

Actions from giving oral evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee on 14th March 2018 – in regard to Inquiry on Targeted Funding and HMCI Annual Report

Session re Inquiry on Targeted Funding:

- 1. A note on examples of schools that have made considerable progress in narrowing the attainment gap between eFSM and non FSM pupils, and an explanation of what you would regard as making considerable progress in narrowing the gap.**

Given the considerable differences in contexts of individual schools across Wales, it is difficult to quantify considerable progress in narrowing the gap. For example, the sizes of schools vary considerably meaning that the percentage value of individual pupils can have a notable impact on overall data. In addition, there are schools with particularly high proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals and those with very few learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Overall, disadvantaged learners need considerable support to match the performance of other learners at every stage of learning. Schools that do very well in reducing the attainment gap tend to focus on meeting the needs of individual learners from disadvantaged backgrounds particularly well. These needs often go beyond academic needs alone. This impacts positively on overall school performance and results in a reduced performance gap. Pupil performance data at foundation phase and key stages 2 and 3 has not always been reliable enough to ensure that a school's own measure of the performance gap is accurate or to ensure that schools with robust assessment arrangements are comparing their outcomes with a reliable pool of national data. Estyn focuses primarily on whether schools meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils successfully and on whether these learners make the progress and achieve the standards they are capable of in learning and wellbeing.

The examples below are from two secondary schools with externally verified data that confirms their success in narrowing the attainment gap. In both these schools, there is strong teaching and provision for literacy and numeracy. Leaders in both schools have been particularly effective in establishing extremely strong cultures based on high aspirations and sustained improvement.

Fitzalan High School

At key stage 3, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals achieving the core subject indicator has improved over the last three years and is well above the national average for this group of pupils. At key stage 4, in all indicators, the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above national averages for these pupils. Attendance rates are exceptionally high. They have been consistently well above modelled outcomes for the last five years and place the school in the top quarter of similar schools throughout this period. The attendance

rates of pupils eligible for free school meals are significantly above the national average for this group of pupils.

Provision in key stage 3 meets statutory requirements and builds well on previous learning. The school provides an extensive range of subject options at key stage 4 and in the sixth form, including a wide variety of vocational qualifications. It is highly effective in responding flexibly to pupils' needs and interests to provide a curriculum that is tailored to each individual. The school provides high quality provision to support those pupils at risk of disengagement. This has a very positive impact on the outcomes of these pupils.

Cefn Hengoed Community School

Around 41% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average of 17.4%. About 60% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales.

Pupils eligible for free school meals achieve remarkably high standards when compared with similar schools and national averages. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals is considerably higher than the averages for the family of schools and Wales.

2. A note on examples of effective uses of the PDG on looked after children or adopted children, and also on any ineffective uses.

Estyn's main source of evidence in relation to the use of the PDG for looked after or adopted children comes from Raising the attainment, achievement and aspiration of children who are looked after - a best practice report, (Estyn, July 2016). A link to the full report is available [here](#). It is important to remember that this is a best practice report rather than an evaluation of the quality and impact of provision across Wales.

The best practice report's findings are based on inspection evidence; engagement with groups of looked after learners and visits to a selected group of primary, secondary and special schools identified as having effective practice. The report also draws upon evidence from local education authorities and the four regional consortia.

- Nearly all schools visited as part of this report have used the PDG/LAC well to support children who are looked after.
- Until April 2015, the component of the pupil deprivation grant for looked after children (PDG/LAC) was allocated to schools. The local authority had a central role in ensuring that the funds were used in line with the terms and conditions of the grant.
- Many schools were clear on how the grant was to be used. Their local authorities had provided a useful summary for them. All schools were able to

demonstrate how they had used the grant specifically to benefit children who were looked after.

