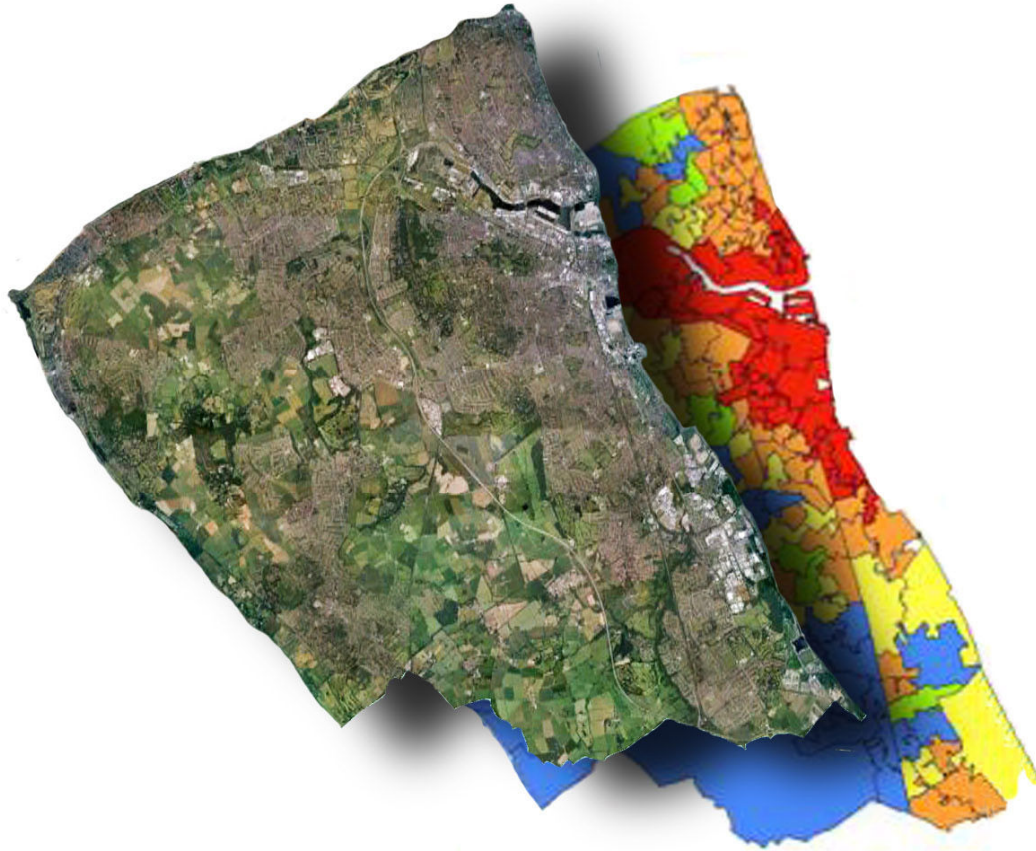# Potential interventions to close the attainment gap
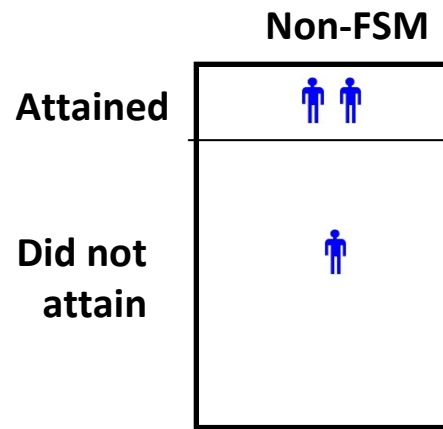
Dave Hollomby
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The scale of the attainment gaps (Wirral 2012 data).
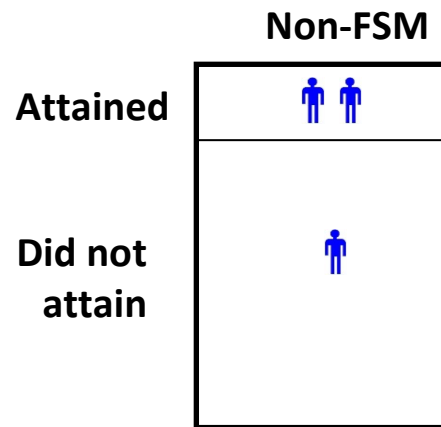
We start with the non-FSM children.

KS2: for every two non-FSM children who attained at L4b or above in reading and maths and L4+ in writing there was one non-FSM child who didn't.

Non-FSM

Attained	🧍🧍
Did not attain	🧍

The corresponding figure for FSM students is 3.

Now for the end of KS4. Again, we start with just the non-FSM children.

For every two non-FSM children who attained at 5+ A*-C GCSEs (**including** English and maths), there was still just one non-FSM child who didn't.

Non-FSM

Attained

Did not attain

The corresponding figure for FSM students is now 5.

The failure rate of FSM pupils has increased – FSM children have fallen even further behind.

Now for A level. Again, we start with just the non-FSM students.

For every two non-FSM students who attained at 3+ A*-A grades were 28 who non FSM students didn't. (3A*-A grades is not an unusual requirement for many competitive universities and courses)

Non-FSM

Attained

Did not attain
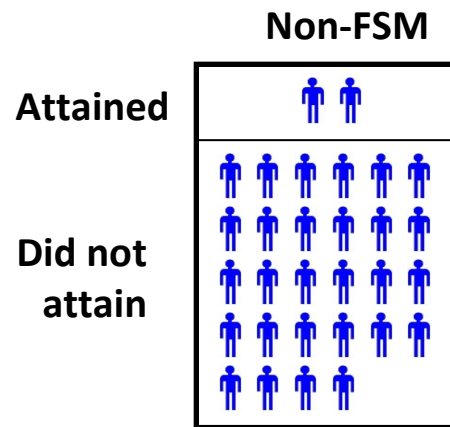
The corresponding figure for FSM students is 560.

It is virtually unheard of for FSM students to achieve the grades necessary to compete for the most selective universities and professions.

**In 2014 only 6 FSM students achieved 3A*-A grades –
just 1 more than in 2012.**

There is an attainment gap at every stage in the education system, but it actually gets wider, not narrower, as children progress through their schooling.

Wirral's gap at age 16 remains a particular concern, standing at the 4th widest in England in 2014.

Many interventions have already taken place, at both primary and secondary level. The Wirral's gap at the end of primary school has shown some narrowing in recent years, but it still significant. But its gap at the end of secondary school is actually widening.

Nationally, the secondary attainment gap is largely unchanged.

Two key questions are:
• what are the interventions typically used by schools?
• why do these interventionshave limited, if any effect, in so many cases?

Interventions and approaches used in schools that are known to be particularly effective

One-to-one and small group tutoring (ideally by teachers; if not, then by well-trained others)

Peer-tutoring

Meta-cognitive approaches (planning, monitoring and reviewing one's own learning)

Explicit, direct teaching providing **quality** feedback to learners

These are most effective when supported by high quality monitoring of pupil progress e.g. appropriate target setting, use of data, classroom evidence.

In addition, these approaches can be effective only if there is clear school leadership in this area.

Ultimately, effectiveness is based no so much on *what* is done but on how *well* it is done.

# How do schools arrive at attainment expectations for children?

They set them targets.

