

How do the most successful schools support disadvantaged pupils?

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Introduction

How should pupil premium money be spent to 'Close the Gaps'?

The gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is growing and is at the largest level for pupils aged 16-19 since 2011. At the same time there is a growing number of young people in poverty. 29% of all children are growing up in poverty, on average 9 in a classroom of 30. In some catchment areas this will be much worse, for example, 46% of black and ethnic minority pupils are growing up in poverty. This poverty underpins the barriers to learning that our disadvantaged children face. As an education system we are struggling to lower these barriers but, across the country, some schools are successful in helping students to progress and are closing this gap.

How do these successful schools address this disadvantage gap? There are schools where the gap doesn't exist and disadvantaged students do as well or better than their peers. What can we learn from them? What are the bright spots of success we can seek out, is there anything we can copy and replicate more widely?

This report uses the pupil premium statements that every school is required to publish and GCSE data to discover how these successful schools are spending their pupil premium funds and what strategies they focus on. The intention is that this information can prompt thought, promote ideas and challenge thinking, leading to application to the different contexts and schools where the gap isn't closing.

Methodology

The schools investigated as part of the report were the 20 schools each year with the lowest gaps between the progress of disadvantaged students and their peers. Data was taken from 2 school years; 2021-22 and 2022-23. To make sure it was consistent and that statistical anomalies were removed the schools also all had the following characteristics:

- At least 100 pupils in year 11
- At least 25% pupil premium
- Whole school progress at national average or above (P8 equal or above 0.00)

In each case the most recent pupil premium statement from the school website was analysed to record the strategies that were funded.

In order to offer a comparison to these successful schools a similar number of schools were chosen with the largest gaps in progress between FSM pupils and their peers. These schools were 'unsuccessful' in closing the gap but still recorded P8 values at least in line with national averages. The intention was to compare schools for which the main difference in results was their success with pupil premium students rather than generic issues around school improvement.

The successful schools are identified in Appendix 1, those with the widest gaps which were used for comparison haven't been named in the report.

Limitations

Information around strategies was only taken from the pupil premium statements, this doesn't give detail of the level of time or input that went into that strategy. To a large extent the impact of a strategy depends on the quality of implementation and this wasn't within the scope of the report. The schools in the study are listed in appendix 1. It may be helpful for those who want to take the information further to visit schools from the list that are close in geography or context. Schools can be so different across the country that some strategies may be applied well and successfully in one and the same strategy fail elsewhere. This is a 'broad brushstrokes' report meant to prompt further research, strategic thought and discussion rather than a 'How to' guide with all the answers.

This is a review that bases success on progress data, a narrow measure of what makes a school successful. Schools that do a great job do more for pupil premium students than just help them academically progress. Next steps could be drawing in information around schools successful in other data including inclusion, exclusion and suspension rates or pupil destinations.

There is a variation in the quality and detail of Pupil Premium statements from school to school, themes from the report should be critically evaluated against available educational research.

Characteristics of a school which closes the gaps

Whilst the schools that are successful in closing the gap are found in different contexts and settings there are some themes in the ways they differ from average secondary schools. The successful schools cohort has a greater representation than average of faith schools, free schools and single sex schools. They are also more likely to have pupils with English as a second language.



The geographical distribution of schools with the largest and smallest gaps. (Green = successful, Red = Largest gaps)

As the map shows the most successful schools at closing the gap are clustered around urban areas with most in London, Birmingham, Bradford and Manchester. There are no schools within the cohort that are found North of Bradford. There is a tendency for the least successful schools to be more rural and closer to the coast. 45% of those schools that closed the gap were sited in areas that fell into the highest 20% of deprivation. The less successful schools had only 25%.

Muslim schools are well represented in the successful schools group in a much higher proportion than expected with the Eden Schools, part of Star academies trust having 5 schools on the list, more than any other trust. All faith schools are represented more than is expected in the successful group. A recent Sutton trust report outlines how faith schools are more likely to be less representative of their catchment areas and more socially selective which may have some effect though our successful schools had higher average pupil premium numbers than those in the comparison group.

Successful schools have significantly higher numbers of pupils speaking English as a second language and higher numbers of free school meal pupils. Single sex schools are also over-represented in the successful group.

All other characteristics (prior attainment, SEN numbers, pupil mobility etc) were in line with national averages across both groups of schools.

