

Leading impact through trusts

Driving up educational outcomes for
disadvantaged White children

March 2026



What is 'Leading impact through trusts'?

'Leading impact through trusts' is a project in partnership between the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) and ImpactEd Group. As CST highlight, 'where a trust runs a group of schools, it has the power to create a collaborative framework' focused on a single purpose – to make its schools the best they can be¹.

This project therefore aims to showcase good practice in school trusts and highlight how they are demonstrating real impact within the some of the most challenging areas in education.

Rather than making a case for one type of trust approach over another, this work seeks to identify and amplify practice that demonstrates how trusts as a whole can effectively tackle the following key themes:

- Driving up educational outcomes for disadvantaged White children
- High quality primary to secondary school transitions
- Effective approaches to reading to unlock educational outcomes

Each of these three themes is explored in a concise paper, drawing on data-driven, real-life examples from a range of trusts across the country, accompanied by actionable insights and question prompts, to support trusts in their own work towards improving pupil outcomes.

A synthesis report will also be published in Spring 2026 to identify insights and learnings across the project, recognising that the themes are interrelated.

This report focuses on the theme of **driving up educational outcomes for disadvantaged White children**. Future papers will be published on the CST and ImpactEd websites.

1. CST, 2025: [What is a school trust? - Confederation of School Trusts](#)



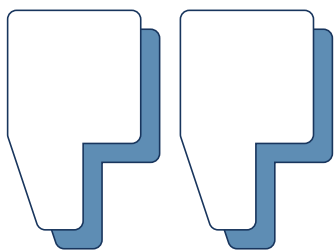
Driving up educational outcomes for disadvantaged White children

Context

Recent research on the low levels of school engagement and poor academic outcomes of disadvantaged White children in England² forms a concerning picture of the barriers that this group can face, preventing them from achieving at the same levels as their more socio-economically advantaged peers.

Overall the attainment of white FSM³ pupils is considerably lower than that of their peers, with **only 38% of boys and 40% of girls in this group achieving a grade 4 or higher at GCSE** in 2024 compared to **66% of all pupils**.⁴ Disadvantaged White children are much less likely to say that they enjoy school – a recent survey of 2,000 children revealed that **26 per cent say they rarely or never enjoy lessons**, compared to 15 per cent for their non-white peers,⁵ and disadvantaged White pupils often enter secondary school less engaged than other groups.⁶

Pupil absence is a key driver of the disadvantage gap⁷, with persistent absence rates remaining far above pre-pandemic levels and research suggesting that building **pupils' sense of belonging** can impact attendance and engagement⁸. Driving up educational outcomes for disadvantaged White children is therefore a key priority area for many schools, but one that can be challenging to meaningfully address.



It's also a challenge that schools have been grappling with for a long time – White British FSM-eligible pupils were one of the lowest performing groups in terms of GCSE pass-rates between 2004 and 2013.

2. The phrase 'White working class' is often used in popular/policy discourse on this topic. As the term 'working class' is difficult to accurately define using data, we will instead be referring to 'disadvantaged White children', which refers to pupils who identify as White, and who have been eligible for free school meals in the last six years.
3. Pupils who have been eligible for free school meals in the last six years
4. FFT, 2025: [The educational outcomes of disadvantaged White pupils - FFT Education Datalab](#)
5. Star Academies, 2025: [Unique new white working class education survey results published - Star Academies](#)
6. Jerrim, 2025: [How engaged are White Low-Income children during secondary school? - John Jerrim](#)
7. EPI, 2025: [Breaking down the gap - Education Policy Institute](#)
8. EEF, 2024: 2. [Build a culture of community and belonging for pupils - EEF](#)
9. Strand, 2015: [Ethnicity, deprivation and educational achievement at age 16 in England: trends over time](#)
10. House of Commons [Education Committee Report, 2014: Education Committee](#)



It's also a challenge that schools have been grappling with for a long time – White British FSM-eligible pupils were one of the lowest performing groups in terms of GCSE pass-rates between 2004 and 2013⁹, and the topic has been the focus of a previous House of Commons Education Select Committee report, published in 2014.¹⁰ Research has also indicated that some of the geographic areas flagged as achieving lower outcomes for disadvantaged White pupils are also those with higher rates of persistent disadvantage.¹¹

These are therefore **deep-rooted, systemic issues that schools have long been attempting to address** – and outcomes data indicates that some trusts are showing promise with tackling these issues.

