

National Assembly for Wales

Children and Young People Committee

EO 17

Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households

Evidence from : Welsh Government

Introduction

The Welsh Government is committed to improving the educational outcomes of children from low income households and has a raft of policies in place designed to achieve this.

1. The Tackling Poverty Action Plan

The Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty Action Plan clearly expresses our ambition to prevent poverty, particularly through investment in giving children the best possible start in life. From conception through to early adulthood, our aim will be to reduce inequality at the earliest possible stage and break the link between socio-economic disadvantage, educational under achievement and the impaired life chances that very often flows from deprivation.

We know that better off pupils are more than twice as likely to achieve 5 good GCSEs including English or Welsh and Mathematics as those eligible for free school meals. We aim to improve the proportion of poorer pupils achieving this target from just over 23% to 37% by 2017.

There is encouraging evidence that Wales is now closing the gap with England in each of the headline indicators. Last year more pupils eligible for free school meals in Wales achieved expected levels at Key Stage 2 than did so in England. More needs to be done, however, to bring about greater equality in attainment levels for poorer pupils in Wales.

Programme for Tackling the Impact of Deprivation on Attainment

We are developing a tackling deprivation programme. This will provide a framework for action that will cross departmental boundaries and draw together a wide range of activity into a coherent plan. The programme will focus on:

- Early Years
- Family and Community Engagement
- Realising Aspirations and Supporting Pupils to achieve their Potential
- Workforce Development

Officials will be seeking contributions from key stakeholders as the programme is developed and already work closely with colleagues responsible for the Communities First Programme, Flying Start and Families First.

This work aligns well with work being undertaken by Estyn to support schools in tackling the impact of poverty on deprivation. Officials are working closely with Estyn to maximise the impact of work in this area.

2. The role of Welsh Government, education regional consortia, local authorities, schools and governing bodies

We are assisting schools, local authorities and consortia to develop essential support structures such as:

- adopting clear systems for working with outside agencies to support disadvantaged learners;
- providing training and support to develop the skills of school leaders to manage partnership working to tackle poverty; and
- using the Pupil Deprivation Grant to target the needs of disadvantaged pupils specifically, whatever their ability.

National model for regional working: The Robert Hill Review, commissioned in response to concerns about the performance of local authorities and regional made recommendations for strengthening consortia regional working. Subsequently, the Welsh Government and local government have worked together to develop a national model for regional working, which will, ensure a more focused and consistent approach across the four consortia regions, and clarify the way local authorities commission the services of regional education consortia to achieve whole school improvement. The key elements will be in place by April 2014.

In addition to the consortia's brokerage and improvement activities, they will commission and quality-assure delivery of governor support services and training for governors particularly in respect of understanding and applying data effectively. Consortia will jointly develop, in consultation with local authorities, governors and headteachers, a performance data template for headteachers to use to report to governors on a termly or half termly basis. The report will cover pupil attendance, pupil exclusions, staff sickness absence, quality of teaching, and progress and attainment data relative to targets.

Local authorities will retain the statutory accountability for school performance together with the responsibility for the exercise of statutory powers of intervention and the organisation of schools.

Looked After Children (LAC): We are committed to improving the educational outcomes of looked after children, and children in need more generally and have been engaging with a wide range of stakeholders and other experts to build support for a new plan for improving the educational outcomes for LAC.

It has become apparent that although a considerable amount of funding is directed towards supporting LAC, the resources are not always administered in a strategic and joined-up way resulting in outcomes not being as effective as they could be.

Along with developing the new Looked After Children in Education Plan, we have strengthened the guidance on the Pupils Deprivation Grant (PDG) and School Effectiveness Grant (SEG) and will also be continuing the work to map the funding streams directed towards supporting LAC.

School Governors: In September 2013, the Welsh Government introduced mandatory training on those areas we believe will make the most difference in better supporting governors to discharging their functions effectively, these being:

- Induction training for new governors to enable them to understand the parameters of their role;
- Training for all governors in understanding and utilising school data;
- Training for Chairs in providing the necessary support and challenge to the head teacher and the senior management team to improve performance.

