London Review of Education

LONDON REVIEW OF EDUCATION

UCLPRESS

Research article

The 'London effect': has it survived the Covid-19 pandemic? An analysis and a reflection on a response to the crisis from within the London education system

Sean Hayes,[1,*] Katharine Vincent[2]

[1] Former Local Government Officer and Honorary Fellow at the School of Education, University of Durham, UK
[2] Senior Director of Research, Innovation & Improvement, Mulberry Schools Trust, UK
* Correspondence: sean.hayes@carmo.myzen.co.uk

Submission date: 17 March 2025; Acceptance date: 19 October 2025; Publication date: 17 December 2025

How to cite
Hayes, S. and Vincent, K. (2025). The 'London effect': has it survived the Covid-19 pandemic? An analysis and a reflection on a response to the crisis from within the London education system. *London Review of Education*, *23*(1), 25. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.23.1.25.

Peer review
This article has been peer-reviewed through the journal's standard double-anonymous peer-review process, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

Abstract

This article examines whether the so-called 'London effect', in which London's schools outperformed the rest of England on key performance measures between 2003 and 2013, has persisted beyond the global Covid-19 pandemic. The research builds on previous work which demonstrated that the London effect had survived the high levels of change that characterised the school system in England since 2013, which included significant changes to the primary curriculum and the national assessment frameworks in both the primary and secondary phases. The research uses detailed analysis of educational attainment data, with its main focus being on determining whether the educational impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic adversely impacted the London effect or if London continued to remain the highest performing region in England after the pandemic. The analysis is based on the Key Stage 4 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)

examination results in 2023. The article concludes with a reflection on the policy context and how this might influence future developments within the London school system.

Keywords London; schools; Covid-19 pandemic; learning loss; disadvantaged and vulnerable students; GCSE results; Reconnect London

Introduction: the London effect

The term *London effect* has become the widely accepted descriptor for the rapid improvements made by London's schools over a period of 10 years from 2003 to 2013. Those improvements were based on standard attainment measures, with primary and secondary schools consistently outperforming the rest of the country in examinations taken by pupils aged 10–11 (Key Stage [KS] 2) and 15–16 (KS 4). Improvements in many London boroughs were remarkable, with London first outperforming national averages at KS 2 in 2009 and at KS 4 in 2004. This article explores whether the shift in educational outcomes in London between 2003 and 2013 has been sustained in 2023, following the global Covid-19 pandemic that occurred between 2020 and 2022. It builds on previous work by one of the authors (Hayes et al., 2018) which demonstrated that the London effect had survived the high levels of change that characterised the school system in England between 2014 and 2016. The article also considers the policy context which supported the emergence of the London effect and how this might be built on into the future.

How did the 'London effect' come about?

Although interest in a so-called London effect in schools intensified from 2013 onwards (Burgess, 2014; Cook, 2013; Hayes and Cassen, 2014; Mujtaba, 2016), to understand the genesis of the London effect, one needs to return to looking at educational outcomes in London in the 1980s and 1990s. In those decades the picture of educational outcomes in London was a mixed one, with some very low outcomes, particularly in the local authorities that made up Inner London. Radford (2009) reminds us that state education in Inner London was delivered through the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) from 1964 to 1990, though the ILEA was abolished in April 1990 through regulations that were part of the Education Reform Act (1988). This ended the unitary system of education that had existed in Inner London for over a hundred years.

In comparison with educational outcomes in London in 2013, the results achieved by many schools in the ILEA in the 1980s looked poor, though they were robustly defended at the time (Gray and Jesson, 1987; Inner London Education Authority, 1982). In 1981, only 13.9 per cent of White British boys achieved 5+ Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) Grade 1 or Ordinary (O) Levels at Grade A–C, while only 10.0 per cent of Black Caribbean boys achieved the same benchmark. It is clear from the failure of many earlier and subsequent initiatives to raise standards in inner city schools that the problem was both ingrained and complex. The CSE and O Level qualifications were replaced by the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), with GCSEs first introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 1986 and the first exams taking place in 1988.

The Education Reform Act (1988), which devoted a lot of its legislative content to abolishing the ILEA, also led to the introduction of the national curriculum and a new assessment framework in England at KS 1 to 5. Educational standards in the majority of the 12 Inner London local education authorities, created following the closure of the ILEA in 1990, did not start to rise substantially in the early part of that decade. In 1995 one of this article's authors (SH) was working in Hammersmith and Fulham local authority and remembers three secondary schools in the borough having fewer than 10 per cent of students achieving 5+ A*–C grades at GCSE, against a national average at the time of 43.5 per cent (Department for Education, 1995). One of those schools had been branded in the national media in 1994 as 'the worst school in Britain'. By 1998 the school had become the model for the government's Fresh Start drive to turn around failing schools (Russell, 1998) and part of what would later become known as the London effect. The second author (KV) started her teaching career in the early 2000s in an East London

secondary school which experienced rapid improvement as part of the London Challenge and was later identified as one of 'Twelve outstanding secondary schools: Excelling against the odds' (Ofsted, 2009).

Table 1 shows the GCSE results for the percentage of students achieving 5+ A*–C GCSEs (including English and mathematics) at four points in time – 1998, 2003, 2008 and 2013 – for the 12 Inner London local authorities that had made up the ILEA. In 1998 all 12 of the Inner London local authorities were performing below the England average of 37.0 per cent and most of them would have been considered a cause for concern. The full dataset for Inner and Outer London local authorities indicates that only nine London local authorities were performing above the national average for this measure and all of them were in Outer London.

Table 1. GCSE performance in 1998, 2003, 2008 and 2013 in the 12 London LAs that made up the ILEA (Source: Department for Education (DfE) Statistical First Releases [SFRs])

Local Authority (LA)	ILEA LA London Designation*	% 5+ A*–C (including English and Maths)			
		1998	2003	2008	2013
Camden	Inner	34.6	40.1	45.3	60.4
Greenwich	Inner	23.3	26.4	39.5	65.4
Hackney	Inner	16.9	26.5	42.4	61.2
Hammersmith and Fulham	Inner	35.0	42.6	55.9	66.5
Islington	Inner	15.6	22.5	38.3	63.5
Kensington and Chelsea	Inner	29.5	45.1	58.1	80.2
Lambeth	Inner	19.7	30.1	46.9	65.9
Lewisham	Inner	22.2	30.1	45.8	58.0
Southwark	Inner	18.2	26.3	42.7	65.2
Tower Hamlets	Inner	17.7	25.5	41.2	64.7
Wandsworth	Inner	26.3	37.1	50.0	61.3
Westminster	Inner	24.8	37.1	49.6	69.6
Inner London	**Inner**	**NA**	**NA**	**45.5**	**63.1**
Outer London	**Outer**	**NA**	**NA**	**53.0**	**66.0**
London	**Region**	**NA**	**NA**	**50.7**	**65.1**
England	**National**	**37.0**	**41.9**	**48.4**	**60.8**
Number of Inner London LAs above the England Average		**0**	**2**	**4**	**10**

Notes: * The 12 local authorities listed in this table were the 12 that made up the Inner London Education Authority until its closure in April 1990. Thereafter, Greenwich was re-designated as being in Outer London and Haringey and Newham were re-designated as Inner London. This resulted in 13 local authorities being designated as Inner London. The Corporation of London is geographically in Inner London but it does not have any state-funded secondary schools, so it does not appear in the DfE tables of GCSE results.

The data in Table 1 show that only two of the 12 local authorities of the ILEA had exceeded the national average by 2003 and four had done so by 2008. However, by 2013, 10 out of the 12 had exceeded the England average, while the two that had not, Camden and Lewisham, were within 1 and 3 percentage points respectively of the England average. By 2008 the overall London average had surpassed the England average and by 2013 Inner and Outer London were both outperforming the England average. By 2013 the London landscape, in terms of educational outcomes for young people at 16 years old, had well and truly changed from the 1980s and 1990s. It is this transformation in outcomes, repeated across the primary and secondary phases, that came to be known as the London effect.

https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.23.1.25

What factors contributed to London's success? A brief history and review of the literature

Many individuals and organisations played a part in the transformational change in London's educational outcomes in the 10 years from 2003 to 2013. This includes the students themselves, teachers, school leaders and governors, local authority directors, school improvement officers and elected members, the trade unions, educational researchers and performance data analysts. During this time, key policy changes, including London Challenge and the introduction of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), were important, and education was a key focus for the Labour government from 1997 to 2010 and the Coalition government from 2010 to 2015.

It is likely that some contextual circumstances particular to London might have helped to enable the transformational change in educational outcomes. These include the resilience of London's economy, the demographic profile of London with its ethnically and linguistically diverse population (Burgess, 2014), and the ability of London's teachers to effectively meet the language, cultural and learning needs of their diverse student population. It is nearly impossible to disentangle which of these made the most impact, and it is difficult to assess what other factors might have contributed to the success.

By the 1990s London's economy was more successful and more resilient than that of other regions of England, and as a major financial centre it compared favourably with other international capital cities in the developed world, even though its educational outcomes in the 1990s were not good compared with other English regions and national averages. Against this national and international backdrop, Baars et al. (2014) addressed the following question: do greater levels of economic and cultural dynamism in London compared with the rest of England provide an important stimulus for learning and achievement?

