



Widening Access to Grammar Schools – Case Studies

June 2024

Introduction

Since 2017, the Grammar School Heads Association (GSHA) has been working with the Department for Education through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote the widening of access to selective schools for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This MoU was renewed in 2022 for a further five years. Since 2017, the proportion of grammar schools prioritising children qualifying for the Pupil Premium in their Admissions Policies has increased to around 90%. We realise, however, that while amending admission arrangements is a necessary pre-requisite, it will not on its own lead to the change we would like to see.

The challenge is complex and multi-faceted. In some areas of England, children are automatically considered for grammar school admission as part of a wholly selective system, while in other areas work is required to engage with families to encourage them to consider a grammar school even where this might involve travelling some distance.

Across England, the attainment of children qualifying for Pupil Premium at the end of the primary phase of education lags behind that of their non-disadvantaged peers, a trend which was exacerbated by the Covid pandemic. This means that some able disadvantaged children need extra support in order to demonstrate that they have the potential to thrive in a grammar school.

To address this, grammar schools typically engage in outreach activities aimed at disadvantaged pupils in Key Stage 2 – both in person and online – in order to support the attainment of able disadvantaged children. A growing proportion of our schools also accept a lower qualifying score in their admission tests for disadvantaged pupils. As a result of these developments, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils gaining admission to grammar schools across has continued to rise.

In November 2023, GSHA held a national conference for Headteachers and trustees to share some of the excellent work which our member schools are undertaking in this field. There follows a set of case studies based on the presentations made at that conference, along others from schools undertaking innovative work in this field. We hope that this will provide inspiration for other schools looking to develop their practice.

Dr Mark Fenton
Chief Executive, GSHA

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Case Study 1: Reading School

CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

Reading School serves a diverse community and is the third most unequal city, after London and Oxford in terms of wealth in the UK. (Centres for Cities, Gini co-efficient 2017.) Reading School is located in the heart of a diverse community but in 2017 just 3% of our Year 7 cohort was defined as PP. This has since risen to 14% (2023) as a result of our partnership programs, targeted outreach and adjustments made to our entrance test and admissions codes.

Alongside this we have worked as a school to embed a TILT philosophy for students from backgrounds of disadvantage within our school to ensure that we are offering a broad education, developing cultural and social capital and doing all we can to level the playing and leverage opportunity for the benefit of the students facing the greatest barriers in attainment and future opportunities.

STRATEGY

Our strategy as a school has been to broaden our outreach in terms of scope and breadth, whilst retaining its focus in terms of schools and activities. We have also clearly delineated our program with an offer to support specific students to access and sit the entrance test sitting alongside a separate program focussed on opportunities for all students at 8 partner primary schools in specific primary schools either in, or adjacent to LSOA's and IDACI 1-3 postcodes.

The two parts of the program are complementary but separate.

Opportunities offered to students to support their journey to Reading School include:

- Targeted outreach
- Familiarisation
- Summer Camps
- Reduced qualifying score
- Bespoke entrance test through FCSE (Future Stories Community Enterprise)

We have also been really clear that whilst not all students taking part in the above programs will necessarily get a place at our school, the focus on National Curriculum content with our bespoke entrance tests means that no learning is lost, and that all parts of the program represent added value and contribute to augmenting attainment and supporting transition towards secondary settings.

Opportunities offered to students to support personal development and social capital exist beyond the narrative of grammar school participation and stand on their own feet as valuable experiences that reinforce a holistic education.

We have focussed on deep, sustainable partnership with a smaller number of partner primary schools. Crucially, we have sought to develop positive collaborative relationships that have shifted from transactional, characterised by *'would you like to send your brightest students to take part in...'* to transformational *'we would like to work with you to build a character program for the benefit of all your students'*.

The results of this shift and these partnerships have been significant; we are seeing students in some of the most disadvantaged parts of our town take part in characterful programs which offer a range of opportunities, progression from year to year and a narrative of engagement and positive opportunity.

