

National Assembly for Wales

Children, Young People and Education Committee

CYPE(4)–29–14 – Paper 1

Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households

Evidence from: Welsh Government

The committee has requested an update on a number of areas where significant developments have been made.

1. Early stages of implementing ‘Rewriting the future’

We have made a good start on implementation of the programme since its launch in June 2014, both in terms of progressing the actions and in establishing governance arrangements.

Governance arrangements

Governance arrangements have been established and published as part of the Timeline document¹. They are designed to facilitate cross-departmental and inter-departmental working; early identification of risks and issues; and collaborative thinking on how to accelerate the delivery of the programme’s outcomes. The Internal Reference Group (IRG) and Programme Board met for the first time in early September. The Board next meets on the 18th of November to consider:

- current progress on actions in the programme and any risks;
- the findings of the first year evaluation report on the PDG;
- the outcomes framework and monitoring arrangements for the programme; and
- the communications plan for the programme.

A practitioners Panel is also being established to give direct feedback on the impact of the programme within schools.

The **outcomes framework** will set out the arrangements for tracking progress on the Welsh Government actions in the programme, and on the delivery of its desired outcomes. The framework will provide a clear ‘line of sight’ between the outcomes in Rewriting the future, Qualified for Life² and the Tackling Poverty Action Plan (TPAP). Headline indicators will include those from TPAP that relate to educational attainment outcomes for eFSM pupils at the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. The committee has heard evidence from the Children’s Commissioner and others urging Welsh Government to monitor pupil social and emotional well-being alongside educational attainment.

¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/raisingstandards/rewriting-the-future-schools/?lang=en>

² <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/allsectorpolicies/qualified-for-life-an-educational-improvement-plan/?lang=en>

Officials are working to establish whether it will be feasible to include a well-being indicator in the framework.

The IRG and Programme Board will both meet again in February to consider the 2014 educational attainment data for pupils eligible for free schools meals (eFSM) and those who are not (nFSM), and to consider potential programme actions for 2015-16. The two groups will then meet in April to finalise plans for Welsh Government actions in 2015-16. The Programme Board will publish the programme's first Annual Report in June 2015.

Update on progress against actions in the programme

The Programme Board received an update on progress in September. All actions were progressing according to schedule with the exception of one or two minor (1 month) delays in the publication of guidance and resource materials. Key achievements to date include:

- *Family and community engagement:* A toolkit to support schools to strengthen their engagement with families and their community has been drafted. A 'catalogue' of third and private sector programmes that schools could draw on is also in draft. The *Education Begins At Home* campaign is on-going
- *Early years:* Work on the Early Years Development Assessment Framework is progressing well. A review of the whole phase transition arrangements from Flying Start into and out of Foundation Phase was completed in the summer. Hwb+ is available to 99% of schools and at September 85% of schools had already received training.
- *High quality learning and teaching:* New regulations on School Development Plans are being published ahead of schedule. A Learning Pack to help schools understand and mitigate the impacts of poverty on educational attainment is in draft. This pack forms part of the Masters in Educational Practice.
- *High expectations and aspirations:* Work is underway to implement the new approach to early identification and tracking of the destinations of young people, and Local authorities have begun to implement the proposals for Lead Workers for those at risk of becoming NEET.

2. Forthcoming guidance on Parental Engagement

The committee has heard evidence from a number of sources on the importance of parental/family engagement in improving outcomes for children from low income households, and also on the importance of multi-agency working between schools and other agencies in their community. In January 2015 we will be publishing a **family and community engagement toolkit** for schools.

In excellent schools, family and community engagement activity goes well beyond issuing letters and getting parents along to parents' evening: family and community engagement a central theme of school life, embedded in the school ethos, and clearly articulated in school planning and targets. The toolkit recognises that excellent family and community engagement can be a real challenge for schools, and is being designed to offer very practical assistance and to fit with the National Professional Learning Model. We are developing an 'implementation plan' to encourage governing bodies to make use of these

resources and to ensure that Challenge Advisors and Regional Consortia are clear about their role in promoting family and community engagement. A Masters in Educational Practice Learning Pack will be published on Family and Community Engagement in spring 2015.

The *Education Begins at Home* campaign³, targeted at parents and carers, communicates the simple things that all families can do that can make a big difference to how children get on at school - regular bedtimes, showing an interest in what children have learned at school, asking about homework.

