

# Improving Education Strategy 2025-2030



City of  
**Stoke-on-Trent**



# STOKE-ON-TRENT IMPROVING EDUCATION STRATEGY

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## Our Vision

We are committed to helping every child succeed, regardless of their background and starting point. Access to quality education from early years to adulthood equips children with essential life skills for a productive and happy future.

The Improving Education Strategy for 2025-2030 outlines our aspirations for young people and our plan to provide the resources they need to excel.

This strategy was developed collaboratively, engaging educational leaders and young people across the city to ensure everyone’s voice was heard. While we've made progress through initiatives like the Priority Education Investment Area and the Education Challenge Board, there is still more to do, together with partners, to achieve the best outcomes for our young people.

As Stoke-on-Trent marks its 100th anniversary, this strategy invites reflection on our city’s impact and encourages ambition for the next century. It details how we can continue working together to secure a bright future for all our children and young people.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Sarah Jane Colclough".

**Councillor Sarah Jane Colclough**  
**Cabinet Member for Children and Family Services**

## Introduction and Context

Our ambition is to create an education system in Stoke-on-Trent that promotes the very highest standards for all children and young people, closes the attainment gap with the rest of the country, and allows every pupil in Stoke-on-Trent to reach their full potential.

This Improving Education Strategy identifies the key actions that are required to create a high support/high challenge culture that gives young people the best chance to succeed and enables leaders, teachers and other education staff, to feel empowered to contribute fully to the improvement journey. This strategy will serve as a central part of the council's evolving Children and Young People's strategy, working collaboratively with other initiatives like Best Start in Life to help every young person in Stoke-on-Trent reach their full potential.

Of course, we need to plan change over a longer period than just five years. A child starting reception this year will hopefully be in our education system for the next 14 years. We would hope that over that period that child and their family will experience many different improvements that build on each other as we accelerate progress. The speed of digital advancement will change fundamentally how education is experienced in the coming years, and we want Stoke-on-Trent to build on its successes in this area and be at the forefront of those developments.

We want to create a culture where mediocrity is never accepted. We don't want any of our schools causing concern or 'stuck' because our children and young people deserve better than that. We want to create a collective culture where we demand the best of each other, including the Council, backed by a clear offer of support. We will also not back away from hard judgements if we consider a change in provider is needed. We want the absolute best providers in Stoke-on-Trent, some of whom are already in the city, so that our young people thrive.

We have worked in partnership with the city's educational leaders in multi academy trusts, our Local Authority maintained schools, early years providers and a range of stakeholders including young people to co-create this strategy. As an education partnership we have used forums, data reviews and consultation to identify the key education priorities and the work and change that is needed to make progress towards meeting each of them. Through the leadership groups such as the CEO Partnership, CEO Futures Forum, Secondary and Colleges Leaders Group SASCAL, the Primary Heads network, Special Schools Heads group, Young Peoples Learning and Skills Board, Early Years Board and the Stoke and Staffordshire Teacher Education Collective (SSTEC) to embed a desired culture of (mutual) high expectations, support and challenge.

We will use the experience and learning from the work and impact of the Priority Education Investment Area initiative and the Education Challenge Board. We will do this by fully engaging with our regional Department of Education (DfE) team and the emerging Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) initiative to

ensure transparency in monitoring of schools' performance and early identification of need for targeted support and intervention. This will allow a strong dialogue about improvement with our Trusts and schools across the city to focus on using the best practice in Stoke-on-Trent to raise standards. There will be a similar approach to improvement through dialogue and, challenge and support for maintained schools as, ultimately, the goal is the same, i.e. securing better outcomes.

Young people in our city have choices to make choices about careers and pathways, and choices about the goals, ambitions and values which will shape their future lives. In 2025, our young people have more choice than ever before, with a variety of vocational, technical, academic, work based, classroom-based, online and hybrid pathways on offer. They also have more career paths to choose from, it may be that many of the young people who are leaving school this year will, over the coming decades, work in industries, jobs and sectors which do not even exist yet. This strategy sets out how we will support young people to make the best choices and to reach their full potential.

The success of the strategy is vital to the delivery of a number of other city-wide priorities including the Stoke-on-Trent Corporate Vision [Our City, Our Wellbeing](#) , Future 100 [Stoke-on-Trent - Shaping our City, Growth for all](#), and Stoke-on-Trent Children, Young People and Families Strategy (2025-30).

## Our City, Our Wellbeing



Our City, Our Wellbeing, encapsulates Stoke-on-Trent City Council's vision and priorities for the next four years to tackle inequality, share wealth and support a better standard of living. It sets out how we will invest in and deliver services that support the city, and places significance on working with communities, other public services, businesses and other agencies to best use Stoke-on-Trent's collective resources.

This Improving Education Strategy particularly speaks to the priorities 6 and 7.

- Fairer- Tackling inequality and improving life chances for everyone.
- Skilled – Providing opportunities for people to improve their skills and education.

## Future 100 Stoke-on-Trent - Shaping our City, Growth for all.

Stoke-on-Trent has been among the fastest-growing local economies in the UK. As the primary city economy and driver of employment and economic growth in Staffordshire and the wider northern West Midlands, Stoke-on-Trent is primed to deliver sustained, rapid growth due to its geographical advantages, strong labour supply and a diverse industrial base. This encompasses strong sectors including both conventional and advanced



manufacturing, digital and CreaTech, creative industries, transport and logistics and healthcare and life sciences. The Future 100 prospectus is based around five missions and sets out a bold set of actions that, together, aim to transform the city's economy and unlock prosperity and opportunity for decades to come. Education will play a part and impact on all the mission, but there will be a specific focus in the Removing Barriers mission with targeted action around:

- Help more children succeed by closing the education gap.
- Support adults to gain higher qualifications, opening up better job opportunities.