- There are many examples where schools have used the PDG/LAC to meet the academic and emotional needs of children who are looked after better. This was often done through additional support staff, extra tuition, and access to enrichment activities, specialist equipment and other resources. These schools used the grant well and the majority supplemented the PDG/LAC with other grants or the core budget of the school. In nearly all cases this allowed greater access to the curriculum, including enrichment activities, and in many cases led to improved outcomes for children who are looked after.
- A few schools have used PDG/LAC funding to provide specific equipment and resources for pupils. One school bought a sewing machine for use by a pupil who was following a GCSE course in textiles. Other schools purchased computer equipment where this was not available or through the foster care placement. These schools plan well for the use of the grant and can demonstrate the impact on pupils' standards.
- In a few schools, the grant has been used to pay for private tuition for pupils, particularly older pupils studying for external examinations. In addition, the grant has been used to part-fund residential and cultural activities including school trips abroad. These approaches help to ensure that children who are looked after are included in experiences available to other pupils.
- A very few schools use the PDG/LAC to develop whole-school training for staff. This includes training in attachment, mindfulness and effective coaching models.
- Brynteg Comprehensive School in Bridgend has used the PDG/LAC grant very effectively. The school uses meetings with other professionals and foster carers to identify how the grant can be best used to support children who are looked after.

Case study: Brynteg Comprehensive School – using the pupil deprivation grant for looked after children. (This case study highlights the use of the pupil deprivation grant prior to the grant being administered by the regional consortium).

Context

Brynteg is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive and is one of the largest secondary schools in Wales with 1,603 pupils on roll, with 434 in the sixth form. Currently there are 30 children who are looked after in the school. The majority of these are in key stage 3, with just over a quarter in key stage 4 and the remainder in the sixth form. Half of the children who are looked after are on the special educational needs register.

The school has high expectations for all its pupils. The social, emotional and physical wellbeing of all pupils is at the heart of the school. It understands that only when pupils are secure in their environment will they learn and flourish.

Strategy

The school aims to use the PDG/LAC to secure better outcomes for pupils.

Actions

The school has used the PDG/LAC to provide additional support and resources for pupils, to widen their cultural experiences and to develop whole-school approaches to working with foster carers. Decisions on how to use the pupil deprivation grant on an individual basis are made in conjunction with pupils, their foster carers and any requests from professional partners. Careful consideration is given as to how the grant will improve pupils' social, emotional or physical wellbeing and ensure that they keep healthy and safe and participate as fully as possible in school life.

Providing additional support:

- Many pupils have received laptops, allowing them to access on-line curriculum materials to complement the work they do in school. In addition, pupils are able to develop their research skills and apply this to homework or coursework projects.
- Extra tuition, particularly in English and mathematics, has developed pupils' understanding in these subjects.
- The school supports pupils' literacy and numeracy skills by funding boot camps, which give targeted support to individuals. They also provide extra-curricular revision packages in mathematics and English. Children who are looked after attend these activities during registration, after school and during school holidays. The PDG/LAC has been used to fund transport to enable the pupils to stay after school and to be taken home safely.
- The majority of pupils also benefited from the purchase of revision materials, subject guides and equipment for subject areas such as art and physical education.
- A sewing machine and materials have been purchased. These enabled pupils to complete their textiles coursework. As a result, they were not disadvantaged by the lack of access to appropriate equipment at home.

Widening the cultural experience of children who are looked after:

- The school uses the PDG/LAC to fund educational visits, including overseas learning experiences.
- There are a considerable opportunities for out-of-school learning at the school. A range of clubs, sporting opportunities, visits, special events, and links with the community and other extra-curricular activities are available to children who are looked after. Many children are involved in at least one club. The school sets targets in pupils' PEPs to access out-of-school learning.

Working with foster carers:

- The 'Helping Hands' programme was established to support parents or carers of the most vulnerable pupils to develop their skills in areas that will be useful to the pupils' needs.

- The Reading Café provides a space where carers can work alongside their children and support them in guided group reading. This helps to build relationships while improving literacy and numeracy skills.
- Links have also been developed with the local library, which supports this group of learners. This is also part of a wider school 'Parent Partnership Programme', which engages parents and carers in school life, giving them an understanding of the approaches used to teach literacy and numeracy.

