



ACCESS
UNIVERSITIES FOR NORTH EAST ENGLAND

A Shortened Version of North East Regional Data Report

Identifying Equality of Opportunity Gaps

Prepared by **IntoUniversity** for Access UNEE- Universities for North East England (formerly NERAP)

January 2026



About this shortened version of the report



This is a shortened version of **Into**University's *North East Regional Data Report – Identifying Equality of Opportunity Gaps*, commissioned by Access UNEE- Universities for North East England, and prepared for inclusion in The Sutton Trust's *University Best Practice Guide*.

Access UNEE (formerly the North East Raising Aspiration Partnership) is a long-standing partnership which provides a distinctive regional model for widening participation. Bringing together the five North East universities to deliver collaborative outreach, robust governance and evaluation, and regional leadership.

This version of the report includes a selection of pages to provide an overview of the report's background and methodology, including the prioritisation approach and the wider data context. It also includes an example of the findings for one Local Authority, Darlington. The full report contains equivalent analysis for all 12 Local Authorities across the North East.

Multiple pages of the original research are displayed as quarters per page in places to condense the full report.

IntoUniversity is currently working on a similar report for Greater Manchester Higher which will be completed at the end of 2026.

If you have any questions or enquiries following your reading of this shortened report, please contact michael.spierin@intouniversity.org.

The **full** report presents key findings from the North East Data Dashboard, a tool designed to identify where there are significant barriers to Higher Education (HE) progression for students aged 14–19. By consolidating key datasets across 12 local authorities, the report provides both a broad overview of the North East and a granular look at where support and intervention is most critical.

Eight core metrics were analysed in the North East Data Dashboard which can be categorised into 3 broad areas:

- **Socio-economic:** Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility, Ever6 FSM rates, Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and ethnicity data.
- **Engagement and progression:** education retention rates and TUNDRA (HE progression) scores.
- **Academic performance:** Attainment 8 and Progress 8.

Using a weighted prioritisation formula, agreed with AccessUNEE, state secondary schools were categorised into three tiers of need: **Tier 1 (High Need)**, **Tier 2 (Moderate Need)**, and **Tier 3 (Lower Need)**.

From the analysis, Newcastle upon Tyne had the highest proportion of Tier 1 schools (57.1%) out of all local authorities in the North East, followed by Darlington (37.5%). Hartlepool was found to have no Tier 3 secondary schools, with the majority being Tier 2 (80%).

Insights from this report and the North East Data Dashboard will be used by AccessUNEE to guide future outreach work and resource allocation to ensure support is directed where it will have the greatest impact on social mobility.

- Background
- Data Context
- School Prioritisation Model Method
- North East wide context
- An example- Local Authority Analysis (Darlington)

Overview:

IntoUniversity was commissioned by Access UNEE to develop a comprehensive regional data report to underpin the strategic planning of the five North East universities: **Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland, and Teesside.**

The aim was to build a granular, regional understanding of the equality of opportunity gaps affecting pupils aged 14–19 in the North East and identify the barriers that hinder progression into Higher Education.

Project objectives:

Socio-Economic Mapping: summarise the key socio-economic factors that affect HE access across the North East.

Identify regional cold spots: Pinpoint specific geographic areas and secondary schools where pupils face the most significant barriers to progression.

Dashboard Development and school prioritisation: Generate a dedicated Data Dashboard covering all 12 local authority areas to provide data driven insights to identify high-need secondary schools.

The summary report and North East Data Dashboard will

- Support Access UNEE to facilitate informed discussions with partners and stakeholders about equality of opportunity challenges within the region.
- enable Access UNEE to make informed, data driven decisions about where to allocate resources and where to target their collaborative outreach and intervention initiatives.

Barriers to Higher Education (HE) are rarely the result of a single factor, but rather a cumulative compounding of disadvantage. This report draws on key data sets and how they intersect to provide a nuanced understanding of local need.

Data has been explored at a regional level, a local authority level and at a school level.

Key datasets that are examined in this report include:

- Higher Education Access Tracker -HEAT (2025)
- Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019 and 2025)
- Free School Meal rates (2025)
- POLAR 4 (2020)
- TUNDRA (2021)
- Performance data: Attainment 8, Progress 8, GCSEs and A-levels attainment (2023)
- Destination Data*: KS4 to KS5, KS5 to Higher Education/Training/Employment (2022)
- School level data: demographic data, deprivation data, performance and progression rates

In addition to external data sets, this report also draws on **Into**University's data mapping tool which brings together data from GOV UK school statistics and Office for National Statistics. This data is overlaid onto the UK map, using specific LSOA/MSOA or local authority boundaries to create a visual picture of the data.

Further details about the different datasets can be found in appendices in the full report.

North East Data Dashboard: school prioritisation model method

The *North East Data Dashboard* draws together the following datasets to categorise the schools across the 12 North East local authority areas into high, medium and low priority for intervention. The following **8 indicators have been combined** with the below weightings to create a **composite need score** which have been used to assign schools to one of the three priority tiers. The model aims to create a consistent, data-led method for identifying secondary schools within each local authority area with the highest need for intervention and support. *These particular data sets and weightings are specific to this report, and would be adapted to suit any future regional reports*

Domain	Indicator	Why it matters	Weighting
Socio-Economic Disadvantage	1 % FSM	Direct measure of deprivation	20%
	2. % EVER6	Sustained disadvantage over the last 6 years	10%
	3. % White (working class)	Focus on white working-class ethnicity* <i>*Studies show a correlation between white working class young people and low attainment outcomes. As there is no data set available to analyse white working class explicitly, for the purposes of this study we have looked at % white and combined it with socio economic indicators to look at this measure in combination with other metrics.</i>	10%
	4. % living in IMD Quintile 1 area	Area-level deprivation	15%
Engagement & Progression Risk	5. % Staying in Education for 2 terms (disadv)	Proxy for post-16 retention; lower % = higher risk	10%
	6. % living in TUNDRA Quintile 1 area	Low HE progression neighbourhoods; higher % = higher risk	15%
Educational Disadvantage	7. Average Attainment 8 (disadv)	Academic attainment for disadv students (absolute number)	10%
	8. Average Progress 8 (disadv)	Pupil progress for disadv students	10%

Why did we choose these indicators?

The 8 indicators were selected as key proxies of disadvantage and deprivation. The measures assess socio-economic disadvantage, place-based deprivation, higher education progression, school performance data and KS4 destination data. The weighting and combining of these datasets helps create an in-depth understanding of need across schools in the North East.

1. **% Free School Meals (FSM)** - IntoUniversity uses FSM as one of our main indicators of need. It is widely reported, and provides recent data on students who are *currently* eligible for FSM. This measure includes those who are eligible but not necessarily accessing FSM.
2. **% EVER6** - students who are eligible for FSM in the past 6 years. This shows more long-term consistent disadvantage.
3. **% White (working class)** - There is a correlation between white working class young people and lower attainment outcomes. Due to a lack of explicit data on % white working class young people we have used % white in combination with the indicators of disadvantage. **It is important to note that % white as a standalone data set is not an indicator of socio-economic disadvantage.**
4. **% living in IMD Quintile 1 area** - a national dataset, used widely in WP research, which looks at 7 different areas of deprivation. IntoUniversity uses IMD as one of the core data sets in our feasibility studies.
5. **% staying in Education for 2 terms (disadv)** - shows how many students facing disadvantage are continuing in their learning/education - how much is the school encouraging continued education?
6. **% living in TUNDRA Quintile 1 area** - how many 18-19 year olds progressing to HE in a specific area. Used instead of POLAR4 as it only includes mainstream state education. Are students surrounded by others who are going to university?
7. **Average Attainment 8 (disadv)** - measure of students average score across their best 8 GCSEs. Indicate if those facing disadvantage are reaching the grades needed for HE.
8. **Average Progress 8 (disadv)** - measure of average student improvement between primary school and end of GCSEs. Indicates if those facing disadvantage are making positive or negative progress compared to expected levels.

The steps below were completed to create a composite need score for each school. This score was then used to categorise each school into tier rankings:

The 8 indicators discussed were first normalised to ensure they all followed the same scale, and then a composite need score was calculated using the specific weightings (shown on slide 6). Each school was then given a tier classification based on the composite need score. Where necessary, schools with missing data were tiered using 5 indicators instead of 8. Refer to 2.0-2.3 in the appendix for more detail on the data method and calculations.

Steps:

1. Standardisation/normalisation

2. Calculation of weighted composite need score

3. Percentile ranking

4. Tier classification:

- **Tier 1, High Need:** Top 25% (percentile value of ≥ 0.75)
- **Tier 2, Moderate Need:** Middle 50% (percentile value of 0.25–0.74)
- **Tier 3, Lower need:** Bottom 25% (percentile value of ≤ 0.24)

5. Calculation to account for missing data

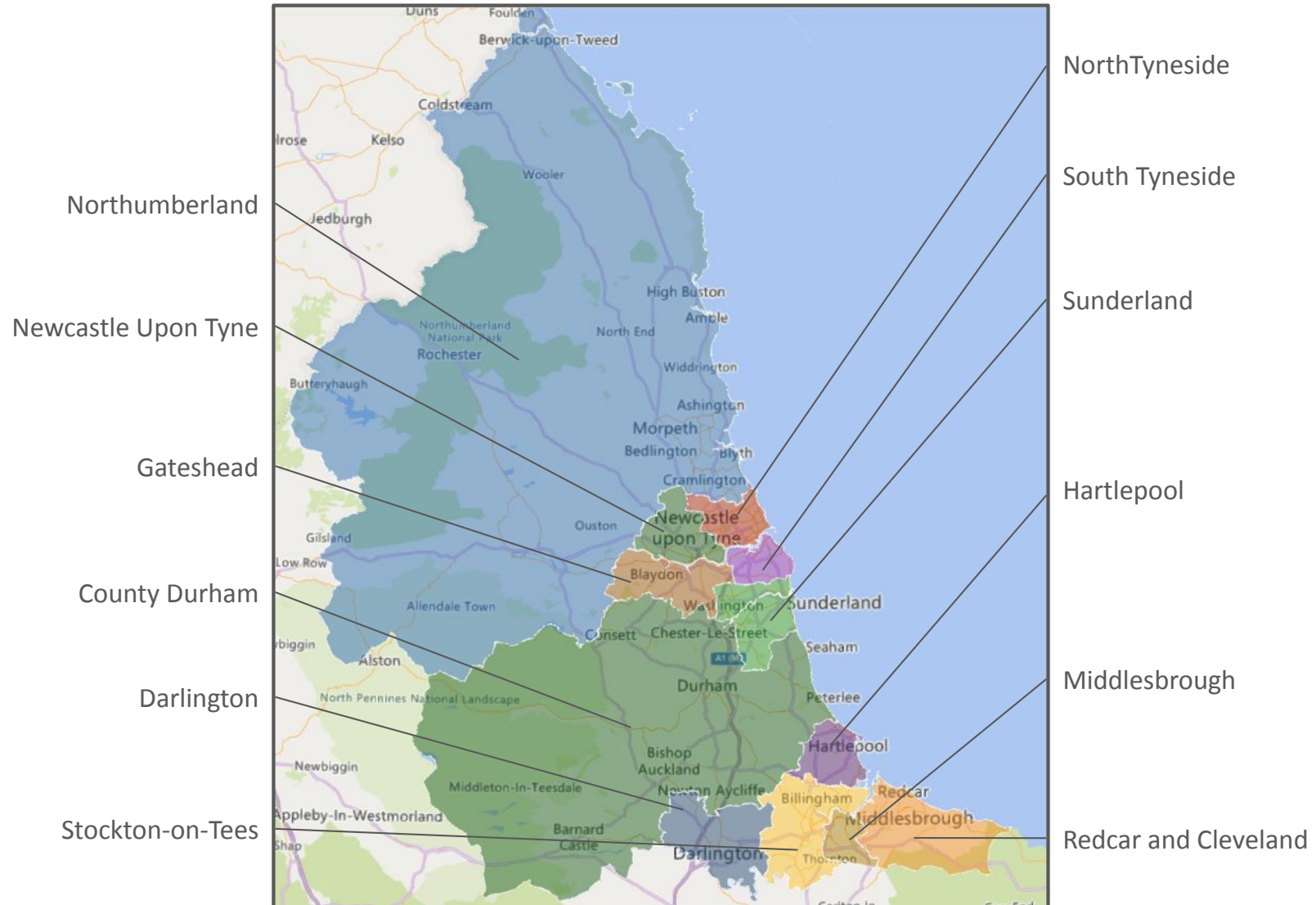
North East wide context



In this section of the report we investigate multiple indicators of socio-economic disadvantage across the North East region and how this compares to the rest of the country.

