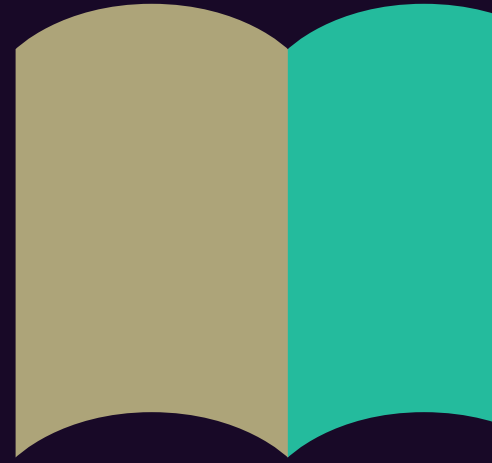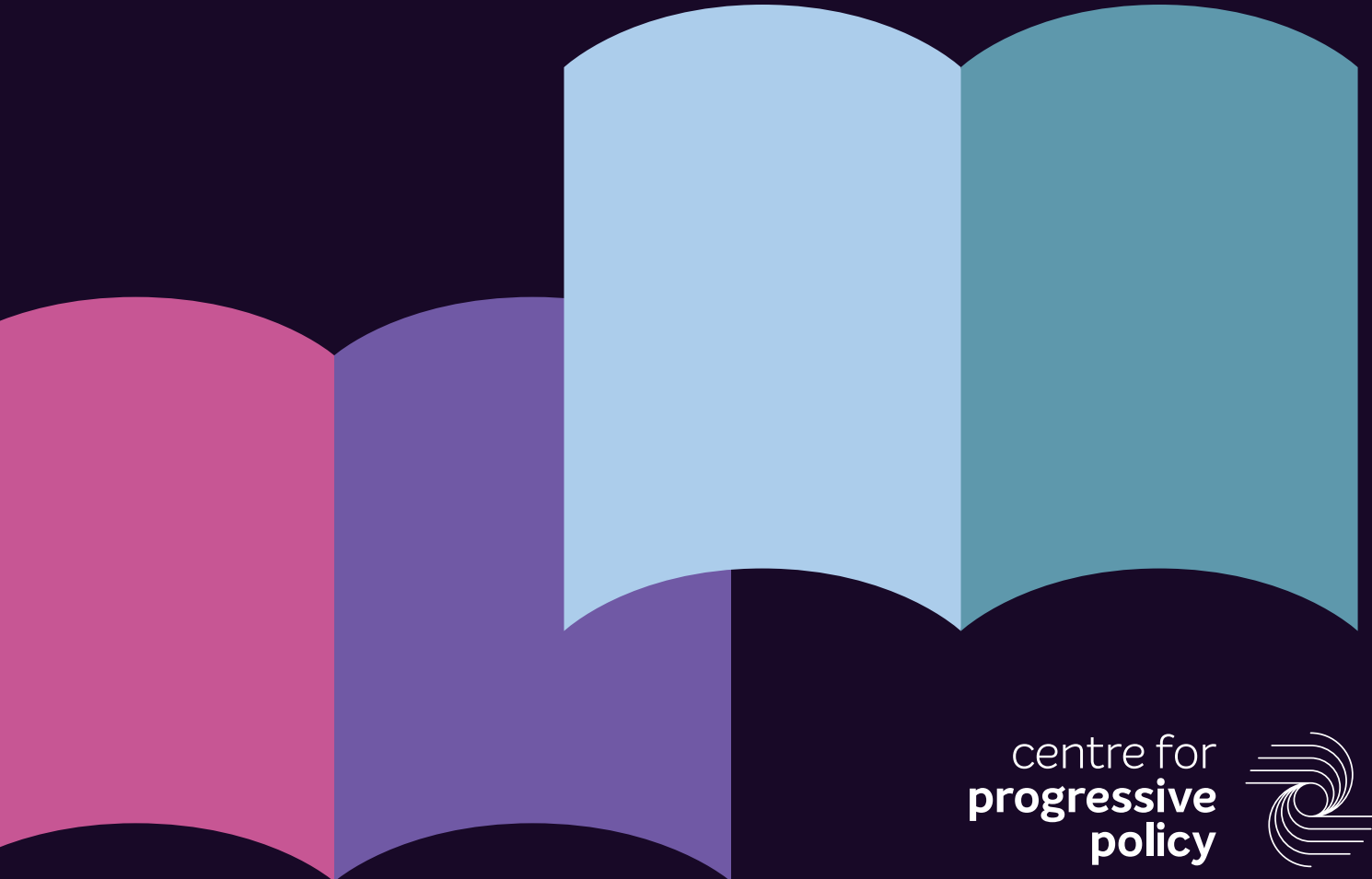# New horizons

**Transforming educational
opportunities to support
inclusive growth**
October 2022

centre for
**progressive
policy**

Executive summary

Across England, significant educational inequalities map closely on to differences in local economic outcomes. Places with higher levels of deprivation are typically characterised by worse educational outcomes, higher unemployment, lower pay, and poorer health. This situation deters local business investment, holds back growth, and undermines living standards.

Improving educational outcomes is critical for breaking this cycle and delivering inclusive growth to every part of the country. However, in order to achieve this, a new approach is needed. Education policy must address a diverse range of factors determining educational success – both inside, and outside, the classroom.

This report sets out a wide-ranging policy package to transform educational attainment in deprived communities in England, informed by over 40 in-depth interviews with teachers and former pupils as well as new data analysis.

The determinants of educational success

New data analysis identifies a strong association between the broader social and economic conditions of an area and its GCSE results for deprived pupils. In particular, the analysis finds that deprived children from areas with stronger local labour markets, including closer proximity to employment opportunities, tend to achieve better results than those living in places characterised by higher rates of unemployment and inactivity.

Established evidence demonstrates that educational outcomes are shaped by the conditions in which a child is raised. These can be grouped into the following:

- **Economic:** The prevalence of child poverty and the quality of the local labour market are two of the most regularly cited economic factors impacting the ability of children to engage and participate in the learning process.
- **Social:** Relationships with parents, carers, teachers, peers, and members of the community can shape children as they develop, with the absence of strong support networks linked to a wide range of potential problems in the classroom.
- **Physical:** Facilities, transport links and community spaces are essential for engagement, expanding educational opportunities, access to parental support services and wider extra-curricular activities.

These findings informed a series of semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted with recent school leavers (aged 18–24) and teachers in areas of high deprivation in the North West of England.[1] Through these interviews, recurring themes emerged about how local environments

have impacted the educational opportunities of children and what should be done in response. These include:

- **Material deprivation:** Personal and local area poverty is a core issue. Children turning up to class hungry or tired, going without the equipment necessary to fully participate in lessons and not fully participating in wider activities created clear divisions which often required specific interventions from educational institutions and individual teachers.

> "You see children that just aren't ready to focus of the day, so you have to put that in your plan, change what you're doing first thing in the morning."
> Educator, F, Liverpool

- **Family and community networks:** Parental support is a key influence over education and child development. In many cases, lack of parental support is a consequence of parents and carers facing hardships themselves, such as struggles with poverty or poor-quality jobs. Similarly, strong relationships with teachers is seen as beneficial. Weak social relationships were frequently commented on by respondents as a source of frustration, due in part to the absence of guidance they received both at home and in school.
- **Mental health:** Both educators and recent school leavers are acutely aware of the mental health crisis emerging for pupils. Lack of appropriate services, the transition to secondary education and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic have all played a prominent role in exacerbating this issue.

> "We did have a support person, but they didn't really tell anyone about her unless they had a full-fledged mental breakdown...I probably went up about 5 times and they've never offered, or like came and checked on me."
> School leaver, F, 22, Oldham

- **Preparation for adult life:** Clear pathways for pupils are critical. Many reported that support was mostly reserved for those planning to go to university. Providing guidance suitable for every student and helping make young people more aware of opportunities in the labour market was a recurring demand.

Alongside acknowledging the impact of deprivation in reducing educational opportunities, were reports of resilience and efforts to ameliorate the social and economic challenges that those in the deprived areas face. Many teachers reported the efforts of their schools to provide basic services, such as free breakfast clubs, and school leavers progressing to further study despite hardships faced in their personal lives.

The interviews underline the need for policy that is targeted at reducing the prevalence of hardship and material inadequacies that hold children back and ensure that communities can deliver the services that will nurture the next generation.

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1 All interviews and focus groups were conducted by Savanta ComRes between May 2022 and August 2022. Savanta ComRes is an independent research agency specialising in public policy and communications research. They are a member of the Market Research Society and abide by its code of conduct. Further information from the interviews is available from a separate report published by Savanta ComRes and available on CPP's website at: www. progressive-policy.net/publications.

Policy recommendations

In response to the specific challenges and ideas raised in the interviews and our wider literature review and data analysis, this report offers a broad range of recommendations. This is a deliberately large policy package requiring an additional investment of £15bn per annum, designed to address the multifaceted determinants of educational success. But the prize is big – transforming communities, reducing inequalities, and fostering ambitions in a way that would dramatically improve educational outcomes in areas of higher deprivation.

