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Education**

Report

A Tale of Eight Regions:

Part 2: Challenge and Support Across the Regional Schools Commissioner Areas

National Foundation for Educational
Research (NFER)



A Tale of Eight Regions

Part 2: Challenge and Support Across the Regional Schools Commissioner Areas

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About this report

Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) were appointed in September 2014 to oversee the growing number of academies in England. In 2015, NFER published *A Guide to Regional Schools Commissioners* (Durbin *et al.*, 2015), which explained the background to RSCs and presented an analysis of the characteristics and challenges faced in each of the eight RSC regions.

We have returned to RSCs now that they have been in operation for more than two years to provide an update of the characteristics of the areas they are responsible for and the challenges they face. We have produced some new analyses of underperforming schools in these areas, and analysed the structures in which academies are organised and managed across the regions.

We have published this analysis across two reports. The first (Hillary *et al.*, 2016) focused on how the schools' landscape has changed, by region, since RSCs were introduced. We examined this in terms of the number and percentage of academies and free schools in each region. The report provided:

- an overview of academies and free schools
- the organisational structures in which they operate in England
- an analysis of changes over the previous 12 months
- a comparative analysis of the differences across the school landscape in RSC areas
- eight individual 'region profiles'.

In this, our second report, we use the latest performance data to explore the future challenges RSCs face in terms of schools in their regions requiring action and the availability of new sponsors to meet this need.

1 At a glance

Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) took up post for the first time in September 2014 and are now firmly embedded within the fabric of the English education system. This report, the second of two published in late 2016/early 2017, builds on our inaugural September 2015 publication on RSCs. This part provides an updated in-depth analysis of underperforming schools and capacity (based on performance rather than finance) within the system to support them. As in the earlier reports, this is presented as a comparative 'overview', followed by eight individual 'region profiles'.

Underperformance varies by phase and school type

According to our definition of underperformance (see Appendix B), about 17 per cent of LA maintained schools and academies in England were underperforming as at September 2016. However, within this figure there is a marked disparity between phases, with one in four secondary schools underperforming compared to one in seven in the primary sector. There are differences between phases for all school types apart from converter academies which were similar.

Some RSCs have greater challenges than others

There is considerable variation between RSC regions in the number of schools with poor Ofsted outcomes, schools below the floor, and coasting schools. Two regions have in excess of 500 schools needing attention, while another has about half the amount. These two regions also have the largest number of schools with very serious underperformance issues. These disparities in workload could affect the RSCs' ability to tackle underperformance as effectively as is

needed. Published performance metrics that highlight both the scale of challenge and the RSCs' responses to this would improve transparency and enable better external scrutiny.

The number of underperforming schools has fallen

The numbers of schools with poor Ofsted outcomes and/or falling below the floor have decreased since 2014 when RSCs first took up office. However, we cannot say whether this is genuinely a real improvement related to the actions of the RSCs or something else. It could be a consequence of other factors such as the introduction of the new Ofsted inspection framework in September 2015 or the new attainment measures that were introduced in 2016.

Finding new sponsors remains crucial

Available capacity in Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) exceeds the demand for new sponsors needed to take on the most serious underperforming schools nationally, but there are stark regional differences. Lancashire and West Yorkshire faces an overall shortfall in available sponsors, but other RSCs may also have local shortfalls when matching need to available capacity. A key priority for these RSCs will be to identify and attract new sponsors.

Underperforming trusts will be a growing challenge

As academy numbers have increased, so have the numbers that are underperforming. Single Academy Trusts (SATs) make up ten per cent of the most serious underperforming group. Academies which have been in the same MAT for over three years account for nearly a further 20 per cent. RSCs will need to be seen to be addressing underperformance in SATs and academies in MATs as proactively as they do for LA controlled schools to maintain public credibility.

2 Policy update

The role of RSCs continues to evolve. Whilst our two previous reports in this series set out the statutory framework that defined the roles and responsibilities of RSCs, further key policies have been introduced in December 2016 and January 2017 that have implications for the work of the RSCs.

Opportunity areas

The designation of 12 Opportunity Areas (OAs) (DfE 2017a) is a major new initiative to target resources at schools in areas with poor social mobility. The criteria used to identify OAs (GB. Parliament. HoC, 2016) and activities planned to address local issues mean they will mostly complement rather than draw on RSC resources. However, most RSC regions contain at least one OA so there is potential for overlap between OA activities and the oversight of the RSCs.

Funding and sources of school improvement

The Government made announcements at the end of 2016 about the funding of school improvement (DfE 2016a). This confirmed £50 million a year to fund a continuing role for local authorities (LAs) to 'monitor and commission' school improvement, at least for the period 2017 to 2020. The level of funding was challenged by the Local Government Association (LGA, 2016) that claimed it represented a substantial cut. Alongside this will be £140 million for a new 'Strategic School Improvement Fund' for academies and maintained schools. This is targeted at schools in most need to help them drive up standards, use their resources most effectively and deliver more good school places. Schools will be able to apply to the fund either alone,

or as a group of schools, with the encouragement and support of a teaching school/National Leaders of Education (NLE), their LA or RSC.

RSCs have a role in determining the type of support or intervention needed in both academies and maintained schools, and also have some funds to commission such support. RSCs have a range of options available and need to maintain information about the capacity that could be used to address the needs of schools in their areas. This could include capacity within LAs as well as the availability of NLEs and the capacity of MATs. RSCs will also have a £13 million regional academy growth fund (RAGF) to support successful academy trusts to grow and to improve standards in underperforming schools. They will prioritise applications that meet the specific needs in their region and of OAs where applicable.

National Funding Formula

The consultation on the National Funding Formula set out proposals for the continuing role of LAs, describing how they will operate alongside the RSCs in the landscape of the 'middle tier' for the period 2017 to 2020 (DfE 2017b). It highlighted that an effective budgeting process within schools should be based on their improvement plan. This confirms the continuing role of the LA in oversight, intervention and support of schools, working alongside the RSCs.

Decision-making framework for RSCs

In December 2016, the Department for Education (DfE) published a decision-making framework for RSCs (DfE 2016b). This report sets out RSC core functions and the circumstances under which they might intervene/act, which is summarised in the table overleaf.

RSC CORE FUNCTION	WHAT ACTIONS/STEPS AN RSC MIGHT TAKE
1. Intervening in underperforming academies and free schools	
Tackling educational underperformance in academies and free schools	- Commission appropriate support; issue a pre-warning or warning notice; terminate an academy's funding agreement; identify a new sponsor to take over an underperforming academy.
Intervening in academies where governance is inadequate	- Ensure discussions are held with the Education Funding Agency and others to ensure that all issues about the trust are considered and appropriate action is taken.
Taking action against poorly performing sponsors and multi-academy trusts	- Reassess MATs at key milestones through the academic year and at key stages of their growth to consider their capacity to support and enable academies in the MAT to improve.
2. Addressing performance concerns in LA maintained schools	
Tackling underperformance in maintained schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any maintained schools judged to be inadequate by Ofsted are required to become a sponsored academy. The RSC will need to find a suitable sponsor and issue the Academy Order. - Work with LAs to identify additional support needed for underperforming maintained schools. - Consider issuing a warning notice, depending on the severity of the case, to a maintained school.
3. Approving conversions of new academies	
Applications from maintained schools to convert to academy status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approve or decline applications from maintained schools to convert to academy status. - Judge whether a school is 'performing well' and can convert as a SAT or as part of a MAT. - Find a suitable sponsor for schools that do not meet the 'performing well' criteria.
4. Approving new sponsors and the creation of multi-academy trusts	
Applications from sponsors to operate in a region or regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RSCs need to encourage suitable organisations in their area to apply to become sponsors. - RSCs also decide who can be a sponsor in their region.
Taking decisions on the creation and growth of multi-academy trusts	- RSCs need to be assured that the governance and leadership in a MAT is clear and robust and has the ability to drive improvement in all of its schools before allowing further expansion.
5. Ensuring that the pipeline of outstanding free school proposers is secure and capable of delivering great new schools	
Advising on free school applications and proposals under LA free school presumption arrangements	- RSCs advise ministers on free school applications and will make recommendations about which applications to reject or approve.
6. Taking decisions on changes to academies and free schools	
Significant changes to academies and free schools	- RSCs decide on applications from an academy or free school to make material changes (which in general may have an impact on the number, type and/or location of school places).
Other	- RSCs decide on changes to admission arrangements and exemptions from providing Christian collective worship

Source: DfE, 2016c

3 Underperforming schools across RSC regions

Introduction

In our first report in 2015, we examined differences in the level of challenge across RSC regions due to underperforming schools. Here we present updated estimates. However, the role of RSCs has continued to evolve since our first report. During this time, DfE has published more information to clarify RSC roles and responsibilities. This includes a more nuanced explanation about how RSCs should work with other organisations (e.g. LAs) to tackle underperforming schools and when they can intervene in academies.

Changes since our 2015 report

Our research has also evolved since our first report to try to reflect our latest understanding of the role and responsibilities of RSCs. The main differences between this and our first report are summarised in the box below. The effect of these changes in approach is explained in Appendix A.

Main changes since our 2015 report

- **We have extended the scope of our definition of an underperforming school.** In our 2015 report, schools falling below the floor or 'coasting' were classed as underperforming, whereas in this report, we have also included schools rated by Ofsted as inadequate or requiring improvement (RI).

- **We have split underperforming schools into two groups** to reflect the fact that some types of underperformance will be of greater concern to RSCs. The 'immediate need' group includes schools where underperformance is deemed very serious, where the RSC is likely to need to intervene in the near future. The 'watch list' group includes all other underperforming schools. RSCs will want to monitor these schools to ensure they are receiving the appropriate support to improve, but they do not currently require direct, rapid intervention.
- **We have changed the way we assess whether there is sufficient capacity to help underperforming schools.** In our 2015 report, we compared the capacity available in MATs to total need (i.e. all schools below the floor and coasting). However, now that we can distinguish between types of underperformance, we have compared available capacity within MATs that appear ready to expand to the number of 'immediate need' schools.

These new definitions are designed to better align with the types of school underperformance covered in the Schools Causing Concern guidance (DfE 2016c).

Definitional differences

In both this and our previous report, we have included a wider set of schools in our definition of schools below the floor and coasting schools compared to those used by DfE. This is because we are looking at underperformance from the perspective of the level of challenge that this places on RSCs, whereas DfE uses these measures as part of their accountability system. The box below summarises the main differences.

Definitions for schools that are below the floor and/or coasting

We do not use the same exclusion criteria that DfE uses when calculating the numbers of schools meeting the floor and coasting standards. The differences are:

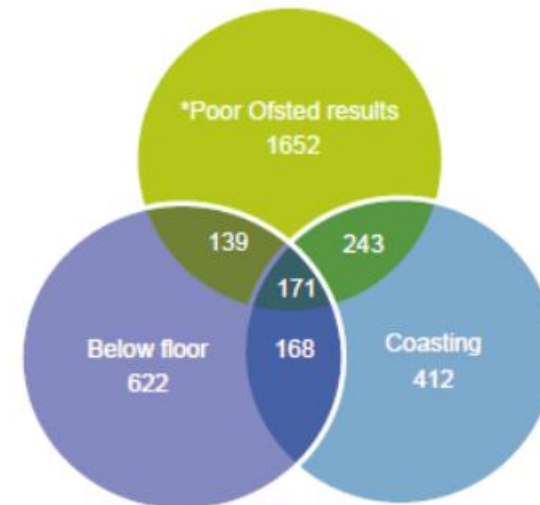
- DfE excludes all schools that close and reopen as a sponsor-led academy during the reference period. They are not subject to the floor standard until they have been open for at least one full academic year or judged as coasting for three successive years. We include these schools in our definitions as we believe that RSCs will want to monitor these new academies to be assured they are improving.
- In DfE's measures, schools are not subject to the floor and coasting standards if they have fewer than 11 pupils in their key stage 2/4 cohorts during the reference period. This is because these schools are more susceptible to year-on-year fluctuations in the ability of their cohorts. However, we retain them within our definition as a number have fallen below the floor standard in multiple years. RSCs should therefore be aware of these schools and be monitoring their performance.
- DfE includes a small number of further education colleges that take pupils at age 14 in their definition. These are not included in our estimates.

