



The University of Manchester



What, if anything, can Greater Manchester learn from London's educational success?

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Key Points:

- Educational attainment in Greater Manchester has been consistently good in the last decade compared with the Rest of England (RoE), despite higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage. But London's performance is exceptional relative to the RoE. This has been the case at GCSE throughout the last decade or more and increasingly at primary level since 2010. Disadvantaged students in London do particularly well by comparison.
- The early years are of particular interest and concern. GM has been falling behind London and the RoE on early years measures but it is not clear why. Some boroughs in London have exceptionally high levels of early years development, exceptionally rapid improvement and very low or no disadvantage gap. This needs further investigation.
- Ethnic composition partly explains why London does better but is not the whole story.
- We know relatively little about what part has been played in London's success by system capacity factors such as funding, teacher recruitment and qualifications, class sizes, nor access to the Capital's resources and labour market.
- A considerably high proportion of schools in London (especially in Inner London) are rated as outstanding by Ofsted than in England or GM and these gaps have widened in recent years.
- The contribution of the London Challenge (a secondary school improvement programme that ran from 2003 to 2011¹) is widely recognised. Lessons from this programme are very well documented and should be a key resource for GM in considering school system transformation. However, all reports stress that the goal should not be to 'copy' London Challenge but instead to develop tailored interventions appropriate to context.

1. Introduction

Numerous recent reports² have commented on growing regional disparities in educational attainment in England, particularly between the North, where aggregate attainment is lower than the national figure, and London, where it is considerably higher. This note has two aims. First, to clarify the position of Greater Manchester. Most analyses focus on the North as a whole, or on individual local authorities. Understanding GM's performance as a whole as well as variations within the city-region is an essential step in developing targets and strategies for education as part of the Greater Manchester Strategy. Second, to understand what can be learned from the existing analyses of 'the London effect' to give an indication of to what extent and how Greater Manchester might emulate London's recent educational success. This short summary is based on two fuller reports, one reporting trends in educational attainment for GM, London and the Rest of England (RoE)³ over the period 2005/06 to 2016/17, and the other a literature review and synthesis covering

¹ London Challenge began as a secondary school initiative but in 2008 was extended to primary schools.

² Children's Commissioner (2018): *Growing Up North* <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/growing-up-north-time-to-leave-the-north-south-divide-behind/>

Northern Powerhouse Partnership Educating the North (2018): *Driving Ambition Across the Powerhouse* <http://www.northernpowerhousepartnership.co.uk/publications/educating-the-north-driving-ambition-across-the-powerhouse/>

Social Mobility Commission (2017): *State of the Nation Report* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/state-of-the-nation-report-on-social-mobility-in-great-britain>

DfE (2016) *A Northern Powerhouse Schools Strategy: Independent Review by Sir Nick Weller*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/northern-powerhouse-schools-strategy-an-independent-review>

IPPR North (2016) *Northern schools: Putting education at the heart of the northern powerhouse.*

<https://www.ippr.org/publications/northern-schools-putting-education-at-the-heart-of-the-northern-powerhouse>

³ Rest of England = England minus Greater Manchester and London. We use this rather than England as a whole (used in most reports) in order to provide a sharper comparison.

