

Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

7 June 2022

Disadvantaged Learners Task Group – Final Report

Purpose of the report

1. To present to the Children's Select Committee (CSC) the findings and recommendations from the task group review of Wiltshire's disadvantaged learners (DLs).

Membership

2. Cllr Jo Trigg (Chair), Cllr Trevor Carbin, John Hawkins, Cllr Kathryn Macdermid, Cllr Gordon King, Cllr Caroline Thomas.

Terms of reference

3. Whilst Wiltshire has a relatively low number of DLs, they are largely underperforming compared to regional and national levels. This task group will aim to:
 - Establish the definition of DLs
 - Understand the Wiltshire profile for DLs
 - Explore current performance levels for Wiltshire's DLs
 - Review the current work being undertaken by the council and its partners to improve outcomes for DLs, with particular focus to Key Stage 2 and Early Years learners
 - Identify opportunities to improve the outcomes for Wiltshire's DLs and report back to the CSC with any subsequent recommendations.

Meetings

4. The task group met on eight occasions:

30 November 2021	Scoping meeting
20 January 2022	Kate Wilkins - Disadvantaged Learners and School Leadership Lead
10 February 2022	Emma Cooke – Early Years' Service Manager
10 March 2022	Lorwyn Randall – Education Endowment Foundation
21 March 2022	Louise Lewis – Project Lead for the Extended Role of the Virtual School
7 April 2022	Samantha Saville – Headteacher Ashton Keynes CE Primary School
28 April 2022	Sally Johnson – Public Health Strategist
10 May 2022	Final meeting to agree findings/recommendations

Findings

Definition - disadvantaged learners

5. DLs are defined by the Department for Education (DfE) as:
 - pupils who have been eligible for free school meals (FSM) at any point over the last 6 years
 - pupils who have been 'looked after' continuously for at least one day in the last year
 - pupils who have left care through a formal route such as adoption.

Pupil premium funding

6. Schools receive funding from government for each disadvantaged pupil. Known as [pupil premium \(PP\) funding](#), this additional money aims to improve educational outcomes; as evidence shows that disadvantaged children generally face additional challenges in reaching their potential at school and often do not perform as well as other pupils.
7. [Service pupil premium](#) is additional funding for schools for pupils with a parent who is serving in HM Forces or has retired on a pension from the Ministry of Defence. Not based on disadvantage its focus is pastoral support or academic progress. It has been combined into PP payments to make it easier for schools to manage their spending. In 2022-23 schools will receive £320 for every pupil
8. [Early Years PP](#)– up to £302 per year is available for children aged 3 or 4 receiving 15 hours free childcare and where the guardian/parent is in receipt of a form of benefit. This is paid directly to the nursery.

The table below illustrates the amount of PP funding allocated per DL:

Pupil premium – annual funding allocation per learner 2022-23

Pupils in year groups reception to year 6 recorded as Ever free school meals (FSM)	£1,385
Pupils in years 7 to 11 recorded as Ever free school meals (FSM)	£985
Looked-after children (LAC) defined in the Children Act 1989 as one who is in the care of, or provided with accommodation by, an English local authority	£2,410
Children who have ceased to be looked after by a local authority in England and Wales because of adoption, a special guardianship order, or child arrangements order (previously known as residence order)	£2,410
Service children – Pupils in year groups reception to year 11 recorded as Ever 6 service child or in receipt of a child pension from the Ministry of Defence	£320

Disadvantaged learners – Wiltshire's profile

9. In 2020-21, 16% of Wiltshire's 69,000 pupils were eligible for PP and service PP funding (see below), nationally this figure was circa 26%. This generated £15 million

in funding support. Members within the review highlighted that the pandemic may have led to increased numbers accessing benefits/universal credit, which could have long-term implications for Wiltshire's PP numbers.

Wiltshire Profile 2020-21

Total no of pupils in Wiltshire Schools	69,316
Number of Wiltshire Pupil Premium	11,005
% Pupil Premium out of all Wiltshire pupils	16%

Disadvantaged learner groupings

10. A large percentage of Wiltshire's DLs face multiple challenges, including 31% who have special educational needs and disability (SEND), 6.7% above the national average.

