

National Assembly for Wales

Children and Young People Committee

CYP(4)-30-13 – Paper 2

Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households

Evidence from : Save the Children

Save the Children believes that no child should be born without a chance to thrive and fulfil their potential. We want to see the link between low educational attainment and deprivation broken once and for all. Through our policy work and our programme work on the ground, we offer solutions to the challenges the UK's poorest children and families face.

We welcome the Children and Young People's Committee consideration of undertaking an inquiry into educational outcomes for children from low income households.

It is unacceptable that at every stage of schooling Wales' poorest children do worse and make less progress than their better-off classmates. Save the Children believes that children's backgrounds should not determine the opportunities they have in life. To break cycles of deprivation, children from the poorest homes must be given high-quality and sustained additional support to ensure they can overcome disadvantage and realise their potential. Save the Children believes that a key ingredient to tackle the attainment gap is additional spending targeted at children living in poverty.

Poverty has a significant influence upon current levels of education performance in Wales. The gap between the achievements of disadvantaged compared to advantaged children is significant as early as age three. The gap often narrows during primary school but widens again by age 11. By GCSE there is a 34% gap in attainment between children living in low income households and their better off classmates.¹

Please see our initial response to the Committee's requests for views on the following points:

1. The effectiveness of Welsh Government policy and strategy in mitigating the link between poverty and educational outcomes, including the 'Tackling Poverty Action Plan'²; relevant education policy; and broader Welsh Government policies in this regard, for example Communities First;

¹ Egan, D. (2012). *Communities, Families and Schools Together: A Route to Reducing the Impact of Poverty on Educational Achievement in Schools Across Wales*. Cardiff: Save the Children.

Egan, D (2013). *Poverty and Low Educational Achievement in Wales*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

² Welsh Government (2012) *Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2012 - 2016*

Both Strategies published this summer ‘Building Resilient Communities’³ and ‘Building a Brighter Future’⁴ clearly articulate the Government’s commitment to mitigating the link between poverty and education. We strongly support the Welsh Government’s decision to make reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment, one of its three national priorities for education in Wales. Correspondingly we welcome the introduction of the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) to enable schools to invest in those pupils eligible for Free School Meals. The Communities First Pupil Deprivation Grant Match-Fund, which encourages joint working between communities and schools and which optimises the PDG, is also an innovative and welcome measure which should achieve strengthened links between schools, communities and families. Communities First continues to be a flagship programme in Wales and following its realignment, the three strategic objectives of prosperous, healthy and learning communities strengthen the link between poverty and education. Similarly the Flying Start programme and its expansion show Welsh Government commitment to this priority.

In terms of the effectiveness of the policies and strategies, it is important that application and performance is carefully monitored and outcomes measured. It is also essential that best practice is shared to ensure the most impactful outcomes for all our children living in poverty in Wales. The School Effectiveness Grant (SEG) and Pupil Deprivation Grant Guidance published in April 2013⁵, presents monitoring arrangements which should prove helpful in determining effectiveness and sharing best practice. We look forward to reading the first narrative evaluation reports due in January 2014 and are pleased that the Guidance referenced the findings of our research in ‘Communities, Families and Schools Together.’⁶ (Egan, 2012 i)

We remain concerned however that existing policy and strategy does not specifically address:

- (1) the increasing number of children experiencing poverty even though at least one parent is working
- (2) the number of children experiencing poverty who live outside the designated Communities First and Flying Start areas

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;

Our report ‘Communities, Families and Schools Together’⁷ concluded, as many other academic works have done, that that we all have a role to play in this matter –

³ Welsh Government (2013), *Building Resilient Communities: Taking Forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan*

⁴ Welsh government(2013) *Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare Plan*

⁵ Welsh Government (2013), *School Effectiveness Grant and Pupil Deprivation Grant 2013 to 2015*

⁶ Egan, D. (2012). *Communities, Families and Schools Together: A Route to Reducing the Impact of Poverty on Educational Achievement in Schools Across Wales*. Cardiff: Save the Children

⁷ Egan, D. (2012). *Communities, Families and Schools Together: A Route to Reducing the Impact of Poverty on Educational Achievement in Schools Across Wales*. Cardiff: Save the Children

it is not a problem that schools alone can fix. Importantly, strategic direction is provided by Welsh Government together with resources and guidance to assist all stakeholders to implement effectively. It is inevitable that initially there will be variations between schools as each determines what best meets their needs. Each school and its community are unique. There are a range of potential interventions and to some extent one can expect a period of 'trial and error'. The aforementioned SEG and PDG Guidance⁸ refers readers to the Sutton Trust Toolkit⁹ which provides invaluable information in terms of assessing impacts but whose list of programmes, as stated on the website, is not exhaustive. There are anecdotal accounts of schools using their PDG to recruit staff; this is clearly not the use for which it is intended – as reflected in this year's Guidance. One would expect less variation with the publication of SEG and PDG monitoring reports which will engender the sharing of best practice.

