

# On the Money?

## Targeted funding to improve educational outcomes

June 2018



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June 2018



# About the Committee

The Committee was established on 28 June 2016 to examine legislation and hold the Welsh Government to account by scrutinising its expenditure, administration and policy matters, encompassing (but not restricted to): the education, health and well-being of the children and young people of Wales, including their social care.

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UKIP Wales  
North Wales



**Hefin David AM**  
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## Chair's foreword

In recent years, the Welsh Government has targeted additional resources at particular groups of pupils. This funding has been allocated in recognition of the fact that some of the disadvantages faced by particular groups of pupils can inhibit them reaching their full potential. The impact of this targeted approach has been the focus of our inquiry.

The negative correlation between deprivation and attainment is well established. Breaking this link has been a priority for the Welsh Government for many years. Of course, many pupils from deprived backgrounds do very well and flourish academically, but we know that many more do not. Pupils who do well often do so against the odds and in spite of, rather than because of, their circumstances. Politicians and policy makers cannot ignore this – if Wales is to have the first class, heralded education system we all aspire to, we cannot and should not leave any pupils behind.

The Welsh Government targets extra funding at deprived pupils (as measured by eligibility for free school meals – eFSM), Looked After Children and adopted children through its Pupil Development Grant (PDG). The policy has received considerable support from politicians and stakeholders, and its annual cost of £94 million takes up a significant portion of the Welsh Government's education budget.

While we welcome the broad principle of targeting funding, we believe that it is vital that we ensure that an investment of this magnitude is delivering value for money. This is why we wanted to shine a light on the extent to which it is improving the educational outcomes of those pupils it targets. We also wanted to consider whether the PDG is reaching all those pupils it is intended to help, and to ensure that it is also supporting those most able and talented pupils to achieve their full potential.

Separate to the PDG, the Welsh Government targeted additional, tailored funding and support under the Schools Challenge Cymru programme. This funding was allocated to selected schools that were underperforming and facing the greatest challenges. The programme lasted for three years (2014-2017). Some schools made substantial progress as a result of this investment, whilst others made less progress. Our inquiry considered some of the reasons underpinning these mixed results and our report outlines how we believe the legacy of Schools Challenge Cymru should be taken forward.



We have made 31 recommendations, the majority of which are aimed at making the most of the investment in the PDG and building on Schools Challenge Cymru. However, this inquiry also shone a light on two broader issues affecting our schools. First, the pressure on school budgets, which has been highlighted as an issue in almost every topic we have investigated in this Fifth Assembly. Secondly, the impact of school performance measures and the unintended consequences these can have on school behaviour, which is reflected both in entries for qualifications and how schools prioritise the support they provide to pupils. We believe both topics warrant further scrutiny and consideration.

Finally, I would like to thank stakeholders for the positive way they have engaged with the Committee during this inquiry and I commend our report and recommendations to the Welsh Government.

Lynne Neagle AM  
Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee



## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** The Welsh Government should regularly assess the scale of investment required for the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) in terms of value for money and opportunity cost. In particular, the Welsh Government should closely monitor on an ongoing basis the PDG's impact on the pupils it targets. .... Page 26

**Recommendation 2.** The Welsh Government should ensure there is coherence in its approach to targeting funding to improve educational outcomes, addressing any inconsistencies between the principle behind the PDG and the ending of other targeted education grants. In doing so, the Welsh Government should demonstrate the logic behind any differences in its approach. .... Page 27

**Recommendation 3.** The Welsh Government should take all steps to emphasise that the PDG is to be used to support all eligible learners, including those who are more able and talented. This should include updating its PDG guidance, issued in 2015, accordingly. .... Page 31

**Recommendation 4.** The Welsh Government should ensure Key Stage 4 performance measures and school accountability arrangements incentivise schools to support eFSM pupils in achieving as high grades as possible. .... Page 33

**Recommendation 5.** If the Welsh Government wants schools to use the PDG on pupils who have been eFSM at any point in the past two years, it should fund schools' PDG allocations on this basis, i.e. per pupil who has been eFSM at any point in the past two years, rather than expecting schools to support additional pupils from a grant allocation based on a one year snapshot of eFSM eligibility. .... Page 36

**Recommendation 6.** The Welsh Government should consider adopting a longer-term timeframe for determining eligibility for the eFSM PDG so that pupils who have been eFSM in the recent past can also be supported. The Welsh Government should investigate differing thresholds of eligibility, for example two, three, four or five years, against different amounts per child to arrive at an optimum, affordable model, taking into account the trade-offs involved. .... Page 36

**Recommendation 7.** If the Welsh Government decides to continue with a one-year headcount for determining PDG allocations, it should allocate the 2018-19 and 2019-2020 PDG to schools according to the higher of their individual eFSM count from PLASC 2016 or the latest available. .... Page 37

**Recommendation 8.** The Welsh Government should ensure that the recently appointed PDG lead officers within the regional consortia are proactive in monitoring, and challenging where necessary, schools' use of the PDG, in order to ensure maximum impact and value for money..... Page 42

**Recommendation 9.** The Welsh Government should encourage and place an onus on schools to take full account of the available evidence and expertise on what constitutes effective use of the PDG, whilst enabling school leaders to take appropriate decisions for their own pupils. In doing so, the Welsh Government should work with Estyn to ensure it plays a full role in monitoring this..... Page 47

**Recommendation 10.** The Welsh Government should ensure that there are always effective systems and processes available to all schools for tracking pupils' progress. The Welsh Government should ensure that the regional consortia provide clear advice and support to schools within their region on which methods are available.....Page 48

**Recommendation 11.** There needs to be a greater emphasis on the use of PDG to improve eFSM pupils' attendance. The Welsh Government should urgently improve, through its PDG guidance and directions to consortia, how the PDG is used to improve eFSM pupils' attendance and engagement with their education..... Page 53

**Recommendation 12.** The Welsh Government should urgently improve, and place greater emphasis on, how the PDG is used to improve the engagement of eFSM pupils in order to reduce the number of cases where they receive fixed-term exclusions. ....Page 55

**Recommendation 13.** The Welsh Government should urgently investigate the widening of the eFSM/non FSM attainment gap in 2017 and learn and apply lessons from this at the earliest opportunity. This should focus on both the implications of the changes to performance measures in 2017 and how the PDG is used to improve eFSM pupils' resilience in the face of such changes.....Page 69

**Recommendation 14.** Whilst the Committee welcomes the Cabinet Secretary's action to encourage more appropriate entries for qualifications at Key Stage 4, the Welsh Government should investigate any unintended consequences and adverse effects on pupils, including eFSM pupils, who risk being unable to take vocational qualifications even where these are best suited for them. The Welsh Government should report back to the Committee by the end of 2018.....Page 70

**Recommendation 15.** Whilst the Committee understands the rationale for the Welsh Government’s revision of Key Stage 4 performance measures in 2017 and 2018, the Cabinet Secretary should reflect carefully on the message this conveys regarding the value of vocational qualifications as opposed to general qualifications, particularly given the Welsh Government’s commitment to a “parity of esteem”. The Welsh Government should report back to the Committee by the end of 2018.....Page 70

**Recommendation 16.** The Welsh Government should set out what action it has taken to minimise any potential adverse impact on the summer 2018 cohort, particularly eFSM pupils and Looked After Children, from the changes to performance measures in 2017 and 2018..... Page 71

**Recommendation 17.** The Welsh Government should publish any impact assessment it has carried out regarding its decision to change Key Stage 4 performance measures from 2018/19. If no impact assessment has been carried out, the Welsh Government should explain the rationale for this..... Page 71

**Recommendation 18.** The Welsh Government should ensure that its new interim school performance measures at Key Stage 4 from 2019 do not have any unintended consequences or particular implications for specific cohorts of pupils, including annual cohorts who are amongst the first affected, Looked After Children and eFSM pupils in light of the objective to close the attainment gap..... Page 71

**Recommendation 19.** The Welsh Government should ensure there is an effective, strategic approach to using the Looked After Children and adopted children PDG, giving due consideration to ICF Consulting’s evaluation and subsequently making any improvements which are identified as necessary. ....Page 76

**Recommendation 20.** In conjunction with the regional consortia, the Welsh Government should ensure that the PDG for Looked After Children and adopted children is used specifically for these groups of pupils. In doing so, the Welsh Government should take account of relevant aspects of ICF Consulting’s evaluation report..... Page 77

**Recommendation 21.** The Welsh Government should urgently consider how the PDG can be used for improving Looked After Children’s engagement with their education, including attendance rates and exclusion rates. This should take into account the conclusions of ICF Consulting’s evaluation. ....Page 80

**Recommendation 22.** The Welsh Government should review data on Looked After Children's attainment throughout the lifetime of the PDG and the implications that changes to performance measures might have had. The Welsh Government should publish its assessment of this, and consider how the PDG can deliver greater impact in terms of improving Looked After Children's educational outcomes.....Page 80

**Recommendation 23.** The Welsh Government should extend the PDG to include children who have been looked after for any significant period in their lives. The Welsh Government should fund allocations to the regional consortia accordingly and ensure that the consortia also target the PDG at these pupils. In doing so, the Welsh Government should decide what constitutes a significant period, including giving consideration to the Committee's suggestion of any period of 13 weeks or more, as is used for determining eligibility to after care services for former Looked After Children.....Page 82

**Recommendation 24.** The Welsh Government should put in place a mechanism from academic year 2018/19 to enable parents to inform schools when their children are adopted children and to have that information gathered and added to the child's school record. This information should then be used to target support under the PDG at pupils known to be adopted children and to enable individual pupil educational outcomes for adopted children to be monitored in a similar way to Looked After Children.....Page 85

**Recommendation 25.** The Welsh Government should ensure that it funds its allocations of the Looked After Children and adopted children PDG to each regional consortia per Looked After Child and known adopted child in each region. Where the number of adopted children is not precisely known, a best estimate should be used. ....Page 86

**Recommendation 26.** The Welsh Government and regional consortia should monitor pupils' educational outcomes in the schools which participated in Schools Challenge Cymru and take steps to mitigate against any potential loss of momentum in those schools which made progress. ....Page 99

**Recommendation 27.** Any future school improvement programme should run for a sufficient period of time to enable it to have durable, long-term impact, usually for longer than three years, The Welsh Government should not, other than in exceptional circumstances, discontinue a programme such as Schools Challenge Cymru, before knowing the results of any evaluation it has commissioned.....Page 104

**Recommendation 28.** The Welsh Government, in conjunction with the regional consortia, should engage with the key players involved in delivering Schools Challenge Cymru, including Professor Mel Ainscow, to discuss what lessons can be learnt from the programme and other school improvement initiatives and subsequently apply these more generally across all schools requiring improvement..... Page 109

**Recommendation 29.** The Welsh Government should closely monitor and evaluate how regional consortia provide challenge and support to schools requiring improvement, particularly those which participated in Schools Challenge Cymru. This should include asking Estyn to include this in its inspections and monitoring of the regional consortia..... Page 118

**Recommendation 30.** The Welsh Government should keep the sufficiency of funding for school budgets under review and consider how this impacts on schools' regard for, and use of, targeted funding such as the PDG..... Page 124

**Recommendation 31.** The Welsh Government should provide, on both an individual and aggregate basis, a list of budget expenditure lines (BELs) within the Education MEG which predominantly finance the raising of school standards, for 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19, as well as commit to doing so for the remainder of this Assembly term..... Page 126

## 1. Introduction

1. The Children, Young People and Education Committee launched its inquiry into *Targeted funding to improve educational outcomes* in November 2017.
2. The inquiry has sought to examine the Welsh Government's approach of targeting additional funding and support at pupils from deprived backgrounds and schools in need of improvement. It has therefore focused on the ongoing Pupil Development Grant (PDG) and the now discontinued Schools Challenge Cymru programme.

### 1.1. Why look at this subject

3. In summer 2017, Committee Members expressed an interest in scrutinising funding and policies designed to improve educational outcomes amongst certain groups of pupils at risk of underachieving. These included pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and Looked After Children, as well as those in underperforming schools.
4. When the Committee consulted stakeholders in summer 2016 on what its priorities for scrutiny should be, the Bevan Foundation said “inequality in attainment levels is a major barrier to social mobility and should be a key focus of the Committee's work”.<sup>1</sup>
5. This is also a key area of government policy. One of the Welsh Government's three education priorities in the previous Assembly was to tackle the impact of deprivation on educational outcomes. The current Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams AM, agreed ten education priorities with the First Minister, Carwyn Jones AM, in June 2016, which included a commitment to the Pupil Development Grant throughout this Assembly term. She has also stressed that narrowing the attainment gap between pupils from deprived backgrounds and their peers is a particularly important objective for her and her Department. This inquiry has therefore given the Committee an opportunity to scrutinise how effectively the Welsh Government is working towards this objective and hold the Cabinet Secretary to account on one of her stated priorities.
6. The inquiry has also enabled the Committee to build on its predecessor Committee's 2014 inquiry, *Educational outcomes for children from low income households*, undertaken not long after the introduction of the PDG. The 2014

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<sup>1</sup> CYPE 58, Bevan Foundation, Children, Young People and Education Committee, Consultation: Priorities for the CYPE Committee, July – September 2016

inquiry took a broader look at the issues surrounding the link between deprivation and attainment, while this inquiry has focused specifically on the targeted use of funding and support.

**7.** The Committee takes seriously its role in scrutinising how the Welsh Government allocates its budget, including value for money, prioritisation and affordability. The annual budget for the PDG is £94 million, which is 6 per cent of the total Education revenue budget,<sup>2</sup> and the Welsh Government has invested approximately £400 million in the PDG to date. In addition, nearly £40 million was invested in Schools Challenge Cymru over three years. These are significant levels of resources and this inquiry has complemented the Committee's overall approach to financial scrutiny.

## 1. 2. Terms of Reference

**8.** This inquiry's focus has been on targeted funding and support for certain groups of pupils or schools. The Committee's terms of reference have therefore centred on support for disadvantaged pupils through the Pupil Development Grant and the complementary yet distinct Schools Challenge Cymru programme which, until its closure in 2017, sought to work with schools facing the greatest challenges in improving. The inquiry has therefore not focused on the general £100 million pledged by the Welsh Government in this Assembly for raising school standards across the board. That funding is for school improvement more generally

**9.** The inquiry has also not considered other forms of targeted funding and support such as that for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners, which was the subject of an earlier inquiry by the Committee, or for pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), which the Committee considered through legislative scrutiny in 2017.

**10.** Shortly before the publication of this report, the Welsh Government announced a consultation on revising eligibility criteria for free school meals following the introduction of Universal Credit. This occurred after the Committee completed its consideration of the evidence. This report has not had the opportunity to fully factor in the impact of any changes that may be made to free school meal eligibility following the Welsh Government's consultation.

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<sup>2</sup> Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL), excluding Annually Managed Expenditure (AME).



**11.** The Committee adopted the following Terms of Reference for the inquiry:

- 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;
- Regional consortia's<sup>3</sup> use of the PDG on Looked After Children and adopted children, and the impact this is having;
- Progress since the previous Children, Young People and Education Committee 2014 inquiry; *Educational outcomes for children from low income households*;
- 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;
- Evaluation of attainment data in light of the PDG and Schools Challenge Cymru programmes;
- Targeted funding / support for more able and talented pupils;
- The value for money of both the PDG and Schools Challenge Cymru programmes.

### 1. 3. Evidence gathering

#### Oral evidence

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**12.** The Committee held nine oral evidence sessions, details of which are listed at Annex A. These sessions included the organisations commissioned by the Welsh

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<sup>3</sup> The regional consortia are arranged as follows: ERW (South West and Mid Wales): Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot; CSW (Central South Wales): Bridgend, Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff; EAS (South East Wales): Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Newport; GwE (North Wales): Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham.

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Government to evaluate the PDG and Schools Challenge Cymru; regional consortia; teaching unions; Welsh Government education expert advisers; Estyn; and the Cabinet Secretary for Education.

### Written evidence

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**13.** 21 written submissions were received to the Committee's call for evidence. A list of respondents is provided at Annex B. These ranged from the organisations who were also called for oral evidence, several from the third sector and representatives of local government.

### Engagement activity

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**14.** The Committee undertook several exercises of engagement facilitated by the Assembly's Outreach team. These consisted of:

- School visits to Eastern High, Cardiff; Bedwas High, Caerphilly; Ysgol Clywedog, Wrexham; and Barry Comprehensive, Vale of Glamorgan.
- Focus groups with school staff and governors.<sup>4</sup>

**15.** These sessions enabled the Committee to hear from practitioners involved in the use of targeted funding and their experiences and views on how effectively it is operating in practice.

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<sup>4</sup> Children, Young People and Education Committee, Targeted Funding to Improve Education Outcomes Focus Group Summary, March 2018

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## 2. Policy context

### 2.1. Tackling the impact of deprivation on attainment: the Pupil Development Grant

**16.** Tackling the impact of deprivation on educational outcomes is a key priority for the Welsh Government and is the focus of its *Rewriting the Future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools strategy*, launched in 2014. The Pupil Development Grant (PDG) is the main financial lever used by the Welsh Government to improve the attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM), which is the Welsh Government's proxy for deprivation.<sup>5</sup>

**17.** The ten education priorities, which Kirsty Williams AM AM agreed with the First Minister upon her appointment to the Cabinet in June 2016, included a commitment to maintain the PDG throughout this Fifth Assembly.

**18.** The PDG was introduced in financial year 2012-13 and provides extra money to schools based on the number of pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM).

- Schools currently receive £1,150 per eFSM pupil from Years 1 to 11 (age 5-15 at start of years). This has increased from the £450 per eFSM pupil that was allocated when the PDG was introduced in 2012-13.
- The PDG also provides money to regional consortia to be spent on Looked After Children and adopted children, on the basis of £1,150 per registered looked after child in each region.
- In 2015-16, the PDG was extended to Early Years (3-5 year olds: up to and including the Reception year) on the basis of £300 per eligible child. This rose in 2017-18 to £600 and again in 2018-19 to £700.
- In 2017-18, the Welsh Government extended the PDG to cover children educated otherwise than at school (EOTAS) – both at ages 5-15 (£1,150 per pupil) and in Early Years (£600 in 2017-18, raised to £700 in 2018-19).

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<sup>5</sup> In April 2017, the Cabinet Secretary changed the name from the Pupil Deprivation Grant to the Pupil Development Grant (PDG), although confirmed that the PDG would retain the same emphasis on pupils from deprived backgrounds (in answer to WAQ73368 in April 2017 and in the Children, Young People and Education Committee on 14 June 2017).

- 19.** The £94 million annual budget for the PDG<sup>6</sup> includes the following:
- Approximately £77 million is paid in respect of eFSM pupils in Years 1 to 11.
  - Around £9.5 million is paid for the Early Years PDG in respect of 3 to 5 year olds (up to Reception class) estimated as being eFSM if they were of compulsory school age.
  - Approximately £4.6 million is paid to the regional consortia to distribute for use on Looked After Children and adopted children in their region, based on around 3,900 children of compulsory school age who are registered as looked after.<sup>7</sup>

#### Ipsos MORI and WISERD evaluation

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**20.** The Welsh Government commissioned two evaluations of the PDG. Ipsos MORI and WISERD carried out a process and impact evaluation of the school-age PDG in three annual stages, whilst the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is evaluating how the Early Years PDG is being interpreted and implemented in practice.

**21.** The Year 1 and Year 2 reports of Ipsos MORI and WISERD's evaluation were published in October 2014 and December 2015 respectively. The final evaluation report by Ipsos MORI and WISERD was published by the Welsh Government on 13 December 2017. At the time of writing, the NFER report was awaiting publication.

**22.** The Ipsos MORI and WISERD evaluation, and WISERD's evidence to this inquiry, included the following conclusions:

- Both eFSM and non FSM attainment improved during the period for which attainment data was evaluated for impact of the PDG (up to summer 2015).<sup>8</sup>
- The attainment gap between eFSM and non FSM pupils narrowed during the evaluation period but the gap was already narrowing before the introduction of the PDG, so it is difficult to ascertain how much of

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<sup>6</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, Welsh Government paper to the CYPE Committee on the Education Main Expenditure Group, Draft Budget 2018-19, November 2017

<sup>7</sup> Welsh Government website, Pupil Development Grant and Early Years Pupil Development Grant

<sup>8</sup> For analysis of more recent years, see the Research Service publication, Key Stage 4 Attainment Data (February 2018)

this can be attributed directly to the PDG. Evidence suggested a longer-term analysis is needed.

- Schools regard PDG funding as invaluable. It is predominantly being used for extra staffing – mainly for teaching assistants rather than teachers due to a lack of long-term certainty over the funding.
- Schools are generally using the PDG effectively, commonly on literacy and numeracy interventions, but also on pupil engagement. However, schools are making insufficient use of external academic expertise, particularly the Sutton Trust Toolkit.<sup>9</sup>
- Schools are blurring eFSM eligibility and a wider interpretation of disadvantage, targeting PDG at pupils beyond the intended beneficiaries (eFSM pupils). This could limit the extent to which tangible benefits for eFSM pupil outcomes can be discerned from the PDG.
- Schools are also blurring disadvantage with low attainment, suggesting that the PDG might be being used to address low attainment generally rather than amongst eFSM pupils. Furthermore, there is ambiguity and inconsistency about whether the PDG should be used for all eFSM pupils (including more able and talented eFSM pupils) or for only low-attaining eFSM pupils.

**23.** The use and impact of the PDG on Looked After Children and adopted children was not part of the remit set for Ipsos MORI and WISERD's evaluation. In November 2017, the Welsh Government commissioned ICF Consulting to evaluate the Looked After Children PDG. This is expected to be published before the Assembly's 2018 summer recess.

## 2. 2. Improving pupils' outcomes in underperforming schools: Schools Challenge Cymru

**24.** Schools Challenge Cymru was initially announced in February 2014 as a two-year programme (financial years 2014-15 and 2015-16) to target funding and support at specific schools. The Welsh Government said that the programme was targeted at the schools which "face the greatest challenge in terms of

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<sup>9</sup> The Sutton Trust-Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Teaching and Learning Toolkit is a summary of educational research which provides guidance for teachers and schools on how to use their resources to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

circumstance and stage of development”.<sup>10</sup> The criteria used to select the schools were outlined by the then Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis AM.<sup>11</sup> 39 schools, known as “Pathways to Success” schools, received additional funding for their development and improvement under the programme.<sup>12</sup>

**25.** There were four main themes to Schools Challenge Cymru: Leadership; Learning and Teaching; the Pupil; and the School and the Community. Welsh Government guidance at the time said that Pathways to Success schools would receive four core entitlements:

- A “school on a page” template that provided a snapshot of where their school is on its improvement journey and what its strengths and areas for improvement were.
- A committed, experienced adviser to support and challenge the school on how it could improve, and to help broker support.
- A “Single School Development Plan”, showing how the school’s efforts for improvement were drawn together, including an entitlement to draw on additional resource, as needed.
- An “Accelerated Improvement Board” to support the school’s leadership through its improvement journey.

**26.** The programme initially arose from a Barnett consequential uplift resulting from the UK Government’s decision in Autumn 2013 to introduce free meals for all infant pupils in England. The Welsh Government decided to use the additional £12.1 million to “continue to drive up educational standards” and put this towards the cost of Schools Challenge Cymru.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Welsh Government, Draft Budget 2016-17: *Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment*, December 2015

<sup>11</sup> Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis AM, *Answer to WAQ66974*, May 2014

<sup>12</sup> Of the 40 schools initially selected, two schools (Llantarnam School and Fairwater High School) subsequently amalgamated into Cwmbran High School, meaning there were actually 39 schools within the programme. Another two of these (Michaelston Community College and Glyn Derw High School in Cardiff) federated during the programme and were subsequently amalgamated to form Cardiff Community High School in September 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Welsh Government, Cabinet Statements: Minister for Finance, Jane Hutt AM, *Allocations arising from the Autumn Statement 2013*, 27 January 2014; Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis AM, *Schools Challenge Cymru*, 10 February 2014.

**27.** Schools Challenge Cymru lasted for three financial years (2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17) and three academic years (2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17). In autumn 2016, the Welsh Government announced the confirmation of the discontinuation of the programme beyond 2016/17, saying it was always intended to be “time-limited”.<sup>14</sup>

**28.** The Cabinet Secretary for Education informed the Committee during draft budget scrutiny in November 2016 that the annual £15 million budget for the programme had returned to the Welsh Government’s central reserves and was not available for alternative use in the education budget.<sup>15</sup>

### SQW Consulting evaluation

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**29.** The Welsh Government commissioned SQW Consulting to evaluate the Schools Challenge Cymru programme. This was undertaken in two stages. A first evaluation report was published in July 2016, which focused on process and implementation, followed by a final evaluation report in July 2017 exploring outputs and outcomes.

**30.** SQW concluded:

“The two years over which SCC has been running are not long enough to assess fully its impact on ‘hard outcomes’ (attainment and progression) for pupils in Pathways to Success schools. (...)”

In summary, the evaluation provided a rich insight into the complexity of school improvement, demonstrated the value of careful diagnosis of individual schools’ trajectories and needs, and highlighted the importance of tailored support that specifically helped to meet those needs. Although school interviewees tended to feel that SCC funding was the main factor in enabling improvements, it was the intelligent and targeted use of funding that most supported impact. Both Challenge Advisers and AIBs had a notable (though not always fully acknowledged) role to play in this.”<sup>16</sup>

**31.** Dr Marian Morris from SQW also reported the following conclusions in oral evidence to the Committee:

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<sup>14</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Welsh Government paper to the CYPE Committee on the Education Main Expenditure Group, Draft Budget 2017-18, November 2016

<sup>15</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Letter to CYPE Committee, 30 November 2016

<sup>16</sup> SQW Consulting, Assessing the contribution of Schools Challenge Cymru to outcomes achieved by Pathways to Success schools, July 2017, paragraphs 33 & 37

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- SQW's conclusion that each of the Pathways to Success schools made academic progress between 2013/14 and 2015/16 was based on their attainment being better than their forecast trajectory.<sup>17</sup>
- Pathways to Success schools were divided into three contextual groups for the purpose of the evaluation:
  - Group A schools, whose performance was declining before the programme, made more progress than expected in terms of the Level 2 threshold inclusive.<sup>18</sup>
  - Group B schools, whose performance was below the Welsh average but relatively stable prior to the programme, improved their Level 2 threshold inclusive rate but less than expected.
  - Group C schools, whose performance had started to improve prior to the programme but was still below average, improved against the Level 2 threshold inclusive at the expected rate.
- There was limited impact on pupil engagement, which the evaluation team primarily viewed in terms of attendance. Schools made less progress than would have been predicted, particularly in 2014/15. However, in 2015/16, Group A and Group C schools made slightly more progress than forecast, while Group B schools had lower levels of attendance than expected.
- There were some reductions in unauthorised absences and schools used some of the funding to improve attendance. Many schools were concerned this would not be sustainable following the end of the programme and its associated funding.
- The evaluation did not find evidence of schools using the support under Schools Challenge Cymru to benefit more able and talented learners.
- Schools themselves identified the additional funding as the most important factor in making improvements. However, the evaluation found that Schools Challenge Cymru Challenge Advisers and Accelerated Improvement Boards were the two most important

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<sup>17</sup> However, attainment data indicates some individual schools saw performance at Key Stage 4 decrease against several measures. See Research Service, [Key Stage 4 Attainment Data](#) (February 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Level 2 threshold inclusive equals 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C, including English/Welsh and Mathematics, or the vocational equivalent.

