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Attainment Scotland Fund evaluation: Fourth interim report - year 5



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS



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Executive Summary

Introduction

E1. The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) was launched in February 2015 with the strategic aim of ‘closing the poverty-related attainment gap between children and young people from the least and most disadvantaged communities’. The £750 million Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF) follows the duration of the SAC over the course of this Parliament, prioritising improvements in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing of those children adversely affected by poverty in Scotland’s schools. Achieving excellence and equity in education are the key aims.

E2. The programme of evaluation of the ASF is ongoing. The evaluation aims to provide learning about the overall implementation of the ASF and to assess progress towards the following long-term outcomes:

1. Embedded and sustained practices related to addressing the impact of the poverty-related attainment gap.
2. All children and young people are achieving the expected or excellent educational outcomes, regardless of their background.
3. An education system which is aspirational, inclusive in practice and approaches for all including teachers, parents and carers, children and young people.
4. Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.

E3. This report focuses on the Year 5 (2019/20) evaluation of ASF across Pupil Equity Funding (PEF), Challenge Authority and Schools Programme Funding streams.

E4. In order to take account of the unprecedented challenges associated with responding to COVID-19, the evaluation was adapted to consider both the period of August 2019 to March 2020 prior to COVID-19, and the period of school building closures from March to June 2020.

E5. The report provides a narrative on progress from a range of evidence sources which inform the evaluation including:

- Administrative data;
- National Improvement Framework (NIF) quantitative measures on attainment and wellbeing;
- Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports;
- Surveys of headteachers and local authorities undertaken on an annual basis to explore perspectives on ASF.

E6. We have seen response rates to the Headteacher and Local Authority surveys impacted by COVID-19, however the current evaluation methodology continues to make the best use of existing data to inform our understanding of

factors that support improvement in closing the attainment gap at the five year point of the Programme.

Key findings

E7. The findings overall suggest broadly continuing trends across Year 5 of the ASF as previously indicated in the Year 4 report. This included, for example, a focus on continued development of collaborations, the increasing use of and capacity within the system regarding data and evidence, and the governance and support arrangements in place nationally and locally.

The role of Attainment Advisors

E8. The role of Attainment Advisors continued to be highly valued in providing support at local authority and school level, with strong recognition of the importance of Attainment Advisors in facilitating links between national, local and school contexts.

Approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap

E9. Approaches to close the poverty-related attainment gap continue to develop, with evidence of ongoing refinement of approaches based on improvement and use of data and evidence. Rapid developments resulted from COVID-19 and school buildings closures March to June 2020, with approaches and interventions paused, adapted and/or adjusted. During this period there was strong evidence of new partnerships and collaborations, particularly with the third sector and there was a considerable focus on health and wellbeing and on engaging families and communities.

Funding and sustainability

E10. Funding continued to provide a focus throughout 2019/20. Whilst there was a need to address the immediate challenges associated with school building closures as a result of COVID-19 in the period March to June 2020, the focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap remained.

E11. There was evidence of considerable use of ASF flexibilities to respond to the challenges associated with responding to COVID-19.

Culture change and ethos

E12. There was continued evidence of systemic change in terms of culture and ethos towards:

- improved understanding of barriers faced by pupils and families affected by poverty;
- approaches to equity becoming more embedded within the school;
- a more collaborative system at school and local authority level.

Long-term outcomes: Contribution to improvement and reduction of the poverty-related attainment gap

Perceptions of success

E13. There were continuing positive messages in terms of perceptions of success. This included the views of headteachers gathered through the Headteacher Survey 2020:

- 90% of headteachers reported to *have seen* an improvement in closing the poverty-related attainment gap as a result of ASF supported approaches. This measure remained broadly the same as in 2019 (91%).
- 88% of headteachers reported to *expect to see* improvement in closing the gap over the next five years. There was a 10 percentage point decrease on this measure since the previous survey (98%).

Quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing

E14. Progress in closing the attainment gap on a number of measures, although this is a varied picture depending on the measure under consideration.

E15. For the majority of measures, attainment of those from the most deprived areas has increased, although in some cases not at the same rate as those in least deprived areas.

E16. Change in attainment in the Challenge Authorities (combined) is also a mixed picture; the gap has widened for more measures than it has narrowed, however, largely, this is not due to performance worsening, rather performance has improved but not kept pace with performance of those from the least deprived areas.

E17. With respect to the Challenge Authorities (combined), the proportion of S3 pupils achieving Third Level or better in literacy and the proportion of school leavers with one or more pass at SCQF Level 5 or better are measures where attainment for pupils from the most deprived areas has decreased and the gap has widened.

E18. It is worth considering the data on the attainment gap in the context of the headteacher perceptions of success to date. The attainment data presents a national picture of performance for the pupils within the scope of each measure's definition e.g. Achievement of CfE Level data report on P1, P4 and P7, but not the remainder of the Primary stages. Conversely, the Headteacher Survey results present a holistic view of headteachers' perceptions at their school level. It is important to reflect on the range of data sources in order to consider on progress on closing the attainment gap.

Conclusions and discussion

E19. The ASF seeks to support progress towards the strategic aim and associated long-term outcomes of SAC, alongside the wider range of national programmes and initiatives which form the SAC. The ASF evaluation report has sought to bring together evidence to assess progress towards achieving these long-term outcomes and the overall aims of the fund.

E20. The evidence continues to highlight positive progress towards long-term outcomes in a number of areas, including:

- Embedded and sustained practices related to addressing the impact of the poverty-related attainment gap;
- An education system which is aspirational, inclusive in practice and approaches for all including teachers, parents and carers, children and young people.

E21. Evidence on closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged young people suggests that there is progress on some measures, and there continues to be positive reported evidence of perceptions of impact.

E22. However, there is an ongoing and long-term challenge which remains in closing the poverty-related attainment gap between the most and least deprived pupils.

E23. Whilst the evidence suggests COVID-19 will impact on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap, progress towards the long-term outcomes at the education system level continues.

E24. It remains difficult to assess the reasons behind any observed improvement in attainment or closing the poverty-related attainment gap, and whether these changes have occurred as a direct result of the fund. However, the evaluation continues to support our understanding of these improvements, and the contribution made by the fund to the realisation of these improvements.

E25. Moving forward into the evaluation of ASF in 2020/21, there will be continued consideration given to gathering evidence of the ongoing impact of COVID-19.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Methodology

Introduction

1.1 The Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF) evaluation began in 2015 and follows the duration of the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC). An evaluation of the first two years of the ASF was published in [March 2018](#), with the Year 3 (2017/18) evaluation report published in [June 2019](#) and the Year 4 (2018/19) report published in [October 2020](#).

1.2 This chapter sets the Year 5 Evaluation Report (2019/20) in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and provides detail on the aims of the evaluation, the overall approach and the structure of the Report.

Background

COVID-19 Context

1.3 This report covers 2019/20, a year which saw unprecedented change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This academic year was in many ways a year of two parts – the period from June 2019 to March 2020, prior to the emergence of the COVID-19 virus, then from March 2020 to June 2020, the first lockdown period of school building closures and remote learning in Scotland.

1.4 The likelihood that school building closures will have an impact on the poverty-related attainment gap has been widely acknowledged. This makes it critical that the evaluation of the ASF should consider the impacts of this period on the operation and use of the fund. An [Equity Audit](#) was undertaken during the autumn of 2020 to help deepen understanding about the impact COVID-19 and resultant school building closures had on children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

1.5 The findings of the Equity Audit highlight the importance of an ongoing, long-term and system wide focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap. They also highlight the scale and potential depth of the impacts of the pandemic, and recognise that the full extent of those may not become fully visible for some time.

SAC Context

1.6 The SAC was launched in February 2015 to help close the poverty-related attainment gap. It is underpinned by the National Improvement Framework, Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it Right for Every Child. Backed by the £750 million ASF over the course of this Parliament, it prioritises improvements in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing of those children adversely affected by poverty in Scotland's schools. Achieving excellence and equity in education are the key aims.

1.7 The SAC leads system change through a tripartite shared leadership of national government, local government and the executive improvement agency,

Education Scotland. The core aims of the programme are to support and empower headteachers, schools, local authorities and their partners to develop focused and innovative approaches to improving outcomes for learners, reflecting their own local circumstances.

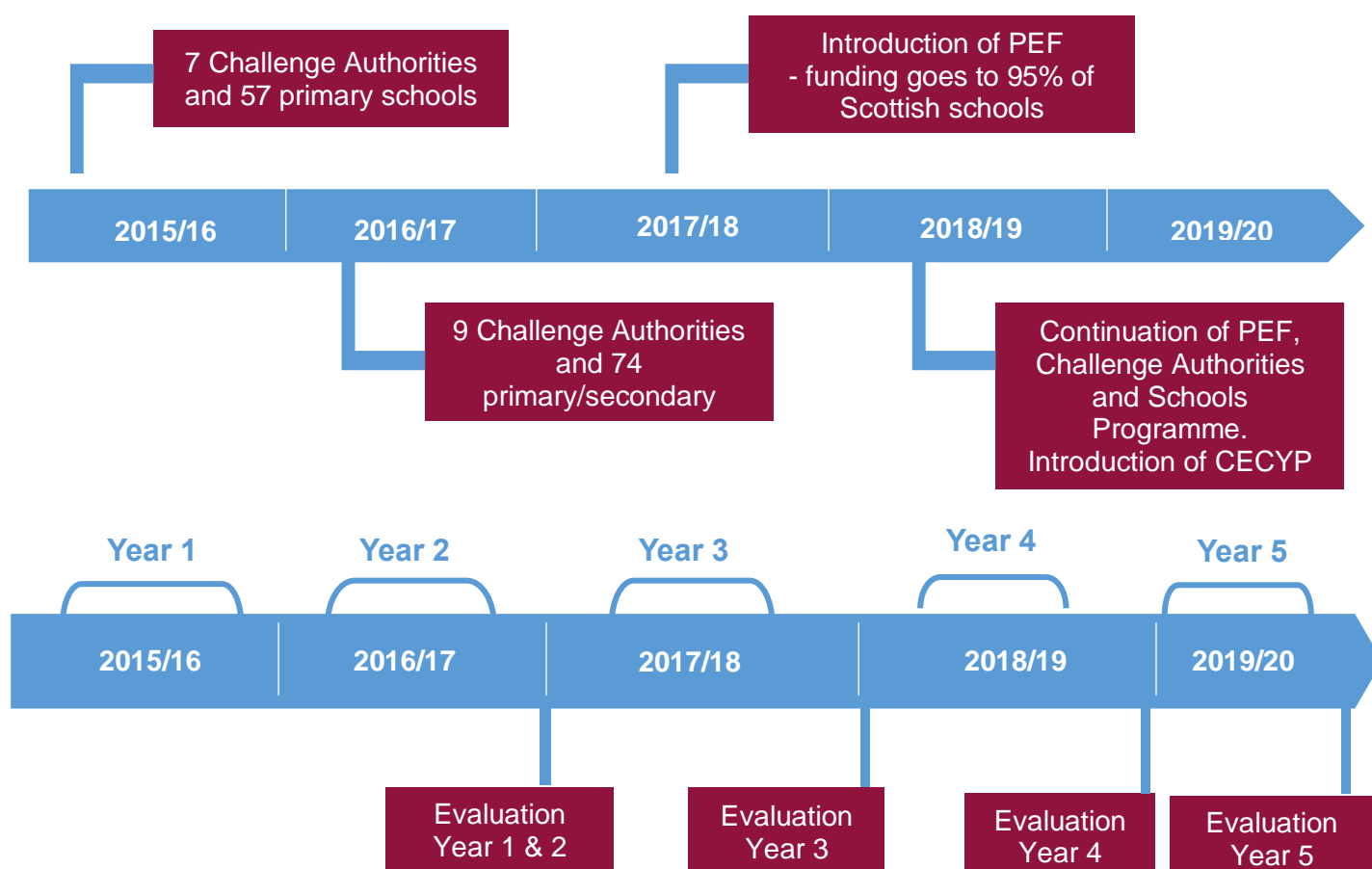
1.8 The SAC has the following main strands:

- **The Challenge Authority and Schools Programmes** provide additional resource to nine local authorities, and a further 73 schools outwith those local authorities with the highest proportions of deprivation. Each Challenge Authority/Schools Programme school receives funding and support to deliver improvement plans focused on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. The nine 'Challenge Authorities' are Glasgow, Dundee, Inverclyde, West Dunbartonshire, North Ayrshire, Clackmannanshire, North Lanarkshire, East Ayrshire and Renfrewshire.
- **Pupil Equity Funding (PEF)** provides £120m each year, directly to schools for headteachers to use at their discretion on initiatives that they consider will help close the poverty-related attainment gap. Over 97% of schools in Scotland have been allocated funding for pupils in Primary 1 through to third year of secondary school, based on the estimated numbers of pupils registered for free school meals.
- **Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP)** funding for targeted initiatives, activities, and resources, designed to improve the educational outcomes of this group. This was introduced in 2018/19 with funding allocated to all local authorities based on the number of looked after children they have in their care.
- Additionally a number of national programmes have been supported for targeted work to raise attainment and improve equity, including: staffing supply and capacity; professional learning and school leadership; investment in Regional Improvement Collaboratives and a number of third sector organisations.

1.9 These strands have developed over the period of the SAC. Challenge Authority and Schools Programme were the initial funding streams which commenced in 2015, followed by the introduction of PEF in 2017/18 and the CECYP in 2018/19.

1.10 The Scottish Government's 2019/20 Programme for Government included a commitment to continue funding the SAC at current levels for the duration of 2021/22, one year beyond the current parliamentary term, reinforcing the sustained focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. This evaluation report for Year 5 of ASF is published alongside an overarching report on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap since the introduction of SAC, ['Closing the Poverty-related Attainment Gap: A Report on Progress 2016 – 2021'](#)

Figure 1.1: Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation Reporting Timeline



Methodology

1.11 The evaluation aims to provide learning about the overall implementation of the ASF and the extent to which the aims of the ASF have been met.

1.12 The evaluation has the following objectives:

- Assess the impact of the overall fund in improving attainment and health and wellbeing and reducing the difference between pupils from the most and least deprived areas;
- Assess the extent to which the further aims of the fund have been met: promote capacity for data-based self-evaluation and improvement, and encourage collaboration between schools and local authorities;
- Provide learning and increase the Scottish evidence base of what does and does not work to improve attainment and health and wellbeing, especially of pupils from the most deprived areas;
- Provide learning on what did and did not work well in the process of implementing the fund across participating Challenge Authorities and schools and which factors helped and hindered the fund achieving its outcomes.

1.13 Figure 1.2 sets out the long-term outcomes for the SAC as set out in the SAC Logic Model. A full refresh of the Logic Model and associated evaluation strategy was planned for Year 5, however, given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, a process of adapting the SAC Logic Model to take account of COVID-19 was taken forward instead. This process was taken forward with Education Scotland and Scottish Government policy officials and analysts. The ASF Evaluation research questions were subsequently adapted in line with the SAC Logic Model, resulting in a sub-set of COVID-19 impact evaluation questions.