Underpinning both will be a target of:

- The attainment gap will have been closed with the national average, with a 2.5 percentage point increase in the number of working-age residents with Level 3 or higher qualifications.
- The [Improving Education Strategy](#), [Adult Skills and Employment Strategy](#) and the [Young People's Learning and Skills Strategy](#) will work together to support the ambition to fulfil this mission.

The Stoke-on-Trent Children, Young People and Families Strategy replaces and builds on the previous Children, Young People and Families Strategy, 'Room to Grow', which was in place from December 2020. The new strategy has been developed in consultation with partners and a wide range of stakeholders, including children and young people. The strategy reflects the current needs, views and priorities of real children and families in Stoke-on-Trent and is relatable and relevant to their lives. Learning and insights from the consultation, and engagement process are captured in the strategy and reflected in the revised priorities and action plan that also ties in with the Families First Partnership Programme.

Key priorities addressed in the strategy include:

- Enhancing partnerships to deliver a unified, citywide strategy that supports family life and empowers local communities.
- Developing more effective ways to engage children and young people, incorporating their insights to shape better local services, approaches, and interventions.
- Aligning with government guidance and best practices by enabling more children to safely stay with or return to their families.
- Expanding high-quality in-house care options for children who require it and improving outcomes for those with care experience.
- Increasing opportunities for disadvantaged children, young people, and families regarding education, health, employment, recreation, and overall quality of life.
- Ensuring more children are prepared for learning by age five and enhancing educational opportunities and results for all ages.
- Creating a comprehensive city plan to promote good mental and emotional health among children.
- Providing every child with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) the best chance to reach their full potential.

Through these city-wide strategies working in synergy with the Improving Education Strategy, the Early Years Strategy, the SEND Strategy, the Young Peoples Learning and Skills Strategy, and the Adult Skills and Employment Strategy we will ensure that our education system prepares all children and young people to become confident and responsible adult citizens. We will equip them with the skills they need for their own future economic prosperity, and that of the city.



The local authority also has a range of statutory duties in respect of ensuring the quality of education and plays a crucial role in the development of the newly created RISE Universal Offer.

Our responsibilities include ensuring transparency in monitoring school performance and early identification of needs for targeted support and intervention.

This involves working closely with the Regions Group in the Department of Education (DfE) and the emerging Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) initiative. The local authority aims to foster a strong dialogue about improvement with Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) to focus on using the best practices in Stoke-on-Trent to raise standards. While there will be a different approach for maintained schools, the ultimate goal remains the same: securing better outcomes for all our young people.

In partnership with our schools, we will build a school system where the highest quality education is delivered in all Stoke-on-Trent schools, and all schools work together in a self-improving, self-sustaining school-to-school support system. Together we will act as the champion of pupils and families, particularly our most vulnerable.



## Early Years Phase

In pre-school education across the city, there are 78 registered childminders, 59 of whom have a current Ofsted rating with 91.5% rated Good or Outstanding.

There are 70 Education and Childcare settings and Preschools of which 59 have an Ofsted rating and all are currently Good or Outstanding.

In total 53.9% of two-year-olds where families are in receipt of additional support are in funded education, which is lower than the West Midlands average (62.4%) and the national average (65.2%). 93.1% of three- and four-year-olds are in free education, this is below the West Midlands average (94.5%) and in line with the national average (93.1%).

There is one maintained Nursery School in Stoke-on-Trent that is ranked Good in all areas at its last inspection in July 2025.

## Primary Phase

There are 71 primary schools. Currently 8 are still maintained with 2 of these in the process of joining a multi academy trust. In terms of Ofsted the percentage of good or better schools is 95.3%. No primary schools are Inadequate.

## **Secondary Phase**

There are 15 secondary schools, 14 are academies and the remaining school is a Free School supported by an Academy Trust. In their last Ofsted inspection, the percentage of good or better schools was 83.3%. 1 high school is currently in measures but is now engaging with RISE support and is making substantial progress.

## **Special Phase**

There are also 5 special schools. Three were judged as Good at their last inspection, one was judged as Inadequate but has since converted to an academy and is part of Multi Academy Trust which has a specialism in special education. A new specialist free school opened in September 2025 with a specialism in SEMH- they are yet to be inspected. There is also an LA maintained, Medical Pupil Referral Unit/Hospital School which was recently judged as Good.

## **Further Education Phase**

There are two Further Education Colleges in the city both Ofsted rated 'Good', Stoke College is a General Further Education College providing a wide range of vocational and technical education across two campuses one in the north of the city and one in the centre. Approximate numbers are around 1400 learners on 16-18 education programmes, 1200 learners on adult learning programmes and around 600 apprentices. The City of Stoke Sixth Form College is a 16-19 Academy and the founding academy of the Potteries Education Trust. They provide academic and vocational programmes for around 1400 16-18 years old, they have a specific expertise in T levels and also offer a range of Higher Education programmes in association with the University of Staffordshire. A small number of mainstreams, faith school and two of our special schools also offer Post 16 programmes, two of the city's 11-18 Catholic high schools and one from Staffordshire, work in partnership to provide a joint Trinity Sixth Form offer.

## **Independent Provision**

This is a growing area of provision in the city; there are currently around thirty settings offering both mainstream independent education along with Special and Alternative Provision settings.



