



# Unlocking Potential

Breaking the link between poverty  
and poor outcomes

Impact Report 2015



## Contents

Foreword	2
Introduction	5
Our impact: Challenge the Gap in numbers	6
How we are breaking the link	10
The Cascade: whole school change	11
Meet the Teams changing pupils' lives	12
Meet the Teams taking the lead	20
Meet the leaders improving the system	28
About Challenge Partners	30
What next?	32
References & acknowledgements	33

**“This programme takes the desire of educational professionals to make a difference to the life chances of all children, irrespective of background, and empowers them to make it happen.”**

Teacher  
Kingsbridge Cluster

# Foreword



**Challenge Partners exists to enable every pupil to reach his or her full potential. Through Challenge the Gap, we are proud to offer a school-led programme that is improving the life chances of some of the country's most vulnerable young people.**

Inequality is entrenched in England today. Far too many young people from deprived backgrounds start school locked into a cycle of disadvantage that will continue for the rest of their lives. By age five, there is already a 19-month gap in school readiness between the richest and the poorest children in the country. This is only the beginning.

By age 16, this early gap in achievement translates into a much larger and more serious problem. According to the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), "the latest figures show that just 37% of disadvantaged children achieved 5 good GCSEs, including English and Maths, compared to 63% of all other pupils." Poor educational attainment is linked to poorer health, lower wages and far greater likelihood of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training).

**But the inequality in our education system is not inevitable. We know that many schools already hold invaluable knowledge that allows them to improve outcomes for every pupil, regardless of their start in life.** The sharing of this knowledge is at the heart of our work. At Challenge Partners, we create structures that enable successful schools to share what works, and that enable even the best schools to continually improve through access to research and emerging innovation.

With the help of funding from the EEF in 2012, we designed a school improvement programme that allows any school to access the combined wisdom of the education system in order to tackle this educational inequality. Challenge the Gap is led by some of the best schools in Challenge Partners;

schools committed to sharing what they have already learnt about narrowing the gap, while continually improving how they support disadvantaged pupils.

**After our pilot year, feedback and pupil impact data from the 39 schools involved proved that our programme is an effective framework for school-to-school improvement which narrows the gap.** Through Challenge the Gap, education professionals can turn their ambition of improving the life outcomes of their most vulnerable pupils into a reality.

The education professionals taking part in Challenge the Gap today work in schools that are hugely varied in their contexts: large and small numbers of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM); rural, urban and coastal locations; large schools and one-form entries; early years, primary and secondary. We know that no school is the same, just like no two pupils are the same. But we have a common mission, and we know we will achieve it better together.

We are incredibly grateful to all the headteachers, leaders, teachers, para-professionals and pupils who have been involved in the programme and have taken the time to feedback as it has developed in the pilot and beyond. Their thoughtful and insightful comments have enabled us to improve the programme, ensuring that we have the greatest possible impact on the pupils we serve.

**This report offers you the chance to see how Challenge the Gap Teams across the country are learning to unlock the potential of their pupils, whatever their context, and change their lives for the better.**

**Professor Sir George Berwick**  
CEO, Challenge Partners

**"The inequality in our education system is not inevitable. We know that many schools already hold invaluable knowledge that allows them to improve outcomes for every pupil, regardless of their start in life."**

"It is about setting high expectations for every child, and committing to seeing those children meet, and even exceed, those expectations. It is about schools and families collaboratively driving our children towards better futures."



# Introduction



**This is the story of how, together, we are beating the odds to break the cycle of disadvantage and, in so doing, unlocking the full potential of all our pupils.**

In just three years, we have trained 35 Challenge the Gap Facilitators across the country to support colleagues in their local area; promoting a truly school-led, self-improving education system. In turn, these Facilitators have trained **200 leaders, 360 teachers and 280 para-professionals, serving 130,000 pupils** across the country; helping them to become experts in tackling disadvantage in their schools.

Challenge the Gap is not an add-on intervention programme; it is a school improvement programme which builds leadership capacity at all levels within a school. Staff are given the tools they need to forensically analyse the specific challenges affecting their pupils and are trained to tackle those challenges using evidence based approaches.

**As a result, Challenge the Gap Teams are developing effective practice that is seeing many pupils targeted by Challenge the Gap — typically those pupils previously at risk of underachieving — exceed the expectations of progress set for all pupils nationally.**

Challenge the Gap is not just about improving academic outcomes; it is about developing the broader skills integral to ensuring that pupils are prepared for life after school. Education professionals across the programme — myself included — have seen the self-confidence, perseverance, grit, participation and motivation of their pupils dramatically improve.

But the greatest impact of Challenge the Gap goes far beyond improving outcomes for individual target pupils. The greatest impact of Challenge the Gap is in the long-term change we are seeing in and across

schools as a result of their journey on the programme. By building their leadership capacity, each Challenge the Gap Team develops the skills they need to bring about sustained improvement in outcomes for all pupils, cascading and embedding effective strategies across their school.

I am where I am today because of Mammy. Mammy was the driving force behind my success and that of my seven brothers and sisters, making sure we completed our education instead of dropping out early to help our father support our family. She was looking towards the future, our future, and she believed we could achieve more.

Everyone needs a Mammy — someone who believes they can achieve more and will help them to do so. For me, this is the mission of Challenge the Gap: ensuring that every pupil is treated as an individual with potential to fulfil. **It is about setting high expectations for every child, and committing to seeing those children meet, and even exceed, those expectations. It is about schools and families collaboratively driving our children towards better futures.**

**Kieran Osborne**

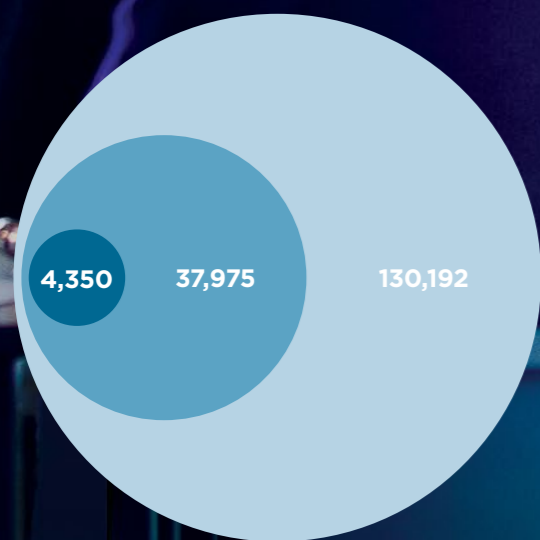
Executive Principal, Hayes School  
Chair, Challenge the Gap

# Our impact: Challenge the Gap in numbers



## Our pupils in numbers

By June 2015, our Challenge the Gap Teams had worked with:



“The new measures we’ve put in place with Challenge the Gap are changing the way our staff teach. Now, pupils have no excuses: everyone is expected to achieve their potential.”

**Leader**  
Compton Cluster

- Disadvantaged pupils as part of their Target Cohorts
- Disadvantaged pupils as part of their Cascades
- Pupils across their schools as part of their Cascades

## It begins with the Target Cohort

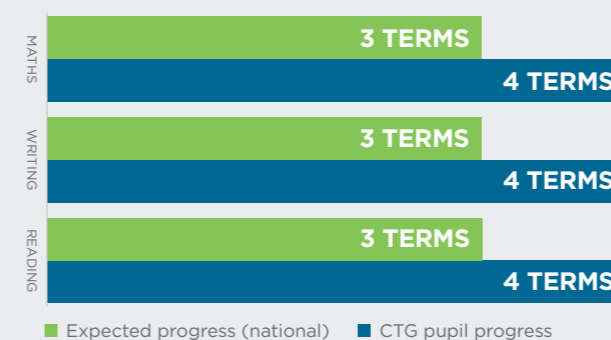
The emphasis for schools in their first year is on the ‘Target Cohort’; a small target group of 15 underachieving disadvantaged pupils.

By building up a deep understanding of these pupils’ needs, with the help of Challenge the Gap tools, Teams are much better placed to look to the research, and at what other schools are doing, to select strategies that are most likely to work for them.