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features. Challenge Advisers were seen as critical in driving schools' improvements, although this often depended on the strength of the relationship with the headteacher. Accelerated Improvement Boards worked well where the school accepted the need to improve and embraced additional scrutiny and support.

- Schools Challenge Cymru only ran for a relatively short time. There was no discussion from the Welsh Government about evaluating the third year of the programme. Such a school improvement programme needs to last around five years to have a meaningful effect.
- The way schools are assessed, performance measures and the accountability system are areas which would benefit from further consideration.

### 3. The principle of targeted funding and the Welsh Government's approach

#### Background

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**32.** As set out in the introductory chapters to this report, the Welsh Government has an established approach to target additional funding and support at groups of pupils whom it believes require extra interventions to realise their potential.

**33.** In the case of deprived pupils, as measured by free school meal eligibility, or disadvantaged pupils such as Looked After Children or adopted children, the PDG is the main financial lever the Welsh Government uses for this.

**34.** In the case of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners, the Welsh Government has in the past provided ring-fenced grants and more recently (since 2015-16) targeted this funding through the partially hypothecated Education Improvement Grant. However, from 2018-19, the Welsh Government has removed the funding for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners from the EIG with an expectation that this be mainstreamed and funded from local authorities' Revenue Support Grant (RSG) allocations. The Cabinet Secretary has announced transitional funding for local authorities in 2018-19, and expressed her intention that this also be available in 2019-20, while the transition to a mainstreamed approach is managed.<sup>19</sup>

**35.** Another example of a targeted grant which has come to an end is the School Uniform Grant, which previous to 2018-19 provided funding for families of eFSM pupils in Year 7, the usual year of entry to secondary school. The Welsh Government ended the £700,000 grant to make money available for school budgets in the RSG. However, the Welsh Government subsequently announced it was introducing an "improved scheme" from September 2018, "PDG Access", which it says "will be more flexible and relevant to the needs of disadvantaged learners than the previous school uniform grant".<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, [Letter to the CYPE Committee, 25 May 2018](#)

<sup>20</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, [Letter to the CYPE Committee, 11 May 2018](#), and Written Cabinet Statement, [Pupil Development Grant – Access, 7 June 2018](#)

## Stakeholders' evidence

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**36.** There was general support amongst stakeholders for the principle of targeted funding such as the PDG. The PDG was seen as having added value, echoing Ipsos MORI and WISERD's finding that schools regard it as "invaluable".

**37.** Each group of teachers, headteachers and governors convened by the Assembly's Outreach team to inform the Committee's evidence gathering strongly agreed with the principle of targeted funding and that it works in delivering improved outcomes.

**38.** There was a consensus that the PDG has raised the profile of the deprivation/attainment agenda. As Estyn reported, "overall, schools across Wales now have a stronger focus on reducing the impact of poverty than at the beginning of the inspection cycle 2010-2017",<sup>21</sup> reinforcing Ipsos MORI and WISERD's findings.

**39.** The headteacher unions said they would prefer school funding to be de-hypothecated as far as possible, although they recognised the importance of specific grants for a specific purpose, particularly at a time of pressure on core budgets.

**40.** When asked if the funding for the PDG should instead be provided for schools' core budgets, Rob Williams, Policy Director the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) Cymru, told the Committee:

"I think in an ideal world we'd probably say 'yes'. I think the caution around that is our fear at the moment in terms of pressure on the core budget. One of the concerns we have with additional grants, like the PDG for example, is the potential dilution of their impact, because of the pressures back in the core budget."<sup>22</sup>

**41.** Elaine Edwards, General Secretary of UCAC, highlighted the dilemma that if targeted funding was de-hypothecated then there would be no guarantee it would be spent in the way it is intended:

"In terms of including that element within the more general budget, the problem that we have is that we see funding generally reducing, and the concern would be that if you were to include that within the

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<sup>21</sup> Written evidence, [TF 11 - Estyn](#)

<sup>22</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 276], [8 March 2018](#)

school improvement grant, we wouldn't then know how much money should be there in terms of deprivation.”<sup>23</sup>

**42.** Adoption UK argued that “the targeting of education funding is an effective way to ensure vulnerable learners are better supported in school”.<sup>24</sup>

### The Cabinet Secretary's position

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**43.** The Cabinet Secretary for Education told the Committee:

“One of the most important things that PDG has done is highlight the importance of this agenda within schools, and really raise this up in the thinking of leadership and senior management teams in our schools, and has driven a focus on scrutiny and accountability in the systems that are working with our schools.”<sup>25</sup>

**44.** She has argued the case for targeting funding at deprived pupils through the PDG:

“Whilst I am the Cabinet Secretary for Education, then the PDG will exist, and I will do my best to ensure, where there are opportunities to increase the value of that, like we did last year, and like we have done this year, that we will do just that. I make no apologies for wanting to invest this money in the education of our poorest children. (...)

Listening to schools, listening to the evaluation and listening to Estyn, I believe that this is the right path, this is the right focus, and whilst I remain in this position, it will continue to be so.”<sup>26</sup>

### The Committee's views and recommendations

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#### 3. 1. Ensuring value for money and improving pupil outcomes

**45.** The Committee supports the principle of targeting funding to improve the educational outcomes of particular groups of pupils or certain schools. The Committee therefore supports the principle behind the PDG as a means of helping to meet the objective of narrowing the gap between disadvantaged and deprived pupils and their peers.

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<sup>23</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 365], 8 March 2018

<sup>24</sup> Written evidence, TF.01 – Adoption UK

<sup>25</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 39], 22 March 2018

<sup>26</sup> Plenary, 17 April 2018

**46.** However, the level of investment in the PDG is significant and has increased during the lifetime of the policy from £32 million in 2012-13<sup>27</sup> to its present level of £94 million. There is therefore a need to ensure value for money and that the expenditure is driving up pupil outcomes. The PDG's annual budget of £94 million in 2018-19 makes up 6 per cent of the Welsh Government's Education budget and the policy has a considerable opportunity cost, i.e. the resources required to fund it could be put to significant alternative use.<sup>28</sup>

**47.** Whilst the attainment gap between eFSM pupils and their peers narrowed prior to 2017, as the joint evaluation by Ipsos MORI and WISERD reported, this trend had already started before the introduction of the PDG and it is difficult to discern to what extent it can be directly attributed to the grant funding.

**48.** However, the Committee notes that schools generally regard the PDG as "invaluable" and is satisfied from the evidence received that the PDG has had a positive impact and made a contribution to narrowing the attainment gap. Nevertheless, the Committee believes more needs to be done to demonstrate value for money, particularly given that the policy consumes significant resources. This is particularly pertinent given the worrying widening of the eFSM/non FSM attainment gap in 2017 following years of sustained progress.

**Recommendation 1.** The Welsh Government should regularly assess the scale of investment required for the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) in terms of value for money and opportunity cost. In particular, the Welsh Government should closely monitor on an ongoing basis the PDG's impact on the pupils it targets.

### 3. 2. Coherence of the Welsh Government's approach to targeting funding

**49.** The Committee believes there are inconsistencies in the Welsh Government's approach to targeting funding to improve educational outcomes. The Cabinet Secretary for Education has robustly defended the need for dedicated, ring-fenced, targeted funding for eFSM and Looked after or adopted children in the form of the PDG.

**50.** However, at the same time, the Welsh Government has removed funding from the Education Improvement Grant for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and

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<sup>27</sup> Minister for Education and Skills, Leighton Andrews, [Welsh Government paper to the CYP Committee, Draft Budget Proposals for 2013-2014 Annex 1, October 2012](#)

<sup>28</sup> As a proportion of Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) Revenue funding within the Education Main Expenditure Group (MEG). Note that core funding for school budgets is allocated via the Local Government MEG.

Minority Ethnic learners. Consequently, the Welsh Government is ending partially ring-fenced funding for these groups of learners with an expectation that such support be mainstreamed and instead financed from the local government RSG. The Committee recognises that the Cabinet Secretary has made funding available while this transition to a mainstreamed approach is achieved. The Welsh Government has also ended the School Uniform Grant before deciding to introduce a replacement “PDG Access” grant.

**51.** The Committee notes that there has been a government-wide approach of “reprioritising” local government funding from 2018-19, which has resulted in the ending of some specific grants. These have been either transferred into the RSG or, in the case of the aforementioned education grants, the funding removed with no visible, commensurate movement into the RSG. The Committee appreciates the Cabinet Secretary probably has little option but to operate within this approach. The Welsh Government as a whole, including the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, should consider the coherence and consistency of its approach to targeting funding to improve educational outcomes, given it has ended certain dedicated grants but affirmed the importance of the PDG.

**Recommendation 2.** The Welsh Government should ensure there is coherence in its approach to targeting funding to improve educational outcomes, addressing any inconsistencies between the principle behind the PDG and the ending of other targeted education grants. In doing so, the Welsh Government should demonstrate the logic behind any differences in its approach.



## 4. Targeting of the eFSM Pupil Development Grant

### 4.1. Blurring disadvantage with low attainment?

#### Background

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**52.** The Welsh Government issued guidance in March 2015 on how PDG allocations should be targeted and used. This states:

“While the PDG must be used to support eFSM and LAC learners, the grant does not have to be tracked to those learners. Only eFSM and LAC learners may receive PDG-funded support from individualised programmes such as Catch Up, but the grant may also be used for whole-school strategies that disproportionately benefit eFSM and LAC learners.”<sup>29</sup>

**53.** The Welsh Government’s 2015 guidance does not explicitly state that the PDG should be targeted at more able and talented eFSM pupils as much as any other eFSM pupil. However, during the course of the Committee’s inquiry, the Cabinet Secretary has taken the opportunity in her annual letter to schools (March 2018) accompanying the publication of individual school allocations to emphasise that they should be targeting the PDG at all eFSM learners, including those more able and talented.

#### Stakeholders’ evidence

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**54.** During the Committee’s visit to Eastern High School in Cardiff, the school advocated a pragmatic approach to targeting the PDG. They have made some of their PDG-funded activities, for example wellbeing and engagement (including with parents), available to the whole cohort of pupils as they said it would not make sense to exclude non FSM pupils from beneficial interventions if this does not add to costs and it is efficient to do so. Staff explained that this was particularly relevant in Eastern High’s case given its high proportion – 45 per cent – of eFSM pupils, meaning they make up a large part of the cohort. Eastern High said they combine PDG allocations with core budgets to ensure appropriate use of PDG funding and welcomed flexibility in how they target the PDG.

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<sup>29</sup> Welsh Government, Pupil Development Grant – Essential Guidance, March 2015, page 4

**55.** However, one of the themes emanating from Ipsos MORI and WISERD's evaluation of the PDG, and particularly in Professor Chris Taylor's evidence to the Committee, was that the PDG is insufficiently targeted at eFSM pupils who are more able and talented. There was also a general observation from stakeholders that schools are predominantly, and in some cases solely, targeting the PDG at low attaining eFSM pupils.

**56.** WISERD's Professor Chris Taylor referred to a "blurring of the targeted intervention to mitigate disadvantage with the wider school improvement funding and grants and priorities". He explained:

"Schools were using their money to raise low attainment, not necessarily raising the attainment of all children who are from disadvantaged backgrounds, which is kind of a fundamental misunderstanding of the conceptual basis of the policy. (...)

The point of the policy was to mitigate the structural inequalities that some of these children experienced living in poverty. It doesn't matter what their levels of attainment are; they can be high-achieving pupils. (...). They also ought to receive the benefit, because the argument is that they should be doing better than where they are now. And I think schools have not really grasped that, partly again because there are other priorities in the school, particularly for many schools about raising levels of attainment."<sup>30</sup>

**57.** Estyn wrote that "very few" schools have used the PDG to support disadvantaged pupils who are more able and that this is "rarely a central aspect" of schools' PDG plans.<sup>31</sup> HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, Meilyr Rowlands, told the Committee:

"So, if there is a cohort of pupils who are missing out on this, they are the more able and talented pupils who receive free school meals. There are a number of reasons for this, I think. One of them is that there's still some feeling that less able children should be receiving this grant, children who are underachieving. Schools don't always identify underachievement of those more able children. It seems that they are doing okay, but if they were given more support, they would do even better."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 125 & 136], 28 February

<sup>31</sup> Written evidence, TF.11 - Estyn

<sup>32</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 15], 14 March 2018

## The Cabinet Secretary's position

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**58.** The Cabinet Secretary was unequivocal in oral evidence that the PDG should be targeted at all eFSM pupils, including those who are more able and talented:

“I’m absolutely clear that PDG needs to be used for those children who are eligible to drive potential, whatever the potential of that child is, including more able and talented. (...)”

So, yes, I’m absolutely clear that PDG shouldn’t just be seen to be getting individuals to the average. For those children who are more able and talented, it should be used to support them.”<sup>33</sup>

**59.** In her letter to schools alongside the announcement of their PDG allocations for 2018-19, Kirsty Williams AM wrote:

“Evidence tells us that we must do more in Wales to identify, support and stretch our more able learners. I want to be clear the PDG supports all eligible learners including our most able learners.”<sup>34</sup>

**60.** Subsequently, in her Plenary statement of 17 April 2018, the Cabinet Secretary said:

“Evidence has been presented to the committee suggesting that the PDG isn’t always used for all eligible learners, with the focus sometimes being only on those who are struggling academically. Let me be very clear: the PDG is there to support all eFSM learners and looked-after learners, including those who are more able. This position is not new, but I am keen to reinforce its importance and I want to see practitioners building on current good practice.”<sup>35</sup>

**61.** However, the Cabinet Secretary has not indicated that she intends to update the 2015 guidance on the targeting and use of the PDG to reflect this position.

## The Committee's views and recommendations

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**62.** The Committee noted from the evidence it received that there is clearly some blurring between FSM eligibility and a wider interpretation of disadvantage in the way schools target the PDG. This appears to be in part because FSM

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<sup>33</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [paras 7-9], 22 March 2018

<sup>34</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Letter to schools regarding 2018-19 PDG allocations, March 2018

<sup>35</sup> Plenary, 17 April 2018

eligibility is seen as a relatively crude, imperfect measure, failing to capture a full picture of deprivation or disadvantage.

**63.** The Committee recognises that it is sensible and pragmatic that schools have a degree of flexibility in how they interpret disadvantage in terms of their use of the PDG. However, the Committee is also concerned that this may in some cases become the beginning of a worrying trend of diluting the targeting of the funding at its intended beneficiaries. It may also be used as a justification or means for using the PDG more generally on low-attaining pupils.

**64.** The Committee notes that, whilst any personalised interventions funded by the PDG must only be with eligible pupils, the Welsh Government permits use of the PDG on whole-school approaches where these disproportionately benefit eligible learners. This may often make good sense and represent best use of resources, as it would be inefficient and serve no benefit to unnecessarily exclude non FSM learners, where it does not detract from the benefits to eFSM pupils. However, again the Committee is concerned that this could be used to justify using the PDG in ways not purely intended, particularly in an environment of pressure on schools' core budgets.

**65.** The most significant and concerning blurring of eligibility is between disadvantage and low attainment. The Committee was particularly concerned to hear that the PDG is not being routinely used to support more able and talented eFSM learners, with schools focusing only on low-attaining eFSM learners. This is contrary to both the spirit and explicit purpose of the PDG which is to support all deprived pupils to reach their full potential, including, for example where this means turning a C grade into an A or an A\*.

**66.** The Committee welcomes the steps the Cabinet Secretary has taken to communicate more clearly to schools that the PDG should be used on more able and talented eFSM pupils and believes the PDG guidance should be strengthened in this regard.

**Recommendation 3.** The Welsh Government should take all steps to emphasise that the PDG is to be used to support all eligible learners, including those who are more able and talented. This should include updating its PDG guidance, issued in 2015, accordingly.

## 4. 2. The impact of school accountability arrangements on the way the PDG is targeted

### Background

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**67.** In recent years, the main school performance measures used by the Welsh Government at Key Stage 4 have been the Level 2 threshold inclusive (5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C including Maths and English/Welsh, or the vocational equivalent) and the Level 2 threshold (5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C, or the vocational equivalent).

**68.** It is generally accepted, including by the Welsh Government, that this has led to disproportionate importance being placed on a GCSE C grade and insufficient incentive, in terms of performance measures, for schools to support pupils to attain the highest grades.

### Stakeholders' evidence

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**69.** There were some suggestions from stakeholders that the existing performance measures were skewing how schools use their available resources, including the PDG. This may be limiting the extent to which schools are targeting the PDG at more able and talented eFSM pupils. Neil Foden of the National Education Union (NEU) explained:

"I think until relatively recently the focus had been very, very much on C and above, and I think we would have to welcome some of the steps that the Welsh Government has taken to address the perverse incentives that have been created by the school performance system. (...) However, as long as there are nationally reported performance measures, schools are still going to tailor a lot of what they do to meet the performance measures."<sup>36</sup>

### The Cabinet Secretary's position

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**70.** The Cabinet Secretary has previously expressed her concern that the current performance measures place disproportionate significance on grade C in GCSEs and insufficiently incentivise schools to support learners to achieve the highest grades.

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<sup>36</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 384], 8 March 2018

**71.** On 17 May 2018, the Cabinet Secretary announced new “interim” performance measures which will take effect from academic year 2018/19.<sup>37</sup> These are designed to shift away from the “narrow focus on borderline C/D grade pupils that past use of threshold measures has cultivated” towards recording the achievement of pupils at all grades. An updated “Capped 9” points score will replace the Level 2 threshold inclusive as the main school performance measure, which will score GCSE grades differentially (a grade A will be worth more than a grade B etc). Attainment of the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate will also be a performance measure in its own right.

**72.** The revised measures are “transitional and interim” and the Welsh Government is working with the OECD to develop a new Assessment and Evaluation Framework, which will be published alongside the new curriculum for feedback in April 2019 and for implementation from September 2022.

### The Committee’s views and recommendations

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**73.** The school accountability regime, which currently places disproportionate importance on C grades rather than the highest grades pupils are able to achieve within their potential, is likely to have contributed to a focus on low attaining eFSM pupils, rather than also on more able and talented eFSM pupils. The Committee welcomes the Cabinet Secretary’s intention to address this issue and notes the interim performance measures recently put in place from 2018/19. The updated Capped 9 points score should offer greater incentive to schools to improve the proportion of pupils, including those eFSM, achieving the highest grades. However, the Committee is disappointed that this is too late for pupils completing their GCSEs in Summer 2018.

**Recommendation 4.** The Welsh Government should ensure Key Stage 4 performance measures and school accountability arrangements incentivise schools to support eFSM pupils in achieving as high grades as possible.

## 4. 3. Extending the FSM eligibility timeframe for PDG eligibility

### Background

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**74.** The Welsh Government allocates the PDG on a single financial year basis. Prior to 2018-19, schools’ allocations were determined in accordance with their number of eFSM pupils recorded in the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) taken in the January of the preceding calendar year (2017-2018 allocations

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<sup>37</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, Written Cabinet statement, [Update on Key Stage 4 performance measures arrangements for 2019 onwards](#), 17 May 2018

according to PLASC January 2016 etc). For 2018-19, the Welsh Government decided to base allocations on January 2016 PLASC data, rather than January 2017, which would have been expected as it is the latest available.

**75.** The Pupil Premium in England applies an “Ever 6” rule meaning pupils attract the grant if they have been eFSM at any point in the previous six years. This is designed to capture pupils who may not be eFSM at the current point in time but are managing the effects of disadvantage resulting from their recent past.

#### Stakeholders’ evidence

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**76.** Many stakeholders felt that FSM eligibility is a blunt measure for deprivation but offered no viable alternative. The NAHT summed up views when it said:

“NAHT looked at this quite some years ago—and free school meals was probably the least worst measure, if that’s a decent phrase to use.”<sup>38</sup>

**77.** However, there was appetite generally amongst stakeholders for moving to a model where the PDG is drawn down for pupils who have been eFSM at any time over a given period, rather than at a single point in time, as in the “Ever 6” model in England.

#### The Cabinet Secretary’s position

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**78.** On the strength of FSM eligibility as a measure for deprivation, the Cabinet Secretary told the Committee:

“I’ll be the first person to say that maybe it’s not as absolutely focused, but in the absence of anything different to identify a proxy for need, I think it’s probably the best that we’ve got at present. And we will continue to have discussions with local government about whether there are different ways.”<sup>39</sup>

**79.** The Cabinet Secretary was asked by the Committee about whether she was considering an Ever 6 type model as in England. She said that to extend the PDG to all pupils who had been eFSM at any point in the past six years would cost “in the region” of an “additional £40 million”. However, she said the Welsh Government was giving thought to how schools could have greater “flexibility” in how to target the PDG.

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<sup>38</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 264], 8 March 2018

<sup>39</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 15], 22 March 2018



**80.** This greater “flexibility” was explained in the Cabinet Secretary’s letter to schools (March 2018) as an instruction that PDG should be used to support pupils who have been eFSM in either of the previous two years.<sup>40</sup> However, schools will not receive increased PDG allocations to account for this larger cohort of pupils. PDG allocations will continue to be based on a one-year headcount of schools’ eFSM pupil totals.

**81.** Another issue arising during this inquiry, which the Cabinet Secretary has sought to respond to for 2018-19 and 2019-20, is the lack of certainty some schools feel they can have about future PDG allocations. The Welsh Government has confirmed that PDG levels will remain at £1,150 per eligible Year 1 to 11 pupil and £700 per eligible child in Early Years. Allocations for 2018-19 and 2019-20 will also be fixed according to schools’ January 2016 levels rather than the latest annual censuses, January 2017 and January 2018 respectively.

**82.** The Cabinet Secretary explained the reasons for using the 2016 PLASC data rather than 2017 as follows:

“We have used that data because it is what allows me to get the most money into the system, because, actually, because of a whole range of factors, free school meal eligibility is dropping. So, 2016 gives me more money than using 2017 data.”<sup>41</sup>

### The Committee’s views and recommendations

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**83.** There are three issues the Committee believes the Welsh Government should consider and resolve in terms of the timeframe of pupils’ FSM eligibility for the purposes of being eligible for the PDG:

- That the Welsh Government intends pupils who have been eFSM in the past two years to benefit from the PDG but they are not included when calculating the overall annual PDG allocation and therefore funding is not provided for them;
- Whether the Welsh Government should go a step further and adopt a longer timeframe than two years for former eFSM pupils.
- If the Welsh Government continues to calculate schools’ PDG allocations on a one-year basis, which annual dataset it uses.

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<sup>40</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Letter to schools, March 2018

<sup>41</sup> Plenary, 17 April 2018

**84.** Recommendations 5 to 7 are proposed to address these three issues.

**85.** The Committee notes that the Cabinet Secretary expects, from 2018-19, schools to use their PDG allocations on pupils who have been eFSM at any point in the past two years. Whilst the Committee welcomes the Welsh Government's attempts to provide greater flexibility in the targeting of PDG, this needs to be funded accordingly.

**Recommendation 5.** If the Welsh Government wants schools to use the PDG on pupils who have been eFSM at any point in the past two years, it should fund schools' PDG allocations on this basis, i.e. per pupil who has been eFSM at any point in the past two years, rather than expecting schools to support additional pupils from a grant allocation based on a one year snapshot of eFSM eligibility.

**86.** The effect of Recommendation 5 above would be to have an "Ever 2" model for the PDG in Wales. At present, the Welsh Government has an Ever 2 model in terms of whom schools can target but not in terms of how schools' allocations are funded.

**87.** Moving a step further, the Committee believes there would be advantages in having a longer-term model for the PDG in Wales, based on similar principles to the "Ever 6" model in England. Under such a model, schools would receive the PDG for pupils where they had been eFSM at any point in a given number of previous years. This would target to a greater extent those pupils whose circumstances fluctuate but remain essentially deprived.

**88.** The Committee believes that using six years as a threshold, as in England, might be too long a timeframe and notes that, at the current level of £1,150 per eligible pupil, the Welsh Government estimates an Ever 6 model would cost around an additional £40 million. However, based on the evidence gathered, the Committee believes further work is needed to establish what the optimum timeframe and level of funding per eligible pupil should be. For example, the Welsh Government should look at options for an Ever 2, Ever 3, Ever 4 or Ever 5 model for the PDG in Wales.

**Recommendation 6.** The Welsh Government should consider adopting a longer-term timeframe for determining eligibility for the eFSM PDG so that pupils who have been eFSM in the recent past can also be supported. The Welsh Government should investigate differing thresholds of eligibility, for example two, three, four or five years, against different amounts per child to arrive at an optimum, affordable model, taking into account the trade-offs involved.

**89.** The Committee notes that the Welsh Government is basing its 2018-19 PDG allocations to schools on the January 2016 PLASC data, rather than the customary approach of previous years when the latest available data was used. In the case of 2018-19, this would be PLASC January 2017. The Committee acknowledges the rationale given by the Cabinet Secretary for doing so, which is that the January 2016 numbers are higher, meaning more money is drawn down for the PDG. The Committee welcomes this in terms of securing a higher aggregate total for the PDG but has concerns about how this will be distributed between schools over the next two years.

**90.** Fixing the 2018-19 and 2019-20 allocations at PLASC January 2016 eFSM data could disadvantage individual schools who have higher eFSM levels in January 2017 or January 2018 than they had in January 2016. Whilst some larger schools may have relatively stable eFSM levels between years, this may not be the case for some smaller schools. The Committee believes that it is essential that no individual school loses out financially from the decision to fix PDG allocations according to January 2016 eFSM levels. For example, if a school's number of eFSM pupils increased between January 2016 and January 2017, under the Welsh Government's current arrangements that school would not receive the requisite level of PDG. This is something the Welsh Government should address.

