ETI:  Promoting Improvement in the Interest of all Learners

**eti**

**The Education and Training Inspectorate**
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
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**Foreword**

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) published its evaluation[1] of the implementation of the *Delivering Social Change: Improving Literacy and Numeracy (Signature) Programme*[2] in April 2015 as a result of commissioned evaluation work undertaken at the request of the Department of Education (DE).  The evaluation report by ETI highlighted many examples of excellent practice adopted by schools to raise pupil attainment in literacy and numeracy, the key aim of the programme.

The programme represented a significant investment of approximately £13.8m by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMdFM) and £2m by DE to address the challenges of disadvantage and inequality that afflict society by improving literacy and numeracy attainment.

Although the programme was completed in June 2015, it was evident during the inspection visits that the most successful schools were sharing the best practice in raising standards in literacy and numeracy across the school and with other schools, particularly within their own area learning communities. Where this was most effective there was a clear focus on sustaining the improvement and building further on the work undertaken during the programme to ensure a lasting legacy for as many pupils as possible.  To support this aim, DE initiated a Legacy Programme with an additional funding of approximately £110,000 to be delivered during the 2015/16 academic year by the Education Authority (EA).

**The purpose of the report**

This report aims to provide for:

Schools

- a synopsis of the main principles and drivers which underpinned the effective practice observed by ETI during the evaluation of the programme and strategies adopted by schools to ensure a lasting legacy for future learners; and

DE

- an independent evaluation of the success of the programme, including an assessment of the quality of the outcomes for the pupils targeted and the quality of the work of the teachers provided with employment during this project.

It also aims to support and inspire teachers and leaders in their relentless drive to provide all pupils with high quality provision and tailored support, in particular, for those pupils who are at risk of underachieving.

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[1] The ETI evaluation can be accessed at https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/evaluation-implementation-delivering-social-change-improving-literacy-and-numeracy

[2] Delivering Social Change Framework established by the Executive, seeks to co-ordinate key actions across government departments to take forward work on priority social policy areas. The details of the programme can be accessed at https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/topics/social-change/delivering-social-change-signature-programmes#toc-8

**Quantitative terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate**

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms.  Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Almost/nearly all | - | more than 90% |
| Most | - | 75%-90% |
| A majority | - | 50%-74% |
| A significant minority | - | 30%-49% |
| A minority | - | 10%-29% |
| Very few/a small number | - | less than 10% |

**Performance levels**

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) uses the following performance levels when reporting on Achievement and standards, on Provision for learning and on Leadership and management:

| |
|---|
| Outstanding |
| Very good |
| Good |
| Important area(s) for improvement |
| Requires significant improvement |
| Requires urgent improvement |

**Executive Summary**

- This is the second of two evaluation reports by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) on the Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy (Signature) Programme. The first report[3] published in April 2015 focused on the quality of the provision for the pupils and teachers, and on the leadership of the programme. This report provides an evaluation of the overall outcomes of the programme and, given its cessation in June 2015, the legacy of the programme for the academic year 2015-16.

- The programme involved 151 primary schools and 142 post-primary schools, with 8,770 pupils receiving support for English/literacy and 9,753 pupils receiving support for mathematics/numeracy. In total, 310 newly qualified or recently qualified teachers – 270.6 full time equivalent (FTE) teachers - were appointed to the programme.

**Main findings**

**In primary schools**

| Achievements and standards in literacy for the pupils targeted for support | Good |
|---|---|
| Achievements and standards in numeracy for the pupils targeted for support | Very good |

- In the primary schools visited, 75.0% of the pupils targeted for support attained a level 4 or above in Communication in English (literacy), with 6.1% attaining level 5. In Using mathematics (numeracy), 82.7% of the pupils targeted for support attained a level 4 or above, with 15.3% attaining a level 5.

- The pupils reported increased enjoyment of learning and improved levels of motivation, confidence and self-esteem as a consequence of their involvement in the programme. In discussions with the teachers, they reported improvements in the children's levels of self-reliance and self-management, behaviour, attendance and engagement in class. A small number of pupils would have liked the intervention to have been provided earlier as they felt they had struggled with the area of learning for a number of years.

**In post-primary schools**

| Achievements and standards in English for the pupils targeted for support | Very good |
|---|---|
| Achievements and standards in mathematics for the pupils targeted for support | Good |

- In the post-primary schools visited, 73.8% of the pupils targeted for support attained a grade C or above in English, with 18.4% attaining at grades A* to B. This percentage was similar for pupils with, and for those without, free school meals entitlement (FSME).

- In mathematics, 61% of the pupils targeted for support attained a grade C or above, with 9.4% attaining at grades A* to B. The percentage of pupils who achieved at a grade C in mathematics was 55% for pupils with FSME, in comparison to 65% for pupils without FSME.

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[3] The first report can be accessed at: https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/evaluation-implementation-delivering-social-change-improving-literacy-and-numeracy

- This data suggests significant improvement in the attainment levels for all pupils targeted and, importantly, a closing of the performance gap between those pupils who have FSME and those who do not, particularly in GCSE English. There was less of an impact on the performance gap for these pupils in mathematics. More work is needed to address the barriers to grade C attainment in GCSE mathematics for pupils who have FSME.

- In June 2015, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more GCSE examinations at grades A* to C including GCSE English and mathematics increased substantially by 6.4 percentage points to 41.3% from its level in 2012-13. Addressing the sometimes complex social, emotional and educational needs of pupils requires early intervention and sustained, well-targeted intervention if they are to achieve this standard. More work remains to be carried out to ensure all pupils, regardless of social background, achieve to their full potential, particularly in addressing the barriers to grade C attainment in GCSE mathematics for pupils who have FSME.

**Provision for learning**

**In primary schools**

| Provision for learning in literacy for the pupils targeted for support | Very good |
|---|---|
| Provision for learning in numeracy for the pupils targeted for support | Very good |

**In post-primary schools**

| Provision for learning in English for the pupils targeted for support | Very good |
|---|---|
| Provision for learning in mathematics for the pupils targeted for support | Good |

- The overall quality of provision for learning, as reported in the ETI report published in April 2015, was good or better in 89% of the schools visited, and very good or outstanding in 60% of the schools.

- Improved provision for the pupils targeted was evident in: better use of data to inform planning and teaching and the setting of individual learning targets; meaningful involvement with parents and carers; and improved teaching pedagogy, including the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning and effective questioning to consolidate and extend learning.

- In a minority of the schools visited, it was evident that the targeted support sessions were, at times, too short in duration, too infrequent to have an impact and were not planned sufficiently. Also, the work set was not matched well to the pupil's specific learning needs so did not allow the pupil to make sufficient progress; this was particularly evident in some of the mathematics sessions.

**Leadership and management**

**In primary schools**

| Leadership and management at all levels, including the capacity for sustained improvement | Very good |
|---|---|

**In post-primary schools**

| Leadership and management at all levels, including the capacity for sustained improvement | Very good |
|---|---|

- Over one-half of schools evaluated the programme as 'highly effective', with 13% of schools evaluating the programme as having 'limited effectiveness'. These evaluations align with the findings of ETI's evaluation report of the implementation of the programme published in April 2015. In this report, the leadership and management of the Signature Programme was evaluated as good or better in 85% of the schools visited.

**Legacy**

In approximately 85% of the schools visited, there was clear evidence of the programme's legacy, a tangible impact of the school's involvement in the initiative affecting favourably the nature and quality of provision for the current cohort of pupils.

