



Annex: Qualitative Research for the Evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund (produced by Research Scotland)



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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List of acronyms

ADES	Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
ASF	Attainment Scotland Fund
COSLA	Coalition of Scottish Local Authorities
CPD	Continuing professional development
ESOL	English as a second or other language
GIRFEC	Getting it Right for Every Child
IT	Information technology
NIF	National Improvement Framework
NPFS	National Parent Forum Scotland
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEF	Pupil Equity Fund
RAFA	Raising Attainment for All
SAC	Scottish Attainment Challenge
SHANARRI	Safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, included (Eight wellbeing indicators)
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
SIPP	School Improvement Partnership Programme
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and maths

Executive Summary

About this research

This report sets out findings from qualitative research to inform the evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF), which supports the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

The ASF is a targeted initiative focused on raising attainment among pupils living in communities with the highest concentrations of deprivation. The ASF comprises of three strands: the challenge authority programme, the schools programme and Pupil Equity Funding. This research covers the challenge authority programme and schools programme elements of the Attainment Scotland Fund, and not Pupil Equity Funding which was introduced more recently.

This qualitative research seeks to supplement wider statistical data analysis; reviews of administrative data, plans and reports; and other surveys undertaken as part of the Scottish Government's evaluation of the ASF. The research explores stakeholder views on a range of issues, including selecting interventions, targeting, governance, support, funding, use of data, collaboration, outcomes and sustainability. It explores how practice has evolved at both school and local authority level.

This research involved interviews with:

- 87 teachers at 80 schools in Scotland;
- 65 local authority officers in the nine challenge authorities – including Directors of Education, key attainment leads, data officers and others;
- 6 local authority officers involved in the schools programme;
- 8 Attainment Advisors;
- 4 national strategic stakeholders; and
- 9 parents from across Scotland.

Programme aims

Almost all found the aims of the ASF very relevant, and it was felt that there was a broad understanding of its aims – particularly within challenge authorities and the schools programme. The ASF supported local authorities and schools to tackle the poverty related attainment gap faster and with more purpose, focusing on the themes of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

Interventions

The approach to selecting interventions at local authority level varied. In some cases, schools were encouraged to select their own interventions (with support) while in others, schools were offered access to interventions set at local authority

level. These different approaches meant that while most teachers felt involved in the process of selecting interventions for their school, a few felt that they had too much autonomy and a few felt that they had little choice or influence.

Evidence played a key part in the process of selecting interventions. Local authorities largely took the lead on identifying evidence based approaches, and supporting schools to use data to inform their understanding of needs. Teachers often worked jointly with local authority officers and Attainment Advisors to use a range of evidence to inform the selection of interventions.

Targeting

Local authority approaches to targeting schools within their area differed. While some targeted support at schools with the highest proportion of pupils living in deprived areas, others used a more universal approach. Within schools, most used a mix of targeted and universal approaches to involving children and families in ASF activity. Data played a significant role in the targeting process, with data being analysed in a way that schools didn't do before. Most teachers felt that they now had the information, skills and support they required to be able to target pupils effectively – with many highlighting the value of the Attainment Advisor here. However, many teachers indicated that this was a big learning curve for them.

Short and medium term outcomes

There was a clear belief across all stakeholders that the ASF had improved teaching skills and created leadership opportunities. It had provided access to training, encouraged reflection on skills, increased professional dialogue, improved collaboration and provided opportunities to mentor, network and lead on new approaches.

Views on progress around parental engagement and home learning were more mixed. Many indicated that parental engagement was a challenge, and that it was work in progress.

Improving attainment

Many felt that it was still too early to comment on longer term outcomes, but that initial indications were good. Many spoke of seeing an upward trend in indicators, and positive evidence from small scale projects. Many felt that the groundwork (in terms of data use, targeting and understanding the aims of the ASF) had been laid in order to achieve longer term outcomes in coming years.

Teachers and local authority officers were generally more able to comment on outcomes around literacy, and less able to comment on outcomes around numeracy and health and wellbeing. Numeracy work had often started later, or involved newer approaches. Progress towards health and wellbeing was highlighted as challenging to measure, but both teachers and local authority officers were able to point to signs of positive progress.

Use of data

Teachers and local authority officers felt that their approach to gathering, understanding and using data was improving, with positive attitudes, more conversations about data, increased confidence and greater skills around use of data. Support from local authorities and Attainment Advisors was very important in enabling schools to develop their skills and confidence around data use.

Local authorities found, however, that it could be challenging to establish user friendly systems which provided the data required without being overly complex. Other challenges included measuring progress towards outcomes without a national baseline or indicators; measuring impact over short periods of time; and the time and work it takes to use data effectively.

Collaboration

Overall, almost all stakeholders felt that the ASF had a positive impact on collaboration. Collaboration within schools, between schools and with other partners had increased in many instances. While there had been some collaboration between local authorities, most felt that there was room for improvement around joint working and sharing practice.

Sustainability

Overall, stakeholders were positive about the sustainability of improvements in the poverty related attainment gap beyond the ASF. This was largely because of the focus on building staff skills, creating a culture shift, enabling collaboration and improving use of data. However, stakeholders stressed that some elements of the approach would need ongoing funding – particularly targeted work and dedicated posts focusing on closing the poverty related attainment gap. Some highlighted the wider context of local authority budget cuts as a key challenge to sustainability, particularly the significant cuts in education funding.

National and local governance and support

Most teachers were very happy with the support they received from their local authority, through a clear plan, guidance, support, training and opportunities to share experiences.

Local authorities welcomed the funding from the Scottish Government, but some would like more trust in the direction of travel of their work, evidenced through reduced bureaucracy and reporting requirements.

While most teachers highly valued the support provided by Attainment Advisors, local authorities had mixed views on the support they received. A few felt that the support was excellent, but there were challenges around lack of clarity around the role, management lines, and skills and expertise.

Funding

Most local authorities and teachers welcomed the resources provided through the ASF, and found funding levels reasonable and appropriate. The timescales for spending the funding were perceived to be tight, with the time taken to agree plans with the Scottish Government, and implement plans in line with local authority procedures impacting on the time available to deliver interventions and spend resources.

Local authorities and most teachers said that the ASF was not being used to mitigate other funding pressures. However, a few teachers said it was hard to determine this, as they were going through funding cuts at the same time as gaining ASF funding.

Unintended consequences

Teachers and local authority officers felt that the main positive unintended consequence as a result of the ASF was increased positivity and improved morale among teachers and education teams. However, at the same time teachers felt that the main negative unintended consequence was an increase in workloads and additional pressure to achieve outcomes.

Wider inequalities

Most stakeholders felt that there had been a strong focus on poverty related deprivation, and limited impact on wider inequalities. However, some felt that having improved approaches to monitoring and tracking pupil needs would benefit all pupils. Some local authorities felt that there was a lack of recognition of rural poverty within the ASF.

Key issues

Overall, experiences of the ASF were broadly positive. However, there were a number of consistent issues which emerged across the themes explored with stakeholders. These were:

- **Timescales** – The timescales for introducing the ASF were perceived as very tight. This impacted on ability to plan, build partnerships and spend funding. The timescales for reporting on impact were felt to be very short, and importantly did not fit with other reporting timescales within schools over the school year.
- **Pressure on schools** – Schools were working in a challenging financial environment, and often struggled to recruit teachers to focus on work on closing the attainment gap (or faced wider staffing challenges). This meant that schools often found it hard to collaborate, share ideas and develop new approaches due to challenges of releasing staff to focus on attainment gap

work. Many teachers were excited and motivated by the ASF and the opportunities it offered, but at the same time, many indicated that workloads were increasing and pressure to deliver was high.

- **Poverty as a wider issue** – Stakeholders highlighted that schools alone could not close the poverty related attainment gap. Some were unsure why the focus was on primary and secondary schools, when they felt that work should begin earlier, before children start school, where the poverty related gap is already apparent. And some felt that there needed to be better connections between education and other, wider services supporting children which can have a major impact on poverty and the attainment gap. Stakeholders emphasised that education could not bring about sustainable change on its own, and that wider partnership across a range of other services was essential.
- **Measuring poverty and deprivation** – A small number of teachers, local authority officers and strategic stakeholders were concerned about the approach of focusing on pupils living in SIMD 1 and 2 deciles, believing this to be a crude measure of poverty. Many talked about how they balanced this data with other information about pupils to ensure targeting took into account a range of factors. Some teachers and local authorities were also concerned about obviously identifying and targeting particular children for support based on living in SIMD 1 and 2 areas, due to concerns about stigmatisation. And a few felt that this approach may mean that children with other needs may be missed, such as children with additional support needs or with English as an additional language.
- **Attainment Advisor clarity of role** – While the support offered by Attainment Advisors was highly valued by schools, local authorities had mixed views on this support – largely due to a perceived lack of clarity about the rationale for the role, and the responsibilities this involved. Attainment Advisors also found this a challenge, but felt that the clarity of their role had improved and developed over time.
- **Ongoing challenges engaging parents** – While teachers were largely seeing improvements in short term outcomes around teacher skills, leadership and collaboration, parental engagement remained a challenge for many.
- **Learning between local authorities** – Most felt that there was room for improvement around joint working and sharing practice between local authorities, around closing the poverty related attainment gap.

1. Introduction

About this research

1.1 This report sets out findings from qualitative research to inform the evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF).

Research aims

1.2 The Scottish Government has set up an evaluation of the ASF which will largely be undertaken by analysts in the Learning Analysis Unit. The evaluation aims to:

- assess the extent to which the ASF is contributing to its aims of improved numeracy, literacy and health and wellbeing of pupils living in poverty;
- provide learning on what is and isn't working and what is helping or hindering in achieving the aims of the ASF; and
- provide learning more generally on what is and isn't working well to improve attainment and close the poverty related attainment gap in Scotland.

1.3 The evaluation plan includes a component of qualitative research, which seeks to both supplement and validate wider statistical data analysis, reviews of administrative data, plans and reports, and other surveys.

1.4 This qualitative research focuses on exploring stakeholder views on a range of issues around the themes of:

- understanding and engagement with programme aims;
- choosing interventions;
- targeting and reaching the target group;
- governance and support;
- intermediate outcomes;
- long term outcomes;
- sustainability;
- use of data;
- collaboration;
- unintended consequences;
- funding;
- other inequalities; and
- working in rural areas.

Research context

A key national priority

1.5 In Scotland, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap is a key national priority. The Scottish Attainment Challenge was launched in February 2015 to give a greater sense of urgency and priority to achieving equity in educational outcomes. It has a particular focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap. It was reinforced through the Programme for Government in 15/16, 16/17 and 17/18 and is underpinned by the National Improvement Framework.

The Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF)

1.6 The ASF is a targeted initiative focused on raising attainment among pupils living in communities with the highest concentrations of deprivation. A £750 million investment has been committed to the ASF over the course of this parliament. In 2017/18, two funding streams contributed to this investment:

- Challenge authority and schools programme - £50 million has been made available to provide targeted support to specific local authorities and a number of additional schools outwith these local authorities, supporting children and young people in in areas with the highest concentrations of deprivation. 2017/18 is the third year of this programme of funding. **The qualitative research focuses on this aspect of the ASF.**
- Pupil Equity Funding - £120 million has been made available for headteachers to use for interventions that they consider will help raise attainment. For school year 2017/18 almost all schools (95%) received this funding at a rate of £1,200 for each pupil in P1 to S3 known to be eligible for free school meals.

ASF – Challenge authority programme

1.7 Initially in 2015/16, the ASF focused on seven local authority areas. These 'challenge authorities' were identified as the authorities with the greatest concentration of primary age children living in the 20% most deprived areas of Scotland based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation¹. These authorities were asked to submit local authority wide improvement plans to bid for funding for initiatives to improve literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, particularly for pupils living in poverty. The approaches planned and introduced were very varied. Some focused on one theme – of literacy, numeracy or health and wellbeing – while some focused on all three. There were different levels of targeting – with some focusing on specific schools or pupils, and others targeting all. And interventions focused on different

¹ The Scottish Government's tool to identify areas of multiple deprivation in Scotland - <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD>

approaches – such as developing staff skills and capacity, parental engagement or nurturing approaches.

1.8 In June 2016, the Deputy First Minister announced a package of action to extend the reach, expand the scope and increase the pace of the Attainment Challenge. This included:

- increasing the number of challenge authorities from seven to nine, to include East Ayrshire and Renfrewshire;
- increasing the scope of the challenge to include secondary schools both in the challenge authorities programme and schools programme; and
- allocating more than £20 million to continue the work of the challenge authority primary programme into its second year.

1.9 The nine challenge authorities are:

- Clackmannanshire
- Dundee
- East Ayrshire
- Glasgow
- Inverclyde
- North Ayrshire
- North Lanarkshire
- Renfrewshire
- West Dunbartonshire.

ASF – Schools programme

1.10 In addition to the focus on these nine challenge authorities, specific schools outwith these areas have also received support through the ASF. In summer 2015, 57 primary schools outwith challenge authority areas were asked to submit improvement plans to the ASF, focusing on improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The schools were selected on the basis of having 70% of their pupils in the most 20% deprived areas of Scotland. Bids were made by or on behalf of individual schools.

1.11 In June 2016, when the challenge authority programme was extended to include secondary schools, there was also an extension of the schools programme into some secondary schools. Secondary schools associated with primary schools in the schools programme that had at least 20% of their pupils living in the 20% most deprived parts of Scotland were also invited to submit improvement plans.

1.12 By 2017 the schools programme involved 74 schools – 46 primary schools and 28 secondary schools.

Attainment Advisors

- 1.13 To support work to close the poverty related attainment gap, all local authorities have direct access to a named Attainment Advisor. The support from Attainment Advisors is delivered through a combination of full time and part-time roles. Challenge authorities, and specific schools programme authorities with the highest proportion of children living in SIMD decile 1 and 2 areas (the 20% most deprived datazones in Scotland) have full time support.
- 1.14 The role of each Attainment Advisor is developed and agreed with the local authority, according to the needs of individual authorities and schools. This means that what they do and what they are involved in differs between local authority areas, including the extent to which they give direct support to schools. Most will have a key role in building the capacity of leaders and supporting practitioners' effective self-evaluation.

Research method

- 1.15 This qualitative research explores stakeholder views on and experiences of the ASF. It was commissioned to supplement and validate the wider evaluation of the ASF, being led by the Scottish Government. It explores how practice has evolved at both school and local authority level.
- 1.16 The research method for this evaluation was developed in discussion with the Research Advisory Group for this work, which involved Scottish Government and Education Scotland representatives. The research involved six key stages as follows:

Table: Key research stages

Research stage	Number of interviews
School telephone interviews	87 teachers (from 80 schools)
Visits to the nine challenge authorities - meeting with the Director of Education, key attainment leads, data officers and other key staff	65 interviews
Telephone interviews with local authorities in the schools programme	6 interviews
Telephone interviews with Attainment Advisors	8 interviews
Telephone and face to face interviews with national strategic stakeholders	4 interviews
Telephone interviews with parents from across Scotland	9 interviews

1.17 Copies of the discussion guides for each group are included in Appendix One.

Telephone interviews with schools

Profile of schools

1.18 The research involved interviews with 80 schools in Scotland. We identified the pool of potential schools to involve in the research through:

- a list of all of the schools involved in the ASF schools programme (provided by the Scottish Government); and
- using the Scottish Government schools' database to identify all schools in challenge local authorities.

1.19 We agreed that there would be a balance of 15 interviews within the schools programme, and 65 interviews with schools in challenge authorities. This approach reflected that most schools involved in the ASF work were within challenge authorities, but also recognised that the research would need to involve a large enough pool within the schools programme to allow for meaningful analysis.

1.20 We then agreed how the 65 interviews within challenge authorities would be split between each of the nine areas. We considered whether the interviews should be split:

- using an equal split between the nine areas;
- proportionate to the number of schools within each of the nine areas; or
- proportionate to the amount of funding received by each of the nine areas.

1.21 The Research Advisory Group agreed to allocate the interviews at a point which sat between equal and proportionate to the number of schools. This meant that we undertook between six and twelve interviews in each area.