As a result of these differences, we have 821 schools below the floor at Key Stage 2 compared to DfE's figure of 665 (for Key Stage 4, the figures are 280 and 282 respectively). We have 620 schools which are coasting at Key Stage 2 compared to DfE's figure of 477 (Key Stage 4 figures are 376 and 319 respectively).

Analysis by phase, school type and region

The diagram below shows the total number of English state schools that are underperforming. This illustrates that some schools fall into more than one category for underperformance.

Figure 3.1 Analysis of reasons for underperformance



* Schools judged as being inadequate or requiring improvement

Underperformance varies by phase and school type

We start by examining the proportion of underperforming schools in 2016 by phase of education and by type of school. The following table shows there is a disparity between phases, with one in four secondary schools underperforming compared to about one in seven in the primary sector.

Table 3.1 Underperforming schools by phase* and type

School Type	Primary %	Secondary %
LA maintained	14	31
Converter academies	15	16
Sponsor-led academies	28	43
Free Schools (incl. UTCs and Studios)	7	26
All schools %	15	27
Number*	2503	904

* All-through schools, as well as middle deemed secondary schools, are included in the secondary schools category, although they might be classified as underperforming based on their KS2 results.

Breaking this down further by type of school reveals some other interesting patterns.

- The proportion of schools that are underperforming in the secondary sector is markedly higher than in the primary sector for all school types apart from converter academies where the levels are similar.
- The proportion of underperforming LA maintained schools in the primary sector is broadly in line with that of converter academies but half that of sponsored academies.
- The proportion of underperforming LA maintained secondary schools is double the primary sector level.

We have explored the reasons for the differences between primary and secondary phases. For all school types apart from converter

academies (where there is no difference between phases), the higher incidence of underperformance is driven by differences in Ofsted judgements and in the proportion of schools below the floor. Of particular note, one in 11 LA primary schools are judged as inadequate or requiring improvement compared to one in four LA secondary schools.

The challenge of tackling underperforming schools varies by RSC region

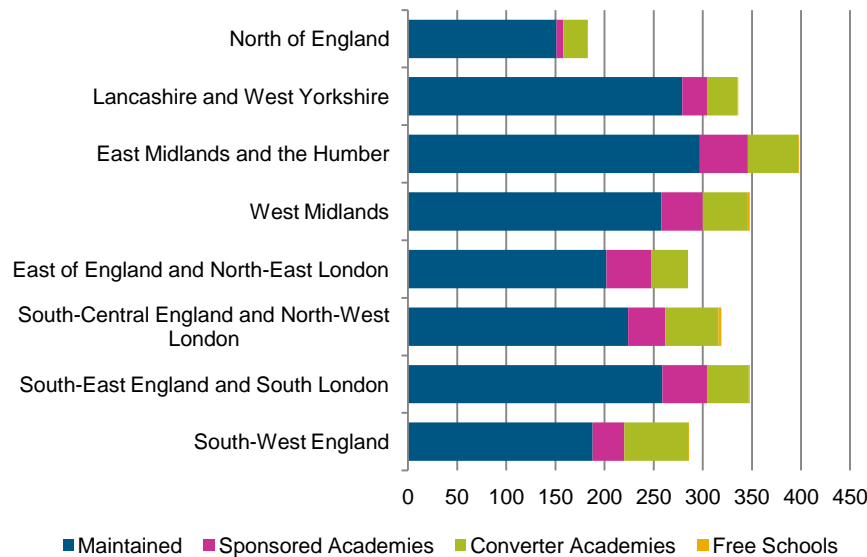
When looking at underperforming schools by region, it is important to note that there is a large variation in the number of schools in an RSC region. With 1709 schools, the North of England has the fewest schools among RSC regions, while its neighbour, Lancashire and West Yorkshire, has the most with 3156 schools. In the figures below, we have deliberately presented absolute numbers of schools requiring action rather than percentages as absolute numbers provide the greatest insight into an RSC's workload.

Primary phase

There is considerable variation between RSC regions in the primary sector with the total number of underperforming schools ranging from 183 in the North of England to 398 in the East Midlands and the Humber. While it is not solely the RSC's responsibility to lead in tackling all underperforming schools in their region, they will nonetheless want to monitor them to ensure that lead organisations (e.g. LAs) have actions in place to help the schools improve. As shown in Figure 3.2, given this variation in underperforming schools

between regions, this suggests that some RSCs will have a greater workload than others.

Figure 3.2 Primary schools requiring action



Secondary phase

The picture is more mixed across school types in the secondary sector, which reflects the higher level of academisation (two-thirds of secondary schools were academies in September 2016 compared to just over a fifth in the primary sector). As shown in Figure 3.3, the absolute numbers vary across region from 70 in the East of England and North-East London to 185 in Lancashire and West Yorkshire, revealing that one RSC has nearly three times the workload when tackling underperforming secondary schools. In percentage terms, both the East Midlands and the Humber and the

North of England have similar levels of underperforming secondary schools to Lancashire and West Yorkshire (around 35 per cent).

Figure 3.3 Secondary schools requiring action

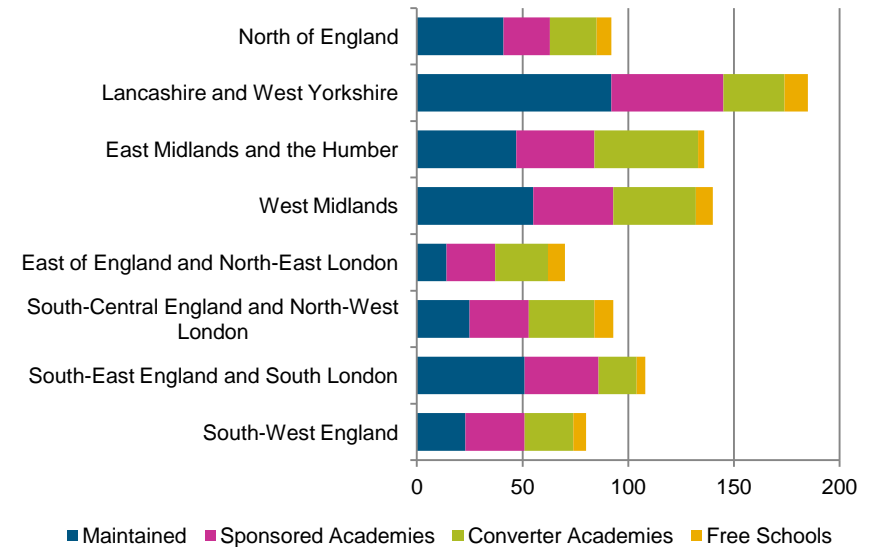
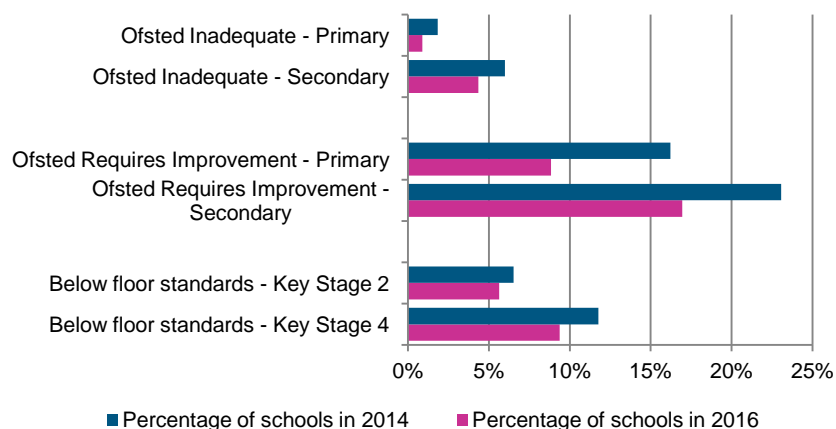


Figure 3.3 also shows a breakdown by school type. Of particular note is the number of free schools requiring help by region, which is perhaps larger than might be expected. This is because this category includes University Technical Colleges (UTCs) and Studio Schools. Of the 217 secondary free schools including UTCs and Studio Schools, 26 per cent are underperforming. However, this varies markedly by school type within this group, with only 16 per cent of Free Schools underperforming, compared to 35 per cent for UTCs and 50 per cent for Studio Schools. The main reason for these schools requiring support is because they have fallen below the floor standard.

The number of schools which are below the floor and/or with a poor Ofsted outcome has fallen since 2014.

We have explored how the numbers of schools below the floor and schools judged by Ofsted as inadequate or requiring improvement have changed since RSCs first took up post. It is not possible to do this for coasting schools as these were only formally introduced in 2016.

Figure 3.4 Changes since 2014 by underperformance category



The largest category of underperformance is schools judged by Ofsted as being inadequate or requiring improvement. The proportion of schools with a poor Ofsted outcome has decreased by eight percentage points in both the primary and secondary sectors since 2014. All RSC regions saw a drop, but the three regions with the largest proportion of schools with poor Ofsted outcomes in 2014 (East of England and North-East London, South-East England and

South London, and East Midlands and the Humber) saw the largest reductions by 2016.

There are also fewer schools below our measure of the floor standard in both the primary and secondary phases compared to 2014. The proportion of schools below the floor at Key Stage 2 fell by nearly one percentage point to 5.6 per cent while the proportion at Key Stage 4 decreased by 2.4 percentage points to 9.4 per cent. Most RSC regions saw a reduction over the same time period, with the notable exceptions of the North of England and South-Central England and North-West London.

Although there have been reductions in underperforming school numbers since 2014, the data does not shed light on why these changes have occurred. It is not known whether these have resulted from the actions of RSCs or is a consequence of the introduction of the new Ofsted inspection framework in September 2015, the new attainment measures that were introduced in 2016, or other factors driving improvement. Caution is needed in drawing conclusions from the data.

See Appendix B for further analysis of the different categories of underperformance, and how they have changed over time.

The number of schools in immediate need varies by region

There are a range of reasons why schools may be classified as underperforming, some of which are more serious than others. For example, DfE’s Schools Causing Concern guidance (DfE 2016c), places a firm requirement on RSCs to issue an Academy Order to any LA maintained school judged by Ofsted as being inadequate, to

turn them into a sponsor-led academy as soon as a sponsor can be found. Conversely, this guidance describes a softer, less rigid approach that enables RSCs to use judgement in terms of deciding what support to give coasting schools to help them improve.

Schools in immediate need

We have defined our 'immediate need' category as:

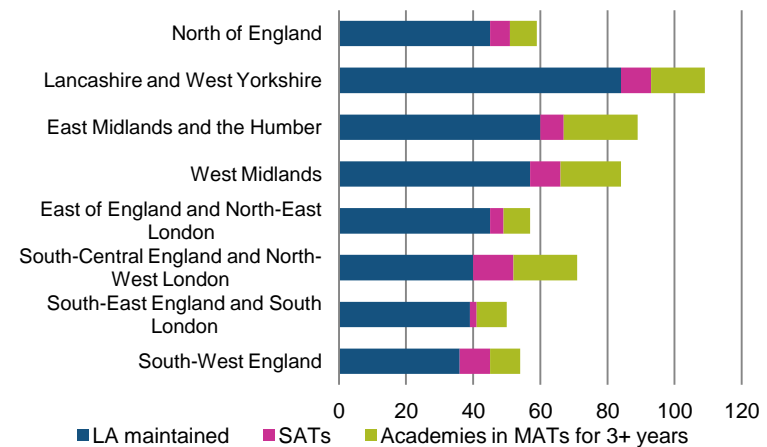
- schools judged by Ofsted to be inadequate
- schools that are below the floor in 2016, which were also below the floor in at least one of the prior two years
- schools judged by Ofsted as requiring improvement which are also below the floor in the current year.

