

NAO study - Supporting the attainment of disadvantaged children in educational settings

Submission from NGA: January 2024

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and governance professionals of state schools in England. We have several categories of membership and represent the interests of boards irrespective of their school type and governing structure. Our aim is to improve the well-being of children and young people by promoting high standards and improving the effectiveness of governing boards.

What is educational disadvantage and how does it affect a child's ability to learn?

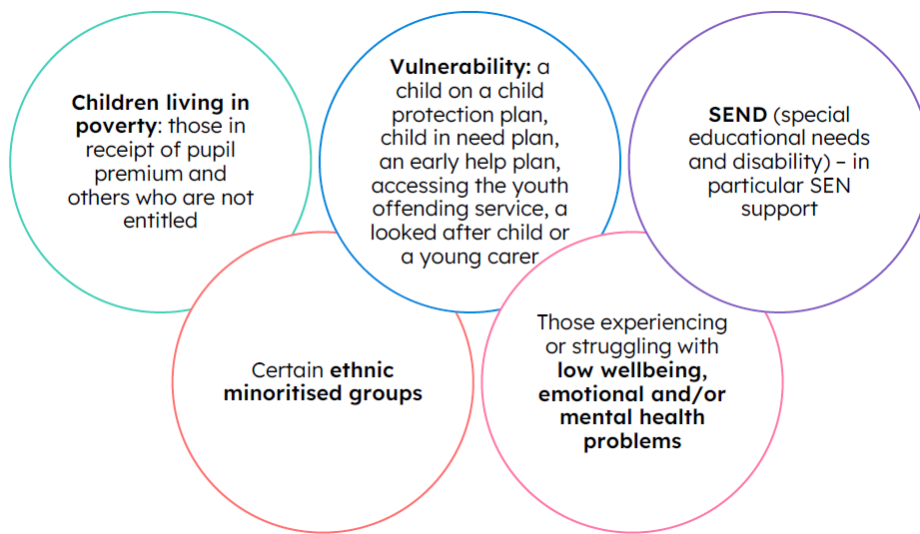
The Department for Education (DfE) doesn't explicitly define 'disadvantage', and we suggest that this has meant that the issue of the full range of disadvantages and their links have not considered across the sector. We very much welcome this study by the NAO, particularly as the number of children and young people with an educational disadvantage is growing.

The DfE makes pupil premium funding available to schools to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils based on restrictive socio-economic eligibility criteria. While we recognise the importance of pupil premium funding and the accountability measures in place for effective spending, the limits of entitlement to pupil premium seem to have cultivated a narrow focus on what is considered educational disadvantage.

Disadvantage is a nuanced term - children can experience barriers to their education for many different reasons, not just socio-economic factors, and as a result be at an educational disadvantage. We believe a wider definition of education disadvantage is needed and we adopted this approach in our guidance: 'Disadvantage, Widening the Lens' (see attached to email):

"Research shows that there are other groups of children who are overlooked in pursuit of closing the attainment gap who are statistically at a significant educational disadvantage."

We aimed to establish a set of broadened parameters to enhance the governing board's ability to focus their support on all pupils facing educational disadvantage. NGA's widening the lens guidance paper introduces five dimensions of disadvantage alongside a toolkit for each of those dimensions:



These pupil groups are statistically more likely to be behind their peers in relation to academic progress and attainment, more likely to be suspended and/or excluded, and less likely to have a good attendance record.

The toolkits have been developed over the past two years to provide insight into the potential systemic barriers to learning that exist for children experiencing one or more of the ‘five dimensions of disadvantage’, and how governing boards can work with their school leaders to mitigate their impact on academic attainment.

While each dimension is addressed in separate toolkits, there are many pupils who fall into more than one of these groups. It is also important to note that NGA is not trying to label pupils or put them into boxes – quite the opposite. If a child belongs to one or more of these pupil groups, it doesn’t inherently imply that they are disadvantaged, and therefore they should not be viewed as such. It actually means that statistically they are more likely to be at risk of experiencing educational disadvantage and care must be taken to mitigate and address these risks.

Below are some examples of how educational disadvantage for each of the named pupil groups may manifest and how this impacts a child’s ability to learn.

a) Vulnerability

Children who we have defined as vulnerable have often either encountered or are experiencing a circumstance that has compromised their safety, or they may be in a situation that has the potential to have a negative impact on their welfare.

Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance makes clear that vulnerable groups are potentially at greater risk of harm than others. Such risks are not limited to adverse effects on development and educational outcomes but can also include being at great risk of safeguarding issues, including neglect and other forms of abuse (Public Health England, 2020).

Vulnerable children may experience emotional and psychological stress due to the circumstances contributing to their vulnerability. This stress can affect their ability to concentrate, engage in learning activities, and form positive relationships with teachers and peers. It can also lead to the child presenting challenging behaviour, and being perceived as just 'naughty', which can result in suspensions and/or exclusions if the appropriate interventions are not in place. Their circumstances may lead to disruptions in a child's attendance at school and increased monitoring can increase anxiety levels.

Vulnerable children may experience changes in their living situations too, such as moving to a foster home or residential care. Such transitions can be disruptive and may affect a child's sense of stability, which in turn can impact their focus and performance at school and may involve school moves.

Key stats:

- Children with a social worker do worse than their peers at every stage of education. Those in their GCSE year are around half as likely to achieve a strong pass in maths and English than their peers, three times less likely to study A levels and five times less likely to go on to higher education at age 18 (DfE, 2022).
- Children on a child in need plan are four times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion than their peers (Timpson, 2019).
- 27% of young carers (aged 11 to 15) miss school or experience challenges in their education. They achieve an average of one grade lower than their peers at GCSE and are more likely to not be in education, employment or training (NEET) between the ages of 16 to 19 (The Children's Society, 2022).

b) Mental health and wellbeing

2023 NHS statistics show one in five children and young people struggle with mental health. Mental health difficulties can lead to educational disadvantage and increase the risk of poor academic performance, absenteeism, poor behaviour at school and challenges in forming positive relationships.

Children who struggle with their mental health can present symptomatic challenging behaviours at school such as aggression, emotional outbursts or a lack of engagement. This behaviour is often wrongly interpreted, leading to children and young people either being punished and/or missing out on receiving the support they need. Poor mental health may contribute to irregular attendance or reluctance to participate in classroom activities. Students may avoid school due to feelings of anxiety, stress, or a lack of motivation.

Academic attainment may be directly impacted due to a lack of motivation and a reduced ability to meet learning targets. Skills such as planning, organisation, and time management can be impacted resulting in difficulties with completing assignments, meeting deadlines, and overall academic planning.

Key stats:

- 20.3% of children aged 8 to 16 have a probable mental disorder. This increases to 22.6% for those aged 11 to 16 (NHS Digital, 2023).
- Mental health difficulties increase absenteeism (EBPU, 2019) with children facing mental health challenges twice as likely to miss school than their peers (NHS, 2022).
- Children with poor mental health are more likely to be excluded (Timpson Review, 2019).
- 79% of young people and 87% of parents and carers agree a young person's behaviour is linked to their mental health (Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition, 2022).

c) SEND

The government's 2022 SEND green paper, Right Support, Right Place, Right Time acknowledged that the educational outcomes of children and young people with SEND often "fall behind those of their peers".

Children with SEND are usually entitled to one of two levels of support: SEN support and Education, health and care plans (EHCP). As there is no legal framework around SEN support offered by schools, pupils with additional needs who do not have the legal safety net of an EHCP are statistically at a significant disadvantage in their education.

Key stats:

- Data published in January 2023 states that there are currently 517,026 children on an EHC plan (gov.uk, 2023) but there are 1,129,843 children with SEN support (gov.uk, 2022).
- The experiences and outcomes of children and young people [with SEND] are poor, provision and interventions are often inconsistent, inadequate and late in meeting their needs (SEND green paper, 2022).
- By the end of reception year, children receiving SEN support were over a year behind their peers with no identified SEN in 2022. This gap grows to 18 months by the end of primary school and to almost two years by the end of secondary school (EPI, 2023).
- The EHCP gap for pupils at the end of primary school was 28.3 months in 2022. By the end of secondary school, the EHCP gap was even wider at almost three and a half years (40.7 months) in 2022.
- In 2022, 18.3% of pupils with SEN achieved grades 5 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs, compared to 58.0% of pupils with no identified SEN (DfE, 2022).
- Children with SEN are more likely to be excluded from school (Timpson Review, 2019).

