



SOUTH-WEST
SOCIAL MOBILITY
COMMISSION



University
of Exeter

The Equity Scorecard: Strengthening Educational Equity in Schools

Pilot findings and Phase 2 scale-up



March 2026 | Beth Brooks, Lee Elliot Major & Anne-Marie Sim

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the generous contributions from multi-academy trusts, schools and educators in the South West and nationally. We would like to express our gratitude to the schools and teachers who continue to work with us to improve educational equity – we appreciate your trust in testing the Equity Scorecard and your generosity in sharing Equity Case Studies with us.

We would like to thank our Equity Case Study participants and their schools: Katie Alpin (Torquay Academy), Sam Banks (Dawlish College), Keziah Featherstone (Q3 Academy Tipton), Amy Le Bredonchel (Ilfracombe CofE Junior School), Susan Matheson (Maritime Academy Trust), Jo Pike (ThinkForward), Lisa Pollard (Palladian Academy Trust), Aidan Sadgrove (The Brigshaw Learning Partnership) and Karen Taylor (Broadwindsor Primary School).

We would also like to thank Policy@Exeter for their support in co-producing the “Equity in Education Mini-Conference” in May 2025.

Finally, we would like to thank our funders. We are extremely grateful to receive funding from a core group of key supporters for the work of the South-West Social Mobility Commission, without which none of this would be possible. These include:

- Cobalt Trust
- Cornwall Council
- Devon County Council
- Great South West
- Persimmon Foundation
- Somerset Council
- University of Exeter

We are engaging with other potential supporters for this important work. If you are interested in supporting the work of the Commission, please get in touch with us [here](#).

About the authors:

Beth Brooks is an Executive at the South-West Social Mobility Commission (SWSMC), where she is involved with various social mobility projects. Before joining the Commission, Beth worked in Widening Participation at the University of Exeter, and as a secondary school teacher in the South-West peninsula.

Professor Lee Elliot Major OBE FAcSS is the country's first Professor of Social Mobility, based at the University of Exeter. As one of the world's leading social mobility experts, his work is dedicated to improving the prospects of young people from under-resourced backgrounds. Lee was formerly Chief Executive of the Sutton Trust and a trustee of the Education Endowment Foundation. He is focused on the impact of research, working closely with

Governments and policy makers as well as schools, universities, and employers across the world. Lee advocates an “equity approach” in schools based on principles set out in his book Equity in Education.

Dr Anne-Marie Sim is co-founder and lead for the SWSMC. She and Lee Elliot Major set up the Commission in the wake of stark evidence about the state of social mobility in the South West. Anne-Marie has a DPhil, masters and bachelor's degree from the University of Oxford. Her DPhil in social anthropology involved eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork with children in and out of school environments in south London. Prior to working on social mobility, she was a strategy consultant at the Boston Consulting Group.

Foreword

By Dr Jennifer Blunden OBE
CEO Truro & Penwith Academy Trust

The Equity Scorecard was first introduced in 2024 as a new approach to assessing educational equity in schools. Educational equity is one of the fundamental principles of the South-West Social Mobility Commission and calls upon every organisation in the region to play their part: adopting a social mobility lens so that decisions and actions support children and young people from under-resourced backgrounds to thrive.

As a Commissioner and a participant in the pilot phase, I am very proud to introduce this evaluation report on the Equity Scorecard pilots which have taken place in Somerset, Devon and Cornwall. This report shares an updated Version 2.0 of the Equity Scorecard and outlines plans for national expansion.

Social mobility and social justice are fundamental expectations for inclusive education which reflects the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, whereby every child has a right to an education.

The Equity Scorecard can be used as a springboard, bringing different sources of evidence together into a unified narrative to enable deeper conversations with staff, parents and carers and community members to facilitate education provision that overcomes barriers for under resourced pupils.

At a time of significant change for schools, with a new Ofsted framework highlighting inclusion in our classrooms and leadership decision making, the Equity Scorecard has the potential to be a tool and an asset for school leaders to help shape school-level policies to ensure our most vulnerable pupils are accessing high quality education to improve their life chances from the earliest possible starting points.

System leadership needs these evidence-informed tools to develop policies and practices impacting on generations of children and our experience of the Equity Scorecard thus far is positive. We are looking forward to using this tool in place-based hub models to ensure educational equity; working with communities, multi-agency partnerships and groups of schools as anchors in our communities.

I would like to thank Professor Lee Elliot Major, Dr Anne-Marie Sim and Beth Brooks of the University of Exeter for their relentless work to ensure the evaluation and impact of the Equity Scorecard is an asset for educators to make better practical decisions to make education more equitable and to advantage our most vulnerable.

I am ambitious for the Equity Scorecard to support more coordinated action across our education system to shift the focus from managing inequality to actively reducing it. Version 2.0 of the Equity Scorecard provides a shared and rigorous evidence base to support more targeted and coordinated action.



Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Foreword	3
Executive Summary	5
Introduction	6
Piloting the Equity Scorecard	9
The Equity Scorecard Version 2.0	16
Community Partnerships	20
Disadvantaged Inclusion	24
Disadvantaged Outcomes	28
Phase 2: National Roll-Out	33
Theory of Change	36
Equity Case Studies	42
Torquay Academy: Red Flags Review	45
Ilfracombe Junior School: Connecting Curriculum to Place	48
Bligh Primary School: Home Visits	51
Broadwindsor Primary School: Homework Club	54
Dawlish College: Weighted Entitlement (WE) List	57
Palladian Academy Trust: Changing the Language of Disadvantage	61
Q3 Academy Tipton: Home-School Meetings	64
ThinkForward: Asset-Based Language Guide	67
The Brigshaw Learning Partnership: Festival of Transition	70
Conclusion	73
Our Vision for the Equity Scorecard	74
Appendix & Bibliography	75

Executive Summary

A pilot involving 20 schools across the South West shows the Equity Scorecard prompted meaningful changes in equity practice. Schools reported shifts in curriculum design, pastoral systems and family partnerships, as leadership teams reflected on evidence-informed “good bets” for improving outcomes for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds and those facing extra barriers to learning.

The Scorecard’s checklists supported honest reflection and productive challenge between pastoral and academic teams. Long-held assumptions were questioned, helping schools move beyond siloed thinking towards shared ownership of equity.

Leaders reported greater clarity about priorities, with the Scorecard shaping decisions about where to focus time and resources. In several schools, equity was embedded directly into School Improvement Plans and Pupil Premium strategies.

Feedback from the pilot has informed an updated version of the Scorecard, also presented in this report, alongside plans for national scale-up. Improvements include clearer prompts for equity “good bets”, deeper evidence summaries, milestones to support accountability, and guidance on embedding equity within existing school improvement cycles. The national scale-up pilot will initially engage 75–100 schools, supported by open webinars and peer learning.

“Equity Case Studies”

The report also includes a first wave of Equity Case Studies documenting how schools have implemented equitable strategies in practice. These case studies offer practical guidance on both the potential benefits and the trade-offs involved in different approaches.

Practices included: building relational trust with families through home visits, using vulnerability indices to prioritise support rather than label pupils, adopting inclusive language to shape professional expectations, paying close attention to transitions where disadvantage gaps can widen and developing community partnerships.

These case studies point to three key balancing judgements teachers must make when considering equity approaches, echoing the evidence gathered for the Scorecard checklists.

1. Using deeper knowledge of pupils to remove learning barriers, not to label.

Equity-informed teaching in a world of multiple complex barriers to learning depends on knowing more, not less, about pupils – understanding the specific impediments they face at particular moments, and responding with targeted support that preserves high expectations rather than slipping into crude or deficit labels.

2. Strengthening relationships to improve learning, not dilute it.

Improving relationships and improving results are not competing goals but complementary aims. Trust, empathy and strong partnerships with families and communities create the conditions in which feedback, challenge and learning can take hold – especially for pupils facing extra pressures beyond the school gate.

3. Teaching powerful knowledge through culturally inclusive curricula.

Curriculum equity is not about abandoning knowledge-rich teaching but considering the cultural frames through which it is accessed – deliberately widening horizons while avoiding assumptions about prior exposure or lived experience.

Taken together, the Equity Scorecard pilot shows that equity is strengthened through deliberate, evidence-informed decisions, embedded in everyday leadership practice. An equity approach is a shift for schools to actively reduce the barriers that shape many pupils’ experiences and outcomes, replace labels with diagnosis and action, and brings community context and equity into routine cycles of improvement, planning and accountability.

Introduction



The Equity Scorecard is a pioneering toolkit designed to help schools turn the principles of equity into measurable action. It is designed to be for schools' private reflection and internal review, with the aim of fostering honest engagement rather than compliance, negative incentives or performativity.

The Scorecard combines a structured set of self-evaluation checklists, that include examples of effective equity practice, with rigorous data measures. Together, these help schools to assess how well they are supporting pupils from under-resourced backgrounds and serving their local communities. By drawing attention to material and cultural barriers to learning both inside and outside the school gates, the Scorecard aims to help schools adopt a sharper focus on disadvantage, embed an equity mindset, and ensure every child has a genuine opportunity to thrive.

One year on from its launch, this report sets out what we have learned from piloting the Equity Scorecard¹ and how those lessons are shaping its continued development and use by schools. It is intended for school leaders, trusts and partners who want to understand how the Scorecard can be used to support more equitable educational practice.

This report should be read alongside *The Equity Scorecard: A New Approach to Assessing Educational Equity in Schools*², which was published in December 2024. This initial report sets out the toolkit in full, alongside justifications for the choice of indicators and measures selected for inclusion.

Since that report was published, we have piloted the original Equity Scorecard with twenty secondary schools across Somerset, Devon and Cornwall. In this report, we summarise findings from that pilot, set out an improved Version 2.0 of the Equity Scorecard, and outline plans for national expansion, which have already begun.

Initial findings and next steps

Our evaluation of the initial roll-out showed that participants found that the Equity Scorecard provided a useful framework for structured reflection, prompting consideration of areas that are not always foregrounded in day-to-day operational discussions, particularly community engagement and inclusion. Leaders also noted that drawing together multiple sources of evidence supported a more coherent and nuanced understanding of how disadvantage is experienced within their setting. Many used it as a springboard for deeper stakeholder engagement, including conversations with staff, parents/carers³ and community members, and for planning more targeted interventions. At the same time, participants pointed to areas for improvement, including time markers, such as webinars, to strengthen accountability and support schools in completing their Scorecards. Teachers and leaders told us that the Equity Scorecard was already directly shaping elements of their School Improvement Plans (SIP) and Pupil Premium (PP) strategies.

We have now embarked on a national roll-out of the Equity Scorecard (Phase 2), which is taking place over the course of the 2025-26 academic year. The toolkit continues to generate interest across the sector, with between 75 and 100 schools already signed up to this next phase, with many more using the toolkit individually and independently. We have used the learnings from our pilot evaluation to improve the Scorecard and refine the participation process.

1 Brooks, B., Sim, A., & Elliot Major, L. (2024). From herein referred to as the Scorecard/the Equity Scorecard interchangeably.

2 Ibid

3 From herein referred to as "parents" in the text as a shorthand for parents/carers.

Ultimately, the aim is for the Equity Scorecard to be supported through regional hubs, with schools and trusts playing a central role in helping others to adopt and use the tool effectively. Our hope is that by embedding the Scorecard into regular school improvement cycles, we can not only improve outcomes for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds in individual schools but also build the case for equity-centred accountability across the South-West peninsula and beyond.

Wider context

This work continues to build on the recommendation made in the 2022 report *Social Mobility in the South West*⁴ to adopt a sharper focus on disadvantage within the education system. Persistent attainment gaps between pupils from under-resourced backgrounds and their more advantaged peers remain a defining challenge across the South West and nationally. Despite sustained attention, these gaps are systemic: they open early, and too often widen as children move through education, shaping later access to post-16 pathways, employment and early career opportunities.

Evidence gathered by the South-West Social Mobility Commission (SWSMC) and others⁵ has consistently shown that these patterns are closely linked to place. Factors such as rural isolation, coastal disadvantage, limited transport connectivity and uneven access to high-quality provision all influence educational outcomes in ways that are not always visible in national data. While these challenges are particularly acute in parts of the South-West peninsula, they are not unique to the region and reflect wider structural barriers faced by schools nationally. Although current approaches have led to improvement in some settings, overall progress has been slow and uneven. Too often, support is spread thinly across systems rather than directed towards those facing the greatest barriers, limiting its impact.

This update to *The Equity Scorecard*⁶ is rooted in a clear understanding of what equity means in practice. Equity is not about treating all pupils or communities the same. It is about recognising that some face greater challenges and require greater levels of support to achieve comparable outcomes.

By focusing attention on where barriers are most prevalent and where progress has stalled, the Scorecard provides a shared and robust evidence base to support more targeted and coordinated action. This is about moving away from crude dichotomies of defining pupils who are disadvantaged and those who are not, and recognising a range of barriers. In doing so, it seeks to move the system from managing inequality to actively reducing it, ensuring that efforts to improve outcomes are aligned with need and grounded in local context.

What's more, since the publication of *The Equity Scorecard: A New Approach to Assessing Educational Equity in Schools*⁷ in December 2024, the national debate about school accountability has come into sharper focus. In early 2025, the school inspectorate in England, Ofsted, replaced its single overall judgement with a more granular "report card", including a five-point grading scale across evaluation areas. These proposals place greater emphasis on "disadvantaged" and "vulnerable" pupils, assessed through the lens of "inclusion", increased use of contextual information and new toolkits tailored to different phases and types of provider. The proposals reflect feedback from parents/carers seeking clearer and more nuanced accounts of school performance.⁸ The SWSMC welcomed the stronger emphasis on inclusion and disadvantage but emphasised in its consultation response the need for clearer definitions, expectations and guidance if the new framework is to drive consistently strong practice in schools.⁹

Against this backdrop, the Equity Scorecard pilot (Phase 1) was launched with 20 secondary schools across the South-West peninsula. The region continues to face some of the starkest attainment challenges in the country, with only 40% of disadvantaged pupils at Key Stage 4 (KS4) attaining a grade 4 in both maths and English GCSEs last year.¹⁰ Piloting the Equity Scorecard supports broader efforts to address educational inequity in the South West – a region with distinct social mobility challenges.¹¹ By emphasising a context-sensitive, actionable approach, the Scorecard aims to build schools' capacity to embed an equity mindset in everyday practice.

4 Sim, A. & Elliot Major, L. (2022).

5 See for example: Ovenden Hope, T., Brown, V., & Achtaridou, E. (2025)

6 Brooks, B., Sim, A., & Elliot Major, L. (2024).

7 Ibid

8 Ofsted (2025).

9 Elliot Major, L., Brooks, B., & Sim, A. (2025).

10 Sim, A., Brooks, B., & Elliot Major, L. (2025).

11 See for example: Sim, A. & Elliot Major, L. (2022).

Structure of this report

The report begins with findings from our 2024-25 pilot of the Equity Scorecard with 20 secondary schools across the South-West peninsula. This focuses on how schools engaged with the tool, what they found useful and where they felt further support or refinement was needed. It addresses questions to do with the tool itself, as well as the guidance and support provided to school leaders around their use of the tool, provided by the SWSMC team.

We then introduce the Equity Scorecard Version 2.0. This section explains how feedback from schools has been incorporated. In particular, we have updated the self-assessment checklists and made them more prominent within the Scorecard visual. Meanwhile, we have removed the survey element to prevent survey fatigue but encourage schools to continue seeking pupil and parent/carer voice through an additional question within the checklists.

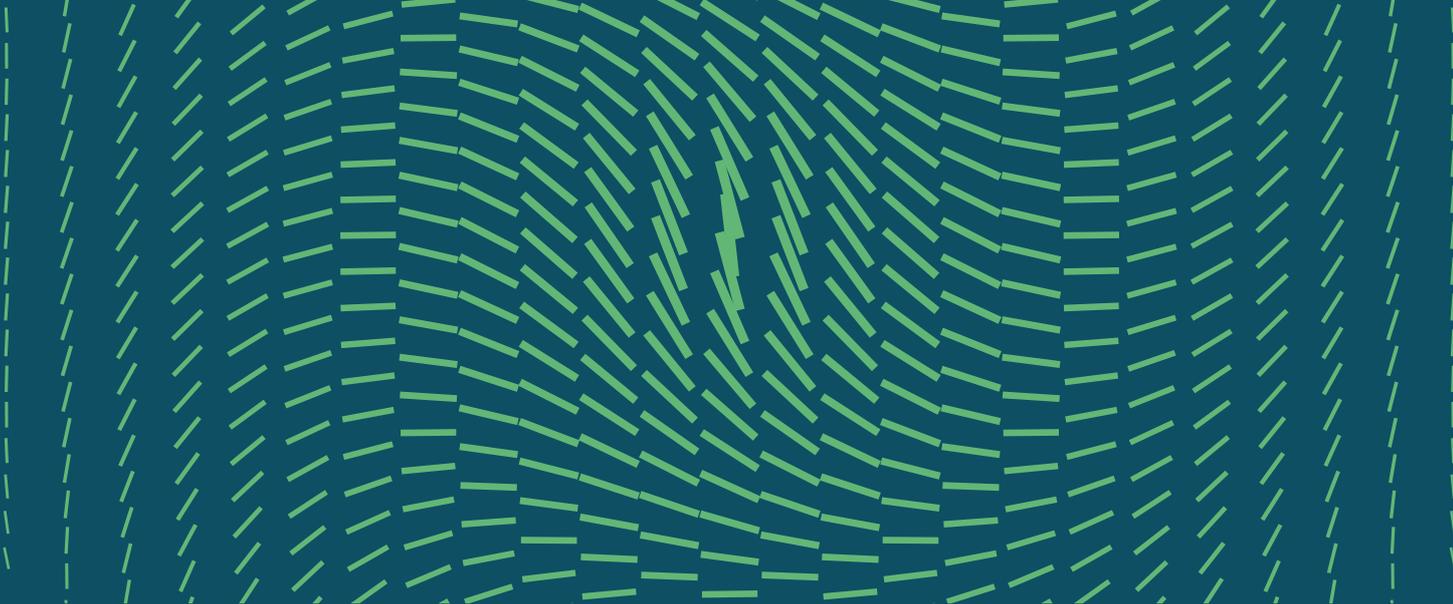
We go on to discuss Phase 2 of the work: the national roll-out of the Scorecard during the 2025-26 academic year. This section describes how we are supporting use of the Scorecard at scale, again incorporating lessons from the pilot.

The Theory of Change section sets out our initial thinking on the mechanisms through which use of the Scorecard might lead to its intended outcomes of improved educational equity. We hope to develop the Theory of Change in future reports as we learn more about the Scorecard's use in practice.

Finally, a series of Equity Case Studies exemplify how schools, trusts and partners are applying equity principles in practice. They are intended to illustrate different approaches rather than provide templates, reflecting the importance of local context. We are continuing to collect case studies from Scorecard participants with the aim of building an online Equity Case Study Library, as a shared resource for schools and trusts.

The Scorecard remains rooted in the conviction that school accountability must centre on more than just academic results. It must also measure how well schools support pupils from under-resourced backgrounds: their outcomes, inclusion and schools' partnerships with families and their wider communities. Through structured self-assessment, targeted data and context-rich conversations, participating schools have begun to recognise blind spots, build a shared understanding of disadvantage, and identify new priorities for action.





Piloting the Equity Scorecard

Piloting the Equity Scorecard

The original Equity Scorecard report was published in December 2024.¹² The report included the toolkit in full, enabling any school or trust to use it free of charge. However, the SWSMC also decided to pilot use of the toolkit with a small group of schools in the South-West peninsula. This enabled us to support them with its use, understand schools' experiences using the tool, gather feedback to assess its effectiveness in promoting equity-related practices, and inform its ongoing development and implementation.

20 schools across Somerset, Devon and Cornwall participated in the Phase 1 pilot. Schools were recruited through existing SWSMC relationships, including through local authorities, multi-academy trusts and school leaders already engaged in work to improve outcomes for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds. The cohort reflected a range of contexts and levels of readiness, enabling SWSMC to explore how the Equity Scorecard operates across different secondary school settings.

The pilot

Participation in the Phase 1 pilot involved a structured but manageable process, designed to support meaningful reflection while recognising the demands on school staff. Schools and trusts were able to join the pilot at different points during the year, allowing for a flexible and responsive approach that acknowledged the operational pressures they often face.

At the start of the pilot, schools took part in an informational kick-off call with the SWSMC team to plan their engagement, clarify expectations and agree indicative timelines. Schools were then supported through a combination of tools, data and guidance provided by SWSMC.

Schools received:

- Scorecard templates;
- Survey questions for completion, enabling them to capture a wide range of perspectives on equity and inclusion;
- Structured self-assessment checklists for senior leaders, with options to consult wider staff as appropriate;

- Online and in-person sessions to support schools in their Scorecard completion and collaboration with others;
- Publicly available data, compiled by the SWSMC team; and
- At the end of the pilot, once all component parts had been submitted, a digital Scorecard dashboard, presenting each school's findings alongside aggregated, anonymised benchmarking with other pilot schools.

Meanwhile, schools carried out a set of core activities to complete their own Scorecard and contribute to pilot findings.

Schools:

- Set realistic timelines for completion and submission of materials and shared these with the SWSMC team;
- Arranged for surveys to be completed, returning aggregated, anonymised data to the SWSMC team;
- Allocated two to three hours for senior leaders to complete the self-assessment checklists and shared scores with the SWSMC team;
- Monitored attendance at parents' evenings for disadvantaged pupils, sharing this data with the SWSMC team; and
- Contributed to an evaluation of both the pilot scheme and the Equity Scorecard to support improvement.

¹² Brooks, B., Sim, A., & Elliot Major, L. (2024).

Participation in the pilot went beyond schools completing the Scorecard independently. SWSMC offered a programme of one-to-one onboarding, ensuring that each school had a clear understanding of the purpose of the Scorecard and how it could be used as a tool for improvement as well as accountability. Schools received resource packs, rubrics and guidance materials to support consistent and meaningful self-assessment.

Throughout the pilot, SWSMC offered facilitation and ad-hoc support, tailored to individual school needs, supporting schools to maintain momentum and engage in high-quality reflection over time.

A central aim of Phase 1 was to foster collaboration and shared learning. An "Equity in Education Mini-Conference" brought school leaders together to explore common challenges, share practice, and reflect on what equity-focused improvement looks like in different contexts. The event also supported the creation of Equity Case Studies, highlighting the value of peer learning. We share this first set of case studies later in this report. Alongside this, SWSMC captured learnings from the pilot through interviews with participating schools and trusts. These learnings have shaped improvements to both the tool and its delivery, laying the groundwork for the next phase, which we set out later in this report.

Summary of Findings

Overall, schools reported that the Scorecard offered a helpful structure for reflecting on areas that are often overlooked in day-to-day discussions, particularly community engagement and inclusion. Leaders felt that bringing different sources of evidence together enabled them to form a clearer picture of disadvantage in their setting.

Participants described the process as straightforward and manageable:

- "It was straightforward. There weren't that many things to do."
- "It was very manageable in terms of just getting our heads around what was required."
- "Going through the process has sharpened our focus on disadvantage."

Many welcomed the opportunity to revisit the same questions each year:

- "It's a really nice routine to get annually... feedback on the same questions with stakeholders."
- "The annual cycle of it should tell us where we're having impact."

Some raised concerns about the reliance on self-assessment, noting that without external moderation there is a risk of over- or under-estimating performance:

- "When you're self-assessed, you could tick any box on there if you wanted to."

Leaders also highlighted challenges around survey completion, such as timing and survey fatigue. Several felt the Scorecard had potential at trust level, where it could support more systematic comparison, improvement and accountability across a greater number of schools.

These insights have informed the development of our national roll-out (Phase 2), described later in this report.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation was guided by three overarching questions:

Process:

How do schools engage with the Scorecard in practice, and which forms of support are most helpful?

Outcomes:

To what extent does the Scorecard prompt meaningful reflection and changes in practice?

Impact:

What early signs are there that the Scorecard contributes to improved outcomes, inclusion and community engagement for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds?

The interviews explored how schools used the Scorecard and what they felt it added to their work. A summary of the topics covered in the interviews is provided in Appendix A.

Methodology:

Feedback was gathered from leaders and staff across the pilot schools. Interviews were held with 12 individual schools (with the member of staff responsible for implementing the Equity Scorecard) and one trust lead, representing a further seven schools, meaning that 19 schools contributed to the evaluation. Participating schools were located across Somerset, Devon and Cornwall and included six multi-academy trusts, one foundation school and one single-academy trust.

Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, using a semi-structured format, and typically lasted around one hour. This approach provided consistency across schools while allowing participants to describe their experiences in their own words.

Findings From the Process Evaluation

1. Checklists

The first strand of the Scorecard involves structured, self-assessment checklists, designed to prompt discussion and reflection across leadership teams. Each checklist presented a series of questions linked to the Scorecard's three areas of interest, accompanied by two types of prompts: "Good Bets"- established practices likely to benefit most settings - and "Have You Tried" - more innovative approaches intended to stretch thinking and provide schools with new ideas to strengthen equity practice. Schools scored themselves on a scale of 1-5 against each question. Across the evaluation, the checklists were consistently seen as the most valuable element of the Equity Scorecard. More than half of participating schools identified them as the most useful part of the process, describing them as clear, well-structured and easy to use. For many, the discussions they generated were their most productive leadership conversations of the year: "everybody around the table said that they really enjoyed the process... it was thought-provoking and there was a lot of challenge."

Most schools reported spending between two and four hours completing the checklists, usually over two Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meetings. These meetings frequently involved between ten and 15 staff including, for example, pastoral leads, curriculum leads, assistant heads and, in some cases, trust-level directors. Schools valued bringing these diverse perspectives together: "it ensured there was good coverage from all angles".

The checklists helped surface blind spots and encouraged more honest reflection. In several schools, pastoral and academic teams held contrasting views, prompting rich discussion about what their equitable practice looks like in reality. One participant described watching "those teams... disintegrate and dilute before your very eyes"- not as a negative observation, but in the sense that long-held assumptions were being challenged.

The checklists also played an essential role in driving change. Participants told us they "contributed the most to changes in practice", clarifying priorities for the year ahead and prompting leaders to revisit decisions about curriculum, pastoral systems and community work. The structure of the checklists, including both "Good Bets" and "Have You Tried?" was widely welcomed, helping schools recognise where they were performing strongly and where more innovative practice could be adopted. Several leaders told us these sections of the Scorecard were directly shaping elements of next year's School Improvement Plan (SIP) or Pupil Premium (PP) strategy.

At the same time, some challenges were identified. A small number of leaders felt that sections overlapped or that some prompts were familiar rather than stretching. Others raised concerns about over-generous scoring, particularly where schools had confidence in their provision: "as I'm reflecting on it, we possibly over-assessed ourselves." Several suggested adding opportunities to record existing good practice or propose new approaches for future iterations of the Equity Scorecard.

