

Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Venue:
Committee Room 1 – Senedd

Meeting date:
14 November 2013

Meeting time:
09:15

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



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Agenda

AGENDA

Private pre-meeting – 09.15 – 09.30

1 Introductions, apologies and substitutions (09.30)

2 Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households – Evidence session 1 (09.30 – 10.30) (Pages 1 - 10)

CYP(4)-29-13 – Paper 1 - Estyn

Ann Keane, HM Chief Inspector
Meilyr Rowlands, Strategic Director
Simon Brown, Strategic Director

3 Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households – Evidence Session 2 (10.30 – 11.30) (Pages 11 - 18)

CYP(4)- 29-13 – Paper 2

Professor David Egan

4 Papers to note

Welsh Government Draft Budget 2014 – 2015 – Correspondence from the Minister for Education and Skills (Pages 19 - 22)

CYP(4)-29-13 – Paper to Note 3

5 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to resolve to exclude the public from the meeting for the following business:

Item 6

6 Education (Wales) Bill – Stage 1 – Draft Report (11.30 – 12.30)

(Pages 23 - 61)

CYP(4)-29-13 – Private paper 4

National Assembly for Wales

Children and Young People Committee

CYP(4)-29-13 - Paper 1 - Estyn

Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households

Evidence from : Estyn

The National Assembly for Wales's Children and Young People Committee is considering undertaking an inquiry into **Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households**. As part of its inquiry, the Committee is undertaking a consultation to gather evidence that will inform its work.

Estyn welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence for this inquiry. Our response is set out below for the questions asked. The responses draw largely on Estyn's recent thematic reports:

- Working together to tackle poverty – September 2013
- Annual Report of HMCI - 2011-2012
- Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools - November 2012
- Tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools: working with the community and other services - July 2011
- Good practice in parental involvement, Estyn, 2009

1. The effectiveness of Welsh Government policy and strategy in mitigating the link between poverty and educational outcomes, including the 'Tackling Poverty Action Plan'; relevant education policy; and broader Welsh Government policies in this regard, for example Communities First;

The poverty gap has not closed appreciably over recent years, despite additional grant funding and initiatives such as RAISE. Additional funding intended for supporting disadvantaged pupils is often used to raise achievement generally (boosting pupils' literacy skills for all those pupils below a certain skill level etc), rather than to tackle the specific needs of disadvantaged pupils (cultural, social, financial etc) and to focus on these particular issues for free school meals pupils. Many schools do not treat these grants as separate from other elements of their funding, but as an extension to normal funding streams. Hence the pupils who directly benefit from this additional funding are not always those from poorer backgrounds. This is often because many schools do not do enough to monitor the progress of pupils from poorer backgrounds, and there are no national benchmarks and national targets for outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. (*Annual Report of HMCI 2011-2012*)

Through work to address Welsh Government priorities, many authorities use a broader approach to identify their disadvantaged learners and use this information to develop good strategies and approaches that aim to overcome the barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged learners. In a few cases, they have studied the relationship that school attendance has with benefit claims, crime and unemployment, for example, to give them a better understanding of the issues related to poverty in their communities.

Generally, different services within a local authority do not align their plans or performance indicators for tackling poverty. This means that it is difficult to measure the progress of strategies for partnership working or the impact of this work. A few local authorities have been successful in bringing together service plans for education, youth, and social services to develop a comprehensive strategy for tackling poverty. They have produced an integrated plan that provides a co-ordinated approach to delivering services and avoiding duplication.

Although local authorities have an increasing focus on tackling the impact of poverty and disadvantage, only a few have improved the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners.

The few local authorities that are effective in raising the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners take a preventative approach to tackling poverty. They start with a thorough needs-analysis that identifies the nature and extent of the impact of deprivation on local families. By mapping the needs of disadvantaged families in this way, the local authority can share intelligence with schools and partners as well as providing a baseline from which to measure the effectiveness of new initiatives.

Although many local authorities are improving joint working, they do not always share information about disadvantaged learners with other agencies and services and this is a barrier to progress. Different services compile their own lists of disadvantaged children and young people. A few local authorities are working towards a single, more comprehensive database for information on learners and groups of learners. This would enable all staff to gain a full picture of the needs of individual learners.

In the last two years, many schools have become more focused on the outcomes of their disadvantaged learners. The PDG, the SEG, the Estyn inspection framework, and the Welsh Government data packs have all contributed to schools' awareness of the need to develop their data and tracking systems.

The introduction of the Pupil Deprivation Grant has helped schools to introduce a range of strategies to raise the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners. In many schools, the Grant is used to raise the achievement of all lower-ability learners and not specifically directed towards disadvantaged learners although the spend will still benefit them if they are low-achieving. In these

schools, Pupil Deprivation Grant spending shortcomings are similar to those that Estyn identified in relation to RAISE funding in the past.

The recent introduction in February 2013, of the Communities First Pupil Deprivation Grant Match Fund has the potential to build closer links between schools and their communities in the areas of highest deprivation across Wales. However, it is too early to see the impact of this work.

In general, it is difficult to evaluate WG initiatives on children's outcomes as there are often no clear targets/aims and it is even more difficult to attribute progress to one initiative if a school has many.