## 1.   Introduction and context

1.1    In 2012, the publication of a European Union report by a high level group of experts on literacy highlighted a 'literacy crisis that affects every country in Europe' and highlighted the central importance of literacy in the life-chances available to young people:

*'Literacy is about people's ability to function in society as private individuals, active citizens, employees or parents... Literacy is about people's self-esteem, their interaction with others, their health and employability. Ultimately, literacy is about whether a society is fit for the future'.* [4]

Numeracy, as stated in the Joint Report by the ETI in Northern Ireland and the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate of the Republic of Ireland (April 2015), serves as an equally vital prerequisite for life-chances:

*'Numeracy embraces all aspects of being a mathematical thinker and is much more than being able to calculate with fluency and accuracy. It involves the transferable skills needed to think critically, to communicate effectively and to make a full contribution to society in this increasingly data-rich world'.* [5]

The DE's *Count, Read: Succeed – a strategy to improve outcomes in literacy and numeracy* [6] (March 2011) sets out a clear vision for schools with the aim of supporting teachers and school leaders in their work to raise overall levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy among young people and to narrow the gaps in educational outcomes.  The importance of giving every learner the best opportunity to reach their full potential in literacy and numeracy is undoubtedly recognised within our schools and the wider society.

1.2    In October 2012, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMdFM) announced the *Delivering Social Change: Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature* Programme.  This programme was one of eleven programmes initiated by OFMdFM with the aim of addressing the challenges of disadvantage and inequality that afflict society by improving literacy and numeracy levels among all school leavers, with additional support targeted at underachieving pupils.  It also aimed to provide valuable teaching experience for recently graduated teachers who were not in employment at that time.

*'An additional 230 recent graduate teachers who are not currently in work will be employed to deliver tuition, where appropriate, for children in primary and post-primary schools who are currently struggling to achieve even basic educational standards.'* [7]

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[4]  This report can be accessed at http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/literacy-report_en.pdf , EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, 2012

[5]  The ETI/DES report 'How Best to Promote and Improve Literacy and Numeracy in our Schools', April 2015 can be accessed at https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/best-practice-guidelines-literacy-provision-post-primary-level-and-best-practice

[6] This strategy can be accessed at: http://www.deni.gov.uk/count_read_succeed_a_strategy_to_improve_outcomes_in_literacy_and_numeracy.pdf

[7]  A full transcript of the OFMdFM statement can be accessed at:
http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/official-reports/written-ministerial-statements/oct12/written-ministerial-statement-ofmdfm-10-10-12.pdf

1.3    A Strategic Oversight Group, led by the Western Education and Library Board (subsequently the Education Authority (EA)), was established to oversee the effective development and implementation of this programme. Membership of the oversight group consisted of representatives from the employing authorities, teaching unions and other educational stakeholders.  See Appendix 1 for membership of the Strategic Oversight Group.

1.4    In addition to this Signature Programme a number of other initiatives to raise the standards achieved by pupils in literacy and numeracy were being undertaken by schools across Northern Ireland including: Achieving Belfast/Achieving Derry – Bright Futures; Extended Schools; and Full Service Schools.

To support the continuing professional development of teachers, in particular the building of their capacity to tailor provision to meet the learning needs of children, the ETI evaluated the outworking of DE's 'Special Educational Needs Resource File'; the DE-funded 'Understanding Difficulties in Literacy Development'; and the 'Certificate in Competence in Educational Testing' programmes. The ETI also engaged in a programme to promote improvement for learners with a specific focus on English and mathematics in schools of high socio-economic deprivation – the 'Promoting Improvement in English and Mathematics' programme.

The ETI's dissemination of best practice events post publication of the ETI's *Survey of Best Practice in English and Mathematics in Post-primary Schools[8] and The Chief Inspector's Report 2012-2014[9]*, for example, and the increased focus being placed on whole-school staff development and support in effective literacy and numeracy by the EA and the other employing authorities have all had a clear focus on building the capacity of teachers and raising the standards attained by pupils.

The ETI's evaluation report on the implementation of the Signature Programme[10] published in April 2015 recognised that:

***'A significant strength of the programme has been the impact it is having on bringing greater cohesion to the other initiatives operating in schools to effect overall improvement in the literacy and numeracy standards attained by the pupils'.***

## 2.    Methodology

2.1    This evaluation includes the evidence collated and analysed for the initial ETI report published in April 2015 which included visits to a stratified sample[11] of over 80 primary and post-primary schools and over 200 lesson observations.  As the programme reached its conclusion in June 2015, the ETI, supported by its associate assessors, collated further evidence to look more closely at the overall attainment of the pupils, by the end of year 7 and the end of year 12 in the primary and post-primary schools respectively, and to harness the views of school practitioners on the effectiveness of the Signature Programme within their own school setting.

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[8] This report can be accessed at https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/best-practice-guidelines-literacy-provision-post-primary-level-and-best-practice

[9] This report can be accessed at https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/chief-inspectors-report-2012-2014

[10] This report can be accessed at https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/evaluation-implementation-delivering-social-change-improving-literacy-and-numeracy

[11] The stratified sampling of the primary and post-primary schools was representative of phase (primary and post-primary), geographical spread, size, sector (controlled; catholic maintained; controlled integrated; grant maintained integrated; and, voluntary) and recruitment method (centrally recruited by the EA or recruited by school).

2.2    Between January and March of 2016, the ETI evaluated the programme and its legacy by further engagement with key personnel in over 50 primary and post-primary schools.  These school visits involved:

- discussions with the principal, senior leaders, heads of departments and co-ordinators on the strengths, limitations and legacy of the programme;

- discussions with post-primary pupils who had participated in the programme and were now undertaking post-16 study, teachers whose employment had been funded by the programme, parents of the pupils who had participated in the programme and pupils who were currently accessing support through legacy programmes established within schools as a consequence of the Signature Programme; and,

- analyses of the school's documentation which was conducted mainly through access to the Northern Ireland Signature Project for Numeracy and Literacy (NISPLAN) website which enabled ETI to have access to each school's action plan, self-evaluation of the progress of the programme and relevant pupil performance data, including attendance and outcomes.

Further performance data was collated on the pupils' attitudes and dispositions to learning, standards of attainment at the end of year 7, standards in public examinations at the end of year 12 and staying-on rates to year 13 study.  Throughout the visits, inspectors took into consideration the varying contexts and priorities of the individual schools; in particular, consideration was given to the length of time the programme had been in operation in the school as, in some cases, the pupils only had access to additional support for a limited period due to the delayed appointment and/or deployment of the Signature-funded teacher.

## 3.    The key findings

## 3.1    Achievements and standards[12]

**In primary schools**

| Achievements and standards in literacy for the pupils targeted for support | Good |
|---|---|
| Achievements and standards in numeracy for the pupils targeted for support | Very good |

**In post-primary schools**

| Achievements and standards in English for the pupils targeted for support | Very good |
|---|---|
| Achievements and standards in mathematics for the pupils targeted for support | Good |

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[12] The ETI's evaluation of achievements and standards is based on the evidence collated throughout the visits to the stratified sample of schools and could, but may not, be representative of the population as a whole.

3.1.1   In the primary schools visited, 75.0% of the pupils targeted for support attained level 4 or above in literacy, with 6.1% attaining level 5.
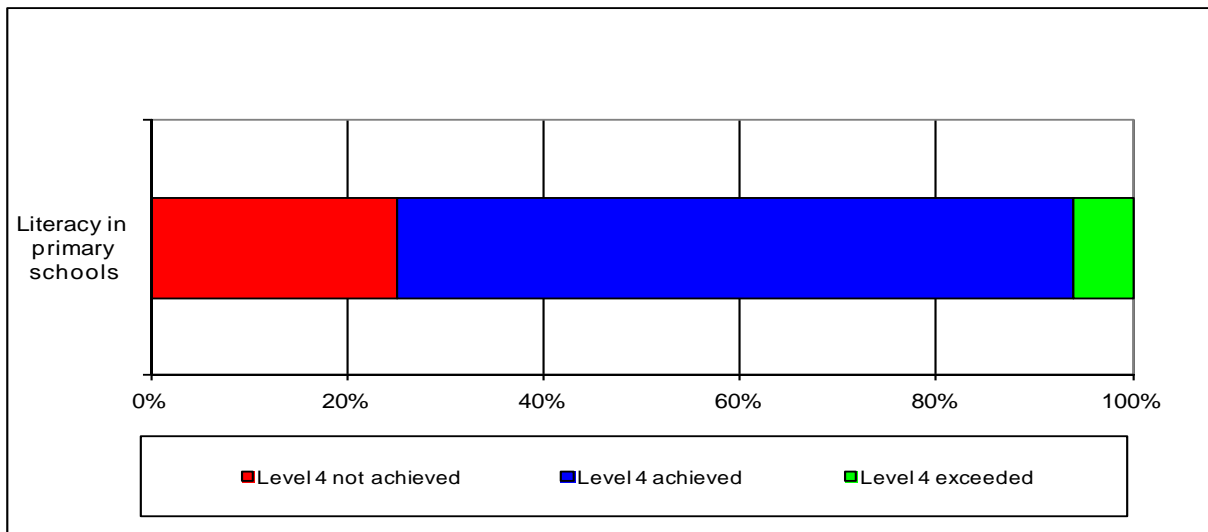