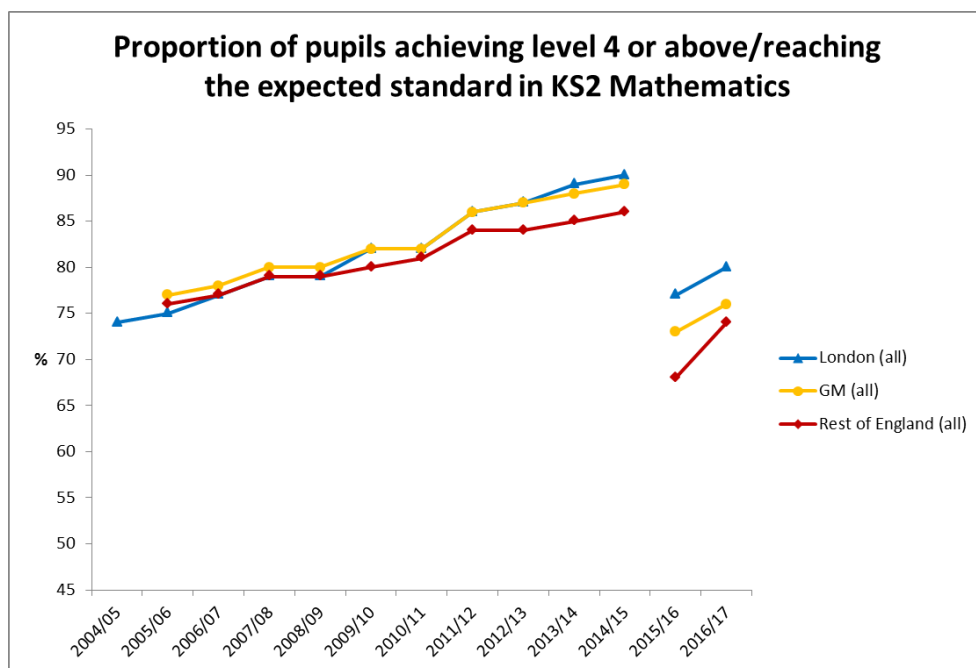
explanations for some of the trends observed. Both reports are available on the IGAU website www.manchester.ac.uk/inclusivegrowth.

2. Trends in Educational Attainment in Greater Manchester, London and the Rest of England

Greater Manchester is not a ‘basket case’ – it performs relatively well. What stands out is London’s exceptional performance

In a general climate of commentary on the North’s poor performance relative to London, it is important to note that educational attainment in GM has been consistently good compared with the Rest of England, despite higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage. Compared to RoE, GM has improved at a faster rate in Key Stage 2 mathematics (at the end of primary school; Figure 1), and on both benchmark measures⁴ at Key Stage 4 (GCSE; Figures 2 and 3).

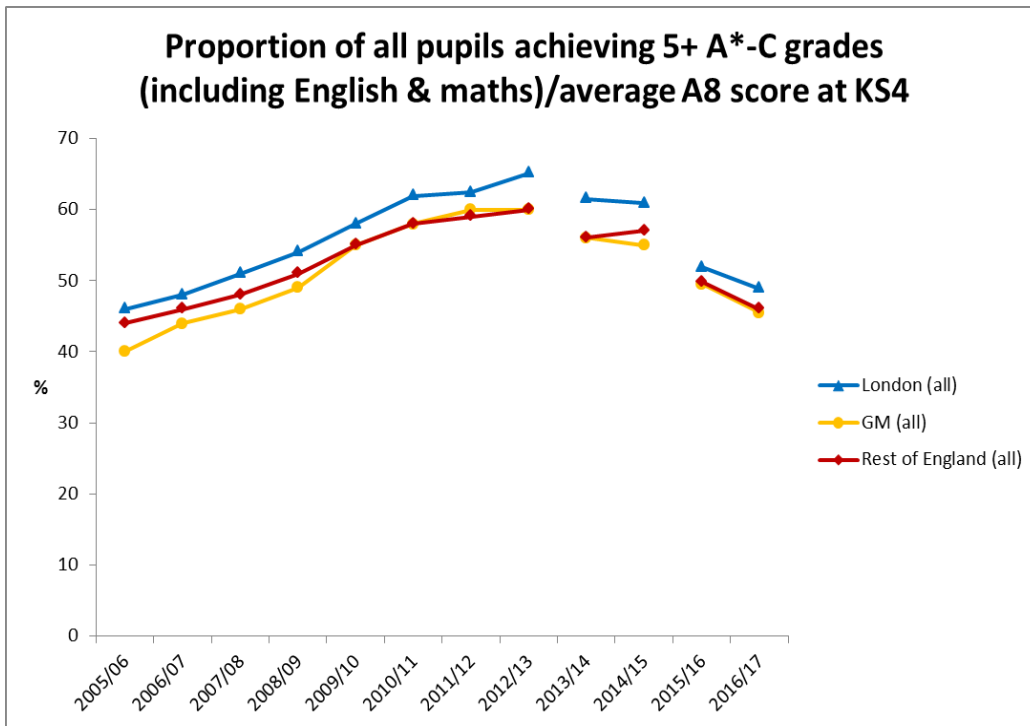
Figure 1. Proportion of pupils achieving level 4+/the expected standard in KS2 mathematics.