Datasets and studies on child poverty, unemployment and university progression are analysed. These are used to provide further context about the region. Alongside these, we make reference to the 8 core data sets of this report to demonstrate their indication of socio-economic disadvantage.

Map showing all 12 local authority areas in the North East



Child poverty in the North East



In 2023, **36,500 more young people in working households were growing up in poverty in the North East**, a large increase from 2010. [TUC](#) (June, 2024) says a “toxic combination” of pay stagnation, rising insecure work and cuts to social security have had a “devastating impact on family budgets”.

More than half (52%) of all children in **Middlesbrough and Thornaby East** are growing up in poverty, as well as 43% of all children in Newcastle Central and West. This points to significant deprivation within the region.

Child poverty rates in constituencies across the country are ‘directly and strongly correlated’ with the percentage of children in the area living in families affected by the two-child limit policy in Universal Credit. ([Time for Government to turn pledges into real action for North East children](#)). **Over 70,000 children growing up across the North East region are living in families affected by the ‘two-child limit’ in Universal Credit**. ([North East Child Poverty Commission, April 2025](#)).

89%

of all constituencies in the North East have at least 1 in 4 children growing up in poverty

[The End Child Poverty Coalition in partnership with the University of Loughborough](#)

- This compares with 66% of constituencies having a child poverty rate of 25% or higher in the UK.

Analysis of the Child Poverty Reduction Unit’s Action Plan



In September 2024, the country’s first **Child Poverty Reduction Unit (CPRU)** was set up, when the North East Mayor, Kim McGuinness, made tackling child poverty a priority. This unit developed a 5 year Child Poverty Action Plan for the region, backed with £500,000 initial investment. This plan includes eight measures to monitor progress in tackling child poverty, such as the percentages of children in low income households, food insecurity and economic inactivity. ([North East Evidence Hub, 2025](#)).

Free school meal (FSM) rates is also an indicator of child poverty, the North East FSM landscape is set out in the right hand graphic.

The North East Evidence Hub reports data for the **North East Combined Authority (NECA)** area. NECA includes seven councils.

Authorities outside NECA (e.g., Tees Valley) are excluded by design. The Hub reflects administrative boundaries, not the wider regional definition of “North East.”

29.8%

of North East children are eligible for free school meals

This is higher than the England excl. London rate of 23.4% (NE rate highest among 9 English regions)

- The highest rate of FSM eligibility in the NE is Newcastle with 39.6%, the lowest in Northumberland with 22.2%
- Primary schools in the NE have an average FSM rate of 30.4% (England excl London: 23.8%)
- Secondary schools in the NE have an average FSM rate of 27.8% (England excl London: 22.0%)

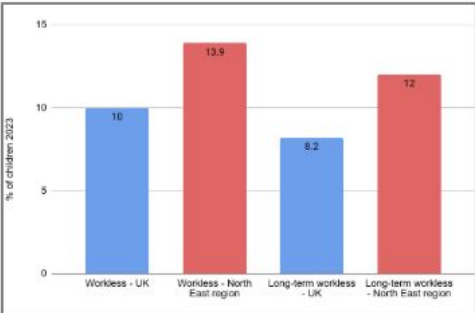
Core indicator: FSM (1)

North East Combined Authority comparison to the rest of the UK in terms of food insecurity and ‘workless’ households

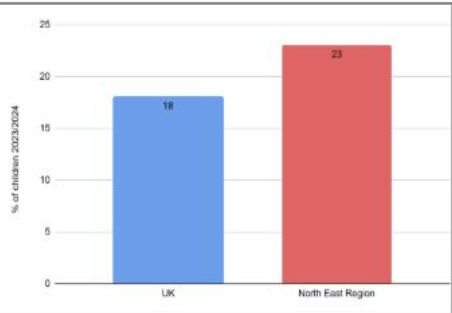


The Child Poverty [action plan](#) concluded that the proportion of children growing up with food insecurity and living in ‘workless’ households is greater than the rest of the UK

Children living in ‘workless’ and ‘long-term workless’ households



Children living in food insecure households



The North East Combined Authority comparison to the rest of the UK for NEET, unemployment levels and education destinations levels



4.73%

of young people aged 16-17 were NEET in the North East in 2023

This is higher than the England rate (excl. London): 3.04%

- NE education and training participation rate of 89.9%, compared to England excl. London rate of 91.6%
- Newcastle had the highest NEET rate of 5.83% compared to the seven Local Authorities
- North Tyneside had the lowest NEET rate of 3.4%
- Decreasing NE NEET rate from 2019 to 2023: -1.7 pp

4.4%

of all economically active adults in the North East were unemployed (Jul 24-Jun 25)

This is higher than UK (excl. London) rate: 3.8%.

- NE was the 7th highest out of the 15 English combined authority areas.
- South Tyneside had the highest unemployment rate out of the 7 NE local authority areas, of 5.6%
- Northumberland had the lowest unemployment rate out of the 7 NE local authority areas, of 3.5%.

79.3%

of 16-18 year olds in the North East were in sustained education, employment or apprenticeships

This is lower than the England rate (excl. London): 82.7%.

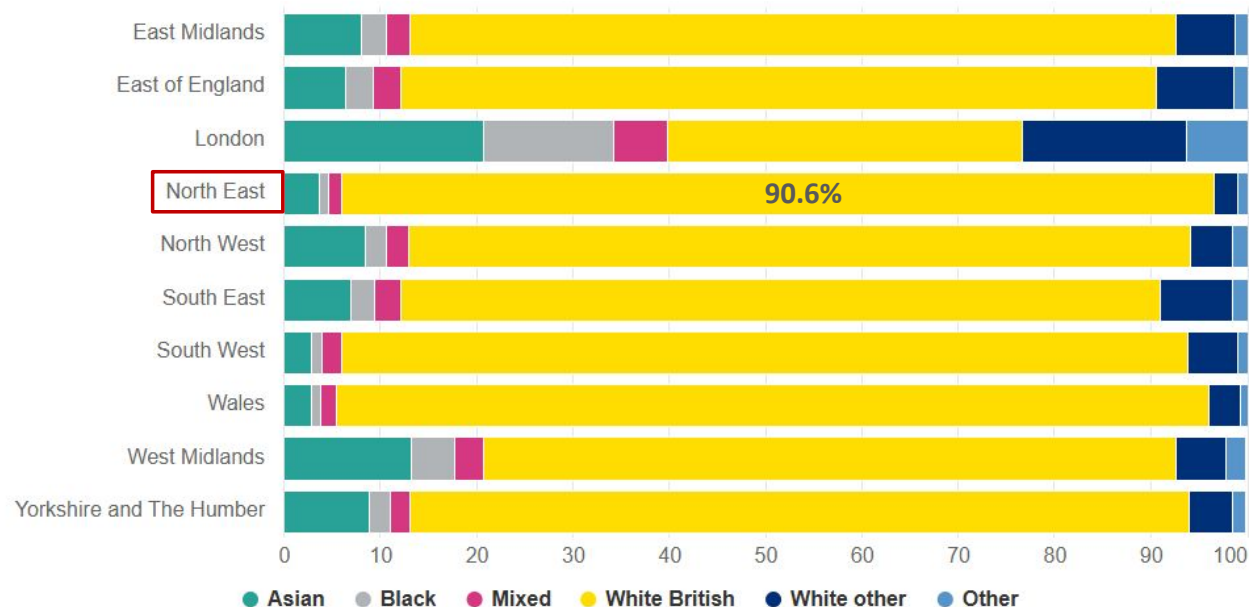
- 47.6% were in education, including 38.1% in higher education in the NE
- 21.6% were in sustained employment in the NE
- 10.1% were in apprenticeships in the NE
- students from North Tyneside schools and colleges were most likely to be in a sustained destination

Core indicator: Staying in education (5)

Ethnicity in the North East in comparison to other regions in England & Wales in the 2021 census



Areas of England and Wales by ethnicity



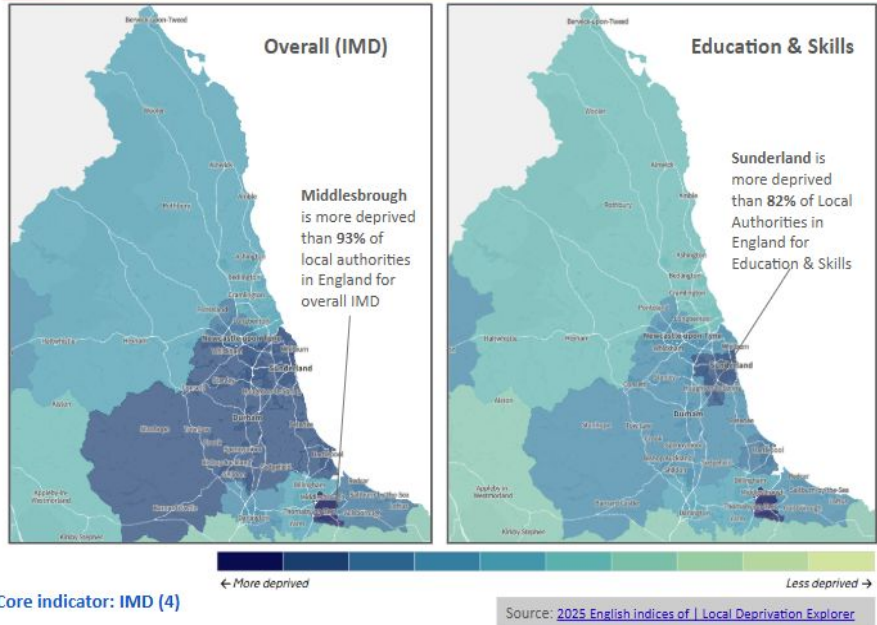
The North East region reported the joint highest rate (with Wales) of White British residents. Further analysis included in appendix 3 shows that even in the most diverse areas like Newcastle and Middlesbrough, at least two-thirds of FSM-eligible students are White British. In many other Local Authorities, that figure exceeds 90%. This data provides a clear justification for the "White (working-class)" focus in this report as the FSM population in this region is statistically very likely to fall into that category.

Research has shown that disadvantaged White British pupils (FSM) have significantly lower GCSE attainment, higher persistent absence and much higher suspension rates than the national pupil average: [The educational outcomes of disadvantaged White pupils, 2025](#).

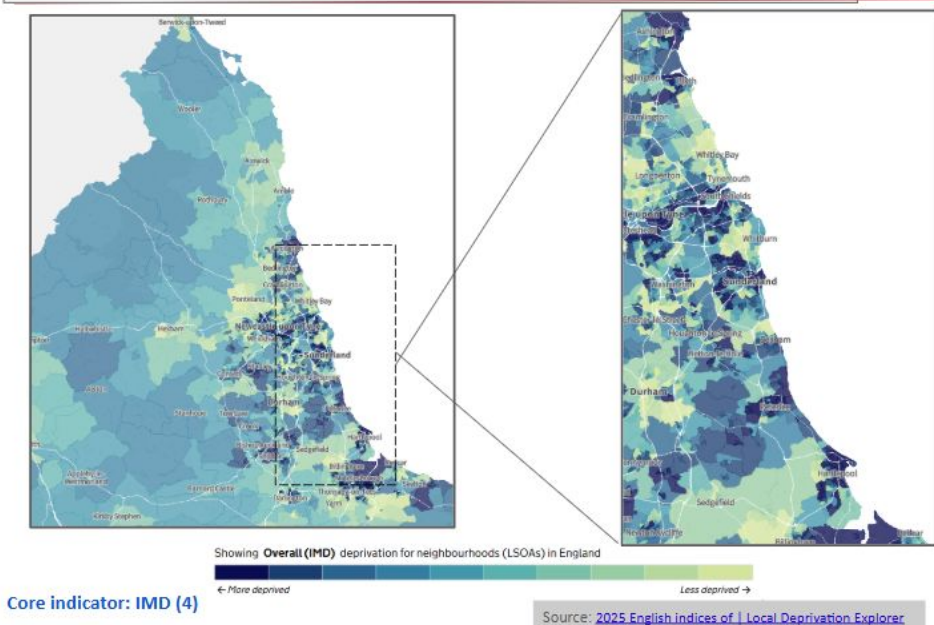
In England:

- GCSE attainment (2024): Only 38 % of disadvantaged White boys and 40 % of disadvantaged White girls achieved grade 4+ in English & maths - compared with 66 % of all pupils nationally.
- More than half of White FSM6 pupils were persistently absent from school - compared to 28 % of all pupils.
- Disadvantaged White boys had a 68% suspension rate in 2023, considerably higher than the 23 % rate for all pupils; permanent exclusions were also higher (0.89 % vs 0.25 %).

