

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	10th March 2025	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	Whole systems approach to reducing the educational attainment gap	
WARD:	All – across B&NES	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		
1. Report: A whole systems approach to addressing the educational attainment gap		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 Educational attainment has broad benefits on health, wealth and happiness. Inequalities in educational attainment between children from more and less affluent backgrounds is an issue nationally and has worsened in recent years.
- 1.2 B&NES schools at Key Stage 4 (year groups 10 and 11) and in their A Level results (years 12 and 13) produce some of the best education results outside of London. Most schools are Ofsted rated good or outstanding, with every secondary school rated good or above. However, B&NES has a long-standing attainment gap between the educational outcomes of pupils that are defined as disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils, and this is particularly concerning at key stage 2 (year groups 3-6).
- 1.3 Whilst education settings have a critical role in reducing the educational attainment gap, many drivers of educational attainment are outside of educational settings. In an average year, children spend around 20-24% of their waking hours in school and 76-80% of their waking hours outside of school. The wider environment in which children and young people grow up in therefore has a huge role to play, and a whole systems approach can help to understand the broader drivers and solutions to the educational attainment gap. Both schools and society matter. The aim of this workstream is therefore to investigate the potential causes of the educational attainment gap in B&NES, with a focus on causes and barriers outside of education settings, and make recommendations as to how a whole systems approach could help address the gap.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to:

- 2.1 Note the work underway on a whole systems approach to reducing the educational attainment gap.
- 2.2 Review the draft report and provide feedback.
- 2.3 Support the ambitions of the work by considering opportunities to champion the work underway.

3 THE REPORT

Background information

- 3.1 The educational attainment gap between pupils defined as disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged has been a persistent inequality in B&NES. This gap starts in the early years and is particularly concerning in Key Stage 2 (year groups 3-6). This gap cannot be fully explained by the premise that non-disadvantaged pupils are doing particularly well, as pupils defined as disadvantaged are doing less well in B&NES than their comparative cohort nationally. 33% of B&NES pupils defined as disadvantaged reached expected standards in Reading, Writing and Maths at KS2 in 2023-24 compared to 46% nationally.
- 3.2 When children defined as disadvantaged finish their education in KS4, data suggests that their educational outcomes are broadly in line with the national average compared to the same cohort nationally. However, when you compare their outcomes with those of their non-disadvantaged peers locally, the gap remains substantial. The above national average performance of B&NES non-disadvantaged pupils contributes to this (at KS4).
- 3.3 97% of schools in B&NES are academies; the majority of these schools are organised into Multi-Academy Trusts. As organisations, they are accountable to the Department of Education and not the Local Authority. However, the Local Authority, via the DCS function, still holds the responsibility for ensuring good educational outcomes for all children.
- 3.4 The aspiration for B&NES is for our disadvantaged cohort:
 - to have improved educational outcomes in KS2 reading, writing, and maths that are in line with national performance.
 - and narrow the gap between the KS4 results of pupils defined as disadvantaged and their local non-disadvantaged peers, by improving the results of disadvantaged pupils.

Why reducing the education attainment gap is important

- 3.5 The benefits of good educational attainment are widely recognised in reducing inequalities and enhancing life opportunities. The links between good academic achievement and improved life outcomes, whilst multiple, are logical. For example, when we achieve a good level of academic attainment it gives us a greater chance of getting a decent job and money to buy what we need for good

health, such as food and heating. This in turn reduces stress that can impact our mental and physical health.

3.6 The evidence suggests higher education attainment makes the following more likely:

- Better prospects in employment options and earning potential
- Improved physical and mental health
- A thriving community and economy; a report by the economic thinktank the Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP) in 2022, estimates that bridging the education attainment gap between the most and least deprived areas of England could deliver an annual earnings boost of £14.4bn to the economy¹.

3.7 There is also an important moral imperative to reduce the attainment gap. In B&NES we want all of our children and young people to thrive, and for those from low-income families to have the opportunities, capacity and resources to do as well as their more financially privileged peers. This is a priority corporately and politically. Reducing inequalities is a prominent feature in B&NES Council strategies including the corporate strategy, the health and wellbeing strategy and the economic strategy.

A whole systems approach to addressing the education attainment gap

3.8 Whilst education settings have a crucial role in reducing the educational attainment gap, many drivers of educational attainment are outside of educational settings. In an average year, children spend around 20-24% of their waking hours in school and 82-86% of their waking hours outside of school. With this, socio-economic factors and the physical environment in which we grow up in account for between 30-55% of our health outcomes. The wider environment in which children and young people grow up in therefore has an important role to play in contributing to educational attainment.

3.9 As an example, lower income families are more likely to rent or live in lower quality housing (i.e. with damp, mould, and overcrowding), which will affect stability and quality of the home learning environment². Income and working hours will also affect digital resources and time available to support children with their homework, which in turn affects attainment.

3.10 As B&NES Council and system partners are in a position to influence some of these core determinants, a whole systems approach to addressing the attainment gap is helpful. Such an approach helps us to identify the multiple factors and pathways affecting educational attainment outside of the classroom, and system partners roles in influencing these. By addressing the root causes of educational attainment inequality together and at different levels in the system, we are in a better position to create lasting change.

