Good morning

As Ofsted’s Chief Inspector, I am determined to use the power and influence of inspection to improve our education system.

With government, I am determined to challenge providers to do better so that our education system can genuinely become world class and compete with the most successful nations in the world.

This is entirely within our capacity. I wouldn’t be doing this job unless I thought it was so. But, as a country, we have to tackle two major barriers to becoming world class.

Firstly, the wide variety in regional performance highlighted in my first Annual Report. This found that in some parts of England parents had over a 90 percent chance of finding a good primary school whereas, in others, parents had less than a 50 percent chance.

Secondly, the long tail of underperformance which mainly affects our poorest children. In this regard, we are amongst the worst performing of the OECD countries.

The two issues are closely related because providers who fail their poorest children are more prevalent in some regions than in others. This is what our data shows us.

That is why I have such high hopes of Ofsted’s regional structure and the work of our Regional Directors and HMI. They must shine a spotlight on local authorities and individual institutions that are failing their children.

But system-wide improvement needs much more if we are going to reduce this historical underperformance. It requires co-ordinated action by national and local government, as well as by education professionals throughout the land.

I also have an optimistic message as Chief Inspector. The rising tide of educational standards is, at last, beginning to lift the boats for our poorest children in some parts of our country.
This third report in 20 years into the provision for our most disadvantaged children is not as bleak as the findings of Stewart Sutherland in 1993 and David Bell in 2003.

This is a more optimistic report because we are beginning to learn the lessons of the good practice that we see in schools which are doing well for our poorest children.

I am quite clear about the prime reason for this more optimistic picture. Where the political spotlight focuses attention on the needs of our poorest children, improvement does follow.

That is why this report is entitled *Unseen children*. They emerge from the darkness of educational failure when we as a country show the resolve to do something about them.

Poor, unseen children can be found in mediocre schools the length and breadth of our country.

They are often found in leafy suburbs, market towns and seaside resorts. They can be found in comparatively prosperous communities, many of them achieving far less than they should.

They are labelled, buried in lower sets, consigned as often as not to indifferent teaching. They coast through education until – at the earliest opportunity – they sever their ties with it.

These children are not unseen in our best schools, which have good knowledge and high expectations of every child. But in more complacent schools such children do badly.

So, let me be clear; disadvantage and poor achievement are not necessarily tied to urban deprivation and inner city blight.

Indeed, since the last report 10 years ago, a considerable number of our poorest children are doing much better in such areas, particularly in London.

Political focus, good organisation and professional leadership can make a difference to these historical problems.

That is why I am making practical and affordable recommendations to government which I believe can make a lasting difference to closing the attainment gap.

This report is the result of widespread deliberation by an Expert Panel of head teachers, academics and educational leaders. I am most grateful to each of them for their input but I take responsibility for the findings and recommendations of this review. Many other people and organisations have contributed to the review and I wish to thank them also.

The evidence on which this speech is based contains much supporting data and analysis, as well as a number of academic papers on specific issues. The evidence is
published separately today. I hope you will take the time to look at it carefully, because it paints a striking new picture of disadvantage and educational underachievement.

Although we have looked again at the seven local authority areas examined originally in 1993, this review is more far-reaching than previous reviews and reports, for the following four reasons.

Firstly, we show that poverty of expectation is a greater problem than material poverty because we know of examples of schools serving areas of great disadvantage that are doing very well by their children. It is true that many families find it hard to make ends meet. But the children of poor families with high aspirations do better at school than those whose parents and teachers expect little of them.

Many children who live in spiritually and culturally barren circumstances with confused values and constant worries present a real challenge to our society. Some parents, having been failed by education themselves, place little value on it. This is the greatest blight, and it predominates within the underprivileged White British communities that are the lowest performing of all the major ethnic groups in England.

Secondly, this review is far wider in scope. It is not simply focused on secondary education and urban disadvantage but considers less visible, underachieving children and young people the length and breadth of the country.

