

REPORT TO CABINET

MARCH 2025

REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

Children & Young People - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Clare Besford

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE 2024 – 2025 FOR VULNERABLE PUPILS

Summary

This report presents a summary analysis of vulnerable pupil performance in the academic year 2024-2025 for all key stages and all providers in the Borough. It is informed by the latest available data, some of which remains unvalidated and compared to national and regional averages where they exist. It includes performance outcomes for:

1. Pupils in receipt of Pupil Premium Funding.
2. Performance by gender.
3. Performance by ethnicity.
4. Children and Young People in Our Care.
5. Children with a Social Worker.
6. Children with Special Needs.
7. Children from Service Families.
8. Attendance and exclusion figures for Stockton.

Strong attainment outcomes for vulnerable pupils are achieved in Stockton-on-Tees despite significant underlying structural inequalities.

In interpreting the performance of vulnerable groups, it is important to acknowledge that the Borough continues to experience some of the most pronounced neighbourhood-level inequalities in the country, which is often masked by Borough-wide averages. These inequalities intersect with the wider system challenges highlighted through our work on Early Intervention and Prevention (EIP), which identifies an estimated 2,205 adults experiencing Severe and Multiple Disadvantage (SMD) locally each year.

Many of the vulnerabilities seen among our children and young people such as suspensions, poor attendance, SEND, social care involvement and unstable housing are understood to be early indicators of future risk, underlining the critical importance of whole-family, place-based and early intervention approaches.

Together with our partners, we are working to strengthen the collective system response by removing organisational boundaries, improving multiagency data sharing, aligning resources, and building a shared “One Voice” approach around prevention.

This strategic alignment ensures that work to improve educational outcomes is supported by wider efforts to address the root causes of inequality, stabilise families experiencing complex lives, and create the conditions for long-term positive change.

Reasons for recommendations

Key Headlines:

- **Overall attainment for vulnerable groups shows positive direction of travel**, with notable improvements for disadvantaged pupils, girls, non-white pupils, and pupils with SEND.
- **Stockton frequently outperforms national benchmarks** across multiple groups and all key stages.
- **Gender outcomes are strong**, with both boys and girls performing well compared with national figures and holding high regional rankings.
- **Children in Our Care achieve well**, especially at EYFS and KS4, supported by strong partnership work from the Virtual School.
- **Children with a Social Worker show improving trends** in key areas including suspensions and attendance.
- **SEND outcomes at KS2 and KS4 have strengthened**, both for pupils with EHCPs and for those receiving SEN Support.
- **Exclusions practice is increasingly effective**, with no permanent exclusions in special schools and several exclusions prevented through early intervention and challenge.
- **Attendance work is having measurable impact**, with primary and special school attendance performing better than national/regional levels and secondary attendance improving. However, **PRU attendance is a significant concern**, with very high persistent and severe absence.
- **Suspensions and attendance challenges continue** for Children in Our Care and for Children with a Social Worker.
- **Early Years outcomes for children with SEND remain below national**, despite progress elsewhere.
- **Permanent exclusions remain too high**, especially in KS3, and numbers have increased slightly overall.
- **Access to specialist services** (e.g., EP and Speech & Language) remains a barrier for some groups.

Recommendations

Recommended that the report be noted.

Detail

In Stockton in 2025*:

1. Disadvantaged

- a) 30.7% of pupils aged 4–16 in Stockton are disadvantaged (and entitled to Pupil Premium), this is **2.9% above the national figure** (27.8%). Rates vary widely by school (2.9%–83.1%, Spring Census 2025).
- b) 27.9% of primary pupils are FSM Ever6, **3.2% above the national average** (24.7%), with school-level variation between 2.2%–76.3%.

- c) 28.7% of secondary pupils are FSM Ever6, **2.9% above the national average** (25.8%), ranging between 15.5%–79.5%.
- d) Disadvantaged pupils perform worse than their peers, and long-term disadvantaged pupils perform worst of all. 12% of pupils in the North East are long-term disadvantaged, compared to 15% in London.
- e) 28.4% of children in Stockton live in poverty (2022/23), slightly below the UK rate (30%). This represents a 2.9% increase since 2014/15 (25.5%), while the UK rate is unchanged over the same period.
- f) Many disadvantaged pupils face additional challenges (SEND, EAL, social care involvement, poor attendance). All SEND schools are 13%–50% above the LA average for disadvantage.

2. Children in Our Care (CIOC):

- g) 1.25% of pupils are CIOC, 0.58% above the national rate (0.67%).