d) Ethnicity

Children from groups which constitute ethnic minorities in England can be subject to racism, both overtly, and through systems and processes. This may have an impact on their attainment, but

also exclusion rates and mental health and wellbeing. The Education Policy Institute’s (EPI) analysis of data from the DfE identifies the ethnicity GCSE attainment gap in months relative to their White British peers, including:

Ethnicity	Gap in months (2022)
Gypsy/Roma	31.4
Traveller of Irish Heritage	22.3
Black Caribbean	8.6
White and Black Caribbean	7.4

The YMCA conducted research looking at the experiences of young Black people in education and found that teacher perceptions, a lack of diversity in the curriculum and representation in the teacher work force were significant barriers to achieving in school. According to the Institute of Race Relations, just 11% of GCSE pupils studied modules in 2019 that referred to the presence of Black people in British history.

In the academic year 2018-19 (the last full academic year unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic for which data is provided), pupils from Gypsy/Roma ethnic groups had the highest rates of suspension and exclusion, being almost four times more likely to be suspended or excluded, followed by Travellers of Irish heritage. Children from a Black Caribbean background were three times more likely to be excluded than their White peers (six times more likely in some local authorities according to figures obtained from the DfE by the Guardian). Although data for the academic year 2021-22 was impacted by social restrictions – meaning comparisons to previous years should be treated with caution – the data continued to show similar trends.

e) Poverty

On average, the academic performance of pupils from poorer families falls below that of their more affluent peers. The relationship between educational attainment and poverty is one that continues into adulthood, with a child’s educational achievement being the most influential factor affecting their later work prospects and so the risk of future poverty (ONS, 2014).

- At primary school, the disadvantage gap increased between 2019 and 2022 from 9.3 to 10.3 months – the second largest gap since 2011, when it was 10.6 months (EPI, 2023).
- For pupils in their reception year, the disadvantage gap widened in 2022 to 4.8 months, its highest level since 2014 (EPI, 2023).
- The suspension rate for FSM eligible pupils is more than 4 times that of non-FSM eligible pupils. The permanent exclusion rate for FSM eligible pupils is 5 times that of non-FSM eligible (DfE, 2023).

- Children who are FSM6 are more than twice as likely to be persistently absent than their peers at both secondary and primary school age. (FFT Education Datalab, 2023)
- Children who are FSM6 are 2.5 times more likely to be severely absent at primary age than their peers and 3.5 times more likely at secondary age. (FFT Education Datalab, 2023)

The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has conducted research, gathering the views of pupil from low-income families on ways they face exclusion and stigma. Findings included:

- **Curriculum and learning:** Pupils experiencing poverty in England are financially excluded from full participation in a wide range of school subjects and activities, including PE, music, swimming and art and design.
- **Stigma:** Day-to-day practices in English schools often unintentionally draw attention to family incomes and make children feel embarrassed and different. These include expensive uniform policies, non-uniform days and requirements to bring in material possessions like pencil cases.
- **School fun:** Families are borrowing money to pay for school activities like school trips, not wanting children to lose out on these valuable learning opportunities.
- **School food:** Policies and practices relating to food in school often mean that children experiencing poverty don't have the same options as their peers at lunchtime.

The costs associated with school attendance are a major barrier affecting pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds ([Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk)) - specifically transport and uniform costs are identified as barriers to school attendance, especially with recent pressure on the cost of living.

Pupils from 'disadvantaged backgrounds' are often perceived to lack aspiration, this is not the case for them any more than their more affluent peers, but they are more likely to lack the opportunities, connections and sometimes inspiration to look beyond their current circumstance.

1. Spotlight on Disadvantage

The findings of a study carried out by NGA in 2018, Spotlight on disadvantage, reinforces the need for a wider discourse around disadvantage. The research explored the role of governing boards in spending, monitoring and evaluating the pupil premium and was based on a self-selecting survey of 875 governors and trustees, supplemented by a thematic analysis of 36 pupil premium strategies from a wide range of schools. Although pupil premium strategy statements have to be published on schools websites at that time no-one at all in the system was considering them.