The immediate need group includes some academies that are already in a MAT. Where an academy has been in the same MAT for less than three years, we have assumed an intervention has already taken place, so an RSC will wait to see whether a school starts to improve. However, academies that have been in the same MAT for more than three years, which are still causing concern, are included in this immediate need group as the RSC may be strongly thinking about re-brokering their sponsorship arrangements.

To reflect this, we have split our analysis into two groups. The first group comprises schools where the underperformance is deemed very serious, and where the RSC is likely to make some kind of immediate and critical intervention. The second category, which we label as our 'watch list group' includes all other underperforming schools. RSCs will need to monitor these schools and ensure they receive the appropriate support to improve as they may need firmer interventions in future if improvements are not made.

There are 573 underperforming schools in immediate need. Most of these (406) are LA maintained schools, while 58 are SATs and 109 are academies which have been in the same MAT for at least three years. Of the 3407 underperforming schools in 2016, the remaining 2834 are in the watch list group.

Figure 3.5 Number of underperforming schools in immediate need



There are clear differences between RSC regions in the number of schools with serious underperformance issues. Lancashire and West Yorkshire has the most with 109 such schools, which is more than double the lowest RSC region, South-East England and South London, which only has 50.

4 Potential capacity in the system

We have discussed the number of schools needing help and now we turn our attention to explore the potential capacity in the system to help these schools.

A core RSC function is to tackle underperformance in LA maintained schools and in academies/free schools. One of the key actions an RSC can take in the most serious cases is to transition an underperforming LA maintained school into an academy and place it in a high-performing MAT, or to re-broker the sponsorship for an underperforming academy. Both rely on RSCs having access to a pool of suitable MATs that are willing and ready to take on the additional responsibility of providing support to one or more underperforming schools.

Identifying MATs that are ready for expansion

One of the key considerations for RSCs is when a MAT is ready for expansion. To improve the RSCs' management of MATs, particularly their expansion, the National Schools Commissioner, Sir David Carter, developed a four-tier trust system, which classifies MATs as follows:

- (a) **Starter trusts:** MATs with up to five academies all in the same region
- (b) **Established trusts:** MATs with between six and 15 academies in the same region

(c) **Regional trusts:** MATs with between 16 and 30 academies, which operate across regions

(d) **System trusts:** MATs with over 30 academies which may be located across the country.

As part of deciding whether a MAT is ready to expand from one category to another, there are a range of factors that RSCs will take into account. Among other things, this will include the MAT's size, the ratio of good to underperforming schools within the MAT, whether a MAT has achieved successful improvements for lower-performing schools that they previously took on, governance arrangements, budget and quality of leadership.

Our methodology

It is not possible to measure all of these factors from the available quantitative data. The method we have used to estimate which MAT trusts are ready to expand is set out below.

- Identify the number of positive-performing schools within a MAT. These are schools above the floor, not coasting, and judged as good or outstanding by Ofsted.
- Identify the number of underperforming schools in a MAT (see Section 3).
- Calculate the ratio of positive to underperforming schools and classify a MAT as ready to expand if this ratio is at least 2:1, with the exception of smaller MATs where the actual ratio is 2:1, 4:2 or 6:3, for which taking on additional underperforming schools could stretch the MAT too much.

See the methodology section in Appendix C for more details.

Using this methodology, we estimate that 60 per cent of MATs are ready to expand. However, the picture varies by type of trust, with smaller MATs being much more likely to be ready to expand than the largest ones, which may be a consequence of the latter rapidly expanding in recent years.

Table 4.1 Analysis of trusts which are ready to expand

Academy Grouping	Number of trusts	Number of trusts that are ready to expand	Percentage of trusts that are ready to expand
Multi-Academy Trusts			
Starter MAT	853	514	60
Established MAT	150	86	57
Regional MAT	17	10	59
System MAT	11	4	36
Total MATs	1031	614	60

We have also estimated the additional capacity that MATs which are ready to expand could provide. If all of these trusts expanded to their maximum potential size, they would have capacity to take on 915 underperforming schools.

Accessible capacity exceeds immediate need nationally but there are regional differences

We now compare the potential available capacity in the system to the level of immediate demand for new sponsors across regions.

Table 4.2 Potential additional capacity versus immediate need for new sponsors

RSC Area	Accessible additional capacity	Immediate need for new sponsors	Whether have sufficient capacity	Ratio of accessible capacity to immediate need ¹
North of England	63	59	Capacity	1.1 to 1
Lancashire and West Yorkshire	75	109	Need	0.7 to 1
East Midlands and the Humber	125	89	Capacity	1.4 to 1
West Midlands	126	84	Capacity	1.5 to 1
East of England and North-East London	102	57	Capacity	1.8 to 1
South-Central England and North-West London	108	71	Capacity	1.5 to 1
South-East England and South London	165	50	Capacity	3.3 to 1
South-West England	151	54	Capacity	2.8 to 1
England	915	573	Capacity	1.6 to 1

When looking at available capacity and comparing it to immediate need for new sponsors, we see that across England supply

¹ This assumes that any MAT with available capacity could take on any school with an immediate need. However, in practice, some MATs may only have schools in one phase and may not be willing to take on an underperforming school from a different phase. Therefore the level of challenge may actually be greater than these ratios of available capacity to immediate need suggest.

exceeds demand by a ratio of 1.6 to 1. However, the national picture disguises differences between RSC regions. The two most southern regions appear to be in a very healthy situation with at least 2.8 slots of available capacity for each school in immediate need. However, there is insufficient available capacity in Lancashire and West Yorkshire to meet the immediate need for new sponsors to take on the most serious underperforming schools. Also, available capacity in the North of England is lower than the national average. This low level of available capacity in the northern RSCs is likely to be due to differences in the level of academisation between regions, which our earlier report identified (Hillary *et al.*, 2016).

Growing available sponsor capacity will be a key priority for most RSCs

Although Table 4.2 shows that almost all RSCs regions have more available capacity compared to immediate need, it is likely that many of the RSCs will nonetheless have difficulties matching suitable sponsors to need. RSC regions cover large areas of the country and it is possible that the capacity and need could be at opposite ends of the region. In addition, some MATs might be unwilling to take on an underperforming school, perhaps because they only have schools in one phase but the underperforming school in need of support is in the other phase. It is therefore likely that a key priority for many of the RSCs will be to identify new sponsors.

One potential source of help that RSCs may look towards to expand their sponsor capacity are high-performing SATs in their regions. Many of these are converter academies that deliberately chose to become a SAT, so may not be willing to convert to a MAT and take

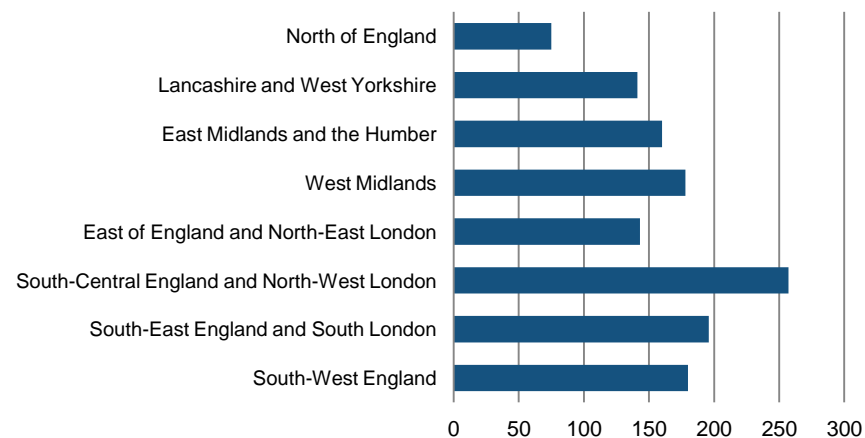
on additional responsibilities for underperforming schools. However, SATs exist in large numbers in most RSC regions, are mostly high performing and have a track record of operating successfully as an academy, so they should be an attractive option for RSCs who need to expand their sponsor capacity.

High-performing SATs

We define a high-performing SAT as one which meets at least one of the following criteria:

- judged as outstanding by Ofsted
- being in the top quartile for attainment and having a progress score which is greater than 0 for all subjects at KS2
- being in the top quartile for attainment 8 and above median progress 8 score or top quartile progress 8 score and above median attainment 8 at KS4.

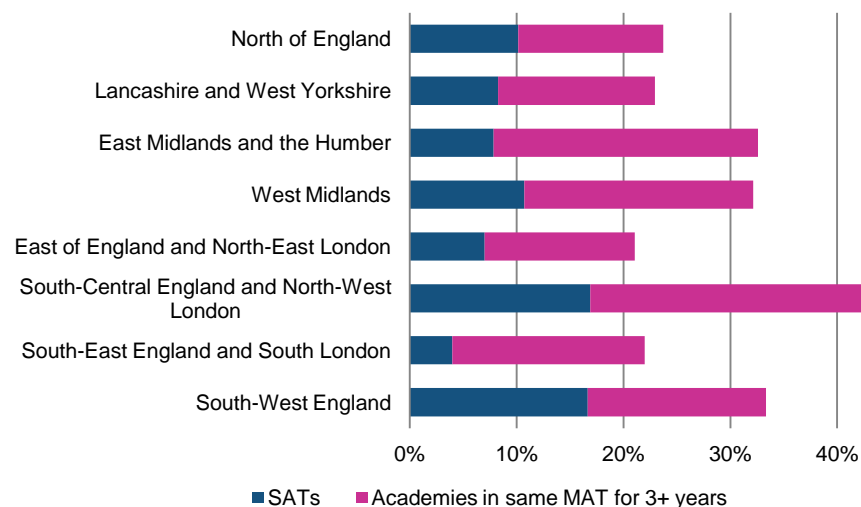
Figure 4.1 Number of high-performing SATs by region



Our analysis shows there are 1330 high-performing SATs. There are clear variations in the number by RSC region, with the North of England and Lancashire and West Yorkshire having the lowest number of high-performing SATs of all RSCs. Despite this, these regions have a large number of high-performing SATs relative to the available capacity from MATs which are ready to expand. It would therefore certainly ease available sponsor pressures if the RSCs could successfully persuade some of these SATs to become a MAT and take on responsibility for an underperforming school.

A growing part of the challenge for RSCs will be tackling underperformance in trusts

Figure 4.2 Percentage of immediate need group that are SATs and academies in MATs for 3+ years



A large part of the challenge for RSCs will be working with local authorities to tackle underperforming LA maintained schools. However, as the proportion of schools that are academies has increased, so have the number of underperforming academies, and tackling these will become an increasing part of the RSCs' role. Already, this is quite significant, with ten per cent of schools in most immediate need of help being SATs and nearly a fifth being academies which have been in the same MAT for over three years.

The picture varies significantly by RSC region with nearly a half of the immediate need group in South-Central England and North-West London comprising SATs and academies in MATs. This compares to East of England and North-East London where the rate is just over a fifth. RSCs will need to demonstrate that they are taking steps to address underperformance in SATs and academies in MATs as proactively as they do for LA maintained schools to maintain public confidence in the academisation programme.

5 Region profiles

<u>North of England</u>	16
<u>Lancashire and West Yorkshire</u>	17
<u>East Midlands and the Humber</u>	18
<u>West Midlands</u>	19
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<u>South-Central England and North-West London</u>	21
<u>South-East England and South London</u>	22
<u>South West England</u>	23

The North of England has a relatively high number of underperforming schools. The available capacity to need ratio in the region is amongst the lowest of all RSC regions, and finding new sponsors could be a challenge.

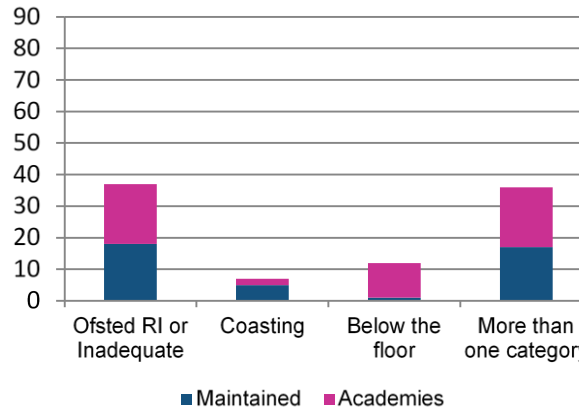
1. The North of England has 275 underperforming schools, the lowest number of all RSC regions, albeit that this region has the smallest number of schools.
2. There are low to average proportions of schools in each category of underperformance (poor Ofsted outcomes, coasting schools and below the floor) in the primary sector, but higher proportions amongst secondary schools.
3. The region has 59 underperforming schools identified as having an immediate need, which the RSC may soon need to find new sponsors for.
4. There are 49 MATs that are ready for expansion with capacity to take on 63 underperforming schools. The ratio of available capacity to immediate need is the second lowest at 1.1 to 1.