Students will have taken part in mentoring sessions to develop academic aspirations and attainment, enjoyed outdoor adventurous activities developing teamwork and collaboration and contributed to a broad personal development curriculum offering opportunities for personal development.

Our broad offer and partnership work includes but is not limited to the programs detailed below:

- Subject based mentoring
- Science or other curriculum enrichment programs
- Sports programs
- Cultural capital opportunities
- Character education
- Residential
- Overseas visits

Language has been an important lever for use and definitions around disadvantage have supported our focus.

Collectively we have adopted the broadest definitions of disadvantage for students in school, in order to ensure that in addition to targeted support for PP students, students living in IDACI 1-3 postcodes are also identified and benefit from both quality first teaching and other interventions such as free musical instrument hire, subsidised trips and first choice of elective and other activities.

IMPACT

In terms of access to our school our Pupil Premium intake in numbers has risen year on year for the past 5 consecutive years, from 5, to 8, to 11, to 14, to 18 and then 21 students and with 72 students in years 7-11 currently in receipt of the Pupil Premium.

This is a necessary but not sufficient indication of impact. We have also seen a growth in the number of non-PP, IDACI students at the school. Numbers are up from our partner primaries both for applications and successful admissions: aspiration and attainment both need to increase.

Impact will only be clear in the years ahead: in some ways it is the easy part to widen access. We have been glad to see these pupil cohorts grow but there is so much more to do.

Walking the corridors of New College, Oxford, with a student who has no familial history of tertiary education and who goes home to live in a tower block is the greatest of privileges. Working together to define the impact of the education we offer is in and of itself to redefine what success looks like. Great results might be important, but we hope to offer all students the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to society: perhaps even to make the communities in which we live and work better.

Significantly, at the heart of our strategy lies the relationships between our students and those in schools around us.

“With your tutor it’s easier, like they are talking directly to you.” Frankie

“He has a lot better ways, not to be offensive, but not like in the olden days! He knows the way I know because he’s not old!”

“I do look up to him because he’s really smart and he likes what I like.” Ronnie

This is perhaps the greatest impact our program has, fostering connections across divides, building positive relationships and role modelling aspiration and purpose.

Tom Evans, Assistant Headteacher

Pate's Grammar School, Cheltenham

CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

The Shaping Futures Programme is a social mobility initiative that works in partnership with like-minded grammar schools across the country, and their local primary schools, to further equal opportunities.

Socio-economic gaps distinguished between early years learners, in the UK, widens most considerably between the ages of 7 and 14.¹ Subsequently, future educational success is strongly correlated by an individual's level of attainment at the age of 11, highlighting the important of primary-age interventions in reducing attainment gaps and promoting growth mindset.²

Therefore, the aim of Shaping Futures is to nationally widen horizons of opportunity for under-resourced primary students, to raise ambitions and provide the knowledge and skills to support progress toward their future aspirations. We work alongside primary experts to nurture the aspirations of able, underrepresented students, so that they are supported in reaching their full potential; be that within a grammar school or beyond.

The Shaping Futures programme's core purpose is to:

Promote equal opportunities, regardless of socio-economic background, by widening access to Grammar Schools for under-resourced children by providing a unique combination of:

- Additional academic support
- Guidance on the knowledge, skills, and characteristics required to achieve future goals
- Activities to support pupils to develop self-esteem, motivation for learning or self-efficacy
- Opportunities for pupils to encounter new experiences and settings

This is the grass-roots element of our strategy to widen access to Pate's Grammar School and works alongside top-down approaches such as admissions criteria.

Every September local primary schools with the highest levels of FSM are invited to nominate Pupil Premium students, who they feel might be able to access and benefit from the programme. These families are then contacted by Pate's and invited to attend a welcome evening event to tour the school, meet the mentors, receive free KS2 Maths & English resources and learn more about the programme.

Those families who choose to engage in Shaping Futures attend fortnightly sessions after-school at Pate's. During these sessions, students experience a range of:

- Team building and learner skills workshops.
- Co-curricular enrichment run by subject departments to extend the primary students' subject areas and familiarise themselves with secondary level learning.
- KS2 Maths and English support with their Sixth Form mentor, along with some 11plus familiarisation using a free online platform.