Our analysis concluded that entitlement to pupil premium was not the only determinant of disadvantage; a more holistic approach was needed. Although the majority of survey respondents defined 'disadvantaged' as those eligible for the pupil premium (unsurprisingly given the remit of the research), other criteria being used in schools and trusts was reported, including:

- any child identified by the school as needing additional support
- children with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- those who speak English as an additional language or who are from a minoritised ethnic background
- pupils with a challenging home life
- those with prior attainment issues
- those with social, emotional and mental health needs
- pupils identified through a school's own socio-economic calculations.

The analysis also highlighted a disconnect between the strategies adopted by schools and the barriers to learning that had been identified for individual pupils.

When considering the impact being disadvantaged has on a child's ability to learn, it is important to acknowledge the tension between addressing the systemic factors that create and sustain poverty (and injustices associated with the other dimensions of disadvantage) and addressing the immediate educational needs of children.

The concept of the "pedagogy of poverty", argues that the provision of material resources alone is not sufficient to address the educational challenges faced by children in poverty and doing so would promote a culture of deficit thinking. The research highlights how these children often encounter low expectations and a focus on discipline, limited intellectual engagement, and an emphasis on academic attainment at the expense of a connect between poverty, housing and many other issues that would disrupt us in our own ability to function at work, let alone children experiencing these issues and having to then attend school. This approach is likely in the most part driven by a high stakes accountability system that has a heavy focus on academic attainment, even down to an academic results driven pupil premium success measure. There is some useful research on values driven pupil premium spending with successful results, which would be a beneficial angle for the DfE to place emphasis on too in addition to the focus of Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) research.

There are a number of studies that highlight teachers' misconception of poverty as being caused by parental actions/cultural factors, exacerbating low expectations and potentially resulting in negative behaviours. This, in turn, impacts their interactions with children. Children in poverty frequently express frustration at being reprimanded, often for not having the correct equipment or uniform. This significantly affects children's well-being and leads to increasing disengagement from learning.

While recognising recent SoS's focus on the importance of cultural capital and the importance of extra-curricular initiatives, the DfE's current approach to addressing educational disadvantage still focuses heavily on 'fixing' the child and addressing their perceived deficit and not enough on removing systemic barriers. The schools sector has often attempted to solve the disadvantage gap by concentrating on classroom practice and quality of teaching. This is clearly central to the educational mission of the school, but it does not necessarily have an impact on the gap and moreover it is not necessarily addressing the child's barrier to learning.

Addressing disadvantage must include assessing policies, practices and procedures that create and sustain disadvantage, not doing so will limit the impact of other well-meaning strategies put in place.

3. The role of the governing board

Governors and trustees must consider how the school/trust is going to raise standards for all children, but also governing boards have a pivotal role to play in ensuring that pupils who are at a disadvantage have the support they need to learn. Every board hold the responsibility for:

a) Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction

Governing boards, together with their school and trust leaders, should be setting time aside to think about disadvantage outside of the pupil premium. Governing boards have the freedom to explore what this means for their context, looking beyond the national narratives.

Governing boards are responsible for ensuring that their school meets the DfE requirement to publish their pupil premium strategy statement. This is an important responsibility and should be kept under review through the governing board's monitoring cycle.

While the school's leadership team is responsible for writing the strategy, the process of compiling it should be collaborative. Boards should be able to see how the strategy is focused on raising attainment for disadvantaged pupils and how it is aligned to the school's vision and strategic priorities.

b) Hold executive leaders to account for educational performance

Governing boards will need to consider a number of factors when monitoring the academic progress and attainment of pupils at risk of disadvantage. Children attend school to receive an education and to be equipped with the tools they need to progress onto their next stage in life and become functioning members of society. But while at school, children with disadvantages are more likely to face other challenges, such as higher rates of exclusion, challenges with their mental health and poor attendance.

Monitoring key data in relation to the five dimensions of disadvantage, as defined by NGA is key. This includes both progress and attainment data of all pupils, as well as data on behaviour, safeguarding, exclusions and attendance. These are all important indicators of how well a pupil may be thriving at school and the barriers that may be preventing pupils from engaging with learning.

c) Overseeing financial performance and making sure its money is well spent

Governing boards will need to monitor the impact of pupil premium spending. The governing board (or delegated committee) should receive regular reports from school and trust leaders in between annual strategy statements (once a term, for example) that cover the number of eligible

pupils, spending to date and an assessment of spending against outcomes referred to in the pupil premium strategy.