Commonly, to generate targets, schools use the assessment scores from a previous key stage and essentially add something on.
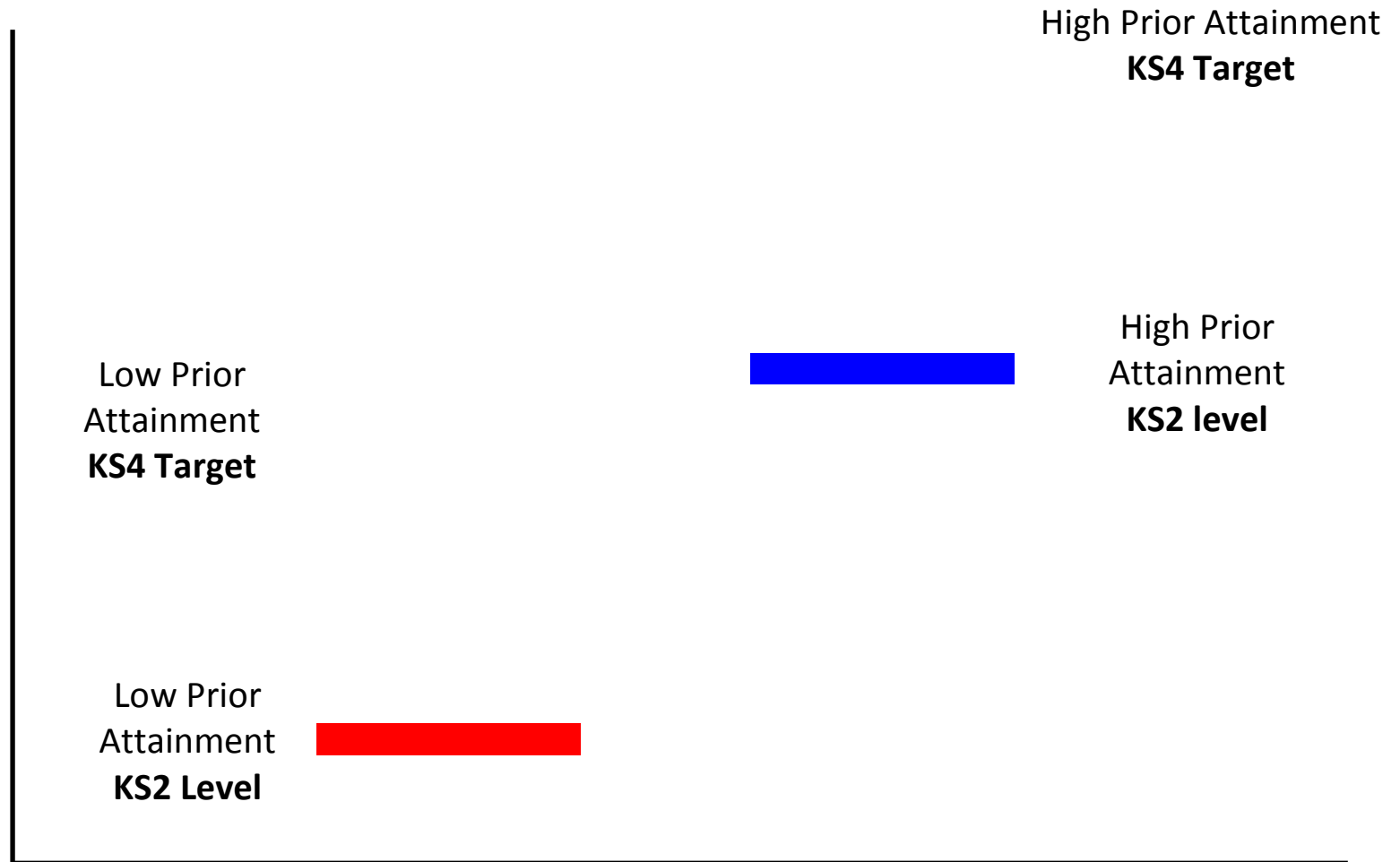
What are schools' expectations for disadvantaged children?

