

# Pupil premium strategy statement – Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre

This statement details our school’s use of pupil premium funding to help improve the attainment of our disadvantaged students.

It outlines our pupil premium strategy, how we intend to spend the funding in this academic year and the effect that last year’s spending of pupil premium had within our school.

## School overview

Detail	Data
Number of pupils in school	1532
Proportion (%) of pupil premium eligible pupils	9.8%
Academic year/years that our current pupil premium strategy plan covers ( <b>3-year plans are recommended – you must still publish an updated statement each academic year</b> )	2025/2026-2027/2028
Date this statement was published	December 2025
Date on which it will be reviewed	December 2026
Statement authorised by	Ms L Mathews (Headteacher)
Pupil premium lead	Mrs S Flynn (Assistant Headteacher)
Governor / Trustee lead	Professor E McCrum

## Funding overview

Detail	Amount
Pupil premium funding allocation this academic year	£154 300
Pupil premium funding carried forward from previous years ( <i>enter £0 if not applicable</i> )	£0
<b>Total budget for this academic year</b> <i>If your school is an academy in a trust that pools this funding, state the amount available to your school this academic year</i>	£154 300

# Part A: Pupil premium strategy plan

## Statement of intent

Highdown's vision is to be the school of choice for parents in Reading, a school where for every child success is desirable, demanded and achieved. We are unapologetically ambitious for each and every child and want our students to achieve beyond what they thought possible both in the exam hall and in all aspects of school life. We want them to leave us with a true strength of character to successfully navigate life's hurdles.

Being a Highdowner means joining in, demonstrating our values of aspiration, respect and excellence and it means taking responsibility. We know the transformative value of seven years with us and believe fundamentally in the mobility of education. We are in the business of creating exceptional life chances for every student that walks through our gates.

All staff know and take responsibility for the outcomes of their disadvantaged students and have the highest expectations of these students. The outcomes for every disadvantaged student will be met through:

- Quality first teaching
- Targeted academic support
- Wider Strategies to support participation, attendance, behaviour, and wellbeing

At Highdown we define disadvantage as those students identified to be in receipt of the Pupil Premium funding alongside students whose life circumstances and experiences place them at a significant risk of underachievement. Reasons for this may include: students from low-income families not eligible for Pupil Premium (including uncertain income and risk associated with self or unemployment); students whose families need additional support from external agencies; students experiencing housing or fuel insecurity; students who have experienced bereavement of a primary carer; students who are young carers; students with transport difficulties or with long journeys to school.

## Challenges

This details the key challenges to achievement that we have identified among our disadvantaged students.

Challenge number	Detail of challenge
1	<b>Overall attainment and progress are lower for disadvantaged students than for non-disadvantaged students.</b> From 2022-2024 there was an improving trend in Average Attainment 8 (2022 - 3.5, 2023 - 3.7, 2024 - 3.9). In 2025 the Average Attainment 8 score was 3.3 which is in line with the National Average but is more than a grade lower than their non-disadvantaged peers.
2	<b>Overall disadvantaged students have a lower reading age on entry than non-disadvantaged students.</b> Currently, by the end of KS3 many disadvantaged students do not increase their reading age to a level which enables them to fully access GCSE exam papers.
3	<b>Overall the attendance for all students needs to improve.</b> The attendance for disadvantaged students on average is lower than non-disadvantaged students, particularly at KS4. Our observations and collection of internal and public assessment data indicates that this is having a negative effect upon their progress.
4	<b>Overall disadvantaged students participate less in co-curricular activities at school including trips, visits and lunchtime and after school clubs.</b> Despite the extensive offer of activities currently only 19% of disadvantaged students attend clubs.
5	<b>Overall families of disadvantaged students participate less in the wider school community and the take-up of opportunities to develop their educational understanding is lower.</b> Attendance at Parents' Evening and Information Events is lower for disadvantaged families. In part, this can be due to parental experiences of education.

## Intended outcomes

This explains the outcomes we are aiming for **by the end of our current strategy plan**, and how we will measure whether they have been achieved.

