



**Education in the North –
a Comino-Cook consultation**

Swinton Park, North Yorkshire

3rd - 4th October 2018

Background

The Comino Foundation and the Gordon Cook Foundation are education charities. Both of them have significant and long-term engagement with schools¹. These two Foundations have for some time collaborated in hosting 24 hour consultations on issues related to their charitable purposes. The consultations are designed to draw together a range of participants with relevant experience and offer them an opportunity to:

- to share experiences and insights;
- deepen existing connections;
- develop new partnerships.

Education in the North brought together a group of people who work in, with and for schools in the north of England. Headteachers from primary and secondary schools were joined by participants from business, universities, parliament, think tanks, arts bodies and charities. We met for 24 hours in Swinton Park, North Yorkshire. Swinton Park's Wensleydale location, in the rural heart of North Yorkshire, reaffirmed the splendour of the north of England and allowed members of the group rare, if brief, uninterrupted time to debate, to think and to get to know each other.

The current priorities of the Comino Foundation are:

- **Social opportunity** – which to the Foundation means finding approaches/initiatives which help young people, whatever their background, to live fulfilling and productive lives in whatever ways have meaning and value for them
- **Personal capabilities** – developing approaches which enhance young people's personal capacity to cope with the demands of growing up and with adult life
- **Improving practical capability** – especially that which relates to designing and making, to innovation and to manufacturing.

The Gordon Cook Foundation is dedicated to the advancement and promotion of all aspects of education and training which are likely to promote character development and citizenship. It uses the terms **Values Education** and **Citizenship** as broad descriptors of the wide range of activity it seeks to support:

- The promotion of good citizenship in its widest terms, including aspects of moral, ethical and aesthetic education, youth work, cooperation between home and school and coordinating work in school with leisure-time pursuits
- The promotion of health education as it relates to Values Education
- Supporting relevant aspects of moral and religious education
- Helping parents, teachers and others to enhance the personal development of all young people
- Supporting developments in the school curriculum that relate to Values Education
- Helping young people to develop commitment to the value of work, industry and enterprise generally
- Disseminating the significant results of relevant research and development.

¹ www.cominofoundation.org.uk; <http://www.gordoncook.org/>

Participants **Swinton Park, North Yorkshire**

3rd - 4th October 2018

David Adams	Trustee of Gordon Cook Foundation
Janice Allen	Head of Falinge Park High School, Rochdale
Dr Lynne Bianchi	Director, Science & Engineering Education Research and Innovation Hub, The University of Manchester
Derri Burden	CEO Curious Minds – Arts Council Bridge Organisation for the North West
Greg Burke	Director, South Yorkshire Futures
Dr Ian Butterfield	Head of Hindley High School, Wigan
Prof José Chambers	Development Fellow, The Comino Foundation
Dr Lorraine Coghill	University of Durham
Susan Coles	University of Northumbria; Co-ordinator All Party Parliamentary Group for Art, Craft and Design
John Cridland	Trustee of Comino Foundation and Chair of Transport North
James Frith MP	MP for Bury, member of the Education Select Committee
Gill Houghton	Head of Abraham Moss Community School, Crumpsall
Helen Hubert	Head of The Derby High School, Bury
Prof Bill Lucas	Director of the Centre for Real-World Learning, University of Winchester
Richard Mason	Senior Manager for the Responsibility Programme, Burberry
Liz Marsden	Director of Early Excellence, Centre for Inspirational Learning, Huddersfield
Bryan Pearce	Deputy Swallow Hill Community College, Armley, Leeds
David Perry	Trustee of Comino Foundation
Helen Phillips	Head, Bedford High School, Leigh
Nicola Potts	Head of Christ the King RCPS, Walkden, Salford
Simon Prinsep	Deputy Headteacher, Castleford Academy, West Yorkshire
Helen Rafferty	The Shine Trust
Gavin Ross	Trustee of Gordon Cook Foundation
Bart Shaw	Associate, LKMco
Nicola Shipman	CEO Steel City Schools Partnership
Jonathan Sobczyk	CEO Peter Jones Foundation
Emma Starkey	Head of the The Hyndburn Academy, Blackburn
Peter Thomas	Education Consultant and Chair of the National Association of English
Pat Walters	Strategic Manager of NW Comino Creative Consortium

