



Estyn

Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

Working together to tackle the impact of poverty on educational achievement

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- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ independent specialist colleges;
- ▲ adult community learning;
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- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ Welsh for adults;
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- ▲ learning in the justice sector.

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Introduction

This report is the third in a series produced in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit letters to Estyn over the past three years. These reports look at how schools and local authorities in Wales are tackling child poverty and disadvantage to improve learners' achievement and wellbeing.

The first report in 2011 was about community-focused schools. The second report in 2012 used a series of case studies to illustrate what good schools in challenging circumstances do to tackle poverty. This latest report looks more closely at the partnership work between schools, local authorities and various agencies and services. The report includes case studies of best practice.

The report is intended for Welsh Government, headteachers, and staff in schools and local authorities. It may also be of interest to parents and staff in other services and agencies who are working with schools to tackle poverty. The report draws on the evidence noted in Appendix 1.

Background

The most recent data shows there has been a slight narrowing in the gap between the performance of learners who are eligible for free school meals and those who are not. However, learners eligible for free school meals still do not perform as well as their peers against all key performance indicators (see Appendix 2). The link between disadvantage and educational underachievement is still strong.

Recent Welsh Government initiatives

The Welsh Government has introduced a number of policy initiatives to help schools and local authorities improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners. In February 2011, the Welsh Government published the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales,¹ which identified the following priorities:

- a focus on early years as fundamental to children's development;
- the need to address the needs of families as well as the needs of the child;
- that building resilience is critical because prevention is more effective than cure;
- that schools should focus on literacy, numeracy and breaking the link between educational attainment and poverty;
- to raise aspirations and maintain a ladder of opportunity for young people; and
- working together with local partnerships.

In 2012, the Welsh Government published the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, which contained further actions to help deliver the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales. In

¹ Information document No: 095/2011

March 2013, an update on baseline indicators for the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales was published. This showed a mixed picture of improvement between 2005 and 2011 for the five indicators relating to education and training.

The Families First programme was launched in 2010. Families First is a programme that promotes the development by local authorities of multi-agency systems and support, with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention for families, particularly those living in poverty. The programme is part of a continuum of provision for children, young people and families that includes:

- Flying Start, for children aged three years and under in the most disadvantaged local areas;
- Communities First, targeting the prospects of the most disadvantaged communities; and
- Integrated Family Support Teams, which provide a holistic approach to families with high level needs.

The Welsh Government is providing £42 million during 2012 -2013 for the Families First programme, with the figure set to increase to £43.4 million in 2013-2014.

In 2011, the Welsh Government introduced the School Effectiveness Grant. The grant drew together a number of different grants available to schools and local authorities to improve outcomes for learners. Its overarching aim is to provide focused support for the Welsh Government's three national priorities.

In 2012, the Welsh Government introduced the Pupil Deprivation Grant to support action to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment. The Welsh Government intends that the School Effectiveness Grant and the Pupil Deprivation Grant should work 'hand in glove'. The grant allocation for 2012-2013 for the School Effectiveness Grant is £32.6m together with £32.4m for the Pupil Deprivation Grant. The School Effectiveness Grant is a rolling grant, which will continue beyond 2015, and funding for the Pupil Deprivation Grant is initially for three years.

In May 2012, the Welsh Government produced guidance on the use of the School Effectiveness Grant and the Pupil Deprivation Grant. The guidance states that, "The grant funding should support schools raising standards across the whole school and narrowing the attainment gap by:

- supporting the development of disadvantaged learners through curriculum content and delivery, with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy;
- putting in place effective learner tracking systems for attainment and wellbeing to help ensure learners progress regardless of their background;
- establishing or strengthening professional learning communities that enable the school to engage with other statutory and voluntary agencies to gain a clearer understanding of young people's needs and how to address them;
- supporting and improving the levels of family engagement and the capacity of parents to support their children's learning;
- using community resources more effectively to support the particular needs of learners in local communities, especially in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage where the Communities First Programme and schools are strongly

- encouraged to work closely together to maximise available resources; or
- strengthening engagement with parents and carers to promote more effective home learning.”²

More recently, in February 2013, the Communities First Pupil Deprivation Grant Match Fund was launched, which aimed to build closer links between schools and their communities in the areas of highest deprivation across Wales.

Recent Estyn reports on poverty

In ‘Tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools: working with the community and other services’ (Estyn 2011), we found that, in a few local authorities, strategies to tackle disadvantage are a high priority and are evaluated with all partners against shared targets to improve the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners. These local authorities have a clearly articulated and strategic drive to tackle the effects of disadvantage.

In the few best examples, workers from different agencies and services work well together to identify disadvantaged learners at risk of underachieving. Schools benefit most where the local authority co-ordinates the work of different agencies to help schools to identify and target their disadvantaged learners. The various agencies involved pool their resources and information to identify these learners, taking good account of their range of needs.

However, in too many cases, the different services within the local authority use different tracking systems to monitor the progress of disadvantaged learners. Often, local authorities do not share this information well enough across services or with schools to help schools with their own tracking and monitoring.

Most local authorities have been aware of the need to develop the leadership skills of headteachers and senior and middle leaders in schools in relation to tackling poverty and disadvantage. Many local authorities organise headteacher meetings, conferences and training events that explore aspects of disadvantage and community-focused schooling. These activities help to raise school leaders’ awareness of the need to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners. However, very few school leaders have received training specifically for developing the skills of partnership working or engaging the community.

In 2012, we published a good practice report called ‘Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools’, which described the characteristics of good practice and illustrated them through case studies from schools in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage. The report identified 10 strategies that effective schools in challenging circumstances use to combat the factors that disadvantage learners. These schools:

- 1 take a whole-school, strategic approach to tackling disadvantage – they have a structured, coherent and focused approach to raising the achievement of

² School Effectiveness Grant and Pupil Deprivation Grant 2013-2015, Welsh Government guidance document 101/2013 April 2013

- disadvantaged learners;
- 2 use data to track the progress of disadvantaged learners – they gather information from a range of sources and use it to analyse the progress of groups of learners;
 - 3 focus on the development of disadvantaged learners' literacy and learning skills;
 - 4 develop the social and emotional skills of disadvantaged learners – they understand the relationship between wellbeing and standards and often restructure their pastoral care system to deal more directly with the specific needs of disadvantaged learners;
 - 5 improve the attendance, punctuality and behaviour of disadvantaged learners – they have suitable sanctions, but find that reward systems work particularly well;
 - 6 tailor the curriculum to the needs of disadvantaged learners – they have mentoring systems that guide learners through their programmes of study and help them to plan their own learning pathways;
 - 7 make great efforts to provide enriching experiences that more advantaged learners take for granted – they offer a varied menu of clubs, activities and cultural and educational trips;
 - 8 listen to disadvantaged learners and provide opportunities for them to play a full part in the school's life – they gather learners' views about teaching and learning, give learners a key role in school development, and involve learners directly to improve standards;
 - 9 engage parents and carers of disadvantaged learners – they communicate and work face-to-face to help them and their children to overcome barriers to learning; and
 - 10 develop the expertise of staff to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners – they have a culture of sharing best practice, provide opportunities for teachers to observe each other, and have performance management targets that are related to raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners.

In 'Statutory INSET in schools' (June 2013), we reported that the Welsh Government expects schools to focus on literacy, numeracy and reducing the impact of poverty on attainment during their INSET days. Almost all schools intend to use at least one INSET day to focus on literacy and a majority of schools have identified numeracy in their INSET plans. However, only a minority of schools have plans to focus on reducing the impact of poverty on attainment in 2012-2013.

Main findings

- 1 Although many schools have recently become more focused on the importance of improving the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged pupils, tackling poverty is still not a high enough priority for all schools. For example, only a minority of schools had specific plans for in-service training on reducing the impact of poverty on attainment in 2012-2013.
- 2 The few schools that succeed in raising the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners focus on the needs of each individual learner. Where learners have complex needs that the school cannot meet on its own, these schools work with agencies to provide broad family-related services to meet those needs or they may work with specialist services to meet specific health or wellbeing needs. For example, a few schools host clinics and drop-in centres for health, counselling and social services on the school site.
- 3 Some schools with vulnerable new pupils, such as those who do not speak English or Welsh, engage families by creating an environment that is welcoming. These schools establish family or nurture rooms where children can learn with their families for a period. Working in these rooms can provide the social and emotional support that the children and their families need when settling into a new school or community.
- 4 Pupils in schools that are involved in 'Team around the family'³ approaches benefit from multi-agency working. The pool of skills within the team means that the health, domestic and social welfare concerns of learners and their families can be addressed. Many schools identify positive outcomes for learners who have been supported through this initiative. A minority of schools we visited identified shortcomings in the implementation of this model, including failing to ensure that all agencies are represented at meetings to discuss progress and agree strategies.
- 5 It is a challenge for schools to co-ordinate and manage the work of several external partners. The few schools that raise the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners significantly identify a senior member of staff to co-ordinate the work with partners. These schools know about and understand the support that the pupil receives from an external partner and staff monitor progress carefully.
- 6 Some schools pool their resources in joint strategies and training to address disadvantage, but few 'professional learning communities' of teachers from a cluster of schools focus on poverty directly. A few schools have designed approaches to improving outcomes for disadvantaged learners across phases through their cluster work. This has helped the pupils to make the transition from primary to secondary school by supporting them, for instance in their social and emotional learning, and in literacy.