The Shaping Futures programme also serves as an opportunity to develop and refine the leadership skills of secondary school students, through the creation of mentorship roles. The Shaping Futures mentor role instils a strong awareness of social responsibility within students, which they carry forward in their future endeavours. Mentors play an important role in encouraging and motivating students on the Shaping Futures programme, by building effective and meaningful relationships through; face-to-face academic interventions, 11+ support, and personal development activities/trips, which is delivered over an extended period.

IMPACT

The impact of Shaping Futures has widened over the years. Collectively, there is now 80 Year 4 and Year 5 students who regularly attend the programme and receive enrichment and support from one of the 170 Sixth Form mentors. Primary students attend from across 18 primary schools, 15 of which are within a 5-mile radius of the school.

Shaping Futures has proven successful in widening access to students across the Gloucestershire Grammar Schools. Predominantly, the numbers of under-resourced students registering and sitting the entrance test has consistently increased over the 3-years that the programme has run. Furthermore, in the first year of inception Pate's Grammar School increased numbers of under-resourced students to 10% of the year group with over half of these students coming through from Shaping Futures. For the 2022-23 Shaping Futures' cohort, 1 in 4 students involved in the programme were successful at gaining a Grammar School place within Gloucestershire.

Along with admission reforms, we hope that Shaping Futures continues to remove barriers and challenge misconceptions about grammar schools, so that more socio-economically disadvantaged students are able to access a Grammar School education.

Bethan Morgan, Assistant Headteacher

Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall (QMGs)

CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

The school applied for a Selective School Expansion Funds (SSEF) grant in 2018 and started to develop primary school links. Prior to 2018, fewer than 10% of the intake qualified for pupil premium and the target was to triple this to 30%. We had some previous connections, but the journey has been about building relationships. Some areas of Walsall rank within the most deprived parts of the UK and we felt that we had a genuine opportunity to change lives.

My personal story of being a first-generation university graduate motivated me, with the chance to offer life-changing opportunities for young people. We were aware that we would need to challenge perceptions of elitism, but the staff and students at the school were motivated to do just that. Many of our alumni speak with passion about how the school was the springboard for their lives and we wanted to share the story.

STRATEGY

In 2018, the school's governors worked to change our admissions arrangements, giving preference (for the first time) to children who qualify for the Pupil Premium, with a minimum qualifying score being established. The SSEF was awarded to us and Queen Mary's High School (QMHS) in November 2018 and we set about delivering the Fair Access Partnership Plan (FAPP).

The first stage of this was to build relationships with local primary schools. Working with QMHS, we split Walsall into geographical clusters and met the headteachers in those areas, to sell the vision. For those schools who wanted to be part of the scheme, we went into the primary schools to present to parents and children and then set up (with the help of the Queen Mary's Foundation) Spring term aspiration sessions in our schools, in order to bring Year 5 children to us. Each school attended two sessions, one at QMGs and one at QMHS. In the first year, we worked with around 15 primary schools and 150 children, but overtime this has grown. We now work with almost 30 schools and over 250 Year 5 children each year.

The aspiration sessions were well received, by schools and children alike. They were an opportunity for the children to meet our staff and students and to, in many cases, experience a secondary school for the first time. They were followed by familiarisation sessions, in the summer term, where parents were invited to bring in their children to learn more about the entrance exam. These have always been well-attended, and we have been able to effectively sign post parents to resources in order to support their children, We have partnered with Frog education in order to give access to their familiarisation portal.

A significant number of the children who have attended our sessions have gone on to register for the entrance exam and have successfully gained entry into the schools. Word of mouth has been very powerful and we have experienced a year-

on-year increase in demand for our work from both parents and primary schools, with more coming on board each cycle. The primary schools have become important advocates to us, and the relationship with them is vital, as they have daily access to the parents. Many of them have done additional work with their pupils and are proud when they successfully gain admission into the schools.