Despite these limitations, all participants reported that they enjoyed the process and believed it deepened their understanding of equity within their school. For many, the checklists offered the first structured opportunity to hold a collective conversation about disadvantage that cut across leadership roles and functions, creating a shared sense of purpose.

2. Data

The second strand of the Scorecard combined publicly available Department for Education data with a local metric: attendance at parents' evenings for pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM). For several leaders, this was the first time they had engaged with a dataset that brought together attainment, attendance and inclusion measures, for FSM-eligible pupils, in a single place.

Although many schools had not yet received their fully completed Scorecard at the time of the pilot interviews - and therefore had not seen the benchmarking piece in full - participants were clear about the value of the data strand. Leaders particularly welcomed the objectivity and comparability of the Department for Education data to complement the self-assessed component of the Scorecard. One described it as helpful to move beyond Progress 8 as the dominant measure of success, while another commented that the Scorecard "reinforced the gaps that exist in the data side of it... it's made me reflect more on what we can do to change some of those numbers."

The inclusion of parents' evening attendance data was also seen as useful. Some schools already tracked this; for others, it provided new insight into which families were engaging with school and who might be missing. Leaders reported that this prompted fresh conversations about how to improve attendance at key events, and why it was important, where several schools described introducing new systems to record, analyse or follow up attendance more consistently.

Participants also suggested potential additions for the future, including additional contextual data about their pupil population, and measures related to mental health referrals or travel time to school. These reflected a desire for the Scorecard to capture a fuller picture of context so that schools could allocate time and resources effectively.

Across the board, the data strand was regarded as a credible component of the Scorecard; one that could anchor self-assessment judgements, support comparisons across the peninsula and facilitate collaboration. Several schools spoke positively about the opportunity to connect with peers within their own schools and trusts, as well as externally, with leaders noting that the Scorecard "doesn't feel like another league table" but rather a tool to support shared improvement and the identification of potential schools with whom they could collaborate.

3. Surveys

Survey data formed one of the three core strands of the Scorecard data set in this initial pilot. Schools collected views from pupils, parents and staff using a standardised set of questions, completed online and returned to SWSMC in anonymised, aggregated form for benchmarking. The rationale for including attitudinal data was clear in the first Equity Scorecard report: under current accountability systems, without the perspectives of those who experience school life day to day, important aspects of inclusion and engagement remain invisible to leaders.

Across the evaluation, feedback on the surveys was mixed. A small number of schools described them as the most useful part of the process, particularly valuing the clarity of the questions and the potential to track responses year on year. For these schools, it was often the case that the surveys surfaced tensions and discrepancies that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. One leader described the parent/carer survey as "a little light-bulb moment", while another school noted that the results revealed sharper contrasts in pupils' sense of belonging than expected.

For others, however, the practicalities of running the surveys created significant challenges. Several leaders highlighted "survey fatigue", particularly where trust-wide questionnaires were already in circulation. Some told us the Scorecard surveys were "very similar to what we already send out", and that duplication risked undermining response rates or relationships with parents. Several schools struggled to identify a suitable point in the year to distribute them, reporting that "we couldn't find a place to get them out where we hadn't already sent another survey out within the last few weeks".

Five schools reported that completing the surveys was "too difficult", often due to clashes with trust schedules or existing cycles for stakeholder feedback. In addition, barriers to completion varied both between and within schools. Some schools reported that parents lacked access to online forms or were unwilling to complete surveys; where for others, pupils required significant logistical coordination to gather responses ("You have to block book computer suites...and there's so much organisation"). Overall, participants reported that parent/carer surveys remained the most difficult to run; staff surveys the most straightforward.

Despite these challenges, some participants felt the surveys had value. Several schools anticipated being able to integrate the Equity Scorecard survey questions into existing trust and school level systems in future, either by aligning survey cycles or by adapting selected items for annual use. One school planned to link future surveys to parents' evenings to support more equitable completion - suggesting giving out tablets while parents were already on the school site as an opportunity. Others were keen that the Scorecard surveys be "better aligned with trust surveys" so that duplication and fatigue could be reduced.

Taken together, the evaluation findings suggest that while the surveys offer important insight, particularly around belonging and parental perceptions, their future use will depend on closer alignment with local systems, better timing, and greater flexibility for individual schools.

4. The Equity in Education Mini-Conference

Although not a part of the original Equity Scorecard report, a dedicated moment of momentum came with the Equity in Education Mini-Conference held on 21st May 2025, hosted by the SWSMC and Policy@Exeter at the University of Exeter's Innovation Hub. The event drew teacher-leaders, trust executives and system influencers from across Somerset, Devon and Cornwall to reflect on both the promise and practical challenges of embedding the Scorecard.

A key session was a panel chaired by Professor Lee Elliot Major, where leaders emphasised equal ambition without deficit thinking, the need for relational accountability grounded in trust, and a continuous learning culture, rather than treating equity as a one-off compliance task. Through case study presentation sessions and panel discussions, schools shared how they are already using the Scorecard and their own examples of equity practice, including: mapping pupil vulnerability, reforming behaviour policies and designing inclusive policies for extracurricular provision.

Many participants described the conference as a rallying point: not just a tool for reflection, but a catalyst for a grassroots movement towards educational equity across the region. For many, it was one of the most useful and galvanising parts of the Equity Scorecard process, with participants reporting that the opportunity to meet in person was highly valuable.

The response to the event highlighted the value of creating a "community of practice" around equity work and the use of a shared tool to spark discussions. This has informed our future vision of regional hubs, led by pioneering schools or trusts, that support equity practice across a region. These hubs would support schools in their region to use the Scorecard and convene events like the Equity in Education Mini-Conference to bring participants together and share ideas and practice.

5. Impact and Anticipated Impact

Although they had only engaged with the Scorecard for a few months in most cases, all schools that took part in the evaluation reported tangible changes in perspective and practice. Leaders consistently described how the process had sharpened their focus on disadvantaged pupils, helped them to prioritise key areas of work and provided a structure for revisiting and questioning their assumptions. Several spoke of the Scorecard as a catalyst for conversations that had not previously taken place: "it's opened up those conversations about whether this is the most inclusive curriculum."

Practical changes were already underway in every school. Schools described using the Scorecard evidence to revise SIPs and PP strategies, adjust leadership responsibilities, strengthen attendance monitoring, and communicate more systematically with parents and carers. Examples of specific actions included the introduction of a hardship fund, a change to roles within the senior leadership team to introduce a member of staff responsible for equity, and home visits for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds.

The evaluation also showed that many leaders also used Scorecard insights to support governance work, including discussions with local governing bodies, trustees and regional directors. Several schools described the Scorecard as a useful, independent reference point for Ofsted preparation, offering a structured account of the school's approach to disadvantage, however, some reported that linking the Scorecard more closely to the Ofsted framework would increase its usefulness when it came to inspections. Overall, participants reported that they appreciated the impartiality of the Scorecard but felt it could be more useful if linked with existing accountability frameworks.

Looking ahead, all participants expected the Scorecard to have increasing impact over time. Most saw potential for the tool to become part of annual improvement and governance cycles, enabling schools to track progress and compare findings across a trust. Leaders anticipated that it would highlight “blind spots” and help them to broaden discussions beyond attainment to include community strengths and local context. A common

theme was the value of the Scorecard’s combination of activities, bringing together self-assessment data and nationally recognised metrics to build a more rounded picture of equity than any single measure could provide. Taken together, participants felt that the Scorecard had already begun to shape thinking and practice, and that its greatest contribution would come through repeated, embedded use.

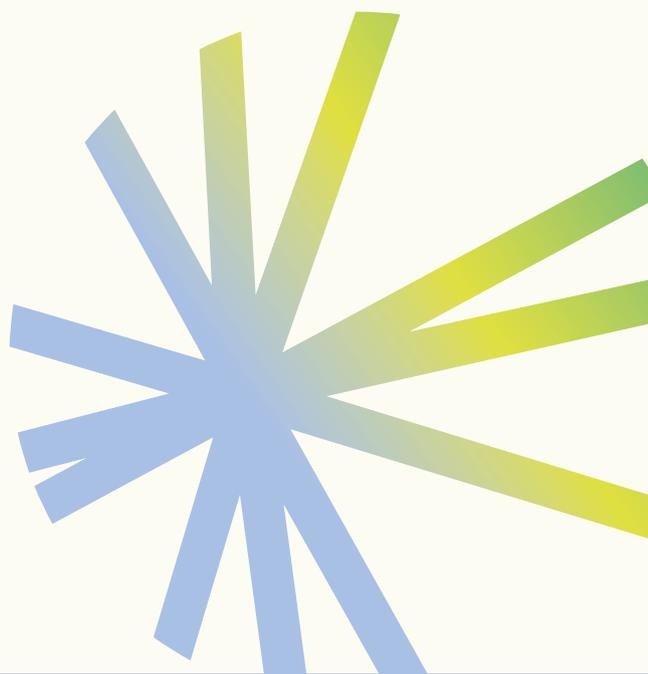
Next steps

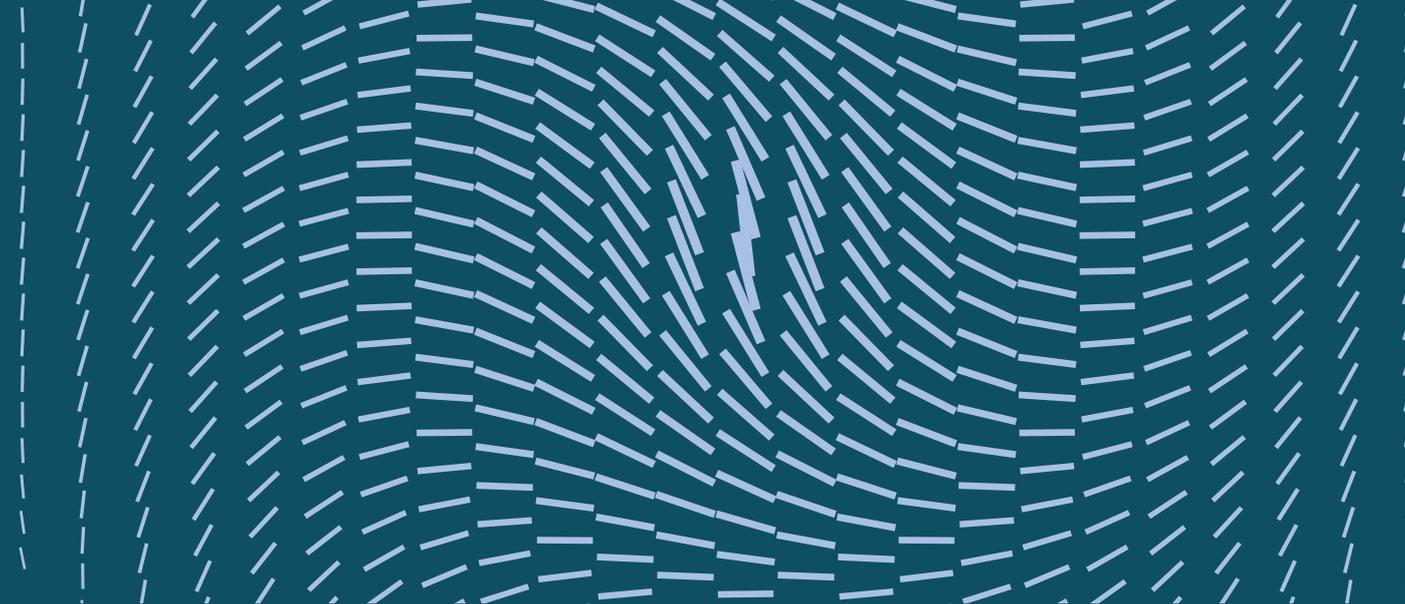
The process evaluation shows that the Equity Scorecard has begun to shift practice, priorities and conversations across schools in the South-West peninsula. While schools varied in their starting points, there was a shared recognition that the Scorecard provided a structure for honest reflection, a means of unifying disparate forms of evidence, and a prompt for new approaches to longstanding challenges. The surveys brought community voice into sharper focus; the checklists generated in-depth professional dialogue; and the data strand provided an objective anchor that strengthened accountability and comparison across settings.

Importantly, the mini-conference demonstrated that the Scorecard is not just an evaluation tool, but a driver of collective movement. By convening leaders from across schools and trusts, the event created space for shared learning, affirmed the SWSMC’s ambitions for the Equity Scorecard, and reinforced the idea that equity work is both relational and rigorous.

Some challenges remain. Schools were candid about the difficulties of running surveys alongside trust systems, the risks of over-generous self-assessment, and the need for clearer links to existing accountability structures. These insights have informed refinements to the Equity Scorecard (Version 2.0, described in the next section) and have shaped our plans for national roll-out (Phase 2, described later in the report).

Overall, so far, the Equity Scorecard has supported schools to think more deliberately about disadvantage, strengthened collaboration across the South-West peninsula and has begun to embed equity more firmly within school improvement processes. The next phase of work builds on this foundation, ensuring the tool remains practical, credible and responsive as it moves towards wider national and cross-phase use.





The Equity Scorecard Version 2.0

The Equity Scorecard Version 2.0

Building on the insights from the initial pilot and feedback, we have refined the Equity Scorecard tool to make it more practical, scalable and sustainable.

Key Changes to the Scorecard

The following key changes distinguish the new Scorecard from the earlier version:

- **Surveys:** Parent, pupil and teacher surveys have been removed from the Scorecard, being replaced with a single checklist question about how schools manage parent and pupil feedback. This reduces survey fatigue – especially for those schools already running regular surveys – while continuing to encourage schools to think about how they use feedback practices through an equity lens. We will continue to provide the original survey questions as a helpful guide for what schools might want to include within the surveys they already run.
- **Checklist Scores:** Rather than including checklist scores in aggregated form, we have integrated all the checklist questions into the Scorecard so that schools can see their score for each checklist question at a glance within the full Scorecard. Checklists were by far the most popular element of the original Scorecard and this change foregrounds the checklist element within the overall Scorecard, giving it equal prominence alongside the official school data. The rating scale (1-5) has also been reversed (so 5 now represents the top score) to aid readability.
- **Updated Checklists:** We have updated the checklists to include new examples of good and innovative equity practice and to add clarity where feedback has suggested this could be helpful. The updated checklists are provided in full alongside additional “evidence bases” later in this section.
- **Data:** Schools will only report a single year of data for current and previous year’s data indicators. Although the original report suggested averaging three years of data, the pilot suggested that schools were happy with the reporting of single years of data and that this made data collection more practical.
- **Contextual Data:** Based on feedback, we have added in additional optional data measures such as the per centage of pupils with English as an additional language (% EAL), the per centage of the pupil population with a special educational need or disability who receive SEN Support (% SEND K) and those who have an Education Health and Care Plan (% SEND E), the number of pupils on roll, and the per centage of pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding (% PP), to help paint a fuller picture of schools’ wider contexts.
- **Recording Schools’ Equity Journey:** In the new version of the Scorecard, we have included an “Equity Context Narrative” section with five question prompts as an optional tool to support schools in reflecting on and recording their equity journey. The questions are:
 - 1) Where are we on our equity journey?
 - 2) What are our greatest assets in our locality?
 - 3) What is putting the most pressure on us at the moment?
 - 4) What are our equity priorities (prior to scorecard completion)?
 - 5) What are our equity priorities (post scorecard completion)?
- **Equity Case Study Library:** In the pilot, schools and trusts shared examples of innovative approaches to equity with SWSMC. We are building a bank of examples which we will share with all schools and trusts via our website. Initial Equity Case Studies can be found later in this report.

The Equity Scorecard Version 2.0

Equity Scorecard		Pupil Number (n=)	School's Data (this year)	Last Year's Data & Progress	Regional Compare	National Compare	School context
Community Partnerships							
School-collected data	Parents/carers' evening attendance for FSM eligible pupils	282	65		62	67	Number on roll 1591
Checklists	Understanding of the community	n/a	3	2	3	3	% pupils FSM eligible 17.7
	Parent/carer partnerships		2	2	3	3	% pupils PP 23
	Local community partnerships		3	3	2	2	% pupils SEND (K) 14.2
	Community access to facilities		4	3	4	5	% pupils SEND (E) 18.4
	Parent and pupil voice		1	1	4	3	% pupils EAL 18
Inclusion							
DfE data	Fair share of FSM eligible pupils	282	17.7	18	21	26	
	KS4 off-rolling practices for FSM eligible pupils	113	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.4	
	Suspensions for FSM eligible pupils	282	0.2	0.2	1	0.8	
	Permanent exclusions for FSM eligible pupils	282	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01	
Checklists	Broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum	n/a	5	3	4	3	
	Extra-curriculars and enrichment		4	3	2	4	
	Pastoral care and wellbeing		3	3	3	4	
	Inclusive policies		2	1	3	3	
Outcomes							
DfE data	School missed by FSM eligible pupils	282	7	9	8	8	
	FSM eligible pupils missing 10%+ of school	282	43	45	50	43	
	English and maths pass rate (KS4) for FSM eligible pupils	56	42	38	40	44	
	FSM eligible pupils in education or employment at age 16	56	89	87	86	86	
Checklists	Deploying staff	n/a	4	4	3	3	
	Making teaching inclusive		2	3	3	3	
	Tracking every pupil's performance		3	4	2	1	
	Equitable access to resources		3	3	2	2	
	Improving attendance		4	2	5	4	

Updated Checklists

The original Equity Scorecard included a set of practical, self-assessment checklists designed to help schools reflect honestly on how well they support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Each checklist brought together examples of effective practice, recognising that while evidence can guide us, schools can also try innovative new solutions, using their professional judgement and knowledge of their local communities to improve outcomes for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds.

The checklists are divided into two parts:

- **“Good Bets”** – tried-and-tested approaches that have shown positive impact across a range of school settings.
- **“Have You Tried?”** – innovative ideas drawn from local practitioners and wider research, offering inspiration for schools wanting to explore new ways of working.

This approach draws on the principles outlined by Elliot Major and Higgins in their 2019 book “What Works?”¹³, emphasising the importance of adopting a research-minded attitude: open to evidence, but also grounded in the understanding that no single strategy works everywhere. Practice must always be adapted to the realities of individual pupils, families, and community contexts.

In the initial pilot, schools rated themselves using a five-point Likert scale to help prompt discussion about their strengths, challenges, and areas for development. The intention was not to judge, but to support continuous improvement and to provide a structured way to focus on disadvantage.

1 Updated Order and Naming of Checklists

The checklists have been reordered to follow a clearer, more logical progression:

1. **Community Partnerships**
2. **Disadvantaged Inclusion**
3. **Disadvantaged Outcomes**

This new order highlights the importance of strong relationships beyond the school gates and recognises that meaningful community engagement and partnerships are a crucial foundation for improving inclusion and outcomes for pupils.

“Community Partnerships” has replaced “Community Engagement” to emphasise the importance of doing this work with local communities.

2 Revised Likert Scale

For Phase 2, the rating scale has been reversed for more intuitive use. A higher score is reflective of a “better” self-assessment. “Fully in place” has also been replaced with “in place” to reflect participant feedback. The new scale is:

5. **In place with regular review**
4. **Mostly in place**
3. **Somewhat in place**
2. **Not in place but being considered**
1. **Not in place and not being considered**

3 Refined Checklists

As part of improvements to the Scorecard, we have updated the checklists to present new examples of good practice and incorporate feedback from the pilot evaluation. For example, because the survey element of the scorecard has been removed, there is an extra checklist question to assess how schools use pupil and parent voice.

The checklist content has been updated to:

- Ensure each question includes examples that are likely to stretch schools;
- Include supporting evidence bases for further information and background;
- Simplify “have you tried?” suggestions; and
- Incorporate promising practice from Equity Case Studies.

Supporting evidence bases for each of the three checklist areas are also provided prior to each of the relevant checklists in this report.

The revised checklists with evidence bases are in full below.¹⁴

13 Elliot Major, L. & Higgins, S. (2019).

14 Where references are made to “Equity Case Studies (2026)”, these can be found later in this report.

Community Partnerships

A relationships approach to partnerships

Family circumstances and community conditions play a major role in shaping children's attainment, attendance, self-esteem, wellbeing and belonging. A substantial share of the variation in children's outcomes is driven by factors outside the school gates. An equity-informed response does not treat these realities as excuses for lower expectations. Instead, it recognises that strong relationships with families and communities can be the gateway for learning to take hold. Improving relationships and results are not conflicting priorities but complementary aims.

One study in the United States found that schools with strong parent-community ties were ten times more likely to improve in maths and four times more likely in reading. But more studies are needed on which specific school-led strategies are most effective in influencing these out-of-school factors. Teachers should consider approaches with a critical eye, combining best bets with professional judgement and local insight.

Partnerships should first and foremost be grounded in mutual trust. Trust, listening and mutual respect are essential foundations for any partnership. When trust is low, even well-designed academic support will fail to take root. This might include listening-focused meetings, events celebrating local communities through food and music, extended support around food banks or relationship-building home visits, all underpinned by genuine two-way communication.

Schools can act as community connectors signposting other essential support services. Real momentum comes when communities are galvanised to be part of the solution.

A co-created strategy for parent partnerships needs to set clear expectations of what schools can and can't do. Teachers increasingly navigate two extremes: highly assertive parents demanding more resources, and families struggling with a cost-of-living crisis. An equity mindset requires consistent boundaries with the former, and relational, non-judgemental support for the latter.

The aim is to build trust with families before considering learning-focused support at home. Children benefit most when parents focus on routines: teachers can give parents advice about smartphone use, alarm clocks, bedtime and how to manage homework, which can make a real difference.

Middle-class parents are more likely to know the cultural norms of education – “how schools work” – and be able to attend events, ask questions, and respond in ways schools recognise as engagement. By contrast, parents facing insecure work, caring responsibilities, language barriers or negative past experiences of education may engage in less visible ways. We must avoid slipping into deficit views by misinterpreting poverty-related constraints on time or visibility as lack of interest. It's also important to recognise the distinctive strengths that many families bring to school – a potential focus for home visits.

The language we use meanwhile transmits our values. A non-deficit language replaces terms such as “disadvantaged pupils” with pupils from under-resourced (or disadvantaged) backgrounds. The danger with official terms is that they can unconsciously lead to stereotyping, labelling and lower expectations. Agreeing a consistent mutually respectful language about pupils and communities is a practical way to challenge our assumptions.

Relationships do not replace learning – they make learning possible. Amid growing pressures on families, adopting a relationships approach to partnerships is a promising foundation for improving learning, wellbeing and belonging.

Community Partnerships Checklist:

1	Does the school have a strong understanding of its community and use this to build purposeful partnerships?¹⁵
	Good Bets
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually reviewing how the school engages with families, local organisations and services to build trust and develop a clear, place-based understanding of the community, using this insight to adapt practice over time. • Embedding structured listening mechanisms (e.g. community listening events, drop-ins, surveys, trusted intermediaries) so community and family voices directly inform school practices. • Positioning the school as a connector, not a catch-all, with clear and consistent signposting so families can access local health, wellbeing, employment, FE/HE and advice services early and easily. • Aligning partnership work with prevention, recognising that reducing disadvantage before gaps emerge is more effective than late intervention once attainment divides are entrenched.
	Have You Tried?¹⁶
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreeing a locally grounded definition of “pupils from under-resourced backgrounds”, and training staff to understand its implications for communication, expectations and support. • Gathering local data indicators such as those on poverty, deprivation, health, education and employment outcomes, to complement on-the-ground knowledge of your local community and the wider conditions shaping pupils’ lives. • Mapping existing community assets, including parents, alumni, faith groups and local organisations, to avoid duplication and shift from deficit to asset-based thinking. • Supporting or hosting a community hub that brings together services, advice and informal networks in one place - recognising that this may be delivered with partners rather than by the school.
2	Does the school maintain effective and equitable partnerships with families?¹⁷
	Good Bets
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-developing a parent partnership plan with families, setting out shared aims, expectations and boundaries, focused on deepening relationships and trust, and home support for learning, considering that some parents’ own experiences of schooling may have been negative or exclusionary. • Prioritising accessible, two-way communication, avoiding jargon and unnecessary formality, using simple, low-cost communication methods (e.g. text messaging) to sustain connection. • Supporting parents with practical, realistic strategies at home that focus on routines, encouragement, emotional regulation and time management, not direct instruction.

15 See Sim, A. & Elliot Major, L. (2025) for further discussion of structured listening, positioning the school as a local connector, and partnership working. This report also explores the use of local data indicators, community asset mapping, and the hosting of a community hub. Axford, N. et al (2019); Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023 p.127) provide insight into how schools can engage effectively with families (see section on family partnerships). One of the most consistent and robust findings of education research is that variation of pupil outcomes is driven significantly by factors outside the school gates. See for example Hanushek, E. (2016). A longitudinal study in Chicago found that schools with strong parent–community ties were 10 times more likely to improve in maths and four times more likely in reading (Bryk 2020).

16 Sim, A. & Elliot Major, L. (2025) refer to these practices in their study of The Reach Foundation’s cradle-to-career partnership. Further examples and case studies can be found on The Reach Foundation’s website. See below for examples on developing a vulnerability index. Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023) argue for benefits of a non-deficit language, replacing terms such as “disadvantaged pupils” with “pupils from under-resourced backgrounds”. They urge schools to agree a mutually respectful language for pupils and communities. For the full argument, see: Elliot Major, L. (2023) Fixing a broken tongue. Kapp, S.K. et al (2013) show that deficit-based labels undermine wellbeing and reinforce stigma. A good example is Equity Case Study, Pike, J. (2026).

17 Axford, N., et al (2019); Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023 p.127) set out what successful “parent partnerships” are and offer guidance around partnerships with families more generally. Ofsted (2011 p.6) suggests that schools consider auditing, and then using more widely, parents’ skills as a resource to improve the school; Jones, C. et al (2025) find that few teachers have training in working with parents; Stokes, L., et al (2022) offer solutions for two-way communication strategies and strategies which schools can use to support parents at home. Graham-Clay, S. (2024) offers strategies for communicating with parents.

Have You Tried?¹⁸

- For families with whom the school has less engagement, explicitly asking “What’s getting in the way?” rather than “Why aren’t they engaging?”, to surface structural barriers such as work patterns, caring responsibilities, language or past experiences of schooling.
- Working with parent/community volunteers or “community champions” to build bridges with families not engaging with school, ensuring these roles strengthen trust rather than gatekeep access.
- Using relationship-building home visits selectively and carefully, prioritising trust-building rather than instruction, and focusing on pupils from under-resourced backgrounds where relationships may be fragile.
- Reframing parent-teacher meetings as listening-first conversations, where parents share insights early and older pupils may contribute or lead parts of the discussion.
- Offering flexible, relationship-focused contact points (e.g. drop-ins, informal conversations, home visits), recognising that presence in school is not the only form of engagement.