The Context - Putting Children at the Centre

The day we began this consultation, the Children's Commissioner published an essay, written by her for the Fabian Society's Report *Growing Up in the 2020s*. She wrote that, if the drive to regenerate communities in the north of England is to have any prospect of long-term success, we must focus on children's experience of growing up in the region:

"As someone who lives in the north, I can feel a buzz of anticipation that this could be a period of real change for our towns and cities. But it will only happen if we look ahead to what our children need to make successful lives in their local communities and put them at the heart of the policy-making process. Every child in the north deserves to go to a good, well-funded school, with excellent teachers and help and support as they leave school to go into work, apprenticeships or higher education. They want the area in which they live to be ambitious for their futures and to bring together those that can help make it happen. Devolution has the potential to transform childhoods in the next 10 years. Northern children won't forgive us if we don't grasp this once in a lifetime opportunity and do it."

These sentences match the opinions and beliefs expressed at Swinton Park by participants in this consultation.

The flurry of recent reports on "education in the North" provided a background to our discussions. (A brief overview of these reports is given as an annexe to this account of the consultation.) We kept in mind their findings and recommendations. However, at Swinton Park our prime focus was on the current experience of participants working in and with schools. For them the most pressing needs were:

- To build a momentum of collaboration focussed on nurturing the flourishing of all children growing up in the north of England.
- To prompt a more inclusive regional debate on education, asking questions like:
 - "How do we recognise a good school?" "What better ways of measuring a 'good school' might there be?"
- To explore what knowledge, capabilities, experiences, values and 'know-how' are likely to be vital for young people growing up in the north of England if they are "to make successful lives." To ensure that children's experience of all aspects of school life help develop and embed such attributes.
- To make a reality of education for ALL: to provide adequate resources of time and expertise to respond effectively to special educational needs of all kinds, including those special needs associated with some of the most able. To reduce and better manage exclusions from school.
- To nurture and sustain the professionalism of all teachers in schools in England
- To restore trust in school leaders, so that their voices are heard and heeded; to identify the shared moral purposes and values which underpin brave leadership in English schools.

Two viewpoints from different perspectives

At the end of Day One, John Cridland summed up what he had heard:

“We want to give every young person in our schools the best opportunity in life we can. We want to open up the world to them. So, true to form, we decided that the ‘exam’ question –

“Does education in the North underperform
in comparison with education in the south and, if so, why?”

- isn't the key question.

We decided that it is ‘*disadvantage*’ we need to tackle and it's likely there is a greater concentration of disadvantage in the North. I was struck by two key themes in our discussions on the first day of the consultation:

- optimism that schools can and do help young people to realise their potential in so many different ways,
- frustration with the controlling compliance culture (linked to externally imposed performance measures) that currently pervades school education throughout England.

For me, the question which arises from those emerging themes was how far the compliance culture hampers the capacity of schools to work for all the young people growing up in the full range of communities which schools serve. I was also struck by recurring references to ‘nurturing’. We need more nurturing of children - and that means of all the children - in our schools. This means a new focus on the curriculum, so that it is designed to work for all young people: a wider, richer curriculum which emphasises creativity and character and which offers applied as well as academic study.

Finally, I was unsurprised to hear how vital it is for schools to be well led if they are to serve their children well. And summing up the whole day –

“If we want well-led schools, we need to let the leaders lead.”

On Day Two, James Frith MP offered us these reflections:

Given the locations of continuing disadvantage in which many northern schools are based, James took as his theme the need for:

“inclusive, repeat opportunity.”

Reflecting on what he had heard, James suggested that education should be “meeting individuals in their own lives” and asked if the current system is fit for modern life and the challenges of the future. He argued that we need to be able to play to children’s strengths – and “where there is a chink of light, try again” - offer not just one chance, at one point in life, but continuing access - equal opportunities throughout school life and beyond. Looking at issues like access to help with Special Educational Needs, it seemed that current provision is framed through “the prism of struggle” – indeed “repeat struggle”. So, let us celebrate and reinforce the sense of moral purpose that drives most people working in most schools, but moral purpose alone is not enough: we have to open up the dilemmas and challenge the status quo.

