A strong ethos is likely to help poorly performing faith schools to turn around, provided that other key factors such as an effective leadership team are in place.

2.36 Collaboration often occurs between schools and the private sector. For example, Business in the Community – a national movement of 700 companies wishing to make a positive impact on society, operating through a network of local partnerships – is active in organising support for selected schools. **Case study 4** gives an example of one of these partnerships.

CASE STUDY 4

An effective partnership with the private sector – Oaklands School, Tower Hamlets

Oaklands School is a small secondary school in a very deprived area. According to analysis by the Department, Oaklands was the 15th most improved school in the country over the last four years. In 2001, 41 per cent of the school's pupils achieved five A* to C grade GCSEs, rising to 75 per cent in 2004.

The school has a successful partnership with Lehman Brothers, the investment bank, which became involved with the school in 1998. The partnership has assisted the school in many ways, including the Lehman Brothers providing reading and science 'partners' and mentors, running intensive GCSE study days and providing pupils with work experience. Oaklands' headteacher considered that the aspirational impact of the relationship with Lehman Brothers was hugely important for pupils.

Other schools can provide support

2.37 Collaboration between schools enables them to share problems, good practice and sometimes facilities and staffing, which is particularly important if a school has lost staff following a poor inspection report. Over half of schools (53 per cent) that responded to our survey had benefited from the support of other schools.

2.38 There can be disincentives to collaboration, with some schools preferring to concentrate on their own problems. And there may be competition between schools for pupils and funding, so that headteachers may be uncomfortable with sharing ideas and resources. The 2005 Schools White Paper proposes that local authorities require schools in Special Measures to collaborate with other schools, although collaboration can only take place where other schools co-operate.

2.39 The Department is encouraging schools to collaborate through federations. Federations are groups of schools with a single governing body, formed under the provisions of the Education Act 2002, or with a formal written agreement to work together to raise standards (known as a 'hard' federation). This may involve one headteacher working across two or more schools (commonly called an 'executive headteacher'). A 'soft' federation is where schools work in other types of collaborative networks to raise standards, promote inclusion, find new ways of approaching teaching and learning, and build capacity within schools. From October 2004 the Department began funding 37 federations for a period of three years. Half of them have

poorly performing schools as members, including schools in Ofsted categories, low-attaining and under-performing schools (definitions in Figure 10 on page 20) at both primary and secondary level. The Department's evaluation of the Federations Programme is due to be published in October 2006. In the meantime, the Department wishes to promote federations and, more widely, the concept of collaboration as a means for schools to share strengths, benefit from expertise and promote learning.

2.40 Two of the Department's programmes, Leadership Incentive Grant and Excellence in Cities, are also designed to encourage schools to work more closely together. Their rationale lies in the understanding that inward-looking schools are at greatest risk of poor performance. Collaboration helps to promote a supportive network and wider use of good practice. Headteachers told us that the collaboration provided unexpected benefits that were not immediately connected to financial incentives, for example sharing ideas about teaching and learning and meeting other education professionals. **Case study 5** provides an example of how a Collaborative is working in one area.

Improving school buildings can contribute to better performance

2.41 While unsatisfactory buildings are not a main cause of poor performance, improving buildings has a positive effect: 46 per cent of headteachers in our survey considered that the unsatisfactory quality of school buildings had contributed to their schools' difficulties, while 54 per cent considered that improvements to school buildings had assisted in recovery.

2.42 While an Ofsted pupil survey in 2005 reported a link between good accommodation and high satisfaction with a school, only a small minority of pupils at schools with unsatisfactory accommodation were dissatisfied with the school as a whole. A 2003 assessment of the impacts of schools' capital investment found some evidence of a statistically significant link between capital investment and pupil performance. The review also found that capital investment on its own was not necessarily enough to improve pupil performance in areas that are economically very deprived.[33]

CASE STUDY 5

Effective collaborative working within a local authority – Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

All eleven of Knowsley's secondary schools are receiving Leadership Incentive Grant for the three years to August 2006. The Council formed a Collaborative comprising a senior representative from each school that meets monthly with regular reports on progress. The Council is represented in the Collaborative and has the same status as the schools. Each school contributes £20,000 Leadership Incentive Grant into a fund that is allocated by the Collaborative according to its main objectives to:

■ strengthen leadership at all levels;

■ stimulate collaboration between schools;

■ speed up the transformation of standards; and

■ build on the work done in the Excellence in Cities Programme.

The Collaborative has a number of priorities, including peer review; teaching and learning; continuous professional development; workforce reform (to give teachers more time outside the classroom); curriculum and transition (primary to secondary); assessment and data management; and social inclusion.

The Council believes that the Collaborative has encouraged schools to work more closely together for the wider good, and that increased collaboration has been a major contributor to an improvement in GCSE performance in the Borough from 33 per cent of pupils obtaining five or more good GCSEs in 2003 to 45 per cent (provisional) in 2005. And Ofsted reported in February 2005 that education in Knowsley was outstanding despite high levels of disadvantage in the borough.

2.43 The Department's programme Building Schools for the Future aims to refurbish or replace all secondary schools (including investment in information technology), starting with those areas of greatest social and economic need (as measured by pupil eligibility for free school meals), and educational need (as measured by GCSE performance). The first wave of the programme, from 2005-06, involves 19 local authorities and over £2 billion in funding. The Department estimates that 180 schools will be refurbished or replaced in the first wave. It estimates that an average 900 place secondary school without a sixth form will cost around £15 million, although costs will vary greatly depending on location. Partnerships for Schools, a Non Departmental Public Body, will coordinate delivery and support local authorities. The Department expects the programme to take between 10 and 15 years to complete.

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33   *Building better performance: an empirical assessment of the learning and other impacts of schools capital investment,* PricewaterhouseCoopers for Department for Education and Skills, 2003.

Fresh Start and Academies are programmes that replace schools suffering long-term poor performance

2.44 The Department's Fresh Start and Academies programmes focus on schools in the most difficult circumstances, where other options have failed or are not practicable, and there is a continuing need for a school in the area. Under both programmes, a new school with a new name is formed. Most academies will be located in a new building, and Fresh Start school buildings are often substantially refurbished. With both programmes, there is an intended theme of a fresh beginning with a rejuvenated sense of purpose and ethos, and the new school normally has a new leadership team. They are founded on the principle that all pupils, including those living in the most deprived areas, should have access to the best possible facilities.