1
Reducing economic disadvantage

- Enhance the pupil premium through:
  - Increasing the amount received by primary school pupils to £1,781, restoring the real value of the premium to its 2015 levels.
  - Equalising the payment for secondary school pupils with the primary school entitlement.
  - Expanding pupil premium payments to pupils in further education at the same rate.

- Reform the benefit system to eliminate the two-child limit, equalising payments for every child and reversing the impact of the benefit freeze, with the intention of significantly reducing child poverty.

- Introduce a labour market package to improve the working conditions of parents and carers and improve post-school opportunities. These policies should include:
  - Mandate employers to offer guaranteed contracts to zero-hours workers who have performed regular hours for three months.
  - Guarantee the right to request flexibility as a day one right, and invest in training to support organisations improve their flexible work offer.
  - Conduct a review of careers advice in areas with higher levels of deprivation to explore the adequacy of current levels of provision and funding, and the extent to which school aged children are being made aware of opportunities regarding both further study and future employment.

2
Improving social relations

- Invest in school mental health services to establish a legal ratio of school counsellors to school and college pupils of 250 to 1, with oversight from a new taskforce to be created and embedded within the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities to guarantee every child access to mental health support and prevent potential conditions worsening.

- Establish a £600m funding pot for the most deprived local authorities in England to work with schools and colleges to trial community hubs which harness existing infrastructure to deliver key services for local children and families.

- Establish 3,500 new family hubs by 2030 to support parents and carers of young children and match the scale of service provided by Sure Start centres at their peak.

3
Expanding educational access

- Subsidise transport for school and college pupils, through the creation of a new universal bus pass, with the aim of ensuring every child can go to the educational institution they want within the community.

In addition, we are calling on both the establishment of a cabinet office position to oversee child welfare and development and to help co-ordinate relevant policy across government and the introduction of a new statutory obligation for educational institutions to produce a Family Support policy to foster greater engagement and dialogue between families and teachers.

Introduction

Where children are born and raised has become increasingly important in determining their life chances. In England, there are persistent and severe educational inequalities between places, which compound and exacerbate wider economic differences.

In 2018, it was found that children living in the poorest homes were a year behind children from the most affluent backgrounds in terms of language and literacy skills by the age of 5.[2] These disparities which appear in early years continue to manifest themselves right through to GCSE age and beyond. In 2020/21, Key Stage 4 scores in the least deprived decile of English local authorities were almost 15% higher on average than those in the most deprived. Yet deprivation is just one important factor, and it is well known, for instance, that highly deprived local authorities in London consistently outperform other deprived parts of the country.

More can be done to understand the reasons for differences in attainment and to design robust policy responses. Through in-depth interviews and new data analysis, this report gets under the skin of local areas, exploring the multiple barriers and enablers for children in deprived communities to achieve their full educational potential.

Ensuring that every child has the best education possible has never been more important. Following a decade of low growth, the Covid-19 pandemic, and now a cost of living crisis, the UK faces a gloomy economic outlook. Future challenges such as climate change will likely lead to further disruption. Equipping the next generation with the knowledge and skills to overcome these difficulties and contribute to a more productive, sustainable economy is essential. For the Centre for Progressive Policy, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to achieve at school is an essential component of inclusive growth – where everyone can benefit from and contribute to the economy.

To identify the broader, place-based determinants of educational success, a series of detailed interviews have been conducted with educators and young people who have recently left school or college in the North West of England. These findings have been used to inform a wide-ranging policy package, to help ensure that children from every community have the opportunity to achieve their potential.

This report is set out as follows:

1 **Educational inequalities:** A brief overview of the scale of educational inequalities in England, current challenges and policy environment.
2 **Determinants of educational success:** An exploration of the literature and new quantitative analysis to help identify the overarching determinants linked to educational success.
3 **Qualitative interviews:** A deep dive into the educational experiences of those living in deprived areas that help to identify the major themes that impact learning outcomes.
4 **Policy recommendations:** A series of policies targeted at improving the educational environment, within schools and colleges and the wider community.

15%

In 2020/21, Key Stage 4 scores in the least deprived decile of English local authorities were almost 15% higher on average than those in the most deprived

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2   Save the Children (2018) *Mind the gap – getting our children ready for school*. Available at: https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2018/mind-the-gap-getting-our-children-ready-for-school

Educational inequalities: problem and policy context

1

Chart 1: Average Attainment 8 score by local authority, by decile of performance

Decile of performance
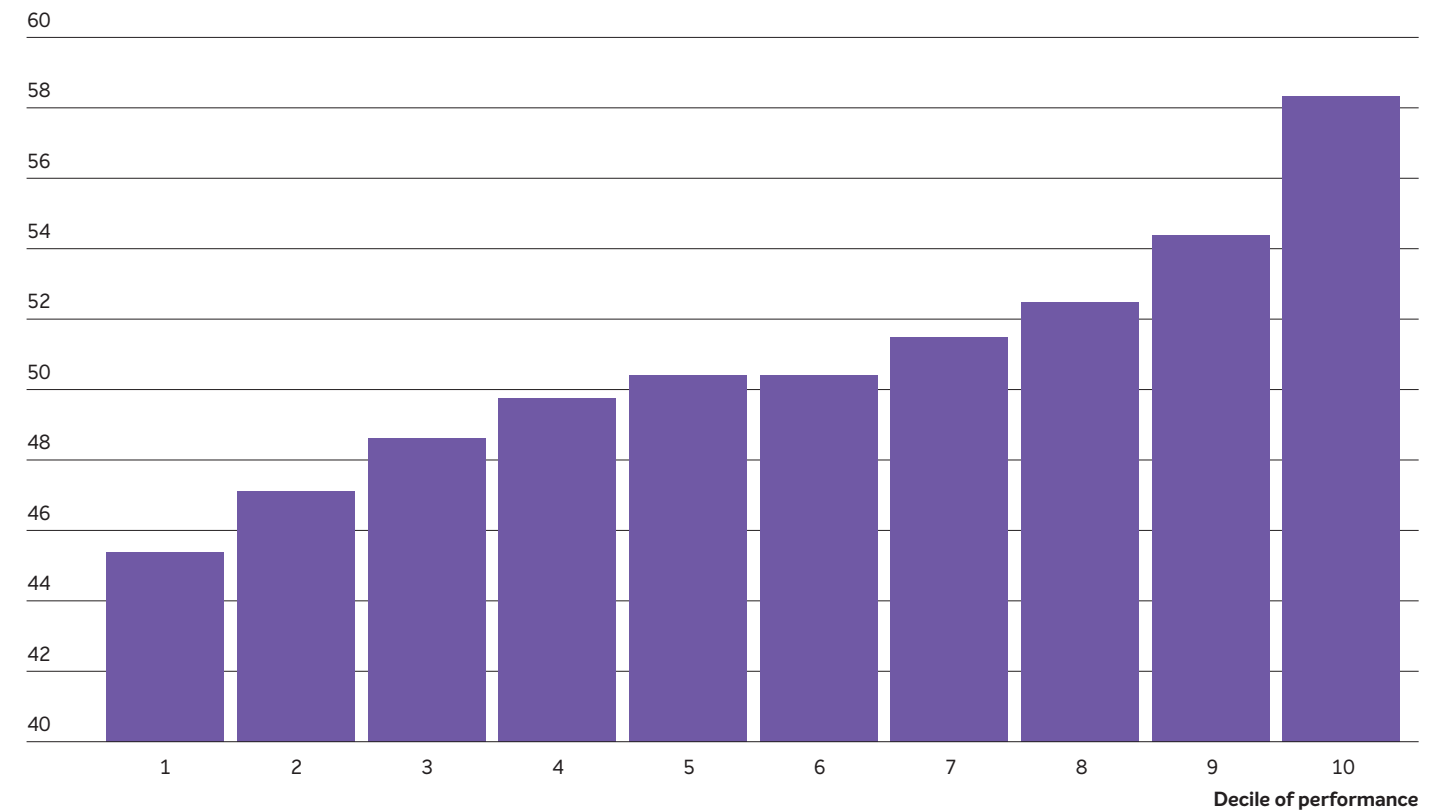
Good education is a crucial foundation for a strong economy and improving educational outcomes has the potential to generate increased economic benefits for both individuals and their communities:

- **Productivity growth:** Education equips children with the knowledge and skills to participate in higher skilled activities in the labour market, as well as fostering creativity and innovation which help drive productivity and economic growth.[3]
- **Better jobs:** Those with higher qualifications are not only more likely to be employed in the labour market[4] but are also likely to earn more.[5] This can mean more social mobility, higher living standards, and greater consumption which can also stimulate growth.
- **Enhanced wellbeing:** Education has been linked to healthier behaviours and longer lives.[6] Those with more years of schooling have also been found to form better social connections, which can widen social networks and promote greater levels of civic engagement.[7]

Ensuring the economic benefits of good education are widely shared is crucial to delivering inclusive economic growth. The estimated gains from improving educational outcomes in more deprived places are significant. CPP estimates that if qualification levels in the most deprived areas matched those in the least deprived areas, total earnings would be £14.4bn higher per annum in these areas (see appendix). This would represent a significant boost to living standards and help stimulate local growth.

