

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 16 March 2016
Report for: Approval
Report of: Scrutiny Committee Closing the Gap Task and Finish Group

Report Title

Closing the Gap: Reducing Educational Inequalities within the Borough of Trafford – Task and Finish Group

Purpose

Following a meeting with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee in July 2015, the Acting Corporate Director, Children, Families and Wellbeing produced a report outlining the proposed education topics for Scrutiny Members to investigate. This report was brought to the Scrutiny Committee on 1 October 2015, and as a result it was agreed that a Task and Finish Group be formed to investigate educational inequalities within Trafford, and how these could be reduced.

The review's aim was to determine where and why these educational inequalities exist and which strategies can be implemented to improve this, and in turn, 'Close the Gap'.

This report sets out the findings and recommendations of the Group. The Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider these and make recommendations to the Executive for their first meeting in the 2016/17 municipal year.

Recommendations

That the recommendations set out below be endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee for referral to the Executive:

Recommendation 1 – That the Executive consider using Trafford outreach workers to facilitate one off workshops to provide early years services to parents where an appropriate case could be made.

Recommendation 2 – That the Executive support the collaborative work of five schools (Stretford High, St Anthony's, Altrincham College, Wellacre & Wellington) in undertaking a project combining their resources and expertise to work towards closing the gap in all schools.

Recommendation 3 – That the Executive consider allocating appropriate funding to support the project highlighted in recommendation 2.

Recommendation 4 – That the Executive agree that the Council take the lead in organising an event to provide an opportunity for all Trafford schools to come together and share ideas on the four sub topics investigated by the Task and Finish Group.

Recommendation 5 – That the Executive support the development of a depository for schools to share good practice and ideas through an online forum on the InfoTrafford website.

Recommendation 6 – That the Executive support the organising of a workshop for Head Teachers / senior leaders from both Primary and Secondary schools in Trafford to focus on improving resilience in children.

Recommendation 7 – That the Executive support the distribution of a letter from Trafford Council which schools can use in conjunction with their own communications outlining the benefits of providing information (particularly National Insurance numbers) to identify children eligible for Pupil Premium funding.

Recommendation 8 – That the Executive supports the Trafford Innovation Hub's work in developing an interactive map providing data on deprivation which allows schools to take a targeted approach to Pupil Premium funding.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Chris Gaffey

Extension: 2019

1. Background

Following a meeting with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee in July 2015, the Acting Corporate Director, Children, Families and Wellbeing produced a report outlining the proposed education topics for Scrutiny Members to investigate. This report was brought to the Scrutiny Committee on 1 October 2015, and as a result it was agreed that a Task and Finish Group would be formed to investigate educational inequalities within Trafford, and how these could be reduced.

The review's aim was to determine where and why these educational inequalities exist and which strategies could be implemented to improve this, and in turn, 'Close the Gap'. The 'gap' refers to the 'attainment gap', which can be observed as a persistent disparity of educational measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity and gender.

It was agreed that Education Services would assist with the investigation, and would facilitate the inviting of Head Teachers from around the Borough to provide expert advice on how these aims could be realistically achieved.

Scrutiny Committee members were invited to register their interest with Democratic Services if they wished to take part in the investigation.

The following data shows the current attainment gap within Trafford schools at Key Stage 4 (the measure used is the percentage of disadvantaged children which have achieved a 'good' level of attainment compared to non-disadvantaged children):

Key Stage 4 (End of Secondary School):

Trafford Gap: 38%

National Gap: 27%

Key Stage 4 Attainment Level within Trafford:

Disadvantaged Children: 41%

Non-disadvantaged Children: 79%

38% point gap between the two cohorts.

The above clearly shows that improvements can be made, which the Task and Finish Group set out to achieve.

2. Review Approach

Following initial meetings, it was agreed to break the investigation down into smaller sub-topics, allowing more detailed focus on specific areas. Group members were asked to register their interest in the area they would like investigate, with the sub groups expected to report their findings back to the full group for discussion.

The Acting Corporate Director, Children, Families and Wellbeing and the Head of

Service, Education Standards provided assistance to the groups.