Most Fresh Start schools have improved

2.45 Fresh Start was introduced in 1997 to improve schools with the most intractable problems and where all other efforts at recovery had failed. For inclusion in Fresh Start, schools must be in an Ofsted category, subject to a formal local authority warning, or a secondary school achieving less than a 30 per cent rate of pupils gaining at least five A* to C grade GCSEs. There have been 51 Fresh Start schools (27 secondary, 23 primary and one special school) since the programme was launched. Fresh Start schools have received, on average, £1.6 million for capital works and £0.6 million in additional revenue funding (over three years). The programme has recently incorporated 'Collaborative Restart' to emphasise the Department's requirement that Fresh Start schools should collaborate with a successful neighbouring school **(Case study 6)**.

2.46 The Fresh Start programme has not been formally evaluated. Our analysis of GCSE performance in the 27 Fresh Start secondary schools suggests that, on average, they are performing better than their predecessor schools **(Figure 30)**. The nine schools that had reached their fifth year were on average doing more than twice as well as their predecessor schools in terms of the proportion of pupils achieving five A* to C grade GCSEs. Two Fresh Start schools failed to improve and have closed. Overall the programme is achieving improved attainment levels for pupils at challenging schools.

CASE STUDY 6

A successful restart – The Regis School/The King's Church of England School, Wolverhampton

The Regis School closed in 1998 following a period of very serious difficulty and lack of investment (though as it had not recently been inspected, the school was not in Special Measures). It reopened under Fresh Start as The King's Church of England School. It serves a diverse community, with over half of the school's population coming from ethnic minorities. The school is partnered with a neighbouring school, but operates autonomously.

Over four years, the new school received capital funding of £3.1 million and revenue funding of £0.6 million, enabling it to carry out extensive refurbishment and take on a new deputy head and advanced skills teachers (excellent teachers who also support other teachers). Around 48 per cent of pupils obtained five GCSEs at grades A* to C in 2004, which was close to the national average, and a big improvement on the 1997 performance (25 per cent).

It is too early to judge the cost-effectiveness of the Academies Programme

2.47 The Academies Programme is a major element of the Department's strategy for improving poorly performing secondary schools and schools in challenging circumstances. Academies are all ability schools established by sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups working in partnership with central Government, local authorities and schools. Capital costs for academies are shared between sponsors and the Department. The Department meets running costs in full at a level equivalent to funds received by maintained schools. Capital costs have ranged from £7 million to around £38 million, which includes up to £2 million from a sponsor. The average capital costs of the first academies are higher than the estimated average cost of schools to be built under the Building Schools for the Future programme, which is due to a range of factors including single-school procurement, the larger average size of academies, their location in inner city areas where land and building costs can be high, and enhancements to facilities beyond recommended standards. The Department is aiming to reduce the cost of academy buildings by incorporating them within the Building Schools for the Future programme. Academies are set up as companies limited by guarantee with charitable status, with autonomous governing bodies that are not accountable to the local authority. In place of the local authority school advisers, the Department has advisers who support academies.

30 Performance of Fresh Start secondary schools

On average, the 27 Fresh Start schools have improved GCSE results compared with their predecessor schools and take three years to rise above the GCSE floor target for 2004.

Mean proportion of pupils obtaining 5 GCSEs A* to C

Years before and after Fresh Start
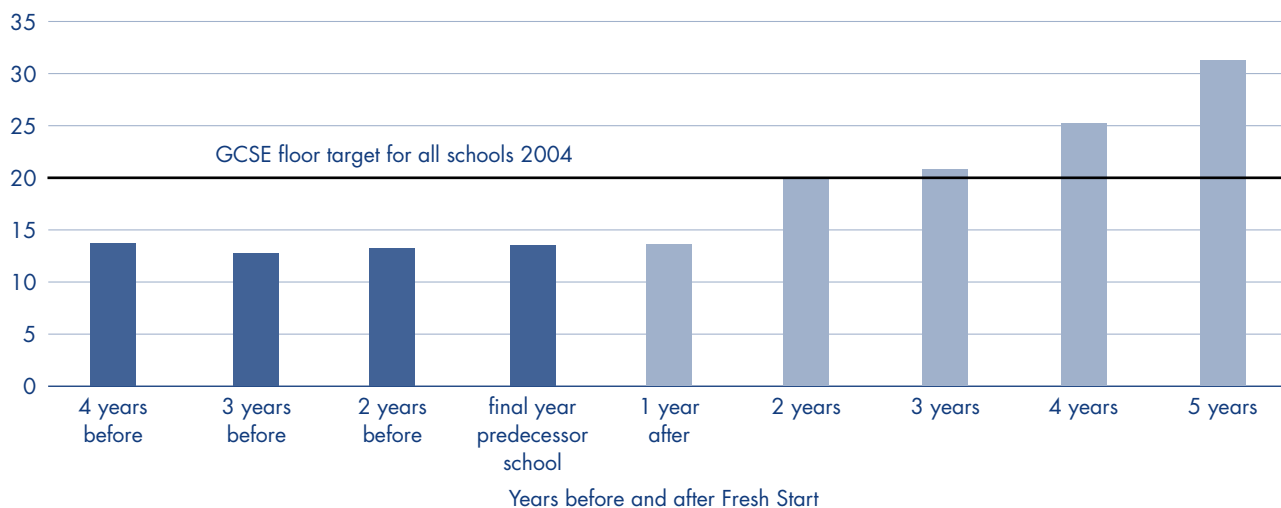
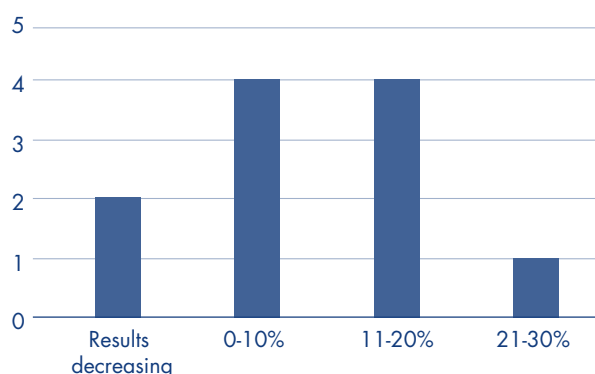*Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from the Department*

2.48 The Department plans to have 200 academies open or in development by 2010. At this point, early in the Programme, 27 academies have opened, including 10 that opened in September 2005. At the time this report was prepared, only three academies had three years of GCSE results, so it is difficult to establish with confidence the performance of the Academies Programme to date in improving pupils' attainment in comparison with predecessor schools. **Figure 31** shows that most academies did well in their first year. Figure 8 on page 9 shows that the underlying improvement in performance started in the last two years of the predecessor school, whereas Fresh Start schools' results started to improve only once the new school opened.