3. Special Educational Needs (SEND):

- h) 13.5% of pupils have SEN Support plans; this is 0.4% **below the national average** (13.9%)
- i) 5.2% of pupils have an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP), **matching the national average**

4. English as an Additional Language (EAL):

- j) Although the proportion of EAL pupils is increasing, it remains **below the national average**. Primary: 8.9%, 14.4% below national (23.3%). Secondary: 7.5%, 11.4% below national (18.9%).

5. Assessment Context:

- k) No statutory reporting at the end of KS1.
- l) KS2 progress data is unavailable in 2025 due to the absence of KS1 assessments during COVID.

*Based on the spring census

DISADVANTAGED PUPILS

Disadvantaged Pupils (DS) in this report are defined as those in receipt of Free School Meals at some point within last 6 years, and who have been eligible for Pupil Premium funding. Disadvantaged pupils perform worse than their peers, and long-term disadvantaged pupils perform worst of all.

1. WHAT HAS WORKED WELL

- a) The attainment of DS pupils in 2025 has improved compared to 2024 in KS2 reading and the KS4 4+EM benchmark.
- b) The attainment of DS pupils in Stockton is higher than the national and regional average for DS pupils at the end of the EYFS (GLD), in Y1 phonics, all of the end of primary benchmarks and the KS4+EM benchmark.
- c) The attainment of non-disadvantaged (NDS) pupils in Stockton in 2025 was above national average for all benchmarks in both primary and secondary.

- d) The gap between DS and NDS pupils in Stockton has reduced for the KS4+EM benchmark

The following approaches have supported these improvements:

- a) A continuous focus on raising the attainment of DS pupils through all our networks and CPD for schools.
- b) Robust challenge and support around pupil outcomes for all our maintained schools.
- c) Enhanced focus on improving the attainment of DS pupils through work to address the recommendations of the appreciative inquiry: 'Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment'

2. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT/CHALLENGES

- a) Although both groups attained above the national average, the gap between DS and NDS pupils in Stockton has widened at the end of the EYFS, and for reading, writing and the combined reading, writing and maths (CRWM) benchmarks at the end of KS2.
- b) Opportunities to engage with some schools that are part of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) are limited

GENDER

The overall challenge is to ensure that the gap in performance between girls and boys is minimised and that attainment for both groups is strong.

3. WHAT HAS WORKED WELL

- a) The attainment of girls remains above national average for all EY and KS2 benchmarks. The 1.5% improvement in girls' attainment of GLD and the 3.3% improvement in girls' reading at the end of KS2 mean that the performance of Stockton girls was at least 2.1% higher than the national average across EY and KS2.
- b) Both boys and girls in Stockton outperform their peer groups nationally on all benchmarks.
- c) The Stockton boy/ girl gap is narrower compared to the national boy/ girl gap in KS2 attainment for maths and CRWM, and KS4 (4+EM) benchmarks.
- d) The attainment of boys ranked first in the North East for GLD, and first equal for writing and CRWM at KS2.
- e) The attainment of girls ranked first in the North East for GLD and for reading at KS2.

4. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT/CHALLENGES

- a) Although the attainment gap for GLD between boys in Stockton and the national figure has narrowed (0.1% compared to 2.1% in 2024), this is due to a lower proportion of boys in Stockton achieving GLD in 2025. A similar picture is reflected in maths at the end of KS2. In both cases, however, boys' attainment remains above national average.
- b) The KS2 reading gap between boys and girls exceeds the national average (7.2% compared to a national average of 5.9%). While both groups improved on 2024 outcomes and remain above national benchmarks, girls' improvement outpaced that of boys.

PERFORMANCE BY ETHNICITY

The overall challenge is to ensure that the gap in performance between ethnic groups is minimised and that attainment for all groups is strong.

5. WHAT HAS WORKED WELL

- a) The attainment of both non-white and white pupil groups at the end of EYFS is above the national average and the gap between the groups is one of the smallest in the region.
- b) Non-white pupils in Stockton outperformed this group nationally on every measure, except maths at KS2.
- c) White pupils in Stockton outperformed this group nationally on every measure
- d) Non-white pupils in Stockton outperformed white pupils in Stockton on every measure at KS2 and KS4.
- e) The attainment of non-white pupils in reading at the end of KS2 has improved by 4.4%, contributing to an overall improvement for the CRWM benchmark. This improvement places Stockton joint first in the region for these benchmarks.
- f) The gap between white and non-white pupils in reading at KS2 has closed in comparison with 2024 (0.2% compared to -2.6% in 2024)

6. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT/CHALLENGES

- a) The narrowing of the KS2 maths gap between white and non-white pupils is primarily due to a decline in performance among non-white pupils, rather than an improvement in outcomes for both groups.
- b) The KS2 CRWM gap between white and non-white pupils has widened, and it is now slightly wider than the national average.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUR CARE

1.25% pupils are identified as Children in Our Care (CIOC). This is 0.58% higher than the national average of 0.67%.