It was agreed that the overall aim would be to produce a report with the group's findings and recommendations to the Executive. The group would also aim to implement positive changes which would not require Executive approval where possible.

3. Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the review was

To undertake a review of the educational inequalities within the Borough of Trafford and identify realistic objectives and strategies which could potentially 'Close the Gap'.

The Group investigated the following sub-topics:

- (i) Why Attainment is Lower for Disadvantaged Children
- (ii) Improving Parental Engagement
- (iii) Bringing Schools Together to Share Good Practice
- (iv) Supporting Schools in Identification Process for Pupil Premium – Exploration into Eligibility

It was noted that some of the data used for the review would not be in the public domain, and would not be released without consent.

4. Membership of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

The review was carried out by

Councillors: J. Coupe (Chairman), R. Bowker, C. Boyes, K. Carter, M. Cordingley, L. Dagnall, D. Hopps and D Western.

Co-Opted Members for Education Matters: Ms. Saadia Khan and Ms. Tora Rushby.

Co-Opted Head Teachers for Expert Advice: Nicola Doward (Stretford High), Cathy Graham (Wellfield Infants), Tony Rae (Seymour Park Primary), Kris Stallman (Moss Park Juniors) and Fiona Wright (St Antony's).

Support Officers: John Pearce (Acting Corporate Director, Children, Families and Wellbeing), Adrian Hallett (Head of Service – Education Standards), Jane Bryan (Secondary School Improvement Advisor), Jamie Whyte (Data Innovation and Policy Specialist), and Chris Gaffey (Democratic & Scrutiny Officer).

The Task and Finish Group participants were asked to register their interest in one or more of the sub topic groups:

Sub Topic	Member(s)	Officer(s) / Expert(s)
Why Attainment is Lower for Disadvantaged Children	Cllr Ray Bowker Cllr Mike Cordingley	Fiona Wright
Improving Parental Engagement	Cllr Karina Carter Ms Saadia Kahn Ms Tora Rushby	Cathy Graham
Bringing Schools Together to Share Good Practice	Cllr Chris Boyes Cllr Mike Cordingley	Nicola Doward Kris Stallman
Supporting Schools in Identification Process for Pupil Premium – Exploration into Eligibility	Cllr Jonathan Coupe Cllr Louise Dagnall Cllr David Hopps	Tony Rae

These sub groups agreed to meet separately to investigate their respective topics in more detail and reported back to the full group. The findings of the full group are set out below.

5. Why Attainment is Lower for Disadvantaged Children

The reasons why attainment is lower for disadvantaged children are complex and varied, with many differing schools of thought. To ensure the investigation was Trafford specific, sub group members agreed that an exercise involving schools within the Borough was important. A questionnaire was distributed and schools were asked the following question:

What do you believe to be the main reasons for disadvantaged students underachieving? Try and answer this even if there is no gap in your own school.

From a list of predetermined reasons as to why attainment could be lower for disadvantaged children, the top four answers were:

1. Lack of parental support for/engagement with school
2. Poverty in the home environment e.g. no place to study, no access to revision materials, useful technology etc.
3. Lack of student perseverance in reaching their goals
4. Lack of parental aspiration

(Note - the full questionnaire and its results can be seen in Appendix 1)

The results show Trafford schools believe that a lack of parental engagement was the key contributing factor for low attainment amongst disadvantaged children. This was investigated as a topic by the second sub group.

6. Improving Parental Engagement

This is considered an important areas as lack of parental engagement was considered to be the main reason for disadvantaged students underachieving amongst schools in Trafford.

Parental involvement in a child's education should start as soon as possible, and is vital at stages of transfer and transition – home to nursery, nursery to Reception, KS1 to KS2 and Year 6 to High School – which are seen as being particularly relevant. A Trafford guide to transition for children through the Early Years Foundation Stage called 'Changes for Children' is available, and the popular practice of home visits by the school before the child starts is considered to be an effective way of promoting the value of parents working together with schools.

The Scrutiny Task and Finish Group did feel that the reduction in Children's Centres has had some impact on the ability of parents to attend courses, meet friends, and get involved with their child's education at an early stage. In turn, this has affected the ability for schools to engage with some parents.