Figure 1.2: Long-term outcomes for Scottish Attainment Challenge

<p>1. Embedded and sustained practices related to addressing the impact of the poverty-related attainment gap</p>	<p>2. All children and young people are achieving the expected or excellent educational outcomes, regardless of their background</p>	<p>3. An education system which is aspirational, inclusive in practice and approaches for all including teachers, parents and carers, children and young people</p>	<p>4. Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people</p>
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1.14 It continues to be recognised that there are limitations to the evaluation methodology, for example the specific ‘interventions’ being implemented by schools and local authorities and the outcomes of those interventions is out of scope. There is also an approach to reporting that attempts to avoid burdening the education system with onerous reporting requirements, recognising the trust placed in the education sector to make considered judgements about how resources are used.

1.15 Whilst response rates to surveys and available data (Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels) have been impacted by COVID-19, the current evaluation methodology continues to make the best use of existing data to inform our understanding of factors that support improvement in closing the attainment gap at the five year point of the programme.

1.16 Evidence in relation to the ASF aims has been gathered from a range of sources and evaluated against the research questions.

1.17 The sources used to inform progress in Year 5 of the ASF are set out below.

- **Administrative data:** Information gathered as part of the routine organisation of the ASF provides data primarily on the funding that local authorities and schools received from the different funding streams.
- **Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports:** Challenge Authorities and Schools Programme Progress Reports in March and September 2020.

- **Local Authority Survey 2020:** Between December 2020 and January 2021, all 32 local authorities were invited to take part in an online survey about perspectives on the ASF. The survey response rate was lower than the 2019 survey (15 responses in 2020, compared to 28 responses in 2019), and it is likely that the survey response was impacted by the COVID-19 context. In addition, the 2019 response included all nine Challenge Authorities, whereas the 2020 response included five of the nine Challenge Authorities. The 2020 Local Authority Survey results should therefore be interpreted with some caution. For example, direct comparisons with 2019 findings, and the opportunity for considering responses by funding stream, are limited. Broad continuation/discontinuation of trends are however referenced in the text.

This was the fourth wave of the Local Authority survey. The first wave took place in 2016 with Challenge Authorities only and the second (2018) and third (2019) waves were undertaken with all local authorities.

The third wave introduced an expanded survey format. This built on the findings of previous waves of the survey but in addition to considering existing themes (such as governance, funding, sustainability, PEF planning and implementation) also sought local authority perspectives of:

- developing approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap;
- the extent to which data and evidence featured in decision making at the local level;
- the extent to which the fund increased collaboration;
- factors supporting and mitigating progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap within local authorities.

The fourth wave covering 2019/20 maintained the expanded survey format, but also considered COVID-19 impacts for all survey questions specifically focusing on the period of school building closures between March – June 2020.

Views on planning and implementation of the CECYP Fund were also sought in the Local Authority Survey. The CECYP Fund is however outwith the scope of this evaluation report.

- **Headteacher Survey 2020:** In January 2020 an online survey was distributed to headteachers of all Challenge Authority, Schools Programme schools and a representative sample of schools receiving PEF funding. The purpose of the survey was to provide an insight into the experiences of headteachers in relation to ASF and to understand changes over time and across different respondent groups (funding stream; urban versus rural; primary versus secondary). This was the fifth year of the survey and 420 headteachers responded to the survey, representing a 27% response rate. The response rate is reduced in 2019/20 which reflects the COVID-19 context, with a second lockdown and resultant school building closures. (Response rate in 2019 47%, 40% in 2018. The inclusion of all PEF-only schools for the first time in the 2019 survey resulted in approximately 1,000 more headteachers

being invited to respond in 2019 than the previous year). [The Headteacher Survey 2020 top-line findings](#) were published alongside this report, with a full report scheduled for May 2021.

- **Quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing:** The report draws on available data consistent with the National Improvement Framework measures of the attainment gap. Analysis focuses on patterns of attainment across Challenge Authorities, non-Challenge Authorities and Scotland overall. Data on attendance and exclusion is not available for 2019/20 as it is published on a biennial basis. Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) data was not collected in 2019/20.

Table 1.1: Data Sources for the ASF Evaluation

Data Source	Coverage	Years covered				
		Year 1 (2015/16)	Year 2 (2016/17)	Year 3 (2017/18)	Year 4 (2018/19)	Year 5 (2019/20)
Administrative data (financial information)	All Challenge Authorities, Schools Programme local authorities and schools receiving PEF	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Challenge Authority and Schools Progress Reports	All 9 Challenge Authorities and all Schools Programme Progress Reports	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Local Authority Survey	Year 1: Challenge Authorities only Years 3, 4 and 5: all local authorities surveyed	✓		✓	✓	✓
Headteacher Survey	Years 1 and 2: (Challenge Authorities and Schools Programme schools)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	<p>Year 3: (Challenge Authority, Schools Programme funding plus sample of PEF-only schools)</p> <p>Year 4: All schools in receipt of ASF funding (Challenge Authority, Schools Programme, PEF-only)</p> <p>Year 5: All schools in receipt of ASF funding (Challenge Authority, Schools Programme, PEF-only)</p>					
Quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing	Analysis of attainment measures set out in the 2020 National Improvement Framework .	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ (limited data available)

Report Structure

1.18 This report focuses on ASF in Year 5 (2019/20) of the SAC. Findings highlighted in the report seek to show changes over the duration of the fund to date encompassing changes in Year 5 from Years 1 to 4.

1.19 Similar to the Year 4 report, this evaluation report considers Challenge Authority, Schools Programme and PEF funding streams and seeks to highlight any emerging differences across the three funding streams.

1.20 The report is structured around the inputs, activities, short- to medium-term outcomes and long-term impact of the ASF. This reflects the revised research questions for Year 5 which are set out in the chapter structure overview below. The

COVID-19 focus of the evaluation questions introduced for the Year 5 evaluation are also indicated below. These provided a key focus for the adaptation of survey instruments for the Year 5 evaluation.

Chapter 1 Introduction, Background and Methodology

Chapter 2 Inputs: Governance and Funding

- What did and did not work well in the national and local governance and support as part of the Fund?
- How much funding did local authorities and schools receive, to what extent did they consider it adequate, supplement it with other funding sources, and use it in accordance with the fund's requirements?

COVID-19 Focus:

- What did and didn't work well in terms of changes to national organisation and governance of the Fund as a result of COVID-19: focus on funding flexibilities, how funds were used differently and how they supported the programme aims.

Chapter 3 Activities and Outputs: Approaches

- How did schools and local authorities identify, select and implement their approach for addressing the poverty-related attainment gap?
- To what extent did the selected approach aim to support pupils (and parents) from the most deprived backgrounds?

COVID-19 Focus:

- In what ways were approaches modified or identified to support pupils during the period of school building closures?

Chapter 4 Short and medium term outcomes: Perceptions of success, collaboration, use of data and evidence

- To what extent did schools and local authorities involved with the fund feel the intended outcomes of their approach had been achieved?
- To what extent did stakeholders understand, engage and further the programme aims, and why?
- To what extent has the fund encouraged collaboration, and why?
- To what extent did schools and authorities use data, analysis and evidence to drive improvements as part of the fund?

COVID-19 Focus:

- How did COVID-19 impact on the outcomes that Local Authorities and schools were intending to progress? How did COVID-19 impact on collaboration? How did COVID-19 impact on use of data/analysis/evidence?

Chapter 5 Long-term outcomes: Contribution to improvement and reduction of the poverty-related attainment gap, sustainability

- To what extent did the fund contribute to an improvement in attainment and health and wellbeing, and a reduction of the gap between pupils from the most and least deprived areas?
- To what extent can the focus on addressing the poverty-related attainment gap be sustained beyond the years of funding?

COVID-19 Focus:

- Perceptions of impact of COVID-19 on existing patterns of numeracy and literacy attainment and health and wellbeing? focus on families moving into being affected by poverty. What does this mean for our understanding of the 'target group', its size/scale/make-up? To what extent did sustainability remain a factor or replaced by immediate COVID-19 concerns?

Chapter 6 Discussion and conclusions

Chapter 2 Inputs: Governance and Funding

2.1 This chapter focuses on how the ASF was organised and supported at both a national and a local level. It also outlines the financial inputs to the programme by funding stream.

Governance

2.2 The evaluation considers what did and did not work well in the governance of the ASF at national and local level and considers the part Attainment Advisors play in local governance. It reviews how national and local organisation and governance of the fund worked across the funding strands of the ASF.

2.3 Evidence used to address this has been largely drawn from the Local Authority Survey 2020 and Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports.

National Governance and Support

2.4 National governance refers to the support provided by the Scottish Government and Education Scotland and the organisation and administrative requirements of ASF.

2.5 Local authority perspectives on working with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland were broadly positive. Some challenges associated with administrative requirements raised in the first two years of ASF were noted as having reduced by Year 3/Year 4 with the Year 4 evaluation report describing established reporting procedures. Challenge Authority Progress Reports reflect embedded reporting procedures and support from Attainment Advisors is noted.

2.6 In terms of what was working well in relation to **Scottish Government** governance, several themes emerged on local authority perspectives from the Local Authority Survey 2020. Overall responses highlighted the ongoing and consistent focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap, the clarity of national guidance, communication and opportunities for discussion and exchange with other local authorities as positives. Communication and opportunities for discussion and exchange were more prominent in Challenge Authority responses with a number of responses from Schools Programme and PEF only authorities indicating more limited communication in particular.

2.7 Areas of potential improvement to national support were suggested by Local Authority Survey 2020 respondents, broadly focused on the need for greater clarity given the current stage of the programme and increased pressures resulting from responding to COVID-19. The need for early clarity on funding strategy and timescales for 2021/22 and greater certainty to enable longer term planning, including for staff on temporary contracts was particularly highlighted. This was linked with the need for early communication of proposals around SAC 2.0.

2.8 There were also a number of further suggestions including attention to reducing perceived duplication of reporting requirements and difficulties associated with reporting timescales being based on financial rather than academic year. One local authority respondent also suggested the need for a national Health and Wellbeing census tool particularly in light of COVID-19. Greater clarity of guidance on timescales and key dates for reporting at the beginning of the year was also suggested, reflecting ongoing concerns also reported in the Local Authority Survey 2019. Some calls were made for further reduction of bureaucracy and greater recognition of the resource demands associated with existing reporting requirements, as well as the need for greater alignment of funding streams.

2.9 Local authorities responding to the Local Authority Survey 2020 were broadly positive about what was working well with **Education Scotland** in terms of the fund. As referenced previously through the Local Authority Survey 2019, positive relationships continued to be evidenced between local authorities and Education Scotland and the advice, guidance and support received in relation to the fund. One local authority respondent particularly referenced closer working relationships established as a result of the period of school building closures and responding to COVID-19. As well as resources through the National Improvement Hub, other sources of support mentioned included the regular SWAY 'Signposting Equity' resource. Opportunities for sharing good practice and attending events and training were also viewed as positives, including virtual events and training such as 'Big Blethers' and 'Wee Blethers' during the period of school building closures. Opportunities for sharing of good practice and collaboration at the regional level through the RICS were also mentioned by a few respondents. Many local authority respondents indicated that the majority of interactions with Education Scotland were through Attainment Advisors. This is addressed in the section on Local Governance below.

2.10 Areas for potential improvement highlighted in the Local Authority Survey 2020 in working with Education Scotland included:

- Occasional instances where there were perceptions of more limited or inconsistent support (such as due to staff changes);
- Need for strengthened focus on some training and events (e.g. clearer outcomes for Wee Blethers), and strengthened opportunities for evaluation and feedback on events;
- Further opportunities for sharing of good practice at local authority and school level (e.g. one respondent suggested an ASF dashboard to link local authority and school approaches would be beneficial);
- Need for greater clarity and longer lead in times for audit and reporting (challenges associated with recent audit reporting timescales were noted on occasion).

Local Governance and Support

2.11 The role of Attainment Advisors in respect of local governance and support was highlighted in the Local Authority Survey 2020. Local authority responses were very positive of the support provided by Attainment Advisors with "tremendous

support”, “strong relationships” and “collegiate working” being referenced. The majority of responses indicated that the support and challenge provided by Attainment Advisors was embedded within local governance structures and was working both at authority-wide level as well as on a more targeted basis with identified schools. As in the Local Authority 2019 survey, support provided by Attainment Advisors was described in terms of information and good practice exchange, professional learning, data analysis, strategic planning, policy development support and direct work with schools.

2.12 As in the 2019 Local Authority Survey, the Attainment Advisor role continued to be viewed as providing an important link between the national, regional and local levels.

2.13 Areas for further improvement also broadly continued themes highlighted in the 2019 Local Authority Survey. Consistency and availability of Attainment Advisor resource continued to be raised by a small number of local authorities. A small number of comments related to a desire to have more direct input from Attainment Advisors in schools, in one instance specifically to support schools in receipt of small amounts of PEF to maximise their use of funding. The challenge of working directly with schools in the context of COVID-19 was however recognised. A number of respondents indicated they were no areas for further improvement, reaffirming their highly positive experience with the Attainment Advisor role.

PEF support and processes – headteacher perspectives

2.14 Evidence on headteachers’ views of the support in place for schools to develop and implement their school plan for PEF was gathered in the Headteacher Survey 2020. Approximately three quarters (76%) of respondents to the 2020 survey felt there was sufficient support in place to develop and implement their school plan for PEF. This was similar to the 2019 survey (74%) and represents a 20-point increase on the 2017 survey (56%). Views were broadly similar across key respondent groups.

2.15 Headteachers were also broadly positive in relation to processes around the allocation of PEF, with 3 in 4 respondents (75%) to the Headteacher Survey 2020 indicating that reporting requirements associated with PEF were reasonable. A similar proportion felt that timescales for planning for PEF have been sufficient (75%). These findings each represent a 12-point improvement from the 2019 Headteacher Survey.

2.16 The great majority of headteachers also felt they had autonomy to develop PEF plans that are responsive to their local context and needs (94%). This view was consistent across key respondent groups and is also similar to that reported in 2019.

2.17 Local authorities also provided details of the level and nature of support given to schools in their local authority to aid their implementation of PEF through the Local Authority Survey 2020. This included:

- Mechanisms to support procurement processes;

- Equity networks to facilitate links between schools and the local and national levels;
- Development of PEF guidance linking national and local levels;
- Data-focused sessions to support headteachers to make the best use of data sources for planning and measuring impact of PEF interventions;
- School visits, cluster meetings, and clinics;
- Co-ordination roles to support headteachers;
- Professional development opportunities for headteachers including input on finance and staffing resources.

Specific examples were also provided:

- development of a ‘closing the gap’ planning tool to support schools with planning and implementation of PEF;
- development of suite of PEF guidance (national guidance, local planning and impact templates).

Funding

2.18 This section considers evidence related to funding gathered to address the following evaluation question:

How much funding did local authorities and schools receive, to what extent did they consider it adequate, supplement it with other funding sources, and use it in accordance with the fund’s requirements?

2.19 Evidence on funding is primarily drawn from Scottish Government administrative data. It also draws on the Local Authority Survey 2020, which explored local authorities’ use of resources towards improving outcomes for pupils living in the most deprived communities. Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports have also informed the analysis. Specific evidence on aspects of the above evaluation question related to *adequacy of funding, supplementation with other funding sources, and use in accordance with the Fund’s requirements* gathered through qualitative research undertaken in Year 2 has not been repeated, and therefore there continues to be limited more recent evidence on these aspects. However, in line with ASF flexibilities introduced in May 2020 to enable local authorities to respond to COVID-19, evidence has been drawn from the Local Authority Survey 2020 on the use of flexibilities during this period.

