HOUSE OF COMMONS

Education Committee

Oral evidence: Left Behind White Pupils from Disadvantaged Backgrounds, HC 279

Tuesday 3 November 2020

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Jonathan Gullis; Tom Hunt; Dr Caroline Johnson; Kim Johnson; Ian Mearns; David Simmonds.

Questions 74 - 156

Witnesses

I: Henri Murison, Director, Northern Powerhouse Partnership; Sammy Wright, Social Mobility Commissioner, Social Mobility Commission; and Dr Alex Gibson, Senior Research Fellow, University of Plymouth.

II: Jonathan Douglas, Chief Executive, National Literacy Trust; and Ed Vainker, Chief Executive, Reach Academy.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Henri Murison, Sammy Wright and Dr Alex Gibson.

Q74 **Chair:** Good morning, everybody. Thank you very much for coming today. For the benefit of the tape and those watching on the internet, could you please introduce yourselves?

Dr Gibson: Good morning. My name is Alex Gibson. I am a research fellow in the school of medicine at the University of Plymouth, with expertise in resource allocation, particularly health and children's services.

Sammy Wright: I am Sammy Wright. I am the lead for schools and HE at the Social Mobility Commission, and I am also vice principal of a secondary school in Sunderland.

Henri Murison: I am Henri Murison. I am director of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, and I am also here representing the Northern Powerhouse Education Consortium. That includes a number of other organisations, including SHINE, an education charity, and the likes of South Yorkshire Futures, which is led by Sheffield Hallam, a group working to improve educational attainment in South Yorkshire—a number of organisations that have a significant interest in place and the role of place in disadvantage and those children's progress.

Q75 **Chair:** Thank you very much. If you are okay, we will address you by your first names, unless you prefer otherwise. Can I ask you to be as concise as possible in your answers? We have very strict timings in terms of broadcasting, and that will be really appreciated.

We know that white British pupils who are eligible for free school meals perform less well than free school meal-eligible pupils from every other ethnic background throughout their educational career. The statistics are there for all to see. What do you think are the principal causes of this?

Henri Murison: For us, the role of place is critical to that answer. There are things happening in our communities that affect children's wider ability to learn. Parental support is one element of that, but there are also other barriers, like the quality of houses people live in. Fundamentally, because we have a large number of white working-class girls and boys in the north of England, particularly from disadvantaged households, we have studied for a number of years the impact that has on their attainment. The Committee has very generously championed some of that work and made the point about it.

Fundamentally, it is not everywhere in the north where these issues occur. Do you mean these types of children who are on free school meals to meet the education data, our definition, all through their time? The most disadvantaged kids have the most significant issues. When they are also white or from black Caribbean backgrounds, we call that our high impact group. They are doing disproportionately worse in every part of

the country. The problem is that they are very highly concentrated in certain localities, in parts of the north of England but also parts of the West Midlands. There are pockets in Essex as well, but the highest numbers are in areas like the north-east of England where they are very much a key part of the education—

Q76 **Chair:** Even if they are a smaller population, why is it that the ethnic minorities in those areas do better? They have the same poor quality housing, often worse, and the same low income.

Henri Murison: We have done quite a bit of work getting into it and, fundamentally, there are particular elements of culture in certain communities around attitudes towards education. There is also people's experience of deindustrialisation.

It is very much the experience of certain left-behind communities and left-behind towns that have been discussed before in this Committee and elsewhere in this debate. Young people and their parents within those communities often have very limited life chances, so children rationally sometimes do not believe there is much point applying themselves at school because it will not lead to anything.

You also have to think about, in County Durham, there are very few people from BME backgrounds proportionally as part of the population, so the left-behind communities we are talking about have a preponderance of monocultural communities. These are very largely white areas but the effect also exists in big cities, like the one that Kim represents in Liverpool, and in other more diverse places, where you do see a distinction between those white working-class families and others.

We also have to remember that disadvantaged kids do worse overall. This is just an extra loading factor, so the primary issue is still that you are poor and you come from a family that is poor. This just—

Q77 **Chair:** I am going to come on to the other witnesses. I accept that, but what I do not understand is that these other families are poor, too, yet are doing better, so you have not answered that question.

Sammy Wright: A really important thing to note is that, in the breakdown of the figures for Progress 8, it is minus 0.8 for white British FSM. It is also minus 0.8 for mixed white and black Caribbean. The statistics are not quite as stark as only the white working class, but it is quite as stark that it seems to be those who are, as Henri described, from the most long-term disadvantaged communities.

What you might say, for example, about white and black Caribbean mixed is that the fact there is a mix indicates that these are not recent immigrant communities, and perhaps that is something that is causing some of the effects here. Ethnicity is an indicator of other things and perhaps, as Henri says, it is the poverty, and it is why the poverty is hitting certain communities worse than others.

Q78 **Chair:** I think it was Trevor Phillips who pointed out in a very important article in yesterday's *Times* that poverty is hitting other ethnic groups and, yes, it is true that Afro-Caribbean and Roma also do not do as well. We are looking at those in future evidence sessions, but the fact remains that most other ethnic groups, particularly Asian groups, do better than white working-class boys and girls, and they have the same levels, if not worse, of poverty, poor housing and low income.

Sammy Wright: One of the things we really see here is that it is an interaction between what you might say are raw indicators of poverty, like income, and a wider poverty within the region. For example, in our recent report, "The Long Shadow of Deprivation", what we saw was that there are certain areas where educational inequality is there—as it is almost everywhere in the country—but that leads to a wider social inequality at age 28, so there is a further inequality that goes on top of that.

That is something that I see in my working life here in Sunderland. I see that students who have a similar level of disadvantage to students I taught in London are on a double disadvantage of being in a region, in an area that, as Henri says, lacks that sense of hope from job opportunities and other opportunities around that.

Your question about ethnicity, in my opinion, comes down to the idea that we need to look at the demographic patterns across the country and why it is that these particular spots of really low social mobility seem to coincide with certain demographic groups.

Q79 **Chair:** Alex, could you answer? Also, are there cases of different parts of the country where white disadvantaged pupils do better than other white disadvantaged pupils? If you look at exactly the same disadvantage indicators, is it worse in the north than the south even if they have the same levels of poverty, housing and so on?

Dr Gibson: I sense a bit of pushback here, that you want us to focus on this ethnic difference, and we are all saying that is important but there are other—

Chair: That is the purpose of our inquiry. That is the title of our inquiry. None of you has answered the question.

Dr Gibson: What I think we are trying to say—and I do not want to speak for Henri and Sammy—is that this is an issue. There is no doubt that it is an issue in the statistics. I am not an educationalist, so I am not going to try to explain any differences that are there, but they are actually relatively small once you start digging down into the data. When you look nationally, you seem to get this effect of white British underperformance, but to a degree—not entirely, but to a degree—they are the consequences of a complex interaction of local disadvantage and regional differences in performance.

I was trying to find some way of teasing that out. There are 122 local authorities where you get more than one ethnic group coming out with more than 20 children, so you can actually do some statistics. White British children are the worst-performing cohort in only 55 of those 122 local authorities. Elsewhere it is the black African cohort, the black Caribbean cohort, black other cohorts and mixed other, so in fact, once you start teasing it down, it is not quite as clear cut that there is this underperforming white British community everywhere. It does vary from place to place.

The degree of variation is relatively slight. Yes, there are some groups—and the Chinese ethnic group is the one that comes out as particularly highly performing—that both perform more highly and do not have quite such a sharp distinction between the most advantaged within that ethnic group and the most disadvantaged. The disadvantaged Chinese ethnic children tend to do better than you would expect, whereas the disadvantaged white children tend to do much worse. There is a steeper gradient there.

As to your question about whether it varies, the variation is astounding. If you look at the free school meal children, white British free school meal children in Rutland, Westminster, Wandsworth, Kensington and Chelsea, and I could go down a load of other inner London authorities—

Q80 **Chair:** Give me some non-London ones, because we know London is a challenge.

Dr Gibson: North Tyneside is where I get to 45 points on Attainment 8 compared with Reading, Leicester, Oldham, Isle of Wight and Cumbria all at 33, 35, 36, so there is this huge variation in performance regionally. This is the same cohort of children. This is the free school meal children, white British, and they vary from 30-odd points at Attainment 8 in Reading, Leicester and Oldham to 47, 48, 51 in Rutland, Westminster and Wandsworth, so there is a fantastic variation in performance among white British.

For me anyway—the other two can comment—the white disadvantaged children are not particularly white. They are children in particular areas and in particular disadvantaged localities within those areas. That is the kind of dimension that I would particularly like to focus on.

Henri Murison: The simplistic point is that there are some stark differences. If you take your County Durham ex-mining community, there is definitely a poverty of aspiration that comes from living in that community. That effect is less pronounced if you live in a more prosperous place, but communities are very tightly bounded. The point is that for the white working-class kids who are in a very prosperous area it is a very different experience of what your future could look like. The social mobility dream applies for that child. The reality is that the social mobility dream does not operate in many parts of the north of England. It is not true that, if you work hard and really apply yourself, everything will

happen for you, because for many young people who do that it does not happen.

The change that we would see, compared with some other groups in certain cities in the north, is that they definitely are recent immigrant communities with very strong social and economic problems but with very high levels of parental support towards success academically. That does not exist in communities where there are cycles of economic decline, where parents and grandparents have perhaps not had successful work outcomes or family members and those in the streets they grew up in have not been good role models for them in terms of what success looks like.

