

Written evidence submitted by The Centre of Education and Youth

Left behind white pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds

Centre for Education and Youth

1 Introducing the Centre for Education and Youth

The Centre for Education and Youth is a 'think and action-tank'. We have expertise in relation to disadvantaged pupils' educational outcomes. For instance, we have undertaken research projects with King's College London to understand why white working-class boys and Gypsy Roma Traveller young people are underrepresented in higher education. We have also worked with the Greater London Authority to explore how best to support Black Caribbean and Free School Meal Eligible White Boys in education. This means we have a deep understanding of the educational issues facing boys from disadvantaged backgrounds and the challenges that need to be overcome.

We believe that society should ensure all children and young people receive the support they need to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. Our mixed-methods research on marginalised young people and our backgrounds as teachers and youth workers mean that we are particularly well placed to provide the education select committee with evidence on left behind white pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

2 The extent of underachievement for white pupils who are eligible for FSM (free school meals)

As reported in our report for the Social Mobility Commission 'Ethnicity, Gender and Social Mobility', White British pupils who are eligible for FSM are vulnerable to underperformance in education. Among white working-class pupils, it is boys who fair marginally worse than girls (Shaw et al, 2016).

Although in every ethnic group, those eligible for Free School Meals underperform compared to their more affluent peers, the gap is widest for pupils from White British and White Other groups. This is the case from the Early Years through to Key Stage Five, although by Key Stage Four the gap for 'White Other' pupils is smaller than the gap for 'White British' pupils (Shaw et al, 2016; Shaw et al, 2017).

Disadvantaged young people from White British backgrounds are the least likely to access Higher Education, with only 1 in 10 of the poorest attending university, compared to 3 in 10 for Black Caribbean children, 5 in 10 for Bangladeshis and nearly 7 in 10 amongst lowest income Chinese students. (Shaw et al, 2016).

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3 The variation within the cohort of white pupils who are eligible for FSM and how well the DfE's statistics capture that

3.1 Ethnicity

3.1.1 Pupils recorded as 'white other'

It is difficult to track academic attainment and progress for groups of white pupils who do not identify as 'British' and who fall into the 'white other' category'. As we highlight in 'Ethnicity, Gender and Social Mobility,' pupils who fall into the 'white other' category in government data collections include a range of different groups, including European migrants (Shaw et al, 2016).

3.1.2 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are the lowest performing groups in primary and secondary education in the UK on all measures of attainment, progress, behaviour and attendance (Mulcahy et al. 2017).

The Centre for Education and Youth's research also shows that the way educational data is collected for this group creates challenges for getting a detailed and accurate picture of pupils' educational attainment and progress.

GRT pupils may ascribe under the broad 'white other' category and this poses challenges.

GRT pupils experience racism and discrimination. This can result in pupils and families avoiding ascribing as GRT for fear of abuse (Mulcahy et al, 2017). As one parent in Mulcahy's research explained:

"The government has spent a significant amount of funding and resources to get Gypsies to ascribe themselves in the last census and to engage families in schools ...[they] went out there and knocked on doors and said 'you must ascribe yourselves'. And then my Big Fat Gypsy Wedding happened and all those children that had ascribed were being bullied. My own children were bullied remorselessly. There is a price to ascribing your identity...until we can rein in the media and the press you will not get people like me ascribing themselves because the price is too high." Parent quoted in Mulcahy et al, 2017: 40.

Some GRT pupils and families may therefore ascribe as 'white other' and this poses challenges. If Gypsy Roma Traveller pupils are included in this group, it becomes difficult to track their attainment and progress specifically because the category includes a variety of ethnic groups.

The School Census categorises GRT pupils differently to the national census, and this poses specific challenges (Mulcahy et al, 2017: p. 14):

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When reporting pupils' ethnicity, schools are presented with two possible categories for GRT pupils: 'Traveller of an Irish Heritage' and 'Gypsy/Roma'. The inclusion of 'Roma' as separate from 'White Other' allows a fuller picture of GRT pupil performance, but grouping 'Gypsy' with 'Roma' means that data on European Roma children, who are likely to speak English as an additional language, is combined with data on British Gypsies who do not face this additional disadvantage. Disaggregating this data would allow a more detailed picture of these pupils' attainment and the different barriers affecting their school performance.