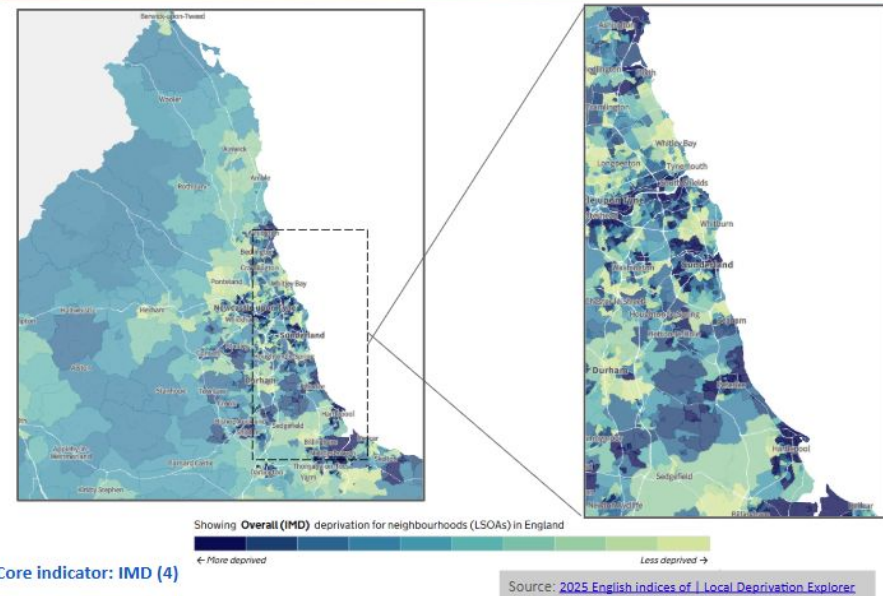
The maps shows the levels of deprivation in the North East Local Authorities - overall (IMD) and Education & Skills, 2025



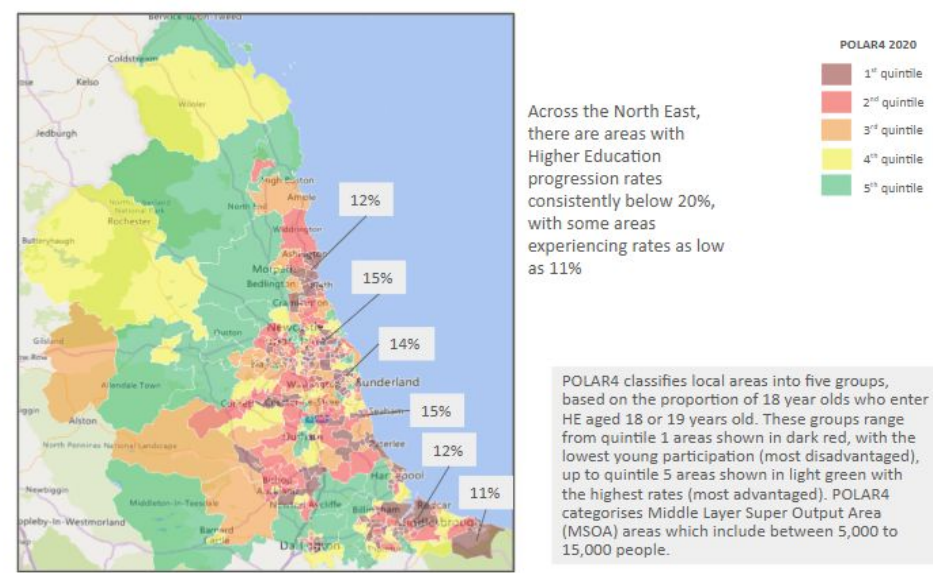
The map shows the levels of deprivation (IMD, 2025) in each LSOA area within the North East



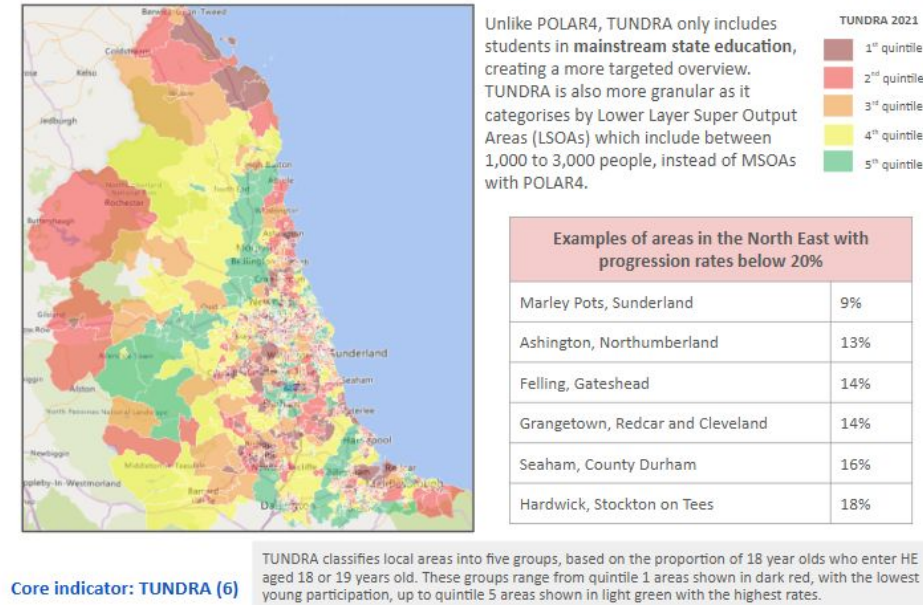
The map shows the levels of deprivation (IMD, 2025) in each LSOA area within the North East



The map shows the levels of Higher Education participation across the MSOA areas in the North East (POLAR, 2020)

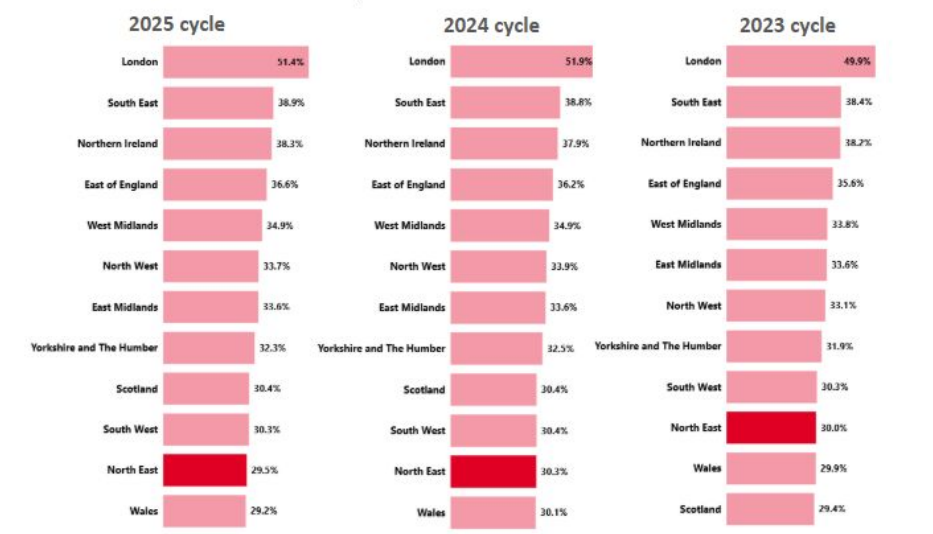


The map shows the levels of Higher Education participation across the LSOA areas in the North East (TUNDRA, 2021)

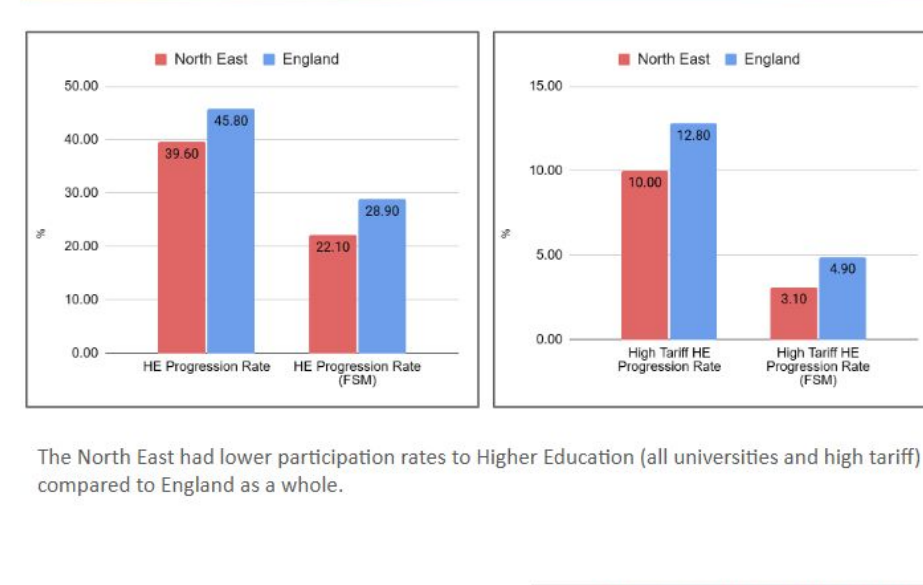


UCAS data showing 18 year old entry rates into Higher Education in the North East in comparison to other regions in the UK