The table below breaks down the Wiltshire PP groups further:

Pupil Premium Groups	Number	Percentage
No other	6130	56%
PP & all SEND	3457	31% (9% Educational, Health and Care (EHC) Plan)
Service children	627	6%
PP & child protection/ children in need	589	5%
PP & English as an additional language	461	4%
PP& Young Carers	302	3%
PP Looked after children/adopted	221	2%
PP Gypsy, Roma and Traveller	132	1%

Nationally, in 20-21, 2.03 million children were eligible for some form of PP funding. The vast majority (1.85 million) were eligible under the deprivation criteria, around 112,000 children were eligible for PP for looked after and previously looked after children and around 79,000 attracted the service premium ([source](#)).

Comparison in Wiltshire Free School Meal numbers against national averages

11. The table below illustrates the varied picture across Wiltshire in respect of disadvantage. 37% of our schools are above the national average for numbers of pupils in receipt of free school meals (FSM), whereas nearly two thirds of schools are below average. 24 schools have less than 5% of their learners eligible for FSM, but for 14 schools this figure is above 40%.

% Profile of FSM in Wiltshire

Below National Average				Above National Average				
Below 5%	5>10%	10<15%	15<20%	20<25%	25<30%	30<35%	35<40%	Above 40%
24 schools	58 schools	45 schools	29 schools	20 schools	6 schools	14 schools	3 schools	14 schools
Total = 156 (63% Wiltshire schools)				Total = 57 (37% Wiltshire schools)				

Wiltshire performance levels for disadvantaged learners

12. Wiltshire's DLs performance for Early Years, Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2) sees the county ranked between the 93rd and 97th percentile. Performance outcomes between DLs and non DLs within this cohort are also significant, with the greatest difference observed at KS2 – reading, writing and mathematics combined. Members were told that the gap between DLs and non DLs in Wiltshire had been growing in recent years.

2019 Wiltshire disadvantaged learner outcomes

	National	All Wiltshire	Wiltshire Non-Disadvantaged	Wiltshire Disadvantaged	Wiltshire Disadvantaged Percentile Ranks
EYFS GLoD	71.8%	72.4%	74.4%	48.4%	93 rd
Phonics	81.9%	80.1%	84.4%	64.1%	93 rd
KS1 RWM Comb	64.9%	63.1%	66.2%	41.2%	97 th
KS2 RWM Comb	64.9%	63.8%	70.6%	41.9%	96 th

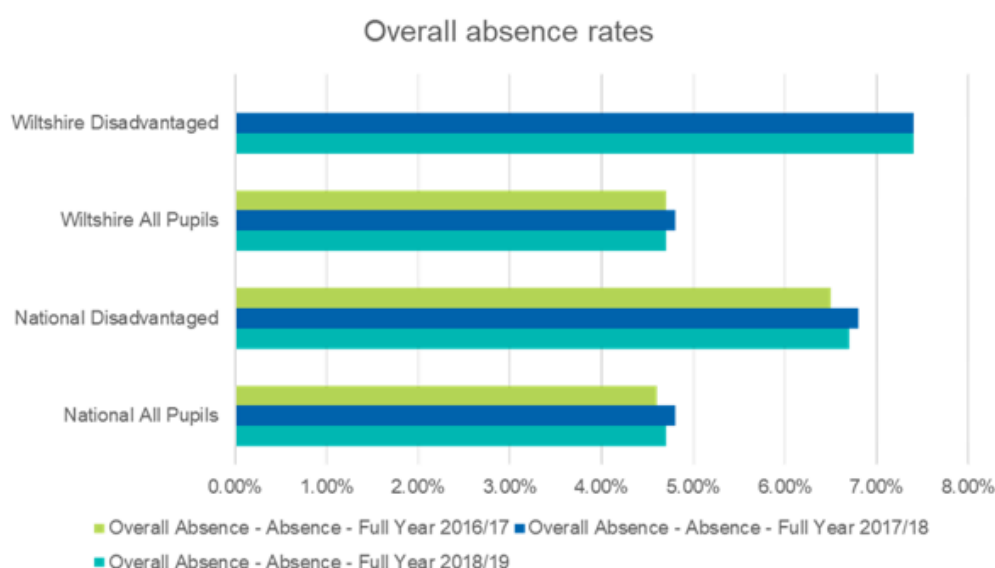
(EYFS GLoD – Early years foundation stage - good level of development

