

Education, Children and Young People Committee

6th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 23 February 2022

Scottish Attainment Challenge

Introduction

The Committee is undertaking an inquiry to scrutinise the Scottish Attainment Challenge. The Committee launched a [call for views](#) which closed on 8 February.

At its initial oral evidence session for this inquiry, held on [9 February](#), the Committee took evidence from academics and policy experts who have researched the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

At this meeting, the Committee will take evidence from third sector organisations that provide services funded through the Attainment Challenge.

Committee meeting

The Committee will take evidence from—

- Jim Wallace, Director of Children and Families, Aberlour Child Care Trust;
- Maureen McAteer, Assistant Director, Barnardo's Scotland;
- Sara Spencer, Cost of the School Day Project Manager, Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland;
- Louise Goodlad, Senior Head of Partnerships – Scotland, The Prince's Trust Scotland.

Supporting Information

The Committee has received written submissions from Aberlour, Barnardos, Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland and the Prince's Trust Scotland. These are provided in [Annexe A](#) to this paper. A SPICe briefing on the issues being considered at this evidence session, is provided at [Annexe B](#).

Education, Children and Young People Committee Clerks
22 February 2022

Aberlour

February 2022

Key Messages

1. If children come to school hungry, tired or stressed then they are going to find it difficult to learn
2. Children's learning is significantly impacted by what happens away from school, at home and in the community
3. To help improve children's learning we need to understand the interaction between school and home – then we can better put in place what support children and families tell us they need
4. Putting relationships at the centre of how we support children develops consistency and trust in the adults around them that can help children to regulate, enabling them to come to school ready to learn
5. Family support is a vital part of how we support children and families before and beyond the school gates and help to improve children's learning
6. The pandemic has had an unexpectedly positive impact on the learning experiences of some children in residential care
7. We need to develop more flexible and individualised approaches to learning for children and young people whose circumstances mean they struggle to engage with education

Introduction

Aberlour is Scotland's largest, solely Scottish children's charity. We work with vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalised children, young people and families throughout Scotland, providing services and support in communities around the country. We help to overcome significant challenges, including the impact of drugs and alcohol on family life, growing up in and leaving care, poor mental health, childhood adversity and trauma, living with a disability, and the impact of poverty and disadvantage. We aim to provide help and support at the earliest opportunity to prevent problems becoming intractable or spiralling out of control. We are committed to **#KeepThePromise** and to the incorporation of the UNCRRC.

Aberlour is a member of the End Child Poverty coalition and is committed to combatting the impact of poverty and disadvantage on the children and families we work with, as well as actively campaigning

to see a Scotland where no child grows up in poverty. We are also committed to realising and fulfilling children and young people's right to learn, by supporting their learning in ways that best respond to their individual circumstances, needs and interests. We aim to make sure children and young people are at the centre of decision making around what their education and learning looks like, and that their voices and views are elevated in ways that can influence and shape their own learning and education experiences.

Supporting Learning at Aberlour

Aberlour supports children's learning in a variety of ways, working in partnership with schools and local authorities across Scotland. We deliver Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) and attainment focused support in schools, including in primary and secondary schools. This includes direct one-to-one support or group work with children in school, focusing on routines, change and transitions, health and wellbeing and emotional support.

Our family support services work with children and families at home and in the community, and often in partnership with schools, to help and support children with the challenges in their lives that can impact on their learning. Our dedicated Learning Service supports the learning of children who

live in our cluster of residential children's houses in Fife. During the pandemic our services have worked closely with schools to support children's learning at home.

We know that when children come to school hungry, tired or stressed their ability to learn is significantly diminished. A critical part of the work we do to support children's learning is focused on family wellbeing and mitigating the impact of the often multiple and intersecting challenges families face in their lives. The single biggest challenge that the majority of families we work with face is poverty, and we work with families in a range of ways to limit the impact of poverty and disadvantage on their children's learning.

Our family support services work with families on their terms, to understand the stressors in their lives and to ask them what will best help them and their children. We aim to make sure children and families are at the centre of decision making so they can determine and have choice in what the help and support they get looks like. This allows us to develop trusted relationships, find solutions together and ultimately help children to be ready to learn when they arrive at school.

We know that what most often impacts on a child's learning is what happens away from school – before and beyond the school gates, at home and in the community. Children spend the majority of their time away from school, with only around 15% of their time spent in school¹. For children who are struggling with their learning, additional in-school support is important, such as nurture hubs, learning support bases and education support workers.