What stands out in these figures is not the poor performance of Greater Manchester, but the exceptional performance of London. At GCSE, London has performed consistently better than both GM and RoE across this period, but has not increased its lead over GM, taking the period as a whole. In primary mathematics, GM has consistently outperformed RoE since 2005/06. However, whereas GM was ahead of London at the start of the period, this position has been reversed, and the gap has widened since 2009/10.

⁴ The government’s preferred benchmark measure was ‘achieving 5+ A*-C grades including English and mathematics’, up until 2015/16 when Progress/Attainment 8 were introduced.

Figure 2. Proportion of pupils achieving 5+ A*-C grades (inc. English and maths)/average A8 score.

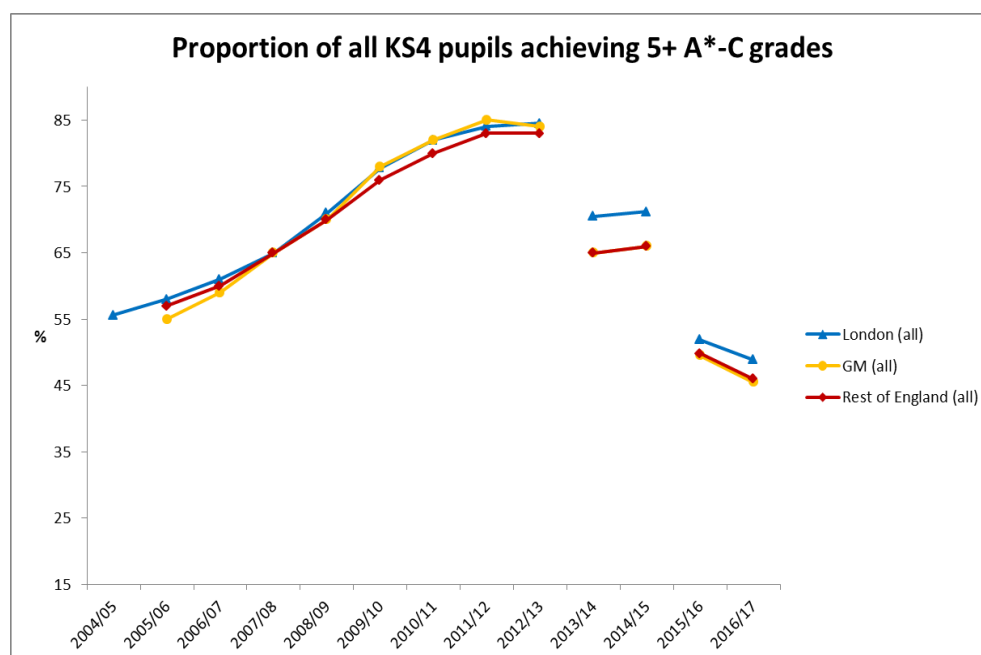


Assessment Criteria Matter

Changes in relative position of London and GM may reflect changes in the actual capabilities and achievements of students but they may also reflect changes in assessment criteria. What is assessed, and in what way, can affect the relative success of different social and economic groups. Furthermore, professionals in different places can interpret curriculum changes and assessment frameworks differently. A prominent example of this is the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which we cover in the next section, but it also applies at KS2 and KS4. Note that in Figure 1, GM's relative performance at KS2 appears to decline in 2015/16 with the introduction of a more stringent performance benchmark.⁵ At GCSE level, we can see that between 2005/06 and 2012/13 GM improved at a faster rate year-on-year than both RoE and London on the less 'academic' benchmark of 5+ A*-C grades. However, when these measures were changed to exclude many vocational qualifications, gaps between London, GM and RoE increased (Figure 3). This suggests the need to understand different curriculum and examination strategies in different places, and how changes in national frameworks service to advantage or disadvantage particular groups.

⁵ Prior to 2015/16, the 'expected level' at KS2 was Level 4. The new framework from 2015/16 set the benchmark higher, around Level 4b. The widening gap between London and GM at this point may indicate that London's earlier attainment figures included a high proportion of pupils attaining at higher than expected levels.

Figure 3. Proportion of pupils achieving 5+ A*-C grades/average A8 score.