Outcomes

- Due to the support and the wide range of opportunities provided, children who are looked after have equal access to learning experiences. These experiences equip the pupils with valuable social and life skills.
- Pupils enjoy school and have opportunities to participate fully in school life. At 95%, the attendance of children who are looked after is higher than the average for all other pupils.
- There have been no permanent exclusions of children who are looked after in the last three years and the number of fixed-term exclusions is very low.
- Through cultural experiences, pupils gain a better understanding of different communities and they develop their wider knowledge and understanding.
- Over time, pupils become more confident. Their sense of worth and self-esteem grow.
- At key stage 3, many pupils achieved the expected level for their age in the core subjects. All pupils at GCSE achieved the level 1 and level 2 indicators.
- The purchase of additional resources, as well as a bespoke timetable, supported one pupil to achieve an A grade for the practical element of their GCSE design technology course.
- At the end of Year 7, an achievement evening is held, where a number of awards are given. These celebrate the successes of children who are looked after. Over the last four years, children who are looked after have had their achievements recognised. They have received various awards, including the Spirit of Brynteg award, a sponsored citizenship award and school council, skills and Spelling Bee Champions awards.

The report also identified that:

- In Greenfield Special School in Merthyr Tydfil, the LACE co-ordinator was effective in monitoring the resources and provision provided by the PDG/LAC funding last year. Pupils' social workers and foster carers also contributed to reviewing the impact of the use of the PDG/LAC. However, the involvement of foster carers in planning for the use of the grant is not a common feature across schools in Wales.
- Very few independent special schools receive the pupil deprivation grant. Most local authorities consider that the funding provided for placements covers all aspects of provision for the pupils. Where PDG/LAC funding has

been made available, a minority of schools have used this to provide increased access to community and cultural activities such as theatre trips.

- Since April 2015, regional education consortia are responsible for the PDG/LAC funding. Consortia were required to produce spending plans that clearly outlined how the grant would be used within the consortia and the expected benefits for children who are looked after. Each of the consortia produced a spending plan that outlines its broad principles. All have improving outcomes in literacy and numeracy for children who are looked after as their top priorities. Additional priorities include early intervention, tracking individual pupil progress and support for school staff through increased training opportunities.
- There is considerable variation in the level of detail in consortia plans. The rationale for priorities is not always clear. Actions that need to be taken are sometimes vague and often relate to processes rather than the expected benefits or outcomes for children who are looked after. Costings against priority areas are not provided in half of the spending plans. In addition, there is a lack of clarity about how monies are delegated to schools or how schools can access the grant to support the specific needs of individual pupils. This uncertainty puts additional pressures on schools, particularly where they are maintaining a level of service that was previously funded through the PDG/LAC.
- The regional consortia were not well placed to determine how to use the PDG/LAC. They lacked expertise in this area, failed to consult widely enough with expert practitioners to gain a broader insight into the challenges, and did not use all available data to inform their plans. In addition, the timescale they were given to produce meaningful spending plans was too short.
- Regional consortia do not have a good enough understanding of where there is good or effective practice either within their own local authorities or further afield. As a result, they exclude practices that are effective and are unsure whether the approaches included in their plans will be successful.
- As a result, many schools are unaware of the region's strategy and what this means for them. This has created a degree of uncertainty and many schools are unsure whether they will be able to maintain the enhanced level of curriculum and support that they provide for children who are looked after.

Estyn has limited evidence of the impact of the use of PDG funding on outcomes for looked after learners since the publication of this report, for the academic year 2016-17. It is important to note that Estyn does not report on standards or progress of particularly small groups of learners (normally 5 or less) to avoid the identification of individual learners.

