EDUCATION OBSERVATORY

The Black Country Education Insight report 2019

UNIVERSITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON

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The University of Wolverhampton's Education Observatory has provided a much needed overview of the Education landscape in the Black Country. This inaugural report provides us with a coherent understanding of education from the early years to post-compulsory adult learning. We are confident that it will help all sectors to not only better understand the local challenges but to also maximise the current and future opportunities in this area. The University of Wolverhampton is the 'University of Opportunity', working with our partners in the region to further economic prosperity and social mobility. It is essential that organisations from different sectors work together to address current and future education and skills needs and we look forward to continue working collaboratively to deliver a vibrant economic future for Black Country residents.

Prof. Jackie Dunne
Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Access and Lifelong Learning

The University of Wolverhampton is a key player in its region serving the people of the Black Country and beyond. As the University of Opportunity, we provide quality higher education for many learners from diverse and non-traditional backgrounds. We are also an institution that values research that makes a difference to people's lives and are proud of our important role in local place making. The inaugural Black Country Education Insight, produced by the Education Observatory is a much needed review of learning across all phases. We hope and believe that this data and commentary will support practice and open up further opportunities across our region.

Contents

Executive Summary

The Black Country has made significant improvements in recent times in all phases of education. In the early years and in primary schools, the majority of provision is rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding. Many of its secondary schools are approaching the Government's curriculum changes and focus on Attainment 8 in creative ways to meet the needs of their students and local communities. There have been significant improvements in adult learning. The proportion of residents with no qualifications has reduced and the number of residents gaining higher level qualifications has grown by 20,000 (12.7%) since 2012. The region has also been successful in attracting skills capital investment, for example through the forthcoming Institute of Technology.

However, significant challenges remain. The Black Country has some of the highest rates of child poverty in England and deprivation in many areas is severe. Arguably as a result, children's progress and attainment remain below national averages in every phase of education. Disadvantaged children and young people face particular challenges in achieving in education and realising their aspirations. The gap between the Black Country and the national average in higher level skills continues to increase, which has particular implications for its ability to benefit from technological innovation and the 'fourth industrial revolution'.

This first report produced by the University of Wolverhampton's Education Observatory considers education in the Black Country holistically and broadly. It moves from early years through compulsory and post-compulsory education, addresses key issues such as mental health and special educational needs and disability, and concludes with a look at possible futures. It highlights how disparities at each phase of a Black Country resident's experience of education locally influences the next. The rationale behind our approach is that all phases of education are interdependent. It is our assertion that focusing on education, skills and employment in the Black Country in depth and as a whole, using data to highlight what works well as well as where improvement is needed, is more likely to help us bring about positive change than addressing issues in isolation.

We welcome feedback on how to improve this report and how to use its findings and conclusions to influence change. Therefore, rather than offering formal recommendations for local practice and policy, we conclude by highlighting four interdependent themes which emerged from the analysis undertaken for the report. These are:

- Collaboration and competition
- Valuing the local
- Realising and reconceptualising aspiration
- Transitions.

These are areas in which we consider improvement could have significant impact. We are aware that there are many areas that we have not covered in the report, for example, teacher development, school leadership, and ethnic and gender inequality. We welcome feedback on what we should address in future reports, but hope that our analysis provokes thoughts and reactions about education in the Black Country and how it can be further explored and improved.

Introduction

Michael Jopling

This is the first of what we intend to be an annual series of reports which explore education and its associated challenges and issues in all phases of education in the Black Country. To do this, we have primarily used analysis of publically available data, combined with research findings where appropriate, to exemplify the different phases. We are aware of the limitations of this approach and that many have stated that the emphasis on accountability and competition in education in recent decades has prevented schools and colleges in particular from fostering the flexibility, creativity and collaboration that, as we see in final section of the report in particular, are likely to be vital in the future. We are also aware that many of the progress and attainment measures used are insensitive to local contexts and fail to take into account the multiple disadvantages that characterise many children and young people's lives in the Black Country and other areas. Our intention is not to use our analysis to highlight deficits, rather to identify successes where they are apparent and suggest in a spirit of realism where things might be improved.

The Education Observatory was created at the University of Wolverhampton in 2017 to undertake research in all areas of education and allied areas of social policy to secure social justice and regional transformation in the West Midlands. This first report takes a broad, holistic approach, moving from early years through compulsory and post-compulsory education, as well as addressing key issues such as mental health, special educational needs and disability and possible futures. It highlights how disparities at each phase of a Black Country resident's experience of education influences the next. It is our belief that focusing on education, skills and employment in the Black Country in depth and as a whole, using data to pinpoint what works well as well as where improvement is needed, is more likely to help us bring about positive change than addressing issues in isolation.

This report has been very much a team effort report, written quickly to a tight deadline, and it will doubtlessly contain mistakes, infelicities and omissions. We would like it to be both the start of ongoing dialogue and a means of helping to effect change in the Black Country.

Early Years and Childhood Education

"The quality of early years provision in the Black Country is rated as high by Ofsted."

Chris Pascal and Zeta Brown

The importance of the early years

What happens during the early years is critically important to a child's development in later life. [1][2]Evidence has consistently demonstrated that:

- Brain development is at its most rapid during this phase of an individual's life.
- The impact of early disadvantage on children can be significantly reduced through positive early interventions. These can have a positive effect on areas such as growth, cognitive and social development.
- High quality early years support helps children to succeed and achieve more at school.
- Investing in high quality early years provision provides a significant net benefit to society socially and economically.

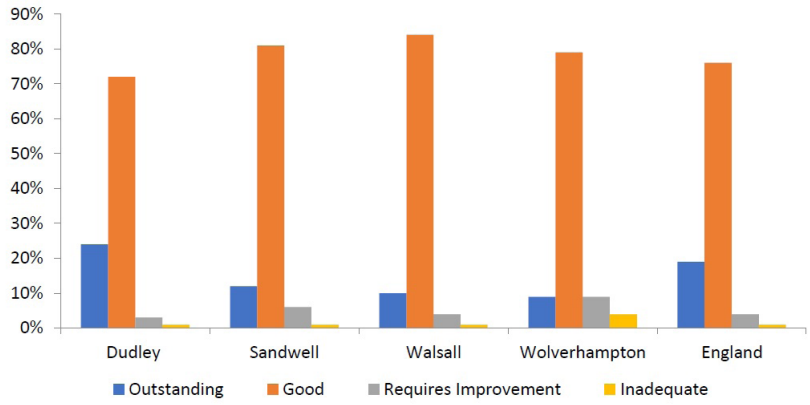
It is thus clear that addressing disadvantage in the Black Country to improve outcomes in later life and produce an economically stable sub-region means ensuring that children in this area have positive experiences in the early years. This section examines some of the current early years' data in Black Country.

Provision in the Black Country

There are large numbers of early years providers and registered places in the Black Country. For instance, Sandwell council had 274 early years providers (including childminders and home child carers) with 6,499 registered places in 2018. Of this total, 130 providers and 5,621 early years registered places related to childcare on non-domestic premises[3].

The quality of early years provision in the Black Country is rated as high overall by Ofsted. Figure 1 indicates that the majority of settings are good or outstanding. In Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, the proportion of good early years provision is higher than the national average. Dudley has the highest rate of outstanding providers in the Black Country and is the only one of the four local authorities (LAs) that is above the national average in this respect. It should be noted that many of these settings offer high quality provision in local contexts of significant child poverty.

Figure 1. Early years provision in the Black Country by Ofsted ratings [4]



Austerity and child poverty

It is impossible to discuss early years and childhood experiences in the Black Country without considering increases in child poverty, the greatest predictor of low educational achievement, poor health and a range of other impediments to a fulfilling life[5]. In 2017/18 between 25% and 34% of children in the Black Country were living in poverty before housing costs and between 34% and 43% of children were doing so after housing costs[6]. Every Black Country LA has higher rates than the national average. After housing costs, Sandwell (ranked 12th) and Walsall (18th) were both in the top 20 LAs with the highest rates of child poverty in the country. Before housing costs, Sandwell (10th) Walsall (15th) and Wolverhampton (13th) were in the top 20 LAs for high rates of child poverty.

[1] OECD (2011) Investing in high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC)
[2] UNICEF, Early Childhood Development: https://www.unicef.org/early-childhood-development [accessed 10th June, 2019]
[3] OFSTED 2018: Childcare Providers and Inspectors
[4] Figure 1 also taken from OFSTED 2018: Childcare Providers and Inspectors
[5] End Child Poverty (2019) Poverty in your area. http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/poverty-in-your-area-2019/. [accessed 3rd June 2019].
[6] Stone, J. & D Hirsch, D. (2019) Local indicators of child poverty, 2017/18. Loughborough University: Centre of Research in Social Policy.
[7] Figure 2 graph based on Stone & D Hirsch (2019).
[8] Child Poverty Action Group (2019) Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Handbook 2019/20. CPAG: London.
[9] Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2019) UK Poverty: Causes, Costs and Solutions. JRF: London.
[10] Pascal C., Bertram, T. and Cramp A. (2019) Austerity and its Impact on Early Years Informal and Family Learning in Disadvantaged Urban Communities, (Forthcoming)

Figure 2. Local percentage of children living in poverty 2017/2018[7]

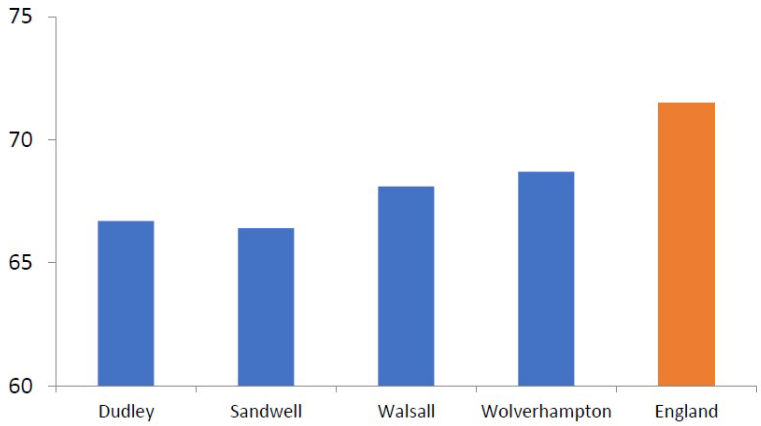
Early childhood education, health and family-support services delivered by the public, independent and voluntary sectors work hard to ameliorate some of the debilitating effects of child poverty, but cannot address all the disadvantages associated with being raised in a household in economic hardship. Recent research from the Child Poverty Action Group[8] and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)[9] has revealed how regressive recent policies have been, having a negative impact not only on those most in need, unemployed lone parent families, but also on working families with two or more children. The JRF research shows that nationally more than 44% of children live in households whose income puts them below an adequate standard of living. It also suggests that reducing poverty is dependent on three areas of public policy: an industrial strategy that delivers an economy that works for all; fixing Universal Credit; and increasing the supply of affordable housing to increase living standards.

This reseach suggests that the crisis in public finances and roll-back in public services has had a disproportionate impact on the poorest sectors of society in England, which include parts of the Black Country. It has also had a disproportionate impact on families with young children, creating a double disadvantage for our most disadvantaged groups which is likely to have a long term effect on their lives[10]. In the Black Country as with other areas, poor families with young children have often been hit hardest by austerity policies. To counter this, informal family learning in community spaces has increasingly contributed to the development of young citizens in areas such as character-building and the development of positive learning dispositions and executive learning functions, which should have a more positive influence on school outcomes. This connection between school outcomes and informal learning in urban (and other) environments is vital, under-researched and relevant to many communities experiencing austerity.

Assessment of child outcomes

As already indicated, while the quality of early years provision in the Black Country is high, outcomes for children remain below the national average in all four LAs. In 2018, the proportion of children who achieved the Government's target of a 'good level of development' in the LAs ranged between 66.4% and 71.5%[11], as Figure 3 illustrates. This requires children to reach the expected level in communication and language; physical development; personal, social and emotional development; literacy; and mathematics.

Figure 3. Percentage of children achieving a good level of development in the Black Country (2018)[12]

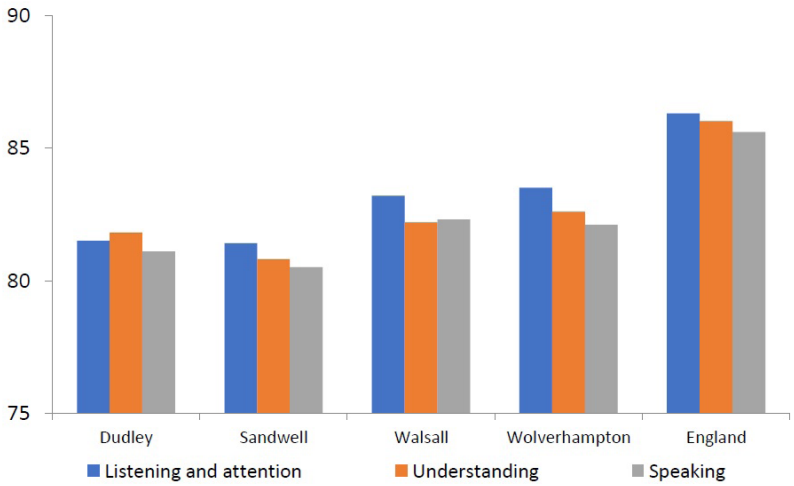


[11] EYFSP (2019) Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results 2017 to 2018. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2017-to-2018. [accessed 3rd June 2019].
[12] Figure 3 and Figure 4 are also based on: Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results 2017 to 2018. [online]. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2017-to-2018. [accessed 3rd June 2019].