We have viewed disadvantage in the context of those children entitled to free school meals. We have identified where they are, and how well they achieve.

Many live in areas that might be considered generally affluent but nonetheless are performing poorly. Many others live in places that are relatively isolated, such as rural communities and coastal towns. We need new policies and approaches to deal with underachievement in these areas.

Thirdly, we have considered pre-school education, schools, and vocational training to the age of 19.

In what follows we often refer to the outcomes for children at the end of secondary school as a measure of success or failure. This is not because I think secondary education is the most important phase for young people. Far from it. If we could get the earlier years right for everyone, that would make much more of a difference.

However, the outcomes at the end of secondary school reveal clearly the impact of what has gone before. They also account, to a large extent, for success in subsequent courses and qualifications and the prospects of a secure economic future thereafter.
Finally, we have found growing evidence that good schools and other providers with the missionary zeal to do more, are making a powerful difference. They do much to compensate for family shortcomings.

In particular, such schools ensure that no child remains unseen. They shine the spotlight on these children and bring them out of the shadows. The more this happens, the better they do. Some reach unforeseen heights.

I shall return to this later, but let me start by saying a bit more about our first theme.

**Poverty of expectation** bears harder on educational achievement than material poverty, hard though that can be. And these expectations start at home.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds very often have high ambitions, especially when they’re young. But the odds against achieving them can worsen with age.

All too often there comes a point at which expectations shrink. They don’t see their elder siblings or friends going to university, so they think it’s not for them. Or no-one in their household is in paid work, so they don’t expect to get a job. But where the family is supportive and demanding then in my experience the child is much more likely to succeed.

Success can be achieved in all communities. There have been striking changes to the pattern of achievement by the main ethnic groups in England over the last five years.

For example, Black African children have now caught up with - and Bangladeshi children have surpassed - the performance of White British children by the end of secondary school.

Let me give you another example. There is now almost no difference between the GCSE results of children who speak English as their mother tongue and those for whom English is an additional language.

When we consider those children entitled to free school meals, it is the White British children who do worst out of all the main ethnic groups. The underperformance of low-income White British pupils matters, particularly because they make up the majority – two-thirds – of such pupils. So the lowest-performing group of poor children is also the largest. If we don’t crack the problem of low achievement by poor White British boys and girls, then we won’t solve the problem overall.

Let me emphasise, this is not a gender issue. Poor, low-income White British girls do very badly. So we should stop talking about ‘white working class boys’ as if they are the only challenge.

It is sometimes said that ‘schools cannot do it alone’, but this is not quite true. Exceptional schools can make up for grave disadvantages faced by young people.
In the process they almost become surrogate parents. However, the job of schools is made so much easier, or so much harder, by the expectations that families have for their children. So as a society we have to create a culture of much higher expectations for young people, both in our homes and in our schools.

Far too many children fail because they live in families and attend schools which have far too low expectations of them. Poverty of expectation is insidious because it limits achievement and thus damages children’s prospects.

The most effective schools can and do make up the deficit. Our previous reports on outstanding schools in challenging circumstances absolutely demonstrate this. The very best of such schools and heads must be celebrated and incentivised to do more, and much more. I will return to this later.

Let me now turn to the geographical inequities for poor children.

Many children from poor families live in urban areas of social and economic disadvantage and go to schools serving concentrations of such pupils.

However, many don’t live in this kind of place at all. Often they are spread thinly, as an ‘invisible minority’ across areas that are relatively quite affluent.

Where do you think is the worst place in England to be a child from a poor family, in terms of educational opportunity? Is it inner London, Liverpool, Leeds or Manchester? Absolutely not at all. The evidence suggests that it’s West Berkshire.

Disadvantaged children in this lovely, affluent part of south east England last year had:

- the worst attainment in the whole country at primary school
- the second worst at secondary school
- and were in one of the bottom three local authorities for qualifications at 19.