KS1/2 RWM Combined– Key Stage 1/2 reading, writing, mathematics combined)

13. The task group review focused more heavily on the work taking place within Early Years and Primary schools. This was in recognition of the evidence, which suggested the earlier positive interventions took place, the more likely successful outcomes would be realised. For information, Wiltshire's Key Stage 4 results saw the county ranked nationally as 106th for DLs, below the national average.

Understanding the performance of Wiltshire's disadvantaged learners

14. The task group explored the reasons for Wiltshire's current DLs performance. One of the first justifications given was that some schools had low numbers of DLs and, therefore, did not receive significant PP funding to support improvements. To provide further context, members were told that 53 Wiltshire schools only have one DL within their school populations.
15. Use of PP funding was also suggested as a factor to explain performance levels. Historically, PP spend had been on wider strategies, such as the provision of teaching assistants, pastoral care, and extracurricular activity, as opposed to investment into classroom teaching. Currently, there was a mismatch within some schools' perception of the importance of quality of teaching in achieving good outcomes for DLs. It was suggested that some schools were using existing activities to justify their use of PP, reverse engineering what they were always going to do.
16. The evidence suggested that school leadership is critical in delivering outcomes. The task group was told that governors play a key role in the support of DLs. Governors ensure that the school provides a good quality of education for all pupils. In response, council officers were working with governors to enhance their understanding of DLs and the importance of quality of teaching.
17. Attendance levels were also a key factor in determining DL outcomes. The challenge being that if children are not in school or nursery, they do not benefit from the education. The table below illustrates the difference in attendance levels between DLs and non DLs, with on average Wiltshire DLs absent for over 7% of the school year, higher than the national average. Missing school for just a few days a year can damage pupils' chances of gaining good GCSEs, according to the [Department for Education](#).



18. Although data was currently limited, the task group explored the impact of school closures during the pandemic. Initial national research suggested that the closures had led to a learning loss for all, but especially DLs, with maths being more than twice as affected compared to reading (in primary schools). Members were told that

by the summer term 2021, DLs had lost 1.2 months of reading learning in primary schools, with 2.6 months of maths learning being lost. There was also a link between pupil absence (despite schools being open for in-person learning) and higher learning losses.

DL Strategies – focusing on quality of teaching

19. Members learnt that all schools in receipt of PP funding must publish a [PP strategy statement](#) on their websites by 31 December of each academic year, for example - [Ashton Keynes PP Strategy](#). The DfE requests that strategies focus on quality of teaching, with an acknowledgement amongst all task group witnesses that this area is essential to achieving the best outcomes for all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged.
20. The DL strategy statements can be broken down into 3 tiers with the percentage focus for each tier detailed below:
 - 50% focusing on quality of teaching
 - 25% on targeted academic support (which includes intervention programmes, extra feedback, 1:1 support)
 - 25% wider strategies (attendance)
21. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), a charity created to improve the educational attainment of the poorest pupils, in a 2022 snap survey established that Ofsted rated outstanding schools used almost 40% of their PP funding on teaching, whereas those poor rated allocated just 32%, reinforcing the focus of the DfE.
22. In addition to the reprioritisation on the quality of teaching, the DfE provided general guidance on expectations for strategies, which called for DLs to:
 - be treated individually
 - be given a high profile within the school
 - avoid using pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare needs as an excuse for low achievement
 - ensure high levels of parental engagement is pursued.
23. Reflecting the importance of this area, Ofsted inspections continue to consider DLs and school strategies, with inspectors speaking directly with DL pupils and examining schoolwork, for example.