Yet despite the tangible economic benefits of reducing educational inequalities, the gap between the best performing and worst performing areas on education remains vast (see Chart 1). Indeed, place has become a more powerful predictor of educational attainment in recent decades.[8] This ultimately means that where children are born has become increasingly important in determining their life chances. For this reason, improving educational outcomes in communities that have faced systemic economic disadvantage has taken on a new urgency.

Given the variation between places, understanding how local characteristics, such as access to amenities and public resources, impact education is an essential step to delivering policies that can remedy the situation.

3   Sweetman, A. (2002) *Working smarter: education and productivity. The review of economic performance and social progress.* Available at: https://core.ac.uk/reader/7033290
4   Bosworth, D. (2015) *Opportunities and outcomes in education and work: gender effects.* UK Commission for Employment and Skills [UKCES]. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/477360/UKCES_Gender_Effects.pdf
5   Bhutoria, A. (2016) *Economic returns to education in the United Kingdom.*
6   Public Health England [PHE] (2021) *Education, schooling and health summary.* Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-schooling-and-health/education-schooling-and-health-summary
7   Ibid.
8   Broughton, N. (2016) *Educational inequalities in England and Wales.* Social Market Foundation [SMF]. Available at: https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/educational-inequalities-in-england-and-wales/

Which characteristics count?

As a first step in understanding which local characteristics matter, new CPP analysis explores the association between the features of the local environment and educational attainment at local authority level. Using GCSE performance as the core metric of educational success,[9] the analysis finds:

- **A strong local labour market is positively associated with higher attainment for disadvantaged young people:** living in an area with a strong labour market (which we define as a place with high labour market participation, a low % of low paying jobs, high median earnings, and low levels of income deprivation affecting children) was associated with a significant increase in KS4 results worth just over 2 Attainment 8 points.
- **Good housing conditions and access to a range of employment opportunities is also associated with higher attainment for disadvantaged young people:** living in an area with strong housing conditions (which we consider to be a combination of good build quality, high levels of affordability, and good accessibility), with close proximity to a wide range of employment options, was associated with a significant increase in KS4 results worth just over 1.7 Attainment 8 points.
- **The 'London effect' was abundantly clear in our analysis, yet there were no other significant regional effects:** the effect of simply living in London on the attainment of disadvantaged children was worth an increase of around 3.3 Attainment 8 points.
- **These factors are potentially more influential than prior attainment:**[10] all of the above factors were more strongly associated with KS4 success than prior attainment at KS2. Our results showed that strong KS2 results were associated with an increase of just 0.8 in the Attainment 8 score.

While this analysis does not claim to identify causality, what it does demonstrate is that elements of the broader environment in which deprived children grow up – particularly the labour market – are strongly related to educational attainment at GCSE level. This suggests that while learning in the classroom and the role of educators is crucial to the educational experience, a diverse range of external factors can impact results. Education policy therefore needs to have a broader remit, to create environments that allow children to excel in the classroom and beyond.

Policy context

Improving educational outcomes is professed to be a significant part of the levelling-up agenda, a core manifesto commitment that the Conservative government was elected upon in 2019. The Levelling-Up White Paper, which set out the government's vision for tackling regional inequalities, included a commitment to ensuring that by 2030, 90% of primary school children in England would reach the expected standard in reading, writing and maths.[11]

Further commitments to education were outlined in the recent Schools White Paper. Alongside a target for higher average grades in maths and English GCSEs, a range of measures were put forward covering a range of other areas, including admissions, attendance, oversight, behaviour and curriculum support.[12]

Schools are not the exclusive focus of government when it comes to education. Legislation was introduced last year to overhaul post-16 educational opportunities. Additional funding was made available, and reforms were introduced that have given the government powers to intervene when colleges have failed to deliver good outcomes and to embed employers more closely in the skills system with a requirement on employers and colleges to collaborate to develop skills plans.[13]

> While this analysis does not claim to identify causality, what it does demonstrate is that elements of the broader environment in which deprived children grow up – particularly the labour market – are strongly related to educational attainment at GCSE level

However, despite the positive rhetoric, efforts to achieve the government's stated ambitions will take place against a backdrop of significant challenges. Education was subject to large funding cuts throughout the 2010s. Even with additional investment, school spending per pupil in 2022/23 has been projected to be 1–2% lower in real terms than in 2009/10 in England.[14] Additional funding for post-16 education will fail to reverse past cuts, while reforms to the National Funding Formula left schools in the most deprived areas experiencing the largest cuts between 2009 and 2019, with the most deprived 20% of local authorities seeing real terms spending per pupil fall by 14% during this period.[15]

14%

The most deprived 20% of local authorities saw real terms spending per pupil fall by 14% between 2009 and 2019

A generation of pupils are also continuing to deal with the legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic. Early evidence has suggested that the disruption of school closures and prolonged isolation has had an extremely negative impact on child development. It has been found that fewer young children are reaching the expected standard across a range of basic skills including literacy and maths, as well as emotional development.[16] While efforts to catch up on schooling have been proposed, it is an additional challenge for an education system that has long faced resourcing constraints.

Finally, the cost-of-living crisis threatens to diminish living standards for millions and will put further cost pressures on the education sector. Inflation is expected to reach 10% by the end of 2022 and it has been projected that household incomes will begin falling and will not recover until 2024.[17] Unless further action is taken to mitigate the impact of this economic crisis, it is likely that deprivation will intensify, at both the individual and local level, which in turn will have a negative impact on education.

Despite the scale of these challenges, initiatives to address them have so far remained lacklustre. Kevan Collins, the government's 'Education Recovery Commissioner' appointed to oversee a programme that would help children catch-up in the aftermath of the pandemic resigned in June 2021 after investment proposals fell significantly short of what was requested. In March 2021, an additional £79m was made available to mental health support for children but this level of resource was reported to be inadequate to meet demand.[18]

~~While questions remain on the extent to which the new prime minister wishes to continue with the levelling-up agenda, the declared commitments to improving economic growth[19] will require a well-educated and highly skilled population. Tackling education inequalities is imperative to achieving this and requires more than the current policy approach which is at best ambivalent about the powerful influences that exist within the communities where children are being raised.~~

The UK is currently facing a period of high economic uncertainty amidst the worst cost of living crisis for generations and a war in the Ukraine. This situation will likely impact the various determinants of educational success. To develop appropriate policy responses it is imperative to develop a fuller understanding of the complex interplay of local and national factors that determine educational performance.

> Inflation is expected to reach 10% by the end of 2022 and it has been projected that household incomes will begin falling and will not recover until 2024

9   To conduct our analysis, we applied a statistical technique called Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and ran a multivariate linear regression with our components on KS4 attainment. The full details of our methodology, including our final model output, can be found in the technical appendix that accompanies this report.
10 Here, prior attainment refers to the average KS2 score for each local authority in the year that these exams were taken (2015/2016), for the year of the cohort that we use for our KS4 attainment 8 scores (2020/21).
11 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities [DLUHC] (2022) *Levelling Up the United Kingdom.* Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom
12 Roberts, N. (2022) *March 2022 schools' white paper (England).* House of Commons Library, research briefing. Available at: https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9511/CBP-9511.pdf
13 Blundell, R. et al. (2021) *Inequalities in education, skills, and incomes in the UK: the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic.* Institute for Fiscal Studies [IFS]. Available at: Inequalities in education, skills, and incomes in the UK: The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic | Inequality: the IFS Deaton Review.

14 Sibieta, L. (2021) *School spending in England: trends over time and future outlook.* Institute for Fiscal Studies [IFS]. Available at: https://ifs.org.uk/publications/15588
15 Farquharson, C. Sibieta, L. Tahir, I and Waltmann, B. (2021) *Education spending changes put a major brake on levelling up.* Institute for Fiscal Studies [IFS]. Available at: https://ifs.org.uk/publications/15859
16 Tracey, L. Bowyer-Crane, C. Bonetti, S. Nielsen, D. D'Apice, K. and Compton, S. (2022) *The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children's socio-emotional wellbeing and attainment during the Reception Year.* Education Endowment Foundation. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-childrens-socioemotional-wellbeing-and-attainment-during-the-reception-year
17 Francis-Devine, B. Harari, D. Keep, M. Bolton, P. and Harker, R. (2022) *Rising cost of living in the UK.* House of Commons Library, research briefing. Available at: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9428/
18 Department of Health and Social Care (2021) *£79 million to boost mental health support for children and young people.* Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/79-million-to-boost-mental-health-support-for-children-and-young-people
19 As highlighted during the prime minister's first speech outside Downing Street. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-minister-liz-truss-statement-6-september-2022

In depth: reviewing the determinants of educational success

As the above analysis shows, educational success is heavily dependent upon the environment in which children are raised. The literature on this topic is diverse, with many factors inside and outside the school influencing the ability of young people to engage with their education in different ways.

