Pupil premium strategy statement

This statement details our school's use of pupil premium funding for the 2026 to 2029 academic year to help improve outcomes for our disadvantaged pupils.

It outlines our pupil premium strategy, how we intend to spend the funding in this academic year and the effect that last year's spending of pupil premium had within our school.

School overview

Detail	Data
School name	NCEA Castle School
Number of pupils in school	164
Proportion (%) of pupil premium eligible pupils	48%
Academic year/years that our current pupil premium strategy plan covers **(3-year plans are recommended)**	2026/2027 to 2027/2028 to 2028/2029 (Year 1 of 3-year strategy)
Date this statement was published	Autumn 2026
Date on which it will be reviewed	Autumn 2027
Statement authorised by	Sonia Wilkinson (Acting Headteacher)
Pupil premium lead	Lyndsey Robertson
Governor / Trustee lead	Inclusion Link Governor (Pupil Premium)

Funding overview

Detail	Amount
Pupil premium funding allocation this academic year	£ 115,480
Recovery premium funding allocation this academic year	£0
Pupil premium funding carried forward from previous years (enter £0 if not applicable)	£0
Total budget for this academic year If your school is an academy in a trust that pools this funding, state the amount available to your school this academic year	£115,480

Part A: Pupil premium strategy plan

Statement of intent

At NCEA Castle School, we believe that every pupil, regardless of their individual circumstances or starting point, should have the opportunity to achieve ambitious outcomes, develop independence and participate meaningfully in school life.

With almost half of our pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding, we recognise that disadvantage can interact with complex special educational needs and disabilities to create additional barriers to learning, communication, engagement and wider participation.

Our three-year strategy is underpinned by a commitment to high-quality teaching, informed by robust assessment, specialist expertise and a deep understanding of individual pupils. We recognise that the greatest impact comes when effective teaching, therapeutic recommendations and targeted interventions are consistently translated into everyday classroom practice.

Our approach prioritises:
• High-quality teaching: developing consistent, ambitious and adaptive teaching across all pathways.
• Specialist-informed practice: ensuring occupational therapy and other specialist recommendations translate into meaningful improvements in classroom learning, communication, regulation and independence.
• Targeted support: directing additional provision towards identified barriers and individual educational outcomes.
• Attendance and family partnership: working collaboratively with families and multi-agency partners to understand and address barriers to attendance and participation.
• Equity and enrichment: ensuring disadvantaged pupils have meaningful access to enrichment, community opportunities and experiences that develop confidence, communication and independence.

We are committed to ensuring that Pupil Premium funding makes a demonstrable difference to the educational outcomes and experiences of disadvantaged pupils. Through baseline assessment, regular monitoring and evaluation, and effective governance, we will identify what works, for whom and why. Where provision is not achieving its intended impact, we will adapt, refine or reallocate resources.

Our ambition is not simply to close gaps, but to ensure that disadvantaged pupils at Castle School make strong progress from their individual starting points and have equitable opportunities to thrive.
Our three Strategic strands are; high quality teaching, targeted academic and specialist support and wider strategies. Specialist and therapeutic provision is judged by implementation and pupil outcomes including evidence of transfer into everyday classroom practice, rather than delivery alone. Castle's curriculum drivers are Communication, wellbeing and Independence.

Three - Year direction:
Year 1 - 2026-27: diagnose precisely and strengthen implementation
Year 2 - 2027 - 28 :evaluate, refine and scale approaches according to evidence
Year 3 - 2028 - 29: Sustain effective approaches, demonstrate impact and inform the next strategic cycle.

Challenges

This details the key challenges to achievement that we have identified among our disadvantaged pupils.