2. The respective roles of the Welsh Government, education regional consortia, local authorities, schools and governing bodies in addressing this issue and why there is variation between schools in mitigating the link between poverty and educational outcomes;

Each school is now visited by a consortium system leader to support and challenge the school. While a majority of schools found this support useful when looking at the performance data of groups of learners and individuals, no schools in our recent survey on working together to tackle poverty had received support or advice from their system leader about inclusion matters, multi-agency working, or specifically about tackling the issues of poverty and disadvantage. It is unclear whether system leaders have a good enough understanding of the role played by different services in the local authority to help improve the performance of disadvantaged learners.

Local authorities are now more clearly focused on tackling the impact of poverty and disadvantage. However, only a few are successfully improving the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners. The few that are effective in raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners take a preventative approach to tackling poverty. They anticipate need and intervene early. These authorities gather evidence to inform the actions they take, with other partners, to address issues of poverty, and provide a baseline from which to measure the impact of these actions.

A few local authorities are making good progress in bringing together plans across local authority services to develop a stronger, more comprehensive strategy for tackling poverty and disadvantage. However, many local authorities' planning does not include specific enough objectives, measurable targets or clear lines of accountability. A majority do not involve schools well enough in their strategic planning which means that the role of schools in addressing priorities is not always well understood. The best plans have been developed through extensive consultation with a wide range of partners including families, children and young people.

A minority of authorities have specific targets and key performance indicators for narrowing the gap between the achievements of those eligible for free school meals and those who are not. These more effective authorities measure their progress against these targets. However, many local authorities do not use this information well enough to challenge schools robustly to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

Although many local authorities are developing their partnerships to improve joint working, information sharing about disadvantaged learners is still not effective enough. In many local authorities this is a barrier to progress.

The link between disadvantage and educational underachievement is still strong. In general, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds do not achieve as well as their peers. Most schools still fail to target support specifically at disadvantaged learners, particularly those who attain at average or above average levels. Schools are better at identifying and supporting low performing learners, whether they are disadvantaged or not.

Only a few schools have effective mechanisms to identify and target support to disadvantaged learners. These learners include those eligible for free school meals, those from minority groups, such as looked-after and gypsy traveller children, and those identified as being in need of additional support by the school's pastoral system or by services working with the school.

Most schools do not use their assessment and tracking systems well enough to identify the specific needs of disadvantaged learners or to monitor their progress. Most local authorities are beginning to analyse data to identify trends and patterns in the progress made by learners who are eligible for free school meals.

The few schools that support their disadvantaged learners well analyse data rigorously to plan and implement systematic, whole-school approaches for supporting disadvantaged learners. They have tailored the curriculum to meet the needs of all learners and have raised the achievement of disadvantaged learners by providing effective skills-based teaching and activities that support individual learners, such as mentoring or help with basic skills and homework.

Only a few schools plan explicitly to raise disadvantaged learners' aspirations. Although learners are offered a range of out-of-hours learning in many schools, only in the few best examples are these extra activities carefully designed to increase learners' confidence, motivation and self-esteem. Where schools have had the greatest impact on raising learners' achievement, staff plan out-of-hours learning to match the needs of learners and to complement the curriculum.

The few schools that are successful in raising the achievement of their disadvantaged learners have good systems of communication between partners. They focus on the individual needs of each learner and co-ordinate effectively the

interventions by a range of agencies to ensure that the learners' needs are met in an holistic way.

The few schools that are effective in raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners have identified senior members of staff who co-ordinate and develop well the schools' work with its external partners.

In the most effective schools, the work of external agencies and services is monitored carefully by measuring learners' performance. These schools use their data systems to evaluate the impact of this work. They also share school performance information with external partners to ensure that school approaches are consistent with partners' intervention strategies.

Schools that are involved in Team Around the Family (TAF) approaches are very positive about this work and its potential for making effective multi-agency working more achievable. Many schools reported positive outcomes for the learners who had been supported through this approach. However, a minority of schools in our recent survey identified common issues of organisation with the TAF model in their schools, such as ensuring full attendance in meetings, or reporting procedures.

The challenge for schools is to co-ordinate and manage the work of several external partners. The few schools that are effective in raising the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners identify a senior member of staff to co ordinate their work with its partners. These schools have a good understanding of the support that the learner is receiving, outside the school or provided by an external partner and they monitor progress carefully.

Schools in challenging circumstances that raise the achievement of disadvantaged learners do what all successful schools do to secure the achievement of learners. In addition, they also create an outstandingly positive ethos that allows disadvantaged learners to achieve well. These schools employ strategies specifically to combat the factors that disadvantage learners. Effective schools in challenging circumstances:

- a) take a whole-school, strategic approach to tackling disadvantage – they have a structured, coherent and focused approach to raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners;
- b) use data to track the progress of disadvantaged learners – they gather information from a range of sources and use it to analyse the progress of groups of learners;
- c) focus on the development of disadvantaged learners' literacy and learning skills;
- d) develop the social and emotional skills of disadvantaged learners – they understand the relationship between wellbeing and standards and often restructure their pastoral care system to deal more directly with the specific

