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[Blog article](#) by Deborah Howe, Senior Policy & Engagement Officer, ECNI

What needs to change to address educational underachievement in Northern Ireland?

The Equality Commission has put forward a number of key recommendations which it believes are needed to effectively tackle the issue of educational underachievement in pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in Northern Ireland.

The recommendations are relevant to the recent [report by the Northern Ireland Audit Office \(NIAO\)](#) (*pdf*) which identified fundamental issues around social deprivation and educational attainment in Northern Ireland over the past 15 years.

According to the NIAO report, 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment', the Department of Education is "unable to demonstrate the effectiveness of its two main funding interventions, accounting for almost £102 million per annum that is provided to address the education attainment of pupils from social disadvantaged backgrounds."

In light of this assessment, the Commission is highlighting [a number of its recommendations](#) (*pdf*) that it believes would help to effectively tackle educational underachievement:

Firstly, **robust equality data should be routinely collected** by schools and analysed by the Department and others to enable evidence-based policy-making and allow the Department to target its resources more effectively.

Secondly, **interventions and budget allocations targeted at identified groups should be monitored** to ensure they improve results for those pupils. By monitoring the targeted spend of this additional resource, the barriers faced by ethnic minority and other groups will be addressed more effectively.

Finally, a system should be put in place for **learning from successful interventions**. This system would disseminate and share best practice with other schools and raise understanding about which interventions can help to raise educational attainment.

We recognise the work that the Department of Education undertakes to improve the lives of children and young people. We believe that implementation of our recommendations is vital to tackling the issue of educational underachievement in

Northern Ireland. We would stress the need to have a wider discussion not just about poverty, but also the barriers and inequalities which are exacerbated by poverty and social exclusion.

The Commission also believes that the Anti-Poverty Strategy currently being developed by the Department for Communities will be more effective if it views poverty through an equality lens.

Tracking the impact of policies on children from each equality group can make public policy more effective and put resources where they are most needed. And this benefits everyone in our society.

You can read more at:

- www.equalityni.org/Education/Policy
- www.equalityni.org/EqualityData
- www.equalityni.org/PfG