

# **Strategy** for the Support of **Vulnerable Learners in Educational Settings in Wiltshire 2014 – 2017**







## Introduction:

Overall, pupils in Wiltshire generally attain well at school, with educational performance at levels that are in line with or just above the national average. However, this masks an underlying pattern of low achievement and slow progress for pupils in many of the more vulnerable/disadvantaged groups, and there are some pupils for whom this general picture of good attainment is not true.

In this strategy we identify who those pupils are, and outline our set of objectives to determine that no child or young person is left behind, in order to ensure that every pupil in a Wiltshire school can access the most appropriate and effective support, and the very best teaching and learning.

## Our vision:

**Our vision is to support all our vulnerable learners in reaching their full potential, and for every child and young person in a Wiltshire school to attain and achieve the best that they possibly can.**

We aim to support these pupils in their development as independent learners who take responsibility for their own learning, and who question, reflect and persevere in the pursuit of learning in order to be able to respond effectively to the challenges of the future.

## Defining vulnerable learners:

The Ofsted definition of disadvantaged children is those children who have been eligible for Free School Meals in the last six years, or Looked After Children who have been in care continuously for six months in the last year<sup>1</sup>. Within Wiltshire, we are also including the children of Service families who also receive the Pupil Premium Grant, those children who qualify for Two Year Old Funding (providing 15 hours of free childcare per week), and those children who will qualify for the three and four year-old Pupil Premium funding from April 2015. There is a focus on children's development within early years in the Children's Trust's early help strategy and also within the council's child poverty strategy. This vulnerable learners' strategy will also link closely with Wiltshire's school improvement strategy.

<sup>1</sup> As of June 2, 2014, 402 children and young people (0.6% of Wiltshire's pupils) were defined as 'children looked after' by the Local Authority. Eligibility for the LAC Pupil Premium also changed from April 2014, when in addition to becoming eligible for the Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) at the higher rate of £1,900 p.a., Looked After Children, children adopted from Care, and children with guardians became eligible for the PPP from the point at which they enter one of these categories. At the time of writing, the Ofsted definition of 'Disadvantaged Pupils' has not changed in line with this 'point of care' criteria.

## The national context:

There has recently been an increased national focus on the attainment of disadvantaged children/vulnerable learners, and the need to close the attainment gap between these children and other learners. This is partly in response to the introduction of the Pupil Premium Grant.

Michael Wilshaw's 'Unseen Children' lecture, delivered in June 2013, heralded the 'Unseen Children Evidence Report', and referred to "the long tail of underperformance which mainly affects our poorest children," going on to say that "In this regard, we are amongst the worst performing of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries."

The 'long tail' – comprising small numbers of pupils in different groups who can be left behind due to their 'invisibility' when more general trends are looking positive – often leads to a lack of clarity in identifying who these pupils are, and how best they might be effectively targeted to support their attainment.

Michael Wilshaw stated in his lecture on the Unseen Children report: "We have viewed disadvantage in the context of those children entitled to free school meals. We have identified where they are, and how well they achieve. Many live in areas that might be considered generally affluent but nonetheless are performing poorly. Many others live in places that are relatively isolated, such as rural communities and coastal towns. We need new policies and approaches to deal with underachievement in these areas." Market towns are also specifically referred to, and it is not difficult to see the relevance of these environmental factors as they relate to the geography of Wiltshire.

The lecture also highlighted the 'Poverty of Expectation', and the importance of high expectations of disadvantaged pupils by both parents/carers and teachers as being key to helping vulnerable learners achieve their full potential.

In addition to the Unseen Children lecture and report, the 2013 and 2014 Ofsted Handbooks increased the level of emphasis, importance, and pressure with regard to actions that schools must take in order to effectively raise the attainment and achievement of, and opportunities for, those pupils eligible for Free School Meals and other groups of vulnerable pupils.



## The Wiltshire context:

The attainment of our pupils who are eligible for Pupil Premium is a key driver for Wiltshire, and the council's latest business plan recognises that this is an issue:

“Educational achievement in Wiltshire is generally in line with or better than in similar local authority areas, but there is a wider than average gap between the attainment of some children in vulnerable groups and their peers”.

Wiltshire Council Draft Business Plan 2013-7, page 10

Our demographic is such that we are keenly aware of our service families; and Wiltshire has been recognised at national level as an authority that champions the educational progress of looked after children through the Virtual School Head and the effective use of the Pupil Premium.