Disadvantaged students do much better in London than in GM or the Rest of England

As many reports point out, differences in educational attainment between richer and poorer students remain very large in England. Defining ‘disadvantage’ in terms of eligibility for FSM, we can see that gaps tend to be narrower in GM than RoE in 2016/17 (see table below), GM’s FSM gap was three percentage points smaller than RoE in EYFS, four at KS2, and one at KS4. But gaps in London are smaller still. Gaps have been falling quicker in London in early years and Key Stage 2 between 2006/07 and 2016/17; however, at Key Stage 4, gaps have fallen most in RoE.

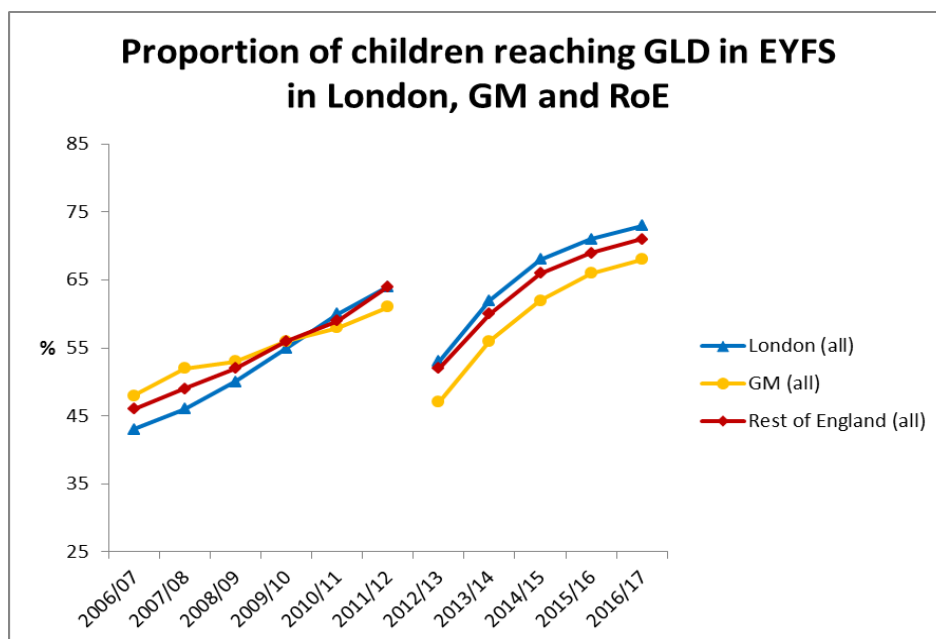
		Proportion FSM-eligible pupils achieving benchmark in 2006/07	Proportion FSM-eligible pupils achieving benchmark in 2016/17	Percentage point change	FSM gap 2006/07	FSM gap 2016/17	FSM gap change 2006/07 – 2016/17
Early Years	GM	30	54	24	23	16	-7
	London	29	64	35	18	11	-7
	RoE	27	54	27	22	19	-3
Key Stage 2	GM	64	62	-2	18	17	-1
	London	64	69	5	17	15	-2
	RoE	60	56	-4	20	21	1
Key Stage 4	GM	21	35	14	27	13	-14
	London	31	41	10	22	9	-13
	RoE	19	34	15	31	14	-17

Note. Early years benchmark is reaching a good level of development; KS2 benchmark is ‘achieving L4+’ in 2006/07 and ‘reaching the expected standard’ in 2016/17; KS4 benchmark is ‘achieving 5+ A*-C grades including English and Maths’ in 2006/07, and ‘average Attainment 8 score’ in 2016/17. GM = Greater Manchester; RoE = Rest of England (England minus London and GM). As earlier explained, there have been changes in assessment and these may also have affected FSM gaps.

The EYFS deserves particular scrutiny

Patterns in the early years are particularly striking. They may genuinely reflect increasing disparities in early childhood development and/or different responses to changing assessment criteria. In the period following the introduction of the EYFS profile, GM was ahead of London and RoE. However, it progressively lost ground as the new profile became embedded and the gap widened after the introduction of the revised profile in 2012/13 (Figure 4). While it is important to note that the proportion of children reaching a good level of development (GLD) has increased in all three locations, understanding the reasons for these changes in GM's relative position seems particularly important given the widely recognised importance of the early years for future life chances, and the Mayor's focus on school readiness.