Key facts:

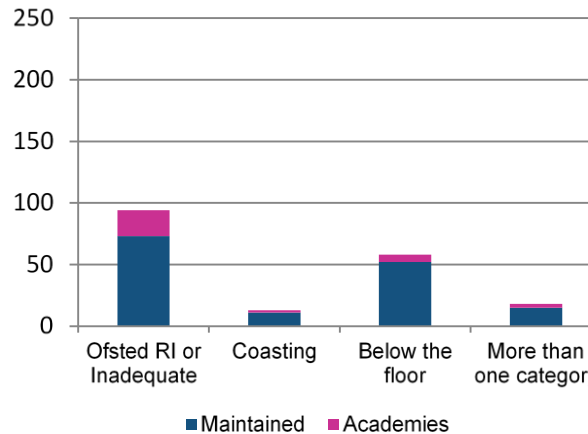
16.1% of schools are underperforming → **3.5%** Schools need immediate help

187 Trusts operating in the region → **49** MATs have available capacity

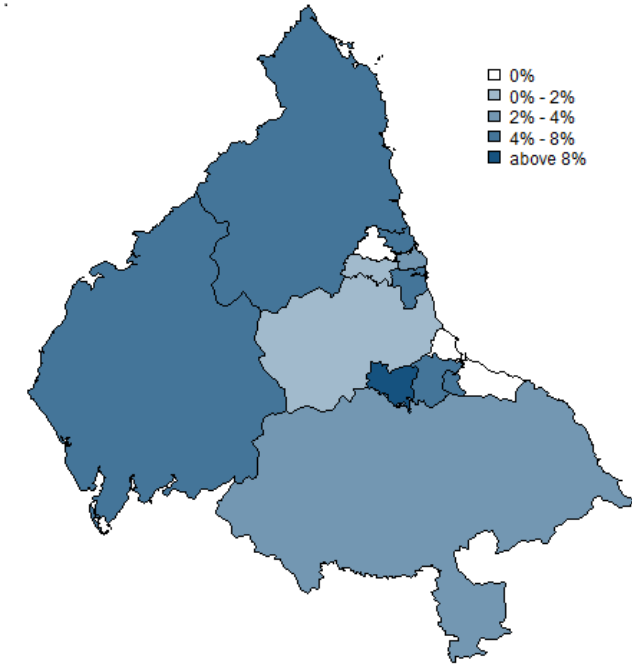
The North of England has 92 secondary schools that are underperforming, which is a third of its total stock.



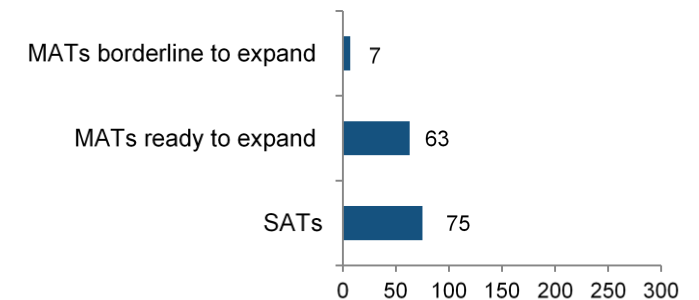
However, the region has the lowest number and proportion of underperforming primary schools of any RSC region.



The region contains the LA with the highest proportion of immediate need schools, but also has three LAs with no immediate need schools.



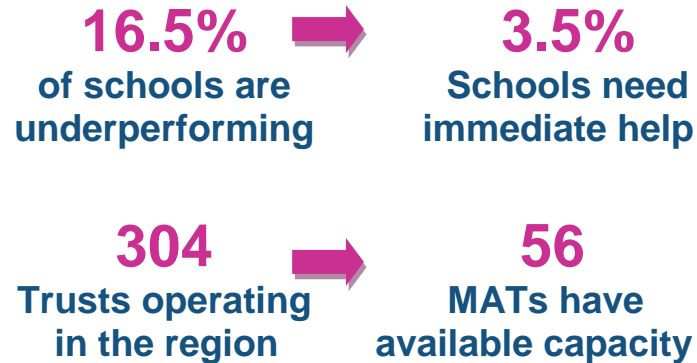
The region has low available capacity and relatively few high-performing SATs that the RSC might approach to find new trusts to help.



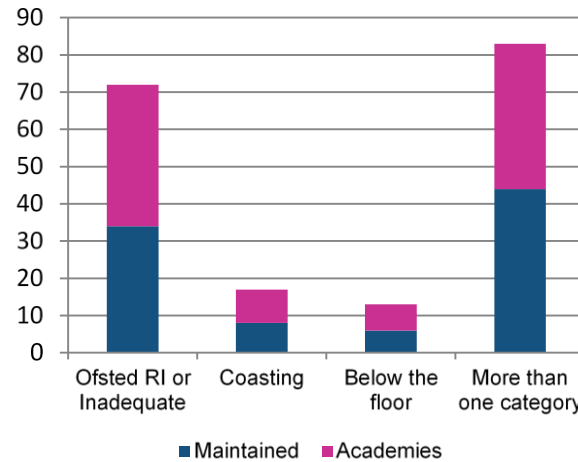
Lancashire and West Yorkshire faces major challenges in terms of underperforming school numbers and having insufficient levels of available capacity to meet its needs.

1. Lancashire and West Yorkshire has 521 underperforming schools, the second largest of all regions, although it has the most schools.
2. There are low to average proportions of schools in each underperformance category (poor Ofsted, schools coasting and below the floor) in the primary sector, but the highest in the secondary sector.
3. The region has 109 underperforming schools identified as having an immediate need, by far the largest of all RSC regions.
4. There are 56 MATs that are ready for expansion with capacity to take on 75 underperforming schools. There is insufficient available capacity to meet the immediate need (ratio 0.7 to 1).

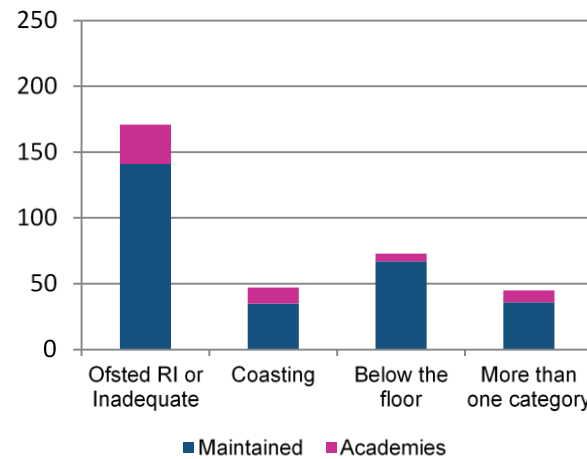
Key facts:



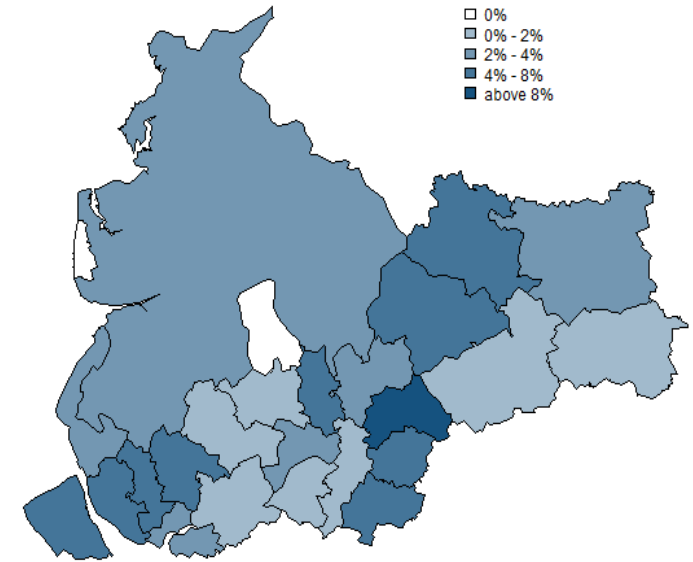
Lancashire and West Yorkshire has the highest number and highest proportion of underperforming **secondary** schools.



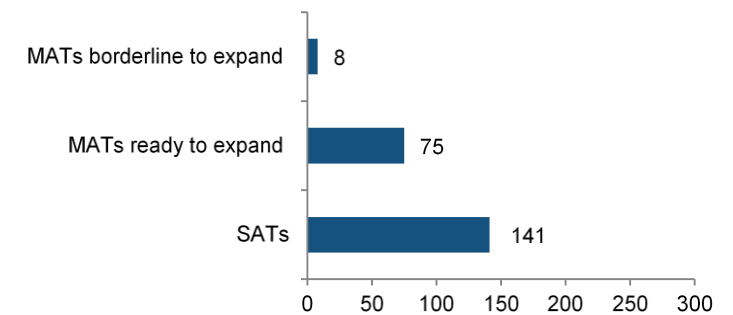
However, the region has slightly more than the average number of underperforming **primary** schools.



Lancashire and West Yorkshire contains three of the top ten LAs with the highest proportion of schools with an immediate need.



The region has very low available capacity, but there are 141 high-performing SATs that the RSC might approach to find new trusts to help.



East Midlands and the Humber

2517 schools

749,837 pupils

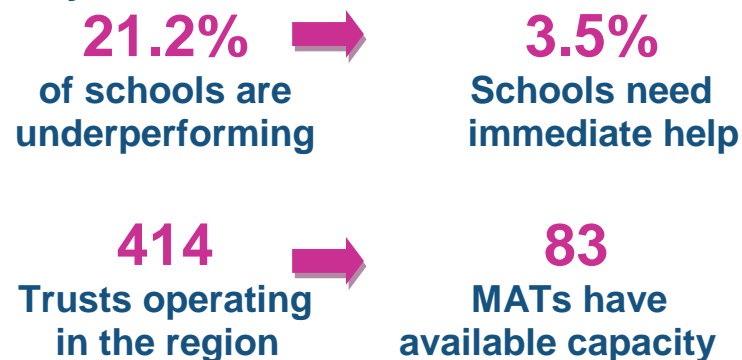
27% of primaries academised

74% of secondaries academised

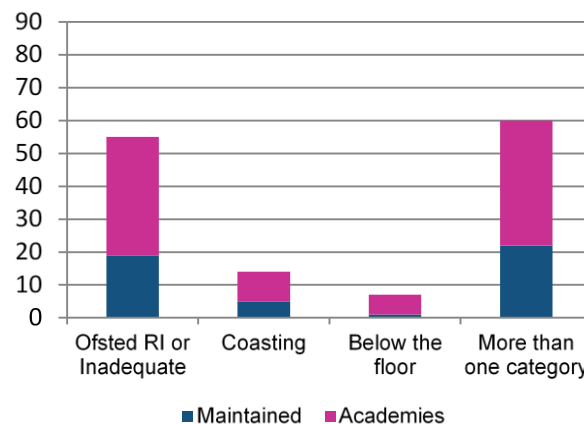
East Midlands and the Humber faces challenges in terms of number of underperforming schools and comparatively low levels of available capacity.

1. East Midlands and the Humber, with 534 LA maintained schools and academies requiring attention, has the highest number of underperforming schools of all RSC regions.
2. The region also has amongst the highest proportion of underperforming schools across each category (poor Ofsted, coasting schools and schools below the floor) in both phases.
3. There are 89 underperforming schools in the region identified as having an immediate need, which the RSC may need to find new sponsors for in the near future, which is the second highest.
4. There are 83 MATs that are ready for expansion with capacity to take on 125 underperforming schools. The ratio of available capacity to immediate need in the region is 1.4 to 1.