> London has been the most economically successful and culturally rich part of England for centuries, including those years in the 1980s and 1990s when London schools were notorious for underachievement. While recognising the beneficial impact of London's economy and cultural assets, these factors do not seem to be a convincing explanation for the transformation of London schools between 2000 and 2013. Our assessment of the question of opportunity leads us to conclude that while the dynamism of London is of value to young people in the city it does not constitute a major cause of the London improvement. (p. 54)

Baars et al. (2014) effectively concluded that the dynamism and economic success of London was not the key factor in explaining the London effect.

In the 2000s, the single biggest educational intervention in London was the Department for Education's (DfE) London Challenge school improvement programme, established in 2003 to improve outcomes in low-performing secondary schools in the capital, with primary schools included from 2008. The London Challenge was led by two key players: Tim Brighouse, the ex-Birmingham Council Chief Education Officer and London Schools' Commissioner, and David Woods, the ex-Principal National Challenge Adviser for England and Chief Adviser for London Schools. It used independent, experienced education experts (London Challenge advisers) to identify need and broker support for underperforming schools. The advisers were supported by a small administrative team based in the DfE. The cost of the support and the brokered services came directly from the DfE and was spent as the advisers directed. The London Challenge had four core elements:

- a consistent message about the pressing need to improve educational standards
- programmes of support to local authorities, which were managed by experienced and credible London Challenge advisers
- improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools
- developing robust systems to track pupils' progress and using data to evaluate effectiveness.

The most significant evaluation of the London Challenge was carried out by Hutchings et al. (2011) in a report for the DfE, *Evaluation of the City Challenge Programme*, which evaluated the programme in London, as well as those in Greater Manchester and the Black Country. Another feature of the London Challenge was that it worked with local authority school improvement advisers, and the evaluation by Hutchings et al. (2011) acknowledges that 'To be effective, capacity building with local authorities has to involve working as partners' (p. 95). Many local authority advisers reported that there was effective

partnership and that this benefitted them and the schools. There was some evidence that working with the Challenge advisers had resulted in some changes to the way that the local authority conducted school reviews, that is, they became more focused on teaching and learning. Several local authority interviewees talked about the key role that Challenge advisers had played, both in expanding the number of people working on school improvement in their boroughs and in developing the expertise of the local authority school improvement teams. However, some local authority officers also felt that the City Challenge did not recognise the work the local authorities had been doing in their schools over an extended period and was claiming credit for improved results which were related to previous groundwork they had undertaken. One local authority officer argued that 'they're very much airbrushing out the contribution made by local authorities to the success of the Challenge' (Hutchings et al., 2011, p. 96).

Previous work by Hayes and Cassen (2014) and Hayes et al. (2018) explored the essence of this tension and concluded that the London Challenge was one key factor that contributed to the positive change in educational outcomes in London. The London Challenge provided a significant catalyst for many London local authorities and their schools to embark on a journey of rapid improvement but it did not achieve the successful educational outcomes on its own. It was most successful when DfE advisers worked in effective and collaborative partnerships with local authority school improvement teams; together, they played an important part in improving educational standards. Tim Brighouse's (2014) view was that London Challenge played a large part and that 'it made more good things happen and fewer bad things happen' (n.p.). Hutchings et al. (2011) concluded:

> Perhaps the most effective aspect of City Challenge was that it recognised that individuals and school communities tend to thrive when they feel trusted, supported and encouraged. The ethos of the programme, in which successes were celebrated and it was recognised that if teachers are to inspire pupils they themselves need to be motivated and inspired, was a key factor in its success. (p. 110)

It is reasonable to read into this that the City Challenges, including the London Challenge, were most effective when all parties worked together, including schools, Challenge advisers and local authority school improvement staff. It is also important to acknowledge that the educational outcomes show that the London Challenge was more successful than those in Greater Manchester and the Black Country.

There were clearly factors in common among the local authorities whose schools achieved some of the greatest improvements, including excellent leadership, a focus on school improvement, improved teaching and learning, pupil tracking and the use of performance data, continuing professional development, partnership working, and community involvement and development (Baars et al., 2014; Demie and McLean, 2015; Woods et al., 2013). The report by Woods et al. (2013) demonstrated how effectively one Inner London local authority, Tower Hamlets, turned around its educational outcomes from having been positioned in 1997 as 149th out of 149 local education authorities in England in terms of its performance. Woods et al. (2013) identified six major factors which the council believed explained their experience and successful approach to turning around educational outcomes:

- shared values and beliefs, with robust and resilient purpose and professional will
- highly effective and ambitious leadership at all levels: local authority and schools
- schools rising to the standards challenge: improved teaching and learning, enhanced Continuing Professional Development, rigorous pupil tracking and assessment, a relentless focus on school improvement
- partnership working: inward and outward facing with shared responsibility and accountability
- community development: building collaborative capacity and community cohesion
- a professional learning community: building momentum and engagement through and across school communities, high levels of knowledge, trust and professional relationships.

The report concludes with this positive endorsement of what Tower Hamlets achieved:

> it is not unreasonable to argue that what Tower Hamlets has created are some of the best urban schools in the world. This is a genuinely exceptional achievement, worth celebrating, worth understanding, but, above all, worth learning from. (p. 57)

The report by Demie and McLean (2015) similarly shows how Lambeth Council transformed its educational outcomes from a low base in the mid-1990s. This report identified 10 key factors that underpinned the successful transformation of the local authority:

- ambitious local authority leadership at all levels
- strong school leadership
- high-quality teaching and learning
- effective school improvement service
- effective research and data service
- maintaining strong partnerships and trust
- effective support for schools causing concern and use of local initiatives
- tackling disadvantage beyond the school gates
- effective governing body
- effective support for pupils who speak English as an additional language.

The overall conclusion from this report is that

> Lambeth LA has bucked the national trend through the use of a range of strategies to raise educational attainment at Key Stage 2 and GCSE, and has transformed education in its schools. (p. 4)

The report by Baars et al. (2014) also referenced the approaches to school improvement being taken in Haringey and Hackney councils and said that they had 'a similar theory of action as Tower Hamlets', based on first-rate leadership of the school improvement service, a tough approach to the performance management of headteachers, a strong emphasis on the use of data, and effective professional development for leaders and class teachers.

The research by Hayes et al. (2018) demonstrated that the London effect had survived the high levels of change that characterised the school system in England between 2013 and 2016. These included significant changes to the primary curriculum and the national assessment frameworks in the primary and secondary phases. In the secondary phase this included policy changes to make GCSEs more rigorous by reducing or removing course work requirements, moving to linear examinations, and qualifications such as BTECs only being allowed to count as a single GCSE equivalent and not two or four GCSE equivalents as some of them had counted in previous performance measures (Parameshwaran and Thomson, 2015). Despite those changes, the reported outcomes at KS 2 and KS 4 in 2016 (Hayes et al., 2018) clearly showed that London remained the pre-eminent region in England for educational performance, including outcomes for progress and attainment.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education

In early 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic had become a worldwide issue of dramatic medical concern. The impact of the pandemic was felt across the globe and just as it impacted on family life, the world of work and the social lives of everyone, it also had a dramatic effect on how education was delivered between 2020 and 2022.

The Covid-19 pandemic in the UK was part of the worldwide pandemic of coronavirus disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS CoV-2). The UK government and each of the three devolved governments in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales introduced public health and economic measures, including new laws, to mitigate its impact, including a series of national lockdowns, with the first of these introduced on 23 March 2020.

In the world of education from 23 March 2020, as part of the measures taken to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic, the DfE closed schools to all children except those identified as vulnerable and children of key workers. Some year groups returned to school on 1 June 2020, although many schools and local councils delayed children's return until after this date and most children did not return until September 2020. In reality most primary and secondary school students returned to classes for the first time in early September, almost six months after their schools closed.

https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.23.1.25

On 4 January 2021, after the Christmas break, the governments of Wales, Scotland and then England introduced further measures to deal with the second Covid-19 wave. Schools in Wales would remain shut for in-person teaching in favour of online teaching. In Scotland a new lockdown included postponing the opening of schools for face-to-face teaching until 1 February, instead moving to online teaching. In England, schools had already started to open when they were instructed to switch to remote learning until at least the February half term. Schools in Northern Ireland also closed, although nurseries and special schools were kept open.

The impact of school closures on pupils' learning

Much has been written (Betthäuser et al., 2023; Cole and Kingsley, 2022; Ofsted, 2020a, 2020b) about the impact of school closures on pupils' learning and progress, particularly the impact on disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils. A report published in October 2020 by Ofsted on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children in England after their first period out of school found that more school leaders talked about

> pupils having many gaps in their learning, or having regressed, than in the visits that took place earlier in the term. This is likely to be because they had had more time to assess pupils to find out what they had learned during the first national lockdown, and what learning was not yet secure (Ofsted, 2020a, p. 10).

The subsequent report published in November 2020 by Ofsted found that while some children had coped well with lockdown, often enjoying the extra time with their families, others had struggled, regressing academically and losing basic skills, such as young children who had previously been potty trained returning to wearing nappies. The report said, 'Now that [school] leaders have had more time to assess their pupils … many believe the learning lost over the first national lockdown was extensive' (Ofsted, 2020b, p. 2). The report also indicated that children with special educational needs had been particularly badly impacted by the pandemic.

Some commentators also questioned the efficacy of national school closures during the pandemic. In the book *The Children's Inquiry*, Cole and Kingsley (2022) argued that school closures were unnecessary for children and young people, predicated on the grounds that 'as we now know the survival rate among children and adolescents appears to be around 99.995%' (Smith et al., 2022, p. 16). While this is the statistical data on survival rates, we do not know what would have happened if schools had not closed. There was a significant risk to teachers and to support staff, who were more likely to be in high-risk groups. While school-aged children have high survival rates, their infection rates were high, so they were often carriers of infection back home to families. Nadhim Zahawi, who was then Secretary of State for Education, said in March 2022 that 'school closures were a mistake' (Mikhailova, 2022); nonetheless, they did happen and there is a significant volume of research showing that they had a detrimental effect on the education of many children and young people (Breslin, 2021; Edwards et al., 2021).

One such study is an international one (Betthäuser et al., 2023) which asked the question: 'To what extent has the learning progress of school-aged children slowed down during the COVID-19 pandemic?' Their work was based on a pre-registered systematic review, a quality appraisal and a meta-analysis of 42 studies across 15 countries and they assessed the magnitude of learning deficits during the pandemic. They considered all types of primary research, including peer-reviewed publications, preprints, working papers and reports, for inclusion. To be eligible for inclusion, studies had to measure learning progress using test scores that could be standardised across studies using Cohen's *d*.

They observed a substantial overall learning deficit (Cohen's $d = -0.14$, 95 per cent confidence interval -0.17 to -0.10), which arose early in the pandemic and persisted over time. They found that the learning deficits were particularly large among children from low socio-economic backgrounds and that they were also larger in maths than in reading and in middle-income countries relative to high-income countries. They also found that learning progress slowed substantially during the pandemic. The effect sizes in their research are expressed in standard deviations and they suggest that under normal circumstances, students generally improve their performance by around 0.4 standard deviations per school year. Thus, the overall effect of $d = -0.14$ suggests that students lost out on 0.14/0.4 standard deviations, or about 35 per cent of a school year's worth of learning. In a typical school year of around nine months, this equates to an average loss of three months' worth of learning.

https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.23.1.25

Research from the Education Policy Institute (EPI) and Renaissance for the Department for Education (2022) found that primary pupils in the 2021/22 autumn term had shown signs of recovery since the 2020/21 summer term but for students in secondary schools, in reading, there were further learning losses over this period. At a national level in reading in primary schools they found an average learning loss by the end of the first half of the 2021/22 autumn term of 0.8 months, though this learning loss was largely unchanged since the end of the 2020/21 summer term. This chimes with Betthäuser et al. (2023), who found: 'our results also suggest that fears of an accumulation of learning deficits as the pandemic continues have not materialized' (p. 381). However, the research for the EPI found that secondary school students were on average 2.4 months behind in reading by the end of the first half of the autumn term 2020/21 and this had increased by 0.5 months since the end of the summer term.

This research also found that learning losses were lower in London in both primary and secondary schools compared with other parts of the UK. This finding is supported by another piece of research by the EPI (Sibieta and Cottell, 2020) which showed that the amount of learning taking place at home during the lockdown period varied greatly among the English regions and across all four UK countries. They found that hours of home schooling by parents and carers were highest in London, the South East and South West of England, with around a quarter of pupils learning for over four hours per day, while hours were lower in other English regions and the other jurisdictions of the UK. In this context home schooling is not to be conflated with home education, which is where children have been removed from school and receive full-time education at home from their parents or carers. The fact that home schooling rates in London were higher than in other parts of the country may have contributed to the relatively lower rates of learning loss for students in the capital.

A meta-analysis of 10 studies on learning loss during the pandemic carried out for the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) (Newton et al., 2021) reported similar findings to those of other researchers. The report makes it clear that there are limits to the conclusions that can legitimately be drawn from the 10 studies, owing to the limited scope of the available attainment data to enable valid observations, but there are many other studies which back up the findings (Blainey and Hannay, 2021; Di Pietro, 2023; Education Endowment Foundation, 2020; Milanovic et al., 2023; Nelson et al., 2021).

In their meta-analysis Betthäuser et al. (2023) found in most of the studies they examined that

> learning deficits have been largest for children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. This holds across different timepoints during the pandemic, countries, grade levels and learning subjects, and independently of how socio-economic background is measured. It suggests that the pandemic has exacerbated educational inequalities between children from different socio-economic backgrounds, which were already large before the pandemic. (p. 381)

Tony Breslin (2021) makes the same point in his book *Lessons from Lockdown: The Educational Legacy of Covid-19*, saying that 'Inequalities of outcome have been a challenge for education systems the world over since the inception of mass schooling' (p. 32). He goes on to quote Amanda Spielman, then Ofsted chief inspector of schools, who acknowledged:

> Although many children have continued to learn well, and will bounce back … it's a sad fact that children will have had very unequal experiences at home. Not every child will have had a quiet place to work, a supportive adult … or access to technology; many will have become demotivated, even with all of these. For some catching up on lost learning won't be easy. (p. 36)

One of the things London schools had done consistently well since the upturn in educational outcomes in the capital was to secure better outcomes for disadvantaged pupils compared with other regions in England. As early as 2012, Chris Cook's analysis (Cook, 2013) of the national data for GCSEs in England showed that students for every Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) income decile achieved better GCSE Average Points Scores compared with all other English regions. The analytical section of this article explores outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils to see if London has continued to achieve better outcomes for them post-pandemic, as it had done pre-pandemic.

Methodology

The methodological approach adopted in this research has been a quantitative analysis of educational attainment and progress data taken from Statistical First Releases from the DfE. The analysis includes data at the national level for England and regional data at the level of Government Regional Office. The analysis focuses on educational outcomes at KS 4 in 2022/23 (Department for Education, 2024).

Key Stage 4 GCSE performance in the school year 2022/23

This research uses an analysis of the 2023 GCSE results in England as the basis for answering the question: did the London effect survive the Covid-19 pandemic?

After three years of teacher-assessed grades being reported at GCSE – 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 – it was decided to focus on the results in the first year, that is, 2022/23, that GCSE examinations returned to being assessed on the same basis as in 2018/19, the last full school year before the pandemic started. It is this analysis of the 2022/23 GCSE results that is being used to test whether or not the London effect has survived the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The main approach is to compare the 2022/23 GCSE performance in London with the other regions in England. The analysis will include performance breakdowns for Inner London, Outer London and London overall and the other English regions, which are the following: North East, North West, Yorkshire and The Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, East of England, South East and South West.

Figure 1 provides the percentage of students achieving Grade 4 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs by English region in 2022/23. The GCSE outcome for London, at 71.2 per cent, shows that London outperformed the England average of 65.4 per cent by 5.8 percentage points. Outer London students outperformed the England average by 6.5 percentage points and Inner London did so by 4.3 percentage points.

Figure 1. Percentage of students achieving Grades 4+ in English and maths GCSEs by English region in 2022/23

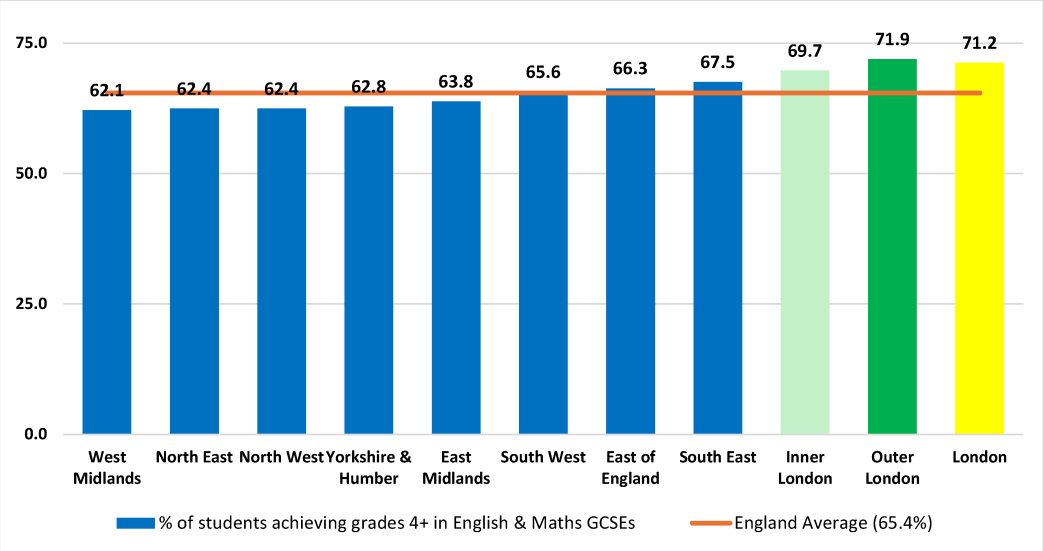


Figure 2 provides the percentage of students achieving Grade 5 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs by English region in 2022/23. This is the more challenging of the two English and mathematics GCSE measures as 5 is a higher grade than 4 in the scale which goes from 9, the highest grade, to 1, the lowest grade. On this measure the GCSE outcome for London, at 54.1 per cent, shows that London outperformed the England average of 45.5 per cent by 8.6 percentage points. Outer London students outperformed the England average by 9.4 percentage points and Inner London did so by 6.9 percentage points.

https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.23.1.25

Figure 2. Percentage of students achieving Grades 5+ in English and maths GCSEs by English region in 2022/23

