

FAL 01

Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a Llywodraeth Leol

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Ymchwiliad Legacy

Legacy Inquiry

Ymateb gan: Estyn

Response from: Estyn

## **National Assembly for Wales' Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee inquiry into poverty in Wales**

### **Response from Estyn**

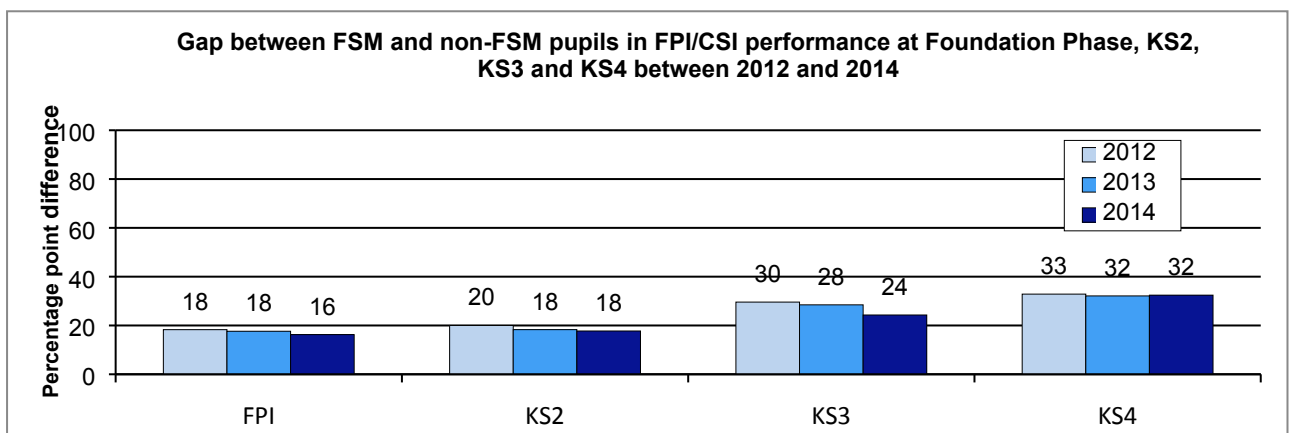
This is a response to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee's invitation to Estyn to share our views on the terms of reference for Strand 1 of the inquiry into poverty in Wales: **poverty and inequality**.

### **The impacts of poverty, particularly destitution and extreme poverty, on different groups of people**

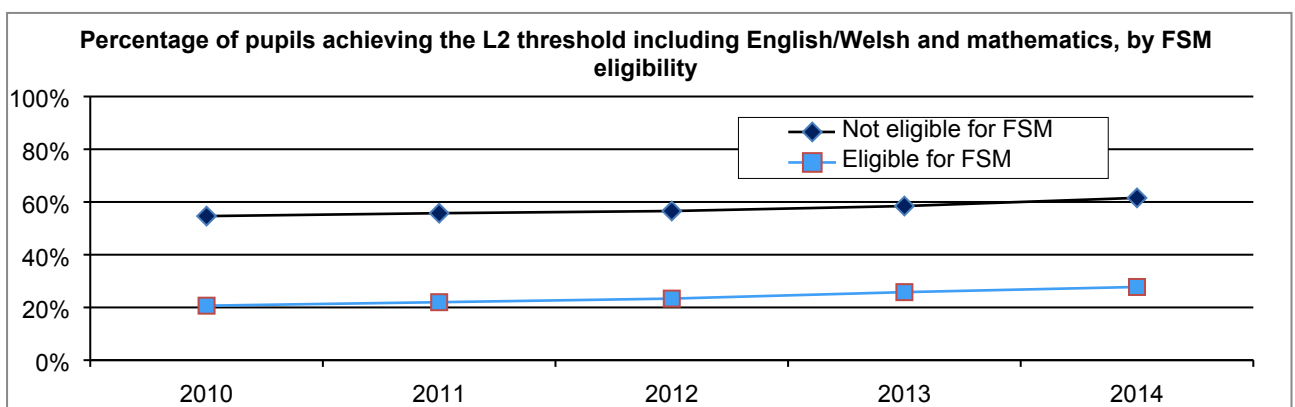
1. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is the key indicator in identifying the level of poverty and social disadvantage within an educational setting. In general, pupils in educational settings with higher percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals are located in areas with higher levels of poverty and social disadvantage. Estyn does not have access to information about the depth of poverty or social disadvantage experienced by individual students beyond eligibility to free school meals and we therefore have limited evidence about the impact of destitution and extreme poverty specifically on the educational attainment of different groups of learners.
2. The overall impacts of poverty and social disadvantage on educational attainment and levels of wellbeing is well documented and is supported by our inspection evidence. We know that socially disadvantaged children and young people are vulnerable in many ways. They are more at risk of doing poorly in school. They usually enter school with significantly lower levels of skills, knowledge and understanding than their peers and seldom catch up. They are more likely to be absent, to behave badly, to be excluded and to be taught somewhere other than in a school. They may not have access to the same resources, such as a computer or a quiet place to work, that are available to their peers. Their parents may not be able to help them with their schoolwork because the parents themselves have a negative perception and experience of education. In adulthood, they are more likely to be low paid, be unemployed and have poorer health.
3. In recent HMCI annual reports, we have shown that learners who are eligible for free school meals perform significantly less well than other learners against a range of performance indicators. The most recent data shows that the performance of both

