

Operational Sub-Group

School Performance Tables and GCE 'A' Level results - London

Item No: 7

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Summary This paper summarises the school performance tables and A Level results published by the Department for Education (DfE) on 12th January 2011, with particular emphasis on London.

Recommendations OSG members are asked to note the report.

1 **Background and Introduction**

- 1.1 The government has provided updated information on the overall achievements of young people in GCSE examinations and other accredited qualifications in 2009/10.¹ Two new indicators are included: the percentage of pupils achieving the English Baccalaureate and the percentage of pupils achieving GCSE English and maths at grade A* - C.
- 1.2 Accredited iGCSEs are included in the figures for the first time in 2010 as equivalent to GCSEs and have been counted towards the new indicators as well as existing measures.
- 1.3 At the same time, the government has published the A Level results for 2009/10.

2 **Headlines (See table 1)**

¹ A Statistical First Release (SFR) based on information taken from data collated for the 2010 Secondary Schools Performance Tables

Table 1: Summary of performance		
	England	London
Achievement of the English Baccalaureate*	15.6%	17.0%
Achievement of 5 or more GCSEs at grade A*-C (or equivalent) including English and mathematics GCSEs or iGCSEs	53.4%	58%
Achievement of 5 or more GCSEs or equivalent	75.4%	77.8%
Achievement of at least 2 GCE equivalents	94.8%	94.4%
Achievement of 3 or more A* or A grades at GCE A-Level	12.8%	9.8%
Average QCDA point score per Level 3 entry	214.4	212.4
Average QCDA point score per candidate entered for Level 3 qualifications	744.8	698.8

*The English Baccalaureate comprises passes in English, maths, science, languages and one of the humanities .

Sources: Statistical First Releases (available via the DfE research and statistics:
<http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics>)

2.1 The London picture

- In London, 58 per cent achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grade A*-C or the equivalent including English and mathematics GCSEs or iGCSEs. This is 4.6 percentage points higher than the average for England. London's overall performance has improved by 4 percentage points better than last year.
- 77.8 per cent achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grade A*-C or the equivalent, an improvement of 6.6 percentage points on the 2009. This is the best performing regional average and is 2.4 percentage points better than the average for England as a whole.
- 17 per cent achieved the English Baccalaureate in 2009/10 -1.4 percentage points above the national position (this is a new measure).
- The average QCDA point score per candidate entered for Level 3 qualifications in 2009/10 was 698.8 – 46 points below the national average. The London 2010 average is 7.5 points higher than the 2009 average.
- The average Level 3 point score per entry is 212.4 (+2.6 on 2009) – 2 points below the England average.
- 94.4 per cent of candidates achieved passes equivalent in size to at least 2 GCE/Applied GCE A-levels. This is 0.4 percentage points below the national position, but also a decrease of 0.4 percentage points on last year.
- 9.8 per cent of GCE/Applied GCE A-level candidates achieved 3 or more A* or A grades at A-level. This is 3 percentage points lower than the England performance level and is 0.1 percentage point better than the 2009 London outturn.

3 **Reaction**

Reaction has been mixed, with professionals in the sector voicing criticism of the way in which the new measures have been introduced, while the government and its supporters are equally steadfast in their determination to see improvement in the system.

- 3.1 Michael Gove, Secretary of State: "England still lags behind other nations. We have not succeeded in closing the gap and in raising attainment for all students." Mr Gove felt the results vindicated the government's approach to education, especially the introduction of the Baccalaureate. The DfE later confirmed that Elizabeth Sidwell, the new Schools Commissioner, will review the plans of the 216 schools not reaching the new floor target and order further intervention where necessary.
- 3.2 Andy Burnham, the shadow education secretary (quoted in The Daily Telegraph and the BBC), said The English Baccalaureate would have a "devastating effect on morale...Improving schools in some of the most challenging areas will see themselves plummet down the league tables – putting at risk all of the progress they have made." He added that Labour supports "academic rigour" but felt the government should promote modern vocational qualifications and not persist with outdated teaching.
- 3.3 Association of School and College Leaders: ASCL General Secretary Brian Lightman said: "The English Bac shows how many students have taken a specific combination of subjects. It says nothing about the range of courses on offer, the suitability of the curriculum for the students in that school or overall achievement. I don't know of any employers or universities that say they need more applicants who have studied geography or history instead of other rigorous academic GCSEs...Today's announcement is unfair to young people as well. There are sure to be students who achieved 12 A grades at GCSE but because they did not choose to study history or geography as a humanities subject will not earn the bac."