Communication and language gap

Local data also indicates that children enter early years settings and schools with communication and language skills well below the expected levels for their age. The gap is particularly severe in Sandwell which fall at least 5 percentage points behind the national average for all areas of communication. Notably, all Black Country LAs are significantly below the national average in communication and language, as Figure 4 indicates.

Figure 4. Percentage of children achieving at least expected standards in communication and language in the Black Country and England (2018)



Given the scale of disadvantage and child poverty in the region, it is clear that the high quality of provision on offer in the Black Country is insufficient to mitigate against the barriers that disadvantage creates for young children. Below average outcomes are not necessarily a product of sub-standard provision. This suggests that in attempting to improve outcomes for young children in the Black Country, we should focus on improving the quality of settings as part of a more holistic approach that also considers a host of other factors associated with vulnerability, such as family background, income, and the availability of effective support for parents. In the Education Observatory, we are involved in a number of early years projects, based locally, regionally and nationally. They focus on key early years areas such as literacy and supporting children with complex needs, as well as broader issues such as 'vulnerability', and are attempting to take this kind of holistic approach.

Primary schools

> Black Country primary schools are located in communities with some of the highest levels of disadvantage in England.

Michael Jopling

Black Country primary schools in context

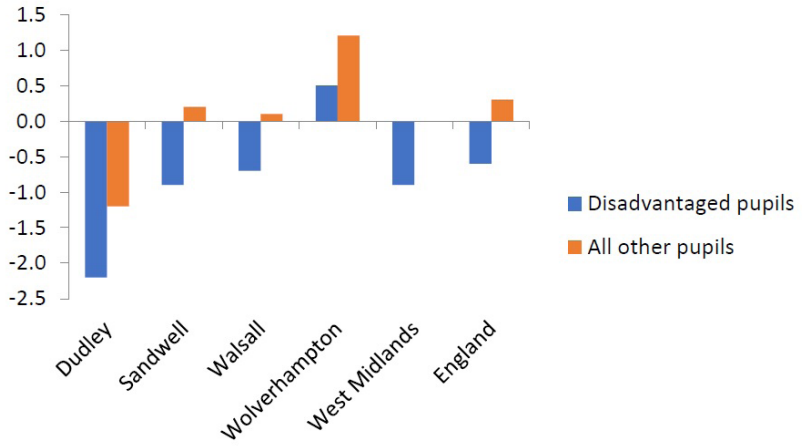
There are a number of ways in which primary schools' performance is judged, including progress made by pupils by Key Stage 2 at the end of the primary phase; attainment at Key Stage 2; Ofsted ratings; and (at least until recently) the degree to which they are deemed to be coasting. This section offers an overview of these issues. Its focus as far as possible is 2018 data but previous years' data have been included where appropriate. As discussed later in the secondary school discussion, it should be noted that current DfE school performance data does not take pupils' backgrounds or level of disadvantage into account, although distinctions are made between outcomes of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children in the published data. As we have already outlined, Black Country primary schools are located in communities with some of the highest levels of deprivation in England, which should be taken into account when examining the extent to which they have been able to close the 'attainment and progress gaps' between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children.

Changes to accountability measures for primary schools

Before examining the data, it is important to outline changes made by the Government to accountability measures for primary schools in 2016. They aim to capture the progress that pupils make from the end of Key Stage 1 (when pupils are typically aged 7) to the end of Key Stage 2 and primary school (when pupils are typically aged 11). These progress measures compare pupils' results with those of other pupils nationally with similar prior attainment and were intended to highlight the progress made by all pupils, whether they had low, middle or high prior attainment. The rationale behind this was to broaden the focus from attainment to pupils' progress, although the progress measures themselves and their use has been extensively examined and critiqued[13].

[13] See, for example, Perry, T. (2016) English Value Added Measures: Examining the limitations of school performance measurement, British Educational Research Journal, 42(6), 1056-1080; Hayes S., Jopling, M. and Gul, R. (2018) What have the changes made to primary and secondary assessment frameworks since 2014 done to the 'London effect' in school performance? London Review of Education, 16(3), 491-506.

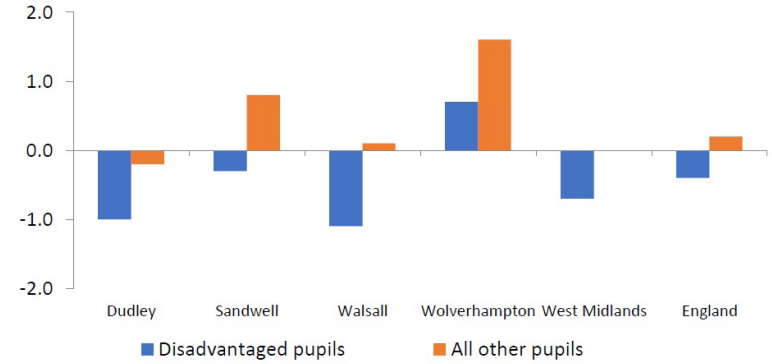
Figure 5. Black Country Key Stage 2 progress in reading (2018)[14]



Progress at Key Stage 2 in Black Country primary schools

In reading, although overall progress was negative in both cases, disadvantaged pupils made less progress in the West Midlands (-0.9) than nationally (-0.6) in 2018, as Figure 5 indicates. This was mirrored in the Black Country LAs except Wolverhampton where progress is considerably better (0.5). All other pupils also made more progress nationally (0.3) than in the West Midlands (0.0). Walsall (0.1) and Sandwell (0.2) did a little better than the region. Wolverhampton did considerably better (1.2). Dudley did worse (-1.2).

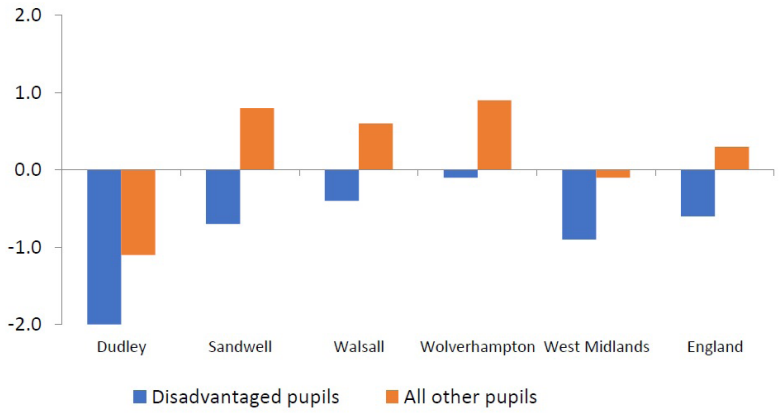
Figure 6. Black Country Key Stage 2 progress in writing (2018)



In the writing teacher-assessment (Figure 6), disadvantaged pupils also made less (negative) progress in the West Midlands (-0.7) than nationally (-0.4). In the Black Country, Wolverhampton again did rather better (0.7), Sandwell did a little better (-0.3), Walsall (-1.1) and Dudley (1.0) did worse. All other pupils made more progress nationally (0.2) than in the West Midlands (0.0). All the Black Country LAs except Dudley (-0.2) had better outcomes than the national average, with all other pupils in Wolverhampton again performing the most effectively (1.6).

[14] All attainment and progress data taken from DfE National curriculum assessments at key stage 2, 2018 (revised)

Figure 7. Black Country Key Stage 2 progress in mathematics (2018)

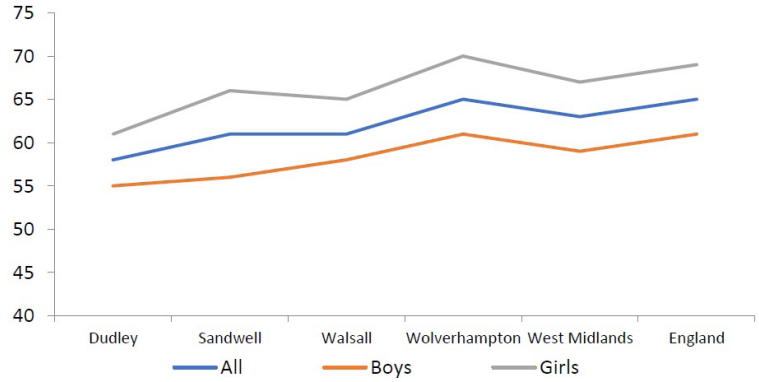


Finally, similar patterns could be observed in Maths (Figure 7). Disadvantaged pupils performed better nationally (-0.6) than in the West Midlands (-0.9). Wolverhampton (-0.1) and Walsall (-0.3) did better than the national average, Sandwell (-0.7) and Dudley (-2.0) did not. All other pupils also make more progress nationally (0.3) than in the West Midlands (-0.1). Dudley was the only Black Country LA which saw negative progress for this group (-1.1). Walsall (0.6), Sandwell (0.8) and Wolverhampton (0.9) all did better than the national average.

Attainment at Key Stage 2

65% of children nationally reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths in 2018 and 10% exceeded it. Girls did better than boys. As Figure 8 illustrates, in the West Midlands, the corresponding figures were 63% and 9%. Girls also did better than boys but were slightly below the national average. Among Black Country LAs, Wolverhampton met the national average for expected standards but were one percentage point below the national average for the higher standard. The other LAs were below the national average. The same pattern was apparent when reading, writing and maths were separated. Wolverhampton was above the national average and the other LAs were below, with the exception of Sandwell matching the national average in writing.

Figure 8. Percentage of children reaching expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics



Dudley
77%
good or outstanding

Sandwell
82%
good or outstanding

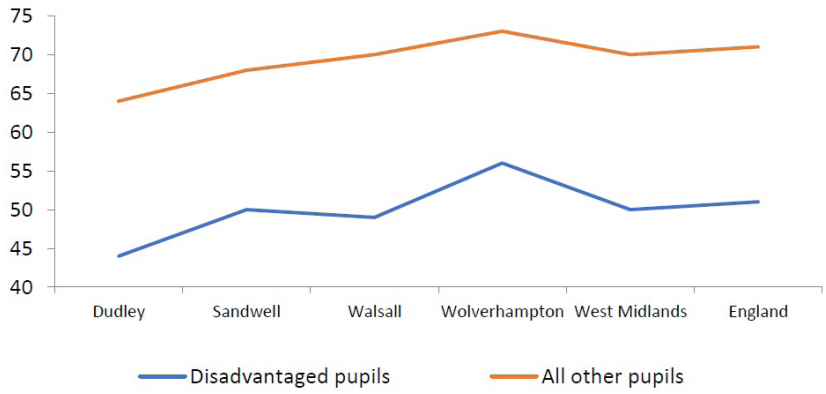
Walsall
81%
good or outstanding

Wolverhampton
82%
good or outstanding

Attainment and disadvantage

51% of disadvantaged pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths in 2018, compared with 71% of all other pupils. In the West Midlands the percentages were 50% and 70%. Wolverhampton did better than the national average (56%: 73%), Dudley (44%: 64%), Sandwell (50%: 68%) and Walsall (49%: 70%) did not.

Figure 9 Percentage of children reaching expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 (disadvantaged and all other children) (2018)



Ofsted

Based on their most recent data available as at 30 April 2019, 87% of primary schools in England were rated good or outstanding and 3% were inadequate. 84% in the West Midlands were good or outstanding and 4% were inadequate. Dudley has 78 primaries, 77% of which were good and outstanding and 5% were inadequate. Sandwell has 94 primaries, 82% were good or outstanding and 4% were inadequate. Walsall has 85 primaries. 81% were good or outstanding and 6% were inadequate. Wolverhampton has 72 primary schools. 82% were good or outstanding and 7% were outstanding. In the Black Country, Sandwell had the highest proportion of outstanding primary schools (21%); Dudley had the smallest proportion (9%), closely followed by Wolverhampton (10%). 15 per cent of primaries in Walsall were rated outstanding.

Primary school numbers and academisation

According to DfE data, there were 2211 primary schools in the West Midlands in 2017-18. 711 (32%) were academies or free schools, which is a little higher than the national average of 27 per cent. 42 per cent of primaries in Wolverhampton were academies or free schools. All the other Black Country LAs had fewer primary academies than the national average (between 20% and 23%) and no free schools.

[15]Jopling, M. (2019) How neoliberal policy inhibits partnership-building in the primary phase: A new social movements approach, Power and Education.

Secondary Education

> There are sharp differences across the regions of the Black Country and many successes.

Sally Riordan

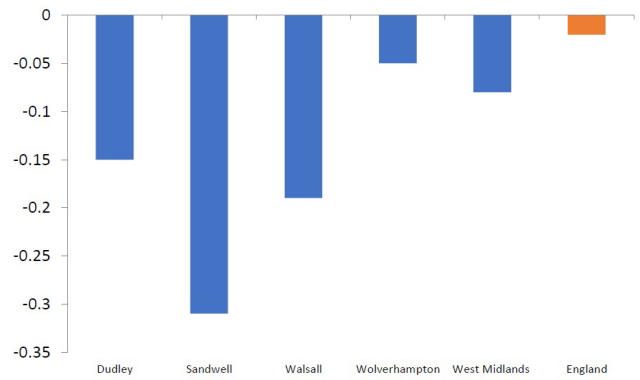
Secondary school performance in the Black Country

The Black Country does not have a good reputation for the performance of its secondary schools. This hit a low in 2016 when Lorna Fitzjohn, regional director of Ofsted, wrote an open letter to all local authorities, multi-academy trusts and MPs in Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton, raising her concerns about "continuing low standards and weaknesses in the quality of provision for secondary-aged pupils"[16]. Based on raw statistics, the letter painted a bleak picture of performance and progress across all areas of the Black Country, in both LA-maintained schools and academies. The headline figures, however, did not account for the fact that, as we have already seen, Black Country schools serve communities with some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country. More nuanced analysis reveals that there are sharp differences across the regions of the Black Country and many successes. Schools in Walsall and Wolverhampton are achieving higher than average levels of progress for pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM). Only Dudley has a stark disadvantage gap between pupils eligible for FSM and those who are not. Wolverhampton and Sandwell schools have tackled the challenges facing their local communities by offering wider non-GCSE provision than is commonly available. In Wolverhampton, a higher percentage of a pupil's Attainment 8 score (explained below) is obtained by complementing GCSE studies with vocational courses than elsewhere in the country.