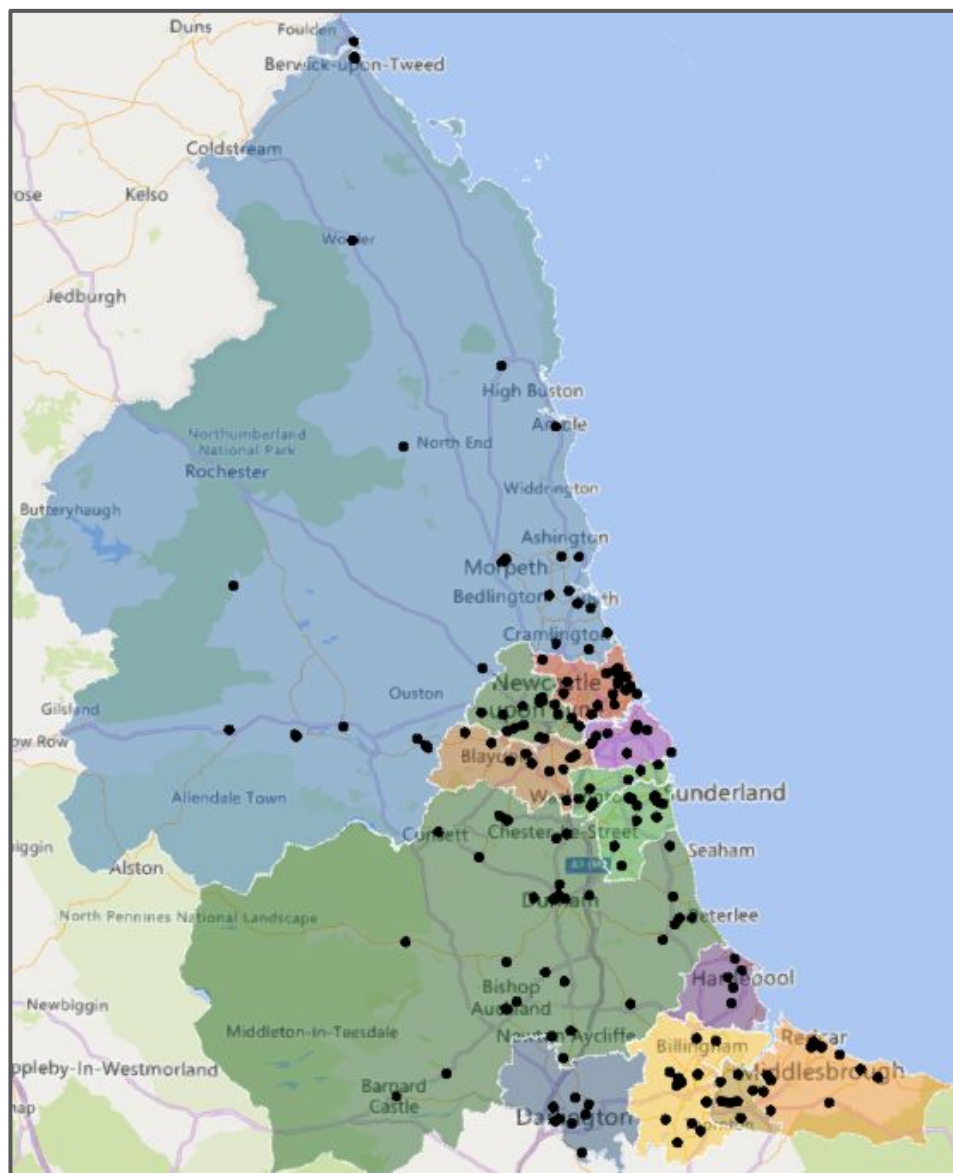
In 2025 and 2024, the North East had the 2nd lowest participation rate into university than all other regions in the UK. This is a decrease from the 2023 cycle, where the North East scored 3rd lowest.



The graphs show widening participation data from DfE in the North East compared to the England average (2023/2024)

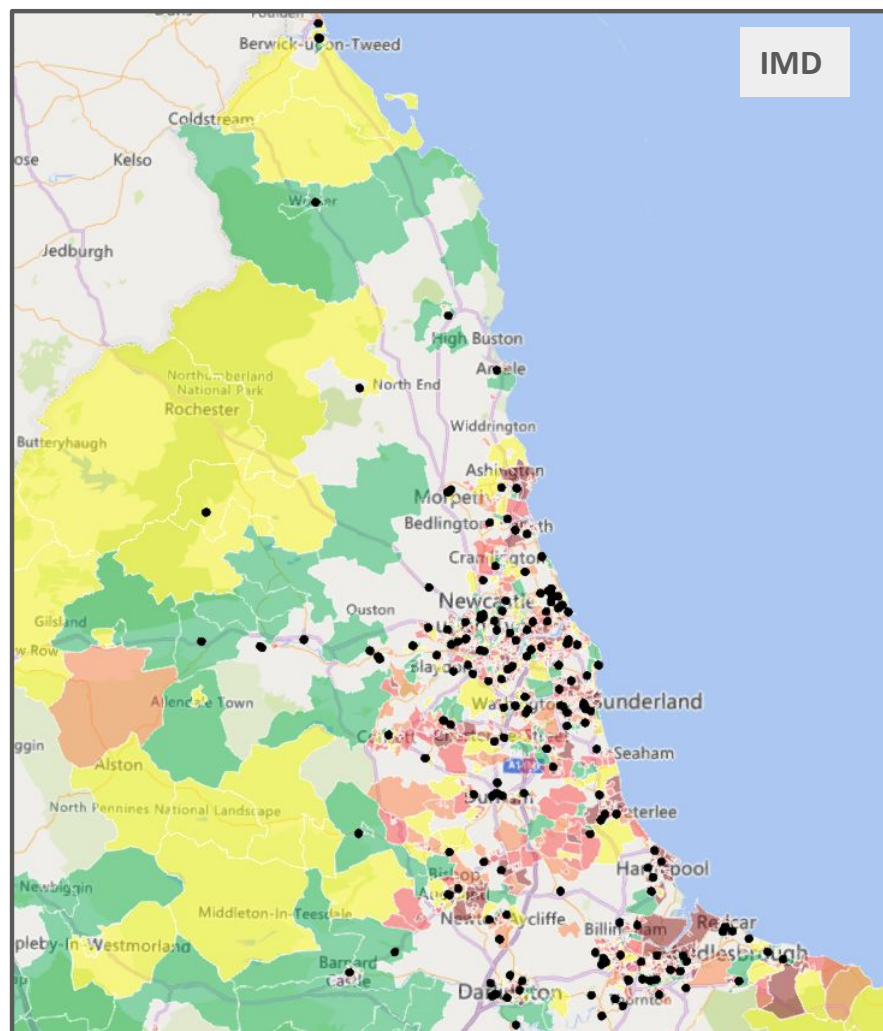


Map showing secondary schools across the North East

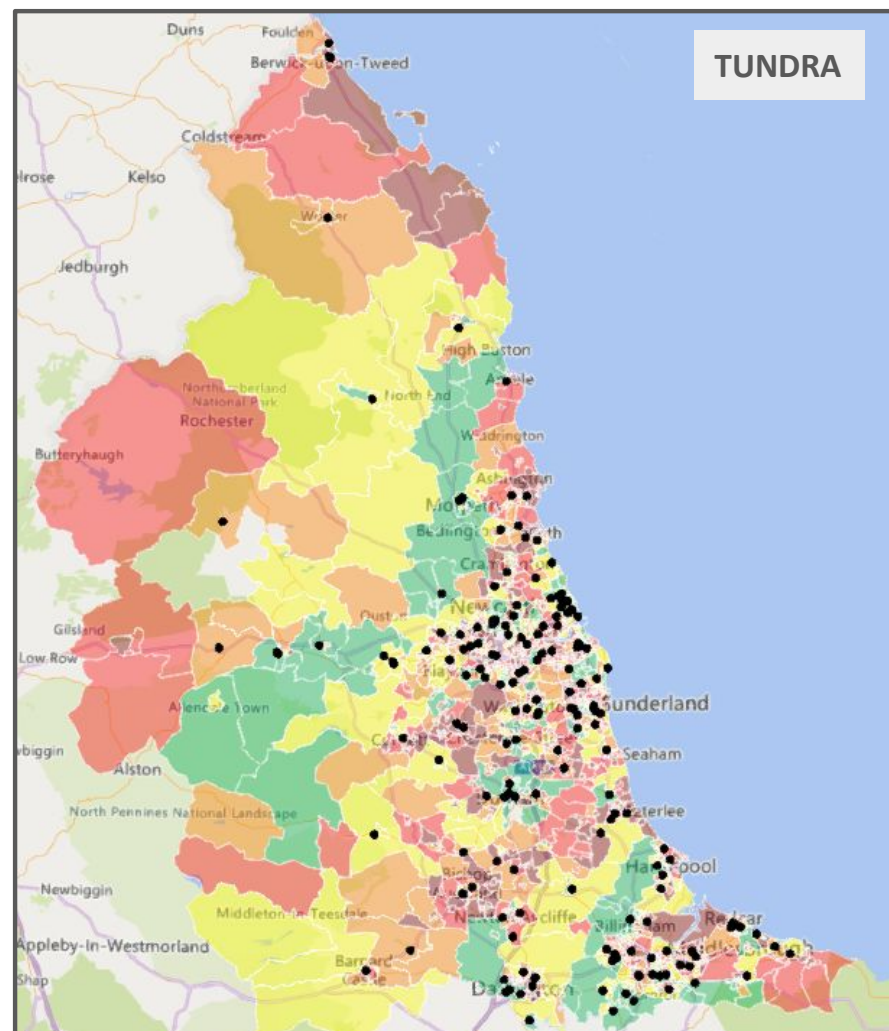


● State-funded secondary school

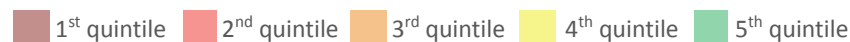
The maps show the location of secondary schools in the North East in relation to Higher Education progression and deprivation



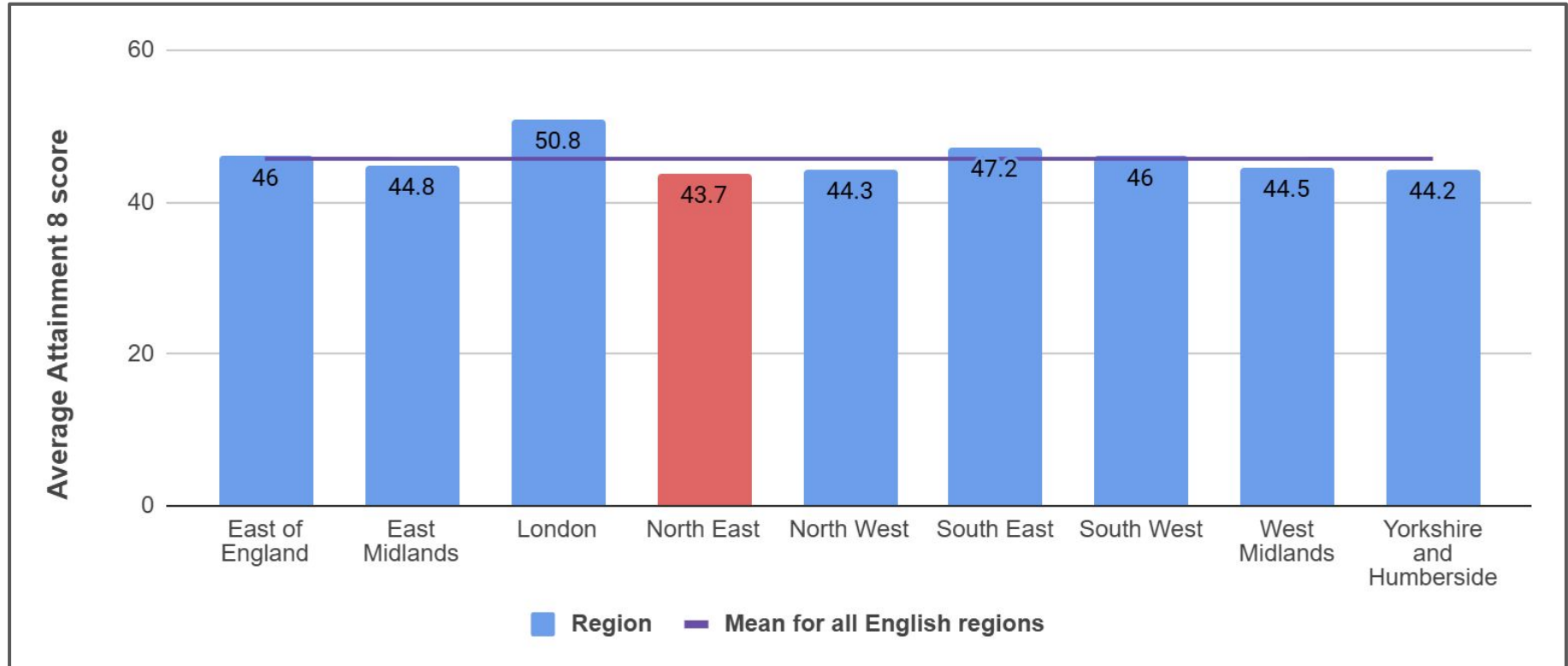
IMD (2025)



TUNDRA (2021)