The LA utilises a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) to commission high-quality Alternative Provision (AP), ensuring transparency, consistency, and best value in the procurement process. The DPS enables providers to meet clear entry requirements aligned with statutory guidance and local priorities, while supporting market development and responsiveness to pupil needs. Sitting under the DPS, the LA's AP Quality Assurance Framework provides a structured approach to monitoring, evaluating, and supporting providers, with

a clear focus on safeguarding, curriculum breadth, re-integration pathways, and outcomes for children and young people. This combined approach drives continuous improvement and raises standards across the sector, ensuring all commissioned AP is safe, inclusive, and effective in meeting the needs of learners.

## **Attendance**

Although a slightly improving picture in the last year, as a city we still have improvements to make.

Attendance in primary schools was 94.4% based on 2023/24 academic year. Compared to other data sets, we are 0.2% better than West Midlands, 0.2% better than Statistical Neighbours and 0.1% lower than National figures. We were ranked 89<sup>th</sup> against all LAs nationally for primary attendance.

Attendance in secondary schools was 89.8% based on 2023/24 academic year. Compared to other data sets, we are 1.2% lower than West Midlands, 0.3% lower than Statistical Neighbours and 1.3% lower than National figures. We were ranked 130<sup>th</sup> against all LAs nationally for secondary attendance.

## About our Children and Young people

Stoke-on-Trent has an overall population of 255,378, 24% of whom are aged between 0 – 18 years old. Each year the city provides a school place for around 41,000 children.

Children in Care – As of January 2026 there are currently 1077 children in care, including Young Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers, and they are supported by the city's Virtual School who were highlighted as providing a very high standard of support in the most recent ILACS inspection.

SEN -the official DfE statistics state that 4.9% of school aged population within Stoke-on-Trent have an EHCP. This compares to 5.3% nationally, 4.7% in the West Midlands and 5.3% across our Statistical Neighbours.

Stoke-on-Trent has the 8<sup>th</sup> highest proportion of pupils who have an EHCP compared to all other LAs within our Statistical Neighbour group. Rotherham has the highest proportion within the statistical neighbour group (6.2%) and Doncaster is the lowest LA within the group (4.2%). This data includes total pupils submitted in the January 2025 census by schools and the pupil's SEN status captured in the census return.

Whilst the majority of residents in Stoke-on-Trent are predominately White/British, there are other diverse cultures in Stoke-on-Trent who have a BAME or Eastern European background and the city and our schools are becoming more diverse, over a quarter of the school population have English as their second language, and in a number of our schools over 50 spoken languages have been recorded.

There are some areas of deprivation where most children will be living in low-income families and the City Councils' approach to partnership working will support children to obtain the education, health and social care support they need to live healthy, happy lives. 39.9% of our school aged children are in receipt of free school meals this is significantly above both the West Midlands figure of 25.7% and the national average of 30.9%.

The percentage of 16–17-year-olds who are participating [RPA – Raising the Participation Age] in education or training has increased over recent months. We are performing 0.1% worse than West Midlands and 0.4% better than the national figures. We are currently ranked 79<sup>th</sup> against all LAs nationally.

Since September 2016, local authorities have been compared on the combined NEET and Not Known measures. As of January 2026, for this combined figure we are performing 2.3% better than the West Midlands and 4.4% better than national but are still 2.5% behind our statistical neighbour's average. For in-learning we are ahead of West Midlands and national figures. This is a much-improved picture. In 2023 our September Guarantee was 33% following a restructure and the DfE added a caveat to cover this data. However, Stoke's September Guarantee 2024 improved to 92.6% of young people receiving a suitable offer compared with 95% in West Midlands and 94.6% nationally. There is nevertheless still much work to do particularly with care leavers and young people with SEND.

## Where we start – Current Education Outcomes

While the quality of education in Stoke-on-Trent has marginally improved over the last few years, at the end of all the main key stages, pupils achieve lower standards than the national average or the average across the 14 West Midlands local authorities.

The gap starts in the early years and the gap that exists at the Early Years Foundation Stage

(EYFS) does not close. The same goes for the inequality gap. 65% of pupils achieved a Good Level of Development at the end of the Foundation Stage in 2025 compared to the West Midlands average of 67% and 68% in England.

For this measure, we were ranked 135th out of all 152 local authorities in England and 15<sup>th</sup> out of 15 Local authorities in the West Midlands. We as well as other LAs, have been tasked by the Government to improve GLD, in our case to 72% by 2026 and 75% by 2027.

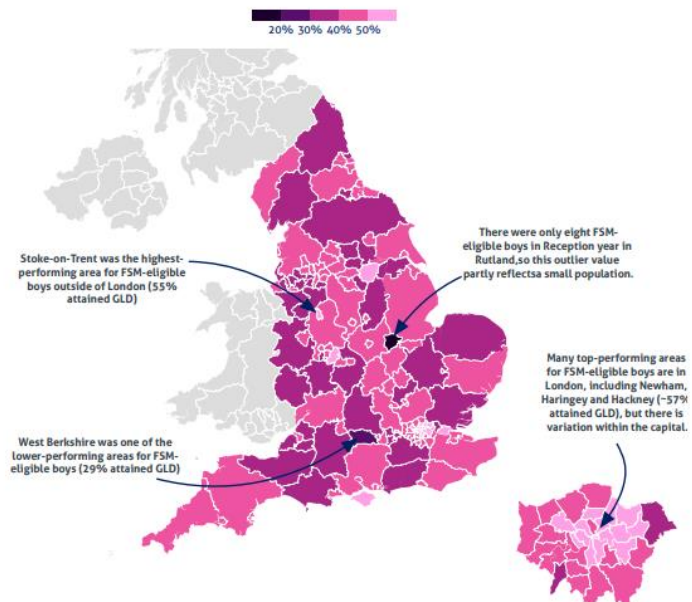
The recent Institute for Government report identified Stoke-on-Trent as the highest-performing area for FSM-eligible boys outside London.