West Berkshire is an example of a much wider problem affecting the relatively prosperous counties of south-east England. On the surface, the overall outcomes for these areas may look good but, for children eligible for free school meals, they hide deep and shocking failure.

So let me be absolutely clear this morning.

My first recommendation is for Ofsted. We will be tougher in future with schools which are letting their poor children down. Schools previously judged outstanding, which are not doing well by their poorest children, will be reinspected.

Other such unseen children are concentrated in small towns which are relatively isolated, including coastal towns. These places have rarely been the focus of the policy initiatives that have tended to operate in our big cities.
The distribution of underachievement has shifted. Twenty or thirty years ago, the problems were in urban areas. Inner London schools were the best funded and worst achieving in the country. Now, schools in inner and outer London are the best performing, and performance in parts of Birmingham, Greater Manchester, Liverpool and Leicester has also been transformed dramatically.

Let me show you what I mean.

[Show the two maps of the strongest and weakest schools for FSM pupils in England]

This map shows you secondary schools serving above average numbers of low income pupils, where they achieve very well. Look at the concentration in London. The next map also shows schools which are serving disadvantaged communities, but which are doing particularly badly for FSM pupils. And look at the different distribution.

Many of the invisible children inhabit the classrooms and corridors of the legions of coasting – or sometimes sinking - schools that populate the provinces and hug the coasts of England. Disadvantaged children are usually in a small minority in these schools. They keep most of their parents happy with broadly acceptable results and purport to do their best for the rest.

In the past, many of these coasting schools flew under Ofsted’s radar. They were not seriously challenged by the ‘satisfactory’ or ‘good’ judgements they routinely received when inspected.

The underachieving children, populating the middle or lower sets of secondary schools, often remained invisible even to some inspectors, who were not sufficiently assiduous in seeking them out. Too many primary schools were satisfied with Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2 without striving for Level 5 and now 6.

So in many areas of the country, we have underachieving poor children...

- in unremarkable schools...
- with complacent leadership...
- where there is poverty of expectation...
- and lack of challenge by governors, parents or local authorities.

Why, has education in seaside towns like Blackpool and Hastings been so poor?
(Although I am pleased to see positive signs recently in Hastings itself.)

Why is education so dire in much of Norfolk?

Why does East Anglia have so few National Leaders of Education?
Why are schools in Herefordshire and Shropshire letting down their Free School Meals pupils?

This is not good enough. I make no apologies for directing inspections towards schools that are anything less than good. They require improvement and we shall visit and revisit them until they do improve to good.

These coasting schools are not just those in coastal isolation. They are equally to be found in Kettering and Wokingham, Norwich and Newbury, and in many other places that you’ve just seen on the map.

The pattern of underachievement is particularly evident in a swathe of the country down the East and South-east of England. My Annual Report drew attention to this geographic preponderance of schools that were no better than satisfactory.

When I visited East Anglia recently and was interviewed on local radio, the presenter wasn’t surprised that I was questioning standards in his part of the country. His view was that complacency and sluggishness had prevailed for years in this part of the world. “You’ll never change that here” he said. Well, let me tell you, Ofsted will not let the providers in these areas continue to fail their children.

The eastern region includes local authority areas where national initiatives have left little trace. In these areas, National Leaders of Education and Teaching School Alliances have little foothold. In these areas, undue reliance is placed on school improvement services that lack impact and – increasingly – capacity.

And yet, when I visited an outstanding primary school in East Anglia, I saw the reverse. I saw fantastic outcomes, brilliant teaching and inspired leadership. It can be done.

There are such teachers, leaders and schools in all parts of the country – but in some areas, their power to have influence with schools more widely is stifled by complacency, mediocrity and timidity in school and local authority leadership.

So what is to be done about these geographical areas or regions of underachievement?

I very much favour the idea of sub-regional challenges, based on London Challenge, but adapted to the area or locality involved.

