

Submission to the House of Commons Education Select Committee's Inquiry into left behind white pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds

This submission to the House of Commons Education Select Committee's inquiry into left behind white pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds is based on Local Trust's experience managing the Big Local programme and research we commissioned from OCSI on neighbourhoods that might be described as the most 'left behind'. This research found that young people living in such neighbourhoods have worse educational attainment and much lower levels of participation in higher education than young people living in other equally deprived areas or the nation as a whole. The population of these areas is predominantly White British (88%); this is higher than the average across England (80%) and significantly higher than the average for areas that are equally economically deprived (61%). This suggests that policies designed to level up the educational attainment of white pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds should take a place-based approach and focus on the places that can reasonably be defined as the most 'left behind'.

The Big Local programme

Local Trust helps to deliver the Big Local programme, which is supported by a £217m endowment from the National Lottery Community Fund. It has provided £1.1m to each of 150 neighbourhoods across England, chosen because they had both missed out on lottery and other public funding and scored in the top 20% of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). In each area, resident led partnerships make the decisions about how Big Local funds are invested. They have 10-15 years in which to spend their money to improve their area and their quality of life. Local Trust offers a range of support designed to build the confidence and capacity of these partnerships to achieve the objectives they have set for the programme. Local Trust also undertakes policy and advocacy work based on our learning from Big Local areas.

Recommendations

There are a number of policy proposals that would help to facilitate communities in 'left behind' or other deprived areas to take greater responsibility to improve the educational underachievement of pupils, enabling them to address many of the underlying structural issues that hold pupils back:

- 1. Take a 'least first' approach when setting out schemes to alleviate educational deprivation.** Investing in 'left behind' neighbourhoods first would alleviate the spatial deprivation that is holding back many pupils. It would benefit left behind white pupils to a greater degree than any other targeted intervention.
- 2. Use the extended dormant assets scheme to create a Community Wealth Fund to invest in the social and civic infrastructure in 'left behind neighbourhoods.** This Fund, worth an estimated £2bn, would provide foundational funding for the social and civic infrastructure that 'left behind' neighbourhoods lack. The proposal put forward by the Community Wealth Fund Alliance would give residents control over spending, allowing them to drive improvements in educational attainment in their communities. This would help to alleviate many of the underlying issues that contribute to disproportionate levels of educational underachievement in 'left behind' neighbourhoods.
- 3. Use Towns Deals and the proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund to ensure underachieving pupils are connected to high quality training and job opportunities.** The OCSI 'left behind' areas research influenced the selection of the 100 towns that will benefit from the £3.6bn Towns Fund. As a result, many of the 225 'left behind' neighbourhoods will be covered by a Towns Deal. In order to capitalise on this opportunity, the government should encourage all councils to develop specific proposals for how the Fund will benefit 'left behind' neighbourhoods, ensuring that young people from these areas can access high quality training and well-paid, skilled employment. The proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund should be similarly targeted.

The principal factors that contribute to this underachievement, with reference to:

The role of place (reflecting regional variations)

Our experience of delivering the Big Local programme and our research into spatial deprivation has highlighted that place plays a crucial role in educational underachievement. The most meaningful geography at which to consider the issue is, in our view, the neighbourhood – communities of 3,000-10,000 people. A regional analysis risks glossing over the fact that pockets of deprivation can often be found alongside more affluent areas.

From our experience of Big Local, the areas that struggle, the most 'left behind', are those that lack places to meet, an active community and connectivity both transport and digital access to economic opportunities in the wider geography. To analyse the difference that these factors have on socio-economic outcomes, Local Trust commissioned OCSI to create a Community Needs Index (CNI). The main finding from the research was that wards that are in the 10% most deprived on both the IMD and the CNI have markedly worse socio-economic outcomes than areas that simply rank in the 10% most deprived on the IMD alone.