**91.** The Committee believes that, if, rather than taking forward recommendations 5 or 6, the Welsh Government decides to fix PDG allocations at PLASC January 2016 in order to maximise quantum of investment, it should ensure that no individual school loses out. Where any individual school's eFSM total is higher according to January 2017 PLASC data than for January 2016, the Welsh Government should determine the school's 2018-19 PDG allocation in accordance with the higher figure. Similarly, where any school's January 2018 rate is higher than the default January 2016 measure, their 2019-20 PDG allocation should be determined by the higher figure.

**Recommendation 7.** If the Welsh Government decides to continue with a one-year headcount for determining PDG allocations, it should allocate the 2018-19 and 2019-2020 PDG to schools according to the higher of their individual eFSM count from PLASC 2016 or the latest available.



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The proportion of schools that make effective use of the PDCG has remained at around two-thirds of primary and secondary schools.

**Estyn**

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## 5. Practical uses of the eFSM Pupil Development Grant

### 5.1. Effectiveness of the use of PDG funds

#### Background

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**92.** Ipsos MORI and WISERD’s evaluation found that schools are generally using the PDG effectively. They reported the following examples of “schools developing innovative approaches to engaging with pupils and parents in ways that are recommended in the PDG guidance”:

- Whole-school strategies to improve teaching and learning;
- Methods to engage parents in the life of the school and in their children’s learning;
- Innovative uses of technology to engage and motivate children and parents;
- Focusing on attendance and behaviour, and in particular methods to engage pupils with the school and learning more effectively to incentivise good attendance and behaviour; and
- Supporting the social and emotional skills of learners.<sup>42</sup>

#### Stakeholders’ evidence

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**93.** Estyn reported to the Committee that “around two-thirds” of primary and secondary schools make effective use of the PDG.<sup>43</sup> When questioned whether it is satisfactory that one third of schools do not, HM Chief Inspector said:

“I think that sort of proportion broadly corresponds to the schools that don’t have particularly good leadership. I think, ultimately, all of these sorts of initiatives come down to strong leadership and effective leadership—that they know how to organise and use those grants effectively. One of the shortcomings that we often identify is evaluation—that money has been spent on a particular way of using the

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<sup>42</sup> Ipsos MORI and WISERD, Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant: Final report – December 2017, para 1.13

<sup>43</sup> Written evidence. TF11 – Estyn

grant, but it has not been evaluated well. So, I think quite a lot of it is to do with generic leadership skills.”<sup>44</sup>

**94.** Estyn highlighted the following types of activities which schools generally use the PDG for:

- Systems to track the progress of different groups of pupils, including eFSM pupils or Looked After Children;
- Improving attendance;
- Family and parental engagement;
- Working with pre-school groups and parents before children join primary school;
- Withdrawal programmes such as catch-up (eg literacy and numeracy);
- Wellbeing and self-esteem initiatives;
- Paying for educational visits and residential trips, including musical tuition;
- Literacy and numeracy projects; and
- Staff development.<sup>45</sup>

**95.** The Committee’s wider engagement activity with schools and governors indicated the same types of uses as those listed above from the evaluation and Estyn’s findings. Schools and governors cited staffing as one of the main expenses which PDG was used for, as well as training for staff and new equipment such as IT.<sup>46</sup>

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### The Cabinet Secretary’s position

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**96.** When asked whether she would have expected a higher proportion than two thirds of schools to be using the PDG effectively, the Cabinet Secretary said:

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<sup>44</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 32], 14 March

<sup>45</sup> Written evidence. TF 11 – Estyn

<sup>46</sup> CYPE Committee, Focus Group Summary, page 2



“Well, to flip it on its head, the vast majority of schools, as identified by Estyn, are using this money to good effect. So, that’s the way I like to see it—that the vast majority of schools are doing well. (...)”

I think we’re seeing better usage of the money year on year.”<sup>47</sup>

**97.** However, the Cabinet Secretary added that the aim of appointing PDG lead advisers within each consortia was to improve how schools use the PDG. She stated that “clearly we want all of this money to be deployed as well as it can be”, including the way schools use available evidence and expertise (this is discussed further in section 5.2 of this report).<sup>48</sup>

### The Committee’s views and recommendations

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**98.** The Committee noted the evidence from Estyn that around two thirds of schools are using the PDG effectively, which the Inspectorate qualified as reflecting the fact that around the same proportion of schools have good or better leadership. The Committee also noted that the Cabinet Secretary appeared to consider this to be an acceptable level of effective use of the PDG for this reason.

**99.** Given the PDG is now in its seventh year and almost £400 million has been invested in it, the Committee would have expected a higher proportion than two thirds of schools to be using the money effectively. Although this may be related to the overall quality of leadership within a school, the Committee does not believe that the Welsh Government or others should be satisfied that one third of schools do not use the PDG effectively.

**100.** The Committee welcomes the appointment of the PDG leads within each of the four regional consortia. They have an important role in monitoring schools’ use of the grant and evaluating effectiveness. There has not been enough challenge of schools’ use of the PDG, particularly in the one third of cases in which Estyn cite its ineffective use. The Committee heard very little evidence of consortia Challenge Advisers challenging ineffective use of the PDG, which reinforces the conclusion by Ipsos MORI and WISERD that this is not happening sufficiently.

**101.** However, the Committee was encouraged by signs that the consortia have intensified their activities in this area, which is likely to be as a result of the appointment of the PDG lead officers in each region.

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<sup>47</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 33], 22 March 2018

<sup>48</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 35], 22 March 2018

**Recommendation 8.** The Welsh Government should ensure that the recently appointed PDG lead officers within the regional consortia are proactive in monitoring, and challenging where necessary, schools' use of the PDG, in order to ensure maximum impact and value for money.

## 5. 2. Use of evidence and expertise

### Background

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**102.** The Welsh Government's PDG guidance does not prescribe how schools should use the grant, although it points to best practice case studies produced by the Policy Observatory Project. The Policy Observatory Project was created to provide schools, regional consortia and the Welsh Government with evidence-based information on actions schools can take to reduce the impact of poverty on educational achievement. The Welsh Government also encourages schools to take account of academic and external expertise such as the Sutton Trust Toolkit.

**103.** Whilst the consortia passports the eFSM element of the PDG in its entirety to schools, narrowing the attainment gap is an important part of the regional consortia's school improvement remit. The consortia are therefore expected to work closely with schools on how they are using the PDG, providing challenge where necessary. For example, the Welsh Government's Early Years PDG guidance states:

“Regional consortia will be responsible for ensuring that the EYPDG funding is distributed appropriately, that effective use is made of all resources, and that all providers are using the funding in accordance with the agreed purposes.”<sup>49</sup>

### Stakeholders' evidence

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**104.** The consortia's role in challenging ineffective use of the PDG is an area which was relatively undeveloped at the time of Ipsos MORI and WISERD's evaluation (which was completed in summer 2016). Their evaluation found that, while the consortia's Challenge Advisers “are helping to inform school leaders”, there was “little evidence of the challenge role in practice”.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Welsh Government, Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant: Guidance for regional consortia, local authorities, schools, nurseries, playgroups and childminders, July 2015

<sup>50</sup> Ipsos MORI and WISERD, Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant: Final report – December 2017, para 1.5



**105.** When asked by the Committee about this, the consortia were unable to offer many examples of where their challenge and advice has changed a school's use of the PDG. PDG lead officers have only recently been appointed within each region and the consortia indicated this is something they are now intensifying. For example, ERW told the Committee in follow-up written evidence:

“Our Leader of Learning for PDG is relatively new in post and a large part of his work moving forward will be to meet with Challenge Advisers and discuss the use of PDG grant in their schools in a detailed manner, and to work alongside them to plan for effective expenditure that can demonstrate impact. In their initial research, no schools have had their PDG grant money clawed back, but there are instances where expenditure has been changed – one school initially planned to pay for free bus passes for eFSM pupils but then withdrew that element of the spending plan after no clear impact could be demonstrated from this use of the funding.”<sup>51</sup>

**106.** Overall, in terms of how they work with schools to ensure effective use of the PDG, the consortia told the Committee the following:

- ERW Challenge Advisers review use of PDG during their visits to schools and the impact of the grant is evaluated.<sup>52</sup>
- CSW “monitor the use of PDG through schools’ improvement planning and self-evaluation reports” and said that “Challenge Advisers focus on pupils eFSM when looking at the tracking of pupil progress and target setting”.<sup>53</sup>
- EAS said there is “now a much sharper regional focus on the use of data for FSM learners”. Challenge Advisers use details of FSM performance at the end of each key stage against PDG allocations in their discussions with schools.<sup>54</sup>
- GwE said that data, target setting and tracking are consistently applied to challenge and support via their advisers who gather evidence of use of PDG and its impact in all school visits.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> ERW, [Further information submitted following meeting on 8 March](#)

<sup>52</sup> Written evidence, [TF 20 – ERW](#)

<sup>53</sup> Written evidence, [TF 07 – CSW](#)

<sup>54</sup> Written evidence, [TF 12 – EAS](#)

<sup>55</sup> Written evidence, [TF 14 – GwE](#)

**107.** Estyn reported that it is “difficult to quantify” to what extent schools use research to identify evidence-based approaches, for example the Education Endowment Foundation and the Sutton Trust Toolkit. The Inspectorate said that it is even more difficult to identify the extent to which schools use such resources effectively, although:

“It is fair to say that schools who are successful in mitigating the impact of poverty on educational outcomes use evidence-based strategies, such as assessment for learning strategies well. However, a few schools that are highly effective in raising standards of learning and wellbeing for disadvantaged learners challenge research findings based on the evidence arising from their own context.”<sup>56</sup>

**108.** HM Chief Inspector added:

“I think that, of all the areas of school policy, [use of the PDG] is the one that’s most evidence-based. I think that, generally, schools can do much more about using evidence and research findings, but this particular area is probably the one that schools are strongest at using research in.”<sup>57</sup>

**109.** EAS wrote that its Challenge Advisers and school leaders have been trained on the use of the Sutton Trust Toolkit through a series of workshops and that there is an agreed process by which PDG spend is agreed by Challenge Advisers in line with best practice and grant terms and conditions.<sup>58</sup>

**110.** ERW told the Committee:

“One of our roles is to share best practice, as I said earlier: to identify best practice, to share it, to match schools with similar schools, or very often with schools that aren’t similar, so that they can share those practices.”<sup>59</sup>

**111.** CSW described the various practices they have in place to “support and advise schools on best spend and best practice”, including eligibility workshops, best practice hubs, and school improvement groups.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Written evidence, [TF.11 – Estyn](#)

<sup>57</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 45], 14 March 2018

<sup>58</sup> Written evidence, [TF.12 – EAS](#)

<sup>59</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 31], 8 March 2018

<sup>60</sup> Ibid [para 33]

**112.** Whilst the Sutton Trust Toolkit and other forms of external expertise and guidance were generally regarded by stakeholders as useful for schools, there was a word of caution from the NAHT not to rely on these excessively. Damon McGarvie, Head Teacher of Pennar Community School and NAHT Cymru President, told the Committee:

“It’s also worth noting that when we look at the Sutton Trust, it shows some areas of value for money that I don’t necessarily agree with. They’ll make a decision, perhaps, on the use of teaching assistants in the classroom, and they have said in the past that there’s very little value in the use of teaching assistants. I would disagree with that. I would say that it’s about, if you’ve got teaching assistants, what quality they are and how you use them. So, it’s to be used as a reference, but it’s to be used with caution.”<sup>61</sup>

**113.** Rob Williams, NAHT Cymru’s Policy Director added:

“Ultimately, it has to be based upon the school decision because it should reflect your self-evaluation. I think you have to be a little bit cautious of just picking something off the shelf because it looks like it has good value for money if it actually doesn’t fit with what is the key area within your school.”<sup>62</sup>

**114.** Estyn echoed that it is down to schools themselves to make the best decisions on how to use the PDG with their pupils. HM Chief Inspector said “there is a lot of easily accessible research evidence available”, “which makes it much easier for schools to make a decision”:

“But I think what’s missing is that you can’t just take that evidence as it is, because you have to implement it in your own school, and that then will affect how effective that particular intervention is. Just because it is evaluated by researchers as being generally very effective doesn’t mean that you will necessarily implement it effectively. So, it is therefore important that each school does evaluate. So, there are kind of two sides to using research. There’s looking at research, but there’s also doing your own research and evaluating how effectively you have implemented something. I think that’s been a weakness.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 303], 8 March 2018

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, [para 310]

<sup>63</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [paras 45 & 46], 14 March 2018

## The Cabinet Secretary's position

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**115.** The Cabinet Secretary highlighted Estyn's observation that the PDG is "probably" the best example of schools making evidence-informed decisions. She also reiterated that schools should be free to make the best decision for their own circumstances but that they must demonstrate they have considered the available evidence on what works and best practice. In oral evidence, the Cabinet Secretary said:

"But we want to see schools demonstrating their evidence base, and if they're not, if a school isn't doing that, okay, so demonstrate to us why you've made those decisions and, crucially, what are you doing as the school to judge whether that decision is actually making a difference for your individual pupils. So, if you're moving away from tried and tested interventions, what we know works, if you're doing something different with your money, okay, you need to justify that and you need to explain how you're going to demonstrate impact."<sup>64</sup>

**116.** The Cabinet Secretary also told the Committee that she was looking at developing a "Welsh toolkit around good practice, evidence base and research".<sup>65</sup>

## Committee's views and recommendations

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**117.** Estyn told the Committee that the PDG represented an area where schools were making best use of evidence to guide their decisions on how to use the PDG. The Committee believes that it is vital schools continue to make full and appropriate use of the available expertise, including the Sutton Trust Toolkit and other evidence based interventions.

**118.** The Committee was concerned to hear from Ipsos MORI and WISERD's evaluation that schools are not making sufficient use of the Sutton Trust Toolkit, although also recognises evidence from headteachers that they are usually best placed to decide how to apply the available evidence and expertise to their school's specific circumstances.

**119.** The Committee noted that the Welsh Government intends to issue a "Welsh toolkit" and welcomes this, although emphasises that there should be no "throwing the baby out with the bathwater". Rather than starting from scratch,

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<sup>64</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 35], 22 March 2018

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, [para 217]

any new toolkit should build on what is known to already work, such as elements of the Sutton Trust Toolkit.

**Recommendation 9.** The Welsh Government should encourage and place an onus on schools to take full account of the available evidence and expertise on what constitutes effective use of the PDG, whilst enabling school leaders to take appropriate decisions for their own pupils. In doing so, the Welsh Government should work with Estyn to ensure it plays a full role in monitoring this.

### 5. 3. Use of the PDG for tracking pupils' progress

#### Stakeholders' evidence

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**120.** Sir Alasdair Macdonald, the Welsh Government's Raising School Standards Advocate, described to the Committee how schools' tracking of pupils had developed in recent years:

"It's very, very difficult to go into a school now that hasn't really got a system in place for tracking pupils that identifies the free-school-meals pupils. Whereas in the past the school administration might have known who they were but individual teachers didn't, we now have a system where individual teachers do. We now have a system where they're being tracked."<sup>66</sup>

**121.** The Committee heard about various tracking tools and methods used by schools to follow pupils' progress. For example, the GwE consortia discussed its "G6 dashboard" which it hopes will establish a consistent and coherent approach to the way schools in North Wales track pupils' progress:

"This dashboard has been given a very warm welcome from Estyn and other stakeholders, but also from our headteachers. That dashboard will promote and encourage that consistency that you referred to. Of course, a school can use its own internal systems, but as a region, as you say, we need that consistency across the board so that we are working effectively across the area."<sup>67</sup>

#### The Cabinet Secretary's position

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**122.** The Cabinet Secretary affirmed the importance of schools tracking pupils' progress but confirmed that the Welsh Government does not give a particular

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<sup>66</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 513], 8 March 2018

<sup>67</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 182], 8 March 2018

lead or direction on which of the various tracking systems to use. Kirsty Williams AM said:

“Firstly, can I say it’s absolutely crucial that we track performance, absolutely crucial? That’s the bedrock. We don’t dictate to individual schools the nature of the system that they should employ in their school. There are a number of different programmes that allow schools to do this, but we are absolutely clear, and best practice and evidence shows us, that individual pupil tracking is key and crucial. And, as I said in the beginning, where we weren’t tracking pupils at all, initial investment in PDG was used to establish these systems within schools. Again, one of the outcomes from the schools challenge review, and one of the lessons learnt, was, again, the importance of individual tracking of pupils throughout their school career. But we don’t dictate a single system.”<sup>68</sup>

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### The Committee’s views and recommendations

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**123.** It is vital that schools track individual pupils’ progress over time. This should be a best practice use of the PDG in terms of eFSM pupils and Looked After Children and adopted children. The Committee heard about various tracking tools and methods used by schools but it was apparent that there is relatively little direction or guidance given at either a national or a regional level about which should be used.

**124.** The Committee accepts it would not necessarily be desirable for the Welsh Government to prescribe one pupil tracking system above all others or for schools not to have flexibility to choose what works best for them. Nevertheless, the Committee believes it should not simply be left to schools to discover what is available and make decisions in isolation or without adequate information and guidance.

**Recommendation 10.** The Welsh Government should ensure that there are always effective systems and processes available to all schools for tracking pupils’ progress. The Welsh Government should ensure that the regional consortia provide clear advice and support to schools within their region on which methods are available.

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<sup>68</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 213], 22 March 2018

## 6. Impact of the PDG on eFSM pupils' attendance and engagement

### 6. 1. Attendance

#### Background

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**125.** The Welsh Government's PDG guidance (March 2015) includes the following questions within its criteria for eligible uses of the PDG, "Will the action impact positively on behaviour or attendance?" and "Will the action impact positively on well-being?"<sup>69</sup>

**126.** Pupil attendance has improved in Wales in recent years. A higher priority and profile has been given to this issue and it has a more prominent focus in Estyn inspections.

**127.** Welsh Government statistics show that the proportion of half day sessions missed by pupils has:

- Reduced amongst primary school pupils from 6.7 per cent in 2010/11 to 5.0 per cent in 2016/17;
- Reduced amongst secondary school pupils from 8.6 per cent in 2010/11 to 5.9 per cent in 2016/17.

**128.** Amongst eFSM pupils, the proportion of half day sessions missed by pupils has:

- Reduced amongst primary school pupils from 9.3 per cent in 2010/11 to 7.3 per cent in 2016/17;
- Reduced amongst secondary school pupils from 13.5 per cent in 2010/11 to 9.9 per cent in 2016/17.

**129.** Amongst non FSM pupils, the proportion of half day sessions missed by pupils has:

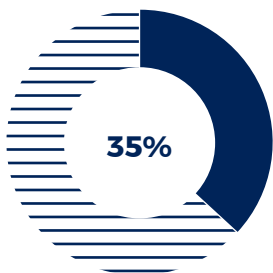
- Reduced amongst primary school pupils from 6.0 per cent in 2010/11 to 4.6 per cent in 2016/17;

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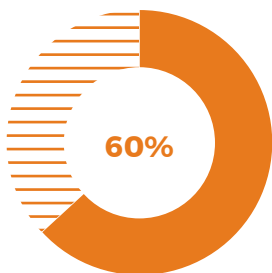
<sup>69</sup> Welsh Government, Pupil Deprivation Grant: Essential guidance, March 2015, Annex A

# LINK BETWEEN FSM ELIGIBILITY AND ATTENDANCE RATES

Proportion attending at key stage 4 for at least 95% of the time.

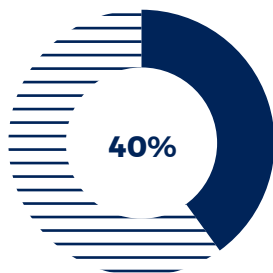


**eFSM pupils**

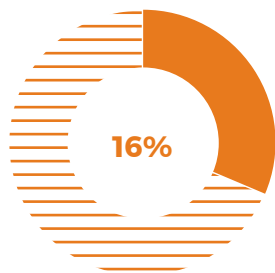


**non FSM pupils**

Proportion attending at key stage 4 for less than 90% of the time.



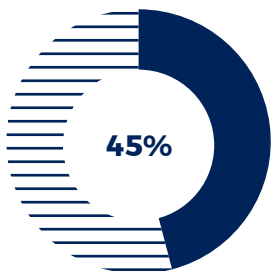
**eFSM pupils**



**non FSM pupils**

# LINK BETWEEN ATTENDANCE RATES AND ATTAINMENT

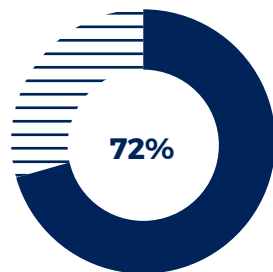
Proportion achieving the level 2 threshold inclusive



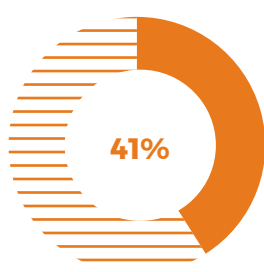
**eFSM pupils with attendance of higher than 90%**



**eFSM pupils with attendance of 90% or lower**



**non FSM pupils with attendance of higher than 90%**



**non FSM pupils with attendance of 90% or lower**



- Reduced amongst secondary school pupils from 7.5 per cent in 2010/11 to 5.1 per cent in 2016/17.<sup>70</sup>

## Stakeholders' evidence

**130.** Estyn's evidence demonstrated the strong correlation between poor attendance and low attainment. Where eFSM pupils attend for 90 per cent or more of the time, 45 per cent achieve the Level 2 threshold inclusive.<sup>71</sup> However, where their attendance is less than 90 per cent, the achievement rate is 23 per cent.<sup>72</sup>

**131.** Estyn reported to the Committee that eFSM pupils' attendance has improved to a greater extent than the attendance of non FSM pupils in both primary and secondary schools. However, the Inspectorate says the gap is still too large, highlighting the following data in its paper.

**132.** At Key Stage 2, over the period 2014-2016:

- Approximately 25 per cent of eFSM pupils in Key Stage 2 attend for less than 90 per cent of the time, compared to 9 per cent of non FSM pupils.
- Only 45 per cent of eFSM pupils attend for 95 per cent or more of the time, compared to 65 per cent of non FSM pupils.

**133.** By Key Stage 4, over the period 2014-16:

- Around 40 per cent of eFSM pupils have less than 90 per cent attendance, compared to 16 per cent of non FSM pupils.
- Only 35 per cent of eFSM pupils attend for 95 per cent or more of the time, compared to 60 per cent of non FSM pupils.<sup>73</sup>

**134.** In light of the "clear link between attendance and attainment for disadvantaged pupils", Estyn expressed concern that:

"The gap in attendance between eFSM pupils and others increases at every key stage and is a particular cause for concern in Key Stage 4. Evidence suggests a strong correlation between poor attendance and

<sup>70</sup> Welsh Government, Absenteeism from schools by pupil characteristics, March 2018

<sup>71</sup> Level 2 threshold inclusive equals 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C, including English/Welsh and Mathematics, or the vocational equivalent.

<sup>72</sup> Written evidence, TF.11 – Estyn

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

low attainment especially for disadvantaged pupils. This is particularly notable by the end of Key Stage 4. The overall national picture does not suggest that schools have used grant funding well enough to address the poor attendance issue. (...)

Schools will not succeed in reducing the performance gap until this situation improves.”<sup>74</sup>

**135.** In their evaluation commissioned by the Welsh Government, Ipsos MORI and WISERD reported:

“Attendance has improved every year (prior to and after the introduction of the PDG) and has improved for non-FSM and eFSM pupils at [broadly] the same rate. Although it is possible that the PDG is having some impact on overall attendance (e.g. in preventing the gap from widening further) unfortunately it is not possible to isolate the impact of the PDG from other policies improving attendance.

It does appear that the PDG could be having an important impact on unauthorised absence. This has improved significantly for eFSM pupils between 2011 and 2015. This contrasts with the rate for non-FSM pupils where the rate has remained fairly constant.

While there have been significant improvements in the levels of persistent absence in Wales for all pupils, including eFSM pupils, the results suggest that other policies to improve attendance could be having a greater impact than PDG alone.”<sup>75</sup>

### The Cabinet Secretary’s position

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**136.** The Cabinet Secretary pointed to examples of a best practice in using the PDG to improve attendance, including a “walking bus” at Pembroke Dock School. This school used the PDG to send teaching assistants to collect pupils on route to school in the morning. However, Kirsty Williams AM acknowledged:

“We’re looking again at what more we can do to support this particular agenda in terms of improving attendance, because although, again, there are examples of good practice, there is still a gap between the attendance of free-school-meal pupils and non-free-school-meal

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<sup>74</sup> Written evidence, *TF 11 – Estyn*

<sup>75</sup> Ipsos MORI and WISERD, *Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant: Final report – December 2017*, para 1.13,

pupils. And, of course, we can have the best curriculum in the world with really high-quality teaching, but unless the children are in the classes then we're not going to make the difference for them. Whilst that differential exists, then it's going to be hard to close the attainment gap for those children."<sup>76</sup>

## The Committee's views and recommendations

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**137.** The Committee recognises that there have been improvements in pupil attendance rates in recent years. We also note from the latest Welsh Government statistics that the proportion of half day sessions missed by eFSM pupils has decreased by slightly more than amongst non FSM pupils.

**138.** However, the Committee was very concerned to hear that eFSM pupils' attendance still lags considerably behind other pupils, particularly at Key Stage 4. There was a stark contrast at Key Stage 4, where only 35 per cent of eFSM pupils attended school for more than 95 per cent of the time, compared to 60 per cent for other pupils. The Committee was also concerned to learn that 76 per cent of eFSM pupils attend for 85 per cent or more of the time, compared to 93 per cent of non FSM pupils.<sup>77</sup>

**139.** The Committee believes that eFSM pupils' lower attendance and engagement is as big a factor as any in their lower achievement. One of the main uses of the PDG must therefore be to improve eFSM pupils' engagement with their learning; if they are not in school they are not going to learn. However, Estyn told the Committee that, overall across Wales, schools have not used the PDG well enough to address the attendance gap.

**Recommendation 11.** There needs to be a greater emphasis on the use of PDG to improve eFSM pupils' attendance. The Welsh Government should urgently improve, through its PDG guidance and directions to consortia, how the PDG is used to improve eFSM pupils' attendance and engagement with their education.

## 6. 2. Exclusions

### Background

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**140.** The Welsh Government publishes data on numbers and rates of permanent and fixed term exclusions for all pupils, and by free school meal eligibility. Fixed

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<sup>76</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 46], 22 March 2018

<sup>77</sup> Written evidence, TF.11 – Estyn

term exclusions in particular are higher amongst eFSM pupils. Since the introduction of the PDG, the differential has improved for longer fixed term exclusions but not for short term exclusions.

