

Children and Young People
Committee
Child Poverty in Wales:
Eradication through Education

27th October 2010



WLGA • CLILC

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities, the three fire and rescue authorities, and four police authorities are associate members.
2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.
3. The WLGA welcomes the Children and Young People Committee review of Child Poverty in Wales: Eradication through Education? The WLGA is committed to working with others to help eradicate child poverty in Wales and is pleased to be able to provide evidence on this issue. Education has a very important role in breaking the cycle of poverty and helping children, young people and their families move out of poverty. Education can help to empower people to enter or return to work and to encourage them to participate in their community. It is important to emphasise the value of working in partnerships and the role of the Children and Young People Partnership in developing the Children and Young People Plan (CYPP).
4. The WLGA, local authorities and schools are all committed to combating child poverty in Wales and work hard to ensure there is a range of services to meet the needs of all children and young people. However, there continues to be a clear link between low educational achievement and poverty. There are a number of indicators that can be used to illustrate this link, for example, the relationship between household income which is often indicated by the take up of free school meals and lower academic attainment and the high level of young people who are not in employment, employment and training (NEET). There may be a number of reasons for children and young people living in poverty to do less well in school. These include a comparative lack of resources, overcrowded housing, lower expectations, stigma, bullying, emotional and behavioural difficulties and higher levels of educational needs.
5. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation argues that schools alone cannot overcome the links between poverty and educational attainment and that there needs to be greater integration of policies and emphasis on a broader range of out-of-school and community based services. The development of the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) has been designed to improve educational performance and achieve greater equity within the school system. The three strands of the SEF, numeracy, literacy and

breaking the link between poverty and low attainment plays an important role in eradication of child poverty through education. The SEF is about making the whole education system, including Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), local government and schools more effective. This should result in the whole educational system within a local authority area being held accountable for the quality of the educational experience of all the children and young people regardless of their background. This is being led by local authorities at a consortia level on a regional basis working in partnership with WAG.

6. The WLGA worked with Save the Children on the development of Child Poverty Solutions Wales (CPSW) in partnership with WAG. The CPSW is an on line toolkit which aims to help to reduce local child poverty through public service delivery. The CPSW contains a large number of resources to help support public services to meet the needs of children, young people and families living in poverty. The project was developed in partnership with public bodies, including local authorities and the WLGA continues to sit on the board.
7. In the time since the publication of the Children and Young People Committee report¹, and the written response by the responsible Ministers², there have been many welcomed developments. The Committee report made a number of recommendations which have been satisfied by the recent development of a Measure and a new national Child Poverty Strategy. These new developments have provided a coherent national strategic direction for service provision in Wales, which was called for in the 2008 report from the Children and Young People Committee. This approach has been welcomed by local government.
8. The Children and Families (Wales) Measure (the Measure) 2009 sets out the strategic direction of child poverty services and Integrated Family Support Teams (IFST) and the associated responsibilities and duties placed on public bodies. Under the Measure Welsh authorities are required to demonstrate their contribution towards eradicating child poverty, as well as other responsibilities concerning parenting, play and participation of children and young people. The WLGA welcomed the Measure in its consultation response but stressed the importance of ensuring that it was used as a tool to strengthen and consolidate existing policy and enable public bodies to meet the child poverty targets without placing any additional burdens on them.

¹ Child Poverty in Wales: Eradication through Education?, November 2008

² Jane Hutt, AM, the then Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills and Brian Gibbons, AM, the then Minister for Social Justice and Local Government, January 2009

9. The IFST have been established under the Measure to meet the needs of some children and families with complex problems. The IFST deliver services through inter-related priorities to improve services for children and families when they come into contact with health and social services. The IFST are based on quality assessment and evidenced based interventions. The IFSTs operate in three pioneer areas, Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Merthyr Tydfil (working as consortia) and Wrexham. The IFST is based on the premise that for some families there is an increased likelihood that the child's physical, social and emotional development will be impaired and that this may result for some children in repeated or long term episodes of being looked after by the local authority. The WLGA recognises that there is a role for such services and welcomes the IFST as a specific intervention service for vulnerable families. Some children and families living in poverty will benefit from the introduction of the IFST; however, the WLGA would stress the importance of ensuring that a link is not made between poverty and poor physical, social and emotional development.
10. The Child Poverty Strategy for Wales and associated Delivery Plan, which was out for consultation in May 2010, set out clear requirements on local authorities and partners as to how they will be able to meet their duties and work together to eradicate child poverty. The strategy sets out three strategic objectives to:
- Reduce the number of families living in workless households;
 - Improve the skill level of parents and young people in low income families so that they can secure well paid employment;
 - Reduce the inequalities that exist in the health, education and economic outcomes for children living in poverty by improving the outcomes of the poorest.