Drawing on trust outcomes data and case studies, this paper aims to provide trust leaders with actionable insights to support their own trust's work on this topic, breaking the theme down into three key areas:

- Creating a strong culture
- Focusing on high quality teaching
- Improving attendance

11. EPI, 2020: [EPI 2020 Annual Report](#)

Who we spoke to

Trust engagement and outcomes data, as well as the proportion of White British and pupils eligible for Free School Meals, were all considered when identifying trusts to speak to about their current approach to driving up educational outcomes for disadvantaged White children.

The trusts that we spoke to about their work in this area all have high proportions of White British pupils and high proportions of pupils eligible for Free School Meals. Their outcomes data indicates that on average, they are achieving well in combined Reading, Writing and Maths outcomes for primary-age pupils, and have strong Progress 8 results at secondary.

It's important to acknowledge that there are many trusts across the country, not featured here, who are **also** doing good work to support disadvantaged White pupils. Similarly, the trusts featured in this paper do not claim to be doing everything perfectly. In fact, all of them were quick to highlight their continued priority areas and emphasise that none of their solutions represented a 'magic bullet.' Instead, the following case studies aim to spotlight tangible examples of trusts utilising their structures, capacity and experience to support pupils and teachers to succeed. You can view a full list of the trusts we spoke to, along with contextual information for each, at the end of the paper.

INSIGHT 1

Creating a strong culture

All the trusts that we spoke to emphasised the importance of creating and fostering a strong culture at a trust level and being deliberate and thoughtful with how this transfers down to individual schools.

‘Culture’ can sometimes feel like an abstract, or vague concept, particularly in a school context. However, whilst the trusts that we spoke to took different approaches to their systems and structures, for all of them, culture had a similarly clear, practical and powerful meaning: **ensuring consistent high expectations for all students, driving continuous improvement and investing in support and development for staff.**

Ensuring high expectations for all pupils

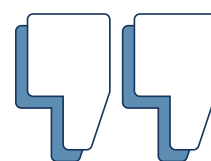
Staff expectations of pupils can play a key role in determining academic outcomes, and low expectations can negatively impact White, disadvantaged pupils. As Jerrim notes, *‘socio-economically disadvantaged pupils may face lower teacher expectations and be more likely to experience subconscious biases than more advantaged pupils (Doyle, 2023). Such differences in biases and expectations may also operate along ethnic lines.’* He notes that ‘negative stereotyping across society’ of White, disadvantaged pupils *‘may then lead to tangible differences in important decisions made within schools, including pupils from certain backgrounds being more likely to be misallocated into the wrong achievement group.’*¹²

To address this, several of the trusts we talked to emphasised the work they had done to reframe the way that disadvantaged pupils were spoken about – **a move away from ‘deficit narratives’**¹³ and seeing barriers to learning as an excuse for lower outcomes, and instead **focusing on how the teacher can remove these barriers and maximise each child’s outcomes.**

As Rachel Wilkes, CEO for Humber Education Trust – where on average, over 40% of pupils across their schools are eligible for Pupil Premium – explains, *‘high aspirations is part of loving and caring for these children. It’s about really, really championing them.’* Rather than being solely about staff attitudes, Wilkes emphasises that this kind of approach is about being *‘properly rigorous’*, *‘mastering the craft of teaching’* and ultimately, demonstrating what’s possible for disadvantaged pupils to achieve.

High aspirations is part of loving and caring for these children. It’s about really, really championing them.

Rachel Wilkes, CEO, Humber Education Trust



12. Jerrim, 2025: [How engaged are White Low-Income children during secondary school? - John Jerrim](#)

13. Fraser, 2024: [Leading a culture where... - Manchester Communication Research School](#)

Identifying and overcoming barriers at Northern Education Trust (NET)



Case Study

At Northern Education Trust – where 43% of pupils are eligible for free school meals – leaders have worked hard to instil a culture of high expectations and a focus on overcoming barriers rather than using them as excuses.

