The Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP  
Chair: Education Select Committee  
Via email

**Education Select Committee Short Inquiry: Opportunity Areas Programme**

Dear Mr Halfon,

It was with regret that I was unable to attend the roundtable session your committee recently held with chairs and stakeholders from the Opportunity Areas. I was hosting a long-arranged visit – to look at the work of my Opportunity Area – by Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools.

I have since read the Hansard for both evidence sessions and felt compelled to write to you.

I’m troubled by the extent to which the discussion focussed on the partnership infrastructure in each area. That’s not unimportant. But I would not Chair this Opportunity Area if that were its main purpose. My interest is in making a practical and visible difference.

We have focussed on the delivery of a relatively small number of key projects which we believe can make a real difference and during the lifetime of this project. Those priorities are: improving early years education; raising outcomes in both primary maths and literacy; and improving secondary school performance. The last has necessitated achieving measurable improvements in the quality of teacher recruitment and resolving the controversial issues of behaviour and attendance in school.

I have been well supported by an extremely able Board but also by a very small group of officials who, while being challenging and sympathetic of the problems schools face in this part of Yorkshire, have not flinched from challenging any sense of resignation. Instead they have brought forward practical and affordable solutions. We could not have made so much progress without that external impetus and challenge.

That progress has been encouraging. On commencement of the Opportunity Area programme, very few schools were engaging in the national roll out of the primary maths mastery programme. Through re-thinking the approach, we are firmly on track to ensure over 80% of all primary schools will be supported intensively to develop this well evidenced approach. The area now has three new and active mastery specialists who have been supported through an intensive year-long training programme and are now cascading that learning with primary schools on the coast. Furthermore, Maths Month was delivered in March, and was a huge success, with over 65% of schools engaging in events, and over 87% of primary schools
competing in maths challenges online. Pre and post survey data reported a 10.5% point increase in pupils’ attitudes towards maths. And we have made measurable improvements in literacy.

We have designed and are piloting an innovative HR Talent Management project in which teacher recruitment for the whole of the Opportunity Area is centralised through a single consultancy; recruitment rounds are now processed faster, and campaigns more tailored and effective, meaning that fewer strong candidates are lost to the area. To date, the consultant has filled 46 of 50 vacancies and in the first hiring round and has attracted and recruited 17 new appointees from outside the Opportunity Area.

I’d be simply delighted if you, alone or with committee members, were able to visit. I promise you will leave with a clear appreciation of practical improvements in the lives of disadvantaged children here.

Yours sincerely

Martin Narey

Sir Martin Narey

Chair, North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area Board