The governing board should look at internal progress and attainment measures for pupil premium eligible pupils as evidence that the funding is having the intended impact, and to inform their questions to school leaders about the strategy.

Governing boards should use external data to verify spending decisions made by school leaders such as Analyse School Performance (ASP) data and third party data tools (such as FFT). Trust boards also should be looking at the trust wide strategy and how it is being implemented on the ground at school level.

d) Ensuring the voices of school stakeholders are heard

There are two ways in which boards should view stakeholder engagement: the whole organisation approach and the board's direct engagement.

Engaging with stakeholders, such as parents, staff and wider community groups, allows the governing board to gather diverse perspectives. These insights can then be used to inform strategic planning.

Stakeholder engagement also aids in gathering feedback on the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at addressing educational disadvantage. The governing board can use this feedback to assess the impact of interventions and make data-driven decisions for continuous improvement.

Establishing partnerships with community organisations and local businesses can enhance the board's ability to address educational disadvantage. Collaborative efforts can lead to resource-sharing, community-based initiatives and a greater understanding of the pupil demographic.

4. How effective is the support that DfE provides to early years providers and schools to enable them to best support the attainment of disadvantaged children?

a) Early years

What works well?

The DfE aims to provide access to high quality early years provision which can support the development of children's educational and wider outcomes, including personal, social and emotional development. With 96% of early years settings rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding, the quality of childcare in England is high.

The DfE provide Early years settings with the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) to help improve education for eligible children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The DfE has recently announced funding as part of the early years education recovery package, focusing on supporting with continuing professional development.

When working well early years education provision will be well resourced and staff will have the knowledge and capacity to nurture and actively engage with children, within safe environments.

Currently, all three and four year olds are entitled to 15 hours per week of free childcare or early education, rising to 30 hours for working families, and 15 hours for disadvantaged two-year-olds, over 38 weeks of the year. Funding eligibility is due to be increased in stages over the next 18 months.

Barriers/challenges

Early years funding is complex to access with it being administered across three governmental departments:

- The DfE offers free early education for all three and four year olds and two year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds
- HMRC administers tax-free childcare that offers a 25% subsidy to working families
- The DWP administers Universal credit where parents can claim back up to 85% of childcare costs.

These complexities can be a barrier to take-up, particularly among lower income families, digitally excluded households, families where English is spoken as an additional language and those living in deprived areas.

Funding should be weighted much more heavily towards children from low-income families and children with SEND to provide equity in access to quality early years provision. The EYPP is currently just £342 per year, compared to £1,455 for primary school pupils and £1,035 for secondary school pupils, the disparity indicates the lack of value placed on early years provision - it should be increased to align with the two later school phases.

The shift in spending away from the tax and welfare system towards the free entitlement benefits many working parents, but has put significant pressure on providers with the current rate of government funding for free entitlement hours being less than the cost to provide them.

This has resulted in many providers requesting parents to subsidise funding or cross-subsidising the government funded hours by raising prices for younger children. Subsequently, the system has disproportionately benefitted those parents on higher incomes who can afford to subsidise the costs and increased the risk of children from lower income families and those with additional needs being crowded out.

Under-funding also impacts pay in the sector and could harm the quality of care on offer, as well as losing quality staff to better paid jobs in other sectors.

There are currently too few trained teachers working in early years provision which is crucial not just for the quality of the service for all, but especially for children facing disadvantage, who do not have as much opportunity to learn at home.

The Family Hub model is currently only accessible to 50% of councils. It should continue to be rolled out, ensuring a family-focused and integrated system of care, education and wider holistic support for young children and their families.

b) Schools

What works well?

The introduction of the National Funding Formula (NFF) in 2018 provided the opportunity for a more equitable funding model for state schools across England. The pupil premium funding is a valuable tool in providing support to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils based on socio-economic eligibility criteria. Having this funding identified separately focused leadership and governing boards on the issue and how best to focus expenditure to make a difference.

