

Tackling
deprivation
and raising
standards



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

Pupil deprivation

May 2014



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- ▲ primary schools;
- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ independent specialist colleges;
- ▲ adult community learning;
- ▲ local authority education services for children and young people;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ Welsh for adults;
- ▲ work-based learning; and
- ▲ learning in the justice sector.

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to summarise the main messages from Estyn reports on tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools. Between 2007 and 2009, Estyn published three reports that evaluated the way schools were using RAISE funding. This was followed in 2010 with a report that identified examples of effective practice and made suggestions about further action that might be taken to improve the performance of disadvantaged learners. Since 2011, Estyn has produced a series of three related reports on the topic, with the latest being published in December 2013. These later three reports contained many case studies that can provide schools with useful information about successful practices.

Background

Reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment was one of the Welsh Government's three national priorities for schools and is now a top priority. It has introduced a number of policy initiatives to help schools and local authorities improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners, including:

- Tackling Poverty Action Plan (2013);
- Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (2011); and
- the Families First programme (2010) that includes Flying Start, Communities First and Integrated Family Support Teams.

In order to support action to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment, the Welsh Government introduced the School Effectiveness Grant in 2011 and the Pupil Deprivation Grant in 2012. The Welsh Government intends that the two grants should work together. The grant allocation for 2014-2015 for the School Effectiveness Grant is £28.1 million together with £71.2 million for the Pupil Deprivation Grant. The local authorities must match fund the School Effectiveness Grant (but not the Pupil Deprivation Grant) to the value of £8.6 million, which brings the School Effectiveness Grant total to £36.7 million. The School Effectiveness Grant is a rolling grant, which will continue beyond 2015, and funding for the Pupil Deprivation Grant was initially for three years, but the Welsh Assembly has agreed to extend it for a further year to 2015-2016.

In April 2013, the Welsh Government produced guidance on the use of the School Effectiveness Grant and the Pupil Deprivation Grant. This contained information on the Communities First Pupil Deprivation Grant Match Fund, which was launched in February 2013. The Welsh Government has also published a concise, 'school friendly' stand-alone Pupil Deprivation Grant guide.

Where are we now?

Children and young people who are trapped in poverty are vulnerable in many ways. They are more at risk of doing poorly in school. They are more likely to be absent, to behave badly, to be excluded and to be taught somewhere other than in a school. They may not have access to the same resources, such as a computer or a quiet place to work, that are available to their peers. Their parents may not be able to help them with their schoolwork because the parents themselves have a negative perception and experience of education. In adulthood, they are more likely to be low paid, be unemployed and have poorer health. If schools do not tackle this early enough and with determination, disengagement from learning can become cyclical: underachievement can lead to poor attendance, behavioural difficulties or exclusion, which in turn results in poorer attainment and further disengagement.

There is a strong statistical link between poverty and low educational attainment. In general, learners from poorer families do not achieve as well as their peers. In each of our last three reports we have shown that learners who are entitled to free school meals perform significantly less well than those not eligible for free school meals against a range of performance indicators. In appendix 1 to this report, you will find the latest data on this situation and this shows that although the performance of both free-school meal learners and non-free school meal learners has improved over the last five years, the gap between them remains too wide. The gap widens with each successive key stage and is not closing significantly.

There is no simple explanation for this link between deprivation and underachievement or an easy solution to breaking it. However, the impact of poverty is not inevitable. We know that the barriers to learning associated with poverty are not insurmountable because some schools in Wales succeed in overcoming them despite being in challenging circumstances. This has been a recurring theme in Estyn's reports on disadvantaged learners.

Key messages from Estyn's reports on tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools

The Estyn reports on tackling poverty and disadvantage provide a clear evaluation of the work of primary schools, secondary schools and local authorities on improving the achievement of disadvantaged learners. The reports highlight the different aspects of a school's work and evaluate the degree to which this work is successful.

What are the areas that need to improve?

It is evident from performance data that there is still much to do to raise the achievements of disadvantaged learners and that progress in addressing this issue has been slow. The reports show clearly the main aspects that need further attention and they are spelled out plainly in the recommendations in each report. The reports highlight the most common and enduring weaknesses of schools and local authorities in improving the achievement of disadvantaged learners. These weaknesses in schools are in failing to:

- prioritise tackling poverty and planning strategically to raise the performance of disadvantaged learners;
- take a systematic, coherent whole-school approach to supporting disadvantaged learners;
- identify a senior member of staff to lead and co-ordinate the work;
- target support specifically at disadvantaged learners, particularly those that attain at average or above average levels;
- match support to the needs of individual learners;
- use tracking systems to monitor the progress of disadvantaged learners;
- identify and support particularly disadvantaged learners that may not be entitled to free school meals;
- tailor the curriculum and targeting out-of-school-hours learning;
- attend to disadvantaged learners' confidence, motivation and self-esteem;
- ensure there is sufficient support for learners' social and emotional needs;
- evaluate the impact of strategies to improve disadvantaged learners' achievement and wellbeing;
- make the most of community-based work so that it can impact on learners' achievement;
- manage and co-ordinate multi-agency working;
- have strategies to engage parents;
- target support for disadvantaged learners when moving from primary school to secondary school;
- have the skills involved in partnership working and in engaging the community; and
- use the Pupil Deprivation Grant to raise the achievement of all disadvantaged learners and not only lower-ability learners.

In addition, the reports identify common weaknesses in the work of local authorities in:

- challenging and supporting schools to improve the achievement and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners;
- offering schools practical guidance on how to work with local communities and services to tackle disadvantage;
- taking a preventative approach to tackling poverty;
- co-ordinating services for disadvantage families;
- sharing information about disadvantaged learners with other agencies and services;
- ensuring that the different services within local authorities use the same tracking systems to monitor the progress of disadvantaged learners;
- bringing together service plans for education, youth and social services to provide a coherent and comprehensive strategy;
- having specific objectives or measurable targets that can be used to challenge schools to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners;
- providing 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; and
- advising schools about how best to use their Pupil Deprivation Grant money.

Effective practice in tackling disadvantage

Although the reports indicated that there was a great deal of work still to do to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged learners and their peers, they also identified what successful schools do. The reports explained the features of successful practice in the different aspects of the school's work, and illustrated this through often detailed case studies of what individual schools did. The reports also identified good practice by local authorities in supporting schools. The rest of this report summarises these successful strategies and in appendix 2 you will find a list of the case studies and a hyperlink to the reports that contain them.

What do effective schools do?

Schools in challenging circumstances that raise the achievement of disadvantaged learners do what all successful schools do to secure the achievement of learners. What is different in the schools that do well in disadvantaged areas is the emphasis they place on particular activities or combination of activities. In addition, these schools also create an outstandingly positive ethos that allows disadvantaged learners to achieve well. The most important thing that these schools do is to employ a range of strategies specifically designed to meet the characteristic needs of disadvantaged learners. This means that they supplement or extend particular strategies to suit the specific needs of disadvantaged learners, for example in adapting successful whole-school strategies designed to raise standards of reading to the specific needs of disadvantaged learners.

This section is broken down into two parts:

- strategies that can be implemented by the school alone; and
- strategies that involve the school working with partners.

Strategies that can be implemented by the school alone

Ten in-school strategies:

- Whole-school approach
- Using data to identify and track progress
- Literacy and learning skills
- Social and emotional skills
- Attendance, punctuality and behaviour
- Tailoring the curriculum
- Enriching experiences
- Listening to learners
- Engaging parents
- Developing staff expertise

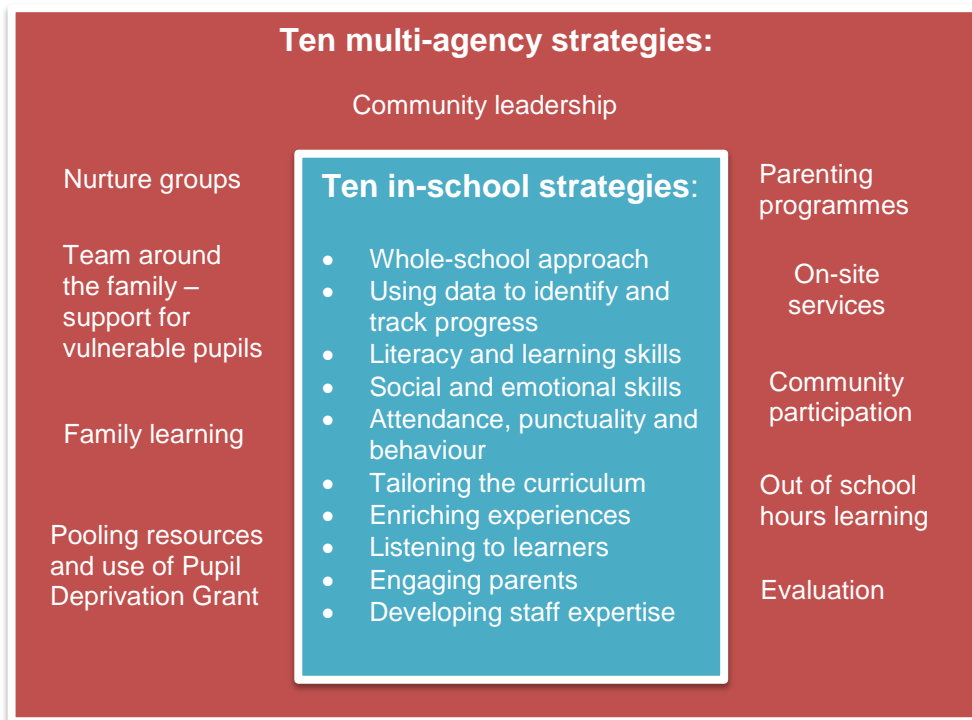
There are a number of strategies that schools can introduce and implement through the usual structures, system and processes that are found in all schools. Successful

schools in challenging circumstances:

- take a **whole-school, strategic approach** to tackling disadvantage – they have a structured, coherent and focused approach to raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners, and ensure that a senior leader has managerial responsibility for overseeing and co-ordinating the school's work on tackling the impact of disadvantage;
- **use data to identify and 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, including monitoring how well disadvantaged learners do against benchmarks and prior attainment, and tracking the progress of individual disadvantaged learners.
- focus on the development of disadvantaged learners' **literacy and learning skills** – they appreciate that an initial literacy deficit lies at the root of many other types of educational disadvantages;
- 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;
- improve the **attendance, punctuality and behaviour** of disadvantaged learners – they have suitable sanctions, but find that reward systems work particularly well;
- **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;
- 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;
- **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;
- 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
- **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.

The strategies above are relatively generic in nature, but if the school wants to make an impact on the achievements and wellbeing of learners, then just doing these things is not enough. Successful schools do something extra and focused for disadvantaged learners in each of these strategies. Their work is intense, specifically targeted on disadvantaged learners and sharply focused on the individual needs of disadvantaged learners.

Strategies that involve working with partners



Schools alone cannot break the link between disadvantage and achievement. Although the school has an important role to play in improving the achievements of disadvantaged learners, research stresses the need for broad-based approaches that involve a number of agencies working together to address community-based issues. In addition to the school, these include other educational, social and health services. Successful schools in challenging circumstances:

- develop the **leadership skills needed for partnership** working, establish protocols and processes, identify a senior member of staff to co-ordinate the work with partners, understand the support that the pupils and their families receive from an external partner, and monitor progress carefully;
- co-ordinate and manage **on-site multi-agency services** – they focus on the needs of each individual learner, work with agencies to provide broad family-related services to meet those needs, and work with specialist services to meet specific health or wellbeing needs;
- engage in '**Team around the family**' approaches – they use the pool of skills within the team to address the health, domestic and social welfare concerns of learners and their families and use specialist support where learners have complex needs that the school cannot meet on its own;
- carefully design a range of **out-of-hours learning** – they ensure that the activities match the needs of learners, complement the curriculum and increase learners' confidence, motivation and self-esteem;
- understand what it means to be **community-focused** – they strengthen community links with the express intention of raising attendance rates, improving behaviour, and raising the level of parental support, including actively engaging with local employers;

- use **nurture groups** to engage the families of vulnerable new learners – they create an environment that is welcoming, establishing rooms where children can learn with their families for a period;
- use **family learning** – they identify families that would benefit from family learning, use facilitators who have credibility and know the circumstances of the families, and monitor the progress made by the children involved;
- encourage participation in **parenting programmes** – they engage parents and carers of disadvantaged learners and help them overcome barriers to learning;
- **pool their resources**, such as funding from the **Pupil Deprivation Grant**, in joint strategies and training – they systematically address disadvantage in their cluster of schools, including designing approaches to enable the smooth transition from primary to secondary school. They direct the Pupil Deprivation Grant specifically towards disadvantaged learners and not low achievers, and use the precise strategies that are known to be most effective; and
- **evaluate** their own work and that of external agencies against clear measures of learner performance – they 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.

What do effective local authorities do?