The gap in phonics at Key Stage 1 has been closing, particularly for pupils from a disadvantaged background. There has been significant work done around improvements that stem from poor speech and language development in the early years.

In Key Stage 2 we are seeing some consistent improvement, and the gap is being narrowed but there is still much further work to do.

In secondary school we claw back a little of the gap. The Attainment 8 score is a measure of the grades achieved by pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 across a suite of eight subjects. The average score achieved by our Year 11 pupils is (provisionally) 39.8 and whilst this is showing a three-year trend of improvement it is significantly lower than a national score of 46.3 and a West Midlands score of 44.5.

The real challenge remains around attainment in GCSE maths and English.



Source: Institute for Government analysis of DfE, 'Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results', 2023-24. Map data: © Crown copyright and database right 2020. Notes: A 'good level of development' is defined as performing at the expected level in 12 specified Early Learning Goals.

*Free School meal-eligible boys attaining a good level of development at Early Years Foundation Stage, 2023-24.*

Our academic outcomes at KS5 continue to improve slightly but remain weak; particularly for the highest grades with just 10% of the cohort achieving AAB or equivalent against 21.3% nationally. The Average Point Score achieved by students in their best three subjects in 2019 was 30.14 compared to 33.96 nationally and 32.22 in the West Midlands. This ranks us 118<sup>th</sup> in England and 12<sup>th</sup> in the region.

74% of nineteen-year-olds have achieved at least one Level 2 qualification compared to 81.8% nationally and 89.9% in the region. This ranks Stoke-on-Trent 143<sup>rd</sup> in England and 14<sup>th</sup> in the West Midlands.

In other key measures, Stoke-on-Trent is ranked 101<sup>st</sup> for Primary Attendance nationally and 12<sup>th</sup> in the region with Secondary attendance ranked 114<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. The local authority is ranked 142<sup>nd</sup> in England for fixed term exclusions and 14<sup>th</sup> in the West Midlands. For Permanent Exclusions it is 100<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>



With the exception of the early years, we do not serve children with special needs as well as we should. We have one of the highest proportions of the children in country on Education, Health and Care Plans but the evidence is that much of this planning is not as meaningful as it should be, often with poor clarity of target

outcomes, lack of timely review and a lack of consistent engagement with families. Outcomes for pupils receiving SEN Support in our mainstream schools are also low. The sponsorship of schools remains fragmented with many single academies and a small remaining number of Local Authority maintained schools. While every case must be considered in its merits, there is a real question as to whether these schools and indeed some of the very small academy groups would benefit from the economies of scale and scope that come from being a larger and successful academy chain. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill anticipated for Spring 2026 aims to clarify the Government's stance on academisation and this will be taken into consideration for our future strategy towards academisation.

## **Where we want to be - our goals**

At the end of this strategy period, i.e. by December 2030 our aim is:

- As a city we will work together so that all early years, primary, secondary and FE settings will be rated highly by Ofsted, representing the best outcomes through the inspection framework in place through the report cards. ‘.
- Our early years workforce including childcare providers will be confident about and trained in their role in supporting starting reception. We continue to need to work in partnership around the early development of speech and language. We rely heavily on the legacy of the ‘Stoke Speaks Out’ programme and will build on that legacy to support early years development through our Best Start in Life ambitions.
- All primary schools will be actively supporting early years development.
- All eligible children will be able to take up their entitlement to funded early years offers in a flexible manner which suits the needs of both the family and the child.
- We will have closed the gap by at least half to the rest of the country with respect to ‘ready for school reception’ percentages and attain the Good Level of Development targets of 75% by 2028.
- Our Key Stage 2 measures for reading, writing and maths will no longer be the lowest in the West Midlands.
- We will have moved into the top 100 authorities for both attainment 8 and over 65% of our young people leave their education journey with a good pass in their core GCSE subjects.
- At KS5, the number of pupils achieving high grades will have grown by 50% to 15% of the cohort.
- We will be renowned nationally for our ambition and progress on specialist digital education and skills pathways.
- Children with SEND will be supported to access a provision which meets their needs and enables them to access the curriculum as fully as possible, with a significant reduction in the number of children being educated outside the city. Young people were very clear during the consultation period that they want equity in education and all our children should be in our city schools with the right support in place. There will always be some young people who really need specialist provision however we really want to drive inclusion across our city so that young people have a strong sense of belonging in our city with strong networks and peer groups to enable them to thrive.
- All schools will feel supported by the local authority and partner agencies in dealing with social, emotional and behavioural issues, and we will have seen a 50% reduction from 2024 numbers in permanent exclusion in Stoke-on-Trent schools.

# The Key Improvement Priorities



## Learning Ready - Reception year

Ensure all our children are Learning Ready for the start of their education journey. Ensuring Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) childcare sufficiency. The majority of children meet School Ready Steady Learn expectations. Work towards the 72% Good Level of Development (GLD) target. Embedding and alignment of Family Hub support for every school and Private, Voluntary and Independent pre-school settings.

**Proposed Target** - Stoke-on-Trent meets the Government set GLD target of 72.9%



## Improving Attendance

Reduce Persistent Absence in all education settings to match national benchmarks. Developing a city-wide Attendance Strategy. Sharing good practice in attendance support. Attendance working group – feed into all Education leader groups.