³ Team around the Family (TAF) is a multi-disciplinary team of practitioners established on a case-by-case basis to support a child, young person or family.

- 7 In a few clusters, pooling resources, such as funding from the Pupil Deprivation Grant, has helped teachers from secondary and primary schools to understand each other's issues. A few secondary school headteachers in our survey commented that this arrangement had raised their awareness of the importance of interventions in the early years.
- 8 In the best cases, schools evaluate their own work and that of external agencies against clear measures of learner performance. These schools use data to evaluate the impact of new initiatives and share performance information with partners to help to join up the school's approaches with other interventions.
- 9 The introduction of the Pupil Deprivation Grant has widened the range of strategies to raise the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners. However, in many schools, the grant is used to raise the achievement of all lower-ability learners and is not specifically directed towards disadvantaged learners, although the spend will still benefit them if they are low-achieving. In these schools, there are shortcomings in how the Pupil Deprivation Grant is spent that are similar to those that Estyn identified in relation to RAISE funding in the past⁴⁵⁶.
- 10 Although local authorities have a focus on tackling the impact of poverty, only a few have significantly improved the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners. The few local authorities that do raise the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners take a preventative approach to tackling the impact of poverty. They start with a thorough needs-analysis to identify the impact of deprivation on local families. Mapping the needs of disadvantaged families means that the local authority can share intelligence with schools and partners and provide a baseline from which to measure the impact of new initiatives.
- 11 Local authorities do not always share information about disadvantaged learners with other agencies and services. Different services compile their own lists of disadvantaged children and young people. A few local authorities are planning a single, comprehensive database of information on learners and groups of learners. Such a database would enable staff to gain a fuller picture of the needs of individual learners and could be used to underpin a common approach.
- 12 A few local authorities have been successful in bringing together service plans for education, youth, and social services to develop a comprehensive strategy for tackling poverty. They have produced an integrated plan to co-ordinate services and avoid duplication. Generally, however, different services in a local authority or consortia do not align their plans or use common performance indicators for tackling poverty. This means that it is difficult to measure progress jointly.
- 13 A minority of local authorities have specific targets and performance indicators related to closing the gap in outcomes between advantaged and disadvantaged learners. These local authorities measure progress against these targets. However,

⁴ The impact of RAISE 2008-2009: evaluation of the impact of RAISE funding on raising the levels of performance of disadvantaged pupils, Estyn, 2009

⁵ Tackling child poverty and disadvantage in schools, Estyn, 2010

⁶ Tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools: working with the community and other services, Estyn, 2011

many local authorities do not have such specific objectives or measurable targets. They do not use the information they collect well enough to challenge schools to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

- 14 A majority of local authorities provide some training to schools on how to address poverty and disadvantage and other guidance on how to use grant funding. However, only a few local authorities give good advice to schools about how to use their Pupil Deprivation Grant money. There are too few training opportunities for school leaders to learn about strategic approaches to tackling the impact of poverty, including how to plan and evaluate different approaches and how well they work.

Recommendations

In order to continue improving the performance of disadvantaged learners, schools should:

- R1 adopt clear systems for working with outside agencies to support disadvantaged learners, for example the 'Team around the family' approach;
- R2 work with other agencies to engage disadvantaged families more in school life;
- R3 work more closely with partner schools to develop a common approach to tackling poverty and to support pupils' transition from primary to secondary school;
- R4 identify a senior member of staff to co-ordinate work with external services and agencies;
- R5 make sure that staff know how to raise the achievement of disadvantaged learners;
- R6 use systems to track pupils' progress in order to evaluate initiatives that seek to improve wellbeing and standards; and
- R7 use the Pupil Deprivation Grant to target the needs of disadvantaged pupils specifically, whatever their ability.

Local authorities and consortia should:

- R8 work with relevant services and agencies to map the specific needs of disadvantaged pupils and their families and share this information with schools and other agencies on the basis of an agreed protocol;
- R9 take a preventative approach to tackling poverty and use 'Team around the family' approaches in co-ordinating services for disadvantaged families;
- R10 make sure that strategic plans to tackle poverty are aligned to include internal services and external partners and have specific and measurable objectives;
- R11 provide training and support to develop the skills of school leaders to manage partnership working to tackle poverty; and
- R12 provide or broker better advice to schools on practical ways to tackle the impact of poverty.

Schools and partnership working

- 15 The few schools that are successful in improving outcomes for their disadvantaged learners have an explicit plan to tackle poverty, with measurable targets and detailed operational proposals. They take a systematic approach to the challenge, including in their strategic planning the ways in which they will work with parents and with external services and agencies.

Engaging parents

- 16 Many schools in challenging areas are developing new approaches to working with parents. Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have parents who are less likely to be involved in their education and more likely to have a negative perception of education. Many schools also find that parents do not always want to engage with services and agencies that could help them so they work hard to build a trusting relationship with parents. They inform parents about the range of services available and create a welcoming environment.
- 17 For example, Treorchy Primary School has a 'Family Room' Facebook page, where parents can find guidance on strategies to manage behaviour and support healthy living and eating. A wide range of agencies that work closely with the school use the 'Family Room' Facebook page to post information for parents. The school uses the site to conduct surveys of parents' opinions and to monitor the number of parents using the site so they can evaluate its usefulness.
- 18 Many schools in challenging areas have found that holding meetings between parents and external agencies like social services at the school helps parents to feel more at ease. A number of successful schools work with external partners to re-design the school as a 'hub' for a range of services. By hosting clinics, drop-in centres and meeting rooms on the school site, schools and agencies such as counselling services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHs), and the health service have found that they have improved working relationships with other agencies and services. This has also enabled the sharing of information about individual learners.
- 19 The following case study shows how Pillgwenlly Primary School provides a learning centre for disadvantaged families.

A family nurture room in Pillgwenlly Primary School

Context of the school

Pillgwenlly Primary School is a large, multi-cultural school in Newport. It serves the inner-city ward of Pill. The catchment area, which contains Newport docks, is one of the most economically-deprived areas in Wales and has a high rate of unemployment and ethnic diversity. There is a transient population of pupils. The school prides itself on being a 'Nurturing School' and offers a nurture class both in the Foundation Phase and in key stage 2.

Strategy

Since 2010, there has been a significant increase in learners arriving at Pillgwenlly who do not speak English and are new to the UK and its educational system. The school recognises the particular needs of these learners and has a strategy to engage their families in the life and work of the school. In partnership with Gwent Ethnic Minority Support (GEMS), the school established a family nurture room to provide these families with social and emotional support while settling into the local community and school.

Action

The family nurture room provides a place where children can learn in a nurturing setting and their family (parents or grandparents) can join them for part of the week. All learners have a base class. They attend the family nurture room for 55% of their week initially, learning alongside their family for 10% to 20% of the week and attending their base classes for the remainder of the week with home language support. As soon as learners have acquired skills to support them with their learning and wellbeing, they transfer into their base class full-time.

Learners start their day by having breakfast, during which they use their home language as well as English and plan for the day. This provides an opportunity to address any worries about their planned areas of learning. The rest of the morning is focused on acquiring the necessary literacy skills and knowledge to support the children when learning alongside their base-class peers. Once or twice a week, their families come and learn alongside them. Parents also have the opportunity of attending other family learning workshops while their children are in their base classes.

Outcomes

The school has successfully engaged with some of the most 'hard to reach' and vulnerable families in this way and has formed trusting relationships with them. Their participation in school life has resulted in improved standards for disadvantaged learners and has provided those learners with the literacy and social and emotional skills they require to achieve at secondary school. Learners' attitudes to learning develop positively and they participate fully in homework activities and school visits and trips.

There has been an increase in attendance rates. The attendance of those learners attending the family nurture room has risen from between 47% and 84% to between 71% and 96%. Parental attendance at joint learning sessions is between 94% and 100% and it is more than 96% at parental consultations and year-group assemblies

With the support of the nurture room staff, all families have registered with doctors and dentists. All school-based paperwork is completed on time, such as high school application forms and parental consent forms.

Within four months, four learners returned to their base class full-time.

Learners value the additional support as demonstrated by the feedback from two pupils below, translated from the home language.

"I like it when I come to school and I have breakfast. I am learning with my friends. I can help them. I am learning to speak English and how to look in people's eyes when I give them something. And it is only one person talking. When Miss is talking we have to sit nicely and listen. When we won't listen we won't know what to do. Our work won't be good."

"I really like to be in this class. We all help each other and Miss also helps us when we do not understand. Mrs Y teaches us English."