3.1.2   In the primary schools visited, 82.7% of the pupils targeted for support attained level 4 or above in numeracy, with 15.3% attaining level 5.
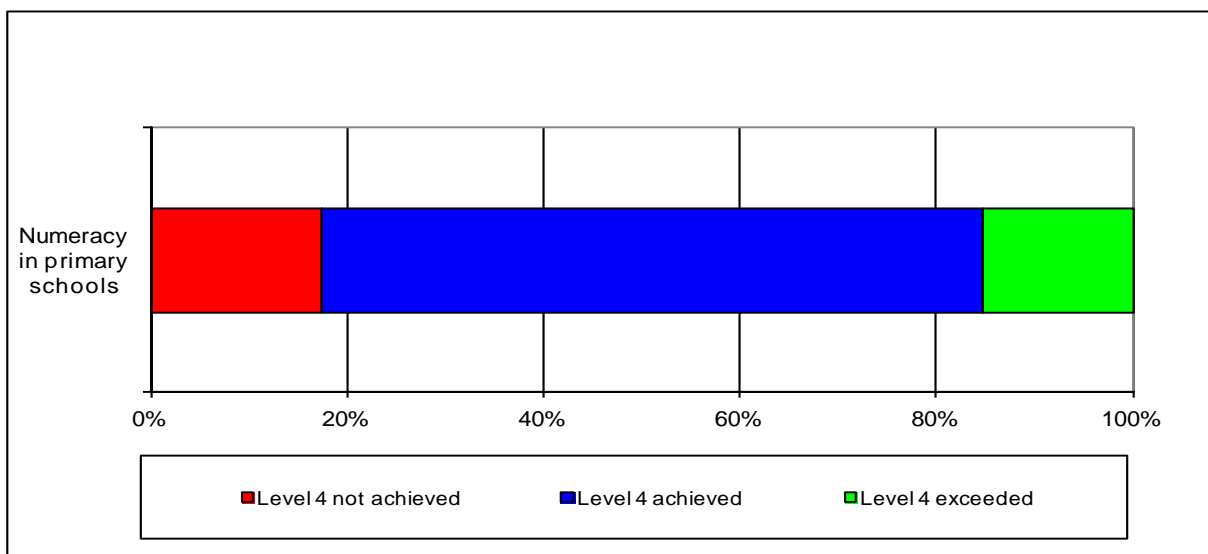


3.1.3   When selecting pupils for the programme, particular attention was given to those pupils deemed by the school as at risk of not attaining a level 4 in literacy or numeracy and who had entitlement to free school meals (FSME).  In the sample of schools visited, there was approximately a 2:1 ratio in favour of pupils with this entitlement.  These proportions compare favourably, with 32.2% of pupils in primary schools having FSME.

3.1.4   In the sample of primary schools, the percentage of pupils who achieved level 4 or above in literacy was 73% for pupils with FSME in comparison to 80% for pupils without FSME.  For numeracy, the percentage of pupils who achieved level 4 or above was 81% for pupils with FSME, in comparison to 87% for pupils without FSME.  This data suggests significant improvement in the attainment levels for all pupils targeted and, importantly, a closing of the performance gap between those pupils who have FSME and those who do not.

3.1.5   In the sample of primary schools, slightly more male pupils than female pupils were chosen by the schools to access the targeted support in literacy, while slightly more female pupils were chosen to access the targeted support in numeracy.  In literacy, the female pupils fared better than the male pupils, with 79% of female pupils attaining a level 4 or above in comparison to 72% of the male pupils.  In numeracy, attainment at level 4 did not differ for males and females with 83% attaining a level 4 or above.

3.1.6   The work in the books of the pupils participating in the programme was of a very good standard in terms of both content and presentation.  Almost all of the children made good progress in learning during the period of support.  In discussions with the pupils, they spoke highly of their increased enjoyment of learning and improved levels of motivation, confidence and self-esteem as a consequence of their involvement in the programme.  In discussions with the teachers, they reported improvements in the children's levels of self-reliance and self-management, behaviour, attendance and engagement in class.  They spoke of the children being 'empowered to take risks in their learning', to 'have-a-go' and of a number of children who would have been quiet in class 'finding their voice', resulting in more productive engagement in paired and group work.  Some teachers reported the improved capacity of the children to use the support cues within the classroom, such as wall displays, study buddies and dictionaries, more effectively to aid progress in learning.

3.1.7   A small number of pupils commented that they would have liked the support intervention to have been provided earlier as they felt they had struggled with the area of learning for a number of years.

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**CASE STUDY:  Numeracy support in a primary school**

**Context**

The pupil, female, was selected for numeracy support when she was starting year 7.  She had transferred from another school in year 5.  She was an extremely creative child and had aptitude in literacy.  She had, however, little self-confidence in her mathematical ability.  She was identified as at risk of not achieving a level 4 in mathematics by the end of year 7.

**Intervention**

The pupil responded immediately and positively to working in the small group, becoming more vocal than in the normal classroom setting.  She enjoyed the informality of the small group setting.  The small group worked, at times, within the classroom setting, particularly when carrying our practical work and investigations.  The two main areas that needed to be addressed in the case of this child were identified as her knowledge and understanding of multiplication tables and her own poor perception of her mathematical ability.  Personal targets were set involving the pupil, teacher and the pupil's mother.  Competence in tables became a part of every daily lesson and, with the assistance of her mother at home, these were soon mastered.

To change the pupil's perception of her mathematical ability and to increase her enjoyment of mathematics, the teacher set work which was more closely matched to her ability, addressed misconceptions as they arose in a timely manner, assessed her progress through monthly assessments, and encouraged and celebrated her achievements regularly.

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**Impact**

The pupil made progress in standardised tests, increasing her standardised score by 15 points and, importantly, moving up two stanine bands in the one year period.  She achieved a level 4 in mathematics at her end of key stage assessment.  Her increased confidence was very heartening for her teacher.