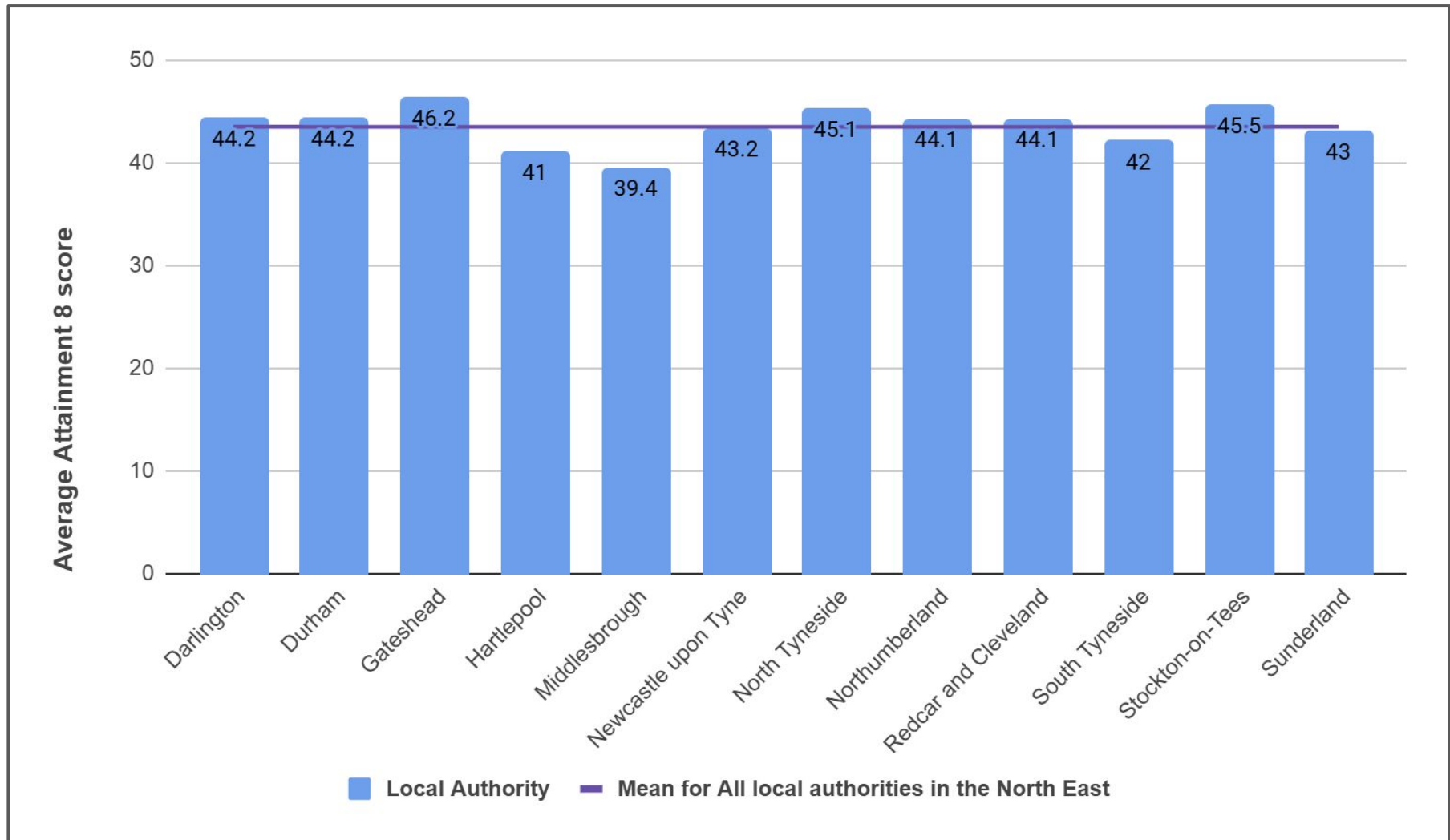


Average Attainment 8 scores in all England regions in 2023/2024



Attainment 8 is a score that measures how well a student performs in eight GCSE-level qualifications. Each grade a student receives is assigned a point score from 9 (highest) to 1 (lowest). The student's Attainment 8 score is the total of the points for their eight subjects, with English and Mathematics counted twice.

Average Attainment 8 scores for all North East local authorities in 2023/2024

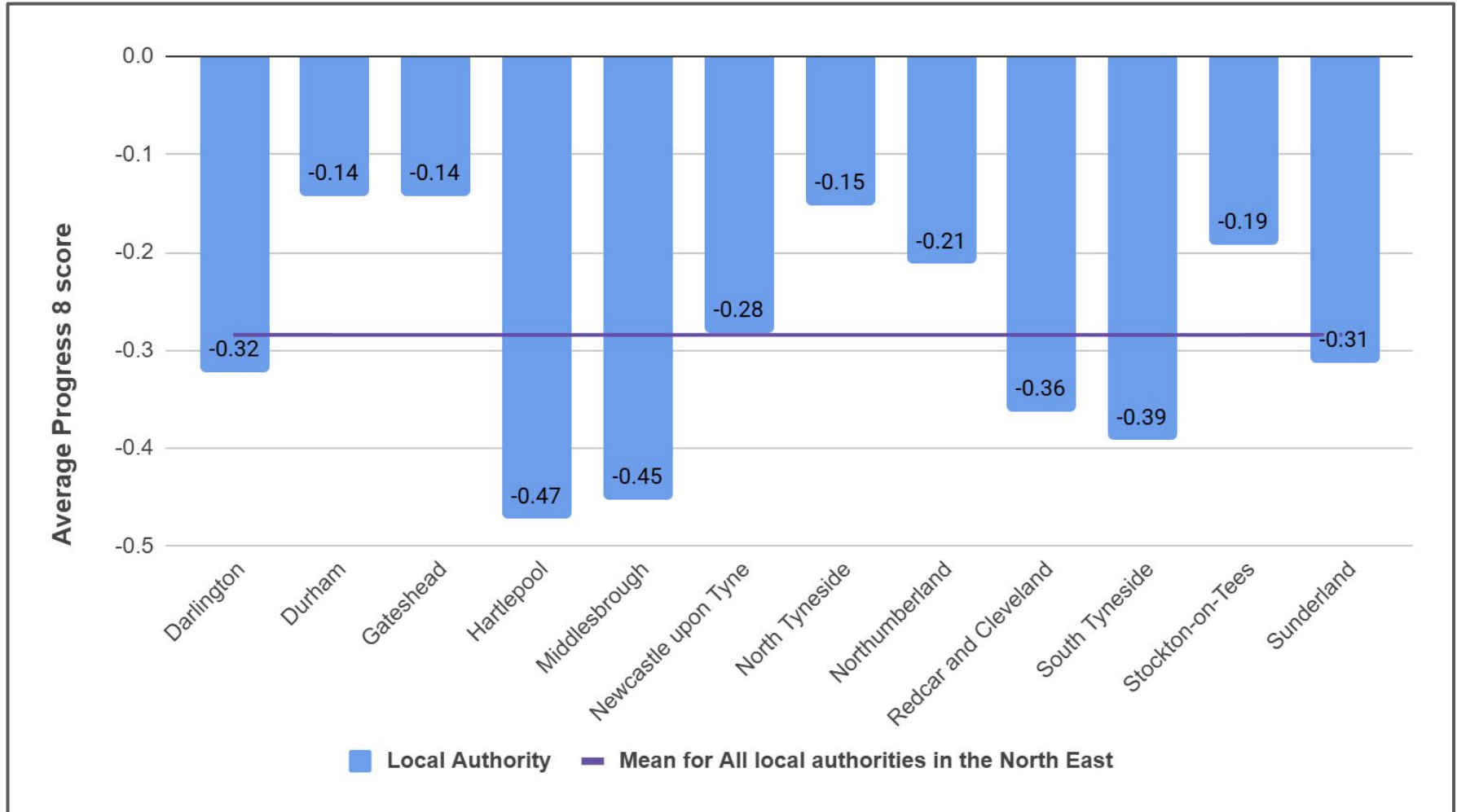


Average Progress 8 scores in all England regions in 2023/2024



Progress 8 is a student's Attainment 8 score compared with the average Attainment 8 score of all pupils nationally who are in the same attainment group at KS2 (based on English and Maths results). A school's Progress 8 score is the average of its pupils.

Average Progress 8 scores North East local authorities in 2023/2024



Local Authority analysis

The next slides analyse each of the 12 local authorities in the North East. The slides detail how schools in that area have been tiered in the North East Data Dashboard and therefore indicate which schools should be prioritised for support.

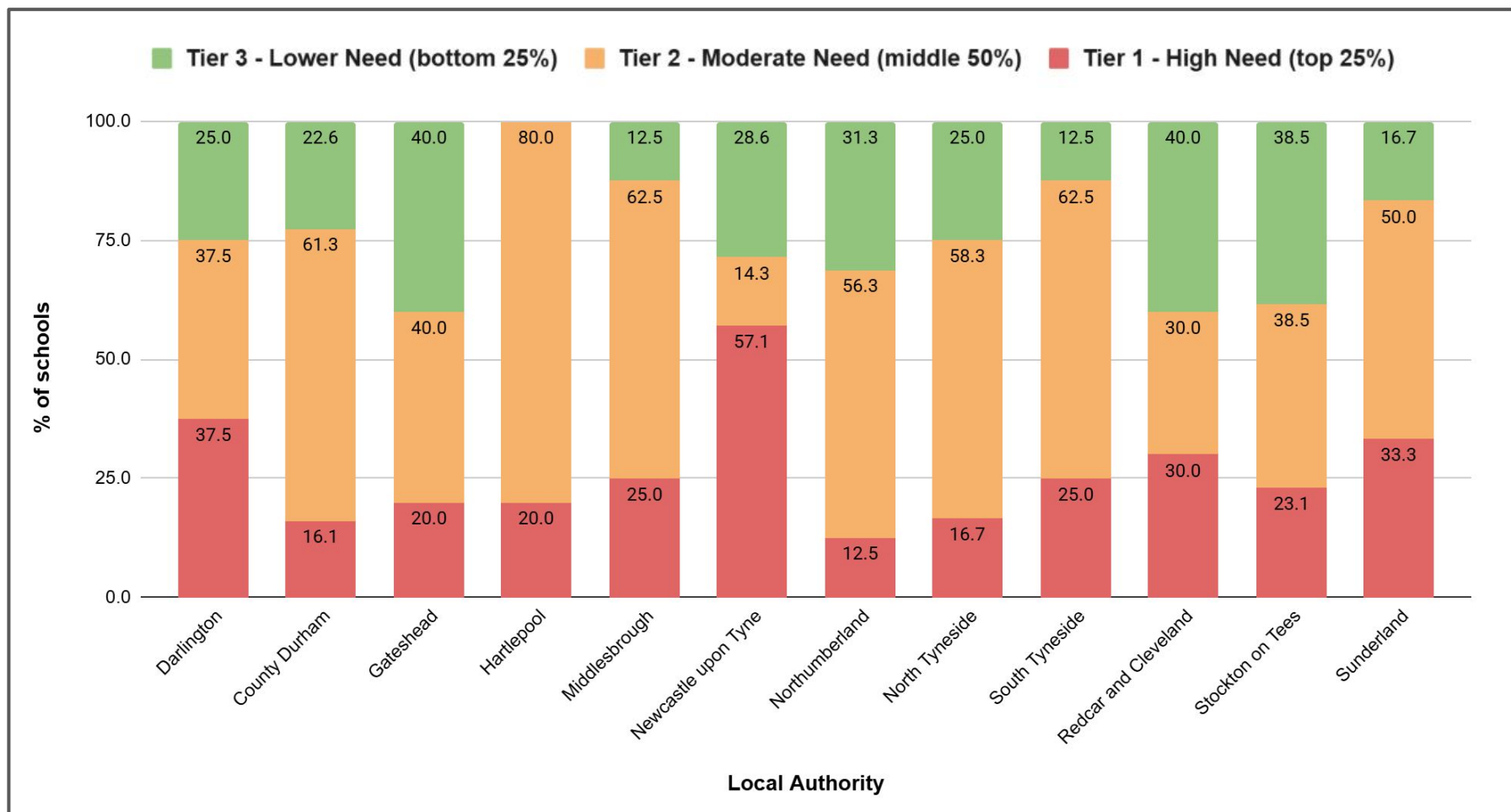


1. Darlington
2. County Durham
3. Gateshead
4. Hartlepool
5. Middlesbrough
6. Newcastle upon Tyne
7. Northumberland
8. North Tyneside
9. Redcar and Cleveland
10. South Tyneside
11. Stockton on Tees
12. Sunderland

Overview of the proportion of each 'Tier' school in all the local authorities from the North East Data Dashboard



This bar chart includes all of the state secondary schools in the north east (153). This includes schools with complete data sets as well as missing data. For more detail about how missing data was accounted for refer to appendix 2.4. The percentages are calculated in relation to the number of schools in the local authority.