How much funding did local authorities and schools receive?

2.20 During the first two years of the ASF (2015/16 and 2016/17), approximately £52 million was distributed for the Challenge Authorities Programme and Schools Programme. In Year 3 (2017/18), following the introduction of PEF, around £165.3 million was distributed. PEF was allocated to schools on the basis of the number of children and young people from Primary 1 to Senior 3 who were estimated to be eligible for free school meals. In Year 4 (2018/19), a total of £172.6 million was allocated.

2.21 In Year 5, a total of £210,408,081 was allocated through the ASF. This included:

- £43,153,867 allocated to Challenge Authorities;
- £7,096, 523 allocated to Schools Programme; and
- £122,517,480 allocated to PEF.

2.22 In 2018/19, a further funding strand, the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund (CECYP) was introduced. CECYP¹ provides funding to local authorities to support work related to improving the educational outcomes of care experienced children and young people. CECYP is outwith the scope of this evaluation report and therefore funding data on CECYP is not included in the tables below.

Table 2.1: Funding allocations to Challenge Authorities Year 1 to Year 5

Local Authority	Year 1 (2015/16)	Year 2 (2016/17)	Year 3 (2017/18)	Year 4 (2018/19)	Year 5 (2019/20)
Clackmannanshire	£718,000	£1,253,999	£1,548,000	£1,569,376	£1,576,091
Dundee	£2,145,000	£4,041,682	£5,582,805	£6,224,790	£6,323,910
East Ayrshire	-	£2,037,323	£2,760,659	£3,762,789	£3,762,790
Glasgow	£3,030,000	£9,107,262	£7,665,677	£8,049,992	£8,050,000
Inverclyde	£592,000	£2,103,269	£3,100,200	£3,505,999	£3,470,640
North Ayrshire	£1,965,000	£3,490,024	£4,874,620	£5,889,762	£5,789,762
North Lanarkshire	£2,241,000	£6,897,347	£7,274,968	£7,478,959	£7,578,859
Renfrewshire	-	£1,711,919	£3,531,000	£4,658,000	£4,558,000
West Dunbartonshire	£1,024,000	£1,850,410	£2,013,108	£2,043,815	£2,043,815
Total	£11,715,000	£32,493,235	£38,351,037	£43,183,482	£43,153,867

2.23 The Challenge Authority Programme was extended in Year 2 to include East Ayrshire and Renfrewshire Council. No further additions to the Challenge Authority Programme have been made. Whilst the overall funding allocation to Challenge Authorities increased considerably between Year 2 and Year 3 (18% increase) and between Year 3 and Year 4 (12% increase), the overall funding allocation for Year 5 remained broadly the same (0.06% decrease). Table 2.1 above provides a breakdown of Challenge Authority Programme allocations by year and by individual Challenge Authority.

2.24 Funding allocations to the Schools Programme at the local authority level are provided in Table 2.2 below. There were no further allocations to either East Ayrshire or Renfrewshire Council through the Schools Programme following their introduction to the Challenge Authority Programme in Year 2 (2016/17). The overall Schools Programme allocation increased from £6.85 million in Year 3 to £7.14 million in Year 4, a small increase of approximately four per cent, and has remained broadly the same in Year 5, with £7.10 million allocated at the local authority level.

¹ For further information on CECYP see: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/care-experienced-children-and-young-people-fund-operational-guidance/>.

Table 2.2: Funding allocations – Schools Programme by Local Authority Year 1 to Year 5

Local Authority	Year 1 (2015/16)	Year 2 (2016/17)	Year 3 (2017/18)	Year 4 (2018/19)	Year 5 (2019/20)
Aberdeen City	£157,500	£454,565	£597,938	£636,133	£632,965
Argyll & Bute	£20,000	£19,944	£25,002	£23,895	£23,895
Dumfries & Galloway	£45,000	£116,533	£139,494	£137,376	£137,376
East Ayrshire	£291,470	-	-	-	-
Edinburgh	£304,645	£743,808	£800,742	£852,403	£847,876
Falkirk	£73,000	£169,463	£282,768	£272,768	£272,500
Fife	£416,112	£685,944	£965,687	£1,010,579	£1,005,280
Highland	£92,700	£594,209	£965,565	£1,200,755	£1,199,445
Renfrewshire	£231,120	-	-	-	-
Scottish Borders	£66,650	£166,620	£218,167	£188,744	£175,603
South Ayrshire	£150,400	£299,580	£399,523	£399,523	£399,523
South Lanarkshire	£548,690	£1,619,271	£2,019,374	£1,980,294	£1,963,820
Stirling	£45,600	£166,581	£180,268	£181,816	£181,816
West Lothian	£26,197	£188,139	£256,505	£256,429	£256,424
Total	£2,469,084	£5,224,657	£6,851,032	£7,140,713	£7,096, 523

2.25 PEF allocations at both school level and local authority level are published [online](#) annually. Pupil Equity Funding is allocated to primary, secondary and special schools, as well as grant maintained schools, on the basis of the estimated number of children and young people in P1-S3 registered for free school meals under the [national eligibility criteria](#). Whilst the funding is allocated on a per pupil basis headteachers can use their judgment to raise the attainment of any pupils in their schools as they see fit.

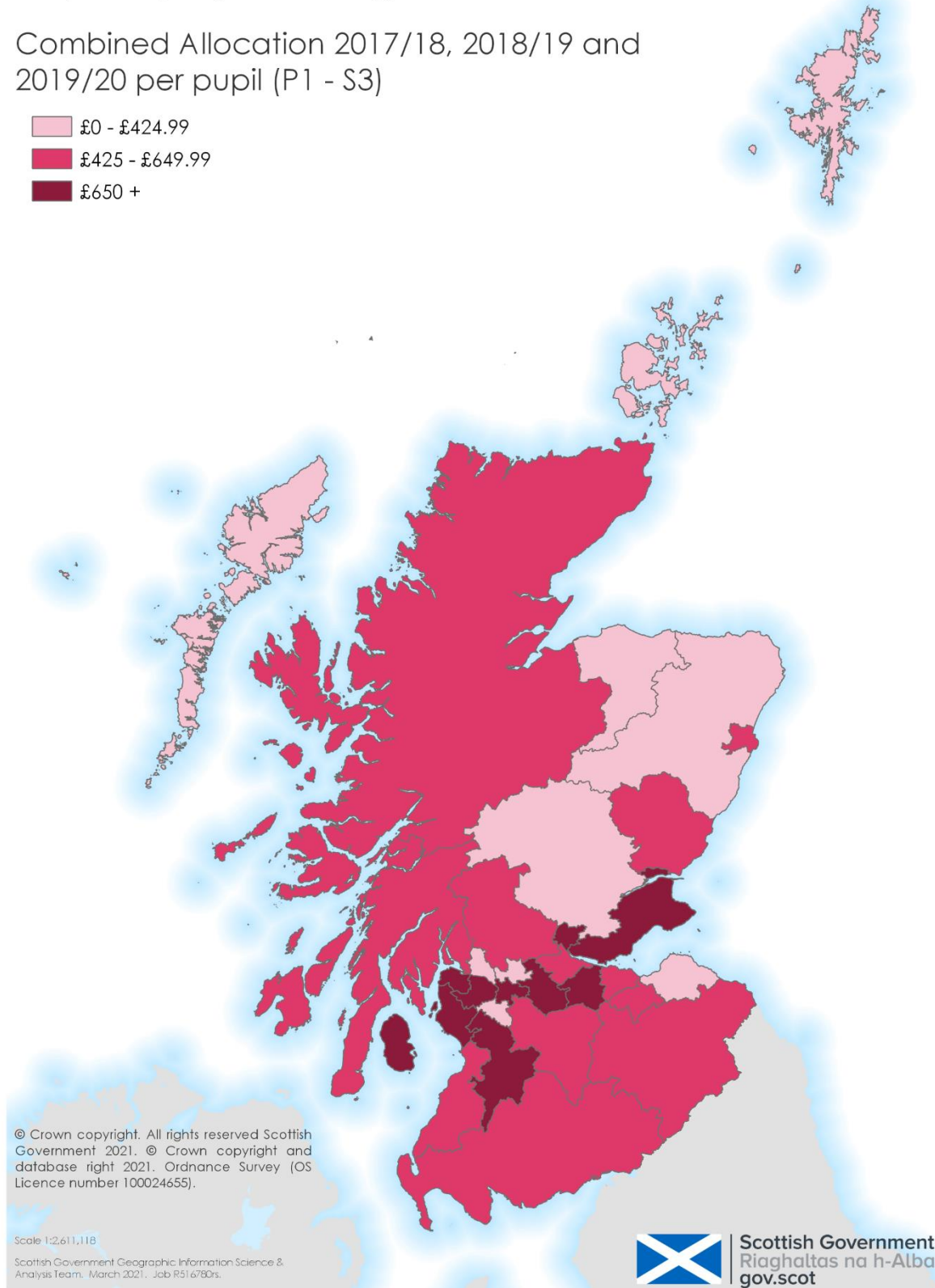
2.26 Of the £122,517,480 million PEF allocated in 2019/20, there was also £37,660,110 million carry over from 2018/19 available. Cumulatively, £365 million has been allocated through PEF across the three years. The chart below provides a breakdown of total allocation per pupil across 2017/18 to 2019/20. This spatial representation of PEF allocation is broadly as expected given higher concentrations of deprivation in the central belt.

Figure 2.1: Pupil Equity Funding – Total Spend to Date 2017/18 – 2019/20

Pupil Equity Funding

Combined Allocation 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20 per pupil (P1 - S3)

- £0 - £424.99
- £425 - £649.99
- £650 +



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Scale 1:2,611,118

Scottish Government Geographic Information Science & Analysis Team, March 2021, Job R51 6780rs.



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Was funding used according to requirements?

2.27 Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports indicate that funding was being used according to requirements, with clear work-streams and plans in place for these respective funding streams.

2.28 Table 2.3 below compares spend versus allocation across the five years by funding stream. This indicates that overall Challenge Authorities spent 97% of their allocated budget in 2019/20, with some variation at the local authority level. Ninety-seven per cent of allocated Schools Programme funding had also been spent in 2019/20. As shown in the table below, Challenge Authority and Schools Programme spend as a proportion of allocation have continued to broadly increase year-on-year from 2017/18 to 2019/20.

Table 2.3: Funding allocation and spend Years 1 to 5

Year	Funding Stream	Allocation £ (Million)	Actual Spend £ (Million)	Spend vs Allocation (%)
Year 1 (2015/16)	Challenge Authorities	11.7	5.9	50%
	Schools Programme	2.5	2.3	92%
	PEF	-	-	-
	Total	14.2	8.2	58%
Year 2 (2016/17)	Challenge Authorities	32.5	25	77%
	Schools Programme	5.2	4	77%
	PEF	-	-	-
	Total	37.7	29	77%
Year 3 (2017/18)	Challenge Authorities	38.4	35.1	92%
	Schools Programme	6.9	6.1	90%
	PEF	120.2	72.2	60%
	Total	165.4	113.5	69%
Year 4 (2018/19)	Challenge Authorities	43.2	40.5	94%
	Schools Programme	7.1	6.9	97%
	PEF*	170.1 ^	132.3	78%
	Total	220.4	179.7	82%
Year 5 (2019/20)	Challenge Authorities	43.2	41.7	97%
	Schools Programme	7.1	6.9	97%
	PEF	160.2^^	*	*
	Total	210.4	*	*

^ Figure represents total distributed for PEF, including £47.9 million carry forward from 2017/18.

^^ Figure represents total distributed for PEF in Year 5, including £37.6 million carry forward from 2018/19.

*PEF spend information for 2019/20 will be published alongside PEF spend for 2020/21 later this year.

2.29 In terms of evidence regarding the extent to which the Fund was supplemented by other sources, there was limited relevant evidence to draw on for this aspect of funding.

Use of core funding towards equitable outcomes

2.30 There continues to be some evidence that local authorities have changed the way they use core funding as a result of the ASF. Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports evidence this, as well as the Local Authority 2020 results.

2.31 Findings from the Local Authority Survey 2020 showed that the majority of respondents (12 of 15) perceived that there had been some change of use of resources in their local authority over the previous year to focus on outcomes for the most socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people (one to a great extent, 11 to some extent), with a further three indicating a limited change of use of resources. Examples provided include:

- Agreement of a family learning budget to support 'holiday hunger', provision of food vouchers and family learning across the local authority (Schools Programme local authority);
- Introducing changes to enable central teams to work with schools and clusters, to enable sharing of resources and sharing insights into working with pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Schools Programme local authority).

2.32 During the COVID-19 school building closure period, local authorities highlighted ways in which resources had been used to focus on outcomes for pupils affected by poverty. This included, for example, combined use of funding from ASF and other sources, including Connected Learning programme, to commission/develop and deploy online learning applications and tools. This was associated with benefits such as economies of scale, through central commissioning. Changes in the use of central staff teams to support logistics, to manage hubs etc, were also identified.

2.33 In their responses, a number of local authorities also mentioned flexibilities introduced in order to respond to the challenges associated with COVID-19. This issue is covered in the section below.

Responding to COVID-19: introduction of flexibilities in the use of ASF

2.34 The Local Authority Survey 2020 invited respondents to indicate the extent to which they had used flexibilities in the use of ASF introduced in May 2020² to enable local authorities to respond to COVID-19. All but one local authority respondents indicated that ASF flexibilities had been used (one to a great extent, 12 to some extent, and one to a limited extent).

2.35 Local Authority respondents described a broad range of ways in which flexibilities had been introduced with funding used flexibly to support response to the challenges associated with the period of school building closures. This included:

² [Education+and+Early+Learning+and+Childcare+funding+flexibility+-+May+2020.pdf \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

- Funding for physical resources to support remote learning, including digital devices;
- Provision of food parcels/vouchers,
- Deployment of central SAC staff to schools to take forward attainment related activities and ensure service continuity;
- Development of new structures and mechanisms.

2.36 Flexibilities were viewed as a welcome introduction by local authorities. Audit of existing plans and revision/adaptation of plans to be responsive to changing needs and circumstances of families experiencing poverty was highlighted by respondents. This included, for example, increased focus on health and wellbeing in some instances. It was also acknowledged that some funding could not be spent as planned due to pausing of activities, or changing the delivery mode from physical to remote, and therefore having the capacity to plan and deliver more appropriately to take account of the challenges during this period was beneficial. The following illustrate benefits associated with the introduction of flexibilities from the perspective of a number of local authorities:

‘The ability to divert funding as required gave us the flexibility we needed to meet the demands of the extended period of lockdown. This is very much a model we see as more efficient than the restrictive model we have been adhered to in previous years.’ (Challenge Authority respondent)

‘Individual schools have used PEF more flexibly in their response to Covid to meet the changing needs of pupils affected by poverty.’ (Schools Programme respondent)

2.37 Another feature to emerge from responses was the support provided by Attainment Advisors and the SWAY resource in supporting and informing schools and clusters regarding the use of flexibilities.