Table: School interviews by local authority area

Local authority area	Number of school interviews
Clackmannanshire	6
Dundee	6
East Ayrshire	6
Glasgow	12
Inverclyde	6
North Ayrshire	7
North Lanarkshire	10
Renfrewshire	6
West Dunbartonshire	6

1.22 We then used the pool of all potential schools in each local authority area (and within the schools programme) to profile our initial 80 schools to approach. In selecting schools, we took account of:

- type of school – primary or secondary;
- geographical location – rural or urban;
- level of deprivation – proportion of pupils living in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland;
- proportion of pupils from minority ethnic communities; and
- school denomination.

1.23 Before approaching schools, we asked each local authority to confirm that they were content with the school selection. This was to ensure that schools were not over-researched or over-stretched. In most cases, local authorities confirmed that they were content with the school selection with no amendments. However, some local authorities provided very helpful feedback which guided the selection of schools, including:

- suggesting replacing schools which had staffing issues, for example a retiring headteacher, or school improvement issues;
- suggesting including nurseries in the sample, due to a strong focus on early years; or
- suggesting including schools which had a longer running or more in depth involvement in the ASF (particularly in areas which had recently moved from schools programme to challenge authority approach).

- 1.24 A small number of local authorities outwith challenge areas suggested involving an alternate school in the research, instead of the school originally identified. This was because the selected school was not seen as representative of the area – for example because of being extremely small or very rural.
- 1.25 We then approached the headteacher in each of the schools, to seek permission to undertake a telephone interview with a relevant representative within the school. Of the 80 schools on the original matrix, almost all (74) agreed to participate. This is an extremely high participation rate for research in schools, and demonstrates the importance of the subject matter. Participation rates were also boosted through local authority representatives encouraging schools to participate.
- 1.26 The six schools which declined to participate did so due to staff shortages, being too busy or not feeling involved in the approach to date. Replacements for the small number of schools which declined to participate were identified through using the Scottish Government database of schools; our sampling matrix; and in discussion with local authorities.
- 1.27 A total of 80 schools participated in the research. Most were in large urban or other urban areas, as set out in the table below.

Table: School interviews by geographical location

Geographical location	Number of schools participating
Large urban	32
Other urban	31
Accesible small town	4
Accessible rural	7
Remote rural	4

- 1.28 The geographical profile of the participating schools was strongly influenced by the pool of schools involved in ASF challenge authorities and within the schools programme.

Profile of interviewees

- 1.29 A total of 87 individuals participated in the schools interviews, due to a small number of joint telephone interviews. The profile of interviewees is set out in the table below.

Table: School interviews by job title

Job title	Number of participants
Headteachers	72
Deputy headteachers	7
Others (including Principal Teachers, and teachers leading on attainment interventions)	8

1.30 Initially, the Research Advisory Group agreed to leave the participant type flexible, allowing for learning around who within schools became involved in the research. However, during the research it became clear that headteachers wanted to be involved directly in the research, and were not keen to delegate the responsibility of undertaking the interview to other staff. This was for a range of reasons, including a desire to take strategic responsibility for the work in the school, as well as pressures on the time of other staff and challenges releasing them to undertake the interview. In the later stages of the research we worked to encourage headteachers to identify other members of staff to undertake the interview. However, where this happened it generally meant a joint interview involving both the headteacher and another member of staff.

Topics covered

1.31 The discussions with teachers lasted one hour, and followed a semi-structured discussion guide. This ensured that all interviews followed the same format, while leaving some scope for probing and prompting on key issues emerging. The discussions focused on relevance of the aims of the ASF; approach to choosing interventions and targeting; outcomes; collaboration; views on support and funding; and impact on tackling wider inequalities.

Visits to the nine challenge authorities

1.32 We visited each of the nine challenge authorities, to meet with the Director of Education, relevant leads on attainment, officers responsible for data around attainment, and other key operational staff. Through these visits, we met with a total of 74 individuals. Overall, the interviews involved:

- 9 Directors of Education (or equivalent);
- 20 Attainment Challenge leads, Heads of Service or Senior Education Officers
- 34 operational project leads, largely responsible for delivering, implementing, championing or building capacity around attainment;
- 7 staff solely focused on data and information management; and

- 4 teachers with responsibility for championing or leading attainment in their school or across a number of schools.

1.33 In most cases we held an individual discussion with the Director of Education (or equivalent); an individual discussion with the Attainment Challenge lead; and a series of group discussions involving project leads, data management staff and (in some places) teachers. However, each local authority planned the visit to suit their local structures and availability.

1.34 The discussions lasted up to 90 minutes and followed a semi-structured discussion guide, exploring views on how interventions were planned and selected; targeting of schools, pupils and families; collaboration; use of data; outcomes; views on support and funding; and impact on wider inequalities.

Telephone interviews with non-challenge authorities

1.35 We worked with the Research Advisory Group to identify a sample of six local authority areas within the schools programme, to gather their views on the ASF. The interviews were with senior managers, lead officers or quality improvement managers. The discussions lasted an hour, and covered the same topics as with the challenge authorities.

Telephone interviews with Attainment Advisors

1.36 We worked with Education Scotland to identify a sample of eight Attainment Advisors, to gather their views. The sample was selected from full time Attainment Advisors, to include a mix of those who had been in post from the inception of the ASF and those who had come into post more recently. The sample also included a mix of both men and women.

1.37 The discussions lasted an hour, and explored the nature of support provided; use of data; and impact on wider inequalities.

Interviews with strategic stakeholders

1.38 We held individual interviews with four strategic stakeholders from Scottish Government, Education Scotland, COSLA (Coalition of Scottish Local Authorities) and ADES (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland). These took place face to face or over the phone, dependent on the interviewee preference. The discussions lasted an hour, and covered views on programme aims, implementation, management, impact and collaboration.

Telephone interviews with parents

1.39 We held nine telephone interviews with parents with some involvement in the ASF. We identified parents through the National Parent Forum Scotland (NPFs), local authorities and schools. Some parents were involved at a more strategic level – for example in their parent council – while others had been

directly involved in parental engagement or family learning work funded through the ASF in their school. We adapted our discussion guide to suit the nature of the parent's involvement, and covered topics including how they became involved in the work, the difference it made to them and their child(ren) and views on information and involvement around the ASF work in their school or local authority area. The profile of parents is not representative (or intended to be). Eight of the parents were female and one was male.

- 1.40 Involving parents in the research was the most challenging element of our work. A number of parents said that they would participate, but did not follow through. Schools often found the process of involving parents challenging, which meant that they were also hard to involve in our research.
- 1.41 Due to the small number of parents involved in this research, and the fact that the profile is not representative, parental responses are limited in the main report and are largely reflected through case study examples, set out in Appendix Two.

Analysis by respondent grouping

- 1.42 In analysing research participant views we explored any key variances of view between respondent groupings, including primary and secondary schools; teachers in different roles; challenge authorities and schools programme authorities; and between different authorities. Where differences of view have emerged by respondent grouping, we have highlighted this within the report.

2. Understanding and engagement with programme aims

Introduction

2.1 This chapter explores key findings around the understanding of and engagement with the aims of the ASF. It summarises views from 91 teachers², 70 local authority officers, eight Attainment Advisors, four national stakeholders and nine parents.

Key findings: understanding and engagement with programme aims

Almost all teachers and local authority officers found the aims of the ASF very relevant to their work. Many teachers and local authority officers highlighted that the ASF was in line with the aims of their school or authority.

A few local authority officers and teachers indicated that their area had already begun a strategic approach to addressing the poverty related attainment gap, slightly in advance of the ASF being introduced. The ASF allowed local authorities and schools to move faster and with more purpose, focusing on the themes of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

Strategic stakeholders felt that there was a high level understanding of the aims of the ASF. However, there were challenges to building understanding including the timescales for introducing the ASF; building understanding outwith challenge and schools programme authorities; connections between education and wider children's services; and fluctuating relationships between local and national government. There were mixed views on whether the close connection between the agenda and the First Minister was helpful.

A minority of teachers and local authority officers indicated concern about the focus on the poverty related attainment gap, highlighting that other factors impact on attainment. Some also questioned why the approach did not begin earlier, before children started school.

Most of the small group of parents involved in this research indicated that they felt well informed about the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the attainment related activity at their children's school. The parents participating in this research were often active in parental engagement approaches locally or

² 87 teacher telephone interviews in schools, and 4 teachers involved in the challenge authority sessions.

nationally, or had participated in ASF initiatives.

Understanding and engagement

- 2.2 We asked teachers and local authority officers how relevant they found the aims of the ASF to their work. Almost all teachers and local authority officers said that they found the aims very relevant.

“It chimes with our aspirations for our young people and for social justice.”
Headteacher, challenge school, primary

- 2.3 Most teachers said that they welcomed any resources and support that could help to address the poverty related attainment gap. Some teachers talked of the need for this type of resource, citing the high proportion of their pupils living in areas of deprivation, or the mix of pupils from different areas resulting in a clear attainment gap in their school.

- 2.4 Many teachers and local authority officers highlighted that the ASF was in line with the aims of their school, and the aims of their local authority. Most local authorities indicated that they already knew tackling the attainment gap should be a priority in their area, and a few had already begun a strategic approach to addressing this slightly in advance of the ASF being introduced. Local authority officers who indicated that they had already begun the journey towards addressing the attainment gap said that the ASF allowed them to move faster and with more purpose, and to focus on themes across literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

- 2.5 Similarly, some teachers indicated that their school was already focusing on tackling the poverty related attainment gap prior to the introduction of the ASF – particularly through approaches relating to health, wellbeing, nurture and engagement. Teachers who were already doing work in this area before the ASF felt that the ASF helped to provide a clearer focus on the poverty related attainment gap, and gave teachers the resources and time to consider new approaches. Teachers in some challenge authorities felt that the work was particularly relevant as it complemented and enhanced existing work, and helped to accelerate their activities.

“The ASF programme came at the right time, it has helped to focus our efforts and to target the right pupils.”
Headteacher, challenge school, primary

- 2.6 However, teachers in one particular challenge authority had slightly different views. In this area, while many teachers felt that the ASF priorities were relevant, most teachers also commented on their concern that the focus on poverty may result in over-generalisation and stigmatisation of children and may miss other wider factors such as additional support needs. These

teachers highlighted that the SIMD was a crude measure, and that not all attainment barriers were linked to SIMD 1 and 2.

- 2.7 In other local authorities a few noted that wider factors such as English as an additional language and the transient nature of pupil connection with the school were often bigger influences on attainment for their school.
- 2.8 In another challenge authority, local authority officers had concerns. Officers in this area highlighted that the aims of the ASF were too wide, and that they had significant issues with the philosophy of targeting only children in SIMD 1 and 2 areas.
- 2.9 Attainment Advisors indicated that in their work, it took a while to get teachers to understand the aims of the attainment challenge. The main challenge was around supporting teachers to make a shift towards targeted work with those who need it most, rather than taking a whole school approach to raising attainment.
- 2.10 When considering the relevance of the ASF, a small number of teachers, and some local authorities also wondered why the ASF did not focus on children before starting school.

A shared understanding

- 2.11 The four strategic national stakeholders interviews were asked whether there was a shared understanding of the aims of the programme among all stakeholders, and the success factors and challenges around this. There was a perception that at a high level, there was a shared understanding of attainment, equity and excellence.
- 2.12 Strategic stakeholders believed that factors which had helped build this understanding included:
 - the public nature of the vision;
 - the provision of ring fenced funding to local authorities;
 - the link to the National Improvement Framework;
 - close work with local authorities to develop the agenda; and
 - the development of a local approach with authorities able to decide how funding was spent – with a clear strategic vision.
- 2.13 There were mixed views on whether the close connection between the agenda and the First Minister was helpful. While some strategic stakeholders felt that inviting the public to judge the First Minister on her record on closing the attainment gap was helpful, others felt that it made the agenda personal and political – weakening the shared understanding.
- 2.14 Some strategic stakeholders felt that within the Scottish Government, people now understood the impact of poverty on educational attainment in a way

they didn't before. However, others felt that a lack of connection between Scottish Government teams had sometimes resulted in confusion, and a lack of coordination.

2.15 There were also some wider challenges to a shared understanding, identified by different strategic stakeholders, including:

- a perception that the initial stages of the programme were rushed, and that the timings of planning and reporting did not fit the rhythm of education in terms of academic years and improvement planning;
- a perception that local authorities which have not been challenge authorities or in the schools programme would have a less developed understanding of programme aims;
- a perception that the relationship between local and national government has fluctuated, with local government sometimes feeling under threat; and
- a perception that education may sometimes be viewed separately to the wider integrated children's services framework.

Parent understanding

2.16 The research involved interviews with very small number of parents (9). Most felt well informed about the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the attainment related activity at their children's school. Parents that were part of the parent council said that attainment had increasingly become a topic of discussion at meetings, and that headteachers have tried to take account of parent and pupils views when making decisions around how additional funding is used.

2.17 A small number of parents who were members of the National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFs) mentioned that the parent council and NPFs worked closely with schools to ensure that information is made available to as many parents as possible. A few felt that their school could do more to ensure that parents knew what new programmes were being implemented at the school and what their child would be involved in.

3. Interventions

Introduction

3.1 This chapter explores how local authorities and schools selected interventions. It explores the evidence and data that informed the selection process; who was involved in decisions about interventions; and whether approaches were completely new or developed from previous approaches.

Key findings: Interventions

Schools developed ASF interventions focusing on literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing, family support and engagement, teacher skills development and equipment and resources. In many cases, interventions built on previous successful approaches at school or local authority level, or in other parts of Scotland.

Most teachers felt involved in the process of selecting interventions for their school. Local authority officers often set broad priorities, building on existing data, evidence, previous approaches and teacher views.

In some cases, schools were encouraged to select their own interventions, with support, while in others, schools were offered access to interventions set at local authority level. These different approaches meant that a few teachers felt that they were given too much autonomy in the process, while a few felt that they had little choice or influence over interventions.

Most teachers involved in this research felt that local authorities had taken the lead on identifying evidence based approaches, and supporting schools to use data to inform their understanding of needs. Local authorities indicated that they had skilled staff teams, and were already very aware of relevant research in key areas. However, they also worked to access wider research to inform the selection of interventions.

Teachers indicated that they, jointly with local authority officers, had then used a range of evidence to inform the selection of interventions – including reviewing pupil and school data to identify need, wider research evidence, local feedback and consultation, and learning from previous interventions.

Attainment Advisors had supported the process of selecting interventions through activities such as acting as a critical friend, supporting a strategic and rigorous approach, and sharing knowledge and practice. However, a few indicated that they were not in post at the time of selecting initial interventions.

Types of intervention

3.2 We asked teachers and local authority officers about the types of intervention they selected. The main themes emerging were in line with the themes of the ASF:

- literacy;
- numeracy;
- health and wellbeing;
- family support and engagement;
- skills development; and
- equipment and resources.

3.3 This chapter looks at the types of interventions selected within each of these themes.

Literacy

3.4 Literacy interventions included:

- literacy leaders and champions;
- one to one and group support – particularly around early literacy;
- approaches such as reciprocal reading, paired reading and (in one instance) children reading with dogs;
- new programmes or approaches such as Read Write Inc, POLAAR (Primary One Literacy Assessment and Action Resource), VCOP (Vocabulary, Connectors, Openers and Punctuation), Ready Steady Read, Word Aware, Word Boost, The Literacy Shed and Rainbow Reading;
- accelerated reader (in secondary schools), active literacy, phonics based programmes, metacognitive work and creative vocabulary development;
- encouraging children to become enthusiastic about reading including creating a literacy rich environment, literacy hubs or (in one instance) having a resident author; and
- working with specialists including dyslexia support and speech and language therapists.

3.5 Most teachers were very positive about the focus on literacy, believing that the ASF had helped the school to embed consistent approaches to literacy, and spend more time on literacy within the curriculum.

Numeracy

3.6 Teachers also felt that the ASF had helped to shift the way that they taught numeracy skills, using new approaches. Numeracy interventions included:

- numeracy leaders and champions;

- new tools or approaches including SEAL (Stages of Early Arithmetic Learning), Nurture Number, Big Maths, Play along Maths, Numberbug, Sumdog, Number Talks and Concrete Pictorial Abstract;
- learning approaches including cooperative learning strategies, problem solving and linking numeracy to wider STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) activities; and
- one to one numeracy support, small group support, extra maths periods (in secondary schools).