**141.** The rate of permanent exclusions has remained relatively stable, with the rate for all pupils rising slightly from 0.1 per 1,000 pupils in 2011/12 to 0.2 in 2015/16. The rate is unchanged amongst both the eFSM cohort (remaining at 0.5 per 1,000 pupils) and the non FSM cohort (remaining at 0.1 per 1,000 pupils).

**142.** Fixed term exclusions of five days or less have risen whilst fixed term exclusions of more than five days have reduced.

**143.** The rate of fixed term exclusions of five days or less:

- Increased from 78.7 per 1,000 eFSM pupils in 2011/12 to 81.9 in 2015/16;
- Increased from 19.0 per 1,000 non FSM pupils in 2011/12 to 19.9 in 2015/16.

**144.** The rate of fixed term exclusions of more than five days:

- Reduced from 6.1 per 1,000 eFSM pupils in 2011/12 to 3.9 in 2015/16.
- Reduced from 1.3 per 1,000 non FSM pupils in 2011/12 to 0.8 in 2015/16.<sup>78</sup>

## Stakeholders' evidence

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**145.** Estyn reported to the Committee:

“One of the main messages arising from the exclusions data is that, over time, there is no overall trend of reduction in the rate of exclusions for eFSM pupils. Pupils from this group are still much more likely to receive fixed term inclusions than others.”<sup>79</sup>

**146.** Estyn also provided statistics to the Committee on exclusion rates, which broadly mirrored those published by the Welsh Government. These showed that for both eFSM and all pupils, the rate of fixed term exclusions reduced during 2013 and 2014 but then rose back to 2012 levels by 2016.<sup>80</sup>

## The Cabinet Secretary's position

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<sup>78</sup> Welsh Government, [Permanent and fixed-term exclusions from schools](#), September 2017

<sup>79</sup> Written evidence, [TF.11 – Estyn](#)

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

**147.** The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee:

“If we looked at permanent exclusions, there isn’t a differential, but if we look at temporary exclusions, there we see there is a disproportionate number of children on free school meals that are subject to those exclusions. Again, I think what schools employing best practice understand is that you need a multi-agency approach to supporting that particular child. Some of those exclusions can be as a result of the need to address other issues going on in a child’s life. (...)

We made some changes last year regarding PDG for EOTAS [pupils Educated Otherwise Than At School]. So, for those children who do find themselves in education other than at school, we are providing additional support that previously was not available.”<sup>81</sup>

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#### The Committee’s views and recommendations

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**148.** The Committee was concerned to hear that fixed-term exclusion rates are considerably higher for eFSM pupils than their peers. There were 86 fixed-term exclusions per 1,000 eFSM pupils in 2015/16, compared to 21 per 1,000 non FSM pupils. While the Committee noted that rates decreased in 2013 and 2014 within both cohorts before rising again in 2015 and 2016, it was concerned that the exclusion gap has actually widened since the introduction of the PDG in April 2012.

**149.** As with attendance, the evidence to this inquiry indicates that exclusions are a significant factor in eFSM pupils not achieving as well as their peers. If pupils are not in school, for whatever reason, they are less likely to learn.

**Recommendation 12.** The Welsh Government should urgently improve, and place greater emphasis on, how the PDG is used to improve the engagement of eFSM pupils in order to reduce the number of cases where they receive fixed-term exclusions.

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<sup>81</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 51], 22 March

## 7. Impact of the PDG on eFSM pupils' attainment

### Background

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**150.** The Committee's consideration of what impact the investment in the PDG has had on the attainment of eFSM pupils was affected by the Welsh Government's changes to Key Stage 4 performance measures in 2017.<sup>82</sup> These changes, predominantly a lesser weighting being given to vocational equivalent qualifications at Key Stage 4, created some distortion in the 2017 results, which the Welsh Government says are therefore not comparable with preceding years.

**151.** The Committee's consideration of the impact of PDG on attainment has taken two forms; consideration up to 2016, and in 2017 specifically. This led the Committee to consider Key Stage 4 performance measures more widely and the influence they have on schools' behaviour, both in terms of qualification entries and the support they give to pupils.

**152.** The main school performance measures used at Key Stage 4 by the Welsh Government in recent years have been the Level 2 threshold and the Level 2 threshold inclusive. The Level 2 threshold constitutes a volume of qualifications equal to five or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C, or the vocational equivalent. The Level 2 threshold inclusive is similar but these five or more GCSEs must include English or Welsh and Mathematics.

**153.** As already discussed in section 4.2 of this report, the Welsh Government is moving away from the Level 2 threshold measures due to concerns that they place disproportionate significance on grade C and provide insufficient incentive for schools to support pupils to attain higher grades. On 17 May 2018, the Cabinet Secretary announced that the Level 2 measures will be replaced by new "interim" performance measures, including a Capped 9 points score which will give a weighted score to pupils' GCSE grades, thereby giving greater recognition to a grade A than a grade B and so on.<sup>83</sup> Attainment of the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate will also be a performance measure in its own right. The interim measures will be in place from academic year 2018/19 and will be

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<sup>82</sup> For further discussion of Key Stage 4 attainment data over recent years and the impact of changes to performance measures in 2017, see the Research Service, [Key Stage 4 Attainment Data](#) (March 2018).

<sup>83</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, Cabinet written statement: [Update on Key Stage 4 performance measures arrangements for 2019 onwards](#), 17 May 2018

transitional, before the Welsh Government introduces a new Assessment and Evaluation Framework, which is currently under development.

**154.** The vocational equivalence is the aspect of the performance measures that changed most significantly in 2017. From 2017, vocational qualifications may make up no more than 40 per cent of the 5 or more GCSEs in the Level 2 threshold, i.e. a pupil must gain a minimum of three actual GCSEs at grades A\*-C to achieve it. This builds on the change introduced in 2016 whereby no vocational qualification can be worth more than the equivalent of two GCSEs in performance measures.

**155.** Another change in 2017 was the discounting of English or Welsh Literature from the Level 2 threshold inclusive. In 2017 and 2018, only English or Welsh Language count towards the Level 2 threshold inclusive.

**156.** Tables 1 and 2 below show achievement rates of the Level 2 threshold and Level 2 threshold inclusive measures by FSM eligibility, over a period of time. The PDG was introduced in financial year 2012-13. Years cited in the tables are academic years. The columns in the left compare eFSM pupils' attainment with non FSM pupils', while the columns in the right compare it with that of all pupils.

Table 1: Achievement of Level 2 threshold by FSM eligibility – All Wales

	<i>Percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 threshold</i>					
	eFSM	non eFSM	% point gap	eFSM	All pupils	% point gap
2008/09	32.5	66.4	<b>33.9</b>	32.5	60.7	<b>28.2</b>
2009/10	35.3	69.6	<b>34.3</b>	35.3	63.8	<b>28.5</b>
2010/11	40.9	73.5	<b>32.6</b>	40.9	67.3	<b>26.4</b>
2011/12	50.9	78.0	<b>27.1</b>	50.9	72.6	<b>21.7</b>
2012/13	57.8	83.0	<b>25.2</b>	57.8	77.8	<b>20.0</b>
2013/14	65.3	87.4	<b>22.1</b>	65.3	82.3	<b>17.0</b>
2014/15	69.4	88.9	<b>19.5</b>	69.4	84.1	<b>14.7</b>
2015/16	71.6	89.0	<b>17.4</b>	71.6	84.0	<b>12.4</b>
2016/17	41.3	73.6	<b>32.3</b>	41.3	67.0	<b>25.7</b>

Table 2: Achievement of Level 2 threshold inclusive by FSM eligibility – All Wales

	<i>Percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 threshold inclusive</i>					
	eFSM	non eFSM	% point gap	eFSM	All pupils	% point gap
2009	20.1	52.1	<b>32.0</b>	20.1	47.2	<b>27.1</b>
2010	20.7	54.6	<b>33.9</b>	20.7	49.4	<b>28.7</b>
2011	22.0	55.7	<b>33.7</b>	22.0	50.1	<b>28.1</b>
2012	23.4	56.6	<b>33.2</b>	23.4	51.1	<b>27.7</b>
2013	25.8	58.5	<b>32.7</b>	25.8	52.7	<b>26.9</b>
2014	27.8	61.6	<b>33.8</b>	27.8	55.4	<b>27.6</b>
2015	31.6	64.1	<b>32.5</b>	31.6	57.9	<b>26.3</b>
2016	35.6	66.8	<b>31.2</b>	35.6	60.3	<b>24.7</b>
2017	28.6	61.0	<b>32.4</b>	28.6	54.6	<b>26.0</b>



## Sources and Notes for Tables 1 and 2

Source: Welsh Government, Statistical First Release: ***Examination results in Wales 2016/17***, Tables 1 and 5, 6 December 2017. Calculations by National Assembly for Wales Research Service

### Notes:

- i) Level 2 threshold = 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C or the vocational equivalent. Level 2 threshold inclusive = 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C including Mathematics and English/Welsh Language, or the vocational equivalent. In 2017, the Welsh Government changed the way the Level 2 threshold measures are recorded, placing a cap on the number of vocational qualifications that may be counted. From 2017, this is limited to 40%, ie vocational qualifications may only count as up to 2 of the 5 GCSEs. The Welsh Government says comparisons between 2017 and previous years are not statistically valid.
- ii) See page 1 and the Notes section of the Welsh Government's ***December 2017 statistical release***, its ***Chief Statistician's blog*** and ***media release*** of 6 December 2017 for further discussion of the issue of comparisons between years. Other changes in 2017 include the first examination of new specifications of English, Welsh and Mathematics (including for the first time Mathematics Numeracy) GCSEs and the discounting of English and Welsh Literature for the purpose of the Level 2 threshold inclusive.
- iii) 2016 and 2017 data based on cohort of pupils in Year 11. Data for previous years based on pupils aged 15 at start of academic year.

**157.** From this data, it can be seen that the eFSM/non FSM attainment gap started narrowing before the PDG was introduced and continued narrowing thereafter, until 2017 when the Key Stage 4 performance measures were revised.

**158.** The re-widening of the gap in 2017 was greater for the Level 2 threshold than the Level 2 threshold inclusive. The gap between eFSM pupils and non FSM pupils narrowed from 34.3 percentage points in 2010 to 17.4 in 2016, but almost doubled to 32.2 percentage points in 2017.

**159.** The Welsh Government has emphasised that comparisons between 2017 and previous years “would not be statistically robust” due to the changes in the way the performance measures are recorded.<sup>84</sup> However, this alone does not explain why the changes have affected eFSM pupils to such a greater extent. The Cabinet Secretary has acknowledged that eFSM pupils proved to be “less resilient” to the changes and that the Welsh Government is investigating the reasons for this.<sup>85</sup>

**160.** Furthermore, there was a widening of the eFSM/non FSM attainment gap in 2017 in GCSEs English and Mathematics after year-on year progress in narrowing the gap. This cannot be explained alone by the lower weighting for vocational qualifications in the Level 2 threshold measures, although it is possible that new specifications for both subjects in 2017 played a part. However, GCSE Welsh (First Language) bucked this trend as the eFSM/non FSM attainment gap narrowed in 2017.

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<sup>84</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, ***Letter to the CYPE Committee, 9 March 2018***

<sup>85</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 56 & 62], ***22 March 2018***



**161.** GCSE Science is a particular case in point as the eFSM/non FSM gap in attainment of grades A\*-C, or the vocational equivalent, widened from 15.0 percentage points in 2016 to 24.0 in 2017.<sup>86</sup> The Welsh Government has acted to address high levels of entries for BTEC Science as opposed to GCSEs, by discounting vocational Science qualifications from the Capped Points performance measure from 2018. Schools' anticipation of this change, coupled with the revisions in 2017 to the Level 2 threshold measures, are likely to have affected entry patterns for eFSM pupils in particular and their consequent achievement in Science.

### Stakeholders' views

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#### *Impact of the PDG on attainment up to 2016*

**162.** Ipsos MORI and WISERD's evaluation only focused on the impact of the PDG on attainment up until summer 2015, due to the period in which the evaluation was undertaken. They concluded:

"Although the attainment gap between eFSM and non FSM pupils remains stubbornly large at the end of Key Stage 4, there is evidence that this is beginning to improve and that much of this improvement does seem to have occurred after the PDG was introduced. (...)

Despite the results being mixed across different measures there is now an emerging pattern of success in reducing the 'effect' of being eFSM on measures of educational progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 in English, Maths and Science."<sup>87</sup>

**163.** Ipsos MORI and WISERD also highlighted that the gap between eFSM and non FSM pupils' attainment of the highest grades (A\*-A) is greater than for grades A\*-C:

"The differential between eFSM and non FSM pupils [achieving grades A\*-A in core GCSE subjects] is considerably wider than it is for achieving grades A\*-C or above. For example, in 2015 20.7 per cent of non-FSM pupils achieved a grade A-A\* in GCSE English/Welsh compared to just 5.8 per cent of eFSM pupils – non-FSM pupils are nearly four times

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<sup>86</sup> Research Service, Key Stage 4 Attainment Data, March 2018

<sup>87</sup> Ipsos MORI and WISERD, Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant: Final report – December 2017, para 7.22 & 1.22

more likely to achieve the highest grades than eFSM pupils. This has barely changed since 2011. A similar picture exists for GCSE Maths.”<sup>88</sup>

**164.** The Welsh Government’s Raising School Standards Advocate, Sir Alasdair Macdonald, pointed in his oral evidence to the difficulty of a relative objective such as narrowing the gap between eFSM and non FSM pupils, rather than the absolute objective of raising eFSM pupils’ performance in its own right:

“If you take up to 2016, there was a narrowing of the gap. It wasn’t massive, but what there was was a massive improvement in the percentage of pupils from an eFSM background who were achieving that. So, if you put it diagrammatically, very simply, what we want is everyone going up but the eFSM kids going up faster, and that’s happening to some extent, but what is happening is that the eFSM kids are doing much, much better. I think if you compare 2009 with 2016—I think, in 2009, only 20 per cent of our FSM kids were getting level 2 inclusive. By 2016, that was 35 per cent. Now, I think that’s a significant improvement. Unfortunately, fortunately, the rest of the kids were also improving, so the narrowing bit becomes incredibly difficult.”<sup>89</sup>

**165.** Sir Alasdair Macdonald also highlighted that eFSM pupils’ attainment had increased up until 2016. He argued that while the gap has “not narrowed fast enough”, the fact that eFSM pupils’ attainment “has gone up” was important. He also identified what he called a “very high level of moral purpose” amongst teachers who he said are all supportive of the PDG because it resonates with their vocational commitment by saying “We want every child to have an equal chance”.<sup>90</sup>

**166.** Estyn reported in its written evidence:

“Performance of disadvantaged pupils, at all key stages, has improved since the introduction of the PDG. However, the performance gap between eFSM pupils and other pupils has not closed significantly at any stage of learning. (...)

Whilst the performance gap between disadvantaged pupils and others has reduced slightly at most phases of learning, the gap is only slightly smaller now in Key Stage 4 than it was in 2011. There continues to be a

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<sup>88</sup> Ipsos MORI and WISERD, *Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant: Final report – December 2017*, para 7.25

<sup>89</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 512], 8 March

<sup>90</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 514], 8 March 2018

strong link between achievement and the level of entitlement to free school meals in secondary schools.”<sup>91</sup>

**167.** HM Chief Inspector told the Committee that “there hasn’t been a major step change in closing the gap”, which he concluded was because “these are major societal challenges and barriers that these young people face”. He said:

“Schools can do a certain amount, and of course they must do a certain amount, but to have a step change you do need to engage with the learners, with the parents and with the community and that’s why the more successful schools do actually succeed—it’s because they do that. So, I think more of a push on that area at a national level would be welcome.”<sup>92</sup>

**168.** The Committee asked HM Chief Inspector what Estyn would consider to be a significant narrowing of the eFSM/non FSM attainment gap. The Inspectorate said that “given the considerable differences in contexts of individual schools across Wales, it is difficult to quantify considerable progress in narrowing the gap”.<sup>93</sup> Estyn highlighted Fitzalan High School in Cardiff and Cefn Hengoed Community School in Swansea as two secondary schools that had succeeded in narrowing the attainment gap.<sup>94</sup>

**169.** EAS acknowledged that the pace of improvement for vulnerable learners, particularly at Key Stage 4, “remains too slow and too variable”. Ed Pryce, the consortium’s Service Strategic and Policy Lead, said:

“If I look first of all at the foundation stage, key stage 2 and key stage 3, the gap has closed. There are marginal improvements in those areas. Key stage 4 is the area where we still have further work to do to close that gap. It did close last year, but there’s further work there. (...)

We’re not satisfied in that, currently—and this reflects across Wales and the EAS—the proportion is half of eFSM learners who achieve relative to their non FSM peers. Our targets for the next three years are to [narrow] that in every year. So, no, we’re not satisfied with the progress yet at key stage 4.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Written evidence, [TF 11 – Estyn](#)

<sup>92</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 81], [14 March 2018](#)

<sup>93</sup> Estyn, [Additional information following the meeting on 14 March 2018](#)

<sup>94</sup> School-level attainment data can be found on the [My Local School](#) website.

<sup>95</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [paras 216 & 236], [8 March 2018](#)

*Impact of changes to performance measures and attainment in 2017*

**170.** The Central South Wales consortium (CSW) commented that the changes in performance measures “seem to have impacted disproportionately on eFSM pupils”.<sup>96</sup> CSW’s Senior Lead for Teaching and Learning Experiences, Debbie Lewis, told the Committee:

“I think for 2012 to 2016, we were making very good progress with our children who were eligible for free school meals and their performance—our dip was in 2017. You’ve particularly mentioned level 2 plus key stage 4, and part of that was that our most vulnerable children find changing and adapting quite difficult, with low self-esteem, and perhaps, with some of the changes that the schools were well prepared for, with the measures et cetera and qualifications, I think our most vulnerable children found those changes, from our analysis of data, quite challenging.”<sup>97</sup>

**171.** Ms Lewis also alluded to particular challenges faced by eFSM pupils in the way examination papers were presented in 2017, which may have been because of the new specifications for GCSE qualifications:

“If [pupils’] functional literacy was low, they found it very difficult to access some of the papers last year.”<sup>98</sup>

**172.** ERW expanded on this, referring to a question regarding Fairtrade within the GCSE English Language paper which they reported as being relatively inaccessible for eFSM pupils.<sup>99</sup>

**173.** EAS told the Committee that the apparent decrease in pupils’ performance in GCSE Science, for example, is largely down to a shift away from vocational qualifications. EAS’ Service Strategic and Policy Lead, Ed Pryce, said:

“The science change is because a number of schools have made a decision to move to GCSEs a year earlier than they actually need to for recording purposes, to prepare for those, rather than continue with BTECs and other vocational qualifications for an additional year. We’ve seen quite a variation when we’ve analysed across our schools. Those

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<sup>96</sup> Written evidence, TF.07 – CSW

<sup>97</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 84], 8 March

<sup>98</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 86], 8 March

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, para 87 and ERW, Additional information following the meeting on 8 March 2018

who've kept those vocational qualifications for another year have sustained those results. Those who've moved to GCSE haven't."<sup>100</sup>

**174.** EAS substantiated this by providing data following their oral evidence on each school's performance in Science, broken down by GCSE and BTEC. This showed that schools in South East Wales, which moved to GCSE entry only in 2017, experienced a 26.3 percentage point decrease in grades A\*-C. On the other hand, when all schools are considered (including those who have continued with vocational entries) there was an average increase across the board in the EAS region in schools' Science reporting rate of 8.9 percentage points.<sup>101</sup>

**175.** Estyn highlighted the potential distorting effects of performance measures and the need to arrive at a more sustainable accountability framework that does not distract schools or lead to unintended consequences. HM Chief Inspector told the Committee:

"I think there's a growing realisation that secondary schools, key stage 4, is driven overly by performance indicators, and, whatever performance indicator you come up with, there will be unintended consequences. (...)

So, I think the previous performance indicators encouraged schools to enter, for example, whole cohorts to do BTEC science, and that's not a good idea because the GCSE sciences are better preparation to go on to A-level science, for example. So, you're cutting out the possibility of progression for those pupils. On the other hand, by discouraging—the new performance indicators discourage BTEC and now people are saying, 'We're not offering BTEC at all', and it is suitable for a certain cohort of pupils. (...)

What needs to be done is to have a different approach to accountability that doesn't put so much attention on these performance indicators, because what you're doing is you're just moving the problem around by changing the performance indicators."<sup>102</sup>

**176.** The Welsh Government's Raising School Standards Advocate, Sir Alasdair Macdonald, told the Committee that the 2017 results should be "put to one side" when analysing trends in narrowing the attainment gap. He said he had a "strong view" on what happened last summer, saying that there were changes in 2017

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<sup>100</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para ], 8 March 2018

<sup>101</sup> EAS, [Additional information from EAS following meeting on 8 March 2018](#)

<sup>102</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [paras 92-93], [14 March 2018](#)

that “differentially impacted” on eFSM pupils. Sir Alasdair referred to Science entries at Key Stage 4, anecdotal feedback from headteachers that the wording of examination papers was more challenging, even within Maths papers, and that:

“Whenever you change something like that—and there were some quite significant changes—then I think, probably, you could have predicted that that would be more likely to have a greater impact on the young people who, again, depend more heavily on the school or the teacher without that additional support from home.”<sup>103</sup>

**177.** Sir Alasdair Macdonald commented further:

“At another level, I have a major concern about last summer, which is that, overall, everything went down by about 5 or 6 per cent. I don’t believe that last year’s 16-year-olds, 5 or 6 per cent of them, were of lower ability than the year before. So, I would have some questions to ask of the exam boards, in a sense, as to how they can explain the fact that this cohort of 35,000 young people—or something like 35,000—how they explain the fact that, this year, they appear to be less able than the year before. (...)”

The children are working really hard. The staff are working really hard. I think I was quite shattered, because I felt I’d seen so much really fantastic stuff going on, and then the results went down, and they went down particularly for the disadvantaged kids, and I wanted to say, ‘Why? Why were there 6 per cent fewer kids who’d passed?’<sup>104</sup>

### The Cabinet Secretary’s position

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**178.** The Cabinet Secretary emphasised the progress made in improving the attainment of eFSM pupils and the narrowing of the gap with their peers, pointing to her view on the role of the PDG in this regard.

“If we look at the period that we have been employing PDG, over that period, we have seen a narrowing of the gap. (...) If we look at where we started from: in 2009, one in five children on free school meals got level 2 plus—one in five—by 2016, we had got that down to one in three.

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<sup>103</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 525], 8 March 2018

<sup>104</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 526], 8 March 2018

Obviously, there's still a way to go, but, Sir Alasdair, who knows about these things, says that that is a significant improvement."<sup>105</sup>

**179.** As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the Welsh Government's position is that the 2017 data on the Level 2 threshold and Level 2 threshold inclusive performance measures is not comparable with previous years, due to the changes in the way they are now recorded. The Cabinet Secretary for Education, advised in her written evidence to the Committee:

"The overriding evidence, and the advice from the Chief Statistician, is that any comparison of headline information with previous years' data would not be statistically robust. The significant changes to performance measures in 2017 and their impact are why comparability is not possible and why 'trend' analysis will only be meaningful when we have more comparable data."<sup>106</sup>

**180.** However, the Cabinet Secretary acknowledged that whilst data between years is not comparable, this does not by itself explain why the gap between eFSM and non FSM pupils widened:

"If you look at it—with the usual caveats about whether you can make direct comparisons on level 2 plus between the exams the year before and the exams that we had last summer—on the face of it, the gap has increased. (...)

Last year, we got some challenges. We need to understand why that happened... (...)

We continue to have discussions with Qualifications Wales to get a better understanding of this. At my next ministerial policy board, in May [2018], we'll be doing a deep dive into this particular subject."

**181.** During budget scrutiny in November 2017, the Cabinet Secretary told the Committee that she had asked her officials to "carry out an in-depth review" of why the changes to performance measures in 2017 disproportionately affected eFSM learners. She provided the Committee with the results of this as part of her written evidence to this inquiry.<sup>107</sup> The Cabinet Secretary's statistics and accompanying commentary suggest three main points:

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<sup>105</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 56], 22 March 2018

<sup>106</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Letter to the CYPE Committee, 9 March 2017

<sup>107</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 56 & 60], 22 March 2018



- The substantial widening of the eFSM/non FSM attainment gap at the Level 2 threshold is in large part due to the cap on vocational qualifications in the recording of the measure (as prior to 2017, eFSM pupils were more likely to take vocational qualifications than non FSM pupils.)
- The smaller widening of the gap at the Level 2 threshold inclusive is due to the removal of English/Welsh literature from the recording of the threshold, rather than the cap on vocational qualifications.
- The decrease in eFSM pupils' performance in Science in 2017 and considerable widening of the gap with non FSM pupils is because of a shift from vocational to GCSE Science as schools anticipate the new performance measures. The Welsh Government's statistics showed that there was a 23.4 percentage point increase in the proportion of eFSM pupils taking at least one GCSE in Science between 2016 and 2017 (from 53.5 per cent to 76.8 per cent. At the same time, there was a 12.1 percentage point increase amongst non FSM pupils (from 77.7 per cent to 89.8 per cent).

**182.** When asked by the Committee why, in the Cabinet Secretary's own words, eFSM pupils proved "less resilient" in 2017, she replied:

"There is no one answer to this. (...)

What I think is important is that there is no one, single reason why there seems to be less resilience in this cohort of children."<sup>108</sup>

**183.** The Cabinet Secretary said the Welsh Government will be adopting new performance measures, a more intelligent suite of measures which better reflect how the Welsh Government intends to hold schools accountable for performance at Key Stage 4. This will mean that the Welsh Government will not retain the target, set in its 2014 Rewriting the Future strategy, for 37 per cent of eFSM pupils to achieve the Level 2 threshold inclusive as it is moving away from this as a performance measure. When asked how the Welsh Government would measure progress, Kirsty Williams told the Committee:

"When we announce our new accountability measures, I will be in a position to address how we'll measure the Government's performance, and national performance, going forward. But, given the fact that we're

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<sup>108</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 58], 22 March 2018



moving away from level 2 plus, then we will need a different set of performance indicators.”<sup>109</sup>

**184.** On 17 May 2018, when the Cabinet Secretary announced new “interim” performance measures which will take effect from academic year 2018/19, she said they were designed to shift away from the “narrow focus on borderline C/D grade pupils that past use of threshold measures has cultivated” towards recording the achievement of pupils at all grades.<sup>110</sup> As discussed at paragraph 153, an updated “Capped 9” points score will replace the Level 2 threshold inclusive as the main school performance measure, which will score GCSE grades differentially (a grade A will be worth more than a grade B etc), within a suite of indicators.