- needs of disadvantaged learners;
- e) improve the attendance, punctuality and behaviour of disadvantaged learners – they have suitable sanctions, but find that reward systems work particularly well;
 - f) tailor the curriculum to the needs of disadvantaged learners – they have mentoring systems that guide learners through their programmes of study and help them to plan their own learning pathways;
 - g) make great efforts to provide enriching experiences that more advantaged learners take for granted – they offer a varied menu of clubs, activities and cultural and educational trips;
 - h) listen to disadvantaged learners and provide opportunities for them to play a full part in the school's life – they gather learners' views about teaching and learning, give learners a key role in school development, and involve learners directly to improve standards;
 - i) engage parents and carers of disadvantaged learners – they communicate and work face-to-face to help them and their children to overcome barriers to learning; and
 - j) develop the expertise of staff to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners – they have a culture of sharing best practice, provide opportunities for teachers to observe each other, and have performance management targets that are related to raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners.

“Schools with high proportions of pupils entitled to free schools meals tend not to perform as well as those with pupils from more advantaged backgrounds, but there are schools that are exceptions. Of the five secondary schools with excellent performance inspected this year, three have about a quarter or more of their pupils entitled to free schools meals and these pupils perform well. This is because the schools concerned take a whole-school, strategic approach to tackling disadvantage.

A common feature of these schools is strong leadership. Strong headteachers lead a structured, coherent and focused approach to closing the poverty gap by developing the expertise of staff, strengthening community links and engaging parental support. Most teachers say that engaging parents is a key factor in tackling the under-achievement of disadvantaged learners.” (*Annual Report of HMCI 2011-2012*)

3. Whether Welsh Government policy sufficiently takes forward issues relating to parental engagement in respect of the educational outcomes of children from low-income households, and whether it addresses the views and experiences of children and young people from such households regarding the barriers in this regard;

Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds have parents who are less likely to be involved in their children's education and are more likely to have a negative perception of school and education.

Our report on parental involvement in primary schools (Good practice in parental involvement, Estyn, 2009) showed that establishing closer links between home and school has a significant impact on learners' wellbeing. Even schools who are effective in raising the achievement of their disadvantaged learners find that engaging parents is a huge challenge. However, the most effective schools constantly strive to find better ways to forge partnerships with parents.

Many schools in challenging areas are developing their approaches to working with parents. Even schools that succeed in raising the achievement of their disadvantaged learners find that engaging parents is a challenge. Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have parents who are less likely to be involved in their education and more likely to have a negative perception of education. Many schools also find that parents do not want to engage with services and agencies that could help them and they work hard to build a trusting relationship with parents. They keep parents well-informed about the range of services, and create opportunities for parents to liaise with these support systems in a welcoming environment.

Successful schools use a range of methods to communicate with parents. They make sure that newsletters, information on the school website, and leaflets about school life and work are produced in a variety of accessible forms. They use text-messaging and social networking websites to contact parents. The schools that are best at engaging parents also monitor the success of the strategies they use, for example by tracking hits on its school website and surveying parents on a regular basis to canvass their views.

However, these successful schools find that the best way to engage with their parents is to communicate and work with them face-to-face. These schools do more than simply have an 'open door' policy. For example, in primary schools, senior leaders and members of staff deliberately plan to meet parents at the beginning and end of the school day.

Many schools in challenging areas have found that holding meetings between parents and external agencies, for example social services, in the school helps parents to feel more at ease and doing this has had a positive impact on attendance by parents at these meetings. Social services also benefit from this arrangement as it gives social workers access to the school's data on the individual learner.

A number of successful schools and their external partners have worked together to re-design the school as a 'hub' for a range of services. By hosting clinics, drop-in centres and meeting rooms on the school site, schools and agencies such as counselling services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHs), and the health service have found that they have improved working relationships with

agencies and services. This has enabled the sharing of information and created an environment that welcomes families and learners.

A few schools employ a member of staff specifically for liaising with parents. This member of staff greets parents at the school gate every morning and encourages parents to discuss any issues with teaching staff. This activity provides the school with valuable information about its strategies to develop partnerships with parents.

Schools often find that parents are willing to attend school events such as productions or prize-giving, but fewer parents will attend more formal sessions to discuss learning and progress. A few schools have overcome this problem by putting on events that combine entertainment provided by learners with information in giving items about how to support learners' progress.

Schools that are effective in tackling poverty and disadvantage have identified a member of the senior leadership team to take responsibility for the performance of disadvantaged learners. These leaders do not only deal with learners' special educational needs or basic skills needs, but are responsible for supporting the achievement of all disadvantaged learners across the full range of needs and abilities. This is particularly important feature of the few schools that work well with a range of partners to tackle issues of poverty and disadvantage.

4. Relevant funding issues, including the effectiveness of the pupil deprivation grant and any anticipated effects of the recently issued guidance for 2013-2015;

Generally, local authorities do not give enough advice to schools about how to spend their PDG. A few authorities have organised conferences and other training events to share good practice on raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners, but this is not widespread enough.

In many local authorities, the Pupil Deprivation Grant has been allocated to clusters of schools. This helps schools to pool their resources to make more cost-effective spending decisions. In Gwynedd local authority, for example, in areas where there are many small schools, the funding has been successfully pooled for professional-development training for teachers to ensure maximum impact.