**Proposed target** - attendance level in Stoke-on-Trent is in line with relevant national benchmarks.



## Improving Key Stage 4 attainment

Develop expertise in higher level Key Stage 3 skills in English and Maths. Maximise the available English and Maths Hub support. Utilise exam board opportunities to support city schools. Sharing good practice particularly from Post 16 providers. Celebrate as a city, the National Year of Reading 2026.

**Proposed Target** - 10% improvement in the number of young people achieving a standard pass in both english and maths GCSE.



## Mainstream Inclusion

A balanced vision that the best progress happens in mainstream settings/ when required all our children can access the best education setting that best meets their need.

LA availability for schools to purchase 'Top Up' places for those at risk of Permanent Exclusions (PEX). Develop a continuum of Alternative Provision.

Alternative Providers will be on the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) and any subsequent framework is open to regular Quality Assurance and Value For Money audit.

Cluster model to support SEN needs with 4 localities, pilot in Central Hub Cluster.

Understand and address the reasons for Elective Home Education (EHE) where these are not in the best interests of the child.

**Proposed Targets** - The % of young people with EHCP and SEN needs in mainstream settings is in line with national benchmarks, the rate for suspensions and exclusions in Stoke-on-trent is in line with national benchmarks.



## Other areas of focus

- Transitions/continuity Key Stage 4 to Key Stage 5 progression.
- Access to quality Information Advice and Guidance (AIG)/careers and progression pathways (climbing frame). Gatsby Benchmark returns: providing a robust measure of schools' progress against the national standards for careers guidance.
- Strengthening commitments to careers entitlement and work experience: To further align with national priorities and the latest research.
- The scoping and consideration of introducing a Stoke Baccalaureate – developing new 14-19 Curriculum gateways that better serves learners and the needs of the city.
- Championing the importance of quality science in the Stoke-on-Trent curriculum.

## **How we will get there – Our approach for action**

### **Set ourselves ambitious targets.**

We aim to achieve continual annual improvement so that by 2030, our academic results will compare well with regional, statistical, and national standards.

### **Early years**

With support from the developing Family Hubs and Family First Partnership Programme, the continued championing of the pilot Thrive at Five programme approach and our ambitious Best Start in Life programme we will establish a true consistent and comprehensive model of school readiness and early years development that covers maternal mental health, positive parental attachment, speech and language, good physical health development and support our youngest children to achieve a Good Level of Development in the Reception year.

### **Tackling disadvantage and promoting inclusion**

We will ensure there is particular focus on reducing the achievement gap for disadvantaged pupils, Children in Care, care leavers and those with special educational needs, including a complete overhaul of our Virtual School, a refreshed provision map for SEND with much greater focus on role of mainstream schools, and scrutiny of the effective use of pupil premiums. We will ensure as many young people as possible remain in mainstream education by encouraging the development of a broad curriculum that encourages practical, vocational subjects and different learning styles. At the same time there will be a universal offer of school, local authority and community-based alternative provision, in the city, to reduce the levels of exclusions and ensure that early help is available to young people and their families. This will build on the success of the Opportunity Area Behaviour and Attendance project.

### **Inclusive Gateways**

As part of our Young People's Learning and Skills strategy that sits in parallel to this strategy and the Futures Forum 'My Future Pathway' we will increase the opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to secure opportunities that expand their horizons, including intensive coaching, business mentoring, work placements etc.

### **The right providers**

We will support our remaining LA schools that want to convert to academy status. We will work with the DFE Regional Director to ensure that any choice of academy sponsor or free school provider meets the very highest standards based on clear track record of success. We will not settle for less. We will ensure there is excellence within our maintained schools and act to address underperformance where school leadership lacks the skills or capacity to do so.

## Positive destinations

We will ensure that every young person leaves school with a clear destination into effective and aspirational further education, employment or apprenticeship. As part of the Young People's Learning and Skills Strategy we continue to work with DfE and the Regional Director to increase choice and quality of provision. We will embrace the opportunity of the new T-levels, especially considering the early success of these programmes in the city and ensure that there is choice and quality of provision in the city. The new 14-18 Gateway curriculum My Future will develop a unified approach across schools, offering an agreed set of linked Key Stage 4 subjects, related career paths, and connections to existing college and training provider programs. This will be featured on our new city e-prospectus, Stoke Futures. - [Stoke Futures - Your Next Step, Your Future.](#)

## Expanding the Post-16 Offer

More broadly, there is a clear need to expand the range of post-16 opportunities available to young people in the city. This includes developing a wider variety of specialist pathways that cater to diverse interests, skills, and future career aspirations. By working in close partnership with our local FE colleges, school sixth forms, and high schools, we will support a comprehensive array of options that enable students to pursue both vocational and technical routes. Strengthening collaboration with local businesses will also be a priority to broaden the apprenticeship offer and create more high-quality work experience opportunities. These efforts will ensure that all young people can access pathways that are relevant, aspirational, and aligned with the evolving needs of the local economy.

We will continue to build on the existing partnership between our FE colleges, school sixth forms and High schools supporting a variety of pathways into vocational and technical routes. We will work closely with our businesses to expand the apprenticeship offer, as well as a broader offer of quality work experience opportunities and make the most of the emerging Youth Guarantee and Getting Britain Back to work programmes.

Actionable intelligence: We will provide robust performance data and position statements on our schools, calibrated with the DfE Regions group's intelligence, to provide a single mirror for school leadership. We will increasingly use data to provide predictive analytics to show schools what their future trajectories are likely to look like without specific interventions and based on the best available evidence, what difference those interventions could make, if properly applied. We will forge a close working relationship with the Education Endowment Fund, Staffordshire Research school and Golden Thread Teaching Hub putting ourselves forward as a testbed for new improvement methodologies.

