

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5 FEBRUARY 2020

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT WORKING GROUP REPORT

Report by the Educational Attainment Working Group

Chair: Cllr John Howson

**Members: Cllr Ted Fenton, Cllr Jeannette Matelot, Cllr Emma Turnbull,
Cllr Michael Waine**

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is RECOMMENDED to consider the conclusions of the report.

Executive Summary

1. Education Scrutiny Committee formed a working group in April 2019 to conduct a deep dive into the educational attainment and progress of disadvantaged and vulnerable students in Oxfordshire secondary schools. This was in response to an identified persistent gap in attainment and progress for children disadvantaged both nationally and locally, details of which are contained in the next section, paragraph 14 onward.
2. As the working group's investigation progressed it became clear that it needed to include looking at the work and links with both primary schools and post-16 institutions to obtain a holistic view of the issues for secondary schools.
3. The working group explored, through school visits, data from education service colleagues and available education research, what good evidence-based practice was being carried out in the county and how the county council might use its reach and influence to both disseminate this and to support work to address the complex influences contributing to the attainment and progress gap. The working group recognises that as all Oxfordshire secondary schools bar one are academies, there are limitations to the ways that the county council can lend its support, but collaboration with partners offers opportunities to explore innovation. The working group also wishes to keep the attainment and progress gap under review via regular and timely reporting of data to Education Scrutiny Committee.
4. Members of the working group are clear that the county council has a duty of responsibility for all children and young people, including for Looked After Children as a corporate parent, and has a direct interest in their education. The Director for Children's Services is responsible for securing the provision of services which address the needs of *all* children and young people, including

the most disadvantaged and vulnerable.¹ Educational attainment results are generally reported by the Local Authority, regardless of whether schools are academies or not.

5. Members also strongly believe that Oxfordshire must work to ensure all disadvantaged children are enabled to progress to reach their full potential.

Introduction and background data

6. The Education Scrutiny Committee selected three areas of activity in 2018 that it wanted to undertake deep dive activities on: exclusions, attendance and educational attainment. The Committee recognised that these three areas are strongly linked to improving educational outcomes and wanted to gain a greater understanding of how these areas were being addressed across the county.
7. Due to a persistent attainment gap in GCSEs between disadvantaged children and those without disadvantage, the Committee decided to focus its deep dive on attainment of disadvantaged and vulnerable children in secondary education in Oxfordshire.
8. Disadvantaged pupils are defined by the DfE as those pupils who are in receipt of 'Ever 6' Free School Meals, adopted from Care or Looked After Children elements of the pupil premium.
9. The decision to focus on attainment recognised that educational progress is also an important measure, and that Oxfordshire's overall Progress 8 measure (-0.25) for 2017/18 was statistically below the national average for pupils who were 'low prior attainers' at the end of their primary school. However, the working group wishes to make clear that low prior attainment does not necessarily equate with disadvantage, and that some pupils from a disadvantaged background are high attainers.
10. Annex 1 and Annex 2 provide the Attainment 8 and Progress 8 data measures for disadvantaged pupils only, at secondary schools in Oxfordshire in 2018. In both data sets Oxfordshire schools' performance is below national averages.
11. As part of the investigation, the working group met with the Headteacher of Oxfordshire Virtual School, and wish here to recognise the progress on outcomes that this school has started to make with its cohorts of vulnerable children; notably a rise from 1.9% to 6.3% from 2017 to 2018 achieving GCSE Grade 9-5 in English and Maths, 6 pupils starting Degree courses and 3 care leavers having graduated from university, while one began an MA.. Councillors also wish to commend the Virtual School's ongoing innovative partnership with the University of Oxford on its Art School programme.

¹ Statutory Guidance on the Roles and Responsibilities of the Director for Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services (DfE) April 2013.