Success for disadvantaged pupils in Walsall and Wolverhampton

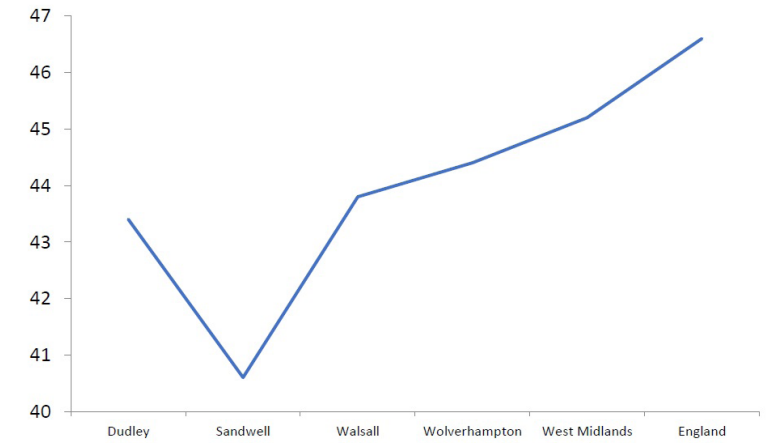
In 2018, Attainment 8 and Progress 8 scores in each region of the Black Country were lower than the average for state-funded schools across England. This has been the case since these measures were first calculated in 2015[17]. The four local authorities of the Black Country also perform poorly on these measures when compared to other regions of the West Midlands, as Figures 10 and 11 indicate[18].

Figure 10. Progress 8 Scores in the Black Country (2018)



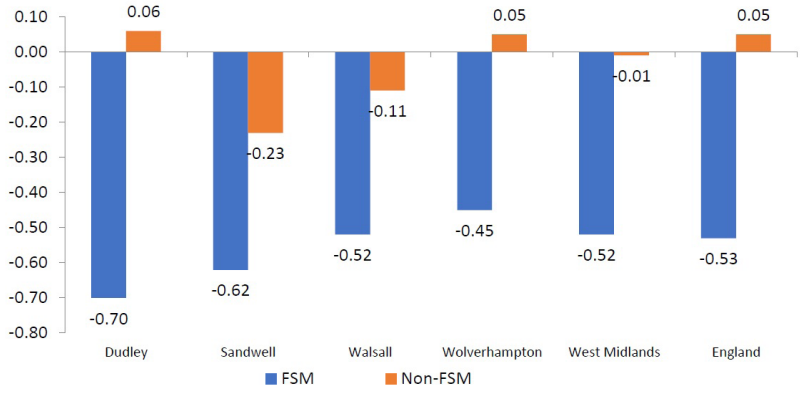
[16]Fitzjohn, L. (2016). Concerns about secondary school performance in the Black Country. Open letter published 13 July 2016, Ofsted. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/secondary-school-performance-in-the-black-country
[17]Department for Education (2016), Schools Workforce in England 2010-2015: trends and geographical comparisons.
[18]Data source: Department for Education (2018), Key Stage 4 and multi-academy trust performance 2018 (revised)

Figure 11. Attainment 8 scores in the Black Country (2018)



On average however, pupils in England who were known to be eligible for FSM progressed by 0.5 grades fewer than other pupils in 2018. Because of this discrepancy, it is important to take into account pupils' socio-economic backgrounds when considering a school's Progress 8 score[19]. The point is well demonstrated by Wolverhampton. This region has an overall Progress 8 score that is lower than average. Yet, it does as well or better than the average for pupils eligible for FSM and for pupils who are not. Its overall negative score is a consequence of the fact that it has a high percentage of FSM pupils. All Black Country regions have higher proportions of FSM pupils than the national average, which has a negative impact on their headline figures. Three LAs, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, had a smaller gap than the national average between the progress of pupils eligible for FSM and those who were not in 2018. Two LAs, Walsall and Wolverhampton, achieved more progress for their FSM pupils than the national average.

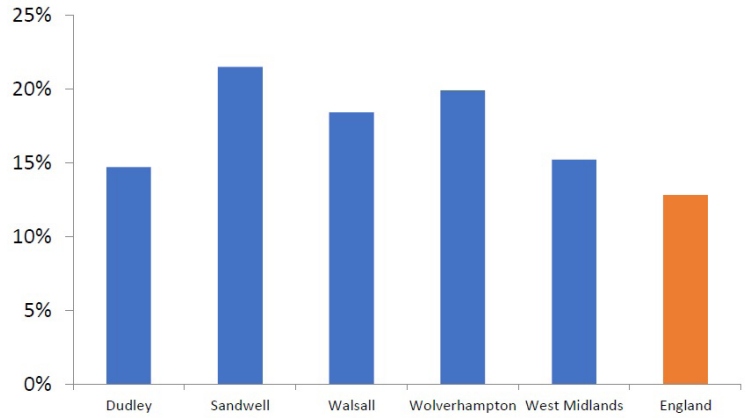
Figure 12. Progress 8 scores for pupils eligible and not eligible for FSM (2018)



[19] Leckie, G. & Goldstein, H. (2018). The importance of adjusting for pupil background in school value-added models: A study of Progress 8 and school accountability in England, British Educational Research Journal, 45(3), 518-537.

Dudley remains a cause for concern regarding the disadvantage gap. In 2018, non-FSM pupils in Dudley achieved three-quarters of a grade more in each subject than FSM pupils, after accounting for their SAT scores at the end of primary school. On the positive side, one of the reasons that this gap is so large is that Dudley achieved the highest Progress 8 score for non-FSM pupils in the Black Country, and a higher score than the national average. Its low overall Progress 8 score, however, unlike other regions of the Black Country, was not primarily due to higher levels of deprivation, if we use FSM as a proxy measure of deprivation. It has a lower proportion of FSM pupils than the West Midlands more widely (see Figure 13). This suggests that Dudley schools are performing poorly for their FSM pupils.

Figure 13. Percentage of Year 11 children eligible for FSM (2019)



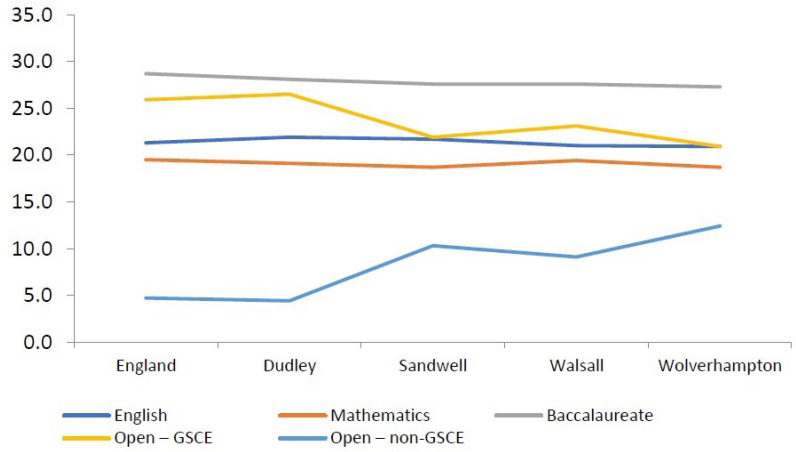
Attainment in other subjects

Deprivation in the Black Country also contributes to the low Attainment 8 scores of the area. Deeper analysis of these figures reveals that Black Country schools have dealt with the challenge of Attainment 8 in creative ways to suit the needs of their local communities. The total Attainment 8 score is summed from scores in mathematics, English, baccalaureate and an 'open' element, which includes BTECs and other vocational qualifications. Pupils in Black Country schools are less likely than those in other regions to study languages: French, German and Spanish GCSE results contribute less to the baccalaureate element than elsewhere in the country. This is particularly true in Sandwell, where only 27.5% of pupils take a modern language GCSE, compared to 46.1% nationally[20] .

Instead, as we have indicated, schools in Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton provide alternative courses for their pupils. Although reaching a lower Attainment 8 score overall, Black Country pupils (13.8) are minimally above the English average on its open element (13.7), most of which is related to non-GCSE courses. Indeed, Wolverhampton has the highest non-GCSE Attainment 8 contribution in the country (Department for Education, 2019). This suggests that headteachers in the Black Country are not feeling coerced into pushing pupils only into more traditional subjects and are achieving success in these alternative routes.

[20] Department for Education (2019), Key stage 4 and multi-academy trust performance 2018 (revised).

Figure 14. Disaggregation of Attainment 8 scores (2019)



Succeeding against the odds

More research needs to be conducted into progress and performance at secondary level at both local and national levels. The Education Observatory has been commissioned by the Social Mobility Commission to conduct a national research into Progress 8 with disadvantaged pupils. Led by Dr Sal Riordon, the purpose of the study, Against the Odds: achieving greater progress for disadvantaged students at Progress 8, is to produce a comprehensive and accurate picture of the Progress 8 gap in English secondary state schools. We will also investigate the characteristics of schools that have successfully reduced and reversed the gap and use its findings to create effective practitioner toolkits to improve outcomes for disadvantaged students in different school settings. The findings of this research, the first on this scale in the England, will provide critical data to inform good practice in schools across country.

English as an additional language (EAL) in schools

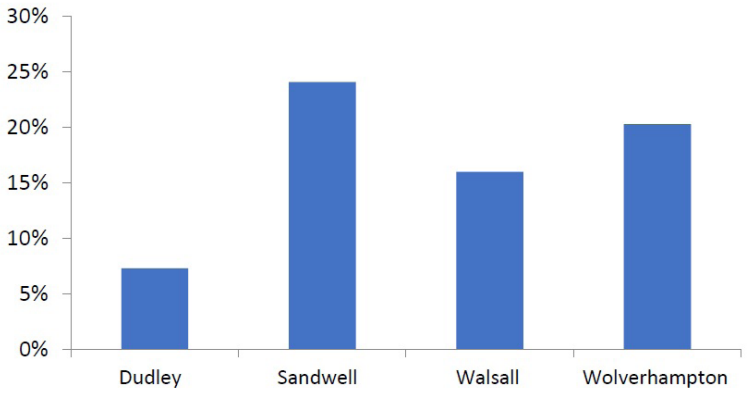
> The Black Country and the West Midlands as a whole have a relatively high number of pupils with EAL.

Brendan Bartram

Supporting pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) has been a national, and indeed regional, focus of attention for some time. Years of economic austerity and accompanying cuts in school funding for EAL support[21] combined with more recent socio-political developments - most notably the UK's vote to leave the EU in the June 2016 referendum - have arguably placed further strains on the situation of many EAL learners. While the implications of budget cuts are more immediately obvious when it comes to the forms of support which schools are able to put in place for children with EAL, the challenges posed by Brexit may initially seem less evident. These relate more broadly to the changing cultural climate in which we live, and which may have become less accommodating towards cultural difference in general, and more specifically to those from other national and language backgrounds. As discussed elsewhere[22], the period after the referendum took place saw an alarming increase in reported incidents of hate crime targeted at non-UK nationals[23]. These varied from physical attacks on individuals to verbal abuse and cyber-assaults. Commentators have suggested that the vote to leave had for some groups and individuals legitimised the open display of negative attitudes towards foreigners and cultural difference, casual xenophobia and indeed racist behaviour[24]. Such comments are especially troubling in a region like the West Midlands, the region which according to the BBC attracted the highest leave vote (59.3%) in thel UK[25].

Government data suggests that the Black Country and the West Midlands as a whole have a relatively high number of pupils with EAL[26]. Data from last year show that EAL pupils made up 14.9% of the West Midlands school population. This compared to 9.3% in the East Midlands, 9.2% in the North West, 4.3% in the South West, and 34.2% in Outer London. Surveys consistently show that after London, the West Midlands has the highest number of pupils with EAL nationally. Focusing specifically on the Black Country, a comparison of data from the four constituent metropolitan boroughs reveals considerable variation, as Figure 15 demonstrates:

Figure 15. Proportion of school aged pupils with EAL in Black Country



Despite these differences, the percentages are clearly indicative of substantial numbers of students with EAL across the region who may be in need of specific support. The Department for Education suggests that in primary schools, 21.2% of pupils are currently exposed to a language known or believed to be other than English in their home. This is an increase of 0.6 percentage points since January 2017 and the figure has been steadily rising since 2006. In secondary schools, 16.6% of pupils are exposed to a non-English language in their home. This has also steadily increased over the last ten years and by 0.4 percentage points since January 2017[27].

