

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 4 December 2015

(Welcome to Policy Eye, a nearly weekly service from Policy Watch offering a regular round up of UK education headlines and stories from over the previous 7 days.)

The week summed up

Ofsted's latest annual inspection **report** tops the education news this week and if you want a quick summary of the 100+ page Report, it came in the opening shots of the Chief Inspector's forthright accompanying speech: *"England's primary schools continue to improve but secondary schools still remain a problem in large parts of our country."*

There's been a depressingly familiar riff to Ofsted Reports in recent years and this year was no different with attainment gaps, English and maths resit performance, apprenticeship standards and weaknesses in leadership and management all cited once again but the headline story was the disparity in performance between secondary schools in the South of the country compared to those in the North, the so-called North-South divide. Sir Michael pointed to the performance of secondary schools below a line drawn roughly from the Bristol Channel to the Wash compared to those above it to make his point.

This picture of *"a nation divided at age 11"* comes just a couple of weeks before the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission publishes its latest annual 'State of the Nation' Report which is likely to reinforce a similar picture and follows concerns raised by the think tank IPPR last month in its Report on the potential for the Northern Powerhouse. It found what it called a *"stark early years gap"* which translated into weak performance at age 16; *"we will never become a powerhouse economy when our children and young people have such a poor start in life,"* it concluded.

The attainment gap is therefore an issue with significant economic as well as social implications so what to do? The government has lined up a host of mechanisms including tougher literacy and numeracy standards in primary, a new coasting performance threshold for all schools, support for National Leaders of Education and from next year a new National Teaching Service due to start in the North West of England, all aimed at tackling the problem. Sir Michael called for the resurrection of the Challenge school improvement model that has been used successfully in London and the Midlands in the past. Yet there's been considerable debate about just what role the Challenge model did play in helping raise standards. An LSE **Paper** a few months ago on *'Understanding the improved performance of disadvantaged pupils in London'* concluded that it was hard to tell while in a blog this week, Professor Michael Jopling **argued** that the template would be hard to replicate.

All in all, therefore there are no easy answers but while so much rests on ensuring our young people get the best start in life and disparity in performance remains so sharp, there'll be no shortage of political solutions offered.

Top headlines this week

- 'Half of teachers rarely use technology in class.' (**Monday**)
- 'North-South divide in England's schools,' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Government reveals 485 teachers on £65k+ as recruitment advert investigation continues (**Wed**)
- 'Rise in foreign students amid accusations universities use them as cash cows.' (**Thursday**)
- 'State school debt on course to double.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- Ofsted Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw who published his fourth annual **report** highlighting continuing concerns about a North-South attainment gap in England's secondary schools and also concerns about teacher retention, standards on some apprenticeship programmes and weak leadership in some schools and colleges
- The DfE who launched a **consultation** on the implementation arrangements for the proposed National Reference (GCSE sampling) Test which is due to come in from Sept 2016
- The BIS Committee who **heard** calls to de-couple the Teaching Excellence Framework from fee decisions when it heard from a full bench of vice-chancellors and others on quality assurance and HE this week
- The House of Commons Education Committee who have opened a can of worms by asking for **views** on what education is for, allowing for discussion over Christmas with responses due by 25 Jan 2016
- The Education and Childcare Minister who **addressed** the Westminster Forum and laid out the bare bones of the government's emerging careers strategy
- The Business Secretary who **highlighted** the 'Midlands Engine,' the latest area to develop regional economic and growth plans, in a speech at the University of Birmingham
- Universities UK who published their latest Patterns and Trends **report** highlighting among other things the growing diversity of the student body with increases in students from a disadvantaged background and from non-EU countries
- HEFCE who **published** a monitoring framework along with guidance and reporting arrangements to help ensure higher ed institutions meet the Prevent requirements
- Peter Scott, professor of HE studies at UCL Institute of Education, who in his latest **piece** for the Guardian put forward 3 reasons why HEFCE shouldn't be scrapped (keeps Ministers at bay, offers a pool of expertise, restructuring is never the answer)
- The Sutton Trust who **issued** 'a cautious welcome' to the widening access proposals in the recent HE Green Paper but called for more to be done to improve access to so-called top tier universities
- The Open University whose latest Innovation Report strained the sinews of learning styles and assessment by **listing** ten new pedagogies for the future from 'crossover learning' to 'stealth assessment'
- HEPI who along with YouthSight sampled the student mood on the EU and **found** most believing it better to stay in
- Martin Doel who is move from the AoC and take up the role of **FETL Professor for FE and Skills** in the UCL Institute of Education next year
- The government who **published** a proposed timescale for the rest of the area-based reviews for the FE sector due to complete in various waves next year
- The University of Huddersfield who have been **handed** the largest grant so far for helping to improve technical and vocational education in FE as part of a 2-year project
- The Manufacturing Advisory service, part of the Business Growth Service, which following the Spending review announcements is being **withdrawn**
- City and Guilds who published a **report** based on YouGov research looking at career choices and aspirations of 14-19 year olds and found many lacking proper guidance about the realities of the labour market