Improving parental engagement is an enormous challenge for schools, particularly when parents are already 'hard to reach'. Schools would therefore need to develop a clear vision for parental engagement based on the belief that parents matter, which would need to be tailored to their particular school and community.

Schools should provide a menu of opportunities and offers for parents and carers to get involved, which could include:

- A universal offer to all parents, such as parents evenings, homework classes, support for reading and maths etc.
- A targeted offer for some parents who have some barriers to engagement and need additional support, such as lack of personal literacy and/or numeracy, English as an Additional Language and/or cultural barriers to attending events in schools.
- A bespoke offer which may involve volunteers, Teaching Assistants (TAs) or extended family members, for children whose parents are unable to engage with school for mental or physical health reasons or families in crisis for instance.

The Group also identified specific areas where schools could improve parental engagement:

- Improve communication, with schools taking time to build relationships with parents (especially parents who are perceived as 'hard to reach').
- Provide parents with clearer explanations of the importance and causal influence of their involvement, and being a role model for their child.
- Designate a community room / area where parents can come on an informal basis, (coffee mornings / space to discuss any difficulties), without it being too formal a setting.
- Provide greater support for parents having difficulties themselves.

- Appoint a member of staff responsible for outreach to parents / carers, and publicise the availability of this staff member to ensure they are utilised.
- Organise workshops for parents to understand the curriculum and how to help at home.
- Provide flexibility to allow for parental involvement. Some parents have childcare or other caring responsibilities, or suffer from lack of confidence, or might need interpreters etc.

In addition to the above, the Parent Governor Representative for Special Schools described the special circumstances / barriers that parents of children with additional needs have in relation to being more actively involved in their child's education. Often the children get transport to school meaning there are no 'school gate friendships' that other parents may benefit from. It is also more difficult to arrange childcare for children with disabilities, which makes evening events more of a challenge. However, this does not mean that schools could not keep in touch with parents by text, 'phone calls, emails and letters, to share how their child is doing, and how they could support their child.

An obvious improvement to levels of parental engagement would be the appointing of a Parent Support Advisor (PSA) by each school; however budgetary constraints make this increasingly difficult. The Parent Governor Representative highlighted a good model currently being used amongst some of the Special Schools within the Borough, where the PSA works throughout a cluster of schools, sharing the resource within the locality.

The Acting Corporate Director, Childrens, Families and Wellbeing suggested that the Council should explore the possibility of utilising Trafford outreach workers to hold one off workshops, providing early years services and advice to parents in specific areas which are considered to have had a reduction in the local children's services available to them. The objective would be to initiate parental engagement at an early stage, preparing parents for engagement with schools as the child progresses through the education system.

A case study of a successful workshop to engage parents provided by one Trafford school can be seen in Appendix 2.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – That the Executive consider using Trafford outreach workers to facilitate one off workshops to provide early years services to parents where an appropriate case could be made.

7. Bringing Schools Together to Share Good Practice

When it comes to closing the attainment gap, there is evidence of good practice happening within the Borough – the challenge is creating the circumstances where this good practice can be shared. Schools find it difficult to find the time and expertise required in order to maximise the potential benefits of sharing good practice.

In terms of sharing good practice, there is a general emerging consensus that commissioning external audits across a cluster of secondary schools to share good practice in making the best use of Pupil Premium funding would be a helpful first step. It is also important for Primary Schools to share their good practice to ensure that progress and attainment levels of Pupil Premium children continue to rise in Key Stage 2, which would create a better baseline for these pupils to support better attainment in Key Stage 3 and on to Key Stage 4.

Talks had been ongoing amongst some schools within the Borough about coming together to share good practice, and it has now been confirmed that Stretford High, St Anthony's, Altrincham College, Wellacre & Wellington have agreed to come together to carry out a project which will combine resources and expertise to work towards closing the gap in all schools. Wayne Trafford from the Heath Academy has been approached to lead the project in the first instance, and all five schools have committed financially, each contributing £1,500 from their respective budgets.