In addition we developed the mandatory training content and provided training programmes to local authorities to deliver the mandatory training, which includes the Welsh Government's three key priorities of reducing the negative impact of poverty on pupil achievement and attainment, and improving literacy and numeracy.

The understanding data training will provide governors with a better understanding of school data including data on pupils in receipt of free school meals and enable them to utilise the data to challenge performance. The programme includes a section on examining the criteria used to establish a 'Family of Schools' by looking at the Free Schools Meals eligibility of pupils living in deprived areas.

Schools governing bodies may also work together to tackle poverty in areas of deprivation by collaborating and setting up joint committees. This is a particularly useful arrangement where clusters of primary schools are supporting one another to improve school performance.

Local Authorities ensuring schools include tackling poverty in INSET training:

In June 2013, Estyn reported on schools' effective use of statutory INSET days. INSET was found to be most effective in schools where it formed part of an integrated system of continuing professional development (CPD) and linked with performance management, self evaluation and priorities at school and national level. Estyn also drew attention to the importance of linking provision for professional development with school improvement planning.

The findings indicate that literacy and (to a slightly lesser extent) numeracy have been prioritised as INSET topics. Reducing the impact of poverty on attainment has received considerably less attention and the report specifically includes two recommendations related to this area: that schools focus more on national priorities in INSET activities, such as tackling the impact of poverty on achievement, and that INSET is linked closely to the priorities identified for school improvement. The Welsh Government's response accepted the context of these recommendations and officials wrote to local authorities and regional consortia in September last year asking that they take account of these recommendations in their work with schools.

3. Parental Engagement

The developing Education and Skills Deprivation Programme includes a specific strand directed at improving parental and community engagement. Supporting the objectives of this strand will be bespoke parental and community engagement guidance, together with a Programme for Engagement. There are programmes

across Welsh Government that support the early years, which help prepare young children from deprived and challenging backgrounds entering the education system.

Flying Start: The Flying Start programme, launched in 2006/2007, is the Welsh Government's early years flagship programme which in the long-term aims to reduce the size of the population with low skills and thereby ultimately tackle income inequality. It is an area-based programme, geographically targeted at some of the most disadvantaged areas of Wales, and is universally available to families with children aged nought to four in those areas.

Flying Start takes a child-centred approach to improving child outcomes through the provision of four key service entitlements:

- an enhanced health visiting service, with a target health visitor caseload not exceeding one health visitor to 110 children (a ratio of 1:110) in each Flying Start area;
- evidence-based parenting support programmes to meet local demand;
- support for early language development (primarily in the form of Language and Play (LAP) programmes);
- free, high quality, part-time childcare for two to three year olds and younger where a need is identified. The Flying Start offer is for two and a half hours a day, five days a week for 39 weeks. In addition, there should be at least 15 sessions of provision for the family during the school holidays.

These entitlements include an overarching focus on early identification of additional support needs.

Parental support is improved through enhancing access to health visitors, childcare and programmes for example, that are associated with enabling improvements in children's development (whether in cognitive, social, behavioural or communication skills), facilitating the early identification of need and supporting the integration of services (through data sharing, for example).

Families First: is a key part of the Welsh Government's approach to tackling child poverty: the programme was designed to address the strategic objectives set out in the 2011 Welsh Child Poverty Strategy. It aims to meet the needs of whole families, rather than individuals within families, and to co-ordinate the support families receive from different agencies.

Families First contains five key elements that all authorities must implement in delivering the programme but they are given flexibility to determine how to implement each of these elements locally. As a result, the operation of Families First is quite different across the Welsh authorities.

The five key elements of Families First are:

- a Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF) used to assess the needs of the whole family;
- a Team Around the Family (TAF) model that oversees and coordinates the interventions families receive;
- a coherent set of strategically commissioned, time limited, family-focused services or projects (in response to a community based needs assessment);

- participation in inter-authority learning sets both nationally and locally; and
- improved support for families with disabled children and young people.

Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant (MEAG) and Gypsy and Traveller Education Grant (GT grant)

Free school meal entitlement varies considerable between different ethnic minority groupings with FSM for Gypsy and Traveller and Black African children well over three times the national average. The MEAG and GT grants aim to raise the achievement of these groups of learners and those who are also eligible for free school meals are also eligible for support from the Pupil Deprivation Grant.