Health and wellbeing

3.7 Many teachers indicated that health and wellbeing provided strong foundations for learning, which needed to be in place in order for attainment to improve. This included addressing social and emotional needs, to ensure that children were able to attend school, enjoy school and be ready to learn. Health and wellbeing interventions included:

- taking a nurture approach (with many mentioning learning from the model used in Glasgow);
- support at key transitions – between nursery, primary and secondary;
- breakfast and afterschool clubs, homework clubs and supported study;
- targeted support for young people including looked after children, children with English as an additional language and refugees;
- counsellors and health and wellbeing assistants integrated within the school, with early intervention for pupils with social or emotional behaviour issues;
- outdoor learning, Green Gyms and community gardens;
- approaches using music, dance, sport, physical activity, massage, relaxation, mindfulness and other techniques to provide positive experiences for pupils;
- use of models such as Neurosequential Model in Education, the ICE Pack training resource, growth mindset; and
- in secondary schools, support moving into positive destinations.

Family support and engagement

3.8 Many schools undertook work on engaging and involving parents and families in the school. This involved working with parents to raise aspirations, and change attitudes to learning. Approaches included:

- parent workshops – on a range of topics, aimed at engaging families with challenging needs with the school environment;
- positive parenting programmes;
- family learning workers – building links with families; and
- targeted homework and family learning support.

Staff development

3.9 All schools and local authorities involved in the research had undertaken some form of staff development. Funding through the ASF had enabled teachers to find the space and time for learning on a wide range of topics. Some training and development activity was compulsory (within challenge authority areas), some was strongly encouraged, and some was voluntary. Approaches included:

- the creation of leaders of learning/ champions/ coaches who developed expertise in key areas and spread this to other teachers;
- access to training and support through Universities, educational consultants and others on a wide range of topics including literacy, numeracy, early play, nurture (the Solihull approach), Video Enhanced Reflective Practice, standardised testing, data analysis and many others; and
- learning communities – including around collaborative action research, sharing approaches to learning and teaching.

Equipment and resources

3.10 A small number of teachers highlighted that they used the funding to buy resources such as:

- learning materials to support literacy or numeracy;
- new spaces, such as nurture rooms or outdoor spaces; and
- ipads (in one school - due to time pressures on spending the funding).

3.11 Where schools had purchased resources, this was most often because they had tried to appoint staff but had been unable to due to challenges recruiting, or where the time to spend the resources had been very limited.

Status of interventions

3.12 We asked teachers and local authority officers whether interventions were new, or if they built on existing interventions. In many cases, interventions were extensions of previous approaches which were tried in the school, local authority area, or in other parts of Scotland.

3.13 Local authority officers indicated that often, the interventions selected related to existing local priorities – particularly where there had already been discussion about a strategic approach to tackling the attainment gap. Sometimes local authorities indicated that their approach built on previous workstreams, but allowed expansion of ideas that had been tested on a small scale.

3.14 Teachers said that they often used the funding to enable them to build on previous successful approaches, or strengthen links that were there already – for example with experts and specialists. Teachers also indicated that they used existing approaches, but targeted them or measured their impact in a new and more focused way.

“The SAC programme has allowed us to ‘turbo charge’ our approach to tackling the attainment gap.”

Headteacher, challenge authority, primary

3.15 In some cases the interventions were approaches that the school or local authority had wanted to try before, but didn't have the resources to implement. However, a few teachers highlighted that some of their activity was filling the gaps in activity that had previously been funded in different ways. This is explored further in Chapter 11.

Approach to selecting interventions

3.16 We asked teachers and local authority officers about how interventions were selected, and who was involved in the decision making process.

3.17 Overall, most of the teachers involved in this research felt involved in the process, and in control of the decisions made. Some described the process as collaborative and flexible. However, perceptions on approaches to selecting interventions varied between and within different local authority areas.

3.18 Most teachers indicated that the local authority set broad priorities, with schools able to discuss how they could best use different approaches. Some teachers welcomed this approach, and felt comfortable with this process because they felt that the interventions were based on good evidence about what works.

3.19 Local authority officers indicated that they set broad priorities through:

- reviewing data to identify attainment gaps;
- engaging headteachers to explore views;
- building on previous successful approaches;
- building on previous experience of programmes such as Raising Attainment for All and School Improvement Partnership Programme;
- gathering evidence and research about successful approaches; and
- building on good relationships with other partners and services.

3.20 In some cases, local authority officers encouraged headteachers to select their own interventions, and research approaches themselves (with support). These local authority areas felt that it was important that teachers took ownership of the approaches, and drove the approach. In others, schools

were offered access to interventions which were set at a local authority wide level. This was to ensure that the approach was joined up and clearly managed and governed. Some areas also indicated that teachers did not always have time to review research and evidence.

“The key to success was not to put things out there and expect people to deliver. We have provided ongoing support to our schools.”

Challenge authority

- 3.21 A few teachers felt that they largely had “free rein” over the interventions they selected, which they welcomed – particularly as they had access to support from their Attainment Advisor. However, a few teachers felt that they were given too much autonomy, and that they would have liked to have more information about possible options, or a ‘menu of options’ of what works.
- 3.22 In a few local authority areas, a high number of teachers felt that they had no choice or influence about the interventions they participated in. There was concern that there had been little discussion, consultation or collaboration. One teacher felt the school had been allocated the wrong priority, and was put into a strand of work where the school was already doing well. Another felt the approach was “top down”. However, some of these teachers felt that this approach at least meant that approaches were consistent and based on evidence.
- 3.23 Within the schools programme, schools began by focusing on the particular issues around the poverty related attainment gap for their school. Teachers looked at data on the gaps, and explored options for closing these gaps through targeted interventions. Often schools considered existing priorities, for example from within the School Improvement Plan. Schools also considered ideas that had emerged from staff or parents but that they had been unable to progress. Often schools built on what was there already, but worked on taking a much more evidence based approach, clearly focused on achieving impact.
- 3.24 While teachers within the schools programme largely welcomed the autonomy they had in selecting interventions, one indicated that they would have liked access to more support and challenge, particularly from the local authority, when developing these.
- 3.25 Most local authorities and teachers were comfortable with the process of selecting interventions, although some did highlight that the timescales were very tight and there was not much time to plan interventions. However, senior staff in one local authority area felt that it was hard to choose as so many interventions can have positive outcomes, and that prior to the ASF there were challenges around capacity within the local authority to undertake research and make strategic decisions about approaches.

Use of evidence

- 3.26 Most teachers involved in this research felt that local authorities had taken the lead on identifying evidence based approaches, and supporting schools to use data to inform their understanding of needs.
- 3.27 Local authorities indicated that they had skilled staff teams, and were already very aware of research in key areas such as growth mindset, nurture, meta cognition, creative curriculum, outdoor learning, personalisation and choice. However, they also worked to access wider research through joint work with universities and exploring evidence produced by institutions like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Dartington Research Unit, Child Poverty Action Group, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Education Endowment Fund.
- 3.28 However, some staff responsible for planning and delivering interventions within challenge authorities felt that it would be helpful to have robust evidence at national level to support the selection of interventions. Some also indicated that within local authorities they were sometimes limited in terms of the cost of accessing research.
- 3.29 Many local authority officers and a few teachers indicated that when planning interventions they used the Plan, Do, Study, Act model, to start small scale interventions, review their impact, and then modify appropriately.
- 3.30 The types of evidence that teachers were aware of informing their selection of interventions, listed broadly in order of frequency mentioned, included:
- pupil and school data – including SIMD, free school meals, Insight data, standardised tests, staged interventions, health and social work involvement, child protection, attendance, pupil tracking systems, ScotXed data, professional knowledge and judgement,
 - research – from places including the Education Endowment Foundation, Dartington Social Research Unit, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Robert Owen Centre, Education Scotland Improvement Hub, and examples from other countries;
 - local research – gathering views of parents and school staff, reviewing key documents like the school improvement plan, and gathering experience of experts like educational psychology or speech and language therapists; and
 - learning from previous small scale interventions – and rolling these out where it was clear they had made a difference.
- 3.31 Some teachers had been involved in previous programmes including Raising Attainment for All and the School Improvement Partnership Programme, either within their existing school or in a previous post. Those involved in

Raising Attainment for All found that it was helpful around data, research, driver diagrams and evidencing impact.

Support from Attainment Advisors

3.32 Attainment Advisors were also asked about the support they provided in relation to selecting and designing interventions. Most supported their schools and headteachers – mainly in primary schools - to select interventions at some point, or to develop tools to measure the impact of the interventions. Attainment Advisors had been involved in discussions around:

- acting as a critical friend providing support and challenge around interventions – both in local authorities and schools;
- building a strategic and coordinated approach to planning interventions across the local authority;
- supporting schools to become more strategic and rigorous in terms of using evidence to select interventions;
- working with schools to accept that in some cases initial approaches won't be possible, for example due to challenges recruiting, and planning other interventions;
- ensuring that approaches focused specifically on closing the attainment gap, rather than raising attainment more generally;
- exploring how interventions will be evidenced at both local authority and school level – developing monitoring and tracking tools and building skills around data, self-evaluation and reporting;
- sharing knowledge and good practice from other areas, and within the local authority area;
- supporting leadership and skills development within schools – including supporting headteachers to become more strategic and less operational in some instances; and
- supporting recruitment of new staff to deliver interventions.

3.33 However, some Attainment Advisors highlighted that they were not involved in the initial process of identifying interventions at local authority level, at the outset of the ASF, as they were not in post soon enough.

4. Targeting

Introduction

4.1 This chapter explores approaches to targeting interventions – for certain schools, pupils and families. It explores strategies and approaches to targeting, and successes and challenges around reaching the target group.

Key findings: Targeting

Local authority approaches to targeting schools within their area differed. Some targeted schools with the highest proportion of pupils living in deprived areas, for example through including only certain schools with the highest levels of deprivation in the programme or allocating resources to schools based on level of deprivation. Others used a more universal approach. One local authority in particular had to adapt its approach to ensure that all schools received some support, due to some feelings of isolation and resentment from schools that were not initially included.

Within schools, most teachers indicated that they used a mix of targeted and universal approaches to involving children and families in ASF activity. The approach to targeting varied dependent on the intervention being used, and the mix of pupils within the school - with schools often using multiple approaches.

Data played a significant role in the targeting process. Local authorities and teachers felt that the process of targeting children and families resulted in real analysis of data in a way that they didn't do before. Most teachers felt that they now had the information, skills and support they required to be able to target pupils effectively. However, many highlighted that this was a big learning curve for them. Many teachers talked of the value of the Attainment Advisor in providing support on data.

Almost all schools also had universal activities. Schools with very high proportions of pupils in SIMD 1 and 2 areas were more likely to offer universal support than schools with more mixed catchment areas. Some teachers and local authority officers were concerned about targeting particular children for support, due to concerns about stigmatisation or a belief that every child should be offered the same opportunities.

Key challenges around targeting included finding the staff to deliver targeted work (with challenges around recruitment and back filling); moral issues around identifying pupils in SIMD 1 and 2 areas and obviously targeting them; and challenges engaging parents.

Targeting schools

- 4.2 Local authority officers were asked about whether and how they targeted certain schools within the local authority area. Approaches to targeting schools differed. In some areas, local authorities targeted schools with the highest proportion of pupils living in deprived areas – for example with 70% or more living in SIMD 1 and 2 areas. Sometimes a small number of schools were targeted initially, expanding over time.
- 4.3 For example, in one local authority six schools were involved in year one, focusing on P1 and P2 pupils rising to twelve schools focusing on P1 to P7 by the third year. In another local authority, schools were allocated a certain level of staff resource, ranging from full time to 0.2 posts, based on the SIMD profile of pupils. This was intended to be a fair and transparent way of allocating support.
- 4.4 In another area, schools in the most deprived areas were initially targeted, using a sliding scale of support based on SIMD data. However, this resulted in “real resentment”, with some schools feeling isolated, so the approach was adapted. Many local authorities indicated that schools which were not included in targeted approaches received some aspects of universal support.

Targeting children and families

- 4.5 At school level, most teachers indicated that they used a mix of targeted and universal approaches to involving children and families in ASF activity. The approach to targeting varied dependent on the intervention being used, with schools often using multiple approaches. Approaches to targeting also varied depending on the mix of pupils within the school. Schools with very high proportions of pupils in SIMD 1 and 2 areas operated in different ways to schools with more mixed catchment areas.
- 4.6 Local authorities stated that they had supported schools to target their activities at pupils and families through various ways such as:
- providing access to data;
 - support with analysing data;
 - building networking approaches and families of schools based on similar challenges;
 - providing support from trained staff; and
 - training or coaching staff within each school on targeting.
- 4.7 Local authorities felt that this resulted in real analysis of data in a way that they didn't do before. Equally, at school level it was evident from discussions with teachers that data played a significant role in the targeting process.

Most teachers interviewed used a wide range of data and evidence to target their interventions, including:

- SIMD data and free school meals data;
- assessment data including standardised test scores, Curriculum for Excellence levels, chronological age levels using a range of methods including Insight, CEM (Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring) – including the CEM InCAS primary assessment and PIPS, YARK (York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension), MALT (Mathematics Assessment for Learning and Teaching), POLAAR (Primary One Literacy Assessment and Action Resource), NGRT (New Group Reading Test), ScotXed and many more;
- health and wellbeing data including Boxall profiles, wellbeing assessment plans, social, emotional and behavioural needs, care settings, child vulnerability, GIRFEC and SHANARRI indicators,
- school engagement data including attendance, time keeping, parental engagement, placing request data; and
- professional knowledge, teacher judgement and reflections from support workers and other teams such as community learning and development.

4.8 Some teachers explained that they now had access to this data for each pupil, on a spreadsheet. This was a new approach for many. Teachers felt that the data from a variety of sources had helped to both identify the target pupils, and inform the necessary interventions. Teachers also indicated that they now felt more able to combine professional knowledge and judgement with robust data from other sources.

“We are clear on how to target specific children and why we are targeting them.”
Acting headteacher, challenge authority, primary

4.9 The way in which pupils were targeted varied – both between and within schools. Sometimes whole classes were targeted, for example where there were clear attainment gaps or attainment was low or falling. Others targeted specific groups of pupils. This could be through offering one to one sessions, targeted group sessions or targeted additional activities. The examples below provide a flavour of some of the different ways in which schools were targeting pupils.

Example: In one school all pupils live in SIMD 1 and 2 areas. Staff looked at the bottom 20% of achievers in each class for literacy and numeracy. These pupils then received additional support through the raising attainment leader or classroom assistant.

Example: One school has focused on providing support to a targeted group of nine children in P3 and P4, who were struggling with literacy. Targeting was informed by quality assurance data, senior leadership team observations, class teacher knowledge and professional judgement, SIMD data and knowledge of

who gets support at home. The class teachers have received capacity building input, and the pupils are taken out of class twice a week to work with a leader on the attainment work.

- 4.10 Most teachers talked about the importance of taking care when targeting pupils, to ensure that they did not feel stigmatised. This was an important issue for many schools. Approaches included providing additional support within the class, targeted group work at the same time as other pupils do group work and regular individual attention for targeted pupils. Nurture rooms and nurture groups were also often carefully targeted at pupils – for example small groups identified by teachers or pupils spending a lot of time out of the classroom.
- 4.11 Additional activities were often promoted carefully to pupils in areas of deprivation – while also allowing others to attend. For example, one school said that it was “artificially manufacturing the waiting lists” for afterschool clubs to allow pupils living in SIMD 1 and 2 areas to access these. Others targeted families for support, heavily promoting and encouraging activities like catch up activities and family support.
- 4.12 In one challenge authority area, teachers indicated that targeting was being led by the local authority to ensure consistency and fairness. Targeting was based on SIMD 1 and 2, alongside teacher professional knowledge and attainment data. Attainment challenge teachers then came into the schools, to work with targeted children and upskill staff.
- 4.13 A few local authority officers also had concerns about targeting. This was a particular concern in one area where senior staff felt that it was hard for schools to get to grips with closing the gap, and that schools could not take on this significantly different role in terms of targeting specific pupils. A few Attainment Advisors also felt that some headteachers found it challenging to target individual pupils, because they were used to taking a universal approach.
- 4.14 A few local authorities said that they found it hard to make decisions about targeting, because they had too much data. And a few found it hard to access the data they needed, for example health and wellbeing data, and map this across to attainment data.

“We have too much data, it needs to be simplified. We are currently developing a dashboard.”