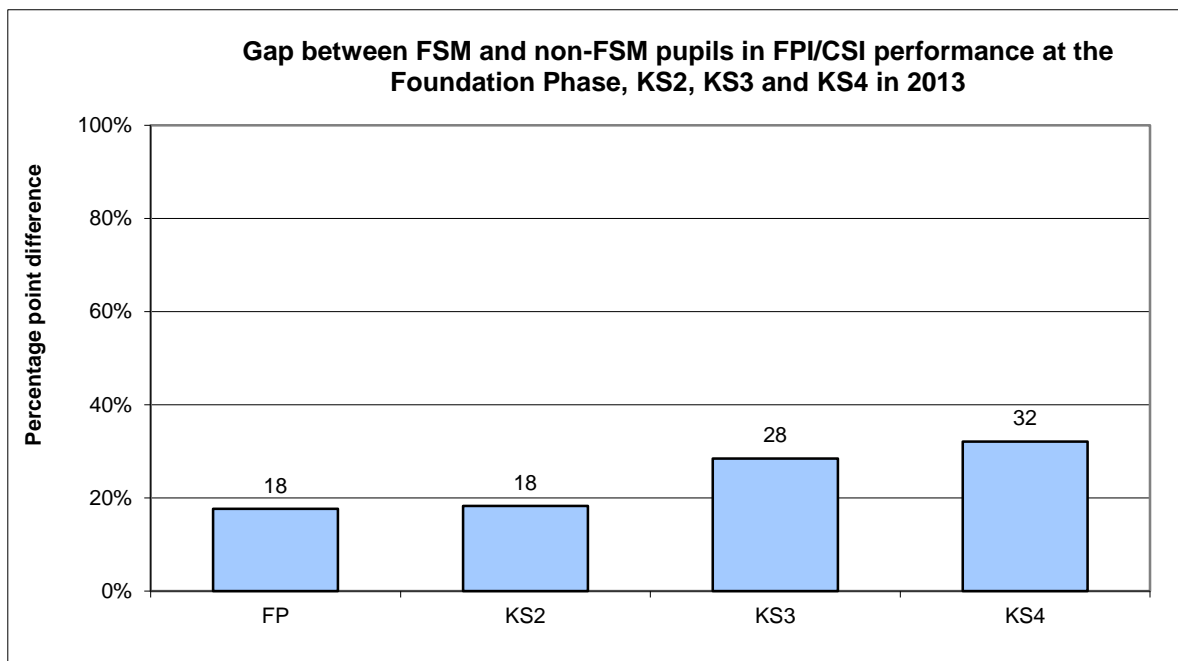
As well as the schools that do well in challenging circumstances, there are also some local authorities that do particularly well. Disadvantaged learners do relatively well in a few local authorities and there is a significant gap between the best performing and the worst. Successful local authorities:

- provide a strong **strategic lead** on tackling disadvantage – they have clearly articulated plans that focus on the issue, involve schools in decision-making processes, and develop the skills of senior leaders in schools in partnership working and engaging the community;
- 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, share intelligence with schools and partners, and provide a baseline from which to measure the impact of new initiatives;
- plan a **single, comprehensive database** of information on learners and groups of learners – they enable staff to gain a fuller picture of the needs of individual learners that is used to underpin a common approach;
- bring together service plans for education, youth and social services to develop a **comprehensive strategy for tackling poverty** – they produced integrated plans to co-ordinate services and avoid duplication; and
- have **specific targets and performance indicators** related to closing the gap in outcomes between advantaged and disadvantaged learners – they measure progress against these targets.

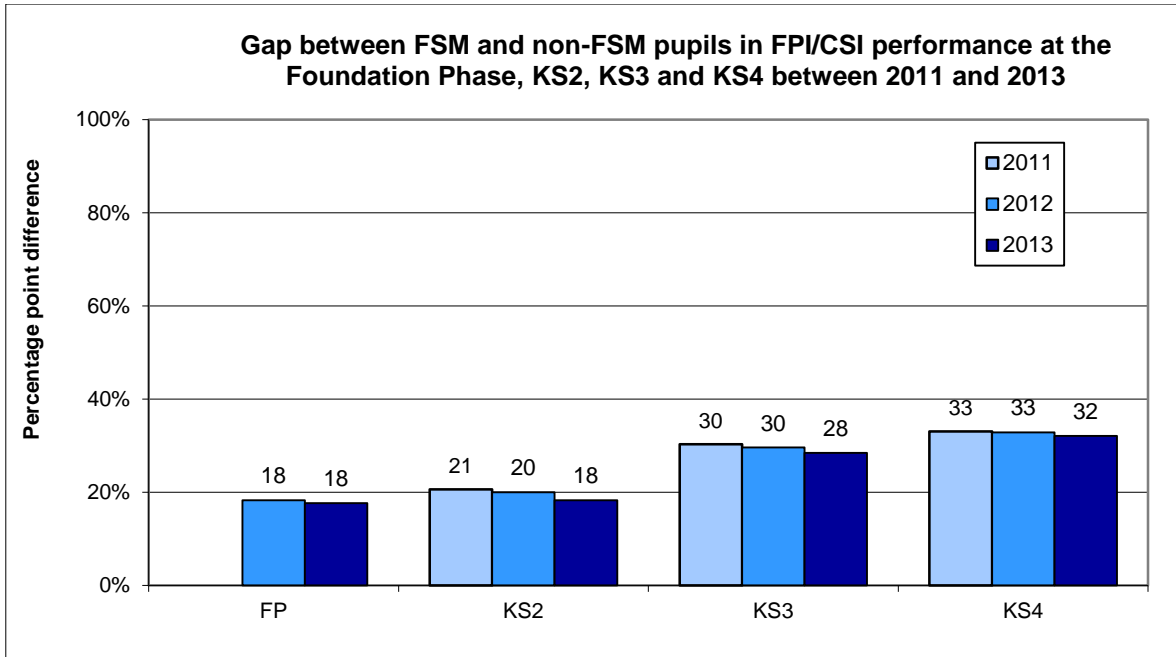
Appendix 1: Data

Welsh Government data for 2013 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.