- 3.4 Union response: Teaching unions have hit out at the government for using the English Baccalaureate measure to rank schools this year, despite the fact that the benchmark was not in place when pupils took their GCSEs. Christine Blower, general secretary of the *NUT* said teachers are dismayed that government has moved the goalposts on school accountability retrospectively. "You can't have schools judged against criteria that were not previously in place," she explained. "This will significantly disadvantage some schools, as they will not have been geared up to doing, for instance, a modern language." Chris Keates, general secretary of the *NASUWT*, claimed the new league tables "trash" the efforts of dedicated teachers and hardworking pupils. "The coalition government is pursuing a relentlessly elitist approach to education, condemning schools to live or die by the narrow range of subjects identified in the English Baccalaureate," she warned.

4 Analysis and Implications

National issues

- 4.1 Despite the criticisms, Ministers have consistently reiterated their belief that all young people should expect to have achieved a rounded education by the age of 16, evidenced by attainment of the English Baccalaureate. Whilst it is possible that there might be some concessions about the content of the Baccalaureate, its introduction as a new standard is likely to have two main effects:
- In the emerging education 'market', schools will be keen to achieve and exploit their competitive advantage. Although Ministers have hitherto expressed the view that schools should determine their own curriculum, the central introduction of the baccalaureate will shape the curriculum offered to each student;
 - As a consequence, qualifications comprising the baccalaureate will assume premier status, whilst other qualifications – irrespective of their other merits – could well be considered second-class.
- 4.2 In particular, Ministers have repeatedly stated in speeches that the policy of "equivalence" introduced in 2004, under which vocational qualifications were given parity with academic exams when compiling league tables, had led to perverse incentives for schools to put children through easier courses. Education Ministers have expressed a strong preference that education at 16 should primarily prepare young people for A Level, which in turn should prepare young people for university. This approach has enormous implications for schools and colleges who wish to position the vocational route as a valuable option in the drive to full participation. It is to be hoped that the forthcoming report from the Wolf Inquiry into vocational education will clarify the position.
- 4.3 The number of schools (and within that the number of academies) that have not reached the floor target and the number of pupils they cover are causes for concern. The Education Bill laid before Parliament reinforces that local authorities have a responsibility to 'challenge' performance, but does not clarify the mechanisms for doing so and their link to formal intervention by the Secretary of State.