[21] Liu, Y., Fisher, L., Forbes, K. & Evans, M. (2017) The knowledge base of teaching in linguistically diverse contexts: 10 grounded principles of multilingual classroom pedagogy for EAL, Language and Intercultural Communication, 17(4), 378-395.
[22] Bartram, B. (2018) International Students in the Age of Trump and Brexit: Implications, Constructions and Trends, Journal of International Students, 8(4), 1479-1482
[23] Burnett, J. (2017) Racial violence and the Brexit state, Race and Class, 58(4), 85-97
[24] Khalili, L. (2017) After Brexit: Reckoning With Britain's Racism And Xenophobia, International English Language Quarterly, 5(2), 253-265.
[25] BBC (2016) EU referendum: The result in maps and charts. http://www.bbc.co.uk /news/uk-politics-36616028, accessed 24 June
[26] DfE (2018) Statistics: school and pupil numbers.

Although the statistics here are worth noting, arguably the more interesting numbers are those which tell us how well or badly EAL pupils actually do at school. In this respect, Choudry (2018) suggests that there is reason for growing optimism:[28]

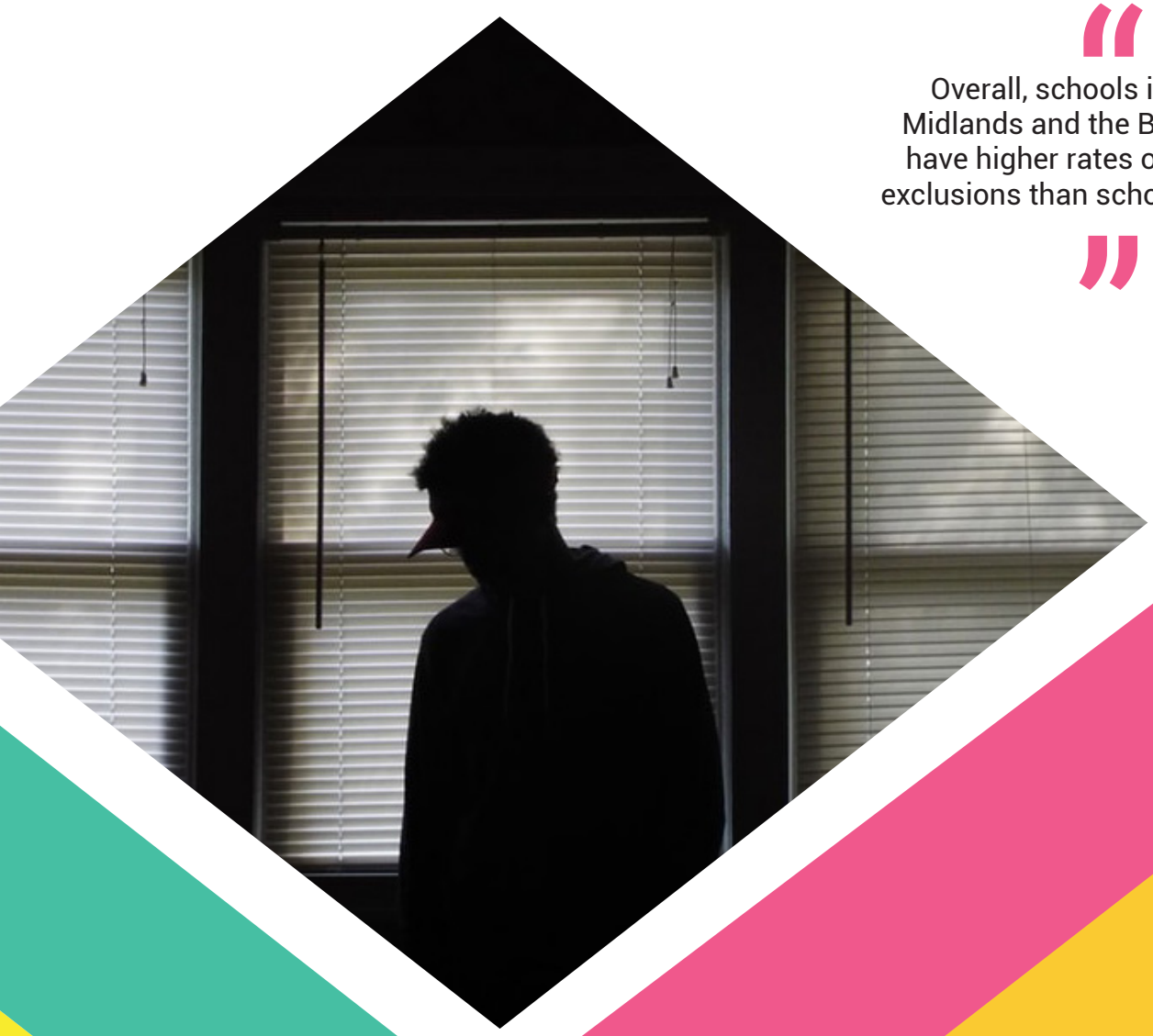
> There certainly have been significant year on year improvements in the attainment of EAL pupils, and this year's GCSE results do show that EAL pupils have outperformed non-EAL pupils. This is definitely a cause for celebration. The hard work of pupils, their families and schools deserves full recognition, particularly at a time when the percentage of EAL pupils has grown so that they now form over a fifth of the pupil population.

She also notes how this situation has been seized upon by some sections of the press to lament the relatively poorer performance of the 'lost', white working class, and exploited to feed into what she sees as growing anti-immigration rhetoric. Though debating these positions is somewhat beyond the scope of this contribution, it is important to note how attainment data can be utilised to bolster very different ideological standpoints. Despite the encouraging picture painted above, Choudry (2018) also notes how the figures conceal significant disparities between schools and regions. From a Black Country point-of-view, she also highlights the persistently lower attainment of EAL pupils at schools across Walsall and Wolverhampton: 'some of this is likely due to the different ethnic and socio-economic composition of their EAL pupil populations, but it highlights that the headlines mask considerable regional disparities'.

As the above suggests, EAL pupils are far from a homogenous group. The singular commonality of speaking English as an additional language conceals a multitude of differences in nationality, language, culture, social expectations and religious identities. The reasons for differential performance are thus unsurprisingly complex, varied and enduring, and addressing them no less challenging. And while attainment is clearly an important focus of attention, it should not eclipse broader educational questions about pupils with EAL in our region's schools – how included do they feel, how well are we helping them to adjust to life in Britain, how well are we supporting them in developing coping strategies and resilience, as well as enhancing their broader interests, alongside their personal and social development? These questions are fundamentally important ones, particularly in the politically fractured, socially divided[29] and economically challenging times we live in, where issues of identity and belonging for all of us are debated on a daily basis, and the current socio-political turmoil looks set to continue for the foreseeable future. As such, I would suggest that schools, authorities and researchers would be well advised not just to focus on issues of academic attainment with regard to pupils with EAL, important though they are, but to examine the wider humanistic dimensions and implications of life in the Black Country for EAL speakers and learners.

[27] DfE (2018) Schools, pupils and their characteristics.
[28] Choudry, S. (2018) The attainment of EAL pupils in England – What the headlines don't tell us, https://naldic.org.uk/https-ealjournal-org-2018-02-01-the-attainment-of-eal-pupils-in-england-what-the-headlines-dont-tell-us/
[29] Ford, R. and Goodwin, M. (2017) "Britain After Brexit: A Nation Divided," Journal of Democracy, 28, 17-30.

School Exclusions



> Overall, schools in the West Midlands and the Black Country have higher rates of permanent exclusions than schools nationally.

Michael Jopling

It was not so long ago when talk about inclusion in schools was much more common than focus on exclusion from schools. However, the two issues are linked and concerns have been increasingly been expressed in recent years both that school exclusions are increasing and that this is having a disproportionate effect on vulnerable students. In its 2017-18 annual report, Ofsted (2018) stated that pupils with SEN support were five times more likely to have a permanent exclusion than pupils without and that 27 per cent of pupils with SEN support had had a fixed term exclusion in the preceding year. More worrying perhaps is the increase in 'off-rolling', which Ofsted[30] defined as:

> the practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without a formal, permanent exclusion or by encouraging a parent to remove their child from the school roll, when the removal is primarily in the interests of the school rather than in the best interests of the pupil. Off-rolling in these circumstances is a form of "gaming".

The same report stated that 19,000 pupils (4% of the total) disappeared from school rolls in Years 10 and 11 between January 2016 and 2017. These are also more likely to be vulnerable children. The reference to 'gaming' indicates the concern that schools are increasingly using exclusions and off-rolling to boost their examination results. Alongside the social justice issues that results from vulnerable children being denied education, there is a danger that they might drift into problematic activities and research needs to be undertaken into the potential links between increasing exclusion and rises in areas such as anti-social behavior and knife crime. Hysterical media reports of such issues need to be grounded and, if necessary challenged, by analysis of data.

This section is an attempt briefly to examine exclusion data in the Black Country authorities in the last three years. There is no intention to blame young people, teachers or schools for rising numbers of exclusions. Rather, we see it as important to gain an accurate picture of what is happening so that key stakeholders can get together to examine the reasons for these increases and how to address them. In doing this, we need to bear in mind Cooper and Jacobs's (2011)[31] warning that preventing exclusion does not necessarily lead to meaningful inclusion in school:

> Ironically, the promotion of the delusion that being present in a school equates with being socially and educationally included, is one of the most dishonest and insidious forms of exclusion.

School exclusion data

DfE exclusion data for the last three years that were available (2014-15 to 2016-17) were examined. The data indicate that both permanent and fixed term exclusions have increased over this period, with the increase in permanent exclusions being greater.

Permanent exclusions

Overall, schools in the West Midlands and the Black Country have higher rates of permanent exclusions than schools nationally. Looked at regionally, along with the North West the West Midlands had the highest permanent exclusion rate in 2016-17: 0.14 per cent of state-funded primary, secondary and special school pupils were permanently excluded from school. This compares with 0.07 per cent in Yorkshire and Humberside and 0.06 per cent in the South East. Schools in the West Midlands also had the highest permanent exclusion rates in 2014-15 and 2015-16. Figure 16 illustrates changes in permanent exclusions in all state-funded schools in Black Country LAs between 2014-15 and 2016-17.

[30] Ofsted (2018) The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2017/18. London, England: Ofsted, p. 80.
[31] Cooper, P. & Jacobs, B. (2011). From Inclusion to Engagement: Helping Students Engage with Schooling through Policy and Practice. Oxford: John Wiley.

Figure 16. Permanent exclusions in all schools in Black Country LAs (percentage of pupil headcount)

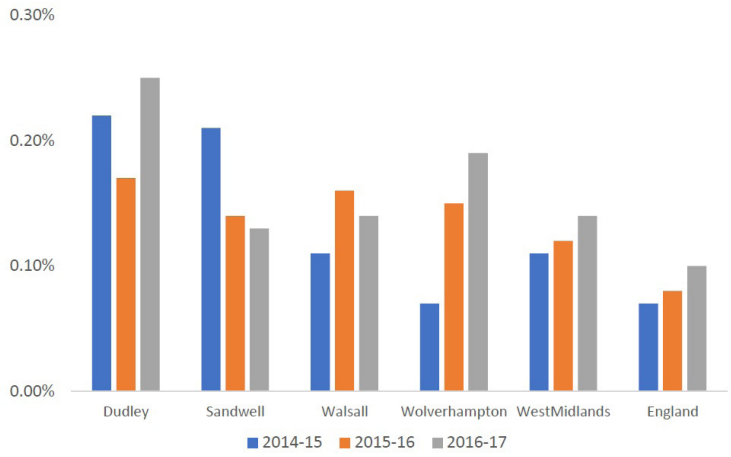


Figure 16 shows us that the national trend for all school phases combined is a slight but steady increase from 0.07 per cent in 2014-15 to 0.1 per cent in 2016-17 (which equates to 7,720 permanent exclusions). It also indicates that all the Black Country LAs have higher levels of permanent exclusion than the national average. Only Sandwell is on a downward trajectory in the period.

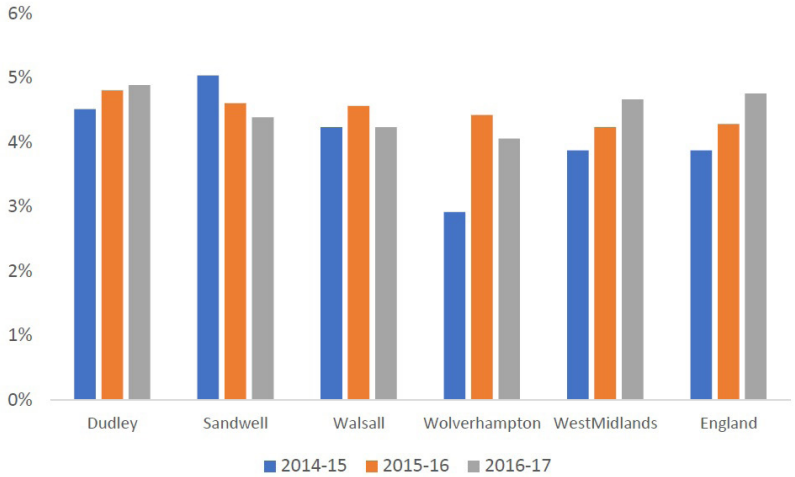
Looked at by phase, the greatest problem is as we would be expect at secondary level. Nationally, permanent exclusions in secondaries have increased nationally from 0.15 per cent in 2014-15 to 0.20 per cent in 2016-17. Schools in the West Midlands schools have mirrored this trend but at a higher rate, moving from 0.21 to 0.25 per cent. The Black Country LAs have had higher levels still in the last two years. Of these, Dudley had the highest permanent exclusion rate in secondaries in 2016-17 (0.50%), the fifth highest in England. At primary level, permanent exclusions are lower but also increasing, from 0.02 per cent in 2014-15 to 0.03 per cent in 2016-17 nationally. Rates were higher in the West Midlands (0.05% in 2016-17. While no Black Country LAs were higher than the West Midlands average in 2014-15, only Sandwell was lower than the regional and national average at primary level in 2016-17 (0.02%). The rate in Dudley was 0.09 per cent. The numbers of permanent exclusions in special schools are low, which makes comparisons problematic.