London Challenge was not a bureaucracy. I know that because I worked in it. It worked because school leaders with the credibility to convey tough messages led it. It was a lean and mean organisation backed by big-hitting politicians. These key ingredients can be applied elsewhere with very little additional resource.

Great leaders who run great schools have been showing for several years a wider moral commitment to help other schools improve. Why shouldn’t they now be regional players and take the lead in fixing schools across the country?
My second recommendation is, therefore, the development and roll-out of sub-regional challenges aimed particularly at raising the achievement of disadvantaged children.

I see sub-regional challenges as being absolutely key in driving forward and coordinating some of the other important changes that need to take place.

The most important of these is to attract and incentivise the best people to the leadership of underperforming schools in these areas.

Norfolk and Derbyshire, for example, have just a tiny handful of National Leaders of Education whilst other less needy local authorities are awash with them. Where is the strategy behind that?

We need more National Leaders of Education working in the places that need them most.

We need more National Leaders of Education with the experience and knowledge of working in the toughest and most complacent schools.

And, above all, we need a strategy that matches the supply of great leaders with the demand for them.

There is much for the National College [for Teaching and Leadership] to do here. Ofsted will make a commitment to work with the college and with government to recognise those who make the greatest contribution to system improvement. Those National Leaders of Education who are not prepared to take ownership of school improvement in areas of greatest need I believe should not be re-designated as such.

My third recommendation, therefore, is that a more strategic approach is taken to the appointment of National Leaders of Education and their matching with schools in need of support.

These sub-regional challenges can also help to ensure that good teachers are deployed in the areas of greatest need. This happens in countries where teachers are directly employed by the State. If, for example, the government contracted with a proportion of good teachers each year to do ‘National Teaching Service’, they could be deployed in the schools which need them most.

I know this goes against the grain of decentralisation and the free market but unless government is interventionist in this area, we are not going to get our most talented teachers to the schools in these areas. The government should work with Teaching Schools and others to identify and incentivise experienced and effective teachers who would be willing to work in these areas for a minimum period of time. To be a National Teacher could be seen as a badge of honour - a prestigious post with enhanced professional development and the likelihood of accelerated promotion.
It would not be unreasonable to expect that those who really flourish should be fast tracked into leadership positions across the country. Again, the National College, together with its brigade of Teaching School Alliances, would have a key part to play in implementing this important proposal.

*My fourth recommendation, therefore, is that government does more to ensure that teachers on funded schemes are directed to underperforming schools in less fashionable or more remote or challenging places. The concept of a ‘National Service Teacher’ should be an urgent consideration for government.*

I want to say something at this point about **underachievement within and across the education, learning and skills sectors**, beginning with Early Years provision for our poorest children.

**Underachievement starts from birth.** Children who fall behind in the early years of their life struggle to catch up. If by seven, children cannot read, the odds are stacked against them.

The good news is that this is much better understood now. Greater political focus and increased public funding have improved provision for the early years.

The bad news is that many children still don’t get the support they need to make a secure start. This is particularly true of children from our poorest families.

Effective nursery and primary schools set high expectations right from the very start. In these schools, children are introduced from the first day to structures and behaviours that help their learning. Clear routines bring order and security into their lives and help build self-assurance as well as awareness of the needs of others.

These schools and nurseries also go out of their way to engage with parents who may themselves have had a bad experience of education. They make strong use of family support and social workers, and routinely make pre-school visits to the home to get to know the children. They also ensure that parents are engaged from the start in their children’s education.

Most importantly, in the best nursery and primary schools there is a systematic, rigorous and consistent approach to assessment, right from the very start.

When children arrive in the nursery or reception class, the best schools quickly assess each child in terms of key skills such as language and grasp of numbers. They use this baseline to inform teaching and support for each child. They link frequent assessments of each child’s progress to the professional development and performance management of their staff.