Her mother commented,

*'I think this year has been massive for her in terms of her development.  Maths was her most stressful subject – it was the subject I worried about as a parent.  She had no belief that she could do maths and it was something she always struggled with.  I have seen a really big difference, mainly around her confidence.  With regard to her maths homework, she now carries this (work) out independently and successfully, she was never able to do that before (the intervention).'*

3.1.8  In the post-primary schools visited[13], 73.8% of the pupils targeted for support attained a grade C or above in English, with 18.4% attaining higher than a grade C.
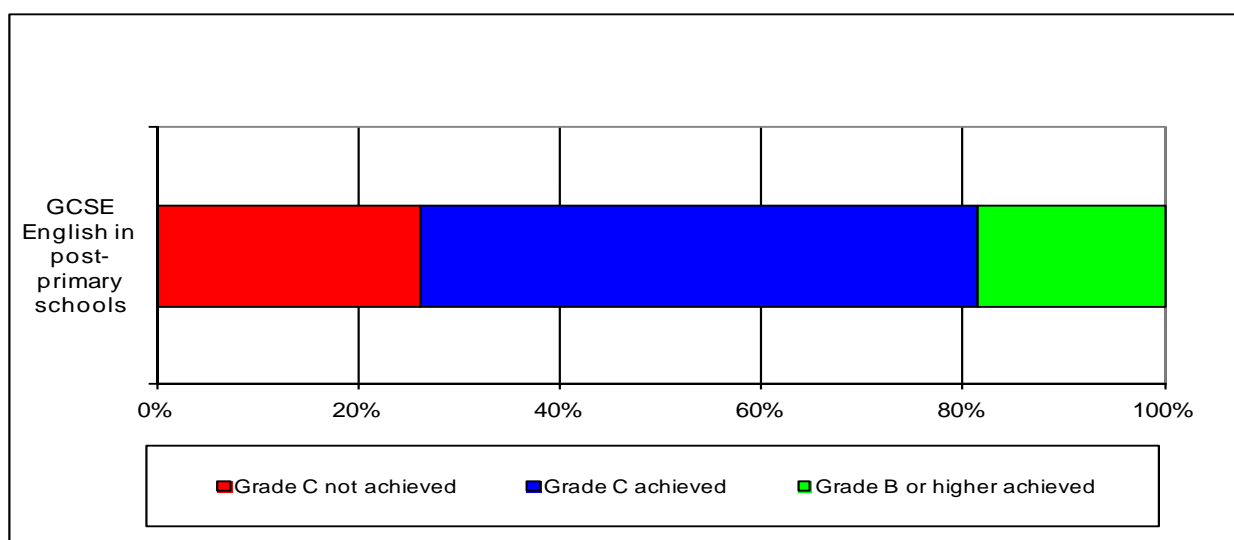


3.1.9  In the post-primary schools visited, 61.0% of the pupils targeted for support attained a grade C or above in GCSE mathematics, with 9.4% attaining higher than a grade C.



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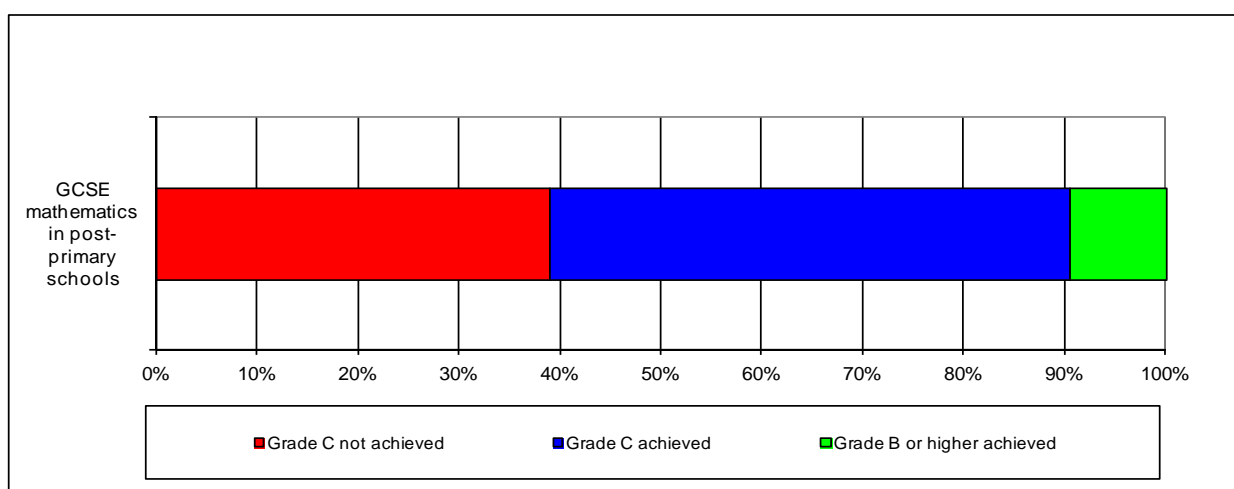
[13] The ETI's evaluation of achievements and standards is based on the evidence collated throughout the visits to the stratified sample of schools and could, but may not, be representative of the population as a whole.

3.1.10 When selecting pupils for the programme, schools were asked by the EA representatives to pay particular attention to the pupils with FSME deemed by the school to be at risk of not attaining a grade C in GCSE English and mathematics. Approximately 30% of the pupils targeted for GCSE English support had FSME, with 38% of the pupils targeted for GCSE mathematics support having FSME. These percentages compare favourably with the Northern Ireland school population where, in 2014-15, 30.6% of pupils had FSME.

3.1.11 In the post-primary schools visited, 74% of pupils achieved a grade C or above in GCSE English. This percentage was similar for pupils with, and for those without, FSME. The percentage of pupils who achieved at a grade C in mathematics was 55% for pupils with FSME, in comparison to 65% for pupils without FSME. This data suggests significant improvement in the attainment levels for all pupils targeted and, importantly, a closing of the performance gap between those pupils who have FSME and those who do not, particularly in GCSE English. There was less of an impact on the performance gap for these pupils in mathematics. More work is needed to address the barriers to grade C attainment in GCSE mathematics for pupils who have FSME.

3.1.12 A significant minority of post-primary schools reported that the outcomes for mathematics tended not be as good as those for English, even when the school's self-evaluation deemed the quality of the support was of as good or better quality. The reasons given included: the pupils chosen presented with greater, more complex barriers to learning; the pupils' understanding of the fundamental building blocks of mathematics were not secure (earlier intervention was needed); it was more difficult for the teachers to diagnose each pupil's specific learning needs; and the focus of the intervention on the development and application of mathematical skills for everyday life was not assessed in familiar contexts in the GCSE examination. Some schools also reported that the key stage 3 assessment data for mathematics was less reliable as a predictor to attainment at GCSE level than the equivalent data for English.

3.1.13 In a significant minority of post-primary schools, over the two year period, the percentage of year 12 pupils attaining five or more GCSE examinations including English and mathematics at grade C or better increased dramatically; in some cases by a factor of more than 50%. The teachers reported that pupils had developed skills which were applicable to other areas of the curriculum, such as: the organisation of large coursework assignments into small, manageable sections which enabled pupils to meet coursework deadlines and to produce work of a higher quality; better time management during examinations; better awareness and capability of how to use the formative marking by the teachers to improve their work; and greater awareness and understanding of the language of the assessment criteria used in the examination.

3.1.14 The pupils who had progressed to post-16 study reported greater confidence in undertaking the work in a wide range of subjects at AS level. They talked positively about their increased awareness of literacy and numeracy skills in other areas of life and work, better mental mathematics skills and being able to focus solely on AS study without the need to continue to study for re-sit examinations in GCSE mathematics and/or English. A minority of the pupils commented that, without their successful attainment in GCSE English and/or mathematics, they would not have met the required level of attainment to access post-16 study in their school.

3.1.15 The ETI evaluated the achievements and standards of the pupils with particular attention to the nature and ability of the cohort so, in a small number of instances, the achievements and standards were evaluated as good or better, even when there was an overall decrease in the school's headline figure of the percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSE examinations, including English and mathematics, at grades C or better. While examination results and outcomes are important, in evaluating the standards pupils reach, the ETI includes as part of the inspection process a wide range of indicators related to pupil progression and achievement, and how a school is contributing to his or her holistic development. As the Chief Inspector stated in her 12-14 report:

***'Pupils' progress relative to their respective starting points is the most important determinant in ETI's evaluation of achievements and standards. Progress measures can override examination outcomes where it is demonstrated clearly by the school that pupils are making progress and the school is adding value for those pupils'.***

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**CASE STUDY: Literacy support in a post-primary school**

**Context**

The pupil, male, was selected for support in English when he was starting year 12. He had a statement of educational need for dyslexia and had very low self-esteem. The perception of his own learning was very poor and, as a result, he was a passive pupil in the classroom who avoided responding to teacher questioning and struggled greatly in group situations. Despite parental/teacher support and encouragement, this particular pupil did not believe he could succeed at GCSE level due to his special educational need. His main barrier to learning was his negative personal image and lack of self-belief.