4. Relevant Funding Issues

The SEG and the PDG are the Welsh Government's principal means of providing financial support for our three national priorities for schools; improving standards in literacy, numeracy and reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment.

The SEG mainly provides support for improving literacy and numeracy but also includes an element of support for reducing the impact of poverty. The PDG provides targeted funding to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment.

The grant provides support for regional consortia, local authorities and schools to implement a range of actions set out with the National Literacy and Numeracy Programmes. This includes ensuring all teachers have the necessary literacy and numeracy skills to embed these skills across the curriculum and implement the Literacy and Numeracy Framework.

A central theme within the Literacy and Numeracy Programmes and the SEG is targeted intervention at school, class and pupil level. Schools are expected to use consistent and robust use of data to support early identification of learners' needs to ensure all learners achieve their potential. Funding is being provided to train teachers and practitioners to deliver catch-up programmes to pupils who are falling behind their peers. There is also support to ensure more able and talented learners are appropriately challenged.

Regional consortia have been asked to identify, develop and deploy outstanding teachers of literacy and numeracy who can coach, mentor and transfer their knowledge to their peers. They will support our Professional Learning Communities and partner other teachers and schools to develop and embed literacy and numeracy skills and help promote good practice in the classroom.

To reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment, consortia are required to demonstrate improvements across 5 key outcomes:

- the gap in attainment between e-FSM pupils and non e-FSM pupils has decreased over the 3 year period
- the gap in attainment between LAC and all pupils has decreased over the 3 year period
- attendance levels for e-FSM learners supported by the grant improve
- attendance levels for LAC learners supported by the grant improve
- PDG-funded initiatives include parental and community engagement and partnership working.

For 2013-14, targeted support for looked after children (LAC) has been included within the PDG rather than the SEG; however activity supporting looked after children is still considered eligible under the SEG.

Allocation of grants: SEG is allocated to consortia on the basis of the number of pupils aged 5-15 in each consortium (60%), the number of pupils aged 5-15 eligible for Free School Meals (20%), and the number of schools in each consortium (20%).

The PDG is allocated to schools on the basis of the number of pupils aged 5-15 eligible for Free School Meals, based on the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) data and the number of looked after children, aged 4-15, based on the social services Social Service Departments Activity (SSDA) data. Revised guidance was issued in December 2013, with a requirement for evidence-based approaches for tackling underachievement of poorer pupils.

The gap is narrowing at each key stage, with some small improvements at Key stage 3 and 4 over the last two years.. Now in the second year of the PDG, it is too early to make a judgement about its impact, but a three year evaluation by Ipsos Mori and WISERD is underway, with a requirement to provide feedback and good practice examples at key points throughout the period of the evaluation to support further improvements.

The four regional consortia are charged with supporting and challenging schools on how they support e-FSM pupils to improve the attainment. Welsh Government is currently undertaking regional stocktakes with each of the consortia to provide challenge on the impact of their work with schools on the use of the PDG. Officials have also been working with Estyn to strengthen the inspection process in terms of supporting poorer pupils' achievement and the use of resources, including the PDG for this purpose.

5. Costs associated with education

The Welsh Government has a number of programmes and policies in place designed to provide practical help to those children from low income households so that they are not disadvantaged with regard to the costs associated with education.

School Uniform Grant: In 2005 the Welsh Government introduced an all Wales school uniform grant scheme The School Uniform Grant is available to pupils entering year 7 of maintained schools in Wales who are eligible for free school meals, and to pupils in special schools, special needs resource bases and pupil referral units who are aged 11 at the start of the school year and who are eligible for free school meals.

In 2013-14, eligible pupils will receive a payment of £105, normally in the form of cheque, vouchers, BACs transfer, or in certain cases, uniform items are provided.

Remission of charges relating to residential trips

In schools other than independent schools, the education provided wholly or mainly during school hours is free. This means that headteachers may not impose a charge

on parents for any visit that occurs during school hours or any transport that is associated with them.