Children in these schools make excellent progress, whatever their background. In such schools, only children with substantial learning difficulties or other barriers fail to achieve the benchmark level 4 in English and mathematics by the end of the primary stage.
It is most important that we learn from this good practice and apply the lessons nationally.

In particular, these schools interpret the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) flexibly and intelligently, rather than following them slavishly. These schools assess their children much earlier than required by the EYFS Profile, much earlier. In my view, the current timing of national assessment, at the end of Reception year, is too late. Children may have lost a vital year of learning by then.

In addition, these good schools focus their baseline assessments sharply on the key skills needed by young children to engage in learning. Their assessments emphasise a core of communication, language and literacy. The assessments are straightforward and carefully moderated to ensure accuracy. The schools use their assessments to track children's progress right through to the end of Key Stage 1.

The EYFS Profile, by comparison, is too broad an assessment and does not link effectively to subsequent Key Stage assessments. It provides a weak basis for accountability.

Therefore, in my view, a major change is necessary in our approach to assessment in the early years. There should be a direct link between national assessment in Reception and assessment at the end of Key Stage 1 in order to measure progress. In addition, if the government does not want to reintroduce external testing in these early years then it must ensure that moderation is more consistently applied by local authorities or others.

These changes would significantly improve schools' accountability for their work up to the end of Key Stage 1. Therefore:

*My fifth recommendation is for government to review assessment in reception and Key Stage 1, with a view to publishing progress measures from the start of school to the end of Key Stage 1.*

I turn now to the other end of the age range that we have considered, and particularly vocational education.

Let me make the assumption on the basis of what we know already, that a poor child has not made it successfully through pre-school, primary and secondary school. What chances has this child of making up ground in post-16 education and particularly in the college sector?

Let me give you one shocking, awful fact. Of the roughly seven out of 10 disadvantaged young people who leave school without the qualifications they need for employment, just one out of the seven will gain them by the time they reach the age of 19.

This attrition rate is a national disgrace. It leads to youth unemployment on its present scale and the stubbornly high levels of those not in education, employment or training.
Vocational and skills-based training has not been good for many years because successive governments have not shone a bright enough spotlight on it. Once again, these young people have remained in the shadows.

I was very critical of the FE and Skills sector in my Annual Report and questioned whether the ‘system was fit for purpose’. We face an apparent paradox. Too few young people reach 19 with the qualifications they need for employment. Yet so-called ‘success rates’ in colleges have been remarkably high.

This is palpable nonsense. It has arisen because providers have focused on the volume of qualifications and not on the real needs of individual learners and employers. This is an unacceptable situation. It has been reinforced by the perverse incentives of post-16 funding streams.

Over half of businesses are not confident of being able to find sufficient recruits with the right skills in the future. Two in five employers seeking recruits with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics skills find it hard or impossible to get them.¹

For too long, the FE and Skills sector has been the Cinderella of the education world. This must change, quickly.

I am encouraged by the government’s response to my critical annual report last year. Rigour and Responsiveness set a new welcome tone of high expectations and rapid intervention to support all FE and Skills providers to be good. It also promised to take more rapid action where failure or inadequacy is identified.

I welcome the establishment of a Further Education Commissioner. It will be an important position in an increasingly complex post-16 landscape. Many providers have opted for a broad generalist approach rather than focusing on specialist vocational provision. This might be appropriate in some areas but less so in others. In the case of poor quality and large generalist FE providers, radical measures are needed.

My sixth recommendation, therefore, is that the government should be more prepared to dismantle inadequate colleges that have grown too large to assure quality across their different activities. Smaller specialist units, including University Technology Colleges, should be created with stronger links to business, commerce and industry.

The level of employer engagement in the FE and skills sector must be strengthened greatly. More employers should be in schools, colleges and providers, advising on the curriculum and providing young people with the direct experience of work.

¹ Source – CBI Education and skills survey 2012 – p.38
Apprenticeships are the best way of developing young people’s vocational skills, giving them a greater chance of secure employment.