Challenge number	Detail of challenge
1	Variable precision and consistency in high-quality adaptive teaching across pathways limit progress for disadvantaged pupils. Specifically, subject-specific pedagogical practice, assessment-informed instruction, curriculum sequencing, modeling, scaffolding, and communication strategies are not yet embedded uniformly across all learning pathways.
2	Disadvantaged pupils with significant communication, sensory, and self-regulation needs encounter barriers to classroom learning due to inconsistent transfer of specialist strategies into daily practice. Without predictable embedding of these specialist approaches across all settings, these pupils experience reduced engagement, heightened dysregulation, and limited opportunities to develop independent learning behaviors.
3	Disadvantaged pupils experience lower overall attendance and significantly higher rates of persistent absence than their non-disadvantaged peers. This disparity stems from complex, unaddressed individual root causes that currently lack a fully coordinated, timely response across school, family, and multi-agency partners, leading to lost learning time and reduced access to the curriculum.
4	While the school maintains a broad enrichment and community offer, leaders currently lack precise tracking to verify equitable participation for disadvantaged pupils or measure its direct impact on key outcomes. Engagement across pathways needs to be monitored, allowing the school's ability to ensure these opportunities systematically build communication skills, emotional wellbeing, confidence, and independence for vulnerable learners.
5	The complex interplay between SEND and disadvantage is not yet evaluated with sufficient precision. Leaders currently lack standardised baseline metrics and outcome tracking to determine 'what works for whom,' limiting evidence-based decisions to scale, adapt, step down, or terminate specific provisions.

Intended outcomes

This explains the outcomes we are aiming for **by the end of our current strategy plan**, and how we will measure whether they have been achieved.

Intended Outcome	How we will measure / evidence	Success Criteria by July 2027
There are sustained and enhanced improvements in the consistency of the	There is no discernible gap between the least effective and most effective teaching and learning.	• All monitoring will include the school's PPG analysis record.

quality of teaching and learning across all year groups at Castle School. Our focus on continuous development and innovative educational strategies has ensured that every student receives the highest quality education, fostering their growth and creating an inclusive and thriving learning environment	Planning is fit for purpose and clearly linked to a sequentially planned curriculum detailing steps to improvements for all cohorts. Evidence of improvements is robust. Staff utilise a range of approaches to ensure all pupils are accessing learning. Specialist interventions, phonics/ EarlyTalk Boost/literacy programmes boost measurable outcomes. Accountability systems and evaluation processes rapidly identify further areas for development. E4L ILP Reviews Pathways & Subject analysis	● Progress from baseline information Data analysis ● Pupil Premium Pupils continue to make strong progress from individual starting points. ● Planning is sequentially mapping next steps to progress ● Source of evidence-Data analysis, monitoring planning x 1 per term ● Staff report pupils are engaging for longer periods of time. ● Baseline measures inform ILP targets. ● ILP analysis x1 a term ● Therapy outcomes are in line or exceed expectations ● School based therapists collate information on the impact of their work and report this to governors. ● Resources support a greater degree of engagement in learning. ● Teacher assessment, checklist recording of improvements in sensory regulation as a result of improved resourcing, weighted vests, sensory stories etc. ● The ILP attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils is maintained within ±2% termly. ● Behaviour incidents per pupil are no higher for disadvantaged pupils than for their peers. ● Any pupil or subgroup showing slower progress is identified and acted upon promptly. ● Learning Walks, Coaching records and pupil progress will demonstrate that

		implementation is evident across all pathways.
Improve consistency of high-quality teaching	Learning walks; curriculum conversations; coaching; planning scrutiny; work/E4L review; staff discussion; implementation checks.	● Agreed high-quality teaching practices are consistently visible across pathways, and changes in planning and teaching can be traced to assessment and identified barriers. ● Any inconsistency identified through quality assurance will have a documented improvement action and follow up review. ● Disadvantaged pupils will sustain strong progress from individual baseline. Leaders will analyse outcomes by pathway and relevant pupil sub groups and record action taken.
Improve access, regulation and engagement	Incident rate per pupil analysis; disengagement/lost-learning data; engagement measures; therapy transfer evidence; case studies.	● For identified pupils, regulation and communication strategies lead to improved engagement and reduced lost learning from individual baselines. Leaders use rates and lost-learning impact rather than raw incident totals alone.
Reduce persistent absence	Weekly/termly attendance analysis; persistent absence tracker; attendance action plans; family contact; multi-agency evidence.	● The PP persistent-absence rate reduces from the Summer 2026 baseline, with individual barriers identified early and action plans reviewed for impact. ● Leaders will review the impact of individual attendance half termly.
Ensure equitable wider opportunities	Participation by group/pathway; pupil voice; family feedback; E4L/ ILP evidence; case studies	● Disadvantaged pupils have equitable access to identified enrichment and community opportunities, with evidence of impact on Communication, Wellbeing and Independence.