¹ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN07148/SN07148.pdf>

However, there must equally be a focus on what is going on in children's lives when they are not in school. Children who are affected by family breakdown, domestic abuse, addiction, poor parental mental health, trauma and other forms of childhood adversity are unlikely to be able to focus and learn as well as their peers. In order to help vulnerable and traumatised children learn we must help them to regulate². By understanding and responding to the stressors and challenges that are causing children's distress, and by building and maintaining trusting relationships with those children, we are better able to help them regulate and to support them to be ready to learn.

Aberlour Attain Case Study

Aberlour Attain is a mentoring and family support service that provides flexible, relationship-based mentoring to support care-experienced children's learning for children looked after at home or in kinship care. Adult volunteer mentors support children in the community with a focus on strengths to build confidence and support learning. The service works with the whole family in partnership with schools to identify barriers to learning and to find family focused solutions to challenges they face

Joe (13) and Robert (14)* are both autistic. Dad passed away last year and Mum has very poor mental health, resulting in emotional breakdown and suicide ideation. Renfrewshire Council social work supported the family and referred them to Aberlour. The family were in financial crisis and needed financial support from Aberlour's Urgent Assistance Fund. Joe and Robert both attended the same school for children with ASNs. Pre-pandemic the boys received respite care at the weekends, but this stopped during lockdown. Aberlour Attain were able to support the boys match them with individual volunteer mentors. During the pandemic the mentors met with the boys for socially distanced contact and activities. The service had regular contact with Mum to provide emotional and practical support (even just to let off steam on the phone). Mum was supported to a school meeting due to concerns about Joe's behaviour. The service worked with the school to help arrange groups for the boys to attend in school, and also helped to deliver additional in school support. The boys are now coping much better and engaged with their education. Joe recently achieved full marks in a recent science test.

*names have been changed

Delivering PEF at Aberlour

Aberlour delivers dedicated PEF funded work in Dundee, Falkirk and Glasgow working in partnership with schools locally in each of those areas. The PEF funded support we deliver is primarily focused on in-school support for learning, with additional practical and emotional support for children and their families away from school when required.

² <https://cycj.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/BBBL-Final-Version.pdf>

The support is largely focused on working individually with children or in small groups in school and during the school day. The support and activities include: Seasons for Growth groups focussing on change and transitions; one-to-one sessions focussing on health and wellbeing; family focused support to understand and respond to family circumstances; building strategies for emotional support to help children self-regulate; and exploring routines, including sleep routines. Support also often includes 'ad hoc' support to respond to family crises. In addition, support includes delivering family sessions or peer support activities to help and support parents.

Children and family workers maintain regular contact with parents to discuss their children's progress, as well as to provide advice, information and signpost families to other agencies (including other Aberlour services) which are able to help respond to specific issues, including: sleep routines, financial support, bereavement support, housing support and mental health concerns.

In Dundee alone, we have been able to support more than 500 children in the last year through the delivery of PEF funded work across 6 primary schools. This equates to more than 80 hours dedicated support per week. One primary school teacher has commented: *"The support our children receive from Aberlour is invaluable, having (Aberlour staff member) has allowed time and space for children to discuss their feelings and find ways to manage them."*

Supporting the Learning of Children in Residential Care

Our children who live with us in our cluster of children's houses in Fife have access to Aberlour's Learning Service. Early relationship disruption and trauma, such as that experienced by children who can't live with their family, can impact on a child's development and learning. For some children and young people who struggle with their education our Learning Service provides an alternative learning environment that encourages them to be actively involved with their education plan whilst supporting them to recognise their ability and fulfil their ambitions. We have strong links with local schools and have educational psychologists as part of our dedicated learning service team.

Working in partnership with schools the Learning Service plans and develops alternative ways to support learning. This includes, outdoor learning, the Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE), as well as access to our Nurture Hub – a quiet, safe space to explore ideas and creativity as well as traditional curriculum-based material supported by the child or young person's school.

The pandemic has been unexpectedly positive for some of our children and young people in residential care. During the pandemic our children's houses offered an insight into how we can think differently about how we support the learning of some of our most vulnerable children and young people. Many of our children and young people, as well as the adults who work with them, reported reduced stress as a result of not being in a formal school environment. The positive impact on children's learning and wider

wellbeing was significant, with many children and young people flourishing during that period.