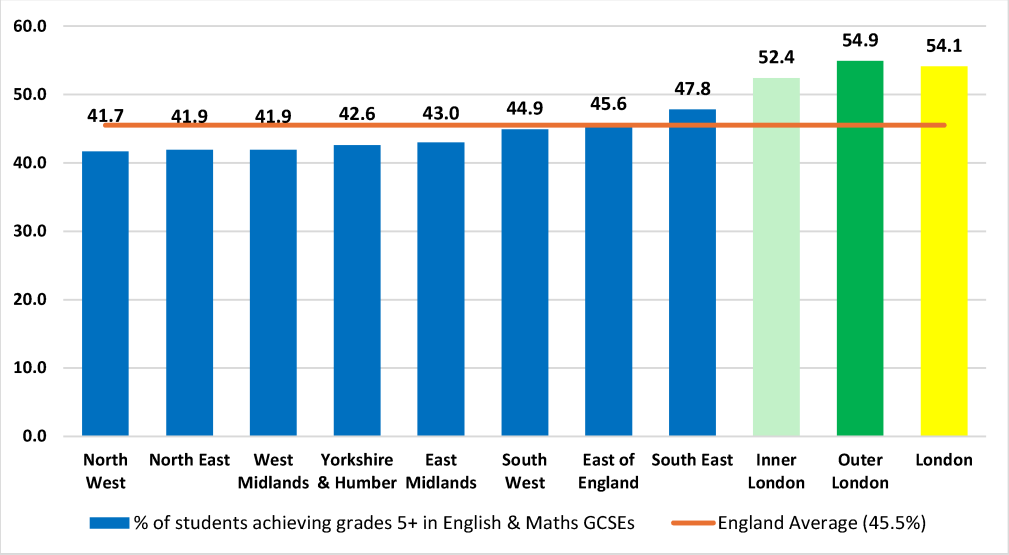
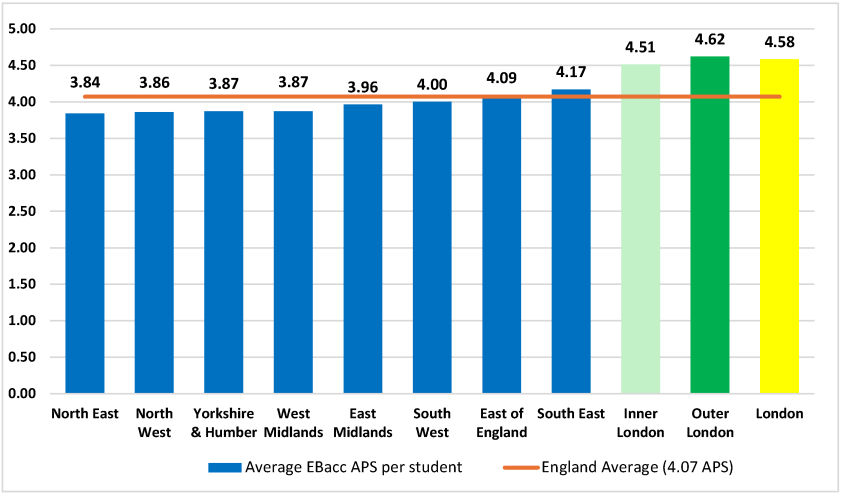


Figure 3 shows the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) average point score (APS) per student by English region in 2022/23. The EBacc is an accountability measure in England. It originally measured the proportion of children who secured a Grade 5 or above in English, maths, science, a humanity (all history or geography) and a language GCSE. Arts subjects are not included. Now to achieve the EBacc students must study at least seven GCSEs and the qualification is made up of:

- English language and literature (both)
- Mathematics
- The sciences (at least 2)
- Geography or history
- A language (modern or ancient).

Figure 3. English Baccalaureate Average Point Score per Student by English Region at GCSE in 2022/23

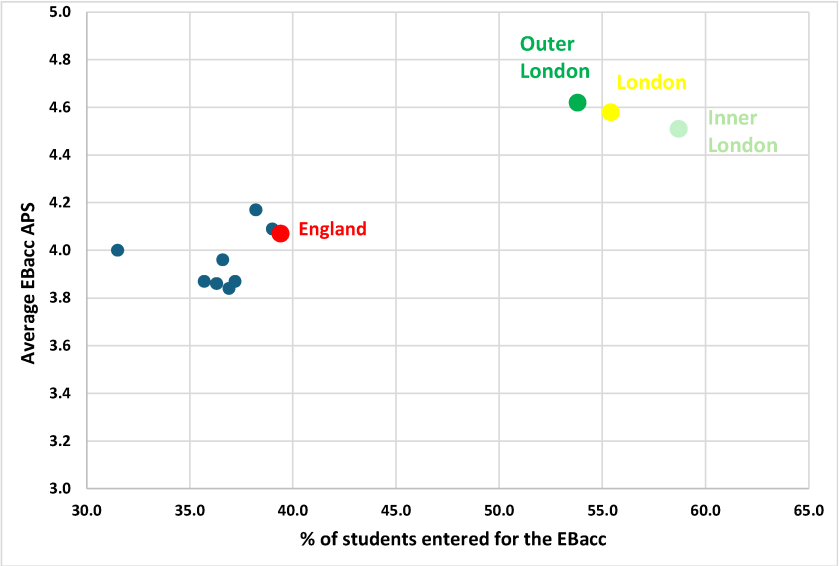


The EBacc measure is now expressed as an APS across all these qualifications that the student must be entered for. To calculate a school's EBacc APS or a region's EBacc APS we add together the EBacc APS for all students at the end of KS 4 and divide it by the number of students in the group. To calculate a student's APS we take an average of the points scored in the five EBacc subject areas; however, the EBacc is a performance measure for schools, not a qualification for individual students.

The outcomes in Figure 3 show that London, with an APS of 4.58, outperformed the England APS of 4.07 by 0.51 points, which is the equivalent of London students achieving half a GCSE grade better across all of the EBacc subjects than the average for all students nationally.

Not all students are expected to be entered for all the subjects that make up the EBacc, so it is of interest to look at the EBacc entry rates by region and to set them alongside the performance in the EBacc. Figure 4 is a scatterplot which plots the entry rate on the X axis and the APS on the Y axis. This figure highlights the London regions, Inner, Outer and Overall as well as the England performance and shows that entry rates and performance levels are higher in Inner and Outer London compared with the England average and with all other English regions. Before the significant improvements occurred in London's GCSE results between 2003 and 2013, the view was largely that London's schools were more likely to enter students for more vocational GCSEs and other GCSE equivalent qualifications, such as Business and Technology Education Council examinations (BTECs). However, the previous work of Hayes et al. (2018) showed that this had largely ceased to be the case based on the GCSE results in 2015/16. This analysis of EBacc outcomes, which is ostensibly an academic raft of GCSE qualifications, indicates that in terms of both entry rates and average grades achieved, London's students are performing, on average, better than those in the rest of England. This continues to dispel the myth that London only performs well because of its schools entering students for GCSE equivalent qualifications, or in other words, less academic subjects.

Figure 4. EBacc APS per student plotted against the percentage of students entered for the EBacc by English region at GCSE in 2022/23



Attainment 8 is a broad-based GCSE performance measure which covers the achievement of a student across eight qualifications, including mathematics and English (both double-weighted to signify their importance), three further qualifications that count in the EBacc measure, and three further qualifications that can be GCSE qualifications (including EBacc subjects) or any other non-GCSE qualifications on the DfE approved list. Each individual grade a student achieves is assigned a point score, which are then added together to give a student's Attainment 8 score.

Figure 5 illustrates the average Attainment 8 scores by English region in 2022/23. The outturns show that Inner and Outer London had higher Attainment 8 scores than all other regions. Performance in

https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.23.1.25

London, at 50.6, was 4.2 points better than national, at 46.4. Like the outcomes in the EBacc, the regional Attainment 8 scores confirm that London is the best performing region in England for attainment at KS 4.