3

Does the school sustain purposeful and equitable partnerships with local organisations, including FE/HE institutions, the local authority, charity partners and employers?¹⁹

Good Bets

- Developing long-term, structured partnerships with universities, employers and FE providers that offer repeated, sustained experiences, rather than one-off encounters.
- Using destinations and progression data, with a specific focus on pupils from under-resourced backgrounds, to identify gaps in access and inform future priorities.
- Designing partnerships with equity in mind, ensuring access does not depend on parental networks, confidence or informal advocacy. Start by auditing who participates in partnership activities, asking: who benefits, who doesn’t, and why?

Have You Tried?²⁰

- Creating regular forums with local authority, FE/HE and community partners (e.g. termly “community breakfasts”) to align expectations, share intelligence and reduce fragmentation around pupils’ pathways.
- Establishing mentoring, workplace or outreach programmes with employers or universities that prioritise pupils least likely to access such opportunities through family connections. Where possible, work with third-sector organisations experienced in developing and delivering these programmes to ensure best practice and avoid reinventing the wheel.
- Building and sustaining an alumni network that provides ongoing guidance, mentoring and navigational insight, particularly for under-served students, and avoiding one-off talks.

18 Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023 p.127) and Sim, A. & Elliot Major, L. (2025) outline strategies to work effectively with parents and the community; understanding their current experiences of working with school and to build bridges. McKie, A. et al (2021) find that home visits enhance student behaviour and attendance; Chang, H. (2018) document relationship-building home visits in the US improving family-school trust. See also Equity Case Study, Featherstone, K. (2026); Ofsted (2011 p.10) and Sim, A. & Elliot Major, L. (2025 p.56) outline ways to conduct parent/teacher meetings and offer contact points with the school.

19 Structured partnerships and sustained experiences are key for equitable provision, as per Education and Employers (2019 p.4); Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2021); Jones, M., at al. (2016) and Social Mobility Commission (2020). Gatsby Charitable Foundation. (2024b) and Department for Education (2025a) outline how use of data and partnership design are integral to equitable access.

20 See examples of forums by The Reach Foundation (2024) and partner schools in Sim, A. & Elliot Major, L. (2025 p.36). Career Ready Impact Report (2023 p.20); Welsh Government (2021) outline how schools can engage with support from outreach programmes and alumni.

4 Does the school enable a diverse range of groups to use school facilities for the benefit of the community?²¹

Good Bets

- Ensuring booking and access processes are simple, transparent and accessible.
- Tracking who uses the space and gathering feedback to identify patterns and barriers, balancing free and discounted use for local groups that have a positive community impact alongside revenue generation for the school.
- Exploring opportunities for on-site wraparound care and promoting available subsidies, prioritising pupils from under-resourced backgrounds where possible.

Have You Tried?²²

- Working with the community to understand their needs and shaping a clear strategy for facility use.
- Co-locating multiple services on site (e.g. food bank and school nurse) to make support easier for families to access.
- Providing incentives such as free trial sessions or referral schemes to encourage greater community use.

5 Does the school intentionally gather and use pupil, staff and parent/carer voice to uncover hidden differences in experience for under-resourced pupils and families?²³

Good Bets

- Considering including in parent/carer surveys a question like “Is your child eligible for Free School Meals?” to be able to track the proportion of FSM-eligible parents who are and aren’t being reached in parent/carer voice activities.
- Using pupil and parent/carer surveys to challenge assumptions about how safe, welcome, and connected pupils and families feel within the school community through a small number of targeted questions, with tracking focused on under-resourced families in particular.
- Designing voice-gathering activities with equity in mind, including consideration of timing, format, language, accessibility, and digital access, to reduce barriers for under-resourced families. This may involve creating opportunities for families to complete surveys in school.

Have You Tried?²⁴

- Establishing pupil advocates, where middle and senior leaders act as “pushy parents” for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds, helping ensure decisions made about a child’s education are in their best interest. These advocates can provide additional scrutiny of information shared with pupils and families and help surface where systems or communication are not working as intended.
- Conducting non-anonymised pupil belonging surveys with select year groups to identify pupils who feel less safe, welcome or connected to the school community, and following up with personalised support.

21 Department of Education Northern Ireland (2024); Sport England (2024a) and Department for Education (2024a) offer suggestions and evidence to support schools in opening up to their local community.

22 ImpactEd (2024) provide suggestions for how to support pupils from under-resourced backgrounds, to ensure that they are proportionately represented in pupil voice activities.

23 Stakeholder voice is key to understanding their experiences of school, as evidenced by Ofsted (2025); Parentkind (2021); Lord, P. et al (2020).

24 ImpactEd (2024) provide suggestions for how to support pupils from under-resourced backgrounds, to ensure that they are proportionately represented in pupil voice activities.

Disadvantaged Inclusion

Culturally inclusive curricula

From an equity perspective, the danger of framing classroom and exam questions in maths around mortgages, second homes or foreign holidays can create unnecessary and unfair barriers to pupils for whom these are alien experiences. For some pupils, the context and terms are familiar. For others, it can impose unnecessary cognitive load unrelated to the mathematical ideas being assessed.

Curriculum equity isn't about abandoning 'powerful knowledge' - here this might be proportional reasoning or compound interest. The central question is not what knowledge is taught, but through which cultural frames it is accessed. Could the same mathematical concepts be taught through contexts such as managing debt or saving for everyday purchases? At the same time, introducing concepts like mortgages carefully and explicitly can open up new horizons, rather than assuming they already form part of pupils' lived experience.

These issues apply across the curriculum: ski slopes and long-haul flights in geography; jam-making in English. All privilege a narrow range of cultural references. Equity does not mean narrowing horizons. All pupils should encounter theatres and art galleries. But it does mean valuing other cultural riches as well: street art, local histories and community knowledge.

In England, debates about curriculum have been strongly shaped by Hirsch-influenced arguments for "knowledge-rich" education. Pupils from less advantaged homes arrive at school unfamiliar with mainstream cultural references, vocabulary and concepts needed to navigate the world. The answer is explicit, systematic teaching of this core.

The problems arise when powerful knowledge is conflated with the middle-class contexts through which it is often taught. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire famously captured this tension in his critique of the "banking model" of education, where learners are treated as empty vessels to be filled with elite culture. His work reminds us that how knowledge is transmitted also matters.

Large-scale studies in the United States have shown that culturally inclusive curricula, reflecting pupils' racial and community histories are linked with improved attendance and academic achievement.

Curriculum equity extends beyond the classroom. Access to a broad range of extra-curricular activities, including sport, music, drama, art, volunteering and clubs can develop confidence, belonging, teamwork and resilience. These attributes are becoming even more important for life prospects in a rapidly changing world. Safeguarding the wellbeing and socio-emotional development of pupils is necessary for both academic and life success.

Often it is these activities that most powerfully build pupils' sense of belonging and self-esteem. An equity lens asks us to see the experience from the child's perspective: do they feel shame because they lack the right kit or materials, or are they excluded because they cannot afford the bus home after an after-school club? An extended school day, delivered by expert practitioners, can help to level the playing field.

Curriculum is not just a body of knowledge or desirable attributes; it is a set of cultural signals about whose experiences count and who education is for. Equity lies not in choosing between knowledge and relevance, but in teaching in ways that engages all our pupils.



Disadvantaged Inclusion Checklist:

1	Does the school offer a broad and balanced curriculum that supports all pupils, including those from under-resourced backgrounds, to access and succeed in every subject?²⁵
	Good Bets
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guaranteeing access to the full curriculum for all pupils, actively resisting early narrowing or restricted pathways that disproportionately affect pupils from under-resourced backgrounds. • Identifying where background knowledge, language, cultural references or home support are assumed, and building in scaffolding, pre-teaching and explicit instruction to address barriers. • Ensuring subject leaders select resources that reflect the diverse communities and lived experiences of all pupils. • Protecting arts, sport, technical and creative subjects as core entitlement, recognising their role in wellbeing, belonging and long-term outcomes, not as optional enrichment.
	Have You Tried?²⁶
2	Are pupils from under-resourced backgrounds able to participate fully in extra-curricular activities, trips and enrichment?²⁷
	<p>Good Bets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning inclusion at the point of design, considering cost, transport, equipment, timing and care responsibilities before activities are launched, and putting in place subsidies or support to enable participation at low or no cost. • Appointing an “Equity Lead” within your leadership team to maintain oversight of participation patterns and remove common identified barriers. • Ensuring pupils from under-resourced backgrounds are systematically prioritised for trips, clubs, music, sport, and enrichment activities not just academic interventions.

25 Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023 p.153) advocate for a broad and representative curriculum and menu of extra-curricular activities which benefits all pupils. Harford, S. (2020) provides evidence for access to the full curriculum for all pupils. Dee, T.S. et al (2017) show that curriculum approaches in the US which are culturally inclusive to race can lead to improved educational outcomes. See also Freire, P. (2017) Frenzel, A.C. et al (2021) recognise the important role of arts and sports in educational equity. Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023) also champion an equity approach to teaching and learning-identifying gaps in critical prior knowledge for learning and ensuring that curricula represent the pupil and staff body. See also Equity Case Study Le Bredonchel, A. (2026).

26 Yemini, M. et al (2022); Dell, S. (2024); Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023) and Equity Case Study Le Bredonchel, A. (2026) all offer evidence-informed suggestions for reviewing and making curriculum content more equitable.

27 Extra-curricular activities, trips and enrichment are all key components of an equitable education offering. Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023 p.132) outline the evidence in favour of systematic equity planning in this area.

Have You Tried?²⁸

- Collecting data and using pupil voice on extra-curricular provision to identify gaps in participation and analyse the soft skills pupils gain.
- Making subsidies automatic rather than opt-in to reduce stigma and reliance on parental confidence.
- Creating equipment banks and shared pools of resources that learners can borrow, use, or keep temporarily, so participation is not dependent on family resources.
- Working with neighbouring schools to broaden the range of available activities for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds and to share costs.

3

Does the school proactively manage relationships, pastoral care and well-being for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds?²⁹

Good Bets

- Tracking wellbeing, belonging and attendance together, particularly for pupils facing multiple barriers.
- Ensuring pupils from vulnerable backgrounds have individual plans outlining strengths, needs and support strategies.
- Providing and proactively promoting on-site, stigma-free, easy access to counselling or mentoring, embedded within whole-school relational practice.

Have You Tried?³⁰

- Reviewing whether every pupil has a member of school staff who knows them well and can act as a “champion” on their behalf, ensuring that their well-being, outcomes and best interests are being looked after across various aspects of school life.
- Creating leadership expectations for staff to build informal, respectful relationships with pupils—engaging in informal conversations about pupils’ interests, hobbies and challenges outside of school. Nurture relationships based on mutual respect and connection, avoiding a deficit approach. Creating informal, open-access spaces where pupils can connect with staff without being “in trouble” (e.g. crafts, clubs).
- Using strengths-based pupil profiles to ensure teaching, pastoral support and expectations are shaped by what pupils can do, rather than assumptions about background.

28 Sim, A. & Elliot Major, L. (2025 p.9/p.45); Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023 p.87); Mazzoli-Smith, L. & Todd, L. (2016); Hewstone (2023 p.9-19) provide low cost, high impact suggestions to support equitable participation, including using data, creating equipment banks and building partnerships with other schools.

29 Giving equitable attention to the pastoral care of pupils experiencing vulnerability and those from under-resourced backgrounds is important for their success at school. See: Gregson Family Foundation (2019); Evidence Based Practice Unit (2024); Department for Education (2025c) and British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (2023).

30 Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023 p.39) and The Reach Foundation (2026) advocate for children to have a “champion” in school. Getting to know pupils and building strengths-based pupil profiles can also support pupils without making potentially harmful assumptions. See: National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (2022); South Tyneside Council (2026). See also: Sim, A. & Elliot Major, L. (2025 p.4). Ellis, B. J. et al (2022) make the case for strength-based approaches – not just in treatment but in how educators and systems view and engage with pupils.

4

Does the school have inclusive policies that promote a positive environment for all pupils so that expectations, routines and systems are explicit, fair and consistently applied?³¹

Good Bets

- Considering committing to a fair admissions pledge and ensuring admissions practices are transparent and inclusive.
- Making routines, expectations and behaviour norms explicit to all pupils. Prior knowledge of what is deemed to be “acceptable behaviour” should not be assumed.
- Monitoring exclusions, suspensions, managed moves, elective home education and persistent absence with particular attention to pupils from under-resourced backgrounds to better understand patterns of exclusion and how to address these.

Have You Tried?³²

- Using restorative approaches alongside clear, consistent boundaries to understand misunderstandings or unmet expectations.
- Participating in regional or national disadvantage networks to benchmark practice.



31 Inclusive policies, from the point of entry to school are key to promoting a positive environment for all pupils and their families, for example: Sutton Trust (2025). Education Endowment Foundation (2019); Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023 p.107); Department for Education (2024a) outline the importance of inclusive behaviour systems and policies, and their effective monitoring. Gill, K., et al (2024).

32 Warin, J., & Hibbin, R. (2020) and Education Scotland (2021) outline restorative approaches. See also: Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023) who outline this use of restorative approaches and clear, consistent boundaries. Many regional disadvantage networks are open for practitioners to join, for example: South-West Disadvantage Network.

Disadvantaged Outcomes

Evidence informed equity

From an equity perspective, the evidence suggests that knowing more, not less about pupils is a good thing. In recent decades, national policies in England have rested on the assumption that acknowledging some pupils are disadvantaged automatically leads to the “soft bigotry of low expectations” in which poverty is treated as an excuse for poor attainment. The real issue is not whether teachers hold information about pupils, but whether that information leads to crude labels, or to action that reduces barriers to learning.

Terms such as Pupil Premium or disadvantaged students can easily become blunt, deficit-laden labels. On their own, they tell us little about a child’s lived experience, the specific impediments they face, or the strengths they bring. An equity approach does not ask teachers to focus on who is “disadvantaged”, but to understand which pupils are encountering additional barriers at a given moment, and what practical actions can remove those barriers without lowering expectations.

In practical terms this means systematically scrutinising the progress and achievement of learners and assessing precisely what hurdles or hardships may have hindered them. A pupil whose progress stalls may prompt questions about low literacy levels or instability at home. A home visit might reveal repeated moves between temporary accommodation, indicating a need for routine, targeted support. A pupil in a crowded household with limited study space may benefit from extended learning time. These insights allow schools to intervene before it’s too late – adjusting support rather than misinterpreting barriers as low motivation or capability.

Effective classroom teaching depends not only on knowing where pupils are in their learning, but also on whether the conditions for receiving feedback are in place. Some studies suggest pupils take one of two broad pathways: a growth pathway, where feedback is interpreted as information for improvement, or a well-being (or survival) pathway, where it is experienced as a threat and triggers avoidance and surface compliance. From an equity perspective, the danger is obvious: we risk blaming pupils for not responding when the issue is the conditions of learning.

Studies also point to unconscious biases in classroom interactions, with teachers sometimes acting differently towards pupils from under-resourced backgrounds, exuding less warmth, giving less eye contact and providing lower-quality feedback.

This is why setting can be a high-risk strategy: grouping decisions often hinge on subjective judgements about behaviour, confidence and “readiness”, which tend to systematically underrate pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Today’s equity challenge is not the same as it was twenty years ago. Pupils are growing up in more unequal and unstable environments, shaped by multiple, intersecting pressures, from rising in-work poverty, housing precarity, to a lack of basic entitlements.

An equity-informed approach does not lower expectations; it raises professional empathy and understanding. Used well, deeper knowledge of pupils can guide scaffolding and support, rather than stereotyping. Otherwise, high expectations risk becoming hollow promises.

Disadvantaged Outcomes Checklist:

1

Is the school deploying staff effectively to secure the best outcomes for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds, ensuring this reduces rather than reinforces inequalities?³³

Good Bets

- Ensuring pupils are taught by subject specialists wherever possible and monitoring where supply teaching affects particular groups, ensuring that pupils from under-resourced backgrounds are not disproportionately affected.
- Deploying the strongest teachers to classes with the highest proportion of pupils from under-resourced backgrounds.
- Treating staff retention, induction and coaching as equity strategies, not HR issues. Investing in people strategies such as workload management and incremental coaching or mentoring can maintain high-quality staffing.

Have You Tried?³⁴

- Conducting an equity skills audit to match staff strengths to pupil needs.
- Considering apprenticeship or training routes to diversify and strengthen the workforce so that it is more representative of the local community. Developing “grow-your-own” routes can stabilise the workforce.
- Tracking which pupils are taught by which staff across year groups and subjects, asking whether the same pupils repeatedly experience less experienced, less stable or non-specialist teaching.
- Developing an induction programme to ensure all new staff understand the school's equity priorities as a shared responsibility, not a specialist role.

2

Are teaching and learning practices consistently high-quality and inclusive of pupils from under-resourced backgrounds?³⁵

Good Bets

- Explicitly and consistently teaching “the rules of success” in each subject (how to revise, how to write, how to practise), rather than assuming pupils already know.
- Establishing a school taskforce of teachers to improve consistency of teacher-pupil feedback across classrooms, focusing on pupil misunderstandings and next steps, building in structured time for pupils to respond to feedback, particularly those who may not receive academic guidance outside school.
- Reviewing grouping, selection or streaming practices through an equity lens to avoid inflexible arrangements that widen gaps, being aware of unconscious biases in assessing the capabilities of pupils from different backgrounds.
- Ensuring all pupils access stretch, challenge and targeted academic support, including high-quality tutoring where appropriate.

33 Effective allocation of staff is key to pupil success. See: Department for Education (2016); Elliot Major, L. & Higgins, S. (2019). Coe, R., et al (2014). Demie, F., & Mclean, C. (2015); Macleod, S., et al (2015). See also: Sharples, J. et al (2015); Elliot Major, L., & Briant, E. (2023 p.69); Hanushek, E., et al (1998) propose people strategies for equity.

34 Education Endowment Foundation (2021b) and Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023) provide suggestions for schools to adopt a strategic, equity-focused approach to their workforce and embedding equity as a shared responsibility through induction and ongoing practice.

35 Elliot Major, L. & Higgins, S. (2019); Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023 p.73); Cullen, S., et al (2018); Education Endowment Foundation (2017); Demie, F. & Mclean, C. (2016) all provide evidence for and practical suggestions to support schools in creating and maintaining high quality and inclusive teaching and learning strategies. Effective feedback in the classroom is a key equity lever for pupils facing extra barriers because it makes expectations clear, builds confidence, and helps teachers adjust support so learning can move forward. It must be inclusive of all pupils. See: Elliot Major, L. & Higgins, S. (2019), Hattie, J. & Timperley, H. (2007), Smith, H. & Higgins, S. (2006), Kluger, A. N. & DeNisi, A. (1996), Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (n.d.). Setting is a high-risk equity strategy – grouping decisions often rely on subjective judgements about behaviour and ‘readiness’, which systematically disadvantage pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds. See: Gamoran, A. (1992) and Taylor et al (2018).

Have You Tried?³⁶

- Embedding metacognitive talk into everyday teaching so teachers verbalise their thinking, helping pupils internalise learning strategies that more advantaged peers often acquire informally.
- Recognising and celebrating contributions to school life, such as positive behaviours like kindness and commitment. Highlighting vocational and practical achievements alongside academic prizes in celebration events, presenting vocational awards first, for example.
- Providing staff training on recognising and mitigating unconscious biases, supported by practical strategies such as anonymised assessment.

3

Does the school understand how pupils from under-resourced backgrounds progress from entry to exit?³⁷

Good Bets

- Improving pupils' experience of transition by appointing a specific staff member to look after the process, coordinating with feeder primary schools to ensure that key information about pupils is passed on, especially where this relates to equity. Schools should treat transition as a process with multiple touchpoints rather than as a single event, for example seeking advice from primaries where a pupil's progress declines after transition.
- Providing a clear, continuous assessment policy, including training staff around strengths and limitations of standardised assessments. Interrogating potential barriers to access for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds.

Have You Tried?³⁸

- Ensuring continuity in learning at transition, for example by developing bridging projects between KS2 and KS3, with particular focus on pupils from under-resourced backgrounds who may have less access to informal guidance, academic support or familiarity with secondary school expectations.
- Using a vulnerabilities index or weighted register to identify and track pupils requiring additional support.
- Gathering attitudinal data for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds (e.g. confidence, aspiration) alongside attainment, asking them to self-report on their progress to gain qualitative data to support attainment data.
- Analysing patterns among pupils not progressing as expected and identifying resourcing or access barriers and using this to create an understanding of what pupil disadvantage might look like in your specific community context.

- 36 A range of evidence suggests that teacher judgements can systematically underrate pupils from under-resourced backgrounds, alongside subtle differences in warmth, eye contact and the quality of feedback provided in the classroom. See: Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023); Lee, M. W. & Newton, P. (2021). Olczyk, M., et al (2022, p. 443–468), Urhahne, D. & Wijnia, L. (2021), Nuthall, G., (2007). The aim is to remove hidden barriers to learning, ensuring all pupils have fair access to challenge, support, and recognition.
- 37 Sim, A. & Elliot Major, L. (2025 p.5) and Equity Case Study Enhanced Transition Sadgrove, A. (2026) explore how transition practices are key to the success of pupils from under-resourced backgrounds. Evidence for the importance of assessment is provided by The Key (2022). See also: Macleod, S., et al (2015 p.4); Popham, W.J. (2009, p. 4); Kime, S. (2016); Rethinking Assessment (2023).
- 38 Hattie, J. and Timperley, H. (2007) show that effective teaching depends not only on knowing where pupils are in their learning, but also on whether the conditions for receiving feedback are in place. The EEF's review of evidence on behaviour policies stresses that effective approaches depend on understanding individual circumstances and implementing responses consistently and well. Education Endowment Foundation (2021c). Arguments for strengthening pupil support and progression by proactively identifying vulnerability, ensuring smooth transitions, and using both academic and attitudinal data to understand and address barriers to progress within the local community context can be found in Council for the curriculum, examinations and assessment (2022) and Equity Case Study Enhanced Transition Sadgrove, A. (2026). See also: Somerset County Council (2011); Equity Case Study Weighted Entitlement Banks, S. (2026); The Key (2022) and Education Endowment Foundation (2024).

4

Do pupils from under-resourced backgrounds have equitable access to the resources they need to learn?³⁹

Good Bets

- Ensuring equitable access to digital learning resources, including devices, connectivity solutions (such as data support or dongles), and secure platforms, so that all pupils can access homework, independent study, and catch-up learning beyond the school day.
- Providing homework clubs or supervised study to ensure pupils have a space and support for independent work.
- Offering targeted interventions, such as tutoring, prioritised for pupils who would not otherwise have access.

Have You Tried?⁴⁰

- Considering poverty-proofing strategies to remove hidden costs from the school day.
- Using the results of local asset mapping to signpost parents to potential sources of support with resourcing, such as second-hand uniform sales, ensuring that pupils' basic needs are met so that they can succeed during a school day.
- Coordinating holiday support for pupils where feasible, exploring partnerships to mitigate learning loss, food insecurity or wellbeing pressures without over-extending school staff.
- Creating mentoring opportunities using alumni or local volunteers for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds where a need has been identified.

5

Does the school have and regularly review an attendance improvement plan that includes targeted support for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds and considers relational practice?⁴¹

Good Bets

- Developing a clear attendance policy with rapid response systems and assigning a staff attendance mentor where helpful.
- Avoiding purely punitive or compliance-led approaches that disproportionately penalise pupils facing structural barriers, and treating attendance as a learning and belonging issue, not just a behaviour issue.
- Providing or signposting clear guidance to parents on attendance expectations, including sickness thresholds.

39 Elliot Major, L. & Briant, E. (2023 p.114-115) provide evidence for access to digital technology for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds. Elliot Major, L. & Higgins, S. (2019) and the Education Endowment Foundation (2021a) highlights that the impact of homework varies and is strongest when tasks are purposeful, well-designed, and supported, particularly for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds. Nickow, A., et al (2020). Kraft, M. A. & Falken, G., T. (2021); Elliot Major, L., et al (2024) make the case for tutoring as a targeted intervention for equity.

40 Children North East (2024) provide guidance for Poverty Proofing the school day. Sim, A. & Elliot Major, L. (2025) and The Reach Foundation (2024) provide evidence-informed guidance on and examples of the use of local asset mapping, partnership working, and mentoring approaches to support pupils from under-resourced backgrounds.

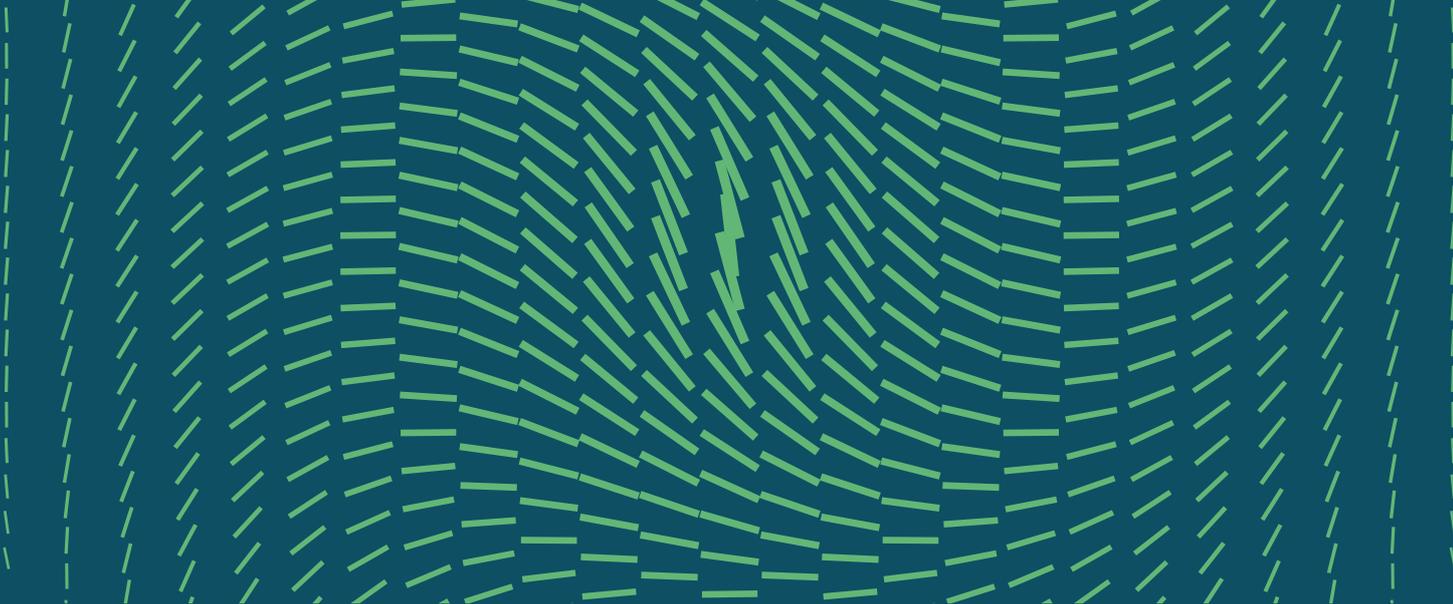
41 Macleod, S., et al (2015); Department for Education (2024b); Gunter, T. & Makinson, L. (2023); Elliot Major, L., et al (2020); Adams, R. & Aguillar Garcia, C. (2023) and Department for Education (2024b) provide guidance on developing clear yet compassionate attendance policies, including the use of rapid response systems and, where appropriate, assigning staff attendance mentors. Guidance on attendance is also key. For example, see: Sandwell Borough Council (2025); Islington Council (2020); NHS (2024).