2.49 Though these are early results for academies, there are signs of continuing improvement. The 2004 Key Stage 3 test results for 14-year olds at academies improved faster than the national average: 9 per cent in English and mathematics compared with a national average improvement of 6 and 7 per cent in English and mathematics respectively.[34] The Department's intermediate objective for academies is that they should exceed the national performance for five GCSEs at A* to C grade (54 per cent of pupils in 2004) within four years of opening, which represents a challenging target for most academies.

31 Academy results compared with predecessor schools

Very early signs for academies are promising, with 9 of the first 11 academies producing better GCSE results than their predecessor schools.

Number of academies

Percentage point increase between first year of academy and average of last 3 years results of predecessor school

Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from the Department

NOTE

School performance is measured as pupils' success in attaining five A* to C grade GCSEs. The first year academy results are from 2003 and 2004.

34   *Department for Education and Skills response to the Second Annual Report from the PricewaterhouseCoopers Evaluation of the Academies Programme*, 2005.

2.50 The Department has employed PricewaterhouseCoopers to carry out a five-year evaluation of the Academies Programme. The second annual report, published in 2005, was broadly positive about the early progress made by the first academies, but acknowledged that at present evidence on educational attainment is limited **(Figure 32)**.

2.51 By August 2005, Ofsted had visited 13 academies, reporting that five have made good progress and most were making at least satisfactory progress.[35] Ofsted has placed one, Unity City Academy, into Special Measures **(Case study 7)**. This Academy has had serious human resources and financial problems and is posing a challenge for the Academy Trust (the governing body) and the Department. Some, such as Greig City Academy, have made a more successful start **(Case study 8)**.

The Department has specific programmes to support poorly performing primary schools

2.52 The Department's Primary National Strategy includes two initiatives to improve the performance of poorly performing primary schools. The Intensifying Support Programme aims to raise standards and improve teaching. The Programme was piloted in the 2003-04 school year and rolled out to 850 schools in 2004-05. An evaluation[36] of the pilot found that the great majority of schools valued the additional support and that their Key Stage 2 performance in English and mathematics rose by nearly a quarter over two years. Ofsted has found that these schools are working within a tight structure and mostly have a sense of urgency in implementing improvements.

2.53 The Primary Leadership Programme is a joint initiative of the Department and the National College for School Leadership, providing consultancy support and aimed at supporting improvement in leadership and in the quality of teaching and learning. Ofsted's early evaluation in 2004 concluded that the first year of the Programme had had a limited impact in most schools.[37] It found that many of the first 4,000 schools involved either did not require additional support (because they were not poorly performing schools) or else were not capable of making full use of it. The evaluation was positive about the potential of the Programme. The Department has since revised its guidance to local authorities in order to focus the Programme more sharply on poorly performing schools. It is confident that the Programme will be effective: results in 2004 and 2005 showed that these schools achieved higher percentage point improvements at Key Stage 2 than other schools. Ofsted has since found that implementation has improved, but that the quality of the consultant leaders is still too variable. The Department has commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research to evaluate the programme during 2005 and 2006.

35   Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, interview on BBC News Online, 3 August 2005: *'Positive picture' of academies.*
36   *Evaluation of the Intensifying Support Pilot*, Griffiths, Cotton and Bowbrick, Nottingham Trent University, 2005.
37   *The Primary Leadership Programme 2003-04*, HMI 2231, Ofsted, August 2004.

32   Second year evaluation of the Academies Programme – summary findings

Positive findings

- New academy buildings have been innovative and received broadly positive feedback from staff, pupils and parents about their overall impact on teaching and learning.

- Sponsors have generally helped to establish the vision for academies, and brought to bear additional resources and expertise.

- Strongly positive feedback, particularly from pupils, that academy principals (headteachers) are transforming the learning culture and raising pupils' aspirations.

- Innovative approaches being adopted on curriculum, staffing, teaching and learning, and timetabling.

- Academies are having a positive influence on some aspects of pupil behaviour.

Challenges

- Ensuring that new buildings adequately accommodate some of the more practical requirements of modern teaching and learning spaces.

- Achieving a balance between recruiting new staff and retaining some staff from the predecessor school.

- Resolving a lack of clarity concerning admissions policies for pupils with Special Educational Needs.

- Tackling bullying, which remains a significant problem in some academies.

Source: Second Annual Report of the Evaluation of the Academies Programme, PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2005

CASE STUDY 7

**An academy with early difficulties –
Unity City Academy, Middlesbrough**

Unity City Academy opened in September 2002, taking pupils from two closing secondary schools in a very deprived area. The Academy's leaders have been challenged by delays in moving to a new building costing around £21 million, difficulties in recruiting staff and financial deficits. At its inspection visit in March 2005, Ofsted identified a number of weaknesses:

- Leadership was unsatisfactory overall, though some individuals were effective. There was a lack of continuity in governance, leadership and external support.

- A third of the teachers were newly qualified or unqualified graduate trainees. Staff absence rate was very high, with as many as a third of teachers away on any given day.

- Quality of teaching was poor overall, though with individual examples of good, very good and excellent teaching. Many teachers and other staff were strongly committed to the pupils and they persevered despite, at times, overwhelming pressures.

- Standards were too low and improvement too slow. Progress that pupils made in learning was poor.

- Pupil attendance was very low and an impediment to raising standards. The rate of fixed-term exclusions was high. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour were unsatisfactory.

- The Academy was heading for a very substantial financial deficit.

Source: Ofsted inspection report, May 2005

CASE STUDY 8

**An academy that has made a better start –
Greig City Academy, Haringey**

Greig City Academy opened in September 2002 and was inspected in December 2004. Ofsted identified a number of areas for improvement (including attainment, punctuality, pupil monitoring and middle management) but overall the school was found to be 'improving rapidly'. Areas that received a positive assessment included:

- establishment of a learning culture within the academy;

- good attitude and behaviour of pupils;

- improving attendance, getting close to the national average;

- good spiritual, moral, cultural and social development of pupils;

- an experienced governing body who are well led;

- good relationships with the local community; and

- significantly improved quality of teaching.

In 2005, 52 per cent of GCSE pupils attained five GCSEs grade A* to C, up from 25 per cent in 2003.