- 3. The Chief Inspector referred to data from Year 6 pupils looking at value added, during the discussion of tracking and more able learners – anything you can provide on this would be useful.**

Overall, too few schools use the PDG to support more able learners to achieve their full potential. It is much more common for schools to target pupils to reach the expected outcomes and levels, for example through intervention strategies for literacy and numeracy. In the thematic report '**Supporting more able and talented pupils. How best to challenge and nurture more able and talented pupils: Key stages 2 to 4**' [here](#), (Estyn, March 2018), inspectors identified that:

In key stage 2:

Pupils who are eligible for free school meals achieve consistently less well than their peers in key stage 2 and key stage 3. Since 2012, the gap has increased slightly in all of the core subjects at key stage 2 and is wider for all subjects at key stage 3 than at key stage 2 (Welsh Government, 2017f & 2017g).

The increases in pupils' outcomes at the higher than expected levels at key stages 2 and 3 over time continue to raise questions about the reliability and validity of teacher assessments, particularly whether there is too much emphasis on teacher assessments for accountability purposes rather than accurate assessment to improve learning.

In key stage 4

More able pupils eligible for free school meals do not perform as well as other pupils who are more able. The gap in performance in the percentage of pupils gaining five A* to A grades has been around 15% for the past three years (Welsh Government, 2017c). Pupils in Welsh-medium schools achieve better than pupils in English-medium schools. This is due in part to Welsh medium schools having lower levels of pupils eligible for free school meals (Welsh Government, 2017c).

National Tests

National test data indicates that pupils eligible for free school meals are much less likely to attain a standardised score of >115 in any of the national tests. A link to the Welsh Government statistics website is <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/national-reading-numeracy-tests-entitlement-free-school-meals/?lang=en>

Questions not covered in either session

- 1. Which aspects of Schools Challenge Cymru could/should be applied more generally to school improvement now that the programme has ended? Does Estyn have any role in the Welsh Government's stated intention to learn lessons from Schools Challenge Cymru and apply them to school improvement across the board?**

The need to co-ordinate support for schools

A majority of SCC schools benefited from the co-ordinated support facilitated by the Accelerated Improvement Boards. A range of partners were represented on the board and provided support to the school and regularly reviewed progress.

The recognition that a minority of schools require bespoke intervention

The programme recognised that a minority of schools needed more extensive and bespoke assistance and resources to support improvement and that the secondary sector faced different and sometimes more complex challenges to improve leadership, provision and standards

The importance of evaluation

Extensive professional support and training helped to ensure that there was greater consistency in the quality of evaluations and analyses.

Estyn recognises the need to co-ordinate support for schools and local authorities, therefore in the latter part of the 2010-2016 inspection cycle, as part of our link inspector work with local authorities, we developed an “improvement conference” approach to help local authorities to improve aspects of their work that were weak and causing concern.

The aim of the improvement conferences is for inspectors to seek assurance from senior officers and members that the authority and its consortium understands and takes shared responsibility for the issues that are resulting in poor performance.

During the conference, we check that the authority has coherent plans to improve, has sufficient resources to implement its plans and has rigorous processes in place to monitor and evaluate their impact. The implementation of the plans is then monitored by the local authority link inspectors during their visits to the local authorities.

During 2016 and 2017 we held pilot improvement conferences in three local authorities, Pembrokeshire, Powys and Wrexham. We invited the key senior officers, elected members and partners to meet to explore the specific areas of their work that were causing concern. In all three pilot conferences, secondary performance was an issue identified as needing to be improved.

At the end of each conference, we were assured that the local authorities understood the reasons behind the weak performance of their secondary schools and that they were taking appropriate action to rectify the situation. For example, the senior leaders in Pembrokeshire authority changed the challenge adviser for nearly all of its eight secondary schools to provide more effective support and challenge. The council also agreed a proposal to reorganise secondary education in Haverfordwest, where the two secondary schools were in special measures.

During 2018, Estyn will revisit each of these local authorities to review the progress that they have made since the original improvement conference. Each authority will be expected to evidence what actions it has taken to address its issues and, more importantly, what impact these actions have had to date on learners. Estyn will write to the chief executive of each authority following the 2018 improvement conference to set out our views on their progress.