These objectives have a strong link to education both within schools and higher and further education institutions. It is clear that in the development of child poverty strategies at a local level education is a key service.

11. Under the new requirements local authorities, and other public bodies, will have to produce a local child poverty strategy setting out how they will meet the needs of disadvantaged families. The Child Poverty Strategy for Wales states that the duty to produce a local child poverty strategy will be discharged through CYPP under core aim 7. The WLGA welcomes this approach to producing the child poverty strategy at a local level as it ensures that all the partners will have to share responsibility for tackling child poverty. The CYPP provides the strategic direction for all services for children

and young people, including the main education and social services plans. Using the CYPP as a mechanism for discharging the duty to produce a child poverty strategy will ensure that services can be streamlined and joined up to meet the requirements of the strategy.

12. In the WLGA consultation response to the Child Poverty Strategy and Delivery Plan for Wales the Association welcomed the plan but emphasised the importance of ensuring that there is a coherent fit with local priorities and other relevant strategic plans. Local flexibility is important to ensure that services meet the need of the local community and that services are cohesive with other plans and priorities. In order to ensure that the child poverty agenda in Wales is effectively addressed, all parties need to be clear about their role and how they can contribute to the local child poverty strategy.
13. The Child Poverty Strategy and Delivery Plan for Wales also set out arrangements for Families First pioneers areas. The pioneer areas are established to support families, especially those living in poverty. The areas will be used to showcase services and to share learning. The pioneer areas will be developed in line with the principles set out in the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales so that services are more family focused, bespoke, integrated, pro-active, intensive and reflective of local need.
14. The WLGA also expressed concern about the future of the Cymorth and Children and Family Organisation Grants (CFOG) and the implications for existing projects if the money is not transferred into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) in 2011 – 2012 as previously agreed according to the Grants Protocol. Huw Lewis AM, Deputy Minister for Children, issued a letter on 7th October outlining the future arrangements for Cymorth and CFOG stating that there are not immediate plans to withdraw funding currently provided by the Cymorth grant. The Cymorth programme is currently being delivered until March 2011 and transitional arrangements will be put in place for 2011-12 for the funding to support the introduction of Families First. As a result of this for 2011-12 local authorities will have to demonstrate that services currently funded through Cymorth meet the key themes of Families First, and relate specifically to improving integrated family support. Services will have to be family focussed, bespoke, integrated, pro-active, intensive and local. The WLGA welcomes the clarity around the future plans for Cymorth funding; however, there is still concern that many services will have to be cut because of a lack of funding.

15. The Children and Young People Committee report in 2008 emphasised the role that schools play in mitigating the effects of child poverty. There is a statistical link between poverty and low educational attainment and the WLGA, local authorities and schools are all concerned that this trend be broken. The SEF will be used as a tool for bringing together these partners and ensuring that they all have a role to play in the improvement of educational attainment and outcomes. There are a number of policies in place to help children, young people and their families in Wales and local authorities and schools work hard in ensuring that there is equity of opportunity.

16. The WLGA recognises that many funding initiatives have been put in place to try and help lift children, young people and their families out of poverty. RAISE (Raise attainment and Individual Standards in Education) was introduced by WAG in 2006 as a grant to schools. The amount of funding received depended on how many pupils were entitled to free school meals, based on 20% entitlement in schools of 50 or more pupils. Although RAISE had a focus on improving standards for those pupils living in disadvantaged households the thresholds put in place for entitlement meant that some of the children and young people most in need did not receive any benefit. The Estyn report on the impact of RAISE 2008-2009³ suggests that it is perhaps too early to tell what impact the RAISE money is having on performance measures however, there are indications of a positive impact in primary schools. The final evaluation of RAISE is due soon and this will indicate the success of the RAISE project for disadvantaged children. The WLGA recognises the importance of evaluation but highlights the difficulties in isolating the impacts of individual variables. For example, it can often be difficult to determine whether any improvements in behaviour or differences in pupil attainment are as a result of an individual intervention such as RAISE.

17. Flying Start is another WAG grant which is primarily aimed at improving the outcomes for children in areas of significant deprivation. To date £148 million has been invested in Flying Start programmes across Wales. Its long term aim is to decrease the number of people with poor skills and to develop a more highly skilled economy. It is a prescriptive and intensive programme of services for the most disadvantaged communities. In order to develop the social and economic benefits the focus of Flying Start is on the child, with support for parents and the community, in order to create the best environment for children's well-being. The Flying Start entitlements include free childcare, health visiting, parenting support and basic skills.