12. In Oxfordshire, the average grade per GCSE subject is 4.7, which positions the county just outside the top quartile nationwide. However, data from The Children’s Society² shows that in 2017/18 nationally there was a 28% gap between children receiving free school meals (FSM) and their wealthier peers in terms of the percentage of pupils who achieved at least 5 A*-C GCSE grades (equivalent now to grades 9-5).
13. Nationally, attainment of children who are eligible for Pupil Premium (PP) funding is 19 months behind their peers at the time they start school and by the time they leave school, it is almost 24 months behind. In Oxfordshire, there is an attainment gap of 21.5 months by the time pupils sit GCSEs relative to non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.³ This puts Oxfordshire in the quartile of Local Authorities with the largest gap, despite being in the quartile of Local Authorities with the smallest prevalence of disadvantage in secondary schools (15.9%).
14. While paragraph 8 contains the DfE’s definition of a child who is disadvantaged, the working group is aware that this does not encompass all of those children that may present as disadvantaged during their school years. The term disadvantaged could be taken to refer to a wider complex group of individuals, including those living in poverty, service children, those with health issues, young carers, Looked After Children, children with SEND and children who frequently move schools. Some of these may be eligible for extra sources of support, but some may not. The composition of a local group of ‘disadvantaged’ children will naturally vary from place to place, as well as over time. The working group believes it is crucial therefore that disadvantaged pupils are not thought about as a homogenous group who all have the same needs.
15. Numbers of children in 2017/18 that were living in poverty in Oxfordshire is shown below. Nationally, the figure is 30%, or 9 in a classroom of 30. 70% of children growing up in poverty live in a family where at least one person works. Even within district councils there may be wide variations between wards: in 2016 in Blackbird Leys (Oxford) ward 36.2% of 0-15 children lived in income-deprived families, whereas in St Margaret’s (Oxford) ward, only 4% did.⁴

16.

Local Authority	Before Housing	After Housing
Cherwell	12%	23%
Oxford	21%	29%
South Oxfordshire	11%	18%
Vale of White Horse	11%	22%
West Oxfordshire	11%	19%

17. It is important to understand that poverty also includes poverty of experience and cultural poverty. One study found that by the age of 3, children from the most prosperous households have heard 30 million more words than children

² <http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/child-poverty-facts-and-figures>

³ Education Policy Institute Annual Report 2019, https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Geographical-pack_EPI-AR_2019.pdf

⁴ Oxfordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2019

from impoverished households⁵. Disadvantage does not therefore equate to low ability, but can equate to lack of opportunity.

18. 19% of children in Oxfordshire are identified with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) but 56% of Oxfordshire Pupil Premium (PP) children are identified with SEND. Concerns exist around this high percentage. PP-eligible children perhaps may not have some specific skills that others do and yet intrinsically the child may have a good aptitude for learning.
19. Due to behaviour and a deficit of some specific skills a child may present, schools might begin to think around issues with speech and language needs, when the problem may in fact be one linked to the challenges of deprivation. A label of special needs may potentially then lead to inappropriate intervention and teaching. Needs not being met in turn could mean children later become disengaged, as learning has never been a positive experience for them or made appropriate to them, with the risk that they are lost to education and experience no sense of achievement or aspiration even before they reach secondary school.
20. The working group gathered evidence of good practice in Oxfordshire secondary schools and its aim was to provoke discussion around how the county council can actively help disseminate this good practice given all but one secondary school in the county are academies. The group feels the county council has a part to play in system-wide improvement for reasons given in paragraph 4.
21. The attainment working group visited four secondary schools (10%) in Oxfordshire, in urban and rural areas with varied demographics in their local communities. The group met with the senior leadership teams of those schools, and senior staff responsible for pastoral care, SEND and attainment of disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils. The group also worked closely with the Education team within the county council and met with the Headteacher of the Virtual School in Oxfordshire. All four schools visited are anonymised in this report.
22. The working group also wanted to identify opportunities for actions the county council could take to support the work of closing the attainment gap Oxfordshire, based on the challenges identified by the schools visited given its duty of care for all children.

Pupil Premium and Funding

23. Traditionally, the main signifier for a disadvantaged child has been eligibility for FSM. This measure is one of the criteria used to assess eligibility for PP payments under the 'Ever 6 FSM' criterion. Current guidance⁶ states:

⁵ Lost for Words: Poor Literacy, the Hidden Issue in Child Poverty: a Policy Paper (National Literacy Trust, July 2013)

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium-conditions-of-grant-2018-to-2019/pupil-premium-2018-to-2019-conditions-of-grant#eligibility>

The pupil premium for 2018 to 2019 will include pupils recorded in the January 2018 school census who are known to have been eligible for FSM since May 2012, as well as those first known to be eligible at January 2018.

