



**Nottinghamshire  
County Council**

# **A Strategy for Closing the Educational Gaps**







# Foreword

I am pleased to provide an updated foreword to Nottinghamshire's Strategy for Closing the Educational Gaps. The original strategy was praised unanimously by full Council on 29 March 2012. It received the support of Members across all political parties because it outlines Nottinghamshire County Council's promises, priorities and expected outcomes in relation to closing educational gaps for vulnerable children and young people.

The strategy builds upon the successes of Nottinghamshire's schools in raising attainment and increasing progress for all students which have now been ahead of the average gains made nationally for each of the past eight years at the end of statutory schooling. We remain ambitious for the outcomes we aim to achieve in the future.

It is a strategy that directly responds to the moral imperative of ensuring that vulnerable children and young people achieve educational success by making accelerated progress which will maximise their life chances and secure their future economic well-being. We are determined to ensure that all our children and young people really do have the opportunity to fulfil their potential whatever their background. We shall work in partnership across the Council with other partners including schools

and, of course, with children, young people and their families.

This strategy contributes to and aligns with Nottinghamshire County Council's strategy for 'Building Aspiration: Working Together to Tackle Child and Family Poverty in Nottinghamshire'. The aim is to contribute to breaking the link between poverty and educational attainment by working even more closely with schools and other educational settings (0-19) alongside key services and partners.

Cllr John Peck  
*Chair of the Children and  
Young People's Committee*



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# 1. Context

The Child Poverty Act 2010 requires all local authorities to prepare and publish an assessment of the needs of children living in poverty in its area. Local authorities are responsible for preparing a joint child poverty strategy to work in partnership with other agencies to reduce and mitigate the effects of child poverty.

This 'Closing the Educational Gaps' Strategy will continue to contribute to Nottinghamshire's Child Poverty Strategy by focussing on closing the educational gaps for vulnerable groups, particularly those children and young people eligible for free school meals (FSM), those who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), looked after children (LAC) and those ethnic minority groups whose attainment and progress is below expectation.

The strategy aims to ensure that the full range of Nottinghamshire County Council services and partners work coherently with schools and other educational settings to maximise the impact of available resources in further raising the attainment and increasing the progression of the most vulnerable groups of learners.



International research conducted by McKinsey & Company in 2007 and reported in 'How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top' states that:

“ the challenge of achieving high and socially equitable distribution of learning outcomes can be successfully addressed and that excellence can be achieved consistently throughout the education systems, with very few students and schools left behind. ”

**Andreas Schleicher**

*Head of Indicators and Analysis Division,  
Directorate for Education, Organisation for Economic  
Co-operation and Development (OECD)*

## 2. The vision

Our vision is for Nottinghamshire to be a place where children increasingly grow up free from deprivation and disadvantage and where birth and social background do not hold people back from achieving their potential.



## 3. The rationale

There remains a need to address on-going educational gaps in Nottinghamshire in all key phases. Most significantly, the gap between the performance of children and young people eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years (FSM6) and their more advantaged peers widens the further they go through our educational establishments.

However, significant gains have been made in reducing the educational attainment gaps between FSM6 and non FSM6 students by the end of both the primary and secondary education phases. This strategy aims to build on the effective strategies used to achieve these improvements in order to further improve the life chances for all Nottinghamshire children and young people.

## 4. Defining the gaps in 2014

In Nottinghamshire, the FSM/Non FSM gap in attainment for children in the early years foundation stage widened slightly from 2013 despite a positive improvement in outcomes for FSM pupils. Nottinghamshire's gap remains wider than the national gap.

At the end of primary schooling, the gap between FSM6 and Non FSM6 pupils achieving level 4 or above in combined reading, writing and mathematics narrowed for the third year running. Comparisons against national figures places Nottinghamshire 1.4 percentage points above the national average. However we continue to narrow the gap at a rate faster than is witnessed nationally.

At the end of the secondary phase of education, the gap between FSM6 and Non FSM6 pupils achieving

5 or more A\*-C grades including GCSE English and mathematics has narrowed. Comparisons against national figures places Nottinghamshire 2.9 percentage points above the national average. However we continue to narrow the gap at a rate faster than is witnessed nationally.

The FSM/Non FSM attainment gap at post-16 for the percentage of 19 year olds qualified to Level 3 in 2014 remained static from 2013. However Nottinghamshire's gap remains wider than the national gap.

Wider gaps also exist for other vulnerable groups including those who are looked after, children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and some ethnic minority groups.



## 5. Partnership, collaboration and inter-agency working

The County Council is fully committed to working in partnership to break the link between disadvantage and educational outcomes within Nottinghamshire. To achieve this, we will continue to work collaboratively with schools and partners to raise the attainment of all learners as well as accelerating the progress made by the lowest performers. We recognise that schools facing high levels of deprivation cannot break this link alone and need support from a range of children's services. Therefore, we will focus resources on children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds because without extra help and support they may fall even further behind.