Network model: Working with the Regions Group in DfE and RISE advisors we will signpost and broker school-to-school support for teaching and leadership. Some of this will come from within the Stoke-on-Trent family of schools by creating centres of excellence for key curriculum areas and learning approaches. We will also deliberately

seek to draw into the city the offer of the best providers elsewhere in the West Midlands and beyond. We will seek to develop a close relationship with our nearest research schools, namely the Aspirer and Staffordshire Research Schools. We will also make best use of our Teaching School hubs in Stoke-on-Trent and the surrounding areas. School-to-school support will include a focus on effective leadership approaches across schools supported by a programme to identify and nurture future leaders.

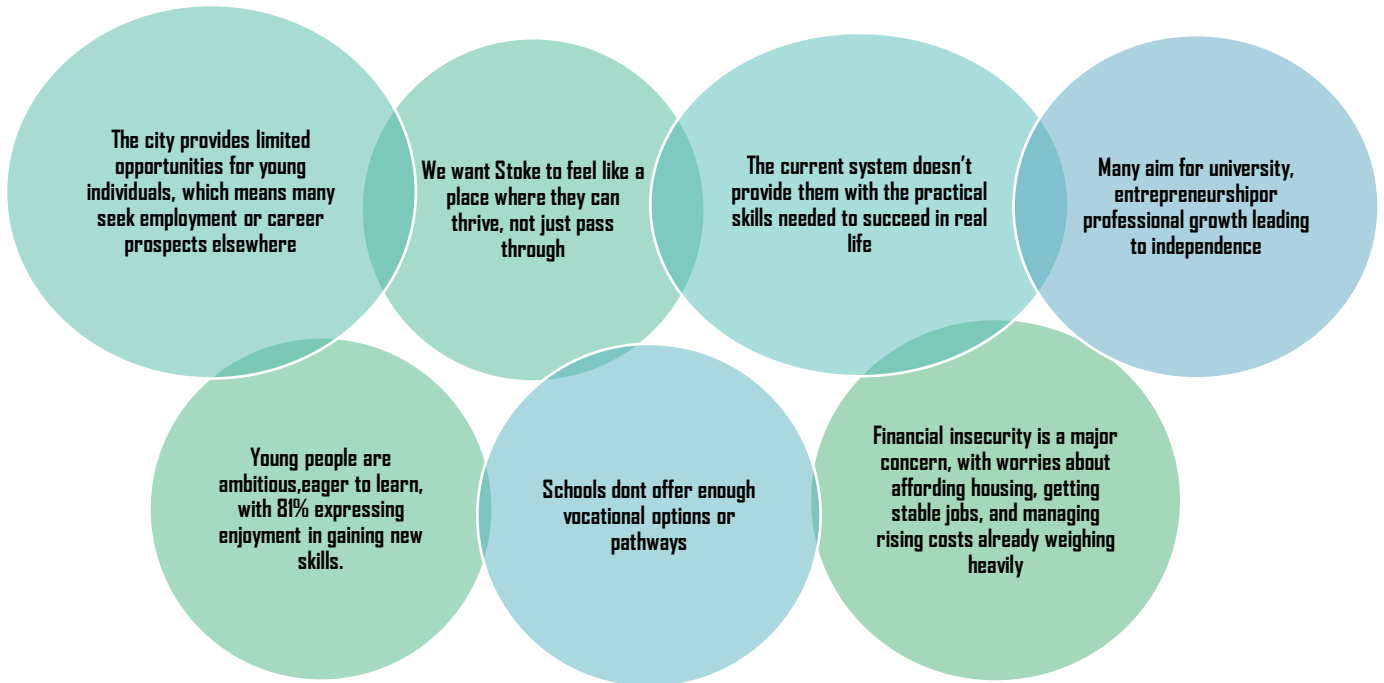
## **The voice of our young people**

In 2024, YMCA North Staffordshire partnered with University of Staffordshire and Keele University (Keele Institute for Social Inclusion) to explore young peoples lived experiences, aspirations, and concerns regarding their future and the city they call home. The [report](#) aimed to centre young voices in conversations about policy, planning, and community development, providing a platform for young people to express what matters to them. As part of the development of this strategy, we have also engaged with schools' councils across the city to seek the thoughts of young people about what they would hope to experience in their education journey.

Key points raised by young people included:

- Stoke-on-Trent is seen as friendly and community-oriented, but many feel judged and excluded in public spaces.
- Urban areas embrace cultural diversity more than rural ones, leading to varied experiences of inclusion. o Limited work, training, and creative opportunities prompt many to consider leaving the city.
- Education is often criticized for lacking real-life preparation and flexibility. o Support from educators varies widely, heavily depending on individual staff engagement.
- Life skills education is insufficient; schools tend to prioritize academics over practical adult responsibilities.

## How Do Young People see their future in the city?



*"You leave school and you're not ready for anything—no one tells you how to do life stuff."*

## How we will get there – what we need

Stoke-on-Trent cannot achieve these ambitions alone. The gap is too great, the city's capacity and capability insufficient for such a leap. We will use the emerging RISE programme to strengthen our strong education partnerships, those school eligible will benefit from the additional resources and support the RISE advisors will facilitate but we are acutely aware that additional funding and capacity from both the city and central government is severely limited and we must strive to make better use of the best practice emerging from our own settings and staff.