The school, however, may still invite parents to make voluntary contributions to the cost of activities, for example swimming lessons, and/or transport costs even if the activity is provided as part of the national curriculum. These requests must make clear that there is no legal obligation to make a voluntary contribution, and that those pupils will not be treated differently from those whose parents have made a contribution. If there are not enough voluntary contributions to make the activity possible and no way to make up the shortfall, the activity must be cancelled. Where activity is offered outside of the school day and is not part of the national curriculum, schools may levy a charge.

A school may not charge parents for anything unless the governing body has adopted a charging policy, detailing circumstances in which the school will charge parents and when it may ask for voluntary contributions. The policy should also explain any circumstances in which the school will wholly, or partially, waive a charge. The governing body should ensure that parents are aware of the charging policy.

Parents and carers who are in receipt of the benefits that form the eligibility criteria for Free School Meals are exempt from paying the cost of board and lodging. The exemption of charges for board and lodgings on residential trips is managed by the school and the cost is borne by the school.

Welsh Government has placed an additional provision in the Education (Remission of Charges Relating to Residential Trips)(Wales)(Amendment) Regulations 2013, to allow pupils whose parents are in receipt of Universal Credit to claim free board and lodgings on a school residential trip.

6. Issues relevant to Free School Meals

FSM Entitlement - Where a parent, carer or the young person themselves can prove they are in receipt of the following benefits they are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM):

- a. Income Support.
- b. Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance.
- c. Any other benefit or allowance, or entitled to any tax credit under the Tax Credits Act 2002 or element of such a tax credit, as may be prescribed by regulations from time to time. Currently the following are prescribed:
 - support under Part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999;
 - Child Tax Credit, providing Working Tax Credit is not also received and the family's income (as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs) does not exceed £16,190 i.e. children who are eligible to receive free school meals;
 - Income Related Employment and Support Allowance.
 - Universal Credit
- d. Guarantee element of the State Pension Credit.

Take-Up Rates: On PLASC census day, in January 2013, 62,583 children claimed a Free School Meal, being 75% of those entitled to FSM. Take-up rates for Free School Meals (FSM) in Wales have reduced slightly over the last ten years and are generally slightly lower in secondary schools than in primary.

Perceived Stigma of Claiming Free School Meals: A survey by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), in 2011, suggests that the main concern for FSM-entitled pupils was queues rather than the stigma per se of FSM entitlement. Other key concerns were the type of food provided; cost (assumed to be the local authority 'allowance' for their meals); and, for FSM pupils not taking up their entitlement, what their friends did. It also suggested that cashless systems don't always result in higher levels of uptake for FSM

Eligibility Criteria for Free School Meals in view of the move to Universal Credit: The UK Government's Welfare Reform agenda impacts on the eligibility criteria for FSM as Universal Credit (UC) will replace existing support payments. Welsh Government officials are continuing to work on the development of delivery options for Welsh Government passported benefits, including FSM, as part of the introduction of UC in Wales. The intention longer term is to maintain a cost neutral option with roughly the same number of families eligible for FSM as is currently the case. Further changes will therefore be required to the eligibility criteria.

The use of Free School Meals as a proxy indicator for income deprivation

As FSM are used as an indicator of deprivation, so changes to the eligibility criteria will have an effect on certain grant streams and on key performance and accountability indicators such as school banding, school data packs, My Local School, school inspections by Estyn, and a number of targets in the Tackling Poverty Action Plan and Programme for Government.

Other Holistic Considerations re: FSM; *Free Breakfast in Primary Schools*

(FBIPS) Initiative: As of 2013, under section 88 of the School Standards and Organisations act, local authorities now have a statutory Duty to provide free breakfast in maintained primary schools in Wales, if requested. Welsh Government provides funding, through the Revenue Support Grant, to all local authorities in Wales for the FBIPS Initiative. It is currently the only level of free universal school food provision in Wales, and uptake on a school level was 78.87% (PLASC 2013). In 2013-14, £14.7m was made available for free breakfasts.

7. Child Poverty: Eradication through Education

The Department for Education and Skills has acted on those recommendations in the Committee's Report "Child Poverty: Eradication through Education" that fall under its responsibility.