Challenge authority

- 4.15 A very small minority of teachers suggested that they did not target their ASF work at pupils with the largest gap in relation to attainment. For example, in one school, where almost all pupils were in SIMD 1 and 2 areas, the headteacher realised over time that targeting the lowest attaining children

wasn't going to give a "bang for buck". Instead she decided to target the "middle of the road" children in terms of attainment, who were most likely to see outcomes around closing the attainment gap. The children with the lowest attainment were very far from attaining at national averages, and had more complex issues than could be dealt with through attainment interventions alone. They were also usually supported in other ways, outwith the attainment work, in schools.

Universal approaches

- 4.16 Almost all schools also had universal activities. The reasons for these varied.
- 4.17 Firstly, schools in areas with very high proportions of pupils in SIMD 1 and 2 areas (often around 90% or more) often took a universal approach. For example, one school only had around six pupils who were not in these high SIMD areas, and felt that it would be unfair to exclude them. This was often the case within the schools programme.
- 4.18 Secondly, some schools reviewed trends in attainment and targeted whole classes (and sometimes groups within these) who had trends of falling attainment. However some said that the approach was universal within classes, but that some targeted pupils also received one to one support.
- 4.19 Thirdly, new teaching approaches were largely universal. For example, if the local authority was promoting a new way of teaching literacy or numeracy, or use of music, outdoor learning or physical activity in learning, this largely applied to all pupils. Linked to this, approaches to build teacher capacity were largely universal. Often these were about building capacity around teaching approaches, mental health, nurture or other new approaches. These were seen to benefit the whole school, but targeted pupils in particular. For example, some teachers mentioned the nurture approach as being universal – although nurture groups and nurture rooms largely targeted a small number of pupils.
- 4.20 Fourthly, some schools had concerns about taking targeted approaches, feeling that every child should be offered the same opportunities. Some also had concerns about stigmatising children by offering them additional support. This was expressed by nursery, primary and secondary school teachers. While some teachers were more comfortable targeting support at particular families than particular children, some local authority staff were particularly nervous about targeting parents for specific interventions, due to concerns about stigmatisation. Some local authority officers also highlighted that they deliberately used mixed ability groups, rather than extracting and supporting particular young people.
- 4.21 Finally, some teachers highlighted that some of the approaches that they had tried and tested with targeted groups of children became universal, as they had the potential to impact on a much wider range of children.

Information, skills and support with targeting

4.22 Most teachers felt that they now had the information, skills and support they required to be able to target pupils effectively. Teachers highlighted that through support from data analysts, champions and Attainment Advisors they had developed their confidence in understanding and using data. Teachers felt that they were now more able to understand their own data, compare with schools with similar profiles, and triangulate data from different sources. Some felt that there was now less reliance on 'common sense', and that the data helped to inform and balance their professional judgements.

“Previously we relied on common sense, there was no baseline information. It is amazing that we now have baseline information, our approach has been much more structured.”

Principal teacher, challenge authority, primary

4.23 However, many indicated that it was a big learning curve for them. A few teachers indicated that they felt “in the dark” in the early stages – and found it took time to get up to speed with data, and then implement targeted interventions. Some found that it was very time consuming at first, but after receiving support they understood how to use data much more confidently, drilling down into the detail required without being overwhelmed by the volume of data. Some had challenges around consistency of data between schools, or over time (for example with the SIMD 2016 data becoming available to replace SIMD 2012).

4.24 Many teachers talked of the value of the Attainment Advisor (in the schools programme and challenge authorities) in providing support on data. Attainment Advisors had supported schools to understand what they needed, interpreted data, and developed the skills of staff around data use. A few also mentioned that it was very useful to share their experiences with others, at discussions facilitated by the Scottish Government.

4.25 Secondary school teachers had more issues with access to data than primary schools, with a few highlighting the need for a user-friendly performance tracking tool to enable them to effectively target pupils. A few said that systems such as SEMIS and Insight were not helpful for targeting pupils, being seen as too complex, including too many layers of data and not user friendly.

Successes of targeting

4.26 Teachers had different experiences of what had worked well for them, in terms of reaching their target groups. Many teachers talked about the growing understanding of the targeted approach, including:

- increasing awareness of the need to tackle the poverty related attainment gap;
- a growing commitment to using a targeted approach – with staff buying into the approach, and a culture of targeting pupils based on attainment developing within the school;
- an increase in confidence using data;
- pupil enthusiasm about being involved;
- staff development; and
- the scope to think creatively about interventions.

4.27 In terms of working with pupils, teachers highlighted that targeted approaches which worked well included:

- targeted interventions which take place at the same time as day to day class activities – through targeted support from the teacher or another member of staff within the class;
- one to one sessions and small groups – which teachers felt could make a huge difference, including helping teachers to identify what works well for individual pupils;
- mentor approaches involving peer support between pupils;
- approaches which mean that other pupils don't know which pupils are receiving targeted support and are not stigmatised;
- interventions at key stages or transitions – for example in the early years of secondary schools when some pupils may be on the cusp of making bad decisions; and
- offering a range of interventions for pupils with complex needs.

4.28 Teachers indicated that additional staff had enabled much of this targeted work to take place.

4.29 In terms of their work with families, teachers highlighted some successful approaches in relation to:

- building links with families through family liaison workers;
- parent focused interventions around wider themes such as health and wellbeing;
- parent engagement with teachers, becoming more comfortable being in the school.

4.30 However, parental engagement was not often raised as a success, and was more often raised as a challenge – as explored below.

Challenges around targeting

4.31 Teachers also highlighted what didn't work well in relation to targeting. Key themes included:

- challenges recruiting staff to deliver targeted work – or back filling posts for people who are focusing on attainment work;
- moral issues around identifying pupils in SIMD 1 and 2 and obviously targeting them for interventions that others don't receive;
- difficulties understanding the attainment gap when most pupils are in high SIMD areas and it is hard to find a comparison group;
- challenges engaging parents, linked to multiple factors including fear of stigmatisation, concerns about parental group work and previous negative experiences with education;
- the time taken to deliver targeted work with pupils, while still delivering core activity within the school;
- the extra administration created around targeting and use of data; and
- the challenges balancing data with other factors like teacher judgement.

4.32 A very small number of teachers indicated other challenges. For example, one said that teachers were frightened of taking new approaches in case they make mistakes and this disadvantages the pupils further.

4.33 Other stakeholders largely did not comment on successes and challenges reaching the target groups, believing teachers were best placed to comment on this. However, some staff within local authorities commented specifically on the challenges of engaging parents, and indicated that approaches tended to work well when:

- interventions were branded as opportunities;
- there were mixed groups of parents, ensuring that people could learn from one another; and
- parents were eased in using a range of activities, rather than focusing initially on literacy or numeracy.

4.34 Our discussions with a very small number of parents highlighted that some were less likely to participate in school activities because of their own experiences at school. One parent suggested that brief taster sessions may be useful, so that they could see what the programme would involve. Another suggested that schools could think carefully about the practical elements of engagement including event timing, refreshments and transport to encourage participation.

Views of strategic stakeholders

4.35 The four strategic stakeholders involved in this research were asked for their views on how activity was targeted at certain local authorities, schools, pupils and families. Each stakeholder had different views, and brought up different issues. Key points emerging included:

- positivity that all local authorities were able to access an Attainment Advisor;

- confidence that schools are reaching the right families and pupils, and are shifting their thinking to a more targeted approach;
- a suggestion that the approach was less strategic in the schools programme than in challenge authorities; and
- recognition that targeting was necessary and that there needed to be some method of deciding how to target.

“Given the aim it is right that only local authorities that have the biggest challenges are selected. This seems a reasonable principle.”

Strategic stakeholder

4.36 However, one strategic stakeholder felt that there was a philosophical flaw at the heart of model – by focusing on schools the approach does not focus on early years or wider services, which can have a major impact on poverty and the attainment gap. This stakeholder also expressed concern that by targeting challenge authorities, the approach missed areas of deprivation in other authorities, feeling that the approach should have been more nuanced.

5. Achieving short and medium term outcomes

Introduction

- 5.1 This chapter explores views on progress towards the short and medium-term outcomes of the ASF – including improving teaching skills, leadership, parental engagement and home learning.

Key findings: Achieving short and medium term outcomes

There was a clear belief across all stakeholders that the ASF had improved teaching skills. It had provided access to training, encouraged reflection on skills, increased professional dialogue and improved collaboration.

There was agreement that the ASF was creating leadership opportunities, with opportunities to mentor, network and lead on new approaches.

Views on progress around parental engagement and home learning were more mixed. Many indicated that parental engagement was a challenge, and that it was work in progress.

Many felt that it would take a bit longer to see and measure tangible outcomes. However, they felt that groundwork (in terms of data use, targeting and understanding the aims of the ASF) had been laid in order to achieve the outcomes in the coming years.

Teaching skills

- 5.2 There was a clear belief across all stakeholders that the ASF had improved teaching skills.
- 5.3 Teachers believed that the approach had a positive impact on teaching and learning, with teachers trained and embracing new pedagogy approaches, and with access to better resources. Teachers felt that the ASF had made practitioners reflect on their skills more, and become enthusiastic about extending their skills. Many felt that the ASF had increased professional dialogue, improved collaboration and raised awareness of the importance of closing the attainment gap.

“It has really helped to change minds and attitudes.”

Headteacher, challenge school, secondary

- 5.4 At a local authority level, local authority staff and Attainment Advisors agreed that there were clear outcomes around improving teaching skills, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Staff felt that the ASF had improved the quality of teaching, increased professional dialogue and improved awareness of the attainment gap. Some were working to set baselines for teaching skills, as some evidence of improvement was anecdotal.

Leadership

- 5.5 Teachers, local authority staff and Attainment Advisors also felt that the ASF was creating leadership opportunities. They pointed to more collaborative approaches being taken within schools, with opportunities to mentor, network and lead on new approaches. Some local authority staff indicated that headteachers were now leading the agenda on closing the attainment gap.

“Every teacher has the opportunity to lead in the school.”

Headteacher, challenge authority, primary

- 5.6 More widely, one authority highlighted that schools were improving more generally, through ASF work, resulting in improvements in school inspection ratings. A few teachers also indicated, unprompted, that this enthusiasm was feeding through to pupils. Attainment Advisors reinforced this view, with some stating that teachers now understood the importance of everyone being aspirational for their pupils.
- 5.7 However, a few indicated that while leadership capacity had been developed, there was still scope to improve.

Parental engagement and home learning

- 5.8 Views on progress around parental engagement and home learning were more mixed. Most teachers indicated that parental engagement was a challenge for them, and that it was work in progress. Many local authority officers also referred to outcomes around parental engagement and home learning as work in progress, and something for which it would take longer to bring about change.
- 5.9 The ASF had encouraged some teachers to reconsider what parental engagement meant, and whether it could be wider than simply having parents within the school building. Some schools had begun using more fun

and less formal ways of engaging parents, including using social media to communicate, coffee and chat approaches to involving parents and play based approaches.

Example: In one school a parental engagement session called ‘playing with sound’ was introduced. Parents could come in to class and play with their children, and the approach particularly targeted parents of children who had struggled with phonological awareness. The parents were given resources that they could take and use at home with the child. Feedback collected by the school suggested that this was very positively received.

Example: In one school there was a series of family learning days, where parents were invited in to showcase assemblies, and then encouraged to stay in school for the rest of the day so that they could participate in a range of shared learning activities for their children.

“Through better parental engagement we are starting to raise the expectations of parents, and they are starting to take more responsibility for their children’s learning.”

5.10 Some had tried approaches which were not successful, and were rethinking how to better engage parents in the future. There were, however, indications of some positive improvements such as parents being happier to come into school and attend parents evenings. A few teachers indicated that they had observed an increase in parental engagement, for example through more parents becoming involved with the parent council. A few had seen positive outcomes from parent leadership programmes, such as Columba 1400.

5.11 Teachers also had mixed experiences of outcomes around home learning, and most were finding that it was still a challenge. However, some were changing their approaches to homework and home learning away from traditional tasks to more interactive activities for the whole family.

Example: Involving parents in school-based learning

One school in South Ayrshire has implemented a new reading programme, as part of its drive to improve literacy. Part of this programme involves reading days, where parents/carers come into the school and read with pupils in small groups.

Two parents we spoke with reported that they found it enjoyable to be part of the school environment, and to be helping pupils increase their confidence around reading. One parent said that she found it useful to know about what was happening in the school, and how her son was being taught.

The new books that the school has introduced as part of the programme have been popular with both pupils and parents/carers, and already appear to be engaging more pupils in reading at school, and at home.

“I’ve noticed a big difference in the boys, especially reading. The reading books are so enjoyable.”

“It has made a huge difference. They [the children] seem a lot more active and a lot more willing to learn.”

Parents, South Ayrshire

Early signs

5.12 Across all stakeholder groups, many felt that it would take a bit longer to see and measure tangible outcomes. However, they felt that groundwork (in terms of data use, targeting and understanding the aims of the ASF) had been laid in order to achieve the outcomes in the coming years. Strategic stakeholders largely felt that there were signs of positive progress – although they highlighted that the quality of evidence was variable, but improving.

6. Improving attainment

Introduction

- 6.1 This chapter explores views on the impact that the ASF is having on longer term outcomes in terms of improving literacy and numeracy attainment, and health and wellbeing.

Key findings: Improving attainment

Many felt that it was still too early to comment on longer term outcomes, but that initial indications were good. Many spoke of seeing an upward trend in indicators, and positive evidence from small scale projects.

Teachers and local authority officers were generally more able to comment on outcomes around literacy, and less able to comment on numeracy and health and wellbeing. Some had seen positive indications from standardised tests and reading scores, as well as observations of increasing literacy skills. Most of the evidence related to younger age groups – most often P1.

There was less evidence of outcomes in relation to numeracy, largely because work in this area had started later. Progress towards health and wellbeing was highlighted as challenging to measure, but both teachers and local authority officers were able to point to signs of positive progress – for example around behaviour, resilience and SHANARRI indicators.

Some teachers, local authority officers, Attainment Advisors and strategic stakeholders reiterated that while there were signs of positive progress, their work would not fully address the poverty related attainment gap. Some stressed that it was important to recognise that a wide range of factors other than school interventions were likely to affect attainment.

Ability to comment on long term outcomes

- 6.2 Many local authority officers felt that it was still early to comment on longer term outcomes, but that initial indications were good. Many spoke of seeing an upward trend in indicators suggesting progress towards the outcomes they wanted to bring about. Evidence from small scale individual projects were largely positive, but related to varied outcomes.
- 6.3 Some local authorities were beginning to see the gap between the most and least deprived pupils decrease, but stressed that this was based on just two years of data. Some also stressed that it was important to recognise that a wide range of factors other than school interventions were likely to affect

attainment. Views on progress were mixed. While some said that they had surpassed their targets, others felt that progress was not happening quickly enough, or that some targets were “too big a reach”.

- 6.4 Some local authorities were working to improve their evidence, build strong baselines for comparison, introduce a consistent approach to standardised assessment, and balance qualitative and quantitative information. Some indicated that because of very high levels of poverty in their local authority area, it could be difficult to identify a comparable cohort of pupils in less deprived areas.
- 6.5 Attainment Advisors and strategic stakeholders also indicated that while there were examples of positive progress, it was a little early to be able to talk definitively about the contribution of ASF to longer term outcomes.
- 6.6 While some teachers felt that it was too early to comment, many were hopeful that they would see positive outcomes in the longer term, and had a general feeling that attainment levels were improving. A few indicated that they would get more results during 2017 which would help them to see whether attainment was improving. Teachers in secondary schools in particular highlighted that it was very early days for their ASF work, and were less likely to be able to comment on outcomes in any detail.

“Turning round kids education is like turning round a huge slow ship. We are talking about deeper learning and understanding. You don’t just turn a switch and it happens, that takes time.”

Headteacher, challenge authority, secondary

“The foundations have been laid now. We believe that we can really make a difference. We feel we have ownership of what we are doing.”

Headteacher, challenge authority, primary

Outcomes across a range of areas

- 6.7 A small minority of teachers were able to talk in detail about the outcomes that they had seen across all three themes of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Examples of two schools which were able to comment in depth on the changes seen in relation to pupil attainment, across a range of themes, are provided below.

Example: One secondary school has seen an improvement in reading age and confidence, in a short space of time. It has also seen a big increase in pupils reaching appropriate numeracy levels at S3 and S4, and teachers can see that pupils are now more able to answer more challenging maths questions. Teachers are also more aware of the types of questions that pupils struggle with, and there is

a numeracy team to provide lesson starter resources to review these questions. Insight data also shows that the approaches are making a difference.