Intended outcome	Success criteria
Improved attainment and progress indicators among disadvantaged students at the end of Key Stage 4	By the end of the current plan in 2027-28 we will be able to show improved KS4 attainment by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a reduction in the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students</li> <li>• a positive overall Progress 8 score for disadvantaged students</li> <li>• attainment will be above national average for disadvantage students</li> <li>• all disadvantaged students achieve a grade 4 or better in English and Maths</li> </ul>

Improved reading comprehension among disadvantaged students across Key Stage 3	By the end of the current plan in 2027-28 we will be able to show improved reading ages by the end of KS3 which will match or exceed biological age.
Improved attendance to school	By the end of the current plan in 2027-28 we will be able to show a sustained improvement in attendance, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attendance for all students will be a minimum of 95% and the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged will be better than national benchmarks</li> <li>• the proportion of persistent absentees and the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students will be in line with national average</li> </ul>
Improve students' participation in extracurricular and enrichment activities	By the end of the current plan in 2027-28 we will be able to show a sustained improvement in co-curricular engagement, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% of disadvantaged students attend an extra-curricular club in year 7, this continues as the students move up the school</li> <li>• the proportion of disadvantaged students who engage with our co-curricular offer matches or improves on the proportion for non-disadvantaged students</li> </ul>
Improve parental engagement with school life	By the end of the current plan in 2027-28 we will be able to show a sustained improvement in parental engagement, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more than 50% of disadvantaged students have a parent attend parents' evenings</li> <li>• parents engage with additional events run by the school to support their child to succeed</li> </ul>

## Activity in this academic year

This details how we intend to spend our pupil premium funding **this academic year** to address the challenges listed above.

### Teaching (for example, CPD, recruitment and retention)

Budgeted cost: £ 50,300

Activity	Evidence that supports this approach	Challenge number(s) addressed
This year: Development of quality first teaching using Steplab to reflect on lessons. This will also allow for the embedding of Highdown's Five Features for Learning.	High quality Learning and Teaching is fundamental to enabling students to reach their potential. Supporting colleagues to evaluate their teaching regularly and to practice refinements using instructional	1, 2, 3

<p>Next steps: Introduce a specific focus on Metacognition linked to Five Features for Learning – The potential impact of metacognition and self-regulation approaches is high (+7 months additional progress). Strategies need to be explicitly taught to support students in evaluating specific aspects of their learning.</p>	<p>coaching creates a climate in which students can excel. <a href="#">‘Addressing educational disadvantage in schools – The Essex Way’ – Edited by Marc Rowland</a> <a href="#">Social Mobility Commission – Against the Odds findings</a> <a href="#">EEF – High Quality Teaching</a> <a href="#">EEF Effective Professional Development</a> <a href="#">EEF – Metacognition and Self-regulation</a></p>	
<p>This year: Embed KS4 study skills programme – students need to be explicitly taught how to organise and manage their learning independently. Students are supported in organising activities into 25-minute study sprints across the week.</p> <p>Next steps: Review and refine current mentor time ‘Learning to Learn’ programme ready for implementation in September 2026</p>	<p><a href="#">EEF – Metacognition and Self-regulation</a> <a href="#">‘Strengthening the student toolbox – study strategies to boost learning’ – Dunlosky et al 2013</a> <a href="#">‘The GCSE Mindset – 40 activities for transforming student commitment, motivation and productivity’ – Steve Oakes and Martin Griffin</a></p>	1, 2, 3
<p>This year: Embed use of knowledge organisers in year 7. Curriculum areas use Multiple Choice Quizzes effectively to identify and close gaps in core knowledge.</p> <p>Next steps: Year 8 and 9 knowledge organisers and MCQs are developed ready for roll out in September 2026. Use KS2 question level analysis to identify gaps and provide targeted intervention to close them.</p>	<p><a href="#">Blog – Multiple Choice Questions and Effective Assessment</a> <a href="#">Knowledge Organiser blog</a></p>	1, 2

## Targeted academic support (for example, tutoring, one-to-one support, structured interventions)

Budgeted cost: £ 54,000

Activity	Evidence that supports this approach	Challenge number(s) addressed
<p>This year: English and Maths teachers to provide small group curriculum enhancement sessions in English and Maths in KS4 as part of student timetables. Students at risk of not achieving a grade 4 in English and Maths will be entered for a functional skills qualification alongside GCSE. Disadvantaged students in year 11 are prioritised for Intervention session.</p> <p>Next steps: End of year 9 GL Assessments to be used to identify gaps in knowledge and targeted intervention provided to close gaps.</p>	<p>Targeted academic support can have a strong positive impact on learning and is an important part of any Pupil Premium strategy. <a href="#">EEF Guide to Pupil Premium – Use of targeted academic support</a></p>	<p>1, 2</p>
<p>This year: Introduce targeted small group intervention for specific students in years 7, 8 and 9 to improve their reading.</p> <p>Next steps: Look to revisit and develop other literacy strategies including development of vocabulary and oracy in line with the recommendations from the Curriculum and Assessment review.</p>	<p>This can have a significant impact on students' attainment. This needs to be planned for the specific needs of the students so they are challenged and supported at the right level. <a href="#">EEF - Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools</a> <a href="#">Sussex Faster Read Project</a></p>	<p>1, 2</p>