The project has already taken some positive steps:

- A directory of Primary Schools willing to share their Pupil Premium strategies to help raise attainment will be included on the Trafford Teaching School's Alliance website. This service will be provided free of charge.
- Some of Head Teachers involved with the project are scheduled to receive training in March to become 'Pupil Premium Reviewers', to equip them with the required skills to carry out Pupil Premium reviews in secondary schools (with other Head Teachers booked for future training dates)

Once the project is complete, the intention would be to draw up a menu of 'Closing the Gap' strategies that were successful across the schools. Other Trafford schools and colleagues could then choose to visit these schools to share in the experience.

Due to the pressures on school budgets, the Task and Finish Group request that the Executive support this project by matching the funding made by the five schools (£1,500 contributed by each of the 5 schools) to cover the funds the schools have already contributed to the project.

In addition, with schools' ability to share good practice constrained by a lack of available time to get together and discuss matters, it is requested that the InfoTrafford website develop a depository for schools to share good practice and ideas through an online forum.

Finally, the group highlighted the importance of improving children's resilience and how this would have a positive effect on their education. Research has shown that an individual's level of resilience is a key factor in determining their academic success, and high levels of resilience help to ensure lifelong success in many areas including health and well-being, relationships and careers. The Head Teachers of Seymour Park Primary and Wellfield Infants agreed to organise a workshop around the issue of resilience in children, inviting Head Teachers and senior leaders from both Primary and Secondary Schools to come together and discuss the topic.

Recommendations

Recommendation 2 – That the Executive support the collaborative work of five schools (Stretford High, St Anthony's, Altrincham College, Wellacre & Wellington) in undertaking a project combining their resources and expertise to work towards closing the gap in all schools.

Recommendation 3 – That the Executive consider allocating appropriate funding to support the project highlighted in recommendation 2.

Recommendation 4 – That the Executive agree that the Council take the lead in organising an event to provide an opportunity for all Trafford schools to come together and share ideas on the four sub topics investigated by the Task and Finish Group.

Recommendation 5 – That the Executive support the development of a depository for schools to share good practice and ideas through an online forum on the InfoTrafford website.

Recommendation 6 – That the Executive support the organising of a workshop for Head Teachers / senior leaders from both Primary and Secondary schools in Trafford to focus on improving resilience in children.

8. Supporting Schools in Identification Process for Pupil Premium – Exploration into Eligibility

The [Pupil Premium](#) is additional funding for publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers

As mentioned in section 7 of the report, funding is an issue for some schools within the Borough, and the Task and Finish feel that maximising Pupil Premium (PP) funding for schools should be pursued as a priority. This is an opportunity to obtain central funding to improve school standards, at a minimal cost to Trafford.

The following significant challenges were highlighted when attempting to identify children eligible for Pupil Premium funding:

- Some parents do not want to divulge personal information about being in receipt of state benefits.
- Language barriers.
- Lower levels of parental engagement.

There are three types of children who can attract pupil premium funding:

- (i) Early Years (EY)
- (ii) Looked After Children (LAC)
- (iii) Remaining PP Pupils

Trafford's Early Years team can identify Early Years PP children using the Department for Education's online Eligibility Checking System (ECS). To perform this check they require 3 pieces of information: Parent's Surname, Parent's Date of Birth and Parent's National Insurance number. Using this information, the system pulls data in from HMRC, The Home Office and DWP to check whether an Early Years child is eligible for PP.

Looked after children (or children under a child protection plan) receive the funding automatically.

The remaining PP children are the ones that schools struggle to identify due to the challenges mentioned above.