2.38 There was also reference to the creation of local guidance for schools’ use of PEF, as well as guidance provided by local authority departments such as HR and finance around use of flexibilities.

2.39 The importance of working collaboratively with partners was a key feature highlighted by local authorities in describing planning and delivery associated with the use of flexibilities, including joint/cluster working and sharing/pooling of resources. (The theme of collaboration is explored further in Chapter 4).

Chapter 3 Activities and Outputs: Approaches

3.1 This chapter explores the development of approaches taken by schools and local authorities with regard to addressing the poverty-related attainment gap.

3.2 The early phase of the evaluation focused on the types of interventions implemented as a result of the fund and how these were planned for and targeted to reduce the poverty-related attainment gap. The evaluation was refocused at the end of Year 3 to consider how schools and local authorities identified, selected and implemented their approach for addressing the poverty-related attainment gap, in order to facilitate a broader exploration of approaches rather than focusing on the intervention level. An associated evaluation question sought to explore the extent to which the selected approach aimed to support pupils and parents from the most deprived backgrounds.

3.3 For the Year 5 evaluation, as outlined in the report introduction, the evaluation was further enhanced to include consideration of the impact of COVID-19 on the development of approaches. As a result, the evidence is presented below with reference to the period of time between August 2019 and March 2020, and separately with reference to the period of school building closures between March and June 2020. This is in recognition of the importance of the 'story' of change and adaptation which occurred throughout the course of the 2019/20 year.

3.4 Evidence is primarily drawn from the Local Authority Survey 2020, Headteacher Survey 2020 and Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports.

How did schools and local authorities identify, select and implement approaches for addressing the poverty-related attainment gap?

3.5 The Local Authority Survey 2020 is a key evidence source on the development of local authority approaches. In the 2019 survey, local authorities provided their views on the extent to which the approach for addressing the poverty-related attainment gap had changed within their local authority over the period of funding, with 20 of 27 respondents indicating that their approach had changed either significantly or to some extent. The focus of the survey question was changed slightly for the 2020 survey to ask specifically about the development of approaches, rather than changes to the approach as in the 2019 survey.

3.6 Local Authority Survey 2020 respondents were invited to report on each of the two key time periods (prior to COVID-19 and the period of school building closures between March and June 2020). The 2020 survey also introduced a specific question on approaches to engaging families and communities, in order to better capture this important aspect of ASF approaches and reflecting a strengthened focus in the SAC logic model.

Approaches during the period August 2019 to March 2020

3.7 All local authority respondents indicated their approach had developed over the period August 2019 to March 2020. Six (of 15 respondents) indicated the approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap had developed significantly over the previous year between August 2019 and March 2020 in their local authority, and nine indicated the approach had developed to some extent.

3.8 Themes which emerged from responses in terms of development of approaches include the **continued development and enhancement of approaches** over a number of years, with **structures, processes and systems** in place to support this, together with **increasing use of data** and associated **improved understanding of closing the poverty-related attainment gap** and of **the effects of poverty on children and young people**, increased **collaborations** and **embedding of equity**.

3.9 Factors associated with the development of approaches highlighted included:

- Collaborative working;
- Evidence of approaches becoming more embedded;
- Improvements in use of guidance and planning;
- Increased focus on the use of data, including greater rigour in use of data, greater access to data and greater data literacy;
- Staffing increases;
- Increasing opportunities for professional learning;
- Easily accessible support and clear communication channels;
- Improved understanding of the poverty-related attainment gap and of the experience of poverty and its impact on children and families;
- Continued development of mechanisms to support strategic planning and governance;
- Aspirational target setting; and
- Increasingly adaptive and responsive approaches.

Exemplar: Local Authority Approach to Numeracy

A Schools Programme local authority described a **numeracy intervention menu** created to support schools in selecting relevant interventions, as well as a **numeracy 'equity and excellence' group** which is supporting driving up numeracy attainment through focusing on pedagogical themes identified in research as raising numeracy attainment, linking this to professional learning and the development and roll out of a **Closing the Numeracy Gap intervention**.

3.10 The box above provides an example of a local authority approach to closing the numeracy gap, outlining a range of complementary actions taken by the local authority which all focus on closing the numeracy gap but which act at different levels. This includes mechanisms to support exchange and sharing of good practice, learning from current research, support for schools on selecting relevant existing

interventions, professional learning, and developing a new bespoke intervention for roll out across the local authority. Local authorities also described the continuing development of specific initiatives, a number of examples of which are provided below for illustration:

- Cost of the School Day³ - One local authority specifically described that CotSD was 'data led and data driven', highlighting the importance of data in driving improvements;
- mentoring through MCR Pathways⁴ available across local authority area;
- a supported study approach, targeted at pupils in SIMD 1 and 2, now available across nearly all schools in local authority in response to pupil feedback.

3.11 At the school level, the development of approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap and addressing equity in education was explored in the Headteacher Survey 2020. The survey found that the large majority of schools had developed their approach to achieving equity during the first part of the 2019/20 year from their approach in 2018/19, with 85% indicating they had developed their approach during this period.

3.12 There was strong evidence from Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports regarding the importance of health and wellbeing within approaches, both before and during COVID-19. There were a wealth of examples of whole school nurture approaches and collaboration with specialist providers.

Approaches during school building closures – March to June 2020

3.13 Local authority approaches had also developed during the period of school building closures (March to June 2020), with the majority of respondents to the Local Authority Survey 2020 indicating this. Five respondents indicated their local authority approach had developed significantly, and seven indicated their local authority approach had developed to some extent. Three respondents felt there had been limited development over the period of school building closures.

3.14 Local authority approaches had developed in a range of ways. A number of local authorities had undertaken reviews to consider planned activities with decisions subsequently made to pause or progress work related to current and emerging priorities and needs. One local authority noted it had undertaken an equity audit to support future planning. Flexibility, agility and creativity were key aspects highlighted during this period of review and adaptation.

³ Cost of the School Day is a Child Poverty Action Group project which aims to understand and address financial barriers at school. The project is in receipt of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding through the national programmes. For further information see [Cost of the School Day | CPAG](#). Education Scotland's National Improvement Hub includes a practice exemplar on [Cost of the School Day \(education.gov.scot\)](#).

⁴ MCR Pathways is a national charity providing mentoring to young people which a number of Challenge Authorities have worked in partnership with to deliver work streams locally.

3.15 Large-scale changes were introduced in order to adapt to meet the challenges of providing remote learning, frequently ‘pivoting’ in very quick time-periods to meet the unprecedented challenges presented by responding to COVID-19. This included the introduction of a wealth of responses, from providing physical resources (e.g. food parcels, home-learning packs), equity-related advice and information, signposting to other sources of support, as well as the continuation of face-to-face support where possible. Prioritisation of health and wellbeing support was a common theme in responses, ranging from increased pastoral support and support for mental health through to physical support such as linking up with food banks. The creation of new partnerships with other agencies in order to take this activity forward, in particular with third sector organisations, were commonly highlighted. Cross-departmental responses were also highlighted, such as joint working through social work and education.

Exemplar: Developing Approaches to Health and Wellbeing

A Schools Programme local authority established a new partnership involving Educational Psychology Service and youth work to provide counselling support in schools. This positively impacted on children and young people affected by poverty, with nearly three quarters of those participating being entitled to free school meals. During the period of school building closures, a wellbeing telephone consultation service was set up for pupils and their families, together with the creation of wellbeing guidance for pupils and families.

3.16 Local authorities described using data to support schools to identify pupils and families in need of further support, whether in terms of attending childcare hubs, or to receive additional support at home, for example digital devices/connectivity, physical home-learning packs etc.

3.17 A variety of systems were established at local authority level to support schools, for example in tracking engagement in home-learning and for keeping in touch with identified pupils, to establish virtual networks across schools to support sharing and exchange, to support schools with adapting plans for use of PEF funding.

3.18 Also commonly highlighted in local authority responses were modifications to existing plans and approaches to enable progress to continue. For example, training was modified to online delivery rather than face-to-face. Authorities highlighted the success in changing delivery of aspects of professional learning to online delivery, often within very short time-frames.

Exemplar: Developing approaches to mitigate the impact of COVID-19:

A Challenge Authority described its schools' use of data and knowledge of families to provide food to vulnerable families, signpost to sources of third sector support, welfare rights advice, and identification of mental health and wellbeing issues. This provision was supported by key family link worker roles based within education hubs.

3.19 Headteachers were invited to provide their views on the development of approaches during the period of school building closures from March to June 2020, with almost two thirds (61%) of respondents to the Headteacher Survey 2020 indicating their approaches had also developed during this period. Whilst this finding was broadly consistent across respondent groups in terms of funding streams and urban/rural location, schools were more likely to have developed their approach during the period of school building closures if the approach had developed from the previous year in the period August 2019 to March 2020.

Approaches to engaging families and communities

3.20 There is considerable evidence of the ongoing development of approaches to engaging families and communities across evidence sources. Evidence from the Local Authority Survey 2020 indicates that the majority of respondents (13 of 15) developed their approaches to engaging families and communities during the previous year (four significantly, nine to some extent).

3.21 In the period August 2019 to March 2020, there were numerous developments highlighted with regard to engaging families and communities. For example, local authorities variously described the development of parental involvement and engagement strategies, and of approaches to family learning. Challenge Authority progress reports detailed a whole range of ways in which local authorities had sought to support children and young people through projects to support families, including provision of targeted support for families, the role of school/family development workers focusing on improving attendance, engagement and participation, and parenting support such as benefits advice, mental health, substance misuse etc, pointing to the holistic nature of much of this activity.

3.22 Whilst family and community engagement aspects had frequently been driven forward at pace in order to respond to the challenges created as a result of COVID-19, some planned aspects of family and community engagement had been paused, or adapted as a result of the school building closures. Adaptations included the development of virtual approaches. For some, work at the local authority level progressed on a more limited level during the school building closures, whilst at the school level engagement with families and communities increased.

3.23 Several made reference to the use of ASF funding including PEF to employ family/link workers in order to build capacity/expand this aspect, and there was evidence of networking between family/link workers to share and exchange

developing approaches and problem-solving in response to emerging issues and challenges.

3.24 Themes which emerged with regard to the period of school building closures include:

- **Increased partnership working**, both with parents' groups, with third sector and with other local authority services;
- **Schools working directly to facilitate increased contact with families**, with provision of food, hard copy materials to support home-learning, face to face visits etc;
- **The role of family/link workers**, often funded through PEF, were highlighted. For a number of local authorities, existing family link worker roles enabled a rapid response to the challenges facing families, often working in partnership with third sector organisations to respond to changing circumstances of families as a result of the ongoing pandemic. Family/link workers were viewed as key as they were able to use their existing knowledge of families and existing relationships with families to engage quickly to start to address their needs, including direct provision to support Health and Wellbeing needs (e.g. delivery of food parcels, clothes), signposting to other services including benefits advice, food banks, and linking with other statutory and non-statutory services in the local area. Evidence sources, including Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports, strongly identified such roles as an increasingly integral part of the local community infrastructure, supporting strong links between both school and individual families and between school and the local community more widely.

To what extent did approaches selected aim to support pupils and parents from the most deprived backgrounds?

3.25 The evaluation sought to explore the extent to which selected approaches aimed to support pupils and parents from the most deprived backgrounds with evidence sought from a range of sources.

3.26 Whilst some approaches focused on universal provision, others were more focused on support of pupils from the most deprived backgrounds.

3.27 Evidence from the Headteacher Survey 2020 on targeted versus universal provision indicates that a large majority of schools have included a targeted focus on pupils and parents experiencing socio-demographic disadvantage as part of their approach to achieving equity. However, survey results show that most schools have taken a mixed response, with 85% of respondents to the survey indicating the use of ASF to support universal approaches. Whilst these findings were consistent across most key respondent groups, there were some differences related to responses of headteachers from rural areas where there was less likelihood of a specific focus on those affected by socio-economic disadvantage and/or other types of disadvantage.

3.28 In terms of mechanisms to ensure approaches were focused on pupils and parents from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, evidence considered for Year 5 points to improved understanding and use of data sources to

support decision-making around identifying target groups. This will be explored further in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 Short and medium term outcomes

4.1 This chapter considers the impact of the ASF in terms of making progress towards the short- and medium-term outcomes. The initial section considers local authority and school perceptions of success in meeting their agreed outcomes.

4.2 The second section explores in more detail two of the key aims of the ASF: the extent to which the fund encouraged collaboration, and the extent to which data and evidence were used to drive improvements as part of the fund.

Perceptions of Success

4.3 This section explores evidence collected in respect of schools' and local authorities' perceptions of success in meeting their short-term and medium term outcomes, to address the following evaluation question:

'to what extent did schools and local authorities involved with the Fund feel the intended outcomes of their approach had been achieved?'

4.4 Evidence from Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports, Headteacher Survey 2020 and Local Authority Survey 2020 is utilised to inform this section.

Embedding approaches

4.5 There was evidence of perceived success with regard to embedding approaches to achieving equity within schools. Findings from the Headteacher Survey 2020 showed the majority (84%) of headteacher respondents felt their approach was embedded within their school community to a great or moderate extent, very consistent with 2019 survey findings and showing broad consistency across key respondent groups in terms of funding stream, and urban/rural schools.

Understanding of challenges and barriers faced by pupils affected by poverty

4.6 Schools' levels of understanding of the challenges and barriers faced by pupils affected by poverty were high, with nearly all (98 per cent) headteachers who responded to the Headteacher Survey 2020 indicating they understood the challenges and barriers faced by pupils affected by poverty, including 78 per cent who felt they understood this 'to a great extent'. This was similar to 2019 Headteacher Survey results, and was consistent across ASF streams. There were however some geographical variations with those in small town and rural areas less likely to feel they understood the challenges. Those with lower proportions of pupils in receipt of FSM (and therefore lower PEF allocations) were also less likely to feel they understood the challenges.

Impact of COVID-19

4.7 Local authorities perceived a range of factors associated with COVID-19 to have impacted on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap, as indicated through responses to the Local Authority Survey 2020.

4.8 It was recognised that there remained a great deal of uncertainty regarding the extent of the impact on progress. Several local authorities referenced internal data gathering exercises undertaken (such as an equity audit), which had sought to understand and quantify the impacts at the local authority level.

4.9 Reference was made to increasing numbers of families experiencing poverty as a result of the pandemic, and of the need to put in place appropriate responses. Longer-term plans were frequently paused in order to focus on short-term priorities, as described in Chapter 3, but all respondents described a continuing focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap throughout the period of school building closures. Rather, the focus was on limiting and mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on pupils and families affected by socio-demographic disadvantage, whilst recognising increases in socio-economic disadvantage because of COVID-19. Local authorities variously described a range of actions in order to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, including:

- adjustments, adaptations, pausing of existing activity;
- altering governance and funding to respond to emerging challenges;
- creating recovery plans and longer-term planning;
- planning for future potential periods of school building closures, or for pupils self-isolating;
- considering the provision of specialised support to address the needs of those pupils not making expected progress;
- addressing digital connectivity challenges, particularly in rural areas;
- developing practice for remote learning.

4.10 Additional funding to support purchase of devices was welcomed, but delays in purchasing devices due to huge demand has been a factor, and access for younger primary pupils remains a concern.