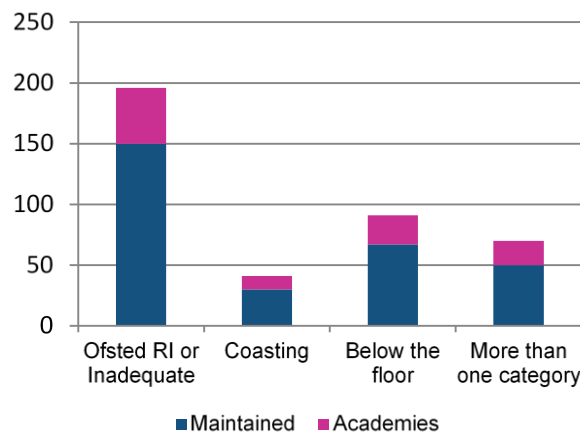
Key facts:



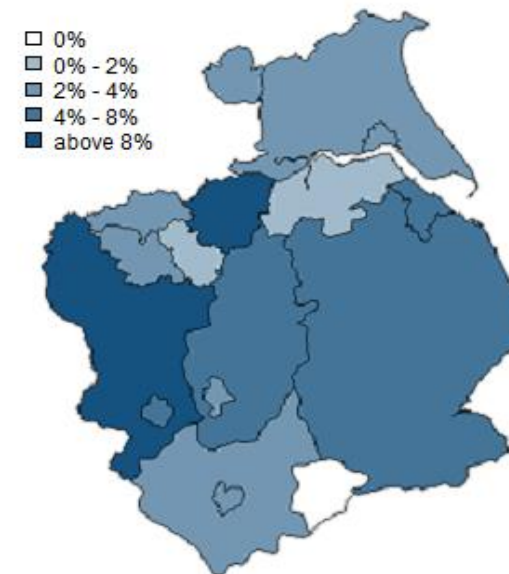
East Midlands and the Humber, with 136 underperforming **secondary** schools, has the second highest number amongst RSC regions.



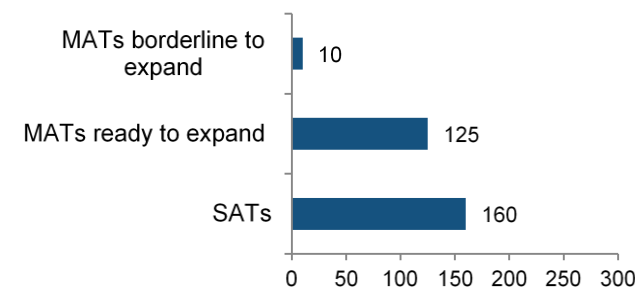
The region has 398 underperforming **primary** schools, the highest number of all RSC areas.



East Midlands and the Humber contains four of the top ten LAs with the highest proportion of schools with an immediate need.



In addition to the **125** spaces available in the region, there are **160** high-performing SATs that the RSC might approach to find extra capacity.



The West Midlands faces a high level of challenge but has sufficient capacity in the short term to manage. It has a large number of high-performing SATs who could provide additional future capacity.

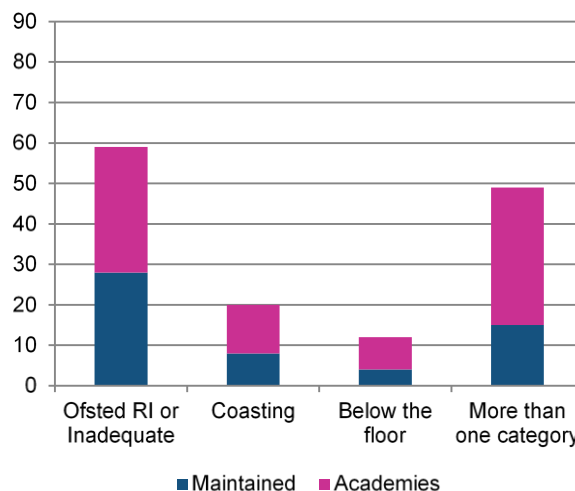
1. The West Midlands has 488 underperforming schools in its region, the third largest of all RSC regions.
2. The region has a high proportion of underperforming primary schools due to poor Ofsted outcomes and coasting schools, but a moderate proportion of underperforming schools across the other dimensions and phases.
3. The region has 84 underperforming schools identified as having an immediate need, which the RSC may need to find new sponsors for in the near future.
4. There are 90 MATs that are ready for expansion with capacity to take on 126 underperforming schools. The ratio of available capacity to immediate need in the region is 1.5 to 1.

Key facts:

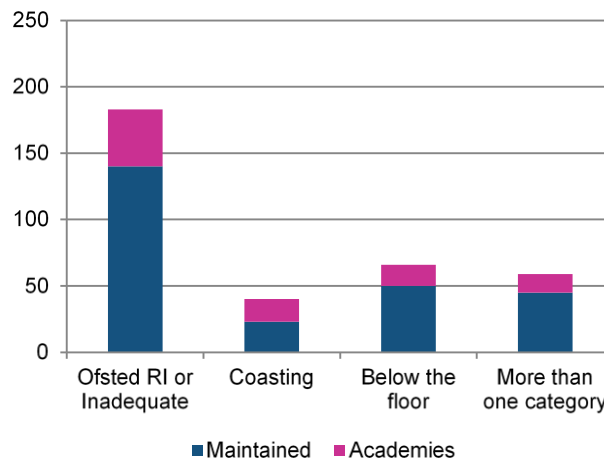
19.6% of schools are underperforming → **3.4%** Schools need immediate help

394 Trusts operating in the region → **90** MATs have available capacity

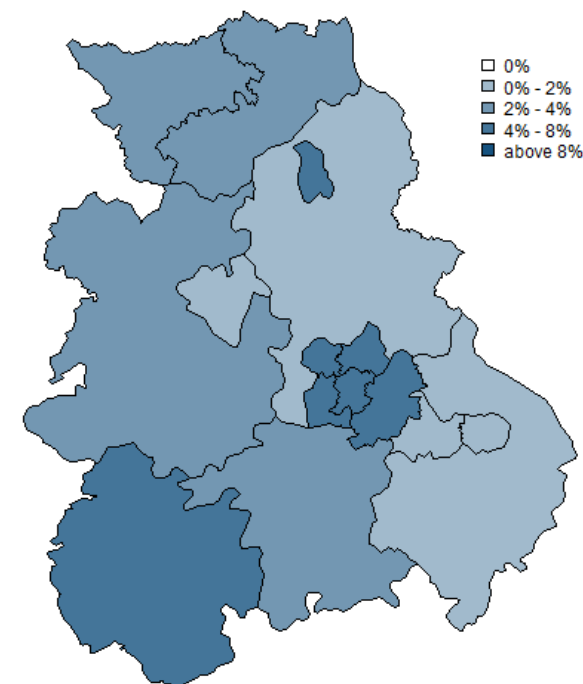
The region, with 140 underperforming secondary schools, has a relatively high number compared to most other regions.



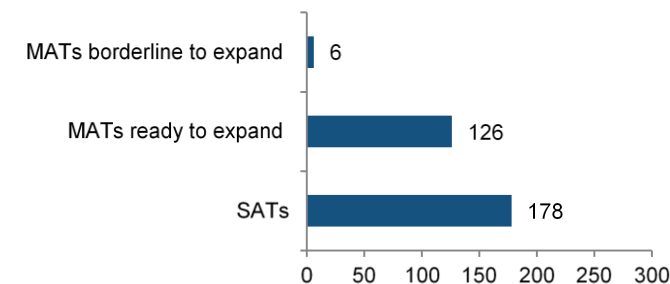
The region also has the joint second highest number of underperforming primary schools.



All of the LAs in the West Midlands have schools with an immediate need, with most LAs with the high proportions clustered around Birmingham.



The region has more available capacity than immediate need. There are 178 high-performing SATs that the RSC could approach if they want to find more capacity.



The East of England and North-East London has a comparatively low level of underperforming schools and sufficient available capacity to meet short-term immediate needs.

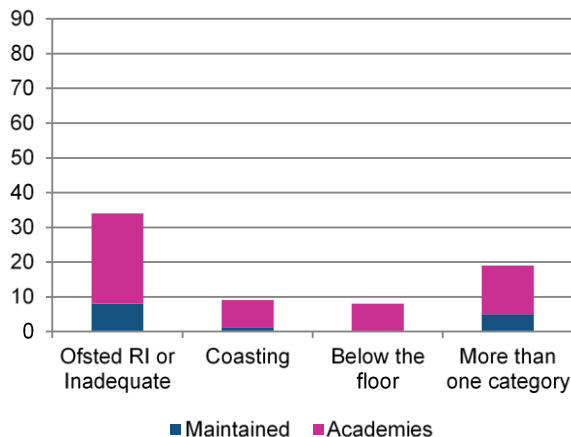
1. The East of England and North-East London has 355 underperforming schools in its region, the second lowest of all RSC regions.
2. The region has the highest proportion of coasting schools in the primary sector, and amongst the lowest proportion of schools underperforming on Ofsted and coasting dimensions in the secondary phase.
3. The region has 57 underperforming schools identified as having an immediate need, which the RSC may soon need to find new sponsors for.
4. There are 79 MATs that are ready for expansion with capacity to take on 102 underperforming schools. The ratio of available capacity to immediate need in the region is 1.8 to 1.

Key facts:

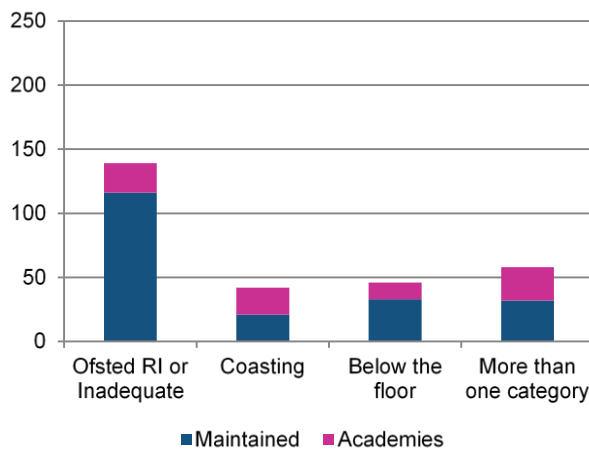
15.9% of schools are underperforming → **2.6%** Schools need immediate help

318 Trusts operating in the region → **79** MATs have available capacity

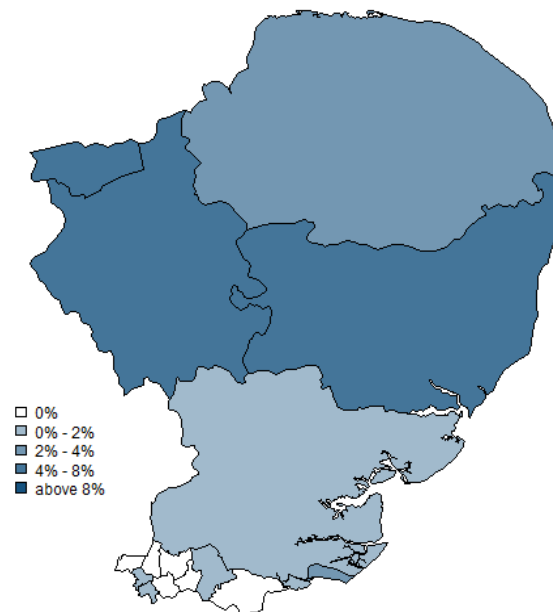
The East of England and North-East London has the lowest number of underperforming **secondary** schools.



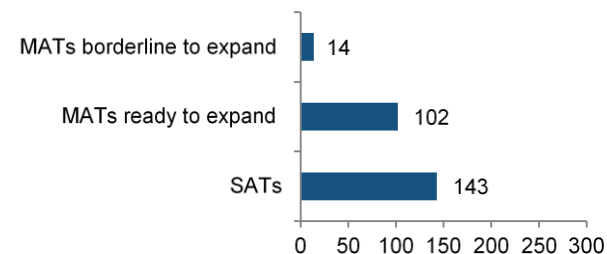
The region also has the second lowest number of underperforming **primary** schools of all RSC areas.