'Team around the family' and multi-agency work

- 20 Many schools in areas of economic disadvantage have strategies to improve outcomes by working with outside agencies that can support learners who have specific health or wellbeing needs.
- 21 Many schools also use outside agencies to contribute to the personal and social education (PSE) programme. In the few best cases, schools liaise with their local authority to identify which agencies can make the best contribution to PSE. In these schools, teachers involve police liaison officers or health service workers to take part in PSE programmes. Some agencies focus on drug and alcohol misuse or the effects of crime on the community or social relationships. Workers in these agencies have up-to-date information and can refer to real-life situations. Where these sessions are done well they can help pupils to deal with the problems that might face them in their lives.
- 22 It is a challenge for schools to co-ordinate and manage the work of a large number of external partners. The few schools that succeed do so when they communicate well with partners. They focus on the needs of each individual learner and co-ordinate interventions to meet the learners' needs. Staff monitor interventions and measure the impact of different approaches by analysing performance data. Staff also understand the range of support that the learner is receiving, even when this is provided outside the school, and try to join up the approaches.
- 23 A recent initiative that is helping schools to co-ordinate multi-agency working is 'Team around the family'. The 'Team around the family' model is a key part of the Welsh Government's Families First policy. Every local authority has a Families First Action Plan (2012-2017), to be delivered with partner organisations under the guidance of Families First delivery groups. 'Team around the family' is a prescribed element of the action plan. Each local authority must explain how they will deliver the project, outlining clear lines of accountability and describe how the project will be evaluated, including an assessment of how the funding is used. At present, the 'Team around the family' approach is at a different stage of development in each local authority.
- 24 In the 'Team around the family' model agencies plan together to deliver services to children, young people and their families in the communities where they live. The

aim is to integrate the delivery of services and match services to local and individual needs. The pool of skills within the team means that health, domestic and social welfare concerns of children and families can be addressed and steps taken to improve attendance, behaviour and attainment. 'Team around the family' also identifies the needs of adults and offers access to practical resources for families.

- 25 In a few local authorities such as Swansea, where 'Team around the family' approaches have been developed well, there is early evidence of its impact. These few local authorities have noted an increased level of need over the last three years. They also report that the momentum provided by Families First has led to more agencies becoming involved in the 'Team around the family'. Schools are positive about the 'Team around the family' approach and its potential for making multi-agency working more effective. Many schools report positive outcomes for the learners who are supported through this approach.
- 26 Coedcae Comprehensive School in Llanelli is using the 'Team around the family' model and holds weekly meetings to facilitate communication between agencies. Both internal and external staff attend the weekly meetings, including the 'Team around the family' co-ordinator, assistant head, pupil support manager, school link social worker, school nurse, pupil support assistants, pupil support leaders, and the school youth worker. The team identifies pupil needs in a holistic way, and provides appropriate intervention. Progress is monitored by the team to ensure that agreed actions are completed. Since September 2012, the school has been involved in a pilot to extend the 'Team around the family' model to its feeder primary schools, which should enable earlier intervention and better continuity in the support provided during and after pupils' transition to secondary schools.
- 27 The 'Team around the family' can play an important part in helping disadvantaged families to overcome challenges and enable children to reach their full potential. Where there are multiple problems that one service cannot address, schools can work with families to identify these early, focus on their strengths, and assess their needs. The following case study shows how multi-agency working is managed in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The 'Canopi'⁷ partnership ensures that the relevant services and agencies meet regularly and are fully informed about each other's services.

Multi-agency work in Treorchy Primary School

Context of the school

Treorchy Primary School is a community-focused school serving upper Rhondda communities. The area is characterised by high levels of economic inactivity. The school has 344 pupils on roll, aged three to 11. Just over a quarter of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Senior managers identified that reducing the impact of poverty on achievement should become a strategic priority for the school.

⁷ Canopi is an approach to multi-agency working in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Partners in the scheme include Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC, Cwm Taf Local Health Board, South Wales Police, Voluntary sector organisations, Communities First, Local Safeguarding Children's Board and the Youth Offending Service.

Strategy

The school took a whole-family approach to tackling disadvantage. Senior managers developed a strategy that included:

- establishing multi-agency partnerships;
- a training programme for staff; and
- a plan for family support and learning

A key part of this strategy was to use Canopi to coordinate multi-agency working to support disadvantaged families.

Action

Senior managers appointed a wellbeing officer and set up a family room to engage with the families of disadvantaged learners. The school's approach has been to help families tackle their immediate short-term issues such as housing, domestic violence and establishing routines. Alongside this, they also improve parents' skills in parenting and basic skills so that they can fulfil their role as their child's first educator.

The school co-ordinates services and practitioners around the child and family, and through Canopi is able to sign-post families to the relevant specialists. The school works in partnership with a wide range of agencies that deliver training on literacy, numeracy, financial management, digital and social skills.

The school also develops training and interventions through multi-agency partners who join local Canopi meetings.

The initial engagement with families was through Family Learning, focusing on literacy and numeracy. The school targeted families of children that were receiving free school meals and were under-achieving.

The school then devised a plan to develop an adult learning programme that included food hygiene, nutrition, personal development, paediatric first aid, essential skills (focusing on literacy and numeracy) and parenting and nurture programmes. These were run in conjunction with multi-agency partners through Canopi.

The school has run a very successful Men Behaving Dadly programme with the fathers of underachieving children. This proved successful and resulted in fathers who had previously been strangers within the school engaging in weekly after-school activities with their children. Through liaison with Canopi, the families that completed the programme were given the opportunity of a three-day activity-packed holiday funded by a multi-agency partner as an incentive for their engagement.

The school's wellbeing officer reports to senior management weekly on the progress of families involved with the programmes. The wellbeing officer also provides teachers with information about any additional support the child receives.

The school has developed a system to identify need within families and track participation. The school also uses a commercial measurement tool to monitor the involvement of parents and the impact of actions on learners.

Senior managers meet every half term with families to discuss progress as a result of engaging with the school and partner agencies. The focus for these meetings is on the impact that the parents feel this is having on their child's attainment and on family wellbeing.

Outcomes

Parents have commented on the improved behaviour of their children and the enhanced relationships with teachers, parents and other adults. Children of families targeted to take part in workshops or courses in the family room attend school more regularly and are more confident.

The school is also beginning to see a positive impact on the outcomes of disadvantaged learners in the Foundation Phase.

On average, attendance has risen by nearly six percentage points for the children whose families have engaged with the school.

The children in nursery class attended the family room both to aid their personal and social development and their general language, literacy and communication skills. The children in receipt of free school meals who were targeted within this programme have made very good progress. All are predicted to achieve the expected level for all children in language, literacy and communication. This greatly exceeds their expected outcomes on entry.

The learners eligible for free school meals in the programme are on target to achieve the expected level for personal and social achievement. This is notable because these learners had low levels of personal and social skills on entry.

Parents take part in half termly one-to-one meetings with the wellbeing officer, where they discuss their personal learning journey, actions and aspirations. Many more parents are now willing to engage with the school and have gained recognised qualifications for the first time in their lives. This has given them the confidence to support their children's learning.

- 28 Although schools generally welcome the 'Team around the family' approach, a minority of schools identified problems with the model. For example, the high turnover of staff in some external agencies means that continuity of support for learners and their families is compromised. This is particularly difficult for looked-after children who may have contact with a number of social workers during their schooling. Schools and local authorities also report that 'Team around the family' meetings are often cancelled at short notice or representatives are unable to attend. This is frustrating for all parties and means that meetings have to be rescheduled, and parents and partners have to reconvene at a later date. This is inconvenient for families and sometimes results in a lengthy wait for issues to be resolved. Schools also say that staff from other agencies do not understand the timetabling constraints of schools and organise meetings during the school day. Schools often find that they have to wait a long time to receive the reports that detail further action and outcomes. This means that support for learners may be delayed.

Co-ordinating and managing partnership working

- 29 In many schools, the role of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) or Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) includes responsibility for the progress of disadvantaged learners. This focuses the work with disadvantaged learners too strongly on learners with special educational needs. Although a high proportion of learners with special educational needs are eligible for free school meals, this arrangement does not ensure that disadvantaged learners of all abilities are supported. SENCos and ALNCoS, especially in primary schools, often have a substantial teaching commitment. This teaching commitment, together with their other responsibilities means that they often do not have enough time to co-ordinate and develop approaches to tackle poverty and disadvantage across the whole ability-range.
- 30 Some schools identify a senior leader to be responsible for the performance of disadvantaged learners. This is a particularly important feature in the few schools that work well with a range of partners. These senior leaders are responsible for supporting the achievement of all disadvantaged learners whatever their needs and abilities.
- 31 These senior leaders:
- seek out agencies and services that will help pupils to meet challenges;
 - are well informed about the functions of professionals in other agencies and services;
 - know who the key people are and liaise with them;
 - oversee the co-ordination of partnership work;
 - manage the sharing of relevant information between agencies and services and the school;
 - monitor learner progress;
 - support school staff to manage partnership work;
 - support individual programmes and initiatives;
 - review regularly the work of services and their impact on pupils;
 - communicate with service leaders in the local authority and external agencies and internally;
 - guard confidentiality, but share information in line with agreed protocols; and
 - include pupils and families in devising the support programme.
- 32 A few large secondary schools share the above responsibilities across the senior team. For example, Duffryn High School links a member of the senior leadership team with each agency working in the school. This means that each leader has a focus on a particular agency intervention with a set of individual pupils.
- 33 The following case study shows how the wellbeing manager in Alexandra Primary School has worked in partnership to raise the achievement of its learners.

The work of a wellbeing manager

Context of the school

Alexandra Primary School serves a community in the centre of Wrexham. Most of the learners are drawn from the Caia Park Estate, an area of significant social disadvantage with nearly a half of learners eligible for free school meals.

There are a significant number of learners who have emotional difficulties, social problems, family difficulties, poor motivation, disaffection, poor social skills, chaotic home life, and lack of parental support and care.

Strategy

The school aims to enable all learners to meet their potential, often against great odds. School development planning takes good account of deprivation by offering an enriched curriculum, an open door policy for parents and making pastoral support a priority in every classroom.

The school has a senior member of staff with responsibility for the achievement of disadvantaged learners.