4.11 Headteachers also viewed COVID-19 and school building closures to have impacted on their progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. The extent of perceived impact is explored further in Chapter 5.

Collaboration

4.12 This section considers the extent to which progress has been achieved towards the stated medium-term outcome on collaboration articulated in the SAC logic model:

'Increased evidence of collaboration across the education system (between schools, local authorities, third sector, other delivery partners and

professionals such as social work) to deliver and evaluate approaches aimed at closing the poverty-related attainment gap’.

4.13 It considers the extent to which ASF encouraged collaboration amongst those receiving funding through Challenge Authority, Schools Programme and/or PEF. It also considers where such collaborations were developing.

4.14 Evidence from previous years of the ASF evaluation has continuously highlighted the positive contribution of the fund to both the level and nature of collaboration.

4.15 As in the Year 4 report, evidence sources have been explored to consider the extent to which strong evidence of collaboration continued in Year 5.

To what extent did the fund encourage collaboration?

4.16 Overall, perceptions of the extent of collaborative working in schools was viewed by headteachers to have increased as a result of the fund. The majority of headteachers responding to the Headteacher Survey 2020 had seen an increase in collaborative working in their school up to March 2020 as a result of the ASF, with two-thirds (65%) indicating this and just over a third (36%) who had seen a large increase. This was broadly consistent with 2019 Headteacher Survey findings, with increased collaboration as a result of the fund a consistent evaluation finding since the introduction of ASF.

4.17 In addition, almost half (46%) of respondents to the Headteacher Survey 2020 indicated they had seen an increase in collaborative working during the school building closures between March and June 2020.

4.18 There was some variation in school experiences of collaborative working, with primary schools and schools in rural areas less likely to have seen an increase in collaborative working, both up to the period of school building closures and during the period of school building closures.

4.19 At the local authority level, strong perceptions of the extent of collaboration as a result of the fund continued to be evidenced from Local Authority Survey respondents. All respondents to the Local Authority Survey 2020 indicated collaborations had increased as a result of the fund, approximately half of whom indicated that this was to a great extent and half to some extent. This continues the trend previously identified in the Local Authority Survey 2019, where the majority indicated the fund had increased collaboration to a great or to some extent.

4.20 Given the lower number of local authority responses to the Local Authority Survey in 2020, it is not possible to provide analysis at the funding stream level. However, it is notable that collaborations were viewed as having increased to a great extent as a result of ASF by all five Challenge Authority respondents. Evidence of increasing collaboration also featured strongly in Challenge Authority progress reports, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing, and with academic institutions and specialist providers.

Locus of increased collaboration

4.21 Collaborations were described on a range of levels in Local Authority Survey 2020 responses, from regional and local authority-wide through to collaborations at school cluster and individual school level, as illustrated below:

- Enhanced collaboration across local authority services. On occasion, the structuring of local authority services was noted as enabling more effective collaborative working, such as through creation of joint education and children/young people's services;
- Collaborative working with Attainment Advisers and SAC lead officers;
- The importance of partnerships with third sector agencies, particularly in terms of PEF;
- Specific collaborations emerging in terms of Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund. For example, a PEF-only local authority highlighted collaboration resulting from the Virtual School Head Teacher role in relation to care experienced children and young people;
- Opportunities for networking and collaboration for senior leaders within and beyond school clusters, including sharing good practice, participation in collegiate activities, professional development etc;
- The development of specific mechanisms (e.g. Equity Networks) and roles (such as 'Challenge' leaders) to support and facilitate collaboration;
- Sharing and pooling of resources amongst a school cluster or learning community.

4.22 Themes emerging from the Local Authority Survey 2020 in terms of local authority perspectives on collaboration with respect to the fund were broadly similar to those emerging from the 2019 survey:

- Funding as a driver of collaboration;
- Collaboration key to enabling sharing of practice, capacity building and improvement;
- Ongoing development of mechanisms to support collaboration and to enable more strategic and systematic collaboration at a number of levels and between different levels of the system;
- Benefits of collaboration continue to be identified e.g. supporting best use of resources; supporting a focus on improving outcomes for children and young people through working collaboratively across services.

4.23 A number of the above themes are illustrated in the following extracts from local authority survey responses:

'Funding has allowed for models of greater transfer of skills, knowledge and innovation across the authority and beyond. Capacity has been built and establishments are more confident in succession planning. ASF has provided greater opportunities to integrate programmes having the greatest impact quickly. Innovation is distributed quickly as there are shared values and goals.' (Challenge Authority respondent)

‘Collaboration within and across all sectors has increased extensively enabling a relentless focus on enhancing teaching and learning, while sharing and planning experiences across the BGE and beyond. This has been both as a direct result of planned programmes and often as an unforeseen gain.’
(Challenge Authority respondent)

‘Much of the ASF work in this authority has been based on effective partnership working and collaboration. Over time we have developed robust collaborative approaches to support working with a range of partners and this has helped to establish and embed several significant partnerships, and supported new and emerging partnerships.’ (Challenge Authority respondent)

‘As a result of the ASF collaboration has continued to be strengthened with a clear focus on raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. While effective collaboration has always been a focus the ASF has helped to shape some of the ways in which we collaborate.’ (Schools Programme respondent)

Changes in collaborations over the previous year

4.24 The Local Authority Survey 2020 invited local authorities to provide an assessment of the extent to which collaborations had changed over the previous year. There was some evidence that collaborations had changed, with five of the 15 respondents stating these had changed significantly and eight indicating these had changed to some extent. For a further two, there were perceptions of limited change.

4.25 Examples of changes in collaborations over the period August 2019 to March 2020 mentioned by respondents include:

- Regional Improvement Collaborative partnership development – family schools groups sharing good practice to build greater understanding of the challenges faced by families living in poverty;
- Expansion of Excellence and Equity Literacy and Numeracy Groups to include wider range of multi-agency partners;
- Increased partnership working with Robert Owen Centre (University of Glasgow) leading to developments across schools in local authority.

4.26 In the March to June 2020 period, respondents highlighted aspects of collaboration associated with the closure of school buildings and transition to remote learning. A range of new collaborations with a wider range of partners, as well as strengthened collaborations with existing partners, were identified as local authorities sought quickly to respond to the demands and needs of responding to COVID-19, with several respondents pointing to the pace of this. Collaborations featured strongly in local authorities’ use of flexibilities (as discussed in Chapter 2).

4.27 Various mechanisms to support collaborative working during school building closures were described. For example, the creation of multi-disciplinary teams functioning in localities across a local authority area to foster collaboration and appropriate response across local authority and third sector partners to meet the needs of vulnerable families. Several respondents pointed to the shared goals of

collaborative partners to respond appropriately to the pandemic as a strength, with trust arising from this shared approach.

Use of Data and Evidence

4.28 This section explores the extent to which schools and local authorities have used data, analysis and knowledge of what works to monitor and inform their activity related to closing the poverty-related attainment gap in order to address the following evaluation question:

‘To what extent did schools and authorities use data, analysis and evidence to drive improvements as part of the Fund?’

4.29 Evidence sources considered include Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports, annual Headteacher Survey and Local Authority Survey findings.

4.30 In line with the positive trend demonstrated since the inception of the ASF, data and evidence continue to feature strongly to support ASF activity in Year 5. This was particularly evident in the Challenge Authority progress reports at the local authority level, and the Schools Programme progress reports at the school level, with many examples of the ways in which strengthened use of data and evidence was supporting decision-making, planning, and measurement of impact. Whilst the Challenge Authority progress reports overall detail progress in increasing expertise at data collection, analysis and informed use at the local authority level and school level, it is also clear that progress remains somewhat variable across different local authorities. For those on the journey to increased data collection and analysis capacity, there is a recognition of where progress is required and a clear intention to develop towards increasing data capacity at all levels.

Data and evidence supporting decision-making

4.31 At local authority level, evidence from the Local Authority Survey 2020 suggests that data and evidence relevant to the local context continued to feature strongly in local authority decision-making with regard to the ASF. The 2019 survey found that this was the case for the majority of local authorities, and for all of the Challenge Authorities. In 2020, the majority of local authorities who responded similarly found data and evidence had featured to a great extent in decision-making over the previous year (11 of 15 to a great extent, and two to some extent).

4.32 For respondents who indicated data use had strongly featured, a range of approaches utilised at different levels in their locality were evidenced, from local authority-wide through to cluster and school level. The application of various tools was described, including both nationally available tools (such as Insight) as well as bespoke tools created at the local authority level to support data analysis and its application to support decision-making. This was also clearly evidenced in Challenge Authority progress reports.

Exemplar: Using data to inform decision-making

A Schools Programme local authority described the process of using data to inform decision-making at school and local authority level

- schools in receipt of Schools Programme funding had been using their data to inform decision-making with regard to closing the poverty-related attainment gap in their context.
 - schools with high levels of PEF funding were working collaboratively with the Attainment Advisors and the local authority SAC lead to use local data to identify needs.
 - PEF clinics held across the local authority area for schools to participate in to make use of school level data and evidence to support schools to make decisions on how to allocate PEF most effectively to close the gap in their local context.
-

4.33 Evidence on schools' use of data and evaluation in relation to ASF supported activity drawn from the Headteacher Survey 2020 continued to be positive. With respect to the use of data and evidence to inform development of their school's approach, the large majority (84%) of headteacher respondents indicated this as 'very good' or 'good'.

The role of data and evidence in driving improvements

4.34 The importance of using data and evidence to support decision-making to drive improvement at different levels of the education system was clear across evidence sources, as previously identified in the Year 4 report. It was apparent from Challenge Authority Progress Reports that there continues to be closer analysis across NIF measures and sub measures combined with local contextual data, which in turn highlights where targeted support is needed and strengthens understanding of where achievement and progress are taking place for children and young people affected by poverty. There was evidence of a clear understanding and in some places embedding that analysis and use of data to improve teaching and learning and in identifying the approaches and interventions that maximise the learner outcomes.

4.35 Linking collaboration around data use in driving improvements emerged as an important related aspect. For example, collaboration in terms of data sharing and dialogue around improvement was highlighted as follows:

'Greater sharing of data across schools and more transparency in our approach, with schools being placed in comparator groupings to further develop dialogue about school improvement.' (PEF-only local authority)

Improvements in data capability and capacity

4.36 Improved capability and capacity across the system to use data and evidence was also evident in Local Authority Survey 2020 responses. Several local authorities described specific approaches to increase data literacy, including data literacy training for teachers, the development of data networks, and local authority data officers working collaboratively with schools. Challenge Authority progress reports

highlighted examples of increased capability and capacity, including upskilling at various levels, from classroom teachers through to the continuing development of data specialist posts in some instances alongside developing skills for school leaders assisting them in self-evaluation and the critical use of school data. There was also increasing evidence of the use of data dashboards to assist schools in tracking data and developing skills. Where bespoke data dashboards are not available data packs are often used to ensure that all practitioners have access to and understand their unique dataset and are able to more effectively direct interventions to improve children and young people's learning, progress and achievement.

4.37 Skills in measuring the impact of school's approaches was also positively indicated, with 82% of 2020 Headteacher Survey respondents positive about their ability to identify appropriate measures, and 76% positive about their use of evidence to measure impact. A similar proportion of respondents (78%) were positive about their ability to measure progress and impact of approaches.

4.38 Despite remaining a strong feature, it is notable that headteacher perceptions on some measures rating schools' approaches to use of data and evidence had decreased in the 2020 Headteacher Survey from previous years. Particularly, perceptions of ability to use evidence to measure impact had decreased from 90% in the 2018 and 2019 surveys to 76% in the 2020 survey, a decrease of 14 percentage points. In addition, there was some variance in terms of funding stream on this measure, with schools receiving PEF-only and those with lower levels of PEF allocation less positive than other schools regarding use of evidence to measure impact.

4.39 School level evidence from Headteacher Survey 2020 indicates that just under two-thirds (63%) of schools felt that ASF support had helped to develop staff skills and knowledge in using data and evaluation, although there was significant variation with PEF-only schools, those in rural areas and those with lower PEF allocations indicating less positive perceptions of this.

Use of data and evidence during the period of school building closures

4.40 A number of aspects were highlighted in terms of the use of data and evidence during the March to June 2020 period of school building closures in the Local Authority Survey 2020, although there remained a strong focus on data and evidence to drive decision-making during this period.

4.41 Local authorities highlighted the different focus required during this period, for example the need to develop new sources of data and evidence to support the transition to remote learning such as engagement data and surveys of parents and pupils on their experiences of remote learning. Data and evidence from existing data sets were appropriately utilised to shape local responses to the pandemic, such as data sharing with third sector partners in order to put in place additional support for vulnerable pupils.

4.42 It was also recognised that the pandemic had impacted on the collection of some data sets.

The role of Attainment Advisors in promoting collaboration and use of data and evidence

4.43 A key feature emerging in particular from Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports was the role of Attainment Advisors in promoting collaboration and use of data and evidence at a range of levels from working with local authority SAC leads down to working with individual schools.

Chapter 5 Long-term outcomes: Contribution to Improvement and Reduction of the Poverty-related Attainment Gap, and Sustainability

5.1 This chapter explores evidence around improvement in attainment and health and wellbeing, and the gap between pupils from the most and least deprived areas. Evidence of impact draws on both analysis of quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing, based on agreed measures for monitoring progress on closing the poverty-related attainment gap, and on reported impacts from survey evidence.

5.2 The first section provides analysis of quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing based on the measures for monitoring progress on closing the poverty-related attainment gap as set out in the National Improvement Framework. For 2019/20, data on Attendance and Exclusions is not available as it is published on a biennial basis. ACEL 2019/20 data was not collected during the period of school building closures.

5.3 The second section explores evidence of impact provided by local authorities and schools, based primarily on survey data drawn from the Headteacher Survey 2020 and the Local Authority Survey 2020. This is followed by consideration of evidence around sustainability.

Evidence of impact: attainment and wellbeing

5.4 Evidence of impact draws on analysis of quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing based on the agreed measures for monitoring progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap set out in the National Improvement Framework. This sets out a basket of key measures and sub-measures to assess progress. The measures with available data for this (and previous) reporting periods are shown in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: National Improvement Framework Measures

			Pre ASF 2014/15	Year 1 (2015/16)	Year 2 (2016/17)	Year 3 (2017/18)	Year 4 (2018/19)	Year 5 (2019/20)
Attainment	Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels	P1, P4 and P7 S3			✓	✓	✓	
	School leaver attainment in National Qualifications – SCQF Level 5 and 6 or better*	School leavers		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Annual Participation Measure	16-19 year olds			✓	✓	✓	✓
Health & Wellbeing	Attendance rates	Primary, Secondary	✓		✓		✓	
	Exclusion rates	Primary, Secondary	✓		✓		✓	
	Total difficulties score	Primary, Secondary		✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Mental Wellbeing Score (SALSUS)	Primary, Secondary		✓	✓			✓

* Level 4 is not included within the attainment related measures – see Evaluation Strategy for Year 3 and 4 Table 2.1.

5.5 All of the measures are available at both Scotland and local authority level. Patterns of attainment in Challenge Authorities, who have been involved with ASF since 2015⁵, and non-Challenge Authorities are outlined in this analysis.