With regard to Wiltshire's Pupil Premium children and young people who are in receipt of free school meals, the attainment gap, at different key stages, is clearly highlighted in the tables below which provide data related to results in 2013:

If we add to this the broader picture that:

- Of Wiltshire's primary, secondary and special schools, 8.4% of children are eligible for and claiming Free School Meals (FSM); the comparable national average being 18.3%
- Only 23 Wiltshire primary schools have above national average numbers of pupils eligible for and claiming FSMs and additional statistics show that:
  - 70% of primary schools (139/200) have 10% or less FSM-registered pupils – and 60% have 5% or less (83/139)
  - 83% of secondary schools (24/29) have 10% or less FSM-registered pupils – and 38% have 5% or less (9/24)
  - of the six special schools, the percentage of pupils registered for FSM varies between 19-37%, with the average being 28%
  - for both primary and secondary, the percentage of Wiltshire's FSM-registered pupils is significantly lower than our Statistical Neighbours' figure of 10.6%.

### 2013/14: Key Stage 2 – % Pupils achieving Level 4 or above – Reading, Writing and Mathematics

Wiltshire non-FSM eligible children	Wiltshire FSM eligible children	National non-FSM eligible children	National FSM eligible children
77.8	54.8	78.9	60

### 2013/14: Key Stage 4 – % Pupils achieving 5 plus A\*-C, including English and Mathematics

Wiltshire non-FSM eligible young people	Wiltshire FSM eligible young people	National non-FSM eligible young people	National FSM eligible young people
63.2	27	64.9	38



- In Wiltshire, only one third of FSM-registered pupils (including ever-6 pupils) have an identified Special Educational Need

In relation to publishing data, it is also notable that for those schools with five or less pupils in receipt of free school meals, figures for Narrowing the Gap will not appear on the Ofsted Data Dashboard, as this information is suppressed due to low numbers.

With this data in mind, we begin to see an increasingly complex picture, in that we have gaps – **but it becomes the task of many schools to close them.** These small numbers clearly mean that the statistical significance will be more evident at county-level, as our areas of deprivation are frequently found in small isolated pockets. For Wiltshire schools this fact means that we need to work together to resolve this issue and for all schools to take up the challenge – in short, we are only as good as each other.

## What we have done so far to support our vulnerable learner agenda:

In November 2012 we ran our highly successful Pupil Premium Conference, at which we launched our 'Working Together to Eliminate the Gaps' booklet.

The impetus for the conference was to highlight pupils who were eligible for the Pupil Premium – those in receipt of free school meals, Looked After pupils, and the children of service families.

Our booklet unpacked the issues for these groups of pupils who are entitled to this additional funding to enable them to attain and achieve their best, and also focused on ways in which schools might best spend the grant to support this process. This booklet included evidence from the Sutton Trust.

In November 2013 we held a second Pupil Premium Conference, for which we took the title 'Unseen Children', and considered those groups of pupils highlighted in the Ofsted report of this name.

In November 2014 we plan to invite delegates to a third conference in this series to which we welcome Sir John Dunford, the DfE Pupil Premium Champion. In addition, we hope to engage delegates in the development of a series of discussions that focus on key themes relating to the underachievement of vulnerable learners.



Both following on from, and pre-dating our conference in 2012, we worked hard to deliver a range of teaching and learning strategies and interventions highlighted in our first Pupil Premium booklet, which had proved to be effective. For example, of those pupils eligible for free school meals who attended schools taking part in our TQ2012 programme, 44.9% had achieved level 4 and above in reading, writing and maths in 2011. Due to the hard work of the Top Quartile (TQ) champions and other teachers and leaders in the school, by 2013 56.8% of pupils eligible for free school meals were achieving this benchmark. This represents an 11.9% increase in pupils achieving this level compared with a 10% increase in FSM pupil outcomes in non-TQ2012 schools. There was also a greater increase in the proportion of non-FSM pupils attaining level 4 and above in TQ2012 schools, which shows that groups, including others eligible for the pupil premium, were also benefiting from the work of the school TQ champions.

This year we are both building on this existing work through the development of vulnerable learner networks and a collaborative programme with HMI (the Maximising Achievement Project – MAP 2015), and also broadening our scope through the development of this strategy and the accompanying Vulnerable Learners' Action Plan. This will bring together the range of initiatives being delivered across the breadth of the local authority in order to raise the attainment, achievement and life chances of disadvantaged children and young people eligible for the Pupil Premium.



## Objectives for future work to support vulnerable learners:

We have identified a series of Key Objectives to support our overall vision for vulnerable learners. These are set out in our action plan, with the relevant timescales and anticipated impact.