³ The Impact of RAISE 2008-2009, Evaluation of the impact of RAISE funding on raising the levels of performance of disadvantaged pupils, A report on the third year of the programme.

18. The Flying Start programme is currently being evaluated and the interim report was discussed in plenary on 14th October 2010. The evaluation found that there have been positive outcomes in a number of areas, including social and emotional development and health outcomes. Many teachers have also reported that they can see noticeable differences in children that have attended the Flying Start programme and that they are better prepared for school and settle quicker. It may be some time before it is clear what impact the Flying Start programme has on educational attainment but at this stage there are positive outcomes for the children and their families. The evaluation report has indeed shown an increase in parental confidence and engagement with services, not just Flying Start.
19. The WLGA is aware that there are some costs involved in participating in education, for example, school meals, uniforms and trips, which could have an adverse effect on the pupil's attainment levels, due to stigma, bullying or lack of access to out-of-school activities. Local authorities are conscious that these costs can be prohibitive for some families and do try to eliminate these barriers and ensure equality within schools. The local authorities receive grants to supplement the amount they spend from the RSG in order to meet the needs of children, young people and families within the education system.
20. There are a number of services that benefit children, young people and families from deprived communities in order to increase participation in the education system. These services range from Language and Play, Integrated Children's Centres, Community Focused Schools and targeted services such as Flying Start, Genesis and parenting programmes. These services help to ensure the engagement of the pupil, their families and the community in the learning environment and help to raise expectations.
21. Initiatives such as the provision of free schools breakfast and meals ensure that children and young people have access to nutritious food at school. Free school breakfasts are a universal entitlement but it is the decision of the school whether they take up the free school breakfast programme or not. Should a school decide to run the free school breakfast programme the costs will be paid for by WAG. Schools will decide whether to run the programme based on the need of the local area. Good school and community links will encourage take up of the programme. Currently over 65% of primary schools run the free school breakfast programme.

22. In the 2008 report the Children and Young People Committee expressed concern that some of the children most in need of free school breakfasts did not attend school in time to receive a breakfast. Teachers and support staff within schools understand the needs of the children within the school and recognise the importance of ensuring that all pupils within a school which runs the programme receive a breakfast if they need to. Through trusted parent and school relationships it is possible to treat children on an individual basis. Some children are not able to attend school earlier because they may be caring for a parent or sibling or have other responsibilities within the home. The WLGA recognises that schools and the professionals that work within them are sensitive to the needs of families and are able to address the needs of pupils on an individual basis.
23. The free school breakfast programme was evaluated in 2007 and the full evaluation is available online (www.wales.gov.uk/breakfast). The evaluation showed that there were a higher number of healthy food items consumed and a more positive attitude towards breakfast eating than in schools that did not provide breakfast. There is an existing evidence base suggesting that breakfast consumption influences cognitive function and classroom behaviour. The evaluation did not show significant improvement in cognitive function but this is likely to reflect that it was a school based analysis based on uptake levels rather than an analysis of tracking change in individuals. Further work is still on going.
24. Not every pupil in Wales is entitled to a free school meal but those most in need will receive them. The Appetite for Life plan sets out the strategic direction and actions required to improve the nutritional standards of food and drink provided in schools in Wales. This will benefit all pupils, whether they are entitled to free school meals or not, and will ensure that at a minimum all pupils will have one nutritious meal a day. The Food in Schools Coordinator responsible for the implementation of the Appetite for Life Plan and the management of software sits within the WLGA. The Coordinator works with the local authorities to ensure that they are meeting the standards and to support them in the roll out of the plan.
25. In addition to free school meals, local authorities also currently receive a school uniform financial assistance scheme grant, almost £74,000 in 2010/11, to help families with the cost of purchasing school uniforms. This will help to ensure that pupils have a decent standard of school uniform to attend school and as such do not feel any sense of isolation from the other pupils. For some children a poor standard of

uniform, or indeed lack of it, would be enough to make them miss school or not fully engage in the lessons and the school community which could impact on attainment.