Access Trafford now offer a Pupil Premium Checking Service which could be used to identify the remaining PP children. The system works as follows:

- To check a child's eligibility, Access Trafford require the surname, date of birth and national insurance number of the child's parent.
- Schools can submit a 'batch' of parent data to Access Trafford who would check the children's eligibility.
- Access Trafford charge a fee of £300 to check each batch (most schools would be happy to pay the fee).
- Schools could submit as many children as they wanted in one batch.
- The results are then be returned to the school, confirming which children are eligible for the funding.
- Schools can conduct a whole school check once per year before school census date in the autumn term.
- This could include all pupils in the school who are new and all non-eligible pupils from previous years as pupils may have become eligible since the last check.
- Pupils who have previously been checked as eligible need not be checked again for 6 years due to the Ever 6 FSM rule (Children qualify for the PP funding if they have been in receipt of certain state benefits at any point in the last 6 years).
- As the criteria is the same for EYPP as it is for Free School Meals (FSM), any child who has been checked (for free) and is eligible for EYPP whilst in the school nursery can also be included as eligible for PP in the next 5 years (reception through to year 5)

The best approach to obtaining the required data would be for schools to capture this on the school registration forms completed by parents.

Pupil Premium funding and the obtaining of the required data would need to be appropriately advertised to parents, and a combined effort by Trafford Council and the schools themselves would be most effective. With members of the public already cautious in divulging personal information, a joint effort explaining why the data is required and how it will be used would alleviate any concerns parents might have in providing it.

The following positive steps have been taken as a result of the sub group's work so far:

- The Council website has been updated in relation to the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) and the free eligibility checking service for all schools for EYPP.
- The page also informs schools of the paid for eligibility checking service for Pupil Premium for Reception to Year 11 pupils, and refers them to the Trafford Education website.
- An item was included in the school bulletin to explain about the two eligibility checking services.
- The Training and Systems Officer, Access Trafford, has been invited to the next Head Teacher's Conference on 15th of June to discuss and publicise the PP Checking System.

Finally, while schools suspect that they are undersubscribed when it comes to Pupil Premium funding, there is no concrete evidence to suggest this. Therefore, the Data Innovation and Policy Specialist agreed to begin work on a data map detailing what state benefits are claimed in different areas of the Borough. The aim of this exercise would be to create a model of the expected rate of state benefit claimants in specific areas, enabling schools to have an idea about whether their Pupil Premium figures are low.

Recommendations

Recommendation 7 – That the Executive support the distribution of a letter from Trafford Council which schools can use in conjunction with their own communications outlining the benefits of providing information (particularly National Insurance numbers) to identify children eligible for Pupil Premium funding.

Recommendation 8 – That the Executive supports the Trafford Innovation Hub's work in developing an interactive map providing data on deprivation which allows schools to take a targeted approach to Pupil Premium funding.

Appendix 1 – Results of the Questionnaire

As part of the work of the Sub Topic Group focusing on ‘Why Attainment is Lower for Disadvantaged Children’ the questionnaire below was emailed to all Trafford Secondary Headteacher.

Dear Headteachers,

I am currently working with two councillors, Councillor Bowker and Councillor Cordingley, as part of the Trafford Council Closing the Gap focus group. We are looking to identify the reasons ‘why attainment is lower for disadvantaged students’.

To assist in our work I would be grateful if you could answer the following three questions:

Is there a PP attainment gap in your school?

Yes

No

What do you believe to be the main reasons for disadvantaged students underachieving? Try and answer this even if there is no gap in your own school. Please highlight five reasons.

1. Lack of parental support for/engagement with school
2. Lack of parental aspiration
3. Lack of student aspiration
4. Lack of student perseverance in reaching their goals
5. Parents not valuing education
6. Students not valuing education
7. Poor relationship with adult authority figures
8. Lack of parental knowledge about the value of education
9. Poverty in the home environment e.g. no place to study, no access to revision materials, useful technology etc.
10. Genetic differences i.e. they were born this way
11. Lack of experience in life e.g. theatre, museum, university visits
12. Poor behaviour of students
13. Poor attendance of students
14. Poor nutrition i.e. students too hungry to work well in school

The selective system in place in Trafford is a factor in making the gap within Trafford greater than that nationally?

Please highlight the statement below which best fits your opinion.

I strongly believe this statement is correct

I believe this statement is correct

I neither believe or disbelieve this statement

I do not believe this statement is incorrect

I strongly believe this statement is incorrect

I would be grateful to receive your answers at your earliest convenience. It would be wonderful to hear back from you all.

With kind regards,

Fiona

Summary

4 out of 7 Grammar School Headteachers replied.

