



November 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the first half termly update of research and activity in Buckinghamshire regarding the attainment gap for pupils in our schools. Whether the language that we have used for raising the attainment of our disadvantaged pupils has been one of 'closing the gap' or 'diminishing difference', the issue has been prominent in society at large and also within Buckinghamshire for as long as any of us can recall.

Much work has historically taken place across the county in relation to raising attainment for these children and improving their life chances. As a head teacher I was engaged in a variety of projects, both council led and with my own staff to support pupils, however across the county there is still a significant gap between the attainment of our pupils eligible for pupil premium and all other pupils nationally. This gap is larger in Buckinghamshire than the gap nationally and for statistically similar authorities across the country.

Whilst we are all working hard to manage the effect of Covid 19 on our schools and communities, it is clear from research carried out in the last few months that those pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds have been further held back compared to their peers, therefore this is the time that we need to work together to address this and support the most vulnerable children in our society.

It is clear that there still needs to be a determined effort by us all to focus on this work, as such during the last year, volunteer head teachers, governors along with officers from the Local Authority have been meeting to identify the key issues behind the attainment gap in Buckinghamshire. As a result of this we have planned a series of actions to support schools to address the problem.

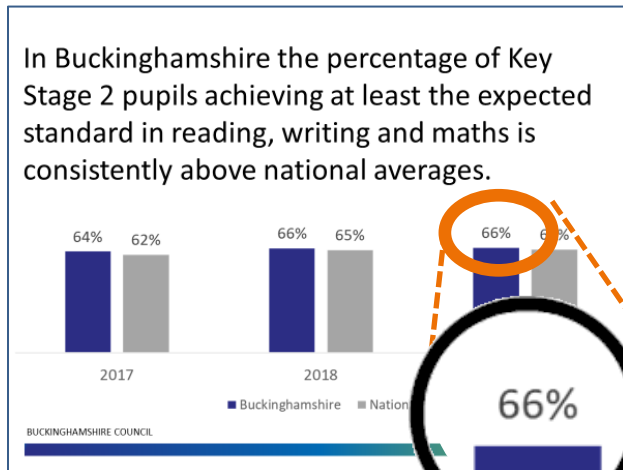
Key messages in this document include:

- An update on the work of the group of school leaders and council officers
- Our first conference for schools – 6th November
- A piece by Marc Rowland regarding approaches to support for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds

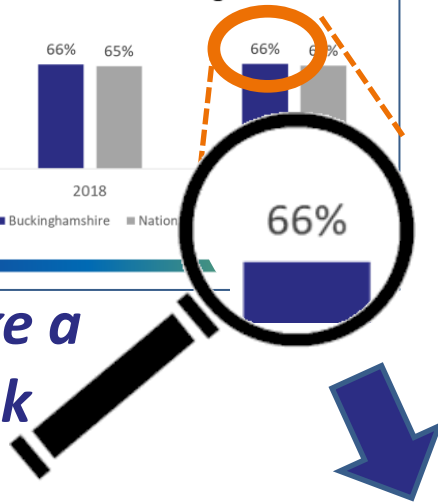
Yours Faithfully,

Gareth Drawmer
Head of Achievement and Learning

Overall results look good...



...but take a closer look



achieving the KS2 expected standard

NOT achieving the KS2 expected standard

all pupils



pupils from Pakistani, Black Caribbean or Black African backgrounds



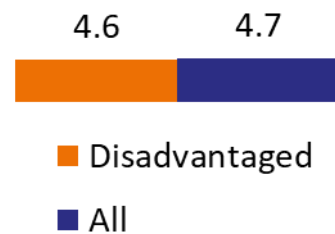
pupils classed as disadvantaged



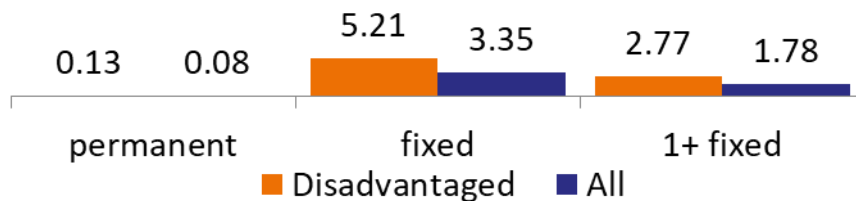


8309 Pakistani pupils (9.7%)
1536 Black African pupils (1.8%)
615 Black Caribbean pupils (0.7%)
10428 disadvantaged pupils (12%)

