



Brighton & Hove City Council disadvantaged strategy consultation

March 2022

PaCC Focus Group

This report is a summary of a focus group on 'disadvantage' that PaCC organized in response to Brighton & Hove City Council 'Better Outcomes, Better Lives Brighton & Hove's Draft Strategy for Tackling Educational Disadvantage September 2022 – September 2026' ([Education Disadvantaged Strategy APX. n 1.pdf \(brighton-hove.gov.uk\)](#)). The consultation looks at ways to 'improve educational attainment for those pupils who are considered 'disadvantaged' so that they are encouraged and supported to achieve their academic potential and will leave school or college with a positive relationship with education'. Findings and recommendations will feed into the Council's consultation.

The focus group took place on Tuesday 8th March 2022 in Moulsecomb Leisure Centre, East Brighton. The focus group was facilitated by Diana Boyd, PaCC Chair, and by Paolo Boldrini, PaCC Engagement Coordinator. The focus group was promoted to parent carers who attend a monthly coffee morning – the Sunflower Support Group – hosted by PaCC and supported by Amaze. 10 parent carers took part.

A) The first part of the focus group looked at what parent carers understand by 'disadvantage'. To start the discussion, we wrote the definitions below on a flipchart:

- 1) Educational disadvantage definition:
'Disadvantaged pupils are defined as: Pupils who have been eligible for Free Schools Meals (FSM) at any point over the last 6 years, Pupils who have been looked after continuously for at least one day in the last year, and pupils who have left care through a formal route such as adoption'

Parents saw disadvantage as:

- Children who get free meals or some other kind of 'free stuff'
- Many parents have to give up employment to look after a SEND child; which can create further disadvantage
- Families who are on low income
- A parent commented that her child has not be able to attend school trips because they were unaffordable and he doesn't receive free meals so can't get reduced rates
- Some parents thought that the definitions are too 'strict' and it would be good to broaden the definition/spectrum. By defining categories of 'disadvantage' the risk is that you will eventually exclude someone who doesn't fit into a category. Disadvantage is anyone who doesn't fit into the majority category, rather than specific categories being 'disadvantaged'.

Therefore, if it non-disadvantaged was a circle, the disadvantaged are those who are outside the circle because the 'mainstream' offer doesn't cater for them. Those on the 'margins'.

2) Brighton & Hove Early Years Strategy (currently being reviewed) definition:

'The agreed definition of those at risk of disadvantage for Brighton & Hove is children who:

- *live in workless families (eligible for free childcare at age two and the early years pupil premium at age three)*
- *live in low-income working families (eligible for free childcare at age two)*
- *have SEND including those in receipt of disability living allowance (DLA) (eligible for free childcare at age two and the disability access fund (DAF) at age three)*
- *are looked after or adopted (eligible for free childcare at age two and the early years pupil premium at age three)*
- *have English as an additional language*
- *are from black and minority ethnic groups*
- *live in vulnerable families, including children: with teenage parents; who suffer neglect; with parents who have poor mental health, learning disabilities, substance misuse, subject to domestic violence ; live in emergency housing and/or with a child in need or child protection plan'*

Parents commented:

- A minoritised ethnic parent didn't think BAME should be included as a disadvantage because not all families are disadvantaged because of their ethnicity. It was suggested that this could be reworded to something like 'disadvantage because of racism' to focus on racism rather than being in a specific group.
- Another parent added that she objected to being called disadvantaged because her child is on FSM "that's offensive"
- Disadvantage shouldn't be seen as only negative like a failure; it could be because of circumstances you can't control. We shouldn't make assumptions
- Use neurodiverse instead of SEND - though another parent pointed out that not all children with SEND are neurodivergent
- Disadvantage should include mental health and anxiety - on the list but could be more explicit
- To add parents with physical disabilities and long-term conditions and parents with non-visible disabilities and mental health issues
- Disadvantaged people shouldn't be seen as "outsiders" or 'on the margins'; if non-disadvantage was a 'circle', the disadvantaged are those who are left outside of the circle. The focus group participants pointed out that what is needed is for everyone to be inside the circle.

What does contribute to disadvantage:

- Lack of opportunities
- Financial barriers
- No social housing available, or housing department not understanding the needs of your child or listening to you
- High rent
- Unaffordable child minding - we can't go out and meet other people because of lack of respite
- Not being listened to

How the current system works:

- Assumptions made by people about others, e.g. not working/on benefits/scroungers.
- Describing people as disadvantage feels very patronising