pupils eligible for free-school meals and non-free school meal learners has improved over the last five years. However, the gap between them remains too wide, increases with each successive key stage and is not closing significantly. There is a strong statistical link between poverty and low educational attainment. The following paragraphs exemplify the impact of poverty on key indicators for academic attainment and wellbeing.

- The data below shows the performance gap for attainment of the Foundation Phase indicator (FPI) and core subject indicator (CSI) between learners eligible for free school meals and those who are not over a three year period. The data shows that at Foundation Phase, key stage 2 and key stage 3 the gap in percentages has decreased very slightly during this period. At key stage 4, the difference in performance between those learners eligible for free school meals and those who are not has stayed at around 32 percentage points.



- In 2014, at key stage 4, the performance of all learners at the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics improved at a slightly better rate than in previous years, however, the gap in attainment between those eligible for free school meals and other learners increased slightly between 2013 and 2014. The performance gap has stayed the same at around 33-34 percentage points over the five year period between 2010 and 2014.

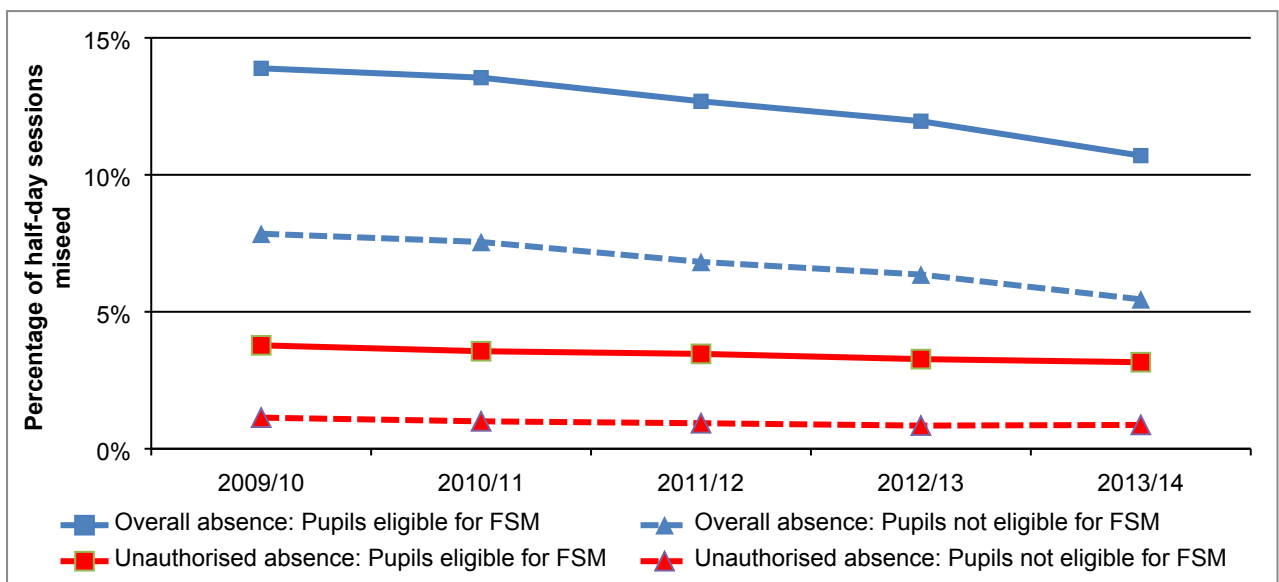


- There is considerable variation in the performance of pupils eligible and not eligible for free school meals between different local authorities in Wales. For example,

when considering the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics for 2014, the performance gap ranges from as low as 16% to as high as 46%.