What we agreed: recurring themes

To serve the needs of all children, school leaders and their staff must know, respect, and be equipped to take account of, the specific community setting of their particular school.

Participants emphasised that to serve the needs of **all** their children, schools must be at the heart of their communities:

“We have to get close to the community – to respect the demographic”.

Some headteachers, from schools in some disadvantaged settings, spoke of their need to “tap into the historical psyche of white working class families”, for some of whom unemployment had become the settled norm over generations.

“We need provocative conversations with parents, not negative ones.”

“We need to know what is happening in our children’s lives and to recognise the impact that their home circumstances will be having on their learning and behaviour.”

We agreed that education is “a moral enterprise”: its purpose within each community has to be rooted in the specific needs of that community, but it also needs to be outward looking and to connect young people to the wider society of which they are part. Though it was accepted that the recent characterisation of some places as “Opportunity Areas” might be helpful in drawing attention to significant areas of deprivation and attracting to them additional funding and resource², this label was also seen as a blunt instrument. It was suggested that this focus on the designated “Opportunity Areas” might deflect attention away from the many smaller, more localised, areas of deprivation.

For instance, our participants stressed that, even close to the centre of flourishing northern cities, there are, for many children, tight boundaries surrounding the immediate vicinity which define their world. Only a mile out of a city centre, children’s experience may be confined to the limits of their own immediate neighbourhood. They venture into the city centre infrequently, if at all. They will often not be aware of the wealth of opportunities and resources which their city offers and will certainly not feel a sense of entitlement to access those resources, unless their school opens doors that would otherwise be closed to them.

Opportunities to provide children with a richer experience of their region were seen as vital to their education and yet funding and staffing limitations, as well as shortage of time and space in the curriculum, mean that for many schools in disadvantaged areas these opportunities are extremely rare.

Burberry, a significant Yorkshire employer represented at the consultation, is helping to challenge what one of our participants described as this:

“poverty of vocabulary, poverty of experience”.

On 8th October 2018, the Burberry Foundation launched a four-year in-school programme, which will be delivered in partnership with the Ideas Foundation. Eight schools in Yorkshire will participate, alongside four local cultural organisations: Leeds Playhouse, Leeds Young Film, Northern Ballet and The Hepworth Wakefield.

²

The Department for Education (DfE) has targeted a three-year £72m programme at 12 areas identified because of the entrenched and widespread social, economic and cultural challenges they face in trying to improve children’s and young people’s life chances.

Called the 'Burberry Inspire' programme³, it is designed to explore how "deep experience of the arts" can have a positive effect on young people's lives. (There are some parallels with the approaches used in successful work funded by Comino and Curious Minds in Greater Manchester⁴). The impact of the four-year programme will be evaluated by the Policy Institute at King's College London.

The evaluation will assess the extent to which cultural and creative education helps young people to widen their horizons, overcome challenging circumstances, and realise their aspirations. Each of the four cultural organisations will provide the schools with a dedicated Artist in Residence who will give Key Stage 3 students hands-on experience of different areas of the creative arts. The Artist in Residence will also collaborate with teachers and students to co-create events designed to have a broad reach across their local communities. Each organisation will work with two schools per year, so that all eight schools will have worked with all four organisations by the end of the four-year programme. Burberry is investing over £1million in support of this programme.

If the goal of 'education for ALL' is to become a reality, schools need to know, respect, and be equipped to take account of, each child as an individual, with differing needs, dilemmas, enthusiasms, aptitudes and abilities: "more love, more nurture, more compassion".

The need to recognise the individuality of each child in every school chimed with specific and pressing anxieties for many of our participants. Many headteachers were troubled by their knowledge of the challenging domestic circumstances which confront individual students daily. Added to this worry was the question of how to serve better those with special educational needs and those confronting mental health issues. It was felt that serving these needs was central to serving all individuals more effectively:

"If we get it right for these people, everyone will benefit."

The "special needs" label covers a complex mix and includes children with 'Dual and Multiple Exceptionalities'⁵, as outlined by the DfE in 2008, but now rarely acknowledged by government. We heard how schools missed the support infrastructure that was once provided by local authorities. In some areas, support services such as educational psychologists and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are few and far between. Where such services are available, they are often beyond the budgets of many schools and their quality cannot be guaranteed. At the moment, we were told, there are a lot of people trying to make money out of schools:

"I get 30-50 emails a day offering services, for instance in relation to special educational needs or mental health problems."