### The Committee’s views and recommendations

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**185.** The Committee’s views on the impact of the PDG on attainment are expressed in two contexts, first in terms of trends up to and including 2016 and secondly in light of the 2017 results which were based on revised performance measures. This report also offers views and recommendations on the wider issue of performance measures and school accountability, which this inquiry has drawn the Committee’s attention to.

#### 7. 1. Attainment up to 2016

**186.** The Committee welcomes the progress made in narrowing the gap between the attainment of eFSM pupil and non FSM pupils. The proportion of eFSM pupils achieving the Level 2 threshold inclusive rose from 23.4 per cent in 2012, the year the PDG was introduced, to 35.6 per cent in 2016. At the same time, the proportion of non FSM pupils achieving the Level 2 threshold inclusive rose from 56.6 per cent to 66.8 per cent, meaning the eFSM/non FSM attainment gap narrowed from 33.2 to 31.2 percentage points.

**187.** Given the level of investment made into the PDG, a greater narrowing of the gap might have been expected, although obviously not to the detriment of improvements amongst non FSM pupils. For example, Estyn said “there has not been a major step-change”. However, as with any relative, rather than absolute, target, the extent to which the eFSM/non FSM attainment gap narrows depends on the performance of the other group of pupils. The important thing is that

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<sup>109</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 78], 22 March 2018

<sup>110</sup> KW written statement 17 May 2018

achievement rates increased for both groups of pupils and at a faster rate for eFSM pupils.

**188.** The Committee notes that there was more progress in the narrowing of the attainment gap for the Level 2 threshold. The proportion of eFSM pupils achieving any 5 GCSEs at grades A\*-C, or the vocational equivalent, rose from 50.9 per cent in 2012 to 71.6 per cent in 2016. The proportion of non FSM pupils achieving the Level 2 threshold during this time rose from 83.0 per cent to 89.0 per cent, meaning the attainment gap narrowed from 27.1 to 17.4 percentage points.

**189.** The Committee welcomes the progress that was made up to 2016 and believes it is likely the PDG played a part in that. However, the 2017 results place some of this progress in a different context and suggests that eFSM pupils' higher take up of vocational qualifications was a considerable factor in schools' progress in narrowing the Level 2 threshold attainment gap prior to 2017. There appear to have been some unintended consequences from the performance measures such as an excessive adoption of vocational qualifications when in many cases academic routes would have remained the most suitable.

**190.** In terms of judging the impact of the PDG up to 2016, as the evaluation by Ipsos MORI and WISERD highlighted, a narrowing of the gap had already started prior to the introduction of the PDG. It is therefore difficult to discern how much of this ongoing trend can be attributed to the PDG itself. The Committee believes the Welsh Government should strive to ensure that the PDG delivers value for money and our **Recommendation 1** in Chapter 3 is designed for this purpose.

## 7. 2. Attainment in 2017

**191.** The Committee is very concerned about Key Stage 4 results in 2017. As the Cabinet Secretary for Education has accepted, eFSM pupils were less resilient to the changes in performance measures and new GCSEs. Whilst one year's data is not enough to identify meaningful trends, the 2017 results present a stark picture of the eFSM/nonFSM gap.

**192.** The proportion achieving the Level 2 threshold inclusive decreased from 35.6 per cent to 28.6 per cent amongst eFSM pupils and 66.8 per cent to 61.0 per cent amongst non FSM pupils. This meant that after years of sustained progress in narrowing the gap, it widened between 2016 and 2017 from 28.4 to 30.8 percentage points.

**193.** The situation is even more worrying for the Level 2 threshold. The proportion of eFSM pupils achieving it decreased from 71.6 per cent in 2016 to 41.3 per cent in

2017, whilst for non FSM pupils it reduced from 89.0 per cent to 73.6 per cent. The gap therefore widened from 17.4 to 32.3 percentage points, the largest it has been since 2011.

**194.** The Committee welcomes the Cabinet Secretary and her officials' intention to undertake a "deep dive" into what lies behind the 2017 results at her Ministerial Policy Board in May 2018 but regrets that this will have been too late for lessons to be learned and applied for the 2018 cohort.

**Recommendation 13.** The Welsh Government should urgently investigate the widening of the eFSM/non FSM attainment gap in 2017 and learn and apply lessons from this at the earliest opportunity. This should focus on both the implications of the changes to performance measures in 2017 and how the PDG is used to improve eFSM pupils' resilience in the face of such changes.

### 7. 3. Key Stage 4 performance measures

**195.** The Committee's consideration of the impact of the PDG on eFSM pupils', attainment in 2017 has caused us to examine in more detail Key Stage 4 performance measures and the implications of the Welsh Government's changes in 2017. Without a deeper examination of these, the impression could be taken that the PDG had little impact in 2016/17 due to the widening of the attainment gap according to the Level 2 threshold measures.

**196.** Undoubtedly, the lower recognition given to vocational qualifications within the Level 2 threshold and Level 2 threshold inclusive performance measures was a factor in the widening of the eFSM/nonFSM attainment gap in 2017. This is illustrated in particular by the Grade A\*-C attainment rate for GCSE Science, which between 2016 and 2017 fell from 71.8 per cent to 57.1 per cent amongst eFSM pupils and from 86.8 per cent to 81.1 per cent for non FSM pupils.

**197.** The GCSE Science eFSM/nonFSM attainment gap has therefore widened from 15.0 per cent in 2016 to 24.0 per cent in 2017. Whilst BTEC Science was still recognised within the performance measures in 2017 (for the last time ahead of changes in 2018), entries shifted from BTEC to GCSE as schools anticipated the change coupled with the changes to the Level 2 threshold measures. This affected eFSM pupils to a greater extent than other pupils.

**198.** The information provided by the Cabinet Secretary showed that the proportion of pupils entering at least one GCSE in Science rose between 2016 and 2017 from 53.5 per cent to 76.8 per cent amongst eFSM pupils and from 77.7 per

cent to 89.8 per cent for non FSM pupils. This followed a reduction amongst eFSM pupils from 58.5 per cent in 2013 to 53.5 per cent in 2016.<sup>111</sup>

**199.** It is apparent to the Committee therefore that higher eFSM pupil entries for vocational qualifications such as Science played a part in narrowing the attainment gap up to 2016. Subsequently, as the Welsh Government's performance measures stopped recognising vocational qualifications at Key Stage 4 to the same extent, this has precipitated a re-widening of the gap in 2017. The Committee will actively monitor what happens in 2018.

**200.** The Committee believes that for some pupils, taking vocational rather than GCSE qualifications, most notably in Science, is the most suitable option for them. However, schools should only take such decisions where it is strictly in the pupil's best interests and not because it helps a school boost its performance against accountability measures.

**201.** If it enhances the right options for learners, the Welsh Government's action to discourage schools from excessive entries for vocational qualifications at Key Stage 4 is commendable. However, there may be unintended consequences as schools may be less inclined to enter a pupil for a vocational qualification even in cases where it is in their best interest to do so.

**Recommendation 14.** Whilst the Committee welcomes the Cabinet Secretary's action to encourage more appropriate entries for qualifications at Key Stage 4, the Welsh Government should investigate any unintended consequences and adverse effects on pupils, including eFSM pupils, who risk being unable to take vocational qualifications even where these are best suited for them. The Welsh Government should report back to the Committee by the end of 2018.

**Recommendation 15.** Whilst the Committee understands the rationale for the Welsh Government's revision of Key Stage 4 performance measures in 2017 and 2018, the Cabinet Secretary should reflect carefully on the message this conveys regarding the value of vocational qualifications as opposed to general qualifications, particularly given the Welsh Government's commitment to a "parity of esteem". The Welsh Government should report back to the Committee by the end of 2018.

**202.** The Committee is concerned that the 2017 cohort, particularly eFSM pupils, has been unfairly and adversely impacted by the changes to Key Stage 4 performance measures. Given that the new interim measures will not be in place

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<sup>111</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Letter to the CYPE Committee, 9 March 2018

until 2018/19, the Committee is concerned that the summer 2018 cohort will have also been at risk of being adversely affected. We expect the Welsh Government to have paid due attention to this and taken action to mitigate such a risk. The changes appear to have had a similar effect on Looked After Children. This is discussed in section 8.2 of this report.

**203.** The Committee notes the Cabinet Secretary's announcement on 17 May 2018 of new interim Key Stage 4 performance measures for 2018/19 onwards. Given the distortion caused by the revisions to performance measures in 2017 and the shifts they have caused in schools' qualification entry behaviour, the Welsh Government needs to carefully consider the implications and any potential unintended consequences of the performance measures it sets at Key Stage 4.

**204.** The Committee also calls on the Cabinet Secretary to ensure that future performance measures and school accountability arrangements give full consideration to the Welsh Government's objective of closing the attainment gap between eFSM and non FSM pupils.

**Recommendation 16.** The Welsh Government should set out what action it has taken to minimise any potential adverse impact on the summer 2018 cohort, particularly eFSM pupils and Looked After Children, from the changes to performance measures in 2017 and 2018.

**Recommendation 17.** The Welsh Government should publish any impact assessment it has carried out regarding its decision to change Key Stage 4 performance measures from 2018/19. If no impact assessment has been carried out, the Welsh Government should explain the rationale for this.

**Recommendation 18.** The Welsh Government should ensure that its new interim school performance measures at Key Stage 4 from 2019 do not have any unintended consequences or particular implications for specific cohorts of pupils, including annual cohorts who are amongst the first affected, Looked After Children and eFSM pupils in light of the objective to close the attainment gap.

## 8. The PDG for Looked After Children

### 8.1. Evaluation and a strategic approach

#### Background

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**205.** A year after it was introduced for eFSM pupils, the PDG was extended to Looked After Children in 2013-14. From 2015-16, it has been allocated to regional consortia rather than at a school level. At this point, eligibility was extended so that it could also be used to support adopted children. The Welsh Government allocates to the four consortia £1,150 per child within their region who is registered as looked after.

**206.** There have been longstanding concerns regarding the educational attainment of Looked After Children pupils. In the 2012 Wales Audit Office report, The Educational Attainment of Looked After Children, the Auditor General said “the educational attainment of looked after children and young people is significantly below that of other children”. The 2012 report included four detailed recommendations to achieve progress. Section 8.2 of this report considers Looked After Children’s attainment.

**207.** In discussing the Looked After Children element of the PDG, this chapter also covers issues relevant to the way the PDG is used with adopted children as well as Looked After Children. Subsequently, the following chapter covers issues that are specific to adopted children.

**208.** The Looked After Children and adopted children element of the PDG was not included within the remit of the evaluation the Welsh Government commissioned from Ipsos MORI and WISERD. It became apparent from the Cabinet Secretary’s letter to the Committee on 9 March 2018 and a paper to the Public Accounts Committee (30 April 2018 meeting) that the Welsh Government had subsequently commissioned ICF Consulting to evaluate the Looked After Children PDG. The Cabinet Secretary confirmed to the Committee that this was commissioned in November 2017 and that a report is expected to be published the summer recess 2018.<sup>112</sup>

**209.** ICF Consulting’s evaluation is looking at how the PDG was implemented and managed by the consortia in 2015-16 and 2016-17, examining what different arrangements are in place and how the money has been spent.

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<sup>112</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [94-97], 22 March 2018

**210.** The Cabinet Secretary informed the Committee that consortia use the Looked After Children PDG in broadly three ways:

- to provide focused training such as emotional, behavioural and attachment training packages for all school staff as well as foster carers, adoptive parents/carers and school governors;
- to support school-to-school working to build capacity and to share good practice; and
- to operate a bursary scheme to meet the specific needs of schools, groups or individuals as necessary.<sup>113</sup>

#### Stakeholders' evidence

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**211.** The National Education Union (NEU) wrote that regional consortia have a very “hit and miss approach” to the way the Looked After Children PDG is managed:

“Often it is largely down to how proactive a school is in their applications to access the monies rather than any specific considerations on behalf of the regional consortia. Additionally, members have stated that they have been informed on occasion by regional consortia staff that there isn’t enough money to share it out fairly for every Looked After Child so the individual school bids will guide the decision process. (...)”

Other school leaders within the union have stated that they simply do not know how regional consortia make use of the PDG, which in itself is a damning appraisal of the consortia’s approach to both communication about and use of this funding.”<sup>114</sup>

**212.** Some of the NEU’s observations chime with a report by Estyn in July 2016, *Raising the attainment, achievement and aspiration of children who are looked after – a best practice report*, which was critical of the ability of the regional consortia to manage the Looked After Children PDG effectively.<sup>115</sup> Estyn reported that as of July 2016, “the regional consortia were not well placed to determine how to use the PDG/LAC” and that “they lacked expertise, failed to consult widely

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<sup>113</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Letter to the CYPE Committee, 9 March 2018

<sup>114</sup> Written evidence, TF 02 – National Education Union

<sup>115</sup> Estyn, *Raising the attainment, achievement and aspiration of children who are looked after – a best practice report*, July 2016, paras 99 & 101



enough ... and did not use all available data to inform their plans". As a result, Estyn said, "many schools [were] unaware of their region's strategy" which "created a degree of uncertainty".

**213.** However, Estyn reported more recently during this inquiry:

"Recent developments arising from work between the Welsh Government and the regional consortia give cause for optimism that there is now a mechanism for the effective and sustainable use of the funding. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this new strategic approach on outcomes for pupils and it is not yet clear how well schools across Wales understand these new arrangements. Estyn will be looking into this aspect of the regional consortia's work during future visits."<sup>116</sup>

**214.** The consortia advised the Committee of the following:

- GwE has developed and implemented a regional grant guidance and allocation procedure for the Looked After Children element of the PDG. Individual schools and clusters of schools, in partnership with local authorities, can apply for grant funding under a number of headings.<sup>117</sup>
- CSW listed several aspects to their support for Looked After Children through the PDG. These include strategically delivered support through training for schools and local authorities particularly on wellbeing, school to school working, a bursary scheme, and bespoke support within schools.<sup>118</sup> A third of their grant allocation is used for strategic support provided by themselves, around 10% is given to local authorities for targeted use and slightly under half is given to schools on an application basis.<sup>119</sup>
- ERW reported that its strategy for using the PDG on Looked After Children and adopted children has focused on "increasing the knowledge and understanding of those working with them about the impact of trauma and stress". They have arranged for training to be delivered to all primary, secondary and special schools on Attachment

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<sup>116</sup> Written evidence, TF.11 – Estyn

<sup>117</sup> Written evidence, TF.14 – GwE

<sup>118</sup> Written evidence, TF – 07 CSW

<sup>119</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [paras 105-106], 8 March 2018

and Trauma Informed Practice.<sup>120</sup> Up to now ERW has provided the funding to local authorities but are now looking at how to give the funding directly to schools.<sup>121</sup>

- EAS allocates the PDG for Looked After Children on a cluster basis. Each cluster is allocated a proportion of the funding based on pupil numbers. The clusters are invited to submit one application showing how they will work together on a school to school basis to meet the needs of eligible pupils in their schools.<sup>122</sup>

**215.** Ravi Pawar, head teacher of Blackwood Comprehensive, told the Committee about the approach the EAS consortia are taking in South East Wales.<sup>123</sup> This is to pool a secondary school's and its feeder primary schools' (a cluster) PDG funds to finance a programme of transition between primary and secondary school. This is targeted at a broader cohort of vulnerable pupils including Looked After Children or adopted children but other children also. The Director of the Welsh Government's Education Directorate told the Committee that it was not only EAS that were taking this approach and that other consortia were adopting similar approaches.<sup>124</sup>

#### The Cabinet Secretary's position

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**216.** The Cabinet Secretary acknowledged that there has been less awareness of the availability of the PDG for Looked After Children than for eFSM pupils. She explained that one of the reasons for commissioning the evaluation from ICF Consulting was to "give greater scrutiny" to how PDG resources for Looked After Children and adopted children are being used:

"[The Welsh Government's Director of the Education Directorate], on my behalf, wrote to the system, setting out our expectations, but also advising them of the fact we will be asking very detailed questions of accountability for that money."<sup>125</sup>

**217.** The Welsh Government pointed to the significance of the requirement on the consortia to appoint Looked After Children coordinators "who are expected to

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<sup>120</sup> Written evidence, TF – 20 ERW

<sup>121</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 103], 8 March 2018

<sup>122</sup> Written evidence, TF – 12 EAS

<sup>123</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [paras 314-322], 8 March 2018

<sup>124</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 108], 22 March 2018

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, [para 88]

work collaboratively to develop effective interventions that support the improved educational outcomes of this group of learners to ensure they reach their full potential”.<sup>126</sup>

**218.** The Cabinet Secretary said that the Welsh Government’s guidance states that consortia should not delegate funding to local authorities and schools “unless robust business plans are agreed that are consistent with the regional approach”.<sup>127</sup>

### The Committee’s views and recommendations

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**219.** The Committee welcomes the fact that the Welsh Government has commissioned an evaluation of the Looked After Children aspect of the PDG. This is long overdue, given that it did not form part of the two evaluations commissioned by the Welsh Government from Ipsos MORI and WISERD, or NFER.

**220.** The Committee has some concerns that there has been comparatively little emphasis on the Looked After Children and adopted children elements of the PDG to date. The approach appears to have been relatively unstrategic until fairly recently when the regional consortia appointed lead officers. The Committee was concerned to hear from the National Education Union that there is a “very hit and miss approach” to the way the regional consortia allocate and spend the Looked After Children and adopted children PDG.

**Recommendation 19.** The Welsh Government should ensure there is an effective, strategic approach to using the Looked After Children and adopted children PDG, giving due consideration to ICF Consulting’s evaluation and subsequently making any improvements which are identified as necessary.

**221.** The Committee has some reservations about the practice some consortia are adopting of using the Looked After Children PDG on broader interventions targeted at a wider cohort of potentially vulnerable pupils, for example at key transition points. Whilst Looked After Children should benefit as part of this approach, it risks diluting funding which is intended to be used on them alone. The Committee will observe the conclusions of ICF Consulting’s evaluation in this regard.

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<sup>126</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Letter to the CYPE Committee, 9 March 2018

<sup>127</sup> Ibid

**Recommendation 20.** In conjunction with the regional consortia, the Welsh Government should ensure that the PDG for Looked After Children and adopted children is used specifically for these groups of pupils. In doing so, the Welsh Government should take account of relevant aspects of ICF Consulting's evaluation report.

## 8. 2. Engagement and attainment of Looked After Children

### Background

**222.** The Welsh Government publishes data on the attainment of Looked After Children in an annual census data on children receiving care and support. Tables 3 and 4 below show Looked After Children's achievement of the Level 2 threshold and Level 2 threshold inclusive measures, over a period of time. The PDG was extended to Looked After Children in 2013-14. Years cited in the tables are academic years. The columns on the left compare Looked After Children's attainment with All Pupils, while the columns on the right compare it with eFSM pupils. Note that the Looked After Children cohort is small, equating to around 300 in each year's data, therefore caution should be exercised in drawing out trends between years. Note also that there were changes to performance measures in 2017 which appeared to disproportionately affect eFSM pupils, and it is possible that there was a similar effect on Looked After Children.

**Table 3: Looked After Children's (LAC) achievement rates of Level 2 threshold – All Wales**

	<i>Percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 threshold</i>					
	LAC	All Pupils	% point gap	LAC	eFSM	% point gap
2011/12	29	73	<b>44</b>	29	51	<b>22</b>
2012/13	40	78	<b>38</b>	40	58	<b>18</b>
2013/14	48	82	<b>34</b>	48	65	<b>17</b>
2014/15	47	84	<b>37</b>	47	69	<b>22</b>
2015/16	56	84	<b>28</b>	56	72	<b>16</b>
2016/17	21	67	<b>46</b>	21	41	<b>20</b>

**Table 4: Looked After Children's (LAC) achievement rates of Level 2 threshold inclusive – All Wales**

	<i>Percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 threshold inclusive</i>					
	LAC	All Pupils	% point gap	LAC	eFSM	% point gap
2011/12	13	51	<b>38</b>	13	23	<b>10</b>
2012/13	12	53	<b>41</b>	12	26	<b>14</b>
2013/14	17	55	<b>38</b>	17	28	<b>11</b>
2014/15	18	58	<b>40</b>	18	32	<b>14</b>
2015/16	23	60	<b>37</b>	23	36	<b>13</b>
2016/17	12	55	<b>43</b>	12	29	<b>17</b>

## Sources and Notes for Tables 3 and 4

Source: Welsh Government: *Wales Children Receiving Care and Support Census*, 27 February 2018; *Wales Children in Need Census* (several years' editions); Welsh Government, *Examination results in Wales 2016/17*, 6 December 2017. Calculations by National Assembly for Wales Research Service.

Notes:

- i) Level 2 threshold = 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C or the vocational equivalent. Level 2 threshold inclusive = 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C including Mathematics and English/Welsh Language, or the vocational equivalent. In 2017, the Welsh Government changed the way the Level 2 threshold measures are recorded, placing a cap on the number of vocational qualifications that may be counted. From 2017, this is limited to 40%, ie vocational qualifications may only count as up to 2 of the 5 GCSEs. The Welsh Government says comparisons between 2017 and previous years are not statistically valid.
- ii) See page 1 and the Notes section of the Welsh Government's **December 2017 statistical release**, its **Chief Statistician's blog** and **media release** of 6 December for further discussion of the issue of comparisons between years. Other changes in 2017 include the first examination of new specifications of English, Welsh and Mathematics (including for the first time Mathematics Numeracy) GCSEs and the discounting of English and Welsh Literature for the purpose of the Level 2 threshold inclusive.
- iii) 2016 and 2017 data based on cohort of pupils in Year 11. Data for previous years based on pupils aged 15 at start of academic year.

**223.** The data indicates that the gap between Looked After Children's attainment and their peers narrowed prior to 2017 for the Level 2 threshold but not particularly for the Level 2 threshold inclusive. As with the attainment gap between eFSM pupils and their peers (discussed in chapter 7), Looked After Children appear to have been disproportionately affected by the Welsh Government's changes to performance measures in 2017.

## Stakeholders' evidence

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**224.** Estyn referred to its 2016 best practice report, *Raising the attainment, achievement and aspiration of children who are looked after*. However, the Inspectorate emphasised this was a best practice report and not a full evaluation of the quality of provision. In follow-up written evidence following discussions with the Committee, Estyn highlighted examples of good practice by schools in terms of engaging Looked After Children.<sup>128</sup>

**225.** Estyn provided statistics on exclusion rates which showed that Looked After Children are over six times more likely to receive a fixed-term exclusion than other pupils:

- There were 201.2 exclusions per 1,000 Looked After Children in 2016. This compares to 85.8 per 1,000 eFSM pupil and 32.3 per 1,000 for all pupils.

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<sup>128</sup> Estyn, *Additional information following the meeting on 14 March 2018*

- The Looked After Children fixed-term exclusion rate is lower than in 2012 when it was 218.9 per 1,000, whilst the eFSM and all pupil rates are broadly unchanged since that time.<sup>129</sup>

**226.** There is no routinely published data on the attendance or attainment of adopted children.

### The Cabinet Secretary's position

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**227.** In terms of attainment, the Cabinet Secretary herself said the latest attainment data for Looked After Children was “extremely disappointing” and that she had asked her officials to work with the consortia and local authorities to better understand the reasons for this and how to learn lessons.

**228.** Kirsty Williams AM told the Committee in oral evidence:

“Well, there’s no getting away from it: the way in which we currently measure outcomes for looked-after children, the results are not good enough. It’s a source of huge concern to me that we need to do better for those children. That’s why officials are engaging with the [Ministerial Advisory] group that David Melding is chairing, to make sure that education is integral to that group and it’s not lost sight of.”<sup>130</sup>

**229.** On that point, the Cabinet Secretary referred to the need for a joined up approach in government, including education, social services and health:

“So, a greater involvement in education and better-linked up working in local authorities will help with this. It can’t just be the job of the PDG. If we think we can crack this with just PDG, then we’re being delusional. It has to be a cross-government approach at a national level, and at a local government level as well, to get this right.”<sup>131</sup>

### The Committee's views and recommendations

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**230.** As with our views about eFSM pupils, the Committee is concerned about Looked After Children’s considerably higher rates of fixed-term exclusion and that they are over six times more likely to receive a fixed-term exclusion than other pupils. It is not clear at all to the Committee how the PDG is being used to address these issues and engage Looked After Children with their education. This

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<sup>129</sup> Written evidence, TF.11 – Estyn

<sup>130</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 121], 22 March 2018

<sup>131</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 114], 22 March 2018

is even less apparent for adopted children given the lack of proactive identification and targeting (see chapter 9).

**Recommendation 21.** The Welsh Government should urgently consider how the PDG can be used for improving Looked After Children's engagement with their education, including attendance rates and exclusion rates. This should take into account the conclusions of ICF Consulting's evaluation.

**231.** The data shows that there was some progress in narrowing the gap between Looked After Children's achievement of the Level 2 threshold and other pupils', which coincided with the introduction of the PDG. However, there was not much progress in narrowing the gap in achievement of the Level 2 threshold inclusive. As with eFSM pupils, the lower weighting given to vocational qualifications within performance measures in 2017 has disproportionately affected Looked After Children's achievement of the new measures.

**232.** Nevertheless, like the Cabinet Secretary, the Committee is "extremely disappointed" by the latest data on attainment rates of Looked After Children. For only one in five Looked After Children to achieve the Level 2 threshold, and slightly over one in ten Looked After Children to achieve the Level 2 threshold inclusive, is a waste of potential.

**233.** The Committee realises that Looked After Children face particular challenges and does not wish to detract from some young people's achievements in attaining four or fewer GCSEs, when in some circumstances this may be a very real achievement. However, Looked After Children must be encouraged to have high ambitions and be supported to realise their full potential.

**234.** In chapter 7, the Committee has made several recommendations surrounding understanding the implications of changes to performance measures on eFSM pupils. These issues also apply to Looked After Children and we believe the Welsh Government should carefully consider the implications of school performance measures for how this group of learners are supported.

**Recommendation 22.** The Welsh Government should review data on Looked After Children's attainment throughout the lifetime of the PDG and the implications that changes to performance measures might have had. The Welsh Government should publish its assessment of this, and consider how the PDG can deliver greater impact in terms of improving Looked After Children's educational outcomes.