24. Other criteria for PP eligibility are:
 - Children adopted from Care or who have left Care;
 - Ever 6 service children (a pupil recorded in the January 2018 school census who was eligible for the service child premium since the January 2013 census as well as those recorded as a service child for the first time on the January 2018 school census.)
25. The criteria for PP eligibility do not encompass the complex circumstances and ways in which a child may be disadvantaged or impoverished.
26. Currently, secondary schools receive the following funding for children eligible for Pupil Premium:
 - £935 per pupil recorded as Ever 6 FSM.
 - £2,300 per Looked After pupil.
 - £2,300 per Care Leaver still in secondary education
27. Pupil Premium payments are made following the January pupil census; it is therefore important for schools' budgets that eligible pupils register as such before then. There is also therefore a lag in funding when an eligible child is enrolled after this point in the school year.
28. There is a persistent issue with parents/carers failing to come forward to register for PP eligibility. Schools in Oxfordshire make great efforts to encourage them to do so; some even offering a prize draw to those that do. However, the perceived stigma, anxiety and misunderstanding around registering as eligible for PP continues stubbornly, resulting in schools missing out on sometimes thousands of pounds of funding. In Reception and KS1, all pupils automatically receive free school meals and this has led many parents/carers to see registering as eligible as unnecessary. Education Scrutiny Committee has written to the Department for Education and the Department for Work & Pensions as the latter holds the data necessary for the former to identify eligible families. No satisfactory response as to why this data is not shared between the two departments has been received, nor any assurance that such work is being considered. Oxfordshire MPs have also been made aware of this issue and have been requested to lobby on it by the Member for Education & Cultural Services.
29. PP funding was essential for all schools the group visited, particularly against a background funding situation that one school described as 'perilous'. This *may* be a greater problem for secondary schools where registration for FSM has often been lower than in primary schools. The Commons Select Committee (Education) has recently published its report into school funding⁷ calling the

⁷ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news-parliament-2017/school-and-college-funding-report-published-17-19/>

system *'broken'* and in need of a 10-year plan. Key recommendations in its report include:

- ensure all eligible students attract Pupil Premium and overcome existing barriers to automatic enrolment as a matter of priority;
 - secure from the Treasury the full amount of estimated Pupil Premium money that has not been claimed because students did not register for Free School Meals, and allocate this money to disadvantaged children;
 - extend the Pupil Premium to provide for 16 –19 year olds.
30. The four schools visited by the working group were identified as performing better than the county average for disadvantaged/vulnerable pupils. During their school visits, councillors asked how schools spent their PP funding. Below is a breakdown of those schools' collective responses:
- Paying for excellent teachers and retaining them.
 - Specialist teachers or specialist roles.
 - Provision of a flexible, tailored curriculum to meet all pupils' needs.
 - After school and holiday or Saturday booster / revision sessions.
 - Cultural trips and opportunities for all pupils.
 - Strong pastoral care and academic mentoring.
 - Home link workers.
 - INSET training.
 - Lesson observation.
 - Workbooks and revision guides.
31. It should be noted that all items on the list above benefit all pupils at a school, not just those with disadvantage. All the schools visited described the focus on progress of all pupils (rather than attainment of high grades, prior to the Progress 8 measure being introduced) as transformative. Strategies schools had put in place to progress disadvantaged pupils or 'low prior attainers' were soon seen to benefit all; as one teacher told the group, *"a rising tide catches all boats"*.
32. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) research on PP spend chimes well with what the Oxfordshire schools told the working group. EEF found that *"using the PP to improve teaching quality benefits all students and has a particularly positive effect on children eligible for PP. While the PP is provided as a different grant from core funding, this financial split shouldn't create an artificial separation from whole class teaching."*⁸
33. The working group proposes that the county council proactively supports efforts to register PP eligible children to ensure the highest possible funding allocation to Oxfordshire schools. The group requests that the Cabinet Member for Education & Cultural Services works with the county Communications team to plan and run a media campaign encouraging eligible parents/carers to register. Every effort should be made to include parent/carer voices in this campaign, advocating to peers the value of registering as eligible.

