"There is no one answer to ensuring high standards of attainment for disadvantaged pupils. What is important is having a clear rationale and evidence base for making decisions, particularly regarding how to spend the funding. It is paramount to identify any specific barriers disadvantaged pupils may have, rather than grouping them together."

ESSEX HEADTEACHER

Tackling Educational Disadvantage: A Toolkit for Essex Schools

Marc Rowland, Jo Moore and Dr Tony Ashmore

Principles

1. An excellent education and the highest expectations for all, regardless of background or barriers to learning.
2. The Pupil Premium should support improved attainment, raised expectations and readiness for life and learning.
3. High-quality teaching and learning should be prioritised over intervention. An intervention culture can lead to disadvantaged pupils being seen as ‘someone else’s responsibility’.
4. The Pupil Premium should be used to ensure disadvantaged pupils access excellent teaching and learning every day.
5. The Pupil Premium should address the needs of pupils as early as possible. It should focus on gaps in learning. End of key stage outcomes are a by-product of this approach.
A whole school approach to improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils is a consistent feature of successful schools:

- Teachers in the classroom are primarily accountable for the outcomes of disadvantaged learners.
- Where interventions are necessary, there is a culture of early, focused, precise and time-limited intervention.
- Are interventions given a time limit with clear success criteria? Do they deliver the interventions do class teachers observe them and give feedback? Are interventions specific, and measured? Are interventions happening more so in EY/KS1/KS3 as concerns arise?
- Are interventions evidence based?
- Pupil Premium is invested at the point of need, in both terms of long and short term strategy.
- Is your Pupil Premium spending reviewed for impact? Is it adjusted to meet the needs of pupils?
- Every opportunity is taken to build readiness, both in and outside of the classroom.
- Do disadvantaged pupils take part in extracurricular activities/holidays to develop their understanding of the world? Do lessons challenge pupil perceptions and promote cultural capital?
- Disadvantaged pupils are given responsibilities and play a prominent role in wider school life.
- Are disadvantaged pupils encouraged to be house captains/school councilors/sports team members/take leading roles in productions?
- Parents are engaged and empowered.
- How do you empower your Pupil Premium parents? Do they feel comfortable asking questions about learning? Do teachers ensure they have frequent, informal discussions with parents.
- In school variations about how disadvantaged pupils are performing are understood and acted upon promptly. This includes a deeper understanding of the characteristics of learners that are struggling that goes beyond the pupil premium label.
- Do staff know how their disadvantaged pupils are performing? Do pupil progress meetings ensure actions are taken quickly to improve underperformance?
- The school day and the school year is adapted to meet the needs of the community.
- Improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils is a whole school priority, regardless of whether the proportion of these pupils is very low or very high.
- Funding is spent at the point of need, rather than at the point of external accountability.
- Staff wellbeing is prioritised. Disadvantaged pupils are disproportionately impacted by high staff absence/turnover.
- There is flexibility in the Pupil Premium strategy to meet both long and short term need.
- The learning and teaching environments respond and meet the needs of disadvantaged children, eg building cultural capital.
- Senior leaders (including governors) are aware of appropriate funding sources to support need. Pupil Premium should not be seen as the answer to every barrier to learning.
- Relationships between pupils and adults are strong.
- Disadvantaged pupils have access to support across all aspects of the school day (eg break and lunchtimes).
- Knowledge and the understanding of pupils and their barriers to learning is shared across year groups and phases to support better outcomes.
- Data should be a key driver for Pupil Premium strategy. Be wary of making changes on the basis of outliers and short-term anomalies in data.

“It’s all about perseverance.” — SECONDARY HT

Having high expectations is critically important. It is an entitlement for all. Every educational achievement is crucial for disadvantaged students:

- Children are expected to make the necessary progress they need to attain. `Expected progress` for even better than `expected progress` can still lead to low attainment if progress has been disrupted. Open, whole school data matters.
- Terms such as ‘bottom set, low attainers and low ability’ are removed from school vocabulary.
- All school staff adapt a shared language around high expectations. Do all staff discuss expectations in terms of age-related expectations and not just progress?
- The Pupil Premium is not simply used for catch-up funding but is also focused on maximising readiness for success for those working at or above age-related expectations.
- Is the Pupil Premium being used to continually challenge and extend higher attaining disadvartaged pupils?
- Metacognitive approaches are adopted so that learners can understand the value and purpose of failure and how strategies to adapt when things go wrong.
- Disadvantaged and vulnerable learners disproportionately work with the best qualified, most effective staff available.
- Transition between key stages is a critical time for disadvantaged pupils. In order to build on earlier successes, support is also provided at KS4-5 transition to sustain success.
- Do disadvantaged pupils have the texts/resources needed prior to starting in KS5?
- Do disadvantaged pupils understand the expectations of them in KS5? Do they have the opportunity to discuss and prepare for the transition from KS4-5? Who is advocating for these pupils?
- That thinking goes beyond narrow academic outcomes, for example: independence, self belief and employability.
- How are disadvantaged pupils prepared for employment? Are social skills modelled/career expectations promoted? Do students understand what is required to achieve that goal? Is high-quality work experience provided for all students?
- That the most effective, long-term strategy for schools to raise self-esteem is academic success.
- How do you promote success? Do staff, pupils and parents understand and experience the link between academic success and self-esteem?
- That positivity about learning is addressed at all levels – build ownership and empowerment.
- That every pupil has an advocate to support them towards ambitious goals.
- Transition into and out of reception (and later points of transition) take into account the characteristics of learners that are vulnerable to underachievement.
- Is grouping by prior attainment or ‘ability’ denying disadvantaged pupils access to support across all aspects of the school day (eg break and lunchtimes).
- Children formerly in care of the local authority may well struggle with challenges to learning. They are additional funding to the setting or school, through trusting relationships and effective channels of communication.
- That better early language is key to later academic success.
- Successful tracking of children’s learning through EYFS starts with knowing their prior experience in pre-school and/or Children’s Centres.
- Children formerly in care of the local authority may well continue to be vulnerable to underachievement due to complex barriers to learning past adoption.
- FFT research shows that any child who has been eligible for FSM at some point is at risk of underachievement. It is important to identify the ‘ever FSM’ group when planning for the needs of the vulnerable pupil in your school.

“The expectation of every pupil is the expectation of a high quality university.” — SECONDARY HT

“We have to be wary of kindness leading to low expectations.” — PRIMARY HT

“Don’t wait for parents to ask. Question whether the books children are reading are challenging enough. Check their reading records. Has the child read the book already?” — PRIMARY HT

“Learning is a difficult experience.” – PRIMARY HT

“A clear understanding of how socio-economic disadvantage impacts on children’s outcomes is crucial to a successful Pupil Premium strategy.

- Barriers to learning identified at all levels? Is there an action plan to overcome these? Is the Pupil Premium spent on appropriate resources to resolve/ reduce these barriers?
- It is important to analyse where pupils have multiple barriers to learning. Think beyond the Pupil Premium label. What are the characteristics of learning that are underserving?
- A deep understanding of children and their families is critical.
- How is historical information about children and families collected and shared across the staff team?
- Teaching quality has a disproportionate impact on disadvantage learners. The highest priority for Pupil Premium spending should be ensuring high-quality teaching in every lesson.
- Is there high quality teaching and learning in every class? Is CPD used to develop and improve teaching?
- Remember that the Pupil Premium is not ring-fenced and leaders have autonomy. Consider how strategies can support informally disadvantaged learners, for example young carers, pupils with a parent in prison.
- Do you provide cultural experiences/trips/visits and opportunities to develop the cultural capital, expectations and self belief of your pupils?
- Maximise the power of Pupil Voice. Listen to learners about their ambitions and goals. Don’t mistake low self expectations for low aspirations. What do you need to do to make disadvantaged pupils more aware of the opportunities open to them? Do you widen and extend their expectations and self belief?
- Build on local expertise for specific groups, for example the work of the virtual school with learners eligible for the Pupil Premium Plus or expertise in children’s mental health.
- Barriers may relate to ‘readiness’ eg work experience, additional secondary school progression opportunities for very vulnerable children.
- Are disadvantaged pupils given additional support prior to and during Key Stage transition? Do they get extra help to organize work experience?
- Analyse the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Be wary of averages when determining strategies. Build an understanding of why pupils are not attending.
- Parents recognise the importance of declaring that their children attract additional funding to the setting or school, through trusting relationships and effective channels of communication.
- That better early language is key to later academic success.
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Relationships between adults and students are critical.” — SECONDARY HT

1 Culture, Leadership and Values

2 Whole School

3 High Expectations

4 Understanding Barriers
The purpose of Pupil Premium funded activity should be to ensure disadvantaged pupils are accessing consistently high-quality teaching (or removing the barriers to accessing high-quality teaching).

- Data should inform funded activities. Which phases or year groups are children not accessing? Are there obvious barriers such as distance?
- Progress and attainment data, pupil progress meetings and requests for interventions for disadvantaged pupils are all indicators for Pupil Premium funded CPD. Data should inform funded activities.
- Do you use data to support and feed in to requests for funded activities?
- Before introducing evidence-based approaches consider first how that evidence can be applied to your school context.
- What are your school barriers? Use evidence-based approaches which target the barriers in your school context!

The Pupil Premium funded activity can benefit all children but should disproportionately benefit disadvantaged learners. High-quality feedback is a good example of this.