Figures on the number of Gypsy Roma and Traveller pupils in schools are likely to be underestimated because families may not be willing to reveal their ethnic background because they are fearful of discrimination (Mulcahy, 2017: p.14):

School census statistics indicate that there are just over 4,000 Irish Traveller pupils and just over 16,000 Gypsy/Roma pupils in UK primary schools. In secondary schools, there are approximately 2,000 Irish Traveller pupils and 12,000 Gypsy/Roma pupils (DfE, 2016). These figures are likely to underestimate the number of GRT pupils in the school population because families may not be willing to reveal their ethnic background. Given that approximately 60% of European Roma populations are below 18 years old, a conservative estimate of 200,000 Roma in the national population (Brown, Martin and Scullion, 2013) suggests that there may in fact be around 124,000 Roma of compulsory school age in the UK (Penfold, 2015), not including other Gypsy and Traveller groups. Meanwhile, a 2003 estimate placed the number of primary aged Traveller children not enrolled in any school at around 12,000 (Ofsted, 2003).

3.2 Regional variation and the role of place

Research by Dr Sam Baars' (Director of Research and Operations at CfEY) indicates that the type of place pupils live in is a stronger predictor of their academic attainment and progress, compared to solely deprivation and ethnicity.

Dr Baars' research on space, place and aspirations suggests that there are stark differences in aspirations (Baars 2014a), school effectiveness (Baars 2014b), and pupil attainment (Baars 2015) between ethnically mixed, inner city area types, and ethnically homogenous (predominantly White) neighbourhoods that we tend to find on the outskirts of urban areas. For instance, pupils attending schools in 'cosmopolitan' inner city areas outperform those in 'hard pressed' outer urban areas by almost a grade and a half in every GCSE they sit – even though both of these contexts are similarly deprived. Dr Baars' research also suggests the effect of area 'type' (such as ONS area classifications, Output Area Classification) are more powerful at identifying the types of area where White British pupils underperform than purely deprivation-based measures.

- The principal factors that contribute to this underachievement
- The availability and quality of early years provision

What happens outside of the home in the early years plays a key role in determining young people's life chances, as reported in 'Ethnicity, Gender and Social Mobility' (Shaw et al, 2016). Our review of the literature highlighted a number of factors that determine young people's life chances:

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- **The quality of childcare settings accessed by parents varies by socio-economic status.** Where parents of children at a setting were predominantly from low SES backgrounds, the pre-school was of lower quality than where the parents had uniformly high SES or where there was a mix. This does not solely impact white children from low SES backgrounds. Given that ethnic minority families are more likely to be from a low SES groups, their children are more likely to be clustered in pre-schools with a high proportion of SES children. Their chances of accessing high quality pre-school are therefore reduced (Sammons et al, 2008).
- **Teacher perception can be gender-biased.** Gender bias in teachers' perceptions of children's ability may contribute to some of the gap between boys' and girls' EYFSP scores. Hansen and Jones (2011) used the Millennium Cohort Study to compare teacher-rated EYFSP scores and the externally rated British Ability Scale (BAS) scores to show that gender gaps were wider in the teacher rated scores than in the externally administered tests.

"I feel like it's actually just a whole society point of view. ...You'll just think, 'oh, white boys from estates', 'that boy is from a working-class estate', 'they're just going to be a distraction and just ruin the class'." Young person during a focus group quoted in Millard et al 2018: p9.

- **Teacher expectations can be lower for lower-income pupils in left behind areas.** In our report "Low-income pupils' progress at secondary school", one Headteacher of a secondary school in a coastal region of Yorkshire and the Humber identified problematic low-expectations amongst their school staff:

"Most teachers come from a fairly supportive, either strong supportive, working class background or middle class background and they've perhaps not experienced this. So I did worry a couple of years ago that there was a lack of empathy from our staff ...so we challenged that and I think that's been critical in changing our approach towards some of these disadvantaged youngsters". Head teacher quoted in Shaw et al 2017: p31.

