

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel – Children & Adults	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	9th of March 2026	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	Early years & education performance 2024/25 (final SEB publication) and whole systems work to address inequalities in attainment	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 This report provides the panel with an overview of early years and school education performance in the academic year 2024-25, and the work underway to address inequalities in educational attainment.
- 1.2 This report's summary of educational performance is derived from the Council's Strategic Evidence Base (SEB) on educational attainment, produced by the Council's Business Intelligence team. The SEB can be reviewed by following the link below.

<https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/strategic-evidence-base-education>

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel / Committee is asked to note the following;

- 2.1 Our pupils' overall positive education performance in B&NES early years settings and schools for the academic year 2024/25.
- 2.2 There was a slight improvement in KS2 educational outcomes for Free School Meal (FSM) eligible children during the academic year 2024/2025. However, the attainment gap between free school meal pupils in B&NES and nationally is significant: 36% of B&NES FSM pupils achieve the expected standard in reading, writing, and maths, compared to 48% nationally.

- 2.3 Unfortunately, performance in the Early Years Foundation Stage has dropped after a significant improvement last year.
- 2.4 Children with SEN Support and an EHCP perform better in all key stages than regional and national averages.
- 2.5 Local Authority Officers continue to collaborate strategically with schools, partners, and the DFE Regions Group to improve educational outcomes for all pupils in B&NES. The DFE Regions Group are in attendance today to provide an overview of their role with academies and the work they do to address academy and trust performance.
- 2.6 The Local Authority remains committed to delivering initiatives with education settings to enhance outcomes for Free School Meal (FSM) pupils. Our efforts focus on the early years, where the LA can have the most impact. This year's budget includes additional funding to expand the delivery of our Language for Life programme, now extended to more early years settings, and to provide targeted support for transitions from nursery to school.
- 2.7 The Local Authority also remains committed to tackling factors outside of education settings that contribute to the attainment gap, including the whole-systems work undertaken over 2025/26 and the work planned for 2026/27.
- 2.8 Support the ambitions of the work by considering opportunities to champion the work underway.

3 THE REPORT – SUMMARY

Early years & education performance 2024/25

- 3.1 Pupils in B&NES attained higher grades than regional and national figures at all stages of education, except at Key Stage 2 (KS2), where attainment remained in line with national averages.
- 3.2 In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), the percentage of children reaching a good level of development increased to 73%, higher than regional and national averages.
- 3.3 Key stage 2 performance for all pupils in the combined reading, writing and maths (RWM) was higher this year, rising from 60% to 63%, higher than the southwest average of 60% and in line with the national average of 63%.
- 3.4 In previous years, B&NES pupils have made good progress between KS2 and Key Stage 4 (KS4). However, for this academic year, the details of this progress for this cohort are not available, as they did not sit KS2 examinations due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3.5 Key stage 4 attainment in grades 9 -5 English and Maths and in Attainment 8, though slightly down from 2023/2024, is once again higher than regional and national averages. This is to be commended.
- 3.6 B&NES A Level results were higher in all measures than regional and national measures.

- 3.7** Girls performed better in Key Stage 2 than boys and in the KS4 Attainment 8 measure, but for the first time since 18/19, boys did marginally better than girls in KS4 grades 9 -5 English and Maths.
- 3.8** Children with SEN support needs and those with an EHCP performed better than all regional and national averages in all Key stages. Particularly in KS2, where 35% of children identified with SEN achieved the expected standard in RWM, compared to 29% nationally. 12% of children with an EHCP achieved the expected standard in RWM, compared with 9% nationally.
- 3.9** Attainment in B&NES is lowest in the Black and Other ethnic groups at all stages of education and remains below national levels at KS2 and KS4. In KS2, 53 % of Black pupils achieved the expected standard in RWM, compared to 63% nationally. The gap reduces in KS4, with 39% of black pupils attaining grades 9-5 in english and maths, compared to 43% nationally. Whilst numbers in these cohorts are relatively low, this is a trend seen for a number of years.
- 3.10** In 2024/25, there was a slight improvement (4%) in the percentage of FSM children meeting the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths from 33% to 36%. However, B&NES remains significantly below the national average of 48% for this cohort of pupils.
- 3.11** When in secondary school, our FSM cohort does make much better progress. Whilst outcomes for this group of pupils in KS4 have previously been in line with national outcomes, this year they have fallen slightly below the national average. However, the progress this group makes in our secondary group is significant.

Whole systems work to address inequalities in attainment

- 3.12** There is a strong moral, socio-economic and strategic case for addressing inequalities in education attainment. We know that education attainment has broad benefits for wealth, health and happiness and so improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils delivers substantial long-term economic and social returns. Addressing this inequality also speaks directly to our corporate commitment to improving residents' lives, and especially those most at risk of being left behind.
- 3.13** As was reported at the PDS Panel meeting in March 2025, work is underway to address the drivers of the educational attainment gap by both working with education settings and by addressing drivers outside of education settings. We know that both education settings and the wider environment in which children and young people grown up in matter and therefore, that a whole systems approach to addressing the education attainment gap is required.
- 3.14** Addressing the attainment gap is a shared responsibility and B&NES Council has an important role in leading a whole-systems approach to addressing the attainment gap by addressing the root causes across Council services, coordinating place-based action with partners, and aligning resources.