"In the future will we see school groups working together as commissioners of services – recreating LEA functions? Is there any regional vision for Special Educational Needs provision in all its diversity?"

The expertise of mainstream teachers in these specialist areas is limited and, unsurprisingly, is not well-served by initial teacher training. Linked to all this is the vexed question of exclusions. Our participants agreed with Robert Halfon MP, Chair of the Education Select Committee, as quoted in July 2018:

3 [The Burberry Foundation launches first in-school arts and culture ...#](#)

4 [Digital Designer in Residence - Manchester Metropolitan University#](#)

5 <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/.../00052-2008BKT-EN.pdf>

“The young people who are excluded are the forgotten children. Many already face a host of challenges, with children in care, children in need... and children in poverty, being far more likely to end up in alternative provision. They deserve the best possible support but often they don't get the education that they need to thrive.”

Schools which have felt a moral obligation to take on children who have been ‘off-rolled’ by other schools in their region emphasised the strain that this puts on their resources: of time, energy, skill and ingenuity.

In this context, as in others, we were also reminded of the need to nurture the emotional well-being of all staff. Participants suggested that there is now a generation of younger teachers who, because of the narrowed emphasis on didactic teaching, have little concept of a pedagogy which takes account of difference and allows them to draw on a varied repertoire of skills that can be applied flexibly according to the needs of individuals. These are teachers who have not been encouraged to see themselves as continuously developing professionals with a duty to question, experiment, innovate:

“who have no concept of risk-taking or creativity in the classroom.”

‘Teaching to the test’ may enable both teachers and children to produce good test results – but, participants asked, at what consequence? For some pupils, boredom, disengagement – even school refusal, or behaviour which leads to school exclusion. To counter some of this, it was argued, teachers need regular access to high quality in-service training⁶, which takes place in a culture of openness, trust and community. Some heads recommended sustaining a regular dialogue with students about their experience of the classroom and of study – a dialogue which will keep staff informed about the underlying causes of “bad” behaviour”, underachievement and disengagement.

If schools are to be agile enough and skilled enough to serve the needs of all their children, how can we mitigate the impact of current performance measures?

Unsurprisingly, the performance measures by which schools are currently judged attracted much attention. Our participants worried about the distorting effect of their impact on the culture of schools - on the choices made by, and the behaviour of, school leaders; on the extent to which performance measures have come to influence both what is taught and how it is taught. Here too our participants found themselves in tune with Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools, Amanda Spielman. OFSTED’s latest [commentary on the curriculum](#), based on qualitative research conducted in 23 schools, was published on 18th September 2018 which reported:

"The cumulative impact of performance tables and inspections, and the consequences that are hung on them, has increased the pressure on school leaders, teachers and indirectly on pupils to deliver perfect data above all else."

"The bottom line is that we must make sure that we, as an inspectorate, complement rather than intensify performance data."

Accurate interpretation of data is not straightforward. It always requires careful and intelligent analysis. Some researchers have suggested that the reason for the comparative success of London schools, as judged by the performance measures used in recent years, is strongly related to the ethnic composition of London Schools. The DfE 2014-2015 data on school performance, as cited by Sir Nick Weller in [A Northern Powerhouse School Strategy: an independent review](#), measured the success of schools on the basis of the proportion of

students achieving 5+ A*-C GCSEs and drew its conclusions. Prof Simon Burgess, of the Centre for Market and Public Organisation at the University of Bristol, carried out a detailed statistical analysis of this 2014 data from London schools and offered an explanation for the 'London effect' in [Understanding the success of London's schools](#):

"The case I have made here is that the basis for the London performance is the ethnic composition of its school population. There is a straightforward effect: the lowest progress group, White British pupils, make up 36% of pupils in London and 84% in the rest of England. London simply has a higher fraction of high-scoring pupils. This is not by chance of course; a key part of the London effect is its attraction to migrants and those aspiring to a better life. More speculatively, because of a more integrated school system and because of a larger population of non-White British pupils, more white British pupils have the opportunity for interactions in school with higher-scoring ethnic minority pupils than those outside the capital do. This potential for peer effect spill-overs may cause higher pupil progress."

