



Permanent Secretary

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Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

27th January 2025

Dear Sir Geoffrey,

Improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged children

Thank you for inviting us to appear before the Committee on 13th January. Juliet Chua, Tony Foot and I greatly valued the opportunity to discuss the findings of the National Audit Office (NAO) report with you and the committee members. I am writing to follow up on points raised in the hearing and to provide further clarity where needed.

Question 43: (Anna Dixon) In terms of all this extra money that is going in, you mentioned it being on two metrics, one of those being disadvantage and the other being attainment. Is that using free school meals again for the education investment areas getting money? Is that the measure of disadvantage, or is it something else?

Education Investment Areas (EIAs) are 55 educationally underperforming local authorities based on sustained low performance (2017 – 2019) across KS2 and KS4.

Priority Education Investment Areas (PEIAs), selected in 2022, are a subset of the Education Investment Areas and include:

- 12 local authorities with sustained low performance at key stage 2 and key stage 4 (between 2017 -2019) who also meet a minimum level of deprivation
- the 12 previous Opportunity Areas (2016 - 2021)

The Local Needs Fund, ending in March 2025, has provided investment in PEIAs for evidence-based activities targeted to support literacy, numeracy and attendance at KS2 and KS4.

PEIA selection criteria

The selection criteria for PEIAs (excluding the 12 previous Opportunity Areas) used data on the proportion of pupils eligible for the deprivation pupil premium. This covered pupils known to have been eligible for Free Schools Meals (FSM) in the previous six years – the main group of pupils counted as pupil premium eligible - and includes No Recourse to Public Fund (NRPF) pupils.



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The chosen criterion to account for levels of economic disadvantage was that at least 30% of pupils across primary and secondary year groups in state funded schools in the local authority must be eligible for the deprivation pupil premium in 2021-22. This ensured that areas selected are those with relatively high levels of economic disadvantage which were likely to have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To ensure that the PEIA programme was consistent with previous policies to improve outcomes in specific areas with high levels of need, the 12 Opportunity Areas were also selected as PEIAs. The Opportunity Area programme, announced in 2016, focused on improving educational attainment and social mobility, with the areas selected based on the 2016 Social Mobility Index which sought to identify areas based on the opportunities young people from poorer backgrounds have to succeed. These areas were cross referenced with the 2016 Achieving Excellence Areas Index which focused on school performance and capacity to improve, resulting in the 12 Opportunity Areas.

I hope the information provided in this letter is useful to the Committee. We look forward to your report and stand ready to assist further – please do not hesitate to reach out with any additional questions.

Yours sincerely,

**SUSAN ACLAND-HOOD
PERMANENT SECRETARY**



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