

National Assembly for Wales

Children and Young People Committee

EO 04

Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households

Evidence from : Governors Wales

1. Governors Wales promotes the effective governance of schools in Wales and provides support to individual governors, local governors associations, fora and other groupings. Governors Wales is committed to the promotion and effective management of quality provision in schools in Wales.
2. Governors Wales welcomes the opportunity to provide information to assist the Children and Young People's Committee of the National Assembly for Wales as part of the inquiry on the Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households.
3. We recognise that this issue is a very complex area, with many factors that can impact the educational outcomes of children from low income families; however, we offer the following comments for consideration:
4. **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.**
 - 4.1 We note that a key objective of the Welsh Government is to break the link between poverty and educational attainment and close gaps in attainment between FSM and non-FSM pupils. This has been very clearly communicated to schools. Estyn's Annual Report 2011/12 reported that in primary schools, pupils' outcomes were good or better in around four-fifths of the primary schools inspected this year where less than 24% of its pupils were entitled to free school meals. In a few primary schools in the highest free-school-meal range (over 32%) of pupils made very good progress. In secondary schools where standards were excellent, most pupils made significant gains in their knowledge, understanding and skills in lessons and there were no significant differences in the performance of different groups of pupils such as boys and girls, pupils entitled to free school meals and pupils with additional learning needs. However, in secondary schools with adequate standards, pupils entitled to free school meals did not perform as well.¹
 - 4.2 The Welsh Government's School Effectiveness Framework aims to achieve joined up thinking, with the then Minister for Education stating "the Framework would address those factors that result in the inequalities that we still have within and between schools,

1 <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/annual-report/annual-report-2011-2012/>

between Local Authorities, between communities and between children”² . It is important to embed Community Focused Schools and Family Support programmes in the School Effectiveness Framework, with funding being crucial for this to succeed. Putting greater emphasis on a range of out of school and community-based services, such as out of school hours learning, free breakfast initiatives, family / parent engagement / support / learning, community engagement, community focused / area based initiatives, can help to address the link between poverty and low educational outcomes. Many useful examples of effective practices can be found on Estyn's Best Practice section on their website.³

- 4.3 Schools play a key role in narrowing the gap, by implementing whole-school approaches to tackling disadvantage, using measures to reduce inequalities in pupil attainment, promoting healthy living initiatives and through Community Focused Schools. This is evidenced again in the best practice section of Estyn's website. Schools and governing bodies need to emphasis raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners in their strategic planning.
- 4.4 Governors Wales believes that all pupils should be encouraged to participate in the life of their school, as a basis for their wider participation in society, through involvement in for example School Councils, Eco-Committees, and Associate Pupil Governors etc.
- 4.5 One of the key roles and responsibilities for the governing body is to monitor the progress and performance of the school. Governing bodies need to be aware of child poverty and its impact on education when setting the policies and monitoring pupil achievement and attainment. Where policies are applied consistently, reviewed on a regular basis and clear and consistent expectations are outlined, they will have a positive impact on the school environment and its learners. It is essential therefore that governing bodies are clear about their responsibilities in these areas and should attend appropriate and relevant training. This is something that should be referenced in the mandatory training programme for governors, due to come into effect in September 2013.
- 4.6 Closing the gap in attainment between FSM and non-FSM pupils is a common target in school development / improvement plans. When governors consider strategies to address this, along with school performance data, they should look also at the performance of all groups of learners, e.g. gender comparisons; performance of learners entitled to free school meals; ALN and attendance etc⁴. Governors should analyse, for example, how many pupils at their school have poor attendance, and if there is any relation to gender, entitlement to FSM etc. The school needs to clearly identify pupils and their achievements in the various aspects of the curriculum; this can then allow for specific support/mentoring for pupils at greatest risk of failure. Mandatory training for all governors on the use of performance data from September 2013 will undoubtedly help with their understanding of data, how to analyse the data and what key questions they should be asking.