The advent of Progress 8, as a relative measure of the outcomes achieved by each school's pupils, was at first seen as more helpful, in that it acknowledges the different starting points of each child's journey through school. Progress 8 measures the degree of progress made by each child by the end of Key Stage 4 since being tested at the end of Key Stage 2. The measure is in relation to that year's average national achievement of children across the country in certain 'buckets' of GCSE subjects. However, in March 2017, the Education Policy institute argued that the DFE:

"should continue to consider how it develops Progress 8 further so that it helps drive genuine improvement in the system. There are ways in which Progress 8 will still be seen as unfair to some schools because it takes no account of other pupil characteristics, such as disadvantage, which are also strongly correlated with outcomes, so there is an argument for contextualising the measure further. Some may argue that this builds in low expectations, but we can have high aspirations for individuals whilst still assessing school effectiveness in a fair way.

It is also possible for individual pupils to have a disproportionate impact on the Progress 8 score. A pupil who significantly underperforms, for reasons beyond their and the school's control, can cause a considerable drop in results. We need to consider how we allow for these cases whilst not introducing perverse incentives or allowing schools to 'give-up' on some pupils."⁷

One of our participants had conducted a statistical analysis of Progress 8 scores as they relate to the proportion of children in each school for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL). The results of his analysis were outlined in the *Times Educational Supplement* in April 2018: [Exclusive: Progress 8 'penalises schools in white working class ... - Tes](#) Similarly, the study by the Education Policy Institute had suggested that:

"schools with large EAL cohorts may perform better under Progress 8, because the key stage 2 test – used as the baseline for the measure – will underestimate some EAL pupils' academic attainment because students take it before they have reached fluency in English."⁸

Understandably perhaps, some of our headteachers resisted these findings – again citing the impact of the particular circumstances of their intake, as they varied from year to year, whatever the proportion of EAL students in their school.

⁷ Analysis: the introduction of Progress 8

⁸ Analysis: the introduction of Progress 8

If schools are to serve the needs of all their children, is the current curriculum fit for purpose? Is it fit for all children? Is it an appropriate preparation for adult life? Is it fit for the needs of society today? Is it fit for tomorrow? What skills do employers really need now - what might they need in ten years' time?

All participants wanted all children in schools in the north of England, especially those growing up in areas of disadvantage, to develop knowledge and skills which would equip them to operate effectively in the wider world. They also wanted young people to have access to an enriched store of experiences which would enable them to sample and develop a broad understanding of the opportunities which might be open to them in adult life.

Participants had tired of the “knowledge v skills” wrangle, in the sense that it seemed obvious that schools have a duty to develop both knowledge and skills and to develop them in tandem with each other. Acquiring knowledge may often be linked to the development of a skill; in some skill areas knowledge may be the precursor to skill. Skills are usually entwined with knowledge, but “know how” does not automatically grow from “knowing that.” The assumption that traditional didactic pedagogy is always the most efficient and effective way of acquiring knowledge was also questioned. Curriculum materials that are:

“**knowledge-rich**, and have **teacher-led instruction** and **whole-class teaching** at their core”⁹

may be useful, but many participants cited how the assumptions behind this emphasis, with its connections to the performance measures by which schools are judged, were having a narrowing and deadening effect on the curriculum offered by schools. They were aware, for instance, of some primary schools where the curriculum for some year groups has shrunk to Maths and Literacy. As noted earlier, for the participants at Swinton, shifts in OFSTED thinking were proving to be a significant source of optimism. In a speech on 11th October 2018 to the SCHOOLS NorthEast¹⁰ Summit, Amanda Spielman commented on the insights derived from OFSTED’s most recent qualitative study of 23 schools. These insights echo many of the themes explored in our consultation. They offer a welcome acknowledgement that the debate about curriculum needs to be revisited:

“We all have to ask ourselves how we have created a situation where second-guessing the test can so often trump the pursuit of real, deep, knowledge and understanding.”¹¹

The new OFSTED framework, Ms Spielman suggested, will have “a new focus on substance”:

“because our curriculum research, and a vast amount of sector feedback, have told us that a focus on performance data is coming at the expense of what is taught in schools. Our new focus will change that, bringing the inspection conversation back to the substance of young people’s learning and treating teachers as experts in their field, not just data managers. I don’t know a single teacher who went into teaching to get the perfect progress eight score. They go into it because they love what they teach and want children to love it too.”