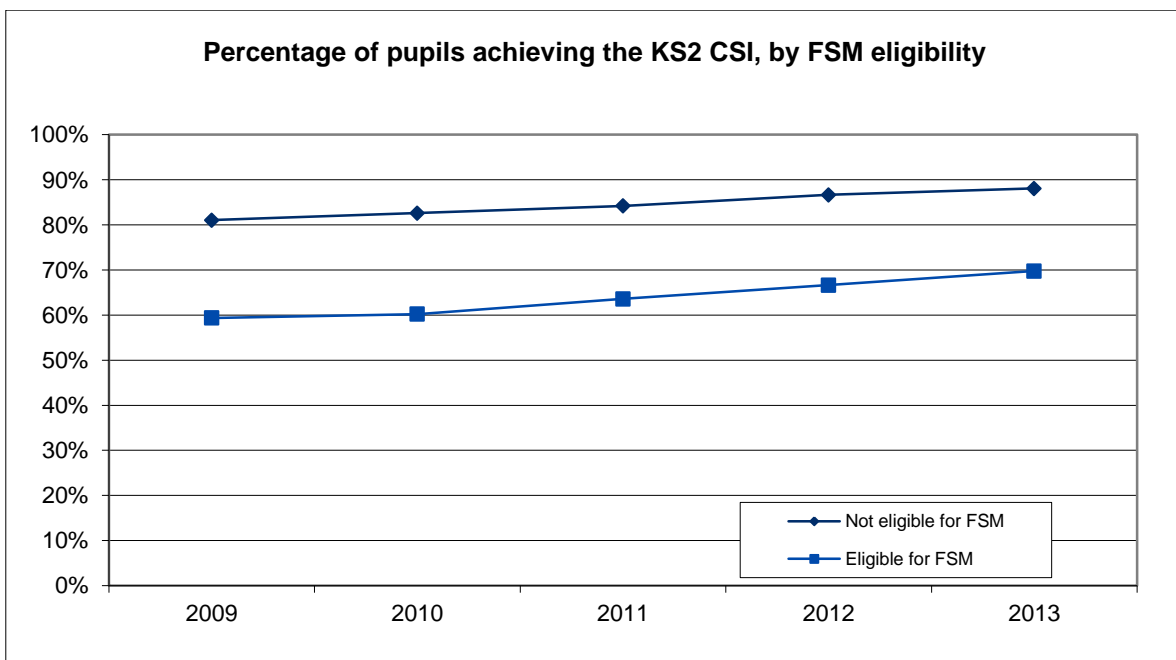
The data below shows the relative percentages attaining the Foundation Phase indicator (FPI) and core subject indicator (CSI) of learners entitled to free school meals and those who are not.



The next chart shows that at key stages 2 and 3 the gap in percentages has decreased very slightly over the last three years. At key stage 4, the difference in performance between those learners eligible for free school meals and those who are not has stayed at around 32 percentage points.