We are progressing a review of how parental engagement is reflected in school performance measures⁴. Estyn inspections already assess schools' partnership working with families, external agencies and their community. To strengthen this we are working with Estyn to produce supplementary guidance for inspectors. The new School Development Plan Regulations⁵ stipulate that all SDPs must detail how the governing body will seek to meet the school improvement targets for the current school year by working with (a) pupils at the school and their families; and (b) people who live and work in the locality in which the school is situated.

The committee has heard Professor Egan's recommendation for kite marking promising third sector programmes that schools might bring in to strengthen their engagement with parents and carers. In January 2015 we will be publishing a **catalogue for schools of Third sector and Private sector programmes**⁶ that have proven effectiveness at improving the educational outcomes of children from deprived backgrounds, are available to schools in Wales, and are eligible for PDG spend. Several of the programmes in this catalogue have family engagement as a key theme. The Achievement for All 3As programme is one of these and we have already commissioned adaptation of their programme for the Welsh context and will be promoting it as a positive investment for PDG⁷.

Costs associated with education – a barrier to parental engagement

The committee has heard evidence on the costs associated with education from a number of sources. We recognise that costs can be a significant source of concern for parents and can lead to the isolation and sometimes stigmatisation of children whose families cannot meet these costs.

As we have said previously in evidence⁸ schools may not impose a charge for education or visits that occur wholly or mainly during school hours. Where activity is offered outside of the school day and is not part of the national curriculum, schools may levy a charge only where this is permitted by the governing body's charging policy. Pupils whose parents are in receipt of various benefits (including Universal Credit) can claim free board and lodging

³ Action FCE5 in the Rewriting the Future timeline

⁴ Action FCE8 in the Rewriting the Future timeline

⁵ Action L&T1 in the Rewriting the Future timeline

⁶ Action FCE7 in the Rewriting the Future timeline

⁷ <http://www.afa3as.org.uk/>

⁸ Evidence to the Children and Young People Committee 6 February 2014.

on residential trips. The governing body is responsible for ensuring that parents are aware of the charging policy.

As the committee has requested, the forthcoming family and community engagement toolkit for schools (and later, the Learning Pack) will make reference to these costs as one of the potential barriers to family engagement. The implementation plan will work to ensure that the message is also communicated to governing bodies. The core family engagement activities promoted to schools in our forthcoming toolkit do not involve costs that need to be met by parents: These core activities relate more fundamentally to school leadership, school planning and the way in which the school encourages two-way communication with parents and carers.

In early 2015 we will be publishing **guidance and resources for schools on enrichment activities** that broaden the curriculum and engage pupils with learning and with school life, and where costs (of trips, sports equipment, music fees, after school clubs) often need to be met by parents. We will provide schools with evidence on the types of enrichment activities that are best able to improve educational and well-being outcomes for children from deprived backgrounds, and clearly set out their eligibility for PDG spend. Using the National Professional Learning Model approach, we will support schools to audit their current practice and develop an action plan. We will use this guidance as a further opportunity to make reference to the costs of education.

A Masters in Educational Practice Learning Pack on **understanding and mitigating the impacts of deprivation on educational outcomes**⁹, planned for publication in late 2014, will make reference to the impacts of the costs of education and what can be done to mitigate the impacts.

3. Early indications on the impact of the Pupil Deprivation Grant

On 22 October we published the *Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant – Year 1 report* by IPSOS Mori and WISERD¹⁰. In the main, the findings of the review are positive:

- the headline findings show that introduction of the PDG has led to a significant **increase in activity** to support pupils for deprived backgrounds. Over half was new activity while the remainder was scaled up from existing activity;
- evidence from case studies suggests that the PDG has led to a **culture change** in many schools. This has been achieved through raising the profile and awareness of how schools can tackle the impact of deprivation on educational attainment and how to monitor the impact of their interventions;
- the majority of schools **use external evidence** when planning spend of the PDG and Welsh Government guidance features highly in these figures;
- teachers perceive the PDG to be having a positive impact, particularly in terms of **pupil engagement and well-being**. The case study evidence highlights that interventions designed to have a positive outcomes on attainment and attendance often had ancillary benefits on engagement and well-being.

