

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales  
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education  
Committee  
Cyllid wedi'i dargedu i wella canlyniadau addysgol | Targeted Funding to Improve  
Educational Outcomes  
TF 19

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Genedlaethol Prifathrawon Cymru  
Response from: National Association of Head Teachers Cymru



**NAHT welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Children, Young People and Education committee.**

**NAHT represents more than 29,000 school leaders in early years, primary, secondary and special schools, making us the largest association for school leaders in the UK.**

**We represent, advise and train school leaders in Wales, England and Northern Ireland. We use our voice at the highest levels of government to influence policy for the benefit of leaders and learners everywhere. Our new section, NAHT Edge, supports, develops and represents middle leaders in schools.**

The invitation to submit evidence to the National Assembly for Wales' Children, Young People and Education Committee concerning the inquiry on **Targeted Funding to Improve Educational Outcomes** is welcome.

NAHT Cymru will focus specifically on the evidence concerning:

- **Schools' use of the PDG and the extent to which this benefits the pupils it is designed to be targeted at;**
- **The relationship between PDG-funded support for pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and expenditure on activities designed to improve attainment of all pupils;**
- **The impact of the Schools Challenge Cymru programme and the consequences of its closure on the participating 'Pathways to Success' schools;**
- **How the lessons and legacy of Schools Challenge Cymru can be used to complement subsequent policies and initiatives aimed at improving educational outcomes;**
- **Targeted funding / support for more able and talented pupils;**
- **The value for money of both the PDG and Schools Challenge Cymru programmes.**

1. **NAHT membership range - Headteachers, Deputy Headteachers, Assistant Headteachers and Middle Leaders - puts us in an excellent position to provide evidence to this inquiry.**

## **Introduction**

2. At the outset, NAHT Cymru note that responses from school leaders continue to indicate perceived shortcomings in using an exclusive eFSM metric to identify the most vulnerable pupils. Many school leaders question whether eFSM is the most effective measure in order to effectively indicate those ‘disadvantaged’ pupils who would benefit most from additional resource such as PDG.
3. Frequently we receive comments from school leaders that indicate how poverty and other vulnerabilities can adversely affect the achievement of groups of pupils who never directly access the full additional resources.  
These circumstances might include:
  - a. those pupils who experience the impact of poverty but have never been eligible for free school meals, such as those from single parent families where the parent may choose to undertake more than one job taking their income just beyond the threshold of eligibility;
  - b. those pupils that are occasionally eligible for FSM at varying times of the year due to unreliable / seasonal parental employment (but not eligible at the point of the PLASC census returns so are not included in allocations of PDG resource);
  - c. those who are eligible but, for a variety of reasons including their family’s perception of an associated stigma, never apply for eFSM status;
  - d. those looked-after children who are unofficially ‘fostered’ by other family members and may slip through the ‘looked-after’ child indicator.
4. The above is clearly not an exhaustive list but illustrates how certain circumstances may result in situations whereby a critical proportion of children and young people adversely affected by poverty / disadvantage never directly benefit from the available resources or cause a dilution of the overall resource within a school as it is spread more widely by the school than the original noted pupil numbers.
5. It is also worth noting that the relationship of eFSM / poverty / looked-after status and educational underachievement is not absolute. Numbers of pupils from categories that would qualify for additional support resources achieve well and their families continue to provide outstanding support to their children in partnership with their schools, despite the challenging economic circumstances the family may face. This is not to say that PDG, for example, should not be utilised in such circumstances, but that the type of additional support must be differentiated by pupil need.
6. Some schools, for understandable reasons, focus the use of PDG on those eFSM pupils who are underachieving, however, in some schools

the resource is utilised for the benefit of all eligible pupils irrespective of the prior achievement levels.

7. However, establishing effective identification criteria is a complex and challenging issue for all governments and is one that NAHT looked at in some detail in recent years. We explored alternative measures that could be used to better identify those pupils that could be considered adversely affected by poverty and disadvantage. The conclusion was that FSM was the best (or 'least worse') of the available options but that possibly including further data, such as the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, as well as utilising the 'Ever 6' FSM indicator for those pupils who have ever been eligible, might enable a greater proportion of those pupils who need support to receive it.
8. NAHT also believe that if eFSM is to be truly effective and the main driver for identification of those requiring support, auto-registration for eFSM is essential as it ensures that as many pupils who are eligible benefit from the support.

**Schools' use of the PDG and the extent to which this benefits the pupils it is designed to be targeted at;**

9. Schools use PDG in a variety of ways and frequently seek to be flexible in the use of the resource in order to meet the varying needs of eligible pupils. Schools may implement specific interventions, such as catch-up literacy programmes, to support particular groups of pupils and such circumstances frequently feature a combination of PDG, other relevant grants and core school budgets.
10. Undoubtedly, there is an effect caused by accountability as to the type of support put in place by schools. Despite recognising the inextricable link between pupil mental health and wellbeing and their ability to learn and make effective progress, schools – particularly those under pressure from literacy and numeracy targets – may choose to focus on specific literacy and numeracy interventions funded by PDG, rather than on initiatives to support pupil wellbeing as the benefits to those pupils in their academic progress may not come to fruition swiftly enough for the school to demonstrate impact to external organisations such as regional consortia or Estyn.
11. The recently published 'Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant - Final report - December 2017' undertaken by Ipsos MORI, WISERD and the Administrative Data Research Centre – Wales on behalf of Welsh Government, indicated the pooling of resource as a fairly common feature - 'as a part of the full suite of funding provided to schools the impact of the PDG is reliant on the existence of other funding streams with similar or complementary aims.....evidence shows that schools top up the funding used to run PDG activities from

their own budgets and/or other funding streams by substantial amounts’.