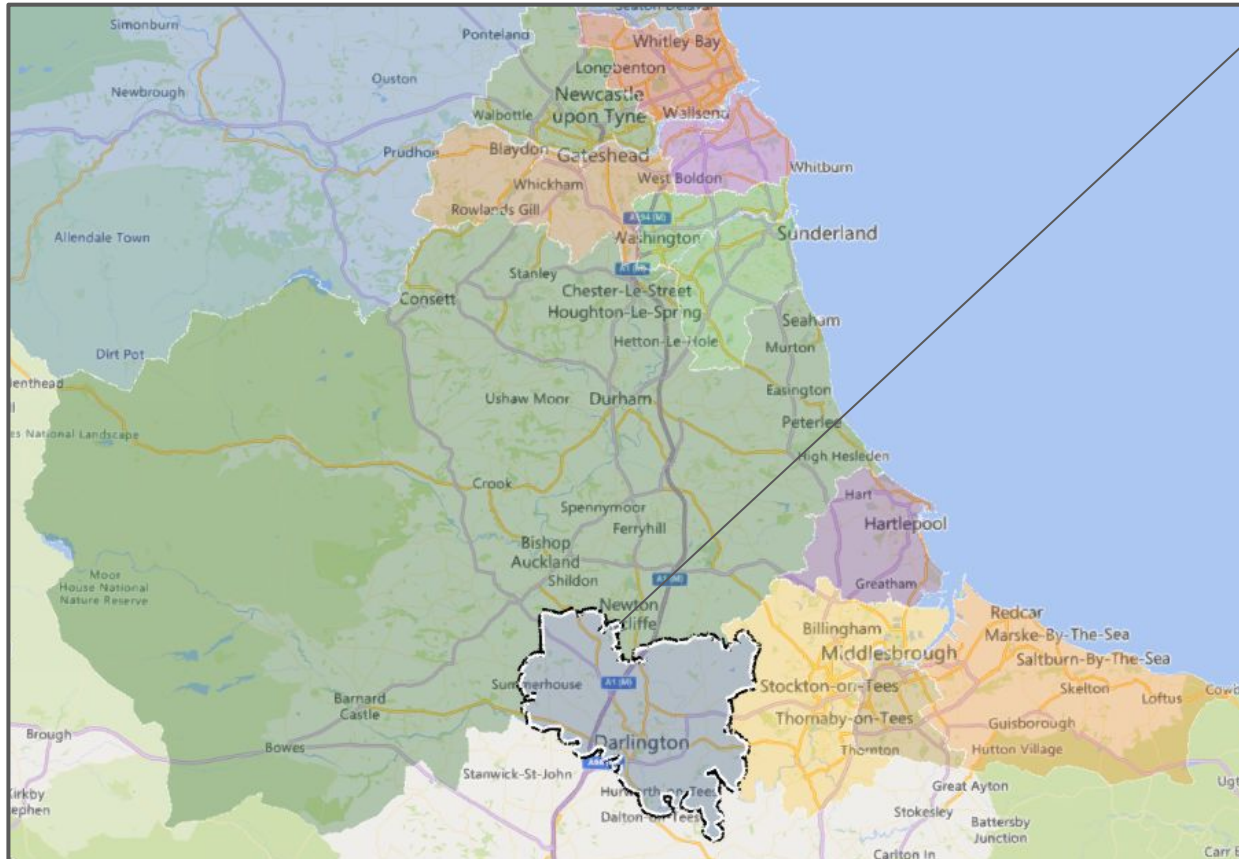
Overview of the number of schools in each 'Tier' across all local authorities from the North East Data Dashboard



Local Authority	Number of Tier 1 - High Need schools	Number of Tier 2 - Moderate Need schools	Number of Tier 3 - Lower Need schools
Darlington	3	3	2
County Durham	5	19	7
Gateshead	2	4	4
Hartlepool	1	4	0
Middlesbrough	2	5	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	8	2	4
Northumberland	2	9	5
North Tyneside	2	7	3
Redcar and Cleveland	3	3	4
South Tyneside	2	5	1
Stockton on Tees	3	5	5
Sunderland	6	9	3

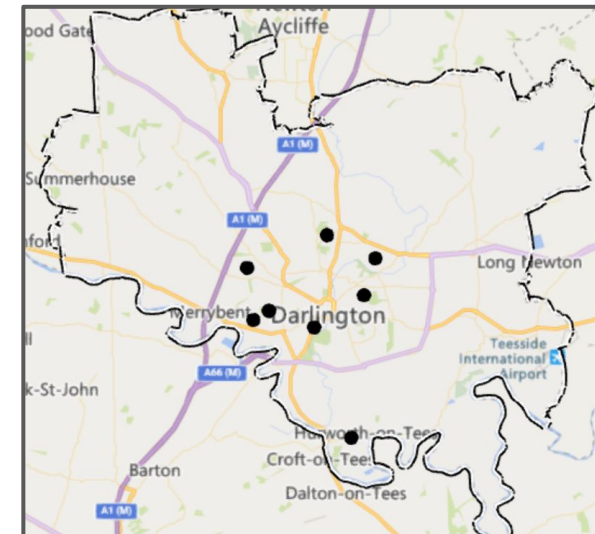
1. An Example Local Authority- Darlington

Darlington has **8 secondary schools**, 1 of which includes a sixth-form.



Darlington local authority boundary

● State-funded secondary school



1. Darlington

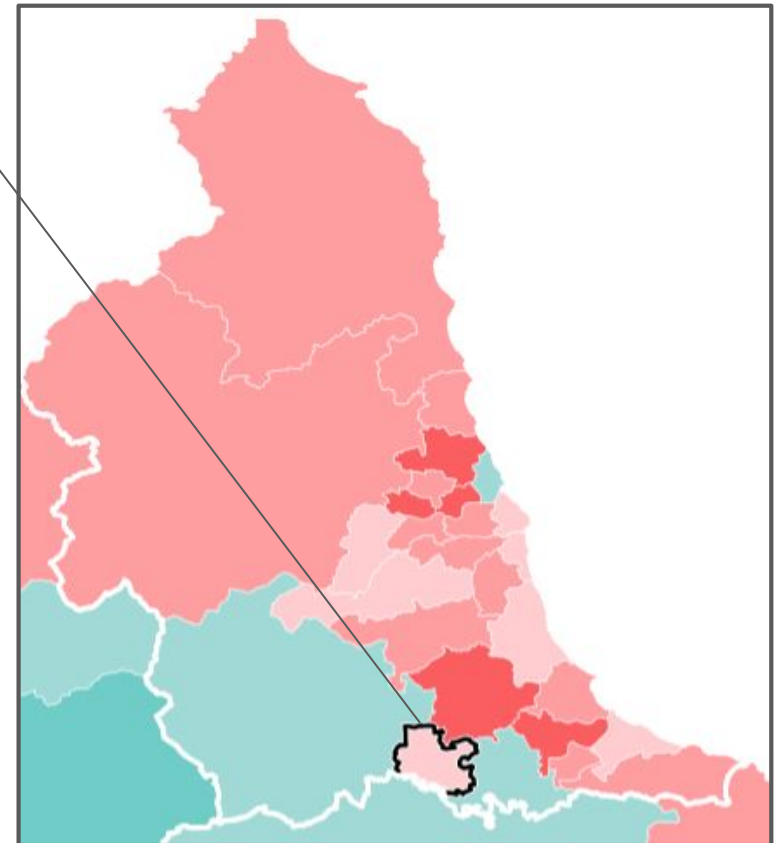
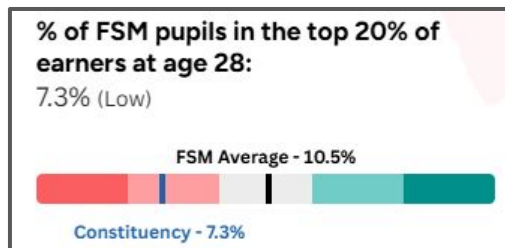
The Sutton Trust Opportunity Index ranking for constituencies in the North East

The Sutton Trust revealed that Darlington has a 'opportunity index rank' of **284** (out of 543), which they label as '**just below average**' in relation to all other constituencies in England.

For each constituency, The Sutton Trust Opportunity Index reports on the following indicators: % of pupils on FSM who achieve passes in English and maths, the % of FSM pupils who complete a degree by age 22, the % of FSM pupils who are in the top 20% of earners at age 28 and the % of all pupils moving to a different region by age 28.

FSM rate in Darlington: **27%** (just above the national average of 25.7% in the academic year 2024/2025).

Darlington scored the lowest in '**% of FSM pupils who are in the top 20% of earners at age 28**' in comparison to the overall FSM Average:

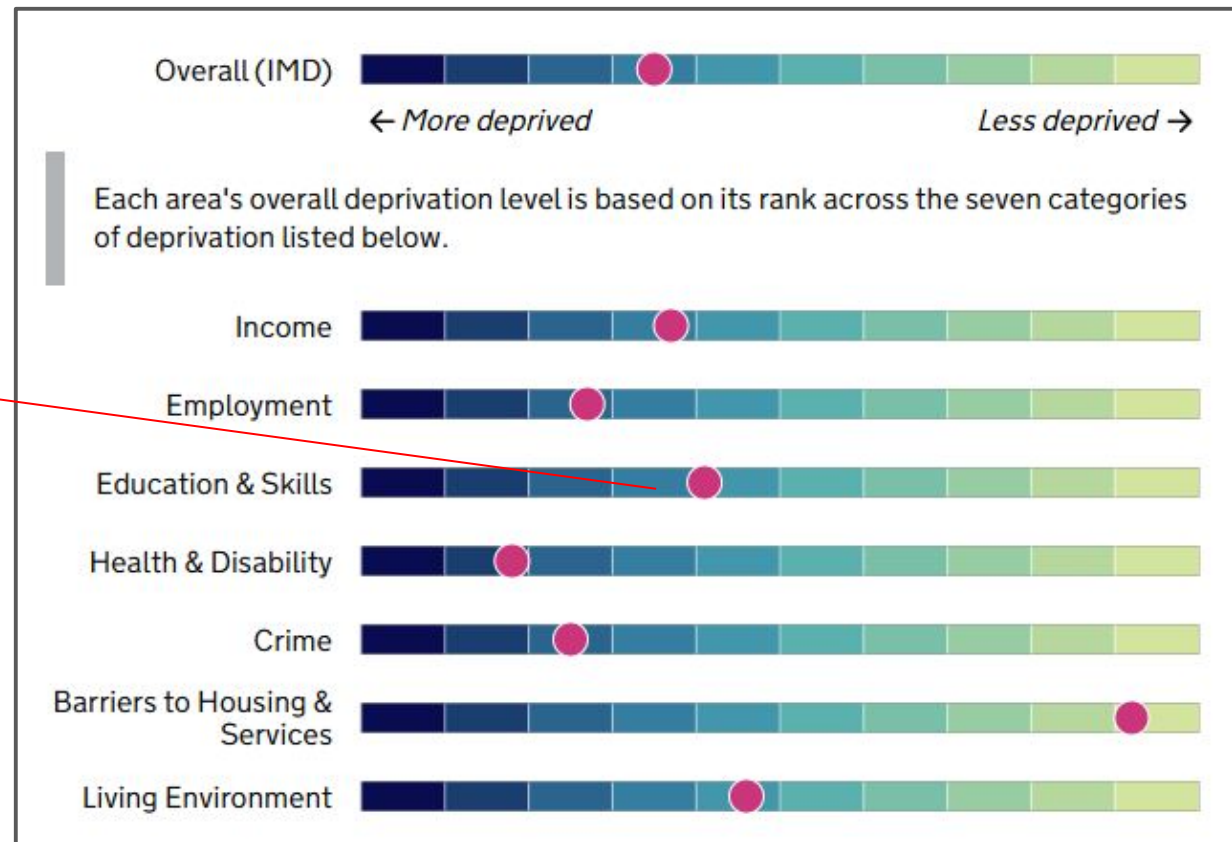


Very low Low Just below average Just above average High Very high

1. Darlington

Local authority scores on the 7 types of deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (2025) indicates that Darlington local authority sits **just below the national midpoint** for **Education and Skills** (ranked below **59%** of local authority districts in England).