**Intervention**

The pupil was selected for small-group support classes; he was initially apprehensive about being part of the support class. The membership of the study group was selected carefully to ensure this pupil would feel as comfortable and secure as possible. The teacher also created an environment of trust in which everyone was free to express their opinions in an open and honest way, where questions were actively encouraged and where incorrect answers were used positively as learning opportunities. In the first few sessions, the pupil was still timid and withdrawn but no pressure was applied to insist he participate. Friendly encouragement and nurturing of friendships within the group resulted in a gradual increase in confidence. By week four, he was contributing to group discussions and asking questions. It was a revelation to him that other pupils were as uncertain about certain aspects of the course as he was and that they had similar difficulties and concerns. His change in attitude was evident for all to see, with other staff commenting on the change and showing an interest in his progress, offering him words of praise and encouragement.

**Impact**
The most tangible impact was the attainment of a grade C in GCSE English language. The pupil exceeded his own expectations, with significant growth in confidence. His other teachers commented on his enhanced confidence which saw him engage more readily with his peers. He also became more active in lessons, answered questions willingly and participated in group activities. He and his parents were very appreciative of the opportunity afforded to him through the Signature programme.

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### 3.2 Provision for learning

**In primary schools**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Provision for learning in literacy for the pupils targeted for support** | Very good |
| **Provision for learning in numeracy for the pupils targeted for support** | Very good |

**In post-primary schools**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Provision for learning in English for the pupils targeted for support** | Very good |
| **Provision for learning in mathematics for the pupils targeted for support** | Good |

3.2.1 The overall quality of provision for learning, as reported in the ETI report published in April 2015, was good or better in 89% of the schools visited, and very good or outstanding in 60% of the schools.
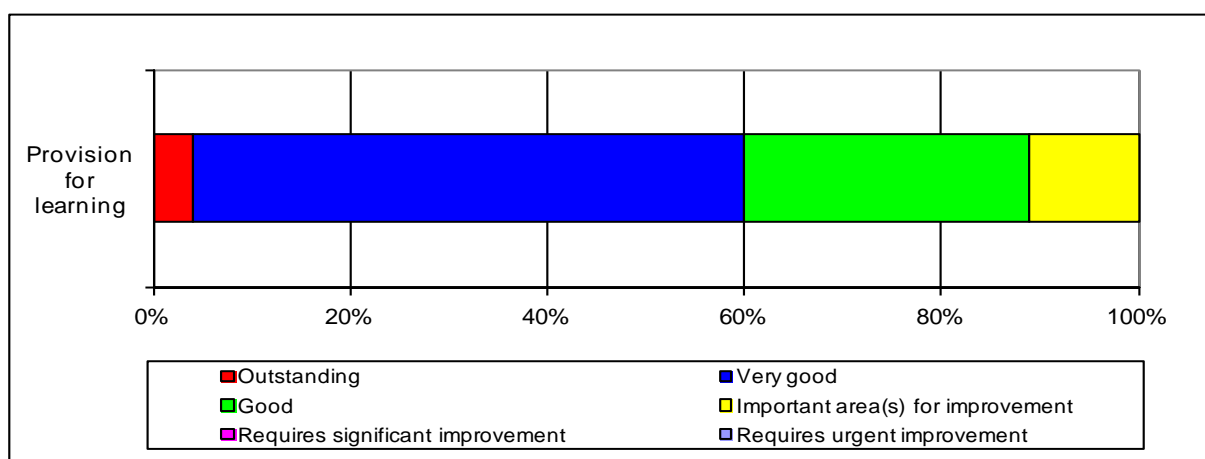


3.2.2 The most effective practice was exemplified by:

- skilful use of a broad range of pastoral and assessment data and to identify accurately the nature of the learning needs of the pupils at risk of underachieving;

- the development of good quality individual 'learning plans' to support the learning of the pupils identified as needing support, with the pupils involved actively in setting personal learning targets;

- meaningful involvement of parents and carers in the programme (in line with the aims of the DE campaign, '*Education Works*'[14], which highlighted the vital role of parents in their child's education), with practical advice being provided on how they may support their child's learning so that they understand better the nature of the support being provided for their child and, in a small number of schools, the use of parental expertise to support learning; and,

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[14]'Education Works' initiative available at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/education-works-better-when-you-get-involved

- the employment of a wide range of teaching strategies to develop further and consolidate learning and to engage and motivate the pupils, including the skilful use of questioning to extend, probe and challenge the pupils' thinking and the effective use of ICT to enhance the learning.

3.2.3   The school leaders spoke positively about the capacity, as a consequence of the additional teacher resource, to have greater creativity in the design of the timetable.  For example, a minority of schools incorporated some team-teaching opportunities for both the Signature-funded teacher and/or the seconded teacher.  This approach enabled the effective sharing of practice and the ability to create individualised timetables for pupils, tailored to provide additional time for the study of both mathematics and English.  A key characteristic of the schools where the outcomes of the programme were most successful was the strategic curriculum planning and timetabling to ensure pupils had access to a coherent and motivating curriculum.

3.2.4   The teachers reported that the mix of team-teaching, small-group work and one-to-one tuition was very beneficial to the pupils. The teachers also felt that they had benefited professionally from working with their colleagues in the classroom context. They also commented that the smaller class sizes enabled them to mark the pupils' work with more frequency and in more detail, giving more direction to the pupil as to how they could improve their work and extend their learning.  They were able to provide examples of high quality teaching resources which had been produced as part of the programme of support and were able to discuss how ICT was being used effectively as a resource to support both the teaching and learning both in school and at home.

3.2.5   In a minority of schools, the school leaders asked ETI to meet with the classroom assistants who, they felt, had played an important role in the outworking of the programme. In these schools, the expertise of the classroom assistants to support the work of the teacher and the pupils' learning was harnessed very well in both the withdrawal sessions and some after-school support classes.

3.2.6.  A key strength of the provision for learning was the active engagement of pupils in target-setting.  One teacher commented:

*'(the programme) focused children away from how they were performing relative to their peers, towards their own goals and targets and, as such, developed their confidence and raised their expectations'.*

The pupils talked positively about their greater willingness to ask questions in the small group sessions, the pastoral care of the teachers, their greater awareness of the 'next steps' in their learning, and their greater knowledge and understanding of the assessment criteria for the examinations in GCSE English and GCSE mathematics.

3.2.7   In the less effective practice, in a minority of the schools visited, it was evident that the targeted support sessions were, at times, too short in duration, too infrequent to have an impact and were not planned sufficiently.  The work set was not matched well to the pupil's specific learning needs so did not allow the pupil to make sufficient progress; this was particularly evident in some of the mathematics lessons.  There were missed opportunities to build appropriately on pupils' responses and to use misconceptions as learning points.  In a small number of lessons, the teachers did not employ an appropriate range of strategies to provide for the range of the complex needs of the targeted pupils leading to some low levels of pupil disengagement.  A small number of primary school teachers commented that the pupils in year 7 were 'difficult to motivate and were reluctant to 'buy in' to the programme'

and felt that the pupils in year 4 and 5 would have benefited more from the intervention.  A significant minority of the teachers in the post-primary schools made similar comments in relation to the year 12 pupils, commenting that, particularly in relation to the intervention for mathematics, the pupils in key stage 3 would have benefited more meaningfully from the support.

3.2.8  In the least effective practice, the curriculum planning and timetabling lacked creativity and was wholly dependent on withdrawal from timetabled, non-examination classes such as classes in personal development, physical education and careers education, information, advice and guidance.  This withdrawal practice led to resentment by some pupils at having to 'miss out' on important areas of learning which they found enjoyable.  This practice was less evident in the second year of the programme, possibly as schools had more time to consider the timetabling opportunities that participation in the programme provided.

