



Everyone Achieves: tackling inequalities in education

Improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people

By Stephen Bush, Senior Education Adviser

Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils across the country, and in West Sussex, remain significantly below their peers, so it is more important than ever that we prioritise improving these outcomes in every aspect of our work. Our [Children and Young People's Plan 2022-2025](#) shows our commitment to narrowing the disadvantaged attainment gap for vulnerable children and young people in West Sussex.

The national and regional disadvantaged gap

Nationally, educational attainment gaps have widened since the years prior to the pandemic. In 2024, the gap was the widest in a decade for 11-16 year olds, and the gap for 5 year olds has still not returned to pre-pandemic levels, according to the [Education Policy Institute](#). On a regional scale, the South East had [the largest disadvantaged gap](#) for 11-16 year olds in 2023, with disadvantaged children and young people achieving at a level approximately 12.3 months behind that of their peers. These trends are also reflected in outcomes in West Sussex across all ages.

All children and young people, regardless of their family's socio-economic status, should benefit from a high-quality education that provides them with the essential knowledge and skills they need to be successful in the next stage of their education, training or working life. It is, therefore, vital that we continue our work to minimise the impacts of disadvantage wherever possible.

Everyone Achieves

The [Everyone Achieves](#) project, designed and supported by the West Sussex Standards and Effectiveness Service, aims to empower school leaders across the County to implement strategies to raise outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people in their settings. In the first year of the project, the project team worked with 21 participant schools to explore, reduce or remove barriers to achievement for disadvantaged children and young people.

Aims

- Inspire and empower school leaders to rise to the disadvantaged challenge in their school
- Establish a collaborative, supportive and challenging culture within the group to drive positive change
- Draw on research, expertise and experience when appropriate to inform and inspire
- Ensure schools maintained a relentless focus on tangible impact
- Continually monitor and evaluate progress, both for individual schools and as a project group
- Demonstrate positive impact on outcomes for the disadvantaged within the project schools by the end of year one, and more widely across schools by 2026
- Synthesise and share key learning messages



Phase 1 – inspire and explore

In phase 1 of the project, the headteacher and disadvantaged lead from each participant school attended a conference to explore the challenges faced by disadvantaged pupils, and how these challenges could be tackled. Schools held collaborative visits in the autumn term 2023, accompanied by an Local Authority project lead, to explore approaches, share best practice and challenge assumptions.

Phase 2 – action and impact

During phase 2, participant schools were asked to reflect on their learning from phase 1. Schools were asked to narrow their action plans, with a defined focus on achievable actions and tangible impacts. Throughout the first year of the project, a focus on monitoring and impact was emphasised.

Phase 3 – evaluate and embed

This final phase allowed school leaders to evaluate and reflect on the progress made across the year. Participant schools were invited to evaluate the impact of the project, not only in their own schools, but also in the Local Authority as a whole. These insights have been vital in the design and roll-out of year 2 of the project. Almost all participant schools from year 1 have continued with the project in year 2, where they are empowered to embed the learning and improvements from the first year of the project.

Outcomes and key findings

We were realistic about the scale of the challenge faced by schools in narrowing the disadvantaged gap in a single academic year, yet were determined to evidence tangible impact. Early on, this is most likely through individual pupil progress, for example improved attendance, but some analysis of high-level data has also been completed.

Everyone Achieves schools have, on average, made significant progress in narrowing the gap between disadvantaged children and young people and their peers. For Everyone Achieves schools, the table below demonstrates an 8% reduced gap in the proportion of children achieving the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths (RWM) at key stage 2 in, compared with a slight (0.7%) increase across the rest of the Local Authority.

	2023 data (Expected standard+)					2024 data (Expected standard+)					DA Gap change 2023-2024 (%)
			RWM (%)					RWM (%)			
	All Cohort	DA Cohort	All (%)	DA (%)	Gap (%)	All Cohort	DA Cohort	All (%)	DA (%)	Gap (%)	
Local Authority (all)	9847	1924	55.4	35.1	-20.3	9558	1752	56.4	35.4	-21	0.7
Everyone Achieves schools	792	110	62.1	34.8	-27.7	758	105	55.5	35.2	-19.7	-8.0

Figure 1: end of key stage 2 RWM (%) for Everyone Achieves vs Local Authority



There are many takeaways from the first year of the project, but some of the key findings that have influenced the success of year 1 of the project are:

- Change starts from the top and involves everyone
- Real impact needs a new mindset, leading to cultural change
- Actions require a very narrow focus to have impact
- Visiting other schools and collaborative working are essential elements of the change process
- Leaders need to define and agree what 'disadvantaged' means in their setting
- Every disadvantaged child is an individual and needs to be supported as such
- Quality First Teaching (QFT) is vital

The promising results of the first year of the project have been mirrored by positive feedback from participant schools:

"The focus this year feels like a whole school effort and there has been a cultural shift towards a more cohesive approach. The senior leadership team are now all holding themselves to account for this work; previously it was the pupil premium coordinator who tended to do this alone."

"The opportunity to visit other schools with differing cohorts was invaluable."

The project has now moved into its second year, and includes the addition of a further cohort of 10 schools to join those already on the project.

Further support from Standards and Effectiveness

The Standards and Effectiveness Service is well-equipped to support settings to narrow their disadvantaged gap, including:

- School visits to review your provision for disadvantaged children and young people
- Quality First Teaching training, which is available to book via West Sussex Services for Education (WSSfE)
- Bespoke coaching for disadvantaged leads and staff who hold responsibility for disadvantaged outcomes

For more information on [Everyone Achieves](#), or for further support from Standards and Effectiveness, please visit the [disadvantaged children and young people page](#) on WSSfE.