Barriers/challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis have had the greatest impact on the most vulnerable pupils and families in our schools and as a result we have witnessed the disadvantage gap increase. For example, the disadvantage gap in GCSE English and maths widened to 18.8 months in 2022 – its largest level since 2012. (Education Policy Institute, 2023).

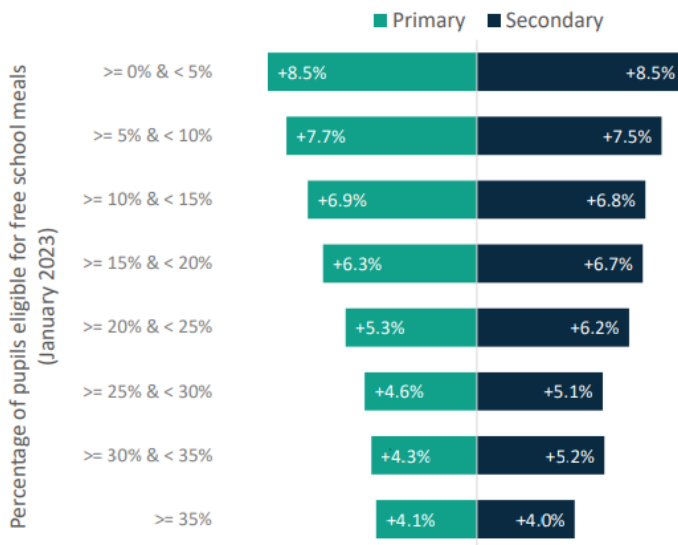
Entitlement to Free School Meals

The current criteria used to measure disadvantage by the DfE is restrictive and there are increasing numbers of children living in poverty (32% or 900,000) who are not entitled to FSM (CPAG, 2023). FSM eligibility should be extended to all those pupils in receipt of Universal Credit. Households below average income (HBAI) statistics for 2021/22 show 71% of children currently growing up in poverty live in a household where at least one adult is working, usually in receipt of Universal Credit.

Funding models:

The pupil premium plays a crucial role in addressing the attainment gap, however, it has not kept pace with inflation, with its value in 2023-24 over 11% lower in real terms than it was in 2014-15. First, its value needs to be protected in real terms. Second, entitlement to the premium could be extended alongside the proposed extension to FSMs.

While we support the NFF it must be reviewed to ensure that as well as all schools receiving sufficient funding to sustain high quality education, they can meet the additional needs of vulnerable groups. The below diagram shows that schools serving the most disadvantaged communities saw the smallest increases in schools block funding between 2017-18 to 2023-24 (EPI, 2023).



Source: Analysis of Department for Education, 'National funding formula tables for schools and high needs'

Attendance and behaviour:

Attendance is a significant challenge for the sector with both persistent absence and overall absence at their highest levels since records began in 2006-07. Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) and vulnerable children have the highest levels of absence.

The increase in absence is symptomatic of underlying challenges faced by children, young people and families, coupled with under resourced children’s support services. Those children are missing out on their education and the challenge to re-engage them is placing significant pressure on schools and trusts. NGA welcomes the government’s ambition to address sector wide attendance concerns. However, as well as the urgent need to rebuild attendance support services, it is important that engagement with families and communities is at the heart of their strategy.

Children who belong to one or more of the five dimensions of disadvantage are statistically more likely to struggle with their mental health, more likely to be excluded from school and more likely to be behind their peers where progress and attainment is concerned. As previously mentioned, poor behaviour is often symptomatic of underlying issues or unmet needs. These challenges are closely linked to absenteeism. The issue is not just about getting children into school, but addressing the underlying and systemic issues.

Outcomes from a recent roundtable on behaviour and exclusions attended by NGA

Some key challenges identified by the group are:

- Ensuring that we do not locate the problem in the child, removing the deficit discourse around disadvantage and its impact on learning and participation in school life;
- A child in difficulty should not be the sole responsibility of the school;

- The importance of understanding and addressing the underlying causes that can lead to exclusion and suspension from school. Evidence shows the key risk factors include: being from lower socio-economic groups, being from certain marginalised ethnic and racial groups, having Special Educational Needs (SEND) - including speech, language and communication needs which have not been addressed;
- A lack of understanding or awareness of the underlying causes of mental health issues and the importance of understanding that behaviour is a means of communication - which is sometimes the case among parents, carers and families, teachers, teaching assistants, and others with responsibility for the child's care and welfare;
- Potential perverse incentives e.g. Ofsted pressures for academic success, resulting in 'problem' children sometimes being excluded from school, to minimise their impact on a school's performance;
- A lack of - or limited - available funding for in-school targeted mental health support;
- The importance of senior decision-makers, such as school governors, understanding why this investment is needed.