Weekly RAG rating meetings, for example, in which leaders sit down with teachers and discuss each individual pupils' progress, are focused, professional conversations. **'Rather than talking about what's the barrier, we ask: what can we do to remove it or overcome it?'**, explains Jane Wilson, CEO of NET.

Deb Murphy, the trust's Senior Executive Principal with a focus on Primary, expands on this further explaining that headteachers monitor RAG ratings from nursery all the way through to Year 6 for every child and where they're at. These RAG ratings help inform decisions about what support individual pupils need – whether that's a focus on high-quality teaching in the classroom, or additional interventions to support them with addressing knowledge gaps.

Pupils' work in books helps to further triangulate this process. Murphy shares an example of sitting in a RAG meeting with an early career teacher (ECT), using a pupil's class work to identify specific barriers or misconceptions and talk through specific approaches for the teacher to try. 'Later, the teacher came up to me and said that they'd put the approach we discussed into action and asked me to come and see. And he was so excited at having put something into place that seemed to be working.'

The Trust's leadership team believes that this approach, has helped to drive up the trust's outcomes. In 2024, 81% of pupils reached an expected level for Reading, Writing and Maths, and for disadvantaged pupils, this was 75% - both figures significantly higher than the national average.

Whilst NET's approach may not be about targeting White, disadvantaged pupils specifically, as, Wilson emphasises, **if you maximise the outcomes for individuals, you maximise the outcomes for groups.'**

Rather than talking about what's the barrier, we ask: what can we do to remove it or overcome it?

Jane Wilson, CEO,
Northern Education Trust



Considering this in your own trust?

- What sort of language do staff use when talking about disadvantaged pupils? Is deficit language prevalent, or do teachers consistently demonstrate high expectations for all pupils?
- When asked about the progress or outcomes of disadvantaged pupils, how do staff respond? Do they take responsibility or use barriers as a reason for these low outcomes?
- If leaders were asked to describe the trust's culture, what would they say?

Driving continuous improvement

For the trusts that we spoke to – most of whom have significantly higher than average proportions of White, disadvantaged pupils – **the work is never done**.

As Rachel Wilkes, CEO for Humber Education Trust explains, *'it's not just about comparing your performance to the national averages, it's also about looking at how you're doing compared to similar schools nationally, or schools down the road. There's still work to do and it's that ambition constantly.'*

The use of Primary Improvement Partners at the Advanced Learning Partnership (ALP)

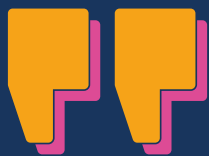


Across ALP, 40% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, and 95% of pupils are White British. In order to build a culture focused around continuously driving outcomes, each school in the trust is allocated a trust-based 'Primary Improvement Partner'.

The purpose of these in-trust roles is to provide tailored support, guidance, and development to school leaders, supporting continuous improvement in teaching, learning, and leadership. The Improvement Partner works collaboratively with staff to evaluate progress, drive educational excellence, and build leadership capacity, ensuring schools meet both internal and external standards for success. As Paul Cowen, Leader of School Improvement at ALP explains, 'these leaders bring a wealth of expertise and

experience, as highly accomplished headteachers who have consistently demonstrated excellence. Their schools have achieved positive Ofsted inspections, maintained strong and sustained pupil outcomes, and fostered highly effective, well-led primary education environments.' It is also highlighted, 'that continuous improvement begins in the classroom. It's about simplifying processes and **using rigorous assessment to gain a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and the impact of interventions** on learning.'

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Continuous improvement begins in the classroom. It's about simplifying processes and using rigorous assessment to gain a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and the impact of interventions on learning.

Paul Cowen, Leader of School Improvement, Advanced Learning Partnership

Louise Templeton, Headteacher at Moorside Primary School, is one of the trust's Primary Improvement Partners. She gives an example of how the model has helped drive continuous improvement across the trust: "In one of our schools we worked directly with school leaders and staff to develop a bespoke model of writing intervention to improve standards. This involved evaluating the curriculum delivery model, working directly with staff to plan and resource the curriculum, then monitoring and evaluating impact on a regular basis. Clear targets for

improvement were set so there was transparency in relation to expectations and achieved impact." Monitoring involved all stakeholders including the Primary Improvement Partner, headteacher, subject leader and class teachers. This secured a shared understanding of the improvement process and accountability at all levels. Monitoring and evaluation tightly tracked and monitored impact against agreed targets, resulting in a 39% improvement in writing outcomes across Year 6 in 2024/25.