This region is largely split with most LAs in London having no schools in immediate need, while the more rural LAs to the north of the region have high proportions of schools with an immediate need.



The region has more available capacity than immediate need. There are also 143 high-performing SATs that the RSC could approach if more capacity was needed.



South-Central England and North-West London

2787 schools

951,061 pupils

18% of primaries academised

75% of secondaries academised

The challenges facing South-Central England and North-West London appear more moderate compared to other RSC regions as capacity exceeds immediate need and there is plenty of scope for finding more capacity from within the region if needed.

1. South-Central England and North-West London has 412 underperforming schools, which is slightly below the RSC region average.
2. The region has a low proportion of underperforming schools across each dimension (poor Ofsted outcomes, coasting schools and schools below the floor) in both phases.
3. The region has 71 underperforming schools identified as having an immediate need.
4. There are 85 MATs that are ready for expansion with capacity to take on 108 underperforming schools. The ratio of available capacity to immediate need in the region is 1.5 to 1.

Key facts:

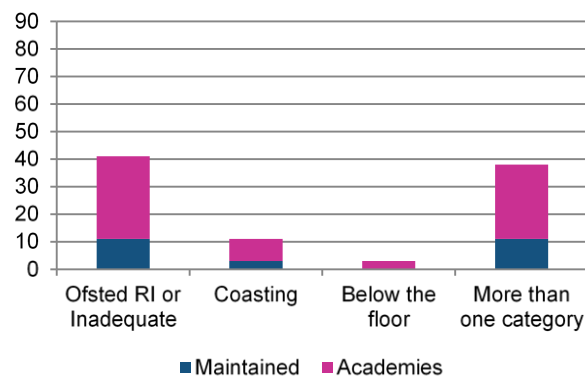
14.8% of schools are underperforming

2.6% Schools need immediate help

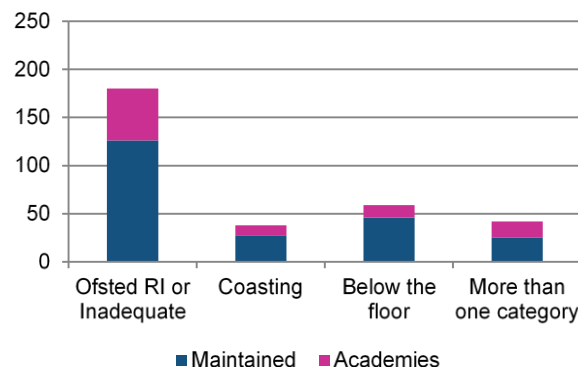
462 Trusts operating in the region

85 MATs have available capacity

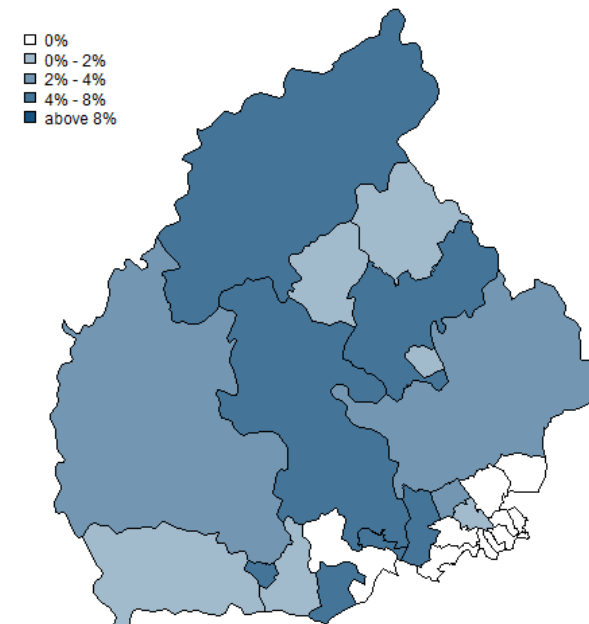
South-Central England and North-West London has a below average number and lowest proportion of underperforming **secondary** schools.



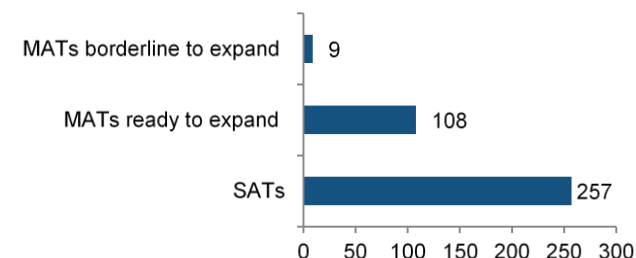
The region also has an average number of underperforming **primary** schools. Academies, which make up nearly a third, are over-represented in this group.



This region is split with most LAs in London having no schools in immediate need, while many LAs outside of London having higher proportions of schools with an immediate need.



The region's available capacity exceeds its immediate need. There are also 257 high-performing SATs that the RSC could approach if more capacity was needed.



South-East England and South London

3067 schools

1,083,861 pupils

21% of primaries academised

64% of secondaries academised

South-East England and South London, with the lowest number of schools in immediate need and largest amount of spare capacity, appears to have fewer challenges than other RSC regions.

1. South-East England and South London has 456 underperforming schools, which is slightly more than the RSC average. As the region has the second largest number of schools, it has the second lowest proportion of underperforming schools.
2. The region has an average proportion of schools with poor Ofsted results in the primary sector and a low proportion of underperforming schools across all other dimensions and phases.
3. The region has 50 underperforming schools identified as having an immediate need, which is both the lowest number and proportion amongst RSC regions.
4. There are 112 MATs that are ready for expansion with capacity to take on 165 underperforming schools. The ratio of available capacity to immediate need in the region is 3.3 to 1, the highest of all RSCs.

Key facts:

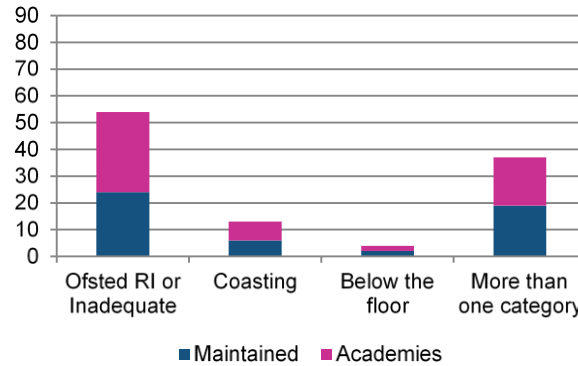
14.9% of schools are underperforming

1.6% Schools need immediate help

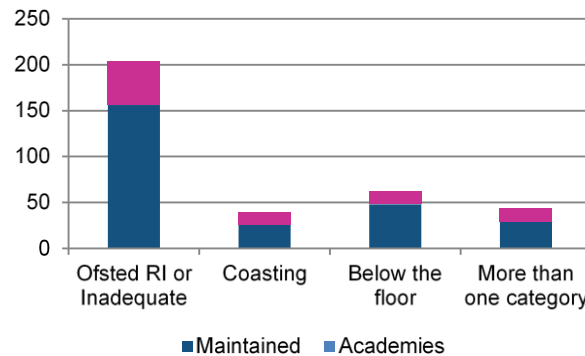
419 Trusts operating in the region

112 MATs have available capacity

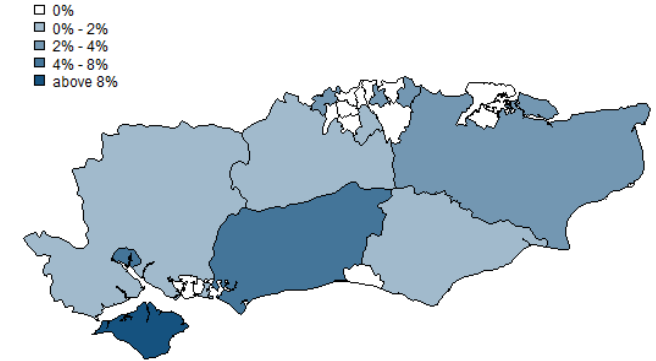
The number of underperforming secondary schools in the region is in line with the RSC average. Nearly a half are LA maintained which are over-represented in this group.



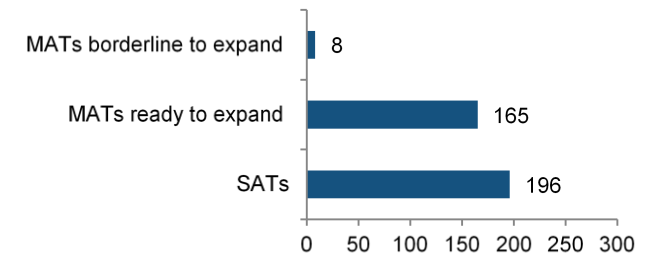
The region has the joint second highest number of underperforming primary schools.



This region is split with most LAs in London having no schools in immediate need, while many LAs outside of London have higher proportions of schools with an immediate need.



The region's available capacity comfortably exceeds its immediate need. There are also 196 high-performing SATs that the RSC could approach if more capacity was needed.



South-West England, with low numbers of schools in immediate need and large amounts of spare capacity, appears to have fewer challenges than most other RSC regions.

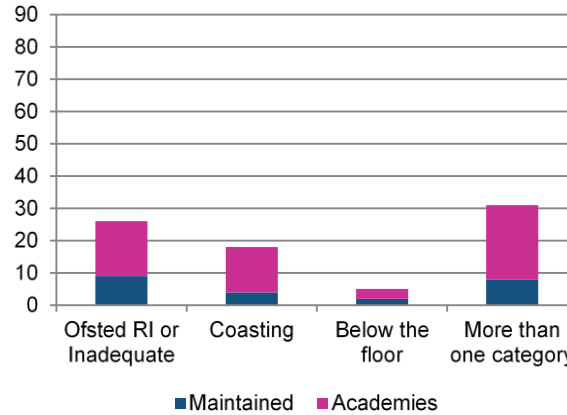
1. South-West England, which is the second smallest RSC in terms of the number of schools in the region, has 366 underperforming schools. This is below the average number for all RSCs.
2. The region has the highest proportion of schools below the floor in the primary sector. It has a low to average proportion of underperforming schools in the other dimensions and phases.
3. The region has 54 underperforming schools identified as having an immediate need, which is the second lowest number amongst RSC regions.
4. There are 87 MATs that are ready for expansion with capacity to take on 151 underperforming schools. The ratio of available capacity to immediate need in the region is 2.8 to 1, the second highest of all RSCs.

Key facts:

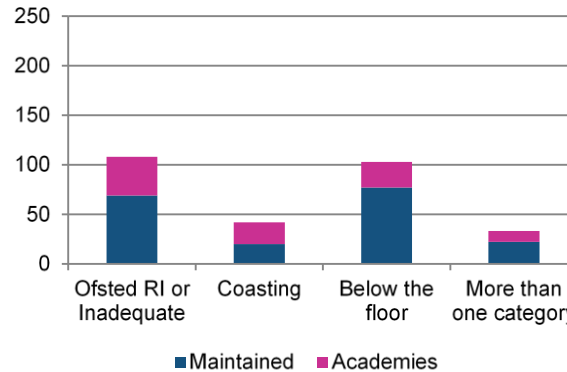
16.6% of schools are underperforming → **2.4%** Schools need immediate help

392 Trusts operating in the region → **87** MATs have available capacity

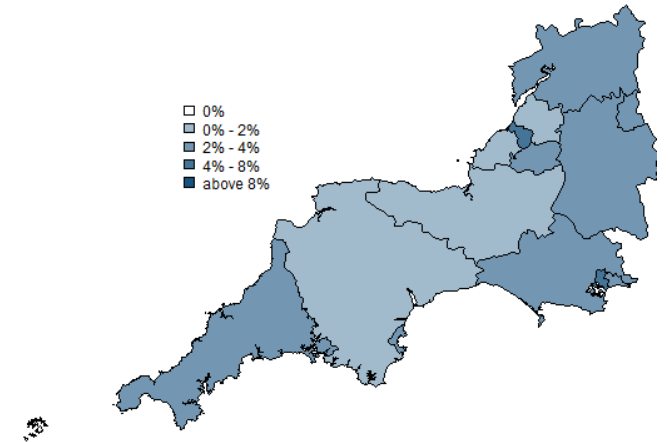
South-West England has the second lowest number of underperforming secondary schools.