Have You Tried?⁴²

- Exploring phased returns, flexible start times, or check-in/check-out routines for pupils struggling to attend consistently, rather than all-or-nothing expectations.
- Working with pupils to identify root causes of persistent absence and establishing practical routines or support solutions. For instance, interviewing pupils to try and establish the reasons for their absence by asking questions such as: “what is your experience of lunch/break times?”; “is it easy or difficult for you to get to school in the mornings?”.
- Considering supportive ways of engaging families on attendance issues: for example, conducting attendance meetings in neutral, welcoming spaces to reduce pressure for families or inviting families to engage with an external community worker in the first instance to initiate open-ended discussions focused on uncovering the root causes of attendance issues.



⁴² These suggestions to adopt a flexible, relational approach to improving attendance by identifying the underlying causes of absence, working collaboratively with pupils and families, and implementing supportive, tailored strategies rather than rigid, punitive expectations is supported by guidance and evidence from Gunter, T. & Makinson, L. (2023); Elliot Major, L., & Briant, E. (2023, p.127), Sim, A., & Elliot Major, L. (2025), and the Department for Education (2024b).



Phase 2: National Roll-Out

Phase 2: National Roll-Out

1 How Schools Can Use the Scorecard

The Equity Scorecard, Version 2.0, is now available for all secondary schools to use, free of charge, with resources and guidance provided on our website.⁴³ Schools can choose to engage with the Scorecard independently or to work with SWSMC as part of a supported programme that is running through the academic year 2025-26 (Phase 2).

Working with us in Phase 2: Schools can opt to participate in our coordinated programme by registering via **Microsoft Forms**.

Independent use: Schools may download the Scorecard and supporting resources to use at their own pace, opting out of benchmarking opportunities and the later evaluation.

Both routes are designed to empower schools to strengthen their equity practice.

Why Work with Us?

While the Scorecard can be used independently, many schools will find added value in joining the supported programme with SWSMC. Working with us provides:

- **A peer network:** Access to support from the SWSMC team and a community of practice consisting of open webinar sessions with peer schools also using the Scorecard.
- **Benchmarking insights:** Comparative analysis that helps schools understand their progress in relation to peers, highlighting strengths and areas for growth.
- **Events:** Participating schools will be invited to SWSMC-hosted events relating to equity in education.
- **Contribution to evaluation:** The opportunity to contribute to the wider evaluation of the Scorecard by providing feedback and reflections to help shape its continued development and impact.

Key changes for Phase 2, compared with the pilot:

Phase 2 of the Equity Scorecard introduces several practical changes to make the process more school-led, collaborative, and scalable. These include:

- **Group webinars:** Rather than one-to-one onboarding, schools now sign up via Microsoft Forms and can access resources on the SWSMC website in an asynchronous way. Across the academic year, schools can engage through regular half-termly webinars, which act as markers of time and provide structured opportunities to share practice, reflect, and learn from peers.
- **Self-directed data compilation:** Schools take responsibility for gathering and analysing their own contextual data from the previous academic year, supported by clear guidance and signposts to public data sources. We believe that this is an important part of the process for schools to fully engage with their data.
- **Clearer guidance and resources:** Streamlined instructions and signposting to public datasets make it easier for schools to navigate the process independently. Schools will download a Scorecard template (in Excel) to complete for themselves, which includes a feature that automatically colour codes measures in green, amber or red based on progress and comparison with regional and national benchmarks.
- **Open case study submission:** Schools/trusts will be able to submit examples of good practice via an open form on the SWSMC website and will be able to read Equity Case Studies from other schools and trusts in a library of case studies that we will host online.

⁴³ See: <https://southwestsocialmobility.com/equity-scorecard-for-schools>

These updates reflect our belief that meaningful engagement with data and the resources provided are central to schools and leaders building an equity mindset. By placing schools in the lead, these changes strengthen ownership, makes the Scorecard more adaptable to local contexts, and embed reflective practice into everyday school life. Ultimately, these changes will help ensure the model is scalable and sustainable, while giving every participating school the tools and context to make equity a lived reality for their pupils.

2 Key Milestone Timeline for Phase 2

Phase 2 of the Equity Scorecard runs across the academic year 2025-26, with a rhythm of activity designed to support schools embed equity practice, reflect on progress, and share learning with peers.

Webinars and key points in the timeline are listed below. Webinars will generally consist of:

- 30 minutes of questions – participants will be given the opportunity to submit questions via Microsoft Forms up to one week prior to the webinar
- 30 minutes of discussion – about upcoming tasks, good practice and guest speakers

Half Term 1 (Oct–Dec 2025)

- First webinar to introduce the Scorecard and early reflection prompts
- Registration for Phase 2 opens (via Microsoft Forms on our website after the first webinar)
- Schools are introduced to the process of parent/carer evening data collection

Half Term 3 (Jan–Feb 2026)

- Schools can download their Scorecard template and begin to complete it using their own compiled data
- Second webinar with peer discussion and reflection
- Schools can begin to complete the self-assessment checklists

Half Term 4 (Feb–Mar/Apr 2026)

- Schools receive the Phase 2 checklists to support completion
- Third webinar for ongoing collaboration and sharing approaches
- South West mini-conference in Exeter (by invitation)

Half Term 5 (Apr–May 2026)

- Preparations for end-of-year review and opportunity to sign up to evaluation
- Fourth webinar presenting Equity Case Studies
- Schools submit data for benchmarking

Half Term 6 (June–July 2026)

- Mini-conference (online/in person TBC) to consolidate learning, showcase outcomes and celebrate progress whilst sharing recommendations for the future

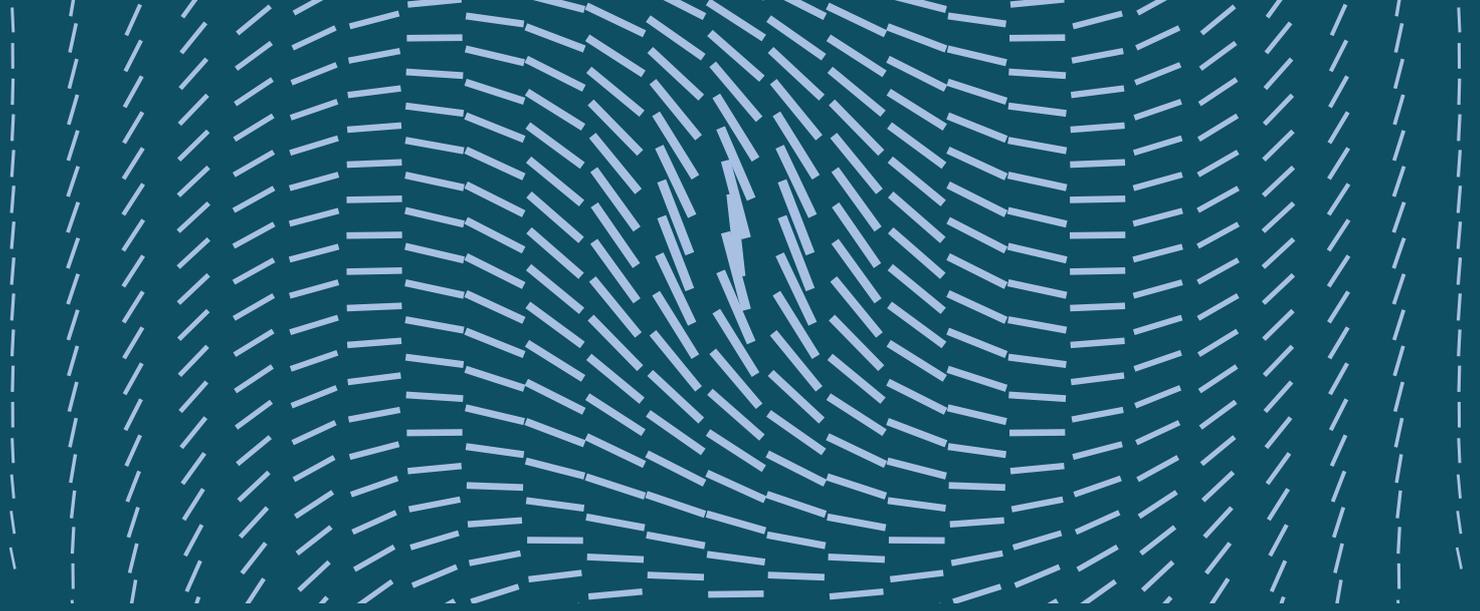
(July–Oct 2026)

- SWSMC evaluation of Phase 2

Webinar topics:

- 1 Onboarding/getting started - opening conference
- 2 Data sourcing and reflection, completing your scorecard
- 3 Mid-year check-in, reflections from early checklist completion
- 4 Parent/carer evening data and case study sharing
- 5 Mini-conference to close





Theory of Change

Theory of Change

Theories of change (ToC) investigate how complex interventions might produce particular outcomes. Because there is no simple causal association between the intervention and potential impacts, ToCs set out the mechanisms through which an intervention might lead to desired outcomes and the assumptions involved.⁴⁴

This ToC explains how we envision the Equity Scorecard working towards the ultimate goal of achieving educational equity and improving outcomes for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds. The Equity Scorecard is built on the logic that when schools are supported to gather contextual data about disadvantage and consciously reflect on equity within school practices, they will be better able to support pupils from under-resourced backgrounds. In particular, we envisage the Scorecard promoting stronger community partnerships, targeted action to support pupils facing additional barriers to their learning, and the embedding of equitable practice in both strategic and everyday decision-making.

This TOC is an initial attempt to map the mechanisms through which use of the Scorecard might support the SWSMC's aim to improve life prospects for young people from under-resourced backgrounds.⁴⁵ We plan to refine it as schools continue to use the Scorecard, and as we learn more about how the Scorecard changes practice on the ground in schools. While this TOC focuses on change at the individual school level, our hope is that the Scorecard has wider systems effects within a region as take-up grows and groups of schools consider equity from the perspective of all children living in that area.

1. Situation

Educational inequity remains a persistent challenge in England⁴⁶. Pupils from under-resourced backgrounds are more likely to face barriers related to attainment, attendance, behaviour, inclusion, wellbeing and access to wider opportunities. In 2024/25, only 44% of FSM eligible pupils in England achieved a grade 4 and above in both their maths and English GCSEs, compared to 72% of their FSM peers.⁴⁷ This situation is particularly acute in the South West, where, last year, only 40% of “disadvantaged” pupils did so.⁴⁸

Key challenges include:

- Persistent gaps in academic outcomes, attendance, exclusions, and post-16 destinations.⁴⁹ In many areas, gaps are widening or stagnant.
- Under-representation in school decision-making from pupils from under-resourced backgrounds, school leaders and teachers responsible for equity, and families and communities.
- High-stakes accountability systems can create perverse incentives, where schools or trusts improve measurable outcomes by limiting inclusion.
- Regional and local contexts: While inequity exists nationwide, it is particularly pronounced in regions like the South West. Even within multi-academy trusts or at local authority level, schools can show very different patterns, highlighting the need for school-level, context-specific reflection.

44 Kerr, K., Dyson, A., & Raffo, C. (2014).

45 At a system level, we also expect that shared evidence across schools and trusts will support more coherent regional and national strategies and inform national policy conversations about equity and accountability.

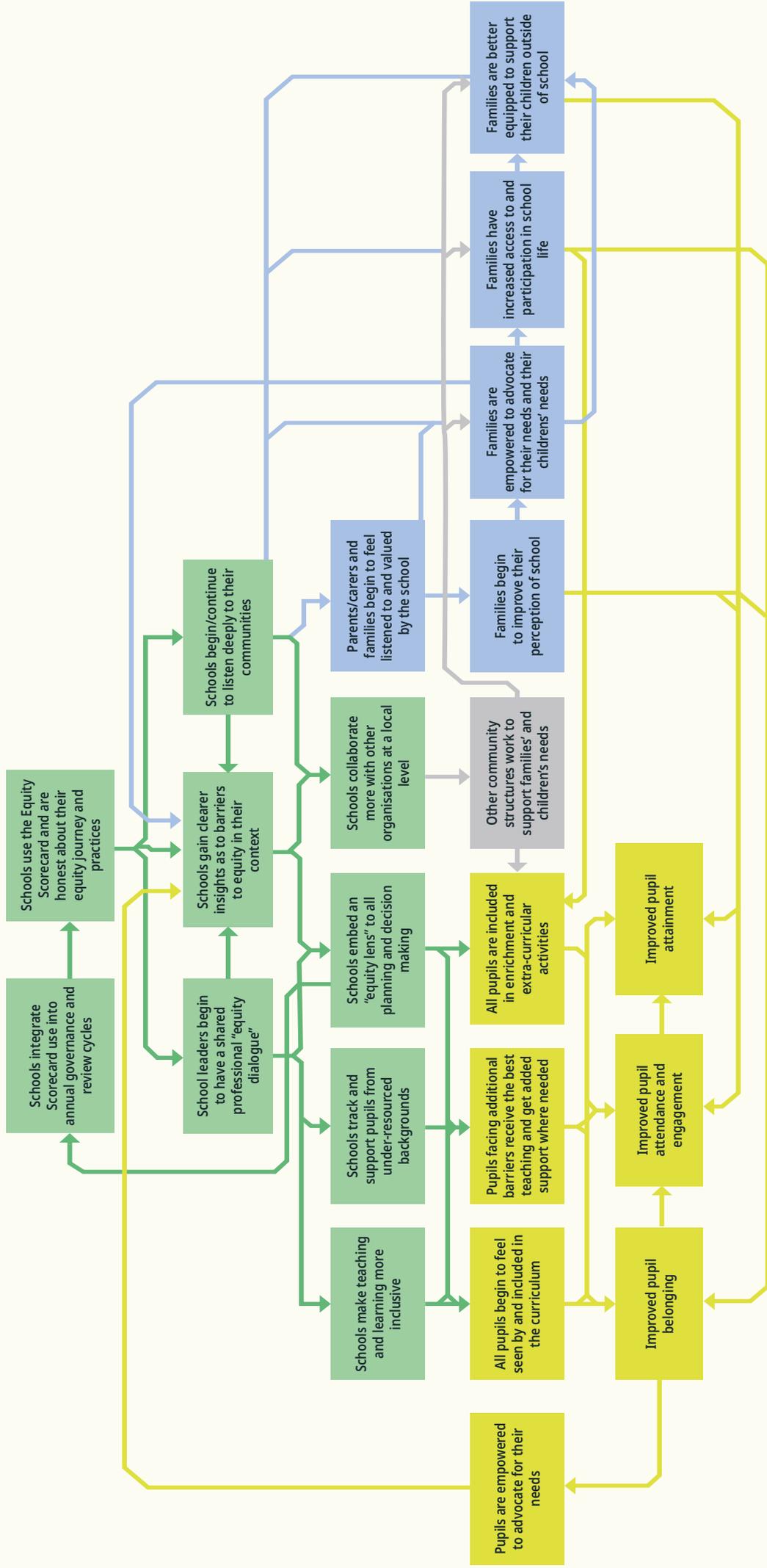
46 For example, Sim, A., Brooks, B., & Elliot Major, L. (2025).

47 Department for Education (2025b). See: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/6ed99442-c30d-4e83-95d4-08de29f25240>

48 Sim, A., Brooks, B., & Elliot Major, L. (2025). “Disadvantaged” pupils is a technical term that refers to pupils that have been on free school meals in the last 6 years (FSM6) or have been in care at any point (CLA/LAC).

49 For example: Sim, A., Brooks, B., & Elliot Major, L. (2025).

START



- Wider pressures: A complex mix of structural, contextual, and school-level factors, including economic pressures on families and gaps in wider service provision, which can make it difficult for school leaders to know how to address disadvantage in their own context.
- Lack of prioritisation and insight from existing accountability metrics. Current systems often focus on headline outcomes only, making it difficult for schools to allocate resources to where they matter most for equity. In focusing on outcomes, they also often fail to equip schools with the insights needed to target barriers effectively. As a result, entrenched patterns of inequity continue to shape participation, experience, and outcomes.

This starting situation has shaped the design of The Equity Scorecard.

2. Aims

The Equity Scorecard aims to provide schools with a robust self-assessment framework anchored by public data and structured professional reflection, to help leaders develop a deeper understanding of their equity performance and identify improvement priorities. Over time, aggregated Scorecard insights could shape local and national policy debates and contribute to more equitable outcomes for pupils facing disadvantage.

It is important to note that the Scorecard does not change pupil outcomes directly. Its contribution lies in strengthening the decision-making, prioritisation processes, and systems that shape those outcomes. By structuring reflection, consolidating data and creating a routine mechanism for reviewing progress, the Scorecard aims to help schools identify barriers earlier, plan targeted actions and monitor improvement more consistently. Over time, these shifts in practice are expected to contribute to improved experiences and outcomes for pupils facing the greatest barriers.

3. Intended Outcomes

Short-term: shifts in understanding and perspective

Once schools complete the Equity Scorecard process, we expect immediate shifts in awareness, understanding and professional dialogue among school and, in some cases, trust leaders. Leaders will gain a clearer insight into how disadvantage manifests in their setting, supported by the structured checklists and combined data offer.

The process surfaces any blind spots, challenges assumptions and builds confidence in identifying strengths and gaps.

In the immediate term, some practical changes may also be initiated – such as allocating a staff member to oversee equity or updating the school's PP strategy, as described in the pilot findings. In some cases, schools will initiate immediate structural responses, such as introducing hardship funds to mitigate financial barriers, designating a senior leader responsible for equity, or increasing direct engagement with families through approaches such as home visits. These early actions signal a shift from awareness to intentional practice.

Medium-term: changes to systems and behaviours

In the medium term, deeper understanding is expected to translate into changes to planning, decision-making and organisational systems. We expect the wider staff body to begin to develop a shared language around equity and a clearer sense of what effective practice looks like.

Schools will start to “do” equity: they may adapt improvement plans, refine pastoral and curriculum structures, or strengthen community partnership strategies based on Scorecard insights. Trusts may begin using the Scorecard to facilitate cross-school collaboration, peer support and shared accountability. Over time, the Scorecard may become integrated into annual school improvement, enabling leaders to track progress across successive years and compare findings across schools within a trust. This repeated use is expected to deepen understanding.

Schools and trusts may also use Scorecard findings to inform governance discussions with local governing bodies, trustees and regional directors. In doing so, equity will become embedded within governance oversight and challenge, strengthening accountability for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds beyond individual leaders. The Scorecard may also serve as a structured reference point during Ofsted inspection preparation, supporting schools to articulate their approach to disadvantage in a coherent and evidence-informed way.

Long-term: impact on pupils from under-resourced backgrounds

Over multiple cycles, repeated use of the Scorecard is expected to support more equitable outcomes for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds and their families. Schools are expected to build stronger relationships with families who have traditionally been less engaged in school life, enhancing belonging and opportunity for pupils. They are also expected to build stronger relationships with other organisations in their local communities, strengthening systems of local support for families. Gaps in attainment, attendance, participation and inclusion are expected to narrow as leaders embed more responsive and effective equitable practices. Through repeated cycles of structured reflection and action, schools are expected to build increasingly responsive systems that address disadvantage in a sustained way.

At a system level, shared evidence across schools and trusts will support more coherent regional and national strategies and inform national policy conversations about equity and accountability.

4. Rationale and Assumptions

The Scorecard is based on assumptions about participants, systems and engagement. These pre-conditions must already be in place, or be reasonably achievable, for the programme to lead to the desired outcomes. These include:

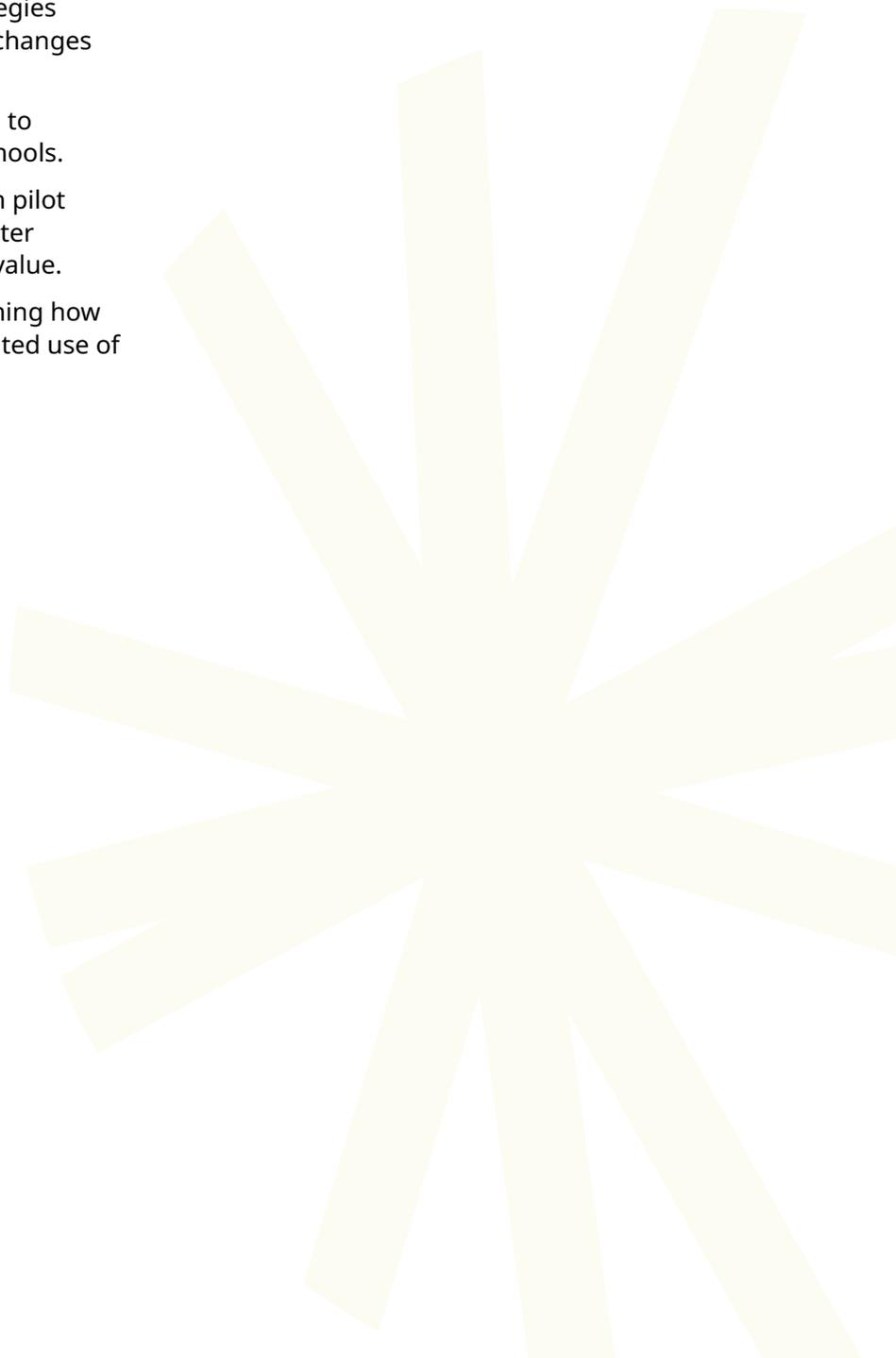
- Schools' capacity and willingness to engage including staff being open to engaging with equity practices and not seeing equity as an add-on or low priority. Schools staying engaged and motivated in equity work, especially with competing priorities.
- School leaders' openness to reflection and challenge. School leaders need to genuinely want to improve equity and take ownership of the findings. Leadership stability, including turnover of headteachers or senior staff, can affect continuity of engagement.
- Schools being honest in their self-assessments, rather than viewing the scorecard as an external judgement.
- The Equity Scorecard tool providing a strong enough evidence base to identify issues and drive improvement. An improved understanding of disadvantage amongst school leaders translating into practical on-the-ground action and whole-school cultural change.
- Schools understanding that improving outcomes for under-resourced pupils benefits all learners and therefore seeing equity as a whole-school improvement strategy.
- Schools acting on identified gaps, rather than gatekeeping or avoiding changes that are operationally difficult. Schools being able to effectively implement equity practices such as those suggested in the checklists.
- The policy environment remaining broadly supportive of equity work, as accountability frameworks shift. Policy changes at national or regional level, including changes to accountability frameworks, school inspections, or funding for disadvantaged pupils may have strong effects.
- The reliability of public data and data system constraints, such as changes to DfE datasets or schools' internal platforms.
- Meaningful opportunities for family and community engagement and partnership. Local context, such as demographics, community characteristics or external pressures on families may affect this. Wider economic or social pressures (for example cost-of-living challenges) that disproportionately affect under-resourced families may influence long-term outcomes.
- Trust- and system-level interest in equity-focused improvement. Trust-level priorities and cycles may support or compete with prioritisation of the Scorecard. Competing workload demands, including other improvement initiatives, statutory requirements or crises can reduce available capacity.
- Schools collaborating with others to share practice and learning.