Action

The school used its RAISE funding to improve attendance by funding a worker based in school who liaised with the local authority's attendance officer. The school-based worker had to have the ability to communicate well with and gain the respect of parents, and have the skills to liaise with outside agencies. The school decided to appoint a senior teacher to this role to reflect the importance of the responsibilities. The initial brief of this teacher was to improve attendance, but, over time, the school created a broader role for this member of staff to support learners' wellbeing more generally.

The role of the designated teacher became that of wellbeing manager. This post is now funded through the Pupil Deprivation Grant.

The wellbeing manager:

- is responsible for improvement in attendance and punctuality;
- manages behaviour and pastoral support;
- manages the additional support for learners and supports them when and where needed;
- meets parents and signposts parents to the relevant support services;
- attends "Team around the child", Children in Need, and child protection meetings and communicates with relevant agencies, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Action for Children, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), Parenting Support, and educational psychology services; and
- supports teachers to help learners with emotional and social issues; and supports teachers' own wellbeing.

The wellbeing manager's role is evaluated through performance management processes based on improvements in attendance, performance and attitudes.

Outcomes

Positive outcomes include:

- performance in the core subject indicator at key stage 2, which has improved from 47% in 2007-2008 to 79% in 2011-2012;
- attendance that has increased year-on-year since 2009 and currently stands at 93%;
- more effective learning in class, with better use of teaching time;
- a reduction in teachers' sickness absence due to stress; and
- an increase in time for the headteacher to focus on school improvement.

There has been a steady narrowing of the gap in performance against the core subject indicator at key stage 2 between those eligible for free school meals and those who are not. In 2009, the gap in performance was 20 percentage points but by 2012 the gap had reduced to 10 percentage points. Almost all learners who are eligible for free school meals make good progress, so that by the end of key stage 2 almost all achieve the level expected. There have been no exclusions for five years.

There have also been positive outcomes in supporting learners' social and emotional skills.

- PASS⁸ results show how excellent relationships have been developed with children and parents;
- more than 98% of PASS results show positive values;
- learners show increased confidence, self-esteem, sense of worth, and happiness in school;
- learners feel supported and fairly treated, and have a better relationship with their parents; and
- learners have better relationships with teachers / support workers: they feel safe, have increased motivation, and are more prepared to learn.

The school monitors the impact of intervention strategies and support through Action for Children reports; student assistance programme and social skills group evaluations; 'Team around the child' results; and social services reports. These evaluation reports indicate that interventions with disadvantaged learners have been successful.

- 34 The best designated leaders for disadvantage make sure that all staff in the school are aware of the partnership working that is taking place. They notify staff of the interventions that individual learners receive. This helps staff to gain a better understanding of the needs of their learners and improves communication about the progress of individuals.

⁸ Pupil Attitude to Self and School survey

- 35 They also ensure that external partners are aware of the school's strategic aims to tackle poverty and disadvantage, and share school performance information with external partners to ensure that school approaches are consistent with intervention strategies. In these schools there is a productive dialogue between school staff and their external partners. In Tywyn Primary School, for example, external staff exchange notes with school staff using a common notebook to log activities and progress. This helps to provide continuity in support.
- 36 The schools that understand how to improve the outcomes for disadvantaged learners invite all staff, including those from external partners, to staff meetings and training events. They involve partners from specialist services and agencies in training events on specific aspects of supporting disadvantaged learners such as how to improve learners' use of social language. In many cases, they invite workers from outside organisations to take a leading role in training. They treat all who contribute to supporting disadvantaged learners as members of the school staff.

Collaboration between schools

- 37 In many local authorities, the Pupil Deprivation Grant has been allocated to clusters of schools so that schools are encouraged to pool their resources to make more cost-effective spending decisions. In Gwynedd there are many small schools, and the pooled funding has been used to train all teachers in a cluster at once.
- 38 In a few clusters, pooling resources has helped teachers from secondary and primary schools to understand each other's issues. A few secondary school headteachers in our survey commented that this arrangement had raised their awareness of the importance of interventions in the early years. A few schools have designed approaches to improving outcomes for disadvantaged learners across phases through their cluster work. This has helped the pupils to make the transition from primary to secondary school by supporting them, often in their social and emotional learning, and literacy.
- 39 In many areas of high deprivation, learners enter school with limited language skills. Many schools have introduced strategies to help learners from deprived backgrounds to improve their language skills and some primary schools have narrowed the gap in performance in literacy between those who are eligible for free school meals and those who are not. However, too many schools do not have good enough approaches to ensuring continuity of skills progression between primary and secondary school.
- 40 Rhymney High School has employed a primary-trained teacher to work with Year 7 learners to help learners to continue to make progress in their reading. The teacher uses the same reading scheme as partner primary schools. Although this approach does not specifically target disadvantaged learners, it helps to ensure continuity for those learners who have benefitted from intervention schemes in the primary school.
- 41 Coedcae Comprehensive School shares approaches to literacy with their partner primary schools. The school's analysis of the impact of this work has found that fewer learners arrive in Year 7 with reading ages below their chronological age, and fewer learners require multi-agency involvement.

- 42 Duffryn High School has a wide variety of partner primary schools, some with high proportions of minority ethnic population, others that are predominantly white working class, but most have high numbers of learners eligible for free school meals. To improve partnership working, a member of the secondary school's senior leadership team sits on the governing body of four of the seven partner schools. They have found that this arrangement has enabled the secondary school to identify the needs of individual learners or groups of learners before they move to the secondary school so they can plan ahead to support these learners when they join Year 7.
- 43 Tywyn Primary School shares a counsellor with its partner secondary school. This enables teachers to track the progress of individual learners from key stage 2 to key stage 3, so that teachers can plan better continuity in the support for individual learners.
- 44 Generally however, there are too few examples of professional learning communities (PLCs) in Wales with a specific focus on tackling poverty. A few schools in areas of deprivation, such as Treorchy Comprehensive School and Llwynypia Primary School, have found that setting up working groups of teachers across a cluster of schools to focus on aspects of poverty has improved outcomes for disadvantaged learners. These schools have shared their strategies for raising achievement and have enhanced each other's practice. A few schools have found that communication between schools has been improved in this way.

Evaluating impact

- 45 In the last few years, many schools have started analysing data on the outcomes for disadvantaged learners. The Pupil Deprivation Grant, the School Effectiveness Grant, the Estyn inspection framework, and the Welsh Government data packs have all contributed to raising managers' awareness of the need to develop their data and tracking systems. More schools now monitor the progress of learners who are eligible for free school meals. A few schools also use this information to evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives. There has been an increase in the number of staff who have received training in the use of data, and in a minority of schools there has also been improved accountability for raising standards. The schools that are most successful in tackling poverty:
- track the progress of individuals and groups of learners;
 - benchmark their progress against that in other schools;
 - use a range of quantitative and qualitative information on learners' wellbeing and perceptions (such as the Boxall Profile or PASS), including to look at year-on-year patterns;
 - monitor interventions at regular intervals and review, refine or abandon strategies that do not result in improvement for learners; and
 - monitor the effectiveness of teachers in improving the outcomes of individuals or groups of learners.
- 46 In the best schools, the work of external agencies and services is monitored carefully against improvements in learners' performance. These schools use their data systems to evaluate the impact of this work. They check learners' progress and achievement in standards, wellbeing and attendance regularly to ensure that new

interventions and initiatives are making a difference. For learners with additional learning needs, these schools also use learners' individual education plans to monitor learners' progress against their targets and by specific interventions. In the best cases, learners and their families are involved in the evaluation of interventions.

- 47 In a few effective schools, leaders and managers contribute to the performance management of external partners. They employ clear management arrangements to ensure that staff from outside agencies work to achieve the strategic priorities of the school. They operate quality assurance procedures such as 'learning walks' to monitor the impact that external partners have on their disadvantaged learners. These processes ensure that all staff receive consistent messages about key school objectives to raise the achievement of disadvantaged learners. In a few effective schools, senior leaders intervene where the quality of external support does not meet required expectations.
- 48 However, in a majority of schools, leaders and managers do not quality assure the work of external partners. In many schools, the impact of the work of outside agencies and services is not evaluated well enough and relies too heavily on informal processes and anecdotal evidence. Too many schools do not focus on which approaches are most effective with disadvantaged learners. This means that their subsequent planning does not benefit from knowing what works well and what does not.

The Pupil Deprivation Grant

- 49 The Pupil Deprivation Grant was introduced to give schools extra resources to raise the achievement of disadvantaged learners. The Welsh Government guidance for the Pupil Deprivation Grant does not say that school actions designed to bring about improvements in the achievement of deprived learners need to be focused on these learners.
- 50 In many schools, plans for the Pupil Deprivation Grant are focused on raising the achievement of lower-ability learners, and not specifically those who are disadvantaged by poverty. In these schools, Pupil Deprivation Grant spending has the same shortcomings that were identified by Estyn in relation to RAISE funding in the past⁹¹⁰¹¹.
- 51 The guidance suggests that schools should consider their School Effectiveness Grant spending together with the Pupil Deprivation Grant plans. The guidance suggests that schools work with partner organisations to improve learners' literacy and numeracy. It does not explicitly recommend that schools work in partnership with other schools, services or agencies to reduce the impact of poverty on learners' achievement.
- 52 Many schools use their grant to design approaches to improving learners' literacy and numeracy. In a few plans, these approaches address the specific issues facing

⁹ The impact of RAISE 2008-2009: evaluation of the impact of RAISE funding on raising the levels of performance of disadvantaged pupils, Estyn, 2009

¹⁰ Tackling child poverty and disadvantage in schools, Estyn, 2010

¹¹ Tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools: working with the community and other services, Estyn, 2011

deprived learners and offer mentoring from staff to pupils to provide them with support and resources to do their work. Mentors will also engage parents in the learning process.