All the schools that were part of the study for both the successful and unsuccessful groups had Good or Outstanding OFSTED ratings or were waiting for their first report. There was around a 10% higher percentage of Outstanding rated schools in the group of those who were successful with pupil premium students.

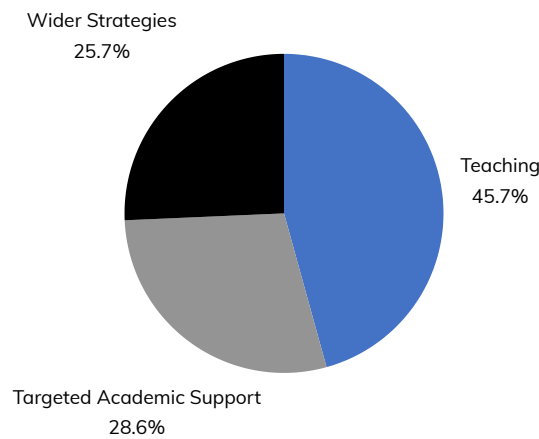
School Characteristic	Most Successful	Least successful	National average
Non-denominational	66.6%	91.8%	83.64%
Church of England	5.1%	0.00%	3.64%
Christian	5.1%	2.7%	1.3%
Roman Catholic	5.1%	5.4%	4.75%
Muslim	17.9%	0.0%	0.49%
Academy	31.6%	37.8%	21.3%
Academy convertor	34.2%	35.1%	43.3%
Free School	23.1%	5.4%	4.0%
Voluntary Aided	10.2%	8.1%	5.6%
Community School	5.1%	5.4%	8.2%
Mixed	56.5%	89.1%	88.9%
All Girls	23%	8.1%	5.3%
All Boys	20.5%	2.7%	5.8%
FSM	43%	30%	30%
English first language	54%	80.3%	83.5%
English second language	46%	19%	15.9%

Spending levels

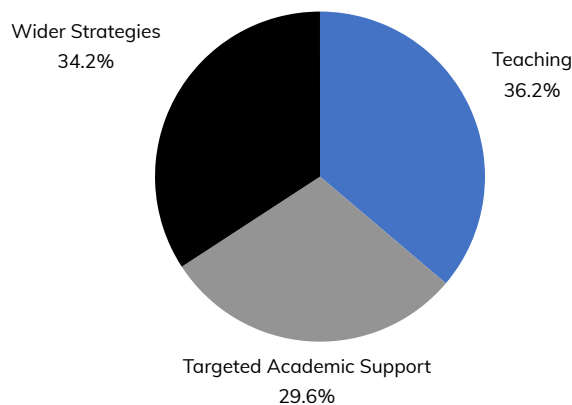
The overall pupil premium funding (including the recovery premium) for schools in both the successful and unsuccessful groups is very similar with an average of £387984.00 for those in the successful group and £380902.00 for those who fail to close the gap.

Spending on the plans is divided into three areas; Teaching, Targeted academic support and Wider Strategies. Whilst there is some error built in because schools categorise strategies in different ways the average spend was as seen below:

Most successful schools:



Least successful schools:



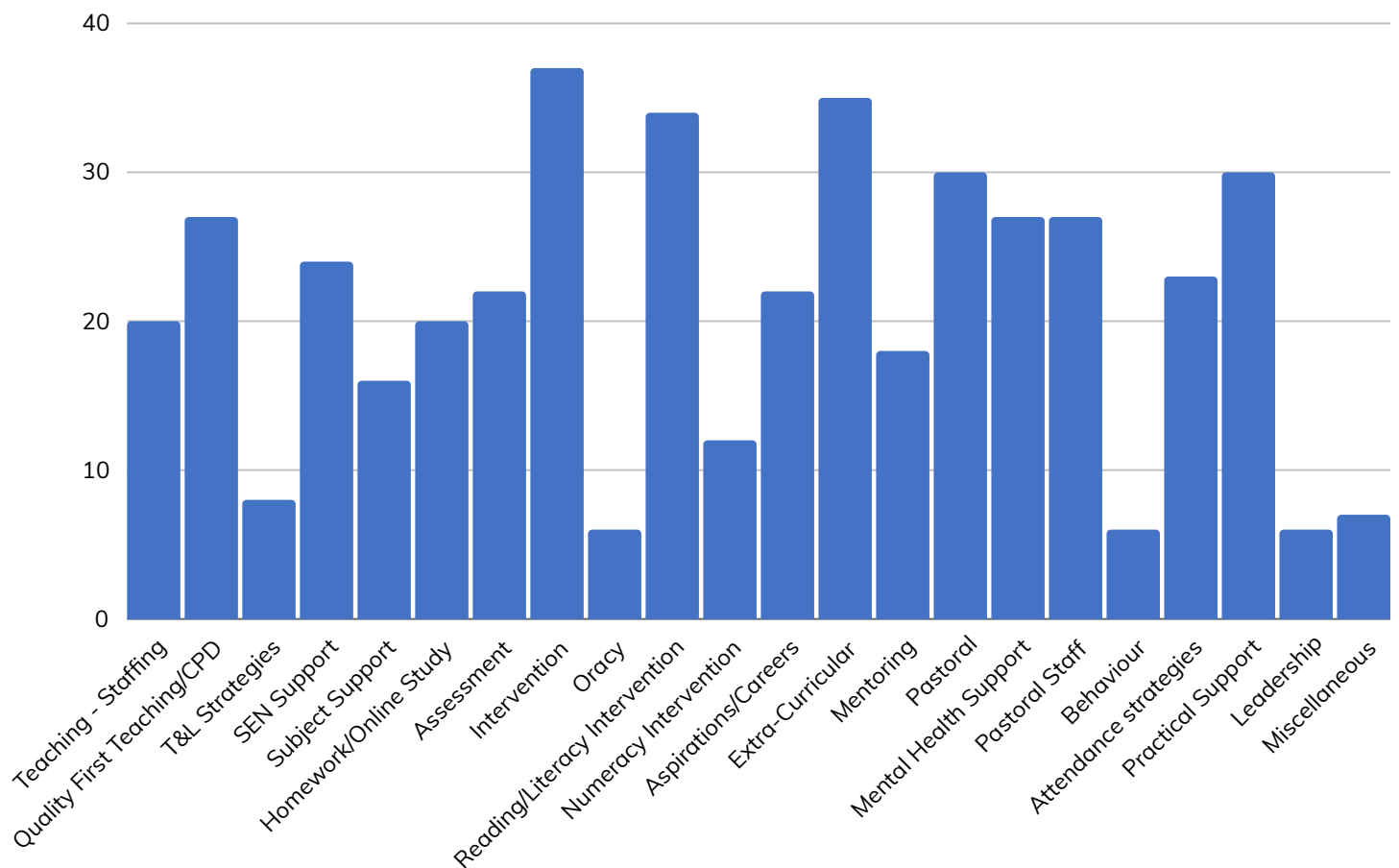
The most successful schools spent a higher proportion of their pupil premium budget on teaching at the expense of wider strategies. This supports the principle of strong teaching being one of the most effective levers in raising progress. As a note, all the schools which were part of the research, both successful and unsuccessful had been judged as Good or above for Quality of Education by Ofsted. They all have overall progress that is in line with national averages. In

theory then, all the schools should have a level of consistently strong teaching across their classrooms, it just isn't always making the difference for disadvantaged students.

On closer examination of the different strategies, teaching funding in successful schools was directed more at teacher CPD, SEN support and teaching capacity. In comparison the least successful schools had more occurrences of spending directed at classroom techniques, teaching QA and subject leadership.

Elements of a successful pupil premium strategy

There are some strategies or areas to which funding is directed in most successful schools. Using pupil premium statements, the number of times a strategy was used was collated for the most successful schools. Breaking down the strategies into categories gives an idea of the popularity of different initiative areas.



Frequency of strategies used by the most successful schools.

Commonalities of successful schools

- Reading and literacy intervention programmes.
- Intervention outside school hours including tutoring and small groups (there was more school-led tutoring in place across successful schools than NTP tutoring).
- Investment in pastoral support including investment in staff roles.
- Practical support for pupils including subsidised resources, food provision and travel.
- An extra-curricular and cultural capital programme.
- Investment in teaching and CPD

Questions for leaders

Are you investing in literacy and reading programmes? How successful are these? Are pupil premium students engaged with these programmes?

Does intervention take place outside school hours?

How sustainable is your tutoring and small group intervention?

What are the practical needs of your cohort and their families? How do you know?

Are pupil premium students given opportunities to access extra-curricular programmes? Are these opportunities being taken up by students?

Do your teaching staff understand the implications of teaching students living in poverty? Is there a classroom focus on high aspirations for all?