## 3.3    Leadership and management

**In primary schools**

| Leadership and management at all levels, including the capacity for sustained improvement | Very good |
|---|---|

**In post-primary schools**

| Leadership and management at all levels, including the capacity for sustained improvement | Very good |
|---|---|

3.3.1   School leaders were requested by ETI to assess the effectiveness of the programme at improving learning experiences for pupils and raising the standards they attain.
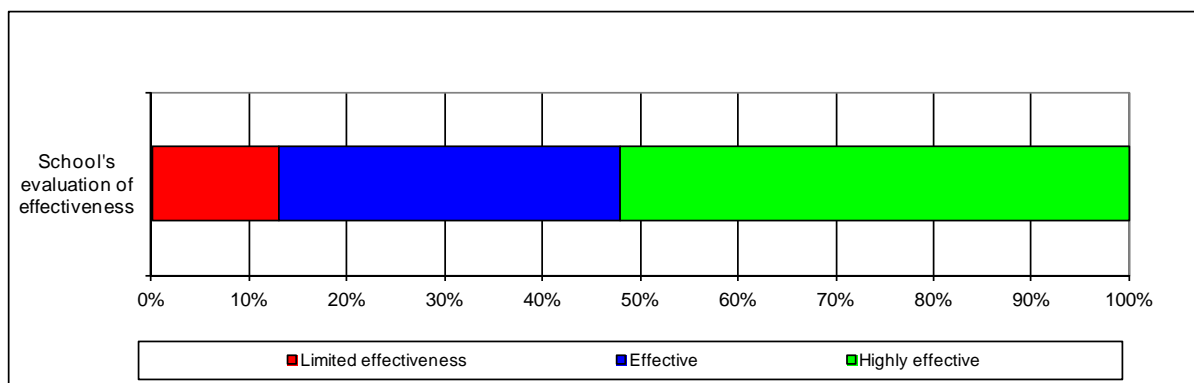


Over one-half of schools evaluated the programme as 'highly effective', with 13% of schools evaluating the programme as having 'limited effectiveness'.  These evaluations align with the findings of ETI's evaluation report of the implementation of the programme published in April 2015.  In this report, the leadership and management of the Signature Programme was evaluated as good or better in 85% of the schools visited.

3.3.2    The key features of the outstanding and very good leadership and management observed include:

- a well-articulated vision for sustained improvement which empowers and engages middle leaders and co-ordinators to lead on their respective areas of responsibility;

- a clear focus of all teachers on raising attainment and improving the life-chances of pupils;

- creative curriculum planning and timetabling to tailor curricular provision to the social, emotional and educational needs of the pupil;

- innovative approaches to the professional development of staff, through the effective use of Performance Review: Staff Development (PRSD) and, for example, action-based research lesson study to encourage teachers to develop further their repertoire of teaching strategies;

- improved links between primary schools, post-primary schools and colleges of further education to develop the capacity of all staff to build effectively on pupils' prior learning and to set the highest expectations for them;

- more effective use of data by senior leaders at year group, class and individual pupil level, including the improved use of diagnostic assessment practice to identify specific areas of need for individual pupils and to engage the pupils and parents more meaningfully in the target-setting process;

- the effective deployment of the Signature-funded teacher, building on the skills of the new or recently-qualified teacher and developing further their capacity to effect improvement;

- the appropriate identification of the member of staff with the appropriate skills to work with the pupils identified as (at risk of) underachieving;

- better contact and communication with parents by co-ordinators and middle leaders, developing further the home-school partnership through, for example, informing parents more frequently of the nature of the work being covered, how they can best support their child's learning and by utilising their expertise as mentors;

- more explicit links between areas of learning, in particular, greater collaboration between the English/literacy and mathematics/numeracy departments; and,

- a fervent focus by governors, curricular leaders and teachers on ensuring a lasting legacy for the programme as evidenced by the seamless integration of this work in school development planning and the well-planned dissemination of the good practice developed as a consequence of the school's participation in the programme.

3.3.3    The school leaders reported that the greatest challenge in leading and managing the programme was in ensuring that there was a tangible legacy post programme funding.  In the most effective practice, the mode of implementation of the programme developed successfully the capacity of staff to effect sustained improvement in the learning experiences and standards attained for the next cohorts of pupils.

3.3.4    To support learning from the Signature Programme, a key focus of this evaluation was to identify the main barriers to its effective implementation.  One significant issue that arose related to the external co-ordination of the programme, in particular the process of recruitment.   The school leaders reported frustration at the lateness of a minority of the appointments from the central pool and the lack of direction available from DE and the EA at the beginning of the programme.  There was, however, recognition from most schools that, since December 2014, the EA had provided very useful advice and guidance to schools.  This guidance was particularly useful in the clarification of the features of best practice which were identified  by the quality indicators produced by the EA specifically for the programme and which linked well to the ETI's quality indicators which guide school inspections found in *Together Towards Improvement – a process for self-evaluation[15]*.   After the first year of the programme, significant sharing of resources among schools was assisted through the medium of the EA's NISPLAN website and training programmes. Schools were highly appreciative of the resources that were made available by the EA representatives and the exemplification of different approaches adopted by schools in the organisation of the programme and the teaching strategies used with the pupils targeted for support.

3.3.5    Significant frustration was expressed by the leaders, parents and pupils in the schools which received a resource allocation of one day per week.   It was reported by these key stakeholders that this limited allocation of resource resulted in: the teacher not being able to participate in some important staff development as s/he was not available to do so; substantial turnover in personnel, with one school reporting that five Signature-funded teachers were interviewed, allocated and inducted over a relatively short period of time as these teachers were applying for 'more stable' posts; difficulty in supporting pastorally the Signature-funded teacher and ensuring s/he felt part of the school community; difficulties in providing sufficient time for the Signature-funded teacher to meet to plan with the other teachers; and a lack of continuity in the learning for the pupils being targeted for support due to the staffing changes.  In the main, although not exclusively, the sharing of the teacher with up to four schools was not viewed as an appropriate mechanism for effecting improvement by the schools.

3.3.6    The main barriers to effective implementation of the programme on the part of the school leaders included: poor initial planning and a lack of preparation for, and understanding of what constitutes, effective learning; under-developed support structures within the school for the effective induction of the  Signature-funded teacher; too many pupils targeted for support which led to less personalised approaches to the planning for, and implementation of, targeted intervention resulting in some pupils disengaging from the programme; and a lack of 'buy-in' from the co-ordinators and middle leaders of other areas of the curriculum as the lack of a whole-school, shared vision led, at times, to competing demands being made on the pupils.  The school leaders also reported some issues with the lack of accommodation and space within the school to work with the pupils in withdrawal groups, and low attendance rates of either the Signature-funded teacher or backfill teacher impeding the progress of the pupils.

## 4.    The legacy of the programme

4.1      There was evidence in most of the 54 schools visited as part of this evaluation that the outworking of the implementation of the programme has led to positive change, both in relation to how the school is led and managed and in relation to improved classroom practice.  Most of the schools visited had made some provision to cater for the current cohort

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[15] The quality indicators can be accessed at: https://www.etini.gov.uk/articles/guidance-support-self-evaluation-and-improvement-planning

of pupils who had not had access to the Signature Programme to ensure the lessons learned from the programme would impact positively on their education. In approximately 85% of the schools visited, there was clear evidence of the programme's legacy, a tangible impact of the school's involvement in the initiative affecting favourably the nature and quality of provision for the current cohort of pupils.

4.2     There was evidence of the teachers, pupils and parents having a greater understanding of, and focus on addressing, underachievement. Through more personalised learning experiences, there were high levels of pupil (and teacher) motivation and application. In most of the schools visited, the practice of setting individual learning targets for the pupils who were deemed to be underachieving was well established. The ability of the pupils to reflect on their own learning was developed well, with the teachers emphasising appropriately the intended learning and associated success criteria. Using this information the pupils were encouraged to assess regularly the quality of their own work and the work of their peers. It was also evident that the pupils who had entered post-16 study were continuing to benefit from the programme, citing improved reading skills, spelling, re-drafting and paragraphing skills and mental mathematical skills as important features of their work in sixth form.