Through a review of the literature, this report identifies three overarching themes impacting on educational attainment, which form the basis for a series of semi-structured interviews with both teachers and recent school leavers, summarised in the next chapter.

The economic environment

At the household level, economic conditions have a well-established impact on educational performance.

Poverty and deprivation

Research has consistently shown that children who experience poverty and deprivation tend to have the poorest educational outcomes.[20] There are various explanations for the strong relationship between deprivation and poverty with poorer attainment, including:

- **Classroom participation:** Many of the stressors associated with poverty, including hunger, sleep deprivation and poor health have a negative impact on children, leaving them more likely to be fatigued in class, and less able to concentrate. When parents and carers face income constraints, it makes it more difficult to provide children with the basic learning resources they need to participate in lessons.[21]
- **Wider activities:** Learning does not just take place in the classroom. Extra-curricular activities outside of school play an important role in child development, teaching new skills and equipping young people with passions and confidence that can help broaden their horizons. However, barriers including costs and time shortages mean that those from low-income households are less likely to participate, depriving them of valuable learning experiences.[22]
- **Contextual education challenges:** Systemic disadvantages within deprived areas can potentially impact the behaviour of education providers. Recruitment can be impacted; additional tasks may be demanded of teaching staff and pressures are likely to be exerted on the relationships between staff and pupils.[23]

Local labour market

Beyond the resource constraints facing households and educational settings, the wider local economy has also been found to have an impact on participation in education – this is consistent with our above analysis which underlined the importance of vibrant labour markets. In circumstances where the conditions of the local labour market are poor, pupils may be encouraged to pursue their education more actively, if they perceive it as enhancing their employment prospects. However, if pupils doubt the effectiveness of education to deliver good employment because of a lack of local opportunities, they may become discouraged to fully engage in their education.[24]

An economic environment that maximises the potential of children to achieve the best educational outcomes is therefore one which provides the resources that allow them to focus and participate in a variety of educational experiences, while also establishing clear incentives that demonstrate the overall value of education.

The social environment

Throughout childhood, the relationships formed with adults and peers can be hugely influential with nurturing, supportive family relationships crucial to fostering positive outcomes. As children grow, the relationships they form outside of their immediate families can also play a substantial role in their cognitive, psychological, and social development[25] which in turn is likely to impact their educational outcomes:

- **Parental/family:** Positive relations in the home are essential for creating a healthy learning environment, providing appropriate support, and fostering positive attitudes towards schooling.[26] A large body of evidence has demonstrated a positive relationship between parental involvement and academic success, as well as creating positive school climates that support children in their overall development.[27]
- **Teachers:** Clearly educators have a significant role in helping pupils achieve their goals. Through developing strong relationships, teachers can be sources of guidance that have a positive impact on the behaviour and academic performance of pupils, as well as shaping attitudes and promoting social development throughout the time children spend in formal education.[28]

20   Thompson, I. and Ivinson, G. (2020) *Poverty in Education Across the UK: A comparative analysis of policy and place.* Policy Press.
21   National Education Union (NEU) *Child Poverty – the facts.* Available at: https://neu.org.uk/child-poverty-facts#:~:text=Poverty%20has%20a%20 significant%20impact.as%20a%20result%20of%20poverty
22   Hirsch, D. (2007) *Experiences of poverty and educational challenge.* Joseph Rowntree Foundation [JRF]. Available at: https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/ default/files/jrf/migrated/files/2123.pdf
23   Lupton, R. (2003) *Secondary schools in disadvantaged areas: the impact of context on school processes and quality.* London School of Economics [LSE]. Available at: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/4187472.pdf
24   Tumino, A and Taylor, M. (2015) *The impact of local labour market conditions on school leaving decisions.* Institute for Social and Economic Research. Available at: https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/research/publications/working-papers/iser/2015-14
25   Kim, J. (2020) *The quality of Social Relationships in Schools and Adult Health: differential effects of student-student versus student-teacher relationships.* American Psychological Association. Available at: https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/spq-spq0000373.pdf
26   Durisic, M. and Bunijevac, M. (2017). *Parental involvement as a important factor for successful education.* Available at: https://files.eric.ed.gov/ fulltext/EJ1156936.pdf
27   Lara, L. and Saracostti, M. (2019) *Effect of parental involvement on children's academic achievement in Chile.* Available at: https://www.frontiersin.org/ articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01464/full
28   Agyekum, S. (2019). *Teacher-Student relationships: the impact on high school students. Journal of Education and Practice.* Available at: https://files. eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED595084.pdf

- **Peers:** Social interactions between peers is an important aspect of childhood. Evidence on the role of peer groups is mixed, however, there is some evidence that peer groups can have an impact on personal attitudes towards education, and intentions to progress into further study among boys[29], while negative relationships, such as bullying, can have a detrimental impact on mental and physical health which harms educational outcomes.[30]

It is not just the relationship between children and those around them, but also between the various groups who are responsible for raising children within a community. Research has found that building a sense of community through strong partnerships and open communication between schools, parents and carers, and other community-based organisations help encourage child development and a sense of civic engagement among the next generation.[31]

The physical environment

The built environment refers to the man-made, physical structures, features and facilities which constitute the environment that children grow and learn in. Well managed environments in schools, colleges, homes, and the wider local community can improve access to education and support learning and development. There are various factors to consider:

- **Housing and living space:** Decent, affordable housing has been shown to have a positive impact on education, through reducing disruptive, frequent moving, and providing an appropriate living space that gives children the space to study and reducing the stressors associated with overcrowded housing, and subsequent impacts on health and wellbeing.[32]
- **Proximity to education:** Having educational institutions accessible within the local community can provide a wider range of opportunities and influence continuation in school. Evidence suggests that for those on the margins of participating in further study after the end of formal schooling, proximity to educational institutions that offer academic or vocational qualifications can have a significant impact on the decisions to participate.[33]

- **Educational facilities:** School and college infrastructure are integral to the learning environment of children and young people. There is strong international evidence on how better facilities are associated with improved student outcomes, while UK-based studies have found that critical design elements can explain the differences in academic progress among young children.[34]

Broader cultural capital within communities can also help create a positive learning environment for children. The presence of libraries, youth clubs and galleries not only help stimulate employment but can also provide learning spaces and offer a greater range of extra-curricular activities. Meanwhile, communities that are better connected through transport links and public spaces have greater potential to foster civic participation, community cohesion and local resilience.[35]

While this review has explored many of the factors for educational success, it is necessary to go further to understand their relative importance and how they interplay within communities to determine a child's educational prospects. In this vein, a series of scripted interviews and focus groups were held with young people and educators living within deprived communities in the North West of England.

29 Dickerson, A. Maragkou, K. and McIntosh, S. (2018) *The causal effect of secondary school peers on educational aspirations.* Centre for vocational education research. Available at: https://cver.lse.ac.uk/textonly/cver/pubs/cverdp017.pdf
30 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2016) *Preventing bullying through science, policy and practice.* Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK390414/
31 Greater Good in Education (2022) *Positive family and community relationships.* Berkeley. Available at: https://ggie.berkeley.edu/school-relationships/positive-family-community-relationships/
32 Brennan, M. Reed, P. and Sturtevant, L. (2014) *The impacts of affordable housing on education: a research summary.* Centre for Housing Policy. Available at: https://nhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/The-Impacts-of-Affordable-Housing-on-Education-1.pdf
33 Dickerson, A. and McIntosh, S. (2010) *The impact of distance to nearest education institution on the post-compulsory education participation decision.* University of Sheffield. Available at: https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/10709/1/SERPS2010007.pdf
34 Teixeira, J. Amoroso, J. and Gresham, J. (2017). *Why education infrastructure matters for learning.* World Bank Blogs. Available at: https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/why-education-infrastructure-matters-learning
35 Kelsey, T. and Kenny, M. (2021) *Townscapes: the value of social infrastructure.* The Bennett Institute for Public Policy. Available at: https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Townscapes_The_value_of_infrastructure.pdf

Educational experiences in the North West

The North West has been a focus point of levelling up, and previously the Northern Powerhouse. It is the third largest regional economy in the UK, outside of London and the South East. Greater Manchester and the Liverpool City Region are two of the largest urban areas in the country and have been prominent examples of devolution in recent years, with the establishment of their Metro Mayors.

The North West is more than its cities, with its diverse towns, villages, and communities also making valuable contributions to the region and nation. But despite these developments, parts of the North West have faced decades of severe deprivation and low educational attainment.