7. WHAT HAS WORKED WELL

- a) The number of children in care, in each cohort, when assessments are carried out can often be so small that comparisons with other larger cohorts of children (for example regional and national cohorts) can be very misleading. The changing nature and stability of these cohorts can also make comparisons difficult.
- b) Outcomes for Children in our Care (CIOC) are well above national outcomes for a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of Reception
- c) The performance of CIOC is broadly in line with the national outcomes for CIOC at the end of KS2
- d) Performance at the end of KS4 was above national outcomes for the benchmark.
- e) Attendance figures for CIOC, although lower than they were prior to the pandemic in 2019, are above national figures for this vulnerable group and all three attendance measures (overall absence, persistent absence and severe absence) have improved
- f) Robust challenge and support from the Virtual School to schools and other professionals, promotes high quality educational experiences for CIOC.
- g) A comprehensive training programme organised and delivered by the Virtual School provides high quality support for schools

- h) Personal Education Plan completion has remained stable at 92.5% although quality of plans has slightly decreased in the top category (Green) from 79% to 77%.
- i) The Virtual School, through strong partnerships with schools, have avoided several permanent exclusions for CIOC. This is achieved through good relationships, allowing for professional challenge and using a problem-solving approach to support appropriate alternative provision for these children.

8. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT/CHALLENGES

- a) Suspensions are still well above the national rate for all CIOC.
- b) Attendance remains below pre-pandemic levels.
- c) Availability of support from Educational Psychology and for Speech and Language remains a challenge.

CHILDREN WITH A SOCIAL WORKER

The Virtual School has extended duties for children known (or previously known) to social care. Since the implementation of the renewed inspection framework in November 2025, schools are increasingly encouraged to identify and report on the performance of this vulnerable group.

The analysis below relates specifically to the performance of children in need (CIN) and children with child protection plans (CP).

9. WHAT HAS WORKED WELL

- a) Early Years outcomes for Children in Need (CIN) are above national CIN measures
- b) Attainment for Children in Need (CIN) in the primary phase is in line with or above those for all Children in Need nationally
- c) Children in Need and Children on a Protection Plan achieve higher than this group nationally for the KS4 benchmark
- d) The suspension rate for CIN and CP is showing an improving trend from 2023/24 to 2024/25
- e) Attendance figures are in line with national figures for this group of children

10. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT/CHALLENGES

- a) Children With a Social Worker (CWSW – including those known to social care within the last six years) still achieve significantly worse academically than non-CWSW. This reflects the national picture.
- b) Attendance figures for CWSW are below the figure for all children and below the figure for CIOC. This reflects the national picture.
- c) Suspensions for CWSW are above the figure for all children and above the figure for CIOC. CWSW make up a disproportionate number of those suspended or permanently excluded.
- d) A continued area for development for this group is to continue to promote this group of children as a group in their own right, and to share their challenges through the FOCUS dashboard and accompanying analysis.

CHILDREN IDENTIFIED AS HAVING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

As of 4th December 2025, 2751 children in Stockton had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). 955 of these were in primary and 1074 in secondary. 70.3% of the plans (1934) were for boys and 29.7% (817) for girls.

Communication and Interaction is the most prevalent primary need. Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are identified in 652 EHCPs and Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) in 632.

Cognition and Learning is the second most prevalent area of primary need. Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) is identified in 554 plans, Specific Learning Difficulties (SPLD) in 81 plans and Physical Disability (PD) in 108. Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) is the primary need identified in 482 plans.

1150 children with an EHCP attend a mainstream school while 756 have a specialist placement.

11. WHAT HAS WORKED WELL

- a) Outcomes for pupils with an EHCP at the end of KS2 have improved in reading, writing and maths. For the combined measure (CRWM), they were marginally above the national average at 9.3% which was a 3.5% improvement in comparison with 2024.
- b) Outcomes for pupils with an EHCP at the end of KS4 have also improved by 3.5%, representing attainment above the national average for this vulnerable group.
- c) The performance of pupils with a SEN Support Plan at the end of KS2 has improved, particularly in reading. 53.6% achieved at least the expected level in reading, a 7.1% improvement on the previous year.
- d) Outcomes for pupils with a SEND Support Plan were above the national average in all the KS2 benchmarks.

12. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT/CHALLENGES

- a) 3.3% of children with an EHCP achieved GLD at the end of Early Years. While this is an improvement in comparison with 2024, it remains below national average (4% in 2025).
- b) The outcomes for children in the Early Years with a SEND Support Plan are also below the national average. 23.8% of children achieved GLD, which was 1.8% lower than in 2024 and 2.6% below the national average
- c) At the end of KS4, the proportion of pupils with a SEND Support Plan who achieved the KS4 4+EM benchmark fell slightly to 42.9%. However, this is still 4.4% above the national average.

CHILDREN FROM SERVICE FAMILIES

From the DfE's Pupil Premium data based on spring 2025 schools census the total number of children from service families in Stockton was 386 pupils (22 fewer than the previous year). Of these, 189 were registered in primary schools, 194 in secondary schools, 3 in a special school and none at the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

The number of children from service families in each primary school, including special schools, eligible for this Pupil Premium funding ranged from 0 to 15 pupils and 4 to 30 pupils for secondary schools.

According to the 2025 spring census there are 49 primary schools, 13 secondary schools and 2 special schools which have children from service families on their roll.

As cohorts in each school are very small, analysis of academic achievement and pupil need is carried out on a school-by-school basis.

PERMANENT EXCLUSIONS AND SUSPENSIONS

The top two reasons for permanent exclusion during the academic year 2024/25 were persistent disruptive behaviour or physical assault against adults or peers. Persistent disruptive behaviour was the most frequent reason for permanent exclusion in secondary aged pupils. Physical assault against an adult was the most common reason for permanent exclusion in primary aged pupils.

We have continued to see permanent exclusions for a 'one off incident' where a child has breached a school's behaviour policy. Any instances of permanent exclusion are carefully reviewed by the Local Authority, and we work closely with schools to explore and promote alternative approaches wherever possible. The majority of suspensions are because of Disruptive Behaviour, this is overwhelmingly the case in secondary schools. We believe that a co-ordinated CPD programme informed by our recent work on the potential correlation between behaviour policies and number of suspensions will help to reduce these suspensions over time.

13. WHAT HAS WORKED WELL

- a) We have continued to have no permanent exclusions from our special schools during the academic year 2024/25.
- b) Several permanent exclusions were avoided through the vulnerable learners and placement & governance teams collaborating with schools to support, or by offering rigorous challenge at pupil disciplinary meetings for permanent exclusions.
- c) We have continued to deliver annual training for governors and headteachers so that they are up to date with current legislation relating to their statutory duty regarding exclusions from schools and academies.
- d) Following the appreciative inquiry during 2023-24, which was multi-agency in its approach and identified high exclusions/suspensions as a key area for development, work with schools continued during the academic year 2024/25 to explore ways to reduce the number of suspensions and exclusions for pupils across Stockton.

14. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT/CHALLENGES

Exclusions

- a) During the academic year 2024/25, 116 children in Stockton were permanently excluded. 13 of these exclusions were for primary aged pupils and 103 were for secondary aged pupils. This was an 11.54% increase overall, with an 85.71% increase for primary schools and a 6.19% increase for secondary.
- b) Unfortunately, this year, we have continued to see permanent exclusions of primary aged children. We continue to use our Pathway Development Centre (PDC) Model to support children in KS1 & KS2 who have been permanently excluded or who are at risk of permanent exclusion and require a short-term placement within PDCs.
- c) In Stockton, boys are still more likely to be excluded than girls. However, we have seen a rise in the number of girls permanently excluded, and the final figure is slightly increased in comparison to last year (from 26 in 23/24 to 29 in 24/25).

- d) Despite the ongoing work with schools, the number of children permanently excluded in Stockton during the academic year 2024/2025 was marginally higher than in the previous year. This is mirrored both regionally and nationally, particularly in Key Stage 3. During the academic year 2024/25, Year 9 saw the highest number of permanent exclusions in Stockton. Figures are also high for Year 8 and Year 10.

Suspensions

- a) The use of suspensions has increased within the borough since we had a full return to school following Covid at the beginning of the Autumn 2021 term. It has continued to increase during the last academic year.
- b) The number of days lost to learning is high and can equate to weeks, months and academic years of education lost when looking at the total. During the academic year 2024-25, the days lost to suspension in Stockton schools totalled 13,807. This equates to approximately 73 academic school years.

ATTENDANCE

The latest DfE published data for autumn term 2024 and spring term 2025 combined is used in this report to give comparisons with national data. The information details the data for overall absence, persistent absence and severe absence across the school phases. Comparisons are with the data from autumn 2023 and spring 2024.