Young people in these 'left behind' areas have much lower educational attainment than those in equally deprived wards. Only 43.2% of pupils achieve 5 GCSEs (A*-C) including English and Maths. This compares to 44.6% in equally deprived areas and 57.1% in England. In addition, 18.4% of all young people (aged 16-24) in 'left behind' neighbourhoods have no formal qualifications, compared to 13.9% in equally deprived areas and 10.5% across England.

A much lower proportion of young people from 'left behind' neighbourhoods go into higher education (20.1%) compared to other equally deprived neighbourhoods (27.6%) and England as a whole (37.5%). The research suggests that the marked disparity in educational attainment for many pupils is driven by place and, more specifically perhaps, a lack of access to the social and civic infrastructure that allows young people to form a broader range of relationships and learn outside the classroom, often for free.

The home learning environment

Many young people do not have access to materials for home learning because their families are on low incomes or are digitally excluded. This is particularly the case for families in 'left behind' areas. Such neighbourhoods were identified in part due to their lack of digital connectivity and since the outbreak of COVID-19, this 'digital divide' has become even more apparent (see next section). Parents in 'left behind' areas are unlikely to be able to pay for internet connections or devices, such as laptops or tablets, that enable children to learn at home successfully. Just under one in three children in 'left behind' areas are living in poverty, a higher rate than across other equally deprived areas and nearly double the national average.

In addition to being unable to fund home learning, parents in 'left behind' neighbourhoods are likely to lack the confidence or capacity to support their children's learning at home. A volunteer at Gaunless Gateway Big Local in Bishop Auckland, identified by our research as 'left behind', noted that adult literacy is a particular challenge in their area. This hinders home learning because "it is difficult to teach children things that you haven't quite mastered yourself". This is a common feature in 'left behind' neighbourhoods, where 36% of adults have no formal qualification and places additional stress on parents.

Parents in 'left behind' neighbourhoods are more likely to be juggling multiple priorities and are therefore less able to spend time supporting their child's education or teaching them at home. 37.5% of households with dependent children in 'left behind' neighbourhoods are headed by single parents. This compares to 34% in other deprived neighbourhoods and 24.5% across England.

The effects of COVID 19 on this group

From our research into the early impacts of COVID-19 and the response of Big Local partnerships, it is clear that COVID-19 has exacerbated the issues that caused pupils in 'left behind' neighbourhoods to underachieve in education. The closure of schools for a prolonged period is likely to have adversely affected pupils from 'left behind' neighbourhoods due to the barriers to home-schooling identified above. A resident partnership member from Three Parishes Big Local, in Shropshire, noted that many children have been "left to themselves" for the past few months. As a result, many may struggle to readjust to a normal school routine in September.

A significant proportion of pupils in 'left behind' neighbourhoods have suffered from an inability to access learning material online. Big Local partnerships have noted that many families do not have laptops or tablets and those with phones often rely on pay-as-you-go sims for data. Many families therefore cannot access online material or have to pay a premium to do so. As a result, many pupils have lost out on vital education, falling further behind their more affluent peers.

The COVID-19 Food vulnerability Index, developed by the British Red cross, highlights that 'left behind' neighbourhoods score 30.08 points higher on average than other deprived areas. A number of Big Local partnerships have been forced to use their funding to help families provide food for their children throughout the pandemic. For example, Barrowcliff Big Local, in Scarborough, have given the local school £5,000 to extend free school meals to all children on the estate until September 2020. They found that families who are not in need, have not taken up the offer of free meals, allowing the money to go further than first expected. The impact of this increased food poverty is likely to have adverse effects on educational attainment both immediately and in the long-term.

The impacts of this underachievement, both for individuals and for communities

The main impacts of educational underachievement are to limit access to employment or to good employment, lowering living standards.

Widespread educational underachievement prevents individuals from accessing good employment and means employers with skilled jobs on offer tend to bypass these communities. This is evident in the fact that there are fewer jobs per 100 residents in 'left behind' neighbourhoods (52) than other equally deprived communities (88). The result of this is that youth unemployment (16.4%) is markedly higher in 'left behind' neighbourhoods than in other equally deprived neighbourhoods (6%). This leads to lower standards of living for residents in 'left behind' communities, where the average household income after housing costs is £7,000 lower than across England.