Figure 5. Average Attainment 8 score by English region at GCSE in 2022/23

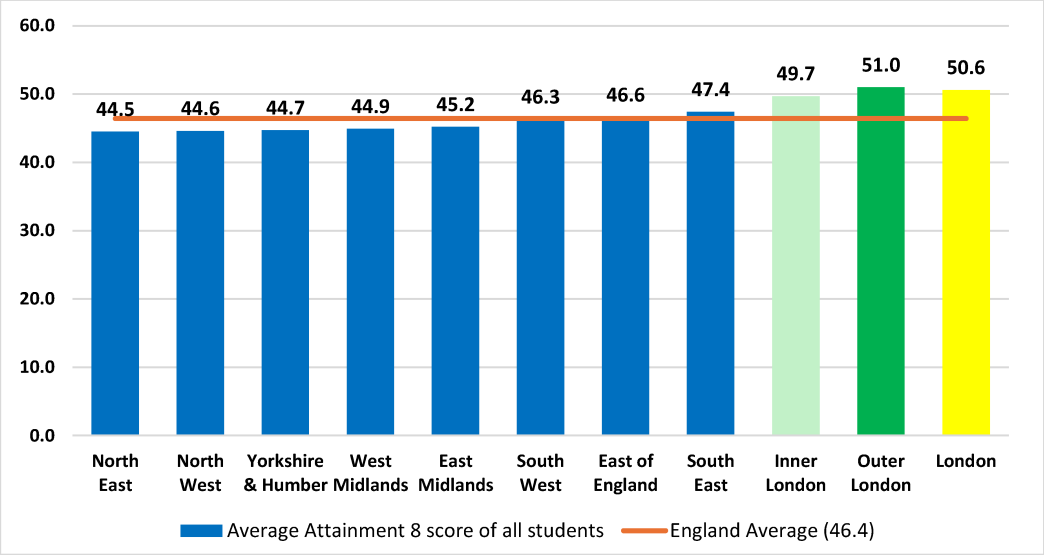
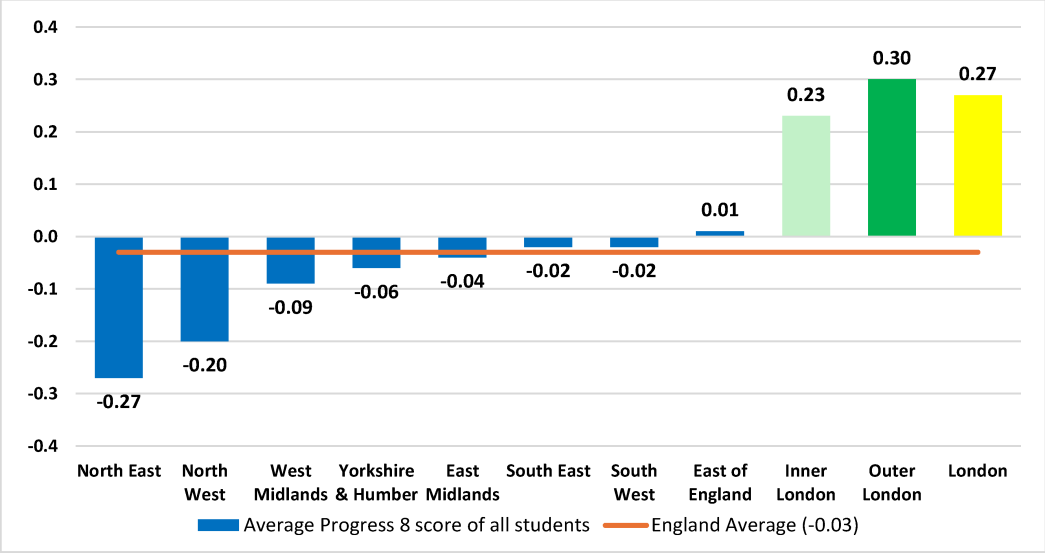


Figure 6 shows the average Progress 8 scores by English region in 2022/23. Progress 8 compares students' KS 4 results with those of other students nationally with similar prior attainment from KS 2. While the calculation is complicated, in straightforward terms, students' Attainment 8 scores are adjusted to take account of their prior attainment at KS 2 and Progress 8 scores are centred around a national average of 0 (zero), with a positive score meaning students have made more progress than similar students nationally and a negative score meaning they have made less progress than similar students nationally.

Figure 6. Average Progress 8 score by English region at GCSE in 2022/23



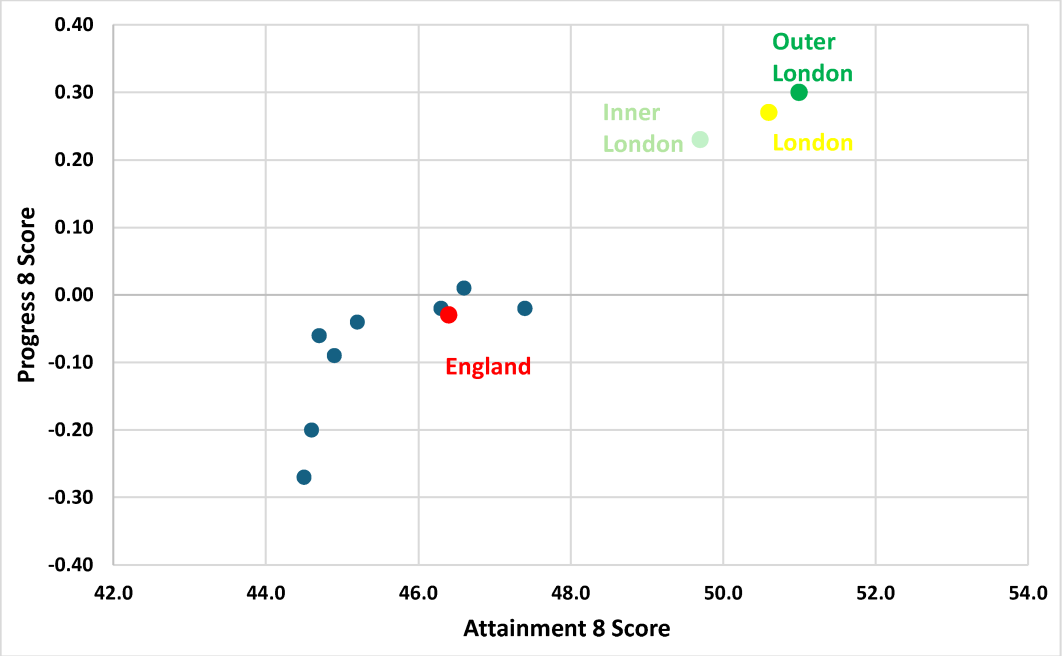
The outcomes in Figure 6 show that Inner and Outer London outperformed all other English regions on the Progress 8 measure. The overall Progress 8 score for London, at 0.27, was 0.30 points higher than

https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.23.1.25

the score for England of -0.03. This means that students in London achieved almost one-third of a grade higher in each GCSE subject compared with students with similar prior attainment nationally, and this is also an improvement on the performance in 2015/16 as reported by Hayes et al. (2018), when students in London achieved around a sixth of a grade higher in each GCSE subject compared with similar students nationally. The GCSE outcomes for Attainment 8 in Figure 5 and for Progress 8 in Figure 6 confirm that London is the best performing region in England in terms of attainment and progress at KS 4.

Figure 7 is a scatterplot which illustrates the relationship between Attainment 8 scores on the X axis and Progress 8 scores on the Y axis, that is, the relationship between attainment and progress. This figure shows all English regions and highlights the London regions, Inner, Outer and Overall as well as the England performance and shows that attainment scores and progress scores are higher in Inner and Outer London compared with the England average and with all other English regions; in fact, only one other region outside London, the East of England, had a positive Progress 8 score, and that was only slightly positive at 0.01.

Figure 7. Average Progress 8 score plotted against average Attainment 8 score by English region at GCSE in 2022/23



The performance of disadvantaged and vulnerable students at GCSE in 2022/23

There was genuine concern that disadvantaged and vulnerable students were being disproportionately adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and this was explored in the research literature (Betthäuser et al., 2023; Breslin, 2021; Moss et al., 2021; Newton et al., 2021), so it is important to consider the outcomes for disadvantaged students and outcomes for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to see how these students performed across the English regions at GCSE in 2022/23.

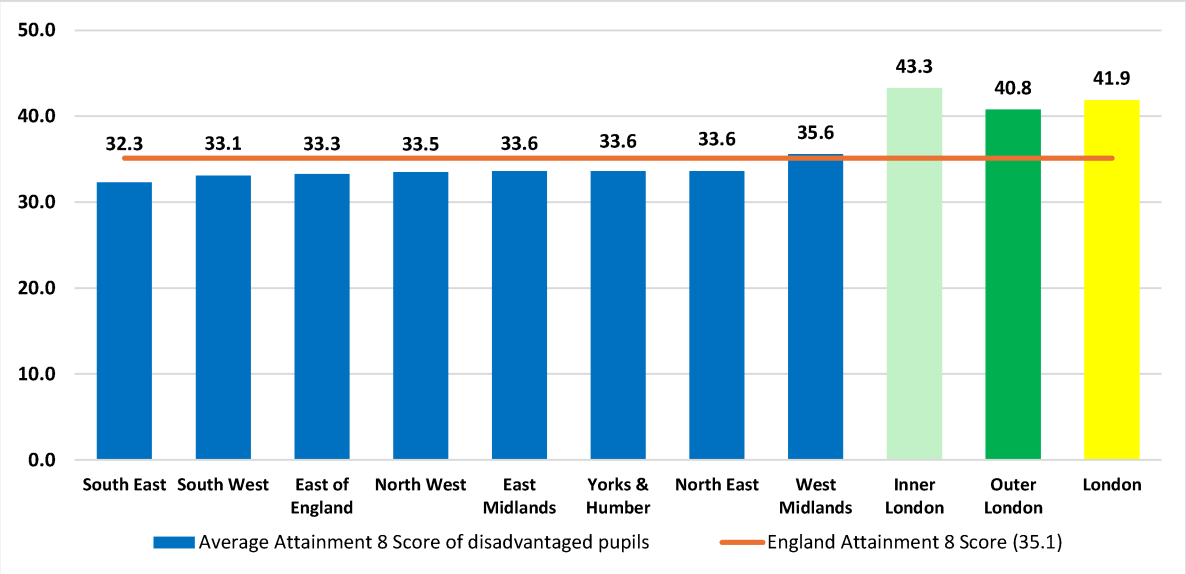
The DfE defines disadvantaged pupils as those who are eligible for free school meals or have been eligible at some point in the past six years, and those who are looked-after children (namely, children in the care of the local authority). It is a broad measure of the students who are disadvantaged, and by using this definition the performance of disadvantaged students can be compared on a consistent basis across the regions of England. Table 2 shows the total number and percentage of disadvantaged students in each region in England alongside their average Attainment 8 score.

