



Report to Children's and Education Select Committee

Date:	9 September 2021
Title:	Closing the Attainment Gap in Buckinghamshire
Relevant councillor(s):	Anita Cranmer and Julie Ward
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1. Executive summary

1.1 The report identifies the current academic outcomes for children eligible for the pupil premium grant (PPG) and the attainment gap between them and all pupils nationally. Key actions to address the gap taken in the last year are highlighted along with the delivery plan for the next academic year. It identifies key measures of success as:

- Maintain the attainment gap at 2019 levels for exam outcomes in 2022.
- 90% of schools in the universal training offer for the academic year 2021-22.
- 100% attendance from focus schools in support sessions.
- 0.5% reduction in the attainment gap for exam outcomes in 2023.
- Further develop programmes, meeting need, to support schools in closing the attainment gap for the next five years.

2. Content of report

2.1 The attainment gap - what it is and how it is measured

The "attainment gap" measure used by Ofsted and the Department for Education, and referenced in this report, looks at the difference in performance between pupils who are classed as "disadvantaged" in the LA and the national average for other, non-disadvantaged, pupils. Disadvantaged pupils are defined as:

- those who were known to be eligible for free school meals in any of the previous six years as indicated in any termly or annual school census, pupil referral unit (PRU) or alternative provision (AP) census;
- children looked after by the local authority for at least 1 day;

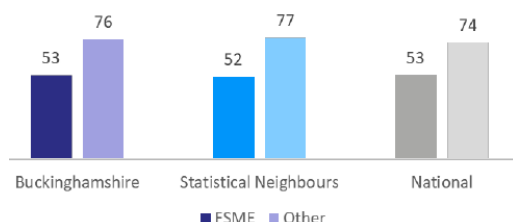
- or children who have been adopted from care. Schools receive Pupil Premium funding for their disadvantaged pupils.

In Buckinghamshire, as reported in the October 2020 census, 12.7% of the pupil cohort (or 10,980 pupils) were eligible for pupil premium.

2.2 What is the attainment gap in Buckinghamshire and how does it compare to national comparators?

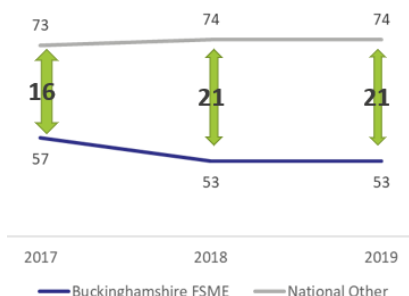
Data is routinely captured at statutory points of assessment throughout the learning journey of every pupil. Standardised results for children who are eligible for the pupil premium are compared with the average attainment for all pupils in England. As there were no statutory assessments for the majority of pupils during the pandemic, the latest data that we have are outcomes from 2019 which were included in the Education Standards Report presented to the committee in November 2020 (appendix 1). The main graphs from the report relating to attainment at each key stage, are shown below.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile 2019 - Attainment of key pupil groups



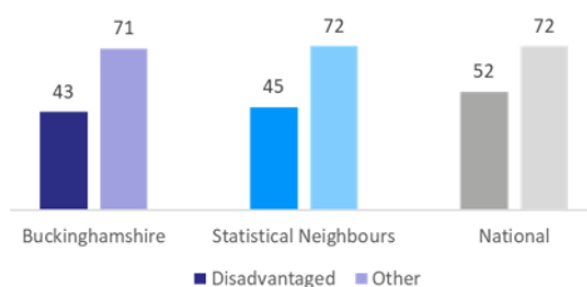
This chart shows the attainment of pupils at the end of their Reception year for the last academic year where we have data. It shows that children in Buckinghamshire who were eligible for free school meals attained as well as those nationally and slightly better than those in our group of statistical neighbours.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile 2019 - Attainment Gap



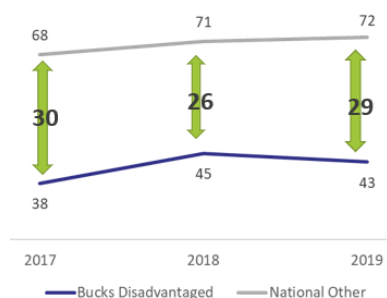
This chart demonstrates the attainment gap between five year olds in Buckinghamshire eligible for FSM against the attainment of all pupils nationally for the last three years. Whilst the gap increased between 2017 and 2018, it remained stable into 2019 (and was in line with national figures).

