



**Nottinghamshire  
County Council**

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



## Foreword

This strategy 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 past successes of Nottinghamshire schools in raising attainment and increasing progress for all students and is ambitious in the outcomes we aim to achieve for 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 Philip Owen  
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services

## Contents

1. Context
2. The vision
3. The rationale
4. Defining the gaps
5. Partnership, collaboration and inter-agency working
6. The role of the County Council
7. Action planning and resources
8. Expected outcomes
9. How we will measure success
10. Summary

## 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 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 (McKinsey & Company 2007) shows 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 is an urgent 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 (FSM) and their more advantaged peers widens the further they go through our educational establishments.

However, in 2011 some gains were made in reducing the educational attainment gaps between FSM and non FSM students in the early years' foundation stage and 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 Nottinghamshire, the FSM/non FSM gap in attainment for children in the early years' foundation stage is in line with the national gap for the first time in 2011. However much remains to be done to ensure early gains made through intensive language development programmes continue to impact.

By the end of primary and secondary education, the FSM/non FSM gap in attainment remains significantly wider than the national gap. Post 16 students eligible for free school meals under perform in relation to their more advantaged peers. Wide 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.

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 very best school systems (in the world) intervene at the level of the individual student, developing processes and structures within schools that are able to identify whenever a student is starting to fall behind, and then intervening to improve that child's performance”.*

## 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 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
- Young Peoples Service
- Targeted Support and Youth Justice Service
- Governor Services
- Children's Social Care
- Admissions
- Performance and Review
- Nottingham Trent 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 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 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;
- challenging the way in which schools and other educational settings use national funding to raise aspirations and to ensure accelerated progress and attainment for the most vulnerable;
- piloting a closing the educational gaps project in one locality, building upon the views and needs of vulnerable children, young people, parents and carers;
- 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 groups.

Key actions include;

- the development of a closing the gaps strategic steering group;
- 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;
- identifying new ways of working to close gaps through dialogue with vulnerable children, young people and their families;
- brokering and commissioning access to key resources, research and strategic partners;
- collaboration with Nottingham Trent University to evaluate the impact of the strategy.



## 8. Expected outcomes

Schools and other educational settings will increasingly be held to account for the attainment and progress of their most vulnerable groups through revised Department for Education (DfE) performance tables and the new Ofsted inspection framework. In addition, schools will be required to report directly to the DfE from September 2012 for the use and impact of the Pupil Premium funding which is allocated to schools to raise the attainment of key vulnerable groups.

Key milestone targets have been identified in the County Council's implementation plan to support and challenge schools to accelerate attainment and progress of the most vulnerable learners. These milestones seek to raise aspiration and ensure that the educational attainment gaps in Nottinghamshire are below national averages at all key assessment points by 2014.



## 9. How we will measure success

We will be successful if we:

- continue to reduce the attainment gap between FSM and non FSM children achieving the expected level in the early years' foundation stage (EYFS) from a baseline of 18.6% to 17.5% in 2011/12 with subsequent milestones agreed following the publication of the revised EYFS curriculum and assessment arrangements;
- reduce the attainment gap between FSM and non FSM children achieving the expected level at key stage 2 from a baseline of 25% to 17% by July 2014;
- reduce the attainment gap between FSM and non FSM children achieving the expected level at key stage 4 from a baseline of 33.4% to 26% by July 2014;
- reduce the attainment gap between FSM and non FSM young people achieving Level 3 at age 19 from a baseline of 30% to 24% by 2014.



## 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 committed to raising aspirations and maximising life chances for all children and young people but particularly for the most vulnerable.



*“Above all, we must make these students feel ‘special’....we must know the children...  
... get to know the families - it’s possible to work wonders!”*

Summary comment from a Nottinghamshire school involved in the ‘Narrowing the Gap’ pilot project  
2009-11