6 out of 6 Secondary Modern (with large gap) Headteachers replied

3 out of 5 Secondary Modern (not with large gap) Headteachers replied

1 Special School Headteacher replied

Question 1

Generally the Grammar Schools do not have a gap. They have small PP cohorts who usually perform as well if not better than their peers. All Secondary Moderns have a gap.

Question 2

For **all** schools the four top answers in order were:

5. Lack of parental support for/engagement with school
6. Poverty in the home environment e.g. no place to study, no access to revision materials, useful technology etc.
7. Lack of student perseverance in reaching their goals
8. Lack of parental aspiration

For **grammar schools** the five top answers in order were:

- Lack of parental support for/engagement with school
- Poverty in the home environment e.g. no place to study, no access to revision materials, useful technology etc.
- Lack of student perseverance in reaching their goals
- Lack of parental knowledge about the value of education
- Lack of experience in life e.g. theatre, museum, university visits

For **secondary moderns with a large gap** the top four answers in order were:

- Lack of parental support for/engagement with school
- Lack of parental aspiration
- Poverty in the home environment e.g. no place to study, no access to revision materials, useful technology etc.
- Poor behaviour of students

For **secondary moderns without a large gap** the top five answers in order were:

- Lack of student perseverance in reaching their goals
- Lack of parental support for/engagement with school
- Lack of student aspiration
- Poverty in the home environment e.g. no place to study, no access to revision materials, useful technology etc.
- Lack of experience in life e.g. theatre, museum, university visits

For **secondary moderns overall** the top four answers in order were:

9. Lack of parental support for/engagement with school
10. Lack of student perseverance in reaching their goals

11. Poverty in the home environment e.g. no place to study, no access to revision materials, useful technology etc.
12. Lack of parental aspiration

Question 3

Grammar school and special school neither believe nor disbelieve the statement. All others school believe or strongly believe the statement.

Appendix 2 - Case Study (Improving Parental Engagement)

Wellfield Infants School, Church Lane, Ashton on Mersey

The Head, Ms Graham, and staff at Wellfield Infant school are committed to including parents in all aspects of their child's learning. They undertake the home visits before a child starts at school, and welcome parents into school.

One successful area they have developed is Workshops for Parents, which are open to all parents, although some are particularly encouraged to attend. Many of the parents of pupils go out to work, so a lot of the workshops are held in the evening to meet their needs. In a previous school, where a lot of the parents stayed at home, the Head found it was more appropriate to hold workshops during the day, often with interpreters, which shows the importance of working with the community the school is based in. Ms Graham encourages parents to ask for workshops they would find useful.

Workshop topics include:

- Supporting boys' development
- Calculation
- Getting ready for reading
- Learning through play
- Letters and sounds
- Keeping your child safe online

If parents are unable to attend then the resources provided at these workshops are available for all parents to access online.

These workshops are fairly formal but friendly, as there is a lot of information to impart. Refreshments are available, and free resources are given as an incentive to attend. I attended session 2/3 on Phonics, and found parents engaged and encouraged to participate. There were some technical terms explained, but the learning was mainly through games, and interactive discussions. It was interesting to note that it was mainly dads who volunteered to come up to the front and have a go at the exercise! Ms Graham promoted useful websites for parents to visit, and also games that parents could play at home to encourage children to read. The workshop was well attended, and at least a third of all parents attend all three workshops. The sessions scored highly in evaluations.

Another initiative is the Stay and Play session that operates for every class once a year. Parents come into school at lunchtime, have lunch with their children and spend the afternoon in the classroom. Parents are given plenty of notice to attend, so they can get time off work if necessary, and parents who are separated are encouraged to come on different days to ensure all parents are catered for. Ms Graham reports that nearly every parent in the school attends these sessions.

There is also a Parents Forum, held with the Junior School, where parents ask questions such as how children are assessed/ homework policy etc., which is held

twice a year. There are also weekly newsletters and a very accessible site for parents within the school website. This is a beacon of good practice in Trafford, and other schools will be welcomed if they want to discuss and share these great ideas.