Key Stage 2 (SATs) 2019 – Attainment of key pupil groups



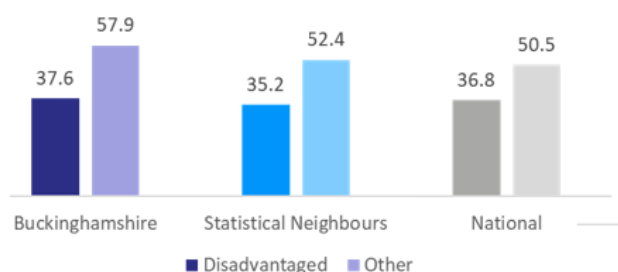
This chart shows the percentage of children achieving at or above age related expectations in reading, writing and maths at the end of their primary school career (Year 6) for the last academic year where we have data. This demonstrates that pupils in Buckinghamshire who were eligible for FSM performed less well academically than equivalent pupils in their Key Stage 2 SATs, both nationally and in relation to our statistical neighbours.

Key Stage 2 (SATs) 2019 – Attainment Gap



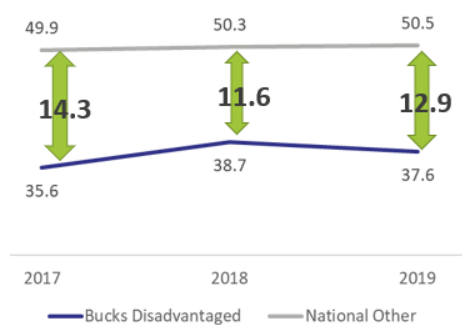
This chart demonstrates the attainment gap between eleven year olds in Buckinghamshire eligible for FSM against the attainment of all pupils nationally for the last three years. Whilst the gap decreased between 2017 and 2018, it grew slightly 2019.

GCSE 2019 - Attainment of key pupil groups



This chart shows the average point score for children at GCSE for the last academic year where we have data. This demonstrates that pupils in Buckinghamshire who were eligible for FSM performed better academically than equivalent pupils, both nationally and in relation to our statistical neighbours.

GCSE 2019 - Attainment Gap



This chart demonstrates the attainment gap between GCSE entrants in Buckinghamshire eligible for FSM against the attainment of all pupils nationally for the last three years. Whilst the gap decreased between 2017 and 2018, it grew slightly 2019 but was still below national figures.

2.3 Current action being taken to address the attainment gap in Buckinghamshire

Strategic responsibility for actions relating to the attainment gap is held by the Buckinghamshire Challenge Board (named after the successful programme of the 'London Challenge' that had a similar aim). The work of the group is defined as to:

- Review and reflect on the reasons for the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged and vulnerable children and all pupils within Buckinghamshire, including the effect of the covid-19 pandemic.
- Identify best inclusive practice in supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils to achieve nationally and locally.
- Review research and literature with regard to identifying accelerated and sustained achievement for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils.
- Work with the community of schools within Buckinghamshire and other agencies to develop programmes of support and challenge, inclusive practice and early help for disadvantaged and vulnerable children.

The board was initially created after discussion between the Corporate Director of Children's Services and Headteachers in 2019. It is open to a representative number of Head Teachers and governors from all groups of schools and Local Authority officers. It has met regularly and developed a programme of work that is being delivered free of charge to all schools in the county.

The board is working to the principles set out below which have been established through experience and evidence of working in schools which perform well for their disadvantaged pupils.

Key Principles

- Pupil need and focussed assessment inform our approach to tackling disadvantage.
- Schools need to adopt and embed a culture where all staff hold disadvantaged pupils in high regard, and believe they can attain well, irrespective of background or barriers to learning.
- Everyone needs to feel an ownership and responsibility for the strategy.

Methodology

Schools should start off with diagnostic assessment around pupil need:

- What is the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on learning?
- How does it present in the classroom?

This is not just testing (diagnostic assessment) but also a mixture of pupil voice, teacher voice and observations to create a wholistic view of the child. This has to happen over time as the impact of disadvantage on learning is a process, not an event.

2.4 Key Issues

a) How to create a sense of belonging for all pupils, in and out of the classroom

Relationships are key, and a collective ownership of the school's strategy by all. All those in school have to believe that disadvantaged pupils can attain well, from governors to midday supervisors and everyone in-between. Unconscious bias towards these students is addressed openly and robustly.

b) How to address pupil needs

Strategies need to address common issues amongst these learners, including language comprehension, feedback and self-regulated learning.

The most effective strategies focus on improving learners through early intervention and a focus on keeping them in the classroom. Schools should reflect on the experience of our less fortunate pupils in lessons.