- 53 Schools use their grant monies to fund a range of projects with a focus on attendance, electronic data tracking systems and strategies to develop learners' social and emotional wellbeing. A majority of schools have also used their funding to employ extra staff. In a minority of schools, this support is targeted at learners who are eligible for free school meals, and involves staff acting as mentors or liaising with families.
- 54 Only in a minority of cases do these approaches focus specifically enough on the needs of disadvantaged learners. Although this extra support will involve some disadvantaged learners, it does not ensure that all of them benefit. Often, those learners who are achieving reasonably well but not to the level of their potential do not receive the attention and support that they need.
- 55 In too many schools, plans for the grant are not based on the outcomes of self-evaluation and do not link well enough to the school's strategic plans. In a majority of schools, tracking systems are not sophisticated enough to capture improvements in standards and wellbeing.
- 56 Many schools and local authorities are aware of the general approaches required to support disadvantaged learners. However, they are unsure as to precisely which strategies are the most effective in tackling poverty and disadvantage. This lack of specific knowledge, especially when coupled with limited evaluation processes, means that these schools do not support disadvantaged learners in the most timely or effective way.
- 57 A few schools have used the research undertaken by the Sutton Trust to implement strategies that have been tried and tested, such as peer tutoring, or giving learners more feedback on their progress. The Sutton Trust uses research evidence on improving learning and outcomes to help schools make more informed choices about how to support their learners. The Toolkit of Strategies to Improve Learning: Summary for Schools Spending the Pupil Premium, by the Sutton Trust, provides guidance on different approaches to support disadvantaged learners. The toolkit identifies the strengths of different approaches to improving learning and estimates the costs of adopting the approaches.
- 58 All local authorities have given advice to schools about using the Pupil Deprivation Grant but it is not specific enough. All local authorities scrutinise schools' spending plans for the Pupil Deprivation Grant. However, in many cases, the feedback they have given to schools is more about generic project-planning approaches than it is about identifying specific strategies to support specifically disadvantaged learners. For example, local authorities comment that targets are not specific enough, or that plans need to identify responsible staff. While this advice is useful, it does not go far enough to help the school to improve outcomes for individual pupils.

Local authorities and partnership working

Strategic planning

- 59 The introduction of the Pupil Deprivation Grant has meant that many local authorities are becoming more focused on tackling poverty and on developing strategies for evaluating the impact of their approaches to reducing the impact of disadvantage. However, the impact of these strategies has been limited.
- 60 The creation of regional consortia to deliver school improvement services (SIS) has created greater complexity because additional learning needs (ALN) and educational inclusion services are still delivered at local authority level. Disadvantaged pupils are more likely to have ALN but the provision of additional support for those needs should be aligned with the larger thrust for school improvement, which is about securing improvements for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged by poverty. Separating out the mechanisms for delivering SIS from those for ALN and inclusion makes alignment more difficult.
- 61 In 2012, the Welsh Government issued guidance to local authorities and their partners to devise single integrated plans. “Shared Purpose – Shared Delivery Guidance on Integrating Partnerships and Plans”, is intended to help local government and the health sector to improve their collaborative work to improve planning, service and delivery.
- 62 In most local authorities’ plans, it is still sometimes difficult to identify how planned actions are intended to have an impact on outcomes for learners. The priorities for education are not linked well enough across key strategic documents, such as the Children and Young People’s Plan, the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Strategy, the Community Strategy and the Welsh Language Plan. In many local authorities’ planning, objectives are not specific enough, there are too few measurable targets, and lines of accountability are unclear.
- 63 Working towards integrated planning to streamline service delivery has helped to sharpen local authorities’ focus on how they can develop partnerships to improve outcomes of disadvantaged learners. All local authorities should now have co-ordinated service plans for education, youth, and social services to develop a comprehensive strategy for tackling poverty and disadvantage. A few authorities have produced an integrated plan that provides a co-ordinated approach to services delivery to ensure adequate provision and to avoid duplication, for example, in the voluntary sector, 14-19 Learning Pathways, and youth work. However, in many authorities, strategic planning does not involve analysing outcomes in order to identify how well the plan has achieved its objectives. A majority of plans lack numerical baselines or clear targets that could be used to judge the impact of actions.
- 64 A few local authorities, such as Swansea, have a well-established track record of partnership working. The authority’s partnership plans and strategies focus on national and local priorities clearly. The work towards the Single Integrated Plan, ‘One Swansea’, is developing well because representatives from partners, such as

the Children and Young People's Partnership (CYPP) and the Local Service Board (LSB), are helping to ensure that existing priorities are mapped appropriately against the priorities of the single plan. The authority plans and monitors provision well using outcomes to measure impact and to ensure all partners are held to account. The authority's systems identify the impact of activities upon key outcome areas. Through careful planning, the authority has sustained an effective multi-agency approach to tackling poverty and improving opportunities for children and young people and their families.

- 65 A majority of local authorities do not involve schools well enough in their strategic planning. Most local authorities consult schools when they make changes to their plans. Where schools are represented on boards, such as the CYPP, Communities First or the LSBs, school leaders make a useful contribution to planning. However, they do not have enough say in strategic planning for partnership work in the local authority. The few best plans have been developed through extensive consultation with partners and have been designed in the light of feedback from families, children and young people.
- 66 A minority of local authorities have reorganised their corporate structure in a way that has improved partnership working. These changes have had an impact on communication, joint work and the sharing of key information through a more streamlined system of meetings. There are also clearer channels of line management and communication. This means that key partners in tackling poverty and disadvantage, such as the Youth Offending Team or agencies that work to prevent drug and alcohol misuse, can respond more quickly to problems faced by individual learners and also work in a more preventative way to support disadvantaged families.
- 67 Carmarthenshire local authority identified that the partnership between education and children's services is central to enabling agencies and partners to support schools and provide intervention quickly and appropriately. The local authority re-structured so that children and education services are in one directorate. This has had a positive impact on the way that services are co-ordinated across schools. For example, the local health authority now finds that there are fewer barriers to organising their work in schools. The restructure has meant that the local authority and its strategic partners have merged priorities to provide a suite of services for children and young people that is helpful in tackling issues of poverty and disadvantage. This has led to a reduction in the number of disadvantaged young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), and those leaving school without a qualification. Carmarthenshire has reduced the percentage of 15-year-old pupils leaving full-time education without a recognised qualification from 1.4% in 2008 to 0% in 2012. Over the last three years, the gap in attainment between learners eligible for free school meals and those who are not reduced at key stage 4 in those indicators that include English and mathematics and there has been a reduction in the number of unauthorised absences in schools across the local authority.
- 68 The few local authorities, such as Swansea and Neath Port Talbot, that are effective in improving outcomes for disadvantaged learners take a preventative approach to tackling issues of poverty that also informs their strategic planning. They start with a

thorough needs analysis of the local community that shows the nature and extent of the impact of deprivation on local families. This evidence base enables the local authority and its partners to inform the actions they take to address issues of poverty, and provides a baseline from which to measure the impact of these actions. This approach to tackling poverty and disadvantage means that local authorities can target preventative schemes and early intervention to address problems. It also allows services to engage with families to improve parents' capacity to support their children's learning.

- 69 Neath Port Talbot works in close partnership with its schools to track the performance of disadvantaged learners and also uses information from its partner organisations to identify the needs of the most disadvantaged families in the area. By mapping disadvantaged families in this way, the local authority is able to share intelligence about disadvantaged learners with its schools. This enables services within the authority and schools to support the families of deprived learners.

The use of a 'vulnerable families mapping tool' in Neath Port Talbot

Context

The percentage of learners aged five to 15 eligible for free school meals is 24.5% in primary schools in Neath Port Talbot compared to 20.6% nationally. In secondary schools, 21.8% of learners in the authority are eligible for free school meals compared to 17.4% nationally.

Mapping needs

Neath Port Talbot uses a commercial tracking tool to monitor performance of learners who are eligible for free school meals, including their attendance, exclusions, the difference between boys' and girls' outcomes and the progress learners make against their agreed targets. This is used well to challenge schools and, as a result, schools are focused on raising the attainment of disadvantaged learners.

A vulnerable families mapping exercise was conducted in Neath Port Talbot by the CYPP with the assistance of a consultancy company. The mapping exercise formed part of the CYPP's needs assessment for the national Families First Programme. The exercise was undertaken in collaboration with the LSB on a European Social Fund funded 'Capacity Building' project to improve understanding of and response to the needs of the most vulnerable families in the local authority.

The mapping exercise sought to identify the most vulnerable families in the local authority that were not receiving specialist or statutory service intervention. The exercise used a tool designed by the consultants based on the Think Family research (from the UK government's Social Exclusion Unit). The tool used a set of indicators of deprivation or vulnerability.

Through the exercise, partners provided information to identify their most vulnerable families. The indicators include:

- no parent in work;
- no parent with qualifications;
- evidence of domestic violence;

- low income; or
- evidence of substance or alcohol misuse and poor parental mental health.