Considering this in your own trust?

- How does your trust measure its progress and how would it define 'success'? Who does it compare itself to?
- If a school in your trust was in need of support, what systems are in place to enable this support to be provided?

Investing in support and development for staff

Many of the trusts we spoke to highlighted that as well as using centralised approaches for areas like finance, HR, data and marketing – freeing up headteachers to focus on school improvement and pupil outcomes – trusts also use a centralised approach to offer **extensive wrap-around support for leaders, wider teaching staff, trustees and local committee members.** .

This model means that, when support is needed, or when a new school is brought into the trust, there are many individuals who understand the trust’s ethos and vision and can offer tailored support. Several trusts observed that for teachers who may have previously been used to working in isolation, **building a culture of collaboration and developing effective peer support networks takes time and requires a purposeful, structured approach.**

Supporting teacher development is especially important for driving up educational outcomes for disadvantaged children – there’s evidence that schools serving more disadvantaged communities struggle to recruit and retain high-quality teachers, with teachers in disadvantaged schools having less classroom experience and being less likely to have a relevant degree.¹⁴

The data also shows that disadvantaged schools face higher turnover and more teacher absences, both of which are likely to create instability¹⁵ – investing in development pathways can therefore help to address this instability through strong leadership.

14. EPI, 2025: [EPI-Report-workforce-quality-gap.pdf](#)

15. EPI, 2025: [EPI-Report-workforce-quality-gap.pdf](#)



Investing in leadership development through Advanced Learning Partnership (ALP)'s 'Talent ID' programme



Christine Durand, Trust Improvement Partner at Advanced Learning Partnership, explains that the key to building a strong culture of collaboration and peer support is 'communicating the reasons why a collaborative ethos has been put in place', helping staff feel safe to share their own professional journeys.

In ALP's case, this is partly facilitated through the trust's 'Institute of Teaching, Leadership & Research', which brings all of the schools in the trust together through evidence-informed training programmes and the development of year group specific networks.

ALP has also worked hard to **grow and foster talent from within** their trust. As Paul Cowen, Leader of School Improvement explains, 'Of our 23 headteachers, a small number have been recruited externally, while the vast majority have progressed and developed their leadership careers from within the trust.' Their Talent ID programme involves 'working with the leaders themselves, but also looking at where they're going to be within the next year, two years, five years, and asking, what do we do to actually retain and keep them?'

The trust's talent identification programme for leaders is designed to systematically recognise, nurture, and develop leadership potential at all levels. This emphasises identification of high-potential staff, providing targeted professional development and opportunities for collaboration both within and beyond the trust. Through a structured leadership framework, high-potential leaders are supported to build expertise in strategic leadership, educational excellence, and operational management, ensuring a sustainable pipeline of skilled leaders who can drive continuous improvement and positively impact pupil outcomes.

[The Talent ID programme involves] working with the leaders themselves, but also looking at where they're going to be within the next year, two years, five years, and asking, what do we do to actually retain and keep them?

Paul Cowen, Leader of School Improvement, ALP

Considering this in your own trust?

- What do staff attendance and retention rates look like within your trust? To what extent do you have mechanisms in place to foster talent and support progression?

Empowering local committee members (governors) through training at Northern Education Trust (NET)



For NET, building a culture of continuous development and high expectations means supporting the development of staff at all levels, not just leaders and teachers.

Training has been developed to support lunchtime staff, caretakers and teaching assistants, all of which is enhanced by the trust's 'Net Resources Portal', a package of training videos and curriculum materials.

Deb Murphy, Senior Executive Principal at NET, emphasises the particular importance that the trust places on **upskilling local committee members (who they refer to as governors) to support them to fulfil their role effectively.**

'Every month we have a theme, for example pupil premium spending, and we invite governors to attend from across the whole trust. We record these sessions and save them within the portal, so that if a new governor is appointed, we can direct them to specific training and support them in their work.'

