

Written evidence submitted by the Education Endowment Foundation

Education Endowment Foundation written submission to the Education Select Committee's Inquiry into Left behind white pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds – July 2020

About the EEF

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is an independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. We aim to raise the attainment of 3-18 year-olds, particularly those facing disadvantage; develop their essential life skills; and prepare young people for the world of work and further study.

The EEF roots its response to this challenge in evidence of what works to improve teaching and learning. We generate evidence by funding robust trials of high-potential programmes, synthesise existing evidence, and support schools, nurseries and colleges across England to put this evidence to good use through our Research School Network. We believe that evaluating practice and building evidence is key to securing equitable outcomes for all pupils.

Summary:

- Eligibility for the Pupil Premium is the best proxy for disadvantage as it captures the majority of pupils living in poverty and is strongly correlated with educational attainment.
- The relationship between poverty and educational outcomes is complex and is affected by multiple intersectional factors, including ethnicity, gender and geography.
- Statistics from the Department for Education demonstrate that across the board, pupils who are eligible for FSM have lower average Progress 8 scores than pupils that do not and therefore, using family income as a proxy for disadvantage is practical starting point for tackling educational underachievement across all ethnic groups.
- School leaders and teachers should use research evidence alongside their professional judgement as they are best placed understand the demographics of their school community and any barriers to effective teaching and learning.
- There is a strong likelihood that during the period of school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the socio-economic gap in educational attainment will increase.
- The EEF recommends schools use evidence-informed Pupil Premium strategies to tackle the attainment gap by adopting a tiered approach, starting with efforts to improve teaching quality, followed by targeted interventions (such as one-on-one or small group tuition) and wider strategies to tackle barriers to learning such as attendance or behaviour.

Defining disadvantage: the EEF's approach

In this response, the broad term 'disadvantage' refers to those children and young people who face particular challenges because of the economic circumstances they face when growing up. The EEF focuses on family income as eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) is the most commonly accepted proxy measure of socio-economic disadvantage and is widely used by policymakers, researchers and schools.

FSM eligibility was the original qualifying criterion for eligibility for the Pupil Premium, the government funding allocated to schools to tackle the attainment gap introduced in 2011. Since then, the government has broadened this criterion to apply to pupils who have been eligible for free

school meals at any time in the past six year ('Ever-6 FSM'). It has also broadened the Pupil Premium to other categories of children facing disadvantage, such as the children of service families and those who are looked after by local authorities. The term 'disadvantage' can, therefore, apply to (from the narrowest to broadest measures) FSM-eligible pupils; Ever-6 FSM-eligible pupils / deprivation Pupil Premium pupils; or Pupil Premium pupils.

The socio-economic attainment gap

The EEF suggests Pupil Premium eligibility is the best proxy for disadvantage as it captures the majority of pupils living in poverty and is strongly correlated with educational attainment. The evidence shows:

- The gap in attainment between pupils eligible for FSM and their non-FSM peers begins in the early years and is already evident when children begin school aged 5.
- The gap grows wider at every following stage of education: it more than doubles to 9.2 months by the end of primary school, and then doubles again, to 18.4 months, by the end of secondary school. This shows the importance of intervening early and then continuing to address the needs of disadvantaged pupils.
- A majority of 19-year-olds who have been eligible for FSM leave education without a good standard of recognised qualifications in English and maths – without which, achieving their goals in the world of work or further study will be much harder.¹

Variation between ethnic groups

When looking at educational attainment, there is some variation between ethnic groups. The Office for National Statistics has undertaken analysis of the 'Progress 8' headline measures collected by Department for Education (DfE), which measures how much progress students make between 11 and 16 years, compared with other students with similar starting points. These findings show in 2018/19:

- The average Progress 8 score for all ethnic groups during the academic year was negative 0.03.
- Overall, White British children achieved less than average progress scores (negative 0.14) and progressed less than average if they were FSM eligible (negative 0.78).
- Overall, Black Caribbean children achieved less than average progress scores (negative 0.31). Black Caribbean children eligible for FSM made less progress (negative 0.54).
- Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma pupils made the least progress of all groups, (negative 1.05 and negative 0.81 respectively). However, these average scores are based on a small number of pupils. For example, in 2018-19 there were 141 pupils from Traveller of Irish Heritage backgrounds.²

The DfE's Progress 8 statistics offer a useful overview of the extent of underachievement of ethnic groups. However, the relationship between poverty and educational outcomes is complex, and is affected by multiple intersectional factors, including gender and geography. For example, White pupils in the North of England achieve the lowest average progress 8 scores in England (negative

¹ Education Policy Institute (2019) Education in England: Annual Report 2019. London: Education Policy Institute. Available here: <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/annual-report-2019/>

² Office for National Statistics (2020), Child poverty and education outcomes by ethnicity. London: Office for National Statistics. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/uksectoraccounts/compendium/economicreview/february2020/childpovertyandeducationoutcomesbyethnicity>

0.28) compared with White pupils in London who achieve above average scores (0.07).³ How schools respond to the specific barriers to effective teaching and learning they encounter will be informed by the context in which they operate and the communities they serve.

The DfE statistics demonstrate that across the board, pupils who are eligible for FSM have lower average Progress 8 scores than pupils that do not and therefore, using family income as a proxy for disadvantage is practical starting point for tackling educational underachievement across all ethnic groups.

The EEF supports school leaders and teachers by disseminating the best available research evidence on effective educational practices and approaches. We advocate for school leaders and teachers to use evidence alongside their professional judgement as they are best placed understand the demographics of their school community. It is important schools consider how they can best use all their resources to improve the quality of teaching, as this will benefit all pupils, but particularly the most disadvantaged.