7. Pupils eligible for free school meals are much less likely to achieve the higher performance levels. For example, around 3% of all pupils achieving 5 A\* grades at GCSE in 2014 were eligible for free school meals.
8. Absence from school has a clear impact on educational performance. Attainment decreases as absence increases. There is also a strong relationship between the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and absenteeism. Pupils eligible for free school meals have a higher rate of authorised absence and unauthorised absence as demonstrated in the figure below.

**Absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age in maintained secondary schools, by free school meal eligibility and type of absence**



Overall, therefore, the evidence shows that poverty has a consistently negative impact on outcomes for pupils across Wales. However, Estyn has identified a range of providers in different phases of the education system that have succeeded in securing high standards of learning, achievement and wellbeing for learners who experience poverty or social disadvantage. For case studies of these providers see <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/best-practice/tackling-deprivation-and-raising-standards/>

**How effectively the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, Strategic Equality Plan and other government strategies work together/How legislation, policy and budgets targeted at tackling poverty and reducing inequality are co-ordinated and prioritised across the Welsh Government.**

1. Estyn’s work relates to education, including evaluating how effectively educational providers work in partnership with other agencies, such as local authorities, for the benefit of learners. In addition, Estyn evaluates the use of grant funding and the impact of strategies implemented by educational providers on the standards of

learning, teaching and leadership. A summary of evidence from the current cycle of inspections relating to the effectiveness of approaches to mitigating the impact of poverty and social disadvantage is given below.

Since the introduction of the new Common Inspection Framework in 2010, inspectors have evaluated and reported on the standards and progress of pupils eligible for free school meals. In September 2014, Estyn published supplementary [guidance](#) about inspecting the approaches taken by schools to reduce the impact of poverty. This guidance provides comprehensive advice for inspectors to consider when evaluating the impact of the approaches taken by schools to reduce the impact of poverty on the educational achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Specifically, inspectors consider:

- how well disadvantaged pupils achieve;
- the impact of approaches designed to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils;
- the extent to which schools take a strategic and co-ordinated approach to improving the achievements of disadvantaged pupils;
- the impact of the school's work with partners; and
- how well schools use resources, including specific grants for pupils eligible for free-school meals and the impact on improving the achievements of those pupils.

This year (2014-2015), inspectors looked closely at how successfully schools use the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG), to improve outcomes for pupils eligible for free schools meals and pupils who are looked after by a local authority.

Overall, nearly all schools in Wales use the PDG funding appropriately and, nationwide, there is a heightened awareness of the importance of working strategically to mitigate the impact of poverty and social disadvantage on educational attainment. Schools allocate significant proportions of the funding to employ staff to support the implementation of their plans. While there are many similarities in the use of funding across Wales, the impact of the grant is variable.

There are many similarities in the ways that secondary and primary schools use PDG funding. They generally fall into the following categories although specific strategies vary from school to school:

- funding staff to coordinate provision for vulnerable pupils and to monitor and evaluate their progress;
- improving family engagement; for instance, by inviting the parents or grandparents of disadvantaged pupils into school. This is often to help them to develop strategies to support their children in developing literacy and numeracy skills. In many cases, this type of arrangement has additional benefits such as improving relationships between home and school. This is beneficial to pupils' wellbeing as well as their attainment and progress.

- improving aspects of wellbeing such as attendance, pupils' self-esteem and aspirations, for instance by employing designated staff to coordinate arrangements to raise the attendance of disadvantaged pupils or by providing bespoke support through activities such as counselling;
- developing a multi-agency approach to supporting disadvantaged pupils and their families through initiatives such as 'Team around the family'. The pool of skills within the team often helps to address the health, domestic and social welfare concerns of learners and their families;
- withdrawal programmes for literacy and numeracy;
- classroom support for vulnerable pupils to support them to develop skills, including social and play skills;
- funding extra-curricular activities, including musical tuition, educational visits and residential trips or school uniform; and
- professional development of staff.