¹ Institute for Progressive Policy <https://www.progressive-policy.net/publications/new-research-suggests-bridging-the-attainment-gap-would-boost-economy-by-14-4bn-per-year#:~:text=CPP%20calculates%20that%20if%20qualification,by%20%C2%A314.4bn%20annually>.

² 20% of private renters have lived in their home for less than a year, compared with just 6% of social renters and 2% of owner-occupiers for example. Health Foundation, 2024: <https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/housing/housing-stability-and-security/trends-in-duration-of-housing-occupancy>

3.11 In line with Be Well B&NES, a whole system approach to reducing the education attainment gap will adhere to the following where applicable:

- Take collective action on the social, economic, environmental and commercial factors that drive our behaviours, as well as supporting individuals and communities to make positive choices.
- Work at different levels of the system to change not only the actions we take, but the structures that support them and the health beliefs that the system holds.
- Exploit the value of working together on the building blocks of health; in this context the building blocks of educational attainment.

Aim and objectives

3.12 The aim of this workstream is therefore to investigate the potential causes of the educational attainment gap in BANES, with a focus on causes and barriers outside of education settings, and to make recommendations as to how a whole systems approach could help address the gap.

3.13 The objectives of this workstream are as follows:

1. Complete a **literature review** summarising the contributing factors to differences in educational attainment and approaches and interventions to reduce this difference, with a focus on aspects outside of education settings e.g. the wider/core determinants.
2. Review and appraise existing **quantitative data** to identify local factors that may be most likely to be contributing to differences in educational attainment and to facilitate targeting of recommendations.
3. Gather **qualitative information** from local professionals, young people and families to understand their views and thoughts on contributing factors to the education attainment gap and how they could be addressed locally.
4. Outline **key findings and recommendations** on how the educational gap in B&NES could be addressed.
5. Use the process to build momentum and commitment to action, including via a task and finish group that oversees the project and the development of an **action plan**.

3.14 A draft report summarising the approach, methodology, key findings and recommendations of the whole systems work is attached. The report (at the end) also outlines stakeholders that have contributed to the qualitative research and who have in turn informed the report findings and recommendations.

Progress made to date

3.15 The quantitative work (led by the Business Intelligence team), literature review and qualitative work have been completed. Over 60 professionals and young people contributed to the qualitative work.

3.16 A task and finish group with cross Council and system partners met four times to oversee and contribute to the work. The final task and finish group took place in November to review systems mapping work of the factors contributing to the attainment gap in B&NES and to discuss and develop the draft action plan. The

task and finish group has had representation from Sustainable Communities, Operations, and Resources within the Council, and wider system partners from health, education, and the third sector.

Key findings and action plan

3.17 This work has highlighted factors and core factors that are contributing to the attainment gap in B&NES. Factors contribute to the core factors, which in turn contribute to the education attainment gap, describing key cause-and-effect relationships. The core factors are as follows:

- Barriers to social mobility
- Barriers to community cohesion, inclusion and equity
- Inequitable social and cultural capital
- Under-resourced home learning environment
- More complex home social environment
- Reduced family and education setting relationships
- Health and wellbeing needs
- Reduced early intervention
- Limited engagement with services/settings (from early years to youth)

3.18 A draft action plan is in development to address the factors and core factors, with actions suggested at different system levels.

Future governance

3.19 Ideally, the whole systems work will be overseen by a multi-partner forum with representation from leads whose areas of responsibility align with the core determinants of health. This includes Heads of Service from Sustainable Communities and Operations within B&NES Council and system partners such as the ICB, HCRG Care Group and third sector partners.

3.20 An option is for the Be Well B&NES steering group to oversee the delivery of the action plan. It has membership from Council officers and system partners that work across the wider determinants of health (i.e. children and education services, but also culture and heritage, sustainable economies, transport, housing etc.) and this work aligns well with the whole systems approach that Be Well is grounded in. If overseen by Be Well, progress will be reported to CMT, the Schools Standard Board, Children and Young People's sub-group, as well as the Health and Wellbeing Board. The HWB has broad membership that aligns with the core determinants and which has made a commitment to reducing the educational attainment gap for children and young people (see priority area one in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy, 2023).

Recommendations

3.21 As well as noting the progress that is being made in relation to the whole systems work, we ask Scrutiny to review the draft report and provide feedback, and support the ambitions of the work by considering opportunities to champion the work underway.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 This work will promote health and wellbeing outcomes for our residents and take action to address health inequalities, and specifically inequalities in educational attainment.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 5.1 The action plan is being developed on the assumption that there are no additional resources and actions need to be achieved within existing budgets and capacity.

6 EQUALITIES

- 6.1 Once a final draft action plan has been developed, an EIA will be undertaken to inform if and how the plan needs to be developed to support equity outcomes further. The Council Equalities Lead is a member of the task and finish group informing the work.

7 CLIMATE CHANGE

- 7.1 No climate issues have been identified in the production of this report.

8 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 No other options have been considered for writing this report.

9 CONSULTATION

- 9.1 This report has been developed with the input and consultation of the Director of Public Health and Director for Education and Safeguarding. The work has been informed by a wide range of internal officers, partners and young people themselves.

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Background papers	Report: A whole systems approach to addressing the educational attainment gap
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	