

"GAP IS THE WRONG WORD,
WHAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT
IS A DISADVANTAGE CHASM"

LONG-TERM DISADVANTAGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

JANUARY 2021

FOREWORD

By Lord Jim O'Neill, vice-chair of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership

Having always been clear that education is one of the key ingredients of the Northern Powerhouse, a contender with skills for the most critical, I am clear that as a Partnership the most important report we have published was *Educating the North*. It highlighted the detail of the education divide between pupils in the north and those elsewhere in England which then creates barriers for those young people to go into more productive, higher paid careers.

We have since then been working with Education Data Lab to deepen understanding of the impacts caused by disadvantage and, in particular, those children from families with a history of long-term disadvantage. The challenge that a disproportionate number of the schools with a large proportion of pupils from such a background are in the Northern Powerhouse has significant implications for public policy. National policy set from Whitehall cannot be the solution, localities understand the intricacies of the challenges within their communities. They must therefore be given the power to tailor interventions to their specific needs, addressing challenges both within and outside the school gates.

The analysis presented here relates to pupils and exam results up to the end of the 2018/19 academic year. Compared with similar analysis we published previously for 2017/18, more schools have a significant proportion of long-term disadvantage pupils and more of them have their attainment significantly below the average Pupil Premium pupil.

And it is important to remember that this analysis relates to the situation prior to the Covid pandemic. Evidence is already suggesting that those already in the worst economic situations prior to the pandemic have borne the brunt of both the health and economic impacts [1]. It is therefore likely that children from those families will face the greatest disruption to their education and potentially widening existing disparities.

Now is the time for bold action to avoid a generation of young people suffering long-term scarring and a permanent impact on their future life and career prospects. If the government is committed to its levelling up agenda, then that cannot be achieved without levelling up the education outcomes for the most disadvantaged children and young people. A northern mentoring programme for every disadvantaged young person approaching or completing their GCSE, the reform of pupil premium to better target it and an answer to what we need to address issues in places, including beyond the school gate.

[1] Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2021) UK Poverty 2020/21

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The number of schools with a high proportion of long-term disadvantaged high impact students has increased from 463 at the end of the 2017/18 academic year to 537 at the end of 2018/19, an increase of 16%.
- The number of schools in this group where attainment was significantly below that of the national average for the general Pupil Premium group increased from 67% to 71%.
- Given that the Pupil Premium group will be increasing following Covid and the resultant increase in unemployment and therefore Universal Credit claimants, now could be the time to look at creating a more targeted support/intervention for those with the greatest disadvantage. Hyper local Opportunity Areas could be one option, though in the immediate future we believe funding a programme of mentoring for year 10 and 11 pupils eligible for Pupil Premium would have an immediate impact.

BACKGROUND

The analysis presented here is a refresh of that presented in Next Steps for the Northern Powerhouse in 2019 and undertaken by Education Datalab based on the National Pupil Database. The main change from the original analysis is that it now incorporates the 2019 KS4 results cohort. To ensure that cohort sizes in each school are large enough for meaningful analysis, the results presented here are therefore based on an aggregation of those cohorts that sat GCSEs or equivalents in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Education Datalab are then able to perform pupil level analysis of results taking into account numerous characteristics such as free school meal status, SEND plans, ethnicity, EAL and so on. This is then reported at school level, local authority, regional and national aggregates for further analysis by NPP.

This paper will focus on secondary schools (KS4 results) though analysis has also been performed at end of KS2. However, given that pupils have not been attending school for as long by the end of KS2, it is by its nature harder to look at “long-term” disadvantage.

INTRODUCTION

In 2019 NPP published Next Steps for the Northern Powerhouse. In that report we developed our previous work on the educational divide between pupils in the north and the rest of England to focus in on disadvantage more closely. It is widely accepted that there is a significant ‘disadvantage gap’ in educational outcomes between those from a disadvantaged background (usually defined by free school meal eligibility) and those from non-disadvantaged backgrounds. That is why the coalition government introduced pupil premium to direct additional funding to these pupils in a bid to narrow the education divide. After a few years of modest progress, the narrowing of the gap has stalled since 2017 and actually increased in 2019’s results.

In Next Steps we went further than the broad definition and considered long-term disadvantage. For students in secondary school, this was defined as spending at least 80% of their school “career” on free school meals. We also focused on the group that Education Datalab viewed as being a “high impact” group in that a disadvantaged background appeared to have a greater impact on their educational outcomes. This was primarily children from White British and Black Caribbean ethnic groups.

What that work showed, was that schools who had a high proportion of children from such a background were likely to have attainment figures that were significantly below the national average for the pupil premium cohort. In other words, it could be argued that the current Pupil Premium criteria is too broad and does not target those pupils with the greatest challenges and the greatest potential to narrow the disadvantage gap through specific interventions.