Figure 4: Proportion of children reaching a good level of development in London, GM, and RoE.



It is particularly striking that disadvantaged children in London are much more likely than in GM or the RoE to reach a good level of development in EYFS and this gap has really opened up since 2010 (Figure 5). As Figure 6 shows, improvements overall at EYFS have been most marked in Inner London and there have been some very dramatic changes in particular local authorities (for clarity only two Inner London boroughs are shown). Over this period, Hackney saw an increase of 30 percentage points in the proportion of its children reaching a good level of development, whereas Lewisham saw an increase of 47 percentage points. This has meant that Lewisham, which was behind the Inner London average of 40 by 8 percentage points in 2006/07, is now 6 percentage points ahead at 79% of its pupils reaching GLD. In some places, FSM gaps have been eliminated or very low. Hackney and Newham have had FSM gaps of less than ten percentage points consistently for the past decade. In 2015/16, Hackney and Haringey had no gap at all. This is not the case in GM where all LAs have had a 10 percentage point or more FSM gap in EYFS across this period, with Wigan and Stockport hovering around the 25-30 percentage point mark. This suggests that 'learning from London' may be most usefully focused on particular LAs.

Figure 5. Proportion of children reaching GLD by FSM eligibility.

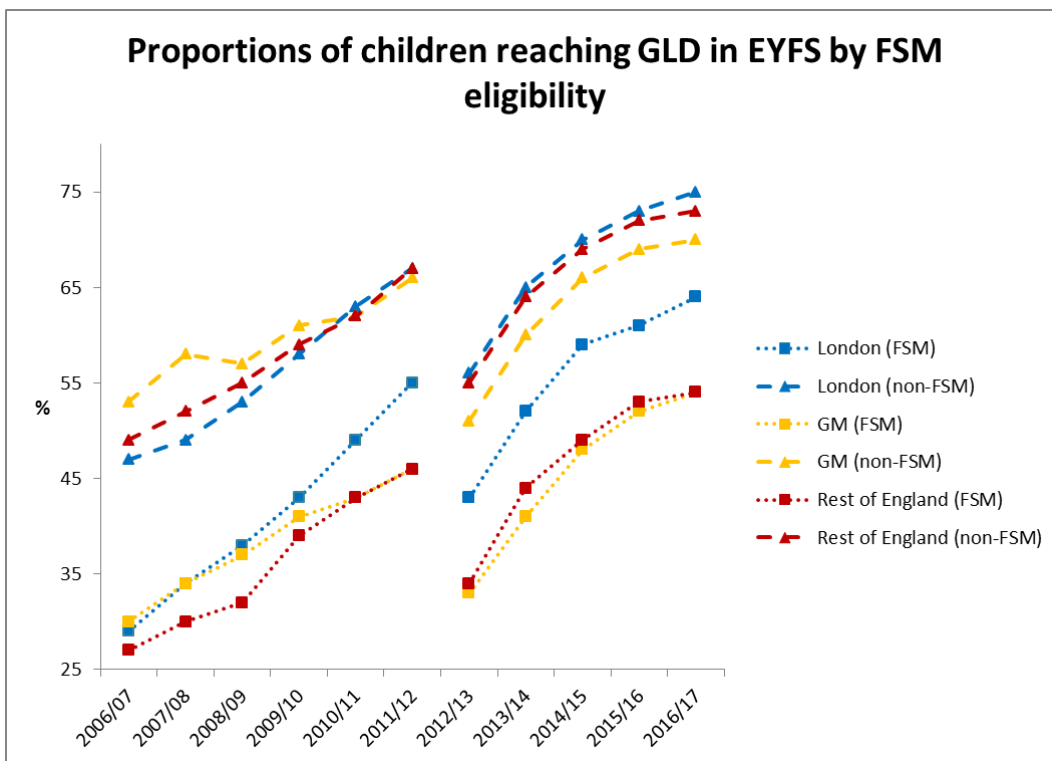
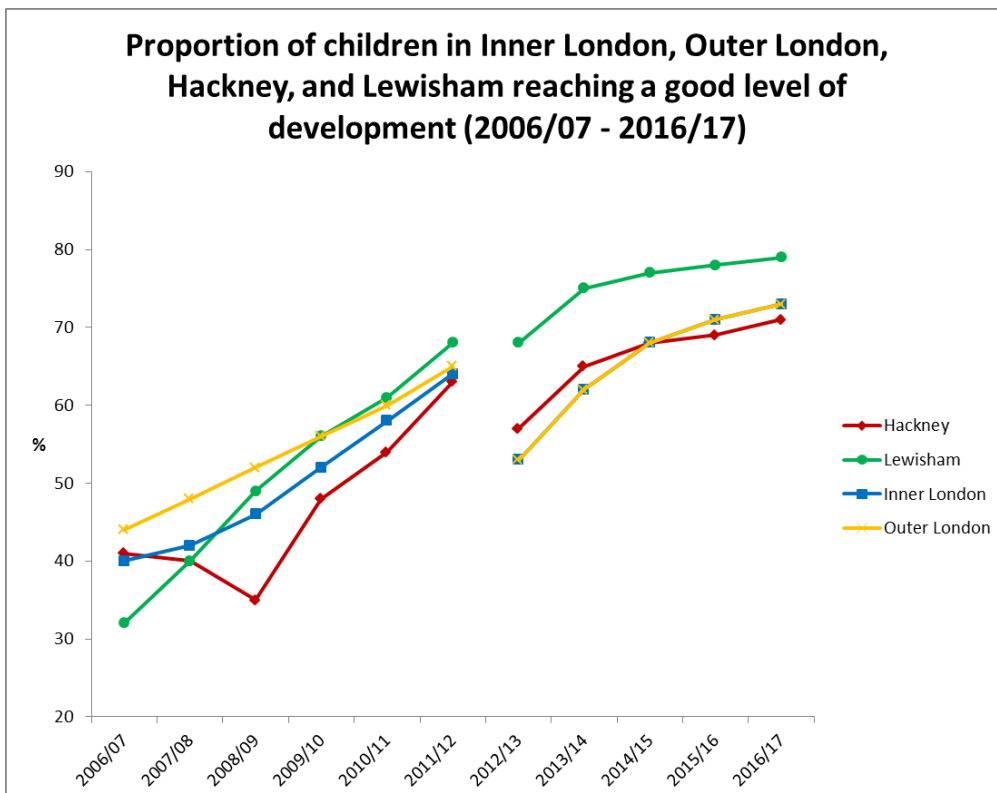


