

# Debate on Committee report on the Education Improvement Grant and Gypsy Traveller and Minority Education

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On 3 May, Assembly Members will debate the Children Young People and Education Committee's [report on its Inquiry into the Education Improvement Grant: Gypsy, Roma and Traveller and Minority Ethnic Children](#) [PDF 739KB] which was published on 21 February 2017. The inquiry focussed on the educational outcomes of these groups of learners and considered:

- How local authorities' use of the funding to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners is monitored;
- The effectiveness of other policies and strategies for supporting these groups; and
- Key issues arising from amalgamating the other separate grants into the EIG.

## What is the Education Improvement Grant?

The Education Improvement Grant (EIG) was established in April 2015 upon the **amalgamation of eleven ring-fenced grants** that had previously been given to local authorities. These included the Gypsy and Traveller Children Grant, and the Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant. The Welsh Government said that amalgamating the grants would lead to greater flexibility and administrative savings.

At the same time as creating a single grant in 2015–16, the Welsh Government reduced the total funding by 8%. In their final year, 2014–15, the sum of the previous grants that were amalgamated to form the EIG was £153 million. There have been reductions each year and in 2017–18, the EIG is



worth £133 million.

The EIG is administered by the four regional consortia, through which local authorities share their school improvement services. The terms and conditions of the grant set a series of requirements for how the funding should be used. These are relatively general in nature and broadly align with the priorities of the Welsh Government's education improvement plan, [Qualified for Life](#).

## What the Committee found

The [Committee's report](#) (PDF 739KB) made 14 recommendations, of which the Welsh Government rejected one, accepting or accepting in principle the others.

The Committee's main concerns related to the extent of **monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the EIG**. The [Committee said](#) the Welsh Government needed to get a 'much firmer grip' on the way the grant is monitored and evaluated, concluding:

The previous Gypsy Children and Traveller Children Education Grant and Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant were subject to thorough monitoring and accountability systems that appear to have largely disappeared with the introduction of the EIG. The Cabinet Secretary emphasised the role of the four regional consortia and local authorities themselves in monitoring the outcomes and impact (...) However, the Committee received very little evidence on how the consortia and local authorities are undertaking such monitoring.

The Committee reported that:

- The Welsh Government does not direct how regional consortia should allocate funding to the different purposes of the amalgamated EIG nor is expenditure tracked;
- Little guidance is provided by the Welsh Government other than high level objectives for the use of the grant;
- It was the role of the regional consortia to monitor and evaluate the use of the grant, although there was little indication that this happens;
- There has been little progress on an 'outcomes framework' which was intended to inform EIG expenditure;



– There was criticism of the level of Equality Impact Assessments undertaken at the time of the decision to amalgamate the grants.

The Committee made an **overarching recommendation** that the Welsh Government **keep under review what is the best funding model** for supporting the educational outcomes of these groups of learners. It recommended the Welsh Government revisit this question and assess whether the introduction of the EIG has been beneficial **by the end of 2020**.

The Committee also made a range of recommendations aimed at improving the monitoring and impact of the EIG. The [Welsh Government said in response](#) (PDF 401KB) it was committed to review the EIG in its third year and will put in place a **‘strengthened outcomes framework’** in 2017–18.

The Committee also recommended that the Welsh Government should undertake a thorough, updated impact assessment of the decision to amalgamate the grants. The Welsh Government rejected this recommendation stating that it does not consider any benefit would be served in revisited impact assessments undertaken previously.

## Attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and Minority Ethnic children

The Welsh Government published updated statistics, [Academic achievement by pupil characteristics](#) on 31 January 2017, during the course of the Committee inquiry. This showed that **Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children have the lowest attainment rates** of any ethnic group in Wales, although there have been improvements.

The proportion of Gypsy/Gypsy Roma pupils achieving the Level 2 threshold inclusive (5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*–C including English/Welsh and Maths) during the 2014–2016 period rose to 24.4%. The rate for all pupils also rose to 59.0%, meaning the attainment gap between Gypsy/Gypsy Roma pupils and their peers narrowed from 40.5 percentage points to 34.6. The gap with pupils eligible for free school meals reduced from 12.3 percentage points in 2013–15 to 7.2 in 2014–16.

Black and minority ethnic learners are less of a homogenous group and attainment rates vary significantly across different ethnic groups. Mixed ethnicity White and Black Caribbean (47.4%), Black Caribbean (40.0%) and Black African (55.4%) pupils have



particularly lower rates of attainment of the Level 2 threshold inclusive in 2014–2016 than the average for all pupils (59.0%). However, other minority ethnic groups outperform their peers.

The Committee recommended that **Estyn should undertake a thematic review** of the educational provision for these groups of learners. It also recommended that the Welsh Government should consider what more can be done to improve the educational outcomes of these specific groups of learners whose attainment is lower than the average.

While highlighting the range of guidance, resources and tools that it has in place to support these groups of learners, the Welsh Government recognised that they more needs to be done. Estyn will also undertake a short review of the impact of current educational services and support on the educational outcomes of these learners in 2018–2019.

### Funding and data

The Committee heard some evidence that since 2009–2010, funding for specific interventions to support the educational outcomes of Gypsy Roma and Traveller and Minority Ethnic learner has decreased, by as much as 50% per pupil. However, the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams said that other evidence suggested this was not necessarily the case. Consortia and local authorities suggested that there were difficulties in planning the future delivery of services amid **uncertainty of future funding**. Evidence also suggested that one of the effects of the removal of the specific grant for Gypsy Roma and Traveller learners was that the data on numbers of these learners was now less accurate.

The Committee recommended that the Welsh Government should work with regional consortia and local authorities to understand how much funding is being made available to support these learners and how more reliable and accurate data on the numbers of pupils can be recorded. The Welsh Government agreed to these recommendations in principle

### Amalgamation of the grants

The Committee heard **mixed messages on the decision to amalgamate the grants**. On the one hand, having one funding stream was viewed as simpler and less bureaucratic and more flexible, with consortia being able to utilise the funding that best suits local



needs. But the Committee also heard that the lack of specific ring-fenced grants could be seen as a de-prioritisation of particular groups of pupils. It was **not clear whether there had a negative impact** that can be directly attributed to the amalgamation of the grants. However, the Committee believed that it was apparent that the Welsh Government could not be assured that this was the case and therefore recommended the amalgamation is reviewed later in this Assembly.

### The wider context of improving outcomes for all learners

The Committee heard that the Welsh Government's policy was to support improvement for these groups of pupils as part of the improvement for all learners in Wales. The Committee has reservations about this approach and believes that it is:

over-ambitious and unrealistic to expect that a focus on all pupils, even generally on those from deprived backgrounds as measured by eligibility for free school meals, will trickle down sufficiently to specific groups of learners such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and all of the different ethnic groups we have in Wales.

The Committee recommended that the Welsh Government should **strengthen its focus and target funding more specifically** on the educational outcomes of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners, and minority ethnic groups that have lower than average attainment. It said that such efforts should 'not rely solely on more general initiatives to raise attainment across the board'.

### How to follow the debate

The debate on the Children, Young People and Education Committee's report is scheduled for around 3.00pm in [Plenary on Wednesday 3 May 2017](#). It can be watched on [SeneddTV](#) and a transcript will be available on the Assembly's [Record of Proceedings](#).

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