**Challenge the Gap Target Cohort pupils made accelerated progress in 2015. These pupils – who were previously at risk of underachieving – met or exceeded national progress targets for all pupils.**

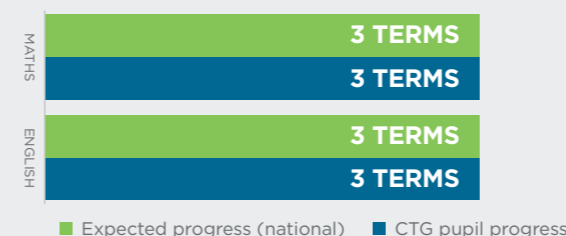
### PRIMARY PUPIL PROGRESS 2014-15

Target Cohort pupils exceeded national progress targets for all pupils; they made an average of four terms’ progress in one year in maths, reading and writing.



### SECONDARY PUPIL PROGRESS 2014-15

Target Cohort pupils met national progress targets for all pupils; they made an average of three terms’ progress in one year in maths and English.



## The Cascade takes it whole school

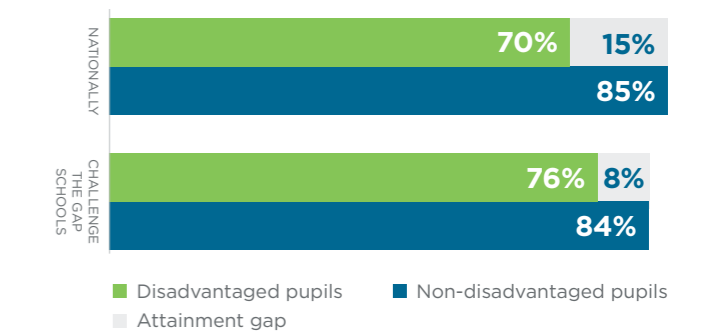
As they come to the end of their first year, and move into their second, the Challenge the Gap Team works increasingly on cascading effective practice across their whole school.

Once the Team sees which strategies are working with the Target Cohort, they cascade them across their school to improve outcomes for all their pupils. This is where practice becomes embedded and the programme begins to have a long-term transformational impact, driven from within.

**As a result, the impact of Challenge the Gap extends far beyond the Target Cohort and can be seen in improved whole school outcomes. In 2015 Challenge the Gap schools recorded a gap between disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers that was narrower than other schools nationally, at both KS2 and KS4.**

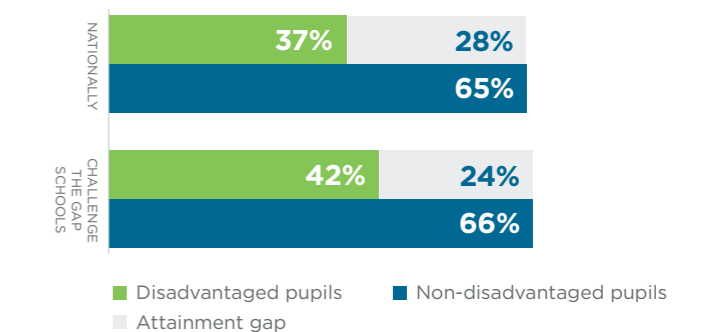
### PRIMARY SCHOOL ATTAINMENT 2014-15

At KS2 disadvantaged pupils in Challenge the Gap schools outperformed disadvantaged pupils nationally in 2015.



### SECONDARY SCHOOL ATTAINMENT 2014-15

At KS4 disadvantaged – and non-disadvantaged pupils – in Challenge the Gap schools outperformed pupils nationally in 2015.



“This has been one of the most meaningful professional development opportunities for our schools”.

Leader  
Feltham Cluster



### Building capacity in the system

Since 2012, we have been arming schools with the resources, skills and partnerships they need to dramatically and permanently change the lives of the country's most vulnerable children, and to break the cycle of disadvantage for good.

Feedback from those involved in the programme indicates that Challenge the Gap is providing excellent professional development for leaders, teachers, para-professionals and programme facilitators alike.

**875** EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS trained to 'Challenge the Gap'

▶ 200 LEADERS

▶ 360 TEACHERS

▶ 280 PARA-PROFESSIONALS

▶ 35 PROGRAMME FACILITATORS

**200** SCHOOLS experienced the impact of our programme

▶ 120 PRIMARY & INFANT SCHOOLS

▶ 80 SECONDARY & ALL-THROUGH SCHOOLS

**15** FACILITATION SCHOOLS accredited to lead a local Cluster

### SURVEYS IN 2015 SHOWED:

**96%** OF PARTICIPANTS would recommend Challenge the Gap to a colleague

**8/10** THE SCORE our Challenge the Gap Teams award our programme for:

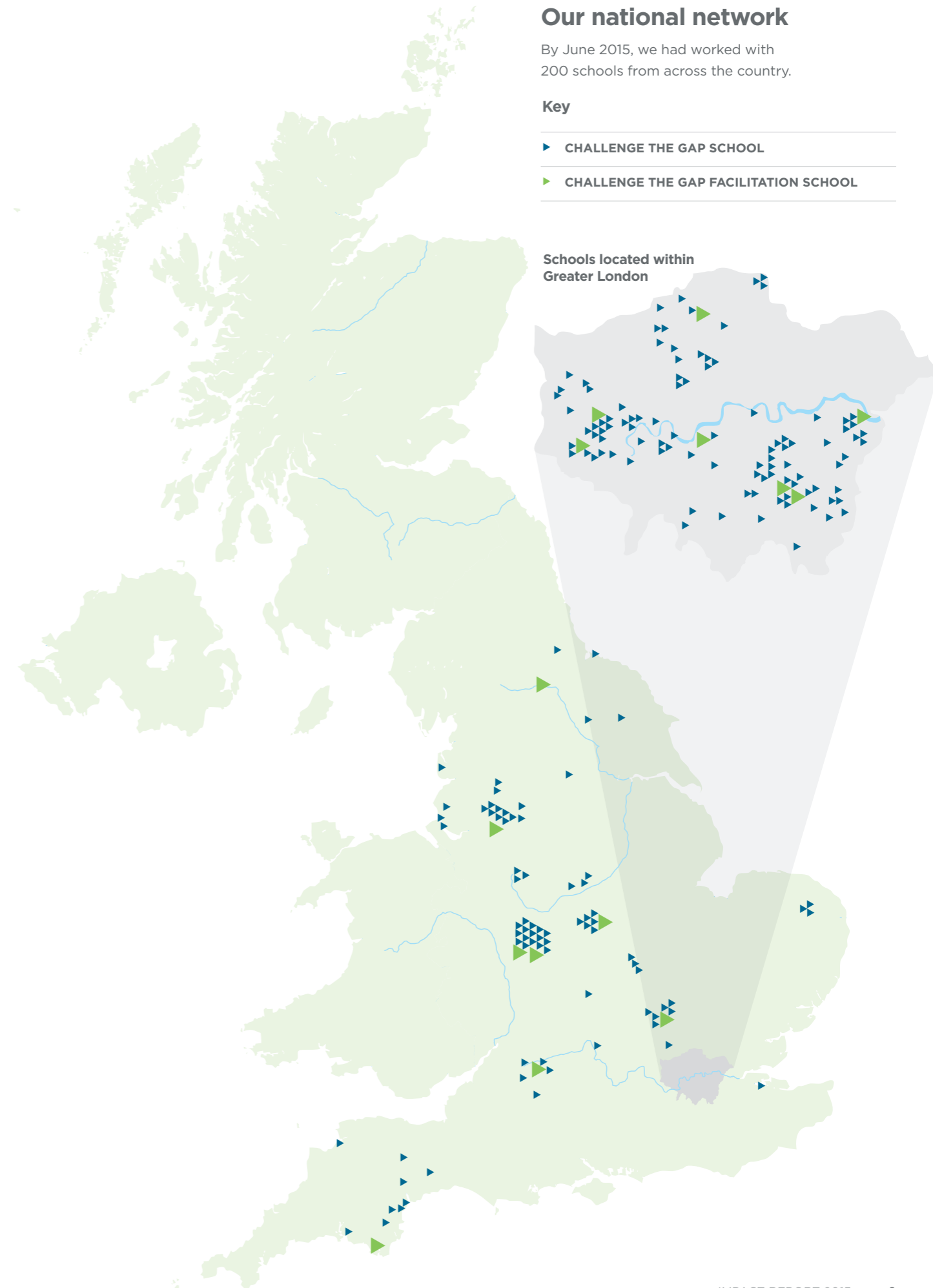
- ▶ Professional development
- ▶ Use of the evidence base to inform their practice
- ▶ Collaboration with others

### Our national network

By June 2015, we had worked with 200 schools from across the country.