Issues specific to London

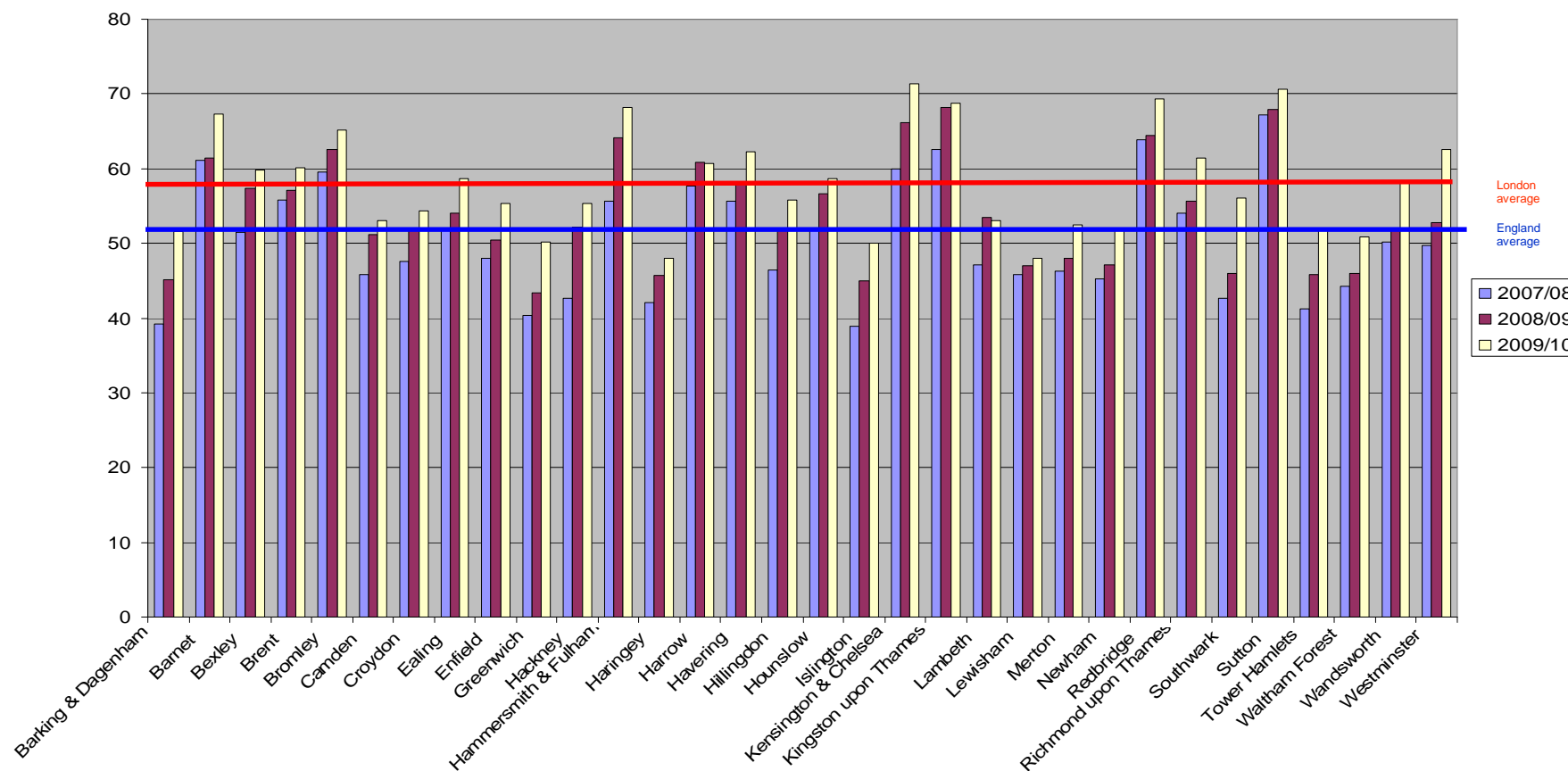
4.4 Significant progress has to be made throughout the 16-19 age range, as demonstrated in the charts included as an annex to this report. On the two key measures:

- Percentage of candidates attaining five GCSEs (grades A* - C) including English and mathematics. Generally all boroughs (29/32) have shown year-on-year improvements. The gap between the best and worst performing borough is 22 percentage points. London has the best regional average in England. Southwark is the most improved borough both in the last year and over the period 2007-10.
- QCDA Level 3 point score per candidate. Most boroughs show an uneven performance, with 17 of the 32 boroughs demonstrating sustained year-on-year improvement in each of the last three years. The gap between the best and worst performing borough is 257.8 points (a Grade C at A Level counts as 80 points). The gap between London and England as a whole has decreased from 47.8 last year to 46 percentage points this year. Merton saw the biggest improvement in the last year, while Hackney is the most improved borough over the period 2007-10.
- Education in London (general): Fewer than half of pupils at 420 state schools in London were awarded the English Baccalaureate. At 69 London schools zero pupils achieved the award. A total of 67,170 pupils in the capital did not get the award out of 81,493 who were entered for the relevant qualifications. Fifteen schools in London, including four academies, are failing and face being taken over or closed. 13,574 pupils are being taught in these failing schools, where almost two thirds of teenagers leave without five GCSEs including English and Maths — the basic benchmark for further study and employment.