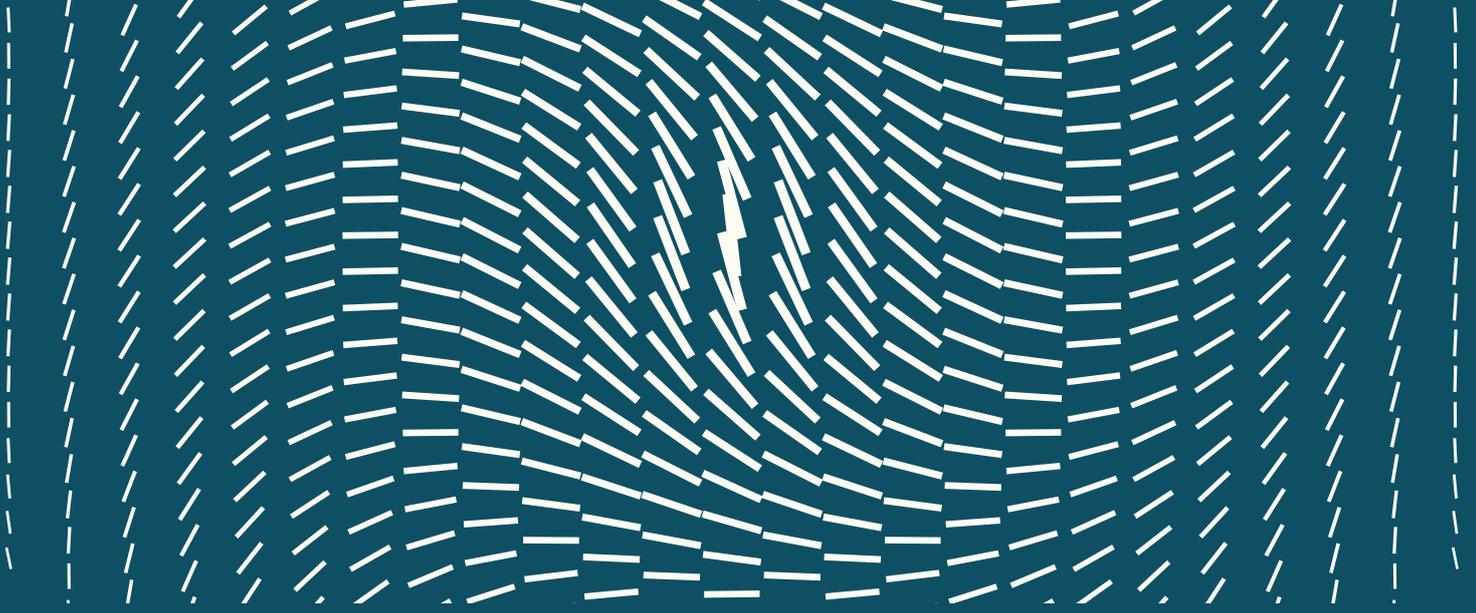
5. Ongoing Evaluation

Continued evaluation activities will explore whether the Scorecard is leading to the intended short, medium and long-term outcomes. A process evaluation for Phase 2 will monitor engagement with the Scorecard, the quality of checklist discussions and the ways schools integrate findings into improvement planning. Future evaluations will include:

- Engagement with a selection of schools to review school documentation, including School Improvement Plans, Pupil Premium strategies and internal monitoring logs, to identify changes influenced by Scorecard insights.
- Analysis of Scorecard data benchmarking to identify patterns over time and across schools.
- Follow-up interviews or focus groups with pilot school and trust leaders to understand later impacts, shifts in practice and perceived value.
- Comparative review across cycles, examining how decisions and priorities evolve with repeated use of the tool.

Overall, the Equity Scorecard is rooted in the belief that when schools are provided with practical tools, opportunities for structured reflection and meaningful support, they are well placed to drive better outcomes for pupils who face the greatest barriers. As more schools adopt the Scorecard, we hope that the collective dataset will strengthen the case for system-wide improvement, contributing to more equitable education at local, regional and national levels.





Equity Case Studies

Equity Case Studies

In this section we present a series of Equity Case Studies submitted by teachers and school leaders. Each case study offers a grounded account of how schools have approached equity in practice.

Taken together, the case studies show what happens when schools organise their work around those who need it most and do so with care. At their core is a simple but challenging question: how do our everyday decisions advantage some pupils more than others – and how can we rebalance that?

The case studies are deliberately honest. They highlight not only what went well, but also what proved difficult: the barriers encountered, the assumptions that had to be challenged. In doing so, they offer practical insights for teachers and leaders looking to translate equity from intention into action.

Across the case studies, a set of common lessons emerge. Each of these is summarised below, followed by summaries of the Equity Case Studies, drawing out what other teachers and leaders might consider in their own contexts.

Overarching lessons

1. Equity starts with relationships

Equity work begins with relationships. Improvements in engagement, attendance or attainment followed deliberate efforts to strengthen relationships with pupils and families, particularly those from under-resourced backgrounds. Whether through home visits, weekly parental contact or relational homework support, schools shifted from reacting to problems to building trust early, particularly with parents who had previously had negative experiences of education. Relational work was the foundation on which academic support became possible. Equity work that waits until behaviour or attainment worsens is already too late.

Practical reflections:

- Which pupils and families do I know well, and which do I only know through data or incidents?
- Where are relationships reactive rather than preventative and positive?
- How can I build structured time for relationships into existing routines (registration, homework, feedback, transitions) rather than crisis-driven communication?

2. Use data to prioritise, not to label

Data becomes powerful when it is used to diagnose and prioritise, not to label. Barriers to learning should be identified through a holistic picture of pupils – drawing on attainment and progress, attendance, reading, safeguarding concerns and professional judgement, alongside formal indicators such as pupil premium or SEND. This enables educators to make deliberate, informed decisions about who needs what, and when to move their learning on. Equity is not about treating everyone the same, but about weighting effort where it is needed most.

Practical reflections:

- Data is a conversation starter, not a verdict. Ask “What might this be telling us?” rather than “What category is this pupil in?”
- Do I know which pupils need more of me this half-term – and why?
- Are we trying to do too much for too many, instead of doing a few things well for those who need it most?

3. Language shapes expectations and outcomes

Everyday language shapes professional judgement. Deficit labels do more than describe disadvantage; they lower expectations and make unequal outcomes feel inevitable. Reframing language does not deny hardship – it locates it in external conditions rather than in the child. When language changes, professional culture begins to change with it.

Practical reflections:

- How do I describe pupils from under-resourced backgrounds when they're not in the room?
- Do my words imply fixed ability, or temporary barriers?
- Listen carefully to how pupils are described in meetings, corridors and reports. What assumptions sit beneath the language used? Is it consistent?

4. Transitions are high-risk equity moments

Transitions, between phases, years, weeks, lessons or routines, are points where disadvantage can widen. Treating transition as a process, not an event, reduces pupils' anxiety and disengagement. This applies as much to daily and weekly transitions as moving from one school to another.

Practical reflections:

- Where are pupils most likely to become disconnected in my classroom or year group?
- How explicit am I about routines, norms and expectations?
- Who needs extra handover, reassurance or continuity – and how do we plan for that?

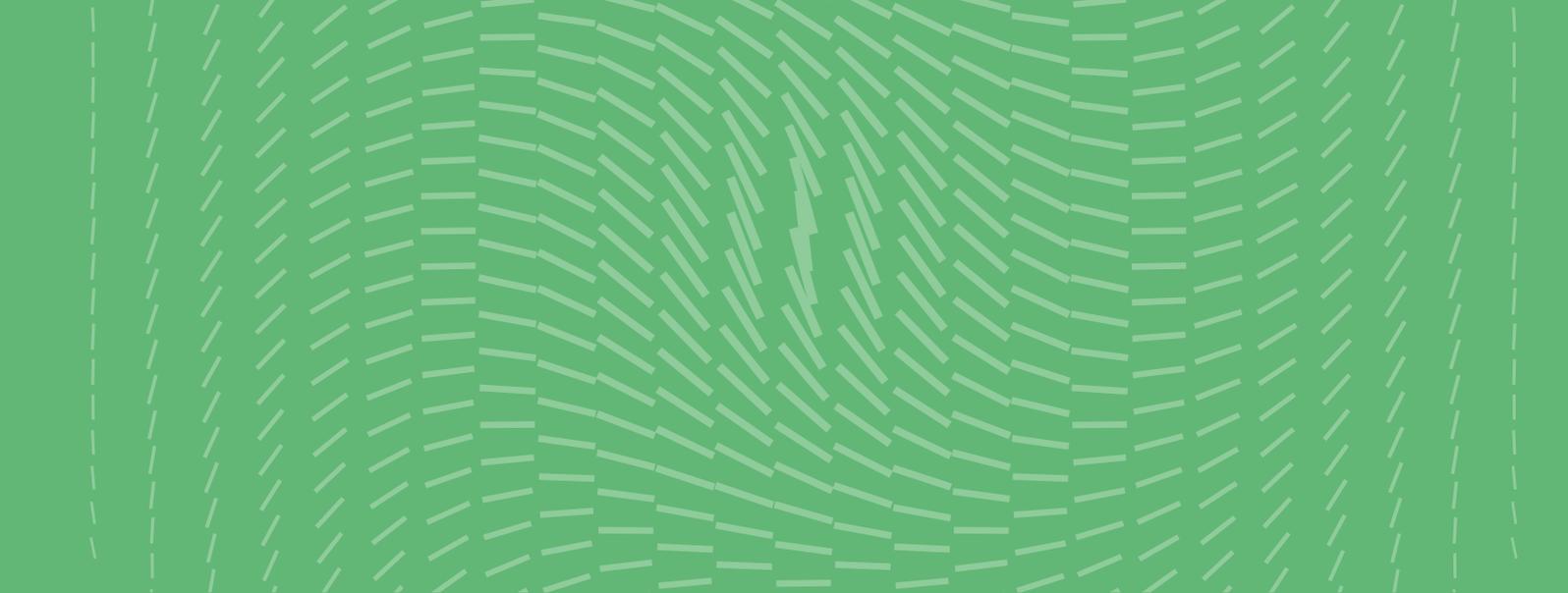
5. Expect resistance – and plan for it

Equity work often challenges established norms. Progress depends on clarity of purpose, repeated communication, evidence-informed expert practitioner dialogue and visible leadership modelling. Where leaders hold steady through early discomfort, practices become embedded. If equity work feels comfortable, it probably isn't going far enough.

Practical reflections:

- Which equity changes feel uncomfortable – and why?
- Are we mistaking familiarity for effectiveness?
- Do we have permission to question “the way we've always done it”?





Equity Case Studies

Torquay Academy: Red Flags Review

Torquay Academy: Red Flags Review

Using data on barriers to prioritise pupil needs.



At a glance

Phase: Secondary (11–18)

Context: Large coastal school in Torbay (c.1440 pupils), part of Torquay Boys' Grammar School MAT

Equity focus: Improving homework completion, attendance and engagement for 11–15-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds facing multiple barriers to learning

Key strategy: Combining “red flag” data with structured relational support

Who led it: Deputy Heads of Year (DHOYs), supported by SLT and subject TLR holders

What changed: Clearer priorities, more consistent parental contact, improved targeting of staff time



The challenge we were trying to solve

Torquay Academy serves a community with high and overlapping levels of disadvantage. Around one third of pupils are eligible for the Pupil Premium, 11 per cent have identified SEND, and significant numbers are young carers, children in need, or have English as an additional language.

Despite sustained effort, gaps persisted. Progress 8 outcomes for pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium were lower than for their peers. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely to achieve a grade 4 or above in English, maths and science GCSEs, had lower attendance and homework completion, weaker parental engagement, and were over-represented among pupils who became “NEET”.

Leaders recognised that the issue was not a lack of effort, but that support was being spread too thinly. Without a clearer way of prioritising need, staff time and energy were being diluted.



What we did

The school introduced a structured, data-informed prioritisation model, designed to identify the most significant barriers facing pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and respond consistently.

Each year group from Year 7 to Year 10 was allocated a Deputy Head of Year (DHOY) with explicit responsibility for pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium. The starting point was a ranking exercise: DHOYs identified the biggest barriers affecting disadvantaged pupils in their year group.

Across the school, three barriers emerged repeatedly:

- Literacy, particularly low reading ages on entry
- Parental engagement, including difficulties supporting homework at home
- Self-efficacy, reflected in low confidence, avoidance and poor help-seeking

These priorities shaped the strategy for the first implementation cycle.

DHOYs then worked with focus groups of 10-15 pupils. Support followed a consistent weekly structure:

- Reading three times a week, using targeted adult support and structured reading activities
- One weekly session focused on PSHE and student wellbeing, with an emphasis on confidence and motivation
- Weekly phone calls home to parents or carers, focused on encouragement, routines and shared problem-solving rather than compliance

Alongside this, staff used a set of agreed “red flags” to prompt professional discussion, including: postcode reading age on entry; KS2 SATs scores; summer birth; primary school attended; gender.

These indicators were used to prioritise attention, not to label pupils.

Target pupils and strategies were reviewed regularly, with pupils moving on or off the focus list as circumstances changed.



Why this mattered for equity

Rather than treating disadvantage as a single category, the approach recognised that need is uneven, dynamic and contextual. Data was used not to diagnose deficits, but to ask sharper questions: who needs what, right now?

This allowed the school to shift from reactive interventions to early, targeted relational support, particularly for pupils whose difficulties might otherwise remain invisible.



What made it work

Clarity of purpose. The focus was deliberately narrow: improving homework completion and engagement, rather than attempting to address every barrier simultaneously.

Relational consistency. Weekly contact with pupils and families helped build trust and reduced the sense of school as distant or punitive.

Professional judgement. Data informed decisions, but staff were encouraged to challenge rankings and bring contextual knowledge to discussions.

Whole-school buy-in. Closing the Gap (CtG) sheets and the red flags approach were introduced through twilight sessions that focused explicitly on relationships. In advance, teachers prepared short slides to welcome new classes, while pupils completed “getting to know you” questionnaires mirroring staff prompts.

At the first twilight, staff focused on 25 pupils per year group who were eligible for the Pupil Premium and, in Key Stage 3, had lower reading ages or scaled scores on entry. Teachers pooled knowledge about these pupils’ aspirations, family contexts and interests, enabling more informed conversations and stronger relationships from the outset.

Clear governance. Subject TLR holders in English, maths and science were linked to the goal of achieving a grade 4 for all pupils, with fortnightly one-to-one meetings to monitor progress and adapt support.



Barriers and challenges

- Staff concern about workload
- Variability in the quality of internal data
- Anxiety about labelling pupils

These were addressed through repetition, clear messaging, and emphasising that the model was about prioritisation, not judgement.



What changed

Staff reported clearer priorities when working with pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, more consistent communication with families, and greater confidence in knowing where to focus limited time and resources.

Crucially, internal conversations shifted from “Who qualifies?” to “Who needs support most, and how do we know?”



Project sustainability

The work is embedded within existing leadership roles, routines and accountability structures. By aligning data review, staff meetings and line management with a clear equity focus, the approach can be maintained and refined over time using existing capacity.



How impact was measured

Impact was monitored using multiple indicators:

- Movement on effort boards (covering homework, attendance, behaviour and mindset)
- Improvements in reading ages for pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium
- Homework completion rates
- Attendance for disadvantaged pupils
- Progress 8 outcomes and grade 4+ attainment in English, maths and science

These measures were reviewed cycle by cycle and used to refine targeting.



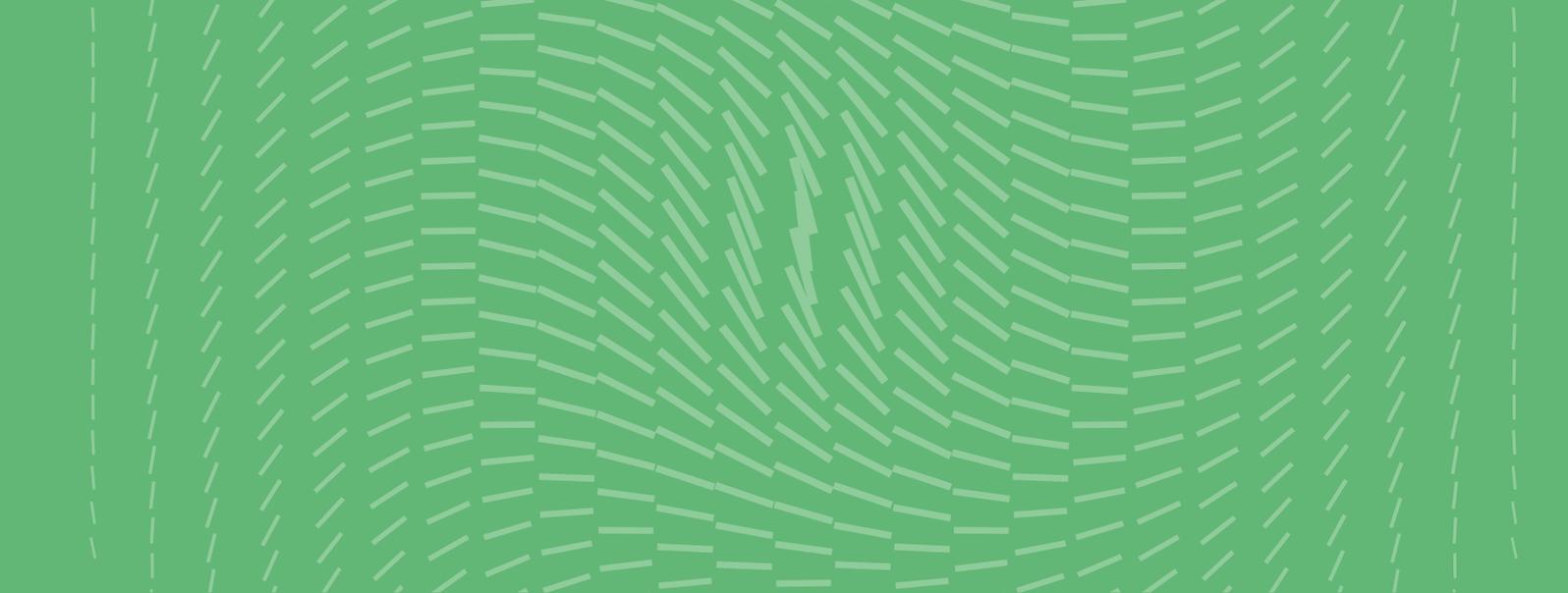
What we'd do differently/advice to others

Start with a small number of priorities; depth matters more than breadth.

Treat data as a prompt for professional dialogue, not a verdict.

Build structured time for relationships into the model.

Review regularly and expect priorities to change.



Equity Case Studies

Ilfracombe Junior School: Connecting Curriculum to Place

Ilfracombe Junior School: Connecting Curriculum to Place

Building belonging, identity and pride through local community



At a glance

Phase: Primary (7–11)

Context: Coastal Church of England junior school in Ilfracombe, North Devon, 371 pupils

Equity focus: Strengthening pupils' sense of belonging, identity and aspiration through a place-based curriculum

Key strategy: Embedding local history and community partnerships into the taught curriculum

Who led it: Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Lead, supported by the History Lead and Headteacher

What changed: Stronger pupil voice, deeper connection to place, increased pride in local identity



The challenge we were trying to solve

Ilfracombe Junior School serves a community experiencing deep and persistent disadvantage. Around 34 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, 35 per cent receive SEND support, and 7 per cent have an Education, Health and Care Plan. A significant number of families are subject to Child Protection or Child in Need plans.

On entry to Year 3, many pupils arrive with low starting points. Average Star Reader standardised scores are below national expectations, with around one third of pupils scoring below 84. Similar patterns are evident in maths. Nearly half of Year 3 pupils require targeted phonics intervention.

The wider community context compounds these challenges. Compared with other parts of Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, Ilfracombe has the lowest life expectancy, high levels of household deprivation, long-term unemployment, insecure housing and child poverty. Seasonal employment and limited transport links restrict access to wider opportunities.

For some pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, this has led to a fragile sense of belonging. A number of families live in temporary accommodation, including families placed in the area from elsewhere, contributing to instability and weak attachment to place.

Leaders were concerned that pupils were absorbing a narrative that opportunity exists “somewhere else”, rather than seeing value, possibility and pride in their own town.



What we did

The school set out to reframe Ilfracombe as an asset, not a deficit, by embedding the town's history, culture and global connections into the curriculum.

As part of the school's history curriculum, leaders developed a unit focused on the Ilfracombe railway, a pivotal feature of the town's Victorian growth, trade and connection to the wider world. The railway was chosen deliberately: it offered a concrete way to explore how Ilfracombe had once been a place of opportunity, innovation and connection.

The unit consisted of:

- Six taught history sessions, embedded within the school's trivium history curriculum
- A visit to the local museum, where volunteers provided an immersive experience
- Visits and assemblies led by community members, including people with family links to the railway
- Contributions from Telling Our Stories/Finding Our Roots (TOS/FOR), who supported research, timelines and storytelling

The work culminated in a final outcome designed to help pupils articulate not just what the railway was, but why it mattered to the people of Ilfracombe.



Why this mattered for equity

For pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, curriculum content that feels distant or abstract can reinforce disengagement. This project took a different approach: it treated place-based knowledge as a source of dignity, identity and motivation.

By rooting learning in pupils' own town, the school aimed to:

- Strengthen pupils' sense of belonging
- Counter deficit narratives about Ilfracombe
- Help pupils see their community as shaped by history, agency and global connections
- Equity here was not about remediation alone, but about recognition and value



What made it work

A clear moral purpose. The work was explicitly linked to the school's commitment to inclusion and equity, informed by the book *Equity in Education* and wider research.

Strong community partnerships. Collaboration with TOS/FOR, the local museum and community volunteers transformed what would otherwise have been a textbook unit into a lived experience.

Curriculum leadership. The History Lead took responsibility for sequencing learning, sourcing materials and coordinating partners, ensuring coherence rather than add-ons.

Willingness to adapt. After the first year, leaders recognised that pupils could recall facts but struggled to explain impact. The final outcome was redesigned to foreground why the railway mattered to local people.



Barriers and challenges

Limited online research material about the Ilfracombe railway

Difficulty identifying people with first-hand or inherited knowledge, given the railway closed over 50 years ago

Time needed to build effective external partnerships

These challenges were addressed gradually through relationship-building with TOS/FOR and local volunteers.



What changed

Staff observed that pupils spoke more confidently about Ilfracombe, its history and its place in the wider world – not only in history lessons, but across the curriculum.

Pupils demonstrated greater pride in their town and greater willingness to talk about their community positively. This was particularly noticeable among pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds who had previously expressed ambivalence or negativity about where they lived.



How impact was measured

Pupil voice, capturing changes in how pupils described Ilfracombe and their relationship to it.

Pupil outcomes, including differentiated final products demonstrating depth of understanding.

Feedback from TOS/FOR, triangulating school observations with external perspectives.



Project sustainability

The project was initially funded through National Lottery funding via TOS/FOR. Ongoing sustainability is supported through:

PTFA fundraising

Allocation from the school's curriculum budget



What we'd do differently/advice to others

Start with a local story that genuinely matters to the community.

Expect to revise outcomes once pupils' understanding deepens.

Invest time in partnerships – they are central, not peripheral.

Treat place-based curriculum as an equity strategy, not enrichment.



Equity Case Studies

Bligh Primary School: Home Visits

Bligh Primary School: Home Visits

Strengthening relationships between school and home to create the foundations for learning



At a glance

Phase: Primary (3–11)

Context: Large community primary school in Strood, Medway, (c.650 pupils), part of Maritime Academy Trust

Equity focus: Building strong, trusting relationships between school and families to support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds

Key strategy: Universal home visits at the start of the school year

Who led it: Headteacher and SLT, supported by class teachers, teaching assistants and office staff

What changed: Stronger parent–teacher relationships, greater pupil confidence at the start of school, improved engagement and attendance



The challenge we were trying to solve

Bligh Primary School serves a community facing significant and entrenched disadvantage. Strood West is in IMD decile 2, placing it in the bottom 20 per cent of areas nationally. Levels of unemployment, poor health outcomes, low qualifications and child poverty are high for the South East of England.

Over a third of pupils are eligible for free school meals, with some year groups exceeding 40 per cent. The school has higher-than-average numbers of pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans and frequent engagement with social care and external agencies. While attendance has improved markedly in recent years and is now broadly in line with national averages, sustaining this progress requires strong relationships with families.

Leaders were increasingly frustrated that the same barriers between school and home kept recurring, limiting the progress pupils could make. It became clear that a reset was needed, not another intervention, but a different way of working.



What we did

The school introduced universal home visits as a foundation for learning, beginning with a pilot in Year 1 in September 2022 alongside two other Maritime schools.

The core aim was simple but ambitious: to ensure that every parent and carer had a strong, trusting relationship with their child's class teacher from the very start of the school year.

Home visits were positioned as part of a wider strategy to blur the traditional boundary between school and home, enabling staff to better understand families' contexts and helping families feel more comfortable engaging with the school.

Over time, it also became clear that the visits had a powerful effect on pupils themselves. Children arrived on their first day of school more confident, already knowing their teacher and having a clearer sense of what to expect. This, in turn, supported attendance and readiness to learn from day one.



Why this mattered for equity

For pupils from disadvantaged or under-resourced backgrounds, relationships between home and school can be fragile or shaped by previous negative experiences. **When trust is low, even well-designed academic support can fail to take root.**

Home visits reframed the relationship. Instead of expecting families to cross the threshold into school on the school's terms, staff crossed the threshold into families' homes, signalling respect, openness and partnership.

Equity here was about creating the conditions in which learning could happen, rather than reacting once difficulties had already emerged.



What made it work

Careful logistics. Each visit involved one teacher and one additional adult (often a teaching assistant). Staff completed around ten visits per day, over three days. This balance was deliberate: more visits would have reduced quality, while fewer would have limited reach.

Clear structure, flexible delivery. Staff followed a shared visit outline but were encouraged to bring their own personality. One adult typically spoke with parents while the other engaged the child, often asking to see their bedroom or favourite toy to help put the child at ease.

Thoughtful communication. Parents selected preferred time slots in July, before the summer break. Reminders were sent by text in early September, and parents were asked to contact the school if plans had changed.

Staff preparation and support. Training took place in the summer term to build confidence. SLT accompanied staff who needed additional support and modelled effective visits. Notes were taken after visits rather than during them, to avoid the visit feeling like an inspection.

Safeguarding clarity. A safeguarding lead remained on site during visits so staff could escalate concerns immediately if needed.

It comes from the top - the Headteacher and SLT must fully buy into this to make it a success.



Barriers and challenges

The first year proved the most challenging. Some parents were initially reluctant to invite staff into their homes. Leaders addressed this through clear, consistent messaging, explaining that home visits were a requirement and emphasising their purpose: **building relationships so pupils could thrive.**

Delaying the start of term by three days to accommodate visits was controversial at first. However, once the impact became clear, this was accepted as a vital investment in long-term success.

For some staff, particularly those new to teaching or the area, visiting homes was emotionally challenging. Ongoing support and space to debrief were essential.



What changed

There has been a significant shift in culture. Relationships with parents are more open and collaborative, and teachers feel better equipped to have honest, productive conversations.

Staff note that parents' evenings are more effective, as relationships have already been established. Pupils arrive at school more settled and confident, and families are more proactive in engaging with learning.

An unexpected benefit has been recruitment: prospective staff are strongly attracted to a school that prioritises knowing its community so deeply.



How impact was measured

Surveys of teachers immediately after visits and again one month later

Feedback from parents and conversations with pupils

Staff reflections on changes in communication, honesty and efficiency in meetings

Teachers consistently reported that home visits improved their understanding of pupils and families, enabling more focused and effective support.



Financial sustainability

The programme is supported by the Maritime Academy Trust. Within Bligh, office staff play a key role in administration and communication, while SLT provide oversight and staff support.

The initiative requires no additional financial resource, beyond three days of staff time at the start of the year.



What we'd do differently/advice to others

Start with one year group to refine logistics.