PART THREE
Sustaining a school after recovery

3.1 The process of turning around a poorly performing school puts a strain on everyone involved, and is expensive. The poor education that pupils have suffered during the school's decline usually takes time to improve during the period of recovery. Teachers and other staff are, at least initially, demotivated and stressed. The extra support needed, for example from the local authority and Ofsted, takes up resources that would otherwise be available to other schools. Recovery usually entails extra financial costs, for example to manage the performance of existing teachers and recruit new ones, and to improve the fabric of the school.

3.2 It is therefore essential that recovered schools sustain their improvement, which is the subject of this part of our report. We examine:

■ whether recovered schools continue performing well;

■ the key factors that sustain school improvement;

■ the risks that schools may face;

■ the importance of the roles of both the governing body and the local authority in helping to sustain improvement; and

■ other relevant issues – funding, recruitment and retention.

Many recovered schools continue to make good progress initially

3.3 Most schools that have come out of an Ofsted category are confident in their ability to sustain their improvement: 94 per cent of headteachers who responded to our survey were confident that their school would continue to make progress. For schools that come out of Special Measures, Ofsted undertakes a full re-inspection two years later. Nearly 60 per cent of schools re-inspected two years after coming out of Special Measures are rated 'good' or better **(Figure 33)**, whilst 5 per cent are assessed as 'unsatisfactory' or worse.

33 Performance of schools re-inspected after leaving special measures, 1995 to 2004

Nearly 60 per cent of recovered schools are rated 'good' or better when re-inspected by Ofsted two years after emerging from Special Measures.

Ofsted 'overall effectiveness' score
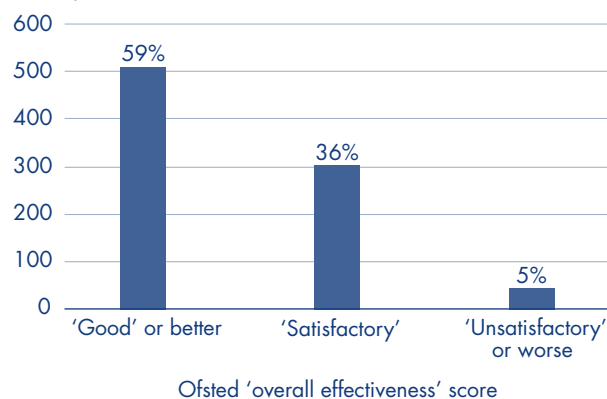
Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from Ofsted

Evidence of continued good progress over the longer term is less clear

3.4 A second failure is likely to cause long-term damage, seriously undermining the school's reputation with parents and position in the community. Between 1993 and the end of the 2004-05 school year, just 44 schools were subject to Special Measures for a second time.[38] However, this excludes schools that went into Serious Weaknesses at some point after they recovered from Special Measures, so it understates the number of schools that remain poorly performing or go back into decline.

3.5 We analysed the long-term outcomes for schools that came out of Special Measures during 1995-96 and 1996-97 using the Department's database of schools and Ofsted's 'overall effectiveness' score from the first routine inspection following the schools' re-inspection. Of the 54 schools in this population, 22 have closed, 31 were at least 'satisfactory' and one was 'unsatisfactory'. We were not able to carry out a more extensive review on the same basis for more schools because of the time lag between inspections – a school coming out of Special Measures in 1997-98 would have its two-year re-inspection in 1999-00 and, under the arrangements in place up to September 2005, might not be inspected again until 2005-06. More frequent inspections (at least once every three to four years: Figure 11 on page 21) from September 2005 will increase the information available on how far recovered schools are sustaining a path to improvement.

3.6 The Department's monitoring of schools showing under-performance or low attainment is relatively new so there is, as yet, only limited evidence on sustaining improvements in these schools.

A culture of continuous improvement is critically important

3.7 We identified several key factors that appeared to be associated with sustained improvement in schools, but in our view a culture of self-evaluation and improvement is key. Schools that fail tend to be inward-looking. They may be complacent or feel powerless to make changes. Just as a culture of continuous improvement is essential to recovery, it must be sustained if the recovery is to continue.

3.8 Headteachers responding to our survey were positive about the self-evaluation framework developed by Ofsted: 89 per cent considered that the framework was helpful in identifying strengths and weaknesses. Nearly the same number (88 per cent) also used other forms of self-evaluation, such as the school's or local authority's own design. Not all were convinced that the framework will have a preventive role: 58 per cent considered that the framework would help to prevent the school from experiencing difficulties in future.

3.9 In order to assist schools and improve the quality of self-evaluation within its framework, Ofsted has identified areas of the self-evaluation form that schools have found the most difficult. Schools needed help in evaluating the impact of systems and procedures and in explaining the effect that leadership and management has on the school. The school needs to be able to explain these clearly in order to give an accurate picture of sustained improvement.

Governing bodies are important to sustaining 'challenge from within'

3.10 Schools in the most challenging circumstances often find it hardest to build an effective governing body. According to the School Governors' One-Stop Shop, a charity that recruits governors, approximately 10 per cent of school governor places are always vacant and schools in some inner city areas have a vacancy rate of 20 per cent or more. Governors are volunteers: they often work in their own time, and the work is time-consuming and can be difficult. Some school governors do not take advantage of employment law which allows 'reasonable time off', which can mean that they do not benefit from governor training, which is organised by local authorities.

3.11 An Ofsted internal report found that school governance tended to be less effective in disadvantaged areas. It nevertheless concluded that 90 per cent of schools had governing bodies that were 'satisfactory' or better, with 60 per cent of schools having good or excellent governors. Areas of weakness identified in the report support our findings, namely that while governors can identify strengths and weaknesses they may not always have the skills and experience to know how the schools should take improvements forward.

38   Of these 44 schools, 29 were no longer in Special Measures and the other 15 were still in the category as at August 2005.