Practical solutions identified by the group to address these challenges, included:

- Better understanding of the individual needs of a child. This includes better and faster assessment to identify which children and young people need which type of help; and which children are more at risk of exclusion;
- A recognition of the importance of good relationships to give a child or young person the best start in life and support throughout their school years;
- Engendering a school culture and ethos, which sees the nurturing approaches of targeted mental health support adopted throughout the school, as part of a whole-school approach to wellbeing and inclusion, from Governors and School Leadership to classroom support staff;
- Supporting the school workforce. Building and developing a school workforce with a better understanding of child development, mental health and risk factors. This includes incorporating mental health into all teacher training; and this should include training for teaching assistants too;
- Involving parents and families, supporting them to help their children to move forward, through mental health training and advice;
- The need for high quality and regulated Alternative Provision, for children who are not in mainstream school;
- Better data to examine the scale and impact of the problem; and better sharing of this data. This is fundamental to ensure a better, more informed understanding of the true scale and cost of school suspensions on society; and to assess how funding is currently allocated and how effective this is;
- School governing boards to have the skills to understand the needs of children and how vulnerabilities impact on behaviour; and their role in addressing these needs;
- Providing specialist, targeted mental health support within all UK schools, which is proven to help reduce the number of exclusions. Place2Be discussed its experience of delivering embedded mental health support in schools and the evidence underpinning why this can be part of the solution. The findings from Place2Be's [published research paper](#) were shared in the session.

Early intervention

Since 2010, government spending on children’s early intervention support by councils in England has fallen by 50% and an average of 61% in the areas with highest levels of deprivation. With children not getting the support they need early enough, spending on crisis intervention has soared.

The pressure on schools to pick up the pieces is unsustainable. It is the duty of local authorities to care for and protect children (The Children Act 1989), and the underfunding of local authorities is resulting in schools and trusts having to offer additional services beyond that of their education offer.

Additional services required

Our annual governance survey for 2023 found that significant numbers of schools and trusts are continuing to offer additional services – significantly increasing amid Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis.

	% of respondents offering specified additional services
Pre-loved or second- hand school uniform provision	73%
Wrap around before and after school care	50% (increasing to 65% for nursery and primary phase)
We provide pupils with breakfast	45%
Financial support with purchasing uniforms	31%
Meals outside of term time	27%
Food bank	22%
Family learning	17%
Advice about income and benefits	15%
Don't know	9%
Washing school uniforms	6%
Other (please specify)	4%
Emergency loans	2%

5. To what extent can early years providers / schools apply learning from research of what works and what does not work, including resources from the Education Endowment Foundation?

Early years providers, schools and trusts can significantly benefit from research informed approaches to addressing educational disadvantage, and it is an approach that NGA advocates –

but the extent to which they can apply this learning, and perhaps more importantly **successfully** apply the learning will depend largely on those with strategic oversight understanding their local context and what disadvantage looks like within their school/trust.

It is also worth noting that while the EEF provide quality research and evidence based resources that no doubt have an impact, they consider their remit to be largely focused on the quality of classroom teaching and we would suggest the need to consider more closely the barriers to learning that are identified by schools and other working with children and their families.

a) Understanding the needs and demographics of your school community

Research evidence can be used to both inform decision-making and challenge plans during planning and implementation. Linking exploration of evidence to issues arising from a rigorous assessment of needs is essential however in ensuring that the strategies fit the specific needs, demographics, and characteristics of their pupils and community. Evidence should inform how schools respond to pupil need in the classroom and in wider school life. A research-informed approach without a rigorous assessment of need may take schools in the wrong direction. Planning and implementation should be firmly embedded in the realities of an individual school context.