“But we know that focusing too narrowly on test and exam results can often leave little time or energy for hard thinking about the curriculum, and in fact can sometimes end up making a casualty of it.”

⁹ DfE Pilot funding July 2018 <https://www.gov.uk> › Education, training and skills › School and academy funding #

¹⁰ <https://schoolsnortheast.org> - “the first and only school-led regional network in the UK”

¹¹ [Amanda Spielman speech to the SCHOOLS NorthEast summit - GOV.UK#](#)

Given these welcome signs of hope, how might schools in the north respond?

Some participants remembered the days of Peter Senge and his “fifth discipline” of “team learning” when ‘MATs’ was an abbreviation for “multi-agency teams.”¹² In recent years, Multi-Academy Trusts have been offered as examples of collaboration, but our participants commented:

“Do we know what really is working in a MAT and what is not?” “How do their cultures differ and with what impact?” “They don’t know what they don’t know.”

We heard - and saw evidence of - schools in the north of England being led by headteachers, with dedication, passion and zest – headteachers who are brave enough to confront the risks of looking beyond the confines of the performance measures by which they and their schools will be judged. Driven by their commitment to the young people whom they serve and to the communities in which these young people are growing up, these headteachers challenge the mythology of the ‘super head’, shipped in from elsewhere to do a ‘quick fix’. They want their own voices to be heard and their experience heeded. They want to replace “the culture of compliance” and “centrally-mandated ‘what works’ mantras” – with a move to local collaboration - ‘subsidiarity’ - where a region would move away from a culture of competition between individual schools - and groups of schools - to one of open sharing, based on trust and collegiality. These headteachers recognise that if they are to help play a positive role in shaping policy and action in the north, they need “to ignore the noise”, to come together, to build: “momentum through collaboration.”

Building momentum through collaboration

Leaders from the different phases of education: early years; primary; secondary; tertiary - FE and HE - rarely have any opportunity to share their experience. Still less do they have the chance to do so in the company of people who bring additional external perspectives to an engagement with education. Participants told us that one aspect of the consultation that they found valuable was the realisation that those working in each phase of education are confronting related problems.

In grappling with the difficult issues outlined in this report, headteachers told us that their motivation was daily sustained by both their teachers and their pupils:

“As colleagues of mine say to each other on a regular basis, “just carry on and ignore the noise”. We know what is right for us, we have a moral purpose - we just need to find the courage to act accordingly. I get my courage every day from pupils and colleagues.”

- but our participants were keen to develop the wider connections made at Swinton Park. We discussed what it takes to build genuinely collaborative partnerships:
 - vision, coupled with continuing revision
 - shared values
 - mutual trust and respect
 - shared purposes, but also the capacity to be comfortable with difference
 - a clear focus and strategy, coupled with flexible planning
 - a willingness to embrace “cultural nuances” – for instance of both a school and of its community setting.

¹² Senge P. (2006) *The fifth discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, 2nd edn. Century, London

We also considered possible actions which might form the focus of partnership:

- Undertaking, in different schools across the north, a piece of collaborative action research? For instance, a number of schools expressed interest in choosing to map the development some key values and attributes, such as creativity or tenacity, across early years and the 4 key stages. Having done so, these schools might pool leadership and pedagogical strategies likely to encourage the development of these attributes. This work could then help schools assemble some formative assessment approaches, so that they might better track and ultimately report on these capabilities.
- Taking control of our data – finding and owning alternative ways of evaluating the outcomes of what we do?
- Building more and different local partnerships, for instance with regional universities and businesses?
- Forming a new regional network – learning from the experience of SCHOOLS NorthEast?

The Comino and Cook Foundations will be looking for ways of continuing this conversation.

Education in the North - the wider context

There has been no shortage of recent reports on education in the north of England. These reports have been prompted by the apparently poor performance of schools in the north of England, when judged by the government's current performance measures, particularly when compared with outcomes achieved by schools in London.