3.12 Some local authority school advisers believe that the role of governor has become so demanding and complex that keeping it as a volunteer role is no longer feasible. They think that some form of remuneration is required, at least for the Chair of Governors and for governors managing the work of committees, in order to add professionalism to the position of governor. One individual might sit on the governing body of a number of schools across a local authority, spending a certain amount of time in each. Using this model, governors would learn transferable skills in different types of schools, as well as acting as a conduit for sharing best practice and initiating collaboration between the schools they were responsible for.
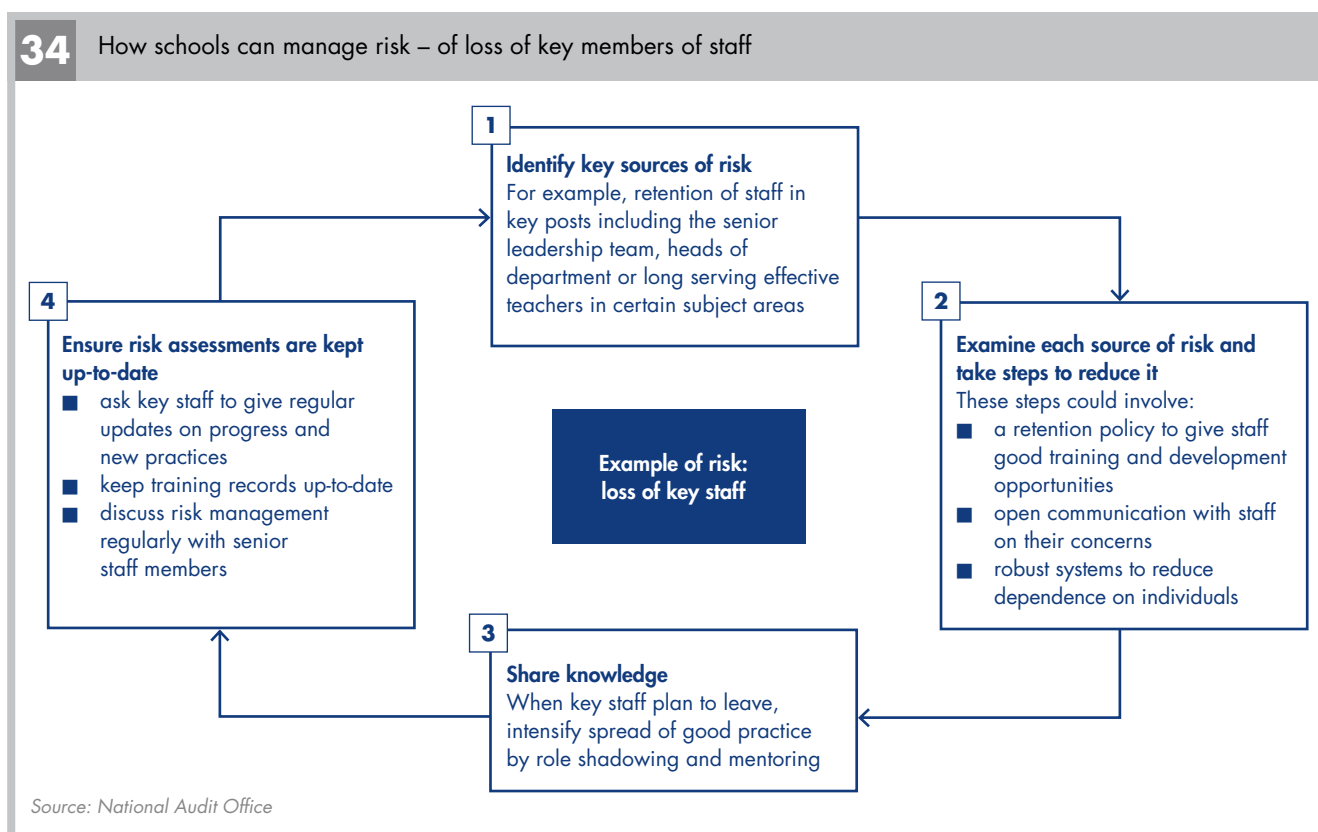
Schools need to identify and manage key risks

3.13 Most schools have well established systems for managing day-to-day risks, such as those that arise from taking pupils on school trips. However, few manage strategic risks systematically as we have recommended

all organisations running public services should do.[39] And yet schools, as organisations depending heavily on human attributes and motivations, and responsible for the care of children and young people, probably face more demanding strategic risks than most other organisations.

3.14 Systems for identifying and managing risk need to be embedded in routine processes, so that they do not rely on the motivation of a particular individual. Embedding systems also means that when an important person leaves the school, they leave 'their' systems behind when they do, to help other people carry on the good work. **Figure 34** shows how schools can approach risk management, using a widely accepted strategic risk – retention of key staff – to illustrate the approach.

"Quality of the senior management is so important. There are countless examples of schools where the headteacher suffers from stress, goes off sick, and the whole edifice tumbles down remarkably quickly."

School adviser

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34 How schools can manage risk – of loss of key members of staff

1 Identify key sources of risk
For example, retention of staff in key posts including the senior leadership team, heads of department or long serving effective teachers in certain subject areas

2 Examine each source of risk and take steps to reduce it
These steps could involve:
■ a retention policy to give staff good training and development opportunities
■ open communication with staff on their concerns
■ robust systems to reduce dependence on individuals

3 Share knowledge
When key staff plan to leave, intensify spread of good practice by role shadowing and mentoring

4 Ensure risk assessments are kept up-to-date
■ ask key staff to give regular updates on progress and new practices
■ keep training records up-to-date
■ discuss risk management regularly with senior staff members

Example of risk: loss of key staff

Source: National Audit Office

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39   *Managing Risks to Improve Public Services*, HC 1078/ Session 2003–04.

3.15 In Part 2 of our report (paragraph 2.6), we referred to the need for school leaders to develop 'distributed leadership' so that the positive ethos of the school is widely owned and communicated. This style of leadership also reduces the risk of decline if a key person, such as the headteacher, leaves the school, because others in the school are already in a good position to continue to take improvements forward.

3.16 Even so, school leaders' vital role makes it essential that schools have 'succession plans' for headteachers and any other key members of staff. This may include interim measures for using other experienced members of staff to fill any temporary vacancies and developing staff with the potential to step into new roles. Around half the surveyed headteachers who were confident about the ability of their school to sustain its improvement after their departure said they had succession plans, which the school could use when it needed to replace them or other key staff.

Schools must engage the local community and remain aware of the challenges

3.17 High expectations and aspirations are important to the success of a school and its pupils. School advisers told us that in some communities, sustaining high expectations is difficult because many parents have low aspirations for their children. In some other communities there are parents who even prefer their children to under-achieve so that they are more likely to stay in the local area.

3.18 Schools have to recognise the reality of community expectations, but it is vitally important that any low expectations are not mirrored by the school and, in particular, that they not adopted by the school's staff. Because a school is a part of the local community, constant vigilance is required so that any low aspirations do not enter the school's culture, and risk, therefore, becoming a self fulfilling prophecy. Schools can also actively engage the local community and play a part in raising expectations; the Audit Commission study (paragraph 2.34) is identifying examples of ways in which schools can raise parental aspirations for their children and involve parents more in the work of the school.