We have also successfully run a broad, mental health based, initiative called 'Change your Mind', involving our sixth formers going into local primary schools to work with young people. This has involved over 30 schools, with over 1500 primary school age children per year being involved.

Our move towards a common entrance exam in the Midlands in 2023 was another positive step forwards, as we have been able to broaden our reach and take advantage of the resources on offer from test provider GL Assessment.

Part of our mission has also been to make sure that we have provision for these children once they come into the school. The cohorts of larger pupil premium numbers have now reached Year 10 and we have tracked them carefully, to make sure that they are achieving academically, whilst also accessing our range of co-curricular activities. We have invested in additional staffing and facilities, whilst also working with the Queen Mary's Foundation to provide additional funding, on top of our pupil premium grant. We are working with families to provide basic supplies and have developed extensive relationships with clubs, charities and other community groups in order to further our aim of being a school for the community of Walsall.

IMPACT

In short, we have achieved our aim of attracting in numbers of pupil premium children, with 30% of our students in Years 7-10 now qualifying. This has met our original aim and we continue to have a large amount of interest from the local community.

We have seen, in our admissions, an increase in intake from the Walsall area and it has been pleasing to see the engagement from families with our support mechanisms in school.

In short, the children who have been part of the scheme and are in our schools are thriving. We feel that our work has developed positive and sustainable relationships with community and that we are making a genuine difference. We are proud of this.

Richard Langton, Headteacher

Colyton Grammar School, Devon

CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

Colyton Grammar School is situated in East Devon and is the only selective school in the area. Over the last eight years, Colyton's widening participation strategy has significantly increased the number of pupil premium recipients at the school on roll, raising the percentage of PP pupils on roll from 3.2% in 2016/17 to 8.2% in 2022/23.

During this period, we have grown ever more conscious that increasing this percentage further is made very difficult by the strikingly low numbers of disadvantaged children in our region attaining highly at Key Stage 2 (E Devon only 1% in this group reached the higher standard). In the South West, fewer children who have experienced disadvantage attain highly in primary school than in any other part of England.

Further examination of DfE data revealed that this is a pattern repeated at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. In the South West, GCSE attainment for high prior attaining disadvantaged children is lower than in all but one English region. Disadvantaged children who do manage to attain highly at GCSE are less likely to progress to higher education than in any other part of the country. In 2021, only two disadvantaged children from Devon went on to study at Oxford or Cambridge (both Colyton pupils).

At the same time, Colyton is consistently one of the top performing schools in the country for both attainment and progress at GCSE, and in terms of A Level outcomes and university progression. While we will continue to redouble our efforts to widen access to the school, we have come to feel we should also use our position as a centre of excellence in the teaching of high attainers to support and develop provision for high attainers in other schools in the region.

The Foundation aims to share Colyton's expertise in supporting high attainers from all backgrounds. Working with leading high tariff universities and multi academy trusts, we want to ensure that under resourced children throughout South West attain highly throughout their school careers, and, consequently, can access the most competitive university courses.

STRATEGY

Universities are required by the Office for Students to raise attainment in schools. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is something they have found challenging in practice. The Colyton Foundation aims to bridge the gap between schools and universities' access and participation plans. It brings together the knowledge and resources of leading universities with Colyton's expertise in supporting high attainers. Drawing on our reach into the region's schools as a Teaching School Hub, we aim to improve outcomes for high attaining pupils in the region's schools.

Schools in the South West, particularly those in rural and coastal areas, face unique challenges. The reality of educational isolation, under resourcing, and myriad competing priorities is that high attainers are not often a priority area for schools. The result: a striking lack of equity for potentially high attaining children from under resourced backgrounds, and the poor outcomes which follow.

The Foundation's approach, therefore, is fundamentally 'school-centred', aiming to work with and through schools to overcome barriers to high attainment. It is what happens day to day in schools that enables children to attain highly. A 'cradle to career' (or perhaps 'playground to PhD'?) philosophy is also central to our model: if university progression for under resourced children is to improve, we need to significantly broaden the 'pipeline' of high attaining disadvantaged children ensuring that support, stretch and challenge is sustained from primary school to university.