3

In 2019/20 the average Attainment 8 Score for Key Stage 4 pupils in the North West was

49

compared with the national average of

50.2
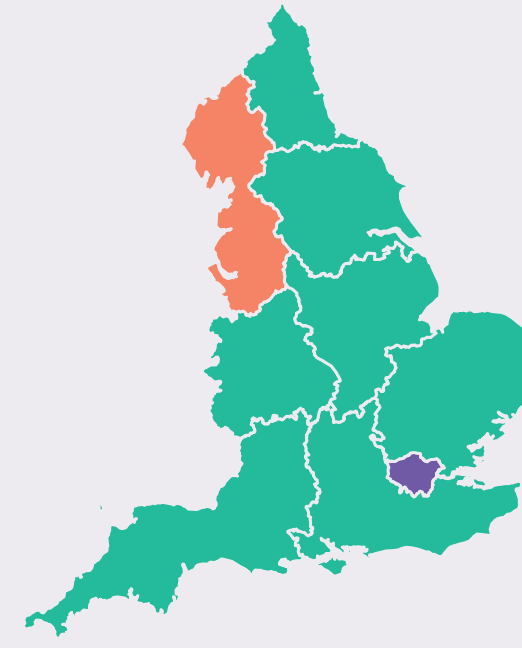
The average proportion of secondary schools rated good or outstanding in the North West by local authorities is

64%

compared with the rest of England at

75%

23% of pupils in the North West are eligible for free school meals

20% of pupils in England are eligible for free school meals

1 in 3

children living in the North West live in a local authority within the most deprived quintile of England

In 2019 in the North West, 69% of girls and 60% of boys achieved expected standards in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 2

compared with 75% of girls and 66% of boys in London

This chapter summarises key themes that emerged from over 40 structured interviews with recent school leavers and educators in the North West of England plus two focus groups. The interviews provide a rich insight into the diverse educational challenges that manifest as a consequence of local area deprivation.

> **The interviewees**
>
> Interviews were conducted among those who grew up or who currently work in education, in local authorities in the North West within the most deprived quintile of England. A total of 25 recent school leavers (aged 18–25) and 21 professional educators in schools and colleges were interviewed.
>
> In addition, three focus groups were held with recent school leavers from the same communities, where they had the opportunity to discuss a series of scenarios to identify barriers to educational success.
>
> These interviews provide a rich insight into the personal experiences of the education system within places facing the consequences of local area deprivation.

For the remainder of this chapter, the findings of the interviews are explored in detail, with several prominent themes emerging, including:

- The impact of material deprivation
- The importance of family and social networks
- The prevalence of mental health conditions
- Preparation for adult life

Within each broad theme, examples were provided which link back to the broader determinants of the educational outcomes discussed in the previous chapter. In many cases, there were significant overlaps across the various challenges identified by both teachers and recent school leavers.

The impact of material deprivation

The harmful impact poverty and deprivation has on children is well documented and was a common theme throughout the interviews. Teachers repeatedly highlighted the impact of material deprivation on their pupils, especially its role in denying them the most basic of goods needed to participate in lessons.

The material deprivation most commonly cited was a lack of food. Nearly two-thirds of teachers, and a third of principals interviewed reported that hunger was an issue they regularly encountered with their pupils. Some also indicated that they had to adapt their lessons to support those children struggling. This would impact the learning of every child in the class, especially in communities where child food poverty was more prevalent.

> "You see children that just aren't ready to focus on the day, so you have to put that in your plan, change what you're doing first thing in the morning."
> Educator, F, Liverpool

In addition to hunger, teachers also highlighted those other essential items deprived pupils lacked including uniforms, text books and IT devices.

The lack of IT devices among some contributed to a perceived digital divide. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the digital divide became a more prominent issue. Teachers noted that technology had become more intertwined with the learning experience, especially for younger pupils and those pursuing technical qualifications. The digital divide could exacerbate inequalities in terms of both access to education and long-term outcomes.

> "Not everyone may have the same level of equipment... not everyone has financial capability to be on that level playing field."
> College educator, M, Blackpool

Many teachers also had a keen sense of awareness of the extent to which poverty was influencing the support children had within the home. Notably, the role of the labour market emerged. One teacher suggested that the prevalence of zero-hours contracts and low wages within their community was pushing parents and carers to desperate measures to make ends meet, including crime. This likely has an extremely negative impact on the home environment in which children are raised.

> "A lot of our parents are on zero-hours contracts... they're turning to the likes of crime or things that you don't want to expose a child to, just to try and make ends meet."
> Secondary educator, M, Liverpool

In response to material deprivation, and child poverty within the local community, many of the teachers interviewed reported their institution offered additional services to try and support their pupils. Several teachers reported that their institution was offering some form of food aid, in the form of breakfast clubs, or even onsite foodbanks. Many also reported they were using funds to provide access to other essentials including travel, course materials, IT devices and uniforms.

> "We do offer a free bus pass to all students so that they can get to the college because a lot of them just wouldn't come because they couldn't afford the cost of travel."
> College educator, M, Liverpool

Given such initiatives may be critical for supporting disadvantaged pupils to engage with their education, it is likely that these efforts put greater financial strain on schools and colleges serving higher deprivation areas. Without additional funding to offset these pressures, there is a risk place-based inequalities are exacerbated as fewer resources are then available for teaching and learning.

It was notable that the specific issue of material deprivation was raised more commonly by teachers. This may suggest that they have a broader overview of how poverty impacts the children in their community. In contrast, many of the school leavers interviewed focused more on the specific ways in which their personal experiences of schooling impacted their health, wellbeing, and social relationships. Potentially, this reflects the consequences of material deprivation.

> Several teachers reported that their institution was offering some form of food aid, in the form of free breakfast clubs, or even onsite foodbanks

The importance of family and social networks

The presence, or absence, of strong familial and social networks were mentioned as having a major impact, especially on young people experiencing challenging circumstances. Being able to rely on parents, carers and teachers for support could help young people persevere through hardships, however, when such support was not forthcoming, it left pupils isolated and prevented them from maximising the benefits of their education. This underlines the value of social relationships in fostering better educational outcomes.

Crucially, many school leaver interviewees reported difficulties in the home environment including parental support. This often reflected entrenched disparities, and many parents and carers themselves faced difficulties, which influenced their personal engagement with their children. Teachers suggested that some parents struggled to help with homework and learning because they themselves lacked basic skills or had distorted expectations over what schools would be teaching their children.

> "Social skills and social graces is challenging...trying to rectify the lack of parenting skills at home to what we have to then rectify in school, I think is another challenge."
> Primary educator, F, Liverpool

As a result, many educational inequalities emerge before children enter school. This suggests that efforts to help parents and carers, especially during the early years of a child's life, could help better prepare children for school and mitigate inequalities as they emerge.

However, the interviews with young people suggested that in addition to the importance of familial relationships was their connection with teachers. Some of the interviewees stressed that teachers provided guidance that may be absent within the home, which exemplifies the importance of strong relationships between pupils and their teachers.

> "If you're not really used to having guidance at home... having teachers to give good advice to you and speak to on a peer level, as well as a role model was really beneficial."
> School leaver, F, 22, Merseyside

When those relationships were absent or weak then issues emerged. Some of the recent school leavers cited personal examples of how their teachers failed to spot warning signs because of difficulties in their home lives. Positive engagement needs to be fostered and teachers need to be aware and trained on how to build strong relationships and reach out when appropriate.

> "I wasn't sleeping very well at home and my English teacher didn't know this, but I fell asleep in his lesson... he didn't stop me, he didn't say anything, but he also didn't come to me and go 'is everything okay at home?'"
> School leaver, F, 21, Oldham

Formal education was not the only source of support outside the home. Many school leavers noted the importance of extra-curricular activities in helping them deal with hardships in their personal lives. During the focus groups, many suggested that extra-curricular activities and the use of sports facilities might have helped them deal with challenging circumstances.

> "I had a rough childhood; I didn't get much learning done out of school...there were clubs available...I remember learning how to play golf after school."
> School leaver, F, 22, Burnley

Having access to clubs to pursue hobbies, sports and other extra-curricular activities can help young people form social bonds, within their schools and communities. This can be an important part of the development process, and as a result, several teachers highlighted how their institutions actively tried to support their pupils to pursue extra-curricular activities and field trips to broaden their horizons, even if this meant covering costs. One teacher reported their school had a mentor programme to connect their pupils with someone from the community to provide guidance and information about careers and other facets of adult life.

> "All students have a pastoral mentor, and they join a pastoral mentor group of about 20 students in the group. The group meets once per week, and in that group session, they deliver things like financial literacy, financial support, safeguarding, and wellbeing information, advice and guidance."
> Primary educator, F, Salford

The importance of building strong relationships in the home, school and wider community is clear from the testimony of both teachers and school leavers. Even those who experience disadvantage and hardship can benefit enormously from guidance and support, and the absence of such important social relationships can stifle the educational experiences of children and limit their potential.