Local authorities need to provide an environment in which schools can sustain improvement

3.19 A number of headteachers noted the importance of continuing to have good relations with their local authority. Schools that are willing to receive support and that welcome advice from local authority advisers are likely to be best placed to spot early signs of difficulty. This is particularly so if problems are linked to issues in the community that the local authority staff identify because they are in contact with several schools. **Case study 9** illustrates how one local authority helped schools in its area to achieve and sustain improvements in GCSE performance through sharing resources and experience.

CASE STUDY 9

A local authority's contribution to sustaining improvements – Blackpool Council

Blackpool Council developed strategies for assisting its schools to tackle under-achievement at GCSE (Key Stage 4):

- a minimum of 16 days of time from two Key Stage 4 consultants for each school;

- development of study skills using good practice from neighbouring successful schools;

- after-school clubs and support from Youth Service;

- 'super learning' days to focus on aspects of the curriculum where weaknesses common to a cohort of pupils are identified;

- work with the authority's school adviser to identify pupils with particular needs;

- research into the potential for, and value of, single sex learning groups; and

- re-deployment of teaching staff where staff with particular strengths can help to boost the teaching of aspects of the syllabus.

"There was a lot of what I would describe as 'dead wood' [on the teaching staff] when I arrived; people with no aspirations or ambitions for themselves or for the school… Any problems in the school; it was the children's fault; it had 'nothing to do with the quality of teaching' – though, in reality, the quality of teaching was poor – that's very much changed now."

Headteacher

3.20 School rolls are falling in many parts of England. Schools and local authorities need to manage together the risks that particular schools may become vulnerable financially if their pupil intake reduces – most of a school's funding depends on pupil numbers – and that less popular schools become more vulnerable because they become obliged to admit disproportionate numbers of challenging pupils. Local authorities currently use local admissions agreements with schools to influence school admissions.

3.21 As part of the government's strategy to involve parents in their children's education, parents are encouraged to express a preference for schools and exercise choice wherever possible. Where there is over-provision of school places in an area, schools that are no longer poorly performing but which have not yet established a good reputation are the most vulnerable to the decisions of parents to apply for places at other schools. Some headteachers told us that they believed some schools in their area were taking more pupils than agreed, and that their own school's future was at risk as a result.

Schools need advance information on funding to enable them to plan effectively

3.22 The Department is to introduce three-year budgets for schools from the 2006-07 financial year to give them more certainty about their funding. To take advantage of the new arrangements, schools will need to develop their capacity for financial management and planning. Those schools that fail to do so may face new risks and are very likely to miss opportunities.

3.23 Schools have long complained about the many separate 'packets' of funding they receive. There are a large number of grants programmes, relating to different activities and requiring specific action to access the grant. The Department proposes to simplify funding over two years up to 2008 by combining most of the grants paid through the Standards Fund into one amalgamated grant available to all schools and according to a common formula.[40] These proposals should help with simplicity and transparency of school funding: 40 per cent of headteachers responding to our survey considered they were unclear on what funding their school was eligible to receive. And only 38 per cent of the headteachers considered that the funding received by their school matched its needs.

3.24 Some schools are nevertheless concerned about 'initiative' funding coming to an end. It is not yet clear how replacing the various initiatives with a single amalgamated grant will affect individual schools. The Department is currently considering how best to replace Leadership Incentive Grant funding for most schools that are currently receiving it. Other grants are to remain targeted at specific schools – including Fresh Start – or at specific activities needing support, including the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant.

Schools need support in monitoring performance

3.25 The Department has an important role in developing a national strategy for schools that makes it easier for schools to sustain their improvement and not relapse into poor performance. The Department's 2004 strategy document *A New Relationship with Schools* sets out the basis for changes in the relationship between government and local authorities and schools. In particular, it envisages lighter touch regulation, a much greater role for school self-evaluation, improved data collection systems, easier systems for schools to apply for the support they need, and a 'unified' dialogue to take place between the school and the wider education system. These changes are intended to make sure that schools receive early support when in need and are thus able to sustain improvement over the long term.

3.26 Local authorities have improved their support to schools, according to Ofsted inspection reports, but concern remains about the number of poorly performing schools. The Department's response has been to introduce School Improvement Partners from September 2005 (paragraph 1.33). The partner is in many cases someone with current or recent headship experience who will advise the school and liaise with the local authority and central government. The School Improvement Partner will also help to set targets and priorities, identify support needed, and advise governors on performance management of headteachers. In the interests of school improvement for the benefit of pupils, we consider it incumbent on all those involved – the Partners, school advisers, other local authority staff and staff in the Department – to make sure the initiative works.

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40   *Consultation on New School Funding Arrangements from 2006*, Department for Education and Skills, 2005.

Schools must be able to recruit good teachers and effective headteachers

3.27 Many local authorities and schools are finding it difficult to fill headteacher vacancies. Applicants for headteacher posts are generally falling, despite salary increases, and there are concerns that it will be difficult to replace the large numbers of headteachers who will be retiring over the next five to ten years. According to Education Data Surveys (a company that provides and reviews education information), there are high vacancy rates for headteachers and deputy headteachers: **Figure 35** shows that a large minority of schools are without a permanent headteacher or deputy, and these posts might have short-term holders such as staff on temporary promotion. Education Data Surveys also reported that a small group of schools experience especially severe difficulties and these were sometimes the very schools most in need of consistent, high quality leadership.

35 School leadership vacancy rates, 2004-05 school year

School leadership vacancy rates are high.

Percentage of posts vacant
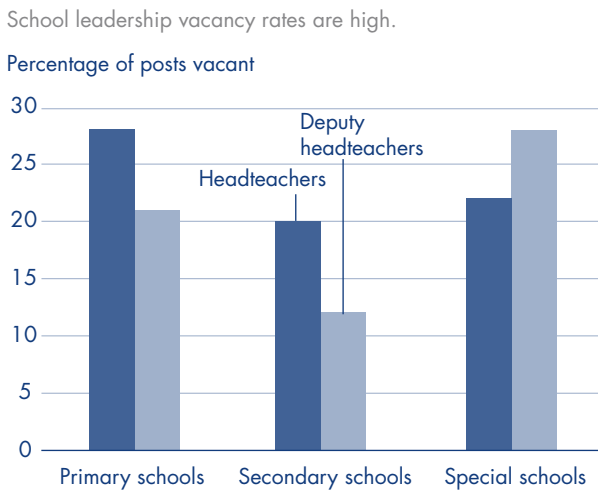
Source: The state of the labour market for senior staff in schools in England and Wales 2004-2005, *Education Data Surveys, 2005*

NOTE

This data includes figures for Wales as well as England, though 98 per cent of responses were from schools in England. Urban areas, such as London, tended to have higher leadership vacancies than average.