How you fix that is difficult, but we have to admit that it is as much about ethnicity as it is about immigrant culture versus some of the challenges we have in certain parts of the north of England. But I would say the real difference—the really important distinction—is between white middle-class kids in more prosperous places and white working-class kids in less successful ones. That is where the starkest divide is because the generic difference in ethnicity hides the working-class problem. Obviously, overall, black and other groups have fewer middle-class kids, relatively speaking.

The real distinction you get is when you compare white working-class children to middle-class children in more prosperous areas. You can see a massive distinction there. That avoids some of the challenges around the fact that this high impact group we have identified is marked by the white working class.

I think what Alex is saying is true, which is that if you are in a very concentrated part of the country where there are larger numbers of these schools—in the north of England we have about half the schools where you have the most long-term disadvantaged white kids, and most of the rest are in the West Midlands—those schools get much worse outcomes, particularly secondary schools. Only a small number of secondaries still get a very good Progress 8.

Some do outperform that trend, but it is the exception not the rule. Understanding what is holding those kids back, particularly at secondary school—because it is a secondary school issue that is most pronounced—is a narrow focus for us because in some communities it means that whole generations of kids are not getting good outcomes at secondary school as large numbers of the kids in those communities meet these criteria, and it is in those places where we are most worried. That is where it has the biggest impact on school attainment.

Chair: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Q81 **David Simmonds:** I would like to ask you an open question. We have been looking at the use of free school meals as a proxy for the group that we are looking at here. We know that has some problems within it, which

you have alluded to. Do you have a view about whether it is fit for purpose?

Sammy Wright: Free school meals on its own does not give us enough information. It is all about length of time on free school meals. Henri has alluded to that already, and we would fully support that in looking at a deeper index of deprivation.

Henri Murison: The group I am most interested in are those who are on free school meals for their whole education, because we know that is where this effect is most pronounced. That is what Education Datalab's work has proved. I would also accept the fact that there are many children on similar incomes throughout their childhood who are completely missed by the system.

The schools that we focus on, that have more than 10% long-term disadvantaged, are usually the schools that have 50% FSM in terms of secondary schools. The other 50% who go to those schools, if they are ending up in those schools—these are not schools parents usually choose because they often have bad Ofsteds and look like they have awful Progress 8s, because the kids who go to them differentially impact on the school before it even gets the kids in the door—are often probably not far off being on free school meals as well.

Once a school has these markers, you almost need to look at all the kids in the school, because the schools with high long-term disadvantage are often not teaching any middle-class children at all in most cases, because the parents who can get away from them do. Often they are considered to be the sink schools in those communities because they are teaching those who are probably going to do the worst. Even the high-performing schools do not look as successful as they are.

You then get an effect of almost honey potting. Once you have lots of these kids, you end up getting lots more of them because even Pupil Premium is not an incentive to encourage other schools to compete for these children. The reality is that other schools and localities do not want them because it is too hard to get them through their exams and they do not want the work. That is a very disappointing element of how the school system competition works.

Chair: Can I ask you to be slightly more concise if you can? We have a lot to get through.

Q82 **David Simmonds:** Very briefly, just to tease out what the next witnesses are going to say. Free school meals eligibility applies in early years. In early years settings, of course, it is much more complex, not least because free childcare eligibility, tax free childcare and so on can often mean that people are simply not on the free school meals register even though they would subsequently become eligible. Do you have a view about the usefulness of free school meals numbers, particularly if we are looking at the children on free school meals for the duration of their

time in education, in respect of the data that would arise before they actually start formal education, especially given that every child gets free school meals when they are in reception and year 1?

Dr Gibson: I do not really know. I was going to make a plea for the use of the national pupil database and the fact that it has the LSOA, the lower layer super output area, where the child lives, and through that you are able to bring in a lot of very local information—this is a group of 2,000 to 3,000 people—about local deprivation, which I found incredibly valuable in trying to explain variations in performance or access to university, whatever it might be.

Once you are able to include that data, for instance the IDACI score that is used in resource allocation—that is the number of children in each area living in income deprivation—you are able to bring in a lot more information. Once you have that, the significance of free school meal status actually drops away. Using the national pupil database, which is one of the most remarkable databases we have, allows you to pull in an awful lot more data than just free school meals, so I would call for that to be used at every opportunity.

Q83 **Tom Hunt:** Just in terms of that disconnect between white pupils who are eligible for free school meals in very small middle-class backgrounds, so it is largely the point that you were making, Henri. There has been some criticism of the education system over the past few decades that there has not been enough focus on technical education apprenticeships. It has been very much a 50% target for university, et cetera.

Do you think it is a problem for some because, almost regardless of whether you want to go to university or whether you want to go on to a good quality apprenticeship, you have to do reasonably well in your GCSEs, for example? Do you think there has been a bit of a problem that, for many, they have looked at university and said, "That seems to be the only thing we are hearing about at school: we need to go to university. We do not really think university is a route for us or for me. It is not achievable for us to get there and there is not really anything else"?

There is not really a sense of there being multiple pathways. There hasn't been enough to promote good quality technical education and apprenticeships. Maybe if there had been there would be more of an incentive and a driver for children from low-income backgrounds, who perhaps do not want to go to university but who would be attracted by that technical route, to do better at GCSEs, for example, and that gap would not be so large.

Sammy Wright: When we talk about this, I think there is sometimes confusion between the factors driving students and the factors driving schools. Schools make a lot of the decisions about the route that students are following. For example at the moment, because of the pressure on EBacc entry, schools will tend to take all their students whom they think can get grades at EBacc and compel them to take EBacc subjects.

That is fine. I am personally a supporter of academic rigour and things like EBacc, but what it means is that you have a stratification of status to do with the subjects. It is very clear in any school that, if I am to be really blunt, vocational routes are for the thick kids. That is the way the school structure is designed to operate.

Rather than simply think about promoting something or pushing technical education, we have to change the conversation and change the way we measure schools so that, in the performance system and the accountability system, we can value outcomes that are not simply narrowly academic.

Chair: You are absolutely right. I agree with you, and change careers advice in schools as well.

Q84 **Tom Hunt:** Careers advice and signposting should start from a very early age. There should be parity of esteem and there should be multiple pathways. I completely agree when it comes to the way that schools are assessed and how there perhaps has not been enough to incentivise schools to view technical education differently. I have spoken to teachers who understand the argument about why more needs to be done on technical education, but they have said that all the incentives point in the wrong direction, so it has to have teeth, really.

I know there have been some positive comments about the new Ofsted framework, and about how there is more to encourage positive outcomes, but time will tell whether it is enough and whether more needs to be done.

Dr Gibson: That is all absolutely true, but there is one additional part to it. It is slightly individualised in what the schools are doing, whereas pupils make decisions in the context of their environments. I agree with everything that Henri was saying with one difference. Understandably, he keeps on talking about the north, but there is a peripheral issue rather than a north-south issue. All the places I look at—to go back to the theme that the white British free school meal children are doing poorly—are the sorts of places where the pupils themselves do not particularly see education, as it is currently set up, as providing the ladder.

The schools can make all the decisions they like, but the children are always going to be making the decisions in the worlds in which they live. When they see the education system is providing them with a ladder, I think most children are ultimately sensible and will use that system to climb the ladder. When you are in Leicester, Oldham, Isle of Wight, Cumbria, Nottingham, Knowsley—and I go through the list of these places—these children, however good the schools are, are thinking, "Well, what is really the point?"

I would say it is a school issue, but it is a much wider issue about providing the opportunities locally for children to benefit from school education.

Q85 **Ian Mearns:** A lot of what I am hearing reflects my experiences as a school governor in the north-east of England. I remember that here in Gateshead, for instance, we had year-on-year improvement in school results until the credit crunch, and it carried on for a couple of years. Then in the aftermath of the credit crunch, as the economy here got worse and worse and worse and job outcomes became worse and worse and worse, performance started to tail off, as youngsters just could not see where the ladder was going to take them in the context of the local economy in the north-east of England.

The question I was going to ask has largely been answered. It is about the context and the factors relating to the areas in which the children live but, also, have you seen any evidence about parents' and grandparents' previous educational experience and outcomes having an impact on children within the family?

Henri Murison: It definitely is a factor, and the interesting thing is whether you are looking at families' economic outcomes or their historical performance. In reality, they are often very highly correlated. The challenge is that, if you are still living in some of the communities we are talking about that have secondary schools serving these sorts of catchment areas, the reality is your life has not changed because those who are economically successful do not tend to stay in the same places.

What we would say is that, however much parents want to do their best for their kids—and I still hold on to the belief that every parent fundamentally wants what is best for their children—your ability to support your children through even a GCSE system that is highly academic is very different.

Coming back to Tom's question, which is very closely related in some ways to yours, Ian, the link is that we have made GCSEs a preparation for A-levels, which are a preparation for university. I understand why A-levels are a preparation for university, because they are predominantly taken by people going to university, but GCSEs are supposed to be a gateway qualification for all young people to get on. The reality is they are not an accessible qualification for people who do not have lots of experience in the family of people who have gone to university.

Schools can do an awful lot to open up those qualifications, but the reality is we need to have a fundamental look at what we are asking kids to study, because I do not think employers are very interested in what they include either.

Q86 **Ian Mearns:** In a nutshell, are you saying that the curriculum that is being provided is only appropriate for the 50% of youngsters who are destined for university?

Henri Murison: Yes.

Chair: That is what I call concise, Henri. That is wonderful.

Henri Murison: I have been listening, Rob.

Q87 **David Simmonds:** A couple of questions about finance. The national differences that exist around this have been alluded to, and I had it pointed out to me that a child in Shropshire in receipt of the Pupil Premium receives less per capita funding than a child in Birmingham who does not receive the Pupil Premium at school level, so we know there are historically a lot of very big differences.