Example: In one challenge primary school there have been clear, measurable improvements across literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing:

- 90% of children living in SIMD 1 and 2 areas have increased their spelling age;
- 15% more children are now reading at their chronological age;
- 37% more children are now working at their chronological age for numeracy;
- 64% more children living in SIMD 1 and 2 areas are now actively learning throughout the year instead of spending significant periods away from the classroom;
- exclusions have reduced from 18 days to 8 within a year; and
- there has been a big improvement in pupils across the SHANARRI indicators.

6.8 However, many were able to talk about outcomes, or positive indicators of progress, in one area - literacy, numeracy or health and wellbeing, as explored below.

Impact on literacy

6.9 Teachers and local authority officers were generally more able to comment on outcomes around literacy than numeracy or health and wellbeing. Teachers who were able to comment had seen an improvement in literacy – including evidence from standardised tests and reading scores, as well as observations of increasing literacy skills.

6.10 Most of the evidence related to younger age groups. Some teachers said that they had seen an increase in phonological and phonemic awareness for pupils in P1, and evidence of this improvement as P1 classes moved up the school. A few also highlighted progress in other year groups, in relation to reading and writing levels.

“We are making progress. The average spelling age for the current P1 year group is 2.2 years ahead of the previous P1 year group.”
Headteacher, challenge authority, primary

6.11 The way that schools measured change varied. Some examples of the way that schools described outcomes around literacy are outlined below, to provide a deeper understanding of the types of changes that different schools were seeing.

Example: In one school, baseline testing for P3, 4 and 5 shows an improvement of 25% in literacy. The school has delivered interventions to target groups and has ‘control groups’ in order to better measure the impact of the intervention. It is also benchmarked against other schools.

Example: One school has used the Read to Self approach with P5 pupils. It began to see tremendous increases in reading age over a very short space of time. It was rolled out to the whole school, and now some pupils are making 36 months progress over 12 months.

Impact on numeracy

- 6.12 Local authority officers made less mention of progress in relation to numeracy, with a few authorities saying that they had made less progress in this area, or had started work on numeracy later than their literacy work.
- 6.13 While most teachers felt that their numeracy approaches were going well, they also had less evidence about outcomes in this area. A few said that this wasn't an early focus for their school (for example a few were involved in focused approaches around literacy specifically). Some had observed children taking more leadership in numeracy, and talking about how they reach answers. And there were some examples of pupils being able to join in the classroom activities, when they wouldn't have before. A few teachers said that they had seen improvements. Again, progress was reported in varying ways. One example of the way teachers talked about change is outlined below.

Example: In one school, through the Number Talks programme teachers are seeing that pupils have an increased ability to talk about maths, and to talk about their strategies for answering questions and problem solving.

Impact on health and wellbeing

- 6.14 A few local authorities said that it was hard to measure progress in relation to health and wellbeing. However, some had seen very positive outcomes from individual initiatives focusing on nurture and calmness.
- 6.15 Teachers also indicated that progress on health and wellbeing could be challenging to track, but some were seeing positive indications. Signs of progress included:
- fewer exclusions from school;
 - better punctuality;
 - improvements in behaviour at school – for example through decreased referrals from class teachers around behaviour issues;
 - healthy family eating;
 - increased pupil motivation and engagement;
 - increased resilience among pupils;
 - awareness among children and parents of SHANARRI indicators; and
 - improvements in relation to SHANARRI indicators.

6.16 Again, teachers talked about outcomes around health and wellbeing in different ways. Some examples of the changes reported by teachers are outlined below.

Example: In one school, teachers evaluate health and wellbeing three times a year using SHANARRI indicators. Pupils self-evaluate using traffic lights to indicate how they are feeling each day. Teachers pick up on any amber or red lights, and meet with parents to address any issues. Teachers have noticed a change from red to amber, which is going in the right direction.

Example: In one school, the nurture group has helped some pupils return to the main class. They are now exploring how they transition pupils back into the main class full time.

Example: One nursery is beginning to see changes as children move into primary one. The support that they have provided to parents is already having a positive impact, for example in relation to regular routines and healthy eating.

6.17 Some teachers, local authority officers, Attainment Advisors and strategic stakeholders reiterated that while there were signs of positive progress, their work would not fully address the poverty related attainment gap.

“[the education authority] can’t eradicate poverty. We can only do what we can do. They still go back into poor, impoverished households. There are barriers still for these young people that we in education can’t overcome.”

Challenge authority

6.18 A few also highlighted that the number of children with additional support needs could also impact on attainment data, as levels of attainment are variable depending on the needs of the child, and often hard to measure and compare. These stakeholders felt that this needed to be taken into account when reviewing the attainment gap.

7. Use of data

Introduction

7.1 This chapter explores the way in which schools and local authorities have made use of data in selecting, developing and evaluating their ASF activities.

Key findings: Use of data

The ASF has resulted in conversations about data happening with local authorities and schools. Teachers and local authority officers felt that their approach to gathering, understanding and using data was improving, with positive attitudes, increased confidence and greater skills around use of data.

Support from local authorities and Attainment Advisors was a key success factor in enabling schools to develop their skills and confidence around data use, often involving support from specialist data teams developed within local authorities through ASF.

Local authorities found that it could be challenging to establish user friendly systems which provided the data required, without being overly complex. Other challenges included measuring progress towards outcomes without a national baseline or indicators; measuring impact over short periods of time; and, for both teachers and local authorities, the time and work it takes to use data effectively.

Understanding and using data

7.2 Overall teachers and local authority officers indicated that the ASF had resulted in conversations about data happening at all levels within the local authority and within schools. Staff in local authorities were confident that their approach to using data was improving, both at authority and school level.

7.3 Local authorities and teachers felt that the use of data had improved considerably through the ASF. It had:

- enabled the development of systems which track each pupil, and allow easy comparison of outcomes within schools, and across some local authorities;
- embedded the use of improvement science methods within some schools;
- built teacher skills around data, evidence, monitoring and evaluation;
- encouraged teachers and schools to take ownership of monitoring and evaluation; and

- enabled teachers to interpret SIMD data, and other data, more carefully and more meaningfully, understanding changes over time.

7.4 Almost all teachers indicated that they were much better at gathering, understanding and using data than they used to be. Teachers and local authority staff talked of developing a real richness of data, an understanding of attainment for each individual pupil, and a good attitude towards data developing among staff and schools. This helped to provide baselines, and informed targeting so that schools knew they were reaching the right children and families.

“It has definitely pulled everybody up a level. Schools are using data more efficiently.”

Local authority, schools programme

7.5 Local authority staff felt that headteachers and teachers were becoming much more confident regarding data, including developing more confidence in their own professional judgement.

7.6 Most teachers felt that they now had the information, skills and support they required to be able to target pupils effectively. Support from local authorities and Attainment Advisors had been critical in enhancing confidence and skills around data use, with teachers finding this change a big learning curve.

“We didn’t really know anything about how to gather and use data in the early stages of SAC. We are now in a much stronger position, and have a better knowledge of the context and our pupils.”

Headteacher, challenge school, primary

7.7 Secondary school teachers, who were newer to the ASF, had more issues with data than primary school teachers – with a few highlighting the need for a user-friendly performance tracking tool to enable them to effectively target pupils.

Successful approaches to use of data

7.8 Local authorities were asked about successful approaches to using data, and felt that approaches which worked well, listed broadly in order of frequency mentioned, included:

- support from local authorities, Attainment Advisors and Improvement Advisors to schools around use of data;
- recruiting or commissioning specialist data or research staff to support the use of data;
- use of improvement science;
- having conversations about data at the outset of an intervention, including thinking about how to measure impact;

- standardised assessment – including the development of locally standardised systems;
- including resources to support use of data within ASF bids;
- the confidence to change approaches to using data where these are not working.

7.9 A few local authority officers mentioned, unprompted, their belief that the new national approach to standardised assessments should allow for more consistent reporting.

Challenges around use of data

7.10 Some local authority officers highlighted that initially, the systems they established were overly complex and unmanageable – because too much data was being gathered. Some had then spent time focusing on thinking through exactly what information they needed to be able to plan, target and measure interventions, and had adapted systems accordingly. Some had also undertaken further training with schools to hone their skills in evaluative writing and impact measurement, to ensure they reported robustly on the things that mattered.

“We are getting huge amounts of data from class teachers, and now we want it to be SMARTer.”

Challenge authority officer

7.11 Local authority officers also felt that there remained some wider barriers to effective use of data, including:

- the lack of national baselines – with a few suggesting that the Scottish Government should prescribe a set of measures or indicators around closing the attainment gap, to enable comparison and encourage greater consistency;
- measuring impact in the short term;
- changing national reporting templates;
- a perceived focus nationally on hard data rather than qualitative information;
- time lags in data being available at national level;
- the need for more standardisation of teacher judgement data; and
- the time/work involved in using data effectively – including supporting schools to manage the volume of data and use this effectively.

7.12 Some local authorities reiterated that there was a particular issue with how to measure progress around health and wellbeing – as highlighted earlier in Chapter Six when exploring outcomes around health and wellbeing. A few said that they would like more national direction on this.

8. Collaboration

Introduction

8.1 This chapter explores the impact that the ASF has had on collaboration, the ways in which collaboration has been supported, and what has worked well and what hasn't.

Key findings: Collaboration

Overall, almost all stakeholders felt that the ASF had a positive impact on collaboration.

Collaboration within schools had increased in most instances, with staff talking, thinking, training and sharing together. Training and continuing professional development (CPD) was a key catalyst for greater collaboration.

Collaboration between schools had increased in many instances, with positive examples of joint working across new or strengthened clusters or groups focused on the poverty related attainment gap. However, there were some challenges around inter-school collaboration, particularly in relation to obtaining cover to release staff to work together. Teachers valued this joint working between schools very highly.

Collaboration with others had also increased, with most feeling that the ASF had helped to enhance joint working with other partners. This enabled schools to develop and strengthen referral arrangements, strengthen support provision, access expertise and ensure better links between school and wider services.

There had been some collaboration between local authorities, often at a small scale around sharing learning and approaches. Local authorities and strategic stakeholders felt that there was room for improvement around joint working between local authorities, sharing practice and learning from experiences.

Collaboration within schools

8.2 Stakeholders involved in the research felt that the ASF had a positive impact on collaboration within schools. It had:

- got staff talking and thinking together about new approaches;
- made teachers more willing to seek out new approaches;
- enabled joint planning and a more formal approach to collaboration;
- encouraged peer observation, team teaching and collegiate working;

- encouraged teachers to undertake joint training and joint learning;
- energised teachers and built a culture of sharing;
- built the confidence of teachers in relation to peer observation and self-evaluation; and
- encouraged more joint accountability and increased expectations around attainment within the school.

8.3 For many, the training and CPD on new approaches and data use for teachers had provided a vehicle and context to support increased collaboration – with teachers coming back to the school and sharing their learning.

“There has been really good collaboration across teachers on literacy work. They are all talking about it.”

Acting headteacher, challenge authority, secondary

8.4 Teachers felt that collaboration within the school worked well because teachers were excited, motivated and wanted to learn more. Many felt that teachers were empowered and confident, and could collaborate more when given time to reflect on their own practise and take time to look at what works.

8.5 A few teachers and local authority officers talked of increased collaboration between teachers of pupils at different stages, highlighting that teachers had become more aware of what learning came before and what would come after their class for the pupil, as they progress through their school learning experience.

8.6 A small number of teachers said that the ASF hadn't really had an impact on collaboration within their school, as they were already collaborating well. One teacher mentioned that sometimes younger staff were more willing to collaborate – older staff often more comfortable teaching in traditional methods.

8.7 A few local authority officers highlighted that collaboration within the school was slightly harder in secondary schools, which were newer to ASF and had a different structure, with more focus on individual subjects. However, most secondary school teachers involved in this research felt that collaboration within the school had increased and improved as a result of the ASF.

Collaboration between schools

8.8 Most teachers and local authority officers felt that the ASF had increased collaboration between schools. This was through:

- the creation or strengthening of family groups of schools, clusters and learning communities brought together based on the poverty related attainment gap;
- joint training, joint in-service days and opportunities for joint discussion about needs, interventions and results;
- joint planning and involvement in steering, strategy or satellite groups;
- visits to other schools to share ideas, peer observation and opportunities to showcase work to others;
- enhanced consideration of transitions between nursery, primary and secondary schools; and
- in some cases, joint initiatives between schools such as shared family engagement days.

8.9 Teachers valued this joint working very highly. Most collaboration was within the local authority, but for some, particularly in the schools programme, there had been collaboration between schools from different local authorities. A few felt that this collaboration had helped to increase trust and build stronger relationships between staff at different schools.

“It has helped build collegiate trust across headteachers that wasn’t there before.”
Headteacher, challenge authority, primary

8.10 Some teachers and local authority officers highlighted that this level of collaboration between schools wouldn’t have happened to this extent without the ASF. However, while some local authority staff felt that the level of collaboration between schools had been “amazing”, staff in some areas felt that it could be further developed.

8.11 The main challenge to collaboration between schools related to staff cover, to enable collaboration. Staff felt approaches had worked best when school staff had cover to take time to collaborate and when approaches were coordinated centrally, with staff making connections and introductions to enable joint working.

8.12 Other challenges to collaboration between schools, raised by a smaller number of stakeholders, included:

- being the only school involved in the schools programme within a local authority area;
- being in a large, rural authority – with large distances involved for face to face collaboration and issues with technology; and
- some perception that there is now a two-tier system – of challenge and non-challenge schools – which a few teachers felt could cause a little animosity.

Collaboration with other partners

8.13 Teachers and local authority officers indicated that the ASF had made them more aware of the need to develop and strengthen partnerships outwith the school. Most felt that the ASF had accelerated partnership development, and built school capacity to work with external partners.

8.14 Schools were working with a wide range of partners including:

- speech and language therapy;
- educational psychology;
- family learning workers;
- community learning and development;
- therapeutic counsellors;
- libraries;
- local employers;
- health visitors;
- Quality Improvement Officers;
- Active Schools;
- nurses and dieticians;
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services;
- third sector organisations;
- universities and colleges;
- parents;
- other local authorities;
- external consultants with specialisms; and
- Police Scotland.

8.15 These partnerships helped to build referral arrangements, strengthen support provision, provide expertise and ensure better links between school and wider services.

8.16 The key challenges to working with other partners, broadly in order of frequency mentioned, were:

- staff time;
- clarity of outcomes and expectations;
- working with other partners which have a different ethos;
- tight timescales to spend funding, resulting in short lead in times for developing projects and building links with partners;
- putting in place clear line management and reporting responsibilities when different partners are working together on the same project;
- practical challenges linked to IT, data protection and procurement rules;
- the volume of partners interested in working with the school – which could be hard to keep up with due to time pressures;
- challenges developing links with some teams, including social work and NHS – which a few felt could be better supported at national level; and

- lack of awareness of what services are available.

Collaboration between local authorities

- 8.17 Local authority officers and teachers indicated that there had been some small examples of collaboration between challenge authorities and challenge schools, including sharing learning and approaches. There had also been some sharing of practice between challenge authorities and other nearby authorities who were not involved.
- 8.18 Some local authorities felt that greater collaboration between Attainment Advisors could have enabled better joint working between challenge authorities, and some Attainment Advisors felt that there was room for improvement around collaboration between local authorities, encouraging sharing practice and learning from others.
- 8.19 Strategic stakeholders felt that there was some evidence that the ASF had impacted positively on collaboration between local authorities. Some pointed to national events providing good opportunities to network and the role of Attainment Advisors in sharing learning. However, a few strategic stakeholders did not think that collaboration between local authorities had improved as a result, with some perceived barriers to sharing and learning between authorities particularly around willingness to collaborate and share lessons learned openly.

9. Sustainability

Introduction

9.1 This chapter explores views on whether any improvement in the poverty related gap in attainment will be sustainable beyond the years of the ASF.

Key findings: Sustainability

Overall, stakeholders were positive about the sustainability of improvements in the poverty related attainment gap beyond the ASF. This was largely because of the focus on building staff skills, creating a culture shift around the attainment gap, introducing better teaching pedagogies, enabling collaborative working and improving the use of data.

However, teachers and local authorities who said that their approaches would be sustainable stressed that some elements of their approach did need ongoing funding. This was particularly applicable to targeted work and dedicated posts focusing on closing the poverty related attainment gap.