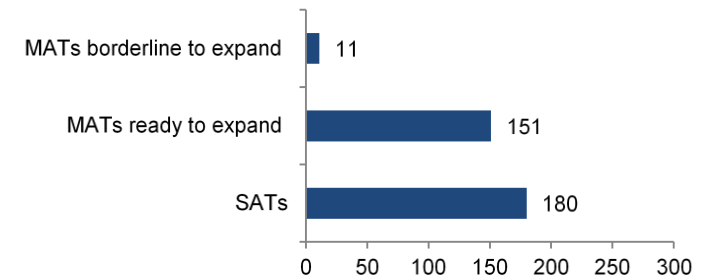
The region also has a relatively low number of underperforming primary schools.



LAs in this region do not really feature much in the top or bottom rank of schools with an immediate need. Most fall in the middle part of the distribution.



The region's available capacity comfortably exceeds its immediate need. There are also 180 high-performing SATs that the RSC could approach if more capacity was needed.



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Appendix A: Changes since ‘A Guide to Regional Schools Commissioners’ (2015 report)

As the RSC role has continued to evolve since our first report in 2015 and more information has become available to explain the RSCs’ role and responsibilities, so our research method has evolved to try to reflect the latest understanding. We have made some major changes to our methodology, which means that it is not possible to directly compare our findings in this report with those in our 2015 report. This appendix sets out the key differences.

New definition of underperforming schools

In our 2015 report, underperforming schools comprised schools that were below the floor or coasting. In this report, in line with the Schools Causing Concern guidance (DfE 2016c) published in March 2016, we have widened this definition to include schools rated by Ofsted as being inadequate or requiring improvement. This has significantly increased the number of underperforming schools. To illustrate, we would have had 1755 underperforming schools in 2016 had we retained our previous definition compared to 3407 using our wider definition.

Improved methodology to estimate capacity

In our 2015 report, we constructed a measure to assess how ready existing sponsors were to expand and take on underperforming schools. This measure indicated that there were 271 sponsors with

a high potential to take on new underperforming schools immediately or with some support.

We have improved our methodology for measuring potential available capacity in this report. Our method compares the ratio of positive performing to underperforming schools within a MAT. Those with a ratio of at least two positive to one underperforming schools are deemed to be ready to expand (excluding MATs with a ratio of 2:1, 4:2 and 6:3). There were 614 such MATs which satisfied our conditions of being ready to expand.

We have then estimated how many additional underperforming schools the MATs we identify as ready to expand might be able to accommodate (i.e. to the point after the addition of another underperforming school took their ratio below 2:1). We found that MATs which were ready to expand had a maximum potential capacity to take on 915 underperforming schools.

To summarise, the available capacity within the system in our latest report is much greater than our previous report because:

- Our new methodology uses MATs rather than sponsors (and not all MATs are signed up to be sponsors).
- We have estimated the maximum potential under performing schools that MATs which are ready to expand could take on.
- There are also more MATs in operation in September 2016 than there were in July 2015.

Categories of underperforming schools

In the period of time since the previous report, DfE has passed legislation to bring coasting schools into being, and has published guidance setting out RSCs’ responsibilities with regard to this and

other types of underperforming schools. Prior to this, we were not able to distinguish between different categories of underperforming schools. However, using the latest Schools Causing Concern guidance, we have been able to split these schools into two groups, as follows.

- Schools in 'immediate need', comprising schools where underperformance is deemed very serious, where the RSC is likely to need to make some kind of rapid intervention.
- 'Watch list' schools, which contains all other underperforming schools. This includes all coasting schools and a large number of schools judged by Ofsted to require improvement which are not underperforming for any other reasons.

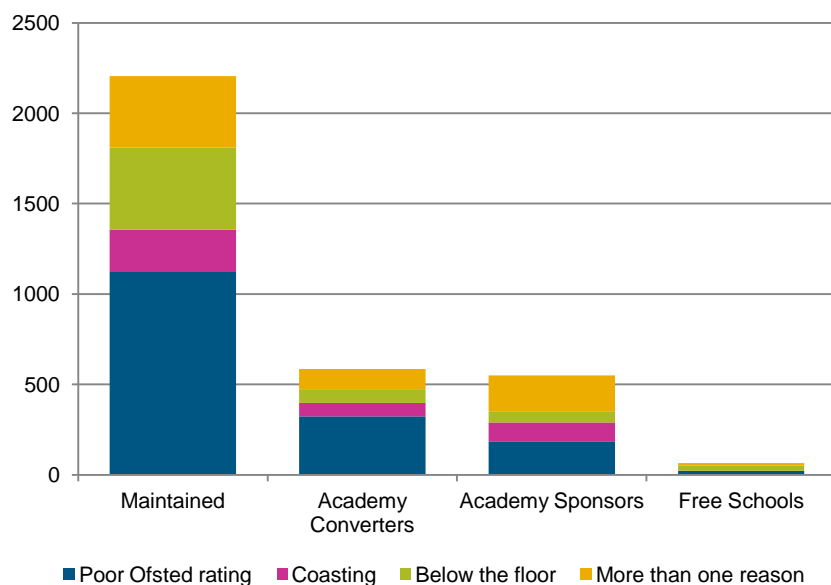
In our 2015 report, in order to assess sponsor capacity, we compared the 1980 underperforming schools which were below the floor or coasting to the 271 sponsors which we had estimated had a high potential to take on new underperforming schools immediately or with some support. However, in this report, we are able to present a more nuanced assessment about whether there is sufficient sponsorship capacity by comparing the 915 maximum potential capacity spaces in MATs which are ready to expand to the 573 schools in the immediate need underperformance group, which RSCs might be thinking will need to be found a suitable MAT to join. As we have refined how we have defined or calculated both the schools in need and the available capacity figures, the figures are not directly comparable to our 2015 methodology.

Appendix B: Definitions of underperforming schools, and changes over time

Reasons for school underperformance

According to our definition of school underperformance, there were 3407 underperforming schools in 2016. LA maintained schools have far more underperforming schools than other school types, much of which is in the primary sector where around four in five schools are still LA controlled.

Figure B1 Number of inadequate underperforming schools



The main reason why schools are underperforming is because Ofsted has judged them to be inadequate or as requiring improvement. However, a fair number are underperforming for multiple reasons, particularly sponsor-led academies where over a third of this school type are underperforming for two or more reasons.

Ofsted judgements

There has been a reduction in the number of schools that are inadequate or which require improvement since September 2014, when RSCs first took up their roles. Then, almost 20 per cent of schools had a poor Ofsted outcome, but two years on, this has fallen to 12 per cent of schools. Although this reduction coincides with the period that RSCs have been in operation, it is not known what is driving this improvement. It could be a consequence of the introduction of the new Ofsted inspection framework in September 2015 or other factors. Caution is needed in drawing conclusions from the data.

Schools judged by Ofsted to be inadequate

The proportion of schools judged by Ofsted to be inadequate fell by one percentage point in the two years to 2016 to 1.5 per cent of all schools. This varies markedly by phase: the proportion of inadequate primary schools decreased from 1.8 per cent in 2014 to 0.9 per cent in 2016, whereas the proportion of inadequate secondary schools decreased from 6.1 per cent to 4.3 per cent over the same period.

In terms of the number of inadequate schools by RSC region, West Midlands has most with 54 while South-East England and South

London with 19 has fewest. All regions have seen a decrease in the number of inadequate schools, but South-East England and South London has seen the greatest reduction, falling from 74 inadequate schools in 2014 (third highest of RSCs) to 19 in 2016 (lowest).

Figure B2 Number of inadequate schools

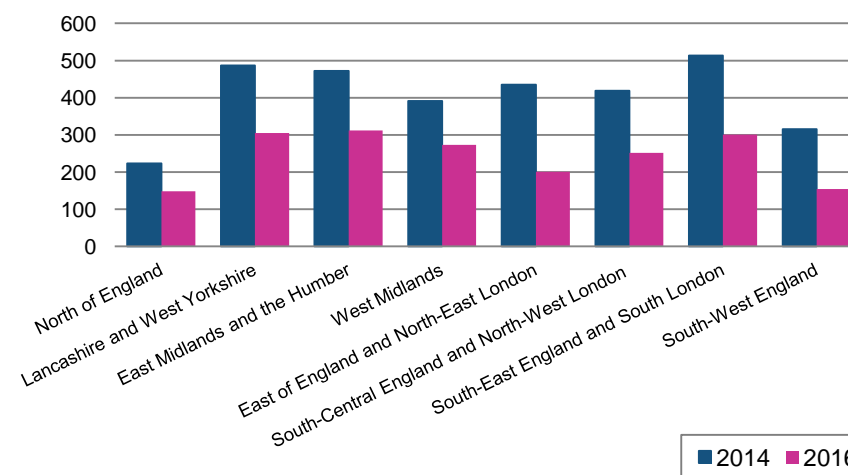


Schools judged by Ofsted as requiring improvement

The number of schools judged as requiring improvement fell by seven percentage points between 2014 and 2016 to ten per cent, with all RSC regions seeing a fall. The three regions with the largest proportion of schools with poor Ofsted outcomes in 2014 (East Midlands and the Humber, East of England and North-East London, and South-East England and South London) all saw the largest reductions by 2016.

As with inadequate schools, there are big differences in the proportion of schools requiring improvement by phase. The proportion of primary schools requiring improvement fell by over seven percentage points to 8.8 per cent in 2016, whereas the proportion of secondary schools fell from 22.9 per cent in 2014 to 16.8 per cent in 2016.

Figure B3 Number of schools requiring improvement



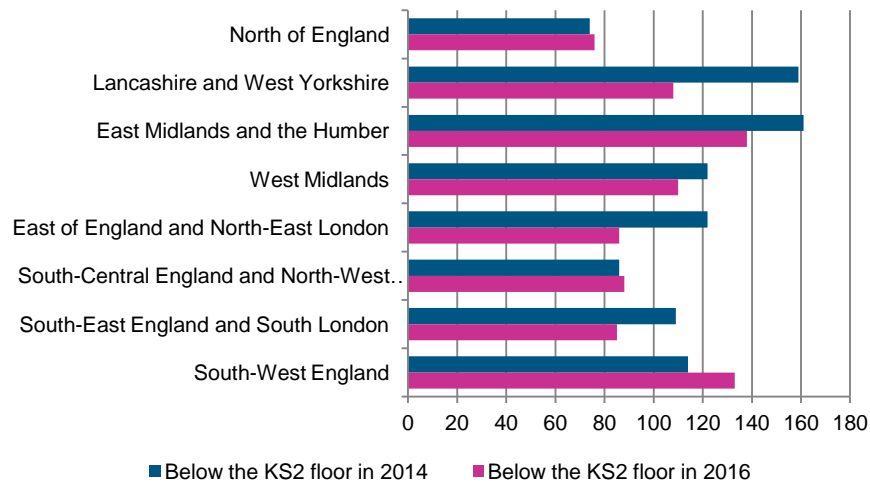
Schools below the floor

The second most common cause of underperformance is schools that fall below the floor standard. The number of schools falling below the floor has fluctuated from one year to the next since 2014, particularly in the primary sector. Although there are fewer schools below the floor in both the primary and secondary phases in 2016 compared to 2014, the number of schools below the floor in 2016 is higher than in 2015. This is because there was a large fall in the

number of schools below the floor between 2014 and 2015, and between 2015 and 2016, the number of schools below the floor increased. Some 4.9 per cent of primary schools and 8.3 per cent of secondary schools fell below the floor in 2016. As with the Ofsted time series data, there may be a number of reasons why the number of schools below the floor has decreased, so caution should be used when interpreting these changes over time.