When we look at the research you have talked about, there is a general theme that runs through it about a lack of funding. What changes to the funding formula will you recommend that would address the impact this has and, in particular, the impact on the disadvantaged white pupils we are talking about in this inquiry?

Sammy Wright: A straightforward thing that we would say at the SMC is that we need to look at 16 to 19 funding. For a disadvantaged young person that is the key time that gives them the qualifications that actually lead on to a potentially fruitful career. As we have said before, GCSEs are a bit of an odd thing. They are a little bit transitional, and the worth of them can be questioned at times. Sixteen to 19 is when you do the qualifications, whether it is an apprenticeship, vocational or A-level, that actually get you your career.

We need to have an equivalent for the Pupil Premium at 16 to 19 that encourages schools and colleges to have targeted intervention for 16 to 19-year-olds who are disadvantaged. At the moment, there is no incentive, there is no recording. Disadvantage might as well not exist at 16 to 19 in terms of the accountability measures. If you tie something like a Pupil Premium in with that, which can be observed and can be strategically directed, that can give a real incentive for these institutions to support the disadvantaged most.

Dr Gibson: My focus would be slightly different, and that is on how resources are distributed around the country rather than between the different levels in the education system. In that, first, I would largely commend what the DfE has done over the last few years in the development of the national funding formula for schools, in so far as it is a great improvement on what has gone before, and it had taken a largely sensible modelling approach to try to work out how much was to be paid to each area to achieve its aim, which was to ensure that wherever a child lives they should be able to achieve their best ends.

The only thing I would say is that DfE has not picked up on the degree to which performance varies so hugely around the country. When I am talking about areas where you get just over 30 points at Attainment 8 and areas where you are getting over 50, you are seeing huge local variations in performance. Therefore, it does currently matter whether you are born, live and grow up on the Isle of Wight or whether you are born, live and grow up in Islington. That is something that the funding formula currently does not address.

It is partly north-south, but it is also a metropolitan-periphery sort of issue. Looking over the long term at the consequences of the funding formula is really important. There is a process in which each Government body—the DfE in this case—develops its funding formula, brings in statisticians, does all the stuff it can do, is very clever, distributes the money as best it can but then you need to see what the consequences are five or 10 years down the line.

At present, there is such a difference in different parts of the country for all ethnic groups—but for white British in particular here—that they need to be looking to see what changes should be introduced to the funding formula.

Q88 **David Simmonds:** The second part of the question is a broader one, but it perhaps picks up on what has been said by witnesses: before asking for more money to go into the system, do you think there is a case for looking at redistributing the £1.4 billion that is currently sitting in surplus balances in schools across the country? It seems to be hard to make the case, and it picks up that last point, that the money is being spent in the right way. Some schools are struggling to make ends meet and others are sitting on literally millions of pounds that they are not spending year after year.

Then the broader question that follows from that: is there a need to broaden this to wider investment in local economies? Tackling disadvantage is not just about schools and, indeed, colleges. It is also about wider opportunities in the local area.

Henri Murison: I think Sammy wanted to answer the question on surplus balances, so I will leave that to him. I have intimated from his expression, so I will not duplicate an answer I would probably agree with.

On the wider question, there is a point that you need to think about the context of what would raise attainment. That is not just about investing in schools, I agree. One of the things that has been tried—and we may get into it later in the session—is an evolution of the concept of opportunity areas that takes a broader view beyond the school gates. That starts at birth and goes right through the lifecycle, because I am very sympathetic to the case Alex makes that the current approach to spending through the formula is very blunt, and we need to consider whether we need more funding around the broader challenges that are beyond the school gate in particular. If you take a purely school-centric approach, which does not involve collaboration between schools, I do not think you will necessarily solve some of these deep-seated problems. The reality is that, in an academised system where there is competition, you have to find mechanisms to breed collaboration. Otherwise it is very hard to fix some of these problems.

Sammy Wright: I completely agree with Henri. I will say very quickly what I was going to say on the surplus, which is that these are the rules that have been established through the academisation system. We have

been told that we cannot run a deficit, so of course there are surpluses. You cannot hit it bang on. You have to have something in the pot, because the penalties are very large for not having a surplus.

In that sense, there may be a case for it, but it is a case for looking at the rules and the way that academisation works. That fits in, of course, with what Henri said about trying to breed collaboration, because at the moment a lot of academies and chains operate as businesses, as they were designed to and, as such, they are getting competition rather than collaboration, which seems to me to be not appropriate for education.

The other thing I would want to say about the wider question that Henri has alluded to, when mentioning the opportunity areas, is that in all of this the important thing to note is that our recent research showed very clearly that the attainment gap is only part of the picture. There is this further gap that then happens in certain areas, and it is to do with the local environment and the local job opportunities, the transport and so on.

On the opportunity areas, one way forward would be to give them a little more clout in looking wider. It comes back to an earlier comment—

Q89 **Chair:** In a nutshell, with the opportunity areas, have they made a difference to disadvantage and some of the subjects that we are discussing today in terms of left-behind white working-class boys and girls? Have the opportunity areas made a difference and, if so, how?

Sammy Wright: Yes. The thing to understand about the opportunity areas is that the way they are set up is as a kind of monitoring and checking. It is a process thing. The simple answer is we do not know yet.

Q90 **Chair:** How many years? They have been around for a long time now. We should have some idea of whether they have made a difference or not.

Sammy Wright: I do not have the stats in front of me, but I would certainly say that, having visited a lot of the opportunity areas, what you see is improvements in some of the schools. I went to Blackpool, for example, and talked to a lot of the schools there, but it was clear that part of the problem was to do with skills in schools. There was also a huge transient population. They had kids entering in the middle of the year in very difficult home circumstances, and that was—

Q91 **Chair:** That is not an answer to my question. Henri, opportunity areas, have they made a difference or not?

Henri Murison: I was critical of them before. Some of the early ones were just too formulaic. They are a lot better, and the one in the most diverse place in Bradford has been incredibly successful, but ironically it is the one place where white working-class attainment isn't the leading problem historically, if that makes sense.

Q92 **Chair:** Do you have any stats to show the success?

Henri Murison: I am happy to provide some.

Q93 **Chair:** Thank you. Alex, do you have any views on whether they have been successful or not? Have they made a difference because of the amount of money?

Dr Gibson: None whatsoever, although I am ever hopeful. I think they started in 2016. When you are looking at education, you are looking at such a long time before you know whether something has worked. It is always a difficult question to answer.

Q94 **Chair:** How much have we spent on it, £100 million so far?

Henri Murison: Yes.

Chair: We are still not 100% sure of the data in terms of whether or not they are getting good outcomes for kids.

Q95 **David Simmonds:** If I may just pop in for a second, just picking up on what Sammy said. There is no requirement that academy schools make a profit or surplus. There is an expectation that all schools will balance their budget. The concern I have with the funding formula is that these surpluses have often been in the system for more than a decade, so they existed long before academisation was ever heard of. If we are broadly in agreement that things like a 16 to 19 Pupil Premium or, indeed, opportunity areas need more investment, there are areas already with more than £1 billion slopping round the system in surplus balances. Previous Governments—Gordon Brown did this—had a top slice on that in order to redirect the resources. That would be one solution. I would like your view. Do you think, given that there is that surplus money in the system, we should be putting it to better use?

Sammy Wright: Any money, yes, I would direct it to where it is needed. In terms of the mechanisms, as a school leader myself, I am aware that, for example, we have just done an extension to our sixth form. It was necessary but we had to do it through our surplus because we were not able to access other funding.

It is a complex point. That is all I would say, but I would certainly approve the principle that the money should be used. Perhaps it could be something along the lines of an incentive for people to use it rather than leave it sloshing there, as you say.

Chair: I will bring in Caroline, Jonathan and Tom, and try to ask as succinctly as possible.

Q96 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** I will be as brief as I can, Chair. Just a few quick questions relating to what has been said so far. One of the witnesses talked about the differences throughout the country where, in some areas, the white working-class children are doing much better. What evidence do you have on why these particular schools are being successful? Is it geography and Government funding? Is it school leadership? Is it a culture among parents? What do you think it is?

Dr Gibson: To a certain extent, I am revealing the data without having the explanation. There are very diverse reasons quite clearly, so the very top-performing area is Rutland. This is for white British FSM children. They are getting 51 points. Those are remarkable scores. Then there is Westminster. Obviously they are not very deprived areas, but very quickly you are down to Islington, Brent and Waltham Forest, very different sorts of areas. I am afraid the answer is all of the above, and I do not have the data here to be able to explain that.

Q97 **Chair:** Sammy, as a head teacher, what is your view?

Sammy Wright: On the SMC we have commissioned a piece of work that is due to be published in December on exactly this question, trying to see how it is that certain schools do better with the disadvantaged. We will be able to provide some detail in December but, having looked at the initial research, what is very clear is that even when the disadvantaged do better the gap is still there. The gap never really declines significantly, so there is a question. Sometimes we might want to say, "Great. That is fine. We can live with a gap if everyone is doing well." We do need to question that, even when the free school meals students are doing better, there is still sometimes an issue within that.

The other thing about that research is that what we have seen is that it tends to be the case that schools with extra resources, so extra parental resources from the non-FSM parents, for example, or resources in the environment, such as co-operative local businesses and so on, that does make quite a difference.

On an earlier point, I just wanted to feed back to you for a second about careers education. Careers education is very important but we have to understand that simply saying "careers education" is not the panacea because you need to have a career to be educated towards. It is not good enough to simply say to students in areas where there is very low opportunity, "Oh, great, you could be X, Y or Z" when they know they cannot be.