With this in mind, we identified three key interventions which we feel will have significant long-term impact in improving provision for high attaining children:

1. Directly supporting under resourced high attainers

In partnership with five leading high tariff universities, we aim to deliver the *Your Future Story Programme*, support 1000 high attaining under resourced pupils from Cornwall, Devon and Somerset to remain on the pathway to high tariff higher education courses over ten years.

The programme will offer a unique, sustained cohort-based model, with children participating from Year 7 to the first year of an undergraduate degree. The programme will include an annual university residential and termly trips to sustain and deepen aspiration. At the same time, however, there will be a strong emphasis on working with participants' schools to ensure they continue to attain highly. Each participant will be supported by a 'Teacher Champion' in their school: a middle or senior leader who will both support programme participants and develop knowledge and leadership of supporting high attaining under resourced pupils through participation in Colyton Foundation CPD (see below), so that the impact of the programme is felt throughout the school.

Through the Foundation's partnerships with the region's major MATs, the programme gives universities the ability to target high impact support towards widening participation target pupils they would otherwise struggle to reach.

2. Developing teacher and school leaders

The Foundation will deliver a suite of CPD programmes aimed at sharing and developing the knowledge and expertise of teachers and leaders in supporting high attainers, particularly those from under resourced backgrounds.

These will include subject specific courses aiming to improve teacher subject knowledge and disciplinary confidence, programmes to support competitive university applications (e.g. Oxbridge & Medics), and a longer leadership course for middle and senior leaders (including *Your Future Story Teacher Champions*).

3. Collaborative school improvement partnerships

The Foundation will also offer direct support to schools and trusts in meeting the needs of high attaining pupils, entering into collaborative improvement partnerships which identify key areas for improvement and offer ongoing support with implementation.

IMPACT

Since the Foundation was established just under a year ago, it has drawn together a collation of universities and multi academy trusts around the *Your Future Story* programme. It has delivered an initial CPD programme to teachers and leaders from 107 schools (both primary and secondary) and has begun school improvement partnerships with four secondary schools.

Our second year of operation will focus on securing full funding for *Your Future Story* and increasing the scale and scope of CPD and school partnership work.

Our aspiration is that the Foundation provides a powerful example of how the expertise of the selective sector can be used to support the wider school system, providing a model for intra-school and intra-sector collaboration and improvement to ensure educational equity and – reflecting the founding philosophy of so many grammar schools – ensuring that background is not a barrier to academic excellence.

Nick Wakeling, Assistant Head

King Edward VI Foundation, Birmingham (incorporating King Edward VI Academy Trust, Birmingham)

CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

The King Edward VI Foundation, with its rare blend of six grammar schools, six comprehensive schools and two independent schools, is deeply committed to widening access to its selective schools. It has worked for many years in partnership with primary schools in Birmingham to make pathways into grammar school visible and attractive to children from all backgrounds. Our twofold approach has seen significant changes to our admissions policies, as well as increasing investment in participation activity and partnerships within our city.

Recently, as part of our vision to be a leader in transforming lives and futures through educational experience and opportunity, the Foundation has developed a new engagement function, designed to facilitate a greater reach within Birmingham and enable more pupils to benefit from the opportunities that Foundation schools offer. The work is focused on counteracting the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their non disadvantaged peers by supporting their access to all our schools.

STRATEGY

The King Edward VI Foundation Strategy 2021-26 is centred around our aspiration to make Birmingham the best place to be educated in the UK. A desire to raise aspirations, widen access and transform lives, regardless of a young person's background, are among the core values that underpin the strategy. Indeed, our work to improve access to our grammar schools is cemented in the following strategic objective, which speaks not only to how we recruit disadvantaged pupils but also support them once they have joined one of our schools:

Access and Impact

A Foundation education should be available to the widest range of learners possible. Disadvantaged learners should receive support to have a meaningful impact on their education. They should benefit from the same opportunities as their peers when they leave the Foundation's schools and achieve similar success.