Figure 6. Proportion of children in Inner London and Outer London, and Hackney and Lewisham reaching GLD in the early years.



3. Why Does London Do Better?

Analysis of the 'London effect' can be found in academic papers (which tend to focus on measurable factors) and evaluation reports (which tend to focus more on practice), and there have also been explanations offered in reviews of Northern education. We summarise some of the main explanations here, as well as showing the results of some of our own analysis on school quality.

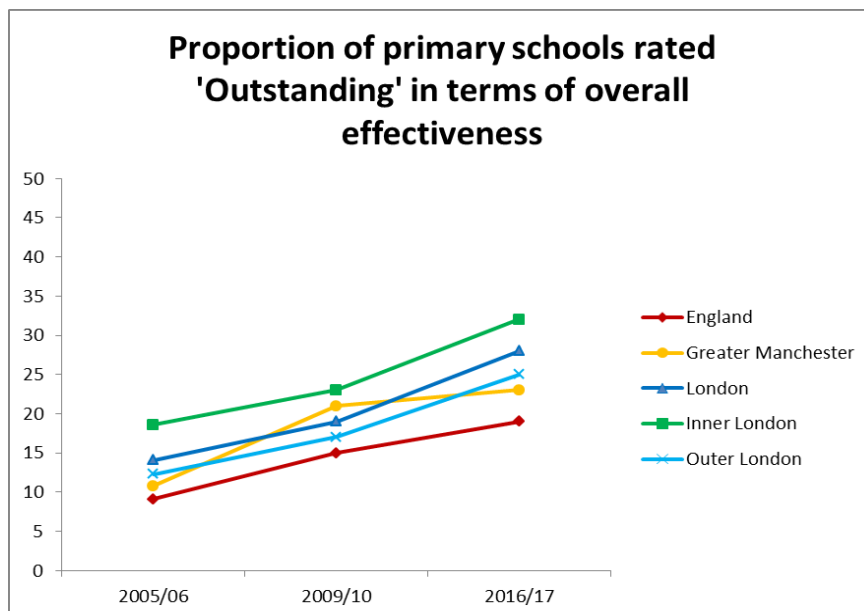
London's different ethnic composition

London's ethnic composition has been cited as a possible reason its success since migrants are likely to invest highly in education. However, studies do not agree on this. The CFBT Education Trust report (2014) found no evidence for a relationship between ethnic diversity at borough level in London and KS4 attainment in 2011. Looking at progress rather than attainment, Burgess (2014) found that ethnic composition accounted for the entirety of progress that one cohort of London pupils made through secondary school. Greaves et al. (2014) and Blanden et al. (2015) both concluded that ethnic composition partly explains why London does better (in the latter case a large part) but is not the whole story, and changes in ethnic composition do not explain changes in achievement levels.

A higher quality of schooling

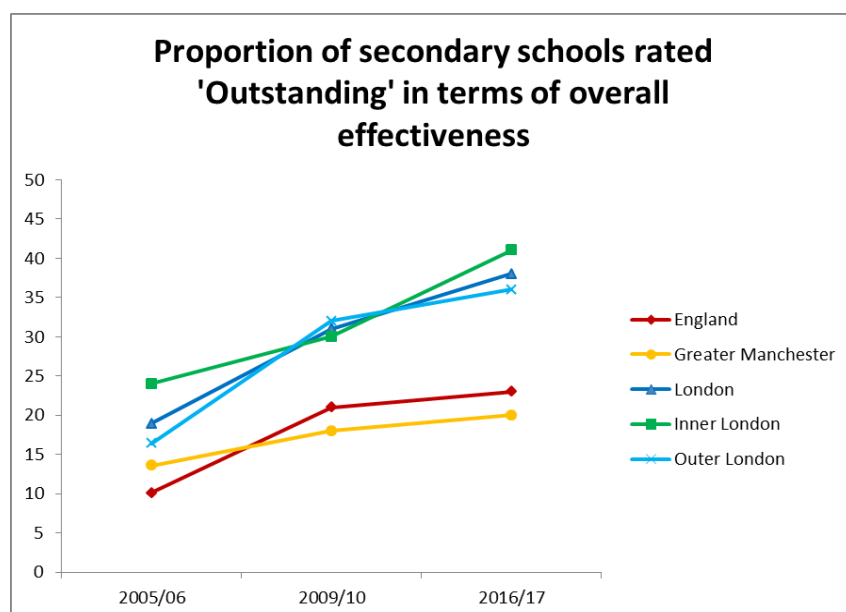
A considerably high proportion of schools in London (especially in Inner London) are rated as outstanding by Ofsted (28% of primaries and 38% of secondaries in 2016/17) than in England (19% and 23%) or Greater Manchester (23% and 20%). Fewer (6% for primaries 7% for secondaries) are rated either inadequate or 'requires improvement' (9% and 21% in England, compared with 8% and 31% GM). Figures 7 and 8 show that these gaps have widened in recent years⁶.

Figure 7. Proportion of primary schools rated 'Outstanding' in terms of overall effectiveness.



⁶ A change in the inspection framework in (check year), moving from a five point to a four point scale meant that nationally, the proportion both of highly rated and poorly rated schools increased (check). However, we can see the increase in outstanding schools in London exceeded the national increase.

Figure 8. Proportion of secondary schools rated 'Outstanding' in terms of overall effectiveness.



Many different explanations have been given for London's higher school quality ratings. The contribution of the **London Challenge** (a secondary school improvement programme that ran from 2003 to 2011⁷) is widely recognised and the lessons are very well documented. Key success factors at a system level were:

- A "Tri-level" approach with the alignment of national, local and school level drivers of improvement
- 'Figurehead leadership' to provide vision and inspiration and galvanise support
- A powerful sense of moral purpose and a positive framing
- Effective coordination, brokering, matching, and deployment
- Use of system-wide data to identify key priorities and to link schools into similar 'families'
- Engagement of experienced school leaders as advisors, working with schools in a bespoke way
- Fostering of school-to-school collaboration
- A focus on disadvantage and narrowing attainment gaps, and on 'Keys to Success' schools and key boroughs facing the deepest challenges.