Again, it comes back to this point about the opportunity areas. The education system is not the answer on its own. The answer is education plus work with employers, actually building local infrastructure, et cetera.

Q98 **Chair:** When you say, "They cannot be", what do you mean by that?

Sammy Wright: I mean, for example, if we say an available career is a theatre technician and there are no theatres. There are certain careers to which you might aspire but in your local area it is very difficult to do. In terms of the white working class as well, there is an issue here—I think someone alluded to it earlier—about the willingness to move away from an area. When your family has a very strong root in an area, where all your cousins, everyone, lives in that one area, it is a difficult thing to move away from it.

We did another report in the summer, "Moving out to move on", which suggests that mobility is actually literal in lots of ways, in that people who are able to be socially mobile are people who are able to move, who have the family resources to go to different places.

Q99 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** There are other things to quality of life, and being around family could be considered one of them, so perhaps we need to ensure people get more local opportunity.

I was going to ask Sammy specifically about something you said earlier in response to David's question on the funding formula, in that it does seem to be directed towards metropolitan areas. You said if you had to change anything, you would change 16 to 19 funding. Yet we have heard from other witnesses that the gap in attainment starts pre-school and gets wider and wider as school progresses. Is investing at 16 to 19 not closing the door after the horse has bolted? Is it not too late by then? Do we not need to focus the money earlier rather than later? I am interested to understand the reasoning behind your answer.

Sammy Wright: There are two answers I would have. One is I think we also need to focus on early years, absolutely, but we say phrases like, "Close the door before the horse has bolted." I know the horses. I do not want them to bolt, and I see them at age 16 and I want help for them now. If we simply look at early years, we are writing off a generation. We have a group of young people now who need our help and support. They deserve it, because they are growing up in one of the most difficult economic climates there has been for a generation.

Q100 **Jonathan Gullis:** I suppose I was quite concerned, like you, Chair, to hear about opportunity areas and the amount of money that has gone in and not having the statistical data to show how they have made a difference. In terms of Stoke-on-Trent, we are in our second year with an opportunity area that is led by two very passionate local people, one from business and one from the university.

I suppose what I was interested in, and Sammy has referred to it, is that we are talking about needing education plus. How do we go and engage with those parents who are white working-class disadvantaged in order to aid and better educate them so that they can support their children better as they go through the system?

Henri Murison: I think that is a fair point, and what we would say is that the opportunity area problem, in terms of how they were defined, is that they are too narrow. They do in many cases look at early years, which is to be welcomed, but they do not look at the wider socioeconomic standpoint. Right to Succeed in North Birkenhead is trialling a different model on a lower level of geographic scale, which is more concentrated and looks beyond education at the wider factors on attainment and progress. I think that is the right solution. In the limitations of the models we are talking about and, as Alex has pointed out, the correlation between the places he mentioned, there are definitely some economic factors that are linking some of those parts of the country that have had

these issues. That might not be the only cause of it, but it is certainly one of the causal factors that will be driving this.

I would say that if you are trying to understand where you would want to intervene, the schools that we are looking at do not always draw children from the same localities. Often if you look at a travel to school area, there will be an ecosystem of schools that are serving broadly the population areas where these challenges are most prevalent. That is where we have to come towards a solution that involves all the partners. I do not think it is narrowly just schools.

We have examples. We have a school, for instance, in West Yorkshire, which is the most improved on our Fairer Schools Index that we have announced today, Carleton High School. It has done that against the wind, against the grain. What you want to do is change the way you are working the wood. You need to make it so that all schools are going in that direction, not just the few that swim against the tide, to draw another metaphor. We have to come up with a model that enables us to do that.

Q101 **Ian Mearns:** There is this issue of place that I think is vitally important. A long time ago we used to have an initiative called strategic area partnerships. These strategic area partnerships were judged in part by the number of people in the locality who got into economic activity. The trouble was that, quite often, what happened in those neighbourhoods and in those areas was that people who got into economic activity—in other words got a job—then moved out of those areas and were backfilled by other people who did not have a job. The stats at the end of the process did not look much better for the neighbourhood, even though hundreds of people had been helped through the process.

I am wondering if that is a large part of the problem with what is happening here. A place like the north-east has never been a stranger to exporting people, but it is usually people with skills. Therefore, what it leaves is a deficit of people in the locality who can be good role models, mentors and so on to other youngsters, because the skilled people have moved out. They go where the jobs are. We have never been frightened to move from the north-east of England, but is that an overall problem because of the deficit that exists in the local economy?

Dr Gibson: You mention mentoring, and I think that is one of the potential routes, not out of this but one of the possible solutions or approaches one might take. When we were doing this, our understanding very quickly came to be that peripheral, often coastal towns were the ones where you got surprisingly low attainment, given the characteristics of their populations. I cannot claim great depth of analysis here, but the gut reaction was very much that these were areas where children did not see that future and did not see that ladder that everybody mentions.

One of the approaches in some of the money we have been trying to get is to start up mentoring schemes in these areas to show children. If you

go to Tynemouth or one of these small Devon towns, it is the small-scale hospitality industry, maybe the local hospital, but there is not much else around for them to see as opportunities. Be it Gateshead, the large northern cities or the small rural, coastal towns, bring to these children a vision of the future that is there if they are able to take advantage of education.

In doing that, just to come right back to the theme of the session, one of the most frustrating issues that we found is that, when we were chasing money to support mentoring, quite a lot of the charities that were doing this had limits. You had to have 10%, 20% or 30% of the children who were BAME children. Of course, you go to Cornwall and 2% are non-white British, so immediately there was no access to the resources to support children in those areas by developing mentoring schemes, which is slightly frustrating. One of the solutions that we saw is to try to provide the children with a vision of their possible future through formal mentoring.

Q102 **Tom Hunt:** It was briefly alluded to earlier, this difference in academic performance between white pupils from low-income households and non-white pupils from low-income households. Within those white households, there may be a settled view, often passed down between generations, that the ladder that is being discussed is not really there and they do not associate it with schooling. Perhaps for non-white pupils who potentially have moved to this country more recently, that is not there in the same way. Potentially, that may explain the difference in performance. Is that what I picked up earlier?

Sammy Wright: It is a hypothesis. It is hard to prove. I have taught in London for 12 years and I have taught in the north-east for six. What you see is different sets of aspiration in different cultural contexts. I think that the context of marginalised communities, particularly deindustrialised communities, is one where there is not that settled sense of education necessarily being a route out.

When you go into the detail on who is really struggling educationally, it is not quite enough to say—and I don't like the parent-bashing element—that working-class parents do not care about their kids' futures. It is not that. It is that working-class parents, when they care about their kids' futures—I did some research in some local schools and I did some questionnaires. I found that free school meal kids have more conversations with their parents about what careers they might take up, what possible work routes they might have, but the fear in those parents is that they will not get work if they do not go very specifically through the vocational route.

The problem with our system is that the vocational routes are lower value. They may not be said to be lower value but, in essence, we all know that they are. If I have a bright kid, I know that I would not be doing them a favour saying, "Follow the vocational route at A-level." I would be doing them a favour saying, "Go A-levels" because I know in

the world of work the A-levels will provide something that employers will respond to better. The employers might not be right to do so, but I know it is doing them a favour, guiding them towards that.

There is a real conflict at the heart here, and when you talk to middle-class kids and middle-class parents what often happens is they have this implicit knowledge of how to work the system. The great example of this is individual students who I talk to, if they come from a working-class home, might say something like, "I want to be a forensic scientist, so I am going to do a forensic science vocational course at 16 to 19." Whereas when you look at how you get into forensics, you need to be a bloody good scientist first. The names of these courses are deceptive. Kids go into it with no other information. They think, "I'm going to do this course, it will make me that person," but it doesn't because that is not how our system works.

Q103 **Chair:** Hopefully the T-levels, when they are rolled out fully, will change that and also cut down the number of other qualifications that you are talking about.

Sammy Wright: Yes, I think so.

Q104 **Kim Johnson:** Good morning, panel. My question is to Henri and it is about the Government's efforts to level up regionally. We know that poverty and disadvantage have increased significantly over the last 10 years as a result of austerity, particularly in areas like mine in the north-west. How effective you think the Government's initiative to support local areas is? You have alluded to the opportunity areas, but can you name some specific initiatives that you think are working? What needs to be done to make things work better for disadvantaged white pupils?

Henri Murison: We would say that if you take a purely simple approach and focus only on the educational worlds, it will not work. I think Pupil Premium has been a great help but it is not targeted at all. It goes to all disadvantaged kids, but we know it is long-term disadvantage that has the particular issue. That is where most of the white working-class issue that Education Datalab initially identified with us a few years ago comes from.

If you do not focus your national targeted funding very well and opportunity areas are still very constrained—there has never been one in the north-east, as Ian Mearns has pointed out at this Committee many times—you have to have more of these targeted interventions. They have to be broader than just education. If you are going to have a national system to back that up, that goes to all schools regardless of how many disadvantaged kids they have, you have to make sure that money is better targeted. As we are going to see more people on benefits, the free school meals bill is going to go up. The risk is all that money could go to people in transitional poverty who have nowhere near the same level of problem as those who will be pushed harder into poverty who have been on free school meals throughout their time in education.

If we want to do something for white working-class kids, we have to make sure that whatever money goes into education in this Parliament goes to the most disadvantaged, who have been on free school meals the longest, or whatever better proxy we can find. That could be through hyper-targeted opportunity areas that are much more wide ranging in impact than the ones that have been tried so far but are more concentrated geographically. You are not looking at big areas; you are looking at the places that most need it.

Q105 **Chair:** Didn't we have something already called sub-regional improvement boards, SRIBs, before opportunity areas were doing this stuff? I think they still exist.