Table 2. Number and percentage of disadvantaged students at the end of KS 4 cohort in each English region in 2023 with average Attainment 8 score (Source: DfE SFR)

Region	Total number of disadvantaged students at the end of KS 4	Percentage of disadvantaged students at the end of KS 4	Average attainment 8 score of disadvantaged students
South East	18,905	19.6	32.3
East of England	14,218	20.8	33.3
South West	11,757	21.0	33.1
East Midlands	12,766	24.2	33.6
Outer London	15,501	26.0	40.8
Yorks and Humber	17,381	28.5	33.6
North West	24,522	29.4	33.5
West Midlands	21,057	30.9	35.6
North East	8,861	32.0	33.6
Inner London	12,995	43.0	43.3
London	28,496	31.7	41.9
England	**157,963**	**26.2**	**35.1**

Figure 8 shows the average Attainment 8 scores achieved by disadvantaged students in each of the English regions in 2022/23, as listed in Table 2. The outturns show that disadvantaged students achieved higher Attainment 8 scores in Inner and Outer London than all other regions and the performance of disadvantaged students in London, at 41.9, was 6.8 points better than the national average, at 35.1. Across all the English regions, the performance of disadvantaged students was highest in Inner London, where they achieved an Attainment 8 score of 43.3 points, 8.2 points higher than the national average, which equates to the achievement of one grade higher across eight GCSE subjects than all disadvantaged students nationally.

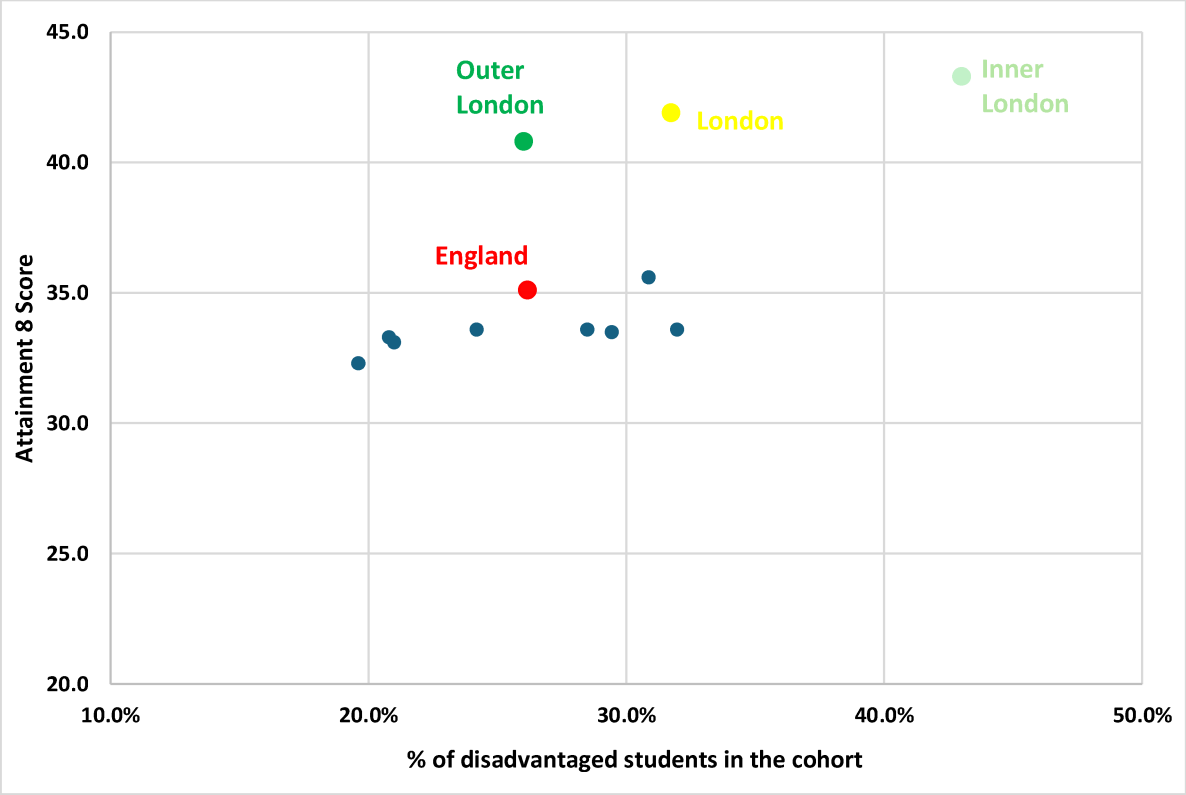
Figure 8. Average Attainment 8 score of disadvantaged students by English region at GCSE in 2023



This article has already mentioned the disadvantage attainment gap and how it has been exacerbated since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns of the population and school closures to the majority of children and young people. What the 2022/23 GCSE results show, however, is that disadvantaged students in London continue to outperform their peers in other English regions despite them all having lived through lockdowns and most of them having had to cope with school closures.

Figure 9 is a scatterplot which illustrates the relationship between the percentage of disadvantaged students in the cohort on the X axis and Attainment 8 scores on the Y axis, that is, the relationship between the quantum of disadvantaged students in a region and the attainment of those students. One hypothesis might be that those regions with lower proportions of disadvantaged students might achieve better outcomes by those students, but the data illustrated in Table 2 and Figure 9 do not support that hypothesis. The four English regions with the lowest proportions of disadvantaged students in the cohort, South East, East of England, South West and East Midlands, have some of the lowest Attainment 8 scores. However, London, which is the region with the second-highest proportion of disadvantaged students, had the highest Attainment 8 score of all regions; and within London, the sub-region with the highest proportion of disadvantaged students, Inner London at 43.0 per cent, achieved the highest Attainment 8 score of 43.3. In the post Covid-19 pandemic world, London seems to have continued its success at getting better outcomes for its disadvantaged students even when it has proportionally more of them than most other English regions.

Figure 9. Attainment 8 score of disadvantaged students plotted against the percentage of disadvantaged pupils in the cohort by English region at GCSE in 2022/23



Children and young people with SEND are recorded as being in one of two possible categories. The first group is those students with SEN support and the second group is those students who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Students with SEN support are the larger group in the school population and usually can have their needs met though the support available within their school. The DfE (Department

for Education, 2025) guidance tells us that an EHC plan is 'for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through SEN Support. EHC Plans identify educational, health and social needs and set out the additional support to meet those needs.'

Figure 10 shows the GCSE outcomes in 2022/23 for students with SEN support by region. The outturns show that students with SEN support achieved higher Attainment 8 scores in Inner and Outer London than all other regions and the performance of these students in London, at 38.1, was 4.8 points better than the national average, at 33.3. This is the equivalent of achieving one GCSE grade higher than their peers nationally across five subjects. Within London, the highest performing students with SEN support were those in Inner London, achieving an Attainment 8 score of 39.4, 6.1 points higher than their peers nationally.

Figure 10. Average Attainment 8 score for SEND students with SEN support by English region at GCSE in 2022/23