Our programme to drive accessibility to our grammar schools is also supported by two of the Foundation's other strategic objectives, in order that our work in this area reflects the Foundation's wider approach to education:

Curriculum and Resources

Learners should follow a curriculum which is broad, balanced and diverse for both academic and vocational education and which is supported by excellent resources. At the same time, learners should have the opportunity to access specialist

provision in other Foundation schools. They should access and enjoy a wide-ranging extra-curricular programme.

Educational Partners

The Foundation should partner with the primary, other secondary, alternative provision, further education and higher education sectors and be seen as a national and international, outward-focused model for education. The Foundation should be a hub for collaboration, networking and the sharing of best practice.

While the work of our engagement function is spurred on by the current strategic objectives outlined above, our work to close the grammar school accessibility gap between disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers dates back earlier than this.

In 2017, the Foundation launched its first major educational resource for primary aged pupils as part of its “Opening Doors” programme – a pilot project designed to combat some of the education inequality that exists before the age of 11 in relation to entrance test tuition. The Foundation neither endorses nor encourages tutoring for the entrance test but recognises that children having opportunities to become familiar with content of the type that appears in the test is valuable preparation. Children registering to sit the grammar schools’ entrance test who indicated that they were eligible for the Pupil Premium were therefore given access to an online platform containing such content, supported by a series of in-person familiarisation sessions in schools.

In 2020, the King Edward VI Foundation introduced a new, shared, admissions policy across its six grammar schools. The policy aimed to introduce accessibility for disadvantaged pupils by increasing the percentage of places set aside for children eligible for the Pupil Premium from 20% to at least 25%. Children eligible for Pupil Premium are able to gain entry to our grammar schools with test scores considerably lower than what was required before the introduction of the policy, but still higher than the average point score in order to ensure that they will be able to thrive at a grammar school. The use of catchment areas, which were also introduced in 2020, guarantees these pupils a place at their local grammar school if they achieve the qualifying score. This guarantee has been highly successful in widening access to our grammar schools.

More recently – in 2023 – the Foundation launched a new partnership with Atom Learning, enabling disadvantaged Birmingham primary school children to access cutting-edge digital learning resources, personalised to their ability, as part of their familiarisation with entrance test content.

Enabling Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6 children (who are eligible for the Pupil Premium) to access the Atom Home entrance test familiarisation platform free of charge complements the continuation and expansion of our primary school partnerships work. We are actively engaging with parents and carers in areas where the Foundation does not normally see applications for grammar schools, and work directly with primary schools to deliver collaborative programmes for

Year 5 pupils including workshops, masterclasses, paired reading sessions, enrichment activities, secondary school visits and entrance test familiarisation. This work began in 2022/23 with a pilot primary school, expanding to five primary schools across Birmingham, all located within the catchment areas of a variety of our grammar schools, in 2023/24.

Our grammar schools are also now working towards adopting a Pupil Premium priority for Sixth Form entry.

IMPACT

We are proud that some of our schools are now the most inclusive in the country when it comes to socioeconomic diversity. Our admissions policy, together with our strong partnerships with Birmingham primary schools, has enabled the Foundation to make great strides towards making selective education accessible to pupils from all backgrounds.

Overall, the King Edward VI Foundation consistently offers more than 20% of its grammar school places to Pupil Premium pupils, with some schools able to offer circa 30% of places in some cohorts. We will continue to strive to achieve the 25% Pupil Premium ambition that we have set for all our grammar schools.

Alongside monitoring the number of primary school children who access the support we make available and the percentage of Pupil Premium children who enter our grammar schools, we are also seeking to measure the impact of our primary school partnership activities on a wider set of outcomes relevant to all pupils, not just those who seek to gain entry to a grammar school, including around motivation, self-efficacy, and a love of learning.

Jo Bullock, Director of External Relations
Grace Cousens, Director of Strategic Management