A majority of local authorities provide some training and guidance on addressing poverty and disadvantage through their advice about the effective use of grant funding. However, only a few local authorities give good advice to schools about how to use their PDG money. Overall there are still too few opportunities for school leaders to learn about strategic approaches to tackle poverty, or how to plan and evaluate approaches to improving outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

The PDG has helped schools to focus on approaches to raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners. Schools are employing a range of strategies designed to improve out comes for learners. However, only in a minority of cases do these

approaches focus specifically enough on the needs of individual disadvantaged learners.

In a few clusters, pooling resources has helped researchers from secondary and primary schools to understand each other's issues. A few secondary school headteachers in our survey commented that this arrangement had raised their awareness of the importance of interventions in the early years. A few schools have designed approaches to improving outcomes for disadvantaged learners across phases through their cluster work. This has promoted effective continuity during transition from primary to secondary school in areas such as social and emotional learning and literacy.

Our recent report on INSET found that tackling poverty and disadvantage was very rarely a feature of schools' INSET programmes.

In the last two years, many schools have started analysing data on the outcomes of their disadvantaged learners. The PDG, the School Effectiveness Grant, the Estyn inspection framework, and the Welsh Government data packs have all contributed to raising managers' awareness of the need to develop their data and tracking systems.

In the best cases, schools evaluate their own work and that of external agencies against clear measures of learners' performance. These schools use data systems to evaluate the impact of new initiatives and share performance information with partners to ensure that the school's approaches are joined up with external interventions.

Many schools now monitor the progress of learners who are eligible for free school meals. A few schools also track this information to evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives. There has been an increase in the number of staff who have received training in the use of data, and in a minority of schools this has improved accountability for raising standards. The schools that are most successful in tackling poverty:

- track the progress of individuals and groups of learners;
- benchmark their progress against other schools;
- use a range of quantitative and qualitative information on learners' wellbeing and perceptions (such as the Boxall Profile or PASS);
- monitor interventions at regular intervals and review, refine or abandon strategies that do not result in improvement for learners; and
- monitor the effectiveness of teachers in improving the outcomes of individuals or groups of learners.

- 5. The costs associated with education (trips, uniforms, sporting equipment etc) and the effectiveness of the Welsh Government's approach in ensuring that children from low-income households are not disadvantaged in this regard;**

Estyn has no specific evidence for this question.

- 6. Issues relevant to free school meals within this context, such as take-up rates, the perceived stigma of claiming free school meals, the use of free school meals as a proxy indicator for child poverty and the impact of the need to revise eligibility criteria arising from the introduction of Universal Credit;**

Estyn has no specific evidence for this question.

- 7. Views on the Welsh Government's response in taking forward the recommendations of the Children and Young People Committee of the Third Assembly in respect of the 'Child Poverty: Eradication through Education' report*.**

It is evident that there is a growing awareness of the need to tackle poverty and disadvantage in schools and local authorities across Wales. However, practice is still much too variable.

You may also wish to submit other evidence that you feel is directly relevant to the link between poverty and educational outcomes, for example the relevance (if any) of class sizes etc

Estyn has no further evidence to submit at this time.

National Assembly for Wales

Children and Young People Committee

CYP(4)-29-13 - Paper 2

Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households

Evidence from : Professor David Egan: Professor of Welsh Education Policy and Director of the Wales Centre for Equity in Education, University of Wales Trinity St David.

- 1. The effectiveness of Welsh Government policy and strategy in mitigating the link between poverty and educational outcomes, including the ‘Tackling Poverty Action Plan’; relevant education policy; and broader Welsh Government policies in this regard, for example Communities First.**
 - From the time of the introduction of the RAISE grant in 2006, there has been increasing focus by the Welsh Government’s Education Department and the education system in Wales on reducing the impact of poverty on educational achievement. It could be argued, as the Minister for Education and Skills has recently recognised, that significant future improvement in our education system will not be achieved unless progress is made in ‘narrowing the gap’ in educational achievement. In recent years as part of its tackling poverty programme, this has also become one of the main priorities of the whole Welsh Government. The ‘Tackling Poverty Action Plan’ sees improvements in educational achievement as being critically important to helping people out of poverty through gaining employment, in preventing future poverty and to some extent in mitigating the effect of current poverty.
 - The record of success of the Welsh education system including the Welsh Government in achieving these objectives is at best mixed and overall is poor.
 - Whilst it is early days to make secure judgements about the new Foundation Phase curriculum, a recent interim evaluation report suggests that it is not leading to a ‘narrowing of the gap’ to the extent that was envisaged. The Minister has responded by commissioning an enquiry into why this situation exists. Evidence suggests that by the time they begin formal schooling, children from our most disadvantaged homes can be up to a year behind in aspects of their cognitive development. Given the international evidence that early years education can make a significant

difference in overcoming these effects, it is, therefore, critically important that the large investment that has been made in the Foundation Phase (supported by Flying Start and other aspects of pre-school education) lead to continuing improvements in the achievement of 3 to 7 year olds from our most needy families.