On average, the prior attainment of disadvantaged pupils is lower than that of other pupils - there is a prior attainment gap at the start of the target-setting process
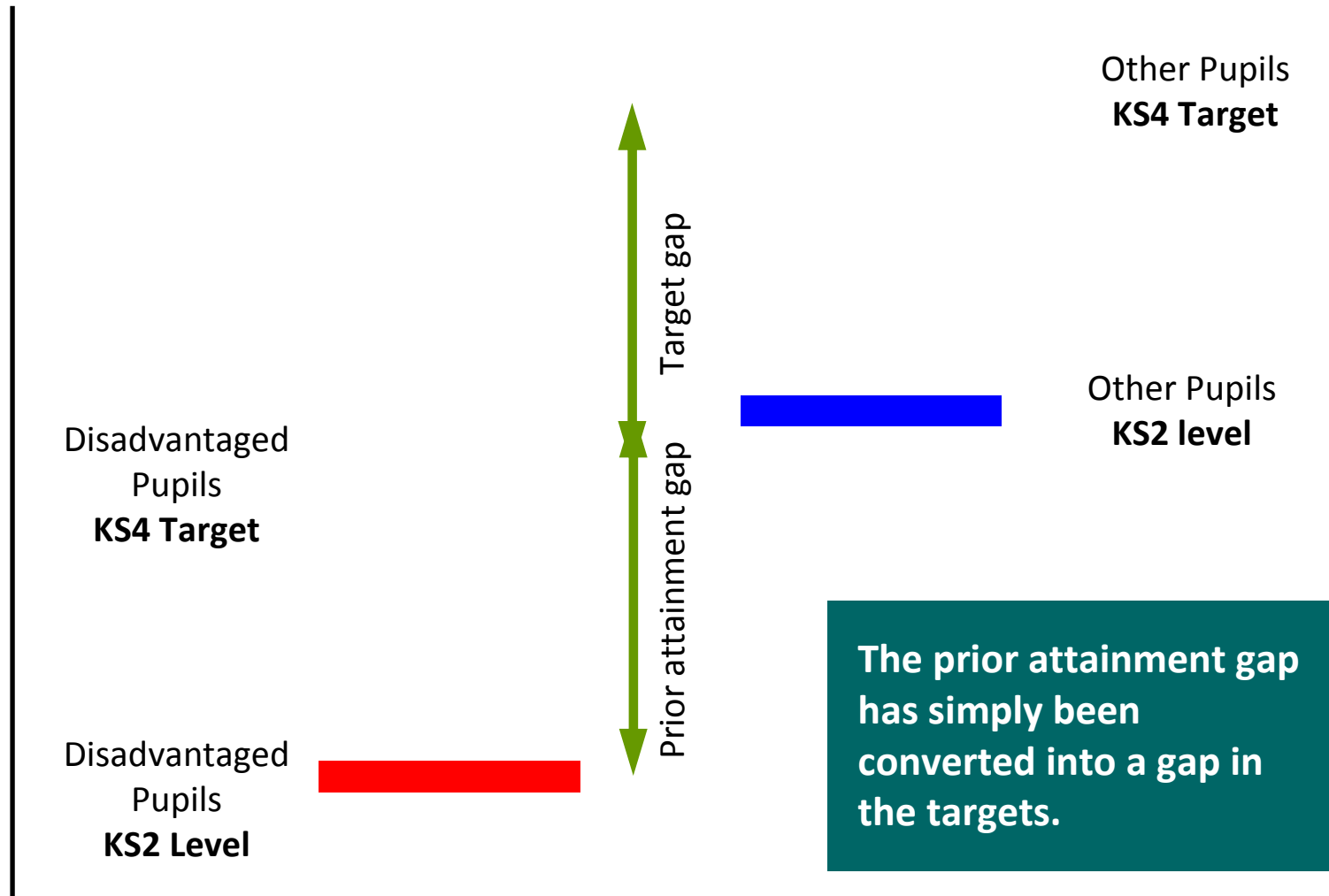
Two questions

Do schools have the same expectations for disadvantaged children as for other children?

On *average*, are the targets schools set for disadvantaged children *systematically* lower than those for other children?

If disadvantaged children have lower targets (on average) than other children then they are less likely to be identified as underchieveing against these targets than if they'd had higher targets.

It's very possible that many disadvantaged children are not appearing on the underachievement 'radar' until very late.

Consequently, interventions will have a much lower chance of working.

The RADY Project
(Raising the Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters)