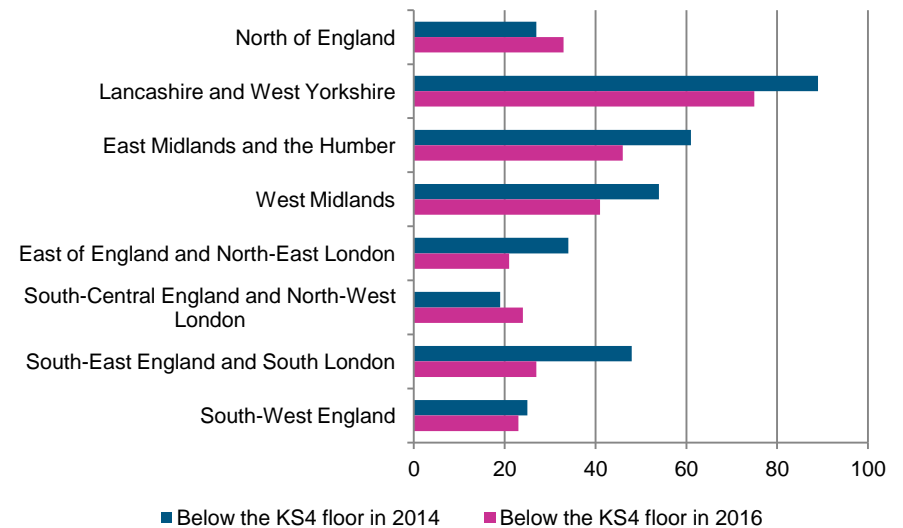
As with Ofsted outcomes, there is again variation in the level of challenge across regions as a result of schools falling below the floor. East Midlands and the Humber has 80 per cent more schools falling below the Key Stage 2 floor standards in 2016 compared to the North of England.

Figure B4 Number of primary schools below the floor



Looking at Key Stage 4, although the number of schools below the floor in Lancashire and West Yorkshire has fallen by one-eighth, this RSC region has by far the largest number of such schools. It has three and a half times the number of schools below the floor than the East of England and North-East London, the region with the lowest number.

Figure B5 Number of secondary schools below the floor



Coasting schools

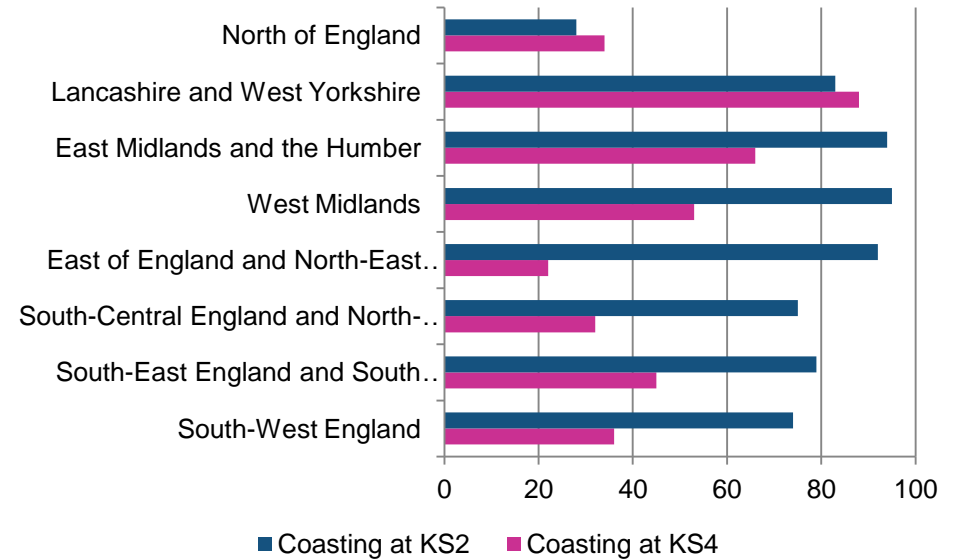
The Education & Adoption Act 2016 allowed the Department for Education to identify ‘coasting’ schools for the first time in 2016. The Department defines these as schools that consistently fail to ensure pupils reach their potential.

The 'coasting' definition captures school performance over three years. In 2016 it will consider performance from the 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16 academic years, and a school is only identified as coasting if it falls within the coasting definition in all three years.

The number of schools deemed to be coasting at Key Stage 2 is relatively equally distributed across most regions with the number varying between 74 and 95. However, the North of England, with only 28 coasting schools, has well under half the number of the next lowest RSC.

Looking at Key Stage 4, the picture is more mixed, with Lancashire and West Yorkshire having the highest number of coasting schools, four times as many as the East of England and North-East London, which has the lowest number.

Figure B6 Number of coasting schools by phase



Appendix C: Methodology

Data Sources

Number of schools and school types by RSCS region and local authority

Numbers and percentages of schools by type and phase in each RSC region and local authority are based on data from Edubase, reflecting school status as of 16 September 2016.

The analysis includes all mainstream state-funded primary, secondary and all-through schools. All-through schools are grouped together with secondary schools for analysis by phase.

The analysis excludes post-16 institutions (i.e. further education colleges, sixth form colleges and sixth form centres, 16-19 academies and free schools), special schools and alternative provisions.

School performance

Number and percentages of coasting schools and schools below floor standards are based on data from the DfE performance tables for the academic years 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16.

For the purpose of this analysis, current academies have been matched to their predecessors to link attainment over time.

Number and percentages of schools classified as requiring improvement or inadequate are based on Ofsted's monthly management information publications, with data including inspections up to 31 October 2016.

Multi-Academy Trust (MATs)

Data on academy trusts is available from Edubase and reflects the status quo as of 16 September 2016.

The size of MATs was calculated based on the total number of institutions recorded as being part of a trust, including post-16 institutions, as well as special schools and alternative provisions. However, post-16 institutions, special schools and alternative provisions have been excluded from the analysis. Therefore, the reported number of trusts excludes those consisting entirely of post-16 institutions, special schools or alternative provisions. Also, the number of schools and pupils in each trust excludes those same institutions.

Definitions

Underperforming schools

Our definition of underperformance follows closely the official definitions from DfE. However, as noted in the report, we do not apply the same exclusion criteria as we are using these definitions for descriptive purposes rather than school accountability.

Key Stage 2

A school is classified as being below the floor at Key Stage 2 in the academic year 2015/16 if:

- the percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in English reading, English writing and Mathematics is below 65%, **and**
- the school achieves a progress score in English reading below -5, *or* a progress score in English writing below -7, *or* a progress score in Mathematics below -5.

A school is classified as being below the floor at Key Stage 2 in the academic years 2013/14 and 2014/15 if:

- the percentage of pupils achieving level 4 or above in English reading, English writing and Mathematics is below 65%, **and**
- the percentage of pupils achieving the expected progress in English reading, English writing and Mathematics is below the national median for all three.

A school is classified as being coasting at Key Stage 2 in the academic year 2015/16 if:

- In 2015/16, the percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in English reading, English writing and Mathematics is below 85%, **and** the school achieves a progress score in English reading below -2.5, *or* a progress score in English writing below -3.5, *or* a progress score in Mathematics below -2.5.
- In 2013/14 and 2014/15, the percentage of pupils achieving level 4 or above in English reading, English writing and Mathematics is below 85% **and** the percentage of pupils achieving expected progress is below the national median for all three components.

Key Stage 4

A school is classified as being below the floor at Key Stage 4 for the academic year 2015/16 if:

- the progress 8 measure is below -0.5, **and**
- the upper bound of the progress 8 confidence interval is below zero.

A school is classified as being below the floor at Key Stage 4 for the academic years 2013/14 and 2014/15 if:

- the proportion of pupils achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs (or equivalents) including English and Mathematics is fewer than 40%, **and**
- proportion of pupils achieving expected progress is below the national median for both English and

Mathematics.

A school is classified as being coasting at Key Stage 4 in the academic year 2015/16 if:

- in 2015/16, the progress 8 measure is below -0.25 **and** the upper bound of its confidence interval is below zero
- in 2013/14 and 2014/15, the percentage of pupils achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs (or equivalents) including English and Mathematics is fewer than 60%, **and** the proportion of pupils achieving expected progress is below the national median for both English and Mathematics.

Underperformance and levels of need

A school is classified as underperforming if it is either:

- below the floor standards in 2015/16, or
- coasting in 2015/16, or
- rated by Ofsted as requires improvement or inadequate.

Within the group of underperforming schools, a school is classified as being in immediate need if:

- it is rated as inadequate by Ofsted, or
- it is below the floor standards in 2015/16, and has been below the standard at least once in either 2013/14 or 2014/15
- it is below the floor standards in 2015/16, and has been rated as requires improvement by Ofsted.

Where an academy falls within our definition of immediate need, we have assumed that it is not in immediate need if it is part of a MAT, and has joined that MAT in or after September 2013. This means an academy is classified as being in immediate need if it is a Single Academy Trust, or if it has joined its current MAT prior to September 2013.

High-performing schools

For the purpose of identifying the capacity to expand of Multi-Academy Trusts (see box below), we have also defined high-performing schools as follows.

A school is classified as high performing at Key Stage 2 in the academic year 2015/16 if:

- the percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in English reading, English writing and Mathematics is within the top 25% nationally, and
- progress scores in English reading, English writing and Mathematics are all above zero.

A school is classified as high performing at Key Stage 4 for the academic year 2015/16 if:

- the progress 8 measure is within the top 25% nationally, and the attainment 8 score is above the national median, or
- the attainment 8 score is within the top 25% nationally, and the progress 8 measure is above the national median.

Classification of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs)

Our basic classification of MATs is based on our size calculations (which include post-16 institutions as well as special schools and alternative provisions, see box above), and follows the guidelines proposed by the National School Commissioner, Sir David Carter.

MATs are classified as follows:

- **Starter MATs** are MATs with up to five schools
- **Established MATs** are MATs with between 6 and 15 schools
- **National MATs** are MATs with between 16 and 30 schools
- **System Leader MATs** are MATs with more than 30 schools.

Note that Starter and Established MATs are generally concentrated in one region, although a small number of them control schools across two or more neighbouring regions. On the other hand, National and System Leader MATs are generally cross regional, with only a small number of National MATs being located in a single region.

MATs readiness to expand

For the purpose of our analysis, we have defined a MAT's readiness to expand on the basis of the proportion of good schools to underperforming schools in the MAT. We have a two-tier classification, where a MAT is assessed at both national and regional level.

The definition of underperforming schools is explained above.

A school has been classified as good if:

- it is rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, **and**
- is not coasting in 2015/16, **and** has not fallen under the coasting threshold in the last two academic years (note that falling below the floor standard would automatically imply falling below the coasting threshold).

This definition leaves some schools with a 'neutral' classification. This would be the case when they do not

have any of the necessary data to produce a classification (many new free schools fall in this category), or because the school performance is variable across the three years of data considered.

We classify a MAT as ready to expand (at the national level) if the overall ratio of good schools to underperforming schools is at least 2:1, with the following exceptions:

- a single-school MAT is classified as ready to expand if the school is classified as high performing
- small MATs with an exact ratio of 2:1 (i.e. where the actual numbers are 2:1, 4:2 or 6:3) are classified as borderline as taking on an additional underperforming school would potentially stretch them too far.

At a regional level, a MAT is classified as ready to expand in a specific region if:

- the MAT is classified as ready to expand at the national level, and
- there are at least as many good as underperforming schools within the MAT in that specific region.

We define the capacity to expand of a MAT as the number of underperforming schools it can potentially take on given the current number of good schools. This is calculated as the number of schools that would bring the ratio of good to underperforming schools below 2:1. As an example, a MAT with 15 good schools and five underperforming schools would be able to take on up to three more underperforming schools, as the third one is the one that would bring the ratio below 2:1.

For cross-regional MATs, we allocate capacity to expand proportionally to the number of good schools within the MAT in the region. Regions with smaller overall capacity are given preference in the case of a tie.

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