### Our objectives cover three areas:

- A clear focus with high expectations for vulnerable learners
- Support for school staff and parents/carers
- A holistic approach to the learning needs of disadvantaged children and young people



## A clear focus with high expectations for vulnerable learners:

### 1) Further develop the role of school leaders in tackling the under-achievement of vulnerable learners

Schools where the leadership team have a sense of urgency, and the determination to raise the achievement of vulnerable learners in order to close attainment gaps, get the better results. This vision has to be shared by all levels of leadership, including middle leaders, subject leaders and key stage/faculty heads, and communicated to all staff members, including teaching assistants, so that everyone knows what is expected of them and what is to be achieved.

### 2) Better early and earlier identification of the needs of vulnerable children and young people

The best primary schools have excellent links with pre-school providers and children's centres in their area so that plans can be made before a child starts school and support can be put in place as soon as the child joins the school at the start of Reception. The best secondary schools have strong links with their feeder primary schools and effective transition arrangements and information sharing.

### 3) Development of a 'Closing the Gap' website

This website is being developed because schools need swift and easy access to guidance and up-to-date educational research about the effective use of interventions for disadvantaged pupils. Also, there is some excellent practice being carried out in many Wiltshire schools, and the website will provide a hub of high quality case studies for schools to gain inspiration and ideas for their own schools.

## Support for school staff and parents/carers:

### 4) Ensure that vulnerable learner leads are provided with the right support/training

The best schools have a designated member of staff, eg special educational needs co-ordinator or inclusion manager, with enough non-contact time to be able to respond quickly and put suitable interventions in place. They manage and evaluate interventions carefully and ensure progress/impact data is recorded and scrutinised. They meet regularly with class teachers to monitor the progress of individuals and to provide guidance and advice as required.

### 5) Increase parental involvement in the education of vulnerable pupils

The importance of parental involvement in the education of disadvantaged children and young people is recognised and actively promoted. Skilled, accessible parenting support advisors who can break down the barriers between home and school are an invaluable asset. Successful schools engage with their communities and provide facilities and family learning opportunities and initiatives.

### 6) Support all schools and settings to have 'good or better' teaching

Teachers who believe they can be instrumental in transforming learning capacity, and who understand their pupils' strengths, actively engage children and young people in their learning, involve pupils in planning, guidance and feedback, and set challenging but achievable targets, will get the best results for their pupils. Teachers of disadvantaged pupils that receive interventions need to be aware of, and where possible, replicate the pedagogy used in the interventions in their daily lessons. They identify disadvantaged children and young people in their lesson planning and ensure that all pupils' needs are met, including those that are more able.

### 7) Maximise the impact of Teaching Assistants (TAs) working with vulnerable learners

TAs need the necessary time, continuing professional development, resources and support to do their jobs effectively. TAs are given the opportunity to develop subject specialism roles, are line managed effectively and have regular meaningful discussions with the class teachers of the children they support, to maximise the impact of their work. Those who deploy TAs, line managers and class teachers, receive training on how to do this to maximum effect.

## A holistic approach to the learning needs of disadvantaged children and young people:

### 8) Enable schools to remove barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils to maximise the impact of interventions

A higher number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds suffer from poor emotional health and wellbeing, as set out in the Children's Trust's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy.

This can act as a real barrier to learning for these pupils, making it difficult to access learning in the classroom or in one-to-one or small group settings. The best schools are sensitive to the emotional wellbeing of pupils and provide the right support, advice and guidance to maximise their learning potential, for example, emotional literacy support assistants in some Wiltshire primary schools.

### 9) Consider the specific ways in which the Pupil Premium is spent to support Looked After Children, including the involvement of the Virtual Headteacher in this process.

Real thought is given on how to get the most out of the funding in terms of outcomes. There is a balance struck between use of evidence-based practice models and innovative approaches. Governors and school leadership understand how this funding is to be used and can effectively monitor the impact the funding is having on standards. This information is clearly displayed on the school's website and regularly updated.

### 10) Promote post-16 provision

High quality post-16 provision is delivered in order to narrow gaps and reduce economic disadvantage through supporting providers to improve achievement, and by supporting transition for all learners.

In working to achieve these objectives through our Vulnerable Learners' Action Plan, Wiltshire will ensure that our priority of enabling every child to receive the best quality educational support in order to reach their full potential remains at the heart of our agenda.

This strategy and its accompanying action plan cover ongoing activity from November 2013 – and future planned activity up to July 2017. All actions, and their impact, will be reviewed on a regular basis and actions will be revised as necessary in order to achieve the Strategy's high level objectives.

Name: Vulnerable Learners' Action Group  
Designation: Commissioning, Performance & School Effectiveness  
Date: October 2014

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