- The Education and Training Foundation who **spelt out** the arrangements and partners for the first stage of the review of Functional Skills which is due to complete next summer
- The National Baccalaureate Trust who **launched** its new website to help promote thinking and development around the concept of a National rather than an E Bacc
- The f40 group (the group that represents the poorest funded local authorities in England) who handed in a **petition** to the House of Commons calling for a fairer distribution of funds ahead of next year's proposed national consultation
- The TES whose recent **survey** of how much state schools were borrowing to finance debt suggested a worrying doubling of previous figures
- The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) who added their voice to the current teacher recruitment and retention issues **highlighting** that even though the actual leaving rate has remained relatively stable, growing pupil numbers and classroom demands are creating pressures at secondary level in particular
- The Education Endowment Foundation who **published** its Annual Report for 2014/15 under a rather Pink Floyd style cover, with an impressive listing of projects, reports and resources all aimed at helping schools tackle attainment gaps and improve learning outcomes

Tweet(s) of the week

- "A great (school) leader knows the name of the cleaner's children." @tes
- "We don't accuse Jaguar for selling cars to foreign buyers. So don't have a go at unis for their education exports." @HEPI_news
- "I'm so concerned where the next generation of school leaders will come from that I've commissioned a survey-Wilshaw." @SchoolsWeek

Quote(s) of the week

- "The only question remaining over school autonomy is not whether it's a good or bad idea but whether the independence it confers is being used well." Sir Michael Wilshaw argues that school improvement is less about structures and more about leadership and teaching
- "If you draw a line roughly from the Wash to the Bristol Channel, 79% of the secondary schools below it will be good or outstanding compared with 68% of those above it." Sir Michael Wilshaw on the North-South performance divide in England's schools
- "External, centrally imposed target setting would not work. It would be a costly, bureaucratic exercise." The Director of Fair Access to HE rejects proposals for admissions targets for universities to be set externally
- "It will have a central role in advising on how much funding government should make available to pay for training and assessment under each standard." The Skills Minister sets out the initial remit of the new Institute for Apprenticeships
- "If government were to say there is no role for local government in education that would be a sad day." The leader of Hampshire County Council responds to the government's latest declaration that all secondary schools should become academies
- "The careers ecosystem is complex and, at present, careers provision is not working as well as it should." The Education and Childcare Minister says it
- "We need to tackle this like parents not politicians." Jamie Oliver on tackling sugary drinks and unhealthy foods among young children

Number(s) of the week

- 77%. The number of FE colleges judged good or outstanding in Ofsted's latest annual report (although there has been a drop to 35% for those inspected this year)
- 16. The number of local authority areas, largely concentrated in the North, where fewer than 60% of pupils attend good or outstanding schools and equally achieve below expected levels of progress according to Ofsted's latest annual report
- 85%. The number of primary schools rated good or outstanding in Ofsted's latest annual report (evenly balanced between the North and the South of the country)
- 70%. The number of students in the latest survey who would vote to stay in the EU (although a third admit to having given it little great thought so far)
- £360,000. How much the Gatsby Foundation has handed to the University of Huddersfield to help improve technical and vocational education and training
- 485. The number of classroom teachers who earned more than £65,000 last year (the top figure quoted in the government's latest recruitment campaign)

What to look out for next week

- BIS Committee witness session with the Minister and other on HE Quality Assurance (Tuesday)
- Ofqual Awarding Organisation's Conference (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session on teacher supply (Wednesday)
- House of Lords Social Mobility Committee session with Nicky Morgan and Nick Boles (Wednesday)