However, although an increasing proportion of schools are aware of their responsibility to use grant funding to support all disadvantaged learners in reaching their potential, the emphasis in many schools remains on supporting pupils with lower levels of attainment.

Overall, inspection evidence suggests that in primary and secondary schools across Wales, grant funding is beginning to have a positive impact, particularly on wellbeing. For example, attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving. The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in end of key stage indicators continues to narrow very slightly each year in primary schools and Foundation Phase settings. However, such initiatives are yet to have an impact on narrowing the gap in the performance of pupils entitled to FSM and others in the most important key indicators by the end of key stage 4.

In the majority of secondary schools inspected this year, the use of the PDG is good. A few schools use this additional funding to secure excellent outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals. Often, these schools achieve this by working strategically to improve pupils' skills and wellbeing, for example by using literacy intervention programmes, offering improved extra-curricular options for pupils and adopting strategies to improve attendance. They make improving engagement with families a priority. This is a key factor in improving outcomes and wellbeing for vulnerable pupils. The most successful schools coordinate all aspects of provision for vulnerable pupils well through effective leadership. For example, Bishop Gore Comprehensive School in Swansea is very successful in reducing the impact of deprivation on outcomes. In key stage 4, pupils eligible for free school meals performed better than similar pupils in the family of schools and compared well with the average for similar pupils across Wales for the last three years.

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/best-practice/community-partnership-supports-disadvantaged-learners>

A minority of secondary schools that make less effective use of PDG funding have appropriate spending plans. However, leaders in these schools do not evaluate well

enough the impact of initiatives on the outcomes for pupils. A very few schools make unsatisfactory use of the PDG funding.

Many primary schools make good use of the PDG and a very few schools make excellent use of the funding. They show improvements in the academic performance and wellbeing of pupils who are eligible for free school meals. They usually achieve this through programmes aimed at improving basic literacy and numeracy skills or improved attendance arrangements, family engagement and pastoral programmes to raise self-esteem. Many schools use data well to track the progress of vulnerable learners. They use this information to inform provision appropriately. A minority of primary schools have improving arrangements to support more able pupils who are eligible for free schools meals. Schools in areas of greater social disadvantage usually offer a wider range of effective provision. This is understandable as these schools have more funding available and often have more experience of working with pupils from more deprived backgrounds. In Christchurch School in Rhyl, around 60% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school uses additional funding innovatively. This includes a highly effective approach to behaviour management that has helped to raise standards in the school.

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/best-practice/establishing-behaviour-groups>

Where the use of funding is adequate, schools do not always plan initiatives well and the evaluation of impact on outcomes for pupils is limited. A very few schools make unsatisfactory use of the funding. Here, the grant has had little or no impact in relation to its intended purposes. A very few schools have not used funding in full accordance with the terms and conditions.

In the last year, Estyn has not undertaken any core inspections of local authorities. However, the evidence from our follow up work and ongoing link inspector work with local authorities suggests that the strengths and shortcomings identified in our evidence in 2014 are still valid. In summary, although local authorities have a focus on tackling the impact of poverty, only a few have significantly improved the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners. Too few local authorities map needs well enough, take a preventative approach or share information and practice well enough with other partners.

Our thematic inspection of the work of regional consortia found that although the regional consortia promote good practice in tackling the impact of poverty from a range of national sources, they do not do enough to share the learning from individual schools that are particularly successful within their region. None of the regional consortia has a coherent strategic approach to reduce the impact of deprivation on attainment. The regional consortia have not monitored closely enough how well schools are using the Pupil Deprivation Grant.

Senior managers in ERW region refer to challenges in improving schools in their regions due to rural poverty. This region covers a large geographical area and has a high proportion of small, rural schools, particularly compared to the other two southern regions in Wales. Generally, only a low percentage of pupils in these schools are eligible for free school meals and so these schools do not receive much additional funding through the pupil deprivation grant, for example. However, ERW

managers have not defined these challenges well enough and the consortium has not planned strategically to address issues associated with rural poverty.

Overall, there is a growing awareness of the need to tackle poverty and disadvantage in schools and local authorities across Wales. However, practice is still too variable and does not have enough impact on outcomes for children and young people.

For a summary of practical ways forward for schools, partnerships and local authorities see our report at <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/download/publication/309390.9/pupil-deprivation-may-2014/>