The prevalence of mental health conditions

Linked to the role of support networks was the issue of mental health. Many school leavers flagged mental health issues as having had significant impacts on them throughout their time in education, while many teachers noted limitations in terms of current support to meet rising demand especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Mental health issues were often a consequence of the broader economic and social environment, with disruptions and changes, including the transition to secondary education being a potential trigger point.

Stories emerged of young people suffering from severe mental health problems in school, which ultimately impacted their engagement in lessons but support was not available unless conditions further deteriorated. Preventing mental health conditions from worsening and having an even greater impact on learning should be a core priority of children's health services.

> "We did have a support person, but they didn't really tell anyone about her unless they had a fully-fledged mental breakdown...I probably went up about 5 times and they've never offered, or like came and checked on me."
> School leaver, F, 22, Oldham

Many teachers interviewed were aware of the prevalence of mental health conditions and lack of support available, but felt unable to intervene effectively, due to the constraints placed on them having to support large numbers of young children. Without additional forms of resource and support – such as more specialist healthcare professionals in schools – it is difficult to see how teaching staff can be expected to identify and provide appropriate support for pupils whose mental health is suffering.

> "So they have 30 children in the class, and you've got a child that has Special Educational Needs, or mental health and it's having that time."
> Primary educator, F, Salford

Delving deeper into the causes of mental health issues, school leavers suggested that major life changes were a trigger of social anguish. The transition to secondary education was notably raised, and from the focus groups it was implied that this marked the point in which behaviours and attitudes concerning education changed, often for the worse.

Some interviewees highlight how the transition was a daunting experience and adapting to new surroundings proved difficult. Disruptions in social relationships, increasing workloads and academic expectations, and new pressures such as paying for lunch, were a cause for concern among some school leavers. This suggests more could be done to help ease the transition into secondary education.

> "It was absolutely terrifying...you've come from such a close, smaller environment in primary school to thousands of people...in your first year it's really hard to focus and absorb information."
> School leaver, F, 21, Oldham

The interviews suggest having appropriate and consistent support networks in place to help young people settle and adapt to new learning environments is critical for children to be able to fully engage with their education. Education can be a pressurised environment for both pupils and teachers. It is critical that young people have someone they can turn to for appropriate support, and if necessary, treatment, before mental health conditions emerge or worsen.

Preparation for adult life

School leavers reported that they felt the education system did not fully prepare them for adult life. Issues ranged from inadequate careers guidance to a general dearth of information about simple tasks. Arguably, education has many purposes, and it is important that the system can support children as they develop into adulthood. Ensuring that young people have an awareness and understanding of the paths ahead is key.

Some school leavers felt that their schools offered inadequate careers guidance. Lack of exposure to potential career paths could have a damaging impact on young people, limiting their expectations and forcing them to pursue subjects which they may dislike or are unsuited for, at the expense of allowing them to thrive in an area which they are passionate about. The interviews underline the importance of having careers services which cover the full array of opportunities for all children.

> "We did have a careers counsellor, but I do feel like they didn't necessarily know the extent of careers that were out there."
> School leaver, F, 23, Manchester

More concerningly, some pupils felt written off due to their behaviour and performance. Some school leavers discussed how they felt they were not provided appropriate support, even when it was clear they were struggling with their work, and other "good" pupils were prioritised. This could potentially lead to some pupils being denied the opportunity to pursue a path that helps them develop and achieve their ambitions.

> "I feel like with my high school personally, they prioritise students being good or students living up to their expectations, instead of looking at what's going wrong."
> School leaver, M, 19, Manchester

The idea that schools focus more attention and resources on those perceived as heading to university education occurred several times during the interviews with school leavers. This notion was felt even among those that did continue into university education.

> "If they know you're interested in pursuing education, I feel like maybe unconsciously they'd take a bit more precedence over other students."
> School leaver, M, 20, Liverpool

Apathy towards school was a common theme, and this was often linked to subjects being perceived as irrelevant to their personal aspirations. For some, progressing into further study that they believed they were better suited for helped them become more engaged in their education.

> "When I went to college, I realised I like to get up, go to class, and I enjoyed learning new things. I had a different aspect of the education process when I went to college. I respected it more. I enjoyed it more."
> School leaver, F, 22, Burnley

A mixed picture emerged from the school leavers who progressed into university. While some felt it had helped them achieve their ambitions, others felt ill-prepared and that it did not live up to their expectations. This suggests that it is important to recognise every child is different. Educational institutions should prepare pupils for further study at university or college but should also look to make young people aware of the challenges of adult life and participation in the labour market, so that they can prepare.

> "I think expectations are a normal thing, but they were all crushed immediately...I think some of them weren't realistic...you'd assume that university is going to be so easy and then finding work...but it's not."
> School leaver, F, 23, Manchester

Preparing young people for adult life is a key task of the education system. However, there are multiple paths and different opportunities that young people can take. It is important to help make them aware of this, so that they can make an informed decision about their future, foster ambition, and help every child achieve their potential.

Reflections on the findings

The above themes reflect the overlapping nature of the broad determinants of educational success. In particular, the interviews strongly expose how material deprivation diminished social relations and lack of clear guidance can distort the perceptions, behaviours, and aspirations of the children and young adults. While the interviews were concentrated in the North West, many of the themes will resonate with teachers, pupils and parents and carers nationally. In the next chapter, we seek to respond to these challenges by putting forward a practical policy package that will help achieve the goal of reducing educational inequalities so that young people can achieve success, regardless of where they are born.

Policy recommendations

4

Creating the environments in which children can thrive in education is the critical task for policymakers. The findings of this report stress the importance of addressing the determinants of educational success, found within and outside the classroom. The following recommendations respond to the findings of the interviews in the North West and are grouped into the broad determinants identified in Chapter 2. Overall, CPP are calling for a £15bn package of investment across education and welfare each year.

Reducing economic disadvantage

Ensuring a base level of economic security and investment in the education and wellbeing of children is critical. These policies focus on funding education, alleviating poverty and creating the labour market conditions that will benefit children and their parents and carers in areas of higher deprivation.

Enhancing the pupil premium

Recent cash injections into education are unlikely to compensate for significant funding cuts during the past decade. Moreover, changes to the National Funding Formula have meant that schools in the least deprived areas are expecting a larger increase in funding than those in the most deprived areas.[36] With the impact of the pandemic still being acutely felt by those in education, it is important to ensure that schools and colleges have the financial resources to deliver the best possible education.

The Pupil Premium offers an effective way to target funding towards young people who have faced disadvantage. The funding for eligible pupils is paid to schools,[37] which have autonomy over how the funding is spent. The Pupil Premium is not a personal budget for individual pupils but is instead used to enhance the overall teaching environment. It has been found to be used most effectively in supporting staff development, offering targeted academic support, and developing wider strategies to address non-academic barriers to success in schools.[38]

Expanding the Pupil Premium was a core policy demand of previous CPP research, alongside establishing a National Pupil Premium Leadership Group to promote best practice.[39] As a first step, the pupil premium should be increased. Since 2015, primary pupils eligible for pupil premium have seen the amount they receive cut. Restoring the real value would increase the amount of funding directed to areas with greater numbers of children experiencing financial hardship.

Further, secondary school pupils should be entitled to the same amount as those in primary school. Poverty among secondary school pupils is no less severe and additional funding would help contribute to broader investment in secondary education.

Finally, expanding the pupil premium to post-16 pupils in colleges or other institutions of further education is an obvious way of continuing to support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds as they strive towards higher levels of attainment.

Recommendations

> Increasing the Pupil Premium payment for primary school children from £1,385 to £1,782 per pupil.[40]

> Matching the Pupil Premium payment for secondary school children with primary school children, meaning an increase from £985 to £1,782 per pupil.

> Increasing the Pupil Premium payment for children who have been adopted or are in care from £2,410 to £2,921 per pupil.

> Expanding the Pupil Premium to cover those aged 17–18 in full-time education at the same rate received by primary and secondary school aged children. Eligibility will be based on whether they received the Pupil Premium in their final three years of secondary education and will be worth £1,782 per pupil.

This overhaul of the Pupil Premium would represent a substantial increase in the funding to support schools to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils. An estimated £2.4bn was spent on the Pupil Premium in 2020/21, £2.2bn of which was to support pupils eligible on account of their deprivation status.

36   Sibieta, L. (2021) *School spending per pupil set to remain below 2009 levels.* Institute for Fiscal Studies [IFS]. Available at: https://ifs.org.uk/publications/15589
37   Or local authorities for children looked after by the local authority.
38   Department for Education [DfE] (2022) *Pupil premium: overview.* Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium/pupil-premium#purpose
39   Alldritt, C and Franklin B. (2021) *Driving growth and shared prosperity. A joint report by CPP and the Northern Research Group.* Centre for Progressive Policy [CPP]. Available at: https://www.progressive-policy.net/publications/driving-growth-and-shared-prosperity
40   For primary school pupils, this increase would mean that pupil premium rates are returned to their peak of £1,434 in 2016 and uprated in line with inflation since then. The proportionate increase between current pupil premium payments and our recommendation have been applied to increase the amounts available to those in care.