**235.** The Committee recognises that education is one part of a Looked After Child's life, albeit an extremely important one. The Committee therefore



acknowledges the Cabinet Secretary's calls for a joined up approach with social services and health and her statement that the PDG cannot be expected to be a "silver bullet" which will solve what are complex and multi-faceted issues. The Committee will follow with interest the work of the Public Accounts Committee on its inquiry into *Care experienced children and young people*.

### 8. 3. Extending the PDG to children who have ever been looked after

#### Background

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**236.** The Welsh Government allocates the Looked After Children PDG (which it expects to also be used with adopted children) annually to the four regional consortia. The amount, £1,150 per child, is determined by the number of children in each region who are registered as looked after on 31 March of the calendar year before the financial year in question.

**237.** As with the eFSM PDG, the Welsh Government does not allocate any additional money to be used to support children who have been looked after in the past but not at the stipulated one-off point in time. Currently, there is no direction to consortia to target the PDG at children looked after at any point in the past two years, in contrast to the current position for the eFSM PDG.

#### The Cabinet Secretary's position

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**238.** The Committee did not ask the Cabinet Secretary about extending eligibility for the PDG over a longer timeframe, specifically in relation to the Looked After Children PDG.

**239.** In the case of the eFSM PDG, Kirsty Williams AM indicated that an Ever 6 model, as is in place in England, would be unaffordable. However, she has instructed schools to target the PDG at pupils who have been eFSM at any point in the past two years, although schools have not been given extra funding to do this.

#### The Committee's views and recommendations

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**240.** Children often enter and exit the care system. At present, the PDG does not target disadvantaged children who are not in care on a particular date but are still managing the effects of being in care previously.,

**241.** The Committee believes that it is even more important than in the case of FSM eligibility that the PDG is used flexibly with children who have previously

been looked after. This report includes a recommendation (Recommendation 6) that the Welsh Government consider an appropriate time period in which a pupil has ever been eFSM for that pupil to attract the PDG. However, the Committee believes in the case of Looked After Children, if a child has been in care for any significant period in their lives they should be eligible for the PDG until the end of their statutory education. Extending the PDG to these children would align with the Welsh Government's own emphasis on supporting children "on the edge of care".

**242.** The Welsh Government would need to consider what constitutes having being in care for a significant period. The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 uses a threshold of a minimum 13 week period of being in care, between the ages of 14 and 16, for determining whether a care leaver is entitled to after care services.<sup>132</sup> The Committee suggests that the same principle of what constitutes a significant period of ever being Looked After could be used in this regard but applied whatever the age the child was at the time of the minimum 13 week period.

**Recommendation 23.** The Welsh Government should extend the PDG to include children who have been looked after for any significant period in their lives. The Welsh Government should fund allocations to the regional consortia accordingly and ensure that the consortia also target the PDG at these pupils. In doing so, the Welsh Government should decide what constitutes a significant period, including giving consideration to the Committee's suggestion of any period of 13 weeks or more, as is used for determining eligibility to after care services for former Looked After Children.

**243.** The Committee notes that, unlike the eFSM element of the PDG, the Welsh Government used the latest year's data (31 March 2017) to determine its allocations to consortia for the Looked After Children PDG. The reason the Cabinet Secretary gave for using the 2016 eFSM data is that numbers were higher and this enabled more funding to be drawn down for the PDG. We understand that the number of Looked After Children in March 2017 was higher than in March 2016 so no such rationale existed for doing likewise with the Looked After Children PDG. The Committee has therefore not reached any particular views on this.

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<sup>132</sup> Welsh Government, Law Wales website, [Leaving care and services for care leavers](#)

## 9. The PDG for adopted children

### Background

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**244.** In 2015-16, the eligibility criteria of the PDG was extended so that the element allocated to support Looked After Children could also be used to support adopted children.

**245.** However, no additional funding was provided for this. The Welsh Government's PDG allocations to regional consortia are still determined by the number of registered Looked After Children and do not factor in the additional numbers of intended beneficiaries. The Welsh Government's argument has been that it is often not known how many pupils are adopted children and it is therefore difficult to quantify how many learners the Looked After Children and adopted children PDG is targeted at.

**246.** In March 2016, this Committee's predecessor produced a [follow up report to its 2012 Adoption inquiry](#), which called on the Welsh Government to "consider the potential benefits of introducing a mechanism to enable parents to inform schools" where their child is adopted. This would bring the situation in Wales closer into line with England, where there is such a mechanism for asking parents to declare their child's adopted status. In England, allocations of the Pupil Premium Plus are triggered because parents are asked to inform the school about adoption to inform the annual school census.

**247.** In Wales, £4.6 million is allocated in 2018-19 to the four regional consortia on the basis of there being 4,037 Looked After Children as of 31 March 2017 (£1,150 per child). As stated above, the number of adopted children within each region is not factored into the Welsh Government's allocations to consortia. In England, £2,300 is allocated to the Pupil Premium for each Looked After Child and each adopted child.<sup>133</sup>

**248.** [Welsh Government statistics](#) show that around 3,625 children have been adopted in Wales since 2005. Annual numbers are relatively stable, with the number of children adopted in each of the past five years ranging from 310 to 385. In the eight years previous (2005 to 2012), annual numbers ranged from 210

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<sup>133</sup> [Gov.uk, Pupil premium 2018 to 2019: conditions of grant](#)

to 260.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, at any one time it is reasonable to estimate there are 3,000 to 3,500 adopted children, aged 3 to 16 who should be eligible for the PDG.

### Stakeholders' evidence

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**249.** In its written evidence, Adoption UK estimated that there are “at least 3,500” adopted children currently attending school in Wales. They highlighted the difficulties which adopted children often face with their education:

“In common with other children who have experienced broken attachments with their main carers and early abuse, neglect and trauma, many [adopted] children struggle to cope with their experience of school. We know from a very recent Adoption UK survey that adopted children from across the UK in the survey were 20 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than non adopted children and that nearly one third of the children had had to change schools because their needs were not being adequately met.”<sup>135</sup>

**250.** The regional consortia told the Committee that its use of the Looked After Children PDG to train schools and teachers in issues such as attachment and trauma benefits adopted children as well as those looked after. However, schools' use of such awareness and training relies upon knowing that a pupil is adopted and is therefore eligible for support.

### The Cabinet Secretary's position

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**251.** When asked what more could be done to proactively identify pupils who are adopted in order to target support at them, the Cabinet Secretary said:

“We're actively looking at whether we should try and find a way of collecting this data, with the caveats [around confidentiality and sensitivity] that I just gave earlier. We can't force parents to divulge information that is a matter for them, nor would I want to. But there is an active discussion going on at the moment about whether we could create a dataset where people divulge this information and we can then track the children through.(...)”

We need to make sure that those parents feel that they can discuss this with school leaders and classroom teachers and explore how best

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<sup>134</sup> Welsh Government, StatsWales, [Adoptions of looked after children during year ending 31 March by age and gender](#)

<sup>135</sup> Written evidence, TF01 – Adoption UK

those individual children can be supported, and how best we can support parents.”<sup>136</sup>

## The Committee's views and recommendations

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### 9. 1. Identifying and targeting the PDG at adopted children

**252.** The Committee is concerned that whilst adopted children are eligible to receive support under the PDG, this is not happening to an adequate extent. The Committee appreciates that it is more difficult to identify adopted children and therefore target support at them, than it is for Looked After Children. Parents may not always wish to disclose that a child is adopted and there is currently no routine mechanism in Wales for ascertaining this information.

**253.** The Committee noted from her oral evidence the Cabinet Secretary's apparent willingness to consider what more could be done to invite parents to declare that their child is adopted for the purposes of drawing down additional funding and targeting support at their educational provision.

**254.** The Committee's predecessor issued a report on Adoption Services in 2012. Education and the provision of related services were highlighted as key issues which presented difficulties for children when they were adopted. There were a range of concerns that some schools and teachers were providing inadequate support to adopted children and did not understand their needs. In addition, schooling was the strongest theme identified by the young people who provided evidence.

**255.** In its 2016 follow up report on Adoption Services the Committee welcomed the extension of the PDG to include support for adopted children but noted it had occurred without a commensurate increase in funding. It led to concerns about the potential impact of spreading the available funds more thinly would have an impact on both Looked After and adopted children. The follow up report made two specific recommendations about the need to focus on how well the PDG is supporting adopted pupils.

**Recommendation 24.** The Welsh Government should put in place a mechanism from academic year 2018/19 to enable parents to inform schools when their children are adopted children and to have that information gathered and added to the child's school record. This information should then be used to target support under the PDG at pupils known to be adopted children and to

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<sup>136</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [paras 112& 119], 22 March 2018

enable individual pupil educational outcomes for adopted children to be monitored in a similar way to Looked After Children.

## 9. 2. PDG funding for adopted children

**256.** If improvements are made in identifying adopted children and targeting PDG support at them, this has implications for the way the Looked After Children and adopted children PDG is funded. The Committee and its predecessor have been concerned for a considerable time that, whilst the Welsh Government expects regional consortia to use the PDG with adopted children as well as Looked After Children, the quantum of funding is merely based on the numbers of Looked After Children aged 3-16.

**257.** No additional funding is provided by the Welsh Government to reflect the numbers of adopted children, or even the numbers of children known to be adopted. This is a significant anomaly as the numbers of adopted children are certainly not insignificant compared to Looked After Children. There are 4,037 registered Looked After Children aged 3-16 and an estimated 3,000 to 3,500 children of school age who are adopted.

**258.** This means two things. First, that there are potentially over 3,000 pupils who should be entitled to support for their education from the PDG but are not receiving this support as they are not identified and targeted. Secondly, if the improvements sought in our Recommendation 24 are made and adopted children are successfully identified and support successfully targeted at them, the quantum of PDG for Looked After Children and adopted children is not far off half the intended amount per eligible child.

**259.** The Committee is concerned at the diluting of the PDG support intended for Looked After Children and adopted children, either through adopted children not being successfully targeted or, where they are, the spreading of the money more thinly meaning each eligible child receives less than the intended £1,150 worth of support. This is an even more pressing concern given that in addition to its more proactive approach of identifying adopted children, the UK Government funds the Pupil Premium in England on the basis of £2,300 per Looked After Child and adopted child.

**Recommendation 25.** The Welsh Government should ensure that it funds its allocations of the Looked After Children and adopted children PDG to each regional consortia per Looked After Child and known adopted child in each region. Where the number of adopted children is not precisely known, a best estimate should be used.

# ALLOCATION OF THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND ADOPTED CHILDREN PDG

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**£4.5 MILLION**

4,037 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN



**£1,150**

**£1,150**

**£1,150**

**£1,150**

3,000 – 3,500 ADOPTED CHILDREN?



**?**

**?**

**?**

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## 10. Impact of the Schools Challenge Cymru programme on attainment

### Background

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**260.** Schools Challenge Cymru was a specific, targeted school improvement programme with 39 schools that were identified as underperforming and in need of additional challenge and support.<sup>137</sup> These schools were known as “Pathways to Success” schools. Schools Challenge Cymru had three financial years’ worth of funding and in practice ran from September 2014 to July 2017. Section 2.2 of this report provides further policy background to the programme.

**261.** The progress of the Pathways to Success schools participating in Schools Challenge Cymru was variable. A majority of schools did very well, some extremely well, in improving their pupils’ performance and appeared to benefit considerably from being part of the programme. These tended to be in the Central South Wales (CSW) region, where all 16 schools improved their Level 2 threshold inclusive achievement rate between 2014 and 2016 and seven did so by over twenty percentage points.

**262.** Where schools did make progress, this was particularly the case in the first two of the three years of the programme, 2014/15 and 2015/16. This is likely to reflect the pattern across the 2016/17 attainment data beyond Pathways to Success schools, which indicated a decrease in performance on the basis of the revised performance measures. However, the perceived de-prioritisation of the programme in 2016/17, as it was reaching the end of its three-year duration and the Welsh Government’s announcement that it would not be continued, may have also been a significant factor.

**263.** Some schools, however, showed limited progress or even a deterioration in performance despite the additional support they received under the programme. These tended to be in the North Wales or South East Wales regions. In South West and Mid Wales, the consortia ERW told the Committee that the four schools in its

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<sup>137</sup> Of the 40 schools initially selected, two schools (Llantarnam School and Fairwater High School) subsequently amalgamated into Cwmbran High School, meaning there were actually 39 schools within the programme. Another two of these (Michaelston Community College and Glyn Derw High School in Cardiff) federated during the programme and were subsequently amalgamated to form Cardiff Community High School in September 2017.

region, which were in Schools Challenge Cymru, made less progress than another four receiving support from a consortium-led intervention.

**264.** Tables 3 and 4 overleaf show the achievement rates of the Level 2 threshold inclusive in the 39 schools which received funding and support under Schools Challenge Cymru. They also show the change in School Support Category.<sup>138</sup> 2013/14 can be treated as the baseline as the programme commenced in September 2014. Comparisons and trends should only be drawn up to 2015/16 due to the changes in the recording of the Level 2 threshold measures in 2016/17. Years cited in the tables are academic years.

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<sup>138</sup> 1. Further data and discussion on pupil attainment in Pathways to Success' schools, including in core GCSE subjects, throughout the duration of the Schools Challenge Cymru programme can be found in the Research Service's February 2018 publication, *Key Stage 4 Attainment Data*.

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**Table 5: Achievement of Level 2 threshold inclusive in Pathways to Success schools – All Pupils**

School	Consortia	% of All pupils achieving Level 2 threshold inclusive (i)					School Support Category		
		2013/14	2014/15	2015/16 (ii)	% Point Change 2013/14 - 2015/16	2016/17 (i) (ii)	2013/14 (Jan 2015)	2016/17 (Feb 2018)	
Milford Haven School	ERW	38.0	43.3	51.7	13.7	48.9	Amber	Red	↓
Morrison Comprehensive	ERW	49.7	46.3	62.6	12.9	46.9	Red	Yellow	↑
Pentrefafod School	ERW	44.3	52.7	53.3	9.0	43.7	Yellow	Yellow	→
Ysgol Bro Dinefwr	ERW	70.7	63.3	72.7	2.0	64.1	Yellow	Green	↑
Bedwas High School	EAS	44.1	35.0	51.0	6.9	54.7	Amber	Red	↓
Tredegarn Comprehensive	EAS	41.6	52.4	53.7	12.1	55.1	Amber	Green	↑
West Monmouth School	EAS	48.0	56.9	52.4	4.4	48.8	Amber	Amber	→
St Cenydd School	EAS	37.9	50.0	41.9	4.0	45.5	Red	Yellow	↑
St Julian's School	EAS	50.7	46.6	51.0	0.3	48.6	Amber	Red	↓
St Martin's School	EAS	50.3	52.3	64.2	13.9	65.2	Red	Yellow	↑
Heolddu Comprehensive	EAS	35.9	48.9	44.3	8.4	40.4	Red	Amber	↑
Llanwern High School	EAS	40.8	45.7	44.5	3.7	26.1	Amber	Red	↓
Llisswerry High School	EAS	40.2	41.3	53.7	13.5	44.6	Amber	Yellow	↑
Abersychan Comprehensive	EAS	49.2	48.7	41.2	-8.0	43.3	Amber	Red	↓
Abertillery Comprehensive (iii)	EAS	23.1	34.4	41.2	18.1	25.5	Red	Red	→
Ebbw Fawr Learning Community	EAS	53.0	54.3	42.8	-10.2	44.5	Amber	Amber	→
Blackwood Comprehensive	EAS	48.8	59.8	57.9	9.1	51.1	Amber	Yellow	↑
Cwmbran High School (iv)	EAS	46.7	46.8	39.0	-7.7	43.1	Amber (2015)	Red	↓
Ysgol Treffynnon (Holywell High School)	Gwe	43.6	37.6	50.0	6.4	39.3	Red	Red	→
Ysgol Bryn Alyn	Gwe	47.4	48.1	48.7	1.3	41.0	Yellow	Red	↓

Ysgol Clywedog	Gwe	48.5	52.8	46.5	-2.0	39.3	Red	Amber	↑
Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi	Gwe	43.4	48.6	48.2	4.8	45.1	Amber	Amber	→
Rhosnesni High School	Gwe	50.5	49.0	49.7	-0.8	35.3	Red	Red	→
Pen-Y-Dre High School	CSW	33.9	39.1	52.6	18.7	32.6	Amber	Yellow	↑
Porth County Community School	CSW	47.2	47.5	51.9	4.7	36.0	Amber	Red	↓
St. Illtyd's Catholic High School	CSW	45.7	46.1	55.2	9.5	46.9	Red	Yellow	↑
Pontypridd High School	CSW	52.4	53.3	61.8	9.4	51.1	Amber	Yellow	↑
Tonypandy Community College	CSW	30.5	49.2	51.9	21.4	44.9	Red	Yellow	↑
Tonyrefail School	CSW	52.1	47.2	60.6	8.5	46.8	Amber	Yellow	↑
Willows High School	CSW	49.7	46.9	52.8	3.1	39.2	Yellow	Yellow	→
Afon Taf High School	CSW	51.2	48.2	58.1	6.9	41.7	Amber	Amber	→
Barry Comprehensive School	CSW	37.4	50.0	62.7	25.3	49.4	Red	Yellow	↑
Bishop Hedley High School	CSW	60.4	64.0	60.7	0.3	48.4	Yellow	Green	↑
Cantonian High School	CSW	35.8	45.0	50.7	14.9	46.1	Amber	Yellow	↑
Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen	CSW	39.9	44.0	55.8	15.9	41.7	Red	Yellow	↑
Eastern High School	CSW	22.4	14.9	25.9	3.5	29.9	Red	Yellow	↑
Glyn Derw High School (v)	CSW	25.6	23.9	28.8	3.2	28.8	Red	Red (v)	→
Michaelston Community College (v)	CSW	21.5	25.2	24.7	3.2	15.9	Red	Red (v)	→
Hawthorn High School	CSW	40.5	49.3	61.8	21.3	45.9	Amber	Yellow	↑
<b>Total (mean average) (vi)</b>		<b>43.4</b>	<b>46.4</b>	<b>50.7</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>43.2</b>			
<b>All Wales</b>		<b>55.4</b>	<b>57.9</b>	<b>60.3</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>54.6</b>			

**Table 6: Achievement of Level 2 threshold inclusive in Pathways to Success schools – eFSM Pupils**

School	Consortia	% of eFSM pupils achieving Level 2 threshold inclusive (i)					School Support Category		
		2013/14	2014/15	2015/16 (ii)	% Point Change 2013/14 - 2015/16	2016/17 (i) (ii)	2013/14 (Jan 2015)	2016/17 (Feb 2018)	
Milford Haven School	ERW	33.3	27.5	41.4	8.1	19.2	Amber	Red	↓
Morrison Comprehensive	ERW	15.0	22.9	44.8	29.8	18.2	Red	Yellow	↑
Pentrehafod School	ERW	26.9	30.2	29.8	2.9	20.8	Yellow	Yellow	→
Ysgol Bro Dinefwr	ERW	35.7	45.0	66.7	31.0	30.0	Yellow	Green	↑
Bedwas High School	EAS	13.0	19.2	40.7	27.7	21.1	Amber	Red	↓
Tredeggar Comprehensive	EAS	27.3	38.0	41.4	14.1	39.3	Amber	Green	↑
West Monmouth School	EAS	32.3	22.7	30.8	-1.5	19.0	Amber	Amber	→
St Cenydd School	EAS	17.4	19.5	25.7	8.3	8.8	Red	Yellow	↑
St Julian's School	EAS	18.0	18.6	21.6	3.6	32.6	Amber	Red	↓
St Martin's School	EAS	25.0	6.9	34.8	9.8	29.6	Red	Yellow	↑
Heolddu Comprehensive	EAS	25.0	29.4	25.6	0.6	32.0	Red	Amber	↑
Llanwern High School	EAS	26.8	28.9	39.1	12.3	17.8	Amber	Red	↓
Lliswerry High School	EAS	25.5	31.7	35.6	10.1	28.1	Amber	Yellow	↑
Abersychan Comprehensive	EAS	24.1	35.1	16.7	-7.4	33.3	Amber	Red	↓
Abertillery Comprehensive (iii)	EAS	8.5	15.8	28.9	20.4	15.4	Red	Red	→
Ebbw Fawr Learning Community	EAS	28.0	30.8	25.0	-3.0	20.0	Amber	Amber	→
Blackwood Comprehensive	EAS	25.0	36.4	28.6	3.6	12.0	Amber	Yellow	↑
Cwmbran High School (iv)	EAS	27.9	29.6	14.5	-13.4	27.7	Amber (2015)	Red	↓
Ysgol Treffynnon (Holywell High School)	Gwe	33.3	16.7	22.2	-11.1	7.7	Red	Red	→
Ysgol Bryn Alyn	Gwe	40.0	22.2	20.7	-19.3	13.3	Yellow	Red	↓

Ysgol Clywedog	Gwe	20.5	26.7	22.2	1.7	17.4	Red	Amber	↑
Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi	Gwe	48.0	40.6	25.0	-23.0	35.3	Amber	Amber	→
Rhosnesni High School	Gwe	15.8	25.6	14.3	-1.5	15.4	Red	Red	→
Pen-Y-Dre High School	CSW	8.3	24.4	28.6	20.3	17.1	Amber	Yellow	↑
Porth County Community School	CSW	27.9	30.3	33.3	5.4	27.5	Amber	Red	↓
St. Illtyd's Catholic High School	CSW	44.0	27.9	50.0	6.0	29.7	Red	Yellow	↑
Pontypridd High School	CSW	30.3	11.5	29.0	-1.3	26.5	Amber	Yellow	↑
Tonypandy Community College	CSW	5.9	24.1	27.3	21.4	32.0	Red	Yellow	↑
Tonyrefail School	CSW	23.7	18.8	35.5	11.8	27.0	Amber	Yellow	↑
Willows High School	CSW	37.7	32.3	44.7	7.0	26.3	Yellow	Yellow	→
Afon Taf High School	CSW	24.2	16.1	46.4	22.2	24.0	Amber	Amber	→
Barry Comprehensive School	CSW	18.9	22.6	46.9	28.0	19.4	Red	Yellow	↑
Bishop Hedley High School	CSW	40.9	54.2	36.4	-4.5	20.0	Yellow	Green	↑
Cantonian High School	CSW	14.3	30.0	40.0	25.7	40.0	Amber	Yellow	↑
Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen	CSW	12.8	34.0	40.4	27.6	27.7	Red	Yellow	↑
Eastern High School	CSW	9.7	10.8	16.2	6.5	22.8	Red	Yellow	↑
Glyn Derw High School (v)	CSW	18.6	14.7	24.0	5.4	17.9	Red	Red (v)	→
Michaelston Community College (v)	CSW	8.6	14.7	15.8	7.2	11.9	Red	Red (v)	→
Hawthorn High School	CSW	16.1	29.3	41.0	24.9	23.8	Amber	Yellow	↑
<b>Total (mean average) (vi)</b>		<b>24.0</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>32.1</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>23.3</b>			
<b>All Wales</b>		<b>27.8</b>	<b>31.6</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>28.6</b>			

## Source and Notes for Tables 5 and 6

Source: Welsh Government, [My Local School website](#). Calculations by National Assembly Research Service. Schools' Support Categories from [Welsh Government website](#).

Notes:

i) Level 2 threshold = 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C or the vocational equivalent. Level 2 threshold inclusive = 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C including Mathematics and English/Welsh Language, or the vocational equivalent. Changes to the measures mean that data in 2017 is not comparable to previous years. See page 1 and the Notes section of the Welsh Government's [December 2017 statistical release](#), its [Chief Statistician's blog](#) and the [media release](#) of 6 December 2017.

ii) 2016/17 and 2015/16 data based on cohort of pupils in Year 11. Data for previous years based on pupils aged 15 at start of academic year.

iii) Abertillery Comprehensive became Abertillery Learning Community in September 2016 after its amalgamation with several primary schools and move to a 3-16 age range. It was categorised as Red in both 2014/15 and 2015/16.

(iv) Cwmbran High School was formed in September 2015 following the amalgamation of Llantarnam and Fairwater schools. Llantarnam's category was Red in 2013/14, while Fairwater's was Yellow.

(v) Glyn Derw High School and Michaelston Community College amalgamated to form Cardiff West Community High School in September 2017. The new school's support category is Red.

(vi) This is the average of the schools' totals rather than the average of all individual pupils in each school.

## Stakeholders' evidence

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**265.** The NAHT reported that the Schools Challenge Cymru programme "appeared to present a varied picture". They wrote that it "appeared to be highly dependent upon the lead school and their commitment and ability to link with partnership schools".<sup>139</sup> Whilst ASCL believe money for the PDG is "well used", they "fear that the Schools Challenge Cymru project did not represent such a good use of funds in all cases", adding:

"It would be wrong to write it off as a failure, because there is clear evidence of significant improvement and positive outcomes in some schools. However, it is also clear that in other cases, the level of duplication, contradictory advice and lack of coordination caused issues and did not represent value for money."<sup>140</sup>

**266.** However, ASCL member, Ravi Pawar, told the Committee that in his own school, Blackwood Comprehensive:

"[Schools Challenge Cymru] made a great deal of difference to lots of things within the school in terms of the way in which we approach teaching and learning, and the way in which we link collaboratively

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<sup>139</sup> Written evidence, TF 19 – National Association of Headteachers Cymru

<sup>140</sup> Written evidence, TF 13 – Association of School and College Leaders Cymru



with other schools. It made a difference also to the ultimate outcomes of the children in the measures that were identified as the key measures.”<sup>141</sup>

**267.** The Committee visited three schools which participated in Schools Challenge Cymru: Eastern High in Cardiff; Bedwas High in Caerphilly; and Ysgol Clywedog in Wrexham. The “stakeholders’ evidence” sections in chapters 10 to 12 of this report draw on those visits. The schools reported the following:

- The head teacher of Eastern High<sup>142</sup> told the Committee that he recognised the need to rebuild confidence amongst parents, prospective parents and the local community. The school therefore used Schools Challenge Cymru funding for some Year 11 interventions to improve their Level 2 threshold inclusive achievement rate and narrow the gap between eFSM and non FSM pupils. Eastern High’s Challenge Plan, which was provided to Committee Members, showed that a “quick win” in this regard was identified in respect of supporting pupils to achieve vocational Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications. Eastern High also said they were able to achieve a marked reduction in the number of short-term exclusions. As a result, Eastern High improved from being in the Red category to Yellow in the 2017 categorisation. Participating in Schools Challenge Cymru also helped the school to progress out of Special Measures.
- Bedwas High used Schools Challenge Cymru funding for literacy, numeracy and wellbeing and were also able to reduce the number of exclusions. The programme also funded capital investment in IT, and additional professional development for all staff. Bedwas High reported that funding and support from Schools Challenge Cymru helped them progress out of Estyn monitoring in 2014, with their attainment improving. However, they also said that the ending of the programme had a negative impact on the school.
- Ysgol Clywedog was in special measures when Schools Challenge Cymru commenced and the school said the programme helped them

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<sup>141</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 352], 8 March 2018

<sup>142</sup> Eastern High in East Cardiff was formed in September 2014 following the closure of Rumney High School and Llanrumney High School. Both of these schools had had lower than average attainment, as well as higher than average levels of FSM eligibility and Additional Learning Needs. The new Eastern High School was inspected by Estyn in December 2014 and placed under Special Measures. Eastern High was removed from Special Measures in November 2017 after an Estyn monitoring inspection in November 2017 found the school had made strong progress.

progress out of special measures. Ysgol Clywedog commented on the position of two other schools in Wrexham, Ysgol Bryn Alyn and Rhosnesni High School. They said that the extra funding came at the right time for two of the three schools which saw an improvement and came out of special measures. One of the schools did not manage to progress out of special measures despite the additional funding and support, whereas another school in the area came out of special measures despite not being part of Schools Challenge Cymru.