Henri Murison: There is money in the system. Our challenge is that the DfE has been quite opaque about how it is spent. I do not think it is necessarily involving the metro Mayors and others who have the knowledge of their local areas. We need to tie this to economic development policy, not be in a cupboard in the DfE, because I don't think the Department is the best at place-based decision making. It is not a good partner with devolved areas, sadly. I wish it was better at it but, under the current leadership, it is not.

Q106 **Kim Johnson:** I just wanted to ask one supplementary question. Maybe Henri could give an explanation as to why we have so many failing schools within our disadvantaged areas that impact on the educational attainment of white working class.

Henri Murison: Some of it is how we measure it. We looked at our schools that have those high long-term disadvantaged cohorts. A number of them are in your constituency; for instance, the Studio School. It looks very poorly performing, but when you look at the intake it goes up significantly. It goes up 1,000 places in the Progress 8 league table.

Some of it is about measurement. If you look at schools with long-term disadvantaged kids, they make less progress on average. If you have lots of long-term disadvantaged kids in one school, because that is a wider problem, your school looks like it is very underperforming. If we add contextual data alongside Progress 8, we could have a much more rational debate about which schools are outperforming what you would expect them to do and which schools are turning it around. Otherwise, we see a lot of schools that end up with the long-term disadvantaged kids closing because they become schools no one wants to send their kids to, and it is partly because their results are masking the fact they are teaching all of the poorer kids for a whole wider area.

Chair: We have to wrap up pretty soon, so can you be very concise, Ian, please?

Q107 **Ian Mearns:** I know Sammy wanted to come in on the back of that question. It sounds to me like Henri is suggesting that we have a return to contextual value-added league tables in order to measure schools. One of the things that we identified previously was that the way in which the

contextual value-added league tables were constructed did not actually use white working-class disadvantage as one of the heavy measures. Therefore, it would have to be a finessed model of contextual value added if we are to do something to overcome this particular problem, as well as the wide-ranging economic development activity that is going to be necessary to provide that local stimulus to educational circumstances in particular localities, too.

Sammy Wright: All I would say is that, in terms of the funding stuff, it is so important that we have an accountability system that incentivises schools to spend that in the right way. This ties in with what Ian is saying about the contextual value added. I taught under the contextual value-added system and I know that, like every single system that has ever been devised for league tables, schools gamed it. The thing we have to say is that there may be a question here about whether we can do the whole idea of league tables differently, making it less high stakes so that schools can afford to be more honest.

The other thing I have been thinking about is how we may need to move away from comparing schools to each other to comparing them to themselves. Are they improving on their previous performance? That is the key question, not whether they are better than their neighbour. Are they doing as well as we think they should be doing?

Q108 **Chair:** Could you do both?

Sammy Wright: Possibly, yes. It is all about the incentives, and the point is that the stakes are so high for a school in disadvantaged circumstances. If you consider that the disadvantage gap is the same in outstanding schools as it is in adequate schools, by very definition if you have more disadvantaged students in your school, you are struggling before you even get out of the gate.

Q109 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** I have a quick question about something Ian said that struck me. If you have an area of high deprivation and somebody is successful, as Ian pointed out, they may well move away. When you are looking at how well a school is performing, how much evidence is there beyond the A-level results at the end to see how these children are performing, say, 10 years after they have left school?

Although there have been comments made about the trades, in fact some of these tradespeople—as we all know if we have had work done on our houses—can be quite expensive and earn quite a good salary. We know some of the people who go to university are not getting a good return on that investment. What results or evidence do we have of how the individuals who attend these different schools in these different areas are doing economically a decade after they have left that particular school, even if they no longer live within that region?

Dr Gibson: On that particular point, very little. To my knowledge, there is tracking through to university if they go to university, but we are in a society that does not have ID cards and I do not think we are naturally

disposed towards tracking individuals and their performance. There are longitudinal datasets that are produced on small scales, but there is no systematic following of individuals other than to university, and then universities will ask their students a year after what jobs they are in.

Q110 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Perhaps that is a gap in evidence that we need to look at so that we pick a school somewhere and say, "Where are your children from a decade ago?"

Sammy Wright: It is not exactly what you are saying, but our report, "The Long Shadow of Deprivation", did exactly that in a way. We looked at 800,000 disadvantaged sons across the country. They were disadvantaged at the age of 16 and we saw where they were at age 28. If you look at that report, we have broken down across the country the income gap and matched that income gap to the educational attainment gap. What we have seen, and I have referred to it several times today, is really strong evidence that some of the inequality that we see at age 28 is due to educational inequality, but in the most problematic areas there is the educational inequality and then there is an additional inequality on top of that. Again, it is a large dataset; it is about 800,000. It is sons only because we wanted to correct for the fact that a lot of the daughters would be in part-time work. It does give some evidence there.

Chair: Thank you. We will look at that again.

Q111 **Tom Hunt:** This is to all panellists. Do you believe that the impacts of Covid-19 will specifically affect areas where there is a high proportion of disadvantaged white pupils? Do you think there will be particular negative impacts from Covid on those pupils? If so, how do you think we should best mitigate that?

Henri Murison: I think the evidence is clear that the disadvantage gap has grown significantly already. During lockdown we saw that those disadvantaged pupils were most likely to fall further behind. There were particular issues around access to digital equipment that made that worse. There are lots of kids who did not have access to devices or to the internet. We know from some of the current problems in schools that that is still the case. We are still in a position where a number of kids are not in school in the north of England and have not been, in quite large numbers, throughout the last few weeks. That problem has been getting worse.

There are a couple of things that we need to look at. We need to make sure that the national tutoring programme has enough delivery capacity on the ground in the north of England. We have probably not seen enough face-to-face options because most of the organisations chosen are not necessarily here. There are some great providers like the Tutor Trust, but we are still going to struggle to get enough provision. The national tutoring programme alone, in its current form, is not going to solve the problem. We need to get a solution to the devices issue to make sure that we do not see the disadvantage gap growing even more.

I very strongly urge that because of the concentration of many of the school closures in parts of the country that also have these problems; you may see real issues in the exam system if we carry on as has been proposed. You are going to be measuring attainment through an end-stage assessment for people who have been at school for wildly different periods of time. We have made the case strongly that we may need to consider teacher assessment this year, but an organised and ruly version. My fear otherwise is we will end up in the new year, or as we approach exams, having to cancel them and having no time to put in place something suitably rigorous. We want a rigorous system but we also want fairness.

My final point is that we want kids in the north to do better. What we do not want is them systematically getting worse results by no fault of their own. Does that make sense? If you have a disadvantage gap and you are going to have an unfair assessment system, that is a chronic issue for us because it means lots of kids will get thrown on an educational scrapheap that they should never have been put on.

Sammy Wright: On that note, one suggestion that has come out is the use of some mock exams as a backup. I want to make the point really strongly that, if we use mock exams as a backup, we are effectively giving them more disadvantage because we have not given the time to catch up on all that they have missed. If their grade is based on what they do in January, that is going to compound the disadvantage. What we need to do is trust the teacher assessment system. We need to ask teachers to base it on mocks, sure, but they need to give a centre-assessed grade that is a judgment, and that judgment then needs to be moderated effectively, statistically adjusted if need be, but done so in a way that is thought out beforehand and planned carefully.

Dr Gibson: On the Covid issue, one of the characteristics of this whole pandemic is that it has exaggerated any existing disparities and disadvantages. I see no reason why that should not carry on in this particular context.

Q112 **Chair:** In terms of exams next year—as Sammy and Henri have spoken about—what is your view?

Dr Gibson: I would hesitate to say. I am not an educationalist, so I will keep quiet.

Q113 **Chair:** Okay. Finally, in terms of the money that has been spent on opportunity areas, if that money had been spent on leadership teams around the country—because we know they make a difference to schools—would that have been a better way of spending £100 million-odd?

Henri Murison: No.

Q114 **Chair:** Why?

Henri Murison: I don't think I have seen much evidence that DfE centralised programmes usually do anything to help the most disadvantaged schools because they are always bottom of the favourite academy chain's list of places they run, so they get a disproportionately low share of any centralised funding. Bluntly, anything you give the DfE to spend always goes to the favoured sons, to use an analogy.

Q115 **Chair:** Would you have spent that £100 million on opportunity areas? If not, what would you have done instead?

Henri Murison: I would have done opportunity areas, but I would have made sure they were less run by the Department for Education and more run by local government and metro Mayors. If we had given local places more power to run them themselves, the problems we have seen in some of them would not have occurred.

Dr Gibson: I will be slightly careful here on metro Mayors. One of the things I would really like to communicate is that it is not an issue of north, south or some particular parts of the country. Deprivation and poor, disadvantaged children are spread everywhere. You mentioned hyperlocal targeting. I would go with that because you get small pockets of deprivation absolutely everywhere. One of the things that is often forgotten is that it does not tend to be disadvantaged urban areas where the lowest performance of white British or any other children happens; it is in these smaller towns spread through the country and in coastal towns. We have to be slightly careful about focusing on metro Mayors or other regional programmes.

Chair: That is an important point.

Q116 **Ian Mearns:** I have a real concern about that, because in the north of England what we have in many places, on a sub-regional basis even, is significant areas of poverty but with pockets of prosperity. What we have in other parts of the country is significant areas of prosperity but with pockets of poverty. I am not convinced that the approach you are taking really meets that challenge.