What Wiltshire is doing to improve disadvantaged learner outcomes

24. Wiltshire Council's Disadvantaged Learners and School Leadership Lead has been in post for nearly two years. This period has been used to gain an improved understanding of Wiltshire's DLs, particularly around their wider challenges and to then introduce subsequent strategies to improve outcomes. Relationships have been developed across the entire Wiltshire school landscape, particularly within local authority-maintained schools.

The table below provides data for PP pupils across maintained and academy status schools:

Wiltshire PP profile schools 2021-22

Schools	All Pupils	% PP
Wiltshire	69,316	16%
All Primary	38,453	15%
Primary Maintained	22,261	15%
Primary Academy	16,192	15%
All Secondary	30,090	16%
Secondary Maintained	3262	21%
Secondary Academy	26,828	16%
Special	773	46%

25. As discussed, the evidence from the DfE indicates that quality of teaching has the biggest impact in addressing the gap in attainment between DLs and non DLs. Council officers were consequently working with schools to help develop their PP strategies to ensure DLs increasingly were integrated into the heart of teaching. The team was looking at schools' development plans and ensuring DLs were at the forefront of these documents.
26. The council had identified 11 schools to act as pupil premium partners. This cohort of schools had demonstrated high quality work with DLs, and the council was facilitating the sharing of good practice within this network, the majority of which were local authority-maintained primary schools. The task group within its recommendations has encouraged the growth of this partnership, to incorporate the good practice taking place across Wiltshire's academies, too.
27. School visits had taken place in 2020-21, with School Improvement Advisers (SIAs) providing DLs support and advice. Visits were scheduled for terms 3 and 4 of this academic year - 2021-22. These would focus heavily on effective DL strategy planning, essential skills (specifically phonics and times tables, as from 2021-22 all schools must complete multiplication tables checks), Governance, CPD and attendance. The SIA visits were directed to maintained and 'traded service' schools only. Members voiced concern about the impact to this programme of work, following the DfE decision to reduce funding of SIAs by 50% this year, with the remaining 50% removed next year. This area has been suggested for further scrutiny within the recommendations.
28. The council now provides an extensive 'continuing professional development (CPD) programme. This supports school improvement through the provision of materials such as templates, toolkits and guidance documents. It is accessible to both staff and governors via the council's 'Rightchoice' web portal and via in person training, including peer to peer support. Evidence presented to the task group suggested that encouraging an improved feedback loop would be beneficial to the trainers and their desired outcomes. This point has been addressed within the recommendations.
29. Looking forward, in recognition of the statistic that nearly one third of Wiltshire's DLs also have SEND, the team is focused on enhancing the links between the two.

Evidence suggested that quality of teaching through enhanced provision and practice for SEND pupils would also benefit DLs. A SEND adviser had just been appointed and will work with the team to look at Quality and Practice in this area.

The team was also working with colleagues to explore links with social care.

Disadvantage learners – links with social care

30. As illustrated in para 10, 5% of Wiltshire's DLs are children in need or subject to child protection measures. In response, the task group met with the project and data leads for the 'Extended Role of the Virtual School'. The virtual school being a statutory service which supports and challenges all those involved in the education of children in care.
31. Typically, children with a social worker have worse outcomes than their peers at every stage of their education and poor outcomes persist, even after social worker involvement ends. Wiltshire Council had received grant funding (£137,000) for 2021-22 to provide Virtual School Heads to support this area.
32. The team had initially sought to understand the Wiltshire context, before moving onto developing guidance and promoting professional practice. The DfE had produced a development timeline that envisaged long-term outcomes by 2024-25.
33. At the point of meeting, officers were rolling out 'five to thrive' trauma attached and resilience training. Available to all Wiltshire schools to schools through in person session and online modules, the approach supports children to make sense of their experience(s) and find ways to manage their emotions and feelings. Work had also begun on developing a local authority 'Attendance Strategy'. The team had also risk assessed CIN children, using a rag rating model.
34. There was acknowledgement that the term 'educational neglect' needed to be recognised within Wiltshire, with two thirds of Ofsted rated outstanding authorities using the terminology. The term 'educational neglect', the link between poor attendance, neglect, poor educational outcomes, and safeguarding have long been researched and proven. The NSPCC recognise educational neglect as one of their 6 forms of neglect and cite it as 'failure to ensure regular school attendance that prevents the child reaching their full potential academically'.
35. Educational neglect is a symptom of a bigger problem that needs to be addressed, such as abuse occurring within the home. Educational neglect refers to a parent's failure to ensure their child's educational needs are being met. Using the term highlights the critical educational and life implications relating to that child/young person that may not previously otherwise have been communicated. It supports thresholds, decision making, and multi-agency planning and helps to improve attendance and educational outcomes for children/young people.