4.3     Most schools have maintained (fully or in part) the intervention strategies adopted as part of the programme. One of the key improvements, and benefits, identified is the more effective use of data to support learning. One teacher commented on how important it is to provide the right level of challenge to a child:

*'You have to know where a child is at, both pastorally and academically. It is of vital importance to not set the work at too low a level to disengage the child and equally important to not set the work at too high a level; I am now much more aware of the overwhelming consequences to a child of the feeling of defeat'.*

Another teacher commented:

*'In providing withdrawal support, I know that I must 'make each session count' for each child. I keep a clear record of the work undertaken at each session and the progress of each pupil. I devise work for home which will show the pupil why this work is important for life, not just for an examination'.*

4.4     Some schools have established or enhanced a pupil mentoring programme to develop the skills of the older pupils in supporting the learning of the younger pupils, whilst consolidating and developing further their own understanding. Some schools have also provided additional time for the staff with responsibility for English/literacy and mathematics/numeracy to provide one-to-one and group withdrawal for targeted pupils.

4.5     On the visits, schools were keen to show the revisions made to schemes of work and support programmes, such as reading partners. Also evident was the development of a coherent approach to the acquisition and development of the pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. One school reported that it had set up small group tutorials for pupils in year 10 as one of the main lessons learned from the programme was the importance of 'giving children a voice', a 'safe' place to ask questions. Another school reported that it had set a target within its school development plan to address better the needs of the 'passive learner' in order to enhance pupil participation and engagement and raise the standards attained.

4.6    In ensuring the legacy of the programme, school leaders in most of the schools at middle and senior level have addressed creatively some deep-rooted issues such as low attendance and poor planning for learning which, without the additional staffing resource, may have been more difficult to address.  Whilst some schools reported that they do not have the budget to support the smaller classes, they continue to place a key focus on tackling underachievement through: more effective collaborative approaches to planning; improved diagnostic use of data; engagement of all staff in the target-setting process at whole-school, class and individual pupil level; a focus on marking for improvement and pupils' self- and peer-assessment; the engagement of parents through more regular progress updates and guidance on how they can support their child's learning; and the dissemination of the effective practice through mechanisms such as regular departmental meetings with a focus on pedagogy, peer observation and team teaching.  One school leader commented:

*'I now take account of the needs of each new cohort as well as the needs of new staff members.  I am (changing practices by) waging war on unnecessary routines that rob teaching of the potential to change lives. Shared planning and regular team teaching is supporting this approach.'*

4.7    A significant minority of the schools identified that the school's performance data and the needs of the pupils indicated that intervention may be more beneficial at an earlier stage.  To this end, some schools have adopted the model of intervention with younger pupils.  Other schools have changed radically their approach to timetabling and curriculum design, with extra periods being assigned to mathematics and/or English for some pupils, literacy and numeracy support as an option choice or additional non-contact periods being used for pupil support (appropriately not placing any undue demands on the teacher's planning and preparation time).  A small number of schools are running 'twilight' support programmes for parents, funded by the parent-teacher association.

4.8    A very beneficial legacy of the programme has been the establishment of a range of school cluster groups with the remit of learning from one another by sharing ideas, resources and practices.

## 5.    Conclusion

5.1    The Programme for Government targets (2011-15)[16] identified the key goals and actions to be taken forward by the Northern Ireland Executive to drive forward the following priority areas:

**Increase the overall proportion of young people who achieve at least 5 GCSEs at A\*-C or equivalent including GCSEs in maths and English by the time they leave school to 66% by 2014-15.**

In 2014-15 this challenging Programme for Government target of 66% was met having risen from 62.6% in 2012-13.

**Increase the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who achieve at least 5 GCSEs at A\*-C or equivalent including GCSEs in maths and English to 49% by 2014-15.**

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[16] The targets can be accessed at: https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/publications/programme-government-2011-2015.

Although by 2014-15 the percentage of school leavers achieving at this level increased substantially by 6.4 percentage points to 41.3% from its level in 2012-13, this even more challenging target has not yet been reached. Addressing the sometimes complex social, emotional and educational needs of pupils requires early intervention and sustained, well-targeted intervention. More work remains to be carried out to ensure all pupils, regardless of social background, achieve to their full potential, particularly in addressing the barriers to grade C attainment in GCSE mathematics for pupils who have FSME. (See Appendix 4 for a more detailed breakdown by gender, school type, religion and free school meal entitlement for 2012-13 and 2014-15.)

5.2     The successful implementation of the Signature Programme has undoubtedly contributed to the substantial increase in the percentage of school leavers attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics in Northern Ireland. This improvement is a consequence of the well-planned, competent implementation by all stakeholders, including: DE officials; the Strategic Oversight Group; representatives of the EA who provided essential guidance and support; the range of employing authorities; Signature-funded teachers; school leaders; teachers who co-ordinated, planned and provided the support; parents; and, importantly, the pupils.

5.3     The vital work undertaken by the primary schools in helping develop children's confidence and competence in the areas of literacy and numeracy through the Signature Programme has led to improved standards at the end of key stage 2. There is evidence through discussions with school leaders, parents and pupils that this support is helping the children access more fully, and successfully, the post-primary curriculum.

5.4     It is paramount to the successful sustainability and further improvement of literacy and numeracy standards that DE and the EA continue to support actively the dissemination of the innovative and effective practice developed as part of the Signature Programme to support all pupils at risk of underachieving and to consider ways to build further on this work.

**Membership of the Strategic Oversight Group**

The Strategic Oversight Group, led by the EA, was established with membership from the employing authorities, teaching unions and other educational stakeholders:

- Department of Education
- Education Authority Representatives (HR, Finance and School Improvement)
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaiochta
- Governing Bodies Association
- Teaching Unions
- General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland
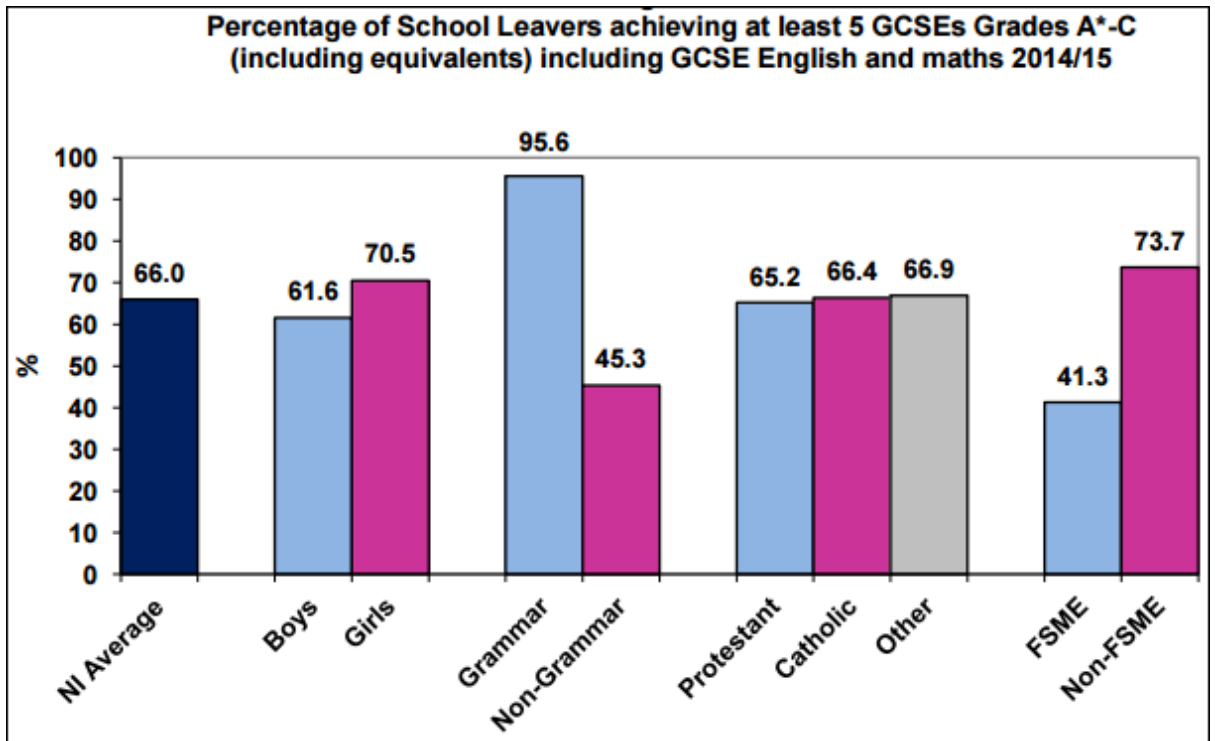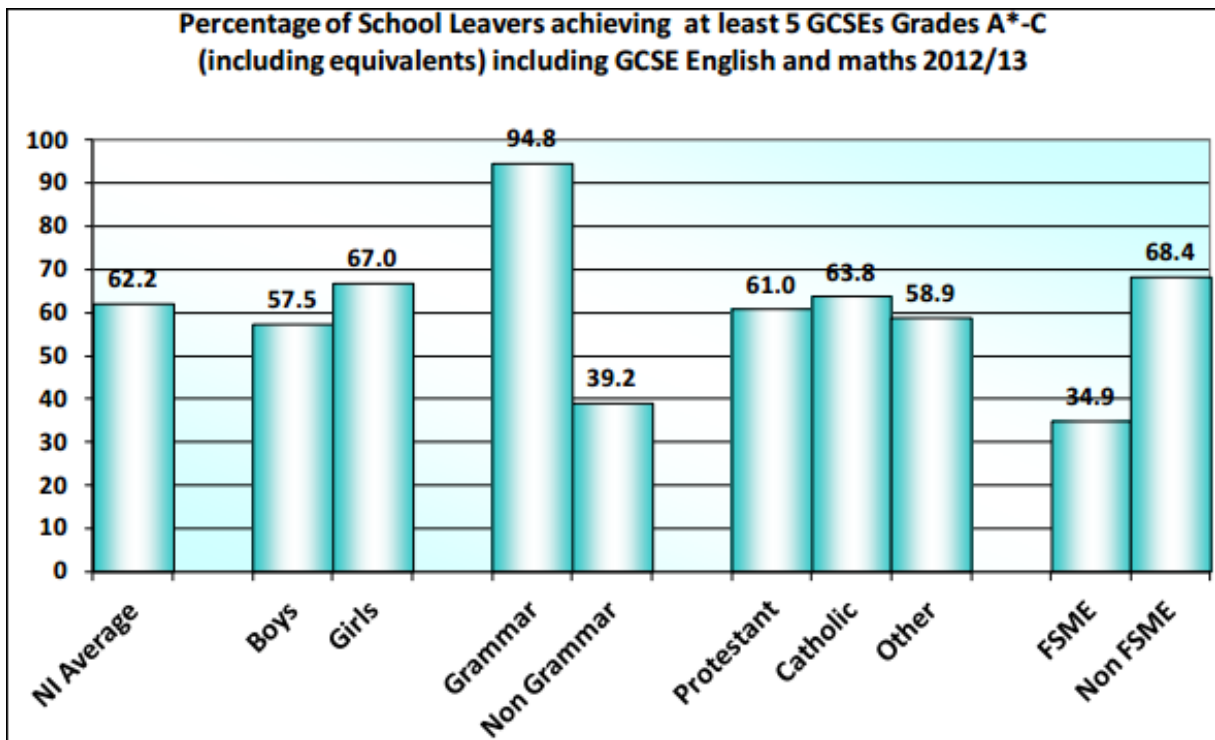- Regional Strategy Group for Special Educational Needs

**Primary schools visited by inspectors as part of the evaluation**

Aghadrumsee Primary School, Enniskillen
Avoniel Primary School, Belfast
Ballykeel Primary School, Ballymena
Ballyoran Primary School, Portadown
Belleek Primary School, Belleek
Blythefield Primary School, Belfast
Bunscoil Cholmcille, Londonderry
Cliftonville Integrated Primary School, Belfast
Donaghmore Primary School, Dungannon
Downpatrick Primary School, Downpatrick
Drumachose Primary School, Limavady
Drumlins Integrated Primary School, Ballynahinch
Elmgrove Primary School, Belfast
Fane Street Primary School, Belfast
Fountain Primary School, Londonderry
Gaelscoil An Chaistil, Baile An Chaistil, Ballycastle
Gaelscoil Ui Neill, Coalisland
Greenhaw Primary School, Londonderry
Harryville Primary School, Ballymena
Hollybank Primary School, Monkstown, Newtownabbey
Mercy Primary School, Belfast
Mount St Catherine's Primary School, Armagh
Mullabuoy Primary School, Londonderry
Parkhall Primary School, Antrim
Sacred Heart Primary School, Belfast
Silverstream Primary School, Greenisland
John Paul II Primary School, Belfast
St Caireall's Primary School, Castlederg
St Columbkille's Primary School, Omagh
St Joseph's Primary School, Bessbrook
St Joseph's Primary School, Artigarvan, Strabane
St Kieran's Primary School, Poleglass, Belfast
St Mary's Primary School, Annalong
St Matthew's Primary School, Belfast
St Michael's Primary School, Mowhan
St Patrick's Primary School, Crossmaglen
St Paul's Primary School, Belfast
St Teresa's Primary School, Mountnorris, Armagh
St Therese's Lenamore Primary Sschool, Londonderry
Stewartstown Primary School, Stewartstown

**Post-primary schools visited as part of the evaluation**

Ashfield Boys' High School, Belfast
Ashfield Girls' High School, Belfast
Campbell College, Belfast
Christian Brothers' School, Belfast
Colaiste Feirste, Belfast
Corpus Christi College, Belfast
St Joseph's College, Belfast
Carrickfergus College, Carrickfergus
Downshire School, Carrickfergus
Dunclug College, Ballymena
Edmund Rice College, Newtownabbey
Glengormley High School, Newtownabbey
Our Lady of Lourdes High School, Ballymoney
Slemish College, Ballymena
St Benedict's College, Randalstown
St Joseph's College, Coleraine
St Killian's College, Carnlough
Ulidia Integrated College, Carrickfergus
Fort Hill College, Lisburn
Lagan College, Belfast
Newtownbreda High School, Belfast
Saintfield High School, Saintfield
St Colman's High School & 6th Form College, Ballynahinch
St Colm's High School, Twinbrook, Belfast
St Mary's High School, Downpatrick
Aughnacloy High School, Aughnacloy
Craigavon Senior High School, Portadown
Dromore High School, Dromore
Holy Trinity College, Cookstown
Integrated College, Dungannon
Markethill High School, Markethill
St Catherine's College, Armagh
St Ciaran's High School, Ballygawley, Dungannon
St Patrick's College, Dungannon
St Paul's Junior High School, Lurgan
Castlederg High School, Castlederg
Dean Maguirc College, Omagh
Lisneal College, Londonderry
Omagh High School, Omagh
Sacred Heart College, Omagh
St Brigid's College, Londonderry
St Cecilia's College, Londonderry
St Mary's High School, Brollagh, Belleek

**Data on percentage of school leavers attaining at least five GCSEs or equivalents including GCSE English and mathematics in 2012-13 and 2014-15.**



Percentage of School Leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs Grades A*-C (including equivalents) including GCSE English and maths 2012/13



Percentage of School Leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs Grades A*-C (including equivalents) including GCSE English and maths 2014/15