5.6 To address the research questions, each of the measures outlined in the above table are considered in terms of:

- Overall attainment
- Attainment for pupils from most and least deprived SIMD quintiles
- Percentage point gap between the most and least deprived

5.7 In addition, data for the following groups will be shown:

- Each of the nine Challenge Authorities and Challenge Authority total
- Non-Challenge Authorities
- Scotland Level

5.8 A range of additional factors influence the extent to which different measures provide us with an accurate and up to date assessment of progress:

- There is a delay in terms of the progress of the ASF and the evaluation. The evaluation is retrospective, in that data reported has been collected for the previous year;
- Some of the data is only available over a small time period, and therefore it is difficult to start ascertaining broader trends. In addition, data is not gathered at each year stage. For example, an authority/school could have been targeting P2 which would not be seen in ACEL for at least two years as this is gathered at P1, P4 and P7;
- The differential implementation of ASF at local authority/school level (based on the funding streams) also introduces a further level of complexity, and affects the extent to which meaningful trends can be inferred from the data. For example, implementation in the secondary sector did not begin until Year 2 of the ASF.
- The introduction of PEF in 2018/19 brings further complexity.

School leaver attainment: percentage of school leavers achieving awards by Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level

5.9 The attainment of school leavers in Scotland is based on the Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations, No. 3: 2021 Edition published 23 February 2021. This data includes attainment in National Qualifications achieved throughout all stages of a pupil's schooling.

5.10 When considering the school leaver attainment publication and the data it presents it is important to be aware of the circumstances around National Qualification certification in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic led to the cancellation of

⁵ East Ayrshire Council and Renfrewshire Council were added as Challenge Authorities in 2016.

2020 National 5 (SCQF Level 5), Higher (SCQF Level 6) and Advanced Higher (SCQF Level 7) exams and the decision for the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) not to collect assess coursework. Instead the grades in these qualifications in 2019/20 were based on teacher estimates⁶. This will have affected the attainment of many 2019/20 school leavers presented in this data. It is for this reason that a dashed line break in the series has been placed between 2018/19 and 2019/20 to indicate that care must be taken when comparing 2019/20 attainment to that of earlier years. It is not possible to fully determine the extent to which the coronavirus pandemic and, more specifically, the certification methods used in 2020 have affected the attainment levels of the 2019/20 school leaver cohort.

5.11 Whilst the School Leaver Attainment publication presents the data and notes the change year on year it is important to understand that any change between the attainment levels of the 2019/20 cohort and those of previous years should not be seen as an indication that performance has improved or worsened without further evidence.

5.12 This section will consider the proportion of school leavers attaining one or more pass at SCQF Level 5 to 7 in Challenge Authorities (combined), non-Challenge Authorities (combined) and Scotland overall, from 2016/17 to 2019/20.

5.13 As seen in Table 5.2 the proportion of school leavers attaining one pass or more at SCQF Level 5 or better for Challenge Authorities (combined) decreased slightly initially (from 84.8 per cent in 2016/17, to 84.2 per cent in 2017/18 and to 83.7 per cent in 2018/19) before returning back to 2017/18 levels (84.2 per cent) in 2019/20. This mirrored the trend at a national level. Non-Challenge Authorities saw a slight increase from 86.6 in 2016/17 to 86.7 percent in 2017/18 and decreased to 85.6 percent in 2018/19 increasing to 86.4 percent in 2019/20.

⁶ Grades in these qualifications in 2020 were initially awarded based on an Alternative Certification Model (ACM) but, following a Ministerial direction, the final awarded grades were based on teacher estimates. The results for those learners who were awarded a higher grade under the ACM approach were retained. The resulting 2020 National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher pass rates were higher than in previous years.

Table 5.2: Percentage of school leavers achieving 1 or more passes at SCQF Level 5 or better, 2016/17 to 2019/20

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Clackmannanshire	79.4	76.1	78.8	77.1
Dundee	82.7	76.8	78.8	80.1
East Ayrshire	83.4	82.4	80.0	83.0
Glasgow	83.2	83.8	83.2	82.0
Inverclyde	88.9	89.1	89.5	89.3
North Ayrshire	84.7	86.2	83.3	89.4
North Lanarkshire	85.5	85.2	84.4	85.2
Renfrewshire	88.3	88.2	88.2	89.7
West Dunbartonshire	87.9	83.1	85.6	85.6
Challenge Authorities	84.8	84.2	83.7	84.2
Non-Challenge Authorities	86.6	86.7	85.6	86.4
Scotland	86.1	85.9	85.1	85.7

Note: A dotted line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 on 2019/20 school leaver attainment.

5.14 Table 5.3 shows the proportion of school leavers attaining one or more pass at SCQF Level 6 or better has seen a similar trend across Challenge Authorities (combined), and Scotland overall, from 2016/17 to 2019/20. This trend has featured an increase from 2016/17 to 2017/18, followed by a decrease in 2018/19 and then an increase of more than 3 percentage points in 2019/20. In Challenge Authorities, the proportion increased from 59.1 per cent in 2016/17 to 59.8 per cent in 2017/18, and decreased to 58.7 per cent in 2018/19 before rising to 61.9 in 2019/20. In non-Challenge Authorities there was an increase from 62.1 per cent to 63.1 per cent in 2016/17 to 2017/18, a decrease to 61.3 per cent in 2018/19 and an increase to 64.7 per cent in 2019/20.

Table 5.3: Percentage of school leavers achieving 1 or more passes at SCQF Level 6 or better, 2016/17 to 2019/20

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Clackmannanshire	53.5	49.7	54.4	53.2
Dundee	58.1	48.9	53.6	58.0
East Ayrshire	58.4	60.5	58.1	59.2
Glasgow	55.9	59.6	58.5	60.6
Inverclyde	64.8	68.0	67.4	70.3
North Ayrshire	57.6	59.9	56.6	61.4
North Lanarkshire	59.3	60.7	59.0	63.5
Renfrewshire	65.6	65.7	63.1	66.5
West Dunbartonshire	64.2	57.6	58.1	59.9
Challenge Authorities	59.1	59.8	58.7	61.9
Non-Challenge Authorities	62.1	63.1	61.3	64.7
Scotland	61.2	62.2	60.5	63.9

Note: A dotted line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 on 2019/20 school leaver attainment.

5.15 As seen in Table 5.4, from 2017/18 to 2019/20, the proportion of school leavers attaining or more one pass at SCQF Level 7 or better for Challenge Authorities (combined), non-Challenge authorities (combined) and Scotland increased slightly in 2017/18, decreased marginally in 2018/19 before increasing by around 4 percentage points in 2019/20. In Challenge Authorities, the proportion slightly increased from 15.4 per cent in 2016/17 to 15.9 per cent in 2017/18, decreased to 14.8 per cent in 2018/19 and rose to 18.7 per cent in 2019/20. In non-Challenge Authorities there was an increase from 21.0 per cent to 22.0 per cent in 2016/17 to 2017/18, a decrease to 20.9 per cent in 2018/19 then an increase to 25.1 per cent in 2019/20. At Scotland level there was an increase from 19.3 per cent to 20.2 per cent in 2016/17 to 2017/18, a decrease to 19.1 per cent in 2018/19 and an increase in 2019/20 to 23.3 per cent.

Table 5.4: Percentage of school leavers achieving 1 or more passes at SCQF Level 7, 2016/17 to 2019/20

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Clackmannanshire	13.9	14.9	19.1	19.1
Dundee	15.9	12.8	14.4	20.6
East Ayrshire	15.0	16.9	15.4	15.7
Glasgow	13.7	15.0	13.7	17.4
Inverclyde	19.1	19.1	17.9	22.4
North Ayrshire	17.1	17.5	15.5	21.7
North Lanarkshire	13.9	15.2	12.3	17.3
Renfrewshire	19.2	19.3	20.6	21.6
West Dunbartonshire	16.9	14.8	14.3	19.2
Challenge Authorities	15.4	15.9	14.8	18.7
Non-Challenge Authorities	21.0	22.0	20.9	25.1
Scotland	19.3	20.2	19.1	23.2

Note: A dotted line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 on 2019/20 school leaver attainment.

5.16 At SCQF Level 5 or better (Table 5.5), the percentage point gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most and least deprived areas attaining one or more pass has reduced for Challenge Authorities and at Scotland level between 2017/18 to 2018/19.

5.17 The gap at SCQF Level 5 widened for Challenge Authorities (combined) from 2016/17 to 2017/18 (18.3 to 18.8 percentage points) before decreasing again slightly in 2018/19 (18.5 percentage points) and widening to 19.4 percentage points in 2019/20. A similar pattern is seen at Scotland level.

5.18 In non-Challenge authorities (combined), the gap at SCQF Level 5 has increased slightly year on year between 2016/17 to 2019/20 from 21.7 percentage points in 2016/17, to 22.7 percentage points in 2017/18, 22.9 percentage points in 2018/19 and 23.2 percentage points in 2019/20.

5.19 At SCQF Level 6 or better (Table 5.6), the gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most and least deprived areas that have attained one pass

or more narrowed across Challenge Authorities (combined) every year between 2016/17 and 2019/20. The gap declined steadily from 2016/17 (37.9 percentage points), 2017/18 (36.3 percentage points), 2018/19 (35.2 percentage points) to 2019/20 (35.1 percentage points). At Scotland level there was a similar pattern between 2016/17 and 2018/18: the gap narrowed slightly each year from 2016/17 to 2017/18 but widened slightly in 2019/20.

5.20 The gap at SCQF Level 6 widened in non-Challenge Authorities (combined) from 2016/17 to 2017/18 (40.3 to 41.1 percentage points), and subsequently decreased in 2018/19 (39.6 percentage points) and again in 2019/20 (39.5 percentage points).

5.21 At SCQF Level 7, across Challenge Authorities, non-Challenge Authorities and Scotland in 2019/20 there has been an increase of over 4 percentage points in the gap from 2018/19 figures.

5.22 The gap at SCQF Level 7 or better (Table 5.7) narrowed for Challenge Authorities (combined) from 2016/17 to 2017/18 (20.9 to 20.4 percentage points), and decreased again in 2018/19 (18.8 percentage points), rising to 23.4 percentage points in 2019/20. A similar pattern was seen at Scotland level. In non-Challenge Authorities (combined), the gap reduced slightly from 26.8 percentage points in 2016/17, to 26.6 percent in 2017/18 and further to 24.3 percentage points in 2018/19 before increasing to 28.6 percentage points in 2019/20.

5.23 The alternative certification methodology for 2020 National Qualifications should be borne in mind given the attainment of many 2019/20 school leavers presented in this data. Care must be taken when comparing 2019/20 attainment patterns to that of earlier years.

Table 5.5: Challenge Authorities - Percentage of pupils achieving SCQF Level 5, by local authority and deprivation, 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20

	Most deprived (bottom 20% SIMD)				Least deprived (top 20% SIMD)				Percentage point gap			
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	20/1617	20/1718	20/1819	2019/20
Clackmannanshire	63.6	64.0	64.2	60.1	96.6	95.0	94.5	*	33.0	31.0	30.4	*
Dundee	71.7	65.0	68.0	67.4	94.8	93.0	93.5	92.1	23.2	28.0	25.4	24.7
East Ayrshire	72.1	69.9	64.7	71.8	96.6	94.5	96.2	95.7	24.5	24.6	31.6	23.8
Glasgow	79.6	79.3	79.4	78.0	93.8	94.9	94.8	95.3	14.2	15.5	15.4	17.2
Inverclyde	83.6	83.4	82.3	83.6	94.9	95.4	96.3	*	11.4	12.0	14.1	*
North Ayrshire	76.1	79.8	74.6	77.0	96.1	97.7	95.5	95.3	20.0	17.9	20.9	18.3
North Lanarkshire	76.5	74.7	75.2	73.7	96.1	95.9	93.4	95.3	19.6	21.2	18.2	21.6
Renfrewshire	75.2	79.5	79.5	79.4	96.0	96.8	95.5	97.8	20.9	17.3	16.0	18.4
West Dunbartonshire	80.7	77.4	80.4	78.3	98.1	95.6	94.2	*	17.4	18.2	13.8	*
Challenge Authorities	77.3	76.7	76.2	76.1	95.6	95.5	94.7	95.5	18.3	18.8	18.5	19.4
Non-Challenge Authorities	72.8	72.6	71.6	72.0	94.6	95.3	94.5	95.2	21.7	22.7	22.9	23.2
Scotland	75.5	75.0	74.4	74.5	94.8	95.4	94.6	95.3	19.3	20.3	20.2	20.8

Note: A dotted line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 on 2019/20 school leaver attainment.

Table 5.6: Challenge Authorities - Percentage of pupils achieving SCQF Level 6, by local authority and deprivation, 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20

	Most deprived (bottom 20% SIMD)				Least deprived (top 20% SIMD)				Percentage point gap			
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	20/1617	20/1718	20/1819	2019/20
Clackmannanshire	36.4	33.6	36.6	36.2	77.6	77.5	76.4	79.6	41.2	43.9	39.8	43.2
Dundee	42.3	33.3	39.0	39.3	82.0	75.5	75.7	81.8	39.7	42.2	36.7	42.4
East Ayrshire	38.2	45.3	39.5	41.6	84.2	82.8	80.6	82.0	46.0	37.5	41.2	40.4
Glasgow	48.6	51.3	51.7	52.7	82.2	87.4	83.3	84.5	33.6	36.1	31.6	31.9
Inverclyde	47.9	53.8	53.6	58.8	83.5	89.7	85.4	87.5	35.7	35.8	31.8	28.7
North Ayrshire	40.3	46.0	43.2	46.7	83.8	86.3	81.8	79.8	43.5	40.2	38.6	33.1
North Lanarkshire	43.5	45.0	42.7	48.7	82.8	83.1	83.2	84.6	39.3	38.1	40.5	36.0
Renfrewshire	41.0	47.9	43.6	46.6	84.1	84.4	82.1	87.7	43.1	36.4	38.5	41.1
West Dunbartonshire	53.2	46.9	46.8	48.3	88.5	80.0	88.5	84.6	35.3	33.1	41.6	36.3
Challenge Authorities	45.2	47.2	46.5	49.1	83.1	83.5	81.7	84.2	37.9	36.3	35.2	35.1
Non-Challenge Authorities	39.6	40.3	39.1	42.8	79.9	81.4	78.7	82.3	40.3	41.1	39.6	39.5
Scotland	43.0	44.4	43.5	46.6	80.6	81.8	79.3	82.7	37.6	37.4	35.8	36.1

Note: A dotted line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 on 2019/20 school leaver attainment.