Disadvantage learners – links with Early Years

36. The task group met with Service Manager- Early Years (EY). All 3 to 4-year-olds in England can access 570 free education hours per year, which is usually taken as 15 hours a week over 38 weeks of the year. 15 hours free education is available for 2 year old children where parents/guardians were receipt of [benefits](#), as prescribed by the DfE. Members learnt that 80% of places were currently taken up, nationally this figure is 62%. The team jointly worked with health visitors to reach the 20% not currently taking up their funded early education places.
37. EY settings provide an environment to develop phonics, literacy, communication, and wider social skills. An EY strategy was being developed in response to the new Business Plan, which prioritises the best start in life and early prevention.
38. In respect of resources each EYs setting was allocated an advisory teacher, quality assurance officer and inclusion adviser (now 8 staff, increasing from 4). A rolling programme was in place for visits (annually for inclusion advisors); this would increase in intensity for settings that had poor performance or a new management team.
39. Within EY, members were told that the variations in the metrics below were not necessarily addressed by interventions. One reason provided for why the gap did not close is because all children within the setting benefitted from the intervention, not just DLs in isolation. This was prevalent in Wiltshire as some settings had extremely low numbers of DLs.

Wiltshire EY performance

	Good Level of Development			
	All	Free school meals	2 year - Free Funding	Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)
2018	72%	49.20%	55,70%	54,60%
2019	72%	49%	56%	51%

40. A further challenge in addressing the Wiltshire v national performance variation was partly due to more deprived areas of England receiving higher levels of funding, enabling broader, more extensive interventions.
41. When considering opportunities for improvement, it was suggested to the task group that there was scope to improve the transition from EYs into primary school by providing suitable learning material to help bridge this transition and encouraging improved collaboration between the two settings.

Disadvantage learners – links with Public Health

42. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) suggested that the attainment gap began pre-natal, and it was recommended to members to consider this period and

into Early Years. In response the task group invited officers from the council's Public Health team to provide evidence.

43. Members learnt that the first 1001 days were critical in the development of children and their long-term attainment. Speech, language and communication (SLC) skills development started from conception and generally continued to increase steeply to the point of starting school and beyond. Members were told that language skills at age five were the most important factor in reaching expected levels in English and Maths at the age of 7 years. Evidence also suggested that there could be a 17-month language gap in relation to children by the age of 3 based upon income levels. There were both short and long-term impacts of development, with children with poor vocabulary skills at age 5 – four times more likely to have mental health problems and twice as likely to be unemployed in adulthood.
44. Early interventions can be effective at addressing these inequalities. For example, the council commissioned Public Health Nursing contract was a key tool in supporting the early identification of vulnerable parents and offering support through the visits that took place up to the age of 30 months.
45. The team also commissioned the perinatal group-based 'baby steps programme'. This targeted parents who would benefit from additional support, when facing mental health challenges, for example.
46. The task group reflected on whether there was an enough emphasis within the Business Plan on the benefits on promoting speech, language, and communication in the first 1001 days? The council, through its FACT change programme, had a workstream addressing this area, but the development of the council's Early Years Strategy offered an opportunity to increase the focus further. By expanding its focus beyond Early Years physical settings and expanding to consider child development from conception to school, using a systems approach, the strategy offered a real opportunity to facilitate change.