Public Health research and report

- 3.15** At the previous PDS Panel meeting, Public Health presented a report that set out why a whole systems approach to reducing the attainment gap is important and

key findings of research undertaken to better understand the drivers - outside of education settings - for the attainment gap in B&NES. Research included exploring the data, published evidence, and conversations with over 60 professionals working with young people in B&NES and young people themselves. The research and report were subject to a discussion with Professor Sir Michael Marmot in March 2025 and Sir Marmot endorsed the approach we are taking.

3.16 The research identified ten core drivers outside of education settings that are contributing to the attainment gap. Articulated as strategic goals these are as follows:

- Support families living in poverty to access and thrive in good work (aligned with the cross-cutting driver of poverty)
- Ensure sporting, social and cultural capital for all
- Advance social mobility and aspiration
- Increase engagement with services
- Improve the home learning environment
- Improve the home social environment
- Improve family and education setting relationships
- Improve the prevention and early intervention offer
- Ensure a comprehensive system wide approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing needs
- Improve community cohesion, inclusion and equality

3.17 PDS Panel members provided some helpful feedback and supported the whole systems approach recommended.

Work undertaken during 2025/26

3.18 Action plan: A B&NES Council action plan is currently being implemented, which takes action to address the core drivers highlighted above. Actions are led by Heads of Service and action leads across the Council, including in teams within the Place, People and Resources directorates. The actions seek to reduce education inequality across key stages and age groups, though priority actions focus more on addressing early years and key stage 2 inequality as this is where the inequalities are greatest and investment in these stages will benefit later stages. The Be Well B&NES Steering Group currently monitors progress made against the action plan. See **B&NES Council Action Plan** attached.

3.19 Securing financial investment: Public Health developed a business case to recommend investment in key areas that will help to address the education attainment gap. A growth request has subsequently been included in the 2026/27 budget which would enable the recruitment of a post to help drive forward action on education inequalities, funding to sustain and strengthen projects already delivering measurable progress (e.g. action learning sets with education settings and Language for Life), and funding for low cost pilots designed for rapid testing, with minimal financial risk, and scalable impact based on effectiveness. Other key areas recommended for investment are being funded through national Best Start and Family Hub funding. These include a Family Hub in Bath West, language for life toolkits, a Get Set for Schools Transition Programme pilot, and funding for Sunshine Circles in early years settings to support children with higher social and emotional need.

3.20 Work with systems partners: Action on education inequalities needs to take place across the wider system and so working with our system partners is crucial. In June 2025 B&NES Council held a conference to share good practice in addressing the attainment gap, with guest speakers presenting and schools sharing case studies. The Multi Academy Trusts have established a B&NES Disadvantaged Network Group to focus MAT efforts, particularly in relation to early years and transition, and a current focus of the Bath Education Partnership (a partnership of head teachers across state and privately funded schools in Bath) is to address the attainment gap. A Mayor of Bath research residency is also being undertaken with the University of Bath, with two PHD students undertaking a 3-month research project on education attainment inequalities.

3.21 Alignment with other key programmes: There is clear alignment between a whole systems approach to reducing the attainment gap and the Best Start in Life Strategy, Best Start Family Hubs, the Family First Partnership Programme and wider system work on neighbourhood health and prevention. Addressing the root causes of the education attainment gap requires investment in approaches and interventions that are important in all of these transformation programmes. This includes for example, a focus on early intervention and support to prevent problems from escalating, a family-centred approach, multi-agency collaboration and integrated services, and the need to target support for families (and in places) that are most vulnerable or facing challenges. As well as informing the work on Best Start and Family Hubs, the education attainment work is also informing other programmes of work, including Local Plan and social infrastructure requirements (e.g. need for places youth services can be delivered in), the delivery of Plans such as the Cultural Development Plan (e.g. taking cultural offers to communities and families that don't usually engage), and WECA's Child Poverty Action Plan.

Planned work for 2026/27

3.22 During 2026/27 the focus will be on continuing to implement the B&NES Council Action Plan, maximising use of additional investment, and aligning the capacity of system partners so that we are making best use of our resources to address education inequality collectively. Another event will be held to support the coming together and mobilisation of wider system partners.

4 CLIMATE CHANGE

4.1 This report contains information on academic outcomes in our early years, primary and secondary schools. No climate issues have been identified in the production of this report.

5 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 No other options have been considered for writing this report.

6 CONSULTATION

6.1 This report has been developed with the input and consultation of B&NES Council's Business Intelligence team. The research that informs the whole systems work on addressing the attainment gap is informed by qualitative interviews and focus groups with over 60 professionals that work with children and young people in B&NES and young people, and including care leavers.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 An equality impact assessment has been completed and submitted to support this paper. This report reveals several areas where academic outcomes highlight inequalities between different groups of children in Bath & North East Somerset. The evidence in the SEB will continue to inform several work streams to address inequalities in outcomes and disproportionality in negative outcomes strategically.

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Background papers	https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/strategic-evidence-base-education B&NES Council Action Plan to address the attainment gap: summary version
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	