#### Key

- ▶ CHALLENGE THE GAP SCHOOL
- ▶ CHALLENGE THE GAP FACILITATION SCHOOL



Schools located within Greater London

# How we are breaking the link

We know that being born into a disadvantaged background can lock children into a cycle of underachievement and poor outcomes for the rest of their lives. We also now know that we can play a role in breaking this cycle.

Challenge the Gap is a two-year school improvement programme, informed by learning from the London Challenge, Olevi and the EEF. It is designed to provide schools with a vehicle for a strategic, whole-school approach to tackling the attainment gap.<sup>4</sup>

**Through Challenge the Gap, school professionals access the combined wisdom of our education system to improve outcomes for all pupils in their own school context.**

This wisdom is accessed through:

► **The latest research.** We provide workshops which focus on building competencies that research tells us are specifically relevant to disadvantaged pupils — academic competence, self-awareness and resilience. Workshop content is informed by, and regularly updated to include, the latest research on these themes from sources such as the EEF.

► **Proven best practice.** Challenge the Gap Facilitation Schools have a track record of tackling educational disadvantage. Best practice from our Facilitation Schools is shared across our national network through case studies and workshop resources, which Challenge the Gap Facilitators create and share.

► **Emerging innovation.** Schools in Challenge the Gap do not work alone. Our programme is delivered in regional Clusters, which provide collaborative structures that enable schools to work together and to learn from each other as new effective practice emerges in their respective schools.



# The Cascade: leading whole school change

Breaking the link between poverty and poor outcomes is too big a task for any one of us alone; that is why Challenge the Gap is not a programme aimed at individual members of staff. All Challenge the Gap schools have a Team of professionals — leaders, teachers and para-professionals — who work together to become catalysts of change within their school.

These Teams are made up of exceptional individuals, each with an important role to play. Leaders are responsible for creating the environment for success; teachers focus on effective pedagogy in the classroom; and para-professionals develop effective strategies to support pupils to enhance their academic, social and emotional skills in and out of the classroom.

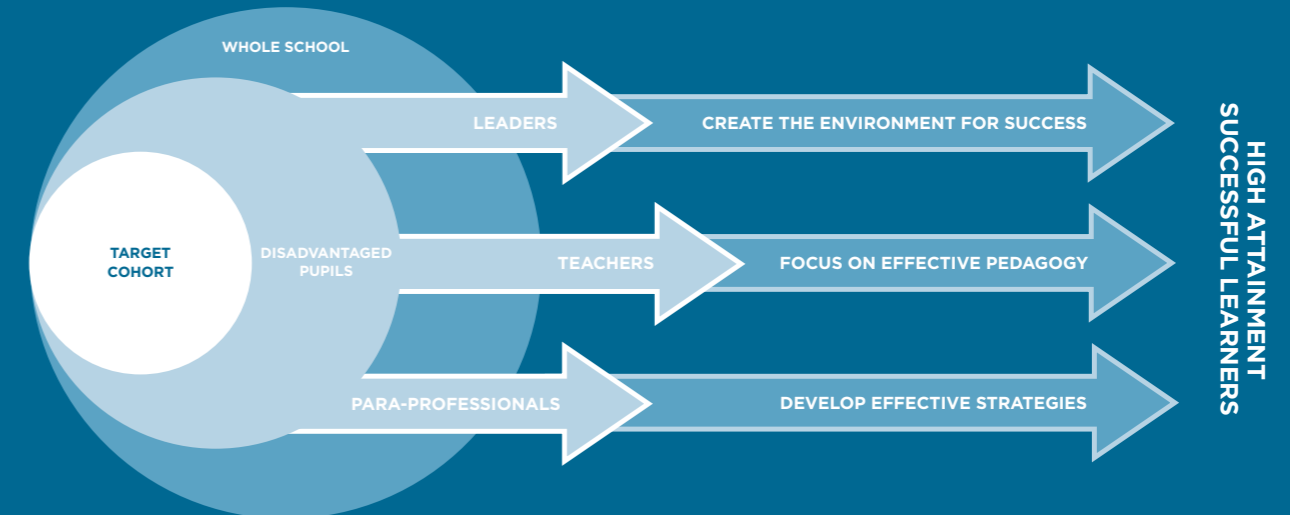
Each year, Challenge the Gap Teams focus on different challenges, depending on the needs they identify through their Target Cohort. They then build up a layered approach, cascading effective strategies across their school, to overcome the many and complex barriers faced by their disadvantaged pupils. And our impact does not end here. Cascading practice that proves to be effective leads to school-wide changes that bring about better outcomes for all pupils.

**“Challenge the Gap has helped us to recognise the importance of joined-up working in school: the teaching assistants, the teachers and the leaders.**

**We’re all working for the same thing — better outcomes for our pupils — so we need to make sure we are doing it together, that we have a coherent strategy.”**

Para-professional  
Pickhurst Cluster

**Our schools think big, start small and scale fast to have a far reaching impact and make a lasting difference.**



# Meet the Teams changing pupils' lives

Here, Teams from four very different contexts each share one of many changes that they have implemented in their school to offer the best possible education to every young person that steps through their doors.

## Primary

### Closing the gap is now a whole school responsibility

**School:** Olive Hill Primary School, Dudley  
**Disadvantaged pupils 2014–15:** 42%  
**Years on the programme:** 2013–2015

**Every member of staff at Olive Hill Primary School knows which pupils need support, what support they need, and how to provide it to offer all pupils the best possible start in life.**

Before the school joined Challenge the Gap in July 2013, just 65% of disadvantaged pupils were making expected progress in maths between KS1 and KS2 – well below other pupils in the school (82%), and other disadvantaged pupils nationally (84%). Olive Hill staff knew they had a high percentage of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium Grant: the next step was making sure they knew these pupils as individuals, and understood their role in providing these pupils with equal opportunity to access an excellent education.

'Challenge the Gap' became a high profile, whole school project, in which each Challenge the Gap Team member played a vital part. Using the Challenge the Gap Pupil Survey, para-professional Helen was responsible for getting to know the school's Target Cohort on a social and emotional level, while leader Hannah tracked academic progress. The Team combined their knowledge about each pupil in the Target Cohort to inform their choice of strategies to best support these pupils. The Team's teacher Megan trialled practice expected to have the greatest impact in the classroom.

One of the Team's most successful strategies has been the introduction of targeted questioning. Now a school-wide initiative, teachers use classroom plans

that detail specific factors to be aware of for each pupil (if they are eligible for the Pupil Premium, for example), and direct questions towards those least likely to engage, like those chosen for the Challenge the Gap Target Cohort.

Today at Olive Hill, teachers not only know which pupils come from a disadvantaged background, but also why they need to know this information, and what to do with it to ensure maximum impact on pupils' achievement, both academically, and in their social and emotional skills. At the start of each academic year, teachers assess each pupil considered 'vulnerable' against a range of academic, social and emotional factors. This assessment is shared with Helen, now Higher Level Teaching Assistant for Nurture, who works with each teacher to ensure sound provision for all disadvantaged pupils.