Detailed breakdown

The DfE have divided pupil premium spend into three areas identified by the EEF in terms of pupil premium good practice; Teaching, Targeted academic support and Wider strategies.

Teaching:

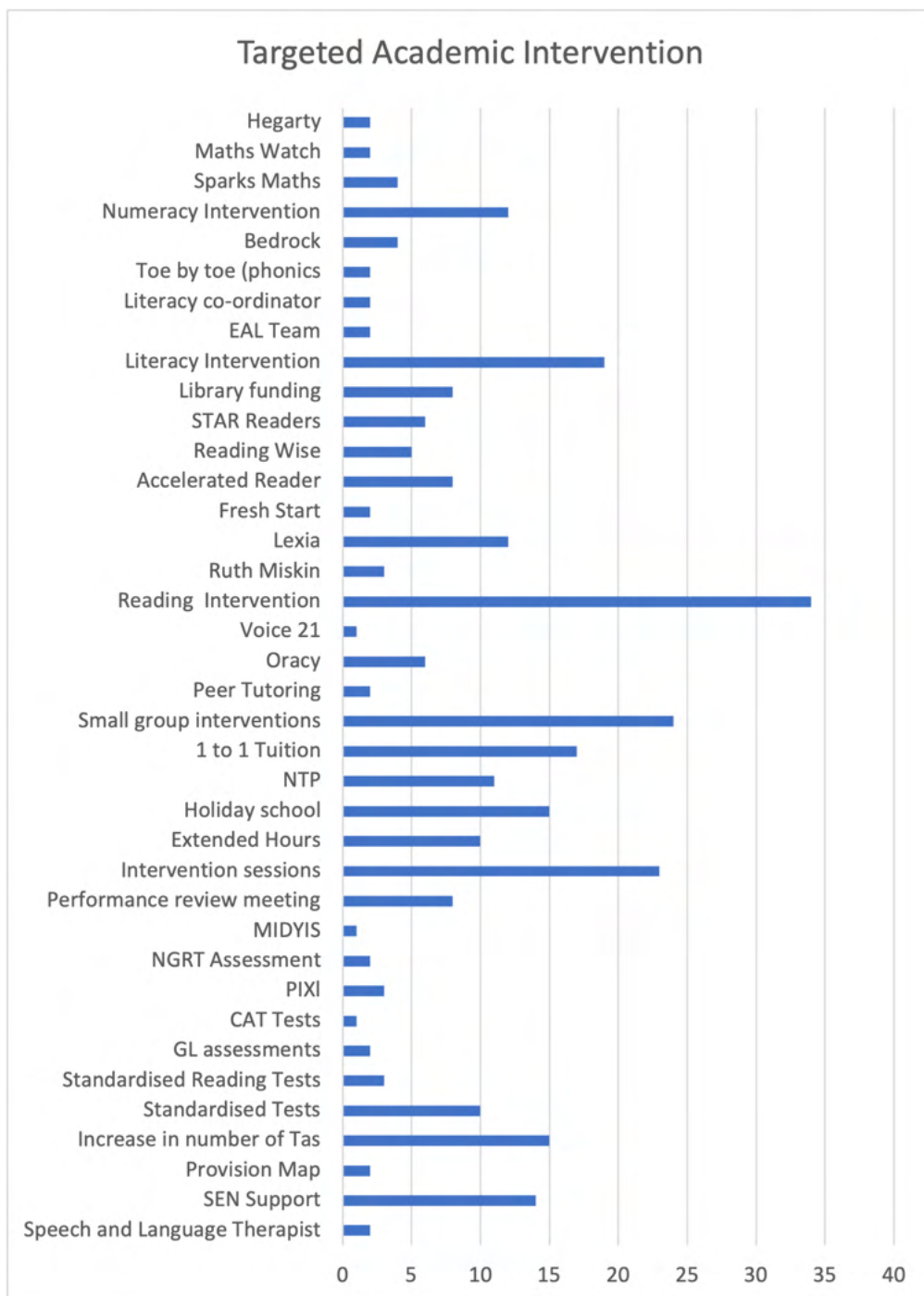
Within teaching the most regular strategies across schools were CPD for teachers and increasing the capacity of core teaching to decrease the group size of classes.

In this section there were several online resources bought in to support teaching these linked with general strategies to support homework which were popular including providing space and support in school.