All CYPP and LSB partners were invited to contribute to the exercise. This included health visitors, social workers, child care officers, teachers, education welfare officers, education psychologists, welfare rights workers, voluntary sector service providers and others.

All schools were invited to attend briefing sessions on the mapping exercise and received a number of emails explaining the process. Those schools that participated were invited to contact the project co-ordinators for help and advice about the exercise and the research base at any time. Regardless of whether individual schools participated in the exercise or not they were invited to a presentation of the findings.

More than 2,000 submissions were made by all partners during the three-month period of the mapping exercise about vulnerable families known to practitioners. From these submissions, more than 1,700 families were identified. The levels and the nature of vulnerability for these families varied from those that professionals identified as having all the indicators of vulnerability to those with a few.

A detailed report was prepared by the consultants based on an analysis of submissions. This provided information about the prevalence of particular vulnerabilities in Neath Port Talbot and mapped the number of vulnerable families across areas of deprivation (Flying Start and Communities First areas) and by the local Health Board's Community Network areas. The report was shared with all partners. In addition, every partner that submitted information concerning families known to them received information back from the consultants, which identified where other professionals had submitted information on the same families. This enabled them to see whether the level of vulnerability was any higher or different in nature than they knew from their own contact with the families.

A presentation of findings was organised for all partners, which also provided an opportunity to debate the implications of the findings for strategic planning and for individual organisations, services and schools.

The mapping tool and the process followed to complete the exercise helped partners to reflect on how well they were responding to the needs of individual learners and families. All the schools that made submissions received details back on those families known to them, which showed how other agencies had assessed the level of vulnerability. Guidance was sent to all agencies about actions they might take if they were concerned that the level of vulnerability was greater than had been thought. This included suggestions to review their current response or to liaise with specific partners, or if need be, to refer to health or social services.

Outcomes

As a result of actions taken, outcomes have improved. Over the last three years, the attendance rates of primary school learners have increased.

The percentage of learners eligible for free school meals achieving the core subject indicator at key stage 2 has risen from 57% in 2010 to 67% in 2012.

In 2012, the gap in performance between those learners eligible for free school meals and those who are not eligible in the Foundation Phase was two percentage points below the Welsh average

Using data to support schools in tackling poverty

- 70 Over the last two years there has been an increase in the number of local authorities that share data on disadvantaged learners with their schools. However, the quality of this information depends on the nature and scope of data held by the local authority.
- 71 Local authorities identify their most disadvantaged learners as those who are eligible for free school meals. They compare the performance of learners eligible for free school meals against the performance of those not eligible in order to monitor the relative progress of learners. However, only a minority of authorities have specific and measurable targets in their key performance indicators for narrowing the gap between the two groups and measure progress against the targets. The analysis of this data has improved in the last two years, and many authorities now understand which schools serve disadvantaged learners well. A minority of authorities have used this information to organise events and meetings to share effective practice between schools. However, many local authorities do not use this information well enough to challenge schools to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners.
- 72 A majority of local authorities also use wellbeing measures, such as Pupil Attitude to Self and School (PASS). However, only a few authorities use a broad range of data to examine the impact of deprivation on learners, track their progress, analyse trends in performance and plan for improvement. A minority of authorities use a broader approach to identify their disadvantaged learners. For example, they have studied the relationship between attendance and benefit claims, crime and unemployment. This gives local authorities a better understanding of the issues related to poverty in their communities.

Identifying and sharing data with partners

- 73 Although many local authorities are developing their partnerships to improve joint working, they do not always share information about disadvantaged learners with other agencies and services and this is a barrier to progress. Different services compile their own lists of disadvantaged children and young people. The fact that they use different criteria to categorise disadvantage is also a barrier to sharing information and to common understanding. It also constrains joint self-evaluation.
- 74 Services within the local authorities do not align those performance indicators that measure how well the effects of poverty are tracked. This means that it is difficult to measure the impact of the work on disadvantaged learners. The voluntary sector has different funding streams that have different requirements for tracking progress. This makes the process of aligning performance indicators more complex and sharing data more problematic.

- 75 A few local authorities are working towards having a single, comprehensive database for information on learners and groups of learners. This would benefit teachers, officers and key workers by giving a full picture of the needs of individual learners. It would also enable better targeting and tracking of learners. However, this work is at an early stage and requires protocols for information-sharing.
- 76 Swansea local authority has developed the 'Vulnerability Assessment Profiles' (VAP) to collect a range of data on individual learners. The database includes information about attendance, exclusions, special educational needs, literacy levels, and school moves, as well as identifying if the learner is eligible for free school meals, has English as an additional language or is looked after by the local authority. This data is used for example, by Young People Services to identify specific needs and to match needs to available services. The VAP database enables officers to analyse the performance of services. In addition, managers use the VAP data to guide their supervision sessions with youth workers in order to ensure that the authority is providing a sufficiently intensive and tailored service to meet different levels of need. This forms part of the quality assurance mechanism within the service at every level of the performance process.
- 77 A few local authorities have redesigned their procedures for the performance management of officers to include achievement against performance measures that demonstrate the impact of provision on individual learners, groups of learners and communities. This has made officers more accountable for the work of services they offer or broker to tackle poverty and disadvantage. In Denbighshire, for example, a Joint Performance Management Framework is used as an assessment tool across partnership activity, clearly linking actions and outcomes to strategic aims. This has helped to improve the consistency of terminology and measures across a range of services

Supporting schools in their partnership work

- 78 Many local authorities have arranged training to support schools in tackling poverty and disadvantage. These events, conferences and meetings have raised awareness about issues such as the use of data to track progress including emotional health and wellbeing, and learner voice. A few authorities, such as Gwynedd, have provided courses to focus specifically on practical strategies to improve outcomes for deprived learners, for example by adding 'Cau'r bwlch' ('Closing the gap') to all subject-based training.
- 79 A majority of local authorities provide general guidance on addressing poverty and disadvantage through their advice about the use of grant funding. However, generally across local authorities, there are still too few opportunities for school leaders to consider strategic approaches to tackling poverty or how to plan and evaluate approaches to raise the achievement of disadvantaged learners. In general, the guidance provided by local authorities is only used well in schools where there is effective leadership, and does not provide enough support for underperforming schools.
- 80 Although local authorities have given general advice to schools about how to use their grant monies, in the majority of schools in our survey the discussions with the

local authority about school improvement did not focus on specific issues of tackling poverty and disadvantage appropriate to their school context or how to support the particular needs of disadvantaged learners in their school. Only a few schools had support from their local authority in how to manage partnership working. This means that many schools have not had enough opportunities to explore the best ways to raise the achievement of their disadvantaged learners, or the most effective means to organise partnership work in their school.

- 81 Many authorities have facilitated cluster-working among groups of schools. This has been particularly helpful to make the best use of grant monies and to maximise external agency work in schools, for example in tackling attendance or behaviour issues. However, many local authorities do not make sure that support for learners continues when they move from primary to secondary schools.
- 82 A few local authorities co-ordinate initiatives between schools and support services well to help schools to work with disadvantaged families. In Wrexham, where 18.6% of learners aged five to 15 were eligible for free school meals in 2012, the local authority has implemented a strategy to deploy parent support advisers to support partnership work with parents in schools. In 2010, the authority ran a pilot programme to introduce parent support advisers into three primary schools in the most challenging areas. After an initial period of induction and training, all started working with parents whose children attend their respective schools. Typically, each week the parent support advisers run a drop-in session, talk to parents in the playground, see them in one-to-one meetings about confidential matters, make home visits and telephone parents about children's welfare, behaviour and attendance. They also attend meetings with the family to provide information, training and advice about good parenting. The parent support advisers have a key role in improving the sharing of information and best practice between services and the school. They maintain links with Wrexham family information service and other local service providers to ensure good knowledge of local services that support parents and their families. They also participate in internal and cross-organisation working groups as appropriate for exchange of information and best practice. Work to achieve higher rates of attendance in Wrexham primary schools has had a positive impact. The percentages of authorised and unauthorised absences have fallen in Wrexham primary schools over the last three years.
- 83 In a few local authorities, there are close links between schools and local authority services such as youth services, specialist support services or voluntary organisations. Officers ensure that there is good support for schools to assist their disadvantaged learners. They provide training for staff and use their expertise to foster better links with parents. However, in many local authorities, ways in which partners can work together to overcome barriers to learning for disadvantaged learners are not well established.

Appendix 1: Evidence base

This report is based on evidence from visits to schools, scrutiny of data and reports on inspections of schools and local authority education services.

The sample of 26 schools included English-medium and Welsh-medium schools, and schools in rural and urban areas. The sample included 10 secondary schools and 16 primary schools. All schools in the survey have at least 20% of their learners eligible for free school meals and are situated in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage.