Estyn's cycle of local government education service inspections begins in September 2018, and the local authorities involved in improvement conferences will be inspected in full. A full inspection will take place approximately one year after the publication of the letter to the chief executive following the 2018 improvement conference.

Later this term, we plan to pilot improvement conferences for schools causing concern.

2. How effectively are the four regional consortia and 22 local authorities contributing to the 'closing the attainment gap' agenda and the successful use of the PDG?

We can be confident that in almost all schools, the PDG is spent on activities aimed at improving outcomes for targeted (eligible) learners. All the consortia promote the use of PDG in line with evidence of what works. All the consortia have appropriate processes to check that schools' spend plans are compliant.

It is much harder to be confident about the actual impact of the PDG, primarily because it is difficult to determine cause and effect when there are so many other variables that contribute to learners' outcomes. It would be too crude to evaluate the impact of PDG from an analysis of annual outcomes for eFSM learners across consortia.

There has been a tendency in schools to focus PDG on short-time interventions to boost test or examination results at the end of key stage 2 or key stage 4 rather than investing the funding in ways that support sustainable improvements in the quality of teaching and the quality of support for learners.

The Education Endowment Foundation's latest report on the attainment gap notes:

There does not appear to be a direct relationship between increased school funding and increased pupil attainment – what matters most is how schools can effectively and efficiently use the resources they have (both financial and human) for maximum impact. (p2, executive summary)

In Wales there is a strong correlation between schools where learners from deprived backgrounds perform well and schools that perform well overall as a result of good teaching and good leadership.

It is also important that providers don't chase accountability measures where this is not in the best interests of the learner. It is better that a learner misses a particular indicator but has a successful transition into further education, employment and training than being trained to jump through an accountability measure hoop but has no appropriate pathway at 16.

3. In the past, Estyn has been quite critical of the extent to which the consortia focus on particular groups of pupils and track outcomes, for example vulnerable learners and more able learners. What is Estyn's updated assessment of how well consortia are doing this now? (From Estyn's inspections of each consortia in 2015/16.)

Although monitoring and tracking the progress and achievements of vulnerable learners is an established part of the work of schools and colleges, the overall statutory responsibility for these learners rests with the local authority. Local authorities commission regional consortia to support this aspect of their work.

The consortia all have suitable systems in place to enable them to track the performance of particular groups, and these systems have all improved since Estyn first visited the consortia. It would be very easy for the consortia to answer a question about the performance of a particular group of pupils, assuming that performance referred to a national performance indicator. Tracking and the evaluation of outcomes tends to be based mainly or wholly on national performance indicators. However, these measures are not always the most helpful measures for evaluating the progress of particular groups, especially where it is important to take full account of their outcomes in previous key stages, their particular needs and circumstances and of their next steps or destinations. Consortia and local authorities together need to make better use of other information when evaluating the outcomes of some groups of pupils where it is too crude to make assumptions from national performance indicators.

Most local authorities commission the consortia to provide support and challenge to schools through the work of the challenge advisors. Part of this role is to question the provision for vulnerable learners alongside that of their peers. Since the initial introduction of the PDG, the regional consortia have developed a better understanding of the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals than was previously the case. They have a suitable understanding of who their disadvantaged learners are and challenge schools about the outcomes of this group, for instance during challenge advisor visits. Generally, they also have appropriate arrangements to ensure that school's use PDG funding appropriately for its intended recipients but do not consistently evaluate impact of the expenditure on improving pupils' outcomes and wellbeing. The regional consortia now have officers with responsibility for improving outcomes for eFSM but it is too early to evaluate their impact

Most local authorities track the progress of LAC learners centrally and have secure processes to monitor their progress through LAC co-ordinators or achievement leaders. The tracking of a few learners who are placed out of county is less secure.

Overall, regions, local authorities and schools do not place a high enough priority on supporting more able disadvantaged learners to reach their potential.