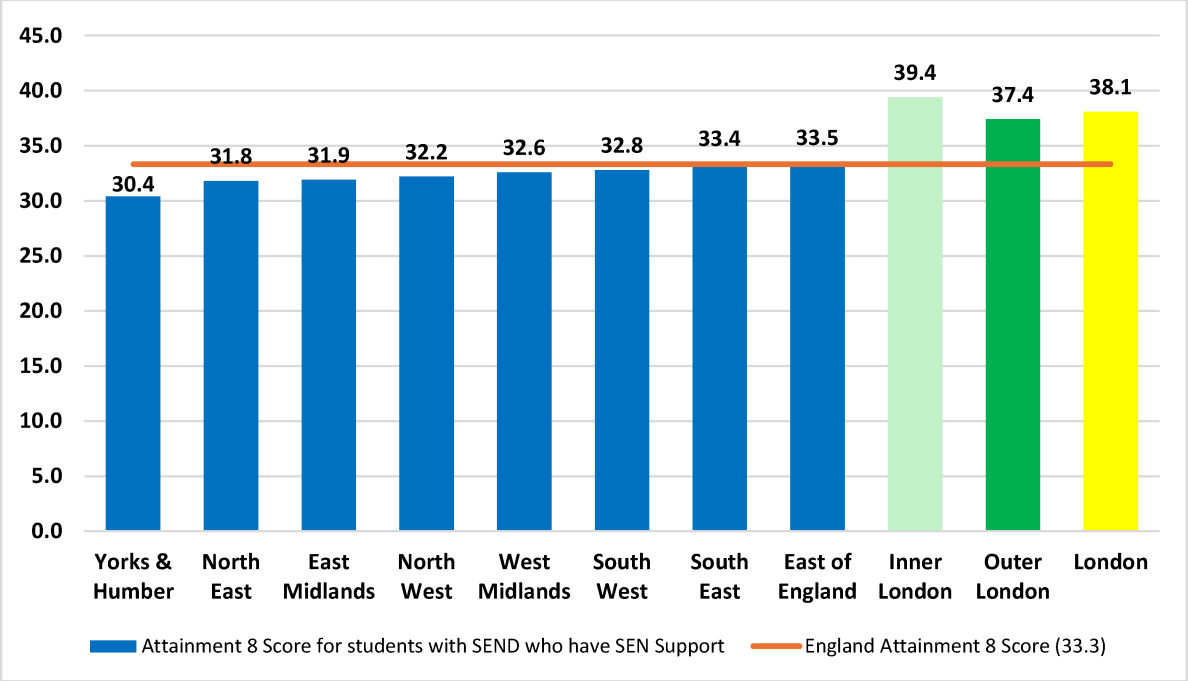
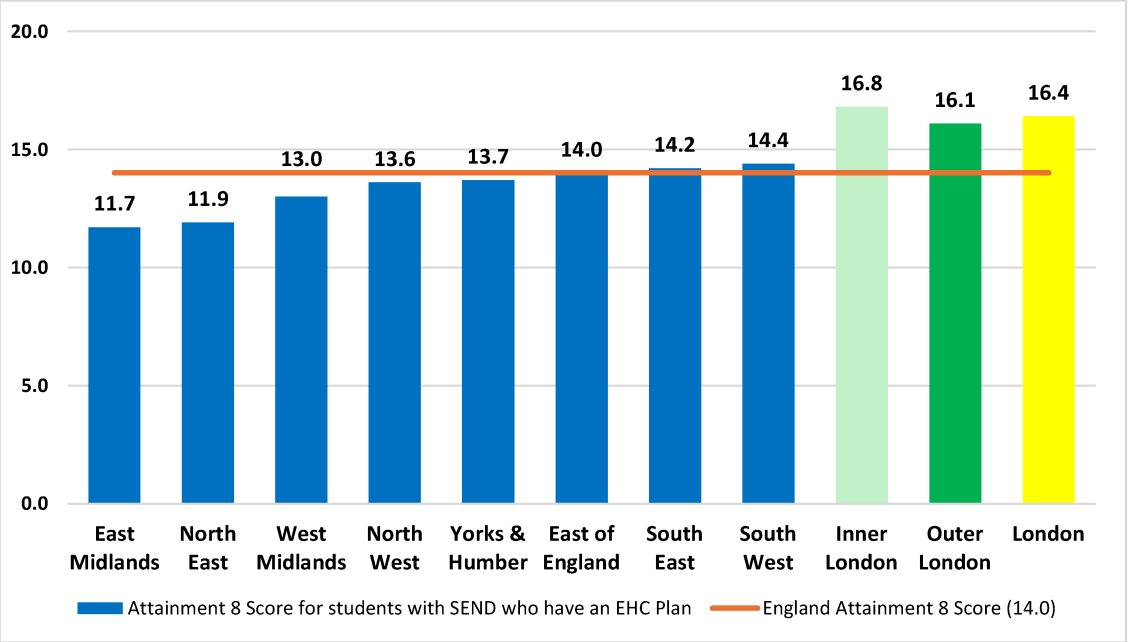


Figure 11 shows the GCSE outcomes in 2022/23 for students with an EHC plan by region. The outturns show that students with an EHC plan achieved higher Attainment 8 scores in Inner and Outer London than all other regions, with the gap between Inner London, at 16.8 points, and the lowest performing region, the East Midlands, at 11.7 points, being 5.1 points. This is the equivalent of these students in Inner London achieving one GCSE grade higher across five subjects than their peers in the East Midlands.

The 2022/23 outcomes for disadvantaged students and vulnerable students with SEND show, on the broadest-based performance measure, the Attainment 8 score, that those students have performed better in London than their peers in all other English regions. This is an indication that, despite the well-placed concerns of those educationalists who created Reconnect London to address these very challenges, the resilience of disadvantaged and vulnerable children has persisted and that their better outcomes in London than their peers nationally show that the London effect has held up for them too since the Covid-19 pandemic abated.

https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.23.1.25

Figure 11. Average Attainment 8 score for SEND students with an EHC plan by English region at GCSE in 2022/23



GCSE performance in London pre- and post-pandemic

One final piece of analysis is to compare GCSE performance in London 2018/19, the last set of GCSE results before the Covid-19 pandemic started, with GCSE performance in 2022/23, the first year post-pandemic that the examinations were sat and marked on the same basis as they had been pre-pandemic. Table 3 compares GCSE performance in London in 2018/19 with performance in 2022/23 on the same range of measures already used in this article.

Table 3. GCSE performance in London comparing 2018/19 (pre-pandemic) with 2022/23 (post-pandemic) (Source: DfE SFR)

GCSE performance measures for London	Year		Difference in performance between post- and pre-pandemic
	2018/19	2022/23	
% of pupils achieving grades 5 or above in English & maths GCSEs	68.7%	71.2%	2.5%
% of pupils achieving grades 4 or above in English & maths GCSEs	49.0%	54.1%	5.1%
Average EBacc APS score per pupil	4.47	4.58	0.1
Average Attainment 8 score of all pupils	49.7	50.6	0.9
Average Progress 8 score of all pupils	0.22	0.27	0.05
Average Attainment 8 score of disadvantaged students	42.6	41.9	−0.7
Average Attainment 8 score for SEND students with SEN support	36.1	38.1	2.0
Average Attainment 8 score for SEND students with an EHC plan	15.6	16.4	0.8

https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.23.1.25

The pre- and post-pandemic analysis of GCSE results in Table 3 shows that performance in London was better post-pandemic on seven out of the eight measures. While the research has shown that there was evidence of learning loss during the first two years of the pandemic, performance in 2022/23 shows that there has been a bounce back for these pupils at GCSE in 2022/23 and that their performance was broadly in line with, or better than, the last reported outturns pre-pandemic for the GCSE cohort from 2018/19. The 2022/23 outturns for London suggest that there was evidence of post-Covid recovery. The only GCSE measure where performance was lower in 2022/23 compared with 2018/19 was the average Attainment 8 score for disadvantaged students, which was down very slightly, by 0.7 points, from 42.6 in 2018/19 to 41.9 in 2022/23 – a drop of 0.7 points equates to an average drop of less than one GCSE grade in one GCSE subject for these students, which is not a dramatic decline in performance. Outcomes for vulnerable students with SEN support and with an EHC plan were better post-pandemic compared with pre-pandemic. In the overall context of this article, the performance data suggest that while there was learning loss between 2020 and 2022, there was also a bounce back for those students who sat GCSEs in 2023 and evidence of post-pandemic educational recovery, and that disadvantaged and vulnerable students benefited from that recovery. The evidence supporting educational recovery would also suggest that networks of educationalists such as Reconnect London were right to be concerned and that the focus of their work on outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable students was warranted.

The next section provides a description of the emerging policy context, with a focus on recent developments including the introduction by the DfE of the RISE (Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence) initiative.

The policy context

The London Challenge was grounded in the belief that school improvement thrives through partnership and collaboration (Kidson and Norris, 2010). It was not about setting schools up to compete against each other or blaming those which were less successful. Instead, a key aim was to foster a culture of mutual support among schools, encouraging the sharing of effective practice and collective problem-solving, as Ogden (2012) explains:

> there was a gradual ceding of power from policy-makers to headteachers and London Challenge advisers who led the policy's implementation. It created a 'high trust / high accountability' model for education policy-making which paired professional autonomy and expertise with accountability to government for improvement in London's secondary schools. This took place within a framework of conditions that required shared moral purpose, strong leadership, high challenge with an openness to supportive and fair data-informed scrutiny and a regional commitment to collegial partnership. (p. 12)

This ethos has left a lasting legacy, with a number of organisations, such as Challenge Partners, continuing to promote school-to-school collaboration based on the principles of the London Challenge. During the 2010s, partnership and collaboration between schools received less emphasis in national policy. In recent years, and particularly since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a renewed focus on collaborative approaches, exemplified by initiatives such as Reconnect London, which seek to support schools through sharing experiences, pooling expertise and undertaking joint projects.

The authors of this article are both involved with Reconnect London. It is a practitioner-led network which was established in 2020 by a group of experienced London headteachers and multi-academy trust leaders. They believed that the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic could only be met through closer collaboration, and they explicitly sought to revive the culture of partnership and collective problem-solving that had been central to the London Challenge, encouraging and enabling schools to collaborate and share expertise rather than compete with each other. The pandemic brought unprecedented challenges, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable students, and the group's aim was to mobilise their collective expertise to support London schools in navigating these challenges.

Reconnect London brings together representatives of both academy trusts and maintained schools, along with key partners, including DfE, the Fair Education Alliance and the Greater London Authority, and experts on child poverty, data analysis and school improvement. A key aim is to facilitate the exchange of effective practice between schools, helping educators learn from one another so that they are better equipped to address the unique challenges they face in their individual contexts.

Through its Knowledge Hub, Reconnect London has produced a series of reports on the nature of disadvantage in London and case studies highlighting effective practice in the capital's schools (Vincent and Bibi, 2022). It has also supported key initiatives that have been put into place since the start of the pandemic to support vulnerable and disadvantaged students, such as the introduction of universal primary free school meals in London (Impact on Urban Health, 2024). In addition, since 2023, Reconnect London has deployed experienced leaders to work directly with schools that are facing operational or performance challenges, helping to stabilise and improve outcomes.