A pilot to see if the hypothesis about target-setting is correct

Wirral Local Authority invited secondary schools with significant numbers of disadvantaged children to join a project designed to test the ideas outlined in the previous slides.
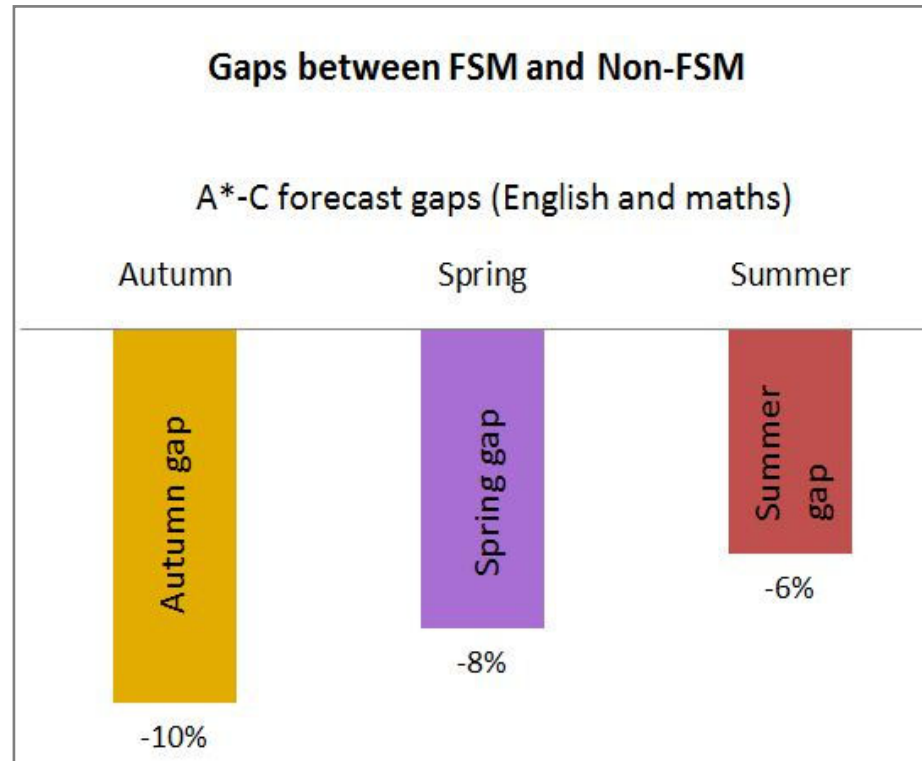
The only requirement was:

Schools were to set targets for their Year 7 disadvantaged children that   were, **on average**, equal to those they set for other children.

No other actions were required. In particular, schools were free to use whatever interventions they thought best to support children who were falling behind.

Additionally, there was no requirement to focus extra support on disadvantaged pupils merely because they were disadvanatged. Only if assessment data indicated that pupils were in need of extra support would they receive intervention.

Results from the first year of the Wirral's closing the gap project with Year 7 pupils

All percentages refer to the proportion of pupils forecast, based on teacher assessments, to attain A*-C in both English and maths

Gaps between FSM and Non-FSM

A*-C forecast gaps (English and maths)

Autumn	Spring	Summer
Autumn gap	Spring gap	Summer gap
		-6%
	-8%	
-10%		

This is the aggregated data for the schools involved in the Wirral pilot.

Based on the recent history of the schools involved (the previous three years) the expected gap at the end of KS4 is over 20%.

By the summer term the forecast gap was in single figures - down to 6%.

Raising the Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters

However, it is a small pilot. More evidence is needed.

Wirral has been in discussion with other local authorities to widen this pilot. The wider project would include many more schools in a wider range of settings.

Also, Wirral has been in discussion with Fischer Family Trust (FFT), the organisation that produces extensive education data analyses for schools and local authorities. One of the pieces of work FFT does is to produce 'benchmarks' that many school use when setting targets for pupils.

We are exploring how FFT might help schools more easily set targets for disadvanatged children, so that these targets broadly match the ones they set for other children.

Finally, a set of major changes in the way exam results are reported, both at primary and secondary level, will happen in just over a year. The tracking and monitoring approaches used in the small pilot cannot be used with the new exam reporting system, and so they need to be completely redesigned.

'Reasons' why it can't be done

Poor children are inherently less intelligent than better-off children - poverty is a symptom of underperformance, not a cause of it.

The expectations of disadvantaged children and their families are too low—they don't have the ambition that better-off families do.

It is stigmatising to identify and target FSM/poor children. Singling out FSM children for special support is contrary to our policy of equal opportunities. Anyway, it's not fair to non-FSM pupils.

Schools cannot address all society's ills.

The results we receive from the last key stage are inflated—they don't give a true reflection for some of the children, since the children have been 'pushed' to get the level.

Have you seen the estate these children come from?

The children have had nothing but intervention—they're sick and tired of it, and it's not working.

Adapted from 'The Extra Mile' project, the BBC News website, National Strategies and other sources.

But…

Consider secondary schools that meet the following criteria:

a) higher than average percentages of disadvantaged pupils;

b) significant numbers of pupils in each group (disadvantaged and others);

c) attainment of disadvantaged pupils was similar to or greater than the national average for all pupils

d) small gaps within the school (in single figures)

In 2011 there were 51 such schools in England.

The corresponding figures for 2012 and 2013 were 73 and 83.

The number of secondary schools succeeding in delivering good attainment outcomes for their disadvantaged pupils is still relatively small but growing.

There are many more that come close, if we relax the first three conditions slightly.