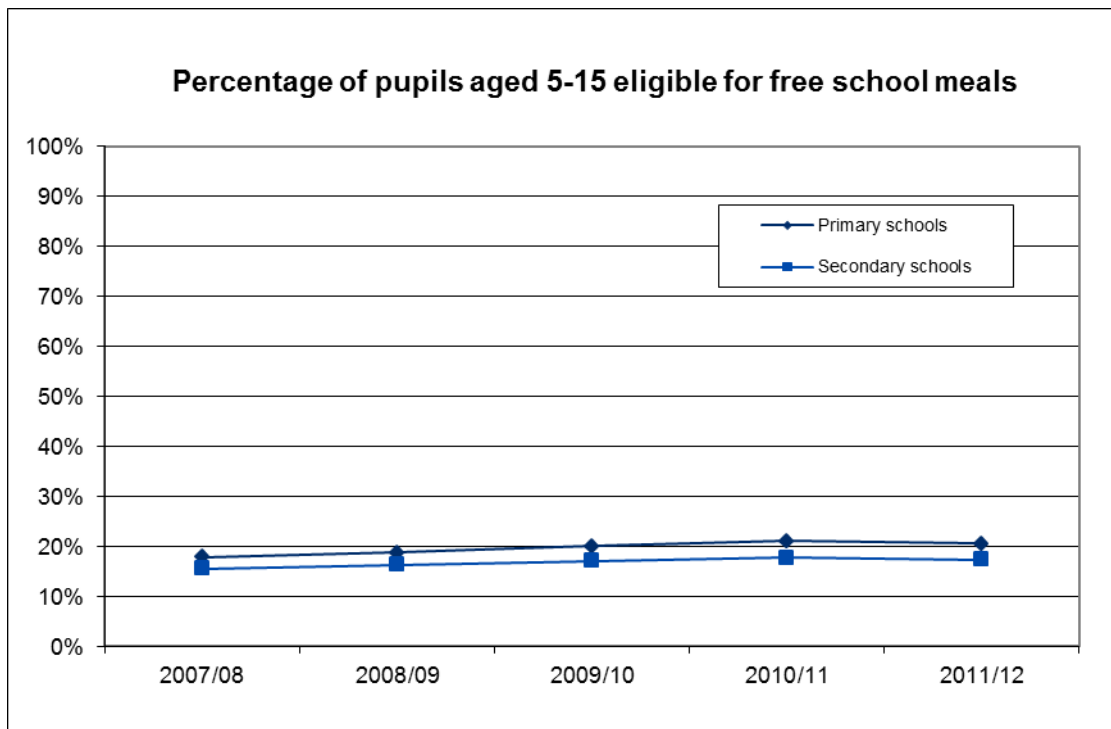
The schools were chosen for the survey through an analysis of school performance data and scrutiny of inspection evidence. They represent schools with a range of outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

Inspectors visited six local authorities across Wales, all with high levels of deprivation.

Appendix 2: Data

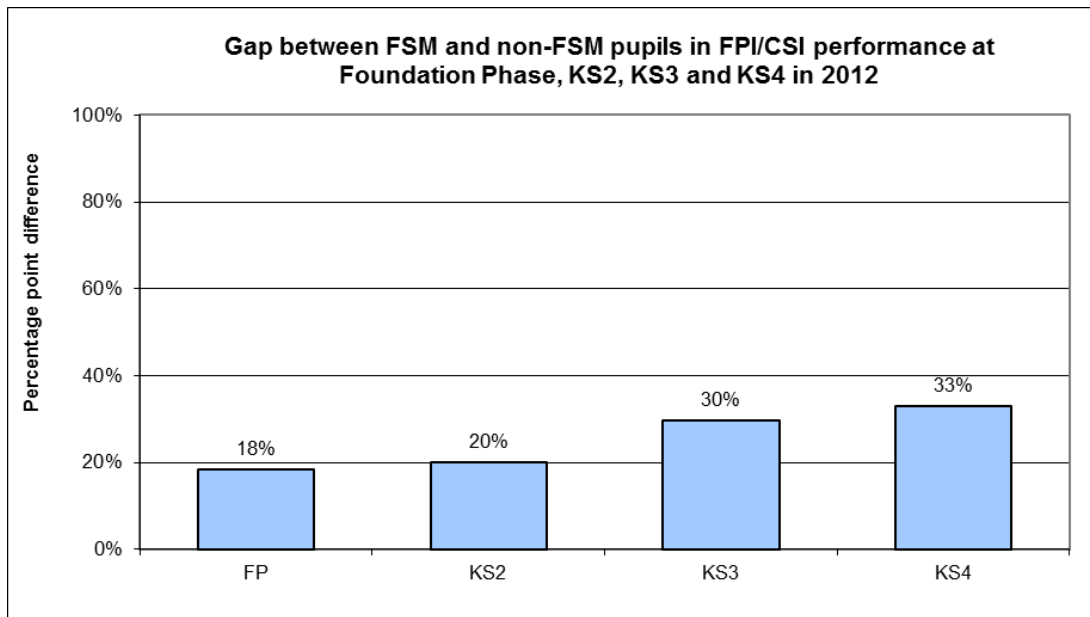
In 2013, the Welsh Government published statistics that indicate an increasing trend in the percentage of learners aged five to 15 eligible for free school meals over the three years prior to 2012. In 2012 this percentage fell slightly. However, there remains a strong link between poverty and educational performance.

There is an increasing trend in the percentage of learners aged five to 15 eligible for free school meals over the three years prior to 2012¹². In 2012 this percentage fell slightly.



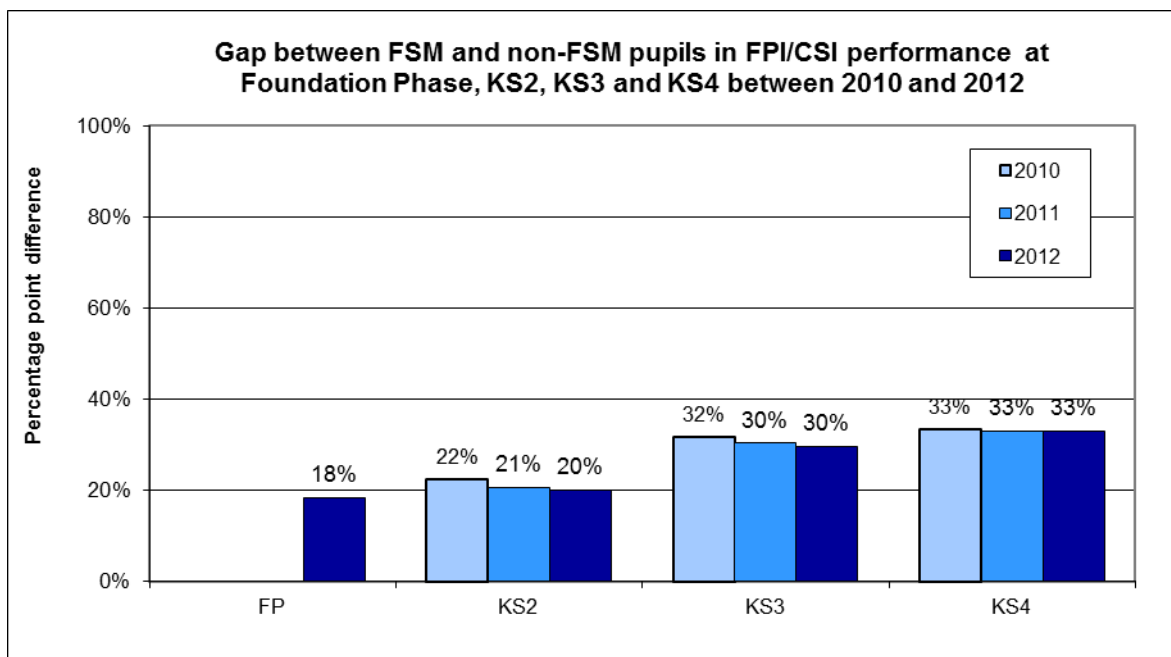
¹² StatsWales 2012

The data below shows the relative percentages attaining the Foundation Phase indicator (FPI) and core subject indicator (CSI) of learners entitled to free school meals and those who are not.

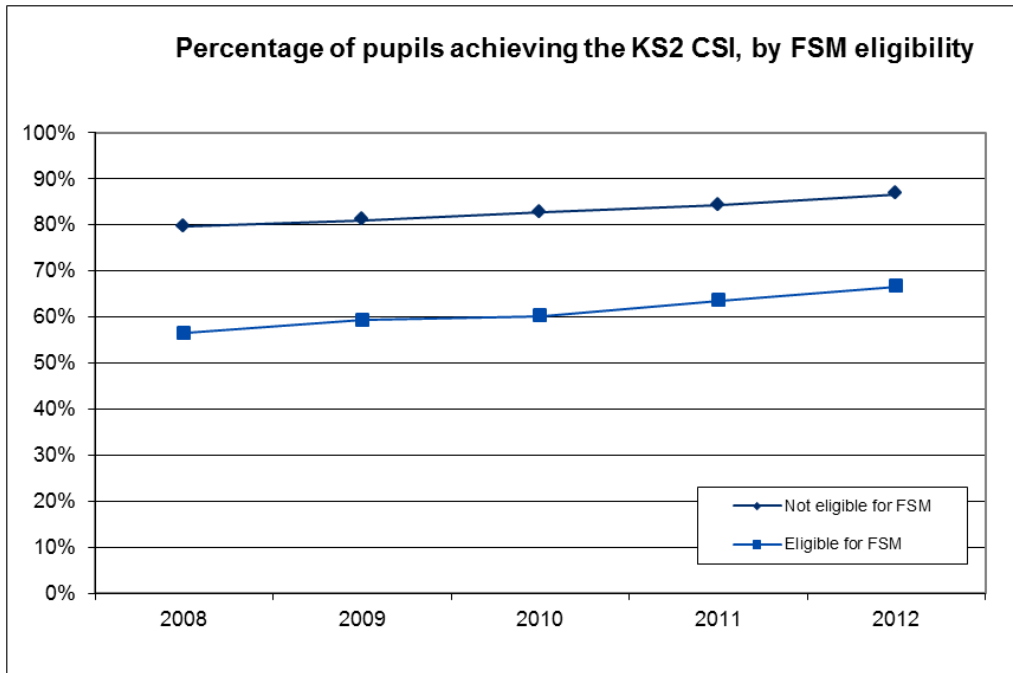


Welsh Government data for 2012 shows that learners eligible for free school meals still perform significantly less well than those not eligible for free school meals against key performance indicators. The gap in attainment of the core subject indicator between those learners eligible for free school meals and their more advantaged peers increases with each successive key stage.