As a result, the in-school progress gap in maths has shrunk from 13% in 2013 to just 2% in 2015: 92% of disadvantaged pupils achieve expected progress, compared to 94% of other pupils in the school, and 86% of disadvantaged pupils nationally. Olive Hill pupils demonstrate good learning behaviours in their lessons, there has been increased participation in home learning activities, and they are better equipped to express how they are feeling. Olive Hill Primary School is teaching its pupils the skills they need for a lifetime of success.

**“We want our pupils to be academically successful, lifelong learners. That means teaching them to be aspirational, socially aware, self-aware and resilient.”**

**Hannah Grasby**  
Deputy Headteacher, Olive Hill Primary School

<sup>5</sup> In order to protect the identity of our pupils, all pupil names are fictional and the images shown are not of the children featured in this report.

**“I used to lack confidence, but being a leading learner helped me to improve.”**

Year 4 pupil  
Olive Hill Primary School



## CHARLIE'S STORY

When we started Challenge the Gap, Charlie<sup>5</sup> was in Year 4. He was disrespectful to staff and reluctant to come to school. We knew he was academically able but he didn't always engage in class or try with his work.

Challenge the Gap taught us to involve everyone in the school in improving individual outcomes for our pupils. That meant making sure staff across the school knew who Charlie was, and what he needed to succeed.

We slowly strengthened his relationships with staff members by giving him regular one-to-one

time to talk about himself, and responding positively to his comments. We introduced 'targeted questioning' so Charlie was no longer allowed to opt out of his learning in class. He was selected as a 'Lead Learner', which meant he played a key role in role modelling good learning behaviours and supporting other pupils to learn well. He responded really well to that.

Now he actively engages in class, he takes his responsibilities seriously and he has very strong relationships with staff in school. In the future, he wants to be a maths teacher.



“It was strange at first when teachers would pick me up on all sorts of things, but I can see that it’s really helped me to improve in my classes.”

Year 11 pupil  
St. James’ Catholic High School

## LUCY’S STORY

Lucy was a well-behaved student with an admirable work ethic, but she lacked the vocabulary and the confidence to explain herself well, and frequently asked for support with her work. She was shy and didn’t work well in groups.

Getting to know Lucy through Challenge the Gap, we realised that she learnt better through visual explanations.

We introduced her to mind-maps, memory cards and subject mats. We taught her to use techniques to help her push through difficulty. Lucy began to

use a thesaurus to develop her vocabulary, and regularly tested her spelling with word lists. She was also paired with a sixth-form mentor to build her confidence, her organisation skills and to talk about her goals for the future.

In one year, Lucy made 5 levels of progress in English to achieve a ‘C’ at GCSE, and 4 levels of progress in maths to achieve a ‘B’. She exceeded expectations to achieve 5 A\*-C GCSEs, including English and maths. She is now studying Art, English and Religious Studies at sixth form.

## Secondary

### Our pupils know how to learn

**School:** St. James’ Catholic High School, North London

**Disadvantaged pupils 2014-15:** 20%

**Years on the programme:** 2012-present

**A school-wide teaching policy to improve pupils’ perseverance, self-awareness and collaboration in the classroom is making the difference at St. James’ Catholic High School.**

In 2013, the attainment gap at St. James’ between disadvantaged pupils achieving 5A\*-C at GCSE and their peers was 18%. By analysing common characteristics among their Target Cohort to understand the root cause of this gap, the school’s Challenge the Gap Team began to recognise a pattern of poor behaviour for learning among this group of pupils.

Learning about research by Guy Claxton and the EEF on metacognitive learning strategies at their Challenge the Gap workshops, the St. James’ Team began to introduce a new teaching approach into their lessons to help pupils understand the learning skills they would need to be successful in the long-term.

The Team chose four key concepts their pupils needed to master to be good learners (‘working together’, ‘don’t give up’, ‘thinking about learning’ and ‘ways of learning’). These concepts were introduced into each lesson as a ‘Learning to Learn’ objective, alongside the usual lesson objective. By setting ‘Learning to Learn’ objectives in each lesson, Challenge the Gap teachers saw pupils begin to better understand how to assess their learning methods, how to learn more effectively, and how to accept and learn from their mistakes.

The Team developed a set of icons to symbolise the four key ‘Learning to Learn’ concepts. These icons helped the Team and the school’s Teaching and Learning Coordinator to teach the ‘Learning to Learn’ approach consistently across KS3, then KS4 and KS5 through whole staff ‘butterfly’ sessions and INSET days.

Now, teaching ‘Learning to Learn’ skills is considered a non-negotiable aspect of pedagogy at St. James’. ‘Learning to Learn’ skills are given a high profile for

pupils, parents and staff at every opportunity: during assemblies; in PSHE; at Parent Information Evenings; and in staff training.

As leader of the Challenge the Gap Team, Lisa Johnston now has the authority to coordinate whole school Teaching and Learning policies to narrow the gap. She has led her Team to share their understanding of the barriers to learning their pupils face, and has seen practice that helps to overcome these challenges embedded across the school as a result. She says, “realising we can meet the need of our pupils as individuals has been hugely rewarding.”

By 2014, just one year later, staff were proud to see this gap shrink dramatically to just 4%. In 2015, the school celebrated a positive Value Added (VA) score of 1043 for disadvantaged pupils, outstripping the 1039 VA score of their peers. Lisa believes that the foundations for the school’s success are rooted in the consistent nature of the ‘Learning to Learn’ approach across departments.

Today, 45 staff from across the school have been trained on Challenge the Gap. Individualised learning approaches and high expectations for all are now well embedded throughout the school. The Target Cohort are Lead Learners, responsible for observing pupils in lessons to find out what it means to be a successful learner and role model this to their peers. Pupils at St. James’ can talk about how they learn and what they need to do to succeed.

“We encourage a culture where mistakes are seen as the pathway to success.”

Lisa Johnston

St. James’ Catholic High School

## Early years

### We are connecting home and school

**School:** Pickhurst Infant Academy, Kent  
**Disadvantaged pupils 2014-15:** 8%  
**Years on the programme:** 2014-present

**Pupils' spoken language skills are improving rapidly with wrap around support from their parents and teachers at Pickhurst Infant Academy.**

Seeing long-term pupil impact from short-term interventions was, at times, a key challenge for professionals at Pickhurst Infant Academy. "Before we joined Challenge the Gap we noticed that, as pupils moved into Year 1, the same children, all from lower-income backgrounds, were getting the same interventions they had received in Early Years," says Head of School Liz Laws. "We knew their progress in academic areas was not as significant as it could have been."

By getting to know these pupils through Challenge the Gap, Liz and the school's Team identified common stumbling blocks among the Target Cohort, like low levels of oracy and parental engagement. They set out to make sure all pupils had the same tools to engage in learning. Strategies included setting high expectations for speaking such as ensuring pupils responded in full sentences, personalised interventions like 'talk boost', and developing vocabulary and a love of reading through the use of rich texts. They created opportunities for shared experiences that then provided the stimulus for activities in class, ensuring that a difference in cultural experience did not become a barrier to achievement.

Over the year, the Team worked with the pupils' parents to increase their engagement in, and their knowledge of how to support, their child's learning. Liz says, "we have run workshops for parents to show them different ways they can support their child's learning. It has been really successful and has had an immediate impact for our pupils and parents alike." Workshops explained the strategies that were being introduced in the classroom and provided extension tasks for parents to go through with their child at home.

Moving into their second year, the Team has ensured that interventions at Pickhurst Infants take a co-ordinated, approach, involving the pupils, their parents and staff in a variety of school roles.

Strategies developed through Challenge the Gap are seen as a core part of Quality First Teaching, rather than optional, add-on initiatives, and are built into the School Improvement Plan. The Challenge the Gap Team have taken every opportunity to share their learning from the programme with colleagues across the school.

Today, teachers can be confident in the high standard of spoken language of pupils going into Year 1. In autumn 2014, 0% of pupils at Pickhurst Infants were working at age-related expectations on entry to the school. By summer 2015, 80% were working at age-related. The story was similar for gains in self-confidence and self-awareness. In spring 2015, the Team saw 100% attendance at Target Cohort achievement and celebration events by invited parents.