Table 5.7: Challenge Authorities - Percentage of pupils achieving SCQF Level 7, by local authority and deprivation, 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19/2019/20

	Most deprived (bottom 20% SIMD)				Least deprived (top 20% SIMD)				Percentage point gap			
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	20/1617	20/1718	20/1819	2019/20
Clackmannanshire	9.3	6.4	9.0	10.1	22.4	22.5	30.9	35.2	13.1	16.1	22.0	25.0
Dundee	7.7	7.5	8.4	10.7	27.0	18.0	19.6	36.4	19.3	10.5	11.2	25.8
East Ayrshire	6.4	8.6	7.3	8.7	25.4	29.7	27.4	27.3	19.0	21.1	20.1	18.7
Glasgow	9.3	10.4	9.0	12.1	34.2	34.8	29.6	39.1	24.9	24.4	20.6	26.9
Inverclyde	8.8	9.6	7.2	14.8	34.2	37.9	34.1	40.9	25.4	28.3	27.0	26.1
North Ayrshire	9.9	9.0	7.8	13.6	31.2	35.9	27.3	31.8	21.3	26.9	19.5	18.2
North Lanarkshire	8.0	8.1	8.1	10.6	26.6	24.8	21.1	35.1	18.6	16.8	13.0	24.5
Renfrewshire	9.6	9.9	10.4	11.1	31.8	33.7	33.2	34.7	22.3	23.8	22.9	23.6
West Dunbartonshire	11.9	10.6	7.9	13.6	38.5	31.1	34.6	35.9	26.6	20.5	26.7	22.3
Challenge Authorities	9.0	9.4	8.5	11.8	29.8	29.8	27.4	35.2	20.9	20.4	18.8	23.4
Non-Challenge Authorities	7.7	8.8	8.8	11.4	34.5	35.3	33.1	40.0	26.8	26.6	24.3	28.6
Scotland	8.6	9.1	8.7	11.7	33.8	34.7	32.4	39.5	25.3	25.5	23.7	27.8

Note: A dotted line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 on 2019/20 school leaver attainment.

Annual Participation Measure

5.24 The **Annual Participation Measure (APM)** is an agreed measure for considering progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap, set out in the National Improvement Framework. Since August 2017 the APM has been the source of the National Performance Framework Indicator, 'Percentage of young adults (16-19 year olds) participating in education, training or employment'. It is produced by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) using a shared data set to report on the economic and employment activity of the wider 16-19 year old cohort, including those at school. A range of partners contribute to the shared dataset, including Local Authorities (schools), colleges, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and SAAS.

5.25 When considering the APM as a measure in the ASF Evaluation it is important to highlight that the ASF funding started in 2015, therefore a lag occurs between intervention at school level and impact on APM (mostly post school). The APM is also measured from 1st April – 31st March, as opposed to the academic year considered in the ASF evaluation. As such the figures are not considered across a directly comparable time period.

5.26 This section reports on the participation rate for Scotland overall and at local authority level. For school pupils, local authority relates to the location of the school they are attending. For those who have left school local authority continues to relate to location of their school up to 12 months after leaving, and thereafter the individual is reported against the local authority linked to their postcode.

5.27 All local authority level data disaggregated by SIMD is available [online](#) and therefore the focus in this report is specifically on the Challenge Authorities, who have been involved with the ASF for the longest period of time.

5.28 Table 5.8 below shows the proportion of 16-19 year olds participating in education, training or employment was 92.1% in 2020 which represents an increase of 0.5 percentage points compared to 91.6% in 2019 and is the highest rate since the inception of the APM. The 2019 figure showed a decrease of 0.2 percentage points compared to the 2018 figure (91.8%). Previous figures were in 2017 (91.1%) and 2016 (90.4%).

5.29 The participation gap between those who lived in the 20% most deprived areas and those in the 20% least deprived areas continues to show narrowing with a gap of 9.9 percentage points in 2020 (compared to 12.9 percentage points in 2016, 11.5 percentage points in 2017, 10.8 percentage points in 2018 and 10.5 percentage points in 2019).

5.30 Looking specifically at the participation rate in the Challenge Authorities, eight of the nine authorities recorded an increase between 2017 and 2020, with the exception of Clackmannanshire whose participation rate has fluctuated between years, peaking at 90.1 per cent at 2019.

Table 5.8: APM - Challenge Authorities Percentage of 16-19 year olds participating, by local authority, 2017 - 2020

	Participation rate				Percentage point change between 2017 and 2020
	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Clackmannanshire	89.7	89.3	90.1	89.3	-0.4
Dundee	87.6	88.7	88.2	90	2.4
East Ayrshire	88.1	89.3	88.7	90	1.9
Glasgow	88.2	88.8	89.2	89.5	1.3
Inverclyde	91.9	91.6	91.8	92.9	1
North Ayrshire	90.3	91.1	90.5	90.6	0.3
North Lanarkshire	90.2	90.5	90.1	90.7	0.5
Renfrewshire	91.4	91.6	91.7	92.4	1
West Dunbartonshire	88.3	90.1	90.3	90.2	1.9
Challenge Authorities	89.3	89.9	89.9	90.6	1.3
Non-Challenge Authorities	91.9	92.8	92.4	93.5	1.6
Scotland	91.1	91.8	91.6	92.1	0.5

Source: Annual Participation Measure, Skills Development Scotland

5.31 At Scotland level, as shown in Table 5.9, between Year 4 and 5 of the ASF, there was an overall reduction in the participation gap between those living in the most deprived areas compared to those living in the least deprived areas (9.9 percentage points in 2020, 10.5 percentage points in 2019, 10.8 percentage points in 2018, 11.5 percentage points in 2017). The participation rate increased for both those living in the most and least deprived areas; but by a greater extent for those living in the most deprived areas (0.8 percentage points). With regards Challenge Authorities Table 5.9 shows the following:

- In Year 5 of the ASF, four Challenge Authorities had a smaller or similar participation gap compared to Scotland
- Between Year 4 and 5 of the ASF, the participation gap narrowed in seven Challenge Authorities
- In Year 5 of the ASF, the participation rate for those living in the 20% most deprived areas was higher or similar in four Challenge Authorities, compared to Scotland
- Between Year 4 and 5 of the ASF, the participation rate for those living in the 20% most deprived areas increased or was maintained in six Challenge Authorities

Table 5.9: APM - Challenge Authorities percentage of 16-19 year olds participating, by local authority and deprivation, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020

	Most deprived (bottom 20% SIMD)				Least deprived (top 20% SIMD)				Gap Percentage points			
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2017	2018	2019	2020	2017	2018	2019	2020
Clackmannanshire	82.0	81.6	84.5	83.9	95.6	93.9	96.6	96.3	13.6	12.3	12.1	12.4
Dundee	82.4	82.9	83.4	85.4	96.2	95.6	96	96.2	13.8	12.7	12.6	10.8
East Ayrshire	82.7	83	83.1	84.8	94.2	97.2	96.2	96.3	11.5	14.1	13.1	11.5
Glasgow	85.5	86.1	86.3	86.8	96.3	96.1	95.5	95.6	10.9	10.0	9.2	8.8
Inverclyde	88.2	87.4	88.3	89.9	96.4	96.3	96.3	96.3	8.2	8.9	8.1*	6.4
North Ayrshire	85.9	87.6	87.8	86.9	97.5	96.4	94.7	96.7	11.6	8.8	6.9	9.8
North Lanarkshire	85.0	85.6	84.3	85.9	96.2	95.8	96.7	96.5	11.2	10.2	12.4	10.6
Renfrewshire	85.5	86.6	85.1	87.3	96.5	96.9	97.3	97.6	11.0	10.3	12.1*	10.3
West Dunbartonshire	84.8	85.7	85.7	85.4	95.5	96.9	98.9	95.3	10.7	11.2	13.2	9.9
Scotland	84.8	85.7	85.8	86.6	96.3	96.5	96.3	96.5	11.5	10.8	10.5	9.9

Source: Annual Participation Measure, Skills Development Scotland (SDS). Note that 2016-19 APM uses the SIMD 2016 whereas the 2020 APM uses the SIMD 2020.

*SDS published figures used which are calculated with absolute percentages. In the 2020 publication SDS have altered how the PP differences within the resources are calculated. They now use percentages calculated rounded to one decimal place rather than absolute percentages, this means that in the 2020 publication the pp difference will match the figures presented in charts and text.

Health and wellbeing

5.32 Data on Attendance and Exclusions is not available for consideration in the ASF Year 5 Report as it is published on a biennial basis. Information on health and wellbeing is available from the Scottish Health Survey and the Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey (SALSUS). The findings are based on two variables: scores on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) which measures emotional and behaviour problems, and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). Mental wellbeing is measured using WEMWBS questionnaire and is used as a sub measure to report progress around Health and Wellbeing in the ASF Evaluation.

Total Difficulties Score

5.33 The social, emotional and behavioural development of children has been measured via the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The SDQ is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire designed for use with the 3-16 age group.

5.34 The SDQ comprises 25 questions covering themes such as consideration, hyperactivity, malaise, mood, sociability, obedience, anxiety and unhappiness. It is used to measure five aspects of development: emotional symptoms; conduct problems; hyperactivity/ inattention; peer relationship problems; and pro-social behaviour.

5.35 A score was calculated for each of the five aspects, as well as an overall 'total difficulties' score which was generated by summing the scores from all the domains, except pro-social behaviour. The total difficulties score ranged from 0 to 40 with a higher score indicating greater evidence of difficulties. There are established thresholds indicating 'normal' (score of 13 or less), 'borderline' (14-16) or 'abnormal' scores (17 or above).

5.36 Regardless of age, children in the most deprived areas were more likely to have a borderline or abnormal total difficulties score. This is summarised in Table 5.10 and further detail is given in the paragraphs that follow.

Table 5.10: Total Difficulties Score – By Deprivation

	Year	Most disadvantaged (bottom 20% SIMD)	Least disadvantaged (top 20% SIMD)	Gap
		%	%	Percentage points
Total difficulties score (aged 4-12)	2012/15	22	6	16
	2014/17	22	10	12
	2015/18	25	10	15
	2016/19	25	9	16
Total difficulties score (aged 13 & 15)	2015	34	26	8
	2018	42	34	8

Children aged 4-12 years old

5.37 The social, emotional and behavioural development of children aged 4-12 has been measured in the Scottish Health Survey via the SDQ. In the Scottish Health Survey, the SDQ was completed by a parent on behalf of all children aged 4-12.

5.38 Children in the most deprived areas were more likely to have a borderline or abnormal total difficulties score (25 per cent) than those in the least deprived (9 per cent) in 2016/19. Whilst the gap of 16 percentage points initially decreased (12 percentage points in 2014/17 and 15 percentage points in 2015/18), it returned to 16 percentage points in 2016/19.

Children aged 13 and 15 years old

5.39 The social, emotional and behavioural development of children aged 13 and 15 was measured using the same approach, that is the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The data collection used was the Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey (SALSUS), which allows for greater sample size amongst the year groups of interest. Pupils complete the survey themselves.

5.40 Children in the most deprived areas were more likely to have a borderline or abnormal total difficulties score (42 per cent) than those in the least deprived (34 per cent) in 2018. The gap was also 8 percentage points in 2015 (the proportion of

children aged 13 and 15 with a borderline or abnormal total difficulties score in the most and least deprived areas both increased and by the same amount.

Health and wellbeing sub-measures

Mental wellbeing score

5.41 Mental wellbeing is measured using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) questionnaire and is used as a sub measure to report progress around Health and Wellbeing.

5.42 While the SDQ measures emotional and behavioural problems, WEMWBS measures mental wellbeing – for example how good a pupil is feeling or how well they think they are coping in their life. In the WEMWBS scale, the lowest score possible (indicating poor mental wellbeing) is 14 and the highest is 70 (indicating good mental wellbeing), so a higher average score for any particular group indicates higher mental wellbeing.

5.43 Overall, mental wellbeing among 13 to 15 year olds decreased with age for all children. Mental wellbeing recorded higher levels for 13 to 15 year old boys than for girls. The figure below presents data by year group and gender.

5.44 Mental wellbeing showed a correlation with areas of deprivation. Overall, pupils in the least deprived areas had a higher WEMWBS mean score indicating better mental wellbeing than those in the most deprived areas. Table 5.11 shows the mental wellbeing score by those most and least deprived and displays the gap between the two.

Table 5.11: Mental Wellbeing mean score – By Deprivation, 2018

	All children	Most disadvantaged (bottom 20% SIMD)	Least disadvantaged (top 20% SIMD)	Gap
Mental Wellbeing Score (13 year old boys)	50.0	48.4	51.2	2.8
Mental Wellbeing Score (13 year old girls)	46.3	45.0	47.0	2.0
Mental Wellbeing Score (15 year old boys)	48.3	48.0	48.7	0.7
Mental Wellbeing Score (15 year old girls)	43.3	41.9	43.9	2.0

Reported evidence of impact

Perceptions of improvement

5.45 Reported evidence of impact emerged from a variety of evidence sources.

5.46 Challenge Authority progress reports featured reports of local impact, particularly with regard to health and wellbeing.

5.47 There were acknowledgements of the ongoing difficulties with measuring progress on health and wellbeing at the local level and that this will continue to be affected through the pausing of the HWB census rollout.

5.48 However, there was also an emerging narrative within Challenge Authority progress reports in terms of the impact of approaches, interventions and programmes on ‘soft indicators’ of health and wellbeing, with evidence cited of, for example, improved readiness to learn, decreased disruption in the classroom, and improved social and emotional competence. Improvements were also indicated in terms of improved practitioner confidence, knowledge and practice in supporting health and wellbeing, as a result both of professional learning and strategic focus on health and wellbeing in policy and guidance. Pupil voice was also noted as a further form of impact evidence in terms of improvements in health and wellbeing. A number of Challenge Authorities described data gathered on such measures as social and emotional competence, reduced disruptive behaviours, improved empathy and problem solving skills.

5.49 At the school level, positive perceptions of success in meeting long term outcomes amongst headteachers continued as a theme for Year 5. The large majority (90%) of schools responding to the Headteacher Survey 2020 reported seeing an improvement in closing the poverty-related attainment gap as a result of ASF supported approaches, including 20% who perceived 'a lot' of improvement to date. There was some variation amongst respondent groups however, with schools in receipt of PEF only less likely to have seen 'a lot' of improvement to date than schools in receipt of Challenge Authority or Schools Programme funding in addition to PEF. The Headteacher Survey 2019 finding on this measure was very similar (91% of headteachers indicated they had seen such an improvement).

5.50 A similar proportion of headteachers (88%) reported that they expected to see improvements in closing the poverty-related attainment gap over the next few years. The evidence suggests future expectations have declined to some extent, with a ten percentage point decline on this measure from the Headteacher Survey 2019 (from 98%). This finding may be related to some extent to schools who have already made good progress not expecting to see further progress (due to the gap being virtually closed from their perspective). It may also reflect a change in expectations due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting school building closures. However, there was some correlation between improvement to date and future expectations, with 67% of respondents who had seen 'a lot' of improvement to date having expectations of future improvements, whereas 11% of respondents who had only seen 'a little' improvement to date had expectations of future improvements.

Influencing Factors

5.51 Evidence on the factors that local authorities and schools thought influenced success in progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap were gathered from the Headteacher Survey 2020 and the Local Authority Survey 2020. Increased capacity, culture/ethos, collaborative working, increasing skills and knowledge in using data and evidence, and increased levels of understanding of poverty were identified as factors supporting progress from the perspective of local authority respondents. However, it was also recognised by several respondents that further progress was required - for example in increasing data and evidence skills and use, and understanding of poverty - across all levels of the system.

5.52 Factors hindering progress were also raised. Whilst the specific influence of COVID-19 is addressed in the following section, a number of other factors were suggested by some local authority respondents, including staffing issues (such as staff turnover), issues associated with geography/rurality, and short-term funding cycles. There was also a recognition of the level and extent of poverty influencing progress.