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;

There will always be scope for improvement in this regard which is where Third Sector organisations such as our can help. We can provide access to the beneficiaries of our programmes (Families and Schools Together and Eat Sleep learn Play), who have agreed to speak about their experiences. We can also provide access to young people via our Young Leadership programme and others such as the Young Researchers whose publication 'Small Voice, Big Story'¹⁰, was so warmly received by Ministers, Assembly members and Welsh media in February of this year. The recommendations made by these young people included providing a safe place to learn, peer mentoring, and a joining-in fund to ensure all children can participate in extra-curricular activities (not dissimilar to the Joining-in fund which the Minister for Education and Skills has advocated). Save the Children continues to pursue these recommendations and strongly advocates that policy-makers are given increased exposure to those whom their policies aim to help.

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

Please see 1 and 2 above.

In addition, Save the Children would support that Welsh Government adopts the same approach as in England whereby pupils who have been eligible for FSM at any

⁸ Welsh Government (2013), *School Effectiveness Grant and Pupil Deprivation Grant 2013 to 2015*

⁹ Sutton Trust and Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit, *online resource*

¹⁰ Save the Children Wales, (2013) *Small Voice, Big Story*

point in the previous six years, or have been in care for more than six months continuously, qualify for the Pupil Premium.

We also support the extension of the PDG to Nursery schools.

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

According to our Young Researchers who interviewed pupils across Wales¹¹ this continues to be an issue and one set to worsen as poverty levels increase, as anticipated. The Report quotes from one Focus Group,

'...You need the school to help provide things like running shoes and the things children would like, to be able to join in with everyone else.'

In the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations to the UK in 2008, they stated that:

'[The Committee] is concerned that significant inequalities persist with regard to school achievement of children living with their parents in economic hardship.' The Committee went on to recommend that: 'The State party continue and strengthen its efforts to reduce the effects of the social background of children on their achievement in school.'

Save the Children is pursuing the recommendation for a fund to help children from low income families access help with meeting the cost of additional books, stationery, school trips et al

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

Save the Children is concerned that many children living in poverty are still not entitled to free school meals.

We are also concerned by the persistently low levels of take-up of free school meal entitlement. Findings by the Welsh Assembly Children and Young People's Committee in February this year record that the average take of-up of free school meals in Welsh secondary schools is just 68%¹². Several key child poverty organisations have collectively campaigned for universal free school meals to eradicate stigma and bullying and to improve take-up whilst also reducing financial

¹¹ Save the Children Wales, (2013) *Small Voice, Big Story*

¹² Welsh Government (2013) *Free school meals case study report*

pressures on families. Save the Children supports universality as the best way to overcome stigmatising in schools and to ensure that those children living in poverty who do not qualify for free school meals under the current system, are not missed. Save the Children welcomes moves to facilitate flexible charging for school meals, designed to make school meals more affordable for families, especially those from low income groups.

The introduction of Universal Credit is a major cause of concern in terms of it eliminating the existing means of identifying entitlement to FSM. We welcome Welsh Government's commitment to find alternative means to identify Free School meal entitlement and hope that this will be an opportunity to address the issues listed above.

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

The prominence of this issue in key documents, *Building Resilient Communities*¹³ and *Building a Brighter Future*¹⁴ together with the published SEG and PDG Guidance¹⁵ and targeted funding demonstrates a clear and positive commitment to this agenda.

Concluding comments

We welcome the opportunity to comment and hope that any future enquiry will include consideration of the issues that remain a concern for us. Namely,

- (1) the increasing number of children experiencing poverty even though at least one parent is working
- (2) the number of children experiencing poverty who live outside the designated Communities First and Flying Start areas
- (3) Provision for the extension of PDG to cover other groups of children depending on the new eligibility criteria for FSM set out under Universal Credit, under 5's etc.
- (4) Monitoring PDG spend and looking at ensuring those from deprived backgrounds with good or high attainment levels are given additional support.

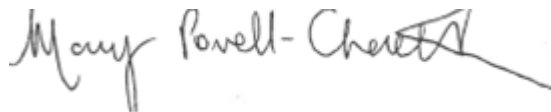
¹³ Welsh Government (2013), *Building Resilient Communities: Taking Forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan*

¹⁴ Welsh government(2013) *Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare Plan*

¹⁵ Welsh Government (2013), *School Effectiveness Grant and Pupil Deprivation Grant 2013 to 2015*

- (5) How the voices and experiences of children and young people can be taken into account in prioritising and monitoring PDG spend.

Finally, we will welcome the opportunity to provide more detailed written and or verbal evidence if the Committee Members proceed with an inquiry.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Mary Powell-Chandler' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mary Powell-Chandler
Head of Save the Children, Wales

**Save the Children works in more than 120 countries.
We save children's lives. We fight for their rights.
We help them fulfil their potential.**