Next Steps also demonstrated that while there are schools all over the country with high proportions of students in the long-term disadvantage high impact group, a large proportion of them were located in the North and also the West Midlands.

ANALYSIS

This year's analysis covers 3,199 secondary schools across England, though some may have had cohort sizes too small to be included in every calculated variable.

537 schools had at least 10% of their cohort in the long term disadvantaged high impact group at the end of the 2018/19 academic year. That is an increase of 74 schools (or 16%) since the previous year when 463 schools were included in our analysis group. Regional breakdowns are provided in the table below with the three regions of the north and the West Midlands having the greatest concentration of these schools - indeed 25% are located in the North West alone.

What is also clear from the table below is that the greatest increases in new schools meeting our criteria in both absolute and percentage terms, has taken place outside the north with the South West, South East and the East of England showing the greatest increases. This once again demonstrates our previous assertions that, although the north has the greatest proportion of pupils and schools in this category, the issue is not uniquely northern. It must also be remembered that this analysis has taken place before we consider any impact from the Covid pandemic. There is growing evidence that those in disadvantaged communities have been most affected in most if not all aspects of life including economic, health and education as discussed in more detail in the conclusion.

Table 1: Regional breakdown of schools with a high proportion of pupils in the long-term disadvantage high impact group - 2018/19

Region	Number of secondary schools	Proportion of total (may not sum to 100% due to rounding)	Change since 2019 analysis
East Midlands	45	8%	7 (18%)
East of England	30	6%	9 (43%)
London	23	4%	2 (10%)
North East	75	14%	6 (9%)
North West	136	25%	-1 (-1%)
South East	43	8%	11 (34%)
South West	40	7%	19 (90%)
West Midlands	73	14%	0 (0%)
Yorkshire and the Humber	72	13%	7 (11%)
England Total	537	100%	74 (16%)

ANALYSIS

Despite not having the greatest number of schools in our analysis group, the North East has the greatest proportion of its total pupils in the long-term disadvantage high impact group at 10.1%, almost double the national average and well above the lowest level of 2.8% recorded in Outer London.

Also, despite some large increases in the number of schools identified in Table 1 for some regions, the change in the number of pupils in this group in total at a regional level is more modest. There are a number of possible explanations for this such as the increase is very geographically focused within a region (local authority level or even lower) or, some schools are admitting high proportions of pupils in this group, rather than them being distributed evenly across schools in a local area.

Table 2: Regional breakdown of pupils in the long-term disadvantage high impact group - 2018/19

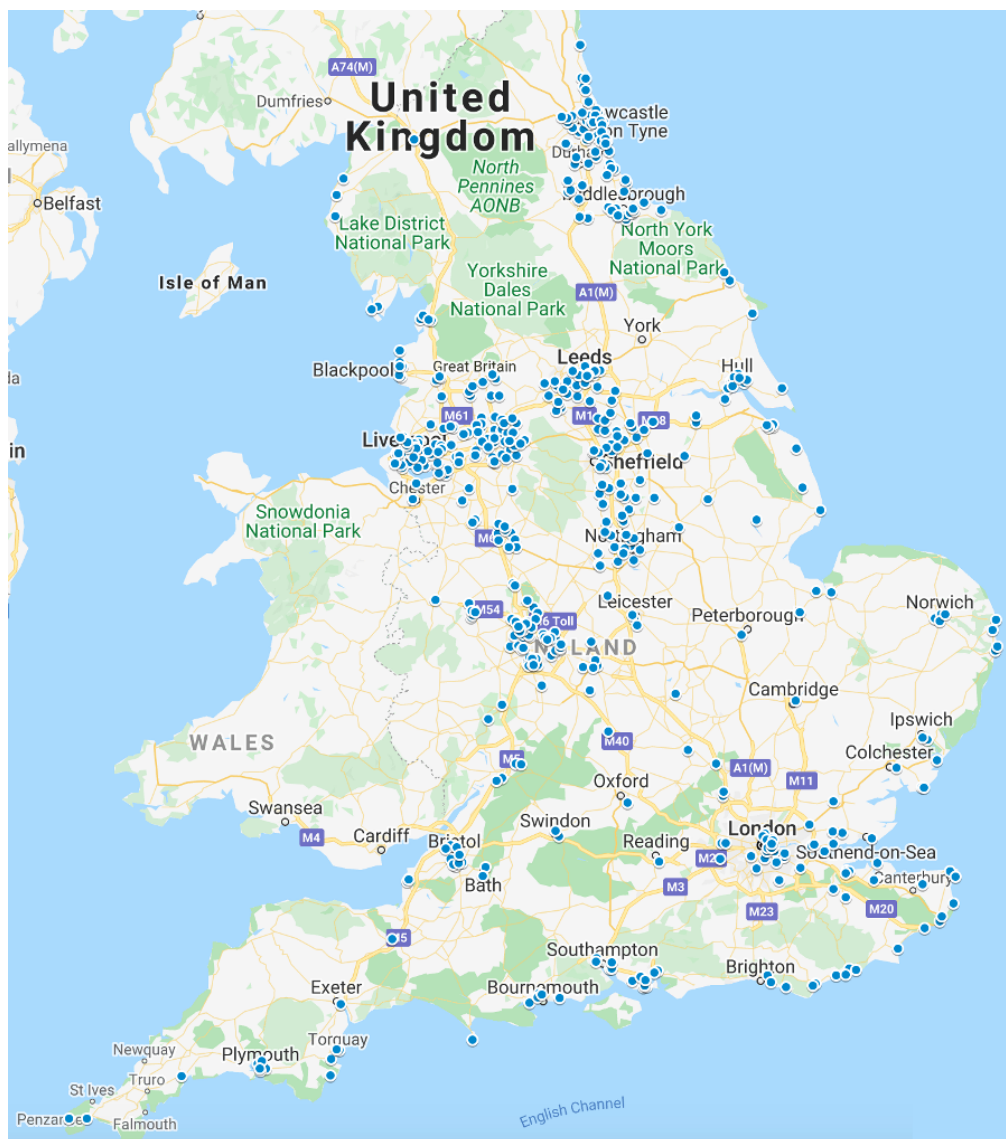
Region	Proportion of pupils in long-term disadvantage high impact group	Change since 2019 analysis (percentage points)
East Midlands	5.2%	0.4
East of England	3.9%	0.3
Inner London	4.6%	-0.6
North East	10.1%	0.1
North West	7.3%	0.2
Outer London	2.8%	-0.4
South East	3.4%	0.2
South West	4.7%	0.9
West Midlands	5.7%	0.0
Yorkshire and the Humber	6.0%	0.0
England Total	5.1%	0.1