		• Leaders will establish participation baselines for disadvantaged pupils across identified enrichment and community opportunities, identified barriers to access and evaluated the contribution of these activities to pupils' outcomes.

Activity in this academic year

This details how we intend to spend our pupil premium (and recovery premium funding) **this academic year** to address the challenges listed above.

The following activities are directly aligned to identified barriers and are evaluated termly through PP vs non-PP data analysis, attendance monitoring, behaviour scrutiny and stakeholder feedback.

Teaching (for example, CPD, recruitment and retention)

Budgeted cost: £57,740

Activity	Evidence that supports this approach	Challenge number(s) addressed
School Occupational Therapist	Therapy – in – the -curriculum approach/ OT expertise where recommendations are translated into classroom practice. Integrated occupational therapy supports sensory regulation, engagement and access to learning. "understanding the needs of individual pupils and weaving specific approaches into everyday, high-quality classroom teaching—being inclusive by design not as an afterthought." — Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Leadership development and external challenges strengthen teaching consistency and monitoring systems. EEF (Guide to Pupil Premium) – ensuring an effective team is in front of every class, and that every teacher is supported to keep improving, is especially important for socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Educational consultancy and external school improvement support (including leadership development and evaluation).		1, 2, 3, 4, 5

	https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/behaviour-interventions	
Coaching, professional development and subject/pathway leadership focused on adaptive teaching, assessment, communication, modelling, scaffolding, checking understanding and self-regulation.	Castle's SDP and SEF identify consistency of adaptive teaching, research-informed practice, sequencing and assessment-informed teaching as priorities. Implementation will be monitored through QA and coaching. Staff develop shared, evidence informed practice; PP pupils experience consistently ambitious and accessible teaching through a bespoke CPD timetable to ensure that all staff have quality training to include Maslow, Vygotsky, Piaget and strategies to develop metacognition. "implementation is critical for turning engagement with research into tangible changes in school practices and pupil outcomes, including, crucially, for pupils experiencing socio-economic disadvantage." — EEF, A School's Guide to Implementation (2024).	1,2,5
Use assessment/ E4L/ILP and termly pupil progress reviews to identify barriers and adapt teaching and curriculum.	Assessment leads to a clear change in teaching rather than simply recording. Disadvantaged pupils remain visible within whole-school analysis. Staff should understand assessment over time i.e assess, plan, do, review cycles..	1, 2, 4, 5

Targeted academic support (for example, tutoring, one-to-one support structured interventions)

Budgeted cost: £56,724

Activity	Evidence that supports this approach	Challenge number(s) addressed
HLTA x 2 Targeted support where an educational outcome is identified.(Hydro & Rebound)	The HLTAs will provide structured, purposeful support which helps pupils develop skills that can transfer into learning: communication, engagement, confidence, physical access, self-regulation, independence and participation. "Targeted deployment, where teaching assistants are trained to deliver an intervention to small groups or individuals has a higher impact" — EEF, Teaching Assistant Interventions, Provision is informed by individual assessment, pupil need and learning priorities. Sessions are planned to develop communication, engagement, physical participation,	1, 2, 4, 5