The National Assembly for Wales's Children and Young People Committee: Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households

Additional information requested for Written Evidence Paper to C&YP Committee

Welsh Government Strategy:

The effectiveness of the Sutton Trust Toolkit and its uptake in Wales.

The Sutton Trust Toolkit, developed by the University of Durham in conjunction with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), is a well-established source of information. All EEF projects are rigorously evaluated by independent experts in educational research. The extent of the Toolkit's use amongst education practitioners in English speaking countries across the world as well as the UK and the fact that the interventions it includes are constantly being evaluated ensures that they are effective.

The initial scoping phase of an evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant, commissioned by Welsh Government indicates that reference to the Toolkit in Wales appears low, although the sample size was too small to draw firm conclusions. Furthermore, the interviewees in the scoping stage may not have been sufficiently close to management of the grant to accurately reflect how it is used. This will be addressed as the evaluation progresses.

New guidance on the use of the PDG has since been published which makes it absolutely clear that schools are expected to be making use of evidence-based approaches such as those described in the EEF Sutton Trust toolkit. There are however, other sources of information about what works and these have been made available via the Learning Wales website under the Poverty Improvement Area.

The Welsh Government will be meeting with regional consortia at the beginning of February to seek assurance that the PDG is being used to deliver evidence-based solutions.

Other evidence based approaches are recommended to practitioners in Wales which include Save the Children Cymru's Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme, and the Achievement for All 3As programme.

The Minister's response to the first report of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission's findings.

On 2 September 2013, Vaughan Gething AM, Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty, responded to the Commission, describing progress reported by Welsh Government Ministers towards achieving the objectives set out in the Child Poverty Strategy.

The information provided to the Commission relating to Education is set out below in headline terms:

The performance of both free school meal (FSM) and non-FSM pupils has improved every year since 2006, except at key stage 4.

The gap in performance at key stage 4 increased every year between 2006 and 2010, but has fallen over the last two years.

The latest data for 2013 (published on 22 January 2014), shows a continuation of this trend with 25.8% of pupils e-FSM achieving the level 2 threshold in 2013, compared with 23.4 in 2012.

Attainment across the board has risen but e-FSM has risen more than n-FSM at each key stage including Foundation Phase.

Through the School Effectiveness (SEG) and Pupil Deprivation Grants (PDG) the Welsh Government is taking action to improve standards in literacy numeracy and to address the impact of poverty on educational attainment. The Budget Settlement for 2014/15:

- maintains the commitment to increase spending on schools over the next two years;
- provides targeted support to reduce inequalities in attainment by extending the Pupil Deprivation Grant to 2015-16; and,
- provides £35m extra investment in 2014-15 to increase the PDG from £450 per pupil to £918.

Welsh Government commissioned over 1700 places for young people to take part in the Pathways to Apprenticeship programme in 2012/13. This is partly financed through the European Social Fund.

In October 2012, the former Minister for Education and Skills launched a new national implementation plan for the education of pupils aged 3 to 16 in Wales called 'Improving schools'. The plan sets out the three national priorities for education, which are raising attainment in literacy and numeracy and reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment.

The new Higher Education Policy Statement, published in June 2013, re-confirms the Welsh Government's commitment to opening up higher education to all those with the potential to benefit from it regardless of age, gender, mode and level of study, country of origin and background.

On 17 July 2013 the Minister for Education and Skills, the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty and the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty launched Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare Plan. The Plan sets out the direction of travel for the next 10 years with actions and timescales for delivery. It brings coherence across different policies and programmes impacting on and influencing the early years.

Targets/Monitoring

Any issues the Minister wishes to highlight to the Committee in respect of Progress towards the two 2017 targets in Building Resilient Communities:

Taking Forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan in respect of narrowing the attainment gap.

The recent introduction of the Foundation Phase means that indicators have only been in place for 2 years. In 2012 the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals who achieved the Foundation Phase Indicator was 66.2%, compared with 84.5% for non-FSM pupils. In 2013 this had risen to 69.2% and 86.9% respectively. The rate of attainment has, therefore, risen across the board at Foundation Phase, but the difference between e-FSM and n-FSM has reduced by 0.6 percentage points. While it is not possible to draw conclusions from only 2 years of data, if this rate of improvement continues the gap would have narrowed by 3 percentage points by 2017. In other words, the Foundation Phase target will have been exceeded by 1.2 percentage points.