3.28 One way local authorities have sometimes tackled this problem is by appointing executive headteachers leading more than one school. This can be successful but it involves risks. Headteachers already have a challenging job and the burden of the extended role can prove onerous. There is a risk that the school without its own headteacher demands more attention than the executive headteacher can realistically provide. However, the model has worked for some schools.

3.29 Schools in some areas of the country also have features that make it especially difficult to attract enough teachers of the right calibre. Areas at the extremes tend to suffer most – deprived areas, and in affluent areas where the cost of living is high. Of headteachers responding to our survey, 70 per cent said that such issues featured in their school's problems. Recently an Institute for Public Policy Research report examining the barriers to teacher retention in challenging schools found that pupil behaviour and overwork were the most common causes.[41] While salary was seen as important, teachers most wanted a better quality of initial and ongoing training, and better support. The schools may have to rely on supply teachers, which can make sustained improvement difficult because they may not have a long-term commitment to the school.

3.30 In contrast, some parts of the country are beginning to see a surplus of primary school teachers, reflecting falling school rolls. There is a risk that newly trained primary school teachers do not have an immediate opportunity to use their skills and experiences, and they may even be lost to teaching altogether if they turn to other careers.

3.31 In 2001, the Government set up the National College for School Leadership to be its lead partner and a key agent for transforming the quality of leadership in schools. The College is a company limited by guarantee and a public body independent of the Department. Before it opened, headteachers were often appointed without training. According to figures published by Ofsted, leadership is now 'good' or better in around three-quarters of primary schools and secondary schools (though other aspects of management, such as self-evaluation, still need to improve). The National Professional Qualification for Headship became mandatory from April 2004 and some universities have agreed that this qualification will count as a 33 per cent credit towards a Masters degree in School Leadership and Management.

41   *Choice and Equity in Teacher Supply*, Institute for Public Policy Research, 2005.

3.32 The College has plans for other developments, for example linked to the important challenges for headteachers and schools arising from *Every Child Matters*, which will expect schools and other agencies to collaborate more closely to support and help children. The College is developing its own responsiveness so that it can help to equip school managers and leaders with the wide range of skills, knowledge and expertise they will require to work effectively.

"We used additional financial support from the Department and the local authority to fund two Management Training Programmes that strengthened the senior management links across the Federation. And we also had 10 of our middle managers taking part in the NCSL's 'Leading from the Middle' programme. That was extremely good focused work for our managers, at all levels of experience. Some very experienced, very successful middle managers got an awful lot out of it... the course was very strong."

Headteacher of a school that recovered
from Special Measures

APPENDIX 1
Study methodology

1   This report is based on:

- quantitative analyses of data on school performance, initiatives and Ofsted inspection results;

- costing of initiatives aimed at preventing failure and improving poor performance;

- visits to 14 schools, both primary and secondary, with a variety of experiences of being defined as poorly performing in some aspect. The visits included interviews with the headteachers, senior staff, teachers, pupils and governors at these schools;

- a survey requesting information from headteachers of schools that came out of Ofsted categories;

- focus groups with school advisers from local authorities;

- discussions with staff of the Department, Ofsted, and local authorities;

- consultation with a range of stakeholder groups;

- analysis of academic and other research;

- advice from an educational psychologist on our collection and interpretation of evidence; and

- consultation with a reference panel of experts.

2   Some of our fieldwork, including three joint visits to schools, was carried out with the Audit Commission. As part of its work for a report to be published later in 2006, the Audit Commission has been examining:

- the impact of council policies (for example on regeneration, housing, and community safety as well as education) on schools in more deprived neighbourhoods; and

- how successful schools can be fostered through more proactive relationship building with local communities.

Quantitative analyses of school performance data

3   The Department and Ofsted provided data on school performance and initiatives which we used to identify the number of schools in various categories:

- in Ofsted categories;

- with examination results below government target levels;

- receiving extra government funding via the Excellence in Cities initiative and the Leadership Incentive Grant, and the Secondary Performance Project; and

- that have opened under 'Fresh Start' or as academies.

4   Our main quantitative analyses included:

- logistic regression analysis of 15,050 primary and secondary schools in England in July 2005 (where the full data set was available), to identify what were the risk factors for a school being in an Ofsted category (the 'outcome variable'). The eight 'explanatory variables' included in the model were: phase of school; percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (grouped into 3 bands); percentage of pupils with Special Educational Needs (grouped into 3 bands); religious character of school; size of school (headcount); mixed or single sex school; percentage of pupils not white British (grouped into 3 bands); and percentage of pupils with first language not English (grouped into 3 bands). Statistical significance was tested at the 95 per cent confidence level;

- trends in Ofsted inspection numbers, schools placed in Ofsted categories, and schools that are low-attaining or under-performing;

- rebased trends in GCSE results for Fresh Start schools, academies and other recovered secondary schools, and 2000-2003 trends in GCSE results for other schools; and

- targeting of the Leadership Incentive Grant by calculating the proportion of pupils receiving free school meals in schools receiving the grant.

Costing of initiatives

5   We analysed data from the Department and Ofsted including:

■   Section 52 budget and outturn statements (2003–04 and 2004–05);

■   Standards Fund data, including costs of initiatives; and

■   schools in Ofsted categories.

Visits to schools

6   We visited three primary schools and 11 secondary schools, including two academies and one special school. We selected schools according to their experience and geographic location so as to gain a good spread of schools in England. The schools included some in Ofsted categories or recently emerged from categories, some with low attainment, academies and Fresh Start. We visited:

■   Capital City Academy, Brent

■   Cardinal Hinsley High School, Brent

■   Childwall Valley Primary School, Liverpool

■   Crosthwaite Church of England School, Cumbria

■   Hardman Fold Community Special School, Oldham

■   King George V School, South Shields

■   Lowfield School, York

■   Manchester Academy, Manchester

■   Onslow St Audrey's School, Hertfordshire

■   Salisbury Road Junior School, Plymouth

■   St George's Church of England High School, Blackpool

■   St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled School, Essex

■   The Bishop David Brown School, Surrey

■   The Heartlands High School, Birmingham

7   During each visit, we held an interview with the headteacher and a representative of the school governing body. In many cases we also interviewed other members of the management team and teachers, and met with pupils. In addition, during our scoping work we visited The King's Church of England School in Wolverhampton and St Aloysius Primary School and Bowring School in Knowsley.