⁸ https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Pupil_Premium_Guidance.pdf

34. The working group further proposes that Education Scrutiny Committee endorses the development of a county council Pupil Premium Strategy and requests officers brief Committee on it for input prior to its implementation. Members note the work done by other Local Authorities in producing ‘toolkits’⁹ of good practice for their schools around educating children from disadvantaged backgrounds and suggests Oxfordshire could learn from these and consider developing its own.
35. The working group proposes that Cabinet may consider requesting the DfE includes Oxford East constituency in an Opportunity Area in order that schools located there receive necessary funding to raise attainment levels for the concentration of disadvantaged pupils attending them.

Excellent teaching, every lesson, every day

36. The EEF found that *“good teaching is the most important lever schools have to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.”* In the schools the working group visited, this came across very strongly in terms of good practice. In School 1, which has made the most consistent demonstrable progress with raising disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils’ attainment in Oxfordshire, the group was told that the focus of the whole school is placed on the 30% of children who are disadvantaged, not the 70% who are not. This was described as the school’s ‘moral purpose’ which ran through all staff meetings and recruitment and retention. The best teachers in the school are working with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils and this focus has come from the senior leadership team.
37. All schools visited were quick to point to their evidence-based teaching methods of working. The EEF was referenced frequently, and some schools pointed to educational research publications that had informed their ways of working and thinking. One school described its entirely new recently-implemented teaching methods as *“getting rid of anything that was not proved by evidence to work”*. This included scrapping Year 11 homework and replacing it with personalised revision tasks, including producing an entire system (the Get Ahead Programme) teaching pupils how to revise and prepare for exams. This was initially for disadvantaged pupils only but was recognised as so powerful that the school now uses it universally. The EEF concurs: *“evidence-informed teachers and leaders combine findings from research with professional expertise to make decisions.”*
38. Senior leadership teams the working group spoke to emphasised the importance of quality in planning, curriculum and assessment as well as in teaching. A clear method, curriculum learning communicated in advance and worked through in an orderly way, followed by low-stakes ‘quizzing’ was felt to disproportionately benefit disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils. Schools felt this approach set expectations, that pupils could visualise where they were in

⁹ <https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/pupil-premium/Documents/Toolkit.pdf>

the curriculum and therefore understand where their learning was heading, increasing their engagement.

39. All the schools the working group visited used small group, adapted curriculum offers for their most disadvantaged pupils from the start of Year 7. Schools agreed these were expensive to run, and this model has serious financial implications for a relatively low-funded county such as Oxfordshire. The adapted curricula varied from school to school, but all agreed that the acquisition of language was the key starting point to enable a child to access the rest of the curriculum. School leaders told the group that without vocabulary and understanding of language, the rest of the curriculum could not be unlocked and life chances would therefore be seriously affected. Research¹⁰ by Save the Children agrees: *“In England, struggling to read is more closely linked to low pay and the risk of being unemployed than in any other developed country, including the USA. Around one in four people earning less than £10,000 were not functionally literate – this compared with fewer than one in 25 of those earning over £30,000. In short, reading and poverty are directly linked.”*

School	Adapted Curriculum Programme
School 1	English, RS, History and Geography taught in small intensive group with specialist, excellent teachers using projects and with literacy learning objectives. Other subjects are taught in the normal mainstream lessons. Individual literacy targets, constant feedback and opportunities to act on it are given. Children are known as individual learners, not a group. Curriculum planning changes each year depending on the cohort. The first cohort benefiting from the group from Year 7 onward took GCSEs in 2018. Of 13 children, 10 went on to Colleges, 2 went into the 6 th Form and 1 began an Apprenticeship.
School 2	Small group of 10 students in Year 7 with an adapted curriculum. This has been running for only two terms to date. The group learns Mindfulness, Catering Skills, Outdoor Learning and practical outdoor skills at Hill End and Warriner Farm and a day a week volunteering at a care home for older people. In school they study key English texts. All the children have remained engaged and are attending school.
School 3	Small group Year 7 – Year 9 teaching of English and Maths. 100% of pupils offered a place in the group take it up (20 pupils per year group). Taught by specialist teachers, this has been running for 3 years, so the first cohort has not taken GCSEs yet. In Year 9 only a small percentage carry on with the specialist group, doing 7 or

¹⁰ *Read On, Get On: How Reading Can Help Children Escape Poverty*, Save the Children, 2014