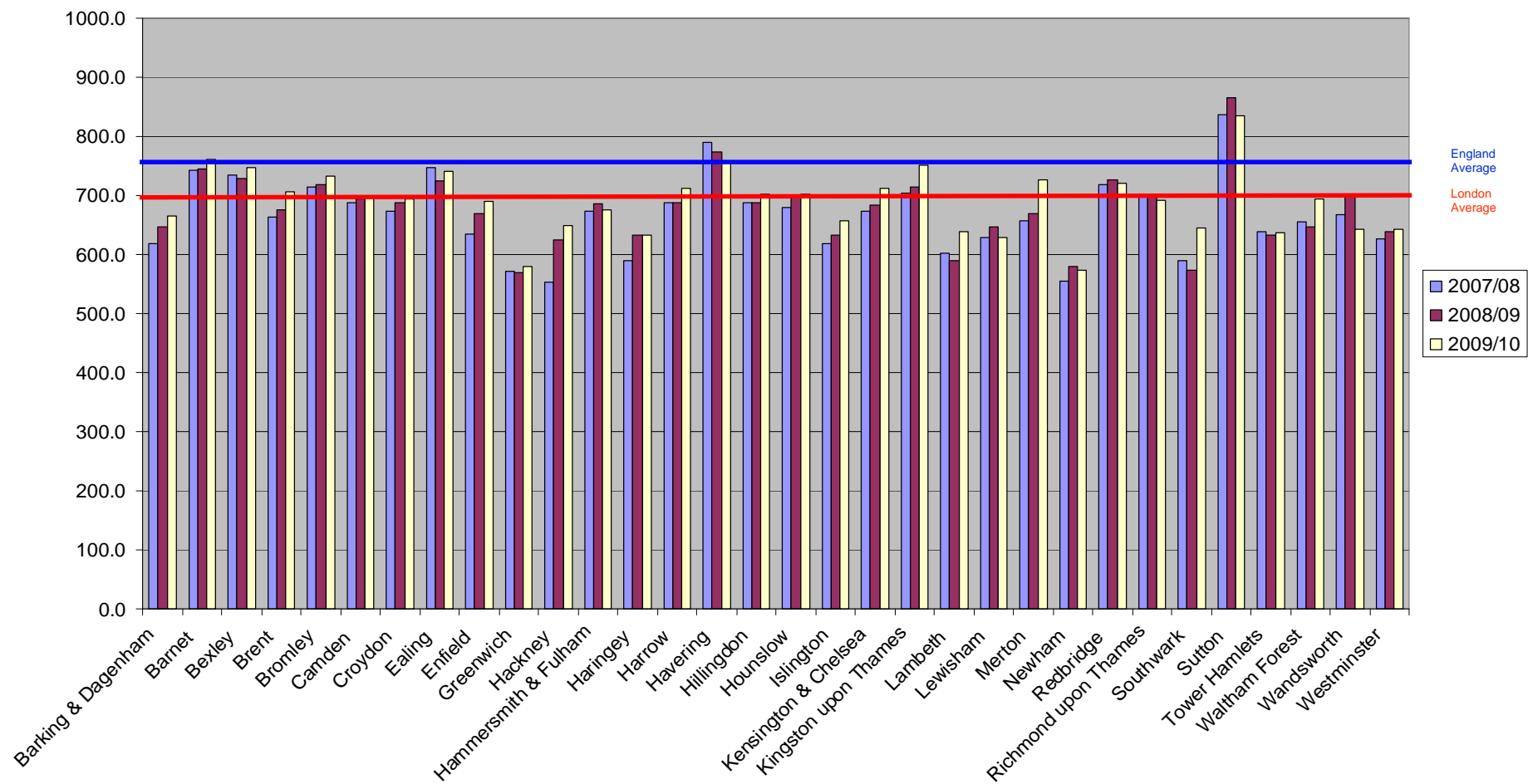
5 Recommendations

5.1 The operational Sub-Group is asked to note this paper.

Percentage of candidates attaining 5 GCSEs (A*-C) inc Eng & maths



QCDA Level 3 Point Scores Per Candidate



Percentage of Candidates Attaining 5 GCSEs (A*-C) including English and maths