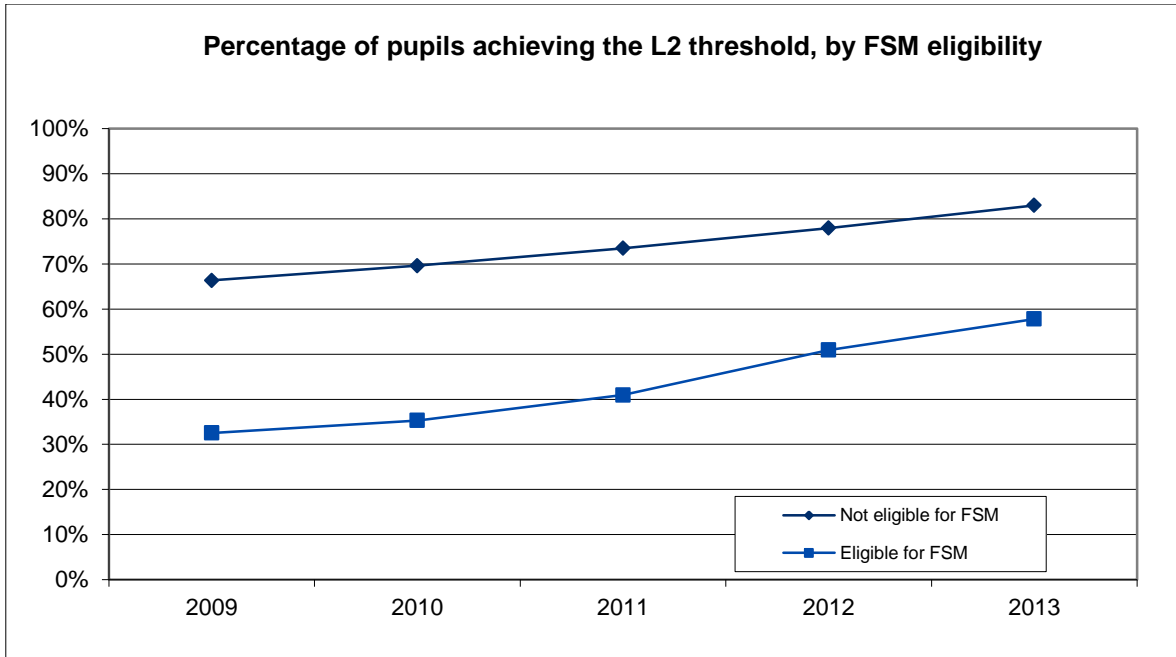


The chart below illustrates how the achievement of all learners at key stage 2 in the core subject indicator in Wales has improved over the last five years. The gap in the percentages attaining the core subject indicator between those entitled to free school meals and those who are not has narrowed slightly,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

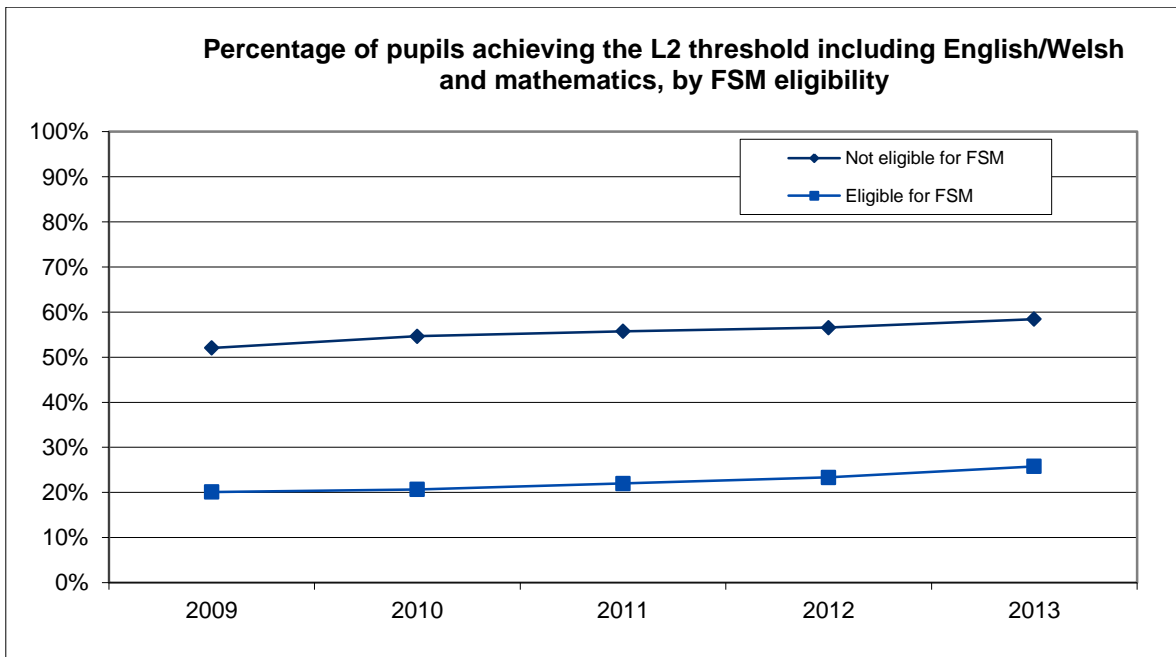


In 2013, at key stage 4, the performance of all learners at the level 2 threshold improved at a slightly better rate than in previous years. The gap in attainment between those entitled to free school meals and those who are not had stayed constant at around 33 percentage points up to 2011, but narrowed in the last two years.

