

NAO study - Supporting the attainment of disadvantaged children in educational settings

Submission from NGA: January 2024

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and governance professionals of state schools in England. We have several categories of membership and represent the interests of boards irrespective of their school type and governing structure. Our aim is to improve the well-being of children and young people by promoting high standards and improving the effectiveness of governing boards.

What is educational disadvantage and how does it affect a child's ability to learn?

The Department for Education (DfE) doesn't explicitly define 'disadvantage', and we suggest that this has meant that the issue of the full range of disadvantages and their links have not been considered across the sector. We very much welcome this study by the NAO, particularly as the number of children and young people with an educational disadvantage is growing.

The DfE makes pupil premium funding available to schools to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils based on restrictive socio-economic eligibility criteria. While we recognise the importance of pupil premium funding and the accountability measures in place for effective spending, the limits of entitlement to pupil premium seem to have cultivated a narrow focus on what is considered educational disadvantage.

Disadvantage is a nuanced term - children can experience barriers to their education for many different reasons, not just socio-economic factors, and as a result be at an educational disadvantage. We believe a wider definition of education disadvantage is needed and we adopted this approach in our guidance: 'Disadvantage, Widening the Lens' (see attached to email):

"Research shows that there are other groups of children who are overlooked in pursuit of closing the attainment gap who are statistically at a significant educational disadvantage."

We aimed to establish a set of broadened parameters to enhance the governing board's ability to focus their support on all pupils facing educational disadvantage. NGA's widening the lens guidance paper introduces five dimensions of disadvantage alongside a toolkit for each of those dimensions:













