# Campaigners demand public review after Sutton Trust reveals education crisis in east Brighton



Recent research from the Sutton Trust has spotlighted alarming educational disparities affecting pupils in east Brighton, particularly those eligible for free school meals. The findings have stirred the grassroots campaign group, Class Divide, to demand a public review of these persistent inequalities. Their call for action was encapsulated in an open letter to Bella Sankey, the leader of Brighton and Hove City Council, highlighting that the Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven constituency ranks a troubling 527th out of 543 in terms of education outcomes across England.

The statistics are stark. The Sutton Trust reports that merely four per cent of young people in the area attain a degree by the age of 22. When they reach 28, fewer than half are in stable employment. Class Divide’s founder, Carlie Goldsmith, stated, “Children on free school meals growing up in this constituency have some of the worst rates in the whole country on six measures.” These encompass school performance, access to further education, employment status, and earnings post-secondary education. She lamented that only 16 constituencies in England reported even worse outcomes, emphasising that systemic failings, rather than national trends, are at play.

Curtis James, a co-founder of Class Divide who was raised in Whitehawk, echoed this sentiment, recounting how a teacher once told him he wasn’t “university material.” With only one GCSE to his name, James attributes his later success to a rare moment of support from a teacher, underscoring the critical role of belief and opportunity in uplifting students from impoverished backgrounds. His story exemplifies the urgent need for a responsive education system that acknowledges and accommodates the realities faced by working-class children.

The letter from Class Divide frames the situation as a “systemic failure,” questioning why a city known for its vibrant culture and affluence can leave so many youths behind. It specifically calls for an independent review to scrutinise the causes of these poor outcomes, focusing on vital areas such as secondary education, post-16 pathways—including further and higher education and apprenticeships—and the barriers that young people from low-income brackets face.

The council’s recent discussions around school admissions policy have gained traction, particularly after reports emerged showcasing stark educational inequalities within Brighton and Hove. A previous report indicated that only 26% of GCSE students from Moulsecoomb and Bevendean achieved top grades, compared to a commendable 75% in the affluent Withdean ward. These figures underscore a pressing need for targeted interventions to bridge such divides.

In response to these educational gaps, Class Divide has outlined five key demands aimed at enhancing equity within the local education system. These include the creation of yearly reports on school performance in deprived areas and making compulsory training on the experiences of working-class children for educators. The group stresses that addressing these inequalities requires ongoing support for local initiatives and training opportunities—crucial elements for fostering long-term change.

Currently, approximately 275 supporters have signed the open letter, with ambitions to present it to the local council before the month's end. Whether such advocacy will spur actionable changes remains to be seen, yet the demand for immediate attention to educational outcomes for vulnerable young people is clear and urgent.

As Brighton navigates this critical juncture in educational reform, both the council and the community face a challenge to ensure that the city’s wealth and diversity translate into equitable educational opportunities for all its children.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25227853.calls-review-poor-outcomes-east-brighton-pupils/?ref=rss), [[6]](https://www.classdivide.co.uk/news/class-divide-response-to-the-secondary-school-admission-arrangements-in-brighton-and-hove)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25227853.calls-review-poor-outcomes-east-brighton-pupils/?ref=rss), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/21/the-guardian-view-on-school-reform-southern-discomfort-about-the-class-divide), [[6]](https://www.classdivide.co.uk/news/class-divide-response-to-the-secondary-school-admission-arrangements-in-brighton-and-hove)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.classdivide.co.uk/our-5-demands), [[4]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/23357149.new-report-educational-inequalities-schools-brighton-hove/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.brightonandhovenews.org/2025/02/27/with-video-councillors-hold-key-vote-on-secondary-school-admissions-changes/), [[7]](https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/education/campaigners-welcome-proposed-changes-to-brighton-school-admissions-5000516)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.classdivide.co.uk/our-5-demands)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25227853.calls-review-poor-outcomes-east-brighton-pupils/?ref=rss), [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25227853.calls-review-poor-outcomes-east-brighton-pupils/?ref=rss)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25227853.calls-review-poor-outcomes-east-brighton-pupils/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.classdivide.co.uk/our-5-demands> - Class Divide, a grassroots campaign group in Brighton and Hove, has outlined five key demands to address educational inequalities in the area. These include ensuring the Local Authority produces annual reports on school outcomes for children in deprived areas, publishing a plan to reduce educational inequalities, making training on the experiences of working-class children compulsory for school leaders and teachers, reducing school exclusions, and providing ongoing support for local learning and training opportunities. The group aims to create a fairer education system for young people in East Brighton.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/21/the-guardian-view-on-school-reform-southern-discomfort-about-the-class-divide> - An editorial in The Guardian discusses the class divide in education, highlighting how school performance influences property prices and social segregation. It references research by the Sutton Trust, which shows that some comprehensive schools are more socially selective than grammar schools. The article also notes that Brighton and Hove City Council is considering changes to secondary school admissions to promote social integration, a move supported by the campaign group Class Divide. The editorial calls for bold action to address educational inequalities.
4. <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/23357149.new-report-educational-inequalities-schools-brighton-hove/> - A report in The Argus highlights educational inequalities in Brighton and Hove, focusing on disadvantaged pupils in Moulsecoomb and Bevendean, and East Brighton. The report reveals that only 26% of GCSE students in Moulsecoomb and Bevendean achieved top grades, and 37% in East Brighton. In contrast, 75% of students in Withdean ward achieved top grades. The report suggests that targeted projects and professional development are needed to address these disparities and improve educational outcomes in the most deprived areas.
5. <https://www.brightonandhovenews.org/2025/02/27/with-video-councillors-hold-key-vote-on-secondary-school-admissions-changes/> - Brighton and Hove News reports on a council vote approving changes to secondary school admissions policies, with 38 votes in favour and 11 against. The campaign group Class Divide welcomed the decision, viewing it as a significant reform aimed at providing better educational opportunities for families in historically disadvantaged communities. The changes are expected to give families in areas like Whitehawk more choice in secondary schools, addressing longstanding educational inequalities in the city.
6. <https://www.classdivide.co.uk/news/class-divide-response-to-the-secondary-school-admission-arrangements-in-brighton-and-hove> - Class Divide responds to Brighton and Hove City Council's engagement on secondary school admission arrangements. The group advocates for socially and economically integrated schools, supports families in Whitehawk seeking equal choice in the admissions process, and opposes school closures. They express concerns about the council's engagement process, citing issues with accessibility and transparency, and call for a more inclusive approach to decision-making in education.
7. <https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/education/campaigners-welcome-proposed-changes-to-brighton-school-admissions-5000516> - Sussex Express reports that the campaign group Class Divide has welcomed Brighton and Hove City Council's proposals to change secondary school admissions rules. The group, which formed to tackle educational inequality, advocates for giving children from lower-income backgrounds priority for secondary school places. The proposed changes aim to provide more children from areas like Whitehawk with the opportunity to attend schools such as Dorothy Stringer and Varndean, addressing longstanding educational disparities in the city.