Education & Skills: This type of deprivation refers to low levels of education and skills attainment in children, young people and adults. It contributes to 13.5% of a neighbourhood's overall (IMD) deprivation score.

1. Darlington: tiering of schools in the North East Data Dashboard

Tier 1 (High Need) schools:

- Haughton Academy
- St Aidan's Church of England Academy
- Wyvern Academy

Tier 2 (Moderate Need) schools:

- Longfield Academy
- Polam Hall School
- Hummersknott Academy

Tier 3 (Lower need) schools:

- Hurworth School
- Carmel College*

Tier 1, High Need: Top 25%

Tier 2, Moderate Need: Middle 50%

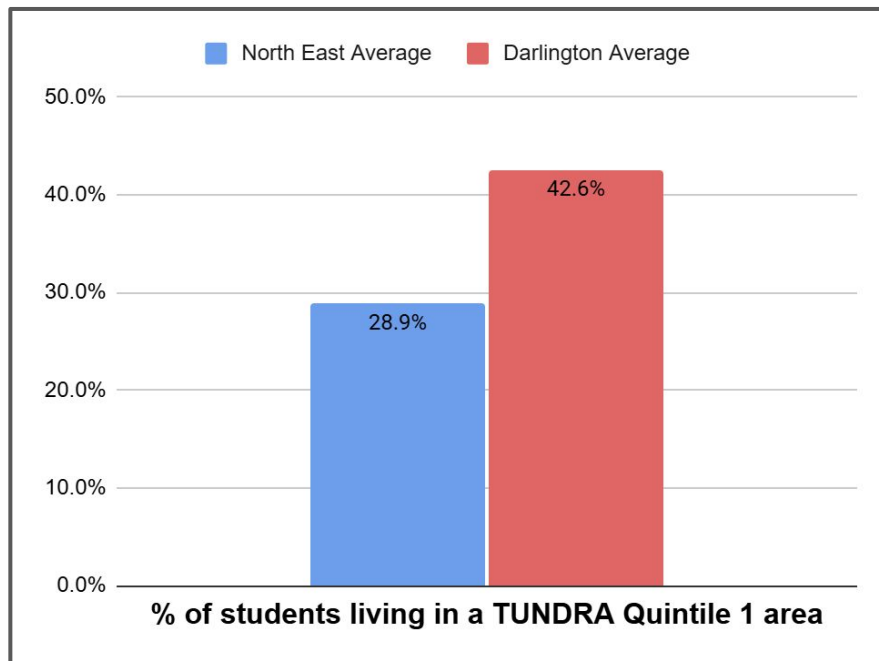
Tier 3, Lower need: Bottom 25%

* Schools which include a sixth form

1. Darlington

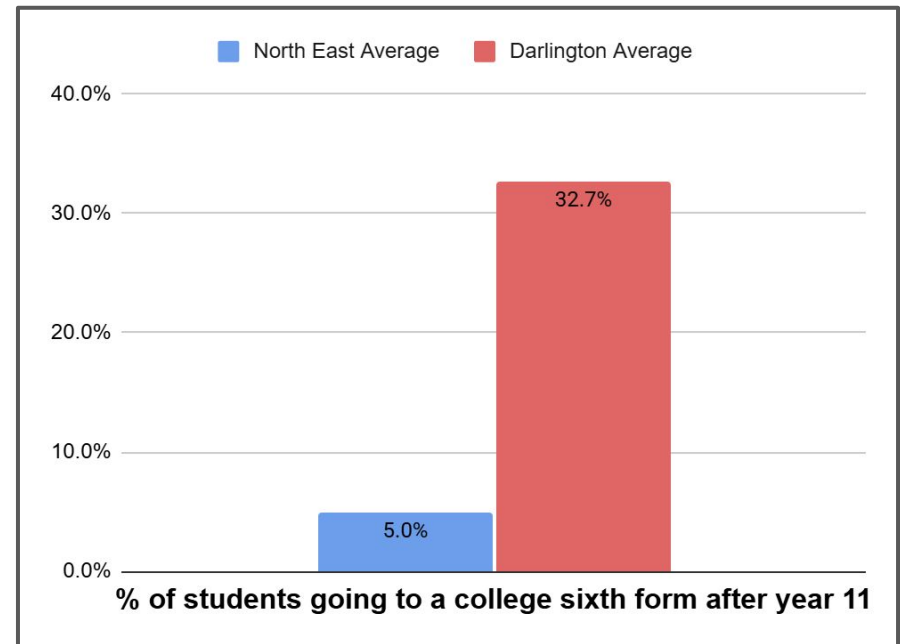
Data outliers in Darlington

When comparing the Darlington local authority average to the North East averages for all the datasets explored, Darlington deviates from the North East average on the following:



A much larger share of Darlington secondary students live in neighbourhoods with lower HE progression.

Darlington relying heavily on college-based sixth form provision rather than school sixth forms.

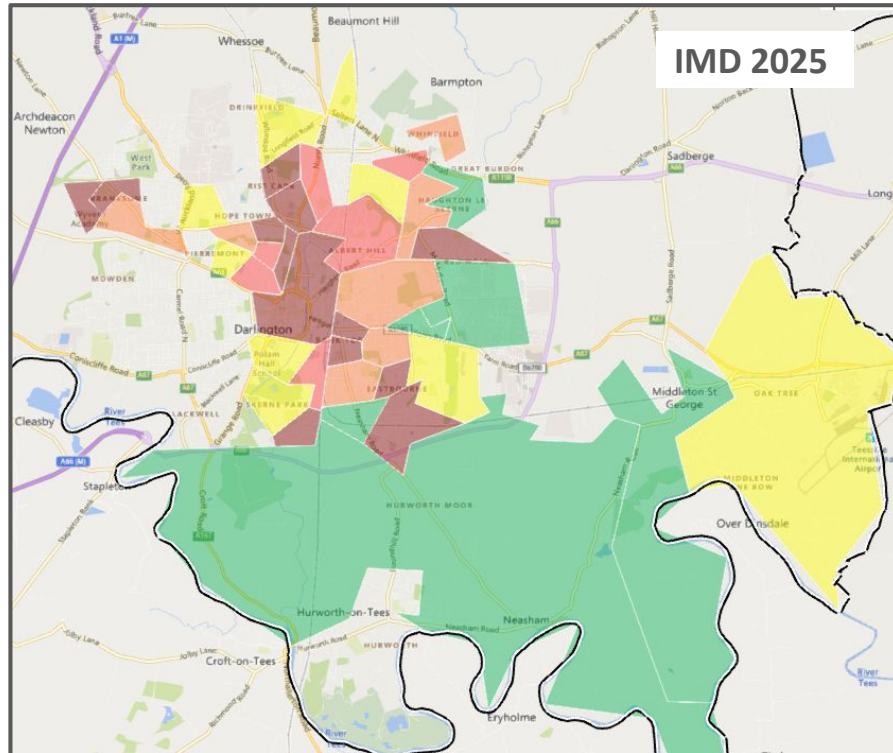


The North East and local authority averages were calculated using the data gathered from 153 secondary schools in the North East taking into account the size of the school (whole schools and just KS5).

1. Darlington

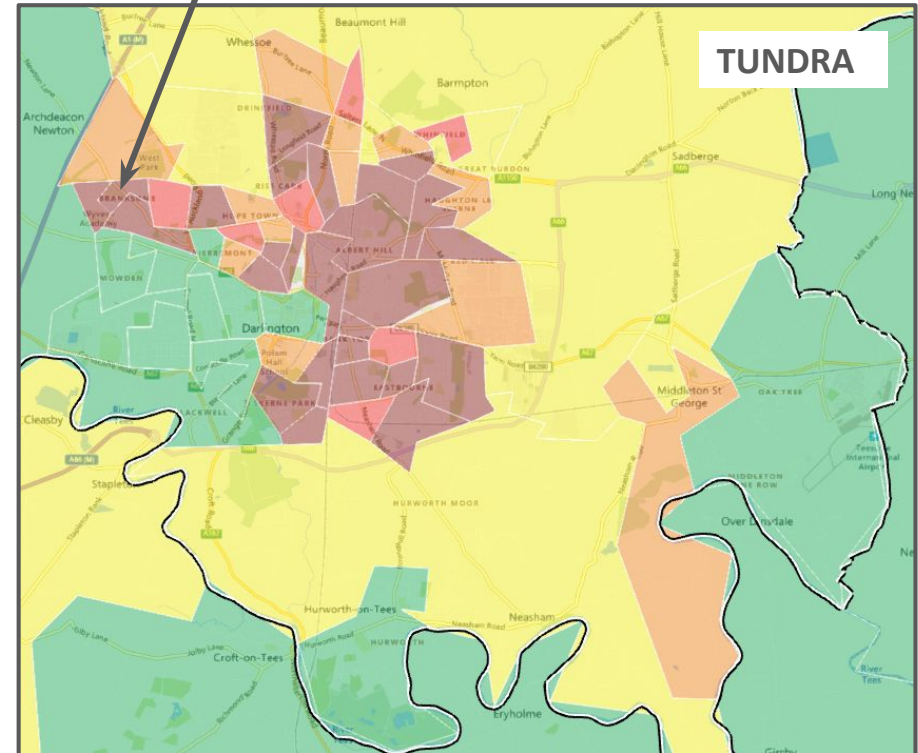
The spread of deprivation and Higher Education progression

7% progression rate to Higher Education (Branksome)



IMD (2025)

1st decile 2nd decile 3rd decile 4th decile 5th decile
6th-10th decile



TUNDRA (2021)

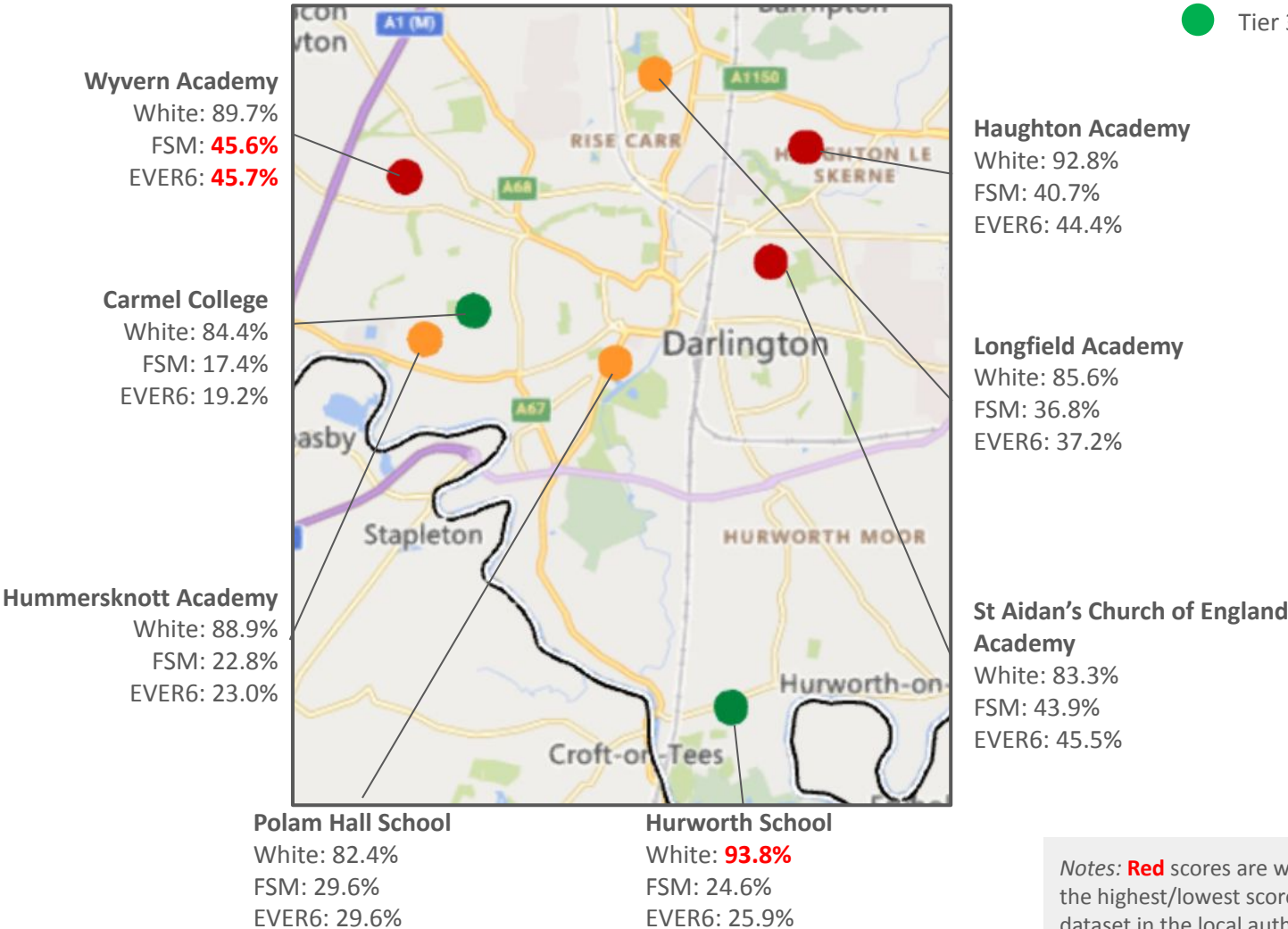
1st quintile 2nd quintile 3rd quintile 4th quintile 5th quintile