- In the phases of education covering the later stages of primary education and through secondary education the picture is a mixed one, but overall it continues to give cause for concern. Over the five years between 2005 and 2007, there has been improvement in the expected levels of performance of children receiving Free School Meals by the ages of 11 and 14 (measured by teacher assessment) and a smaller improvement in the achievement of 15 year olds of 5 'good' GCSE's including English (or Welsh First Language) and Mathematics. There has been a small reduction in the gap between FSM children and non-FSM children at the age of 11(4.4%) and a very small decrease (0.5 per cent) at the age of 14. For the achievement of 5 'good' GCSEs including English (or Welsh First Language) and Mathematics, the gap has actually grown by 3.5 per cent.
- The final indicator above is generally accepted as a crucial one. If young people are to have a reasonable chance after the age of sixteen of proceeding to an apprenticeship or moving to a good sixth form or tertiary course and eventually on to further/ higher education and entering the labour market, achieving what is now known as a Level 2 Inclusive qualification is seen to be the key enabler. Even in the period of recession we are passing through and with the knowledge we now have of the extent of 'in work' poverty, educational skills and qualifications are still the best safeguard for moving out of poverty through employment and in preventing future poverty. Currently no more than a quarter of our young people in Wales who are growing up in poverty achieve this level of qualification, after twelve years in full-time education. In some of our most disadvantaged schools and communities the percentage is much lower than this.
- There are of course examples in the education system in Wales where these trends have been bucked, but as a whole the system does not have the knowledge or the level of performance to tackle what is effectively the great 'fault-line' in our educational performance.
- Some Welsh Government policies, including Flying Start, Communities First and RAISE have contributed to the progress that has been made. Estyn has pointed to good practice at individual school level. What this does not represent, however, is evidence of a system-wide improvement

of the type that is enabling some nations and areas of the world to break the link between disadvantage and low achievement and to build successful and equitable education systems.

- How could this be achieved in Wales? Firstly, the Welsh Government and the Regional Education Consortia can do considerably more than they are currently, within existing resources, through 'policy bending'. Secondly, through community-based approaches which bring schools, families and communities together in a common purpose. Progress is being made in each of these areas, but there is far more that can and should be done.
- The first of these solutions should build upon the knowledge we have from research and inspection evidence that schools can make a significant difference for their most needy pupils. This requires purposeful leadership from Governing bodies and from leaders at all levels within our schools. This leadership should focus on using data to identify as early as possible pupils who are falling behind leading to interventions designed to support their learning and wellbeing. It also necessitates that our most skilled and motivated teachers are deployed to work with these pupils using the types of teaching methods which have been identified by the Sutton Trust and others as being highly effective with disadvantaged pupils. It would be worthwhile for the Committee to take evidence from the Sutton Trust and Teach First, the charity which recruits outstanding graduates to teach in our most disadvantaged schools and which is now working in Wales, in this area. Schools need to use all of their resources to support these approaches 'bending' them towards the pupils who most need their support, rather than focusing solely on the use of the PDG, which is intended to be an additional funding source.
- The second solution that I point to above flows from the recognition that whilst schools are a necessary part of the solution to the problems we face, they are by no means sufficient. 40 years of research around the world on school effectiveness, has led to the conclusion that schools are at the very most about one third of the cause of high achievement in pupils. The Committee may want me to expand upon this point in my oral evidence. The biggest influence on young people is their parents, followed by the impact of peer groups and the place they are brought up in. This points to the importance of schools working with their parents and communities to make the sustainable and transformative difference that is needed. This is backed up by research and inspection evidence and the experience of countries around the world and in parts of the UK where the greatest progress is being made in improving equity within education and society. Again the Committee may wish me to say more on this. There are

some examples of such community-based approaches developing within Wales with Communities First, other anti-poverty programmes and the Third Sector being important within these. I would suggest that the Committee take evidence from the People and Work Unit on the work that is underway in the Glyncoch area of Pontypridd and from Communities First in the Ely area of Cardiff. This practice is almost certainly the way to bring about the step-change and the transformation that we are seeking, but it is too limited, fragile and almost random in its occurrence. I would suggest that this is a major area for consideration by the Committee.

2. The respective roles of the Welsh Government, education regional consortia, local authorities, schools and governing bodies in addressing this issue and why there is variation between schools in mitigating the link between poverty and educational outcomes.

- As the Education Minister has acknowledged, whilst reducing the impact of poverty on educational achievement has been for some years one of the three national priorities of the Welsh Government, it has not received the same level of attention as improving literacy and numeracy. He has signalled his determination to rectify this and to develop a national programme. From what I have heard in outline about the programme, it seems to me to be a sensible approach which addresses most of the evidence I have pointed to above. There seems to be, however, insufficient focus on the need to develop community-based approaches, but I may be misinterpreting the very brief details that have been announced. I think it would also be desirable for the programme to be supported by a sustainable funding approach which eventually mainstreams the current PDG and that encourages schools to 'bend' all of their resources towards the pupils who need the greatest support.
- Whilst I should declare an interest, in my view the Welsh Government *Tackling Poverty Strategy* has an appropriate focus on the important role which education can play in preventing future poverty and helping people out of poverty through strengthening their chances of employment. It has also introduced appropriate indicators designed to milestone progress.
- As with the Welsh Government, the Regional Education Consortia have in my view not thus far focused nearly strongly enough on the poverty priority. With one exception, I am less sanguine that they are now beginning to address this priority with the same urgency as the Welsh Government. I could be open to challenge on this and I recognise that they are now beginning to plan future work in this area. Given the likely direction of education service delivery in Wales following the Hill Report, it

is critical that the Consortia develop robust and ambitious strategies for this priority if the progress which is required is to be made. In line with what I have argued above, I think that they should do this through partnership working with Welsh Government anti-poverty programmes, other public service agencies and the third sector. The Committee may be interested in this respect in the work of Canopi in RCT. The one Consortium where I believe progress has been made is Central South Consortium and I would suggest that the Committee take evidence from them. Again I should declare an interest, as I have been involved in this work.