## Wider strategies (for example, related to attendance, behaviour, wellbeing)

Budgeted cost: £ 50,000

Activity	Evidence that supports this approach	Challenge number(s) addressed
Additional pastoral staff and Inclusion Officer appointed to build capacity in Pastoral Teams to monitor attendance.	Attendance initiatives are in line with the DfE's guidance. The appointment of an Inclusion Officer has added additional capacity to enable more interventions for EBSA students. <a href="#">Working together to improve school attendance</a> <a href="#">EEF – Supporting School Attendance</a>	3
Investment in making all students feel a member of the school community by supporting with the cost of school uniform, equipment and school trips.	“To be successful, disadvantaged pupils will need to feel like they belong in our schools and in our classrooms” <a href="#">‘Addressing educational disadvantage in schools – The Essex Way’ – Edited by Marc Rowland</a>	1, 3, 4
Continue to run Daily Breakfast Club.	Benefits of running Breakfast Club include: improved punctuality, students being more settled and ready to learn and the social interaction which it affords students. Numbers are currently small, but we are continuing with the club and hope we can expand numbers going forward. <a href="#">EEF – Magic Breakfast Trial</a>	1, 3
<p>This year: Student engagement with co-curricular activities is tracked with a target of 100% of Year 7 disadvantaged students involved in activities. Disadvantaged students are proportionally represented across the different tiers of student leadership.</p> <p>Next steps: Engagement with co-curricular activities continues at 100% in year 8. 100% of year 7 disadvantaged students involved in activities.</p>	Participation in events outside the classroom supports in the development of a student's cultural capital and sense of belonging. Arts participation approaches can have a positive impact on academic outcomes in other areas of the curriculum. <a href="#">EEF – Arts participation</a>	3, 4

<p>This year:</p> <p>Introduction of specific events for parents of disadvantaged students at Highdown and at venues away from school e.g. Yr 7 'understanding your first report' November 2025 at Weller Centre; Study skills evening for yr 10 February 2026; Year 11 next steps evening February 2026.</p> <p>Develop strong relationships with families of disadvantaged students in summer term for year 6 students attending Highdown in year 7. Organise home visits to answer questions and provide additional support where needed.</p> <p>Investigate celebration events for year 7 in summer term using 'Learning without Limits' structure where students present on work and accomplishments they are proud of.</p> <p>Next steps:</p> <p>Investigate events for each year group so parents of disadvantaged students have regular contact with school</p>	<p>Parental engagement has a positive impact on average of 4 months' additional progress. It is crucial to consider how to engage with all parents to avoid widening attainment gaps.</p> <p>Assistant Heads of Achievement are the Pupil Premium champions for their year group and will make regular contact home to advertise school events.</p> <p><a href="#">EEF - Parental Engagement</a></p> <p>'Creating Learning without limits' – Mandy Swan, Alison Peacock, Susan Hart, Mary Jane Drummond.</p>	<p>1, 2, 3, 4, 5</p>
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**Total budgeted cost: £154,300**

## Part B: Review of the previous academic year

### Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils

We have analysed the performance of our school's disadvantaged students during the 2024-25 academic year using Key Stage 4 performance data and our own internal assessments. There is no Progress 8 score for this cohort of students as they did not take KS2 SATs due to the pandemic.

For 2025 outcomes, there were 22 disadvantaged students in Year 11 (just under 10% of the cohort). There is no Progress 8 score, however internal analysis using the information received from Primary Schools indicates that the progress gap has narrowed slightly compared to 2024. The average Attainment 8 score for our disadvantaged students is 3.3 which is in line with the national average of 3.4. A significant number of our disadvantaged students had poor attendance which became a significant barrier to their learning and hindered progress.

2025 was the end of the previous 3-year strategy. The wider strategies to support student engagement and wellbeing have had a positive impact on the students involved (Canine Assisted Wellbeing, The Outdoor Mentor and other alternative provisions). Continuing support for families to provide uniform, equipment and access to school trips supports student belonging as students feel part of the Highdown Community. The specific strategy of using Accelerated Reader to improve Literacy has supported the school message of the importance of reading and there was improved engagement during the allocated fortnightly lesson. However, it did not make a big enough impact on the reading ages of the disadvantaged students who were furthest behind.

## Further information (optional)

At Highdown we take pride in being an inclusive school and seek to continue to embed this culture through whole school CPD with a strong emphasis of the impact effective teaching and learning can have on life chances for all young people. The pupil premium strategy requires continual evaluation to make sure that the strategies we use are having the greatest impact upon our students. As a school, we will continually look for opportunities to collaborate and to develop our practice. Whilst this is a three-year strategy, it will be reviewed at least annually to ensure we are meeting the needs of the students at that time.