Some highlighted the wider context of local authority budget cuts as a key challenge to sustainability, particularly the significant cuts in education funding.

Stakeholders emphasised that education could not bring about sustainable change on its own, and that wider partnership across a range of other services was essential.

Sustainable approaches

9.2 Overall, stakeholders were positive about the sustainability of improvements in the poverty related attainment gap beyond the years of the ASF.

9.3 Staff within local authorities were clear that their whole approach was built upon ensuring longer term sustainability. This focused on changing the culture and ethos of schools, building staff skills, introducing better teaching pedagogies, enabling collegiate working and improving the use of data. Strategic stakeholders also felt that through investing in teachers, the ASF should result in long term benefits.

“The whole point is it isn’t a flash in the pan while money is there.”

Challenge authority

9.4 Most teachers also said that their work would be sustainable, because:

- there was a strong focus on building staff capacity;
- there was a culture shift and an increased awareness of the attainment gap;
- there was a new and positive approach to data use;
- the school will continue to use new approaches to literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing which have been developed through the ASF work;
- the school had invested in new resources;
- strengthened relationships between schools would be sustainable;
- sustainability had been built in from the outset; and
- the Pupil Equity Fund would enable them to build on approaches tested through the ASF.

9.5 Attainment Advisors also highlighted that if the focus was on teacher training and skills development, the benefits would long term and sustainable – through developing the teaching approach, mind-set, pedagogy, capacity, leadership and use of data.

Need for ongoing support

9.6 Teachers and local authority officers who said that their approaches would be sustainable stressed that some elements of their approach did need ongoing funding. Local authority officers cautioned that if the funding ceased, they could lose the impact and momentum that they had built up. While some teachers cautioned that there was a need for ongoing strategic leadership from within the local authority, to continue to drive the approach. Attainment Advisors also felt that approaches which relied on additional resources were less likely to be sustainable.

9.7 This was particularly applicable for targeted work and small group work; additional funded posts such as counsellors or support assistants; and work that involved collaboration, appointing third sector organisations. Some teachers stressed that if funding was not there, posts would need to go. Local authority officers highlighted that funded posts had been very important in bringing about change, and that schools were still under a lot of pressure in terms of capacity.

9.8 A few Attainment Advisors felt that investing in improving family links and taking a nurture approach could also have longer lasting and more sustainable outcomes – particularly if this involved work with early years children. However, without some ongoing financial support, these approaches would be difficult to maintain at the same level.

9.9 Local authorities and teachers highlighted that over time, the positive changes around staff skills, leadership and teaching approaches could decline without ongoing investment and support. Teachers indicated that while a key benefit of ASF was that teachers had been upskilled, this meant

that there was a need to hold on to well trained staff – or to ensure new teachers are well trained in approaches to closing the attainment gap. Some teachers highlighted that it was vital to ensure that student teachers were getting the right training to ensure that they could teach when they completed their training.

- 9.10 One school said that it was confident that the additional specialist posts funded for raising attainment would be made permanent. Others said that they hoped the local authority would continue to invest in the approach, which would help to make it sustainable. However, some teachers highlighted the wider context of local authority budget cuts as a key challenge to sustainability, particularly the significant cuts in education funding, with schools losing key staff. A few also felt that wider budgets might impact on the ability of other services to support the approaches – such as community learning and development, Active Schools and other partners.

“The benefit of ASF is having extra staff. If you take that away, you will lose the added value that this delivers.”

Headteacher, challenge authority, primary

- 9.11 A small number of teachers indicated that the approaches would not be sustainable largely because they felt that more resources, and more staff, were essential to continue to close the attainment gap. Some teachers felt that the simple answer to closing the attainment gap was smaller class sizes, group work, specialist support and more staff – all of which took resources.

“We need to have the additional resources to be able to offer a wider range of interventions and approaches to children.”

Headteacher, challenge authority, nursery

A joint approach

- 9.12 Many stakeholders emphasised that education could not bring about sustainable change on its own, and that wider partnership across a range of other services was essential. Some teachers also stressed that there was only so much change that they could bring about, and that it was important the approach was supported in the home, and by other services working with children and families. These teachers emphasised that schools alone would not be able to bring about the changes required. These teachers stressed that poverty would always be a factor in Scottish society, and that a wide range of services needed to focus on reducing poverty related inequalities.

“The school can’t be expected to turn this around in four years. NHS and social services also have important roles to play, although their budgets are also constrained.”

Headteacher, challenge authority, primary

9.13 A few schools felt that for approaches to be sustainable there was a need to share learning about what interventions were having the most impact across Scotland, which they didn't feel was happening between local authorities currently to any great extent.

10. National and local governance and support

Introduction

10.1 This chapter explores what is and isn't working in relation to the support provided by local authorities, Scottish Government, Education Scotland, Attainment Advisors and others, as part of the ASF.

Key findings: National and local governance and support

Most teachers were very happy with the support that they received from their local authority. Many highlighted that the local authority had a clear strategic plan, and provided a drive and focus to the work – with good guidance, support, training and opportunities to share experiences.

However, a few teachers felt that there were still some areas for further improvement, particularly around leadership, clear messaging and joint training and support at local level.

Local authorities welcomed the funding from the Scottish Government, and mainly welcomed the one to one meetings. Some would like more trust in the direction of travel of their work, evidenced through reduced bureaucracy and reporting requirements. Many felt that the reporting was very onerous, and that the timescales were very challenging.

Challenge authorities had mixed views on support from Education Scotland. Some felt that they had received useful support from their Education Scotland link officer, and a few found the National Improvement Hub a useful resource, which teachers had also used.

While most teachers valued the support provided by Attainment Advisors highly, local authorities had mixed views on the support they received. A few felt that the support was excellent. However, there were challenges around a lack of clarity about the role and the rationale for Attainment Advisors; blurred lines around management and decision making powers; gaps in provision of Attainment Advisors; and skills and expertise.

Attainment Advisors felt that the support they provided worked well when they had existing links with the local authority and were accepted by the local authority team. However, they had also experienced challenges around the clarity of their role.

Support from the local authority

10.2 Most teachers were very happy with the support that they received from their local authority. Teachers felt that their local authority central teams brought experience and expertise. Most said that they had good relationships with their local authority.

10.3 Many teachers highlighted that the local authority had a clear strategic plan, and provided a drive and focus to the work. Most felt that they had:

- access to good guidance – including keeping schools up to date with priorities and expectations and providing access to research;
- tailored support – opportunities to meet with the local authority, discuss approaches, understand priorities and question and challenge approaches as appropriate;
- opportunities to share experience with others – through headteacher meetings, implementation group meetings and other gatherings; and
- access to training and professional development opportunities – which most teachers felt was at the right level, well run and on appropriate topics such as data, improvement science and new pedagogies.

10.4 However, there were still some areas for further improvement. A small number of teachers in four challenge authorities said that they had experienced some issues with support. The main issues were:

- lack of leadership and clear messaging from the local authority - which a few teachers found frustrating, confusing and chaotic; and
- in one area, a lack of group training and support from the local authority, particularly around implementing new interventions and measuring success.

“We are so excited about what has happened over the last six months. We could have done more if there had been more strategic support and better leadership from the centre.”

Headteacher, challenge authority, primary

Support from the Scottish Government

10.5 Local authorities welcomed the funding from the Scottish Government, and felt that they had been given a sound financial support resource. Challenge authorities mainly welcomed the one to one meetings with Scottish Government, which they found to be useful, reassuring and enabled the development of positive relationships. However, a few authorities highlighted that these sessions were very time consuming, may be of limited value and could potentially be linked to other meetings (such as Education Scotland meetings). Some challenge authorities also valued attainment challenge forums and events.

10.6 However, a few local authorities did not feel that they had received support from the Scottish Government. And some would like more trust in the direction of travel of their work, evidenced through reduced bureaucracy and reporting requirements. Many felt that the reporting was very onerous, and that the timescales were very challenging.

10.7 Authorities in the schools programme didn't feel that they had any other support from the Scottish Government. They felt that:

- demands on schools were unrealistic and put pressure on schools;
- deadlines for reporting on progress to the Scottish Government were too tight, and not linked to the broader school cycle of planning and reporting;
- expectations were not always clear; and
- paperwork and reporting was time consuming and laborious.

"The pressure on schools has been quite intense."

Local authority, schools programme

10.8 Most teachers said that they had not had direct support from the Scottish Government, beyond receiving the funding. However, some had accessed support including:

- **A national event** – A Scottish Government national Scottish Attainment Challenge event (held in June 2016) was mentioned by a few teachers, with headteachers and others finding this very helpful in terms of understanding the agenda.
- **Clear national priority** – Some teachers felt that it was very helpful that the Scottish Government was driving the agenda, setting clear principles, establishing policy approaches within national policy documents, and working to keep the profile of the attainment challenge high across the country. Some mentioned that the National Improvement Framework provided a good guide. A few also mentioned that it was positive that the Scottish Government has set clear priorities without being overly prescriptive in how the agenda is delivered on the ground.

"The message is clear. They are putting their money where their mouth is."

Headteacher, challenge school, secondary

- **Direct support** – A few teachers said that they had direct support from the Scottish Government through attendance at headteacher events, attainment event and workshops and support with the improvement science methodology. One nursery mentioned the support it received through the Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative.

10.9 However, there were still some areas for further improvement, including:

- Teachers sometimes indicated that they found it hard to distinguish between support from the Scottish Government and Education Scotland. A minority said that they found it unhelpful to have different messages emerging from national bodies.
- Many found the timescales for responding to ASF opportunities very tight, which some said made the process very stressful. A few also said there was a lack of flexibility about budgets and timescales.
- Some said that the pace of change and volume of associated information was overwhelming. This included the volume of communications about ASF, the range of different initiatives, and the information that teachers needed to read and understand.

“They need to look at the pace of change for schools and teachers. We almost can’t keep up.”

Headteacher, challenge authority, primary

Support from Education Scotland

10.10 Challenge authorities had mixed views on support from Education Scotland. Some felt that they had received useful support from their Education Scotland area lead officer, and a few found the National Improvement Hub a useful resource. A few said that they got useful help around upcoming priorities and areas to develop their thinking around.

10.11 However, some challenge authorities felt that they had not received useful support from Education Scotland. Some were unclear on what support was available, and some felt that there was a lack of leadership. Local authorities in the schools programme would welcome more guidance on what information to explore as headteachers have limited time.

10.12 The main support that teachers indicated they had accessed through Education Scotland included:

- **Attainment Advisors** – This support is discussed separately, in the next section of this chapter.
- **National Improvement Hub** – Some teachers felt that the National Improvement Hub had lots of information. However some felt that it was not very accessible, it was hard to find what you were looking for, and that the advice was not very helpful. One teacher mentioned that it was now easier to find good practice examples since the resource had been updated.

Events – A few teachers who had attended Education Scotland events felt that the events were motivational, and provided information about the reasoning behind the approach to closing the attainment gap.

- **Emails and newsletter** – A few teachers felt that it was useful to hear what other schools were doing, and to keep up to date with current approaches.
- **Local input** – A few teachers mentioned that Education Scotland staff had attended headteacher meetings and had provided advice on themes like health and wellbeing and physical activity, which they found very helpful.

“Attending national events was really great for headteachers and staff, as you feel more informed about what is happening and what is available.”

Headteacher, challenge authority, primary

Support from Attainment Advisors

10.13 Challenge authorities had mixed views on the support received from Attainment Advisors. A few felt that the support was excellent, and provided very valuable support on data and work with individual schools. However, there were challenges around:

- a lack of clarity about the role and the rationale for Attainment Advisors;
- blurred lines around management and decision making powers;
- gaps in provision of Attainment Advisors; and
- skills and expertise.

10.14 Local authorities in the schools programme largely felt that their Attainment Advisor was a good source of support. They were seen as hands on, credible and with a good depth of knowledge. However, in two areas in the schools programme, there had been gaps in the Attainment Advisor role, so the local authority felt quite unsupported.

10.15 Most teachers found their Attainment Advisor to be an extremely useful source of support. Teachers valued that Attainment Advisors:

- were supportive, visible, approachable and reassuring;
- challenged and asked searching questions in a supportive way;
- understood what happens in schools and the challenges they face;
- brought expertise in key areas including use of data, action research and improvement science;
- brought links with other Attainment Advisors, other local authorities, and Education Scotland and Scottish Government; and

- kept schools up to date with new information, signposts to research, national insight and clarified national messages.

10.16 However, support was provided in different ways in different authorities. Some teachers in a few local authorities indicated that they had not received much or any support from their Attainment Advisor. A few were unsure about their role, while a few felt that there were some tensions in the relationship and that they as a school did not get much out of the support. One felt that the role involved more asking for information, rather than providing support or advice.

10.17 A few teachers felt that Attainment Advisors were very varied in quality, with changes in the individual performing the role resulting in changes in the level and quality of support provided. A few teachers indicated that although initially Attainment Advisors took time to “find their feet”, the support improved over time.

Experiences of Attainment Advisors

10.18 We asked Attainment Advisors about what worked well and what didn't around the support they provided to schools and local authorities. Attainment Advisors felt that support worked well when they:

- had existing links within the local authority;
- brought specialist knowledge – for example around nurture;
- were able to work closely and directly with schools;
- were accepted by the local authority team and not seen as a threat; and
- were able to discuss approaches with other Attainment Advisors.

10.19 However, there were some challenges. The main challenge related to clarity around the role of the Attainment Advisor. Most said that they carved out their own roles in each local authority area. However, it took time for Attainment Advisors to develop these roles, and they experienced a lack of trust and buy-in in the early stages. A few said that it took up to two years to build this trust, and establish a clear role. Most said that they felt under constant scrutiny, and some found it hard to balance local and national roles and responsibilities.

10.20 Most also highlighted that they came into post after local plans had been developed, so they weren't involved from the outset. Some also felt that the timescales and deadlines for reports to the Scottish Government did not match the natural reporting cycles of schools, and could be very tight.

“The tight deadlines were a real risk factor for schools, they were unrealistic and did not fit with other deadlines that schools were dealing with.”

Attainment Advisor

10.21 Attainment Advisors welcomed the national events run by Scottish Government and Education Scotland. However, some Attainment Advisors in rural areas felt that national networking opportunities and support were centrally based, and there was a need to consider more options for involving people from across Scotland through technology and roadshows.

Support from others

10.22 Few mentioned other sources of support. The main areas highlighted, just by a very small number of teachers, were support from:

- leadership teams within schools;
- the Scottish Centre for Excellence in Leadership; and
- delivery support from partners including the third sector.

Lessons learned at strategic level

10.23 The four strategic stakeholders involved in this research were asked more generally what lessons had been learned about programme management, what had been encouraging and what they might do differently. Stakeholders felt that the Advisory Group for the work had been useful and effective, but one felt that the approach could have involved local authority representative bodies more effectively.

10.24 A few stressed that the approach had grown iteratively, with real changes every few months, which had impacted on how the programme was delivered. The strong political drive behind the approach was also highlighted, with some feeling that this may affect collaboration. A few highlighted the tension between the desire to give more autonomy to individual schools, and the duty of local authorities to ensure best value and be a good employer. One strategic stakeholder felt that the amount of money going to schools (both through ASF and Pupil Equity Fund) was far outwith the experience of some teachers and was unsure of the ability of schools to cope with this level of funding.

10.25 A few felt that the approach was at times over centralised and bureaucratic, and that there was a need to move from reporting on resources and spending, to reporting on outcomes.

11. Funding

Introduction

11.1 This chapter explores views on the level of funding provided through the ASF. We also explored whether teachers and local authority officers felt it was adequate to meet goals; whether it was supplemented with other sources of funding; and whether it was being used to compensate for budget cuts in other areas.

Key findings: Funding

Most local authorities and teachers welcomed the resources provided through the ASF, and found funding levels reasonable and appropriate. A few teachers would have liked more direction on how to use the additional funding.

The timescales for spending the funding were perceived to be tight, with the time taken to agree plans with Scottish Government, and implement plans in line with local authority procedures impacting on the time available to deliver interventions and spend resources.

Local authorities and schools were largely not supplementing ASF with other sources of funding, although some schools had accessed other funding pots to support their work.

Local authorities and most teachers said that the ASF was not being used to mitigate other funding pressures. A few teachers indicated that they were going through funding cuts at the same time as gaining funding, so it was difficult to determine whether funding had been used to maintain some previous staff or activities.