Our research into the early impact of COVID-19 has shown that unemployment in 'left behind' neighbourhoods is already at 10.6%, compared to 6.5% across England. In addition, a disproportionate number of those on the Job Retention Scheme (JRS) are employed in 'at risk' industries such as retail and hospitality, suggesting that more jobs could be lost after the JRS ends in October. Pupils in these areas thereby face an increased risk of poverty and fewer job opportunities over the long-term.

When unemployment or low-quality employment is all that is available to people living in particular neighbourhoods, young people tend to have low aspirations. In 'left behind' communities this can become an entrenched problem as a large proportion of the community do not think that the system is designed to support them to succeed. Once this culture of underachievement becomes embedded within the community, it takes a collective effort to overcome.

A worker from Arches Big Local in Chatham explained that, in order to improve educational attainment amongst pupils in the most deprived communities, "we need to start changing [...] aspiration levels as a community".

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

Our experience of the Big Local programme has shown that locally-tailored solutions devised and run by residents tend to be the most effective. Residents understand the multiple issues that communities face and are often best placed to tackle their root cause. As the Community Development Manager at Marsh and Micklefield Big Local noted:

“community groups have the local knowledge and flexibility to “do what needs to be done to remove the barriers”.

The examples below highlight both that residents understand what causes educational underachievement in their areas and are capable of addressing it.

Gaunless Gateway, Bishop Auckland, providing virtual tools for home learning

Gaunless Gateway Big Local is located in south-west Bishop Auckland. It is defined in our research as ‘left behind’, 96.3% of its population identify as White British and educational underachievement is a significant issue. On average, 20.1% of young people and 38.2% of all residents in Gaunless Gateway have no qualifications, whilst just 13.5% of residents are educated to degree level. 53.5% of pupils achieve 5 GCSEs (A*-C) including English and Maths.

As part of an education project designed to help children learn during lockdown, Gaunless Gateway Big Local has provided £3,000 of funding to “Cardboard Castle”, an online platform containing learning resources. The platform will contain short informative videos with ideas and materials for home schooling activities across different themes including art, history, nature, numeracy and literacy. Each lesson has activity packs with material to be downloaded and printed out or copied onto paper, for families without access to laptops or printers. There will also be links to support for parents struggling with the demands of home-schooling. One of the videos highlights a mobile bookshop swap that has been set up in the community where children can swap their finished book for a new one. They have also been working with local tourist attractions to educate children about local history, increasing the knowledge of Bishop Auckland and providing ideas for days out as lockdown is eased.

The project has been designed as a tool to support both parents and children looking to remove the “stress around replacing the class teacher” whilst at home. The two volunteers that are running the project have spoken to the local schools that are keen to use it as a formal teaching tool once schools return in September. They believe that, after lockdown eases, the “Cardboard Castle” will work alongside formal classroom education and improve educational attainment across Bishop Auckland.

Marsh and Micklefield, Wycombe, providing laptops and virtual tutoring services to the most deprived

Marsh and Micklefield Big Local encompasses a small neighbourhood in Wycombe. 26.1% of residents are educated to degree level whilst 54.1% of pupils gain 5 GCSEs (A*-C) including English and Maths.. It is more ethnically diverse than the 'left behind' neighbourhoods identified in our research, with 67.8% of residents identifying as White British.

The Big Local partnership has funded "Micklefield Community Tutoring" – a local social enterprise which is run by a former teacher and offers bespoke tutoring support to families with children that are underachieving at school. Marsh and Micklefield provided an £8,000 start-up grant to the social enterprise and has given an extra £3,000 to enable it to support children's move to home schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Community Development Worker noted that 'Micklefield Community Tutoring' is able to provide the bespoke support that each family needs and has been able to access new areas of the community that often missed out on support. This is because the teacher providing the tutoring is trusted by, and embedded within, the local community.