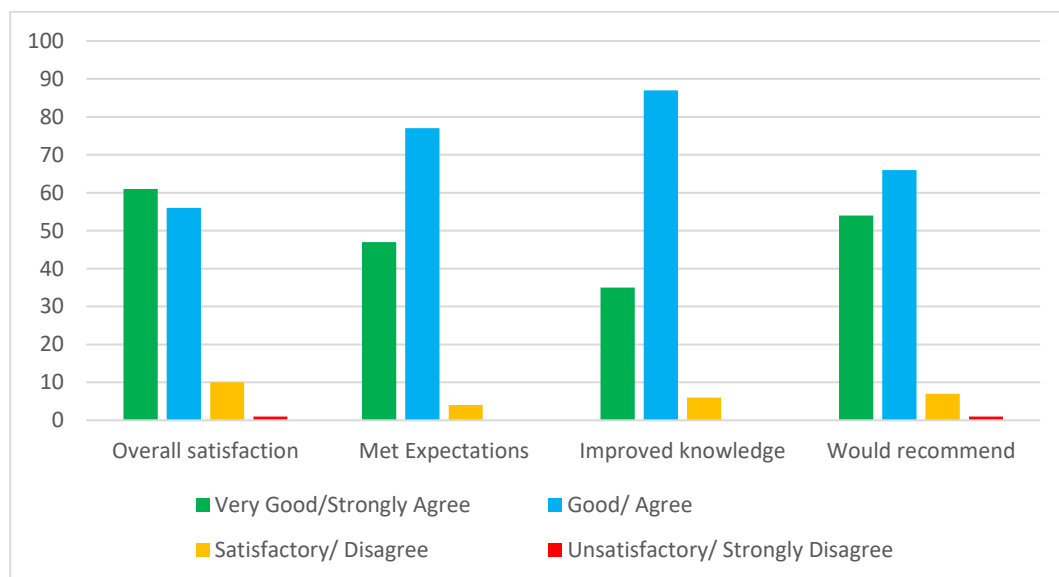
2.5 The Evidence Based Approach in Buckinghamshire

The five points below outline the key pillars of activity to narrow the gap:

1. A tiered model, focussed on Teaching, Academic Intervention and Pastoral Approaches (that are intertwined), and a long-term view underpinned by early intervention is critical.
2. Effective, inclusive teaching is the best lever for improving school and disadvantaged pupil outcomes.

3. New habits, behaviours, routines and approaches are likely to make teaching more difficult in the short term – e.g. mixed attainment teaching, collaborative learning, modelling, metacognition, emphasis on subject knowledge.
4. Meaningful assessment is part of great teaching, identifying the need for intervention and monitoring implementation.
5. Robust impact evaluation – about whether the strategy is working, not setting out to prove that it is – is fundamental to securing better outcomes / making changes where necessary.

In response to the five points above, a series of engagement sessions, open to all schools at no cost, was developed and delivered throughout the academic year 2020-21. Due to the pandemic, this programme of work for the Buckinghamshire Challenge Board was delivered virtually, through conferences and workshops. They were recorded and remain online for all schools to access. The chart below shows that feedback from evaluation forms for all of the sessions across the year has been very good, with the vast majority of delegates engaging positively with the programme. We can see that there has been widespread engagement with the project, with over 70% of schools engaging with our workshops and conferences. Feedback has been positive with school leaders taking information and strategies back to their schools to implement.



2.6 Outcomes for the academic year 2020-21

There have been no comparable assessments in primary schools this year due to the pandemic, and the methodology for awarding GCSE grades is significantly different to previous years, so comparisons are not useful.

3. Next steps and review

3.1 Future plans to address the attainment gap in Buckinghamshire

From Mitigation to Success: Tackling Educational Disadvantage

Over the last year, Buckinghamshire schools who have engaged with our ongoing online training have developed a strong knowledge about tackling educational disadvantage. In order to maintain this momentum, we have devised a new and bespoke programme that will enable us to continue to build on this. We have made progress, but there is still much to do.

The programme will be rooted in research evidence and provide opportunities to learn from successful practitioners and schools. By focusing sharply on schools' own strategies, we will consider: *what is the impact of educational disadvantage on your pupils and what is within your gift to address this?* These sessions are online and available to all. Some schools may be targeted for attendance. They will last two hours each, run as twilights. Schools should book and sign up for the whole programme. The sessions will include input from the project board team and case studies from local and national schools.

3.2 Anticipated outcomes of current and future work

It has been widely recognised that the academic impact of the pandemic has widened the disadvantaged gap on a national level. Our aims are therefore:

- To maintain the attainment gap at 2019 levels for exam outcomes in 2022.
- To engage 90% of schools in the universal training offer for the academic year 2021-22.
- To have 100% attendance from focus schools in support sessions.
- To see a 0.5% reduction in the attainment gap for exam outcomes in 2023.
- To further develop programmes, meeting need, to support schools in closing the attainment gap for the next five years.

4. Appendices

4.1 Education Standards Report November 2020



Education
Standards Report Ac

5. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

- 5.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone [] or email []