- In my view the essential tasks for Consortia in addressing the poverty priority should be to challenge schools on their current performance and to support schools in developing their strategic planning and associated intervention strategies. In the latter regard the Committee may be interested in the *Achievement for All* programme. I would suggest that the Committee give close consideration to the critical role of the Consortia in taking forward the national priority.
- In relation to local authorities, I do not believe that any have an outstanding record in this area, although given the dispersed nature of poverty in Wales some are faced by considerably more challenges than others. In line with the Hill Report and the current trajectory of Welsh government policy, I do not believe it would be appropriate or realistic for twenty-two local strategies to be developed, where currently there are none. This should be the role of the Consortia, but it is essential that they work strategically with regional and local partners as suggested above.
- In respect of schools, I have already suggested above that there is good practice within the education system, but this is not widespread and there is significant variation between schools in similar circumstances. In general primary schools are more successful than secondary schools at dampening the impact of poverty. This is probably because of the way in which a single class teacher is able to focus on the needs of all low achieving pupils in class, of which FSM pupils are likely be strongly represented. The gap in performance between FSM and non FSM pupils widens significantly in KS3 and KS4 and this is probably a result of the impact of adolescence, a less strong focus on these pupils because of the pressures of accountability around examination results and a less holistic, whole-school approach to addressing all forms of low achievement. An interesting indication of this is the evidence that FSM pupils tend to do less well in smaller numbers in more privileged schools than they do in larger groupings in our most disadvantaged schools. If the poverty gap is to be

successfully addressed all FSM pupils wherever they are located need support and all schools need to address the issue. The reasons why there are variations between schools, results from all of the complexities covered above, but leadership is a critical area. Where leaders are determined that all pupils will succeed to their potential - a characteristic often of primary schools that achieve success- it is often the case that gaps are narrow, non-existent or even positive towards FSM pupils.

- Governors should be seen as being an important factor in achieving the resolute and ambitious leadership that is required. In my experience of as a Governor and in events that I have undertaken for Governors Wales, there is significant interest in this issue. I'm not sure, however, that we are reaching all Governors and providing them with guidance on how they can best support this policy priority, or that all Governing Bodies have the expertise required to provide the leadership that is needed. Developing greater capacity across primary and secondary schools in the same area and involving Communities First and representatives of the Third Sector on all Governing Bodies would be a good step forward in this regard. The potential role of Governing Bodies within the community-based strategies suggested above could be considerable. I think this is an important and much under-developed area.

3. Whether Welsh Government policy sufficiently takes forward issues relating to parental engagement in respect of the educational outcomes of children from low-income households and whether it addresses the views and experiences of young children and young people from such households regarding the barriers in this regard.

- As suggested above Welsh Government and the Minister have recognised the need to have a parental engagement strategy within the programme that the Minister has commissioned. Given the research evidence that this has the potential to be one of the most effective approaches that can be undertaken in addressing the links between poverty and education, this is encouraging. I am supplying the Committee with the report that I did for JRF summarising this evidence. Parental engagement programmes are developing in Wales at local level, within the work of communities First and notably the well regarded FAST programme which had been promoted by Save the Children. In my view we need a review of existing parental engagement programmes, a kite marking of promising programmes such as has been undertaken for parenting programmes within Flying Start and guidance on how schools and anti-poverty programmes should seek to fund parental engagement strategies. This should be followed by a wide

scale roll-out of parental engagement strategies within the plan being developed by the Department.

- It is essential that we listen to the views of young people who are experiencing poverty. Again this is probably being done but in an inconsistent and unplanned way. The Save the Children Young Researchers Project was extremely impressive. I would anticipate that the Office of the Children's Commissioner will be best placed to advise the Committee on moving forward practice in this area.

4. Relevant funding issues including the effectiveness of the PDG and any anticipated effects of the recently issued guidance for 2013-2015.

- As has been suggested above, I believe it is essential that a sustainable funding stream, which eventually main streams the PDG, be established which enables education Consortia and schools to develop a long-term strategy to address the national priority. This should include a formula that more strongly aligns funding to disadvantage at school level and which requires schools to bend their use of funding to support the needs of their most disadvantaged pupils.
- It is probably too soon to comment definitively on the use of the PDG. The Welsh Government have commissioned an independent evaluation and presumably Estyn will also be asked to undertake work in this area. Unpublished research that I undertook in two local authority areas in a Year 1 of the funding suggested that whilst there were some examples of potentially promising interventions, in most cases the spending did not draw upon inspection and research evidence, was insufficiently focused on FSM pupils and was unlikely to lead to clearly identifiable outcomes that could be monitored. I have heard anecdotal evidence from other areas of Wales which suggest similar concerns. There is a risk, therefore, that as with the RAISE funding, this additional resource will not be used as effectively as it could be to address the national priority and possibly that in many cases the money will have been used to make up for shortfalls in other areas of school budgets. If this proves to be the case, it will be a completely unacceptable situation.
- How can this be addressed? I'm not convinced that issuing Guidance is the answer and I follow those who have valued the Pupil premium in England in coming to this conclusion. My suggestion is that schools should be allowed to come to their own decisions about funding, subject to formal approval of their plans by their Governing Body and Consortia. Thereafter