"Challenge the Gap has given us the tools, framework and strategies to raise the profile of pupils from a disadvantaged background. We are now more focused on outcomes for these pupils, and more coordinated across the school to ensure all pupils fulfil their potential."

**"We have introduced strategies in school and at home that are seeing disadvantaged pupils make significant gains in their learning."**

Liz Laws  
Pickhurst Infant Academy

## ANNIE'S STORY

Annie's mum suffered from attachment disorder, which meant Annie and her mum often had minimal interaction. Annie's complex home life impacted on her outcomes at school, where she was working below age related expectations in all areas, and particularly communication and language.

Our Challenge the Gap Team built a strong relationship with Annie's mum over the course of the year. She came to our parent support workshops, where we modelled effective strategies to enable Annie's mum to support Annie's learning and conversations at home.

Now, Annie and her mum read, and talk together every day. Annie has become a resilient learner with a positive attitude to learning. She is working within age-related expectations for the Prime Areas of Learning and has made accelerated progress from low starting points in all areas.

Annie's mum even comes into school each week as a Parent Helper, hugely increasing her confidence in herself and her ability to support her daughter. She says "Annie is so happy, and talks to me a lot. We are bonding really well."

**"I enjoy reading. I am a good reader. My mum, dad and brother help me read."**

Early Years pupil  
Pickhurst Infant Academy

## SARA'S STORY

Before becoming a member of our Challenge the Gap Target Cohort, Sara often refused to write. She would get upset and tearful, turning uncommunicative. She lacked confidence in her ability, telling us "I can't write".

Attending all three Challenge the Gap day trips means that Sara now has first-hand experiences to draw on; she is no longer put off by a 'blank page'. Linking writing to our trips has helped Sara to see writing as an enjoyable and meaningful activity.

Added to our step-by-step guidance of sentence structures and types, Sara has the words, the willingness and the tools to write independently.

Now, Sara regularly contributes to class discussions in writing sessions. She produces longer, high quality pieces of writing. She is less likely to seek approval of what she writes, and much more likely to want to share her work with the class. Best of all she takes pride in her work.

**"I have something to write about now. I know what I am talking about when I describe a castle."**

Year 3 pupil  
Christ Church C.E. Primary School

## Cross-school

### We plan collaboratively to improve our pupils' writing skills

**School:** Christ Church C.E. Primary School, Salford  
**Disadvantaged pupils 2014-15:** 53%  
**Years on the programme:** 2014-present

**Jointly planning and reviewing lessons with colleagues from other schools enhanced pupil writing skills and life experiences across three primary schools in Salford, Manchester.**

As a one-form entry primary school in Manchester, opportunities to learn from other colleagues were extremely difficult to come across for staff at Christ Church C.E. Primary School in Salford. Challenge the Gap changed that.

Alongside colleagues from two local schools, also taking part in the programme, the Christ Church Team noticed that a lack of life experiences and poor writing skills were common factors for pupils across all three schools.

The Trio of school Teams took a Lesson Study approach to raise pupil achievement. During their Challenge the Gap workshops, they jointly planned three educational and enjoyable day trips for their Target Cohorts, and developed a sequence of literacy-focused lessons to build learning from the days' activities back into the classroom. After each trip, the co-planned lessons were taught in each school at different times, so that colleagues could observe each other teaching. After each lesson, time was set aside to evaluate the pupils' writing and discuss how to tweak the lesson plan to have even greater impact.

The Trio saw that by giving their pupils a clear purpose during their trips, the children were really motivated to explore their environment; they knew what information they would need to be successful in their work back in class.

All three schools saw improvements in the quality of their pupils' written work: the language choices they made; their text and sentence structure; their sense of audience and purpose; even, for the more reluctant writers, the quantity of writing produced. In 2015 at Christ Church, 68% of the Target Cohort were

achieving at or above age-related expectations in writing after the project, compared to 41% before the intervention.

Now, pupils at Christ Church are asked to do a 'cold write' at the beginning of each topic. Teachers use these writing pieces to plan their teaching of the topic based on what the pupils still need to learn. "It's a simple change, but it's been really powerful, and the pupils love seeing how far they've come," says Beverley Jackson, Assistant Headteacher and Challenge the Gap leader at Christ Church.

Beverley explained that working regularly with external colleagues through Challenge the Gap to improve lessons on writing skills, with such tight focus on pupil outcomes, has significantly increased the quality of teaching at Christ Church. She says "Without the opportunity to work with colleagues in our Challenge the Gap Trio, there wouldn't have been such purpose and rigour in our work."

Collaborative learning structures have been cascaded whole school, with a new Teaching and Learning policy that requires all teachers to work with two school colleagues to jointly develop one activity a term that has meaningful impact in the classroom.

**"It was a fantastic learning process. Now, collaborative working structures are embedded across the school."**

Beverley Jackson  
Christ Church C.E. Primary School

# Meet the Teams taking the lead

Challenge the Gap is not a short-term intervention programme. **It is a programme which builds the capacity of school staff so that they can lead long-lasting and sustainable change within their schools and beyond.** As a result we frequently see the rapid progression of these staff.

We have seen: para-professionals starting as teaching assistants and then being sponsored to do their teaching qualification; teachers starting as a classroom teacher on the programme one year and becoming a leader on the programme the next; and leaders on the programme being promoted to deputy-head or headship. **This is a programme which builds transformational leadership capacity at all levels.**

## Leaders

Challenge the Gap leaders create the environment for success, ensuring their Team has everything they need to thrive such as time, resources, access to data, and whole school engagement. They are experts at utilising finite resources for maximum impact.

### Our pupils tell us what they need in order to achieve

**Claire Putnam**, St. Fidelis Primary School, Bexleyheath

**Disadvantaged pupils 2014-15:** 10%

**Challenge the Gap delegate:** 2012-2015

**“Staff across the school now know who our disadvantaged pupils are, and how to cater for them.”**

Before joining Challenge the Gap in 2012, 58% of disadvantaged pupils at St. Fidelis Primary School were achieving Level 4 at KS2, compared to 68% of disadvantaged pupils nationally. Disadvantaged pupils at St. Fidelis were making slow progress in class, had poor motivation and showed low self-esteem.

“We didn’t know what to do to improve outcomes for these pupils, or who should be taking responsibility for them.” says Claire. “When I joined Challenge the Gap as the leader, I was also made Pupil Premium coordinator. The position was given the same status as English or maths coordinator.”


During her first year of Challenge the Gap, Claire led the introduction of ‘pupil conferencing’: using Challenge the Gap Pupil Surveys, Claire’s Team met

the Target Cohort one-to-one on a regular basis to discuss how the pupils were learning, and how they could learn better. Pupils chose their own targets, which were shared with their parents and teachers across the school. Claire met with teachers to monitor the provision they offered for disadvantaged pupils to help the pupils achieve their targets.

Being supported at home and school to achieve their own targets motivated pupils to get involved in their school, both in and outside the classroom. Claire saw pupils who previously ‘couldn’t be bothered’ become engaged and focused, and lead on whole school activities like cultivating an environmental garden. Now, pupils across the school set their own targets. In 2015, the percentage of disadvantaged pupils attaining Level 4 at KS2 had increased to 92%, compared to just 70% of disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Claire says, “I gained the credibility to make change happen — to say that supporting our disadvantaged young people is really important, and something we need to be doing more about.”

*Claire became a Challenge the Gap Facilitator for her Cluster in the school’s second year on the programme and she was promoted to Deputy Headship at St Peter Chanel Primary School, another local Catholic primary school, in early 2015.*



**“I like having the opportunity to talk about my successes every week.”**

Year 6 pupil  
St. Fidelis Primary School

**“We learnt how to act in a respectful way and still have fun. Now we take the mickey if someone does something immature, instead of when people achieve something, like we used to.”**

Year 9 pupil  
Tiverton High School



**Our pupils have high expectations for themselves**

**Tom Williams**, Tiverton High School, Devon  
**Disadvantaged pupils 2014-15:** 14%  
**Challenge the Gap delegate:** 2014-present

**“Challenge the Gap has shown me how to tailor interventions to the needs of the specific community that our school serves.”**

In 2014, Tiverton High School had a -24.2 gap in the Value Added (VA) score for disadvantaged pupils (992.3) and for their peers (1016.5). By unpicking this data, the school noticed that boys from disadvantaged backgrounds were making the least amount of progress. From their knowledge of the local community, the Team believed that the poor achievement of this group was linked to a culture of low expectations.