- Does feedback in your school have a positive impact on the learning of disadvantaged pupils? How do you ensure disadvantaged pupils engage and can access high-quality feedback? Disadvantaged pupils may get less feedback on their learning outside school.
- Consider how best to meet need while avoiding stigmatising learners. Avoid labels.
- The Pupil Premium offers an opportunity to empower teachers in meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils in the classroom. This may range from support for vulnerable learners can access the highest quality work or more funding streams, have leaders considered how different funding streams have worked, not proving it works. We can learn a great deal from outcomes? There are alternative approaches such as reduced contact time, pre and post teaching that may be more effective for less cost.
- Is Pupil Premium solely seen as catch-up funding, or is it being used to support those pupils at risk of exclusion or educational disengagement? Is the Pupil Premium being used to help teachers stretch and challenge pupils, go beyond what might be expected?

If funding is used for Teaching Assistant roles, adopt practices detailed in the Education Endowment Foundation report ‘Maximising the Best Use of Teaching Assistants’.

Consistency matters, but marking should meet the needs of the learner, not the policy. – HEADTEACHER

We use Pupil Premium to ensure our disadvantaged and vulnerable learners can access the highest quality work experience. We ensure employers have a good understanding of our pupils. – SECONDARY HT

We need to build cultural capital. – SECONDARY HT

- Make time sacrosanct to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of your Pupil Premium strategy.
- Don’t base decisions on how many pupils are performing in all year groups? Does your data inform you about multiple barriers to learning? Does your data inform you about multiple barriers to learning? Does your data inform you about multiple barriers to learning? Does your data inform you about multiple barriers to learning? Does your data inform you about multiple barriers to learning? Does your data inform you about multiple barriers to learning? Does your data inform you about multiple barriers to learning? Does your data inform you about multiple barriers to learning? Does your data inform you about multiple barriers to learning?
- Don’t abandon your strategy based on short-term dips in performance.
- Effective evaluation is about finding out what is working and what isn’t working, proving it works. We can learn a great deal from feedback. Disadvantaged pupils may get less feedback on their learning outside school.
- Internal quality assurance is critical. Are Pupil Premium funded activities being rolled out as planned? Is professional development impacting on classroom practice?
- Sufficient leadership capacity is critical for effective monitoring and evaluation. Middle leaders play an important role here.
- Be of your peers for impact and confirmation bias, eg ‘pupils enjoyed…’
- Know your cohorts and know your children. Does a positive performance outcome feel accurate?
- Are qualifications sufficiently robust that they effectively prepare students for their next stage in learning or employment? The destinations of pupils is a key accountability measure.
- External accountability should look for: 
  - close rationales for a school’s Pupil Premium strategy
  - carefully targeted activities that enable good learning and readiness
  - robust monitoring and evaluation
  - improved outcomes for disadvantaged learners
- Listen to parents and pupils about the effectiveness of the school’s Pupil Premium strategy.
- Through trusting relationships and communication, parents and families are empowered to recognise and understand their contribution to their child’s success. Getting this right is key to improving outcomes for relationships throughout school.
- A small attainment gap can be a powerful proxy for success. Accountability should be focused on the attainment and destinations of disadvantaged pupils.

The highest form of accountability is the following outcomes.

- Accountability for the Pupil Premium starts with meeting pupil need. The ‘right’ long-term strategy to tackle educational disadvantage will result in improved outcomes for pupil outcomes. Overtly focusing on end of key stage tests means schools remain cut from the same cloth.
- Hold regular, external peer review of your Pupil Premium strategy, even where outcomes for disadvantaged learners are strong.
- Data about progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils should be accessible to all, and understood relatively to local, national and families of schools outcomes.
- Adopt best practice with online statements about school strategy for tackling educational disadvantage. Check with parents whether the reports are clear and accessible.
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EYFS: % Achieving Good Level of Development (2015)  

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Attainment Data and Survey Results  

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*KES = Keeping an equal status between advantaged children, so FSM is used as a closer proxy measure.

KSI: % Achieving KSI Level 2b+ (2015)  

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KSI: % Achieving KSI Level 5A+ in E&M (2015)  

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Pupil Premium: School Surveys and Website Scrutiny  

1. Attainment Data and Survey Results  
2. Other Resources  
3. Things to Be Wary of  
4. Best Practice and Website Statements  
5. Data Source  

Where is Pupil Premium funding directed?  

Just over 50% of schools that expressed a view felt impact of interventions outside of the classroom was important. A majority of schools highlighted impact evaluation as the primary driver. A majority also cited research and evidence from both their own and other sources such as the Education Endowment Foundation toolkit. About 25% of schools stated that parent and pupil feedback was a strong influence. Staff opinion was also considered important.

Evidence of self-evaluation  

The increasing use of impact evaluation by majority of schools indicates an increasing trend of self-evaluation. While interventions have been cited as valuable, there was increasing recognition that some disadvantaged pupils may have needs that are not immediately obvious.

School confidence  

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