Jane Wilson, NET'S CEO, emphasises that training for governors is focused on 'how they hold us to account. It's not focused on telling them things.' A key element of NET's culture, Wilson explains, is therefore 'recognising that responsibility and accountability sit together', and that by supporting development at every level of the trust, you empower individuals to 'roll up their sleeves and join in.'

Murphy believes that approach to governor support has created a more effective network of governors, with a culture of high expectations and accountability. And he observed that at several of their recent Ofsted inspections, governors demonstrated excellent confidence and knowledge when talking about their school and the trust.

Considering this in your own trust?

- What does staff development and support look like for each role within your trust? Would all staff know how to access relevant support when they needed to?
- Consider the role of your trustees/local committee members. Do they offer rigorous challenge and accountability to school leaders? Are they equipped with the information and knowledge to do this effectively?



INSIGHT 2

Focusing on high quality teaching

In their guidance for schools, the Education Endowment Foundation emphasise that ‘high quality teaching should be a top priority for Pupil Premium spending.’¹⁶ Research demonstrates that this is a key lever for improving pupil outcomes, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁷

In practice, prioritising high quality teaching usually involves implementing a programme of professional development for teachers and supporting them with applying this in the classroom. A key challenge that leaders often face here is that teachers may be at different stages of their development. This might also apply across different subject departments or phases, with some feeling secure in their approach to ensuring quality, and others still trialling different techniques to explore what works. Therefore, whilst many schools will aim to focus on high quality teaching, the trusts that we spoke to are specifically utilising their leadership and collaboration structures to develop quality at scale.

16. Education Endowment Foundation, 2025: [Use reliable research evidence to support your strategy – EEF](#)

17. Department for Education, 2025: [Using pupil premium: guidance for school leaders](#)

Building expert systems and utilising people with expertise to drive outcomes at Delta Academies Trust



For Andy Barnett, Chief Executive Officer of Delta Academies Trust, 'improving outcomes for disadvantaged White British pupils is actually simpler than you would think and comes down to one thing: running really good schools.'

The key elements are phase specific expert knowledge in inclusion, teaching, curriculum and leadership – everything else is peripheral.' This philosophy shapes how Delta operates across its 64 schools, many of which serve communities with high levels of deprivation and White British pupils. Andy adds, 'Advantaged pupils will get there anyway, if you run really good schools then disadvantaged pupils will also get there and the gap will close.'

To this end, Delta has invested in building robust trust-wide systems. As Barnett explains, 'we are a systems-based organisation, that includes how we align on teaching and learning, assessment, intervention, curriculum design.' This means that when schools face challenges or changes in leadership, outcomes don't drop off a cliff for disadvantaged pupils as the systems hold the school up. Central to this model are the network of expert practitioners (known as Directors of Learning in primary and Subject Directors in secondary) who are employed centrally and deployed directly into schools. These individuals are not advisory figures: they work alongside teachers in classrooms, planning and teaching key students. As Trudi Bartle, Deputy Chief Executive (Primary), describes it, 'They do not work from home writing curriculum resources, they are based in schools and help with the heavy lifting. They don't advise, but they do direct, they work alongside staff. They build teachers' expertise and have impact with the students who need it most.'

The trust's approach also includes a rigorous, high-frequency monitoring process. Rather than infrequent termly pupil progress meetings, Delta's headteachers hold weekly conversations with teachers about individual children, discussing specific gaps, barriers and next steps. David Longley, Associate Executive Principal at Montagu Academy in Doncaster, describes the nature of these discussions in practice: 'What is the barrier for that child? What can we do differently? So we're really drilling down into what that child needs at this moment in time so that we can really have an impact.'

While Delta's approach is not targeted at White, disadvantaged pupils specifically, the trust's leaders are clear that getting the fundamentals right for the most disadvantaged benefits every child. As Bartle puts it: 'if you get it right for your most disadvantaged pupils, it works for any child.'

The outcomes at Delta schools reflect this sustained, systematic focus. In secondary, the proportion of all pupils achieving a grade 5 in English and maths has risen from 44% in 2019 to 55% in 2025 (national 45%), the proportion of disadvantaged pupils has risen from 29% to 37% (national 26%), and specifically white-British disadvantaged pupils has risen from 22% to 36% (national 19%). In primary, the proportion of all pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths has risen from 63% in 2019 to 73% in 2025 (national 62%), the proportion of disadvantaged pupils has risen from 54% to 62% (national 47%), and specifically white-British disadvantaged pupils has risen from 55% to 65% (national 42%).