12. It is clear, therefore, that impacts upon other budgets, such as austerity effects on school budgets, is likely to indirectly affect the impact of PDG initiatives.
13. Much of the impact of disadvantage upon children and young people lies outside the direct influence of schools, it is also clear that on arrival at school, pupils from economically challenged circumstances can already be at a significant disadvantage compared to their peers. The Sutton Trust highlighted this school start gap in a report in 2016 which showed that in terms of reading readiness, disadvantaged pupils are on average 8 months behind their peers on arrival at school.
14. NAHT strongly believe that investing in the early years, as well as joint agency approaches in pre-school years, is vital if Wales is to close the gap for disadvantaged children and young people.
15. Schools can evidence that funded interventions, such as employing family liaison officers, can have a huge impact. In such cases, schools are able to support hard to reach families, are better placed to provide good communication, run courses to support pupils and families and improve the school to home link as early as possible. Some of these same schools, however, are reporting that the pressures resulting from more challenging school budget demands may require them to reallocate this vital support in the very near future.

**The relationship between PDG-funded support for pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and expenditure on activities designed to improve attainment of all pupils;**

16. The use of PDG funding is rarely in isolation and frequently involves the pooling of different resources, as cited in the ‘Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant - Final report - December 2017’. Most schools seek to undertake a holistic approach to the self-evaluation / school improvement cycle and, in analysing pupil data and utilising their knowledge of specific pupil needs, will seek to co-ordinate the use of all resources, including PDG resource, on a whole school basis.
17. NAHT fear that the pressures now facing school budgets will have a direct influence upon the type of activities they are able to add in the future for the most vulnerable learners through PDG and other grants.

18. School leaders have told us the following in relation to their budgets and the knock on effect this has with additional grants such as the PDG:
- 'Across the authority, the schools managing to draw together a budget anything like the one they need, tend to be the ones in receipt of significant pupil deprivation grant. We lost £50,000 to the UK government's apprenticeship levy; so we lose two staff to pay for it and the parents will be very unhappy with that situation.'
  - 'Our budget is £300,000 short this year and we are looking at reducing interventions and have increased class sizes'
  - 'Grants (such as EIG and PDG) are masking the extent of the funding shortfall'

**The impact of the Schools Challenge Cymru programme and the consequences of its closure on the participating 'Pathways to Success' schools;**

19. The Schools Challenge Cymru (SCC) programme appeared to present a varied picture. It appeared to be highly dependent upon the lead school and their commitment and ability to link with partnership schools. NAHT are aware of secondary schools in receipt of the SCC funding where primaries in the same cluster saw little benefit at all. In one such case there was no evidence of impact of spending or partnership working. In fact monies promised through agreed plans never materialised, staff appointed by the secondary school to benefit cross phase working did not attend meetings or deliver any programmes and the Schools Challenge Cymru Challenge Adviser at that time never made it to the many cluster meetings to which they were invited. Headteachers from the primary cluster schools never met the SCC Challenge Adviser.
20. However, elsewhere secondary lead schools took a different approach and made effective use of SCC money with visible impact. Partnership working was a key feature and there was a degree of sustainability planned into the system beyond the initial funding.
21. It was somewhat unclear how robustly and consistently the regional consortia monitored the use of the SCC funds. It is also worth noting that the positive outcomes of such a programme are potentially both longer term and in areas such as pupil confidence, wellbeing and engagement which are harder to demonstrate in terms of measurable impact over a short time period.
22. Clearly, the closure of the SCC programme had a variable impact upon the various 'Pathways to Success' schools, depending upon the level of cluster, joined up working that had been established by the lead schools – where it was poor, the impact would have been

minimal, however, where it had been effective, the loss of the programme would place under threat some positive outcomes for vulnerable pupils.

**How the lessons and legacy of Schools Challenge Cymru can be used to complement subsequent policies and initiatives aimed at improving educational outcomes;**

23. In his paper, 'Education Community Partnerships: A new way forward for Education in Wales', Professor David Egan notes a number of features of successful school community co-ordinated approaches from across the world that seek to tackle the underachievement of disadvantaged pupils.

The lessons from the SCC programme appear to align with this type of thinking - in practical terms Professor Egan notes the following requirements in the approach:

- High quality pre-school education.
- Excellent learning and teaching within schools.
- Family engagement opportunities
- Extensive out-of-hours learning opportunities
- A strong focus on wellbeing.
- Opportunities for early intervention when anyone falls behind in their learning.
- A variety of routes to employability.