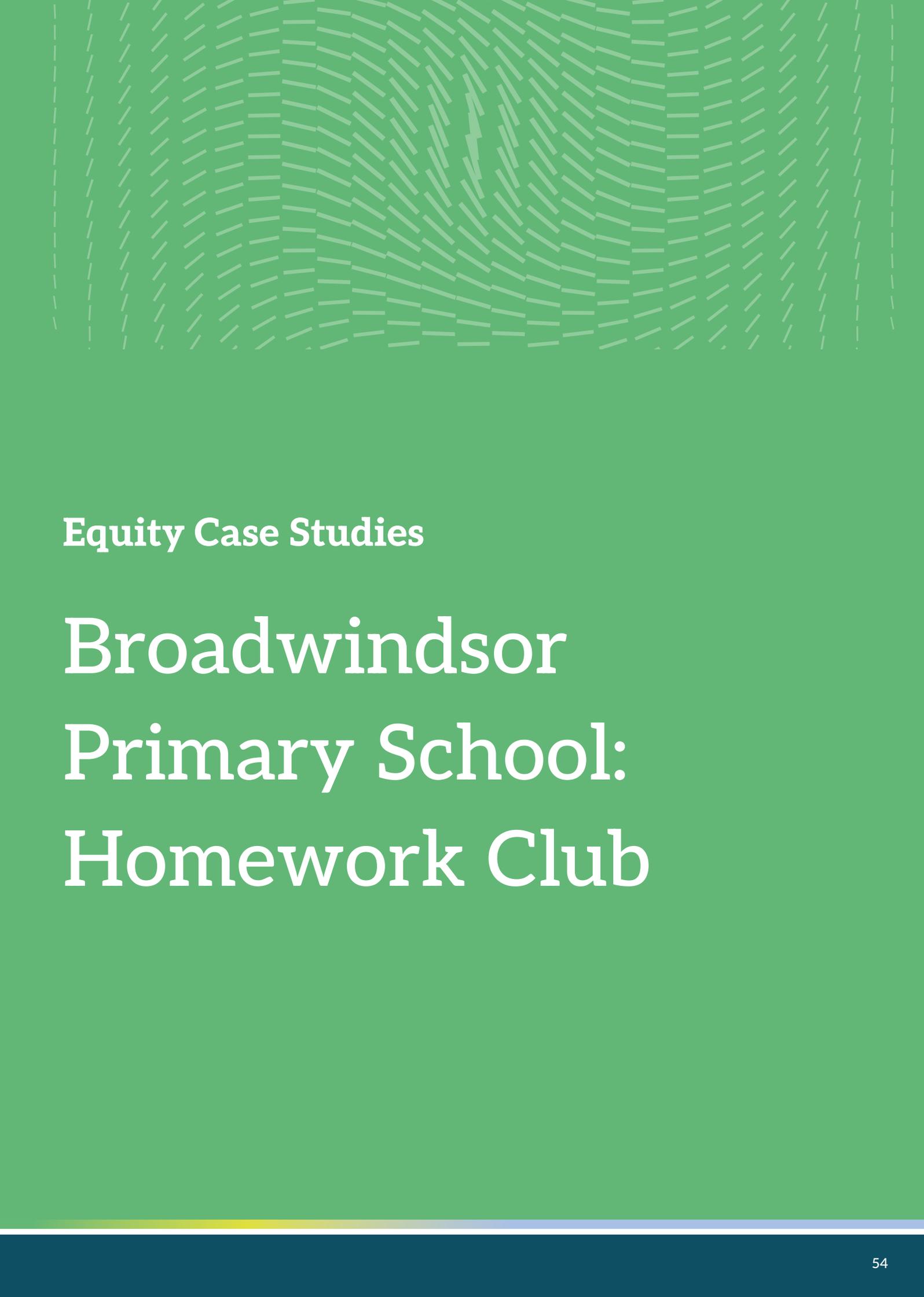
Communicate early, clearly and repeatedly with families.

Provide extra support for less confident staff.

Stay firm in the first year – resistance is normal.

Consider flexible alternatives (such as neutral venues) only as a last resort.

Build in emotional support for staff encountering challenging home environments.



Equity Case Studies

**Broadwindsor
Primary School:
Homework Club**

Broadwindsor Primary School: Homework Club

Removing barriers to home learning through shared time, space and support

At a glance

Context: Small rural Church of England primary school in West Dorset (c 95 pupils)

Equity focus: Ensuring all pupils can access and benefit from homework, regardless of home circumstances

Key strategy: An inclusive, flexible after-school homework club

Who led it: Class teacher (Year 3/4), with support from parents

What changed: Higher homework completion, stronger relationships, reduced stress for pupils and families

The challenge we were trying to solve

Broadwindsor Primary serves a rural community characterised by social and geographical isolation. While the surrounding countryside is attractive, housing costs are high, employment opportunities are limited, and public transport is sparse. These conditions shape families' capacity to support learning at home in uneven ways.

Within the school, around 16 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, 32 per cent receive SEND support, and a small number are subject to Child in Need plans. Although these figures are not extreme by national standards, they mask wide variation in pupils' access to time, space, resources and adult support at home.

The class teacher noticed a recurring pattern: some pupils regularly failed to complete homework, leading to time-consuming follow-up, strained relationships with families, and feelings of exclusion for pupils. At the same time, pupils who had completed homework understandably wanted to share and celebrate their learning, which could further highlight inequalities.

Homework, intended to support learning, was instead becoming a source of frustration and inequity.

What we did

The teacher established a Homework Club, running immediately after school on the same day homework was set.

The aim was to provide a supportive, time-limited space where pupils could complete their homework with access to adult guidance, peer support and appropriate resources. The club ran for 45 minutes, recognising that pupils are tired after a full school day and that brevity was essential for sustainability.

Initially, Homework Club was designed for pupils to attend with their parents, reflecting a belief that joint learning experiences can be powerful. Over time, the model evolved to become more inclusive and flexible:

- Pupils could attend with or without parents
- Siblings were welcome
- Parents could arrive late if needed
- Attendance could be regular or occasional

This flexibility ensured that pupils were not excluded due to work commitments, childcare responsibilities or transport constraints.

Why this mattered for equity

Homework assumes that all pupils have similar conditions at home: quiet space, adult time, resources and emotional bandwidth. In reality, this is rarely the case.

Homework Club addressed this by equalising access to time, space and support, without stigmatising pupils or singling out those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Equity here was about removing hidden barriers, not lowering expectations.

Importantly, the club reframed homework from a private struggle into a shared, supported activity – reducing anxiety and restoring its educational purpose.



What made it work

A predictable structure. Homework always followed the same format: spellings, times tables and an open-ended task linked to class topics. This consistency reduced cognitive load for pupils and parents.

Modelling and guidance. Each session began with the teacher talking through tasks and modelling possible approaches, including multi-sensory strategies and patterns in times tables. Resources used in class were shared explicitly.

A welcoming atmosphere. Adults were offered a hot drink, pupils had water and a snack (supplied voluntarily by parents), and the tone was deliberately informal yet purposeful. **This helped signal that the club was a partnership, not a compliance exercise.**

Active teacher involvement. During sessions, the teacher worked with individuals, supported parents, engaged younger siblings where needed, and facilitated discussion of open-ended tasks towards the end of the session.

Growing independence. As familiarity increased, pupils and parents became more confident, accessing resources independently and even bringing their own learning aids from home.



Barriers and challenges

Early challenges included ensuring the timing did not clash with other after-school clubs and managing communication when pupils attended without parents, particularly for those travelling home by bus.

These were addressed through clear routines and a requirement for parents to notify the school in advance if their child would attend without them.



What changed

Homework completion increased, particularly among pupils who had previously struggled to complete tasks at home. More importantly, pupils became enthusiastic about homework, viewing it as achievable and worthwhile rather than stressful.

Classroom dialogue shifted away from chasing missing homework towards curiosity about learning and sharing ideas. Relationships with parents improved, and tensions around homework diminished.

The strengthened relationships also gave the school deeper insight into families' circumstances, enabling more flexible responses beyond homework and better signposting to wider support where needed.



How impact was measured

- Increased homework completion rates
- Pupil attitudes towards homework and attendance at Homework Club
- Parental feedback on achievability and stress
- Teacher reflection on time saved and relationship quality

The most powerful indicator was qualitative: pupils' excitement to attend Homework Club and disappointment when sessions were cancelled.



Financial sustainability

The project is led by the class teacher, with parents contributing informally through refreshments and peer support. The main cost is staff time, currently given voluntarily.

Homework Club aligns with the school's three-year pupil premium plan commitment to improving home learning for all pupils, providing a pathway for longer-term sustainability.



What we'd do differently/advice to others

Keep the club short and purposeful.

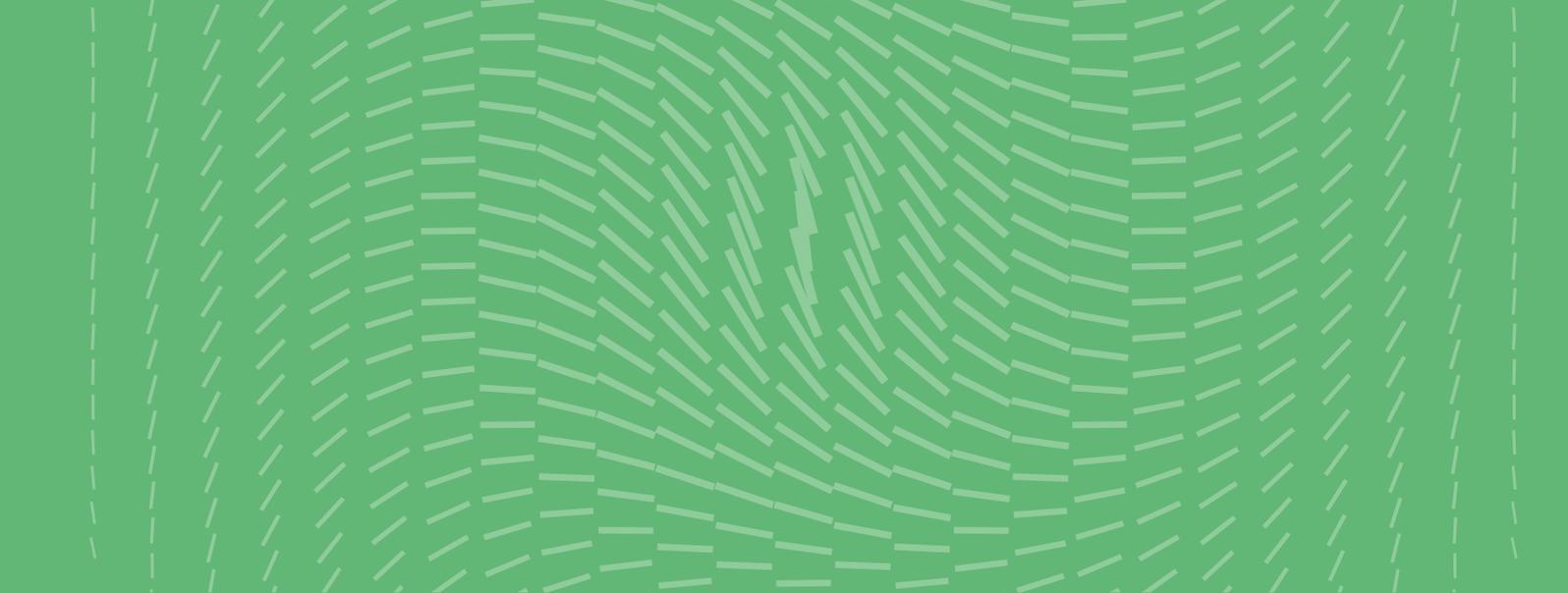
Encourage parental involvement but remain flexible.

Run sessions on the same day homework is set to remove barriers.

Provide refreshments – small gestures matter.

Allow pupils to decide that homework is "complete" at the end of the session, reducing stress and lost work.

Use the club to reflect on and improve the quality and quantity of homework for all pupils.



Equity Case Studies

**Dawlish College:
Weighted Entitlement
(WE) List**

Dawlish College: Weighted Entitlement (WE) List

A practical tool to prioritise resources more equitably



At a glance

Context: Secondary 11–16 school (c 784 pupils) in coastal town in Devon, part of the Ivy Education Trust

Equity focus: Prioritising school resources towards pupils most “entitled” to them, including pupils from under-resourced backgrounds who may be missed by standard proxy measures

Key strategy: A termly Weighted Entitlement List combining internal performance and participation data with key contextual indicators

Who led it: Headteacher, with increasing leadership from senior and middle leaders (Progress Leaders/ Heads of Year)

What changed: Clearer prioritization/sharper targeting of resources, stronger focus on “doing less but better”



The challenge we were trying to solve

Since conversion to an academy in December 2019, pupil numbers have grown (from 540 to 784) and both pupil premium and SEND proportions have risen to above national averages.

Currently, 31.63 per cent of pupils are supported by pupil premium funding. Just over a quarter (25.51 per cent) are identified as having SEND, including 5.23 per cent with an Education, Health and Care Plan. A further 4.34 per cent of pupils are multilingual learners (formerly recorded as having English as an additional language).

Disadvantage in Dawlish is multifaceted. Like many coastal towns, there are economic challenges, including limited or seasonal employment and constrained access to services. Families facing these challenges are not always captured by standard metrics such as eligibility for free school meals or pupil premium funding.

Leaders faced a tightening constraint: the challenge was growing, but resources were not.



What we did

The school created a “Weighted Entitlement (WE) List” a practical tool to help staff prioritise time and resources towards pupils who are most “entitled” to education, based on how well pupils are currently doing at school, not only on proxy labels.

A pupil’s entitlement to additional educational resources is in inverse proportion to their current level of success.

The WE List is created by applying a score to each pupil using a defined set of criteria. It combines three elements:

- Quality internal data about performance (attainment/progress against curriculum expectations)
- Participation indicators (especially attendance)
- Contextual factors that are strongly linked to barriers to learning (e.g., safeguarding involvement, reading)



Why this mattered for equity

The WE List was designed to tackle a structural problem schools face when resources are constrained:

Proxy measures (including pupil premium eligibility) are helpful but limited. Some pupils from under-resourced backgrounds are missed because they do not meet eligibility thresholds, while some pupils who meet thresholds may be thriving and require less additional resource.

A more equitable approach requires schools to weight decisions towards pupils who are not currently thriving, regardless of label.

In short, the WE List aims to shift educational advantage away from those who already benefit most, and towards those who would benefit most.



What made it work

Quality data (not more data)

This is not an abandonment of proxies, but a focus shift towards reliable and valid internal data about how much pupils know of the curriculum (attainment), and what this represents relative to expectation (progress).

For this to be meaningful, schools need strong quality assurance processes in place, including scrutiny of the assessments used to generate data, consistency and accuracy in teacher evaluation, and care in how information is recorded and interpreted.

Putting competence first

A culture shift away from a default mode of therapeutic support, towards learning-focused support that improves progress – grounded in the insight that low motivation at school can be a logical response to repeated failure at school.

A tool staff can use

The list is not just data – it is a work prioritisation tool, designed to provide clarity and focus, especially for Progress Leaders (Heads of Year) and welfare/pastoral teams.

Defined criteria

Each pupil receives scores across a set of defined criteria. The school debated and refined weightings carefully. Social care involvement is treated as a significant global indicator of barriers. Reading ability shapes access to the whole curriculum and is therefore a major limiter of educational success.

SEND identification is significant, but often already has support attached. The school's core job is ensuring pupils make progress in their learning; therefore academic progress is weighted most heavily.

Criteria (simplified)

- Academic status: each subject “below track” contributes a score (highest weighting overall)
- Reading status (NGRT): larger weight for lower standardised scores because reading affects access to the entire curriculum
- Safeguarding status: involvement with social care carries a significant weight as a global indicator of likely barriers
- Participation status: attendance bands contribute different scores (e.g. <90% carries more weight)

- Pupil premium status: yes/no weighting
- SEND status: yes/no weighting (with the logic that additional support already exists, and “below track” will raise entitlement anyway)
- Multilingual status: yes/no weighting
- Attitude status: a smaller weighting via a scaled score (passive/resistant)

The maximum total score is capped (e.g. 50). The list is updated termly when internal reporting data is captured.



Barriers and challenges

Schools are often already relatively good at directing resource towards known groups with proxy labels (pupil premium, SEND). But many pupils from under-resourced backgrounds are missed because they do not meet the criteria; and some pupils who do meet the criteria are succeeding despite other circumstances.

The tool depends on the reliability and validity of internal assessment and reporting processes.

Weak internal data undermines fairness.



What changed

The WE List brought a sharper sense of prioritisation: doing less but doing it better and weighting support more equitably towards pupils who are least well-served by the system.

It also forced productive professional conversations about:

what counts as “progress” in practice

the reliability of internal assessment

the difference between entitlement based on label and entitlement based on need



Project sustainability

The work has been led by the Headteacher, but is sustained within existing school structures, requiring no additional funding beyond planned administration and CPD time. Responsibility is shared across senior, middle and pastoral leaders, supporting long-term embedment rather than reliance on individual roles.



How impact was measured

Qualitative feedback from Progress Leaders and key staff on whether the tool improves prioritisation

- Equity Scorecard survey data, particularly pupil responses
- Tracking the evolution of the list (who rises/falls termly, and why)
- Triangulating with verifiable data such as attendance, attainment and progress outcomes for individuals and groups



What we'd do differently/advice to others

Treat internal data quality as the foundation – there is no shortcut.

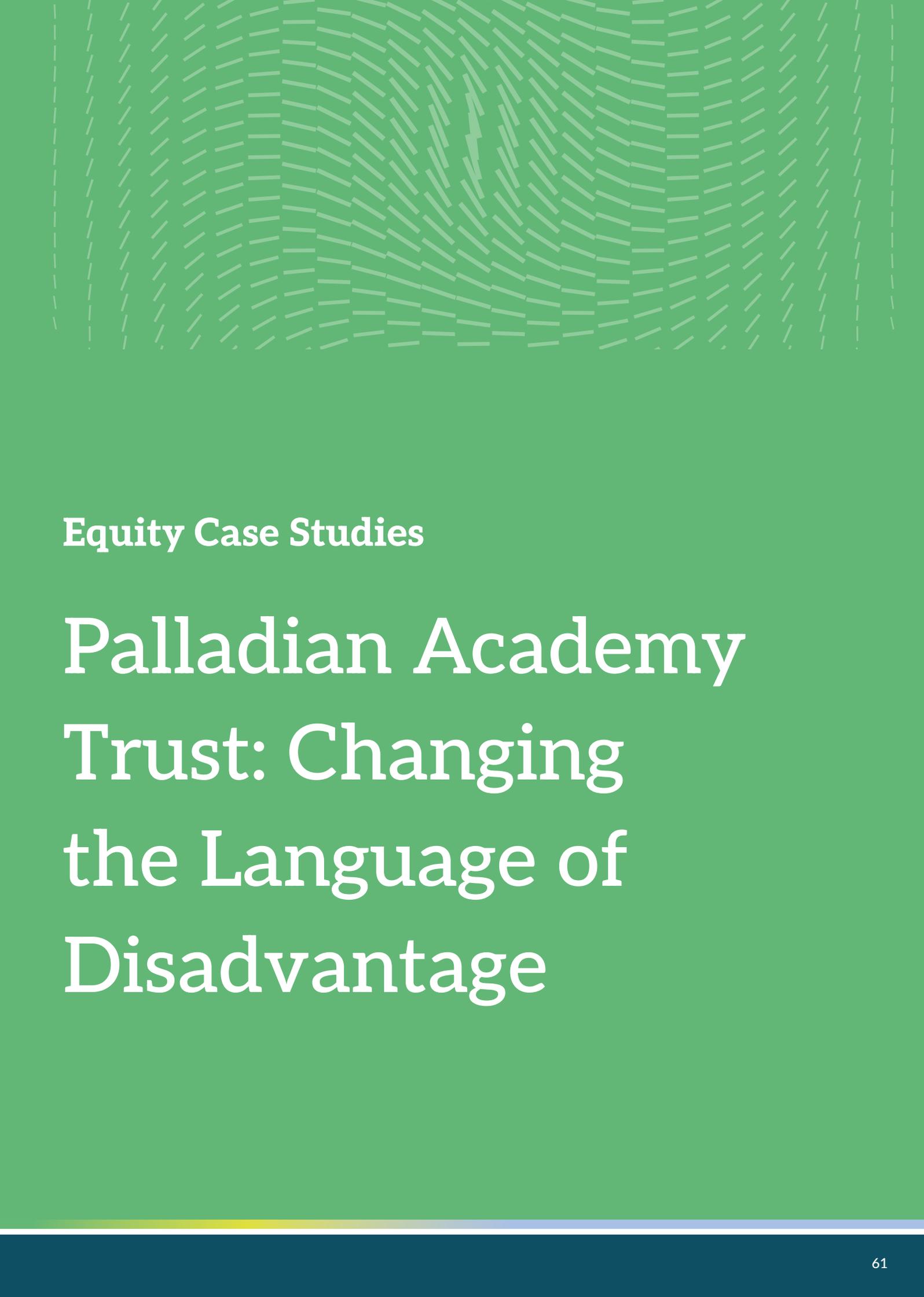
Use proxies, but don't rely on them. Pupils from under-resourced backgrounds can be missed.

Expect the tool to create discomfort: it forces clarity about who is prioritised and why.

Build the list with the staff who will use it, and quality assure anomalies each cycle.

Keep returning to the purpose: do less, do it better, and weight entitlement more equitably.





Equity Case Studies

**Palladian Academy
Trust: Changing
the Language of
Disadvantage**

Palladian Academy Trust: Changing the Language of Disadvantage

Reframing culture to support learners experiencing disadvantage

At a glance

Context: 13 primary and secondary schools across Bath and North East Somerset and Wiltshire

Equity focus: Improving outcomes for pupils from under-resourced backgrounds by changing how disadvantage is understood and discussed

Key strategy: Trust-wide shift in language, culture and professional understanding

Who led it: CEO and Director of Education, supported by Disadvantage Leads and school leaders

What changed: More consistent language, stronger shared understanding, clearer focus on equity in practice

The challenge we were trying to solve

Palladian Academy Trust serves 3,965 pupils across a diverse mix of urban and rural communities. Around 18.4 per cent of pupils meet the government definition of disadvantage (PP), though this varies widely by school. In some settings, disadvantage is highly visible; in others, particularly in Bath and rural Wiltshire, it is often hidden within otherwise affluent communities.

Across the Trust, 24.6 per cent of pupils are identified as having SEND, with particularly high concentrations in some schools, including specialist provision. Leaders recognised that disadvantage frequently intersects with SEND and social care involvement, but that these experiences are not captured well by single labels or proxies.

Despite strong overall attainment, gaps between pupils from under-resourced backgrounds and their peers persisted. Leaders concluded that interventions alone were insufficient. The deeper issue was how disadvantage was understood, talked about and acted upon across the Trust.

What we did

The Trust began by treating data as the start of a conversation, not the end. Leaders focused first on culture and language, recognising that how staff frame disadvantage shapes expectations and practice.

The Trust established internal networks, including a Disadvantage Leads Network, initially bringing

together senior leaders and colleagues responsible for pupil premium strategy. These groups built shared understanding by interrogating definitions, assumptions and proxies, and by openly debating concepts such as equity, equality, social mobility and social justice.

Professional dialogue was deliberately challenging. Professional learning focused on building shared understanding rather than compliance. Photographic stimulus was often used in workshops and sessions, asking participants to consider the language that they may have heard and to share this.

A deliberate shift was made away from deficit-based labels towards language that foregrounded context. Rather than referring to “disadvantaged pupils”, the Trust adopted the term **learners experiencing disadvantage** emphasising that disadvantage is situational, changeable and shaped by wider systems.

Why this mattered for equity

Hidden disadvantage was a recurring theme across Trust schools. In communities where deprivation is less visible, pupils experiencing greater disadvantage were at higher risk of being overlooked or misunderstood.

By reframing disadvantage as contextual rather than fixed, the Trust aimed to reduce unconscious bias, raise expectations and ensure that support was shaped by pupils’ lived experiences rather than narrow proxies. The intention was not to lower standards, but to create fairer conditions for success.

What made it work

Leaders modelled vulnerability and reflection. Staff were encouraged to examine their own assumptions without judgement, supported by carefully designed professional learning activities.

The work was consistently evidence-informed. Nothing was presented as opinion; all discussions were grounded in research and data, helping to build trust and credibility.

Leadership was distributed. While the Trust set the direction, schools were supported to interpret and apply shared principles in ways that reflected their local contexts.



Barriers and challenges

Some colleagues initially questioned whether changing language would make a meaningful difference, particularly in schools with strong overall attainment. Others held implicit assumptions about ability and background that needed to be highlighted and addressed carefully through evidence and professional dialogue.

Hidden disadvantage also posed difficulties. In more affluent communities, pupils experiencing disadvantage were less visible and more likely to be overlooked, while reliance on familiar proxies risked reinforcing assumptions rather than deepening understanding. Sustaining consistent language across a growing Trust required ongoing reinforcement, particularly as new staff and leaders joined.



What changed

Across the Trust, leaders report more consistent and thoughtful conversations about disadvantage. Language has shifted away from labels applied to pupils towards a focus on circumstances, barriers and support.

Attainment for pupils experiencing greater disadvantage has improved alongside improvements for all pupils. External review confirmed rising outcomes, while also highlighting that closing gaps remains ongoing work.

Importantly, the work has strengthened coherence across schools, particularly around transition, inclusion and expectations.