⁹ Action LT3 in Rewriting the Future Timeline

¹⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/evaluation-pupil-deprivation-grant/?lang=en>

There are however some areas where further work is needed and planning is well underway to address these:

- Schools apply a **wider definition of disadvantage** when targeting interventions. Of all pupils benefiting from PDG-funded activities, 60% of primary and 72% of secondary were eFSM or LAC pupils. However it should be noted that nine in 10 schools use significant proportions of their own budgets to support PDG activities. Across all primary schools surveyed in 2012/13, interventions were funded 55% by PDG / 45% by other school budgets, and across all secondary schools the ratio was 58% PDG / 42% other budget. This means that schools are not necessarily spending PDG money on learners who are not eligible.
- **Few schools say they run PDG-funded interventions that target parents** (2% primary, 4% secondary). However, 62% of primary and 72% of secondary schools say that their PDG funded interventions have had a medium or large impact on parents and carers. The researchers suggest that this may reflect the fact that schools do not see parental engagement as a key focus of the activity even where the interventions involve parents and carers. Moreover, since the evaluation only captures school activity funded by the PDG, schools may well be running other parental engagement activities that are either no-cost or are funded by other parts of the school budget.
- Similarly, **few schools cited community links** as an outcome of their activities, although just under a third of interventions run in Communities First areas had involved the local CF partnership.

In terms of the impact of the PDG on educational attainment, the report is only able to consider the pupil attainment data from 2013, one year after the introduction of the PDG. In 2013, the attainment of eFSM pupils improved, continuing an existing trend of improvement in previous years. The rate of year-on-year improvement was not found to be significantly different between 2012 and 2013 – however, the researchers acknowledge (as the researchers for the Pupil Premium Evaluation also acknowledged at the same stage) that one year is too short a timeframe to expect a measurable impact of the grant on educational attainment.

Welsh Government will be releasing the next edition of the *Academic achievement and entitlement to free school meals statistics* (using 2014 data) in early 2015¹¹.

The Committee will be aware of the announced increase in the Pupil Deprivation Grant to schools in 2015/16 to £1,050 for every pupil eligible to receive free schools meals, rising to £1,150 for 2016/17. This addresses one of the concerns raised by our Raising Attainment Advocate, Sir Alasdair MacDonald, who reported recently that the uncertainty of funding was a key barrier to schools being able to plan effectively for PDG investment. We are working closely with the consortia to ensure that the investment is put to effective use, building on the findings of the evaluation report and also refreshing the PDG guidance.

¹¹ To be published at <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/academic-achievement-free-school-meals/?lang=en>

The PDG is also being extended to 3 and 4 year olds. We recognise that a different approach may be required for this age group and we currently working on developing an effective means of distributing the grant and the guidance that will accompany it to signpost early years providers to the most effective interventions.

4. Role of the School Challenge Cymru Programme in delivering educational outcomes for children from disadvantaged households

The Schools Challenge Cymru programme rolled out in schools this September. This innovative and exciting initiative will inject up to £20m funding, alongside proven expertise, to deliver a package of support that is individually tailored to meet the needs of 40 of our most challenged secondary schools and their cluster primaries.

Schools Challenge Cymru is about recognising that some schools face unique challenges and that these require more intensive, additional support, above and beyond that which is provided as a matter of course. Each 'Pathways to Success' School has been appointed a Schools Challenge Cymru Advisor who provides support and challenge to their school to further drive improvement.

The programme aims to deliver a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and leadership. Schools Challenge Cymru also places an emphasis on effective collaboration to drive sustainable results.

The success of the London Challenge has shown that this approach works. Three key lessons set out in evaluations of the London Challenge are of particular importance: first – early intervention is key, and Schools Challenge Cymru encourages work with cluster primaries.

Second – it takes time, creativity and patience to make the sustainable, long-term improvements we need – this is not about quick fixes, but fundamental change.

Finally, London Challenge instilled a general moral purpose that all London educationalists had an interest in all London's children – Pathways to Success schools do not have sole responsibility for their pupils – parents, the community and other schools will all be participating in schools' improvement journeys.

Drawing on the experiences of the London and Greater Manchester Challenges, Schools Challenge Cymru focuses on four main themes, these are leadership, learning and teaching, the pupil, and the school and the community – including parents or carers.

Given the Challenge's focus on breaking the link between deprivation and attainment, its overall success will be measured in how effectively attainment is raised by pupils eligible for Free School Meals – most obviously measured by the Level 2 attainment of pupils eligible for Free School Meals, alongside L2 attainment for all pupils. This is in addition to the Pathways to Success Schools' own success measures.