Dr Gibson: Hence the hyperlocal. If you send all the money into areas with the largest amounts of deprivation at, say, a regional or local authority level, you are going to miss huge pockets of deprivation. The poorest-performing local authority in terms of free school meals children is the Isle of Wight. That is just not what we think of. We think of poor-performing areas and we think of central Manchester, Gateshead, Newcastle or wherever it might be; we do not think of the Isle of Wight. We need to remember that this disadvantage is spread throughout the country in places that we don't often think of.

Q117 **Chair:** Sammy, could you sum up? We genuinely have to finish in a minute.

Sammy Wright: It all comes down to the incentives in the system. If you are spending your money on opportunity areas to try to lift these

areas up, yet everything in the system is penalising the schools in different ways, it is robbing Peter to pay Paul, isn't it? You need to get the system aligned. Henri spoke about getting everyone going with the grain. There is no good in simply diving in and trying to correct something from the outside. You need to get into the mechanics of how the system is working, how it is providing an education that is useful to young people across the country.

Chair: Thank you. I really appreciate your evidence today, it has been absolutely invaluable. I wish you all well and every good health.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Jonathan Douglas and Ed Vainker.

Q118 **Chair:** Welcome, everybody. Thank you for coming today. I am sorry we are slightly late. For the benefit of the tape and those listening on the internet, could you please introduce yourselves and set out how you would like to be addressed, by first name or by Mr or whatever it may be?

Ed Vainker: My name is Ed Vainker. Please call me Ed. I am the CEO of the Reach Foundation. We set up the Reach Academy Feltham, an all-through school in Feltham, in 2012, and we also developed the Reach children's hub, which has a particular focus on early years, seeking to offer cradle-to-career support in the community in Feltham. We are starting to support other groups around the country seeking to do something similar with all-through schools and community hubs.

Jonathan Douglas: I am Jonathan Douglas. I am chief executive of a charity called the National Literacy Trust. You can call me Jonathan.

Q119 **Chair:** Thank you. It is good to see a magnificent bookcase. I would expect nothing less of the head of the National Literacy Trust.

We have heard about statistics related to the educational underachievement of disadvantaged white pupils. With the witnesses we have had, it has been hard to get to the bottom of the specific reason or principal causes of the underachievement. It seems that witnesses are sort of ballet dancing towards the answer rather than setting out how it is.

Jonathan Douglas: I am sorry if I continue to dance. In terms of early years' outcomes, there are three strong interlinked themes. The first is the home learning environment: what happens in the home, how parents support the early development of their children, the resources they have access to, and so forth. The second is the quality of settings and formal early years support. The third is how the community responds through health provision and services that wrap around and support early development.

In terms of the specifics of children from white disadvantaged backgrounds, the evidence around the interplay between disadvantage in all three of those areas and the need for those three things to synchronise their approaches is very clear.

Q120 **Chair:** What would be happening with those families compared with an Asian family that may be doing much better?

Jonathan Douglas: This is the interesting thing. The evidence comparing across ethnicities with the conjunction of disadvantage is rare. One of the few studies that looked at it was the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education project, which looked strongly at the home learning environment theme. It seemed to indicate that families from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities frequently had stronger home learning environments for cultural reasons, which would strengthen early outcomes as opposed to weaken.

Q121 **Chair:** When you say "cultural reasons", what do you mean?

Jonathan Douglas: Interplay between generations, so stronger grandparent interactions with children. Themes around cultural identity through storytelling and language are very important in a way that is not always apparent in white working-class families.

Ed Vainker: My answer is that we do not know. That gap exists at three when children start nursery; it exists at four when they go to school. There is a gap in uptake of high-quality nursery provision. We do not know quite why that is. There is perhaps sometimes a lack of trust in institutions and a lack of co-ordination in the experience that families have. The fundamental point is that we are not sure about this. This qualifies as a wicked problem, which is why you are exploring it and we have not solved it up until now. It is difficult in two minutes to give you a good, clear answer because if we could, we would have analysed it and solved it.

Q122 **Chair:** Do you have evidence that white children from disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to missing out on high-quality early years provision and developing literacy and numeracy skills, compared with other groups or other cohorts?

Ed Vainker: In our community there are gaps in access, particularly of disadvantaged two-year-old funding, and often that is because there is a lack of clarity in the messaging. Is that childcare for working parents? Is that about access to work? If I am not working, is it worth my taking it up? Often the highest-quality settings also do not necessarily offer that two-year-old provision. It is not frequently offered in school nurseries, although we do and there are schools around us that do. Frequently, it is not offered in those provisions and the cost of providing it is mostly not covered by the Government grants these days.

Q123 **Chair:** Okay, but that affects other poor families as well.

Ed Vainker: True.

Q124 **Chair:** None of that is specific. I am asking specifically.

Jonathan Douglas: The evidence suggests that families from white British backgrounds are more likely to access their early education entitlement than families from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly families with English as an additional language.

Q125 **Chair:** What about literacy and reading at home?

Jonathan Douglas: As I said, the crucial factor of the home learning environment is the thing, and it is difficult because obviously it falls out of the sphere of public policy levers because it is about the way in which families interact with their children. In the past three or four years, the DfE, the BBC and Public Health England have all been looking at the home learning environment and how parents can be supported more to interact with their children in positive ways. All three agencies and my charity have been looking at behaviour change mechanisms, how public health has used behaviour change mechanisms to support stronger parenting outcomes and how they can be played into the education space.

Q126 **Chair:** The previous Committee I chaired before the 2019 election did a report into early years. We went to Manchester, and Manchester City Council has data on all babies to work out what families may be troubled families or disadvantaged families and where they can intervene in terms of education and other support. I think every child is assessed eight times between nought to five, including for speech and language development. Do you think that is the right way forward for this and that it should be rolled out much more widely around the country, particularly in areas where there are left-behind groups?

Ed Vainker: I think that is part of the solution. There is a real problem, which is that the high-quality antenatal support and the high-quality support that is available from nought to two—which we know now is an absolutely critical time when the state is intervening far less than it is later in a child's life—is extremely patchy across the country. You cannot do an NCT antenatal course grouped by gestation in Feltham. The kind of assessment you are talking about is part of the solution, but it is also the co-ordinated, high-quality provision and support that is available for parents in this period, which at the moment is patchy or unavailable.

Jonathan Douglas: I agree. There are two themes I would add. The Manchester model is incredibly strong and the two themes that underpin it are, first, integration of local services—health and early child development services are working hand in hand—and effective triage, not simply identification of issues but hand off to appropriate services.

Ed Vainker: I would add that the continuity of care and experience is critical here. It is typical to have an appointment with a midwife, then to have a different person who does a health visitor visit and perhaps then

to have a different person, an agency, who is doing that two-year-old check. What families are experiencing is broken-down support. There is not that continuity. There is not that seamless experience at a time when it would be most valued and have the most impact.

Q127 **Kim Johnson:** Good morning, panel. Jonathan, you have just mentioned that accessing high-quality early years provision and developing literacy and numeracy skills is important during the formative years for all children. Are disadvantaged white children particularly vulnerable to missing out on this in their areas compared with other groups?

I want to pick up on what you just said about integration. When Sure Start was developed, it was very much about integration, early intervention and working with mothers during pregnancy. Do you feel more of that is needed to look at some of these gaps we are experiencing at the moment?

Jonathan Douglas: The issue about access to early education entitlement is absolutely at the heart of this in many ways. The interesting thing is that it is not a childcare entitlement; it is an educational entitlement. One of the barriers to parents accessing it is that they do not always appreciate the fact that it is not babysitting. It is the development of their children that is at stake.

The issues around access seem to fall pretty equally into both supply issues and demand issues. We know that more disadvantaged families frequently find it harder to negotiate even the two-year-old offer, which is designed specifically for them. The interesting thing, as I say, is that white British families are not the group that finds it hardest to access. It is actually families with English as an additional language who seem to find the most barriers.

On the point about integration, it is very interesting. The idea that services need to work collaboratively is, again, key to addressing this. The last session was fascinating on place, but my charity works in 14 places. The approach that we take is trying to use a positive approach to place, using the assets and resources of a place, rather than seeing it as a deficit. Utilising cultural identity and utilising faith and community resources as well is very strong. I would say integration needs to happen across the piece, between the community sector, the public sector and the business sector. It also needs to happen locally and at local authority level.

Chair: Gently, can we try to be as succinct as we can? I know there is loads to say.

Q128 **Kim Johnson:** This is about early years and the childcare workforce, Ed. We know that the workforce is often low paid and there are issues about retaining workers. What do you believe needs to be done to ensure that the early years and childcare professions are able to meet the needs of children who most need it? What challenges do you perceive in your own setting in terms of recruiting, retaining and developing skilled members

of staff for the children's hub?

Ed Vainker: One of the things that we are seeking to do is to create a real sense of a career pipeline. We have an apprenticeship. We have just started running a level 1 course for local people who do not have any qualifications. We have also developed a foundation degree so that people can come and develop their career with us. Over five or six years, they could get as far as getting a degree and then getting qualified teacher status.

The difficulty with that pipeline, which we are really proud of, is that ultimately at the point of getting QTS it is highly likely that those people are going to move out of the early years workforce. The pay issue is a significant issue, and it is a problem. I also think that the career trajectory, the sense for people that this is a career where they can grow and develop, is part of the solution, although ultimately the pay is a barrier to that because of being able to work and earn at a higher level in this workforce.

Q129 **Ian Mearns:** Do you believe that increased resources for early years, such as increasing the early years Pupil Premium, would make a significant and tangible difference to the educational attainment of disadvantaged white pupils, as the group that we are talking about? Would it be possible or effective to target increased early years support at this group?