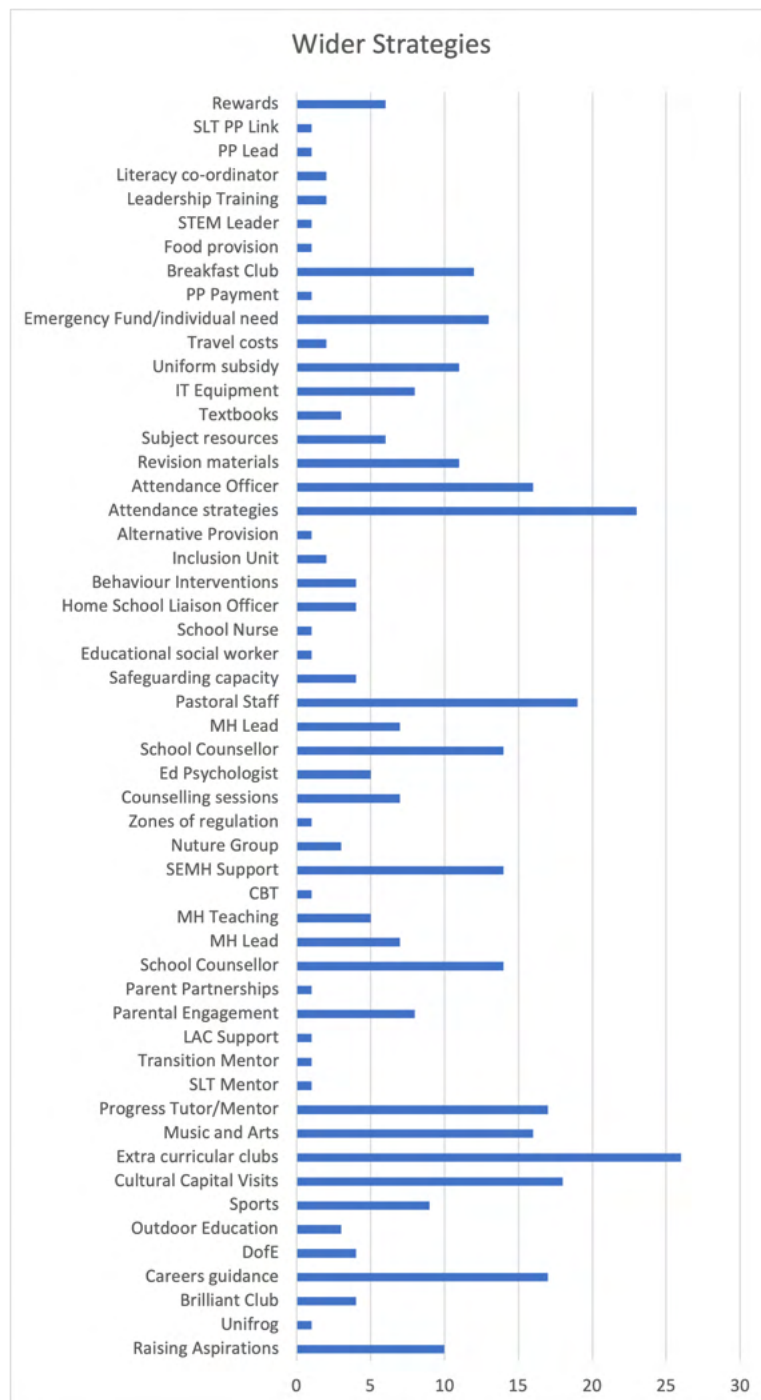
Targeted Academic Support

Nearly every school had some level of reading or literacy intervention. This was likely to be especially important given the above average number of pupils who speak English as a second language in the cohort of successful schools. There were several external packages used to support the literacy and reading with Lexia and Accelerated Reader being particularly popular.



Wider strategies

In this section both attendance strategies and extra-curricular opportunities are funded well across the schools. Most had also invested in increasing the number of pastoral staff to support pupils. There was considerable investment in supporting students mental health with a range of strategies from individual counselling to specific teaching and supportive structures such as nurture groups or internal provisions.