24. If the above were to be undertaken, with similar cluster focused approaches as the SCC programme intended, with robust monitoring and an expectation of joint working between schools and their partners the approach could prove to be more effective. Leadership across the sectors need to share the aspirations, secure buy-in to that commitment through pooling of resources to address the challenges faced by such vulnerable learners and their families both within and outside the learning environment (including front loading pre-school and early years) - as a result there should be a greater opportunity of success for children and young people.

25. For Wales to effectively tackle disadvantage and the impact of poverty on the educational outcomes of children and young people, high level government policy across the various sectors needs to align.

26. In addition, there must be an acceptance that educational institutions cannot address the types of disadvantage affecting children and young people by themselves, each sector must recognise and work together to maximise their impact.

27. Professor David Egan explains that, 'The increasing knowledge we have about the importance of families and communities in influencing educational achievement, joined with a new model of

school improvement, can offer a new innovative direction for Welsh education policy which could be particularly focused on improving equity within the system.....The development of Education Community Partnerships, influenced by current emerging practice in Wales and examples drawn from other countries, could provide an organisational format for this new direction in Welsh education policy.'

28. However, this could prove to be an insurmountable challenge without adequate core funding of the school system as a whole, otherwise the risks outlined in paragraphs 13 and 14 would potentially dilute the impact of the focused resources if they are still covering gaps elsewhere in core budgets.

### **Targeted funding / support for more able and talented pupils;**

29. In previous evidence sessions to the Children, Young People and Education committee concerning areas such as the Additional Learning Needs Bill and the emotional resilience, mental health and wellbeing of children, as well as in paragraphs 13 and 14 of this paper, school leaders have outlined the pressures currently facing them in terms of the use of such funding and resource.

30. The need to target funding / support for more able and talented (MAT) pupils is fully accepted and continues to be a focus for many schools. However, where prioritising is now an inevitable consequence of the increasingly limited resources, schools are left with little left in order to support MAT pupils once they have ensured those learners who are struggling most are supported. For example, numbers of schools are losing support staff who in the past would have been providing additional challenge and support to the most able pupils.

### **The value for money of both the PDG and Schools Challenge Cymru programmes.**

31. One of the major difficulties in assessing the value for money of the PDG and the SCC programmes is being certain that the additional resource or programme itself was the sole reason for any positive outcomes, particularly given the point made earlier in our evidence about combined funding streams. As the 'Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant - Final report - December 2017' states, '.... it is worth reiterating that schools top up PDG funding by a considerable amount. It is therefore difficult to assess the extent to which the additional funding works with PDG to support a wider cohort of learners, who, schools consider, experience broader disadvantage than just being e-FSM.'

32. Any additional resource is welcome and should provide a positive impact for pupils, however, two factors need to be noted. Firstly, the metrics that are to be used to gauge success - certain pupil

data accountability measures are too narrow, or are over too short a time period to provide reliable progress measures – and secondly, only if the resource is completely additional and not diluted by inadequate funding elsewhere.

33. One NAHT school leader member stated, ‘In truth, PDG does not add extra resources if it covers core staffing costs and these core staff members deliver interventions as well as trying to offer in-class support. At KS2 my school has two Teaching Assistants (shared between 6 classes) and without PDG we may not be able to sustain that. This is not enough support but we did not want to set a deficit budget.’
34. Some school leaders report that they submit a grant funding impact report with detailed information on programmes being funded and measurable impact of those to their Challenge Adviser twice per year. It is unclear whether this is a consistent approach across all Challenge Advisers or regional consortia. If this was the case, the level of detailed evidence of the impact of targeted funding would be considerable.

## **Conclusion**

35. For targeted funding to improve educational outcomes, NAHT believe a number of factors need to be considered and acknowledged. These can most effectively be expressed as:
- Education policies (and schools themselves) not operating in isolation;
  - Pooling of cross-sector resourcing to maximise impact;
  - Cross sector leadership being supported to work collaboratively;
  - Strong focus on pre-school and early years;
  - Investment in developing quality of teaching;
  - Support for wider family needs and community to develop effective home-school links;
  - Ensuring additional targeted funding is not consumed or diluted by insufficiency of funding elsewhere;
  - Accountability measures that encourage all stakeholders to seek equity and positive outcomes for all;
  - Providing a clear purpose for maximising educational outcomes related to aspirations, employability and future success – make sure this is clear to children and young people and their families.

**Rob Williams – Policy Director NAHT Cymru**



## References:

- ***‘EDUCATION COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: A NEW WAY FORWARD FOR EDUCATION IN WALES’***

written by Professor David Egan. June 2016

(The Wales Centre for Equity in Education is a national policy and applied research centre dedicated to improving educational equity in Wales. It is a joint initiative between the University of Wales and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.)

- ***Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant  
Final report - December 2017***

Written for Welsh Government by Julia Pye, Lucy Lindley (Ipsos MORI)  
Chris Taylor, Daniel Evans (WISERD) Katy Huxley (Administrative Data  
Research Centre – Wales)

- The Sutton Trust - ***‘International inequalities’ - Learning from international comparisons***

Written by Sean Reardon and Jane Waldfogel  
December 2016