2 Children and Young Peoples' Committee Report "Child poverty in Wales: Eradication through Education? November 2008

3 <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/best-practice/Signposts%20to%20best%20practice%20/>

4 Governors Wales Governor Guide on Using Performance Data

- 4.7 Equally, where parental engagement is effective, this too may impact greatly on improving children and young people's capacity to learn. Many schools are putting strategies in place to engage with parents, recognising that those who are from low income households may sometimes be the least engaged with their child's education and many have a negative perception of education and school, and that securing this engagement is an important way of improving educational outcomes.
- 4.8 Poor behaviour and non-attendance may also be linked to challenges and circumstances that learners may be facing, and in turn affect their educational outcomes. Governing bodies need to be aware of any impact this may have for individual pupils or groups of pupils and their learning and how this can be addressed. Some governing bodies will set up committees, e.g. Teaching and Learning or Curriculum Committees, to look at intervention strategies and review their effectiveness etc., in greater detail. Discussion on the recommendations in the recent report on the Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour is now essential, as this is closely linked to the educational outcomes of children from low income families.⁵
- 4.9 In addition, some governing bodies may also have area link governors in place with specific responsibility for literacy, numeracy, attendance and behaviour etc. The link governor can play a significant role in developing the effectiveness of the governing body and in raising school standards. Reports from the link governor will not only help the governing body understand what happens in schools but also helps the governor to fulfil their strategic role. Visits to school enable link governors to:
- see the school at work;
 - observe the range of attitudes, behaviour and achievements of pupils;
 - get to know the staff and work in partnership with the staff;
 - demonstrate their commitment to the school;
 - give active support to the staff and activities in the school;
 - be aware of the effect of change and different approaches to teaching and learning;
 - evaluate resources and discuss with staff any further requirements;
 - gain first-hand information to assist with policy making and decision taking.
- 4.10 Schools organise INSET training days for staff, and will focus on key education initiatives i.e. literacy, numeracy and breaking the link, sometimes involving governors. This is an effective way of ensuring that all are up-to-date with the latest strategies and information.
- 4.11 Governors Wales also believes that robust performance management procedures, closely aligned with professional standards, will result in objectives that reflect the school's vision, aims and development plan, and improve standards for all learners within schools.

⁵ National Assembly for Wales Children Children and Young People's Committee Inquiry into Attendance And Behaviour, August 2013 <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s19651/Report%20-%20August%202013.pdf>

4.12 There are schools / governing bodies where good practice is shared with school clusters and beyond. Estyn's website also provides useful case study material and thematic reports. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) should be further developed to share and discuss effective strategies etc (refer to Q4.2 and Q4.3 also) i.e. schools that have a positive and aspirational ethos that enable all learners to achieve their potential with clear strategies in place to combat any factors that learners who are disadvantaged face.

4.13 However, schools are not able to overcome the link between child poverty and low educational outcomes alone. Governors Wales believes that tackling child poverty must be a shared mission with joint working and the collaboration of agencies. A consistency of approach and joined up thinking is essential with schools, parents and communities working together. Sharing of ideas and resources is vital for successful outcomes. Multi-agency collaboration already exists in school life for example with LAC and SEN. Building upon the good partnership work that already exists e.g. via children's and young people partnerships, is the way forward. This however, needs to be resourced adequately to provide high quality, timely support and advice to schools / governing bodies as and when required, from Regional Consortia and/or Local Authorities as appropriate.

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

5.1 The introduction of significant funding to support reducing the impact of poverty on attainment, via the School Effectiveness Grant and the Pupil Deprivation Grant, is very positive. The guidance (specifically Part 2) includes information and ideas for schools and regional consortia on reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment, which is welcomed.

5.2 There have been some concerns expressed regarding the Communities First Pupil Deprivation Grant match fund, where a learner attends a school that is just over the border of a Communities First area, this school may not benefit from any extra support or funding even though the learner comes from a Communities First area.