Specific lessons can also be learned from some of particular programmes developed by the Challenge. For example: there were changes to Inner London pay scales to aid teacher retention; housing subsidies; a Chartered London Teacher scheme which provided a unifying framework for professional development; bespoke training in relation to context; school-to-school support with professional development; new teacher and leader networks around issues like EAL; a London student pledge relating to cultural and sporting opportunities; and a coordinated partnership with higher education institutions.

Reports stress that other areas should not necessarily copy the specific initiatives, since these were contextually specific. The key lessons are in how to mobilise and organise system-wide improvement through intervention and capacity building. They also stress that the London Challenge does not explain everything. Greaves et al. (2014) suggest that the improvement in London's secondary school attainment "is more likely to be due to the increase in attainment at primary school over time for disadvantaged pupils in London" (p. 36), rather than interventions targeting secondary schools. They speculate that these

⁷ London Challenge began as a secondary school initiative but in 2008 was extended to primary schools.

improvements in primary schools (which occurred from the mid-1990s) might have been related to the earlier introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Hours in London but it is not clear, if this is the case, why other areas did not catch up.

Other commentators have pointed to effects of **Teach First** and **Academisation** and there is evidence that both of these were influential at key times to address a teacher supply problem and to deal with some of the lowest performing schools. Some have noted that academisation since 2010 has been slower in the North and there are fewer Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) in the North than in London. However, research suggests that converter Academies do not produce any discernible increase in pupil attainment and that there is very wide variation in the performance of MATs. It does appear to be the case that **school-to-school support mechanisms** may be weaker in the North than London. For example, there are fewer Teaching Schools.

While there has been a lot of research on the London Challenge, factors which underpin school quality have been less well explored. It is widely recognised that **schools in London are better funded**, and it may also be the case that they are **better funded in relation to disadvantage**. London's schools have many students from low income families, but not always the students from groups whose disadvantage tends to be most associated with low attainment or challenges for school organisation and processes (such students tend to be white and living in de-industrialised areas. However, we are not aware of any systematic analysis of patterns of spending in London schools compared with others to investigate if/how additional funding translates into practice. There is some evidence that **London schools have a smaller percentage of students in large classes**. Some research suggests issues with **teacher quality, training routes and professional development** in the North compared to London. Others point to differences in approach to **curriculum** and examination entry, with London students taking more academic routes.

Other factors

Many other factors, not yet systematically explored by research, may explain why differences in school attainment in London are higher than in the rest of England, including London's **stronger labour market** and the **visibility of opportunities** for young people to aspire to; its wide range of cultural and sporting opportunities, charities, philanthropists and political institutions; the rapid **gentrification** of Inner London and the **social mix** of many schools and neighbourhoods. Attention to these kinds of factors may be dismissed as 'making excuses' for schools in other parts of the country, but they deserve serious attention. Narrowing educational inequalities and increasing social mobility demands strategies that address the contextual influences on young people's aspirations and achievements not just their schooling.

Future Directions

A clear message that emerges from this analysis is that the question to be examined is not "what is wrong with Greater Manchester?" but "is there anything that can be learned and applied from London's success"?

Review of the existing literature suggests that while compositional factors are likely to explain a lot of the differences, there are many things that can be learned from the London Challenge (as above), which stands as successful example of how a city-wide system can be effectively mobilised and improved. The many texts documenting the work of the London Challenge should be a primary resource for GM, even though the Challenge in itself did not account for all of London's success.

There may also be other specific lessons from practice that could potentially be learned, for example by examining more closely what has been happening in Boroughs with stand-out early years success, and by looking at the practice of those Academy chains which have made the greatest improvements for

disadvantaged students. GM could consider a series of learning studies, visits or enquiries to interrogate these issues.

Finally, however, system capacity factors such as funding, teacher recruitment and qualifications, class sizes and access to city resources like charities and employers and others need further examination. The limited analyses to date do suggest that London may have a better-resourced system in important ways. If that is the case, questions would need to be asked about how those resource differentials can be addressed. National, local and school level approaches need to be aligned towards the same goals in a strategic and coordinated way. Replicating particular interventions may be helpful but will not achieve a transformative effect in the absence of such a coordinated and committed approach based on a thorough understanding of the issues, challenges and opportunities.