

Portsmouth: A digital city

Alongside the National Literacy Trust's first research into young people's and teachers' use of generative AI to support literacy, we find out more about the award-winning Digital City project, which is utilising the power of technology to improve educational outcomes for all children and young people in Portsmouth.

The 'Digital City' project

Understanding the vital role technology and emergent technologies can play in improving learning outcomes for all children, young people and adults, Portsmouth Education Partnership launched its flagship digital strategy in 2021.

The first-of-its-kind in the UK, the partnership's Digital City project brings together the city's 62 schools and local partners to utilise the power of technology to improve outcomes for every child and adult in the city. Their shared focus is to:

- Enhance teaching and learning
- Reduce workload
- Support accessibility and inclusion, and
- Narrow the digital divide.

Why is the project needed?

Portsmouth is one of the Department for Education's 24 Priority education investment areas (PEIA), due to its combined levels of low academic performance and high deprivation.

Portsmouth's deprivation rate is 35.4% (vs 17.8% UK average), while 33.4% of the city's school-aged children are eligible for free school meals (vs 24.6% in England) and 19.2% have special educational needs (vs 17.3% in England).

In terms of academic achievement, last year:

- More than a third of 11-year-olds in Portsmouth left primary school without the reading skills expected for their age (35% vs 27% in England), rising to almost half of those eligible for free school meals (47% vs 40% in England).
- More than a third of 11-year-olds in Portsmouth left primary school without the writing skills expected for their age (37% vs 28% in England), rising to almost half of those eligible for free school meals (48% vs 43% in England).
- Close to half of 16-year-olds in Portsmouth did not achieve grades 4 or above in English and maths GCSEs (47.6% vs 34.9% in England), rising to two-thirds of those eligible for free school meals (67.4% vs 57.1% in England).

Who is leading the project?

Gemma Gwilliam is Head of Digital Learning, Education and Innovation at Portsmouth Education Partnership, and strategic lead on the Digital City project.

An experienced teacher, leader and tech expert, Gemma has worked in early years, primary and secondary settings and is passionate about using technology to enhance teaching and learning, and to equip all children with the necessary skills to learn, and work, in the 21st century.

Here Gemma explains why it is vital to help educators build their knowledge and experience of using emergent technologies, such as generative AI tools, to support their teaching and to help them explore opportunities to enhance and personalise children's learning, particularly those with additional needs:

“As a city, we understand the impact technology can have on improving outcomes for all children, both now and in the future. As generative AI becomes more embedded in our everyday lives, helping children learn how to use it effectively and safely to support their literacy and learning is increasingly crucial.

“Key to this is helping all teachers better understand what generative AI is and how it can be used to reduce their workloads, support modelling, guide practice and, ultimately, enrich teaching and learning. By using the right tool for the right activity in the right moment, teachers can truly personalise their teaching to meet their pupils' needs, and children can enhance their learning.

“When it comes to supporting pupils’ literacy, there are a multitude of ways teachers can use generative AI tools – from making texts accessible for different reading abilities and breaking down vocabulary, to using pupils’ written descriptions to create an image.

“To help more children and young people across the UK explore the possibilities of generative AI for their learning, we must ensure that teachers at all stages of education – and those training to become teachers – have access to guidance, support and training.”

More information

- Read the National Literacy Trust’s accompanying [blog](#) which further explores the potential role of generative AI in education.