Impact of COVID-19 on disadvantaged pupil

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to school closures for majority of pupils across England. Since March 2020, schools have developed remote learning approaches and are continuing to deliver educational provision to their students.⁴ Surveys from the Sutton Trust and the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggest that disadvantaged pupils appear to be learning less than their peers during the period of school closures, with children from the most disadvantaged families spending less time on learning activities, submitting less work and typically having access to fewer resources at home.⁵

There is a strong likelihood that, during this period, the educational attainment gap between children from low-income backgrounds and their peers will increase. In June 2020, the EEF publishes a rapid evidence assessment of the existing literature on school closures.⁶ The search encompassed a wide variety of reasons for schools being closed, including summer holidays. The projections suggest that school closures will widen the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers, likely reversing progress made to narrow the gap since 2011.

Using the Pupil Premium to tackle the attainment gap

Understanding the research evidence is imperative in effective decision-making as schools grapple with where best to direct Pupil Premium funding for the maximum benefit.

The EEF recommends that when spending the Pupil Premium schools adopt a tiered approach, prioritising efforts to improve teaching quality, followed by targeted interventions and wider strategies to tackle barriers to effective teaching and learning such as attendance or behaviour.⁷

³ Office for National Statistics, Child poverty and education outcomes by ethnicity.

⁴ Teacher Tapp (2020). What are teachers doing at home? Available at: <https://teachertapp.co.uk/what-are-teachers-doing-at-home-and-where-are-you-doing-it/>

⁵ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2020). Learning during the lockdown: real-time data on children's experiences during home learning. Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14848>.

⁵ Sutton Trust (2020). Coronavirus and Social Mobility Impact Brief #1: School Shutdown. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/coronavirus-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/>.

⁶ Education Endowment Foundation (2020). Impact of school closures on the attainment gap, Rapid Evidence Assessment, London: Education Endowment Foundation. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/best-evidence-on-impact-of-school-closures-on-the-attainment-gap/>

⁷ Education Endowment Foundation (2019). The EEF Guide to the Pupil Premium. London: Education Endowment Foundation Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/pupil-premium-guide/>

In response to the COVID-19 school closures, the EEF has also published a COVID support guidance for school leaders and teachers.⁸ It is designed to support and inform schools' decisions on how to make the best use of the government's £1 billion catch-up funding package announced in June 2020 and advocates a similar tiered approach to allocating spending.

Improving teaching quality:

According to the EEF's Teaching and Learning Toolkit, improving the quality of teaching is the strongest lever schools have to improve pupil outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged students.⁹ Therefore, is important for schools to prioritise opportunities for staff professional development.

This might include: ensuring high-quality materials are available for early career teachers linked to the Early Career Framework; online courses linked to the best available evidence on improve literacy and maths; and online courses linked to pedagogical approaches that are likely to be particularly effective for disadvantaged learners such as metacognition or feedback.

Targeted support:

A focused catch-up programme – including assessment and targeted support – is likely to be beneficial when pupils first return to school. The EEF has identified a list of [18 promising projects](#) that have been evaluated through randomised controlled trials and shown to have positive impacts on learning, with particularly strong effects for disadvantaged children in most cases.

There is good evidence that one-to-one and small group tuition can have a positive impact on attainment. The EEF estimates that the average impact of one-to-one tuition is five additional months' progress.¹⁰ To increase the availability affordable tuition, the EEF in collaboration with the Sutton Trust, Nesta and Impetus and Teach First, is developing the National Tutoring Programme (NTP). The NTP will make high-quality tuition available to schools from Autumn 2020, providing additional support to help pupils who have missed out the most as a result of school closures.

Wider strategies:

Wider strategies relate to the most significant non-academic barriers to success in school, including attendance, behaviour and social and emotional support. While many barriers may be common between schools, it is also likely that the specific features of the community each school serves will affect spending in this category.

There is a risk to the educational progress of pupils from low-income backgrounds when schools reopen, related to the distinction between school closures and pupil absence. The severe negative effect of absence poses a particularly high risk for disadvantaged children who typically have lower rates of attendance¹¹ and whose families have indicated that they would be substantially less likely to send their child back to school if given the choice.¹²

⁸ Education Endowment Foundation (2020). Covid-19 Support Guide for schools. London: Education Endowment Foundation. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/covid-19-support-guide-for-schools/>

⁹ Education Endowment Foundation (2020). Teaching and Learning Toolkit.

¹⁰ Torgerson, C. et al. (2018). EEF Evaluation Report: The Tutor Trust. Education Endowment Foundation: London. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/tutor-trust-effectiveness-trial/>.

¹¹ Department for Education (2019). Pupil absence in schools in England: 2017 to 2018. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2017-to-2018>.

¹² Institute for Fiscal Studies (2020). Learning during the lockdown: real-time data on children's experiences during home learning. Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14848>.

Parental engagement

Parental and carer engagement in children's learning and the quality of the home learning environment are associated with improved academic outcomes at all ages.¹³ However, the evidence indicates that it is very challenging for schools to increase levels of engagement successfully. Schools may need support in communicating effectively with parents and carers to help them to understand specific ways to support their children's learning.

The EEF has developed guidance on 'Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning'¹⁴ offering clear, actionable recommendations to support schools to adopt an evidence-informed approach to parental engagement.

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¹³ Education Endowment Foundation (2020). Teaching and Learning Toolkit.

¹⁴ [Add link](#)