However, although totals are declining nationally, permanent exclusions were recorded in special schools for the first time in the period in Dudley and Wolverhampton. None were recorded in Walsall or Sandwell.

Fixed term exclusions

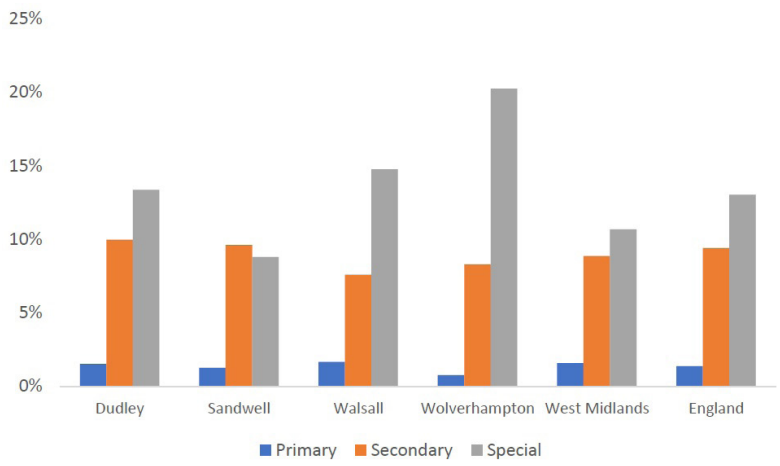
Fixed term exclusions have increased at a slower rate during the period, increasing nationally from 3.88 per cent of the headcount in all state-funded schools in 2014-15 to 4.76 per cent in 2016-17. In the West Midlands, the picture was very similar, increasing from 3.88 per cent to 4.67 per cent in the period. As Figure 2 indicates, Dudley is on an upward trajectory ahead of the regional and national average, Walsall and Sandwell are on downward trajectories and Wolverhampton is inconsistent, remaining relatively low in fixed term exclusions in 2016-17, but having doubled in the previous year (see Figure 17).

Figure 17. Fixed term exclusions in all schools in Black Country LAs (percentage of pupil headcount)



Fixed term exclusions were again higher in secondary schools than in primaries, increasing nationally from 7.51 per cent in 2014-15 to 9.40 per cent in 2016-17. This was higher in the West Midlands in 2014-15 (8.01%) but lower in 2016-17 (8.87%). As Figure 18 indicates, Walsall and Wolverhampton were both lower than the regional and national average in 2016-17, with Walsall having a rate of 7.59 per cent. Sandwell and Dudley were slightly above the national average. At primary level, the rate of increase was almost identical, increasing from 1.1 per cent in 2014-15 to 1.37 in 2016-17. In the Black Country Walsall remained high during the period (1.67% in 2016-17) and Wolverhampton low (0.75% in 2016-17). In special schools the overall trajectory nationally was downwards, although rates remained higher than in secondaries. Rates in the West Midlands were consistently lower than the national average, for example 10.69 per cent against 13.03 per cent in 2016-17. Relatively small numbers make comparisons between the Black Country LAs problematic, but the rate was high in Wolverhampton and increased significantly in Dudley in 2016-17.

Figure 18: Black Country LAs, West Midlands and England Fixed-term exclusions rates by phase 2016/17



The average number of fixed exclusions per excluded pupil overall was 2.08 nationally and 1.93 in the West Midlands in 2016-17, which was lower than all other regions apart from London. Walsall matched the regional average, the other Black Country LAs were slightly lower. The average number of days lost per pupil was 4.32 days in the West Midlands, lower than the national average (4.45) and five other regions. Of the Black Country LAs, only Dudley was lower than the West Midlands and national figures (4.22).

What next?

Persistent disruptive behaviour was the most commonly cited reason for both permanent and fixed term exclusions in 2016-17 nationally, followed by 'other' and physical assault against a pupil. This was closely mirrored in the West Midlands. This suggests that more work needs to be done at all levels to examine the reasons why children and young people are excluded and the pressures they are under. Permanent exclusion rates are increasing at almost twice the rate as fixed term exclusion rates nationally. However, although rates remain higher in the West Midlands, the rate of increase has been much lower (27% as compared with 42% nationally). There are considerable variations among the Black Country LAs. Sandwell is on a downward trajectory, while Wolverhampton is on an upward trajectory in both primary and secondary phases. Fixed term exclusions are increasing at a slightly slower rate (20%) in the West Midlands and the Black Country, but this remains a concern. Having clearly identified the problem, the challenge is to identify the underlying causes and how to begin to address them. The Education Observatory is undertaking research into school exclusion in Wolverhampton with the intention of exploring both the causes and consequences of the regional and national increases

Further Education, apprenticeships and adult learning

> At present the Black Country requires approximately 18,000 more residents to be educated to level 3 to meet the national average and almost 105,700 at level 4+.

Matthew Johnson

The Further Education landscape in the Black Country

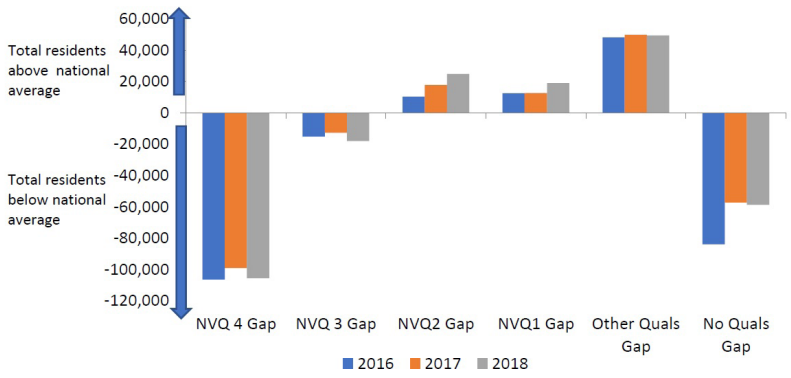
The Black Country is home to six further education and sixth form colleges:

- City of Wolverhampton College
- Dudley College of Technology
- Halesowen College
- King Edward VI College Stourbridge
- Sandwell College
- Walsall College

As of June 2019 all of these colleges were rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, indicating the high quality of local FE provision in Black Country. In addition to the above FE providers, the Black Country also has a number of good quality Adult and Community Learning Centres across the sub-region.

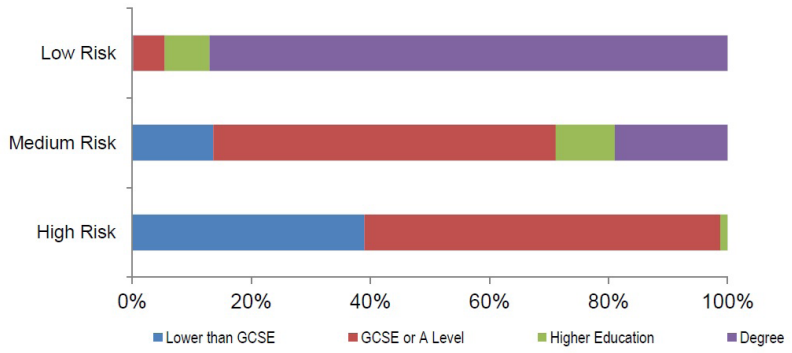
Despite this high quality, Black Country residents tend to underperform in higher level skills (level 4 and above)[32] and the proportion of residents with lower levels of qualifications is above the national average. At present, the Black Country requires approximately 18,000 more residents to be educated to level 3 to meet the national average and almost 105,700 more at level 4+, as Figure 19 illustrates.

Figure 19. The qualifications gap in the Black Country (2016-2018)[33]



There are of course disparities between LAs. For example, Walsall performs well at level 3 and has approximately 3,500 more residents educated to this level than the national average. Walsall also has a relatively smaller gap to the national average than other local authorities at 15,000 compared to a local authority gap high in the sub-region of 36,000 at level 4. However, the general story is one where the Black Country overperforms in lower level qualifications and underperforms at the higher levels.

Figure 20. Proportion of main jobs at risk of automation by education (England)[34]



There is an urgent need to scale up the proportion of residents with higher level qualifications, given factors such as the large numbers of jobs at risk of automation. Unsurprisingly, the risk of this is generally lower for those educated to degree level than for those with lower level qualifications.

[32] Nomis 2018: Annual Population Survey (APS)
[33] Annual Population Survey 2018.

To achieve this requires more seamless transition, particularly between level 3 and level 4+ qualifications in the region. Recent policy discussions about the forthcoming T-levels have outlined the need for a T-level Transition Programme which is likely to come into place from September 2020 . However, the concrete details as to what this transition programme will look like remain unclear.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship starts across the Black Country stood at 13,570, 2% lower in 2016/17 than in 2015/16. However, they also fell a little more rapidly nationally, by 3% . It is important to note in this context that there were some significant policy changes made to apprenticeships in the preceding year, most notably the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy and the move from frameworks to standards . Reductions were forecasted as companies and providers adjusted to the new policy environment.

Since the apprenticeship levy was introduced there seems to have been be some (slow) reorienting of the overall structure of apprenticeship take-up in the Black Country towards higher level apprenticeships. Between 2015/16 and 2016/17 intermediate apprenticeships declined by approximately 1000 starts (11.7%) but higher apprenticeship starts grew by circa 200 (24.1%).

Arguably, the gradual rebalancing of apprenticeship starts towards the higher levels supports the goal of building the resilience of the Black Country to deal with the challenges and opportunities associated of the fourth industrial revolution . However, much of this higher level apprenticeship growth has been driven by those who are already in work and have used the apprenticeship levy to upskill themselves. It is important that the apprenticeship system also creates opportunities for those at the lower levels to take up apprenticeships and then progress to higher level study. This will of course mean ensuring that there are incentives for businesses to invest further in apprenticeship training and upskilling at intermediate and advanced levels.

Institutes of Technology (IoTs)

On 10 April 2019, the government announced that 12 IoTs will be set up in England, including one based in the Black Country following a successful bid by Dudley College of Technology. The Institutes of Technology complement the forthcoming T-levels set out in the Post-16 Skills Plan and the Technical and Further Education Act 2017. The rationale behind these institutes is the acknowledgement that there are gaps in technical provision in the country, particularly in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) skills, which have been linked to low levels of productivity. They will specialise in delivering quality higher level technical training (at Level 4 and 5) in STEM subjects, such as digital technology, advanced manufacturing and engineering with the goal of enhancing local economic competitiveness through fostering relevant labour market skills.

[40] Technical and Further Education Act 2017, Legislation.gov.uk, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/19/pdfs/ukpga_20170019_en.pdf [accessed 27/06/19]

Higher Education

> Strengths-based degree apprenticeships in particular offer an effective way to align the needs of industry with the ambitions of individuals who wish to gain university level qualifications while in the workplace.

Matthew Johnson
and
Sarah Hayes

The Black Country Higher Education landscape

The Black Country is seeing higher numbers of residents accessing Higher Education (HE) courses than ever before. As outlined in the previous section, there has been a significant rise in higher level apprenticeships in the region and the number of residents in the area educated to level 4 and above has increased from 158,000 in 2012 to 178,000 in 2018. Strengths-based degree apprenticeships in particular offer an effective way to align the needs of industry with the ambitions of individuals who wish to gain university level qualifications whilst in the workplace. The focus on an individual's inherent talents offers a new way of approaching HE. However, although there has been a rise in absolute terms, the proportion of those educated to level 4 and above in the Black Country remains significantly below the national average. Furthermore, the annual growth rate in terms of learners accessing higher level skills is currently below the national average at +0.7%, compared to +2.7% nationally.

Given the nature of the current and future skills challenges associated with technological and other innovations (see the final section of this report), there is a significant need to increase the rate of growth in learners educated to higher levels. However, this can (and will) only be achieved through a collaborative, strategic approach from local government, LEPs, schools, Further Education institutions, training organisations, business and of course Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This underlines the fact that discussions of higher education need to involve all these stakeholders. The routes and pathways into education warrant as much attention as the direct providers of HE.

Pathway blockages

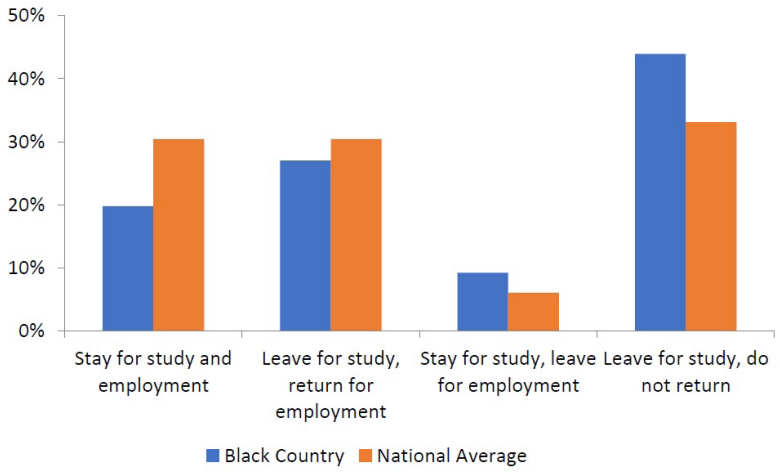
As outlined in the preceding section on Further Education, there is no shortage of take-up in lower level qualifications at level 1 and 2. The challenge comes at level 3 and above, where we start to see significant gaps between the Black Country and national and regional averages. Strategically, more investigation at the local level is needed to understand why these differences have become so great. However, research from other areas suggests that where you see disparities in transition between lower to higher levels of study, it often reflects differences in both the extent to which individuals' aspirations can be realised and the interventions that have been developed to support them. Changing perceptions and realising local aspirations through and with HE is one of the areas which is currently being addressed through widening participation programmes such as the University of Wolverhampton's Aspire to HE programme. This is one of many such programmes across the country which aim to increase access from underrepresented groups, areas and social classes. While such programmes are valuable, such work needs to be accompanied by effective strategic alignment of institutions. Commissioning needs to incentivise cooperation more effectively among the FE, HE and business sectors to increase the co-production of collaborative curricula that meet individuals' and dynamic labour market needs.