Creating a shared lesson framework to promote high-quality teaching across Wade Deacon Trust (WDT)



At Wade Deacon Trust, where over 90% of pupils identify as White and the proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium ranges from 30-60% across its schools, the focus has been on developing more consistent classroom practice.

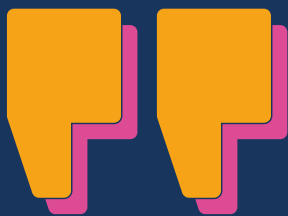
As Simon Corner, Director of Secondary Education explains, 'Our aim was to create real alignment across the secondary phase through a teaching framework that supports teachers and amplifies their impact. This framework gives every teacher **a clear, practical structure for lessons and curriculum delivery** – while still celebrating professional expertise. The framework has also helped staff come together across the trust to share ideas, exchange best practice, and benefit from meaningful collaboration.'

'It's a purposeful structure that supports teachers to deliver lessons with precision and impact,' explains Corner. Before moving to a central trust role, Corner was Principal at Wade Deacon High School, where high-quality professional development alongside consistency of approach was key to improving standards and developing a culture of success and celebration. Students start every lesson with 10 minutes of 'Do Now' retrieval practice – this means that they can

enjoy and access the curriculum as soon as they come in. Teachers then use an 'I do, we do, you do' model, with each lesson featuring the 'Blue Zone' – a period in the lesson that's guaranteed, independent work time.

This framework aims to 'provide students with plenty of opportunities for co-construction before completing an independent task', to maximise their chances of success.

Corner sees this framework as a way to 'elevate the impact of lesson planning and bring greater clarity and consistency to lessons. It's predictable, it's scaffolded and it's really precise.' He also believes that this approach helps to balance 'the very real necessity of having some degree of centralised lesson resources to reduce teacher workload' whilst still 'making sure that first and foremost, **teachers plan for the individual needs of children**, ensuring that they move at the right pace.'



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Simon Corner, Director of Secondary Education, WDT



Creating a shared language for high-quality teaching across Humber Education Trust (HET)



For Rachel Wilkes, CEO at Humber Education Trust (HET), developing high-quality teaching meant creating a shared language of what this looks like in practice. This involved asking questions like ‘What do the teacher standards actually mean? What do they physically look like in a classroom? Are we all going into a classroom and in agreement about what effective teaching is?’

To implement this effectively, the trust’s School Improvement Team focused on **explicit training and discussion with all headteachers initially**. As Wilkes explains, it’s about ‘making sure that everyone’s on the same page. That’s how we get consistency’. This training focuses on **defining and understanding key, effective approaches to teaching that can be applied in every classroom and across every subject** – which together has formed an HET ‘teacher toolkit’.

The trust has then implemented a ‘train the trainer’ model at a school level to embed this

across all teachers in the trust. As Wilkes explains, headteachers have the ‘autonomy to decide how this training will be delivered at a school-level’, but the content will look the same across the board.

This applies on a teacher level as well. Wilkes explains that a key benefit to the model is that leaders can feel confident that teachers have got a suite of high-quality ‘tools’ that they can draw on, whilst teachers retain professional autonomy to decide *how* those tools are utilised within their practice and at different stages of a lesson, carefully considering ‘why this, why now’.

Considering this in your own trust?

- Is there a shared definition for what high quality teaching means across your trust? How embedded is this within teaching practice?
- To what extent is high-quality teaching prioritised across your trust? What proportion of your pupil premium budget is spent on developing high quality teaching?