Under these proposals, the expected cost for increasing the Pupil Premium for those eligible on account of deprivation would rise to £3.8bn a year. Increasing the amount received for those children in care would require just over £600m. Based on current entitlement rates and participation rates in post-16 education, expanding the Pupil Premium to cover post-16 education would require just over £740m. In total, the additional spending would amount to £2.2bn per annum.

This package would target support towards areas where there are more children living in disadvantaged economic circumstances. It would allow schools, sixth forms and colleges to invest in a variety of measures that will improve the educational experience of young people in difficult circumstances. After a decade of funding cuts and changes to the funding formula which have left some communities even further behind, this would be a first, but necessary step towards a fair funding package for the education system. However, while investing in the pupil premium can promise great benefits, attempting to do so through re-allocating funds within the existing educational budget would undermine the impact of the premium. This increase should be funded by new investment in education.

Alleviating child poverty

To go further than support in the classroom, the welfare system should be reformed to better support low-income families with children and reduce child poverty which is so detrimental to educational attainment. At present, an estimated 3.8 million children live in households receiving Universal Credit (UC), and a further 2.7 million live in households receiving Child Tax Credit (CTC). It is estimated that the total amount spent on the child element of UC is just over £9bn, while total spend on CTC is over £8bn.

However, recent developments have weakened the amount families can expect to receive through welfare. The two-child limit, benefit cap and prolonged benefit freeze between 2016 and 2020 eroded the real value of benefits, leading to an increase in child poverty.[41] Through enhancing the social safety net, child poverty, and the associated economic costs of poor educational outcomes (and various other social outcomes) could be significantly reduced.

Recommendations

> Removing the two-child limit.

> Equalising the payments in line with first-born children, born prior to April 2017.

> Reversing the impact of the benefit freeze and ensuring future increases are in line with inflation.

> Lifting the benefit cap.

The UK should follow the example set across Europe where larger families are not financially penalised, with France and Germany receiving higher rates of child benefit for additional children.[42] It has been estimated by the Child Poverty Action Group that lifting the two-child limit would cost an estimated £1bn and lift over 250,000 children from poverty, while providing an income boost to many other households that would still be in poverty.[43]

By adjusting for a higher child element and ensuring that every child receives the same amount, the child element of means-tested benefits would cost an estimated £26.3bn per annum, an increase of £8bn per annum relative to today. Although it is likely this amount would fluctuate in response to broader economic conditions.

While a significant increase, it should be recognised that the economic costs of child poverty are significant. In 2008, it was estimated that child poverty costed the UK an estimated £25bn a year, and this had increased to £30bn by 2013.[44] It is likely these costs have worsened since and are a consequence of adverse social outcomes in education and health which persist into adulthood. A more resilient safety net should be recognised as an investment in the next generation.

250,000

It has been estimated by the Child Poverty Action Group that lifting the two-child limit would cost an estimated £1bn and lift over 250,000 children from poverty, while providing an income boost to many other households that would still be in poverty

Better local jobs

While the importance of education for thriving labour markets is well documented, new evidence in this report demonstrates that a two-way relationship exists. Areas where labour markets are in a poor state, where wages are low, unemployment high, insecurity rife and demand for skills subdued, there is a negative impact on children and their educational attainment. More specifically, this report finds that:

- Bad quality jobs diminish the economic prospects of parents and carers, not only exacerbating the risk of poverty but also placing economic pressures on parents and carers who work in jobs with low pay or irregular hours, leaving them with less time to spend with their children.
- The lack of local employment opportunities can negatively impact the attitudes of young people and dampen their ambitions. It is important that the local labour market is providing decent employment opportunities for young people, and that local educational institutions are able to provide their pupils with clear routes into these.

Recommendations

To improve labour market conditions for parents and carers and to enhance pathways into good work for young people we recommend the following package drawing on previous CPP research and recommendations:

> Mandate employers to offer guaranteed hour contracts to zero-hours workers who have performed regular hours for three months.[45]

> Expand the right to request flexible working as a right available to workers on the first day of their employment and invest in management training to support employers to better accommodate flexibility requests.[46]

> Conduct a review of careers advice in areas with higher levels of deprivation to explore the adequacy of current levels of provision and funding, and the extent to which school aged children are being made aware of opportunities regarding both further study and future employment.

Improving social relations

Fostering a positive social environment can promote healthy development and allow children to build meaningful relationships with their community. This in turn influences aspirations, ambitions, and the ability to fully participate in the educational experience. Policy should ensure every child has access to strong, social support networks.

Meeting mental health needs

Improving mental health outcomes among children is key for supporting better educational outcomes. Lack of support to deal with mental health issues was a recurring theme throughout the qualitative interviews conducted for this report. While additional funding has been made available for young people's mental health services in response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic,[47] there are well-documented pressures that pre-existed Covid, which served as barriers to the provision of mental health support within educational settings.[48]

Enhancing school counselling services is an investment that could help significantly improve mental health outcomes among children. It has been recognised that school-based counselling is important because children do not need a clinical diagnosis to access it, allowing for problems to be identified at a much earlier stage and preventing them from escalating and requiring more in-depth support.[49] Crucially, school counselling services are popular with both parents and carers and young people. A survey from the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) in 2019 found that 79% of parents with children under 18 believed schools should offer counselling services, while 83% of 16–24-year-olds advocated for school-based counselling services.[50]

Recommendations

> Establishing a legal ratio between pupils in schools and colleges and school counsellors of 250 to 1.

> Creating a taskforce within the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) tasked with improving mental health outcomes among children and reviewing the quality and impact of mental health provision in schools.

41 Barnard, H. (2019) *End the benefit freeze to stop people being swept into poverty.* Joseph Rowntree Foundation [JRF]. Available at: https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/end-benefit-freeze-stop-people-being-swept-poverty#:~:text=If%20the%20freeze%20does%20not,in%20working%20families%20with%20children
42 Reader, M. and Curran. M (2021) *The UK is now falling behind both European countries and the US in its support for larger families.* London School of Economics blogs. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/two-child-limit/
43 Child Poverty Action Group [CPAG]. (2022) *New analysis: families hit by two-child limit face additional £900 plus shortfall this year as costs spiral.* Available at: https://cpag.org.uk/news-blogs/news-listings/new-analysis-families-hit-two-child-limit-face-additional-900-plus#:~:text=The%20two%2Dchild%20limit%20is,of%20poverty%2C%20CPAG's%20analysis%20finds
44 Hirsch, D. (2021) *The cost of child poverty in 2021.* Loughborough University. Available at: https://www.lboro.ac.uk/media/media/research/crsp/downloads/the-cost-of-child-poverty-in-2021--crsp-paper.pdf
45 Fogden, R (2020) *From precarious to prosperous, how we can build back a better labour market.* Centre for Progressive Policy [CPP]. Available at: https://www.progressive-policy.net/publications/from-precarious-to-prosperous
46 Hochlaf, D. Franklin, B. and Billingham, Z. (2022) *What women want, tackling gender inequalities in unpaid care in the workplace.* Centre for Progressive Policy. Available at: https://www.progressive-policy.net/publications/what-women-want#:~:text=What%20Women%20Want%20shows%20that,over%20%C2%A360bn%20per%20annum
47 Kulakiewicz, A. and Roberts, N. (2021) *Provision of school-based counselling services.* Available at: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2021-0178/
48 Trade Union Congress (2018) *Breaking point: the crisis in mental health funding.* Available at: https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Mentalhealthfundingreport2_0.pdf
49 Department for Education [DfE]. (2016) *Counselling in schools: a blueprint for the future.* Departmental advice for school leaders and counsellors. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/497825/Counselling_in_schools.pdf
50 Kulakiewicz, A. and Roberts, N. (2021) *Provision of school-based counselling services.* Available at: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2021-0178/

School counsellors can play a vital role, and establishing a base ratio enshrined in law will help bring together government and educational institutions to provide adequate mental health coverage in schools. A ratio of 250 pupils to a single counsellor is based on advice from the American School Counsellor Association. Evidence has shown that larger ratios are associated with worse student outcomes, however, firm evidence on the optimal ratio is lacking.[51] A unit dedicated to reviewing the evidence can make recommendations that can guide policymakers and legislators to ensure that resources are used most efficiently to improve pupil outcomes in England.

Assuming a ratio of 250 to 1 in schools and colleges would require 37,400 counsellors in England. Based on the average salary, alongside employer tax and pension contributions, the labour costs are estimated at £900m. Further funding would need to be made available to ensure the OHID taskforce was able to fulfil their statutory duties. However, it is important to recognise that many schools already provide counselling services with at least 73% employing at least one counsellor. Expanding the number of counsellors to cover every school and college would generate additional costs, but this is an investment to protect the mental health of the next generation, which can lead to longer, healthier, and more prosperous lives.