3.3 The Home Learning Environment

Our research into ethnicity, gender and social mobility shows that the home learning environment and family influences such as parental engagement with education and expectations have a strong effect on the educational attainment of children (Shaw et al, 2016). For some groups, high levels of parental engagement can boost children's academic attainment. For example:

- Chinese and Indian boys and girls across all SES groups may be protected from the effects of disadvantage through higher parental expectations and engagement in their education.
- Lower SES Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups' increased attainment in recent years may in part be explained by family factors such as changing levels of engagement with children's education.

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- A number of studies also refer to the higher “aspirations and expectations” of migrant parents for their children (Platt 2005; Connor et al. 2004; Blanden et al. 2015).

These factors may not always be present for lower-income ‘White British’ pupils. In some cases, parents may place value on non-academic or vocational forms of learning. Gypsy, Roma Traveller parents may, for a number of reasons, be disengaged from formal education and this has a profound impact on their children’s education (Shaw et al 2016).

“[These families] do aspire. They've got high aspirations, but they don't necessarily have high educational aspirations, because they don't see education as instrumental in leading to the kind of outcomes that they want.”
Steve Strand, Professor of Education, University of Oxford quoted in Millard et al 2018: p14.

4 The impact of role models

Our research shows that:

- **White working-class boys may find it harder to access role models who have been to university.** White working-class families are less familiar with the realities and benefits of pursuing education beyond school, and tend not to see higher education as a likely option for their children, even if they do aspire for them to achieve it. This makes it harder for white working-class boys to access informal information and role models who can share their experience of higher education and communicate its tangible benefits (Baars et al, 2016).
- **The education system should not rely too heavily on white, male role models** because this can encourage boys to see white, working class men as their only available source of support (Baars et al, 2016).
- **Peer support can have a positive impact academically and socially for all pupils of both primary and secondary age.** Peer support – for example through peer tutoring or mentoring – can have a positive impact academically and socially for all pupils of both primary and secondary age, as shown in our report ‘Boys on Track’ (Millard et al, 2018). This is particularly the case for pupils with forms of special educational needs and disabilities (particularly emotional and behavioural disorders), or low prior attainment. Peer support should be carefully set up and scaffolded and is often beneficial between older and younger pairings of peers (Millard et al, 2018).
- **Mentoring can have a positive impact on learning and educational outcomes,** although positive impact tends to be associated more with non-academic outcomes such as attitudes to school (Millard et al, 2018).
- **The specific impact of mentoring on academic outcomes is mixed** (Millard et al, 2018; Shaw et al, 2018).

5 The effects of COVID-19 on this group

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Our 'Supporting Young People through Covid' report (Menzies, 2020) highlights that Covid-19 has widened the gap between affluent and poor families and has disrupted schools' ability to level out disparities in families' access to resources:

5.1 The provision of food

Much of the immediate response to Covid has focused on provision of food, particularly in relation to free school meals, but also where schools needed to compensate for overstretched or closed foodbanks. Food remains an important concern, particularly with regard to holiday food over May half term (and possibly the summer holidays).

Roundtable participants described the helpful role being played by community groups, for example those providing a soup kitchen in the North East. However, they also raised the fact that many families are suddenly being pushed into poverty and that schools are having to step in rapidly to provide food for pupils who were not previously identified as eligible for Free School Meals (Menzies, 2020).

5.2 Technology and data

Unequal access to technology is likely to widen educational divides and disparities as dependency on online learning increases. One head teacher we spoke to has therefore distributed laptops where necessary. However, data is proving to be an additional hurdle since not all families have access to wifi at home. Some schools have responded by handing out data dongles and a campaign has led telecom companies to uncap data allowances on phones. However, disadvantaged families frequently rely on pay-as-you-go services so the DfE may need to step in and provide vouchers for data in the same way they do for food (Menzies, 2020).