Ed Vainker: It would be possible to invest more in conception to age three. To me, that is the key point. I have set up a school and I have run a school. It is a lot easier than being a parent. Being a parent is the hardest thing that people do, on the whole. It is often a time when they are most isolated and have the least access to support. The state is intervening less at that point than at any point through the rest of a young person's life. To me, there is a misalignment between what we know about how important this is and the investment that we are giving it. We have had 900, 1,000, 1,100 people go through our school. Parents want the best for their children. What they need is trusted institutions providing high-quality support at moments of stress, and proactively, to help them make the right kinds of decisions to be able to support their children right at the beginning of their lives.

Jonathan Douglas: There is a causal relationship between the language skills and development of a child at three, their attainment at five and their earnings and mental health as an adult. The impact of the earliest moments of a child's life is disproportionate to the investment and opportunities at any other point, yet perversely the system privileges later stages of education above those early stages. Yes, there is a perverse logic at work in the current funding arrangements.

Q130 **Ian Mearns:** Certainly, as a school governor, I have seen an increased problem in the last decade or more of youngsters coming into the very early foundation stage of school or nursery who basically cannot use a

knife and fork, are not potty trained and so on, at that age when they are coming into an educational establishment. That support in the very early years seems to be increasingly important from that perspective.

Jonathan Douglas: That perspective is absolutely right. Our programmes frequently work with families whose children are starting school not recognising their own name when it is spoken. The issue of early speech, language and communication is the fault line in our education system.

Q131 **Ian Mearns:** It is about engaging with parents and getting them to talk to their children and with their children from the very earliest stage.

Jonathan Douglas: Talk to the baby. It is perhaps the simplest but most profound message that the education system has. The attachment in speaking to babies is the foundation of intellectual, social and emotional development.

Ian Mearns: My colleague Emma Hardy, who chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Oracy, will be delighted with your answer.

Chair: If she is listening to the Committee—

Ian Mearns: I am sure she will be.

Q132 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Ed, you talked about the importance of early years, and I totally agree with you on that. You also said it is an area in which the state intervenes least. How do you think it is best to support families in ensuring that children get the best possible developmental opportunities during this period? Of course, one of the ways in which to do it is to say the state can do this and put the children into a nursery, but surely a much better way to do this is to try to support families to do this themselves at home. What schemes are you aware of or what evidence do you have on where this has been done well?

Ed Vainker: There are models. The lottery is funding models in Blackpool, Lambeth and so on where there is very integrated support, very intensive support. Those tend to be investing huge amounts of money. To me, the key here is the relationship between the family and, as I said, those trusted institutions. For us, as an all-through school that starts at two, we are really incentivised to be investing in this area. We have antenatal classes. We have parental support. We are working across local nurseries to build that kind of support. We are incentivised to do that because we know these are the children and families who are going to be with us for the next 14 years. Often there is not that incentive. The biggest and strongest institutions in education tend to be secondary schools. They have the most resource, and they are not incentivised to be playing a role in this space.

Being able to offer that kind of continuity of support, I don't think that is automatically lots and lots of nursery. It is knowing that parents will be able to meet peers who are having a baby at the same time as them. It is knowing they have trusted people that they can go and see at moments

of stress when they need support. It is providing that support, and then it is access to the information that Jonathan is talking about. You do not necessarily know how important it is to talk to your baby, the two-way communication, the smiling and all of that if no one has told you. Why would you?

Making sure that information is readily available and able to be constantly reinforced is critical.

Jonathan Douglas: I would completely back what Ed says. The model we are taking in places like Middlesbrough is a two-tier model, an intervention model supported by social marketing. Support directly working between settings and parents with social marketing activity, as public health would use, talking about the benefits and importance of speech, language and communication in early years, using models like Middlesbrough football club and things that we know will have resonance; in Middlesbrough that has halved the gap between the attainment nationally and the attainment in Middlesbrough. It has massively escalated the attainment in early years.

Q133 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** As a borough girl myself, I am delighted to hear that you are having such great success in my original hometown.

Accepting that my preference would be against too much nursery, as you described it, what changes do you think are needed to make sure that disadvantaged children take up their entitlement? Again, there is an opportunity, if they are there two days a week, to provide support for the other five days when they are not.

Jonathan Douglas: The clarity of the messaging has been a significant barrier, but one of the things we have noticed in the places we are working is the brokerage role. The capacity of the local authority or local public health services to talk specifically to parents on an individual basis, give them directions and give them a helping hand, is very important.

As well as simplifying, making sure the capacity is right, the central brokerage role is very important.

Q134 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** The health visitors presumably have quite a strong role in this.

Jonathan Douglas: Absolutely, yes.

Ed Vainker: We have had about 500 children go through our nursery. Regrettably, we have never had a call from a health visitor or a midwife saying, "There is a child we have been working with coming to you." Unfortunately, that co-ordination is not as strong in communities as I think it needs to be. The way you increase uptake is by a trusted person, a person who knows that family well, at the right moment making that recommendation. The clarity about this being an educational opportunity, the clarity about this being only 15 hours—three mornings or three days a week based on what they need—the clarity about where to go, but the

right relational referral at the key moment is the thing that will get the most vulnerable taking up that offer.

Q135 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** How do you target it? I remember, particularly when I had my eldest child, there were an awful lot of schemes running, baby massage classes I could take them to. They were all free and, of course, I went to several of them. They were lovely and I very much enjoyed that interaction with baby Rosie. It was great fun. I am not entirely sure that I was fully the target audience for some of these schemes. How do you ensure they are used by the people we most wish to target?

Ed Vainker: We think a lot about our progressively universal model. We look to get referrals from midwives, from health visitors. We look to have a universal offer. We look to build relationships across the board. It is really helpful for you and baby Rosie to have that baby massage.

Dr Caroline Johnson: She is not a baby anymore.

Ed Vainker: It is also about using that to build the relationship, and then being able to offer more intensive, stronger support at a later stage when a family needs it. It is that progressively universal model that makes the difference.

Jonathan Douglas: As well as using the traditional methods of identifying families facing disadvantage and challenging issues, we now also work with Experian and use Mosaic consumer profiling to talk directly to families. That allows us to work with a range of consumer brands—people like McDonald's and the Premier League—that we know have strong traction with those families to step outside the traditional mechanisms for talking to families that education has normally had.

Q136 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** That sounds good, because in rural constituencies like mine it is much harder to localise and target the resources than it perhaps is in the cities.

Jonathan Douglas: The trouble is that the families define themselves by what they consume not by the super output area they live in.

Q137 **Kim Johnson:** Ed, Reach children's hub aims to provide a cradle-to-career service, as you just mentioned, to help families access a range of services. In what ways does this model support disadvantaged white children and their families?

Also, the 2019 Conservative manifesto included a promise to champion family hubs to serve vulnerable families with intensive integrated support needs to care for children. How should the Government now take this promise forward, and what benefits would it bring to disadvantaged white families?

Ed Vainker: If I think about the children's performance at GCSE and A-level and rank the children by the amount of progress they made at the

school, it is almost invariably a ranking of the quality of relationship that the school had with that young person and their family.

To me, this is relational. The reason we have developed the children's hub is because we are a trusted institution. We are an anchor institution in the community. We have those relationships, we invest in those relationships. We are all on first name terms in Feltham. We do home visits. We build those relationships, so we are in a great position to broker that support and to make sure that our most vulnerable families are able to access it, both physically, coming to our school, but, more importantly, relationally.

The opportunity with family hubs is about identifying those anchor institutions. I am passionate about the role schools can play in that, and that is why we are seeking to support groups around the country to do that. Those anchor institutions are not only schools. They could be churches, charities or other organisations, but the opportunity with family hubs is to take the existing social infrastructure that we have and maximise its impact and turbocharge it. That is what I would be recommending.

Q138 **Chair:** What do you mean by family hub? What does that mean in practice?

Ed Vainker: We refer to ourselves as a children's hub, and we seek to offer support across the cradle-to-career pipeline. That means we want to be a resource for the community. We want to be a place where people can come and access services. We signpost, and we deliver some services ourselves. We also seek to play, as you were describing in the first session, a collective impact role.

Q139 **Chair:** In a nutshell, if I am a parent in Feltham and I want to come to your children's hub, why would I go? What would I be getting there?

Ed Vainker: You would be getting advice, help, support, friendship.

Q140 **Chair:** What does that mean? Is it doctors you have there? Is it educational? Do you have mentors there?

Ed Vainker: We have early years staff. We have youth workers. We have advisers and mentors. We have support into work. I would love to have a GP. We nearly bid for that, but it is very difficult to get that co-ordination with health. And we signpost. During the summer we helped to co-ordinate the three local foodbanks to a single point of referral, a single point of delivery. We helped them and, with them, we built the capacity from 60 to about 600. It is not only us doing the delivery; it is about co-ordinating the operation we have locally.

Q141 **Chair:** From what I have read about the Reach Academy in Feltham, it seems pretty remarkable what you are doing. Each pupil is visited in their home to understand their family background and build trust. Parents are asked to sign a parent pledge committing to uphold certain standards,

such as uniform and discipline, and to take part in workshops, which has around 85% in the early years. Is that a correct description of what goes on?

Ed Vainker: Yes. I sign a pledge as well, so they know what they can expect from us, our commitment to them and what we are going to offer. It is a true partnership. The home visiting is absolutely critical. If a child is underachieving in our school, the root is very often outside the school. You will often find that a child is going to bed very late, even though they—

Q142 **Chair:** Who does the visiting? Are they trained? Are they teachers or support staff? What goes on when they do the home visits? Do they sit and have a cup of tea? How does it work?