Comparing successful and unsuccessful strategies

There were statistically significant differences between strategies in the following categories (numbers can be found in appendix 2):

- **Teaching and Learning strategies** – more unsuccessful schools invested in promoting classroom strategies, these included metacognition, retrieval practice, and collaborative learning. The only classroom strategy mentioned across the successful schools was developing feedback.
- **Behaviour** – The schools in the successful cohort invested less into behaviour strategies. Is this because behaviour isn't important in the success of disadvantaged pupils or because the successful schools have good behaviour in place and this is what is leading to their success? It would be a fair assumption to presume that successful schools were investing in the right systems to enable good behaviour as seen in the research; mental health, pastoral care and regulating activities like sport.
- **Leadership** – There was a noticeable difference in the investment of schools in the successful group in leadership. Very few invested in leadership across any area whilst it was much more common with those schools who had the large gaps. Maybe successful schools have a more delegated, holistic approach to leadership and the ownership of school priorities.

Individual strategies that showed statistically significant differences:

- **SEN Support** – more successful schools had SEN support as part of their strategies.
- **Subject leadership and lead practitioners** – funded by several schools across the study but none in the successful group.
- **Data analysis** – funded by several schools across the study but none in the successful group.
- **Intervention during the school day** – funded by several schools across the study but none in the successful group.
- **Sports** – sports were funded by several successful schools but none of the group with large gaps.
- **School counsellors** - were funded by several successful schools but none of the group with large gaps.

Conclusion

Key findings

- The most successful schools at closing the gap were single sex schools, muslim schools and schools with a higher than average amount of students who spoke English as a second language.
- Most successful schools were sited in larger cities.
- Successful schools spend more of their pupil premium budget on strategies to support teaching, this is directed towards CPD rather than specific teaching strategies.
- Successful schools invest in Reading and Literacy.
- Successful schools extend learning time outside the school day.
- Mental Health support is a key strategy area.
- More resources were spent on behaviour and attendance in schools with a large gap.

Questions to ask

- What are the key drivers in single sex schools that drive pupil premium progress. Can these be replicated?
- What are the key factors in faith schools (particularly Muslim schools) that drive pupil progress. How do we replicate these?
- Do the most successful schools represent the catchment areas in which they are found or is there any social selection in place?
- What factors keep the successful schools located in cities and out of the North?

Seven areas to influence pupil progress

At Close the Gaps we're enthusiastic around supporting schools with the wider strategies strand of the Pupil Premium funding. We believe that when a young person is disadvantaged and living in poverty they experience barriers that need removing before learning, and the life chances that follow, can start.

In 2023 4.3 million children are living in poverty with numbers having risen sharply. Other measures have risen sharply too; the number of people accessing foodbanks, the number of homeless, the number of those unable to heat their homes, the number of families in debt. These are big issues for our young people, our current national context means that, as schools, we can't just deal in classroom education.

Other than ensure that our classroom practice is as good as we can get it, what else can we, as school leaders do? With limited resources, staffing challenges and a struggling social care system – is there anything we can do?

Poverty is a big enough issue for those working in schools in deprived areas that it needs specific strategies and efforts to approach it. If you're a school leader working with a high percentage of pupil premium students, do you have a specific strategy or plan to address the needs of the students you have in your school who live below the poverty line?

1 - Understand your context



There is a wealth of census data available to give a socio-economic picture of your catchment area. There are parents willing to share their stories. How well do all your staff understand the context of your pupils and the stressors of living in poverty?

Analysis of the socio-economic data from your catchment area can help your team make leadership decisions based on aspects like parents access to transport, unemployment rates or local crime statistics. Do you know which postcode your neediest pupils live in? Have you linked that with attendance or exclusion rates?

2 - Hone your pastoral support



Research around poverty suggests the stressors that involved can affect the way a young person's brain is wired. It also increases safeguarding risks and makes young people more vulnerable to behavioural or mental health problems. Is your team well resourced? Is it proactive? Do all staff understand the local risks and is a response to these built into your approach?

How inclusive is your behaviour approach? Do you seek to understand behaviour and increase the security and safety of young people in your school community?

3 - Develop collaborations



In every area there are charities, faith groups and local organisations who are working to support families and are experts in the issues they face. Develop local links with those working in areas like food poverty, housing, or domestic abuse, and forge networks with referral pathways ready for whenever you come across a family that needs support.

4 - Ensure your staff are trauma-informed



Childhood trauma and ACE's are increased in children growing up in deprived areas. An understanding of the behaviours caused by a trauma response and a knowledge of how to respond can be revolutionary for teachers and pastoral staff. Do all your staff know the importance of encouraging a sense of safety and positive relationships? Do all your staff know how to recognise and respond to a trauma reaction?