The overall attendance rate for disadvantaged pupils was slightly lower than the Buckinghamshire average in 2018-19



Exclusions rates for disadvantaged pupils were above Buckinghamshire averages in 2018-19



Based on this research, and additional discussions, the group whilst recognising that all pupils eligible for Free School Meals should be supported and good practice across this cohort is important, there would be key groups that would be areas of focus within the work:

- Black African Caribbean pupils who as a group are subject to disproportionately high rates of exclusion from schools (mainly in large urban areas)
- Pakistani pupils, who generally have low levels of exclusion but comparatively high levels of absence (mainly in large urban areas)
- Many isolated individual PPG students who may be the only such child in a year group (predominantly in rural areas)
- Developing engagement with other services at the earliest possible point to support very young children have a successful start

The work will be brought together in a variety of ways including:

- Identification schools in Buckinghamshire that had successful outcomes with the identified groups and work with them to develop good practice guidance for publication
- Bring schools together to take part in raising attainment conferences where good practice can be shared and schools have time to reflect on their work to date with follow up workshops for schools that are keen to develop this focus
- Review literature for the group with regard to external research and support and signpost schools to the resources through a dedicated website
- Identify early intervention work with young children to promote key skills
- Develop awareness of governors to ensure that this area is a strategic priority in schools

Closing the Gap in Buckinghamshire

Friday 6th November 2020, MS Teams 1.30 – 4.00pm

Time	Item	Speaker
1.30 – 1.35	Welcome and Introductions	Gareth Drawmer , Head of Achievement and Learning
1.35 – 1.50	Disproportionality	Oliver Foxell , Operations Manager, Youth Offending Service
1.50 – 2.20	Odd One Out	Carol-Anne McCollum , Executive Co-Headteacher, The Three Schools
2.20 – 2.25	Short Break	
2.25 – 2.55	Achievement For All An evidence based approach to improving outcomes	Claire Pankhania , Headteacher Highworth Combined School
2.55 – 3.25	Closing the Gap - Climbing the Stairs Ensuring your strategy for closing the gap is deeply embedded through your values, ethos and leadership.	Jo Pikulski , Co-Headteacher, Disraeli School and Paula O'Shea , Lead DSL and Pastoral Lead

3.25 – 3.55	Pupil Premium and Disadvantaged	Marc Rowland , Adviser, Unity Schools Partnership and the Education Endowment Fund and Tara McVey , Deputy Headteacher, The Towers School a non-selective secondary school in Kent.
3.55 – 4.00	Close	Gareth Drawmer , Head of Achievement and Learning

Evidence and experience of working in schools which perform well by their disadvantaged pupils tells us the following:

- Pupil need, not labels; assessment, not assumption should be informing our approach to tackling disadvantage.
- Schools needs 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.
- 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. Use diagnostic assessment, pupil voice, teacher voice, observations etc. The impact of disadvantage on learning is a process, not an event.
- The biggest issues are interlinked:
 - 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 have to believe that disadvantaged pupils can attain well. Everyone in school, from governors to midday supervisors. Unconscious bias is tackled.
 - language comprehension, feedback and self-regulated learning are often prominent issues.
- The most effective strategies focus on improving *learners* through early intervention and a focus on the classroom. What is the experience of our less fortunate pupils in lessons. Is it something where they get the emotional uplift overcoming difficult learning tasks through inclusive teaching. Or is the lesson something to 'get through', to hide away and feel a sense of relief when it's over? Thinking about of the learning experience through the lens of disadvantaged pupils is important.

- The tiered model, focussed on Teaching, Academic Intervention and Pastoral Approaches (that are intertwined), and a long term view underpinned by early intervention is critical.
- Effective, inclusive teaching is the best lever for improving school and disadvantaged pupil outcomes.
- 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.
- Meaningful assessment is part of great teaching, identifying the need for intervention and monitoring implementation.
- 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.