5.3 Summer schools

Our report on summer schools (Mulcahy et al, 2020) also indicates that it can be challenging to ensure that 'catch-up' provision targets the right pupils and disadvantaged pupils attend:

In usual circumstances, low proportions of disadvantaged pupils attend summer schools. There is some reason to believe that attendance patterns would be different this summer as parents and pupils are concerned about missed school time in a way they never have been before, but this needs to be balanced against additional worries about safety. Janice Allen, Head Teacher of Falinge Park High School, Rochdale highlighted the challenge of targeting and suggested that a universal offer, coupled with working closely with families and utilising staff knowledge of pupils is the key to overcoming this:

"An important consideration is making sure that any academic catch up doesn't feel like a punishment by unfairly targeting more disadvantaged pupils. The message can't be ...'you are disadvantaged so we want you to give up your holidays and work on your English and Maths' That's why working with partners is so important, and why it has to be part of the universal offer. We can then use our knowledge of our pupils, alongside existing relationships to encourage pupils to participate." Janice Allen, Head Teacher of Falinge Park High School, Rochdale quoted in Mulcahy et al, 2020: p13.

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6 Priorities for the government

6.1 The value of locally-tailored solutions, including youth groups and community organisations

Our report '*Can Summer Schools Help Disadvantaged Young People*' highlights that managing demands on teachers' time is a key challenge to providing disadvantaged young people with extra educational support in the wake of the covid-19 crisis. There may therefore be scope for working with volunteers (preferably former teachers) and other local services (Mulcahy et al, 2020). As Janice Allen, Head Teacher of Falinge Park High School in Rochdale explained:

"Maintaining connections is a big priority so we have agreed with that when we return youth services will come in every dinner, to cement the link we have, and I'm going out with youth service starting next week on detached youth work so that the parents see the provision as joined up... It is possible to do this work in partnership, the people are out there but you just have to know where to look and be a bit tenacious" Janice Allen, Head Teacher of Falinge Park High School, Rochdale quoted in Mulcahy et al, 2020: p13.

6.2 The school system

Our research on supporting white boys eligible for free school meals and black Caribbean boys in education (Millard et al, 2018) suggests that the school system should:

6.2.1 Enhance pupils' emotional wellbeing and mental health

Mental health and wellbeing are critical in supporting educational outcomes, as well as wider success and happiness. Specifically, interventions targeting pupils' emotional wellbeing can have a positive influence on non-cognitive attributes such as young people's social skills, motivation, wellbeing and resilience (Millard et al, 2018).

6.2.2 Support disadvantaged young people to take up high-quality early years provision

Attending high quality early years provision (including pre-school settings), or accessing targeted support such as a specific programme targeting young children's development (for example, a family reading programme), can support learning and developmental benefits. Early intervention programmes and quality early years provision are particularly beneficial for children from poorer and minority backgrounds.

The government should therefore raise the Early Years Pupil Premium to match that of the full primary school-age Pupil Premium. This would support the quality of early education and childcare places for the families who need them most (Millard et al, 2018).

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6.2.3 Work with parents/carers and families

Working with parents/carers and families can have a positive influence on young people's outcomes, with evidence that parental aspirations in particular support academic outcomes.

It is important for schools and youth organisations to work collaboratively with parents/carers and understand their challenges. Poorer parents/carers often juggle work, parenting and financial stress. This can make home life stressful. As one interviewee explained:

"The thing is, if you're a single parent, you're going to work, you come home, to make ends meet... If [a] mum is raising, let's say, even two children or three children, it's really hard to just focus on the one child"

Peer Outreach worker quoted in Millard et al, 2018: p14.

The government should therefore support organisations working with young people to build strong, constructive relationships with parents and families by:

- Increasing frontline professionals' access to support, guidance and training specifically with regard to developing relationships with parents from marginalised groups
- Disseminate knowledge about building strong parental relationships

(Millard et al, 2018)

6.2.4 Recruit and retain a more diverse workforce

Existing research shows that all pupils can benefit from a teaching workforce that is diverse in terms of ethnic, cultural and class background. Our focus groups with pupils and practitioners suggest that white boys who are eligible for free school meals may disproportionately benefit.

The Department for Education should therefore recruit teachers from a diverse range of backgrounds and support these teachers to enter leadership roles (Millard et al, 2018).

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June 2020

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