	8 GCSEs, BTECs and a college course once a week. The group has the same staff for 3 years to provide the consistency which may be lacking elsewhere in their lives.
School 4	The most vulnerable or disadvantaged pupils are offered a curriculum which taps into their individual interests to maintain their engagement. Currently, this includes BMX, ice-skating, theatre and art. Pupils who are “at-risk of low attainment” will, from September 2019, be offered a new scheme of learning using ‘organise, apply and recall information’ to provide them with tools to access the curriculum. At GCSE, some pupils take a reduced number of GCSEs plus two double-weighted vocational subjects with local businesses, which reduces the number of exams they must sit from around 22 to around 14.
The Virtual School	The Headteacher has been in post less than a year. While the goal is for each staff member to know the children individually, each currently has a caseload of 150 pupils, so this is not possible. The Virtual School has lifelong learning as a key goal for its children, many of whom exhibit behaviours relating to trauma experience. The school expects 40% of the Year 11s in 2019 to achieve grades 9-5 in English and Maths GCSEs. The Virtual School works at creating successful stories and celebrations around their children, to change mindsets and add cultural capital and aspiration. Examples of work include the Art School pilot, which happens once a month in different places around the city, and there is aspiration to do similar projects in other subject areas such as creative writing and science. Oxford University has offered space, staff and volunteers for the continuation of the Art School.

40. River Learning Trust has supported another Oxfordshire secondary school in developing its teaching for disadvantaged children. That school’s recent Ofsted report (July 2019) stated *“half an hour at the start of several days a week... pupils are introduced to the learning to learn programme where disadvantaged pupils are given extra support in subjects in which they are falling behind. Pupils told me that this time has helped them to feel more positive and optimistic about their learning and progress. Pupils are also reading more frequently and within a more structured approach. Recent evidence shows that disadvantaged pupils in Year 7 have improved their reading ages twice as quickly as would be expected.”* The working group commends the sharing of expertise and practice in this way but remains concerned about the piecemeal approach to this happening across the county.

41. The working group feels It would be helpful if county officers could discuss with the teaching school and the two universities whether a tailored package of professional development for both teachers and other staff that built on good practice and research could be offered to classroom teachers, middle leaders and senior staff. The aim of the package would be to close the attainment gap in Oxfordshire, and for Oxfordshire to be in the top quartile of local authorities, and the best-placed county on this measure. The package should also aim to enable Oxfordshire to move to an above-average Progress 8 measure across all levels of prior attainment.
42. Councillors on the working group heard how in the schools visited, leaders are using data analysis to ensure a holistic, individualised view of each child. Progress data is collected between 3 and 6 times a year, shared across faculty teams and with pastoral staff, and used to hold teachers and departmental leaders to account using self-assessment and peer-evaluation. Poor pupil attendance is picked up and communicated to appropriate staff to prevent silos of partial knowledge about a child occurring. The emphasis from all schools the group visited was on knowing each child individually as learners and constantly adapting to changing data to achieve the best outcomes.
43. Oxfordshire is home to both Oxford Brookes University and Oxford University Department of Education; world-class research institutes. There is opportunity for the county council to engage with them corporately, possibly in developing and testing in county schools a programme of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for Oxfordshire teachers and building up a local wealth of evidence-based teaching methods at the cutting edge of education research. This link would enable local children and teachers to benefit from being in Oxfordshire where globally-significant research is carried out, and potentially be among the first to make use of it in the classroom.
44. The working group feels that Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) are uniquely placed to collaborate on CPD across their schools, and ensure their primaries have access to the same expertise and research-based training as larger secondary schools. Learning around appropriate approaches with children evidencing trauma-related behaviour in particular would disproportionately benefit schools with little previous experience to draw on.
45. Schools visited by the working group had a very strong focus on the process of transition between primary and secondary schools. All had staff working with and visiting feeder schools across the school year to learn about individual children's needs and share information, to prepare for them appropriately. There was action evidenced by all the secondary schools to learn from partner primaries, and carry out preventative work to avoid duplication, delays and issues arising when children transition. Some of the secondaries visited had provided staff to help primary schools apply for Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs), recognising that the burden on primary schools to do this work is onerous (one school said it had taken up to 54 working hours for a single application). The secondary school's view was that if an EHCP was in place at

the start of the year it could prevent months of wasted time in the child not receiving the educational support that was appropriate for them.