The headline measure of performance of 15 year olds is the Level 2 Threshold inclusive of a GCSE at grade C or above in English or Welsh first language and mathematics (L2 inc). The proportion of e-FSM learners who achieved this threshold in 2012 was 23.4% compared with 56.6% of n-FSM learners. Progress against this measure has been improving year on year and the rate of improvement has been increasing.

Improvement in e-FSM performance improved by:

- 0.6 of a percentage point between 2009 and 2010;
- 1.3 of a percentage point between 2010 and 2011;
- 1.4 of a percentage point between 2011 and 2012; and
- 2.4 of a percentage point between 2012 and 2013

In the past 3 years the rate of improvement for e-FSM learners has been greater than for n-FSM learners.

Given this accelerating rate of improvement, supported by the impact of the PDG, strengthened guidance, resource materials and the range of other measures we have implemented or are developing means that we are on track to meet the target for Key Stage 4.

The role of Community Focussed Schools in closing the Attainment Gap

In 2011 it was agreed that a number of grant funding streams be brought together to create a single grant, the School Effectiveness Grant (SEG). The SEG replaced and consolidated funding previously provided through a number of smaller grant schemes, including the Community Focused Schools grant. The initial aim of SEG was to improve school effectiveness and the guidance set out the importance of Community Focused Schooling as part of an agenda to raise standards and meet the national priorities including the breaking the link between attainment and child poverty.

A key aim for the SEG is to promote rigorously the principle of all schools being community-focused, whilst targeting additional support to enable schools in areas of

greater deprivation to realise the ideal more quickly and more intensively.

Specific additional funding to support the educational attainment of pupils from deprived backgrounds was introduced in 2012 via the Pupil Deprivation grant. This has been match funded with £3 million of Communities First funding to further encourage schools to work with their local communities in deprived areas. Officials responsible for managing the grants and policy around them worked closely together to draft the funding criteria to ensure effective partnership working between schools and their communities.

During 2014, our Deprivation Programme, currently being developed for publication later in the spring, will place greater emphasis on strategies to engage harder to reach parents from deprived communities in their children's learning. The Programme will include a specific strand directed at improving parental and community engagement. Such support will include the development of bespoke parental and community engagement guidance together with a proactive Programme for Engagement.

The future role of Communities First 'learning communities' in closing the attainment gap

Following consultation in 2011, the Communities First (CF) was refocused as a Community Focussed Tackling Poverty Programme. It aims to narrow the education/skills, economic and health gaps between the most deprived and more affluent areas by:

- supporting individuals, families and groups of people who have the poorest education/skills, economic and health outcomes;
- supporting those in places where deprivation is most concentrated;
- increasing the life skills, self esteem and self reliance of individuals, including their financial capability;
- supporting and strengthening the local activity which does most to tackle poverty and deprivation.

There are now 52 CF Clusters in Wales, accounting for around 24% of the population.

In November 2013, The Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty announced the extension of the Programme for the life of the current Government subject to an evaluation and future budgetary constraints.

Learning Communities

This outcome is strongly supported in the Delivery Plans set out by each Cluster. Projects supporting this outcome include:

- homework clubs
- toddler groups focussing on making children 'school ready'
- literacy and numeracy classes more generally but also for children and parents to study together

- basic skills improvement schemes, including schemes for vulnerable young people, children from minority or hard to reach groups
- schemes aimed at improved attainment levels at key stages 2, 3 and 4

The CF Programme supports over 100 posts that are focussed on learning and education including family learning initiatives.

Communities First Pupil Deprivation Grant Match Fund

The CF Pupil Deprivation Grant Match Fund (PDG) offers CF Clusters match funding against PDG allocated to their local schools.

The grant aims to increase the number of schools working with Clusters and build on the existing good working relations within CF Clusters where this work already happens. The Minister for Education and Skills