5.53 At the school level, findings from the Headteacher Survey 2020 continue to suggest factors associated with schools' experiences and positive perceptions of progress in closing the poverty related attainment gap including:

- Change of culture or ethos – evidence of embedded approach to equity; and increased collaborative working;

- Improved understanding of barriers faced by pupils and families affected by socio-demographic disadvantage;
- Improved skills and knowledge in use of data and evidence, and application of data and evidence; and
- Developing approaches in terms of approach to equity overall, and in terms of developing approaches to engaging with families and communities.

COVID-19 as an influencing factor

5.54 Evidence from the Headteacher Survey 2020 suggests headteachers perceived progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap had been impacted by school building closures as a result of COVID-19. Almost two-thirds (61%) of respondents perceived that school building closures resulting from COVID-19 had significantly impacted on their progress, with nearly all (95%) viewing an impact to some extent. There was some variation across key respondent groups, with headteachers from secondary schools and those with middle to higher PEF allocations more likely to feel significant impact.

5.55 There was also some evidence of correlation between perceptions of impact of COVID-19 on progress and perceptions of improvement to date in terms of closing the poverty-related attainment gap, with those who perceived a significant impact of COVID-19 on their progress also less likely to have seen a lot of improvement to date.

5.56 In terms of local authority perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap, all respondents to the Local Authority Survey 2020 were of the view that COVID-19 had impacted on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap, albeit to varying degrees (five indicated this to a great extent, eight to some extent, and two to a limited extent). A number pointed to emerging local evidence of the impact of COVID-19 widening the gap between most and least affluent pupils at the local authority level.

5.57 A number of areas of particular concern were highlighted by Local Authority Survey 2020 respondents. This included the potential for rates of recovery to be slower for pupils affected by poverty, despite a recognition that the school building closures affected all pupils. Concern regarding ongoing impact on pupils at key transition points, potentially for a long time duration, was also highlighted, with one local authority respondent indicating initial data suggested this was indeed a factor.

Additionality

5.58 In terms of the extent to which ASF was seen as additional, there continued to be little direct evidence gathered in terms of perceptions of additionality apart from the inclusion of a specific question in the Headteacher Survey. At the school level, headteacher perceptions remain positive regarding additionality as a result of PEF resource. The great majority (89%) of headteachers viewed PEF as having provided additional resource to address the poverty-related attainment gap, broadly reflecting the 2019 survey findings.

Sustainability

5.59 Sustained and embedded practices related to addressing the impact of the poverty-related attainment gap remains one of the high level long term outcomes for SAC.

5.60 The section below considers a number of aspects of sustainability in the context of the ASF. This includes both stakeholder perceptions of the extent to which improvements achieved as a result of ASF are likely to be sustainable beyond the period of funding, and of the extent to which the focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap is likely to be sustainable beyond the period of funding.

5.61 Considerations of sustainability in the context of COVID-19 were also sought, specifically in terms of whether sustainability remained a factor under consideration during the school building closures, or whether this was replaced by more immediate COVID-19 concerns.

To what extent has sustainability featured in planning and developing approaches to addressing the poverty-related attainment gap?

5.62 Actions to support, encourage and/or plan for sustainability were explored in Local Authority Survey 2020 responses. Reflecting findings of the Local Authority Survey 2019, there continued to be broad statements of ongoing commitment to sustainability and the relevance of culture change and ethos, partnership working, embedding of approaches and capacity building to sustainability. Specific actions were also described, including:

- schools considering the sustainability of interventions when planning and implementing PEF;
- support from Attainment Advisors to specifically consider sustainability within plans;
- professional development opportunities focusing on sustainability.

Sustainability of improvements

5.63 At the school level, headteachers' reported perceptions of the extent to which improvements achieved as a result of ASF are likely to be sustainable had decreased in 2020 when compared to 2019 results. Approximately one third (34%) of headteachers who responded to the 2020 survey thought improvements would be sustainable, a decline of seven percentage points. (It is however noted that changes to the question structure introduced in the 2020 survey mean that it is not possible to directly compare results between 2019 and 2020).

Sustainability of focus

5.64 At the local authority level, there continue to be broadly positive expectations that the focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap will be sustainable. The majority of respondents to the Local Authority Survey 2020 (12 of 15) indicated they viewed the focus would be sustainable to a great or to some extent, whilst a further

two local authority respondents viewed the focus would be sustainable to only a limited extent.

5.65 Continuation of funding was the primary factor associated with ensuring a sustainability of focus on equity from the perspective of local authorities. Local authorities also made reference made to:

- ongoing professional learning;
- continued focus on understanding the challenges associated with poverty for children and their families (and associated understanding of the need for a focus on equity);
- focus on data and evidence;
- creating a culture of embedding sustainable approaches; and
- focus on collaboration.

5.66 The importance of strategic planning in promoting a sustainable focus was particularly evident from a number of local authority responses. For example, reference was made by one Schools Programme local authority to a requirement for a closing the poverty-related attainment gap strategy within all School Improvement Plans. Another Schools Programme local authority described the inclusion of SAC/ASF priorities within quality and school improvement plans. Structures and mechanisms to support strategic planning were described, including local authority level governance structures and strategies.

5.67 It was broadly recognised that COVID-19 has had, and will continue to, impact on sustainability of focus to some extent. Local authority perspectives reflected on the reprioritisation which took place during the March to June 2020 period of school building closures, including a greater focus on addressing the immediate challenges of responding to COVID-19 and an increased focus on health and wellbeing. However, there was also a broad affirmation of sustained focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap, as illustrated by the following quote from Local Authority Survey 2020 respondents.

‘As part of the programme management of ASF, sustainability has been an area which has been addressed since the programme started. While Covid-19 affected our ability to deliver aspects of ASF, our focus continues to be on the sustainability of our approach.’ (Challenge Authority respondent)

5.68 The recognition of capacity at the school level to continue focusing on sustainability was however also highlighted, as illustrated below:

‘The focus of sustainability and impact remains as ever a high priority at local authority level. Our concern is the capacity of the headteachers to lead this at present as their focus has turned very much to day to day operational matters and not the sustainability of PEF plans.’ (Schools Programme respondent)

5.69 Headteacher perspectives of the extent to which the focus on equity will be sustainable beyond the years of funding was considerably more positive than their views on sustainability of improvements. Over half (58%) of headteachers who responded to the 2020 survey were of the view that the focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap will be sustainable, representing a 17 percentage point

increase on the 2019 survey. There was some variation across respondent groups on this measure, with headteachers of primary schools less likely to perceive the focus on equity to be sustainable beyond the funding period.

Chapter 6 Discussion and conclusions

6.1 As the introductory section of the report outlined, the evaluation aims to provide learning about the overall implementation of the ASF and the extent to which the aims of ASF are being met in terms of closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

6.2 In terms of the available evidence to draw on for this report, it is important to note that response rates to the Headteacher Survey 2020 and Local Authority Survey 2020 were impacted by COVID-19. However, the current evaluation methodology continues to make the best use of existing data to inform our understanding of factors that support improvement in closing the attainment gap at the five year point of the Programme.

6.3 This concluding section draws together the key findings to assess the extent to which progress has been made towards the overall aims of ASF. It also seeks to provide some reflections on progress to date, on the evaluation, and to highlight links to related activity in this policy area including the publication of *'Closing the poverty related attainment gap - A report on progress 2016-2021'*.

Key findings

Overall

6.4 The findings overall suggest broadly continuing trends across Year 5 of the ASF as previously indicated in the Year 4 report e.g. focus on continued development of collaborations, increasing use and capacity of data and evidence, and governance arrangements in place nationally and locally. The role of Attainment Advisors continued to be highly valued with strong recognition of the importance of Attainment Advisors in facilitating links between national, local and school contexts.

6.5 There was evidence of ongoing developments in approaches to achieving equity at both school and local authority level, for example with the Headteacher Survey 2020 findings indicating that the majority of schools had developed their approach to achieving equity during the first part of the 2019/20 year from their approach in 2018/19.

6.6 The evidence suggests that approaches were adaptive and responsive, and were increasingly embedded. The focus on health and wellbeing and on engaging families and communities were increasingly evident.

6.7 Understanding of the challenges experienced by pupils affected by poverty continues to grow.

6.8 The analysis presented in Chapter 5, and previous analysis of Achievement of CfE Level data, indicates that on a number of measures, there is progress in closing the attainment gap, although this is a varied picture depending on the measure under consideration. For the majority of measures, attainment of those from the most

deprived areas has increased, although in some cases not at the same rate as those in least deprived areas.

6.9 Change in attainment in the Challenge Authorities (combined) is also a mixed picture; the gap has widened for more measures than it has narrowed, however, largely, this is not due to performance worsening, rather performance has improved but not kept pace with performance of those from the least deprived areas.

6.10 With respect to the Challenge Authorities (combined), the proportion of S3 pupils achieving Third Level or better in literacy and the proportion of school leavers with one or more pass at SCQF Level 5 or better are measures where attainment for pupils from the most deprived areas has decreased and the gap has widened.

6.11 Positive perceptions of success continued to be articulated by headteachers, with the great majority (90%) of headteachers surveyed in 2020 perceiving improvements on closing the poverty-related attainment gap as a result of ASF. Whilst perceptions of success on this measure were very similar to 2019, views on future expected improvements were rather less positive than in 2019 with a 10 percentage point drop recorded in headteachers' perceptions of improvements over the next five years in 2020 (from 98% in 2019 to 88% in 2020). This finding may be related in part to schools who have already made good progress not expecting to see further progress (due to the gap being virtually closed from their perspective). It may also reflect a change in expectations due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting school building closures.

6.12 It is worth considering the data on the attainment gap in the context of the headteacher perceptions of success to date. The attainment data presents a national picture of performance for the pupils within the scope of each measure's definition e.g. Achievement of CfE Level data report on P1, P4 and P7, but not the remainder of the Primary stages. Conversely, the Headteacher Survey results present a holistic view of headteachers' perceptions at their school level. It is important to reflect on the range of data sources in order to consider on progress on closing the attainment gap.

6.13 At the local level, there is evidence of impact, for example in terms of health and wellbeing. This included evidence on soft indicators of health and wellbeing, with evidence cited of, for example, improved readiness to learn, decreased disruption in the classroom, and improved social and emotional competence. This is an area where there is potential for the evaluation to explore further in future.

6.14 The evidence suggests increasing capacity, knowledge, understanding, and changing culture reflecting systemic change. For example, the 2020 Headteacher Survey identified the following factors in schools' experiences with positive perceptions of progress in closing the poverty related attainment gap:

- Change of culture or ethos – evidence of embedded approach to equity; and increased collaborative working;
- Improved understanding of barriers faced by pupils and families affected by socio-demographic disadvantage;

- Improved skills and knowledge in use of data and evidence, and application of data and evidence; and
- Developing approaches in terms of approach to equity overall, and in terms of developing approaches to engaging with families and communities.

Impact of COVID-19

6.15 In addition to the above, the evaluation has sought to tell the ‘story’ of change and adaptation which occurred throughout the course of the 2019/20 year as a result of the period of school building closures from March to June 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.16 The evidence considered has suggested the wide range of ways in which COVID-19 impacted on the ASF in terms of processes and progress during this period. Whilst some interventions and approaches were paused, others were adapted and adjusted. There was a focus on limiting and mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on pupils and families affected by socio-economic disadvantage whilst the likelihood of increases in socio-economic disadvantage as a result of COVID-19 was recognised. Health and wellbeing approaches were prioritised during this time. Local authorities’ and schools’ use of flexibilities of ASF in accordance with national guidance produced in May 2020 also featured strongly. The rapid pace at which this work progressed was particularly apparent across evidence sources.

6.17 A number of particular features suggested by the evidence during this period include:

- a strong use of data gathering/analysis (e.g. local equity audit) to respond appropriately to the challenges associated with the period of school building closures and responding to the pandemic;
- evidence of strong partnership working in response to COVID-19 and closure of school buildings, and particularly the role of third sector partnerships;
- the importance and value of family/link worker roles using existing knowledge and relationships with direct work with families and communities to meet needs (food, physical resources, signposting etc) was highlighted.

6.18 Whilst there was uncertainty regarding the extent of the impact of COVID-19, there was concern that whilst school building closures have impacted on all pupils, this would be particularly so for pupils affected by socio-economically disadvantage. Concerns were also expressed of the potential long term nature of the impact of COVID-19 on pupils affected by socio-demographic disadvantage, and of impacts on pupils at particular transition points.

6.19 There was a focus both on responding to immediate concerns but remaining view on long term focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Despite COVID-19, there was also evidence of a remaining focus on sustainability.

6.20 The impact of COVID-19 on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap is clearly identified as a factor. In terms of perceptions of impact of COVID-19 on progress, this featured strongly in the evidence. Nearly all (95%) of respondents to Headteacher Survey 2020 perceived COVID-19 to have impacted on their progress (61% a significant impact), and the majority of local authorities

responding to the Local Authority Survey 2020 viewed COVID-19 to have impacted on progress.

Reflections on progress to date

6.21 The strategic aim of the SAC is ‘closing the poverty-related attainment gap between children and young people from the least and most disadvantaged communities’ and at a wider policy level links to the National Performance Framework shared aim of improving outcomes for children and young people. As outlined in the introductory section, the SAC logic model articulates the following long-term outcomes:

Long Term Outcome 1: Embedded and sustained practices related to addressing the impact of the poverty-related attainment gap

Long Term Outcome 2: All children and young people are achieving the expected or excellent educational outcomes, regardless of their background

Long Term Outcome 3: An education system which is aspirational, inclusive in practice and approaches for all including teachers, parents and carers, children and young people

Long Term Outcome 4: Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged young people

6.22 The evidence continues to highlight positive progress towards long-term outcomes in a number of areas, particularly in relation to Long Term Outcome 1 (embedded and sustained practices related to addressing the impact of the poverty-related attainment gap) and Long Term Outcome 3 (an education system which is aspirational, inclusive in practice and approaches for all including teachers, parents and carers, children and young people). Evidence on closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged young people suggests that there is progress on some measures, and there continues to be positive reported evidence of perceptions of impact.

6.33 However, there is an ongoing and long-term challenge which remains in closing the poverty-related attainment gap between the most and least deprived pupils. Whilst the evidence suggests COVID-19 will impact on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap, progress towards the long-term outcomes at the education system level continues.

Evaluation and further research: reflections and future direction

6.34 The impact of COVID-19 will continue to be considered in the evaluation of ASF for the academic year 2020/21. This will include work to ensure the evaluation takes account of the Equity Audit findings published in January 2021.

6.35 The evaluation will further consider the key messages emerging from the ‘Closing the Poverty-related attainment gap – a report on progress 2016 – 2021’, published alongside this report, to strengthen the evaluation for the 2020/21 year.



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This document is also available from our website at www.gov.scot.

ISBN: 978-1-80004-838-6

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Produced for
the Scottish Government
by APS Group Scotland
PPDAS847186 (03/21)
Published by
the Scottish Government,
March 2021



Social Research series
ISSN 2045-6964
ISBN 978-1-80004-838-6

Web Publication
www.gov.scot/socialresearch

PPDAS847186 (03/21)