ANALYSIS

When plotted on a map, the geographic concentration of these schools is clear at a regional level. However, there is not a consistent conclusion in terms of the more localised clustering of schools. Some local authorities may have a large number of schools that are spread evenly across their geography, others find that they are confined to very specific areas.

In looking at place-based solutions to this issue, there therefore needs to be a flexible approach encompassing hyper-local (perhaps just one or two council wards) to larger solutions such as local authority wide opportunity areas. There is no one-size fits all approach and this should be recognised in education policy. This is an issue that we will pick up in a subsequent piece of analysis in the spring.

Map 1: Location of Secondary Schools Meeting 10% Threshold for Long-Term Disadvantage High Impact Group – 2018/19



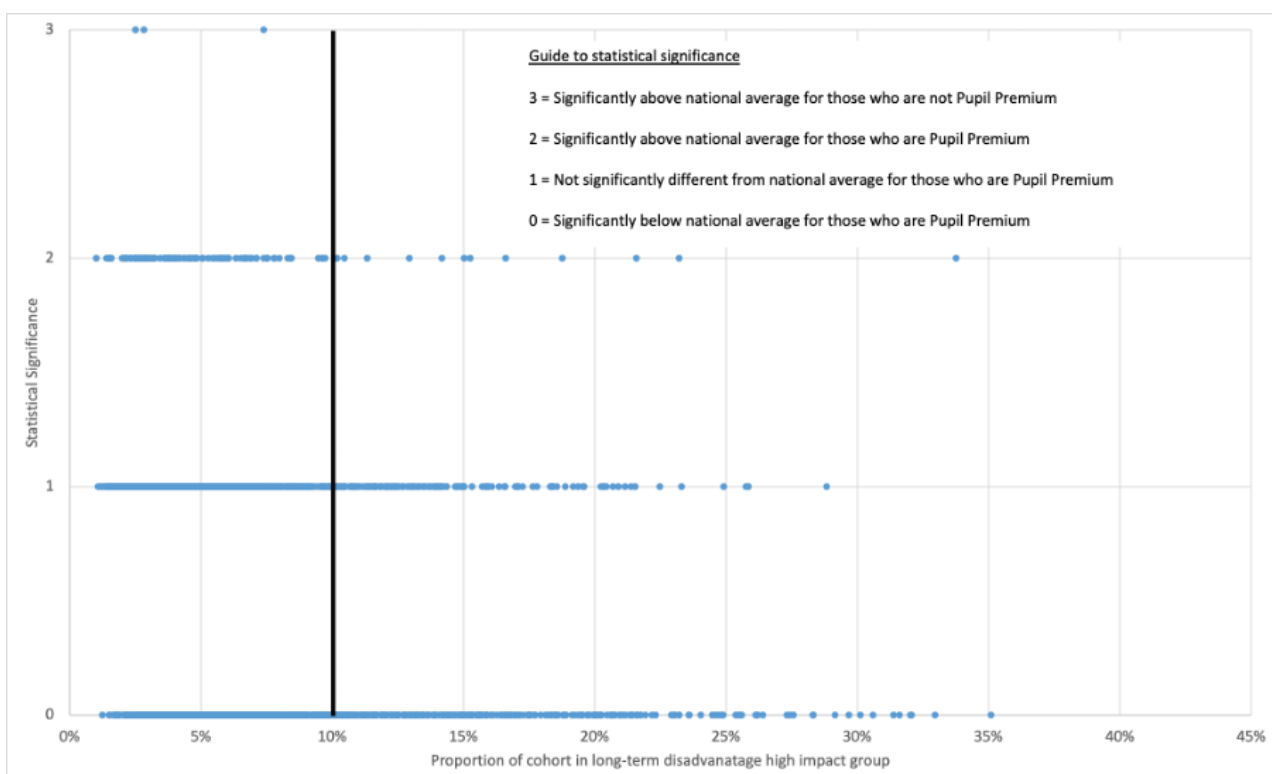
Map data: Google Maps. 2021. Long-term disadvantaged secondary schools. [Online]. [Accessed 18 January 2021].