	independence, social interaction and readiness to learn, as appropriate to each pupil. Entry criteria: Starting points will be identified through ILP analysis, curriculum progress, attendance risk register, incident profile and therapist assessment. Exit criteria: Step-down when targets are sustained across two review points; provision reallocated to the next identified cohort Targeted intervention most effective when structured and responsive to specific need (EEF Small Group Tuition / TA interventions). Small group tuition is most likely to be effective if targeted at pupils' specific needs. EEF Small Group Tuition EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit – Behaviour interventions EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit – Small group tuition EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit – Teaching assistant interventions	
Jigsaw Therapy (Occupational Therapy)	**Entry criteria:** Identified through ILP analysis, curriculum progress, attendance risk register, incident profile and therapist assessment. **Exit criteria:** Step-down when targets are sustained across two review points; provision reallocated to the next identified cohort. Targeted therapeutic input supports regulation and readiness to learn. EEF Behaviour Interventions. By integrating therapy across the school week, pupils' access to learning will be maximised.	1, 2, 4, 5
Music Therapist .	**Entry criteria:** Identified through ILP analysis, curriculum progress, attendance risk register, incident profile and therapist assessment. **Exit criteria:** Step-down when targets are sustained across two review points; provision reallocated to the next identified cohort. Arts participation and structured therapeutic approaches improve wellbeing, communication and engagement. By integrating therapy across the school week, pupils' access to learning is maximised.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Wider strategies (for example, related to attendance, behaviour, wellbeing)

Budgeted cost: £1,016

Activity	Evidence that supports this approach	Challenge number(s) addressed
Parent events and training / Enrichment activities for pupils Review Enrichment Offer and match to curriculum pathways	We believe that Parent enrichment events can strengthen the connection between home and school, helping families and staff work together around the child's learning, development and wellbeing. We aim to; ● Build positive relationships between families and school staff. ● Give parents opportunities to experience activities alongside their children. ● Demonstrate practical ways to support communication, sensory development, play and independence at home. ● Help parents understand their child's learning and celebrate achievements. ● Reduce barriers to participation by offering welcoming, accessible and inclusive opportunities. ● Give families opportunities to share their knowledge of their child and influence school provision. For a special school, this is especially important because parents and carers often have valuable knowledge of their child's communication, sensory preferences, routines and responses. Enrichment events can create opportunities for staff and families to share that knowledge.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Attendance casework and family partnership for pupils at risk of persistent absence. Community Hub/ Workshops where there is a diagnosed barrier that families can help address.	According to the EEF 'The interventions that show promise take a holistic approach in understanding pupils and their specific need, and address the specific barriers to attendance that have been identified'. Strengthening consistent approaches between home and school whilst improving access to support has a positive impact on school attendance. Recent EEF evaluations emphasise that improving attendance relies less on school-wide relational practices, inclusive culture, and strong parental trust.	

Total budgeted cost: £115,480

Each activity is evaluated termly using PP vs non-PP ILP achievement, curriculum progress, attendance, incidents and stakeholder voice. Leaders report costed impact to governors and refine, discontinue or reallocate provision where evidence of value-added impact is limited.

Part B: Review of outcomes in the previous academic year

Pupil premium strategy outcomes

This details the impact that our pupil premium activity had on pupils in the 2025 to 2026 academic year.

Headline impact (strategy trajectory):
ILP gap: 7% (Autumn 2023) - 0% (Autumn 2025) – +2% (Summer 2026)
Attendance (PP): 85% (Autumn 2023) → 89% (Autumn 2025) (gap remains 4%) – 89% (Summer 2026) gap is 1%
Behaviour/Incidents: incidents per pupil equalised (Autumn 2025: 0.02 vs 0.02)
Parent voice (Oct 2025): 100% report their child is happy and feels safe; 100% would recommend the school

During 2025–2026, our Pupil Premium strategy remained central to whole-school improvement, with nearly half of our cohort eligible for Pupil Premium funding. The strategy has focused on securing strong EHCP-aligned outcomes, strengthening high-quality teaching, improving attendance, reducing behavioural disparity and ensuring equitable access to enrichment.

Attainment and ILP Progress

In Autumn 2023, there was a 7% attainment gap in ILP target achievement between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils. Through strengthened therapeutic integration, improved classroom consistency and targeted intervention, this gap has closed.