Transforming educational settings into community hubs

Throughout the qualitative interviews, it was made clear that a lack of local support networks served as a barrier to better educational outcomes. One way of addressing this is to take greater advantage of the roles schools and colleges can play within their local areas – helping them to grow into becoming genuine community hubs. Under the community hub model, existing facilities will become focal points to provide key social and welfare services, parental support, and extra-curricular activities, while strengthening the relationships between parents and carers, educators, local employers, and civil society organisations.[52]

The UK has already committed to some forms of support to help establish schools as community hubs. The national school breakfast club programme for example provides subsidies for schools to establish breakfast clubs to guarantee children a nutritious meal at the start of the day.[53] Some communities have already established networks of community hubs around schools, including Kirklees in West Yorkshire and Dundee in Scotland. Through further investment and learning from best practice, there is a chance to upscale community hubs across the country.

Recommendations

> CPP recommends establishing a fund to support community hub trials in the 20% most deprived local authorities in England.

A funding pot worth £600m should be made available, that can be used to distribute £20m on average over two years to the 20% most deprived upper-tier local authorities in England. The funding allocation should take into consideration population levels within deprived places, and be made in instalments, with additional payments contingent on local authorities demonstrating that the funds have been used to support initiatives which are transforming schools and colleges into hubs within the community. There are various ways in which the funding might be used – although local areas should be free to determine their own exact objectives:

- Opening school facilities for enrichment activities in the evenings and holidays
- Allowing parent support meetings to take place on school grounds
- Hosting careers fairs and other opportunities for children to hear from local employers
- School breakfast and lunch clubs for young people and their families in the community
- Provision of health-based services to support the local community
- Welfare support services to help those on low incomes navigate the social security system

Local authorities should maintain a degree of autonomy and look to work with educational institutions, families, and other local stakeholders to deliver initiatives which meet the needs of their community. Initiatives should be subject to evaluation so that a guide to best practice can be compiled and to assess the impact that different programmes have on child development and wellbeing, with a view to ensuring that every local authority in the country can work to establish community hubs within existing community assets.

> Throughout the qualitative interviews, it was made clear that a lack of local support networks served as a barrier to better educational outcomes

Overhaul the Family Hub programme

The Sure Start programme was introduced in 1999 to deliver a variety of services to support child development. The programme evolved over the course of the New Labour government, with a target of establishing 3,500 Sure Start Children's Centres by 2010. By 2009/10, £1.8bn in total funding was allocated to Sure Start, with almost 35% going towards capital expenditure.[54] However, subsequent spending cuts saw funding fall by two-thirds by 2017/18, with many centres closed in response.[55]

Despite the decision to cut funding, the Sure Start programme has repeatedly been found to have a positive impact on young children. A series of audits had previously found that living in areas with active Sure Start programmes was associated with better outcomes for child development and parental wellbeing, leading to less chaotic households and more productive home learning environments.[56] Having centres at the heart of the community to deliver early years support for young children and their benefits is critical to improving prospects and establishing social bonds that will continue to flourish as children enter formal schooling.

The current government has attempted to deliver Family Hubs as a means of offering early years services and support. However, the independent Commission on Young Lives, chaired by former Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, noted that the funding commitment of £82m in the last Spending Review to establish Family Hubs in 75 local authorities was significantly lower than the investment in Sure Start at its peak. The commission also declared the significant reduction in funding for the Sure Start programme a "historic mistake" resulting in higher costs for more intense services to support interventions for children at later stages.[57] It is imperative that investment in infrastructure to support early years development looks to emulate the successful model that existed before.

Recommendations

> Increasing funding for the Family Hubs to match real-terms spending on Sure Start at its peak.

> Delivering 3,500 local Family Hubs centres by 2030.

Matching real-terms funding with 2009/10 levels will require an investment of £2.7bn per year. Assuming that a similar level is directed towards capital investment, then this would mean just under £1bn should be spent on getting new Family Hub centres up and running, so that they are able to provide services to new parents and young children within the local community.

Local authorities should determine exactly where to develop new centres but with an expectation that they would be located in the areas of highest deprivation. Evidence on the impact of Family Hub services should be assessed at appropriate intervals, taking into consideration the fact that potential benefits will take time to materialise and that family hubs are essentially systems change not a specific intervention.

£2.4bn

Matching real-terms funding with 2009/10 levels will require an investment of £2.4bn per year

51 Kearney, C. Akos, P. Domina, T. and Young, Z. (2021) *Student-to-school counsellor ratios: a meta-analytic review of the evidence.* Journal of counseling and development. Available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jcad.12394
52 Sanjeevan, S. McDonald, M. and Moore, T. (2012). *Primary schools as community hubs: a review of the literature.* Murdoch Children's research institute. Available at: https://www.communityhubs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Primary_Schools_as_Community_Hubs_Literature_Review_Jul_12.pdf
53 Department for Education [DfE] *National school breakfast club programme guidance.* Available at: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/breakfast-clubs-programme-2021-2023

54 Bate, A. and Foster, D. (2017). *Sure Start (England).* House of Commons library. Available at: https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7257/CBP-7257.pdf
55 Cattan, S. Conti, G. Farquharson, C. and Ginja, R. (2019). *The health effects of Sure Start.* Institute for Fiscal Studies [IFS]. Available at: https://ifs.org.uk/publications/health-effects-sure-start#:~:text=Sure%20Start%20drives%20a%20significant,at%20ages%2010%20and%2011
56 Bate, A. and Foster, D. (2017). *Sure Start (England).* House of Commons library. Available at: https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7257/CBP-7257.pdf
57 Commission on Young Lives (2022) *A new partnership with families.* Available at: https://thecommissiononyounglives.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FAMILIES-FINAL-PDF-March-2022-1.pdf

Expanding educational access

The built environment should look to remove barriers to learning. Physical infrastructure can complement economic security and social networks to expand access to education and ensure that every child can pursue opportunities within the wider community.

Subsidising transport for young people

Every young person needs safe, accessible, and affordable routes to the educational institutions within their community. This is partially recognised by the extensive use of subsidies by local authorities to provide low-cost and free travel to young people. For example, children in London can use their Oyster card to access free and subsidised travel services across the capital. However, other local authorities, especially those outside of major cities do not have such readily accessible and subsidised transport for children.

Cuts to subsidised transport in the 2010s accentuated inequalities in access. It was estimated that in 2016, every shire authority and 90% of unitary authorities had cut their provision of school transport, with almost 350,000 children and 50,000 16–18-year-olds losing transport subsidies compared to 2008.[58] This has exacerbated inequalities in terms of transport access, which can disrupt learning and reduce the potential educational opportunities for young people, especially when their options expand after the age of 16.

Recommendations

> CPP recommends providing every child in full-time education in England with a universal travel pass that lets them use buses for free.

As mentioned, bus travel is already free for those aged 5–18 in London, and expanding this to the rest of the country would eliminate an unjustifiable inequality and ensure every child can get to their local school and chosen further education institution without incurring additional costs. Many local authorities already offer subsidised travel support to those from low-income households. Under this policy, the costs of administering such policies would be eliminated.

To ensure fair compensation for those providing bus services, and to avoid additional costs resulting in service cuts or higher costs for other passengers, local authorities should work to secure fair funding deals which will then be covered by additional funding. This initiative should be integrated into broader transport strategies, including efforts to improve active travel, which the central government has committed a major funding package of £2bn towards,[59] as well as efforts to curb carbon emissions.

Towards a joined-up approach

Throughout this report and its recommendations, it has been clear that educational success is determined by a wide range of factors and conditions. Delivering improvements will require a more joined-up approach, it cannot be left to schools and colleges alone, and it most go beyond the current remit of the Department for Education.

Recommendations

> CPP recommends that a new position should be established within the Cabinet Office, responsible for overseeing child welfare and development.

The post-holder would have responsibility for assessing the impact of policies across government on children, with the aim of co-ordinating action across government to improve the lives of children, allowing them to prosper through their time in education.

However, it is crucial that those directly responsible for children are also encouraged to take a more proactive stance to supporting their development.

> CPP also recommends that schools and colleges should have a new statutory obligation to produce a Family Support policy.[60]

This would formalise the ways in which schools and colleges interact with parents and carers, promoting dialogue and building trust and support between parents and carers and educators.

Delivering better educational outcomes for children across the nation is a challenging task, but one with great reward. A good education can transform lives and generate opportunities helping to deliver stronger, more inclusive economic growth, not just for individuals, but their families and communities. It is important that policy adapts to address the various determinants of educational success and creates conditions in which all children can thrive.

58   Campaign for Better Transport (2016) *School transport matters.* Available at: https://bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/16.05.25.school-transport-matters.pdf
59   Department for Transport [DfT] (2021) *Multi-million pound investment to inspire children to walk to school.* Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/multimillion-pound-investment-to-inspire-children-to-walk-to-school
60   Recently Sam Freedman made the case for a Parent Pledge to better co-ordinate the approach to families at the school level. Available at: https://www.tes.com/magazine/analysis/general/why-dfe-must-put-families-heart-education-again

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