The Challenge the Gap Team selected 15 boys, all underachieving, as their Target Cohort. Tom led his Team to introduce a curriculum of 20-minute weekly sessions to increase the Target Cohort’s desire to

achieve both in and beyond school. Sessions covered a wide range of topics, including positive masculinity, aspiration and career support, and pushing through challenge.

After one year, 85% of Tiverton’s Target Cohort was making a minimum of three levels of progress, 78% had improved their attendance and 95% said their self-confidence had improved. By sharing the strategies that have worked for this group more widely, the school has also seen impact on a wider cohort of pupils. The school’s 2015 VA score gap was just -3.6 (1002.9 for disadvantaged pupils; 1006.5 for non-disadvantaged).

“Tracking these pupils through Challenge the Gap helped us to realise that, before we could close the gap academically, we had to make these pupils want to achieve,” Tom says.

*This year Tom is also supporting Teams from Tiverton’s three largest primary partners to improve outcomes for their disadvantaged pupils through Challenge the Gap.*

**Our pupils benefit from proven strategies**

**Stef Florczyk**, Victoria Junior School, Hounslow  
**Disadvantaged pupils 2014-15:** 20%  
**Challenge the Gap delegate:** 2013-present

**“Challenge the Gap has reignited my passion for teaching. Now I know how to motivate disadvantaged pupils in my school, too.”**

Getting caught up in the day-to-day pressures of teaching had meant that Stef, and her colleagues at Victoria Junior School, weren’t questioning their teaching to make sure it was the most effective way to improve pupil outcomes. In 2013, 55% of Victoria Junior’s disadvantaged pupils achieved Level 4 at KS2, compared to 63% of disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Through Challenge the Gap, Stef has been offered the opportunity to learn again. She has visited local schools to observe effective lessons, which she believes has had a great impact on improving her practice. Seeing effective strategies in action gave her the confidence to try new techniques within her own context.

After Challenge the Gap workshops, Stef was so inspired by research that she began to encourage colleagues to pick up a book, too. “Together, we have begun trading books and sharing our learning

with each other, and our colleagues across the school. We have created a research culture, fully supported by our Headteacher, which means we are constantly improving the standards of our practice.”

Evidence-based practice now underpins pedagogy across the school, and Stef believes this has made a big difference for all pupils. In 2015, 73% of disadvantaged pupils at Victoria Junior School achieved Level 4 or above at KS2, outperforming disadvantaged pupils nationally by 3%.

*Originally joining the programme as the Team’s teacher, Stef progressed to become the Team leader in her second year. Stef is now Pupil Premium Champion at Victoria Junior School and a Challenge the Gap Facilitator in the Lampton Cluster.*

**“Ambassadors for Learning has helped me to be more reflective about my learning. It has made me think about things I wouldn’t have thought of before. I think it has helped me a lot.”**

Year 5 pupil  
Victoria Junior School



## Teachers

We know that the greatest impact that we can have on the outcomes of disadvantaged children is in the classroom. Using research, best practice and detailed knowledge of their pupils, Challenge the Gap teachers work with colleagues in their own school, as well as from other schools in their Cluster, to tailor proven strategies to the context of their school.

### Our pupils never give up

**Beth Tanner**, Hayes School, Bromley  
**Disadvantaged pupils 2014-15:** 4%  
**Challenge the Gap delegate:** 2012-present

**“Challenge the Gap has given me a framework to implement effective practice in a consistent way across the school. I can’t think of anything that we’ve done that has been so powerful across subjects and departments.”**

Hayes is an outstanding school in Bromley, with a low percentage of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium Grant. Disadvantaged pupils consistently achieve above the national average for disadvantaged pupils attaining 5A\*-C at GCSE, but these pupils are still not achieving in line with their non-disadvantaged peers in the school. Hayes joined Challenge the Gap in the programme’s pilot year to understand why disadvantaged pupils were not meeting the same high standards as their other pupils.

The Challenge the Gap Team quickly observed through Target Cohort meetings that the pupils they had selected as underachieving were more likely to

give up on challenging tasks. Beth and her Challenge the Gap colleagues began to ask their Target Cohort to define the characteristics of ‘resilience’. These pupils then led a school-wide initiative, Resilience Fortnight, to show teachers and their peers what resilience is, how you can get it, and how you can teach it.

Now, Resilience Fortnight is an annual event and strategies to be more resilient are embedded throughout the school (guidance on how to be resilient is included in pupil planners and is widely visible on resilience posters). Beth regularly runs induction or training sessions for Hayes staff about how to harness the power of resilience. She says “Through Challenge the Gap, I have realised that even more important than teaching maths is teaching a love of learning.”

A ‘resilience’ ethos is now evident throughout the school. External reviewers have commented on the ‘can-do’ attitude and confidence of all pupils at Hayes as ‘a real strength’.

*Beth is now a Lead Teacher at the school, which means she leads on innovations in pedagogy that improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Beth is also a Challenge the Gap Facilitator in the Hayes Cluster.*

### JACOB’S STORY

**Today, Jacob is a different boy to the one he used to be. Previously, he would give up on anything that was even slightly challenging, or even just new, and he fell back on tired excuses to get out of trying. But the sense of belonging and responsibility he now feels as a result of being involved in Challenge the Gap have changed him completely: he engages in every lesson, has strong relationships with staff, he is visibly happier and, best of all, he never gives up.**



### Our pupils are independent

**Karen Richardson**, Stanley Grove Primary Academy, Manchester  
**Disadvantaged pupils 2014-15:** 50%  
**Challenge the Gap delegate:** 2012-present

**“I have found that I can transfer the skills and knowledge that I gained on Challenge the Gap to have impact on pupils beyond the programme.”**

When Stanley Grove joined Challenge the Gap in 2012, the school was in Ofsted’s ‘Requires Improvement’ category, with a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils and around 90% EAL learners. At the end of lessons, teachers would regularly see common mistakes in pupils’ work, but pupils would not ask for help during lessons because they were embarrassed, so their learning did not move on.