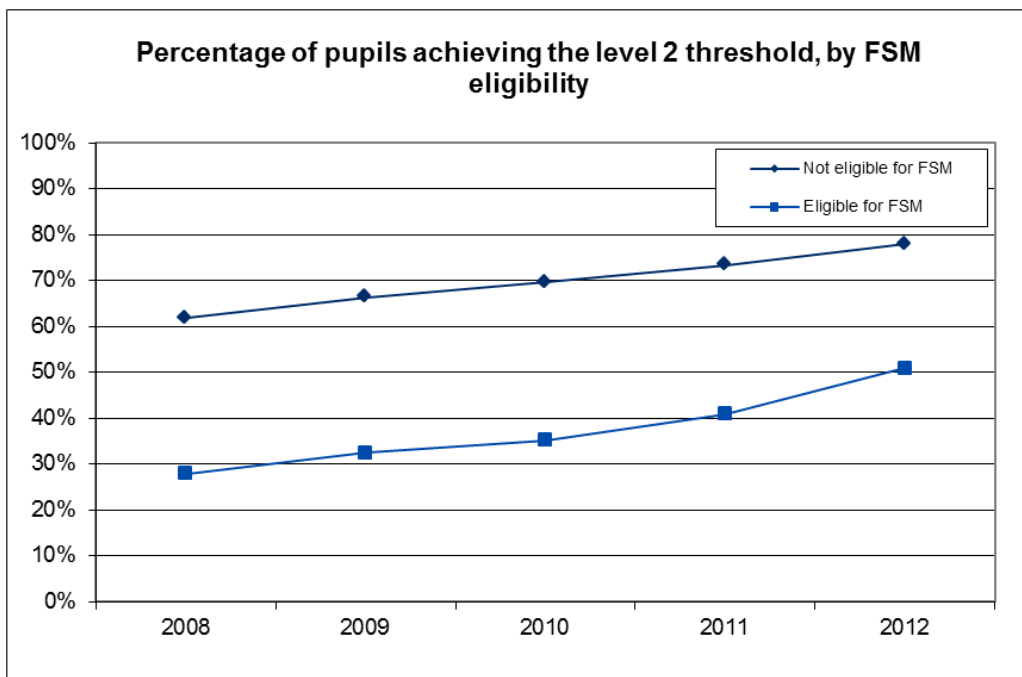
The chart below shows that at key stages 2 and 3 the gap in percentages has decreased very slightly over the last three years. However, at key stage 4, this difference in performance between those learners eligible for free school meals and those who are not has remained static at 33 percentage points since 2010.



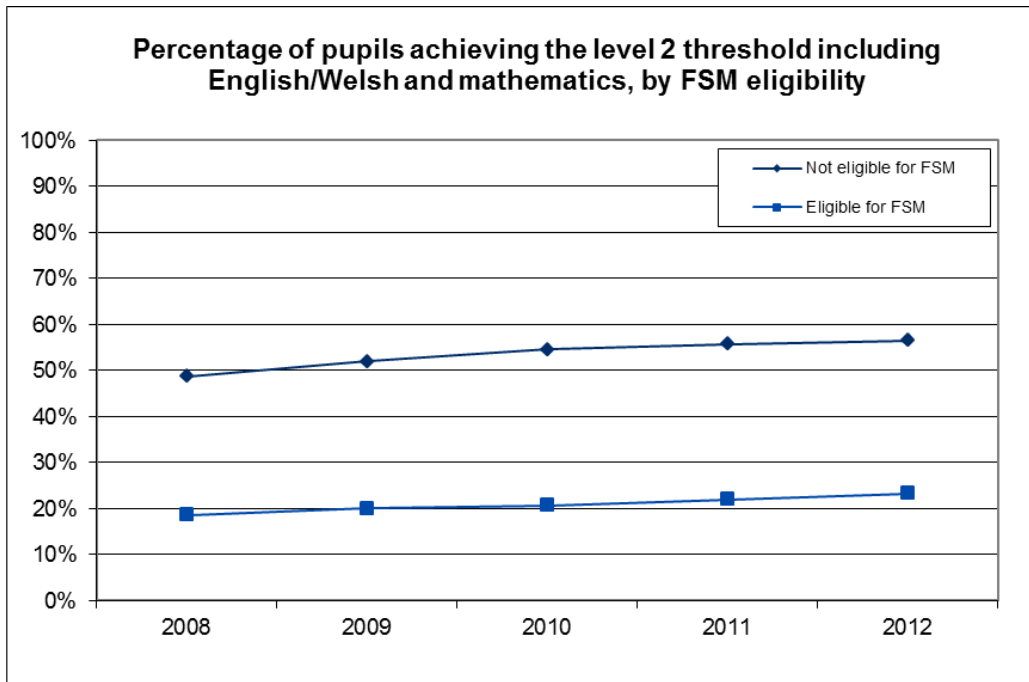
The chart below illustrates how the achievement of all learners at key stage 2 in the core subject indicator in Wales has improved over the last five years. The gap in the percentages attaining the core subject indicator between those entitled to free school meals and those who are not has narrowed slightly, but remains persistently wide.



In 2012, at key stage 4, the performance of all learners at the level 2 threshold improved at a slightly better rate than in previous years. The gap in attainment between those entitled to free school meals and those who are not had stayed constant at around 33 percentage points for the last four years. In 2012, the gap narrowed to 27 percentage points.



However, at the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics at key stage 4, the gap in the percentages attaining at this threshold between those learners who are entitled to free school meals and those who are not increased by four percentage points, from 30 percentage points in 2008 to 34 percentage points in 2011.



The table below shows the percentage point difference from the expected outcome at the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics as determined by the local authority's free school meal profile, 2010-2012.

Local authority	2010	2011	2012
Neath Port Talbot	6	7	9
Swansea	6	7	7
Flintshire	1	1	3
Cardiff	3	3	1
Vale of Glamorgan	4	3	0
Denbighshire	-7	2	4
Caerphilly	2	1	1
Bridgend	3	-1	2
Newport	3	0	1
Rhondda Cynon Taf	1	2	0
Carmarthenshire	2	3	-1
Pembrokeshire	-7	-1	4
Powys	0	-2	0
Angelsey	0	-2	0
Conwy	2	-2	-1
Wrexham	2	0	-3
Gwynedd	-2	-2	-2
Blaenau Gwent	-2	-1	-4
Monmouthshire	-5	-7	-2
Merthyr	-2	1	-9
Ceredigion	-7	-2	-6
Torfaen	-5	-7	-5

The last three years of available data shows that learners in Neath Port Talbot and Swansea have performed significantly above the expected level in the key indicator of the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics. Learners in these authorities have also made steady progress against this indicator over the past three years.

In contrast, in Torfaen and Ceredigion, the lowest performing authorities overall in the last three years, learners have consistently achieved at a significantly lower level than that of the expected benchmark.

In a minority of local authorities, learners' performance has improved over the last three years. However, in 2012, overall performance is poor, with learners in nine local authorities achieving below the expected level.

The data for only five local authorities shows an overall improvement in the performance of disadvantaged learners over the last three years.

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Glossary

Boxall profiling	Boxall profiling provides a framework for structured observation of children in the classroom. It enables teachers to assess the areas of difficulty of disadvantaged children and to plan focused interventions.
CAMHS	Child and adolescent mental health service
Canopi	An approach to multi-agency working in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Partners in the scheme include Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC, Cwm Taf Local Health Board, South Wales Police, Voluntary sector organisations, Communities First, Local Safeguarding Children's Board and the Youth Offending Service.
CSI	The core subject indicator is the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level for their age group in English or Welsh, mathematics and science in combination at the end of key stages 2, 3 and 4.
CYPP	Children and Young People's Partnerships are a statutory requirement of the Children Act 2004. Through these partnerships, local authorities co-operate to improve the wellbeing of children.
FPI	The Foundation Phase indicator is a measure of overall attainment. Pupils have to be assessed at the expected Foundation Phase outcome or higher (i.e. Foundation Phase outcome 5 or above) in language, literacy and communication skills in Welsh or language, literacy and communication Skills in English, mathematical development and personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity to attain the FPI.
NEET	Not in education or employment
NSPCC	National society for the prevention of cruelty to children
PASS	Pupil attitude to self and school. A learner survey used to find out what learners think about school.
PDG	Pupil deprivation grant
RAISE	RAISE (Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education) was a programme (2006-2010) funded by the Welsh Government to address the link between socio-economic disadvantage and pupils' educational underachievement. Schools were eligible for a RAISE grant if they had 50 or more learners of statutory school age, at least 20% of which were eligible for free school meals.

TAC	Team around the child. A TAC is a multi-disciplinary team of practitioners established on a case-by-case basis to support a child, young person or family.
TAF	Team around the family. TAF is a development of TAC to provide support for families.

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