By Autumn 2025, disadvantaged pupils achieved ILP targets at the same rate as their peers (80% vs 80%). Across Communication, SEMH and Sensory areas, previously significant gaps have been eliminated. In Summer 2025, disadvantaged pupils exceeded non-disadvantaged pupils in overall target achievement.

In Summer 2026, disadvantaged pupils out performed non-disadvantaged pupils (88%/86%)

This demonstrates sustained improvement over the three-year strategy period and confirms that disadvantaged pupils are achieving at least in line with their peers.

Curriculum Progress

Across the final three data cycles of 2024–2025, disadvantaged pupils consistently achieved expected curriculum progress in line with or above non-disadvantaged pupils. Improvements in sequential curriculum mapping, moderation and therapy integration have strengthened consistency across pathways and reduced variability in classroom practice. The curriculum is increasingly coherent across pathways, with assessment and pupil starting points informing

teaching. Summer 2026, curriculum target achievement was 86% overall, with 89% in English and 89% Maths.

Behaviour and Engagement

Behaviour incidents per pupil have reduced significantly across the school. Disadvantaged pupils are no longer disproportionately represented in behavioural risk, and incident rates are now equal across groups.

This reflects embedded therapeutic practice, strengthened regulation approaches and effective targeted HLTA interventions.

Attendance

Attendance for disadvantaged pupils has improved from 85% (Autumn 2023) to 89% (Autumn 2025). While a 4% gap remains, the trajectory is positive, and attendance remains a clear strategic priority for the next phase of the strategy

In the Summer 2026 data review, attendance for disadvantaged pupils was at 89% with non-disadvantaged being at 90.2%. A 1.2% difference remains. Overall attendance is strong, but disadvantaged pupils require continued monitoring.

Parent survey responses indicate that absences are predominantly linked to illness or medical appointments rather than dissatisfaction with school provision. Persistent absence has a 5% gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils and this will be a specific strategic focus on our next Pupil Premium Strategy.

Parental Engagement and Wider Development

Parent survey evidence (October 2025) confirms very high levels of parental confidence. All responding parents reported that their child feels happy and safe at school, and the overwhelming majority would recommend the school to others.

Open-text feedback highlights strong relationships with staff, effective communication and the positive impact of enrichment activities on pupils' confidence and independence.

This stakeholder feedback strongly validates the direction of the strategy.

Overall Evaluation

Overall, the Pupil Premium strategy has demonstrably narrowed attainment gaps, eliminated behavioural disparity and sustained strong curriculum progress for disadvantaged pupils. Attendance is strong overall but the remaining priority is to further reduce the attendance gap in terms of persistent absence. This area will continue to be a priority and we have identified early intervention, family partnerships and multi-agency support as important next steps. A 5.% point gap requires continued diagnostic attendance work focused on root causes and individual barriers. It is evident that the school has strong systems for identifying needs, adapting provision and integrating specialist advice.

The ILP progress gap has not been closed but PP outcomes were 2% points higher on the Summer 2026 measure. Our next challenge is to sustain the strong progress and identify individual/subgroup variation.
The Summer 2026 SEF now provides stronger evidence that disadvantaged pupils continue to make strong progress. The strategic emphasis therefore moves from closing an attainment gap to sustaining equity, addressing persistent absence, strengthening consistent practice and sharpening diagnostic evaluation.

Year 1 (2026 – 2027) Diagnose, Strengthen and implementation. Use Summer 2026 evidence to establish precise baselines; strengthen high quality teaching, sharpen attendance/PA diagnosis, formalise implementation and impact review.
Year 2 (2027 – 2028) Evaluate, refine and scale. Use two years of evidence to identify which approaches have the strongest impact for pupils; adapt or scale provision and strengthen pathway – level evaluation.
Year 3 (2028 – 2029) Sustain, demonstrate and impact. Embed effective approaches, demonstrate sustained outcomes and value for money, and use the evidence to set the next strategic cycle.