5 - Poverty proof your school



There are lots of materials available around supporting schools to poverty proof their school year. Has your leadership team worked through these? Have you assessed the cost to parents across the school calendar? Have you looked at adapting your approach to make things more affordable and easier to access for those in poverty?

6- Develop your school 'offer'



Pupils growing up in a deprivation and poverty lack the experiences and cultural capital of their more affluent peers. How has your curriculum been adapted to this? Do all curriculum leaders understand the context and concepts behind this? Are there opportunities for all pupils to access an enriched curriculum and extra experiences that increase their aspirations and cultural capital?

7 - Inclusion and attendance



Deprived students are overrepresented in both persistent absence and exclusions. How does your approach work to reduce these? Do staff work with families to reduce barriers to attendance? Does your use of inclusion services, alternative provision, and pastoral support work to support students in danger of exclusion and struggling with mainstream school?

If, as a school or trust you'd like some help to develop any of these ideas or help with advice or training do contact us at Close the Gaps.

<https://www.closesthegaps.co.uk/contact-us>

Reach Out

Close the Gaps works to help you support struggling young people.

Phone: 03333 397717

Website: www.closesthegaps.co.uk

Appendix 1 - Schools who have successfully closed the gap. 2021-23

Madani Boys School	LE5 5LL
Eden Girls' School Waltham Forest	E17 5SD
Fulham Cross Girls' School and Language College	SW6 6BP
Feversham Girls' Academy	BD3 0LT
Norlington School and 6th Form	E10 6JZ
Heron Hall Academy	EN3 4SA
Carlton Bolling	BD3 0DU
Eden Boys' Leadership Academy, Manchester	M8 8DT
Eden Boys' School, Birmingham	B42 2SY
King Edward VI Aston School	B6 6DJ
Fairfield High School	BS7 9NL
Our Lady's Catholic High School	N16 5AF
Joseph Leckie Academy	WS5 4PG
The City Academy Bristol	BS5 9JH
Mulberry Academy Shoreditch	E2 6NW
Baylis Court School	SL1 3AH
Ark All Saints Academy	SE5 0UB
Djanogly City Academy	NG7 6ND
Copthall School	NW7 2EP
Phoenix Academy	W12 0RQ
Dixons Kings Academy	BD7 2AN
Eden Boys' School, Preston	PR1 4BD
AIM Academy North London	N9 8DQ
Eden Girls' School, Waltham Forest	E17 5SD
Dormers Wells High School	UB1 3HZ
Paddington Academy	W9 2DR
Ark Elvin Academy	HA9 7DU
The Palmer Catholic Academy	IG3 8EU
Ark Victoria Academy	B10 0HJ
Eden Girls' School, Slough	SL1 4AA
Selly Park Girls' School	B29 7PH
Hodge Hill Girls' School	B36 8EY
Central Foundation Boys' School	EC2A 4SH

Marylebone Boys' School	W2 1QZ
Southfields Academy	SW18 5JU
Oasis Academy Hadley	EN3 4PX
The Urswick School - A Church of England Secondary School	E9 6NR
Erdington Academy	B24 8RE
Heartlands Academy	B7 4QR

Appendix 2 - Strategies across the schools

Strategies	Successful schools	Schools needing to Close the Gap
Teaching - Staffing	20	16
Teaching Capacity Core subjects	18	12
Teacher recruitment	2	8
Specialist Teaching	2	0
Quality First Teaching/CPD	27	34
T&L QA	0	10*
Quality First Teaching/Teacher CPD	27	34
Exam board training	2	1
Teacher Coaching	8	6
Teaching Leadership	0	5
Leadership Training	2	3
T&L Strategies	8	17
Metacognition, self reg strategies	4	7
Knowledge Organisers	0	1
Retrieval Practice	1	4
Study Skills	1	3
Feedback Strategies	4	5
Collaborative learning	0	1
SEN Support	24	18
Speech and Language Therapist	2	1
SEN Support	14	6*
Provision Map	2	1
Increase in number of TAs	15	12
Subject Support	16	22
Examiner/Expert Master class	6	1
Languages Assistant	0	1
Subject Leadership	0	6*
Lead Practitioners	0	7*
Specialist Teaching	2	0
Curriculum development	8	8
English/Maths Mastery	2	1
Homework/Online Study	20	22
Homework	9	9
Study space/homework club	12	9
Remote learning	6	5
Digital Resources	6	7