INSIGHT 3

Improving attendance

As highlighted at the start of this report, research on pupil attendance suggests that persistent absence rates are considerably higher for White pupils who are eligible for free school meals.¹⁸ The Education Policy Institute's recent research on the drivers of the gap at secondary also shows that the increase since 2019 can be entirely explained by the higher levels of absence among disadvantaged pupils.¹⁹

Whilst there is an increase in evidence-informed guidance for schools on how to improve pupil attendance,²⁰ it can be difficult to know where to start when looking to tackle attendance and persistent absence in particular. For trusts who are seeing progress in this area, it is often about the small, incremental steps that can **give pupils a sense of belonging and build positive engagement between pupils, schools and parents**. At Wade Deacon Trust, for example, leaders have focused on breaking the curriculum down on a granular level to ensure that every lesson has clear success criteria, and that students can see clear connections across subjects. Simon Corner, Director of Secondary Education at the trust, believes that seeing relevance in the curriculum is 'pivotal to White British pupil engagement, helping them make sophisticated connections and see their progress'.

Delta Academies Trust have deliberately embedded approaches to remove barriers to attendance and engagement. Across Delta's secondary schools, all students receive a free breakfast, PE kit and uniform on entry in Year 7, and a 'Life of a Student' programme funds trips and cultural experiences. As John Hall, Associate Executive Principal and Principal of De Warenne Academy in Doncaster, explains, 'it's removing barriers from not coming to school, which has a knock-on effect on attendance.' The trust has also invested significantly in the physical environments of its schools, recognising that for many disadvantaged pupils, the school building is a source of stability and pride.

Another key priority these trusts that we spoke to identified is around **collecting, breaking down, analysing, and sharing attendance data**. As Louise Templeton, a headteacher in the Advanced Learning Partnership Trust emphasises, it's ultimately about 'that forensic detail to the individual child.'

18. FFT, 2023: [The educational outcomes of disadvantaged White pupils - FFT Education Datalab](#)

19. EPI, 2025: [Disadvantage - Education Policy Institute](#)

20. EEF, 2024: [Supporting attendance - EEF](#)

Building positive relationships with parents at Northern Education Trust (NET)



Working in a variety of contexts across the North of England, NET's approach to engaging parents requires a combination of trust-wide approaches and tailored, school-specific initiatives.

As Jane Wilson, NET's CEO explains, 'we have things that we do as a common approach across the trust – like where we bring parents in to talk about revision and give them fish and chips, and so we call it 'Fish and Tips'; or 'Starbooks', where we invite parents in to come and read with the children and we give them a cup of tea and coffee – but alongside these, schools do different things based on the context.'

The goal is ultimately to **'get them in as much as possible, particularly at the very start of children's education'**, as well as ensuring that the senior leadership team are highly visible to

parents. Deb Murphy, Senior Executive Principal at NET explains that 'all of the senior leadership and exec team are on the gates every morning with yellow jackets on to greet the parents, so that they know when they can have conversations with them.'

They're also acutely aware of the drop-off in parental engagement that can happen at secondary and so aim to avoid this as much as possible, through drop-in sessions and school visits.

We have things that we do as a common approach across the trust.



Jane Wilson, CEO, NET



Considering this in your own trust?

- What are the key barriers to parental engagement within your context? To what extent are these challenges being addressed through parental engagement initiatives?
- How visible are your trust/school leaders to parents? Do parents feel able to approach these individuals with their questions or concerns?

Using data to boost attendance at Humber Education Trust (HET)



For Humber Education Trust, where over 90% of pupils identify as White British, and on average, over 40% of pupils are eligible for free school meals across their schools, over the past few years, they have made strong progress on improving pupil attendance. In 2024, HET narrowed the pupil premium 'attendance gap' to just -1.3%, compared to the national average of -3.5%.

Alongside prioritising building relationships – Rachel Wilkes, Trust CEO, emphasises that 'one of the key successes of our attendance strategy isn't about the end bit where we're putting our foot down through parental meetings. It's all the work that happens before that.'

The trust takes a **rigorous approach to sharing and analysing data**. As Wilkes explains, 'we never hold anything in the centre, that all the schools don't also see. So everybody sees everything.' Alongside senior leaders and headteachers, this means also sharing trust-wide data with each school's local governing body, breaking the data down to look at disadvantaged pupils and persistent absences. 'Every term we meet with the local governing bodies as a group in terms of chairs and vice chairs. And we'll talk them through what that data is telling them so that they get those **constant benchmarks. Not just national, but also comparisons to the school down the road, the schools five towns across'** and so on.