Ed Vainker: They do sit and have a cup of tea. I or Rebecca, or one of our very senior teachers, do the first one. Teachers do them and some of our support staff do them. We would always accept any kind of hospitality. One of our teachers was at home having dinner with a child last week, with their family. They helped to cook it because that child is not eating at school. They are building that relationship.

Q143 **Chair:** How often do the teachers or your staff go into the homes?

Ed Vainker: In early years, outside of Covid, there would probably be two or three home visits happening each week. Everyone will get a single visit. If you get a new teacher, you will get a new visit each year, but you might have two or three in a year if you needed that additional support.

Q144 **Chair:** Finally, what are the outcomes? Personally, I find it incredible what you are doing, literally inspiring, but what are the outcomes of the home visits and your children's hub? What difference has it made to the kids?

Ed Vainker: It is at an early stage, and we do not have that clarity. We have concluded that this is a generational piece of work and we are going to be in Feltham doing this work for the next 30 years. We have good GCSE results. We have good A-level results, but of course we have not had the children who joined our reception in 2012 come all the way through. Our aspiration is that those children will flourish.

Q145 **Kim Johnson:** Ed did not answer the final part of my question in terms of what the Tory Government should be doing to meet their promise about children's hubs.

Ed Vainker: It is about using those anchor institutions in communities, whether or not it is schools. It might be children's centres in some places. It might be charities. It might be churches. I would be looking to expand the reach and capacity of those institutions, making sure they are places that different organisations come and offer their services so that parents have no wrong door to get the kind of relational referrals that will ensure they take up early education or different kinds of support.

Q146 **Kim Johnson:** Do you think that would require extra funding?

Ed Vainker: I guess it would.

Q147 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Jonathan, what effect has the change to phonics teaching of reading had on poor white working-class children? Has it improved their literacy across the board? If so, by how much?

Jonathan Douglas: I cannot give you the specific answer on how much, but we have seen strong increases in decoding skills across the board at year 2. We are now looking to see how those are sustained or not later on. Having won the phonics battle, the challenge now is how the system sustains that.

The other part of the issue is that phonics equips you to do something but does not give you the motivation to do it. As I say, now we have this phonics in place, we are very keen that issues around reading for enjoyment and positive attitudes to reading are played into the system from a very early stage to support those decoding skills. We will get back to you with the specifics on the attainment shift around the decoding test.

Q148 **Ian Mearns:** Obviously, we have covered an awful lot of this already but it is a question of how deep it goes and how important it is. Do you believe difficulties in the home environment are a significant factor in determining the educational underachievement of disadvantaged white pupils? That is not just the social context but the spaces they live in. From your experience, what can the Government do to help families support children's learning during their early years?

I am driven on this, because the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted in stark relief the fact that an awful lot of youngsters, when it comes to trying to learn at home, do not have access to a device, a laptop or a tablet, or, if they do have that, they might not have access to broadband with enough bandwidth to work effectively. They also might not have a quiet place to work.

Jonathan Douglas: The home learning environment is estimated to have four times the impact on a child's medium-term education than the impact of a setting. The home learning environment is incredibly important.

When we get to the specific elements in the home learning environment that have an effect, the research is very particular about taking a child to a library, reading with a child, playing with numbers, playing with letters and so forth. The challenge has been, exactly as you are saying, that the resources to support those kinds of activities are not equally shared across society, so one in 11 children from the lower socioeconomic backgrounds does not have a book at home. C2DE children are less likely to be taken to a library, 40% of parents in some areas will have low education backgrounds themselves so will not be equipped.

The home learning environment is incredibly important, however poorer families find it harder to fulfil that. Covid has played badly into that, and research from last week has particularly demonstrated that most of those indicators in most homes got better during Covid, except for the most disadvantaged children who do not have books at home and could not access playgrounds and other resources in the community.

Ed Vainker: This is a lot about stress. I think about my own experience. When I am stressed or worried, I am a less good parent. Naomi Eisenstadt says it very well when she talks about the need to reduce stress and build capability and capacity. When you are experiencing poor housing and anxiety about work, when you are experiencing all of that, it increases your stress and makes it harder to be a great parent. Everyone knows what that is like. The Government can play a role in helping to reduce that stress and, alongside that, you can build capability and build capacity. Modelling can make a big difference there.

There is a certain amount that you can do with social media and with examples, all of that, but having someone next to you showing you what that looks like—how to read a book with your child, how to talk about that book, how to do that two-way communication—feels very important. If we think that, on its own, is going to make the difference without reducing the stress that parents are under, we are missing something.

Q149 **Ian Mearns:** Can I ask you an overtly political supplementary? Having quiet space can be vitally important. Do you think, for instance, a policy like the spare-room supplement might have had an impact on that for some families?

Chair: Ian, because I know you so well, I will let that one pass. I have a feeling they do not want to answer it.

Ian Mearns: I am looking at the smiles, Chair. I am just looking at the broad smiles.

Q150 **Kim Johnson:** I have one final question. Covid-19, as we know, has shone a very bright light on education and social inequalities. What impact will this have on early years and, specifically, disadvantaged white children? What do you think could mitigate this? Do you think feeding hungry children might be one of those?

Ed Vainker: Covid has had an impact. It is important to say that impact is personalised. If I think about our families at school, there has been a real variety of experience through this period and it is important for institutions like ours to be curious to understand exactly what those circumstances are. To me, the biggest challenge is in the early years space. Uptake in Hounslow is low. It is particularly low for that disadvantaged two-year-old offer. The more we can do to give parents confidence that they should take up that offer, to be clear about the educational benefits not just the childcare benefits, is going to have a big difference.

Otherwise, in two or three years' time, we are going to see the good level of development that we have worked hard as a country to increase going right down, because there will not have been that uptake of high-quality provision between two and three, and those institutions, those high-quality nurseries, may well have gone to the wall.

Q151 **Chair:** I have a couple of questions. Regarding the literacy point, Jonathan, you said you go to families who do not have any books at all or one book on their shelf, or whatever. How do you change that? I think literacy has a huge impact on white working-class boys and girls from disadvantaged backgrounds and other cohorts.

Jonathan Douglas: Yes, I obviously agree. Our core approach is to work from the bottom up. It needs to be tackled community by community.

Going back to the question asked of the last panel about opportunity areas, I heartily believe that place-based working, whether it is the hubs that Ed has been talking about or other focuses, is crucial to this. The irony is that opportunity areas have been focused strongly on school-age children, whereas their effectiveness will probably be most profound on early years.

We took books into homes during lockdown. We worked with 300,000 children directly, with foodbanks and with Women's Aid refuges to ensure that every family in the areas we focus on have physical resources, but we can only do that through a co-ordinated, place-based, bottom-up approach.

Q152 **Chair:** Ed, what would you do to improve literacy—whether they have a Kindle or books, I do not particularly mind—and have a love of reading from an early age?

Ed Vainker: A big part of it is around experiencing success. I do not know that we have quite won the phonics war. I still think really high-quality phonics instruction in schools makes a huge difference, and we all like doing things that we are good at. As kids get better and better at reading, they enjoy doing it and they do it more. There is work to do on that consistency of practice.

Q153 **Chair:** Jonathan, I have spoken to you in the past about Gareth Malone who came to a school in my constituency and encouraged the parents, particularly the fathers, to read to their children. It made a huge difference to their reading development. How would you roll out, encourage or incentivise that to be much more widespread, if it is not happening?

Jonathan Douglas: You are absolutely right. The role modelling of reading within the home is demonstrated to have a lasting impact on a child's reading identity and reading skills. It is about culture and identity. We are doing a lot of work now to think about those people who influence parenting and using those mechanisms. The traditional mechanisms we might have used would have been parenting classes, and now we are

working with footballers and celebrities who have strong traction to those communities, the likes of Gareth Malone.

Mobilising those kinds of role models to support parenting through social marketing is immensely powerful, alongside that direct interrelationship with people in your community.

Q154 **Chair:** If you have not already, could you send the Committee some examples of the programmes you are doing to encourage this? The programme I saw with Gareth Malone was some years ago on the BBC. It was pretty extraordinary what he was doing.

Ed Vainker: It is that, plus modelling organisations like PEEP. Family Links has great programmes and provision that provide that modelling and relational work to make that part of culture. If it is not part of your family culture, it is a matter of exploring that, understanding the benefits of it and then getting joy from doing it. Often that is the example Jonathan is talking about, plus the support locally on the ground.

Q155 **Chair:** I often go to schools and read them chapters out of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.*

Finally, should the early years Pupil Premium be reformed to make a difference to the educational outcomes of disadvantaged children? Should it be ring-fenced?

Ed Vainker: It could be ring-fenced. It would be interesting to explore what expanding that entitlement back to conception would look like in a community, so that money is available right from when the parent finds out they are pregnant, so they are able to access that and have provision attached to them. That might make a big difference as well.

Q156 **Chair:** Jonathan, do you have any final words?

Jonathan Douglas: No, it has been a very thorough session. The fact this Committee is focusing on early years is so essential. I am very grateful that you called us.

Chair: Thank you to both of you. When things are better, I would love to come and visit the Reach Academy and your children's hub. I am sure other members would as well. It would be fascinating to see it. Lots of people have talked about it. It could be ground breaking for the country. Thank you very much indeed.

Ed Vainker: I was just going to say that I hope there will be a free school policy. We have a group in Redcar who are desperate to open one and to do the same thing. I have been talking to people in Sheffield. We would love to grow this model, and we would like to do it locally with people who know their community and think this model could work. I have my fingers crossed that at some point there will be another free school round and we will be able to explore how that could have an impact in other communities.

Chair: Great. I hope we are able to visit it one day, once all this Covid is over. Thank you very much all of you, and every good health. I look forward to perhaps meeting again at some point in the future.