Following the 2024 general election, the government announced the introduction of RISE teams. RISE has a similar approach to the London Challenge and Reconnect London, combining universal and targeted support. The universal strand promotes collaboration and the sharing of effective practice, while the targeted strand provides tailored support for schools facing specific challenges. Several former Reconnect London staff are now RISE advisers, reflecting the continuity of vision and expertise between the two initiatives.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the GCSE results in 2022/23, it can be concluded that the London effect has survived the Covid-19 pandemic. Cook (2013) demonstrated how well disadvantaged students in London performed compared with their peers in other regions of England at GCSE in 2012, and Blanden et al. (2015) demonstrated how the performance of disadvantaged students in London had improved by 2013, to be notably above their peers in the rest of England at GCSE. Hayes and Gul (2017) showed that this was still the case by 2016.

The 2023 data show that, despite the widespread disruptions to education, disadvantaged and vulnerable students in London continue to outperform their peers in the rest of the country. While this article does not explore the underlying causes of this sustained performance, we suggest that understanding the factors driving these outcomes would be a valuable focus for future research, helping to inform policy and practice both within London and beyond.

Challenges and risks to London's educational success still exist, including the apparent intractability of the disadvantage attainment gap, a decline in student attendance post-pandemic, an increase in home education by more parents and carers during the pandemic and falling school rolls alongside a falling birth rate in the capital, with some schools already being closed or merged and with more reductions in the capital's school estate being planned. Other challenges include financial pressures being faced by many schools and increases in the volume and complexity of children and young people with SEND. While examination success and good academic outcomes at GCSE, usually when students reach 16 years of age, are very important, they represent only one dimension of educational success. The challenges that London schools and their pupils continue to face include other aspects such as personal wellbeing, inclusion and the impact of the evolving policy landscape around SEND, which will all shape the futures of these children as they move into post-16 education and on to the world of work. Set alongside the precarious financial situation that many schools find themselves in, these should be the priorities for London schools today. Given this context, it is important to continue learning from the success of London's schools, reflecting on how these outcomes have been achieved and building on past achievements.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

The authors conducted the research reported in this article in accordance with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

References

Baars, S., Bernardes, E., Elwick, A., Malortie, A., McAleavy, T., McInerney, L., Menzies, L., & Riggall, A. (2014). *Lessons from London schools: Investigating the success*. CfBT Education Trust.

Betthäuser, B. A., Bach-Mortensen, A. M., & Engzell, P. (2023). A systematic review and meta-analysis of the evidence on learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *7*, 375–85. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Blainey, K., & Hannay, T. (2021). *The impact of school closures on spring 2021 attainment*. Hodder Education.

Blanden, J., Greaves, E., Gregg, P., Macmillan, L., & Sibieta, L. (2015). *Understanding the improved performance of disadvantaged pupils in London*. http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/spcc/wp21.pdf.

Breslin, T. (2021). *Lessons from lockdown: The educational legacy of Covid-19*. Routledge.

Brighouse, T. (2014). London challenge remembered [Conference presentation]. NUT Conference.

Burgess, S. (2014). *Understanding the success of London's schools. Working paper 14/333*. The Centre for Market and Public Organisation, University of Bristol.

Cole, L., & Kingsley, M. (2022). *The children's inquiry: How the state and society failed the young during the Covid-19 pandemic*. Pinter & Martin.

Cook, C. (2013). How to explain the London success story. *Financial Times*, 13 January. http://blogs.ft.com/ftdata/author/christophercook/.

Demie, F., & McLean, C. (2015). *Transforming education: The Lambeth story*. Lambeth Council Research and Statistics Unit London. https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Transforming_Education_The_Lambeth_Story.pdf.

Department for Education. (1995). *Secondary school performance tables*. http://www.education.gov.uk/cgi-in/schools/performance/archive/shlea1_95?lea=205&type=b.

Department for Education. (2022). *Understanding progress in the 2020/21 academic year*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063488/Understanding_Progress_in_the_2020_to_2021_Academic_Year_Extension_report_covering_the_first_half_of_the_autumn_term_2021.pdf.

Department for Education. (2024). *Key Stage 4 results in 2022/23 revised*. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/key-stage-4-performance-2023.

Department for Education. (2025). *Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)*. https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help.

Di Pietro, G. (2023). *The impact of Covid-19 on student achievement: Evidence from a recent meta-analysis*. Educational Research Review.

Education Endowment Foundation. (2020). *The impact of school closures on spring 2021 attainment: Rapid evidence assessment*. Education Endowment Foundation.

Education Reform Act (1988). His Majesty's Stationery Office.

Edwards, E., Goodman, J., & Fox, A. (2021). *Exploring the impact of Covid-19: Pedagogy, curriculum and assessment*. (BERA Bites Issue 7). British Educational Research Association. https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/BERA-Bites-issue-7-Exploring-impact-of-Covid-19_Pedagogy-curriculumassessment_Feb-2021.pdf.

Gray, J., & Jesson, D. (1987). Exam results and LEA league tables. *Newbury Policy Journal*.

Hayes, S., & Cassen, R. (2014, September 23–25). The transformational shift in educational outcomes in London 2003 to 2013: The contribution of local authorities. [Conference presentation]. BERA Annual Conference, London, UK.

Hayes, S., & Gul, R. (2017, September 4–7). The effect of changing assessment frameworks on London's educational success; continuous improvement or fragile gains? [Conference presentation]. BERA Annual Conference, Falmer, UK.

Hayes, S., Jopling, M., & Gul, R. (2018). What have the changes made to primary and secondary assessment frameworks since 2014 done to the 'London effect' in school performance? *London Review of Education*, *16*(3), 491–506. [CrossRef]

Hutchings, M. (2014). The legacy of the London challenge [Keynote presentation]. NUT Conference, the Institute of Education.

Hutchings, M., Greenwood, C., Hollingworth, S., Mansaray, A., Rose, A., Minty, S., & Glass, K. (2011). *Evaluation of the city challenge programme* [Research Report DFE-RR215]. Department for Education.

Impact on Urban Health. (2024). *More than a meal: An independent evaluation of universal primary free school meals for children in London*. https://urbanhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/IoUH-Free-School-Meals-Report.pdf.

Inner London Education Authority. (1982). *Achievement of leavers by sex, ethnic group and year of final examination*. ILEA Research and Statistics Branch.

Kidson, M., & Norris, E. (2010). Implementing the London Challenge. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation. https://camdenlearning.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Implementing-the-London-Challenge.pdf.

Mikhailova, A. (2022, March 26). Nadhim Zahawi vows to never close schools again. *Daily Mail*. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10655851/Nadhim-Zahawi-vows-never-close-schools-says-forcing-home-learning-mistake.html.

Milanovic, K., Blainey, K., Hannay, T., & Wood, C. (2023). *The longer-term impact of COVID-19 on pupil attainment and wellbeing*. Hodder Education.

Moss, G., Bradbury, A., Braun, A., Duncan, S., & Levy, R. (2021). *Learning through disruption: Using schools' experiences of COVID to build a more resilient education system*. UCL Institute of Education.

Mujtaba, T. (2016). Education in London: Challenges and opportunities for young people. *London Review of Education*, *14*(2), 1–2. [CrossRef]

Nelson, J., Lynch, S., & Sharp, C. (2021). *Recovery during a pandemic: The ongoing impacts of Covid-19 on schools serving deprived communities*. NFER.

Newton, P., Leahy, F., & Khan, A. (2021). *Learning during the pandemic: Quantifying lost time*. Ofqual.

Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills). (2009). Twelve outstanding secondary schools: Excelling against the odds. https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/11232/2/Twelve.pdf.

Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills). (2020a). *COVID-19 series: Briefing on schools, October 2020*. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-schools-october-2020.

Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills). (2020b). *COVID-19 series: Briefing on schools, November 2020*. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-schools-november-2020.

Ogden, V. J. (2012). *Making sense of policy in London secondary education: What can be learned from the London Challenge* [Doctoral thesis, Institute of Education, University of London].

Parameshwaran, M., & Thomson, D. (2015). The impact of accountability reforms on the Key Stage 4 curriculum: How have changes to school and college Performance Tables affected pupil access to qualifications and subjects in secondary schools in England? *London Review of Education*, *13*(2), 157–73. [CrossRef]

Radford, A. (2009). *An enquiry into the abolition of the Inner London education authority (1964 to 1988), with particular reference to politics and policy making* [Unpublished PhD thesis]. University of Bath.

Russell, B. (1998, June 4). The school that rose again from the ashes. *The Independent*. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/the-school-that-rose-again-from-the-ashes-1162726.html.

Sibieta, L., & Cottell, J. (2020). *Education policy responses across the UK to the pandemic*. The Nuffield Foundation.

Smith, C., Odd, D., Harwood, R., Ward, J., Linney, M., Clark, M., Hargreaves, D., Ladhani, S., Draper, E., Davis, P., Kenny, S., Whittaker, E., Luyt, K., Viner, R., & Fraser, L. (2022). Deaths in children and young people in England after SARS-CoV-2 infection during the first pandemic year. *Nature Medicine*, *28*, 185–92. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-021-01578-1. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Vincent, K., & Bibi, S. (2022). *London learners, London lives: The impact of disadvantage on young Londoners and the role of schools in overcoming barriers to success*. Reconnect London. Reconnect-London-Report-June-20221.pdf.

Woods, D., Husbands, C., & Brown, C. (2013). *Transforming education for all: The Tower Hamlets story*. Mayor of Tower Hamlets.