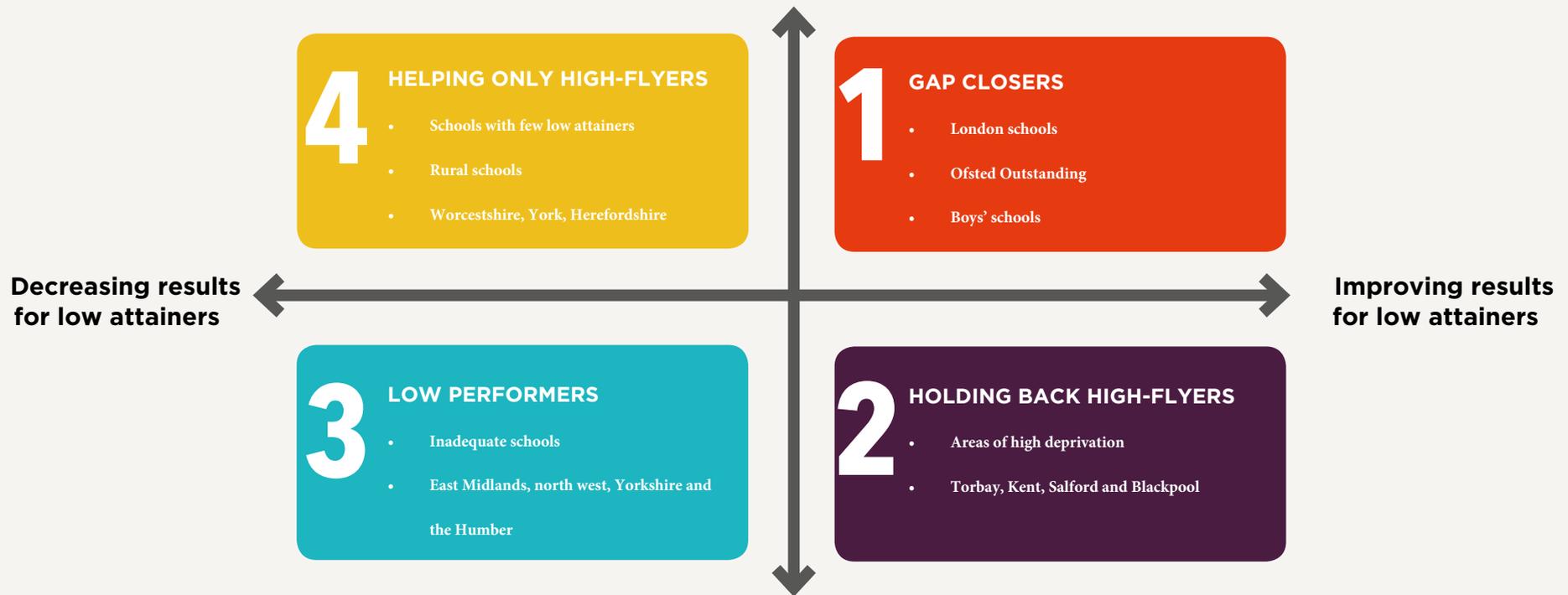


Who is closing the gap between high and low prior attainers?

Improving results for high attainers



Decreasing results for high attainers

The data identifies four different groups of schools, with specific traits, across England that achieve different outcomes for their low and high attaining pupils. These are:

1. Gap closers

Schools doing the most to close the gap between high and low attainers. They are often found in London, are rated Ofsted outstanding, or are boys' schools.

2. Holding back high-flyers

Those that, controversially, decrease the gap by reducing outcomes for high-attainers. A pattern that tends to be found in areas with high levels of deprivation, with Torbay, Kent, Salford and Blackpool

performing poorly on this measure.

3. Low performers

These schools have poor headline measures with results low for high and low-attainers. Ones with the worst gaps are most likely to be inadequate schools and those in the East Midlands, north west, Yorkshire and the Humber

4. Helping only high-flyers

Meanwhile, these are schools look like they are performing well overall, but tend to increase the gap as they are doing well for high attainers, but not for low prior attainers. Typically, they have small proportions of low-attainers, are rural schools, and based in Worcestershire, York,

Herefordshire and the east of England.

In January, *Schools Week* attempted to find examples of schools where low-attaining pupils were achieving on a par with their peers, based on last summer's GCSE results.

There were stringent conditions to be included in this "league table": high proportions of low-attaining pupils, high levels of pupils in receipt of free school meals, above average proportions of low-attaining pupils getting five A*-Cs including English and maths, and the school meeting the government benchmark (40 per cent 5A*C EM) overall.

Of 3,264 state-funded secondaries, just 10 made the grade.

These are extreme examples, but prove there are schools that are able to buck the trend, even with numerous challenges.

As Elliot Major points out: "You must hold optimism that there are schools in the country that do manage to close gaps and fulfil the potential of all children, irrespective of achievement.

"The challenge is always about how you scale up and do that for the whole system."

He said the only way was through evidence-based policies to improve schools, and by making improvements outside the school gates, such as by raising parental aspirations. But it could only work if both of these community-focused and government-led policy changes worked in tandem.