Adequacy of funding

11.2 Local authorities welcomed the resources provided through the ASF, were pleased that the funding was ring fenced and broadly felt that it was adequate. Some challenge authorities felt that it would have been useful to have a guide amount, as they were unsure initially how much would be reasonable to apply for. Some highlighted that while they welcomed the funding, it was not a vast amount in relation to other funds such as Pupil Equity Fund.

11.3 However, one challenge authority felt that too much money was being provided through the Scottish Attainment Challenge, and that more would be a distraction. And most of the schools programme authorities involved in this

research felt that the ASF was a lot of money, with some finding it hard to spend the funding, due to challenges recruiting staff and tight timescales for delivery.

- 11.4 Almost all teachers involved in this research felt that the amount of funding was reasonable, fair and appropriate. A few felt that it was excellent, particularly when compared to the overall school budget which was often very tight. A few indicated that having access to this level of funding was very unusual, and that they had tried to use the funding carefully to build in a bit of sustainability for the future.
- 11.5 A few local authorities and teachers felt that the funding helped them to prepare for the Pupil Equity Fund, and think about how to use that funding or try out new approaches which could then feed into PEF activity.
- 11.6 However, a few teachers indicated that they would have liked more direction in terms of how to use additional funding. One teacher in a challenge authority felt their school had been allocated funding without being consulted by the local authority. And one school in the schools programme wished that it had asked for more money initially, as it now knew what would work to tackle the attainment gap but wasn't able to increase its funding entitlement.
- 11.7 Some teachers indicated that they were unable to comment on the adequacy of funding received, as this had been managed centrally by their local authority. These schools had been allocated additional staffing entitlement, resources or access to training and support – rather than cash. Most of these schools felt that the support provided in this way was good and appropriate. However, there was concern that sometimes these approaches were “people heavy”, creating challenges if new staff could not be recruited.
- 11.8 Some of these teachers were happy that the local authority was taking the lead. However, some wanted to have more influence and autonomy. Different authorities took different approaches. In some areas, local authorities initially made pots of funding available to schools and then became more centralised in their decision making, while in others, decisions were initially taken centrally but then more autonomy was given to schools. Some teachers were pleased with more autonomy, while others were concerned about it – and the associated responsibility.
- 11.9 One teacher from a school which had moved from being within the schools programme to being within a challenge authority expressed disappointment that the school was no longer able to manage its own budget, as this was now done centrally.

Funding practicalities

11.10 Some local authorities, particularly those who hadn't spent their whole allocation, said that it took a long time initially to agree their approach with the Scottish Government, which impacted on spend. In addition, local requirements around recruitment processes, human resources and other requirements could delay activity and impact on spend.

11.11 Many local authorities highlighted that the timescales for national decision making about funding impacted on their ability to spend within the financial year. A few said that each year decisions about funding allocations had been made late, and that impacted on the amount of preparation that could be done for the next academic year. Some said that the timescales and financial arrangements meant that the bulk of activity had to be condensed into an October to April period.

"We would have used more, and more effectively if timescales and turnaround times were better."

Local authority, schools programme

11.12 A few teachers also indicated that they felt restricted by having to spend their funds by the end of the financial year, and another highlighted that the focus on financial year reporting was not helpful within a school setting. A few teachers indicated that reporting systems were bureaucratic, onerous and time consuming.

"SAC has been a positive experience, but meeting very tight deadlines has been an issue."

Deputy headteacher, challenge authority, secondary

Supplementing funding

11.13 Local authorities indicated that they were largely not supplementing the ASF with other funding, although some did also use core education budget and core services to support the approach – for example using human resources and procurement services.

11.14 Most teachers also indicated that their schools were not supplementing ASF with other sources of funding. However, a few indicated that they:

- used the school budget either to fund teaching resources to support ASF approaches, or to roll out successful ASF approaches to the whole school where appropriate;
- supplemented from other sources including Awards for All, Tesco Bag funding, local business sponsorship or contributions, or other funding sources such as ESOL funding (English as a Second or Other Language);

- planned to link ASF and PEF activity in the future; and
- used volunteers to deliver ASF approaches, including teachers giving their own personal time for free to supplement the approach.

Additionality of ASF

- 11.15 Local authorities and most teachers said that the ASF was not being used to mitigate other funding pressures – this was additional work.
- 11.16 A few teachers reflected very carefully on this question, thinking about the context in which schools were funded. This meant some found it difficult to give a definitive answer. A few indicated that they were losing funding through budget cuts at the same time as gaining funding, so it was difficult to determine whether funding had been used to maintain some previous staff or activities.
- 11.17 One teacher gave an example of a post filled by the ASF to tackle the attainment gap which had been directly used to cover for other gaps within the school. This teacher indicated that the school had received 25 hours of staffing for the nurture approach for the past 15 years. However, when the attainment challenge started, this support was taken away and the ASF funding was supposed to replace it. However, there was then a teacher shortage and the teacher funded through ASF became a core staff member, and the nurture work which was previously well embedded into the school became ad hoc.
- 11.18 A few teachers said that ASF funded roles were replacing some support roles which had been cut or were in the process of being cut. One school in the schools programme had recently lost money for support staff in classes, and highlighted that ASF funding still leaves a gap and does not make up for the funding cuts. A few other teachers indicated that at times, additional ASF staff could be used as backfill for other shortages, which they recognised was not what they are there for.

12. Unintended consequences

Introduction

12.1 This chapter explores any unintended consequences, positive or negative, brought about as a result of the ASF.

Key findings: Unintended consequences

Teachers and local authority officers felt that there had been positive unintended consequences as a result of the ASF. The main positive unintended consequence was increased positivity and improved morale among teachers and education teams. However, at the same time teachers felt that the main negative unintended consequence was an increase in workloads and additional pressure to achieve outcomes.

Positive unintended consequences

12.2 Local authority officers felt that there had been positive unintended consequences as a result of the ASF, including:

- increased positivity and improved morale;
- increased capacity of local authority education teams;
- an increased focus on data;
- debates about the value of different types of educational assessment; and
- in a few cases, having the leverage to make connections with secondary schools.

12.3 Most teachers identified some positive consequences. The most frequently mentioned positive unintended consequence was the impact on staff morale and skills – in line with local authority views. Teachers felt that the ASF had energised teachers and enthused them to learn more. This was because:

- there were opportunities for teachers to develop their skills and leadership abilities;
- teachers were working together collaboratively and sharing ideas;
- staff felt valued because of the funding invested and skills development opportunities;
- teachers had been involved in decision making and felt a sense of ownership, expectation and pride;
- teachers had developed more confidence in their own skills and judgements; and
- teachers felt more confident to try new approaches.

- 12.4 A small number of teachers indicated that they had seen staff progressing into other roles, which was positive for individual careers.
- 12.5 Teachers felt that the ASF had encouraged teachers to work more collaboratively on a wide range of topics, beyond attainment. Some highlighted that their senior leadership teams had become more collaborative, and that staff had become more reflective.
- 12.6 Some felt that their approaches to planning more generally had improved, using techniques developed through the ASF – including using data to inform decision making; using an improvement science approach; and focusing on evaluating impact. Some felt more informed by research, with an interest in key themes having been set off by ideas generated through the ASF work. And a few mentioned that the materials and resources developed for their ASF projects were being used across the school.
- 12.7 A small number of teachers mentioned that the ASF had brought people back to realising that the fundamentals of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing are the most important priorities.
- 12.8 Finally a small number of teachers felt that the ASF had a positive impact on pupils – in terms of generating increased enthusiasm for learning – and parents – in terms of building positivity and a strong community. However, only a few teachers felt that there had been positive change around parental engagement, with most finding that this was still a challenge.

Negative unintended consequences

- 12.9 Local authority officers felt that there had been a small number of negative consequences as a result of the ASF:
- it may look unfair to others within the local authority that education is holding onto its resource in the context of cut backs and people losing their jobs;
 - extra teachers being appointed within challenge authorities will draw good teachers from other parts of Scotland, and from teaching roles within the authority;
 - time pressures, as administration takes up a lot of time; and
 - a feeling of divide between challenge and non-challenge areas and schools – which teachers agreed was an issue.
- 12.10 Most teachers also identified some negative unintended consequences of participation in the ASF. However, some stressed that the positive impacts outweighed the negative.

12.11 The main negative consequence related to staff resources. Teachers highlighted that the approach increased teacher workloads, and involved more staff time, and that there was a lot of pressure to deliver on expectations. A few also felt that the challenges of attracting staff constrained what they could do due to not having the staff time or expertise to deliver these interventions, which had a negative impact on teacher morale. A small number of teachers felt under too much pressure, particularly where there were staffing gaps in schools and where staff were off sick.

12.12 A small number of teachers identified wider unintended negative consequences:

- the increasing focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing may mean that children miss out on the wider broad general education;
- there was some concern that pupils in the middle, who would also benefit from support, are being excluded; and
- parents don't want to be stigmatised as being poor, so targeting needs to be handled very sensitively.

13. Wider inequalities

Introduction

13.1 This chapter explores the impact of the ASF on pupils who face wider inequalities because of other characteristics beyond poverty, such as gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or faith. It also explores views on the challenges of supporting pupils living in rural poverty.

Key findings: Wider inequalities

Most stakeholders felt that there had been a strong focus on poverty related deprivation, and limited impact on wider inequalities. However, some felt that having improved approaches to monitoring and tracking pupil needs would benefit all pupils.

Some felt that there may have been positive impacts on pupils with additional support needs, particularly pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs who may benefit from ASF interventions. And a few felt that pupils with English as an additional language may have benefited from ASF interventions.

Some local authorities felt that there was a lack of recognition of rural poverty within ASF. Very few teachers were able to comment on the challenges around tackling the poverty related attainment gap in rural areas, but some local authorities highlighted challenges around travel costs and attracting teachers as challenges when working in rural areas.

Limited impact on wider inequalities

13.2 Most stakeholders felt that there had been a strong focus on poverty related deprivation, due to the clear aims of the ASF. Many indicated that they were already doing lots of work on equality in other areas, and were proud of this work, but that it was not the focus of the ASF. Stakeholders also did not spontaneously mention any impact on wider inequalities when discussing unintended consequences (Chapter Twelve).

13.3 When prompted, some teachers commented that they felt it had no negative impact, but they were not sure whether it had any positive impacts. Many said that they had always tried to meet the needs of all children, and that the ASF had not changed this. A few teachers said these issues weren't really relevant as they hadn't noticed any issues with inequalities in relation to these characteristics.

“Our aim is to make a positive impact for all children in the school. Nobody has been disadvantaged as a result of the focus on poverty.”

Headteacher, challenge authority, primary

13.4 Some teachers felt that there could possibly be by products including:

- a whole school focus on wellbeing and mental health – which could benefit those beyond the main target group;
- the focus on nurture in some schools – which could benefit pupils with learning difficulties and social, emotional and behavioural needs; and
- a positive impact on other children in schools where there is a high correlation between people living in high SIMD areas and people with additional support needs, minority ethnic people or other characteristics.

13.5 A few interviewees highlighted that poverty could also mask other inequalities. And a few felt that to tackle wider inequalities – particularly attainment gaps relating to additional support needs – would require significant additional funding.

“By focusing narrowly on poverty, it means that other types of inequality might be missed.”

Acting headteacher, challenge authority, primary

Some impact on wider inequalities

13.6 Some local authorities and teachers highlighted that the ASF work had developed approaches to monitoring and tracking children’s needs, which would be beneficial for all children. A few felt that the availability of funding to tackle deprivation related attainment freed up resources for other children. However, a few were concerned that there remained children who were ‘middling’ in terms of deprivation and attainment who may be missing out.

“The fund has allowed us to look at each individual and what their barriers to learning might be. If it is linked to gender, ethnicity, etc, then we will address it.”

Acting headteacher, challenge school, primary

13.7 A few teachers, particularly in areas with high minority ethnic populations, indicated that the ASF activity had a positive impact on work with pupils who have English as an additional language. Some found that SIMD and English as an additional language were closely correlated at their school, while others felt that having English as an additional language was one of the main barriers to attainment at their school. Teachers from these schools felt that they were much more able to track progress of pupils with English as an additional language in their school as a result of the ASF work, and were now much clearer on how to identify target groups and plan specific interventions.

- 13.8 Some teachers also highlighted that pupils with additional support needs, including learning difficulties and social, emotional and behavioural issues, were benefiting from work through the ASF. Some felt that small group work and one to one work was very useful for these pupils. Others indicated that whole class teaching methods had become more inclusive, enabling these children to be supported in the wider class setting. And others highlighted that support bases for children with additional support needs had benefited from additional capacity and training through the ASF.
- 13.9 A few teachers indicated that part of their work through the ASF had focused on attainment for boys – particularly around literacy, writing, reading and creative vocabulary.

Rural poverty

- 13.10 A small number of challenge authorities, and some local authorities within the schools programme, felt that there was a lack of recognition of rural poverty within the ASF. Some had faced additional challenges of tackling the attainment gap in rural areas due to travel costs, time involved in visiting schools and challenges of collaboration across large geographical areas. Some found it hard to attract people to work in more rural areas.
- 13.11 Very few schools were able to comment on the challenges faced in tackling the poverty related attainment gap in rural areas – with most being in urban areas. Those who were raised varied points including:
- the rural isolation experienced by people in deprived rural areas, who are unable to travel to widen their horizons, access activities and get new experiences; and
 - the practical barriers of working with pupils in rural areas who often can't come to pre or post school activity due to school transport arrangements.
- 13.12 One teacher highlighted that working in rural areas can also bring positives, such as access to outdoor space for learning.

14. Conclusions

14.1 This chapter sets out high level findings and conclusions, across all themes explored within the research. It focuses on identifying key highlights and key issues emerging.

Key highlights

14.2 Overall, this qualitative research highlights that experiences of the ASF were broadly positive. Key highlights include:

- **Clarity of aims** – There is now a broad understanding of the aims of the ASF, and the need to tackle the poverty related attainment gap in Scotland. Most local authorities and teachers welcomed the resources provided through the ASF, and found funding levels reasonable and appropriate.
- **Evidence based approaches** – Evidence and data have played a key part in the process of selecting interventions and targeting schools, pupils and families. Data is now analysed in a way that both local authorities and schools often did not do before. Most teachers felt that they now had the information, skills and support they required to be able to target pupils effectively.
- **Teaching skills and leadership** – There was a clear belief across all stakeholders that the ASF had improved teaching skills and created leadership opportunities within schools and local authorities. It had provided access to training, encouraged reflection on skills, increased professional dialogue, improved collaboration and provided opportunities to mentor, network and lead on new approaches.
- **Improving attainment** – Initial indications from teachers and local authority officers were that there were signs of positive outcomes from interventions to date, with positive groundwork in place to enable improved attainment for children living in the most deprived areas, over the longer term.
- **Collaboration** – Almost all felt that the ASF had a positive impact on collaboration within schools, between schools and with other partners.
- **Sustainability** – Due to the focus on building skills, enabling collaboration and improving data use, stakeholders were positive about the sustainability of improvements in the poverty related attainment gap beyond the ASF. However, this was tempered with clear views that some elements of work would need ongoing funding, and that schools could not

bring about sustainable change in this field on their own (as explored below).

Key issues

14.3 However, there were a number of consistent issues which emerged across the themes explored with stakeholders. These were:

- **Timescales** – The timescales for introducing the ASF were perceived as very tight. This impacted on ability to plan, build partnerships and spend funding. The timescales for reporting on impact were felt to be very short, and importantly did not fit with other reporting timescales within schools over the school year.
- **Pressure on schools** – Schools were working in a challenging financial environment, and often struggled to recruit teachers to focus on work on closing the attainment gap (or faced wider staffing challenges). This meant that schools often found it hard to collaborate, share ideas and develop new approaches due to challenges of releasing staff to focus on attainment gap work. Many teachers were excited and motivated by the ASF and the opportunities it offered, but at the same time, many indicated that workloads were increasing and pressure to deliver was high.
- **Poverty as a wider issue** – Stakeholders highlighted that schools alone could not close the poverty related attainment gap. Some were unsure why the focus was on primary and secondary schools, when they felt that work should begin earlier, before children started school, where the poverty related gap is already apparent. And some felt that there needed to be better connections between education and other, wider services supporting children which can have a major impact on poverty and the attainment gap. Stakeholders emphasised that education could not bring about sustainable change on its own, and that wider partnership across a range of other services was essential.
- **Measuring poverty and deprivation** – A small number of teachers, local authority officers and strategic stakeholders were concerned about the approach of focusing on pupils living in SIMD 1 and 2 deciles, believing this to be a crude measure of poverty. Many talked about how they balanced this data with other information about pupils to ensure targeting took into account a range of factors. Some teachers and local authorities were also concerned about obviously identifying and targeting particular children for support based on living in SIMD 1 and 2 areas, due to concerns about stigmatisation. And a few felt that this approach may mean that children with other needs may be missed, such as children with additional support needs or with English as an additional language.