Assessment, not assumptions, are at the heart of an effective approach. Assessment of need is not something that is only done before a strategy is implemented. It is a critical ingredient of an effective strategy. Start with the needs of the individual pupils and build a strategy around emerging themes and common issues. Avoid looking for themes to address with a ready-made solution. Pupil need, not labels, should inform all decision-making. Many pupils in our schools will be experiencing disadvantage who are not eligible for the pupil premium. Schools are best placed to determine how disadvantage impacts on pupils in their local communities. The impact of disadvantage on learning is a process, not an event. Neither is it static.

Of course, families may not be significantly economically disadvantaged but may be exceptionally stretched/time-poor or impacted by factors outside of their control. Key questions to consider:

- How does disadvantage impact on pupils' learning (in the individual school context)?
- What are the 'controllable' factors impacting on disadvantaged pupils' learning?
- What factors are most preventing disadvantaged pupils from thriving in the classroom and in wider school life?

Rigorous assessment promotes early intervention and ongoing support for pupils. Early intervention, rooted in pupil need, that enables pupils to thrive in the classroom can prevent narrowing the curriculum and a reactive approach. Responding to assessment of need within teaching and learning, as well as additional strategies and interventions is also essential - identifying issues such as pupils' reading age should elicit a response across the curriculum, not just through reading interventions and whole school reading programmes.

b) The right people involved

Ensuring that the expertise of curriculum, subject, and pastoral leaders is well utilised and that they are heavily involved in the planning and implementation of the school's disadvantage strategy as early as possible is crucial as staff in these roles are fundamental to long-term success.

c) Taking a collaborative approach

Involving parents and the community in the application of research findings can strengthen the impact of evidence-based practices, especially when paying close attention to the dimension of disadvantage being addressed. Collaboration with stakeholders fosters a supportive environment for implementing successful strategies. Collaboration with other schools within the locality is also really helpful when choosing, implementing and monitoring strategies. It is likely that there will be commonalities between the demographics of the school community, both culturally and sub-culturally. Sharing insights, good practice and expertise among other schools can be an effective and powerful way to apply the right evidence based strategy to meet the assessed needs.

Conclusion

The introduction of the pupil premium funding in 2011 was an important and positive intervention in addressing educational disadvantage. However, we recognise that a policy is only as impactful as is enacted, and at present we believe that a wider definition of education disadvantage is needed in order to truly address educational equity, and that a greater focus on systemic barriers to educational disadvantage is necessary.

Our policy propositions are as follows:

- The government to adopts a wider definition of disadvantage that incorporates the five dimensions identified by NGA
- Pupil Premium and NFF enhancement:
 - Strengthen the impact of Pupil Premium funding increasing it in line with inflation and ensuring additional funding is allocated to schools with a higher proportion of disadvantaged students.
 - Expand the research sources for addressing educational disadvantage to include strategies that address systemic drivers of disadvantage.
- Early years:
 - Increase EYPP to reflect the value placed on funding at later stages in education.
 - The Family Hub model should continue to be rolled out, ensuring a family-focused and integrated system of care, education and wider holistic support for young children and their families.
- Curriculum diversification:

- Ensure that the national curriculum is inclusive and reflects the diversity of students in England.
- Promote culturally relevant and engaging materials to capture the interest of students from various backgrounds.
- Teacher training and recruitment:
 - Develop targeted teacher training programs to equip teachers with the skills to address the needs of the five dimensions of disadvantage.
 - Introduce targeted recruitment initiatives to attract more Black and minoritised ethnic individuals to the teaching profession.
 - Implement mandatory cultural competency training for all educators to enhance their awareness and understanding of diverse cultures.
- Ed Tech inclusion:
 - Bridge the digital divide by providing access to ed-tech resources in disadvantaged urban, rural and coastal areas.
- Special Educational Needs support:
 - The [2022 SEND green paper](#) needs to be followed through urgently alongside funding reform, an audit of sufficiency of special school places and a consistent approach to training.
 - Provide additional training for teachers to better support students with additional learning needs.
- Mental Health Support:
 - Make the provision of mental health support for young people throughout all schools and access to specialist services a priority.
- Transportation Support:
 - Evaluate and improve school transport policies to minimise barriers for disadvantaged students, particularly those with housing/location barriers.

Fiona Fearon, NGA Policy & projects manager