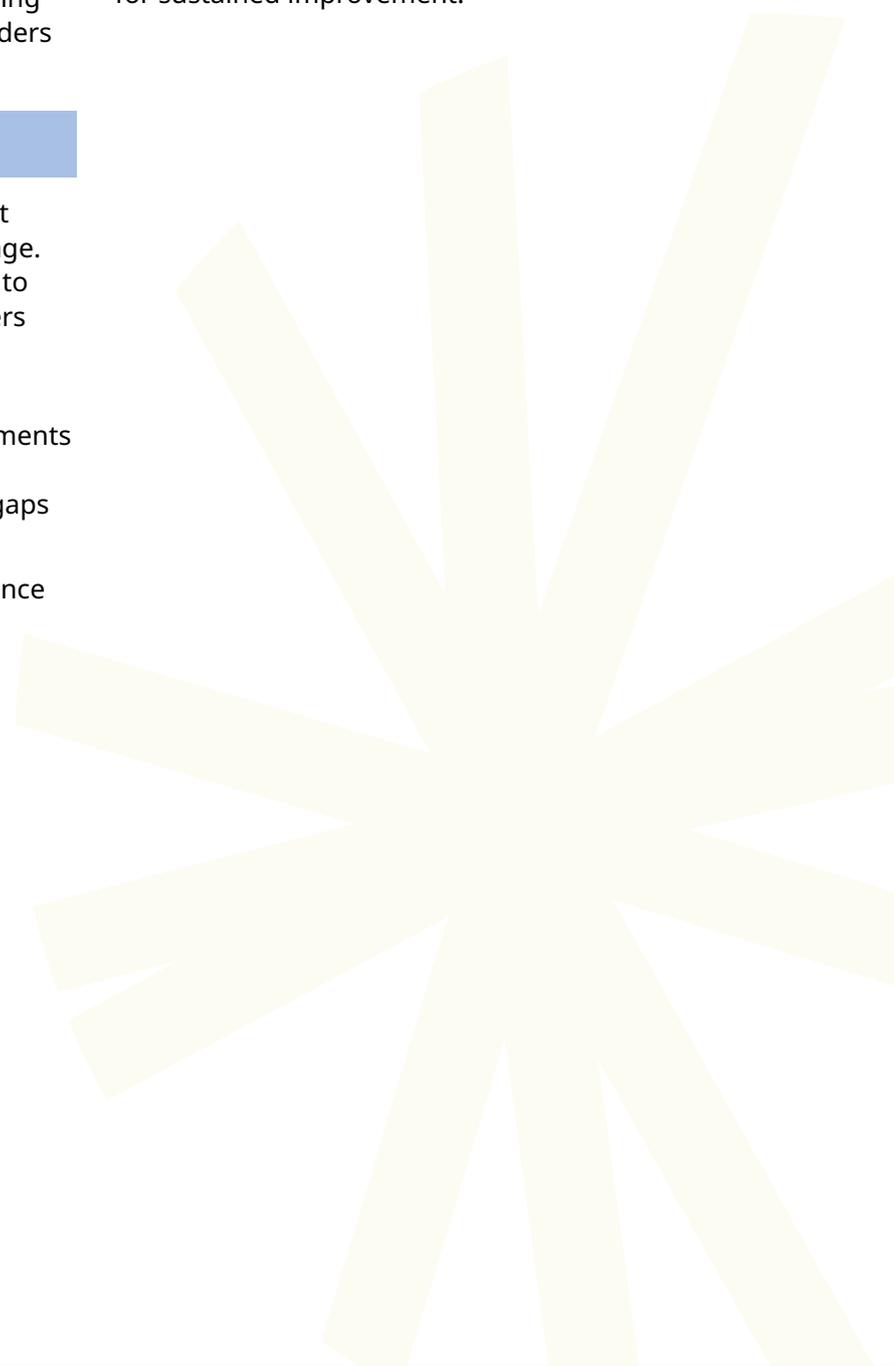
What we'd do differently/advice to others

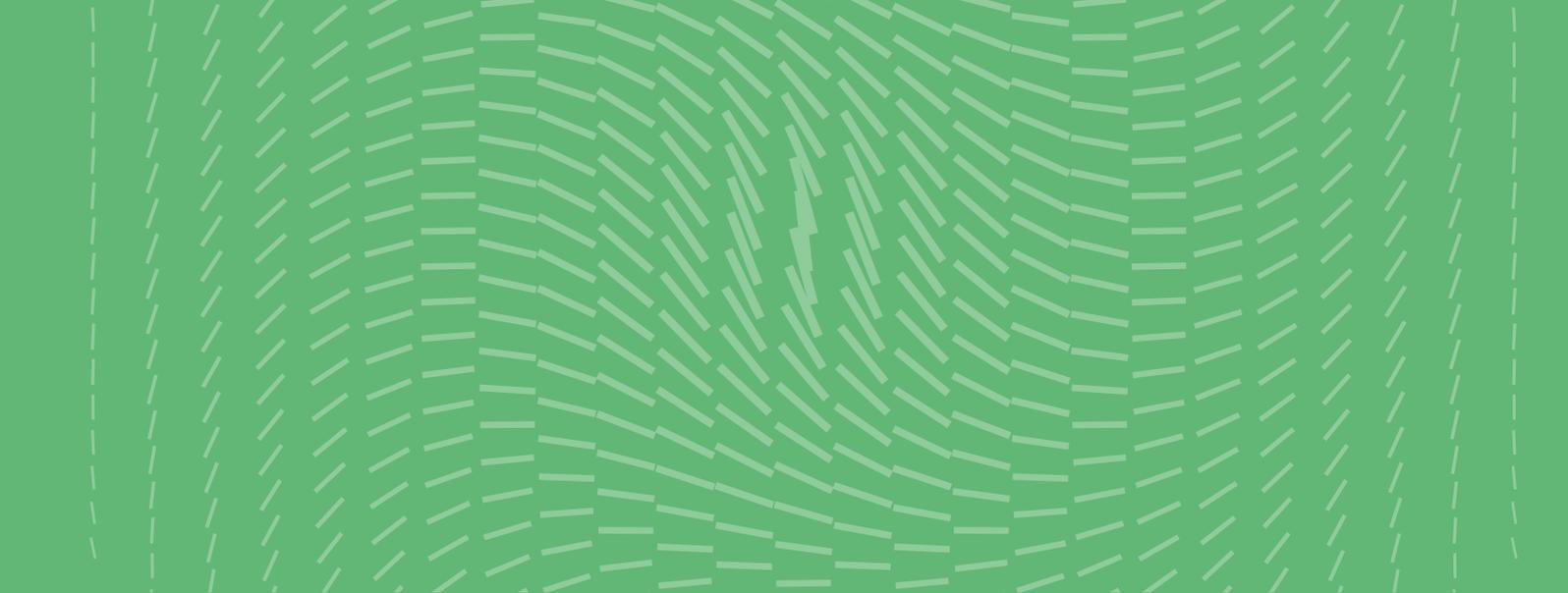
Start with culture, not initiatives. **Language shapes expectations, and expectations shape outcomes.**

Expect resistance. Some colleagues may initially doubt that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds can achieve as highly as their peers. These beliefs need to be addressed carefully, using evidence and high expectations.

Be clear that equity is not a zero-sum game. High-quality adaptive teaching benefits all pupils, not just those facing disadvantage.

Above all, recognise that this is long-term work. Cultural change takes time, but it lays the foundation for sustained improvement.





Equity Case Studies

**Q3 Academy Tipton:
Home-School
Meetings**

Q3 Academy Tipton: Home-School Meetings

Rebuilding trust through early, relational engagement



At a glance

Context: Large comprehensive secondary (11–19) in Tipton, Sandwell in the Black Country (c 1,550 pupils)

Equity focus: Improving attendance, behaviour and engagement by strengthening relationships with families

Key strategy: Structured home-school meetings offered to all families at key transition points

Who led it: Headteacher, later supported by Assistant Headteacher and pastoral teams

What changed: Improved trust with families, stronger engagement, and better outcomes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds



The challenge we were trying to solve

When the Headteacher joined Q3 Academy Tipton, the school was emerging from a prolonged period of instability. Pupil numbers were falling, the school was heavily oversubscribed with hard-to-place pupils, its reputation locally was poor, and it carried significant financial debt. Trust between the school and the local community was low.

Around 70 per cent of pupils live in a small number of highly deprived postcodes in Tipton, an area characterised by low levels of adult qualifications, high unemployment, and limited access to professional employment. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds were over-represented in exclusions, internal isolation and persistent absence. Many families had ongoing involvement with external agencies, and staff often experienced interactions with parents as confrontational or distrustful.

The school needed a fundamental reset in how it related to families. Leaders recognised that without rebuilding trust, improvements in behaviour, attendance and motivation would be limited.



What we did

The school introduced structured home-school meetings at key transition points, beginning with new Year 11 pupils and Year 7 pupils. Families were offered a 20–30 minute meeting with staff, ideally with the pupil present, to discuss how the school could best support the child in the year ahead.

Crucially, families were given a choice about where the meeting took place: at school, in their home (with staff attending in pairs), or in a neutral community space. Meetings were carefully matched to families, involving appropriate staff such as Heads of Year, senior leaders, attendance officers, SEND staff or safeguarding leads, depending on need.

These conversations focused on understanding pupils' strengths and needs, identifying potential barriers to success, updating contact details, and ensuring families felt prepared and supported. Practical issues, such as uniform, equipment or access to free school meals, were addressed early to remove obstacles before the term began.



Why this mattered for equity

For many families, previous experiences of education had been negative. By meeting families on their terms, in spaces where they felt comfortable, the school signalled a genuine commitment to partnership rather than surveillance.

This approach helped shift relationships from reactive to preventative, enabling the school to identify challenges early and support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds before difficulties escalated into absence, exclusion or disengagement.



What made it work

Staff received training and support, including from colleagues experienced in early years home visits, helping to build confidence and consistency. Meetings were voluntary in tone but clearly positioned as a core part of the school's way of working.

The offer was flexible, culturally sensitive and inclusive, with translation support where needed. Importantly, information gathered was acted upon, reinforcing trust and demonstrating that families' voices mattered.



Barriers and challenges

Some families were reluctant to engage, and a minority were suspicious of home visits, fearing surveillance or judgement. At the outset, this required clear, consistent communication about purpose and reassurance that meetings were about partnership, not monitoring.

Some colleagues felt anxious about visiting homes, even in pairs, and needed training, modelling and strong senior leadership support to build confidence. Logistical challenges were also significant, particularly around coordination, communication during school holidays, and ensuring information gathered was followed up effectively.

Sustaining the approach required persistence. In the early stages, leaders had to hold their nerve, respond to feedback, and refine processes while maintaining clarity that this was a core part of the school's way of working, not an optional extra.



What changed

Over time, relationships with families improved markedly. Parental engagement became more positive, attendance stabilised, and the school's reputation locally began to recover.

Pupil numbers have grown and year groups are now full, with the school oversubscribed in Year 7. The sixth form has doubled in size, and Ofsted judged the school "Good" in Personal Development, Leadership and Management, and Sixth Form provision, with other areas improving.



Project sustainability

The approach is sustained within existing school structures and does not require additional funding. Leadership responsibility has been shared beyond the Headteacher, embedding the practice into the school's culture rather than relying on individual champions.



Measuring outcomes

Formal surveys are not used, as leaders were concerned these could undermine the authenticity of relationships. Instead, impact is tracked through qualitative feedback, pupil numbers, attendance, behaviour indicators and inspection outcomes.

The strongest indicator of success has been cultural: home-school meetings are now an expected and welcomed part of joining the school, helping to create a more trusting and collaborative relationship with families from disadvantaged backgrounds.

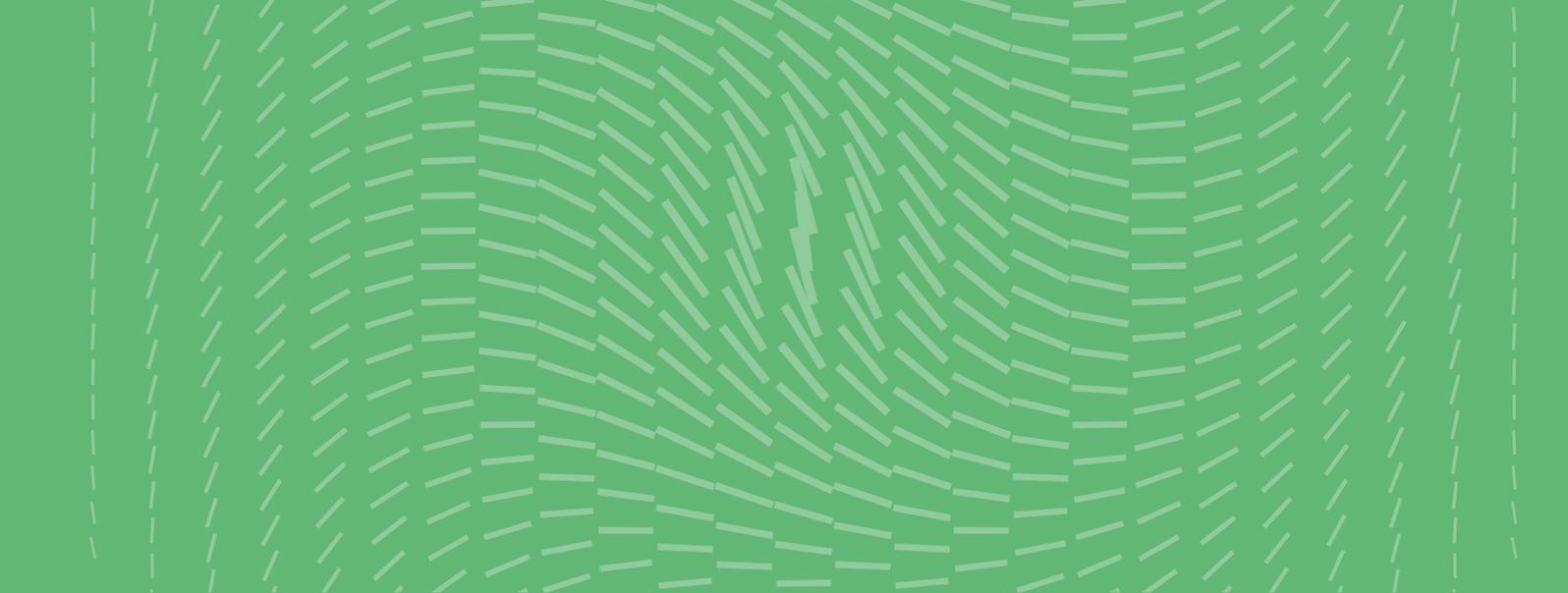


What we'd do differently/advice to others

Organisation matters. Schools need to plan early, communicate clearly, and ensure administrative capacity is in place. Parents often need reminders, particularly over the summer break.

Most importantly, schools must be prepared to use what they learn. Gathering information without acting on it risks undermining trust rather than building it.





Equity Case Studies

ThinkForward: Asset-Based Language Guide

ThinkForward: Asset-Based Language Guide

Shifting how young people are described and see themselves



At a glance

Context: National charity working with young people (ages 13–25) across London, Kent and Nottingham

Equity focus: Challenging deficit language used to describe young people from underserved backgrounds

Key strategy: Co-produced, evidence-informed asset-based language guide

Who led it: Communications & Policy Manager, with young people and Youth Advisory Board

What changed: More confident volunteers, partners and staff; stronger sense of dignity and agency among young people



The challenge we were trying to solve

ThinkForward works with young people who face multiple, overlapping barriers and are at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET). Many of the young people on its programmes experience poverty, low school attendance, special educational needs, discrimination and limited access to opportunity. These challenges are often compounded by how young people are talked about by institutions and adults around them.

Young people themselves raised concerns about being described as “disadvantaged” or “disengaged”. They reported that such labels made them feel othered, stereotyped and diminished. Staff with lived experience of similar challenges echoed this, reflecting on the long-term impact that deficit language had on their confidence and aspirations.

The organisation recognised that language was not a neutral tool. It shaped how young people were perceived – and how they perceived themselves.



What we did

ThinkForward developed an asset-based language guide for staff, funders, volunteers and business partners. The guide sets out the strength-based language the organisation uses to describe the young people it works with, alongside terms it avoids and suggested alternatives.

The guide was co-produced with young people through consultations, including ThinkForward’s Youth Advisory Board, and grounded in existing research on the impact of language on confidence, motivation and dignity. Rather than introducing a fixed script, the guide explains why certain terms matter and how language choices can reinforce or challenge inequality.

Central to the guide is a shift away from deficit labels towards describing young people as “underserved” – placing responsibility on systems and structures rather than on individuals or families.



Why this mattered for equity

Language shapes expectations. Deficit terms can subtly lower aspirations, reinforce stereotypes and normalise unequal outcomes. For young people already navigating structural barriers, this can compound feelings of shame or exclusion.

By adopting asset-based language, ThinkForward aimed to create environments in which young people felt recognised for their strengths, not defined by their challenges. The guide supports adults to communicate in ways that uphold dignity, agency and possibility, without denying the reality of structural disadvantage.



What made it work

The guide was rooted in youth voice. Young people were not consulted symbolically but meaningfully, shaping both the content and tone. Lived experience from staff added further depth and credibility.⁵⁰

The approach was also evidence-informed. Research on social mobility, education and psychology was used to support the case for change, helping funders and partners understand that this was not about “soft language” but about improving outcomes.

Finally, the guide was designed to be practical. It does not just critique existing terms but offers clear alternatives and explanations.

50 A new version of ThinkForward’s asset based guide can be found here: [Asset-based Approach Guide v 2.0 Oct 2025](#)



Barriers and challenges

Language associated with disadvantage is deeply embedded in policy and funding systems, and some partners initially worried that moving away from familiar terms could create confusion. Care was also needed during consultation to avoid introducing new negative labels, relying instead on open-ended listening. Finally, embedding asset-based language consistently across staff, volunteers and partners required ongoing reinforcement rather than a one-off intervention.



What changed

The language guide has been well received by funders, volunteers and corporate partners. Volunteers report feeling more confident and excited about working with young people. Partners have begun to reflect on, and in some cases adopt, similar language principles in their own work.

Young people and parents have shared that being spoken about positively has helped build trust and engagement and allowed strengths to be recognised that had previously gone unnoticed.

The guide has also had wider influence, being shared at sector events and used as a prompt for other organisations to review their own language.



Project sustainability

The guide was produced within existing roles and resources, primarily through staff time. It is reviewed regularly to reflect evolving language and understanding, ensuring it remains relevant rather than static.

Because it is embedded in how ThinkForward communicates across programmes and partnerships, the approach is sustainable without additional funding.



Measuring outcomes

Impact is tracked through qualitative feedback from young people, volunteers, staff and partners. Volunteers report greater confidence in engaging with young people, and partners have shared examples of adopting similar language principles.

ThinkForward has also observed increased engagement from parents and stronger relationships built through more respectful, strength-based communication. While language is not measured through a single metric, consistent feedback indicates improved confidence, aspiration and trust among the young people served.



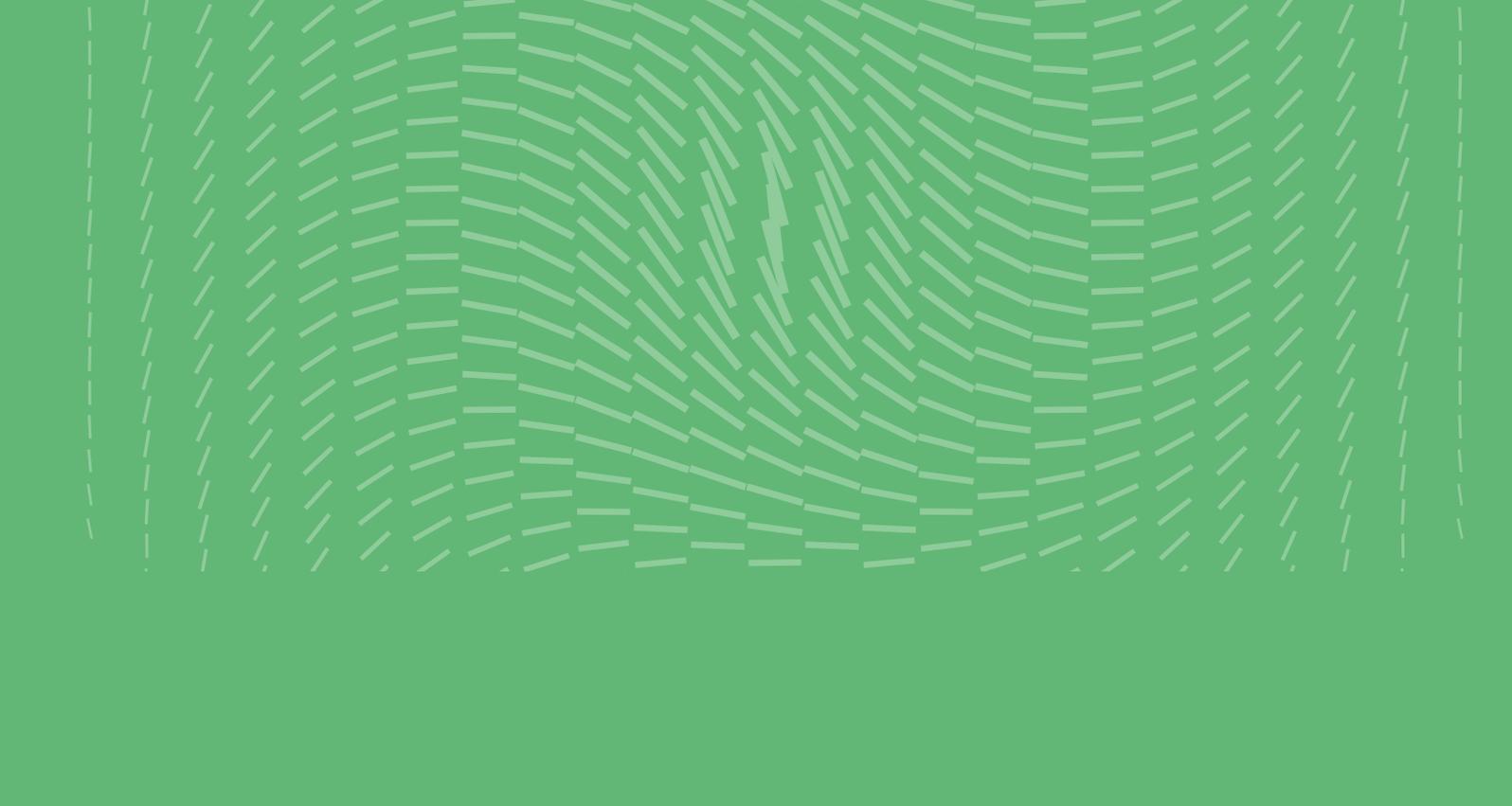
What we'd do differently/advice to others

Be careful not to introduce new negative labels while trying to challenge old ones. Open questions and listening are essential.

Start with those most affected. Young people's perspectives should shape the work from the outset, not be added later.

Expect some resistance. Terms like "disadvantaged" are widely used and convenient, but many stakeholders are open to change when the rationale is clearly explained.





Equity Case Studies

**The Brigshaw
Learning Partnership:
Festival of Transition**

The Brigshaw Learning Partnership: Festival of Transition

Making transition a process, not an event



At a glance

Context: Trust of 7 schools (ages 2–18) serving ex-mining communities east of Leeds (c.3,000 pupils)

Equity focus: Reducing disengagement and anxiety at key transition points, particularly Year 6–7

Key strategy: Trust-wide transition framework culminating in a two-week Festival of Transition

Who led it: Trust executive, primary and secondary headteachers, Community of Practice

What changed: Stronger continuity, reduced anxiety, improved engagement and belonging in Year 7



The challenge we were trying to solve

Brigshaw Learning Partnership serves largely monocultural, post-industrial communities shaped by economic decline and low mobility. While headline attainment was improving, leaders recognised a persistent drop-off in engagement, attendance and confidence at key transition points, particularly the move from primary to secondary school.

Transitions were experienced as abrupt rather than supported. Pupils reported anxiety and loss of belonging; parents often lacked confidence in the process; curriculum and cultural discontinuities compounded disadvantage, particularly for vulnerable learners. Leaders concluded that transition was not a peripheral issue but a critical equity moment where disadvantage could widen or be mitigated.



What we did

The trust reframed transition as a process rather than a single event. Working with the Reach Foundation, it developed a structured transition framework, symbolised and enacted through the annual Festival of Transition.

The Festival brings together pupils, families and staff across phases through curriculum bridging projects, extended visits, team-building activities, and explicit teaching of routines and expectations. Year 6 pupils experience learning in both their primary setting and the secondary school, supported by familiar staff, while parents are actively engaged through events, performances and targeted outreach.

This approach is reinforced by shared rituals, artefacts and language, and by post-transition follow-up in Year 7 to ensure pupils settle academically, socially and emotionally.



Why this mattered for equity

National and local data show that transition points disproportionately disadvantage pupils who are already vulnerable. Anxiety, curriculum gaps and loss of belonging can quickly translate into disengagement.

By prioritising continuity, repeated exposure and relationship-building, the Trust aimed to ensure that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds entered secondary school confident, prepared and known – rather than anonymous and at risk of slipping through the gaps.



Barriers and challenges

Early on, lack of alignment across schools posed a significant challenge. High levels of autonomy had led to differences in curriculum, expectations and practice, making cross-phase collaboration harder. Some staff initially viewed transition work as additional workload rather than core business.

These barriers were addressed through wider trust-wide alignment work, the creation of a Community of Practice, and clear framing of transition as central to outcomes rather than an add-on. Building organisational memory – documenting processes, artefacts and routines – was also essential, as no prior transition framework existed.



What made it work

The work sat within a clear strategic narrative: transition as central to the Trust's mission. Leadership was distributed through a Community of Practice spanning primary and secondary phases, building shared ownership and sustainability.

Attention to detail mattered. Rituals, artefacts and naming (the "Festival of Transition") created coherence and meaning, while evidence from relevant research helped secure buy-in.



What changed

Pupils report reduced anxiety and stronger feelings of belonging. Parents express greater confidence in the transition process. Early indicators show improved Year 7 attendance, engagement and behaviour, particularly among vulnerable groups.

Just as importantly, collaboration between primary and secondary staff has strengthened, supporting greater curriculum and cultural coherence across the Trust.



Project sustainability

The Festival is embedded within the Trust's strategic approach and funded through existing budgets and staff time rather than short-term grants. The Community of Practice model reduces reliance on individual leaders, supporting continuity as the work scales across phases and cohorts.



Measuring outcomes

Impact is tracked through a combination of attendance, behaviour and attainment data in Year 7, alongside pupil and parent feedback before and after transition. Staff reflections and joint planning provide further indicators of improved coherence and practice.



What we'd do differently/advice to others

Start somewhere and improve over time. Transition work does not need to be perfect to be powerful. Treat transition as a process, not a moment, and embed it within a wider vision rather than as a standalone initiative.

Above all, invest in relationships – between phases, with families, and with pupils. Transition is where belonging is either built or lost.





Conclusion

Phase 2 of the Equity Scorecard builds on the insights and successes of the pilot to offer a practical, school-led pathway for embedding equity across the South West and beyond. By engaging directly with their own data, participating in peer learning, and reflecting on practice throughout the year, schools are empowered to turn the principles of equity into meaningful action for every pupil.

Whether used independently or as part of the supported programme with SWSMC, the Scorecard provides a flexible, scalable, and evidence-informed framework for driving improvement. Through collaboration, reflection, and sustained engagement, Phase 2 offers schools the tools, insight, and community they need to make lasting progress in tackling educational inequity.

Our Vision for the Equity Scorecard

A school-led system of collaborative support

Building on the initial pilot, we have launched the updated version of the Equity Scorecard (Version 2.0) and are working with 75 – 100 secondary schools both in the South-West peninsula and nationally throughout 2025-26 to implement the Scorecard with them (Phase 2). Participating schools have access to a programme of events and webinars hosted by the SWSMC, designed to address questions, share good practice, and foster collaboration among equity-focused practitioners. Schools that wish to use the Scorecard at their own pace can download all resources free of charge from our website.

Looking ahead, our ambition is for the Equity Scorecard to be used collaboratively and sustainedly through regionally led models of support. Over time, we envisage key schools and trusts acting as regional hubs, helping to champion the Scorecard, support peer learning and build local capacity for contextualised equity-focused improvement. This approach reflects our commitment to partnership and system leadership, ensuring that the Scorecard is embedded within local and regional improvement structures and continues to support meaningful change for schools, families and pupils.

Primary Equity Scorecard and other versions

Recognising the importance of primary education in shaping long-term equity outcomes, we are actively developing a Primary Equity Scorecard. Consultations with primary leaders from Devon, Cornwall and Somerset have emphasised the need for an innovative and holistic approach that goes beyond academic attainment to include family voice, character development, teacher career and professional development, and community partnerships for a truly equitable approach. The Primary Scorecard will incorporate a range of indicators, balancing feasibility with meaningfulness, and will seek to integrate additional contextual data to account for small cohorts. In future versions, we will include wider data points and will strive to understand if and how primary schools track childcare prior to school age and use information gained upon entry to the school system.

