

# National Assembly for Wales

## Children and Young People Committee

EO 08

### **Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households**

#### **Evidence from : End Child Poverty Network**

The End Child Poverty Network Cymru (ECPN Cymru) welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission to the **Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households**. In its overarching call on education, the ECPN Cymru Manifesto, *Programme Towards Eradication*, states that 'EVERY child and young person in Wales has a RIGHT to a good quality education that gives them opportunities to realise their potential'.<sup>1</sup> Education must be inclusive of all children regardless of their socio-economic background. Breaking the cycle between low educational achievement and poverty in adulthood should continue to be a top Government priority throughout this Assembly term.

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

The End Child Poverty Network Cymru welcomes the Welsh Government commitment to tackling child poverty through education and to improve standards for every pupil. We also welcome that '*reducing the impact of poverty on educational achievement*' is one of the three national priorities for education in Wales and that the other two priorities, namely Literacy and Numeracy, will help to narrow the attainment gap between pupils from low-income households and their more affluent peers. Tackling underachievement amongst children and young people from low income families is a key priority of the revised Tackling Poverty Action Plan, and the new Community First Clusters are required to identify solutions under the main objective of 'Learning Communities'.

Alongside efforts to reduce the impact of poverty on attainment, the importance of supporting and addressing the social and emotional needs of **all** children, especially the most vulnerable and at risk of poverty should be recognised. Whilst attainment levels and qualifications are important for future life chances, children and young people should experience other benefits from participating in school with raising and meeting the aspirations of children a key objective for success.

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<sup>1</sup> **Child Poverty: A Programme Towards Eradication** - The End Child Poverty Network Cymru coalition released this programme for eradicating child poverty in Wales in May 2012. The programme builds on the manifesto published by the End Child Poverty Network in November 2010. P 9  
<http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/areasofwork/childpoverty/povertypublications/index.html>

The development of a wider set of outcome indicators than academic achievement should be developed for schools which focus on pupil wellbeing. This would help to monitor this area and ensure that children are receiving the right support at the right time during their school experience

**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**

A growing body of research suggests that solutions for reducing the poverty gap in education lie in the development of holistic and mutually reinforcing approaches encompassing schools, parents and communities. While schools can have a significant impact on improving the achievement of disadvantaged students, they cannot do it alone and will require both direction and support. Welsh Government can aid the process by providing comprehensive guidance which makes clear ways in which schools, working with their partners, can work together to tackle the link between disadvantage and achievement. The Estyn (2012) report 'Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools' identified 10 key areas in which schools could be effective in challenging circumstances. Effective leadership within schools is essential as is a clear commitment and understanding

Welsh Government could strengthen their guidance for schools and local authorities. Guidance could draw on evidence of best practice and promote the sharing of knowledge of 'what works' in reducing the impact of poverty on education. Welsh Government should work with Local Authority Education Consortia to ensure that in the support and challenging work they are remitted to undertake with schools, they have as one of their core priorities reducing the poverty gap in schools. This should also include training on the effects of income poverty on children in school, for head teachers, teachers and school based staff

**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.**

The ECPN Cymru fully supports the engagement of parents, carers and families in the educational outcomes of children from low-income households. Parents, carers and families play a vital role in a child's educational success with 85% of a child's success at school depending on the type of support and stimulation that their parents provide for learning in the home. Parental involvement is increasingly found to be central to children's academic performance. Supporting parents to ensure that their children do not fall behind is one of the key ways to break the poverty cycle and help children to develop to their full potential.

It is essential that the Welsh Government, local government and the third sector work together to promote and support activities, which encourage parental engagement. However, parental engagement can often be challenging. Many parents are disengaged through having poor experiences themselves when they were children and may not readily

engage with schools. Many parents have poor literacy skills. The ECPN Cymru's response to the White Paper on the School Effectiveness and Standards Bill called for schools to ensure that all communications with the home to be simplified and to look at more creative and interactive ways to engage with parents

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

The ECPN Cymru welcomes the additional investment and continuation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) and the School Effectiveness Grant to provide support to schools to make progress on the three national education priorities, and specifically welcome the focused support they provide for reducing the impact of poverty on pupil's attainment. The additional Communities First Pupil Deprivation Grant match funding is also welcome. However, we would emphasise that **how** the funding is spent is crucial. Robust monitoring and inspection arrangements should be in place to ensure that schools are utilising the funds for their intended purpose and are achieving noticeable results for individual pupils. Where promising interventions are identified, Welsh Government should give considerations to the sustainability of such interventions that have been funded by the grant going forward. Where additional support and interventions for the poorest pupils through the Grant begins to make a real difference and are cost effective, sharing knowledge to other schools with recommendations will be crucial

We would support a review of the eligibility criteria for the Pupil Deprivation Grant to include those eligible for Free School Meals at any point in the last six years and also consideration given to extending the allocation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant to Nursery Schools in Wales with funding in accordance with an early intervention approach.

