

# Impact of poverty on educational attainment, support, provision and transition for early education

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In November 2021, we published our thematic on the impact of poverty on educational attainment, support, provision and transition for early education. Our report draws on findings from visits to funded non-maintained nursery settings that provide nursery education, primary and all-age schools and one children's centre. We also consulted with parents, local authorities and school improvement services.

## Our recommendations

### The Welsh Government should:

1. Ensure that EYPDG funding is allocated equitably to local authorities that fund non-maintained settings
2. Provide improved guidance on how the funding is distributed and used within settings and schools

### Local authorities should:

1. Provide specific professional learning and information to schools and settings on how to best meet the social, emotional and personal developmental needs of early years children adversely affected by poverty and deprivation
2. Ensure that leaders in schools and settings have a secure understanding of EYPDG funding so that they may target it effectively on addressing the impact of poverty and disadvantage for their early years pupils
3. Ensure parity in the early years provision between schools and settings based on a robust understanding of the role of effective environments, enabling adults and engaging experiences

### Schools and setting leaders should:

1. Evaluate the impact that the EYPDG funding has on the progress of children's skills and development
2. Ensure that the provision provided for early years children is developmentally appropriate

## What did our thematic say?

Leaders report significant worsening of poverty levels since the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.

Leaders invest a significant time in building strong and supportive relationships with families in need. Many offer parents practical support such as access to external services such as food banks, housing support and links to other third sector agencies.

Practitioners in both sectors work closely with parents, and multi-agency when appropriate to prepare children for transitions from home to setting or setting to school.

There is a disparity across Wales to how the Early Years Pupil Development Grant (EYPDG) is allocated to and delegated within local authorities. This has a detrimental impact on a few of the most deprived areas of Wales.

In the best cases, leaders use EYPDG funds effectively, prioritising areas for improvement through self-evaluation.

Most school leaders experience lower levels of support and funding available for ALN children compared to what is provided in the non-maintained sector.

Generally, both settings and schools invest in substantial professional learning on understanding childhood trauma, speech and language development, and supporting children with ALN. Overall, this learning enables staff to adapt their provision to meet individual needs effectively. However, there is often a lack of consistency in training and support provided by local authorities to focus on how all schools can best meet the social, emotional and personal developmental needs of early years children adversely affected by poverty and deprivation.

Many practitioners have a robust understanding of child development. They use this knowledge to plan appropriate environments and experiences that match children's developmental stages and interests well. They make thoughtful adaptations to their provision to ensure that children have ample time to play and explore in both the indoor and outdoor environments to develop their communication, social and cognitive skills.

In a few schools, leaders introduce formal learning (for example, early reading and number work) too soon. This approach did not always meet the developmental needs of early years children.

Most non-maintained setting leaders are well supported by their early years advisory teachers, who provide tailored guidance, professional development and support in self-evaluation and improvement planning processes.

Most non-maintained settings receive valuable support from umbrella organisations.

Both non-maintained settings and schools benefit from collaboration with multi-agency teams, including health visitors and educational psychologists, to support children's emotional health, well-being, and development. These partnerships help address issues such as trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).