26. The Children and Young People Committee mentioned that some children and young people may feel stigmatised by receiving additional financial support through free school meals and uniforms. It is important to schools and local authorities that they make the process of attending school as easy as possible and have tried a number of different methods of distributing additional support in order to reduce stigma. For example, some schools have piloted cashless systems in the canteen. It is important that every child or young person is treated with respect and that the school process helps to make the child or young person feel part of the school community. It is important therefore to remember the role that support services such as school counselling and anti-bullying guidance can play in helping a child or young person feel part of the school community.
27. The WLGA and local authorities also recognise the importance of ensuring that support staff, teaching staff and governors are aware of the issues relating to child poverty and are equipped to address needs. It is important that the school is a safe environment where children and young people do not feel isolated and teachers and support staff have a key role to play in helping pupils engage in the learning community.
28. Work with young people is also crucial in the process of eradicating child poverty through education and to meet the objectives of the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales to reduce the number of workless households and improve the skills of parents and young people. Young people are often most in danger of repeating the cycle of poverty because they have become disengaged with the education system and have not yet entered the workplace. Young people at this stage in their life can find it difficult to find a place in the community and it becomes increasingly difficult to reengage with the learning community as they become older. Young people can often be strong role models for younger children and as such it is imperative that focus is also placed on delivering services for young people if the objectives of the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales are to be met.
29. The recent Assembly Enterprise and Learning Committee's report into young people who are, or are at risk of becoming, NEET brings some welcome recommendations in not only focussing on a more co-ordinated process to policy development and service delivery in this area but also by recommending earlier intervention and consideration

of a broader age range (16-24). This must also link clearly with WAG Guidance on Children Missing Education, which aims to ensure that robust mechanisms are in place to support all children and young people in securing, being retained in a placement and developing in an education setting.

30. Whilst a focus on Basic Skills is extremely important, personal and social skills development can be as important and in some circumstances more important, particularly in the short term, for overcoming barriers to education, employment or training. As highlighted in the Learning Pathways policy, Learning & Skills (Wales) Measure (2009) and, more recently, Wales Education and Skills Board (WESB) report, non-formal and informal (e.g. via youth work) learning offers for some children and young people an essential mechanism for re-engaging and/or continued development. This need to compliment what is delivered in formal settings for some can be the main starting point.
31. Core and complimentary curricula delivery provides crucial input to children and young people in empowering them not only to seek appropriate information, advice and guidance (IAG) but also to act on it. Access to IAG is not in itself an answer to young people's issues but subject areas such as Financial Inclusion, Essential Skills, including communication and ICT and a variety of projects such as parenting programmes and alternative curriculum programmes all contribute to young people becoming positive and productive citizens by applying the skills gained.
32. Apprenticeships are receiving a great deal of focus currently as a positive method for preventing young people from becoming NEET. For some this may be an appropriate option. However, apprenticeships are delivered at Levels 2 and 3, which is equivalent to GCSE A* to C and above and this could be beyond the capability of many young people who are currently not in education, employment or training. Consideration needs to be made to these young people, who may be functioning at Level 1, Entry Level or pre-Entry level in up-skilling them to levels where they can access apprenticeships.
33. Crucial to the engagement of children and young people is the essential process of ensuring they themselves are fully involved in any developments relevant to their learning and any other aspect of their lives. The benefits to young people and policy makers of such involvement is clear as the results not only demonstrate this commitment to children and young people themselves, thereby reducing their feelings of disengagement and improving their feeling of belonging, but also often has the

outcome of improved relevance to the young person of curriculum, training placement or employment.

34. There are currently a number of innovative European Convergence programmes aiming to engage with young people aged 11-19. It is essential that clear links are made between these and schools and youth support services to avoid duplication, learn from successful approaches and work towards sustainable provision for this vulnerable group. Although this funding applies to 15 local authority areas, the learning gained across these should be strategically coordinated and disseminated to the other 7 in order to maximise any benefits gained from the programme.

CONCLUSION

35. The WLGA is pleased that there have been a number of positive developments in policy towards the eradication of child poverty. The WLGA recognises that education has a large role to play in the eradication of child poverty and that flagship services such as Flying Start and youth work help to support children, young people and families. It is important to ensure that WAG, local authorities and schools work in partnership to deliver these programmes and to support pupils and their families to achieve the highest attainment possible. Engagement with the school or learning environment can often be the starting point and this is where initiatives such as RAISE and Flying Start can have a real impact.
36. Services for young people, both formal and informal are also very important. Participation in and engagement with services is essential and support services such as school counselling and Education Welfare Officer can help to maintain engagement with the school. It is essential that a holistic approach is taken to raising the educational attainment for all children and young people. Education has a huge role to play in eradicating poverty but it can not do this without support from social services, health and other key partners. The WLGA reiterates the importance of the Children and Young People Partnerships and the CYPP as drivers for the strategic change that can have a true impact on the lives of children, young people and families living in poverty.

For further information please contact:

Dr. Chris Llewelyn
Director of Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture

Naomi Alleyne
Director of Equalities and Social Justice

Welsh Local Government Association
Local Government House
Drake walk
Cardiff
CF10 4LG

Tel: 029 2046 8600