5.3 We are also mindful of the differences between poverty in urban and rural areas, where strategies implemented may work in urban areas that may not work in rural areas and vice versa.

5.4 Schools have to draw up detailed action plans to secure their share of the pupil deprivation grant, which helps to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place. The measures that are put in place must be effective and monitored regularly in order to improve the educational outcomes for children from low income households. Schools are then required to publish their PDG allocation, and details of how they have used the grant, the grant spend and its impact. Governing bodies will need to monitor the use of this grant and the educational outcomes of children from low income families. It is important that the real value of the grant is maintained so that this work can continue.

- 5.5 We stress the importance of safeguarding funding streams for maintaining programmes, for example the Flying Start programme, the Foundation Phase, Community Focused Schools, the School Effectiveness Framework and Free School Breakfasts etc.
- 5.6 It is also important to look at funding for learners in Community First areas as there are a number of pupils who live in Community First areas but attend schools outside of the area due to parental preference and therefore, do not necessarily benefit from additional funds. The funding needs to follow the pupil.
- 5.7 Sufficient funding should be available to ensure that effective CPD for school staff forms a key element of meeting targets in the school improvement / development plan, e.g. to improve standards in literacy and numeracy, to understand the issues around child poverty and the link between poverty and educational attainment and achievement, whether individually or via INSET training days. This is essential to develop expertise and share best practice.
- 6. 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.**
- 6.1 School uniform is widely acknowledged as being a positive aspect of school life. A school uniform, drawn up after appropriate consultation with parents and pupils, can provide a sense of identity and cohesion, promote positive behaviour and reduce peer pressure for pupils to dress in designer fashions - all of which can be beneficial to schools, pupils and parents. However, it is recognised that the cost of school uniform can be a significant burden on some families. Governing bodies need to give high priority to the cost considerations of school uniforms and the wide availability of uniform items.
- 6.2 In addition to school uniform, other school related costs place financial burdens on families such as school trips, activities, events and classroom materials. Governing bodies should be mindful of the cost of these trips/activities and be aware of what they can and cannot lawfully charge families for. The governing body **must** have a charging and remission policy in place which it reviews from time to time. A school may not charge parents for anything unless the governing body has adopted a charging policy. The Welsh Government has issued guidance for governing bodies on Charging for School Activities.⁶
- 6.3 Welsh Government commissioned research into the costs of schooling, which indicated that there appeared to be a lack of awareness about the support that might be available to families, particularly for those on low incomes who could access some support with the cost of residential trips or support by way of school uniform grants. We feel that there should be more standardisation of uniform grants across Wales. Governing bodies should be mindful of the financial difficulties that some families face with schooling costs and should consider:
- the cost implications for parents when setting or reviewing a school uniform policy;

6 <http://www.governorswales.org.uk/publications/2012/01/01/guidance-governing-bodies-charging-school-activities/>

- ensuring that uniform items are affordable and widely available from a range of retailers;
- parents' accessibility to school uniform suppliers;
- reviewing the requirement for logoed school uniform items and allowing parents to sew logos onto items themselves;
- exploring options for buying, selling or loaning second hand uniform;
- the cost implications for parents regarding school trips; and
- raising parents' awareness of support that is available for school uniform (Welsh Government School Uniform Grant Scheme and Local Authority discretionary school uniform grants) and for the cost of school trips.⁷

7. 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.

- 7.1 Improving the take up of free schools meals is a continuing problem. It seems sensible for schools to implement cashless systems to purchase school meals. This may increase the take up of free school meals and avoid the stigma attached with receiving free school meals.
- 7.2 The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 introduced a provision to give local authorities flexibility over the pricing of school meals. This provision can be used flexibly to meet local needs - for example, a local authority could decide to extend free school meals to include families who meet specific criteria and it may potentially increase the take-up of school meals. This is very welcomed.