The Big Local partnership has also set up a project with local schools to provide laptops to the most deprived families. To date, they have bought 10 laptops and are providing technical support to one school at a cost of £10,000. They are now looking to roll this out to all the schools in the area. Alongside this, the Big Local partnership has paid for free hot meals for children at the local Hills Café. This offer has been a response to the challenges that residents have had accessing the free school meal voucher scheme.

Three Parishes, Shropshire, School Savings Club

Three Parishes Big Local spans the three villages of Gobowen, St Martins and Weston Whyn in rural Shropshire. It is 96.4% White British. 14.6% of young people and 26.5% of all residents have no formal qualifications, whilst 20.2% are educated to degree level.

The partnership has worked with the local school to set up the 'school savers club' which operates as an internal bank run by and for the year six pupils. It provides practical opportunities for the pupils to work with money and figures. By applying maths to a real-life scenario, the Head Teacher has noted that pupils are more engaged in class and they have seen an improvement in maths skills across year six.

Luton Arches Big Local, Chatham, providing early intervention for young children through sport.

Luton Arches in Chatham is an urban community which suffers from some of the worst air pollution in Kent. 66.1% of the population identifies as White British. 44.6% of pupils achieves 5 GCSEs (A*-C) including English and Maths and only 14.6% of all residents are educated to degree level.

The Big Local partnership has found that its Fit and Fed programme, which engage local children in team sports activities throughout the school holidays, has increased the aspirations of some of the most troubled children. For some of the most deprived children, their life has "always been a fight". By providing patient support and building up levels of trust between the Fit and Fed session leaders and the children, they are able to increase their social skills. The Community Development Manager for Arches Big Local noted that the increase in social skills has led to a number of children staying in school, whereas before they were being regularly excluded. The success of this project is thought to be down to the fact that Fit and Fed provides the opportunity for children to interact with new people. In this manner, it manages to bring the most deprived children "out of their bubble", encouraging them to work with others and try harder at school.

Gaunless Gateway, Bishop Auckland: increasing community spirit through art.

As lockdown begun, the Head of Art at Bishop Auckland College, who is a volunteer with Gaunless Gateway Big Local, set her children a 30-day art challenge. They were asked to send her a photo of a different piece of work each day for 30 days. She then put these online into a virtual gallery. As more art came in from her pupils, other members of the community saw them and wanted to get involved. The online art group now has over 500 members, each sending in photos of their work and sharing tips and tricks for art and home-schooling.

Every photo sent in is being put into the online gallery. The Big Local believes that this is key to the success of the project because it gives young people a sense of achievement. They have noticed that many young people are determined to create more art and take on the advice from others because they “know it’s going on your page” and want to improve. The virtual gallery also provides space for young people to share advice beyond simple art tips. One young man who had spent 9 weeks shielding on his own in Leeds has now set up his own craft business with the support of the virtual art community in Gaunless Gateway.

In addition, local students have established an informal, socially distanced material sharing group, allowing the most financially deprived to access art materials for free. This has broadened the learning of those who were reluctant to participate in either a school or home environment before. By taking an individual, bespoke approach to teaching, the Head of Art has been able to tailor the content that she is sharing with people via this group to be inclusive of their interests. In this manner she has introduced children to the work of Freida Kahlo, Vincent Van Gough and Tony Cragg.

The Big Local Partnership are hopeful that this group can become a catalyst for bringing the community together, highlighting that education can be fun and inclusive, and increasing aspirations beyond the COVID-19 lockdown.

About Local Trust

Local Trust is a place-based funder supporting communities to transform and improve their lives and the places where they live. We believe there is a need to put more power, resources and decision-making into the hands of local communities, to enable them to transform and improve their lives and the places in which they live.

We do this by trusting local people. Our aims are to demonstrate the value of long term, unconditional, resident-led funding through our work supporting local communities make their areas better places to live, and to draw on the learning from our work to promote a wider transformation in the way policy makers, funders and others engage with communities and place

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