Graduate retention in the Black Country

Given the relatively low numbers of residents in the region with higher level qualifications, it is particularly important for the region to retain its graduates. Again, although HEIs play a significant role, local graduate retention should not be seen as solely their responsibility. The local economy needs to generate more opportunities for students when they leave university. It is important to note that the Black Country is currently one of the most challenged in the country when it comes to employment. It has the lowest proportion of total jobs relative to the working age population (a density of 0.69 in comparison with the national average of 0.83) and the second highest proportion of the population who are unemployed - 6.8% compared with 4.6% nationally. HEIs in and around the Black Country operate in this local employment context. While the Black Country's geographical position in the centre of the country is a potential strength in that it can attract commutors, it also risks losing local talent to other commutable regions if local demand is insufficient. It is thus important that any disconnect between the supply of skills and labour market demand is addressed through strategic collaboration involving a range of stakeholders.

[41] Saville, K. M., Birdi, G., Hayes, S., Higson, H., & Eperjesi, F. (2019). Using strengths-based approaches to fulfil academic potential in degree apprenticeships. https://wlv.openrepository.com/handle/2436/622399
[42] DfE (2014) School and College-level Strategies to Raise Aspirations of High-achieving Disadvantaged Pupils to Pursue Higher Education Investigation.
[43] HEFCE and Black Country Consortium (2018) EIU analysis 2018

Figure 21. Graduate retention in the Black Country (2018)



As Figure 21 illustrates, according to Higher Education and Funding Council for England, graduate retention in the Black Country is below the national average. The data reveal that Black Country graduates are less likely to stay for study and employment than the national average; less likely to leave for study and then return to the region for employment; and more likely to leave the area to work in other regions when compared to regional and national average. Approaching half the students who leave the Black Country to study do not return to the region, a rate which is significantly above the national average of one-third.

Promoting inclusive growth

The West Midlands Combined Authority, led by mayor Andy Street has highlighted inclusive growth as a fundamental component of the recently-published Regional Skills Strategy. Rather than focusing on broad growth only, it highlights the need for all communities to thrive and reap the benefits of local investment. As the only HEI in the Black Country, the University of Wolverhampton is critical to ensuring that this agenda is realised. A significant proportion (70%) of students from the University of Wolverhampton are the first in their family to enter HE, which is far higher than the sector norm (50%). Their transition into HE is consequently more challenging than for those from other backgrounds and their expectations can be affected by not having reference points[44]. There is a considerable body of research which has explored the barriers to entry and success for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These affect students' experience of university, their continuation and their degree outcomes, as well as their employment prospects. As we have outlined, students at Wolverhampton typically have multiple disadvantages, more so than their contemporaries in other HEIs, which in combination make it more difficult for them to succeed during and after their studies. Unite Students found in 2017 that students with multiple disadvantages were more negative about their HE experience than others[45] and it is noticeable that the multiplier effect of such disadvantages is not reflected in the Teaching Excellence Framework's (TEF) methodology. The University of Wolverhampton commissioned independent research in 2015 to improve its understanding of the diversity of its student body and such research needs to be examined and built on in partnership with key regional stakeholders such as the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), LEPs and FE colleges to promote and facilitate the development of inclusive growth in the region.

[44] The Sutton Trust (2017) Rules of the game: Disadvantaged students and the university admissions process.
[45] Unite Students (2017) Everyone In: Insights from a diverse student population.

Special educational needs and disability

> Unfortunately, the progress made by children and young people with SEND is rarely captured by prevailing assessment systems which prioritise narrow conceptions of academic achievement.

Stephanie Brewster
and
Michelle Haywood

This section focuses on educational provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND). While the emphasis is on formal educational provision (in mainstream and special schools), we also consider a more holistic perspective that incorporates access to play, leisure, transport and transition into adult life, which are all significant sites of potential exclusion for those with SEND.

It is now many years since inclusive education for children with SEN was established in British legislation: the 1978 Warnock report and the subsequent Education Act of 1981 enshrined the presumption of education in a mainstream setting for the majority of children deemed to have additional or different needs. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that labelling individual learners as having SEND is not unproblematic. It is seen by advocates of inclusion as maintaining the division between a supposed majority who conform to normative values, and those that do not. This is set to continue to be a site of debate for years to come. An inclusive ethos recognises that the environment (including social attitudes) can create barriers for children, young people and their families and that removing these barriers is an ongoing process that benefits everyone. A child or young person is regarded as having a SEND if they have greater difficulty learning, or accessing mainstream educational provision, than most individuals of their age. This may be because of sensory impairment, physical impairment, learning difficulties or disabilities, an autistic spectrum condition, or speech/language/communication needs.

The Black Country has a relatively high number of SEND pupils. The proportion of SEND pupils in the Black Country has been fairly consistent since 2016, decreasing slightly from 15.6% in 2016 to 15.3% in 2018. This was similar to the West Midlands overall, where the proportion was 15.5% in 2018 but rather higher than England as a whole, where 14.6% of pupils had SEND in 2018.

Funding

In the early years sector, the main focus of attention is on timely identification of needs so that intervention for children and families is provided as early as possible. For some children, provision is dependent on an official diagnosis being made. It should be pointed out, however, that the majority of children with SEND do not access additional funding. At school, this means that adequate provision is heavily reliant on the mainstream school staff having sufficient expertise and confidence. Unfortunately, it appears that nationally this is not currently the case and indeed initial teacher training is regarded by many as not addressing SEND sufficiently. Perhaps as a result, SENCOs are under increasing pressure to meet their responsibilities.

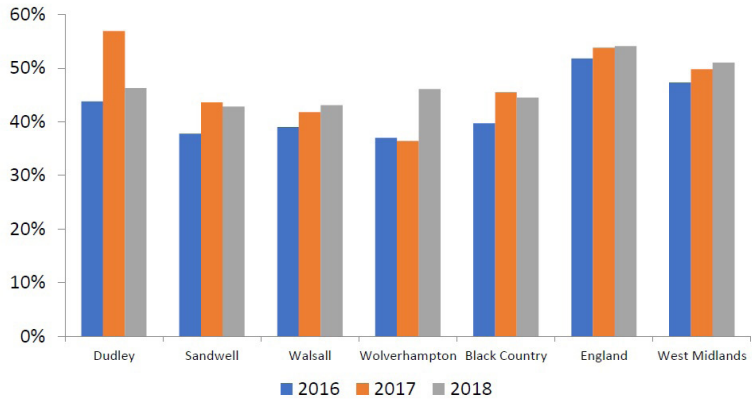
Amidst what could be described as a relentless drive towards raising national academic attainment in schools, there are widespread concerns about tensions within the ethos of inclusive education. Unfortunately, the progress made by children and young people with SEND is rarely captured by prevailing assessment systems which prioritise narrow conceptions of academic achievement. As we have already seen, children with SEND are more likely to be excluded from school[46] . They are also at an increased risk of absence from school, bullying and low achievement, making the school experience for children with SEND less positive than it should be.

In terms of the current policy context, The Children and Families Act (2014) required LAs to produce a 'Local Offer' of support and to ensure that education, health and social care provision are integrated. It marked a move away from statements of SEN to Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) which cover young people up to age 25 years. However, it is widely recognised that such 'joined-up' provision remains challenging. Also of national concern are the high numbers of tribunal appeals against the content of an EHCP or the refusal to issue one, with most tribunals being lost by LAs. There is a perceived reliance on parents to advocate for their children, which can result in inequality of provision.

Beyond school, how do young people with special needs or disabilities fare? The Papworth Trust has consistently reported that disabled people are more likely to be unemployed than non-disabled people[47]. In March 2013, the unemployment rate for disabled people stood at 12%, compared to 7.6% of non-disabled people, and the pay gap between disabled people and non-disabled people has increased by 35% since 2010. Adults aged 16–64 with impairments are twice as likely as their peers to experience barriers to education and training opportunities. Furthermore, support for transitions into adult health and social care services and appropriate housing are crucial, regardless of the young person or their achievable level of independence. In the Black Country the employment rate for those with disabilities has fallen consistently below the national average. However, as shown below there have been improvements since 2016 as the Black Country's work-limiting disability employment rate has gone from 39.7% in 2016 to 44.5% in 2018, as Figure 22 indicates.

[46] DfE (2018) Permanent and fixed period exclusions in England: 2016 to 2017.
[47] Smith, D. (2016) Disability in the United Kingdom, Facts and Figures. The Papworth Trust.

Figure 22. Employment rate of Equality Act core or work-limiting disabled in Black Country (2016-2018)[48]



The University of Wolverhampton supports SEND workforce development, with a student population that draws heavily from the local catchment area (Black Country) through offering a wide range of undergraduate, postgraduate, pre and post-registration courses such as Special Educational Needs, Disability and Inclusion studies; and continuing professional development related to, for example teaching, nursing, social work; and the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination (SENCO). In the Education Observatory, we are involved in a number of research projects relating to SEND and host ResearchSEND, a unique research initiative, which brings practitioners and researchers together to share findings and support practice in SEND[49] .

[48] Nomis/Annual Population Survey 2018 [see https://equalityhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Disability-Facts-and-Figures-2016.pdf accessed 27/07/19]
Equality Act 2010 core defines disability as having a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on an ability to do normal daily activities.
[49] Prosser Haywood, M. & Jopling, M. (2019) ResearchSEND in Ordinary Classrooms. Woodbridge: John Catt.

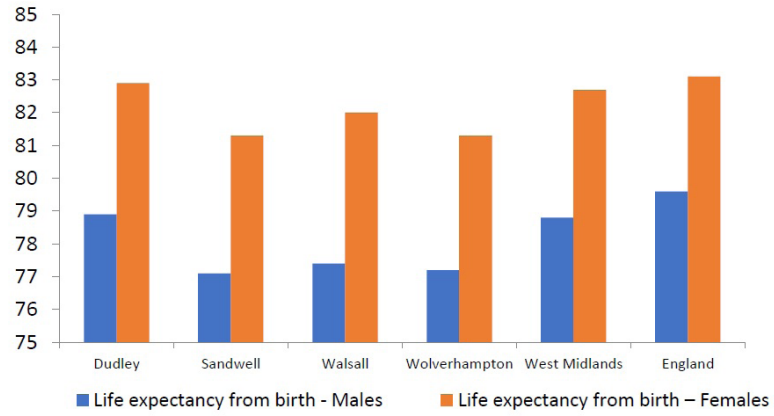
Physical activity

> Every area in the Black Country reported fewer years of good health for both genders than the West Midlands and England.

David Scott

While formal education and schooling are undoubtedly important, it is also vital to consider life outside of schools and classrooms[50]. Community, physical activity, wellbeing and mental health are all critical to individuals' development. Not only do positive physical and mental wellbeing support learning outcomes, they also help to develop better citizens. Thus, we cannot consider formal education without examining informal learning and activity. This section examines health from a physical aspect in order to offer a different, holistic perspective on educational outcomes in the Black Country.

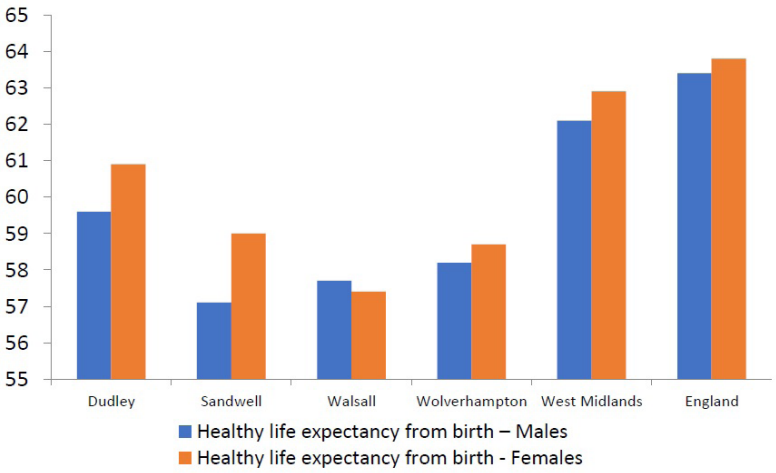
Figure 23. Average life expectancy in the Black Country



Life expectancy

The data on life expectancy (average number of years lived) and healthy life expectancy (average number of years lived in good health) collected in Figures 23 and 24 give us a snapshot of the general health outcomes of the Black Country in comparison with the West Midlands and national populations. In every area of the Black Country except Dudley average life expectancy is lower than the West Midlands regional average. All Black Country authorities are lower than the England average.