Tassomai	3	0
Educake	1	1
Hegarty	2	3
GCSE Pod	1	5
Seneca	3	0
Assessment	22	23
Standardised Tests	10	5
Data Analysis	0	9*
Standardised Reading Tests	3	4
GL assessments	2	5
CAT Tests	1	4
PIXI	3	2
NGRT Assessment	2	5
MIDYIS	1	0
Setting	0	0
Performance review meeting	8	4
Intervention	37	37
Intervention sessions	23	26
Extended Hours	10	11
Intervention during school day	0	6*
Holiday school	15	12
NTP	11	7
1 to 1 Tuition	17	23
Small group interventions	24	30
Intervention Lead	0	1
Oracy	6	4
Voice 21	1	2
Reading/Literacy Intervention	34	36
Ruth Miskin	3	5
Lexia	12	7
Fresh Start	2	3
Accelerated Reader	8	7
Reading Wise	5	0
STAR Readers	6	1
Library funding	8	4
Literacy Intervention	19	27
Literacy Company	0	0
EAL Team	2	3
Literacy co-ordinator	2	6
Toe by toe (phonics)	2	2

Bedrock	4	1
Numeracy Intervention	12	21*
Sparks Maths	4	6
Maths Watch	2	3
Hegarty	2	3
Aspirations/Careers	22	28
Raising Aspirations	10	11
Unifrog	1	0
Brilliant Club	4	3
Careers guidance	17	25
Extra-Curricular	35	37
DofE	4	4
Outdoor Education	3	2
Sports	9	0*
Cultural Capital Visits	18	21
Extracurricular clubs	26	28
Enrichment Coordinator	0	4
Music and Arts	16	18
Mentoring	18	22
Peer mentoring	0	2
Progress Tutor/Mentor	17	18
SLT Mentor	1	0
Tutor Support	0	3
Transition Mentor	1	0
Pastoral	30	24
LAC Support	1	0
Parental Engagement	8	11
Parent Partnerships	1	0
Girls Support	0	1
Mental Health Support	27	28
School Counsellor	14	2*
MH Lead	7	4
MH Teaching	5	1
CBT	1	1
Trauma Informed	0	3
SEMH Support	14	18
Nuture Group	3	9
Zones of regulation	1	0
Counselling sessions	7	9
Ed Psychologist	5	1

Pastoral Staff	27	24
School Counsellor	14	2*
School Chaplain	0	1
MH Lead	7	4
Safeguarding capacity	4	3
Educational social worker	1	0
School Nurse	1	0
Home School Liaison Officer	4	5
Behaviour	6	18*
Behaviour Interventions	4	4
Inclusion Unit	2	15*
Alternative Provision	1	7*
Attendance strategies	23	31*
Attendance Officer	16	18
Attendance Leadership	0	3
Practical Support	30	29
Revision materials	11	10
Subject resources	6	12
Textbooks	3	1
IT Equipment	8	6
Uniform subsidy	11	14
Travel costs	2	8
Emergency Fund/individual need	13	7
PP Payment	1	1
Breakfast Club	12	11
School minibus	0	3
Food provision	1	2
Leadership	6	20*
STEM Leader	1	0
Subject Leadership	0	6*
Teaching Leadership	0	5*
Leadership Training	2	3
Literacy co-ordinator	2	6
Enrichment Coordinator	0	4
PP Lead	1	9*
SLT PP Link	1	0
Rewards	6	12

*Strategy numbers that are statistically significantly different between the two groups of schools ($p > 0.05$)

Appendix 3:

Helpful links/further reading:

<https://ifs.org.uk/articles/uk-education-system-preserves-inequality-new-report>

<https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2023/research/child-of-north-report/>

EEF report on using the pupil premium:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/using-pupil-premium>

NEU No child left behind campaign:

<https://neu.org.uk/campaigns/child-poverty>

Poverty proofing the school day:

https://children-ne.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NEU2037-Tackling-poverty-in-the-classroom-A4-WEB_compressed.pdf

Sutton Trust Report on selective comprehensives:

<https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/selective-comprehensives-2024/>

Joseph Rowntree Foundation Reports on Poverty and Destitution:

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/deep-poverty-and-destitution/destitution-in-the-uk-2023>

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/events/uk-poverty-2023-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk>

If, as a school or trust you'd like some help to develop any of these ideas or help with advice or training do contact us at Close the Gaps.

<https://www.closesthegaps.co.uk/contact-us>