The number of apprentices is increasing, but mainly for the over-25 range. The focus now needs to be on the younger age group – 16-19 year olds - who would benefit from a rigorous level three apprenticeship over at least a two or three year period.

*My seventh recommendation, therefore, is that the Richard Review*² *should be fully implemented. It provides a sound basis on which to reform and grow this system.*

All learners will remain in full-time education beyond 16 from September 2013. It is essential while still at school that they have access to better, well-informed and, above all, independent advice about the full range of opportunities open to them post-16.

We need to have clearer information to help us track the plight of our most disadvantaged – those invisible children - as they grow into young adults and leave school. The free school meal status is recognised in schools and serves to hold headteachers to account for their contribution to improving social mobility.

If we believe the Pupil Premium is important pre-16 then surely we should consider making additional provision post-16 for our poorest students and tracking their progress from school through to employment. We should never lose sight of these young people.

*My eighth and final recommendation, therefore, is that all post-16 providers should report on the rate of progress and outcomes for all young people who had previously been eligible for free school meals.*

So let me recap my recommendations:

- *My first recommendation is for Ofsted. We will be tougher in future with schools which are letting down their poor children. Schools previously judged outstanding, which are not doing well by their poorest children, will be reinspected.*

- *My second recommendation is the development and roll-out of sub-regional challenges aimed particularly at raising the achievement of disadvantaged children.*

- *My third recommendation is that a more strategic approach is taken to the appointment of National Leaders of Education and their matching with schools in need of support.*

My fourth recommendation is that government does more to ensure that teachers on funded schemes are directed to underperforming schools in less fashionable or more remote or challenging places. The concept of a 'National Service Teacher' should be an urgent consideration for government.

My fifth recommendation is for government to review assessment in reception and Key Stage 1, with a view to publishing progress measures from the start of school to the end of Key Stage 1.

My sixth recommendation is that the government should be more prepared to dismantle inadequate colleges that have grown too large to assure quality across their different activities. Smaller specialist units, particularly University Technology Colleges, should be created with stronger links to business, commerce and industry.

My seventh recommendation is that the Richard Review\(^3\) should be fully implemented. It provides a sound basis on which to reform and grow this system.

My eighth and final recommendation is that all post-16 providers should report on the rate of progress and outcomes for all young people who had previously been eligible for free school meals.

I also make a commitment as Chief Inspector that Ofsted will revisit this issue every five years and not every 10.

By the next report in 2018, I hope I can say that most if not all of these recommendations have been implemented and that our poorest children have continued to improve their educational performance.

Nevertheless, everything I have said to this point is predicated on the political will of government and the determination of professionals to move these unseen children from the back of the class to the front, from the darkness into the sunlight.

There are stark consequences for our nation if we do not act with sufficient urgency and see it through. Extremists of every hue will feed upon the anger and despair of those not in employment and with poor prospects. We will continue to lose our place as a competitive nation and bear the costs of failure.

In conclusion, the quality of education and training is, I believe, the most important issue facing Britain today. In the long term, our success as a nation – our prosperity, our security, our society – depends on how well we raise and educate our young people. And for individual children and young people, education can make a huge difference to their health, happiness and fulfilment.

Fifty years ago, a key government committee led by John Newsom produced a report *Half our Future* which led to the raising of the school leaving age. He concluded:

“\[The greater the number of people who prove to be educable beyond all previous expectations . . . \textbf{the stronger the suspicion grows that the rest may have been underestimated also, and that we are somehow failing a substantial number of young people.}\]“\(^4\)

Our education system has undoubtedly got better over the past 50 years and certainly more than ‘half our future’ is now well served.

But our poorest children, roughly 20% of the nation’s children and young people, are still getting a raw deal. As Chief Inspector, I will only be happy if this report has the same impact as the Newsom report of half a century ago.

Thank you.

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