they should be offered support in undertaking the funded interventions and be made subject to greater accountability in relation to outcomes. The support should be through clear and accessible signposting of what works in overcoming the impact of poverty (based on inspection and research evidence) and a bank of effective practice case-studies. The accountability should be through FSM performance having a stronger influence in school banding outcomes for primary and secondary schools and within the Current and future Estyn inspection frameworks.

5. The costs associated with education (trips, uniforms, sporting equipment) and the effectiveness of the Welsh Government's approach in ensuring that children from low-income households are not disadvantaged in this regard.

- This is clearly a key area for mitigating the effects of poverty on children. Whilst I am not well placed to offer the Committee evidence here, I would suggest, however, that as there is little evidence that such meritorious responses actually lead to improvements in pupil achievement, that schools should be encouraged to use regular funding streams in this area and not the PDG.

6. Issues relevant to free school meals within this context, such as take-up rates, the perceived stigma of claiming free school meals, the use of free school meals as a proxy indicator for child poverty and the impact of the need to revise eligibility criteria arising from the introduction of Universal Credit.

- Free schools meals are not a perfect indicator of poverty, but they are the best we have. Others will be better placed than I am to offer the Committee evidence in this important area. One further point here which builds on evidence I have offered above: schools are generally more effective when they focus on tackling low achievement, rather than exclusively focusing on FSM pupils. By doing this they will intervene with the majority of FSM pupils. Some FSM pupils, of course, will not be low achievers.

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Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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6 November 2013

Dear Ann,

Thank you for your further letter of 29 October which summarises your main conclusions following my appearance at the Children and Young People Committee on 16 October. I have set out below responses to the points you raised and those areas where further assurance has been sought.

Protection for schools

My officials have been in regular dialogue with officials in Local Government to discuss the continued protection for schools and I will be meeting the Minister for Local Government later this month to discuss this issue. Taking this forward, we have recently tasked a small group, led by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), to consider school protection. The group is expecting to revisit the annual monitoring forms to ensure they are appropriate and provide us with reassurance that local authorities continue to deliver against this commitment.

The Welsh in Education Grant (WEG) and Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) are directly linked, both being aimed at achieving the outcomes of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy. Indicative 2014-15 allocations for the Grant have been maintained at 2013-14 levels (£5.63 million within the 'Welsh in Education' Action) and monitoring procedures for both the WEG and WESPs will ensure that expenditure continues to support the implementation of each local authority's WESP.

Pupil Deprivation Grant

I am pleased to note that the Committee intends to return to consideration of the effectiveness of the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) in due course. I am determined that schools make the best use of this funding. The independent evaluation of PDG, that is underway, will focus on how the PDG is being implemented and the impact it is having on the performance of pupils from deprived backgrounds.

Modelling work has been undertaken on how the introduction of the Universal Credit will impact upon free school meal eligibility, and the intention is to maintain a cost-neutral basis for eligibility. Since the PDG is allocated on the basis of the number of pupils eligible for free school meals, modelling the impact of the Universal Credit on the PDG could be seen as a duplication of effort at this time.

Literacy and Numeracy

I welcome the Committee's comments in relation to financial literacy and we have made a clear commitment to improving standards of numeracy, as well as literacy, across the board. Our National Numeracy Programme is putting in place a five year programme of activities designed to raising levels of numeracy in school age pupils across Wales. In this draft budget we have set aside funding for the new Numeracy Employer Engagement Programme which is designed to help pupils in secondary school recognise the importance of good numeracy skills in the working world, improving their employability while making them more confident with numbers.

Qualifications Wales and the revised Welsh Baccalaureate

In designing the new organisation of Qualifications Wales, we felt that establishing it in the first instance as an independent statutory body, responsible for the quality assurance of qualifications in Wales, was in the best interests of Wales' learners. The precise timescales for the implementation of an awarding function are yet to be determined, but we will aim to minimise disruption to centres and learners. Planning and discussions are taking place as to the manner in which this additional function will operate in practice and the consequent funding implications. I see the establishment of Qualifications Wales as a key priority for my portfolio, and as such, intend to identify necessary resources during 2015-16 budget round if required once the costs of proposals are finalised.

As the Committee rightly points out, the model for Qualifications Wales, as currently envisaged, does not rely on income from qualifications entries; but neither does it incur the substantial variable costs of the provision of examination services as these services will still be provided by existing awarding bodies. Every effort is being made to minimise the costs of establishing Qualifications Wales, whilst ensuring that it delivers the range of services necessary to achieve its objectives.