In addition to primary education, we are exploring the potential for an Equity Scorecard tailored to further education settings, extending the framework's reach to support equity across a pupil's full educational journey.

These next steps represent a commitment to continuous improvement and contextual sensitivity. Through ongoing collaboration with schools, trusts, and local authorities, the Equity Scorecard will evolve to better equip education leaders with the insights and tools needed to embed an equity mindset and better partner with their communities, ultimately aiming to improve educational equity across England.

Appendix & Bibliography

Appendix A: Focus of the Pilot Evaluation Interviews

The interviews explored how schools used the Scorecard and what they felt it added to their work. They covered the following areas:

1. Motivation and starting points

Why schools chose to take part, how the Scorecard aligned with existing priorities, and where leaders felt they were on their equity journey before joining.

2. Experience and learning

What schools learned from the Scorecard, including any surprises, blind spots or shifts in understanding.

3. Impact on practice

Whether and how the Scorecard had informed classroom practice, leadership decisions, resource allocation and school improvement planning, and how any impact on pupils might be assessed.

4. Embedding the Scorecard

What would support regular use of the tool and how it could be integrated into existing improvement cycles or trust-level processes.

5. Usability and support

What helped or hindered effective use, including the role of supporting materials, staff engagement and the kinds of support needed as the programme expands.

6. Recording and reflection

How schools currently record their use of the Scorecard and whether a more consistent approach would be helpful.

7. Improvements and future development

Suggestions for refining the tool and enhancing its relevance, including changes to categories, structure or supporting resources.

8. Final reflections

Any further comments on how the Scorecard was working in practice and what should be kept or changed in a wider rollout.

Bibliography:

Adams, R. and Aguilar Garcia, C. (2023). *Rise in school absences since Covid driven by anxiety and lack of support, say English councils*, The Guardian. [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/sep/26/rise-in-school-absences-since-covid-driven-by-anxiety-and-lack-of-support-say-english-councils> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].

Armstrong, P. (2015). *Effective school partnerships and collaboration for school improvement: a review of the evidence*. Research report. October 2015. [online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a809a84e5274a2e8ab5117f/DFE-RR466_-_School_improvement_effective_school_partnerships.pdf [Accessed 7 Jan. 2026].

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (n.d.) *Spotlight: Reframing feedback to improve teaching and learning*. [online] Available at: <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/research-evidence/spotlight/feedback.pdf> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2026].

Axford, N., Berry, V., Lloyd, J., Moore, D., Rogers, M., Hurst, A., Blockley, K., Durkin, H. and Minton, J. (2019). *How can schools support parents' engagement in their children's learning? Evidence from research and practice*. Education Endowment Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED612190.pdf>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2025].

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (2023). *School-based counselling - the essential guide for school leaders, mental health leads and commissioners*. [online] Available at: www.bacp.co.uk/media/21211/bacpschool-based-counselling-the-essential-guide-for-school-leaders-mental-health-leads-and-commissioners-july-2024.pdf [Accessed 7 Jan. 2026].

Brooks, B., Sim, A. and Elliot Major, L. (2024). *The Equity Scorecard: A New Approach to Assessing Educational Equity in Schools*. South-West Social Mobility Commission. [online] Available at: https://southwestsocialmobility.com/wp-content/uploads/The-Equity-Scorecard_final.pdf [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].

Brown, C., Douthwaite, A., Donnelly, M. and Shay, M. (2025). *Connected belonging: a relational and identity-based approach to schools' role in promoting child wellbeing*. British Educational Research Journal. [online] Available at: <https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/berj.4112>. [Accessed 11 Jan. 2026].

Bryk, A. S. (2020). *Improvement in action: advancing quality in America's schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Burtonshaw, S. (2023). *Public First research finds parental support for fulltime schooling has collapsed*. [online] Public First. Available at: <https://www.publicfirst.co.uk/public-firstresearch-finds-parental-support-for-fulltime-schooling-hascollapsed.html> [Accessed 4 Feb. 2024]

- Campbell, C. (2011). *How to involve hard-to-reach parents: encouraging meaningful parental involvement with schools*. [online] Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7d5d0440f0b60aaa293fa6/how-to-involve-hardto-reach-parents-full-report.pdf> [Accessed 28 Nov. 2025].
- Career Ready (2023). *Career Ready - Career Ready 2023 Impact Report*. [online] Publitas.com. Available at: <https://view.publitas.com/career-ready/career-ready-2023-impactreport/page/1> [Accessed 29 Nov. 2025].
- Career Ready (2024). *Career Ready - Career Ready 2024 Impact Report*. [online] Publitas.com. Available at: [Annual Report and Impact - Career Ready](#) [Accessed 29 Nov. 2025].
- Cassen, R. and Kingdon, G. (2007). *Tackling low educational achievement*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://researchonline.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/43735/1/Tackling%20low%20educational%20achievement%28Isero%29.pdf>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2025].
- Chang, H. (2018). *Improve Attendance with Teacher Home Visits*. [online] Attendance Works. Available at: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/improve-attendance-with-teacher-home-visit> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2026].
- Chetty, R., Jackson, M.O., Kuchler, T., Stroebel, J., Hendren, N., Fluegge, R.B., Gong, S., Gonzalez, F., Grondin, A., Jacob, M., Johnston, D., Koenen, M., Laguna-Muggenburg, E., Mudekereza, F., Rutter, T., Thor, N., Townsend, W., Zhang, R., Bailey, M., Barberá, P., Bhole, M. and Wernerfelt, N. (2022). *Social capital I: measurement and associations with economic mobility*. *Nature*, 608, pp.108–121. [online] Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-022-04996-4> [Accessed 23 Dec. 2025]
- Children North East (2024). *Poverty Proofing Services*. [online] Children North East. Available at: children-ne.org.uk/how-we-can-help/poverty-proofing-services/ [Accessed 29 Nov. 2025].
- Coe, R., Aloisi, C., Higgins, S. and Elliot Major, L. (2014). *What makes great teaching? Review of the underpinning research*. Sutton Trust. [online] October. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/great-teaching/> (or direct PDF). [Accessed 28 Nov. 2025].
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) (2022). *CCEA Submission – Independent Review of Education*. Independent Review of Education Panel. [online] Available at: https://www.independentreviewofeducation.org.uk/files/independentreviewofeducation/2022-09/Council%20for%20the%20Curriculum%2C%20Examinations%20and%20Assessment.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- Cullen, S., Cullen, M.-A., Dytham, S. and Hayden, N. (2018). *Research to understand successful approaches to supporting the most academically able disadvantaged pupils*. Social Science in Government.
- Curriculum for Excellence Briefing (2013). *The role of Community Learning and Development (CLD) and partnership working*. [online] Available at: education.gov.scot/media/avsmhth3/cfe-briefing-10.pdf [Accessed 11 Nov. 2024].
- Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D. and Terry Orr, M. (2007). *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World. Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs*. [online] Available at: edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/preparing-schoolleaders-changing-world-lessons-exemplary-leadershipdevelopment-programs.pdf [Accessed 1 Nov. 2024].
- Day, C., Sammons, P., Hopkins, D., Leithwood, K. and Kington, A. (2008). *Research into the impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes: policy and research contexts*. *School Leadership & Management*, 28(1), pp.5–25. DOI: [org/10.1080/13632430701800045](https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430701800045).
- Dee, T.S. and Penner, E.K. (2017). *'The causal effects of an ethnic studies curriculum'*. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(1), pp. 127–166.
- Deighton, J., Lereya, S.T., Casey, P., Patalay, P., Humphrey, N. and Wolpert, M. (2019). *Prevalence of mental health problems in schools: poverty and other risk factors among 28 000 adolescents in England*. *British Journal of Psychiatry*. [online] 215(3), pp.565–567. DOI: [org/10.1192/bjp.2019.19](https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2019.19).
- Dell, S. (2024). *Brocklewood Primary School: How does our location drive curriculum choices?*: My College. [online] My College. Available at: my.chartered.college/research-hub/brocklewood-primary-school-how-does-our-location-drive-curriculum-choices/ [Accessed 28 Oct. 2024].
- DeLuca, C. and Johnson, S. (2017). *Developing assessment capable teachers in this age of accountability*. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 24(2), pp.121–126. DOI: [org/10.1080/10969594x.2017.1297010](https://doi.org/10.1080/10969594x.2017.1297010).
- Demie, F. and Mclean, C. (2015). *Context and Implications Document for: Tackling disadvantage: what works in narrowing the achievement gap in schools*. *Review of Education*, 3(2), pp.175–178. DOI: [org/10.1002/rev3.3053](https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3053).
- Department for Education (2016). *'Specialist and non-specialist' teaching in England: Extent and impact on pupil outcomes*. [online] Available at: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a75a6a140f0b67f59fce8a1/SubjectSpecialism_Report.pdf [Accessed 29 Nov. 2025].
- Department for Education (2018). *Destinations data. Good practice guide for schools*. [online] Available at: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/748165/Destinations_good_practice_guide_for_publishing.pdf [Accessed 29 Nov. 2024].

Department for Education (2024a). *Toolkit for schools: communicating with families to support attendance*. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance/toolkit-for-schools-communicating-with-families-to-supportattendance [Accessed 29 Nov. 2024].

Department for Education (2024b). *Working together to improve school attendance: Statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities*. Department for Education. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].

Department for Education (2025a). *Careers guidance and access for education and training providers*. GOV.UK. [online] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-provision-for-young-people-in-schools/careers-guidance-and-access-for-education-and-training-providers?utm_source=chatgpt.com [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].

Department for Education (2025b). *Explore education statistics: [All state-funded pupil characteristics and geography data] from 'Key stage 4 performance'*. GOV.UK. [online] Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/6ed99442-c30d-4e83-95d4-08de29f25240> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].

Department for Education (2025c). *Using pupil profiles to improve disadvantaged outcomes*. Department for Education. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2025].

Department of Education Northern Ireland (2024). *Community Use of School Premises: A Guidance Toolkit for Schools*. [online] Available at: www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/community-use-of-school-premises-a-guidance-toolkit_0.pdf [Accessed 29 Nov. 2024].

Education Endowment Foundation (2019). *Improving Behaviour in Schools*. Education Endowment Foundation. [online] Available at: educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/behaviour [Accessed 29 Nov. 2024].

Education Endowment Foundation (2021a). *Homework*. Education Endowment Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2025].

Education Endowment Foundation (2021b). *Making best use of teaching assistants*. Education Endowment Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2025].

Education Endowment Foundation (2021c). *Improving Behaviour in Schools: Guidance Report*. Education Endowment Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/behaviour>. [Accessed 16 Feb. 2026].

Education Endowment Foundation (2025). *Mentoring*. Education Endowment Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2025].

Education Scotland (2021). *Restorative approaches to support positive relationships and behaviour*. Education Scotland. [online] Available at: <https://education.gov.scot/media/oukk1iaf/restorative-approaches-draft.pdf> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].

Elliot Major, L. (2023). *Fixing a broken tongue: why the language of equity matters in education*. South-West Social Mobility Commission Blog. [online]. Available at: <https://swsmc.substack.com/p/fixing-a-broken-tongue> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2026].

Elliot Major, L. and Briant, E. (2023). *Equity in education: Levelling the playing field of learning - a practical guide for teachers*. John Catt.

Elliot Major, L. and Eyles, A. (2022). *Rising school absences: the post pandemic education divide*. British Politics and Policy at LSE. [online] Available at: blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/rising-school-absences-the-postpandemic-education-divide [Accessed 10 Mar. 2024].

Elliot Major, L., A., Eyles, E., Lillywhite, S. and Machin (2024). *A generation at risk. Rebalancing education in the postpandemic era*. [online] Available at: news.exeter.ac.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2024/04/Nuffield-Report-April-2024.pdf. [Accessed 16 Feb. 2026].

Elliot Major, L. and Higgins, S. (2019). *What works? Research and evidence for successful teaching*. London: Bloomsbury Education.

Ellis, B. J., Abrams, L. S., Masten, A. S., Sternberg, R. J., Tottenham, N. and Frankenhuis, W. E. (2022) 'Hidden talents in harsh environments: stress-adapted skills and the case for strength-based intervention', *Development and Psychopathology*, 34(1), pp. 95–113. DOI: [org/10.1017/S0954579420000887](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579420000887)

Evidence Based Practice Unit (2024). *Key findings 2024*. UCL Faculty of Brain Sciences. [online] Available at: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/brain-sciences/sites/brain_sciences/files/key_findings_2024.pdf [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].

Freire, P. (2017). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed. 50th anniversary edition*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Frenzel, A.C., Daniels, L. and Burić, I. (2021). *Teacher emotions in the classroom and their implications for students*. *Educational Psychologist*. [online] 56(4), pp.1–15. DOI: [org/10.1080/00461520.2021.1985501](https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2021.1985501).

Gamoran, A. (1992). *Synthesis of research: Is ability grouping equitable?* *Educational Leadership*, 50(2), pp. 11–17.

Gatsby Charitable Foundation (2024). *The updated Gatsby Benchmarks*. Gatsby Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://www.gatsby.org.uk>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2025].

- Gatsby Charitable Foundation (2024). *Gatsby good career guidance: the next 10 years*. Gatsby Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://www.gatsby.org.uk>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2025].
- Gill, K., Brown, S., O'Brien, C., Graham, J. and Poku-Amanfo, E. (2024). *Who is losing learning?: The case for reducing exclusions across mainstream schools*. Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and The Difference. [online] Available at: https://ippr-org.files.svdcdn.com/production/Downloads/Who_is_losing_learning_Sept24_2024-09-06-103617_euht.pdf [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- Graham-Clay, S. (2024). *Communicating with Parents 2.0: Strategies for Teachers*. School Community Journal, 34(1), pp. 9–52. [online] Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1425334.pdf> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2026].
- Gregson Family Foundation (2019). *Improving children's wellbeing*. Gregson Family Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://www.gregsonfoundation.org>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2024].
- Gunter, T. and Makinson, L. (2023). *School attendance: Analysing causes and impact in pursuit of solutions*. Nesta.[online] Available at: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/school-attendance-analysing-causes-and-impact-in-pursuit-of-solutions/full> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- Hanushek, E.A., Kain, J.F. and Rivkin, S.G. (1998). *Teachers, schools, and academic achievement*. NBER Working Paper Series. [online] Available at: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w6691>. [Accessed 01 Feb. 2026].
- Hanushek, E. (2016). 'What matters for student achievement: updating Coleman on the influence of families and schools.' *Education Next*, 16(2): pp. 18–26.
- Harford, S. (2020). *Making curriculum decisions in the best interests of children*. Ofsted: education inspection blog. [online] Available at: <https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/09/making-curriculum-decisions-in-the-best-interests-of-children> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- Hattie, J. and Timperley, H. (2007). *The power of feedback*, *Review of Educational Research*, 77, (1), 81–112.
- Hewstone, M. (2023). *Social integration in schools and colleges*. Department for Education. [online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1158554/Integration_in_Schools_and_Colleges_Report_May_2023.pdf [Accessed 16 Feb. 2026].
- Hibbin, R. and Warin, J. (2020). *Embedding restorative practice in schools*. Lancaster University. [online] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341215702_EMBEDDING_RESTORATIVE_PRACTICE_IN_SCHOOLS [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026]. DOI: org/10.13140/RG.2.2.21232.89603.
- ImpactEd (2024). *Understanding attendance: findings on the drivers of pupil absence from over 30,000 young people in England*. ImpactEd Evaluation. [online] January. Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JwmKhhmT874b7RuHIB6zXF9s8ukwtwji/view>. [Accessed 11 Jan. 2026].
- Islington Council (2020). *Minor illnesses and school attendance*. Islington Council. [online] Available at: <https://www.islington.gov.uk>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2024].
- Jones, M., Hobbs, L., Kenny, J., Campbell, C., Chittleborough, G., Gilbert, A., Herbert, S., and Redman, C. (2016). *Successful university-school partnerships: an interpretive framework to inform partnership practice*. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 60, pp.108–120. [online] Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0742051X16301664>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2024].
- Jones, C., Sideropoulos, V., and Palikara, O. (2025). *Do teachers have the knowledge and skills to facilitate effective parental engagement? Findings from a national survey in England*. *Educational Review*, 1–24. DOI: org/10.1080/00131911.2025.2506802
- Kapp, S.K., Gillespie-Lynch, K., Sherman, L.E. and Hutman, T. (2013). *Deficit, difference, or both?* *Developmental Psychology*, 49(1), 59–71.
- Kashefpakdel, E., Percy, C. and Rehill, J. (2019). *Motivated to achieve: how encounters with the world of work can change attitudes and improve academic achievement*. *Education and Employers*. [online] Available at: <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/motivated-to-achieve>. [Accessed 11 Jan. 2026].
- Kashefpakdel, E., Percy, C., Chambers, N. and Rehill, J. (2024). *Insights and inspiration: exploring the impact of guest speakers in schools*. *Education and Employers*. [online] Available at: <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/insights-and-inspiration>. [Accessed 11 Jan. 2026].
- Kerr, K., Dyson, A., and Raffo, C. (2014). *Education, Disadvantage and Place: Making the Local Matter*. Policy Press, Bristol.
- Kime, S. (2016). *Measuring up - helping teachers to assess better*. *EEF Blog*. [online] EEF. Available at: educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/measuring-up-helping-teachers-to-assess-better [Accessed 29 Nov. 2025]
- Kluger, A. N. and DeNisi, A. (1996). 'The effects of feedback interventions on performance: A historical review, a meta-analysis, and a preliminary feedback intervention theory', *Psychological Bulletin*, 119, (2), 254–284.
- Kraft, M. A. and Falken, G. T. (2021) 'A blueprint for scaling tutoring and mentoring across public schools.' *AERA Open*, 7(1): p. 1–21. DOI: org/10.1177/23328584211042858.
- Lee, M. W. and Newton, P. (2021) *Systematic divergence between teacher and test-based assessment: literature review*. Coventry: Ofqual

- Lord, P., Rennie, C., Smith, R., Gildea, A., Tang, S., Miani, G., Styles, B. and Bradley, C. (2020). *Randomised controlled trial evaluation of Families Connect*. Education Endowment Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2024].
- Mann, A., Percy, C. and Kashefpakdel, E. (2018). *Socialised social capital? The capacity of schools to use careers provision to compensate for social capital deficiencies among teenagers*. Education and Employers. [online] Available at: <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/socialised-social-capital>. [Accessed 11 Jan. 26].
- Mazzoli-Smith, L. and Todd, L. (2016). *Poverty proofing the school day: evaluation and development report*. Research Centre for Learning and Teaching, Newcastle University. [online] Available at: <https://eprints.ncl.ac.uk/232454>. DOI: org/10.13140/RG.2.1.2575.2565. [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- Macleod, S., Sharp, C., Bernardinelli, D., Skipp, A. and Higgins, S. (2015). *Supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils: articulating success and good practice*. National Foundation for Educational Research, Ask Research & Durham University for the Department for Education. [online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/473974/DFE-RR411_Supporting_the_attainment_of_disadvantaged_pupils.pdf [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- McKie, A., Terziev, J. and Gill, B. (2021). *Impacts of home visits on students in District of Columbia public schools* (REL 2022-128). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic.
- National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (2022). *Developing a behaviour management policy*. NASUWT. [online] Available at: <https://www.nasuwat.org.uk>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2024].
- NHS (2024). *Is my child too ill for school?* NHS. [online] Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- Nickow, A., Oreopoulos, P. and Quan, V. (2020). *The impressive effects of tutoring on PreK-12 learning: a systematic review and meta-analysis of the experimental evidence*. Working paper 27476. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Nuthall, G. (2007) *The hidden lives of learners*. Wellington: NZCER Press.
- Ofsted (2011). *School-parent partnerships*. Ofsted. [online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/413696/Schools_and_parents.pdf [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- Ofsted (2019). *Ofsted Parent View: toolkit for schools*. Ofsted. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/ofsted>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2024].
- Ofsted (2025). *Education inspection framework: for use from November 2025*. GOV.UK. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework/education-inspection-framework-for-use-from-november-2025>. [Accessed 9 Sep. 2025].
- Olczyk, M., Kwon, S., Lorenz, G., Casoni, V., Schneider, T., Volodina, A., Waldfoegel, J. and Washbrook, E. (2022). *Teacher judgements, student social background, and student progress in primary school: a cross-country perspective*. Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft, 26(2), pp.443-468. DOI: org/10.1007/s11618-022-01119-7 [Accessed: 13 May 2023].
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2021). *Getting the most out of employer engagement in career guidance*. Education policy pointers. DOI: org/10.1787/fbbc3788-en.
- Ovenden-Hope, T., Brown, V. and Achtaridou, E. (2025). *The Pretty Poverty Report: Cornwall Rurality Matters*. Plymouth Marjon University in partnership with the Diocese of Truro. [online] Available at: <https://cornwallreports.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/The-Pretty-Poverty-Report.pdf> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- Parentkind (2021). *Parent voice report*. Parentkind. [online] Available at: <https://www.parentkind.org.uk>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2024].
- Popham, W. J. (2009). *Assessment Literacy for Teachers: Faddish or Fundamental?* Theory Into Practice, 48, 4-11. DOI: org/10.1080/00405840802577536.
- Public Policy Institute for Wales (2016). *Increasing the Use of School Facilities*. [online] Available at: <https://www.wcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Increasing-the-Use-of-School-Facilities-Report.pdf> [Accessed 29 Nov. 2024].
- Rethinking Assessment (2023). *Rethinking Assessment*. [online] Available at: <https://rethinkingassessment.com> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (2025). *Sickness absence in schools: A guide for parents*. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. [online] Available at: [https://hamstead-primary.sch.life/Files/Download/c145e7c3-df68-4569-b57d-74d378bccdae4/0731a1a7-4766-4ae1-9cd1c9c33a1bba8b/sickness%20absence%20in%20school%20a%20guide%20for%20parents%20\(1\).pdf](https://hamstead-primary.sch.life/Files/Download/c145e7c3-df68-4569-b57d-74d378bccdae4/0731a1a7-4766-4ae1-9cd1c9c33a1bba8b/sickness%20absence%20in%20school%20a%20guide%20for%20parents%20(1).pdf) [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026]
- Sharples, J., Webster, R. and Blatchford, P. (2015). *Making best use of teaching assistants: Guidance report*. Education Endowment Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/teaching-assistants> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].

- Sim, A., Bickford Smith, W. and Elliot Major, L. (2023). *South-West Social Mobility Commission Introductory Report*. South-West Social Mobility Commission. [online] Available at: <https://southwestsocialmobility.com/wp-content/uploads/South-West-Social-Mobility-Commission-2023-Report-1.pdf> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- Sim, A., Brooks, B. and Elliot Major, L. (2025). *Improving the way Ofsted inspects education: Shining a spotlight on disadvantage – Response to the proposed new 2025 Ofsted Framework for school inspections*. South-West Social Mobility Commission. [online] Available at: southwestsocialmobility.com/wp-content/uploads/Ofsted-response.pdf [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- Sim, A., Brooks, B. and Elliot Major, L. (2025). *SWSMC Annual Report 2025: Breaking Ground*. South-West Social Mobility Commission. [online] Available at: southwestsocialmobility.com/wp-content/uploads/2025EEG052-South-West-Social-Mobility-Commission-Annual-Report-2025_st10_FINAL.pdf [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- Sim, A. and Elliot Major, L. (2025). *Heart of the community: a study of The Reach Foundation's cradle-to-career partnership*. South-West Social Mobility Commission. [online] Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6633596cd8ba466019733efat/6793273e5279b176c53bac69/1737697100459/Heart+of+the+Community+%7C+South+West+Social+Mobility+Commission+%282024%29.pdf>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2025].
- Sim, A. and Elliot Major, L. (2022). *Social Mobility in the South West: Levelling up through education*. Centre for Social Mobility, University of Exeter. [online] Available at: exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/newsarchive/researchgeneral/Social_Mobility_in_the_South_West_Report.pdf [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- Smith, H. and Higgins, S. (2006). 'Opening classroom interaction: The importance of feedback', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 36, (4), 485–502.
- Social Mobility Commission (2020). *Socio-economic diversity and inclusion. Employers' toolkit: Cross-industry edition*. Social Mobility Commission. [online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60fff2088fa8f5042fd6e877/SMC-Employers-Toolkit_WEB_updated_July2021.pdf [Accessed 29 Nov. 2025].
- Somerset County Council (2011). *Behaviour and Vulnerability Profile Tool*. Somerset County Council [online] Available at: https://www.cypsomersethealth.org/resources/MHTK/Behaviour_and_Vulnerability_Profile_Tool.pdf. [Accessed 16 Feb. 2026].
- South Tyneside Council (no date). *Create your pupil profile*. South Tyneside Council. [online] Available at: <https://southtyneside.gov.uk/article/6919/Create-your-pupil-profile> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- Sport England (2024). *Use our school*. Sport England. [online] Available at: <https://www.sportengland.org>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2024].
- Sport England (2024). *Use our school: measuring success*. Sport England. [online] Available at: <https://www.sportengland.org>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2024].
- Stokes, L., Dawson, A., Williams, C., Alexander, K., Akehurst, G., Manzoni, C., Runge, J. and Xu, L. (2022). *Tips by Text: Evaluation Report*. King's College London and Education Endowment Foundation. [online] Available at: https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/242584470/Tips_by_Text_Final.pdf. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2025].
- The Key (2022). *Monitoring the progress of vulnerable pupils: gathering evidence*. [online] The Key. Available at: <https://schoolleaders.thekeysupport.com/curriculum-and-learning/assessment-primary/tracking-progress-primary/monitoring-progress-of-vulnerable-pupils-gathering-evidence> [Accessed 28 Nov. 2024].
- The Reach Foundation UK (2026). *The Reach Foundation UK*. [online] Available at: <https://www.reachfoundation.uk> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- The Sutton Trust (2024). *Fair School Admissions*. The Sutton Trust. [online] Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/fair-school-admissions> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2026].
- The Sutton Trust (2024). *Selective Comprehensives 2024* - Sutton Trust. [online] Sutton Trust. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/selective-comprehensives-2024> [Accessed 28 Nov. 2024].
- Taylor, B., Francis, B., Craig, N., Archer, L., Hodgen, J., Mazenod, A., Tereshchenko, A. and Pepper, D. (2018). 'Why is it difficult for schools to establish equitable practices in allocating students to attainment sets?' *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 67(1), pp.5–24.
- Urhahne, D. and Wijnia, L. (2021). 'Accuracy of teacher judgements.' *Educational Research Review*, 32, 100390.
- Welsh Government (2021). *School and college alumni toolkit*. Welsh Government. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.wales>. [Accessed 28 Nov. 2024].
- Yemini, M., Engel, L. and Ben Simon, A. (2025) 'Place-based education – a systematic review of literature.' *Educational Review*, 77(2), pp. 640–660. DOI: org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2177260.



SOUTH-WEST
SOCIAL MOBILITY
COMMISSION



University
of Exeter