46. This sharing of resource between secondary and primary schools was welcomed by the working group as necessary and clearly productive, as its focus was achieving the best outcome for each individual child's learning. One secondary school explained how all schools in its partnership scrutinised each other, following lines of enquiry at the host school's request, to build up objective overviews of good practice and a shared knowledge base about children that are transitioning, what work has been done with them and by whom. The working group felt this was excellent, openly transparent practice and recognised that it must be an uncomfortable process for staff to take part in.
47. The working group concludes that Education Scrutiny Committee should request regular reports of data on attainment of disadvantaged and vulnerable children across primary and secondary phases to monitor improvement. Education Scrutiny Committee should also request officers consider how the county council can take an active role in disseminating best practice, supporting and collaborating with MATs, but wishes to make clear its concern around the very low level of resource available in the Education Service to take forward such work with secondary schools.

Post-16 Education and Aspiration

48. As the working group explored the complexity of addressing attainment in secondary education for disadvantaged children, it became clear that in addition to the importance of strong working links with primary schools, the thinking around post-16 education was also paramount. In recent years, the Further Education (FE) sector has *"been cut to the core"*¹¹ with a 16% per student funding cut in real terms between 2010 – 2018. The Commons Select Committee's report states *"the social justice implications of the squeeze on further education colleges are particularly troubling, given the high proportion of disadvantaged students in these institutions."*
49. The schools the councillors visited were offering varied post-16 vocational courses alongside academic subjects, with an eye to maintaining educational engagement that was relevant, to keep post-16 children learning. Most had links to colleges, some working closely to develop pathways for individual children as they progressed on from GCSEs. There was also a note of caution voiced though, which was that some disadvantaged children are assumed to be most suited to vocational college courses when their natural aptitude is academic, but their needs have not been met and so this aptitude is unrecognised. The risk is that the child then drops out of inappropriate vocational learning and becomes Not in Education Employment and Training (NEET).

¹¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmeduc/969/96911.htm>

50. The key importance of instilling aspiration and high expectations was referred to repeatedly by senior leaders in all the schools the working group visited. Educational research¹² agrees that high expectations for all, irrespective of background or barriers is crucial for both a school's success in progressing the attainment of disadvantaged children, and the child's ambition and belief that they are capable of doing well. Research¹³ also cautions against teacher training institutions and schools referring to 'low ability pupils'; such pupils may simply have missed out on language and cultural capital, and the term leads to low expectations of those children, which in turn affects how they are taught and their later life chances.
51. In School 1, which has been running its adapted curriculum small group programme for several years, the numbers of disadvantaged pupils staying on into 6th Form has risen. The school provides a bursary to enable this, tied to attendance and other measures agreed with the pupils concerned, and spent in a mutually agreed way. The school aims to have disadvantaged pupils applying for top university places and is working with an Oxford college to support such pupils on entrance tests and interview skills to address a confidence deficit. The working group recognises the work being done by Oxford University and Trinity College in particular, considers this good practice and feels that turning the county's globally-recognised higher education institutions into a positive advantage as a tool to raise local aspiration is a fitting objective for the county council to adopt and engage with corporately.
52. It is clear to the councillors on the working group that when parents/carers have had poor or inappropriate experiences of education themselves, it is sometimes more difficult to recruit them as partners in supporting a child's engagement with learning or increasing aspiration. The schools that the working group visited are tackling this using PP funding for home link workers and text messaging systems, providing chaperones for pupils whose parents cannot attend a parents' evening (some parents are prevented from attending due to work patterns in holding several jobs for example) and in providing late buses/transport to enable all children to participate in activities after school where parents have no transport of their own.
53. The school that developed its Get Ahead Programme for Year 11 pupils found that disadvantaged children's engagement improved. The school reported an increase from 60 to over 100 children attending Saturday or holiday voluntary booster sessions. The working group would like to commend the teachers who voluntarily run these additional sessions. This is a measure of the commitment teachers in Oxfordshire have to their pupils' learning and life chances. The working group would be interested in seeing outcomes where MATs collaborate to enable primary schools to offer similar sessions, where a pooled budget for this purpose would increase engagement and cultural capital ahead of secondary school.

¹² *Tackling Educational Disadvantage (TED): Building Blocks for Excellence*, Hampshire County Council 2018

¹³ *Learning without Labels*, Marc Rowland, 2017.