1. A strong focus on early years development, and particularly speech and language at all age-groups. We will continue to work with and support all early year's providers; we have good but into our joint training and projects – there needs to be a particular focus on the early development of boys in order to help us meet the new government set GLD target.
2. We will focus on enhancing teaching practices and supporting professional development for leaders at every level. This effort will be carried out through our partnerships with teaching and subject hubs, alongside the diverse expertise and resources offered by our Trusts and schools.
3. A systematic approach to dealing with failing governance and leadership, ensuring all schools have trusted sponsors and strong governance.
4. Utilise the RISE intervention that will bring some of the best MATs and other support into the work with our small number of under-performing schools. Through our strong city-wide leadership and subject networks, we would hope to cascade the best practice approaches these external partners bring through all our schools where it would bring benefit and impact.
5. Activities to improve outcomes for all young people, including those groups often at risk of under-performance, particularly a focus on pulling through able and gifted children from these groups. There is also a clear need to support young people leaving care and those with SEN needs as they transition onto further education, training and employment.
6. Strengthening of the 14-19 offer, including vocational pathways, with an explicit equal recognition of the value of these pathways.
7. A dedicated presence in Stoke-on-Trent to support the delivery of the required improvements over the next 3-4-year period.

## Stronger Together



The city celebrated its centenary in 2025. The city's official motto is "Vis Unita Fortior", which translates from Latin as "United Strength is Stronger."

Most Stoke-on-Trent schools now belong to a Multi Academy Trust, but these Trusts alone have only marginally improved educational standards in the city. A more city focused partnership of schools is a powerful vehicle for improving outcomes and by sharing expertise, working collaboratively we will drive

improvements.

There has been a degree of momentum around a more co-operative approach to the city's education with the formation of the Stoke's Futures Forum, a group supported by the Local Authority but led by Trust leaders. This alongside the existing educational leadership groups including Early Years Board and provider network, Primary Heads Network, Stoke Academy School and College Leaders (SASCAL) secondary, special school leaders' group, Post 16 networks and the CEO partnerships.

### A co-produced strategy

The development of this strategy has been guided by a commitment to collaboration, involving educational leaders as well as young people from across the city. By engaging a broad range of stakeholders, we ensured that all voices contributed to shaping the future of education.

As part of this inclusive process, two key Education Forums were convened on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2025 and 7<sup>th</sup> July 2025. These forums brought together education leaders representing all phases and settings within the city. Participants met to review, discuss, and define the priority areas that will drive education improvement in the coming years, ensuring the strategy is both comprehensive and responsive to the needs of our community.

Multiple working groups were assembled to establish priorities, evaluate requirements, delineate actions, and define criteria for success. These priorities have been further reviewed at various education leadership meetings over the past six months, including CEO Partnership and Futures Forum Boards, SASCAL, the Primary Heads Network, and the Young People's Learning and Skills Board.

Targeted consultations were also conducted with young people via School Councils and youth organisations such as Ruff n Ruby Youth Collective and Uth App. The YMCA Youth Survey was referenced, and collaborative efforts took place with Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Careers Hub, Careers Enterprise Company, Port Vale Foundation, and Caudwell Children.

## Development of Better Governance in our schools

As schools gain more independence, new types of governance are emerging and governors are expected to take on greater responsibility. With greater challenges, governing bodies must strengthen their capacity for strategic leadership and enhance their ability to challenge and support effectively.

Local authorities have a duty to recruit governors, ensure that information and training is available, support the implementation of Interim Executive Boards with the approval of the Regional Schools Director and agreeing and making Instruments of Governance for all maintained schools.

The Local Authority has also developed a Governance Improvement traded offer; this will initially support schools in receipt of RISE funding, but when capacity allows, becomes a universal offer.

The Improving Education Strategy will support the development of strong and effective school leadership including school governors that can:

- Champion improved outcomes for all children and young people
- Focus on challenging schools to close gaps in attainment and progression and exceed national averages, particularly for vulnerable groups.
- Consider national and local priorities and challenge decisions that could be detrimental to improved educational outcomes.
- Maintain an awareness of the school's local area, community and local priorities.
- Promote Stoke-on-Trent as a place that children are proud of.
- Maintain an understanding of and communicate the council's priorities and developments at governing body meetings.
- Promote the expectation that, to drive school improvement, the core training offered by the LA will be taken up by all governors.
- Provide as part of a wider Universal improvement offer CPD and support around school leadership and governance.

The Local Authority will work with schools, trusts, employees, and the wider community to develop a pool of prospective Local Authority Governors and Interim Executive Board members recruited from a broad professional field with wide ranging skills.

The LA will provide support through forums, training and the development of resources for all our governors to ensure that they can effectively support and challenge schools' Senior.

Leadership Teams and act as a conduit for information between the LA and schools. In addition to the core training programme, offered through an SLA, the local authority will increase its use of bespoke training and signpost where appropriate to meet specific needs of Governing Boards. The School Governor Services Team will promote governance at high profile community events and support all schools in finding suitably skilled governors.

If the LA has concerns regarding any of its maintained schools or their governance, it will initially discuss the issue and support to improve through the Governing Body. They will put regular updates in place, and should the improvements required not be met the LA is responsible for applying to put an Interim Executive Board in place (See DfE 'Schools Causing Concern guidance)