However, breaking the link between disadvantage and attainment requires the securing of good progress for disadvantaged groups within **all** schools, not just in those schools serving particularly disadvantaged communities. The diverse nature of communities across Nottinghamshire means that the County Council, in its role as strategic champion for children, families and communities, will support all schools and educational settings to embrace their responsibility and accountability to close educational gaps for vulnerable learners.

This strategy will better align the work of key services and partners by encouraging collaborative working to deliver the strategy for closing educational gaps. Our partners include:

- Children's Centres, Primary, Secondary, Special Schools and Colleges of Further Education
- Early Years and Early Intervention Services
- Education Improvement Services
- SEND Policy and Provision
- Achievement and Equality Services
- Youth Service
- Targeted Support and Youth Justice Service
- Governor Services
- Children's Social Care
- Admissions and Fair Access
- Performance, Intelligence & Policy
- Clinical Commissioning Groups, Public Health and Health Providers
- Nottingham Trent University
- The Centre for Equity in Education, Manchester University.



## 6. The role of the County Council

The County Council can make a significant contribution to closing the educational gaps for vulnerable learners by providing strong strategic leadership.

In its role as champion of children and families, the County Council can facilitate, broker, commission and influence existing and new ways of working to support schools and other educational settings to close educational gaps, whilst continuing to raise attainment and improve progress for all children and young people in Nottinghamshire.



We can support effective implementation of the strategy for closing the educational gaps by:

- re-structuring and, where appropriate, integrating Nottinghamshire County Council services, including the Education Improvement Service, Targeted Support and Youth Justice and the Early Years Service, to meet the challenges of child poverty in Nottinghamshire;
- working with key services and partners to bring closer alignment to the ways in which the Education Improvement Service and other County Council services work with schools and educational settings to support the closing of educational gaps for vulnerable groups;
- using data to analyse where the most significant educational gaps are across the county to inform work with all schools as well as targeting resources and capacity where the gaps are the greatest and where collaborative work could potentially make the biggest difference;
- ensuring that children, young people and families receive the most appropriate intervention and support to meet their needs, including the use of multi-agency approaches to prevent underachievement of the most vulnerable learners at all phases in their education;
- promoting the use of specific, evidence-based language development programmes and one to one tuition to close the educational gaps at the earliest opportunity;
- work with schools, key services and partners to support a whole system approach to planning and commissioning in order to raise aspirations, build school readiness and academic resilience, promote health and economic well-being and ensure accelerated progress and good attainment for the most disadvantaged learners;
- piloting a closing the educational gaps project in second locality, building upon the views and needs of vulnerable children, young people, parents and carers and based on the original pilot in Newark;
- evaluating the impact of locality-working to close educational gaps for vulnerable learners and scaling up any identified successful strategies in other locations across the county.

## 7. Action planning and resources

In conjunction with our key partners, an implementation plan has been agreed which outlines actions to support all schools and educational settings to use data and target resources more effectively to close educational gaps for vulnerable and/or disadvantaged groups.

Key actions include:

- continue to use the Closing the Gaps Performance Board to hold key partners/teams to account for the impact of their contribution to Nottinghamshire's Closing the Gaps Strategy;
- sharing data and relevant research with schools/families of schools;
- the provision of guidance on the most effective strategies to close educational gaps;
- the use of data to identify localities for priority, targeted action;
- sharing new ways of working at locality level to inform further developments in other areas of Nottinghamshire;
- brokering and commissioning access to key resources, research and strategic partners;
- collaboration with The Centre for Equity in Education at Manchester University to evaluate the impact of the strategy at locality and LA level;
- develop quantitative and qualitative datasets to describe how new ways of collaboration at locality level are impacting positively on vulnerable pupils' achievements and access to learning.





## 8. Accountability

Schools and other educational settings are closely monitored and strongly held to account for the attainment and progress of their most vulnerable groups through Department for Education (DfE) performance tables and the Ofsted inspection framework. Schools are required to publish on their website details of how they are spending the Pupil Premium funding and the effect this is having on the attainment of eligible pupils in their school.

The Closing the Gaps Performance Board will hold key partners/teams to account for the impact of their contribution to Nottinghamshire's Closing the Educational Gaps Strategy and report to the Children, Family and Cultural Services Leadership Team, the Children's Trust Board and the Children and Young People's Committee on a six monthly basis.



## 9. How we will measure success

We will be successful if:

- the overall performance of FSM6 and Non-FSM6 children and young people is at least in line with national outcomes at each key stage in 2016.

## 10. Summary

This strategy cannot be fixed in stone. It will grow, change and develop over time as schools and other educational settings embrace their increased responsibility for school improvement including closing educational gaps for vulnerable children and young people.

As champion for children and families, the County Council has a duty to ensure that all services which are provided, brokered or commissioned are informed by latest research and best practice, whilst providing good value for money. This will require effective partnership working based on a shared moral purpose to raise aspirations and maximise life chances for all children and young people but particularly for the most disadvantaged.









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