ANALYSIS

The reason that we focused on the high impact group was that their attainment was significantly impacted by their long-term disadvantage. We would therefore expect that those schools with a high proportion of their cohort from this group would have attainment below the average. In our 2019 research, 67% of schools in this group had attainment that was significantly below the national average for all Pupil Premium children. This year this figure has increased with 71% of an even larger number of schools now showing attainment levels significantly below the average for all Pupil Premium children.

Chart 1 below shows again the impact of selecting our cut off threshold at 10% for the proportion of the cohort from the long term disadvantaged high impact group. Firstly, there is enough evidence below to suggest that there is a correlation between the proportion of students in this group and their attainment scores. There are no 'very high performing' schools (indicated with a significance indicator of 3 below) according to their Attainment 8 scores for this group with a high proportion of pupils from such backgrounds. Similarly, there are very few with a significance indicator of 2 that have a high proportion of children in this group. Those schools that do, should be looked at further to investigate and see if there is anything being done differently that can be shared as best practice. There could be an argument to move the threshold to a higher value than where it is currently set as a number of schools are currently captured where attainment is not significantly different from the average Pupil Premium child. However, 71% of schools in this group do have attainment significantly below that for the average Pupil Premium child which we feel is the right balance.

Chart 1: Statistical significance of difference in attainment between the long term-disadvantage high impact group and others – 2018/19



CONCLUSION

This updated analysis has shown that the incidence of long-term disadvantage amongst our high impact group has increased marginally since our original 2019 analysis, from 5% of all pupils to 5.1%. It would appear however that this increase has not been spread evenly either geographically when looking at the regions of England or at individual school level with 15% more schools now having a sizeable proportion of the pupil body from significantly disadvantaged backgrounds.

All of the analysis above does not of course take into account any impact of the Covid pandemic. We anticipate that the number of Pupil Premium eligible pupils will increase in coming months due to an increase in universal credit claimants as the labour market impacts feed through fully.

Though any worsening of a family's financial situation is undesirable, there is a risk that a larger Pupil Premium cohort that is made up of a greater proportion of less disadvantaged pupils could mask the impact of Covid on those already in the Pupil Premium group and in particular our long-term disadvantage group.

We therefore propose that consideration should be given about how any additional Pupil Premium funding is distributed and could be directed to those most in need. Our own analysis has already shown that pupils in the north have suffered the most disruption to their education. Though all schools suffered from significantly reduced attendance in December, some schools in the North of England had already seen their attendance levels fall to almost 60% in mid-October.

In addition to that a significant number of families do not have access to a single device that would allow their children to access remote learning. Our estimate is that 322,000 families across the north could be facing this barrier.

So not only does this analysis suggest that a greater number of schools are falling into our target group and that attainment is more impacted, but the Covid crisis risks making the position even worse. That means those schools with more long-term disadvantaged schools getting a higher top up payment than others, enabling the system to be reformed without any school losing out compared to what they in real terms received as their total premium support this year.

There is also specific challenge for those young people who this year and next in compulsory education, as well as the current generation about to complete their compulsory education at age 18. For the former group we think there is, with the flexibility to also support the latter group, a case for expanding the GROW Mentoring programme, developed in response to COVID-19 by Sheffield Hallam.

Our plan would be to mirror what the local authority in Barnsley have done and fund this for groups including the current Year 11 for those on pupil premium. We must give every disadvantaged student being awarded a GCSE this year or studying to be awarded them next year, a mentor costing a total of £34m for 108,000 pupils across the Northern Powerhouse. Trained rapidly by Sheffield Hallam University, we would be working with universities across the North to recruit their recent graduates and the class of 2021.