Conclusions

47. The evidence has highlighted the importance the formative first 1001days have in the development of all children. If language development is stalled during this period, the long-term impacts are negative both for attainment and wellbeing. To consider DLs and just discuss schooling or even Early Years schooling, seemingly is superficial as so much opportunity for growth takes place in the period before children enter the school system. The task group recognises the importance of the developing Early Years Strategy. This document presents a real opportunity to encourage an even greater focus towards supporting vulnerable learners and the task group will be encouraging the Cabinet members for Public Health and Education to collaborate around the content of this strategy.
48. However, despite the importance of the first 1001days the task group noted that interventions outside this window are possible and can be effective. Quality teaching is key to improving outcomes and the task group welcomed the focus of the council's officers towards supporting schools to achieve this. The team had prioritised training and development as key tools to deliver the support required. Feedback to the task group suggested that a positive intervention to improve this approach would be to

ask schools which attended training to be more accountable on agreed actions. Rather than just attending the training, attendees could be asked to demonstrate how they will use the information to adapt their school strategies to improve outcomes. This would motivate some of the headteachers providing peer to peer training within this area too.

49. Recognising the size of the SEND group within DLs, the council's intention to develop links within this area is welcomed and something the task group supports. The task group recognises the challenges of working within finite resources, but any opportunity to work collaboratively between SEND and DLs to promote quality of teaching would be a positive intervention.
50. Attendance is critical in securing positive outcomes for DLs. The Attendance Strategy being developed by the Virtual Schools head, focusing on children within the social care system presents an opportunity for system wide learning. The task group would encourage collaboration with the leads for Early Years, DLs and even Public Health to ensure as wide a perspective is sought in the development of this document.
51. Finally, the term 'educational neglect' is not currently adopted as a term within Wiltshire Council. Two thirds of Ofsted rated outstanding local authorities used this term as a matter of course. This term encourages a collective buy-in making this area everyone's business and the task group has addressed this within its recommendations.

Recommendations

52. The task group proposes the following recommendations for endorsement by the CSC:
 - A) that the respective Cabinet members for Education and Public Health ensure that the emerging strategy for Early Years places the first 1001 days as a core principle within the document's development, focusing on uptake in health checks and increasing Early Years take up above 80% (para 36).
 - B) that the emerging Early Years Strategy, to improve outcomes, places quality of teaching as a core principle within the document, further promoting communication, phonics and skills development in the 80% of children taking up placements and, understanding the 20% not attending and their risk in relation to being a future disadvantage learner.
 - C) that the Executive develops and shares with the CSC, before the end of the academic year 2021-22, an expansion plan to increase the number of pupil premium partner schools to ensure further reach for the DL team and the principles it is helping to promote (see para 22).
 - D) that the DLs team enhances its feedback loop in relation to all training delivered. Particularly relevant to 'peer to peer' training, this will enable trainers or online materials to evolve to ensure, with confidence, that they address the needs of the schools accessing the support (see para 28).

- E) that further collaboration takes place between the council's SEND and DLs teams to further tailor the council's support of DLs, particularly those with SEND, recognising that quality of teaching is key to both. The Children's Select Committee is invited to add this work area to its forward work programme.

- F) that the developing Attendance Strategy produced by the Virtual Schools team seeks input from the Public Health, Early Years and DLs teams and that any lessons learnt are incorporated into the CPD provided to schools by the DLs team and used by the Early Years and Public Health teams to further promote uptake of health checks and free nursery placements.

- G) that the Cabinet Member for Education adopts the term 'educational neglect' corporately to reflect the organisation's collective effort to address this area. This will help the critical educational and life implications relating to that child/young person that may not previously otherwise have been communicated. It will support thresholds, decision making and multi-agency planning and support to improve attendance and educational outcomes for children/young people.

- H) that the Children's Select Committee invites a future report from the Executive detailing its transitional plans in response to the reduction in funding for School Improvement Advisers (SIAs).

Cllr Jo Trigg (Chair) - Disadvantaged Learners Task Group

Date 23 May 2022

Report author: Ceri Williams, Senior Scrutiny Officer.