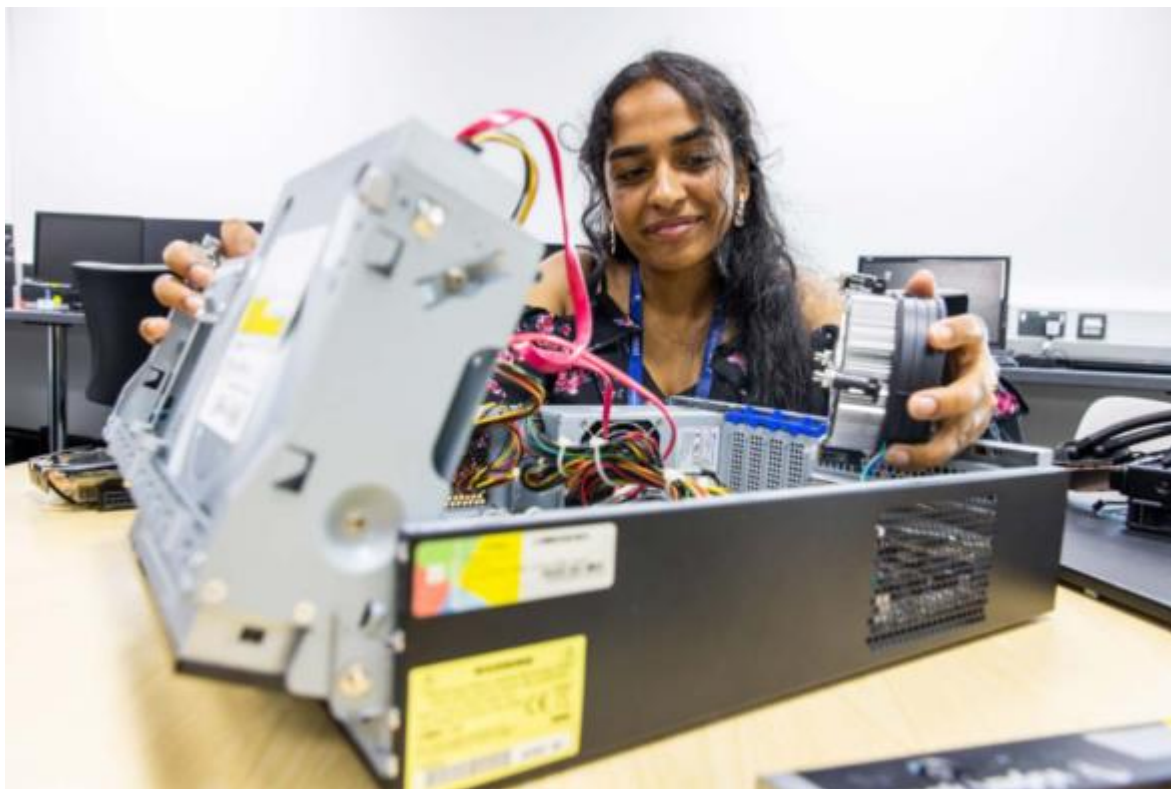
## A Stoke-on-Trent approach to Digital and AI in Education

Our vision is to leverage digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance the educational experience, improve learning outcomes, and prepare students for a rapidly evolving digital world alongside supporting our education workforce in better balancing their work loads.

We aim to work in partnership to enhance learning experiences through the development of AI-driven personalised learning platforms to tailor educational content to individual student needs and learning styles. We would also want to utilise digital tools to create interactive and engaging learning environments that foster collaboration and critical thinking. We have already completed some pilot work with local digital experts Giv Education and have already co created and launched an AI learning platform across our primary schools.

We will also aim to use digital tools and expertise to meet our ambitious targets around inclusion. This would improve the implementation of AI-powered assistive technologies to support students with disabilities and ensure equitable access to educational resources.

We will use our existing forums and leadership partnerships to empower the city's Educators. taking the lead in providing professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their digital literacy and proficiency in using AI tools.



Our digital Implementation Plan will include the following stages.

**1. Current Practice Audit/Review**

Host forums for education settings to share the local authority's approach.

Continue to work in partnership with Giv Education and other partners to create a digital skills climbing for 3-18 years.

**2. Curriculum Integration**

Collaborate with curriculum developers to embed digital literacy and AI concepts into the core curriculum.

**3. Partnerships and Collaborations**

Establish partnerships with technology companies, universities, and research institutions to stay at the forefront of AI advancements. Engage with stakeholders, including parents, students, and community groups such as our Family Hubs, to ensure a holistic approach to digital education.

**4. Continuous Evaluation and Improvement**

We would aim to agree on with schools/trusts and implement a feedback mechanism to continuously assess the effectiveness of digital and AI initiatives across our education settings.

## Proposed Governance of the Strategy and the Education Improvement Partnership Board

A Stoke-on-Trent Education Improvement Partnership Board will replace and build on the work done by the Education Challenge Board reporting jointly to the Council and the Trust/Schools leadership groups. It will work closely with the Education Partnership Network to ensure that we jointly work towards the same aims and maximise the impact of the proposed projects and priorities.

The Board will ensure that school performance is monitored in a rigorous and transparent way by a group of stakeholders from across the education sector. The board will meet four times per year.

The Board is proposed to be attended by:

- Board Chair: An independent nominee.
- One secondary representative (rotational)
- One primary representative (rotational)
- One representative from the Early Years Board
- CEOs representative from Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) with more than 4 schools in the MAT
- Special school representative
- Post 16/Higher Education representative
- Representatives from Teaching School Hub in the city
- Representatives from the LA
- Regional Director DFE or representative
- Education portfolio holder
- Employer and Industry representative
- Staffordshire Training providers representative
- Other external groups as appropriate (e.g. at least one of the city's Local trusted Organisation)

Areas for Oversight by the Board:

- Oversight of the Stoke-on-Trent Improving Education Strategy
- Trends in City wide data
- Methodology for categorising schools
- Trends in Ofsted reports within Stoke-on-Trent
- Progress of improvement work
- Overview of schools causing concern and an agreed support plan
- Understanding and communication of LA and DFE Regional Director's (RD) strategic priorities
- Commissioning of initiatives and project





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**Stoke-on-Trent**