Figure 24. Average healthy life expectancy from birth in the Black Country



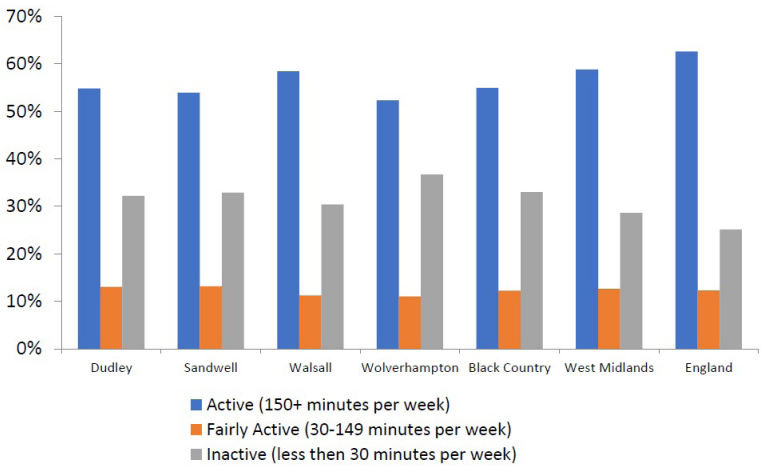
The picture for healthy life expectancy is even starker: every area in the Black Country reported fewer years of good health for both genders than the West Midlands and England. Of particular concern are the figures for Walsall, where both genders have five fewer years of good health on average than in the West Midlands and England as whole. This all suggests that general health in the Black Country should be a concern.

[50] Public Health England 2014, The link between pupil health and wellbeing and attainment: A briefing for head teachers, governors and staff in education settings

Physical activity engagement among adults

Adults in the Black Country are also less active on average than both the West Midlands and England as a whole, as Figure 25 indicates.

Figure 25. Reported activity level estimates across in the Black Country (2017/18)[51]

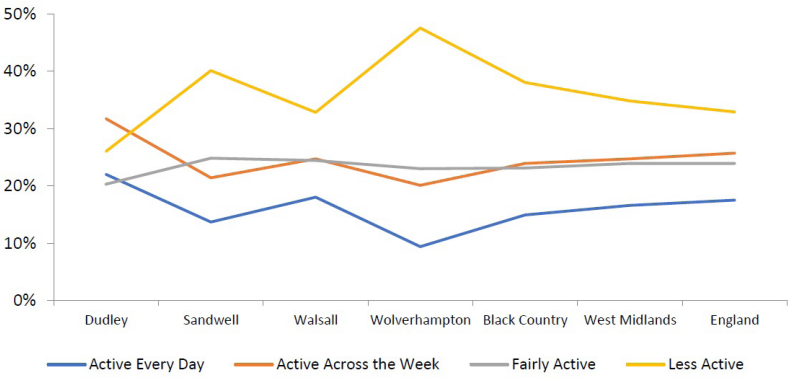


While there is approximately a 6% range across the four LAs, Wolverhampton (36.7%) has the highest levels of physical inactivity among adults. The Black Country as a whole has an inactivity average rate of 33% compared to 25.1% nationally. Inactivity is closely associated with a range of physical and mental health issues and so these figures should also be cause for concern.

Physical activity engagement numbers for young people

The physical activity data for young people in the Black Country are also troubling, as Figure 26 illustrates.

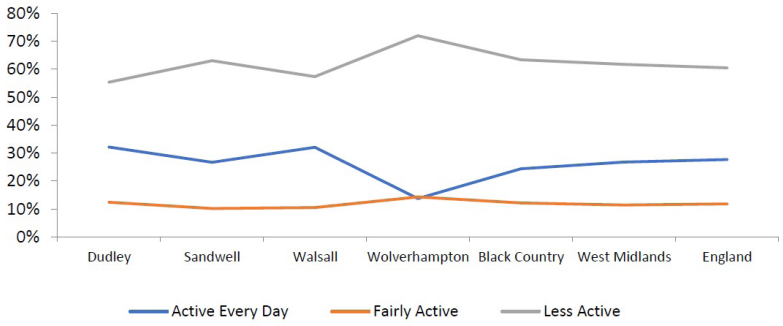
Figure 26. Reported activity levels for school-aged pupils (Y1-11) in the Black Country (2017/18)



While average levels of physical activity for school-aged pupils (years 1-11) in the Black Country as a whole are slightly below the West Midlands and England, this is largely due to low activity levels in Sandwell and Wolverhampton in particular. Dudley and Walsall are in line with the regional and national averages. Figures 27 and 28 explore these data further by differentiating between physical activity levels in school and leisure time.

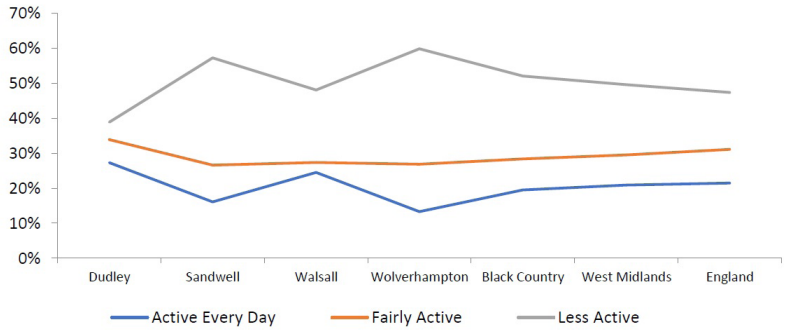
[51] All Physical Activity graphs data taken from Sport England Active Lives Adult Survey, 2017-18

Figure 27. Reported activity levels in school (Y1-11) in the Black Country (2017/18)



It is interesting to note that young people's physical activity levels in Sandwell at school are in line with the regional and national averages and exceed them in Dudley and Walsall. However, rates in Wolverhampton were some way short, which suggests that more in-school interventions may be necessary.

Figure 28. Reported activity levels outside of school (Y1-11) in the Black Country (2017/18)



Similar trends can be seen in Figure 28's focus on physical activity rates outside of school. Children and young people in Dudley and Walsall were above regional and national averages, whereas Sandwell and Wolverhampton were lower. This suggests that children and young people in Sandwell and particularly Wolverhampton need to be supported to become more healthy and active. Research needs to be commissioned and undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions being implemented to improve these behaviours, particularly in areas like the Black Country where opportunities to engage in sport and physical activity are limited.

Mental health and wellbeing

> A strategic approach to improving mental health needs to understand differences within and between population groups.

Lydia Lewis

Mental health and wellbeing

While physical health is important, it is also crucial to consider the mental health of residents in the Black Country. This section provides profile data on wellbeing and mental health problems in the Black Country. A recent report commissioned by the WMCA Mental Health Commission provides a picture of the mental health and wellbeing of adults of working age in the area[52]. The authors emphasize that a strategic approach to improving mental health requires an understanding of differences within and between population groups. As we have already seen in this report, socio-economic deprivation is a significant factor for the Black Country, and prevalence data on mental health issues reflects this. Deprivation impacts on mental health, for example, through creating feelings of powerlessness[53].

Poor housing has a negative impact on mental health and the WMCA report highlighted that overcrowded housing is a problem in Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. The relatively high unemployment rate in the Black Country is also important for explaining the prevalence data on mental health issues in the region. In addition, education as a social determinent of mental health, needs taking into account; for example, the Walsall Adult Mental Health Needs Assessment (2016) highlighted the significance for mental health of a figure of 48% of people with no or low qualifications compared to the national average of 36%[54]. Gender is another important dimension of mental health inequalities. Women generally report higher rates of mental health issues compared to men. For example, in the 2016 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey, common mental health problems were reported by 19% of women compared to 12% of men, and women were also more likely than men to report severe symptoms of these. (10% compared with 6%). Such problems were also more common among Black and Black British women than among non-British White women and White British women.

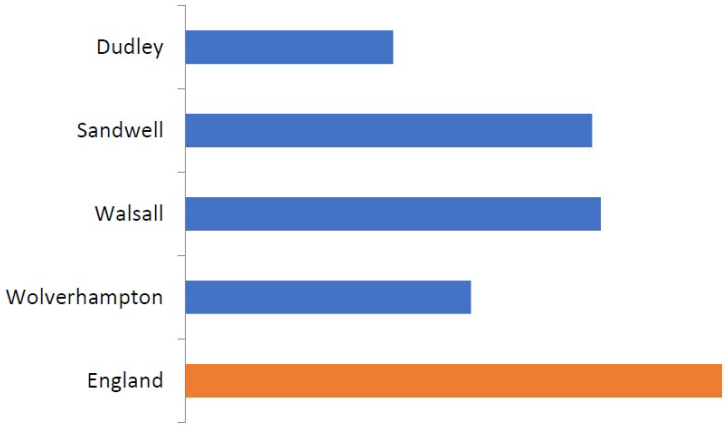
These data reflect differences in the social contexts of women's and men's lives and the unequal gender power relations which persist, as well as the impact of intersections of gender and racial inequalities on mental health. For example, 'women are more likely to be single parents and to have experiences of domestic abuse, sexual abuse and discrimination or harassment in the workplace, while men may face unemployment, relationship breakdown and are generally less keen to seek help and support'[55]. The Walsall Adult Mental Health Needs Assessment (2016) highlighted the importance of ethnicity and gender to understanding mental health inequalities and needs in the borough, for example, isolation and loneliness were issues identified as affecting Asian women in particular.

Wellbeing, Happiness and Anxiety in the Black Country

The Office for National Statistics reported on personal well-being in the UK in 2018[56]. This survey on the various dimensions of wellbeing provide data on areas such as happiness and anxiety, and data are reported at the UK, country, regional and local authority levels. Figure 29, taken from the report, shows findings for the Black Country and England. It indicates that the Black Country local authorities (LA's) do not fare well in terms of the happiness dimension of wellbeing when compared to the national average. All Black Country local authorities fall below the national benchmark of 7.52, with Dudley the lowest at 7.14 and Walsall closest to the England average at around 7.4.

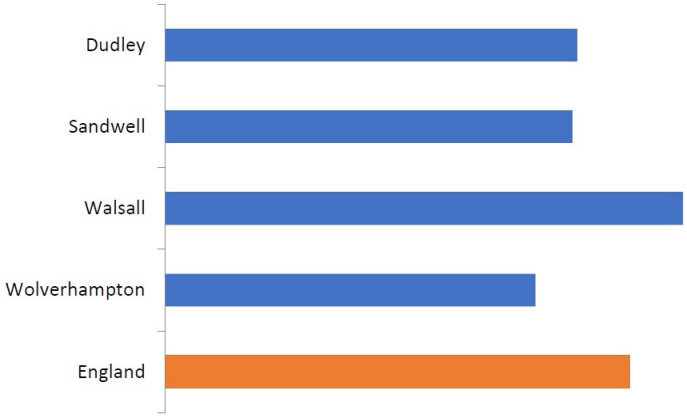
[52]Newbigging, K. and Parsonage, M. (2017) Mental Health In The West Midlands Combined Authority. A Report for the West Midlands Mental Health Commission. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.
[53]Friedll, L (2009) Mental Health, Resilience and Inequalities, Copenhagen: WHO Europe.
Marmot, M., Atkinson, T., Bell, J., Black, C., Broadfoot, P., Cumberlege, J., Diamond, I., Gilmore, I., Ham, C., Meacher, M. and Mulgan, G. (2010) Fair Society, Healthy Lives. The Marmot Review. Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England 2010, The Marmot Review.
[54] Rai, G et al. (2016) Public Health Walsall 2016 Adult Mental Health Needs Assessment, Walsall: Walsall Council.
[55]Newbigging, K and Parsonage, M (2017) Mental Health In The West Midlands Combined Authority, pg 17
[56] ONS (2018) Personal wellbeing in the UK: April 2017 to March 2018. Statistical Bulletin, September.

Figure 29. Reports of happiness in the Black Country



The Black Country does better in relation to anxiety. Figure 30 shows that individuals in Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton reported lower levels of anxiety to the national average rating of 2.90. However, in Walsall people reported levels of anxiety that were significantly higher than the national average with an estimated rating of 3.23. The ONS reports that health status, physical activity levels, educational attainment and unemployment levels provide important context for interpreting this data.

Figure 30. Reports of anxiety in the Black Country



Headstart

One of the most significant recent interventions in relation to resilience and wellbeing is Wolverhampton Headstart, part of a national programme funded by Big Lottery. HeadStart aims to improve the ability of children/young people aged 10 -14 years old to cope with the challenges they face in order to prevent them developing common mental health problems. The Education Observatory is evaluating Headstart in Wolverhampton over four years from 2017 and initial reports are available online[57].

[57]https://www.headstartonline.co.uk; http://educationobservatory.co.uk/an-evaluation-of-headstart-wolverhampton/

The Fourth Industrial Revolution: Skills for the future

> Given the significance of transportation and support services, manufacturing and wholesale and retail trade jobs in the Black Country, it is anticipated that the region will be disproportionately affected by automation.

Stuart Connor

The 4th Industrial Revolution, or more accurately how we anticipate and shape a 4th industrial revolution, has the potential to change the way we live, work and learn. However, any efforts to anticipate the futures of work and skills need to be treated with caution and humility. Change is a complex, dynamic process and needs to be understood within the wider context and interplay of economic, social and political relations, technological developments, and changing environmental conditions[58]. As such, this is not an exercise in predicting the future, but rather an attempt to consider the possible outcomes of current practices and to anticipate potential opportunities and challenges for education and training.

It is projected that developments in genetic engineering, nanotechnology, biotechnology, Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence, robotics, graphene and additive manufacturing (3D printing) will constitute a 4th industrial revolution[59]. New technologies afford new risks and opportunities and a 4th industrial revolution has the potential to create new knowledge or even fields of knowledge, new products and services, new techniques and new forms of institutional relations and practices.