This approach has a dual benefit – firstly, it helps those in governance roles to ask pertinent questions, and secondly, it gives leaders a wider set of comparisons and benchmarks to assess their own progress against.

HET's leadership team believes that their progress in attendance is supporting the trust's outcomes. In 2024, 79.3% of KS2 pupils across the trust reached expected levels in reading, writing and maths. For disadvantaged pupils, this was 75%; significantly above the national average of 45% for this group. The trust has eradicated the disadvantage gap, with disadvantaged pupils outperforming non-disadvantaged pupils nationally by 8%.



Considering this in your own trust?

- How is data used across your trust to monitor and address attendance challenges?
- Does your trust's approach to attendance aim to pre-empt and prevent attendance issues arising, or do interventions occur once problems are flagged?



Conclusion

As the amount of data that trusts access and share increases, it can be tempting, as a leader, to want to roll out more initiatives and attempt to focus on a larger number of priorities.

Instead, a clear theme that emerged from our conversations with trust leaders was the importance of using the data to establish fewer – but clearer – priority areas, building staff buy-in and relentlessly monitoring and reviewing.

For the trusts who are seeing outcomes for disadvantaged White pupils improve, they believe that the key to success is continuously returning to ‘the basics’: the development of a strong trust culture based on high expectations; a focus on establishing the core principles of high-quality teaching; and approaches that maximise pupil engagement through strong attendance.

Underpinning all of this is the importance of building trust-level systems that are resilient, ensuring that the quality of provision does not rest on any single individual, but is embedded in the way the whole organisation works.

We hope that this paper supports further trusts to consider their own approaches to driving up outcomes for disadvantaged students, utilising their trust’s collaborative structures, high-quality professional development and leadership to support their communities to thrive.

With thanks to the trusts who contributed to this series...



Advanced Learning Partnership: *"Dedicated to creating inclusive educational communities where families have confidence in the journey their child take."*

Established: 2017

Number & Type of schools: 13 primary schools, 9 secondary schools

Number of pupils: 8,831

Location: County Durham & Darlington

Website: alplearning.org.uk



The Bath and Wells Diocesan Academies Trust: *"An excellent education for every child, enhanced by a distinctively Christian ethos"*

Established: 2012

Number & Type of schools: 46 primary schools

Location: Across the South West

Website: bwmat.org



Delta Academies Trust: *"Changing Lives"*

Established: 2010

Number & Type of schools: 38 primary schools, 23 secondary schools, 1 all-through schools and 2 alternative provisions

Location: North of England

Website: deltatrust.org.uk



The Education Alliance: *"We are here to make great schools and happier, stronger communities so that people have better lives."*

Established: 2011

Number & Type of schools: 7 primary schools, 4 secondary schools and 1 alternative provision

Number of pupils: 7,250

Location: Yorkshire

Website: theeducationalliance.org.uk



The Elliot Foundation Academies Trust: *"Where children believe they can because teachers know they can"*

Established: 2012

Number & Type of schools: 36 primary schools

Number of pupils: 14,876

Location: West Midlands, London & East Anglia

Website: elliotfoundation.co.uk



Humber Education Trust: *"Disadvantage is not a barrier to achievement, success or happiness. We target resources to close gaps and ensure equality of opportunity for all"*

Established: 2017

Number & Type of schools: 13 primary schools, 4 special schools

Number of pupils: 5,512

Location: Hull and North East Lincolnshire

Website: humbereducationtrust.co.uk



Lift Schools: *"We will provide an excellent education to every child, in every classroom, every day."*

Established: 2008

Number & Type of schools: 32 primary schools, 22 secondary schools and 5 special schools

Number of pupils: 33,943

Location: Across England

Website: liftschools.org



Northern Education Trust: *"All young people, irrespective of background or ability will be successful in our Trust"*

Established: 2012

Number & Type of schools: 13 primary schools and 17 secondary schools

Number of pupils: 20,205

Location: North of England

Website: northerneducationtrust.org



Wade Deacon Trust: *"The vision is for every school in the Trust to be an outstanding school where every child receives an exceptional education."*

Established: 2012

Number & Type of schools: 5 primary schools and 4 secondary schools

Number of pupils: 5,804

Location: Merseyside

Website: wadedeacontrust.com