15. WHAT HAS WORKED WELL

- a) A sustained strategic focus on reducing secondary absence within Stockton has resulted in a measurable narrowing of the gap between national and regional attendance benchmarks. The comprehensive analysis undertaken through the Appreciative Inquiry has enabled the identification of priority areas and facilitated more integrated and aligned working practices between schools and Local Authority teams. This collaborative approach has underpinned continued improvements in attendance. In addition, the ongoing operation of attendance networks, coupled with the delivery of targeted school support meetings, has been instrumental in securing further progress and maintaining an upward trajectory in attendance performance

PRIMARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE: AUTUMN AND SPRING TERMS 2024-25

- b) Overall absence in Stockton primary schools is 4.7% (*a 0.2% improvement*) and is better than the national average by 0.4%. In comparison to local statistical data Stockton is performing better than the regional average of 4.9%
- c) Persistent absence is 11.7% (*a 2.7% improvement*). This is better than the national average of 13.3% and the regional average of 12.8%.
- d) Severe absence is 0.6% (*a 0.1% improvement*) This is better than the national average of 0.9% and better than the regional average of 0.7%.

SECONDARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE: AUTUMN AND SPRING TERMS 2024-25

- e) Overall absence in Stockton secondary schools was 9% (*an improvement of 0.6%*). This has narrowed the gap with the national average of 8% and is the regional average of 8.8%.
- f) Persistent absence in Stockton is 25.4% (*an improvement of 2.4%*)

SPECIAL SCHOOL ATTENDANCE: AUTUMN AND SPRING TERMS 2024-25

- g) Stockton special schools' overall absence is 12%. It is 0.7% better than the national average and 0.5% better than the regional average.

- h) Persistent absence in Stockton special schools is 29.6% (*a 2.6% improvement*). This is 5.6% better than the national average and 2% better than the regional average.
- i) Severe absence in Stockton is 5.2% (*a 2.4% improvement*). This is better than the national average of 6.4% and the regional average of 7.1%.

PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT (PRU) SCHOOL ATTENDANCE: AUTUMN AND SPRING TERMS 2024 - 25

- j) Stockton has one PRU. The relatively small number of pupils makes comparisons difficult, however overall absence has increased by 13.4% to 63%. This is 21% worse than both the national and regional averages.
- k) Persistent absence at the PRU has also increased by 2.9% to 97.7%. This is significantly higher than the national average by 15.8% and 13.7% higher than the regional average.
- l) Severe absence in the PRU is 60.6%. This is an increase of 8.6%. It is significantly higher than the national average by 21.6% and 16.6% higher than the regional average.

16. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT/CHALLENGES

- m) Although overall, persistent and severe absence in Stockton secondary schools has improved over the last two years it remains higher than the national and regional average, and is therefore an area for further development.
- n) Levels of overall absence, persistent absence and severe absence in the PRU continue to be a concern. The PRU was judged by Ofsted to be inadequate for 'behaviour and attitudes' (which includes attendance) and for 'leadership and management'. It is therefore receiving additional monitoring and support.

WHAT WE ARE DOING TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES

Consultation and engagement

1. This report is for information only; the contents cover the outcomes at the end of each key stage for Stockton-on-Tees's pupils identified within each vulnerable group.
2. There has been no consultation as this report is for information only.

Next steps

- 1) Throughout the academic year 2025-26, the Education, Inclusion and Achievement Team (EIA) will:
 - a) Continue to address the recommendations in the Appreciative Inquiry of 2024 which focused on Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment. This work includes developing partnerships beyond the EIA team and making best use of available resources.
 - b) Continue to make intelligent use of data to drive strategic priorities.
 - c) Continue to promote the need to plan strategically to meet the needs of vulnerable groups and, wherever possible, work with leaders from maintained schools and MATs to share best practice through a wide range of networks.
 - d) Further develop the CPD offer for schools and settings from EIA as a whole to ensure that it is clearly focused on supporting practitioners to meet the needs of vulnerable groups.
 - e) Launch the Inclusive Education Frameworks and provide targeted support where appropriate.

- f) Develop the School Readiness strategy and work in partnership to improve Early Years outcomes (particularly for the most vulnerable) through the DfE Best Start in Life funding.
- g) Continuing a strategic programme collaborating across Council services (including the innovative and proactive Skills for Success programme) to reduce suspensions and exclusions and improve attendance.
- h) Continue to provide additional support and challenge to the PRU, working collaboratively with the trust that runs it and with the DfE.
- i) Work in partnership with schools to ensure our CWSW and CIOC receive the right support at the right time to achieve academically and improve their wellbeing

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