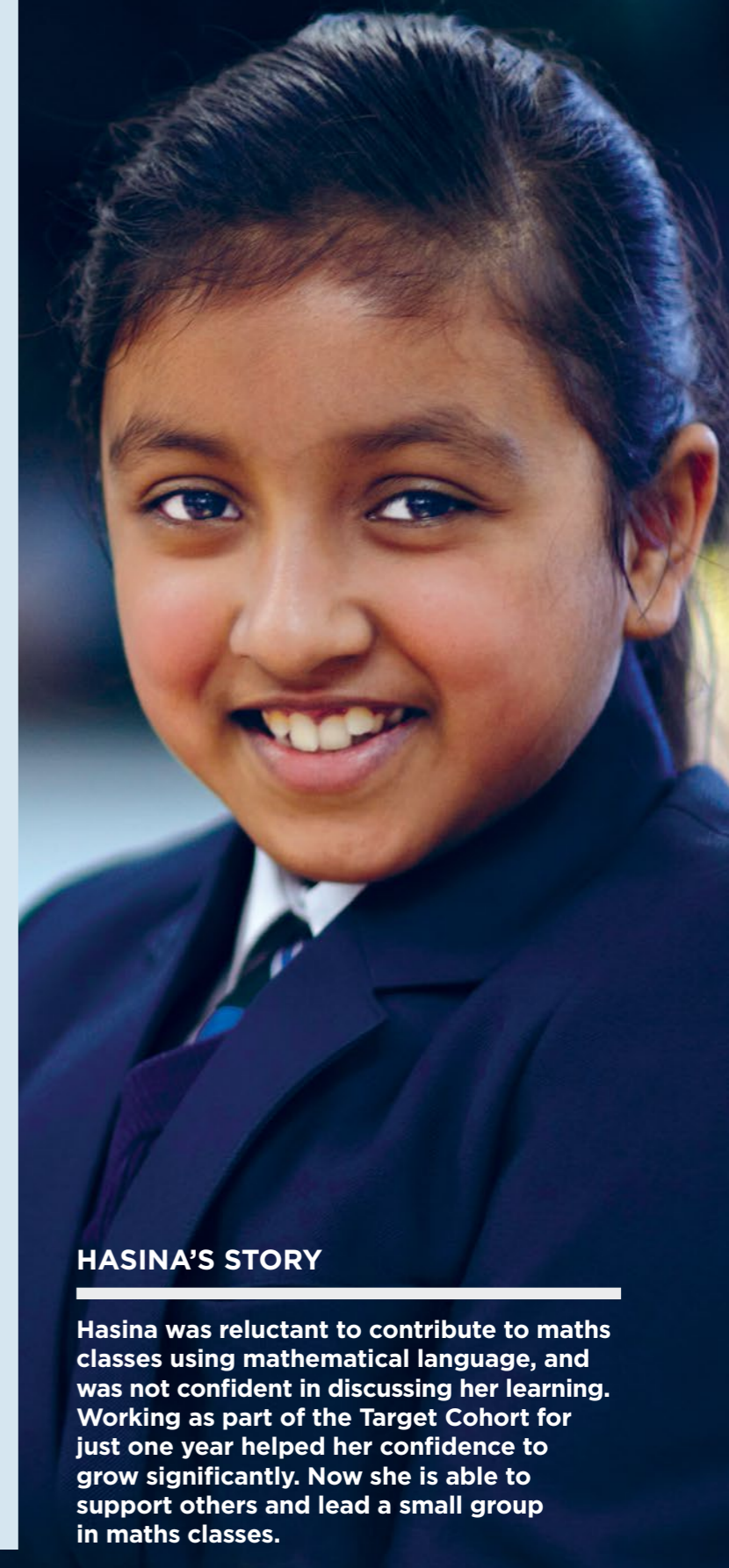
Using the EEF’s Teaching and Learning Toolkit, the Challenge the Gap Team identified metacognitive strategies that they could trial for their Target Cohort to teach independent learning. As the Team’s teacher, Karen introduced Guy Claxton’s 4Rs into her classroom, adapted for the Stanley Grove context. She worked with the Target Cohort to develop characters for each learning characteristic (e.g. Ready Rabbit, Reflective Owl). The pupils designed puppets and posters that clearly explained each of the six learning characters, and used these to aid the cascade of the Stanley Grove 6Rs across the school through assemblies and classes.

Today, the gap at Stanley Grove is all but closed: in summer 2015, 68% of disadvantaged pupils achieved Level 4 at KS2, just 3% lower than non-disadvantaged pupils. Pupils in the Target Cohort made accelerated progress: an average of five APS in reading and writing and six APS in maths. The school were delighted to receive a ‘Good’ rating at their last Ofsted inspection in Summer 2014. Karen believes that one of the greatest drivers behind this dramatic shift was the introduction of a culture centred on independent learning.

*Karen is now the leader of Stanley Grove’s Challenge the Gap Team, and is studying for her National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership (NPQML).*

### HASINA’S STORY

**Hasina was reluctant to contribute to maths classes using mathematical language, and was not confident in discussing her learning. Working as part of the Target Cohort for just one year helped her confidence to grow significantly. Now she is able to support others and lead a small group in maths classes.**



## Para-professionals

With roles as varied as teaching assistant, data manager and librarian, Challenge the Gap para-professionals are best placed to know pupils as individuals. Para-professionals bring this in-depth knowledge of pupils to the Team, so that they can be supported as effectively as possible in and outside the classroom.

### Our pupils aren't afraid to speak up

**Kathleen Bracey and Sarah Larkin,**  
Pickhurst Junior Academy, London  
**Disadvantaged pupils 2014-15: 5%**  
**Challenge the Gap delegate: 2012-present**

**"We are more confident in selecting personalised interventions for the needs of different children. We now know that, if we can provide the right learning environments for these pupils, they blossom and flourish."**

When Kath and Sarah first joined the Pickhurst Juniors Challenge the Gap Team, disadvantaged pupils were more likely to have lower attendance and poorer learning skills than their peers. The para-professionals got to know the Target Cohort, and began to recognise a pattern of passive, compliant behaviours, like low self-confidence and a reluctance to participate in class.

Kath and Sarah laid strong foundations for learning by putting a school focus on the attendance of the Target Cohort. By helping them to form friendships with their peers by suggesting questions they could ask each other, and improving their relationships with adults in the school by giving them time to talk about themselves outside of the classroom, they made school a happier place for these pupils.

Now that pupils are attending and participating in lessons, Kath and Sarah have shifted focus to support accelerated progress in literacy. They have created accessible and enjoyable Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPAG) resources and activities for disadvantaged pupils who find literacy challenging. They also coordinate with classroom teachers to provide 'pre-teaching' SPAG sessions to the Target Cohort so the pupils can be more confident about participating.

Pupils in the Target Cohort are showing an increase in self-confidence, willingly speaking or presenting in front of their classes, with some pupils increasing their attendance by 5%. In 2015, Pickhurst

Junior School had a Value Added (VA) score for disadvantaged pupils of 100.4, compared to the national average VA score for disadvantaged pupils of 99.7.

"Challenge the Gap has taught us how much of an impact external factors can have on our pupils' learning," says Sarah. "And we have learnt the value of running parallel interventions alongside what is being taught in the classroom; shy pupils can have more of a role in the classroom to move their learning on further."

**"I used to get really stressed about speaking in class and I would stutter over my words. I now feel more confident and not embarrassed to talk in class."**

**Year 4 pupil**  
Pickhurst Junior Academy



**"Being a member of Lead Learners [the school's Target Cohort] has taught me how to be a better learner and I really enjoyed meeting new people"**

**Year 7 pupil**  
Mill Hill County High School

### Our pupils can learn from their mistakes

**Emma Smith and Caroline Palmer,**  
Mill Hill County High School, London  
**Disadvantaged pupils 2014-15: 10%**  
**Challenge the Gap delegate: 2013-present**

**"We're changing the life opportunities of these pupils, not just their exam success."**

The Mill Hill Team joined Challenge the Gap in 2013, with the very low attainment among their disadvantaged pupils creating an in-school gap of 45%. "There are always so many competing priorities within a school, but when the RAISEonline data for disadvantaged pupils showed blue, we knew we needed to take urgent action for our more vulnerable children."

In their one-to-one conversations with their Target Cohort, Emma and Caroline began to draw out a pattern of pupils receiving poor or inconsistent feedback in lessons which meant that they struggled to know how to improve their work.

Emma and Caroline's role on the programme gave them opportunity to take their findings straight to the Senior Management Team and, as a result, they were involved in the development and roll-out of a consistent whole school feedback and marking policy that drew on the skills of both teachers and TAs.

"The pupils we work with feel important, listened to," says Emma. "And their learning has improved as a result. Our coordinated feedback and marking approach has been really successful, particularly for our English department: the percentage of pupils achieving A\*-C at GCSE rose from 46% to 64% after just one year."

The school know they still have a long way to go, but the Challenge the Gap Team feel much better equipped to overcome this challenge going forward. Caroline says, "I now have the tools and the knowledge to get to know pupils as individuals effectively. I have the power to make changes that help our pupils to learn better, in and out of the classroom. That is extremely rewarding!"

# Meet the leaders improving the system

Facilitation Schools are schools within Challenge Partners which lead the delivery of Challenge the Gap. Each Facilitation School nominates a team of expert practitioners to run Challenge the Gap for their regional area who then receive training from Challenge Partners to enable them to deliver the programme.

The expertise and experience of our Facilitators is crucial to the success of Challenge the Gap. Their input ensures the programme is continually updated and improved so that it has the maximum possible impact.

