# Norwich primary schools face widening attainment gap despite targeted reforms



The state of primary education in Norwich has recently garnered significant attention, with alarming statistics indicating that a substantial number of pupils are trailing behind their peers nationally. Out of 24 primary schools in the area, 18 report that their students are underperforming in reading, writing, and mathematics. The troubling figures reveal that only 51% of children in Norwich achieve expected levels, a stark contrast to the national average of 61%. This stark reality was vividly illustrated during a recent debate in the House of Lords, where Lord Agnew, chairman and founder of the Inspiration Trust, labelled Norwich a "zombie zone for primary education."

Highlighting the disparity, Lord Agnew pointed to specific schools that have excelled. For instance, Clover Hill Primary School stands out with 88% of its pupils meeting key stage two results, while St Francis of Assisi and Charles Darwin Primary follow with 73% and 71%, respectively. Conversely, the findings reveal that Heartsease Primary Academy is struggling significantly, achieving only 20% of students at the expected standard, underscoring the urgent need for reform in the city’s education landscape.

Despite several initiatives aimed at reversing this trend—such as identifying Norwich as a 'primary education investment area’ in 2022 and establishing the Learning Collaborative think tank—improvement remains elusive for many schools. Recent data shows not only a persistence of underachievement but also declining performance in schools previously on the upswing. For instance, Heartsease suffered a dramatic drop from 44% to 20%, while the Free School Norwich fell from 61% to 46%. In contrast, Mile Cross Primary School achieved a remarkable turnaround, increasing its percentage of pupils meeting standards from 37% to 67%, exceeding the national average.

The broader context reflects a national trend highlighted in various reports. The Institute for Government's Performance Tracker indicates a decline in primary school attainment post-pandemic, noting a fall from 65% meeting standards in 2019 to 59% in 2022. This widening attainment gap, particularly affecting disadvantaged pupils, threatens to reverse gains made over the past decade. As the Department for Education sets a bold target for 90% of children to meet expected levels by 2030, the pressure is on local authorities to innovate and effectively utilise available resources.

A spokesperson for Norfolk County Council acknowledged the need for collaborations across schools to spur improvements. The emphasis on improving attendance rates is crucial, as evidence suggests that consistent school attendance significantly boosts educational attainment. Recent statistics indicate a positive trend, with attendance levels improving in Norfolk schools over the past year. However, challenges remain, particularly in attracting qualified teachers to high-deprivation areas, a concern articulated by Lord Agnew during the Lords debate.

As Norwich navigates its educational challenges, the implications of the ongoing situation extend beyond academic statistics. The government's push for new legislation, including the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, aims to bolster support for deprived areas through provisions such as free breakfast clubs and flexible school uniform policies. These initiatives reflect a growing recognition that educational enhancement requires a multi-faceted approach, particularly in communities facing economic hardships.

In conclusion, while the data paints a concerning picture of primary education in Norwich, there are glimpses of hope. With dedicated efforts from local authorities, schools, and communities, the aim to bridge the educational gap may begin to materialise, fostering an environment where every child can thrive.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25194150.norwich-primary-schools-branded-zombie-zone-lord-agnew/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.eveningnews24.co.uk/news/24000465.new-data-shows-best-performing-primary-schools-norfolk/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25194150.norwich-primary-schools-branded-zombie-zone-lord-agnew/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/primary-school-performance-tables-2023), [[5]](https://snobe.co.uk/best-primary-schools/norwich)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/performance-tracker-2023/schools), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/special/education/school_tables/primary/12/html/926.stm)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25194150.norwich-primary-schools-branded-zombie-zone-lord-agnew/?ref=rss), [[3]](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/performance-tracker-2023/schools), [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/primary-school-performance-tables-2024)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25194150.norwich-primary-schools-branded-zombie-zone-lord-agnew/?ref=rss), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/special/education/school_tables/primary/12/html/926.stm)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25194150.norwich-primary-schools-branded-zombie-zone-lord-agnew/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/primary-school-performance-tables-2023), [[3]](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/performance-tracker-2023/schools)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25194150.norwich-primary-schools-branded-zombie-zone-lord-agnew/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/primary-school-performance-tables-2023> - The Department for Education's 2023 Primary School Performance Tables provide detailed statistics on the achievements of pupils in each state-funded primary school in England. The data includes results from key stage 2 tests in reading, grammar, punctuation and spelling, and mathematics, as well as teacher assessment results in writing. Additional school-level data encompasses pupil absence, pupil population, school workforce, and school finance. This comprehensive resource is essential for understanding the performance metrics of primary schools across the country.
3. <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/performance-tracker-2023/schools> - The Institute for Government's 'Performance Tracker 2023: Schools' report analyses the state of primary and secondary education in England. It highlights a significant decline in primary school attainment since the pandemic, with the percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing, and maths dropping from 65% in 2019 to 59% in 2022. The report also discusses the widening attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, reaching levels last seen in 2012, and examines the effectiveness of government interventions aimed at improving educational outcomes.
4. <https://www.eveningnews24.co.uk/news/24000465.new-data-shows-best-performing-primary-schools-norfolk/> - The Norwich Evening News reports on the latest primary school performance data released by the Department for Education. The data reveals that Ashleigh Primary School and Nursery in Wymondham is among the top-performing schools in Norfolk, with 36% of its students achieving higher than expected standards. Beeston Primary School near Swaffham recorded the best score for reading in the county. The report also notes that only four primary schools in Norfolk—Ashleigh Primary School, Great Witchingham, St Francis of Assisi, and Bure Valley School—achieved above-average scores in reading, writing, and maths.
5. <https://snobe.co.uk/best-primary-schools/norwich> - Snobe.co.uk provides a comprehensive list of the best primary schools in Norwich, including Mile Cross Primary School, Catton Grove Primary School, and Charles Darwin Primary School. The platform offers detailed information on each school's Ofsted ratings, overall grades, student-teacher ratios, and reviews. For instance, Mile Cross Primary School is rated as outstanding by Ofsted, with an overall Snobe grade of A and a student-teacher ratio of 18:1. The site serves as a valuable resource for parents and guardians seeking information on primary education options in Norwich.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/special/education/school_tables/primary/12/html/926.stm> - BBC News presents primary school league tables for Norfolk, detailing the performance of various schools based on key stage 2 results. The tables include metrics such as the percentage of pupils meeting expected standards in reading, writing, and maths, as well as progress scores. For example, Banham Community Primary School achieved a progress score of 100.3, indicating strong performance. The league tables provide a comparative overview of primary school performances across Norfolk, aiding parents and educators in assessing educational standards.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/primary-school-performance-tables-2024> - The Department for Education's 2024 Primary School Performance Tables offer updated statistics on the achievements of pupils in each state-funded primary school in England. The data includes results from key stage 2 tests in reading, grammar, punctuation and spelling, and mathematics, as well as teacher assessment results in writing. Additional school-level data encompasses pupil absence, pupil population, school workforce, and school finance. This resource is crucial for understanding the current performance metrics of primary schools across the country.