54. In Oxfordshire's Virtual School, all post-16 students have secured college placements, and the working group would like to commend the hard work which has led to the achievement of this excellent result.

Recruitment and Retention

55. The working group heard from all schools visited the ongoing challenge of retaining excellent teachers. This is closely linked to the high cost of living, particularly housing. In February 2019 Lloyds once again identified¹⁴ Oxford city as the UK's least affordable place to live, but the issue is by no means restricted to Oxford, with costs of accommodation being high across Oxfordshire. Schools report that recruitment of new teachers can be challenging, and that particularly after 'growing their own' and developing excellent teachers in their schools, they often then leave as the lack of Oxford salary-weighting makes house-buying unaffordable. The same housing costs that pull families into poverty also impact the retention of excellent teachers in Oxfordshire schools, depriving children of that expertise which has been locally nurtured. This disproportionately affects the experience of vulnerable and disadvantaged children, for whom having continuity of excellent teachers through their learning may be the only aspect of stability and aspiration in their lives.
56. The working group concludes that Education Scrutiny Committee should ask Property Services to consider investigating how the county council might work proactively on the challenge of accommodation for teachers. Collaboration with district councils, universities, dioceses and businesses (Oxfordshire is a major centre for educational and academic publishing for example) might be explored around supporting accommodation access for teachers in the county as an educational priority due to its potential impact on attainment for the most vulnerable children in the county. One example of innovative action on this is the accommodation in Wantage at the Convent for newly-qualified teachers provided by the Oxford Diocesan Schools Board.

Attainment for all Oxfordshire children

57. Work to improve the educational attainment and achievement of disadvantaged and vulnerable children by definition addresses existing inequalities of opportunity. The recommendations in this report aim to lever the county council's influence in helping to address some of the complexities causing this inequality. The working group feels strongly that collaboration and innovation is needed to do this. As the Local Authority, Oxfordshire County Council has a duty of responsibility for all children in Oxfordshire and the working group feels this should be its moral purpose behind involvement in efforts to improve educational attainment, and progress, for all, starting with the recommendations made in this report.

¹⁴ <https://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/globalassets/documents/media/press-releases/lloyds-bank/2019/lloyds-bank-affordable-cities-2019-final.pdf>

Conclusions

The working group has agreed the following conclusions following its deep dive investigation:

58. Education Scrutiny Committee should consider adding to its Forward Plan the following items:
 - annual monitoring reports of both the progress and attainment of disadvantaged children across primary and secondary phases;
 - a report on levels of disadvantage compared with those in existing Opportunity Areas, by Parliamentary constituency.
59. Education Scrutiny Committee should consider using its next visit from the Regional Schools Commissioner to ask how best practice can be actively disseminated and collaborated on by academies for the education of all children in Oxfordshire.
60. Education Scrutiny Committee should consider asking Property Officers to consider investigating how the county council might work with District Councils, Universities, Dioceses and businesses around supporting accommodation access for teachers in the county, including reviewing any county council assets that may be suitable for use as rented teacher accommodation.
61. The Educational Attainment Working Group asks the Cabinet Member for Education & Cultural Services to consider working with Communications on a campaign encouraging Pupil Premium registration.
62. Education Scrutiny Committee should consider asking officers to work with appropriate bodies to identify subjects and phases of education where insufficient teachers are being trained for Oxfordshire schools, being mindful of the forecast secondary school population growth.
63. Education Scrutiny Committee should ask officers to investigate with the teaching school and local universities the possibility for the formulation of a tailored package of professional development for Oxfordshire schools with the aim of closing the attainment gap in the county.

Acknowledgements

64. The working group is grateful to all those who shared and presented information as part of its deep dive investigation. Councillors would like to thank the senior leadership teams at all the schools visited by the working group, who generously gave their time and shared their experience and expertise.

Cllr John Howson

Chair – Attainment Working Group (Education Scrutiny Committee)

Contact Officer: Diane Cameron – Policy Officer
November 2019

Annex 1 - Attainment 8 data measures for disadvantaged pupils at secondary schools in Oxfordshire in 2018.

Annex 2 - Progress 8 data measures for disadvantaged pupils at secondary schools in Oxfordshire in 2018.