Survey of headteachers of recovered schools

8   We undertook an e-mail and postal survey of headteachers of all schools that had come out of an Ofsted category during 2004. The aim of the survey was to establish: what factors headteachers thought most contributed to poor performance and subsequent recovery; whether schools received support from local authorities or the Department before being placed in Ofsted categories; and, whether headteachers had found the support and guidance from local authorities, the Department and Ofsted helpful in turning the school around. The Audit Commission contributed to the design of the survey with respect to the community dimension. We conducted the survey from May to July 2005. From the survey population of 287, we received 159 responses (121 primary headteachers, 31 secondary headteachers and 7 headteachers of special schools) which represent a response rate of 55 per cent.

Focus groups of local authority school advisers

9 On our behalf, MORI ran three focus groups of school advisers from 20 local authorities in Bristol, London and Manchester. The main purpose of the groups was to identify:

- the causes of poor performance in schools;

- how poor performance is identified and prevented;

- how schools can recover from poor performance; and

- how improvements in performance can be sustained.

Consultation with stakeholder groups

10 In the course of the study we met with representatives of the following stakeholder groups:

- Improvement and Development Agency;

- National Association of Head Teachers;

- National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers;

- National Governors Council;

- National Union of Teachers; and

- The Education Network.

We also held a focus group with National Audit Office staff who are school governors in their spare time.

Advice from an educational psychologist

11 During the study we consulted with an educational psychologist, Professor Irvine S. Gersch (Chartered Consultant Educational Psychologist, School of Psychology, University of East London) in order to plan the collection of evidence and to measure the evidence from case study visits, surveys and focus groups etc, particularly in areas such as the impact of inspection and the relationships between schools, local authorities, Ofsted and the Department.

Reference Panel

12 We convened a panel of people with expertise relevant to our study to act as a 'sounding board' for the development of the study methodology, and to comment on our emerging findings.

Tim Andrew	Secondary Heads Association
Peter Clough	Department for Education and Skills
Denise Davies	Audit Commission
Professor John Gray	University of Cambridge
Paul Morris	Stanley Technical School, Croydon
Darren Northcott	The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
Andrew Reid	Ofsted

APPENDIX 2

National initiatives of the Department for Education and Skills

Academies Programme

The Academies Programme aims to challenge the culture of educational under-attainment. All academies are located in areas of disadvantage. They either replace one or more existing schools facing challenging circumstances or are established where there is a need for additional school places.

Academies are all ability schools established by sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups working in partnerships with central government and local education partners, such as local authorities and neighbouring schools. Sponsors and the Department provide the capital costs of the academy. Running costs are met in full by the Department at around the same level provided to other schools in similar circumstances.

Academy proposals are usually put together by local authorities and other local education partners. They have to be approved by the Secretary of State.

Excellence in Cities

Excellence in Cities is one of the Government's central initiatives aimed at raising educational standards and promoting social inclusion in major cities and in areas that face similar problems to those faced by the inner cities.

The Excellence in Cities partnerships were set up in 1999, with funding based on a formula going directly to the designated local authorities. Allocation of funding to schools is then determined by partnerships between schools and the local authority.

Federations

Federations are groups of schools collaborating under joint governance arrangements and/or having a formal, written agreement to work together to raise standards. The Department is funding 37 pilot Federations which involve over 200 schools – primary, secondary and special – for a three year period.

Fresh Start and Collaborative Restart

A school is given a Fresh Start when it is closed and re-opened on the same site with a new name and mostly new staff and governors. Eligible schools must be either in an Ofsted category, or subject to a formal local authority warning, or (for secondary schools) have less than 30 per cent of pupils attaining five A* to C GCSEs. Local authorities apply to the Department for a place on the programme, and approval must be given by the Secretary of State before a Fresh Start can occur.

The Department provides additional revenue funding for Fresh Start schools for three years and, when applicable, additional capital funding as part of the support programme.

The Fresh Start programme has now incorporated Collaborative Restart, which reinforces the initial years of a Fresh Start school by providing support from a successful school. Where the headteacher of the successful school takes responsibility for the planning phase and overseeing the first year after opening, the chances of the Fresh Start school becoming successfully established can be considerably improved.

Key Stage 3 National Strategy

The Key Stage 3 National Strategy was introduced in 2001 to improve the teaching and learning practices for 11 to 14 year olds. The Strategy provides schools and teachers with training, guidance, materials and in-school consultancy to improve teacher's knowledge and pedagogy. The Strategy places a strong focus on supporting underperforming pupils to raise their core literacy and numeracy skills to the expected level enabling them to access the full secondary curriculum. The Strategy extended in 2005 to become the Secondary National Strategy for School Improvement covering the 11 to 16 age range.

Leadership Incentive Grant

Leadership Incentive Grant began in April 2003 for mainstream secondary schools facing challenging circumstances – each school was to receive £125,000 per annum for three years. It replaced the Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances scheme. Eligibility is based on satisfying one of the following: being in an Excellence in Cities area, less than 30 per cent pupils achieving 5 A* to C GCSEs or more than 35 per cent of pupils receiving free schools meals.

This increased funding is intended to help leadership teams in those schools transform the delivery of education so that pupils are not disadvantaged by any challenging circumstances that their schools face. The focus is on collaboration between schools in order to substantially strengthen leadership, enhance teaching and learning and establish a culture of high expectations.

Primary National Strategy

The Intensifying Support Programme targets low achieving primary schools where less than 65 per cent of pupils achieve level 4 or higher in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2. The Primary Leadership Programme is a joint initiative of the Primary National Strategy and the National College for School Leadership. The programme is a key element of the Strategy's support to improve performance at Key Stages 1 and 2. It offers school leadership teams the chance to identify priorities for improvement, solve problems and promote teaching and learning across the curriculum through consultancy support.

Secondary Performance Project

These initiatives relate to over 500 secondary schools identified by the Department as under-performing, but which are not in an Ofsted category, not below the floor target and not receiving the Leadership Incentive Grant. The schools are identified by analysing their pupil's GCSE results compared to their initial attainment and for other contextual factors (such as pupils' eligibility for free school meals).

Schools work together in collaborative partnerships with consultants or the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (which works with the Department on this project) to establish the reasons for under-performance and develop strategies for improvement.