By training leaders in our schools to deliver the programme we are also developing system leaders; leaders who can ensure that outcomes for pupils within their own schools continue to improve whilst leading the development of staff and collaboration between schools.



**“Keeping abreast of the latest research, and learning what other schools are doing keeps us on our toes. Our gap has narrowed significantly this year.”**

Karen Hand  
The Compton School Facilitator: 2014–present

**“We have learnt from innovative practice in the national network. Seeing how another school in Challenge the Gap implemented a ‘reading buddy’ scheme for disadvantaged pupils made us want to have a go. The impact has been incredible: one pupil made 18 months progress in just three months!”**

Lynne Dando  
Pickhurst School Facilitator: 2012–present

**“I became hugely upskilled from working with colleagues from both primary and secondary schools through the programme. Staff at Feltham now have a much better understanding of ‘the gap’, why it exists and what they can do about it.”**

Mariella Wilson  
Feltham Community College Facilitator: 2012–2014

**“Facilitating Challenge the Gap has only strengthened my appreciation of the link between pupil outcomes and excellent Teaching and Learning. We have seen improved attendance for our disadvantaged pupils, with really significant gains for some, as well as observing improvements in confidence, self-belief and the development of a ‘can do’ attitude.”**

Sarah Moss  
Hayes School Facilitator: 2012–present





# About Challenge Partners



Challenge the Gap is a programme founded by, and based on the principles of, Challenge Partners.

## A school-led collaborative

At Challenge Partners we believe in providing the best possible education to all our children.

We are a national network of over 300 schools that believes we can achieve this when we harness the skills and knowledge that already exist within our schools. All the activities of the Partnership are designed to help us share the best of our existing knowledge and work together to create solutions to new challenges.

Through collaboration, we seek to provide every professional and pupil in our partnership with access to the combined wisdom of the education system. We enable our schools to learn from the best, whilst simultaneously challenging the best schools to learn more. Because Challenge Partners is owned and led by its members, we decide together how we want to shape the partnership's activity and direction.

## Why our partnership works

Challenge Partners is founded on values of collaboration, accountability, openness and trust. We all work within the same ethical framework to achieve the same goal – the improved performance of our pupils.

This is our moral purpose and underpins everything we do.

To achieve this we have developed an effective knowledge managed community – one in which knowledge is continually developed and shared both within and across schools. The development of four areas of capital is essential in building this community.<sup>6</sup>

Our belief, supported by research and our own experience, is that, to achieve our goal, we need:

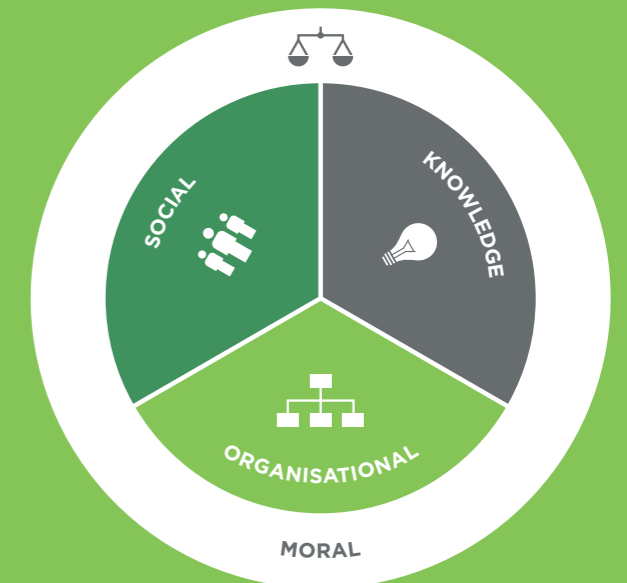
- ▶ **Moral Capital:** the right climate for knowledge sharing between staff and schools
- ▶ **Knowledge Capital:** the ability to identify and capture effective school practice
- ▶ **Social Capital:** the network and skills to enable staff and schools to share their knowledge effectively
- ▶ **Organisational Capital:** the structure and systems for schools to share this knowledge with those who need to learn it.

It was these four foundations of effective knowledge management that drove the school-to-school approach to the London Challenge, and underpins the work of Teaching School Alliances.

With these capitals embedded in our work, together we aspire to become a world-class, knowledge-sharing community, leading the way in school improvement and raising the standards of education for all.

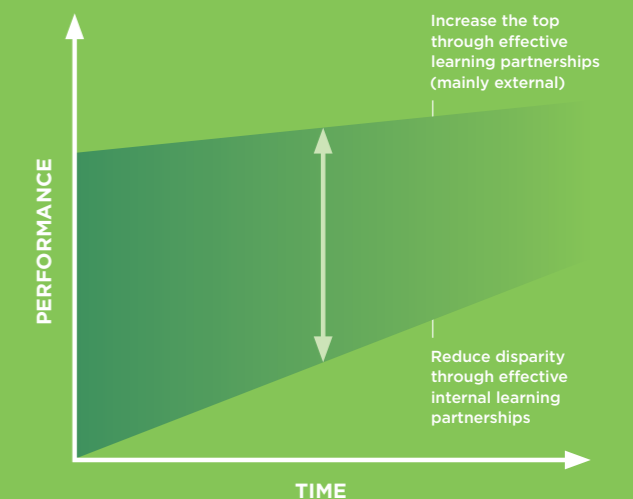
## THE FOUR CAPITALS

The development of four areas of capital is essential in achieving an effective knowledge-managed community.



## UPWARDS CONVERGENCE

We enable our schools to learn from the best, whilst simultaneously challenging the best schools to learn more.



# What next?

Thank you for reading our Challenge the Gap Impact Report for 2015. We are proud to share this report with you as a summary and celebration of the first three years of Challenge the Gap.

What started as a pilot programme for 40 schools is now a national school improvement programme for hundreds of leaders, teachers and para-professionals with some schools now in their fourth year on the programme and still learning.

We continually develop the programme to ensure that it is up-to-date with the latest research and best practice from our schools and this July we will further expand the geographic reach of Challenge the Gap by establishing Facilitation Schools in at least five new areas.

If you are interested in learning more about what impact Challenge the Gap could have for your school, how the programme works and where it will be available in 2016, contact our Challenge the Gap team at [ctg@challengepartners.org](mailto:ctg@challengepartners.org)



# References & acknowledgements

## References

- <sup>1</sup> The Sutton Trust, (2012), The Social Mobility Summit: Report of the summit (p.5) <http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/st-social-mobility-report.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> The Education Endowment Foundation: What we do and why <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/about/what-we-do-and-why/>
- <sup>3</sup> Berwick G. T., (2011) The Approach: Engaging in Excellence, Volume One, GTB Assoc.
- <sup>4</sup> Stevens, C., (2012), Proposal for Challenge the Gap project — Submitted to the Education Endowment Foundation.
- <sup>5</sup> In order to protect the identity of our pupils, all pupil names are fictional and the images shown are not of the children featured in this report.
- <sup>6</sup> Berwick, G. T., (2014), The Four Capitals: The key components of effective knowledge management, 2014, Challenge Partners, London, <http://challengepartners.org/publications/view/3#.vfl-vxFVhBd>.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to express our thanks to the Headteachers and Challenge the Gap Teams at each of the schools that contributed to this report:

Christ Church C.E. Primary School  
Hayes School  
Mill Hill County High School  
Pickhurst Infant Academy  
Pickhurst Junior Academy  
Olive Hill Primary School  
St. James' Catholic High School  
St. Fidelis Catholic Primary School  
Stanley Grove Primary Academy  
Tiverton High School  
Victoria Junior School

### With special thanks to:

Catherine Stevens, Stefani Shedden, Rita Bugler and the Facilitation Schools that make Challenge the Gap possible

### Publication editors:

Hannah Smith and Jess Talbot



15th Floor, Tower Building  
11 York Road, London SE1 7NX

[www.challengepartners.org/challengethegap](http://www.challengepartners.org/challengethegap)

@ChallengePartnr #ChallengetheGap