**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;**

The ECPN Cymru have long campaigned and raised awareness around the costs associated with education<sup>2</sup>. All financial barriers to education should be removed. This is all the more important in the context of unprecedented pressures on family budgets. Welsh Government must ensure that schools and local authorities continue to support children living in poverty by eliminating the costs associated with education in line with the duty placed upon them in the *Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010*.

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<sup>2</sup>**Tackling Child Poverty in Wales: A Good Practice Guide for Schools** - This guide aims to increase awareness of poverty and what schools can do to promote achievement and well-being amongst children who are living in poverty.

**Cost of Education - A Renewed Call 2008****This Briefing Paper**, produced for the UN International Day for the Eradication of Child Poverty 2008, renews the call for the Welsh Assembly Government look into the feasibility of introducing free school meals for school all pupils across Wales. (pdf 69KB)

**The Cost of Education 2006** **This briefing paper**, produced for the UN Eradication of Poverty Day 2006, highlights the "hidden" costs of schooling and presents a number of recommendations. (pdf 42KB)

Poverty can limit a child or young person's ability to fully participate at school by missing out on expensive school trips and activities arranged both in and out of school. School trips and activities provide children and young people with valuable experience and opportunities and should continue to be encouraged. However, the costs associated with some trips are often well beyond the means of many low-income families.

Welsh Government should ensure that all schools fully adhere to equal opportunities principles and that no additional costs are made for activities and essential items required for school, such as costly school uniform policies, equipment and materials for Art, Design and Technology and Home Economics classes. No young person should have to decide whether they can afford to pay for materials, cooking ingredients etc when they are choosing a subject beyond Year 9. Financial barriers for children's participation can lead to children feeling stigmatized and 'different', and increase the risk of bullying.

**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**

The ECPN Cymru firmly believes that Free School Meals (FSM) is an important entitlement for children and young people in low income families. Data shows that the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than those not eligible at every stage of their education experience. The introduction of Universal Credit will mean that the current criteria for identifying entitlement for free school meals will no longer exist and we welcome that the Welsh Government is considering an alternative way of determining entitlement. The new eligibility should not result in the reduction of the number of children eligible for support. Rather, the Welsh Government should take the opportunity to extend entitlement to include other children in low income households not currently entitled. The replacement system should not undermine existing arrangements for monitoring and tracking the attainment of poorer pupils and the allocation of funding which are based on FSM eligibility.

The Welsh Government should give full consideration to extending free school meal entitlement to all children and young people. In light of changes announced through Universal Credit it would be timely for the Welsh Government to extend free school meal entitlement to all pupils through a phased implementation process, potentially starting with primary school pupils in areas of disadvantage. This would not only eliminate the costly and bureaucratic administration process but would also help increase uptake and contribute to improving health outcomes of the poorest through children receiving at least one healthy meal a day. The recognised existing problems around registration and uptake of free school meals under the present system would also be addressed together with the stigma often associated with current arrangements.

**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.**

Since the publication of the Children and Young People Committee follow up enquiry into child poverty and education and the subsequent report in 2011, the prominence given to the need to improve the education attainment levels of children from low income families has arguably increased. This has taken place at a time of increasing levels of child poverty in Wales within a challenging economic climate. The recent Tackling Poverty Action Plan places a clear emphasis on education as a route out of poverty and additional resources through the PDG have been forthcoming.

### **Further Information**

In addition to this collective response, some members of the ECPN Cymru are submitting responses to the consultation on behalf of their agencies and we would wish to bring the Committee Members attention to these.

### **ABOUT US**

The **End Child Poverty Network Cymru** (ECPN) is a coalition of concern focused on the eradication of child poverty in Wales, co-ordinated and managed on a day-to-day basis by Children in Wales. Its steering group include representation from across the voluntary and statutory sectors and the Network has an increasing supporting membership from a broad cross-section of agencies.

Steering Group members include Barnardo's Cymru, Children in Wales, Save the Children Wales, NEA Wales, Action for Children, NSPCC Cymru, WLGA (observers), Citizens Advice, Oxfam Cymru, Public Health Wales, Shelter Cymru, Buttle UK, the Princes Trust, TUC Wales (observers), Welsh Women's Aid and the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales (observers).

Operational since 2001, the ECPN is supporting the Governments vision that no child in Wales should be living in poverty by 2020, and is working to achieve this by

- Increased public and professional understanding of child poverty in Wales
- Public and professional support for measures to tackle child poverty
- Ensure that policies are in place at all levels of Government (local, Assembly and Westminster), which contribute to eradicating child poverty in Wales.

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