Pupil deprivation
May 2014



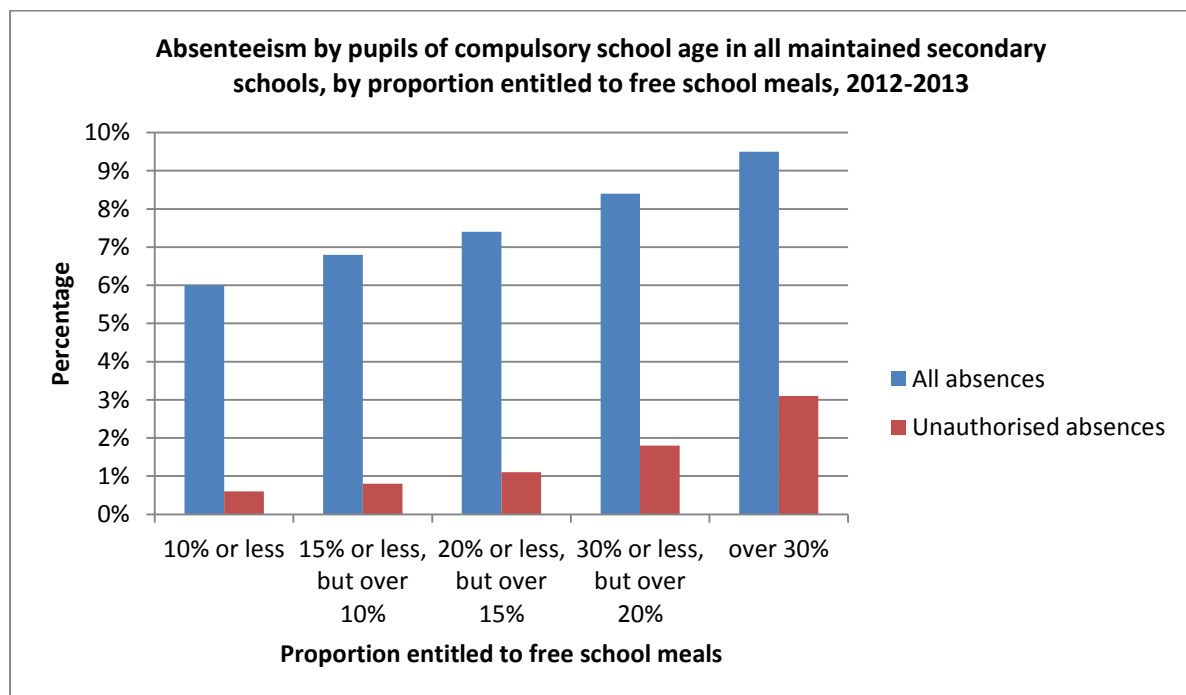
However, at the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics at key stage 4, the gap in the percentages attaining at this threshold between those learners who are entitled to free school meals and those who are not has stayed the same at around 33 percentage points over the five year period between 2009 and 2013.



Absenteeism and deprivation

The following table and chart illustrate strong relationship between the proportion of learners entitled to free school meals and the rate of absenteeism. They show that, in general, secondary schools with a higher proportion of learners entitled to free school meals have higher absences.

Absenteeism (percentage of school sessions missed) by pupils of compulsory school age in all maintained secondary schools, by proportion entitled to free school meals, 2012-2013			
Proportion entitled to free school meals	All absences	Unauthorised absences	Number of schools
10% or less	6.0%	0.6%	49
15% or less, but over 10%	6.8%	0.8%	55
20% or less, but over 15%	7.4%	1.1%	33
30% or less, but over 20%	8.4%	1.8%	56
over 30%	9.5%	3.1%	26
All maintained schools	7.4%	1.3%	219



Local authority data

The table below shows the considerable variation in the performance of pupils eligible and not eligible for free school meals between different local authorities in Wales – the data is level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics for 2013.

Level 2 including	Eligible for FSM	Not eligible for FSM	Gap (percentage point difference)
Merthyr Tydfil	12.3%	46.0%	33.6
Blaenau Gwent	18.6%	46.4%	27.7
Cardiff	20.9%	57.1%	36.2
Rhondda Cynon Taf	21.7%	53.4%	31.7
Wrexham	22.5%	55.2%	32.8
Newport	22.5%	58.2%	35.8
Caerphilly	24.1%	53.0%	28.9
Denbighshire	24.1%	59.5%	35.4
Wales	25.8%	58.5%	32.7
Bridgend	26.4%	58.1%	31.7
Monmouthshire	26.7%	61.6%	35.0
Ceredigion	27.0%	66.6%	39.6
Swansea	28.1%	63.2%	35.1
Pembrokeshire	28.2%	56.8%	28.6
Torfaen	28.3%	55.2%	26.9
Carmarthenshire	29.3%	57.9%	28.6
Neath Port Talbot	30.1%	62.8%	32.7
Gwynedd	30.2%	62.4%	32.2
Conwy	30.9%	61.8%	30.9
Powys	31.4%	61.7%	30.3
Vale of Glamorgan	32.5%	59.9%	27.5
Flintshire	35.7%	67.5%	31.8
Isle of Anglesey	39.1%	57.7%	18.6