- A fourth school, which the Committee heard from, Barry Comprehensive, felt that the programme had been very positive and served as a vehicle to make accelerated improvements.

**268.** The regional consortia (with the exception of CSW), appeared sceptical about the success of Schools Challenge Cymru. This is discussed in chapter 12 on the relationship between the programme and the consortia.

**269.** Professor Mel Ainscow, who the Welsh Government tasked in 2014 to lead Schools Challenge Cymru, summarised, in a discussion paper dated March 2017, *Schools Challenge Cymru: what are the lessons?*, the results of the first two years of the programme:

“In a relatively short time, the forty [39 as two of them merged] schools have all, to varying degrees, made significant progress. In some cases, the gains in terms of examination results have been remarkable.”<sup>143</sup>

**270.** Professor Ainscow quoted one head teacher of a school participating in the programme as saying:

“The Schools Challenge Cymru programme has had a more profoundly positive impact on our school’s standards than any other national or regional programme in which the school has participated over the last decade.”<sup>144</sup>

**271.** SQW Consulting stated in its evaluation report that:

“While the Pathways to Success schools generally [still] performed below the Welsh average in core subjects, each of the Pathways to

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<sup>143</sup> Written evidence, *TF.09 – Professor Mel Ainscow*, page 1

<sup>144</sup> Ibid

Success schools had made academic progress in the two years since the implementation of SCC.”<sup>145</sup>

**272.** The Committee asked SQW about the foundation for this statement, given not all of the schools improved their attainment against several measures. For example, as can be seen from Table 3 in this report, 10 of the 39 schools experienced a decrease in their Level 2 threshold inclusive attainment rate between 2013/14 and 2015/16.

**273.** Dr Marian Morris of SQW clarified that schools were grouped for the purposes of statistical analysis and the evaluation’s findings were based on each group of schools’ projected trajectories:

“Each of these schools needed to be judged from where it was starting, and the context in which it was starting. Our analysis actually grouped the schools because, again, trying to do anything statistically significant with one school is not possible. (...)”

**274.** Basically, the forecasting model was saying, “For all schools, this is what we’d expect. For these schools, what trajectory, based on their current cohort and the history of the previous cohorts, would we expect?” And what we were finding was, in most cases, attainment was on a par with, or slightly above, that which would be expected by that trajectory”.<sup>146</sup> When the Committee put a similar question to Professor Mel Ainscow, he referred to a wider interpretation of improvement than short-term changes in attainment, which encompassed changes in leadership, practice and governance.

### The Cabinet Secretary’s position

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**275.** When asked by the Committee in November 2016 about the impact of the programme on attainment, the Cabinet Secretary said:

“Variable—some schools have indeed made improvements and that is very much to be welcomed. But, unfortunately, for some schools that have taken part in the programme, the improvements were either not there at all or static, which is disappointing, and we will need to renew

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<sup>145</sup> SQW Consulting, *Assessing the contribution of Schools Challenge Cymru to outcomes achieved by Pathways to Success schools*, July 2017, para 9

<sup>146</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 26], 8 March 2018

our efforts about what we can do with those individual schools to drive forward improvements that we would like to see.”<sup>147</sup>

**276.** In her letter dated 9 March 2017, providing information requested by the Committee, the Cabinet Secretary noted:

“[SQW’s] data analysis did show that all of the Pathways to Success schools have made faster progress since the implementation of Schools Challenge Cymru and that, in some cases, progress has been faster (and even greater) than might have been predicted, given their pupil profile of high numbers of eFSM pupils. (...)

However, whilst there were successes in SCC, I was concerned that there remained significant variations between our highest and lowest performing schools. (...)

I acknowledge that performance did vary within the programme and there is no silver bullet for success.”

**277.** In oral evidence, the Cabinet Secretary commented:

“I think we have to recognise that the 39 schools that were part of the programme were in very, very different places. So, I think one of the reasons why some schools did well was because their needs were not so complex, not so deep-seated and a certain level of intervention was enough to get them moving forward. Some schools had very, very different needs.

I think, talking to those involved in the programme, as always, we had some support advisers, challenge advisers working with those schools as part of the programme who were really, really excellent and really good, and were the right fit for the school and really drove the school onwards. We had other people employed in the programme who, perhaps, were less effective at driving change within those individual schools.

So, what we have is a mixed bag of performance, again reflecting the very different challenges that those schools were facing, which led them to be chosen for the programme in the first place.”<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> CYPE Committee, RoP [para 81], 10 November 2016

<sup>148</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [paras 134-136], 22 March 2018

**278.** When asked why her conclusions about the success of the programme differed with those of Professor Mel Ainscow, Kirsty Williams AM said:

“Can I say that I have never described the programme as a failure? (...)

I think, to be fair, there are some people who think the scheme was absolutely fantastic. I’ve had feedback from people who didn’t think the scheme was helpful at all—in fact, they felt it was a hindrance. I’m very much of the view that the scheme worked really well for some schools in some areas and had less impact in some areas. There is a mixed picture.”<sup>149</sup>

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### The Committee’s views and recommendations

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**279.** The Committee believes there were two main factors which influenced the level of success each Pathways to Success School gained from Schools Challenge Cymru. These are: first the extent to which the relevant regional consortium was engaged with the programme, which we consider in section 12.1 of this report, and secondly whether changes were made to the senior leadership within the school.

**280.** The Committee believes the considerable progress of many Pathways to Success schools demonstrates the promise and potential of a targeted school improvement programme, focused on particular underperforming schools, such as Schools Challenge Cymru. The Committee is concerned that some of the schools which made progress may slip back now that the support under the programme has ended.

**Recommendation 26.** The Welsh Government and regional consortia should monitor pupils’ educational outcomes in the schools which participated in Schools Challenge Cymru and take steps to mitigate against any potential loss of momentum in those schools which made progress.

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<sup>149</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [paras 190-194], **22 March 2018**

## 11. Discontinuation of Schools Challenge Cymru and learning lessons from the programme

### 11.1. Discontinuation of the programme

#### Background

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**281.** Schools Challenge Cymru lasted for three financial years (2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17) and three academic years (2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17).

**282.** In autumn 2016, the Welsh Government stated that funding for Schools Challenge Cymru would not continue beyond the financial year 2016-17.<sup>150</sup> This was seen either as a confirmation that the “time-limited” programme would be coming to an end or an announcement that it was ending prematurely before the evaluation of the programme had been completed.

**283.** The Cabinet Secretary informed the Committee that, from 2017-18, the annual £15 million budget would return to the Welsh Government’s central reserves and would not be redeployed within the Education budget (as discussed in chapter 13).<sup>151</sup>

**284.** In January 2017, Kirsty Williams AM announced £200,000 of additional funding to assist transition arrangements and enable the continuation of activities under the programme until the end of academic year 2016/17. A further £1.5 million was provided to the regional consortia in 2017-18 to target at schools (not necessarily Pathways to Success schools) in the Red and Amber categories to build on lessons learnt from Schools Challenge Cymru.

#### Stakeholders’ evidence

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**285.** Some of the evidence received by the Committee showed an understanding and appreciation by schools that Schools Challenge Cymru funding and support would not be indefinite. For example, Ravi Pawar, head teacher at Blackwood Comprehensive, said “we always knew that it was a two-year programme”<sup>152</sup> and Barry Comprehensive said they had been planning for the end of the programme

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<sup>150</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, [Welsh Government paper to the CYPE Committee on the Education Main Expenditure Group, Draft Budget 2017-18](#), November 2016

<sup>151</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, [Letter to CYPE Committee](#), 30 November 2016

<sup>152</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 356], 8 March 2018

and how to sustain some of the activity going forward. However, the same school said that the funding ended suddenly without much notice.

**286.** Evidence collated through the Committee's engagement activity suggested some schools assumed the funding would continue, which influenced the way money was spent. As a result, one Pathways to Success school participating in the Committee's engagement activity reported there were no exit strategies, and explained that activities could not be continued. There was a feeling among focus group participants that Pathways to Success schools' performance would dip following the ending of the programme.<sup>153</sup>

**287.** That was also the view of Bedwas High who told the Committee that their work on pupil wellbeing had been affected considerably following the loss of Schools Challenge Cymru funding, due to a lack of support staff to work proactively with pupils. They explained that the ending of the programme had an overall negative effect on the school and reported there was little support in how to put in place exit strategies and cope with the loss of the extra funding.

**288.** In addition to problems in some schools caused by the ending of the programme, the Committee heard that the intensity of the programme tailed off in its third and final year. The Welsh Government's Schools Challenge Cymru Champion, Professor Mel Ainscow, told the Committee that the "third year rather faded out once it was clear that the programme was rather being sidelined":

"It clearly was evident that once we had a new [Cabinet] Secretary, the work we were doing was certainly not at the centre of the agenda. From the new Secretary's appointment the first time I actually met her was in December of 2016. So it seemed to me that one reason it slipped off the agenda was that there was a change of regime."<sup>154</sup>

**289.** Eastern High suggested there was a "noticeable sea-change" within the Welsh Government in attitudes and priorities towards Schools Challenge Cymru, in this Assembly (May 2016 onwards) compared to the previous term (2011 – 2016). Bedwas High argued that school improvement has suffered for many years from a lack of continuity in political leadership, direction and education policy, with reforms and initiatives too short-term.

**290.** Stakeholders generally felt that a programme such as Schools Challenge Cymru needs more than three years to have a long-lasting, meaningful effect. For example, the London Challenge lasted for around eight years. Dr Marian Morris of

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<sup>153</sup> CYPE Committee, *Focus Group Summary*, page 8

<sup>154</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 470], 22 March 2018



SQW Consulting told the Committee that the Schools Challenge Cymru programme did not operate long enough to create cultural change. When asked how long such a programme needed to last, Dr Morris said:

“I think nearer five years, rather than three, to be honest. I’ve done quite a lot of work in the Republic of Ireland and they talk about 10-year planning cycles. And if they’re putting something in place, after five years they’ll review what’s going on, and they will either continue or discontinue elements of it. They just don’t think that two or three years is sufficient and I think in this case it was based, in a sense, on two-year’s worth of data.”<sup>155</sup>

### The Cabinet Secretary’s position

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**291.** When the discontinuation of Schools Challenge Cymru was confirmed in the draft budget 2017-18, the Cabinet Secretary told the Committee:

“This should not be a surprise to any school. The programme, when it was set up, was set up as a time-limited programme. It was made very clear by my predecessor that that was for two years, and then my predecessor made another year of funding available.”<sup>156</sup>

**292.** Kirsty Williams AM had told the Committee several months earlier in July 2016 that, whilst the Welsh Government’s financial commitment to the programme was time-limited, she would be waiting for SQW’s evaluation before making a decision on its future:

“We’ve asked for independent research to be done to look at the impact of the Schools Challenge programme system. Once that evaluation has been received and looked at, then I’ll be making a decision and an announcement on the future of the programme.”<sup>157</sup>

**293.** However, the Cabinet Secretary announced the discontinuation of Schools Challenge Cymru in November 2016, seven months before SQW’s final evaluation report was published in July 2017.

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<sup>155</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 100], 28 February 2018

<sup>156</sup> CYPE Committee, RoP [para 56], 10 November 2016

<sup>157</sup> CYPE Committee, RoP [para 111], 13 July 2016

**294.** When asked about Professor Ainscow's remarks about the third year (financial year 2016-17 / academic year 2016/17) "fading out", the Cabinet Secretary said:

"I wouldn't characterise it as that. I think there certainly was a transition phase when we knew that the programme was moving and schools were moving into a different level of support, but I certainly wouldn't describe it as a fading out—not at all."<sup>158</sup>

**295.** The Director of the Welsh Government's Education Directorate, added:

"I can see where the perception would come if a programme director like Mel was managing the programme right to the end of the three years exactly the same, and it falls off—not a cliff, but it falls off, then the readiness for schools and the readiness in the system to hand over—so part of the shift of focus was that working as a Government with the programme in those schools to working with the programme, those schools and the region. So, I think, inevitably, one party might see it as a decrease in terms of emphasis on their work, but it was necessary for the transition."<sup>159</sup>

**296.** The Cabinet Secretary has emphasised that she wants lessons to be learnt from Schools Challenge Cymru and applied across the board. Her position, which increasingly emerged during the inquiry, was that Schools Challenge Cymru served its purpose, at least for a few years while the regional consortia were in their infancy, and it is now time for the consortia to take over as part of their remit for school improvement across all schools in their regions.<sup>160</sup> This is discussed further in chapter 13.

### The Committee's views and recommendations

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**297.** The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams AM, inherited the Schools Challenge Cymru programme, which was set up by her predecessor in the Fourth Assembly. The Committee was very struck by the evidence of the Welsh Government's Schools Challenge Cymru champion, Professor Mel Ainscow, who told us that it was "certainly not at the centre of [the new Cabinet Secretary's] agenda" and that the programme rather "faded out" in its third year.

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<sup>158</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 166], 22 March 2018

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, [para 167]

<sup>160</sup> Ibid and Letter to the CYPE Committee, 9 March 2018

**298.** Whilst the Committee noted the Cabinet Secretary's position that the programme was time-limited in terms of the funding committed to it, we believe there was scope for it to be continued if the Cabinet Secretary had felt strongly that it should. However, this might have meant finding the money from her own Department's budget if she could not gain support for the programme's continuation from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance.

**299.** The announcement in the 2017-18 budget setting round, in autumn 2016, that Schools Challenge Cymru would not continue beyond 2016/17 preceded the completion of the evaluation the Welsh Government commissioned from SQW Consulting, which was not published until July 2017. The Committee believes that the decision to discontinue Schools Challenge Cymru was taken prematurely, without being informed by SQW's evaluation report.

**300.** The Committee noted the majority of the evidence given by stakeholders, including SQW, that a school intervention programme of the nature of Schools Challenge Cymru requires longer than three years. For example, the London Challenge lasted for around eight years.

**Recommendation 27.** Any future school improvement programme should run for a sufficient period of time to enable it to have durable, long-term impact, usually for longer than three years. The Welsh Government should not, other than in exceptional circumstances, discontinue a programme such as Schools Challenge Cymru, before knowing the results of any evaluation it has commissioned.

**301.** Later in this report, the Committee has given its views and made a recommendation arising from the movement of the annual £15 million budget to the Welsh Government's central reserves, rather than be used for alternative purposes within the Education budget, which the Welsh Government could have done if it did not believe that continuing Schools Challenge Cymru would deliver value for money. The Committee is particularly concerned about what this means for the Welsh Government's delivery of its commitment to spend £100 million in this Assembly on raising school standards. **Recommendation 31** in Chapter 13 takes forward our concerns on this issue.

## 11. 2. Learning lessons from the programme and applying them to school improvement more generally

### Background

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**302.** In March 2017, Professor Mel Ainscow submitted a paper to the Welsh Government, *Schools Challenge Cymru: what are the lessons?*, which he also submitted to the Committee as written evidence for this inquiry.

**303.** Professor Ainscow's paper contains six "interconnected" lessons for the Welsh Government to take forward from Schools Challenge Cymru, which were generated through discussions he had with school leaders and advisers involved in the programme. Professor Ainscow wrote:

"Together, these lessons provide a basis for a more effective strategy for strengthening the national approach to school improvement, particularly in relation to schools facing challenging circumstances."<sup>161</sup>

**304.** Below is a summary of Professor Ainscow's six interconnected lessons:

- Lesson 1: Start by analysing the context: While schools often face similar challenges, each school is different. It is important to analyse the culture, capacity and confidence of a school – starting with attainment data but with more in-depth probing such as classroom observations and discussions with students, staff and governors. Sometimes, the problem will be in the senior leadership at the school, in which case this itself might need to change. (Around one third of headteachers of Pathways to Success schools were replaced.)
- Lesson 2: Mobilise leadership from within the school: Much of the work of Schools Challenge Cymru Challenge Advisers concentrated on working with senior staff to build confidence and strengthen their leadership skills. Other, relatively inexperienced staff with the potential to lead improvement efforts were also encouraged to step up.
- Lesson 3: Promote a culture of learning amongst students and staff: Progress in Pathways to Success schools led to increased expectations and higher aspirations, thereby establishing the school as a "learning organisation", i.e. a group of people working together collectively to

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<sup>161</sup> Written evidence, TF.09 – Professor Mel Ainscow, page 2

enhance their capacities to create results they are all committed to and feel ownership of.

- Lesson 4: Connect to relevant external support: Schools facing challenging circumstances tend to become isolated and inward looking. Schools Challenge Cymru therefore placed considerable emphasis on linking the Pathways to Success schools to other schools. For example, partnerships included joint professional development programmes.
- Lesson 5: Find ways of injecting pace: Moving forward with urgency was a central emphasis within Schools Challenge Cymru, not least due to a perception that overall progress within the Welsh education system has been relatively slow over many years. One of the Challenge Advisers highlighted that the significant funds available, combined with “ministerial clout”, allowed for quick decision making and the rapid implementation of plans and innovations.
- Lesson 6: Improve the image of the school within its community and more widely: The Schools Challenge Cymru programme identified a need to make speedy progress and promote this within the local community, in order to overcome a vicious circle of poor attainment, poor image and difficulty in attracting pupils. Positive progress has been showcased to create a sense of momentum for the programme.

**305.** The Cabinet Secretary has said on a number of occasions since announcing the discontinuation of Schools Challenge Cymru that the Welsh Government would learn lessons from the programme and apply these to school improvement more generally.

### Stakeholders' evidence

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**306.** From Professor Mel Ainscow's evidence, it appears that the Welsh Government has ended its contact with Professor Mel Ainscow who it appointed in 2014 to lead, and advise on, the implementation of Schools Challenge Cymru. Professor Ainscow told the Committee that since March 2017, he has had “literally ... no contact at all with anybody from Welsh Government”.<sup>162</sup> He said he had been “disappointed” that, after submitting his paper on six interconnected lessons from the programme, “nobody seemed to think it was worth asking my opinion”.<sup>163</sup> Professor Ainscow added:

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<sup>162</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 494], 8 March 2018

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, [para 495]

“At the time when we were closing down gradually, all the rhetoric I was getting, including from the [Cabinet Secretary] ... was that they would be learning the lessons. Now, whether that’s happened, I’m not in a position to say.”<sup>164</sup>

**307.** Each of the regional consortia said they had taken the elements of Schools Challenge Cymru which they felt worked well and incorporated them into their own practices. Accelerated Improvement Boards were the aspect which each consortia cited in particular with all of the consortia on the same page in this respect.

#### Cabinet Secretary’s response

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**308.** The Cabinet Secretary presented a different picture to Professor Ainscow when giving oral evidence on 22 March 2018. Kirsty Williams AM told the Committee:

“I don’t think anything should be read into when I met the individual concerned, because officials were meeting the individual concerned. (...)

I took the time out not just to meet the figurehead of the programme, but actually to meet the people who were doing the work in the individual schools.”<sup>165</sup>

**309.** When pressed further on why, given her stated desire to learn lessons from Schools Challenge Cymru, she had not engaged with the person who was responsible for running the programme, the Cabinet Secretary said:

“I’ve had that conversation with Mr Ainscow. (...)

We’ve spoken to a wide variety of people to get their insight into the lessons learned, what was valuable and what was not valuable. (...)

What I’m saying to you – and I’m absolutely confident – is that we have learnt the lessons, we are taking that work and the good practice forward. (...)

So, the lessons, I am confident have been learnt.”<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 495], 8 March 2018

<sup>165</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [paras 143 and 173], 22 March 2018

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, [paras 175 and 188]

**310.** The Director of the Welsh Government’s Education Directorate, who accompanied the Cabinet Secretary in Committee, said that both he and the then Director General of Education and Public Services had had meetings and discussions with Professor Ainscow since March 2017.<sup>167</sup> However, in a subsequent letter to the Committee dated 11 April 2018, the Cabinet Secretary confirmed that the meeting referred to took place in March 2017 and was prior to Professor Ainscow submitting his paper on lessons learnt from Schools Challenge Cymru.

**311.** The Cabinet Secretary’s letter also said that there was an “exchange of emails” between her officials and Professor Ainscow in June 2017 about the SQW evaluation and that there was a celebration event to mark the end of the programme in July 2017, which Professor Ainscow attended as did a number of senior officials.<sup>168</sup>

**312.** A further letter from the Cabinet Secretary reiterated her belief that there was “no conflict” between her oral evidence on 22 March and her letter of 11 April 2018 and that she is “satisfied that we have taken steps to ensure the experience from Schools Challenge Cymru programme is transferred into the school improvement activity of the regional education consortia”.<sup>169</sup>

**313.** The Cabinet Secretary’s letter to the Committee in advance of her oral evidence (dated 9 March 2017) stated that the £1.5 million she allocated in January 2017 was to “build on the learning from Schools Challenge Cymru and deliver additional targeted work to accelerate improvement in schools, specifically in secondary schools identified by the consortia as being most in need of support”. Kirsty Williams AM said that “a common set of guiding principles” were agreed with the consortia “based on the learning from Schools Challenge Cymru”, comprising:

- a focus on sustainable approaches towards improving leadership, teaching and learning;
- establishing an effective Accelerated Improvement Board (or equivalent);
- a need to review each school’s approach to the use of data and self-evaluation for improvement purposes; and

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<sup>167</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [paras 176 and 179], 22 March 2018

<sup>168</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Letter to the CYPE Committee, 11 April 2018

<sup>169</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Letter to the CYPE Committee, 18 May 2018



- the provision of effective support and challenge from a suitably qualified Challenge Adviser with a proven track record.<sup>170</sup>

### The Committee's views and recommendations

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**314.** The Committee is disappointed that the Cabinet Secretary and her officials have not engaged more actively with Professor Mel Ainscow about how to learn lessons from Schools Challenge Cymru and apply these to school improvement more generally. The Committee believes this is very surprising and unusual considering the Welsh Government invested around £40 million in the programme over three years and the Cabinet Secretary has repeatedly stated that the Welsh Government is learning lessons from the programme and using these to inform school improvement approaches within the regional consortia. In light of this, the Committee would question whether the Welsh Government has made sufficient effort to engage with those involved in delivering Schools Challenge Cymru, particularly Professor Mel Ainscow and the extent to which meaningful lessons are being learned from the programme.

**Recommendation 28.** The Welsh Government, in conjunction with the regional consortia, should engage with the key players involved in delivering Schools Challenge Cymru, including Professor Mel Ainscow, to discuss what lessons can be learnt from the programme and other school improvement initiatives and subsequently apply these more generally across all schools requiring improvement.

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<sup>170</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Letter to the CYPE Committee, 9 March 2018

## 12. The role of the regional consortia in taking forward the legacy of Schools Challenge Cymru

### 12. 1. Relationship between Schools Challenge Cymru and regional consortia

#### Background

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**315.** The education regional consortia were created in 2012 across four regions of Wales.<sup>171</sup> The Welsh Government set out their purpose and role in the guidance document “**National Model for regional working**” (November 2015). Through the consortia, local authorities pool their school improvement services. One of the main ways in which consortia provide support to schools is through Challenge Advisers.

**316.** Schools Challenge Cymru was launched around the same time as the regional consortia were still establishing themselves. Whilst a key feature of the consortia is their Challenge Advisers, Schools Challenge Cymru also had Challenge Advisers working directly within Pathways to Success schools. These operated relatively distinctly from the consortia.

#### Stakeholders’ views

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**317.** SQW Consulting told the Committee that the Schools Challenge Cymru Challenge Advisers worked specifically with Pathways to Success schools, so that the consortia’s Challenge Advisers were freed up to work with the wider group of schools in the region. Dr Marian Morris said:

“We didn’t come across duplication because it was more or less that the Schools Challenge Cymru challenge adviser was specifically for those schools to enable the regional consortia to focus on other schools. So,

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<sup>171</sup> The regional consortia are arranged as follows: ERW (South West and Mid Wales): Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot; CSW (Central South Wales): Bridgend, Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff; EAS (South East Wales): Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Newport; GwE (North Wales): Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham.

there didn't seem to be any duplication of effort—not that we came across.”<sup>172</sup>

**318.** However, ASCL observed that the main reason the programme “did not result in consistent improvements in all participating schools” was a lack of co-ordination with the role of the regional consortia and lack of coherence between the two approaches to school improvement. Tim Pratt, Director of ASCL Cymru, told the Committee:

“Our view is that whilst the intent of the project was admirable and had enormous potential, in implementation there were issues. The most significant of these was in the lack of coordination and resulting layering of further accountabilities on these schools. The fact that separate improvement boards were set up, and were not required to engage with the local consortia and local authorities led to significant duplication of effort and contradictory advice being given in some cases. If these had formed part of a coordinated approach, in our view, it would have been more likely to have resulted in more widespread success.”<sup>173</sup>

**319.** The regional consortia’s evidence indicated they were not particularly closely involved in the delivery of Schools Challenge Cymru, particularly in the early years but that the relationship grew as time went on. Ed Pryce, EAS’ Service Strategic and Policy Lead told the Committee:

“We didn’t have challenge advisers in those schools to duplicate any work of Schools Challenge Cymru advisers. In the first year of the programme, work was quite separate, although over time we got to work more closely with the Schools Challenge Cymru challenge advisers so that they could understand the range of complementary services that EAS could offer into schools, such as literacy and numeracy support, and we felt, over the three years of the programme, that relationship built.”