In 2016, HM Treasury and the DfE commissioned 'an independent review' from Sir Nick Weller, CEO of the Bradford-based Dixons Academies. Sir Nick drew on the DfE 2014-15 data which showed that only 34% of disadvantaged students attending northern schools achieved 5+ A*-C GCSEs, including English and mathematics, compared to the national average for disadvantaged students of 37% and 48% in London. The first of his many recommendations in [A Northern Powerhouse School Strategy: an independent review](#) focused on teachers, in the belief that:

"Teacher effectiveness is the most important determinant of pupil outcomes."

"In my view, the most important step we can take to address educational underperformance in the North, particularly for schools in areas of deprivation, is to meet the challenge of attracting and retaining effective teachers and understand better the issues of teacher supply"

"including at the local level."

Sir Nick also emphasised the need for skilled school leaders who are responsive to the specific needs of schools in disadvantaged areas of the north:

"DfE should consider how it can enhance existing and new leadership initiatives and programmes in the North, which will encourage more participants to take up the challenge of closing the disadvantage gap where it is greatest."

and commended Academy sponsorship as an important school improvement mechanism:

"which in my experience, enables outstanding head teachers to make a difference in more than one school. MATs can also support better recruitment and retention of teachers and help share effective practice across schools."

With this in mind, he suggested: "accelerating growth of MATs is key to driving up standards."

Also in 2016, IPPR North published **Northern Schools: Putting Education at the heart of the Northern Powerhouse**. It argued that:

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

IPPR noted the difference in funding levels between schools in the North and in London:

"Despite often operating in harder contexts, schools in the north of England do not receive the same level of inputs as those in London. On average, northern primary schools receive £4,600 per pupil, which is £900 less than in London; northern secondary schools receive £5,700 per pupil, which is £1,300 less than in London. Some areas of the North can also find

it particularly difficult to recruit and retain teachers, and there are more 'cold spots' without access to support from teaching schools. This suggests that the government should use its forthcoming review of the national funding formula to actively weight funding more heavily towards areas of the country which have high levels of disadvantage and which find it difficult to recruit teachers. It should also find ways to target teaching and leadership support to these cold spots – for example, by establishing professional development programmes or introducing student loan write-offs for those working in challenging contexts, and embedding programmes such as the National Teaching Service and Teach First, which are already geographically targeted.”

As a more recent background to this consultation, our participants had in mind two papers, both published in March 2018:

- **Growing Up North: Time to leave the North-South divide behind** - a report by the Children’s Commissioner, which makes recommendations based on “twelve months of research, analysis and conversations with children, schools, business, councils, health professionals and charities” across the regions of the North of England. The Children’s Commissioner suggests that the report’s conclusions:
 - “demand a commitment to change. The North can deliver this change, but only if it puts children at the centre of the wider changes that are underway.”
- **Educating the North: Driving Ambition across the Powerhouse** which was “overseen by the Northern Powerhouse Partnership’s (NPP) Education and Skills group bringing together representatives of our business-led Board as well as education experts from across the North. They held a series of focus groups, Dragons Den-style events and schools round-table sessions to direct their research.” This report argued that in assessing education we should “shift the focus to long-term achievement rather than short-term measures. Its recommendations were:
 1. An initial £300m increase in government funding for disadvantaged areas across the North, creating place-based funds integrated with other services such as health visitors and voluntary sector providers, ensuring every child is school-ready by age five.
 2. Reform the Pupil Premium to ensure that funding reaches disadvantaged children by allocating more to pupils eligible for free school meals throughout their schooling, addressing the most entrenched barriers to social mobility.
 3. A longer-term government commitment to Opportunity Areas – a Northern Powerhouse Schools Improvement Board to be established, drawing together existing funding with a dedicated 10-year fund to allow for further Opportunity Areas in the North. In particular, this needs to urgently address the lack of Opportunity Areas in the North East.
 4. Simplify the Northern Regional Schools Commissioners areas to establish three: North West, Yorkshire and North East & Cumbria, working within frameworks and plans set by the Northern Powerhouse Schools Improvement Board. These would make the final decision on regional funding streams for school improvement, challenging poor performance in Multi Academy Trusts, re-allocating schools to those with capability and identifying schools that need rebuilding.
 5. Every Northern business to mentor or otherwise meaningfully reach out on careers and enterprise skills to at least the same number of young people as they have employees, from the age of 11. This would see 900,000 young people given experience of work.

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