Appendix 2: Case studies

Schools

Topic	Provider	Sector	Report
Whole-school approach to disadvantaged learners	Lliswerry Primary School, Newport	Primary	Tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools: working with the community and other services, 2011
Whole-school approach to disadvantaged learners	Bryngwyn Comprehensive School, Carmarthenshire	Secondary	Tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools: working with the community and other services, 2011
Tracking learners' progress at key stage 4	Cwrt Sart Comprehensive School, Neath Port Talbot	Secondary	Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2012
Tracking wellbeing and achievement	Llwynypia Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf	Primary	Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2012
Whole-school approach to literacy	Sandfields Comprehensive School	Secondary	Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2012
Pastoral system and disadvantaged learners	Ysgol Bryn Elian, Conwy	Secondary	Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2012
Wellbeing manager	Alexandra Primary School, Wrexham	Primary	Working together to tackle the impact of poverty on educational achievement, 2013
Raising attendance	Cefn Hengoed Comprehensive School, Swansea	Secondary	Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2012
Student study centre for disadvantaged learners	Cwrt Sart Comprehensive School, Neath Port Talbot	Secondary	Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2012
Enriching learning experiences for disadvantaged learners	Ysgol Y Castell, Carmarthenshire	Primary	Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2012
Listening to learners	Cefn Hengoed Comprehensive School, Swansea	Secondary	Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2012
Peer mentoring	Cwrt Sart Comprehensive School, Neath Port Talbot	Secondary	Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2012

'Aspiration Project' about world of work	St Woolos Primary School, Newport	Primary	Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2012
Specialist language support	Ysgol Melyd, Denbighshire	Primary	Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2012
Links with parents and the local community	Cathays High School, Cardiff	Secondary	Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2012
Engaging with parents	Mount Stuart School, Cardiff	Primary	Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2012
Family nurture room	Pillgwenlly Primary School, Newport	Primary	Working together to tackle the impact of poverty on educational achievement, 2013
Parent Council	Herbert Thompson Primary School, Cardiff	Primary	Tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools: working with the community and other services, 2011
*Team about the family	Coedcae Comprehensive School, Carmarthenshire	Secondary	Working together to tackle the impact of poverty on educational achievement, 2013
Multi-agency work	Treorchy Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf	Primary	Working together to tackle the impact of poverty on educational achievement, 2013
Partnership working with a voluntary group	Bishop Gore Comprehensive School, Swansea	Secondary	Tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools: working with the community and other services, 2011
Partnership between a school and a residential care home for the elderly	Blaengwawr Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf	Primary	Tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools: working with the community and other services, 2011

Local authorities

Topic	Provider	Sector	Report
Community-focused schools co-ordinators	Cardiff	Primary, secondary and local authority	Tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools: working with the community and other services, 2011
*Partnership between education and children's services	Carmarthenshire	Local authority	Working together to tackle the impact of poverty on educational achievement, 2013
'Vulnerable families mapping tool'	Neath Port Talbot	Local authority	Working together to tackle the impact of poverty on educational achievement, 2013

*Vulnerability Assessment Profiles	Swansea	Local authority	Working together to tackle the impact of poverty on educational achievement, 2013
*Co-ordinating initiatives between school and support services	Wrexham	Local authority	Working together to tackle the impact of poverty on educational achievement, 2013

Appendix 3: Links to Estyn reports on poverty and disadvantage

For further information on previous reports on poverty and disadvantage or the use and impact of the RAISE funding in schools, please click on these links:

[Working together to tackle the impact of poverty on educational achievement, 2013](#)

[Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2012](#)

[Tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools: working with the community and other services, 2011](#)

[Tackling child poverty and disadvantage in schools, 2010](#)

[The impact of RAISE 2008-2009: A report on the third year of the programme, 2009](#)

[The Impact of RAISE funding: An interim report after the first 18 months, 2008](#)

[The impact of RAISE funding: an interim report, 2007](#)

Other relevant Estyn reports

[The impact of family learning programmes on raising the literacy and numeracy levels of children and adults, 2012](#)

[The impact of deprivation on learners' attainment in further education and work-based learning, 2011](#)

[Provision of community-focused services and facilities by schools](#)

[Good practice in parental involvement in primary schools](#)

Forthcoming Estyn INSET materials

Promoting good practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage: INSET materials for primary schools

Promoting good practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage: INSET materials for secondary schools