In relation to training and development, we are working with the WJEC, teaching unions and other key stakeholders to plan the delivery of the new qualifications and to ensure that teachers and lecturers have the information, resources and CPD/training they need to deliver the new qualification effectively. A stakeholder group has been established to advise on our approach and road shows explaining the changes to qualifications to senior managers in schools and colleges are planned for the first half of 2014. Specifications will be available for the new qualifications from autumn 2014, at which point further road shows will run for teachers and lecturers.

Awarding bodies have traditionally offered support to centres to help ensure that new specifications are understood by those who deliver them. We expect and will require that such support will continue to be provided for the latest suite of GCSEs and A levels, which will be introduced in Wales from September 2015. The introduction of two new maths GCSEs and significantly revised language GCSEs are likely to require additional targeted support and we will work with Awarding bodies and others to ensure that this is provided.

Welsh language budget allocations

As the Committee confirms, funding for the 'Welsh Language' Action has increased by £0.050m in 2014-15. This increase relates to a recurrent transfer in of the same value from the 'Welsh in Education' Action, to integrate the annual grant to the National Eisteddfod for the learners' officer post with the core grant provided to the National Eisteddfod, as part of continued focus on grants rationalisation.

I can confirm that the budget for Welsh Language Commissioner's Office is included within the 'Welsh Language' Action. My officials are in the process of separating out funding from the 'Welsh Language' Budget Expenditure Line (BEL) within this Action, so that the Commissioner's Office has its own BEL from 2014-15 and beyond in order to aid transparency.

While we remain committed to the Welsh language we cannot shield all services from the effect of the UK Government cuts and the implications of prioritising spend. The 'Welsh Language' Action was over committed against its budget for 2014-15 and 2015-16, based on existing budgetary commitments (for Welsh Language Commissioner, Welsh Language Grants and Projects) and additional funding recently agreed for the Technology Fund and set up costs for the Welsh Language Tribunal. As a result, an assessment of the overall budget had to be undertaken to establish where reductions could be found, where the least impact from any cuts would be felt.

As part of the review, it was decided that a 10% cut to the Welsh Language Commissioner's budget, which equated to £0.4 million, could be made and the Commissioner was made aware of this intention. This reduction has been possible since the Commissioner's budget requirements are now clearer following the first year of existence and the production of accounts for the 2012-13 financial year. The Welsh Language Commissioner received funding from the Welsh Government in 2012-13 of £4.1 million with a resulting underspend of £0.5 million. The Commissioner has been able to build reserves from her underspend in order to fund any legal proceedings resulting from her investigations. However, given that the Welsh language Standards and Welsh Language Tribunal will not be in place until well in to 2014-2015, this initial underspend and an expected underspend in 2013-2014 should provide the Commissioner with a sufficient budget to carry out her duties.

I accept that the reduction to the Commissioner's Office was not drawn to the attention of the Committee in our written evidence paper. The request received from the Committee focused this year around Programme for Government commitments, Legislative priorities and preventative spending. The reduction in funding was not considered to impact on our ability to meet Programme for Government commitments in this area, and we remain committed to ensuring the Welsh Language is a 'living' language. As the Welsh Language portfolio now rests with the First Minister, the evidence paper did not reference 'Welsh Language' Action budgets specifically, but did draw the Committee's attention to the reductions in 'Welsh in Education' Action budgets.

Capital Funding

I recognise the Committee's concerns surrounding local authorities' ability to provide match funding for projects under the 21st Century Schools Programme. My officials will continue to work with local authorities throughout the delivery phase to ensure the successful outcome of the first wave of the programme.

We are continuing to explore options for alternative ways of financing the Programme. In her written statement on the Wales Infrastructure Investment Plan on 9 October, the Finance Minister confirmed that she will be making further announcements on the funding to accelerate the 21st Century Schools Programme at Final Budget stage.

Post 16 Education

The first call on the Further Education Provision Budget Expenditure Line (BEL), which decreases in 2014-15 by £38 million compared to 2013-14 levels, is funding of school sixth forms. All learners are protected in this age group. The funding methodology is applied to ensure that the volume of learning funded reflects the full number of anticipated learners. The balance of the budget is then applied to the other sectors.

In Further Education Institutions, the protection is afforded to full time learners who are aged 16-19, thus taking account of those who may start a course of learning at 17, and then switch to a different two year course at 18. The dataset used to calculate individual institutional allocations is split into two categories.

Category one looks at full time learners aged 16-19 and funds them, in full, in accordance with the new Post-16 Planning and Funding Methodology. The remaining budget is then allocated to part time learners, irrespective of setting, the vast majority of whom will be aged 19 or over. Furthermore, when determining their provision plans, institutions are asked to ensure that provision for the younger cohort is regarded as the main priority, with adult learning being the secondary priority. This approach is in line with the requirements of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

My letter of 22 October provided additional information on the arrangements made to convene a small group which will consider how best to minimise the impact of these reductions on both learners and staffing. Discussions with the Further Education sub group will first explore the impact on the provision of learning that the institutions are able to provide. Once that is understood, institutions will need to evaluate the impact on their staffing; which may take some time. In the event that an institution determines that there will be an impact on staffing numbers, discussions with staff will commence to ensure that the process employed is fair to all concerned. Institutions will of course be mindful of their obligations under employment law and my officials will continue to work with institutions to minimise any impact.

I hope this response is sufficient to provide clarification on your points raised.

Yours,



Huw Lewis AC / AM

Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills

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