Disruptions to labour markets, education and skills

It is anticipated that there will be growth and an increased demand for highly skilled labour, notably for people with skills that enable them to operate advancing technology. However, it is also thought that there will be a demand for skills that machines cannot perform. It is projected that there will be increased growth in and demand for roles such as software developers, computer systems analysts and market-research and marketing specialists; medical technicians, physical therapists, and education and training specialists. Those skills increasingly recognised as intrinsically, if not exclusively, representing human traits and interpersonal abilities such as interdisciplinary and critical thinking, empathy, creativity, and communication skills[60] will be vital for responding to the challenges and disruptions of a 4th industrial revolution.

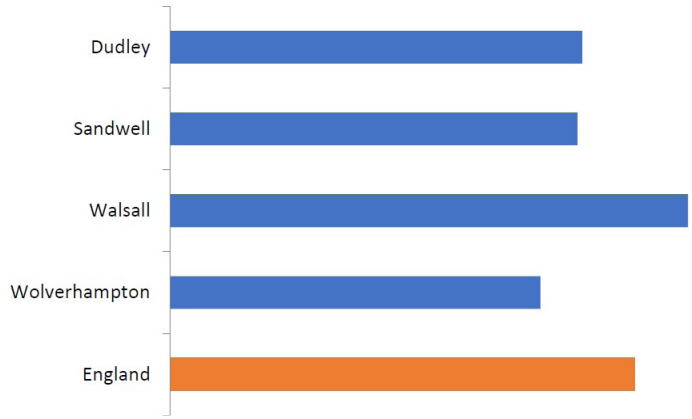
Job destruction

Estimates of the number of jobs with tasks at high risk of automation range from almost 50%, through to 30% or 9%. Estimates differ depending on the assumptions made as to the number of jobs subject to automation and the number of new jobs to be created through developments in robotics, and artificial intelligence[61]. Based on current tendencies, it is manual and routine tasks that are projected to be most susceptible to automation in the short to medium term. The likelihood of automation appears lowest in education, health and social work, and highest in sectors such as manufacturing, retail, transport and storage. Given the significance of transportation and support services, manufacturing and wholesale and retail trade jobs in the Black Country, it is anticipated that the region will be disproportionately affected by automation. Women, young people and those who currently have the lowest wages and work part-time are projected to be most at risk[62]. The projected uneven impact of technologies across different sectors may further widen income disparities and hollow out the labour market. This raises questions regarding the role of education in attempts to increase opportunities and mobility across and ever-widening chasm.

Probability of automation in the Black Country

Compared to other parts of England, the local authorities in the Black Country are towards the higher end of the spectrum, showing a 47% to 50% probability of automation. Areas with a low probability of automation tend to be concentrated in London and the South East (e.g. Camden 33%).

Figure 31. Percentage probability of automation



[58] Connor, S. (2017) Global Megatrends and the Black Country. University of Wolverhampton http://hdl.handle.net/2436/620687
[59] Connor, S. (2018) From Ay I to AI: The Black Country, Work and the 4th Industrial Revolution. University of Wolverhampton. http://hdl.handle.net/2436/621344
[60] NESTA (2017) The Future of Skills: Employment in 2030. NESTA https://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/future-skills-employment-2030
[61] International Labour Organisation (2016) Technological changes and work in the future: Making technology work for all. Issue Note 1 http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_534201.pdf ; UK Commission on Employment and Skills (2014) The Future of Work: Jobs and Skills in 2030, London.
[62] ONS (2019) The Probability of automation in nEngland: 2011 and 2017. https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/theprobabilityofautomationinengland/2011and2017

Addressing the future's skills demands

One of the major challenges and contradictions when anticipating futures, is how can one prepare for the unknown? What skills, knowledge and experience are needed for jobs and challenges that may not exist yet and a world that will continue to change rapidly?

It is anticipated that to compete in a future job market, learners and workers will need repeatedly update to their skills. It is already assumed that in the near future, most jobs will require skills that are not considered vital to such roles today[63]. The rhetoric of 'job-ready graduates' may need to be supplanted with a narrative of lifelong learning. Prioritising investment in the development of knowledge and skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematical (STEM) subjects that are necessary for a 4th industrial revolution may appear to be self-evident. However, it is also thought that social, creative and critical thinking skills will not only prove resistant to automation, they will also continue to represent areas of growth[64]. Current projections suggest that the risks and rewards of a 4th industrial revolution are unlikely to be spread evenly unless anticipatory action is taken, given that economic and educational experiences and expectations vary across different cultures, communities and age groups in areas like the Black Country.

Concerns over technological unemployment have not been fully realised, partly because the relatively high supply and low cost of labour appears to have restricted investment in automation. Current trends suggest that we face a choice between increasing what is already a flexible and casualised labour market work or reducing low-skilled, low-paid work. In both instances unless action is taken, a polarised labour market is likely to be characterised by increased demand and competition for high-skilled, high-paid jobs.

Due to the scale of the change anticipated, it is argued that no one agency will be in a position to meet the challenges of a 4th industrial revolution. Initiatives such as Wolverhampton's Learning City Region[65], supported by the University of Wolverhampton, have the potential to bring stakeholders together to anticipate the opportunities and challenges of a 4th Industrial Revolution. This requires long-term and cross-sector action and thinking involving the public, private and voluntary sectors, which will need to consider how a learner's knowledge, skills and experience can be developed and assessed.

Figure 32. Percentage of jobs in the Black Country at potential high risk of automation by early 2030s[66]

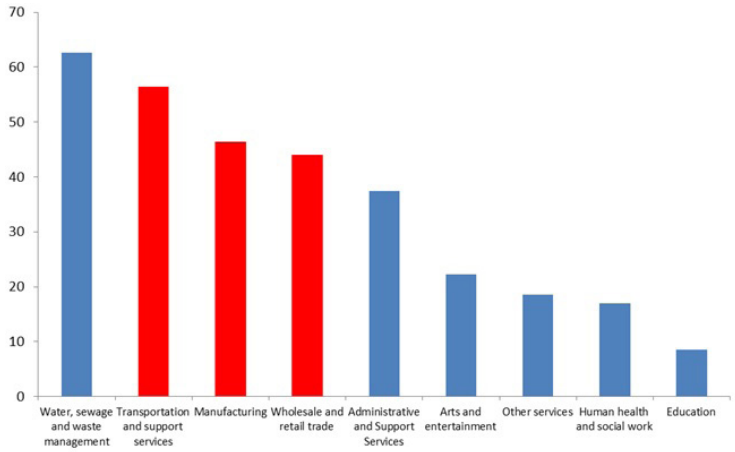


Figure 32 illustrates the proportion of jobs in the Black Country that are a risk of automation. It should be noted that the three sectors marked in red - wholesale and retail trade (19.3% share), manufacturing (13.9%), transportation and support services (6.3%) – taken together represent over a third (39.5%) of jobs in the Black Country, which is a concern.

[63] World Economic Forum (2016) The Future of Jobs: Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial revolution: Global Challenge Insight Report. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs.pdf

[64] Connor, S, Mahoney, M. and Lewis, N. (2019) Anticipating a 4th Industrial Revolution and the Futures of Learning: A discussion paper for Wolverhampton Learning City Region. Education Observatory: University of Wolverhampton.

[65] Wolverhampton Learning City Region is part of an international movement developed and coordinated by UNESCO. Wolverhampton's Learning City Region is constituted by the University of Wolverhampton, the City of Wolverhampton Council and a range of key partners and organisations linked to economic and social development, including Wolverhampton Learning Platform, City of Wolverhampton College, Local Enterprise Partnerships, employers, schools and colleges

[66] Sources: ONS workforce jobs survey for employment shares (2017); PwC estimates using PIAAC data from OECD. High risk of automation is defined as 70% or over based on technical feasibility considerations only. Employee jobs exclude self-employed,

Reflections on the future

In an era of increasing change and impermanence are formal education institutions responsive and flexible enough? When both content and communities are freely available outside the pay walls of such institutions, how will learners respond and how should educational institutions react? Discussion has tended to focus on the role of education and training in a changing labour market. But attention also needs to be paid to the wider role of education in helping people towards fulfilling lives, to develop community wellbeing and to contend with a range of social, political and environmental disruptions.

Given the uncertainty that remains over the impact of a 4th industrial revolution, rather than privilege one future or particular response to the risks and opportunities of a 4th industrial revolution, what is vital is that there is an investment in efforts to surface and develop the diverse visions and networks of learning resources, relations and practices that exist across and beyond the Black Country. Foresight, collaboration and innovation will be required to identify and develop the relevant learning pathways for today and tomorrow. By anticipating the changes on the horizon, there is an opportunity to review and redefine the needs of today's and tomorrow's learners.

Table 1. Projected opportunities and risks of a fourth industrial revolution

Opportunities	Risks
Creation of new knowledge, jobs, products and services. Productivity gains and increasingly bespoke products and responsive services. Improved ergonomics and augmented labour. Abolition of dangerous, repetitive and routine tasks. A connected world, open systems, and increased transparency and accountability. New collaborative and cooperative organisational forms, relations and practices. Possibilities of social emancipation and reductions in social, political and economic inequalities.	Jobless growth with significant levels of job destruction. Emergence of dominant oligopolies and increased concentrations of wealth. Precarious and polarised labour markets. Acute skills shortages in areas of growth and a mismatch between the demand for skills and the supply of education and training. The extension and intensification of monitoring, surveillance and the erosion of privacy. Increased opportunities for cybercrime and disruptive political and economic agents. Digital Taylorism and 'algorithmic' management of behaviour. Policy and regulatory lag, including the weakening of collective action and social protection systems.

Next steps

Michael Jopling and Matthew Johnson

Our intentions in writing this report were to inform stakeholders and interested parties about key education issues in the Black Country by drawing on data and research and to encourage them to use the report as a means of considering the issues and challenges they face. Therefore, we are much more interested in receiving feedback and suggestions about ways forward and other key areas we have not addressed, than concluding at this stage with recommendations for action or change. Such recommendations should be produced in dialogue and collaboration. However, there are four interdependent themes which have emerged from the report that we want to identify as seeming particularly worthy of attention and discussion, although we are aware that there are many others we could have highlighted. These are:

- Collaboration and competition
- Valuing the local
- Realising and reconceptualising aspiration
- Transitions.

Collaboration and cooperation

If you talk to teachers, school and colleage leaders about how they would like their local education system to be organised, they often identify having more opportunities to collaborate and lament the competitive structures and processes that prevent them from doing so. At all levels of education, collaborative approaches to developing colleagues, curricula, learning and teaching are crucial to ensuring that we engage learners, retain educators, and meet the needs of a dynamic and uncertain future. Without closer relationships between business, educational institutions and local government, we are unlikely to succeed in developing the skills needed for such futures. This includes using collaborative approaches and commissioning to incentivise, rather than impede, effective cross-sector and interdiscplinary collaboration in the specific contexts in which we work.

Valuing the local

The Black Country is located in a social and economic context that has varying effects on its residents. This requires us to reject one-size-fits all approaches that ignore the nuances of deprivation and inequality that characterise many communities and develop new approaches to urgent priorities, such as school exclusion or knife crime. Diversity in thought is key to local change and local groups and governing bodies could be redesigned to reflect the communities they serve more effectively in order to ensure that underlying issues are understood and addressed. Child poverty is one of the biggest challenges the Black Country faces. Significant investment could be made in localised child and family support interventions that create opportunities for Black Country parents, particularly lone parents. There is a growing body of evidence that family-oriented approaches, when they draw on and are supported by effective multi-agency partnership, are particularly powerful in overcoming persistent problems in areas such as improving mental health or physical activity.

Realising and reconceptualising aspirations

It is vital that successful work on challenging and realising aspirations among children, young people and their families in the Black Country is shared more widely. Currently, many children and young people lack the confidence and support to attain higher level skills. Addressing this requires input from universities, schools, colleges, and community organisations to break down the barriers which prevent children, young people and adults from continuing to learn and develop. Recent national changes to apprenticeships, which have reduced the availability of lower level, intermediate apprenticeships, have been unhelpful here and could be countered through developing localised apprenticeship pathways, such as the Ladder for the Black Country , which help learners to progress. Similarly, expanding the Black Country's focus on manufacturing, construction and engineering through support for the arts and digital sectors – promoting STEM and STEAM – could also promote creativity and innovation at all levels of the education system.

Transitions

Transition is a persistent problem. This covers transition into primary schools, from primary into secondary, between lower and higher level qualifications, and into FE, HE and lifelong learning. Currently, many schools in the Black Country are failing to combat the disadvantage and adversity that characterise children and young people's lives. Longer term issues mean that it has an over-supply of residents educated to levels 1 and 2 and too few who make the transition to levels 3 and 4. Rather than fear the changes outlined in the discussion of the fourth industrial revolution above, the challenge is to exploit the opportunities for flexible and digital learning to make learning and teaching more accessible locally for the kinds of learners (e.g. lone parents, part-time and older workers) that education systems are currently all too often failing.

The overarching challenge that remains is how to realise these aspirations for change and regional transformation. We welcome feedback, comment and correction on all aspects of this report and in particular on elements that we have failed to address. It is our intention to create opportunities for dialogue between practice, policy and research on the issues we have explored to focus on what it means to learn, teach and be involved in education in the Black Country. Please contact us at educationobservatory@wlv.ac.uk or www.educationobservatory.wlv.ac.uk to get involved.

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