- **Attainment Advisor clarity of role** – While the support offered by Attainment Advisors was highly valued by schools, local authorities had mixed views on this support – largely due to a perceived lack of clarity about the rationale for the role, and the responsibilities this involved. Attainment Advisors also found this a challenge, but felt that the clarity of their role had improved and developed over time.
- **Ongoing challenges engaging parents** – While teachers were largely seeing improvements in short term outcomes around teacher skills, leadership and collaboration, parental engagement remained a challenge for many.
- **Learning between local authorities** – Most felt that there was room for improvement around joint working and sharing practice between local authorities, around closing the poverty related attainment gap.

14.4 These are important issues to consider in planning, delivering and supporting the ASF programme, and further work to tackle the poverty related attainment gap.

Appendix One – Discussion Guides

Discussion Guides – Local Authorities

Duration: 90 minutes

About You

1. How relevant do you find the aims of the Attainment Scotland Fund to your local authority?

Choosing Interventions

2. Can you very briefly summarise how you are tackling the attainment gap within your local authority through the Attainment Scotland Fund specifically?
3. How and why were these interventions selected?
4. What evidence, if any, did you use to inform the selection process?
5. Is this a completely new approach, or did it build on an existing approach?

Targeting

6. Is your approach targeted at certain schools within the local authority? How and why?
7. What support is given to schools to help them:
 - select interventions?
 - identify the target pupils/ families to be involved?
8. What has worked and what hasn't in terms of involving the selected target group in your interventions?

Collaboration

9. In what ways have you tried to support or facilitate collaboration:
 - Within schools
 - Between schools
 - With other partners
10. What impact do you think the Fund has had on collaboration?
11. What has worked well in terms of collaboration? What hasn't worked well?

Use of Data

12. How do you feel about how you have collected, recorded and used data to:
 - select interventions and target groups;
 - monitor progress; and
 - measure impact.

13. What has worked well in relation to use of data? What didn't?

Outcomes

14. So far, do you think the interventions are achieving their intermediate outcomes – such as improving teaching skills, leadership, parental engagement or home learning?
15. So far, do you think the interventions are achieving their long term outcomes – improving literacy and numeracy attainment and health and wellbeing of pupils living in poverty?
16. Do you expect that any improvement in the poverty related gap in attainment will be sustainable beyond the years of the Attainment Scotland Fund?

Support

17. What is and isn't working in relation to the support available to your school as part of the Attainment Scotland Fund:
- From Scottish Government?
 - From Education Scotland?
 - From your Attainment Advisor
 - From others?

Funding

18. How do you feel about the level of funding received through the Attainment Scotland Fund?
19. Were any of the Attainment Scotland Fund activities previously funded through a different source or funding stream? Is it being used to mitigate funding pressures?

Tackling Wider Inequalities

The Attainment Scotland Fund focuses on the inequalities experienced by pupils living in poverty.

20. Through this fund, do you think there has been an impact - positive or negative – on pupils who face inequalities because of other characteristics beyond poverty?

Only if relevant:

21. Have you experienced any particular challenges around supporting pupils living in rural poverty? What are these? How has your authority dealt with these?

Discussion Guides – Headteachers, Deputy heads, Attainment leads

Duration: 55 to 60 minutes

About You

1. What is your involvement in the attainment challenge?
2. How relevant do you find the aims of the Attainment Scotland Fund?

Choosing Interventions

3. How you are tackling the attainment gap within your school through the Attainment Scotland Fund specifically?
4. How were these interventions selected? Were you involved in the decision-making process, and at what level?
5. Did you feel you had enough evidence about what works to select effective interventions?
6. Is this a completely new approach, or did it build on existing interventions?
7. Were you previously involved in other programmes focused on improvement or attainment?

Targeting

8. How are interventions targeted?
9. How did you feel about the information, skills and support you had available to identify and select target groups?
10. What has worked and what hasn't in terms of involving the selected target group in your interventions?

Outcomes

11. So far, do you think the interventions are achieving their intermediate outcomes?
12. So far, do you think the interventions are achieving their long term outcomes?
13. Do you expect that any improvement in the poverty related gap in attainment will be sustainable beyond the years of the Attainment Scotland Fund?
14. Has your participation in the Attainment Scotland Fund had any unintended consequences – either positive or negative?

Collaboration

15. Do you think that the Attainment Scotland Fund has impacted on the level of collaboration:

- Within your school
- With other schools
- With other partners

16. If yes, why are these collaborations happening?

Support

17. What worked well and what didn't in terms of the support available to your school as part of the Attainment Scotland Fund:
- From your local authority?
 - From Scottish Government?
 - From Education Scotland?
 - From your Attainment Advisor
 - From others?

Funding

18. How do you feel about the level of funding received through the Attainment Scotland Fund?
19. Were any of the Attainment Scotland Fund activities previously funded through a different source or funding stream? Is it being used to mitigate funding pressures?

Tackling Wider Inequalities

The Attainment Scotland Fund focuses on the inequalities experienced by pupils living in poverty.

20. Through this fund, do you think there has been an impact - positive or negative –on pupils who face inequalities because of other characteristics beyond poverty?

Only if relevant:

21. Have you experienced any particular challenges around supporting pupils living in rural poverty?

Discussion Guides – Attainment Advisors

Duration: 45 minutes

About You

1. What is your involvement in the attainment challenge? What are your main roles as an Attainment Advisor?

Support

2. Can you summarise the range of support you have provided to your local authority area(s)?
3. What support did you provide in:
 - a. Selecting and designing interventions
 - b. Identifying evidence about what works
 - c. Selecting and identifying the target schools
 - d. Selecting and identifying the target pupils
 - e. Sharing practice between authorities
4. For each of the types of support you provided, what worked well? What did not?
5. Do you feel you have been able to meet these support needs?
6. Overall, how do you feel about the support available to authorities as part of the Attainment Scotland Fund:
 - From Scottish Government?
 - From Education Scotland?
 - From others?

Use of Data

7. How do you feel about how the authority has collected, recorded and used data to select interventions and target groups and monitor progress?
8. What has worked well in relation to use of data? What hasn't?

Outcomes

9. So far, do you think the interventions are achieving their intermediate outcomes?
10. So far, do you think the interventions are achieving their long term outcomes?
11. Do you expect that any improvement in the poverty related gap in attainment will be sustainable beyond the years of the Attainment Scotland Fund?
12. Are you aware of any unintended consequences of the Attainment Scotland Fund – either positive or negative?

Tackling Wider Inequalities

13. Has there been any focus on targeting the improvement of attainment for pupils who face additional inequalities because of other characteristics?
14. What impact do you think the Fund has had on pupils who face inequalities because of other characteristics?

Only if relevant:

15. What worked particularly well?
What barriers have you faced?

Only if relevant:

16. Have you experienced any particular challenges around supporting pupils living in rural poverty? What are these? How has your authority dealt with these?

Discussion Guide – National Stakeholders – 60 minutes

About You

1. Can you briefly describe your role in relation to the attainment challenge and the Attainment Scotland Fund?

Programme Aims

2. To what extent do you think there is a shared understanding of the aims of the programme amongst all stakeholders?
3. What has helped/hindered with building this shared understanding?

Programme Implementation

4. How do you feel about the way activity has been targeted:
 - At certain local authorities
 - At certain schools
 - At certain pupils and families
5. Do you think that there was enough information and evidence available to enable effective decisions about targeting the programme to take place?

Collaboration

6. What impact do you think the Fund has had on collaboration:
 - Between local authorities
 - Between schools
 - With other partners
7. What has worked well in terms of collaboration? What hasn't worked well?

Programme Management

8. How do you feel about the way the programme has been managed?
9. What has been encouraging? What lessons have been learned?

Programme Impact

10. So far, do you think the interventions are achieving their intermediate outcomes?
11. So far, do you think the interventions are achieving their long term outcomes?
12. Do you expect that any improvement in the poverty related gap in attainment will be sustainable beyond the years of the Attainment Scotland Fund?

Discussion Guides – Parents – Telephone Interview - 20 to 30 minutes

Getting Involved

1. Can you tell me how you got involved in (the programme/ intervention)?
2. What did you hope you and your family would get from being involved?
3. Had you been involved in anything like this before?
4. How easy was it for you to be involved? Did you face any barriers or difficulties?

The Activity/ Approach

5. Can you tell me the things that you were involved in through (the programme/ intervention)?
6. What parts did you find most useful? Which parts were least useful?
7. Were you involved in influencing how (the programme/ intervention) ran?

Impact

8. What difference did taking part in (the programme/ intervention) make to you?
9. Has it changed the way in which you are involved with your child's school? In what way?
10. Has it changed the way in which you are involved with your child's learning at home? In what way?
11. Would you get involved in a similar programme again in the future?

The Overall Approach (where relevant)

12. Overall, how do you feel about the information that parents receive about the work around the attainment challenge and the Attainment Scotland Fund?
13. What other information would be useful to you?
14. Overall, how do you feel about how parents in your area are involved in discussions about the attainment challenge and the Attainment Scotland Fund?
15. Do you have any other comments?

Appendix Two – Parent Case Studies

Child development course

Parents in one local authority were invited to attend a 16-week child development course which was delivered at a local nursery and had a creche service funded through the Scottish Attainment Challenge fund. The course was offered to parents and carers of children attending the local nursery and primary school. We spoke with two parents that reported on their experience of the course, and the impact it had on their families.

The approach

The course was delivered once a week, over 16 weeks during term time. It was delivered by a qualified tutor, with occasional guest speakers contributing to classes where relevant e.g. a representative from Bookbug spoke about the benefits of singing and reading with infants. The course covered different aspects of child development and discussed how parents and carers could identify developmental milestones for physical, cognitive and emotional development.

Participants were able to achieve SCQF level 4 accreditation by completing a presentation to the class and a written exam.

Getting involved

Parents got involved in the programme to learn about child development, meet other parents and to get back into learning. One parent said that she was hoping to get back into education and work, and that this course was the ideal stepping stone in her journey towards becoming a nursery teacher.

“I wanted to do something to get my mind working, to mix with adults and get back to learning.”

The course was designed to fit in with school and nursery hours, and a crèche was provided in an adjacent room for those whose children were not attending school or nursery. For some parents, the crèche provided valuable childcare, without which they would not have been able to access the course.

“I wouldn’t have been able to do it if they couldn’t provide childcare.”

“The most important thing is the childcare that was provided.”

One parent mentioned that the tutor was friendly and supportive, and that the general atmosphere was relaxed and informal. She appreciated this approach as she had been out of formal education for some time and felt that the course helped ease her back into learning, and a learning environment.

“Having such a good tutor made it less daunting...we got lots of support.”

Impact on parents

The course was very well received and parents reported that they enjoyed attending the classes, mixing with other parents and learning something new. "It was very interesting and informative, on a personal level."

Parents reported that since attending the course, they have become more involved in their children's school or nursery. One parent has recently joined the nursery parent's committee and has already begun trying to recruit more committee members. Another parent has joined the Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme in her child's school and has started volunteering with other activities in the school.

One parent said that she feels more aware of the importance of sitting alongside her daughter when she does homework, and monitoring her children's levels of physical activity.

Parents also reported that the course helped them improve their own confidence and skills, particularly around learning and participating in a group. One parent is keen to get back into work, ideally in an educational setting. She felt that this course provided a useful introduction to working with children getting back into formal education.

"It's given me a taste of something that I'm enjoying and looking to develop further."

Impact on children

Parents reported that the course helped them understand the small and simple changes they could make at home to support their children's development.

"It teaches you the things you can do at home that will help your child."

"As a parent, I am more aware now of the importance of playing, reading and letting my child guide me on what they want to do."

One parent said that she had not realised the value of playing games and singing songs with her child, and said that she would be making more time to do this at home. Another parent said that the course helped her to think about her child's speech and language development.

"I have learned to make things fun for them, to make things into a game."

"I definitely spend more time with them, just singing or reading. I'm putting into action what I've learned."

Family support

In one area, family support for families with challenging needs was delivered through a programme delivered by a third sector organisation, running for eight weeks during the summer holidays. It aimed to reduce stress and improve routine, giving parents and children strategies on coping with behaviour and building capacity.

All parents selected to be part of the programme were invited to an initial meeting to find out more about the programme and what it would involve. Staff provided transport for families, picking them up and dropping them home to ensure that there were no barriers to accessing the programme.

The approach

Each session started with children and parents/carers preparing a meal together. Children were then free to engage in other activities whilst parents finished cooking the meal, before the group came together to share the meal. After dinner, children took part in more activities, whilst parents took part in discussions facilitated by staff.

The families chose which meals they would cook each week. Over the course of the programme, meals included homemade pizza, homemade burgers, spaghetti with meatballs and fajitas. In the final week, the children learned to make biscuits, which they could share with each other and their parents/carers.

Impact

We spoke with one parent who reported on the impact that the programme had on her and her two children. She felt that the programme helped her children with their social skills, particularly her eldest child who has been diagnosed with autism and ADHD. The programme provided a good opportunity for them to learn new things and meet children of different ages and from other schools. The programme also provided a good environment for her to bond with her children.

“It brought 1:1 time between me and boys...the oldest one tends to take himself away a lot, but at [this initiative] he was with me, which was nice.”

The children are now very keen to prepare meals at home, and are much more willing to try new food – particularly vegetables, which they previously would have refused. She has also found that she is more willing to let them help with food preparation tasks at home, which she never would have done before. This has led to them all spending more time together as a family.

She enjoyed having the chance to meet and interact with other parents as well. One of the other parents was just about to begin the autism assessment process, having experienced this herself, she was able to provide advice and support.

Massage in Schools

In one area, primary schools have been participating in Massage in Schools Programmes (MISP). We spoke with one parent whose child took part in the programme when he was in P4. He has insulin-dependent diabetes, and takes insulin throughout the day to maintain his blood sugar levels. When MISP was being delivered in the school, his parent was working as classroom assistant, so was able to gain direct experience of the programme in situ.

Getting involved

Parents were informed of the programme through a letter sent home, which contained details of who the programme was for and what it would involve. MISP was delivered to the whole class and involved massage over clothes, with no contact between children and adults.

Initially, the parent felt very positive about the programme. She was keen to see what benefits it could bring to the pupils, particularly because her son was part of a large class and a number of pupils in the class displayed challenging behaviour. Her son also displays changes in his behaviour, going from calm to hyperactive, which is often linked to changes in his blood sugar level.

The approach

Pupils received a 12-week course in massage, learning around 14 different massage strokes and breathing techniques. Along with the massage skills, pupils learned about the importance of seeking consent and understanding that not everybody likes the same things. Pupils were also encouraged to practise their new skills at home, with friends and family.

Impact

The parent felt that the programme had a positive impact on her child, the class and her family at home. After only a short time she was able to see a difference in her son's understanding of emotions, and his ability to articulate his own feelings. She also felt that the atmosphere of the classroom was calmer during MISP and for some time afterwards.

“After a couple of weeks, I could see it making a difference. He was more aware of how other people might feel about things...and he was starting to communicate a lot more about what he liked and didn't like.”

The parent and the school monitor her son's blood sugar carefully throughout the day. Throughout the days when MISP was delivered, she noticed a significant improvement in the stability of his blood sugar levels. She feels that this was because the massage helped to calm the, often chaotic, classroom environment, leading to fewer spikes in his blood sugar throughout the day.

The programme has also had a positive impact on the family at home, as her son has been practicing his massage techniques on both his parents. It has helped

them bond over a new activity and facilitated conversations around feelings and consent.

“As a family, it seemed to open up channels to talk to him about other things, like other people’s feelings and choices.”

At home, the parent has been using massage and breathing techniques to help regulate her son’s blood sugar levels, alongside his prescribed medication and regular check-ups. So far, she feels this has been working well, as an additional method of self-regulating his sugar levels and his behaviour.

Overall, she was very pleased with the programme and the impact that it has had, on her son, the atmosphere of his class at school and the way that they communicate as a family at home.



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