1. Darlington



Secondary Schools - general data

- Tier 1 - High Need
- Tier 2 - Moderate Need
- Tier 3 - Lower need

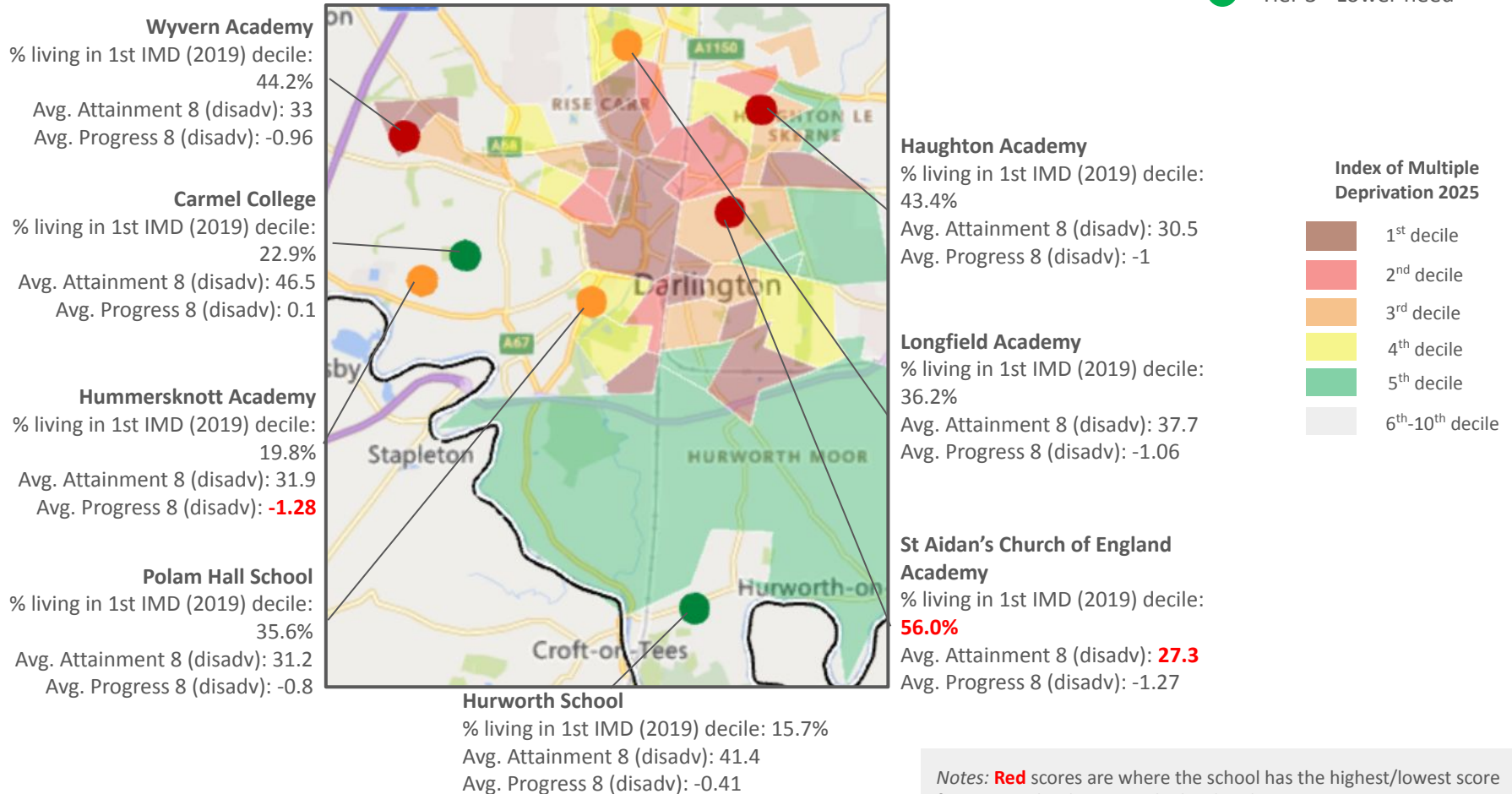


Notes: **Red** scores are where the school has the highest/lowest score for a particular dataset in the local authority

1. Darlington

Secondary Schools - deprivation & performance data

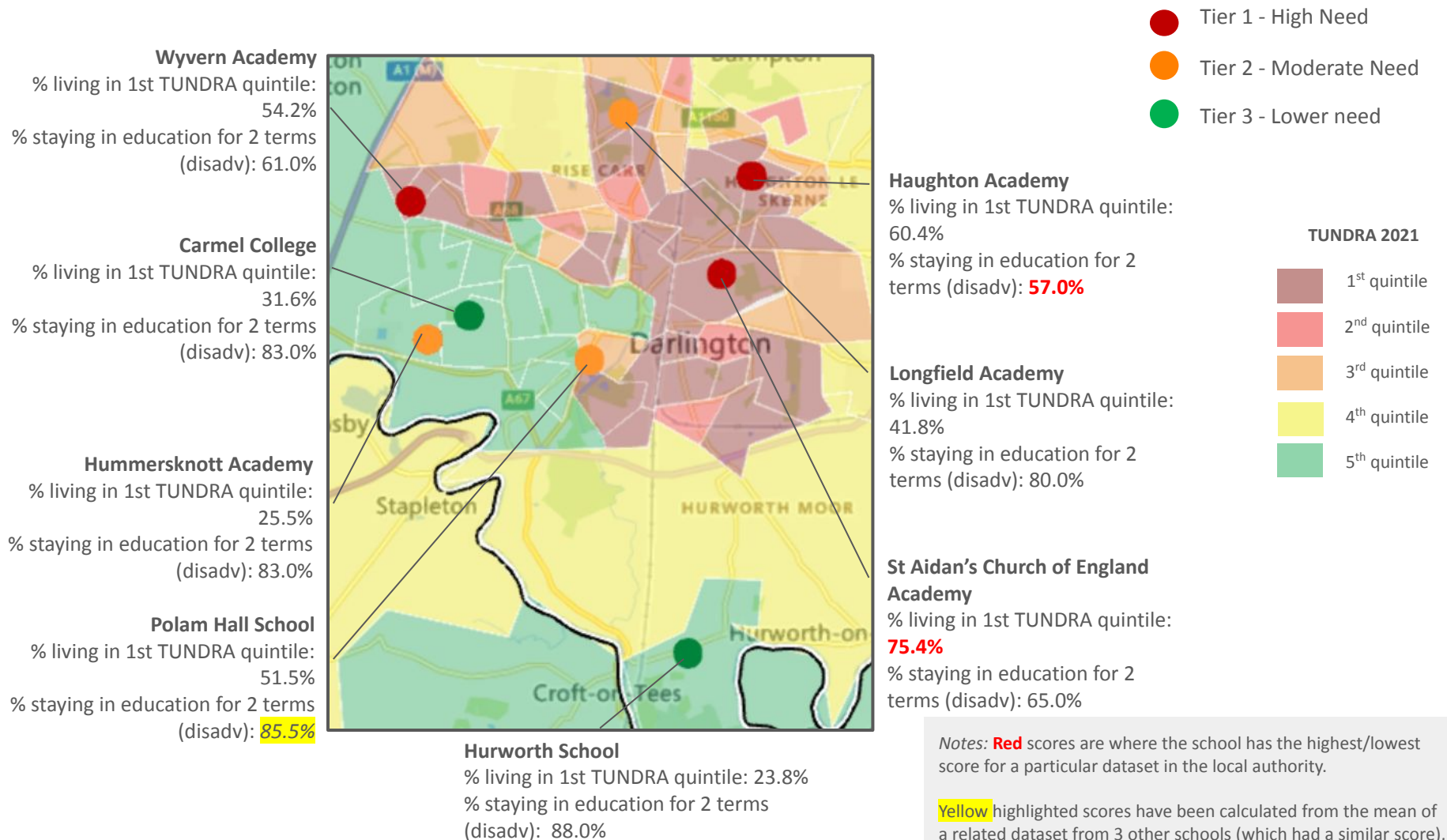
- Tier 1 - High Need
- Tier 2 - Moderate Need
- Tier 3 - Lower need



Notes: **Red** scores are where the school has the highest/lowest score for a particular dataset in the local authority.
The map is IMD 2025, whereas the data for each school is IMD 2019.

1. Darlington

Secondary Schools - Higher Education & destination data



Notes: **Red** scores are where the school has the highest/lowest score for a particular dataset in the local authority.

Yellow highlighted scores have been calculated from the mean of a related dataset from 3 other schools (which had a similar score), as this school had missing data for one data set.

1. Darlington



Secondary Schools - Attainment 8 Rankings

School Name	Performance Rank
Hurworth School	15
Carmel College	17
Hummersknott Academy	65
Longfield Academy	82
Polam Hall School	95
Haughton Academy	112
Wyvern Academy	114
St Aidan's Church of England Academy	132

St Aidan's Church of England Academy ranks in the **bottom 10%** of schools (out of the 146 of which had data) based on average Attainment 8 scores.

The table above shows the performance rankings of secondary schools in Darlington compared to **146** other secondary schools in the North East which were investigated (the 7 schools with missing data were not included). Each school is given a rank based on the **average Attainment 8 score of all pupils (2023/2024)**, with a **lower rank number indicating stronger performance** (for example, rank 1 is the top-performing school in the North East as it has the highest average Attainment 8 score for all pupils).

Summary

The highest levels of deprivation and lower progression to Higher Education are concentrated in the centre of Darlington. The local authority ranked below 59% of local authority districts in England in terms of Education & Skills (IMD, 2025) and ranked 'just below average' in the Sutton Trust Opportunity Index (in relation to all other constituencies in England). Also, only 7.3% of FSM pupils are in the top 20% of earners at age 28 ('low').

Following our analysis of Darlington, it had **3 schools within Tier 1** (High need), **3 within Tier 2** (Moderate need) and **2 in Tier 3** (Lower need).

- Wyvern Academy had the highest FSM rate of **45.6%**, and highest EVER6 rate of **45.7%**
- Hurworth School had the highest % of white students, **93.8%**
- Hummersknott Academy had the lowest average Progress 8 score (disadv) of **-1.28**
- St Aidan's Church of England Academy had:
 - the highest % of students living in 1st IMD (2019) decile, **56.0%**,
 - the highest % of students living in 1st TUNDRA quintile, **75.4%**
 - the lowest average Attainment 8 score (disadv), **27.3**
- Haughton Academy had the lowest % of students staying in education for at least 2 terms (disadv), **57.0%**