**320.** In terms of the success of the programme, GwE accepted that the outcomes in the five Pathways to Success schools in North Wales were “not what one would have hoped they would be” and were “generally disappointing”. However, they

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<sup>172</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 73], 28 February 2018

<sup>173</sup> Written evidence, TF 13 – Association of School and College Leaders

stressed that it depends on the starting positions of the schools and that the five in North Wales had “had a significant improvement journey to undertake”.<sup>174</sup>

**321.** GwE wrote:

“Generally, the rate of improvement in the Schools Challenge Cymru schools has been poor considering the funding invested.”<sup>175</sup>

**322.** ERW highlighted that only four of the 39 schools in Schools Challenge Cymru were in South West and Mid Wales, the lowest proportion of any of the four regions’ schools. They wrote that, after unsuccessful attempts to have additional schools included, they established their own intervention programme with another four schools in the region with similar characteristics to Pathways to Success schools. ERW used similar strategies as Schools Challenge Cymru, including Accelerated Improvement Boards. They reported that these interventions yielded better results than the four schools in Schools Challenge Cymru.<sup>176</sup>

**323.** CSW told the Committee that Schools Challenge Cymru “had a positive benefit for our region” and “overall, it was a positive experience”. They were therefore “disappointed” when the programme ended.<sup>177</sup>

**324.** Professor Ainscow concurred that Schools Challenge Cymru’s progress with schools in Central South Wales had been particularly strong, which he said was a result of the consortium’s engagement with the programme. He highlighted that this was not the case across all regions:

“Clearly we needed to link with the system as a whole, and that’s where we got variation. We’ve got, for example, the four regional consortia. Now, the degree of co-operation with the four was varied. In the one [Central South] where we had the most co-operation—and very clearly it was there—all 16 secondary schools made very rapid progress. Now, in the areas where we had less progress—I’m not saying that’s the only cause for lack of rapid progress—certainly we didn’t have the same kind of levels of co-operation. I’m thinking, for example, in Wrexham [North Wales] and in Torfaen [South East].”<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 153], 8 March 2018

<sup>175</sup> Written evidence, TF 14 – GwE

<sup>176</sup> Written evidence, TF 20 – ERW

<sup>177</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 118 & 129-129], 8 March 2018

<sup>178</sup> Ibid [para 483]

**325.** The differing nature of the relationship between the Schools Challenge Cymru programme and the regional consortia across different parts of Wales was apparent from the school visits the Committee undertook. Eastern High were positive about the role of the Central South consortium whom they said left the school and the Schools Challenge Cymru Challenge Adviser to get on with the task of improving the school. Eastern High saw this as a positive. They were grateful that they and the Schools Challenge Cymru Challenge Adviser were relatively free from the consortium and local authority's direction and were able to do things their own way.

**326.** Professor Ainscow alluded to a lack of appetite from some quarters to pursuing the programme:

“We were creating a challenge as to what is possible in Wales. We were challenging everybody out there at every level of the system to think creatively: is there more we can do? There are no silver bullets. There are no easy answers. Moving schools forward, particularly challenging schools, is a very complex process. It's relatively easy to get quick gains, but sustainable change is much more of a challenge. It takes much longer, in that sense, really. I think, in creating a challenge, we created turbulence in the system, at all levels of the system, and I think some people found that turbulence too much and were happy to go back to the status quo.”<sup>179</sup>

### The Cabinet Secretary's position

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**327.** The Cabinet Secretary highlighted how the regional consortia themselves were amongst the beneficiaries of the Schools Challenge Cymru programme. Information provided by the Cabinet Secretary showed that £29 million was allocated to the Pathways to Success schools, whilst £10 million was given to the regional consortia to develop its school improvement capacity:

“This was to share learning and build capacity and school improvement infrastructure to support all schools in the long term. This funding, therefore, supported improvements that were realised in the wider system, beyond the 39 Pathways to Success schools.”<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 475], 8 March 2018

<sup>180</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Letter to the CYPE Committee, 9 March 2018

**328.** The Committee asked the Cabinet Secretary about the effectiveness of the relationship between the Schools Challenge Cymru programme and the extent to which this varied in the different regions. She answered:

“So, in some cases, if we’re being absolutely honest, there could sometimes be tensions between the two, but in most cases, the relationship was very, very positive and there was continuous feedback between the work going on in the schools under the programme and the regional consortia challenge advisers. But I’m going to be blunt and honest with people—in some cases, it has been reported to me—it’s only anecdotal evidence; I haven’t got hard and fast evidence—that there sometimes was a conflict: ‘We’re a school challenge school so we don’t need to participate or listen to any advice that’s coming from the regional consortia.’ Or, a local education authority said to me, ‘We felt that we couldn’t get involved in that school anymore because it was part of a different programme.’ Those were isolated incidents, and, as I said, it’s only anecdotal feedback. In most cases, the relationship was a very positive one.”<sup>181</sup>

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### The Committee’s views and recommendations

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**329.** As the Committee concludes in chapter 10, the strength of the relationship between the regional consortia and the Schools Challenge Cymru programme and its advisers was a considerable factor in the level of progress made by Pathways to Success schools.

**330.** There appear to have been tensions and an unproductive lack of synergy between those involved in delivering Schools Challenge Cymru and the consortia in some regions. In some cases, consortia appear to have regarded the programme as a competitive threat and not wholeheartedly engaged with it. On the other hand, it is possible that some schools saw participation in Schools Challenge Cymru as an opportunity to escape the influence and direction of their local authority and/or regional consortia and that this in itself was a problem. Either way, the fact that the consortia were still in their infancy during the early years of Schools Challenge Cymru contributed to a lack of synergy between the programme and the consortium in some regions.

**331.** The Committee believes that the progress of Pathways to Success schools in Schools Challenge Cymru depended in no small part on the strength of the relationship between those involved in delivering the programme and the

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<sup>181</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 203], 22 March 2018

regional consortium. This is borne out by the majority of the attainment data, for example schools in Central South Wales made particular progress.

## 12. 2. The role of regional consortia and local authorities in driving school improvement

### Background

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**332.** There has been an increasing narrative from the Welsh Government and the regional consortia that Schools Challenge Cymru was a form of interim school improvement solution, whilst the regional consortia established themselves and matured to a point where they could assume complete responsibility for school improvement.

**333.** When it inspected the regional consortia in 2016, Estyn was quite critical of the extent to the extent to which the consortia focused on particular groups of pupils and tracked outcomes.<sup>182</sup> Subsequent follow-up monitoring by Estyn in autumn 2017 found that three of the consortia had made strong progress in responding to its recommendations, although overall progress made by ERW (South West and Mid) had been slow.

### Stakeholders' views

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**334.** The regional consortia's evidence indicated they were keen to take over the responsibilities that were previously with Schools Challenge Cymru as part of their regional remit for school improvement. For example, GwE told the Committee:

"What we've done in GwE, certainly, not just in terms of ensuring that there isn't duplication, but moving forwards and developing the scheme, is to take a number of the scheme's strengths, particularly the Accelerated Improvement Boards... building on some of the things that were at the heart of the beginning of these schools' improvement journey, because Schools Challenge Cymru was the start of that journey. So, we're confident that we can move this scheme forward."<sup>183</sup>

**335.** Professor Mel Ainscow himself saw the regional consortia taking up the main role for school improvement in the long term, with Schools Challenge Cymru having provided the impetus and foundation for this to be taken forward:

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<sup>182</sup> Estyn, The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2015-2016, p92

<sup>183</sup> Oral evidence RoP [para 144], 8 March 2018



“I didn’t envisage the programme would continue on the same basis, because we’d learnt a lot and we’d moved on, and I certainly wasn’t suggesting we needed the same kind of funding. (...)”

But I think we’d learnt enough after, whatever it was, two and a half years, to put forward a proposal for how this could be built upon. Indeed, I put forward various written strategies of things that would go on and they were much about moving the project into the four consortia, not continuing it as a national initiative. There would need to be some kind of national coordination, but I saw the consortia as the natural home for the evolution of this way of working.”<sup>184</sup>

**336.** Sir Alasdair Macdonald commented on how Schools Challenge Cymru had introduced a more “agile” approach to school improvement which could be adopted by the consortia:

“I think the vision from the outset was, because the consortia were new, that this would move to the consortia. I think our concern was that we felt that some of the more general elements of the schools challenge were to do with the fact that it could be more fleet of foot. We could do things much faster, without, dare I say it, some of bureaucracy that would have been in the local authorities and the consortia, and what we were trying to do was to try to see if we could get a model into the consortia that would follow that pattern, as it were.”<sup>185</sup>

**337.** Estyn observed that the role of regional consortia in supporting school improvement is slightly different to the bespoke, tailored intervention that schools received from Schools Challenge Cymru. HM Chief Inspector told the Committee:

“I don’t think what Welsh Government are doing now is the same as what they were trying to do in Schools Challenge Cymru, because I think what Schools Challenge Cymru did, and did well, I think, was identify that there are a small number of secondary schools that have particular challenges and they need over and above the normal local authority/regional consortia support, they need over and above that a certain quantum of support and resource. I think that’s specifically what Schools Challenge Cymru was trying to do, and that’s not quite the same as what the more universal provision of regional consortia is.”<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Oral evidence RoP [para 563], 8 March 2018

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, [para 566]

<sup>186</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 140], 14 March 2018

## The Cabinet Secretary's position

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**338.** The Cabinet Secretary outlined that Schools Challenge Cymru “served its purpose” which appears to be one of supporting some specific schools, whilst building up the capacity of the regional consortia at a time when they were in their “relative infancy” to take forward school improvement thereafter. She wrote:

“The [Welsh] Government, SCC Advisers and Champions and consortia worked together to ensure the continued improvement of the schools and the transfer of responsibilities to the consortia. (...)”

The design of the programme for the third year was developed in this context, with planning and subsequent implementation taking place at several levels to facilitate a smooth transition and support sustained improvement. Similarly, the consortia were also planning on the basis of resuming their support for these schools once the programme closed. (...)”

At the closure of SCC, I was confident that the consortia were well placed to take the lessons from this programme and apply to their own work.”<sup>187</sup>

**339.** The Cabinet Secretary responded to the suggestion that regional consortia might not be as well-equipped or placed to offer tailored support to individual schools:

“What I would say is that those improvement boards are staying on, and our schools categorisation system is used to identify the level of support. Now, if you’re a red school, that gives you the entitlement to 25 days of support. That is more than you would have got under the Schools Challenge Cymru programme, which would’ve been 20 days. So, actually, moving to this system allows us to really focus in on those schools that need that intensive level of support.”<sup>188</sup>

## The Committee's views and recommendations

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**340.** The Committee notes the Cabinet Secretary's position that Schools Challenge Cymru served its purpose for a fixed period of time, while the regional

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<sup>187</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Letter to the CYPE Committee, 9 March 2018

<sup>188</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 150]. 22 March 2018

consortia were still in their infancy, but the consortia are now able to take up the baton of targeted school improvement in underperforming schools.

**341.** However, as HM Chief Inspector noted, Schools Challenge Cymru provided something specific and tailored to identified schools, which is different to the more universal provision from regional consortia. On the other hand, the Cabinet Secretary believed that the consortia will be able to offer more comprehensive support.

**342.** The Committee has some reservations about whether the consortia will be able to offer the same level of responsiveness and tailored school-specific interventions to schools that need them as Schools Challenge Cymru. This is particularly so, given early concerns arising from Estyn inspections in 2015/16 about the performance of some consortia in focusing on the progress of particular pupil groups and tracking outcomes. However, the Committee recognises that Estyn's follow-up monitoring in autumn 2017 found that three of the consortia had made strong progress in responding to its recommendations, although overall progress made by ERW (South West and Mid) had been slow.

**Recommendation 29.** The Welsh Government should closely monitor and evaluate how regional consortia provide challenge and support to schools requiring improvement, particularly those which participated in Schools Challenge Cymru. This should include asking Estyn to include this in its inspections and monitoring of the regional consortia.

## 13. Wider context of school budgets and funding for school improvement

### 13. 1. Sufficiency of school budgets

#### Background

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**343.** A backdrop of pressure on schools' core budgets came up repeatedly when discussing the subject of targeted education funding with stakeholders. It also emerged as a frequent theme in previous inquiries by the Committee, including Teachers' Professional Learning and Education, and The Emotional and Mental Health of Children and Young People.

**344.** The Welsh Government sought to protect schools' budgets in its 2018-19 budget. This was by reprioritising funding for local government through ending a number of specific grants and providing additional funding to the initial calculation of the 2018-19 Aggregate External Finance portion for school budgets within the Local Government Settlement. However, this only enabled the Welsh Government's funding for local government for the purposes of school budgets to remain broadly the same as 2017-18 levels. Between 2017-18 and 2018-19, there was a £1.5 million (0.1 per cent) increase from £1.554 billion to £1.556 billion.<sup>189</sup>

#### Stakeholders' evidence

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**345.** The headteacher unions highlighted the pressure on school budgets and the risks this poses that money intended to be targeted for specific purposes, such as the PDG, may be used to subsidise core budgets.

**346.** Tim Pratt of ASCL told the Committee:

"One of the issues is that, if the core funding was sufficient, the additional money that was targeted could then be more transparently used. This blurring is what is at issue. It is a real concern that, as a school leader, if I'm faced with £100,000 of potential deficit, and I get £80,000 in on the PDG, I might be tempted to look at ways of allocating that just to sustain what we're doing already."<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services, Alun Davies AM, Letter to the Equalities, Local Government and Communities Committee, 13 November 2017

<sup>190</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 282], 8 March 2018





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The PDG is masking the inadequacy of the school budget.

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The PDG is no longer an extra resource, it is a re-branded core budget.

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The PDG is filling gaps in core budgets and targeted funding like this can only work if there is sufficient funding in other areas.

**Focus Group Summary**

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**347.** In their written evidence, the NAHT reported the feedback of headteachers that grants (such as the PDG and EIG) are “masking the extent of the funding shortfall”. Asked in oral evidence if the parameters of the PDG were being blurred to some extent to cover deficiencies in core budgets, Rob Williams of the NAHT said:

“In reality, it is. That’s the honest answer: in reality, it is. We know that, for example, schools are having to use PDG to sustain key staff members. That would still adhere to the guidance within the grant, because if they were removed, the disproportionate effect would be on those pupils who qualify for eFSM.”<sup>191</sup>

**348.** The teaching unions emphasised the funding pressures schools are under and concurred that the PDG is, as UCAC put it, “merely filling the gaps at the moment, rather than being used for extension work and further provision” as “schools’ financial position does not offer them a great deal of choice”.<sup>192</sup>

**349.** The NEU argued “there is a clear need for a wide ranging debate on education funding in Wales” and encouraged the Committee to revisit education funding as a topic and look at the whole issue in context.<sup>193</sup>

**350.** The NASUWT highlighted what they call “the general underinvestment in education by successive Welsh Governments” which, in their view, has led to the PDG being used solely to “retain staffing levels on a general basis”.<sup>194</sup>

**351.** UCAC wrote that schools do not have enough core funding to maintain their interventions, which has a “negative impact on their ability to offer additional support to vulnerable learners”:

“Following the general and increasing pressures on school budgets, what UCAC members are telling us is that the PDG is increasingly being used to pay for additional staff – usually teaching assistants – rather than other more specialist interventions.”<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 280], 8 March 2018

<sup>192</sup> Written evidence, TF 06 - UCAC

<sup>193</sup> Written evidence, TF 02 - National Education Union

<sup>194</sup> Written evidence, TF 15 - NASUWT

<sup>195</sup> Written evidence, TF 06 - UCAC

**352.** Other respondents to the Committee's call for written evidence commented on the relationship between the PDG and schools' core budgets. For example, People and Work commented:

"Pressures upon school budgets are likely to be adding to incentives to use additional funding to supplement core budgets and for example, pay for staff, rather than offering genuinely additional support."<sup>196</sup>

**353.** General pressure on school budgets and the implications this has for the way funding streams which are intended for a specific purpose, such as the PDG, are used by schools was also a strong message from the Committee's engagement activity. In each of the focus groups held with schools and governors, participants mentioned that the PDG was "propping up" school budgets and preventing redundancies. The following comments were typically representative:

"The PDG is masking the inadequacy of the school budget."

"The PDG is no longer an extra resource, it is a re-branded core-budget."<sup>197</sup>

**354.** Each focus group agreed that this type of funding can only work when there is sufficient core funding available. All participants talked about the tension between budgets and that pressure on the PDG increased as the core budget was reduced:

"The PDG is filling gaps in core budgets and targeted funding like this can only work if there is sufficient funding in other areas."<sup>198</sup>

### The Cabinet Secretary's position

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**355.** When the Committee put it to the Cabinet Secretary that the flexibility in the way schools are using the PDG is driven by pressures on core funding, She replied:

"No, I don't think it's being driven by cuts to core funding. (...)

We're very clear about the usage that this money can be spent on in terms of individuals or universal application within schools and that

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<sup>196</sup> Written evidence, TF.10 – People and Work

<sup>197</sup> Children, Young People and Education Committee, *Targeted Funding to Improve Education Outcomes: Focus Group Summary*, p7

<sup>198</sup> Ibid



forms an important part of the checks and balances that we have in our system.”<sup>199</sup>

**356.** Speaking more generally about funding for school budgets, the Cabinet Secretary for Education highlighted during draft budget scrutiny that local government expenditure on schools increased from £2.123 billion in 2016-17 to £2.142 billion in 2017-18.<sup>200</sup> The Cabinet Secretary for Finance said during the 2018-19 draft budget setting round that the Welsh Government had “protected” frontline school budgets.<sup>201</sup>

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### The Committee’s views and recommendations

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**357.** Pressure on school budgets had a ubiquitous presence throughout this inquiry. The evidence presented to the Committee indicated that schools are using the PDG to make up for what they see as insufficient core budget provision. The Committee believes that the principle of targeted funding, which we have expressed our support for in chapter 3 of this report, will only succeed if schools’ core budgets are adequately funded.

**358.** This inquiry into Targeted Funding has therefore reinforced the need for the wider issue of school funding to be considered further, otherwise the impact of the PDG will be limited as schools may be inclined to use it to subsidise core budgets. The Committee has already looked at the Education Improvement Grant in an earlier inquiry<sup>202</sup> and has now looked at the other main source of additional, targeted funding for schools from the Education MEG, which is the PDG.

**359.** The Committee believes the time has come for closer investigation and scrutiny of school funding. The Committee raised the issue of schools’ core budgets during its scrutiny of the Welsh Government’s 2018-19 budget.<sup>203</sup> This related in particular to the transparency over changes between 2017-18 and 2018-19 and the Welsh Government’s stated policy of protecting school budgets.

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<sup>199</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [paras 39 & 42], 22 March 2018

<sup>200</sup> Welsh Government, [Response to the CYPE Committee report: Scrutiny of the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2018-19](#), January 2018

<sup>201</sup> Welsh Government, [Draft Budget 2018-19 - Outline proposals - A new Budget for Wales](#), 3 October 2017, paras 4.49-4.50 and [Oral statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government](#), Mark Drakeford AM, 3 October 2017

<sup>202</sup> CYPE Committee, [Education Improvement Grant: Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic Children](#), 2017

<sup>203</sup> CYPE Committee, [Scrutiny of the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2018-19](#), December 2017

**360.** Whilst funding for schools' core budgets is contained in the Local Government MEG and therefore outside our main focus of annual budget scrutiny, the Committee intends to undertake a closer and deeper examination of school funding and the impact it is having on the Welsh Government's education policies and objectives.

**Recommendation 30.** The Welsh Government should keep the sufficiency of funding for school budgets under review and consider how this impacts on schools' regard for, and use of, targeted funding such as the PDG.

## 13. 2. Loss of Schools Challenge Cymru budget from the Education MEG

### Background

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**361.** The Welsh Government decided in early 2014 to use the funding, which arose from a Barnett consequential of the UK Government's decision in autumn 2013 to introduce free meals for all infant pupils in England, for school improvement.<sup>204</sup> This funding was used for Schools Challenge Cymru.<sup>205</sup> A £15 million annual budget was assigned to the programme.

**362.** When the confirmation was announced in autumn 2016 that Schools Challenge Cymru would not continue beyond its third financial year 2016-17, the £15 million returned to the Welsh Government's central reserves. It was therefore not put to alternative use within the Education Main Expenditure Group (MEG).

**363.** The Welsh Government's Programme for Government for this Assembly includes a commitment to spend an additional £100 million throughout the five years on raising school standards. The Welsh Government decided to channel this additional £100 million through specific programmes and policies in the Education MEG, rather than through funding for local government and schools' core budgets (as was its method of protecting school budgets in the Fourth Assembly).

**364.** As part of the £100 million pledged during this Assembly, the Welsh Government allocated £20 million to a Raising School Standards Budget

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<sup>204</sup> Welsh Government, Cabinet Statements: Minister for Finance, Jane Hutt AM, Allocations arising from the Autumn Statement 2013, 27 January 2014;

<sup>205</sup> Welsh Government, Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis AM, Schools Challenge Cymru, 10 February 2014.

Expenditure Line (BEL) in 2017-18, with a further £25 million allocated in 2018-19 and £25 million indicative for 2019-20.<sup>206</sup>

**365.** However, at the start of 2017-18, £15 million was removed from the BEL financing Schools Challenge Cymru and transferred to reserves. Arguably, this therefore needs to be factored into comparisons of expenditure on raising school standards between the last budget set in the previous Assembly (2016-17) and budgets allocated in this Assembly.

#### The Cabinet Secretary's position

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**366.** The Cabinet Secretary confirmed during draft budget scrutiny in November 2016 that with the ending of Schools Challenge Cymru, the programme's annual budget of £15 million was transferred from the Education MEG to central reserves:

“As a result of the programme being centrally funded from Reserves, there was a requirement to transfer the funding back to Reserves in 2017-18.”<sup>207</sup>

**367.** In her evidence for this inquiry, Kirsty Williams AM did not indicate that there had been any prospect of the money being retained within the education budget:

“We are constantly having discussions with the [Cabinet Secretary] for Finance around support for the education budget. The [Cabinet Secretary] for Finance was quite clear that it was a time-limited programme.”<sup>208</sup>

**368.** However, the Welsh Government did make available £200,000 transitional funding for Pathways to Success schools to continue activities until the end of the 2016/17 academic year and £1.5 million for the regional consortia to build on the lessons from Schools Challenge Cymru in 2017-18.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, Welsh Government paper to the CYPE Committee on the Education Main Expenditure Group, Draft Budget 2018-19, November 2017, Annex B

<sup>207</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Welsh Government paper to the CYPE Committee on the Education Main Expenditure Group, Draft Budget 2017-18, November 2016

<sup>208</sup> Oral evidence, RoP [para 157], 22 March 2018

<sup>209</sup> Cabinet Secretary for Education, Written Cabinet Statement, Additional funding to aid transition from Schools Challenge Cymru, 11 January 2017; Cabinet Secretary for Education, Letter to the CYPE Committee, 22 June 2017

## The Committee's views and recommendations

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**369.** Whether it is accepted that Schools Challenge Cymru was always intended to be a fixed-term programme or not, whether it should have continued beyond three years, or whether it represented value for money, it is evident that the discontinuation of the programme has resulted in the loss of its annual £15 million budget from the Education MEG.

**370.** It is not clear whether this has arisen because the case was not made to retain the funding within the Education MEG, or if the case was made but Welsh Government priorities sat elsewhere.

**371.** The nature of devolution means that additional funding for Wales arising from a Barnett consequential should not necessarily be spent on the same policy area here as in Westminster. However, the Committee believes it is important to remember that the Welsh Government decided in early 2014 to use the funding which arose from the introduction of free school meals for infant pupils in England, also for education purposes here in Wales; specifically for school improvement. This money has now been diverted away from education.

**372.** This also potentially calls into question the Welsh Government's delivery of its Programme for Government commitment to spend an extra £100 million on raising school standards in this Assembly term. If, on average, the Welsh Government is spending an extra £20 million per year on raising school standards, this needs to be considered against the fact it is allocating £15 million less per year for its school improvement programme, Schools Challenge Cymru.

**Recommendation 31.** The Welsh Government should provide, on both an individual and aggregate basis, a list of budget expenditure lines (BELs) within the Education MEG which predominantly finance the raising of school standards, for 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19, as well as commit to doing so for the remainder of this Assembly term.

## Annex A: Schedule of oral evidence

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Date	Name and Organisation
28 February 2018	Dr Marian Morris, SQW Consulting Professor Chris Taylor, WISERD Robert Smith, National Foundation for Educational Research
8 March 2018	Andrew Williams & Debbie Lewis, Central South Consortium Joint Education Service Betsan O'Connor & Cressy Morgan, Education through Regional Working Paul Matthews-Jones & Sharon Williams, GwE Ed Pryce & Kath Bevan, Education Achievement Service for South East Wales Rob Williams & Damon McGarvie, National Association of Headteachers Cymru Tim Pratt & Ravi Pawar, Association of School and College Leaders Neil Foden & Hannah O'Neill, National Education Union Cymru Rex Phillips, NASUWT Elaine Edwards, UCAC Professor Mel Ainscow, Emeritus Professor of Education and Co-director of the Centre for Equity in Education, University of Manchester Sir Alasdair Macdonald, Welsh Government Adviser on Education

14 March 2018	Meilyr Rowlands, HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, Estyn  Simon Brown, Strategic Director, Estyn  Claire Morgan, Strategic Director, Estyn
22 March 2018	Kirsty Williams AM, Cabinet Secretary for Education  Steve Davies, Director of the Education Directorate  Ruth Conway, Deputy Director of the Support for Learners Division, Welsh Government

## Annex B: Written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the inquiry. All consultation responses can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Organisation	Ref
Adoption UK	TF 01
National Education Union Cymru	TF 02
University and College Union	TF 03
Teach First Cymru	TF 04
The Royal British Legion	TF 05
Undeb Cenedlaethol Cymru (UCAC)	TF 06
Central South Consortium Joint Education Service	TF 07
Mudiad Meithrin	TF 08
Professor Mel Ainscow	TF 09
People and Work	TF 10
Estyn	TF 11
Education Achievement Service for South East Wales	TF 12
Association of School and College Leaders Cymru	TF 13
GwE	TF 14
NASUWT	TF 15
Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)	TF 16
Swansea Council	TF 17
Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team Wales (EYST Wales)	TF 18
National Association of Headteachers Cymru	TF 19
Education through Regional Working (ERW)	TF 20
Welsh Government	TF 21