During lockdown a more relaxed, personalised programme of learning meant increased engagement with education. Children who previously struggled to complete their schoolwork started to do schoolwork independently, asking for support when they needed it. Many children learned to manage their workload when they had the agency to work and learn at a pace that suited them – in contrast to pre-lockdown, where some of children required full-time, one-to-one support to help them engage with their school day. Some children completed more work during lockdown than they previously did at school.

This has enabled us to think differently about how we support the learning of children in residential care. Working in collaboration with our children and young people we have conducted a review of our Learning Service (see Appendices A and B) to help us develop an approach that allows a more personalised and individual way of supporting learning that draws on children's strengths, interests and talents.

What we observed during lockdown:

- Sense of difference was removed for children; everyone was now learning a different way and in a different environment; some of the shame and worry our children have about how school can feel for them was removed;
- We could think more flexibly, be creative and less prescriptive, focus on individual interests, relate learning to everyday activities, be less formal and think differently about we access learning;
- When demand was reduced, young people improved – building trust is crucial to enable goal focused conversations with children;
- Relationship between children and young people in the houses improved;
- Later starts worked better;
- Children and young people had more time to reflect on and consider what they want and need.

What children and young people told us:

- Often, they feel their skills, interests and talents aren't nurtured in school; but home learning/lockdown enabled them to explore these more;
- They would like: to be listened to more; more interactive learning; flexibility; later starts; more outdoor learning; more choice over their education; and more time to think about what they want and need from education;
- A more relaxed and less distracting environment is better for them;
- Some would like to carry on with the lockdown model, whilst others looked forward to return to school.

Aberlour Sycamore Services

Learning Service Review Position Paper
November 2021



Introduction

Aberlour has been supporting children, young people, and families since 1875, when our orphanage in the village of Aberlour first provided a safe, nurturing home for those children who couldn't remain at home.

From then, in 1967 when we opened our first Sycamore children's house in Fife, we have grown and now provide seven houses across Scotland for children aged 8-18 years with four houses located in Fife, one in Tayside and 2 in Highland.

The children/young people who live with us come from families who have been affected by significant disadvantage such as poverty, domestic abuse, child abuse and other life experiences which mean that the families have not been able to look after their children.

A common characteristic of all children/young people referred to us is that they have experienced significant disruption to their formal education with many schools not being able to include our children within their traditional structures, including school sites that offer what is known as additional support for learning services

The purpose of this Learning Service Review Position Paper is to, firstly, highlight issues around children/young people's educational and emotional needs; and secondly, to discuss Aberlour's approach to finding a better solution for the children/young people we support.

Throughout this report – children and young people are referred to as Young People/Person

Rationale

With the aim of supporting Young People to successfully transition to mainstream school, we opened our own Sycamore School in 2001. This was registered as an independent school and primarily supported those children of primary school age.

However, the reality was that Young People spent many years in the Sycamore School and found transition to mainstream extremely difficult with the pattern of exclusion they faced in their early years being re-established.

We recognised that the model was fundamentally flawed, in that it was fixed and inflexible – designed to meet the criteria of the Curriculum for Excellence – which for our Young People was a struggle to fit in to this traditional mode of learning.

Traditional structures are not agile enough to help Young People learn; and don't provide real learning opportunities that understand the impact on Young People of early years trauma.

In 2018 Aberlour reorganised its Sycamore Services, including appointing a Lead Education Co-ordinator (LEC) role which would see the move away from traditional

learning structures to a more flexible range of learning supports for Young People based on their individual, identified needs and capabilities.

For many of our Young People the experience of going to a traditional school was simply terrifying so the LEC and team of Educational Support Workers (ESW) worked with the Young Person, and education/social work professionals, to provide an individual, tailored plan for each Young Person to give them every chance of success in learning.

As Scotland had to change and respond to lockdown due to Covid-19, the pressure of having to 'fit in' with the traditional school attendance model, was removed. We witnessed that Young People were responding far better to having services come to them – for example, virtual lessons.

For many, we noticed the fear of going to school was removed, which has prompted the Learning Service Review to further investigate what a new model of learning support could be – one which is agile, understands our Young People's fears and which supports them to succeed.

We presented Aberlour's Senior leadership Team with options for the review, and they agreed to support "Re-branding the current model with an emphasis on meaningful relationships and purposeful activity, in addition to a Young People's centre/hub.

This has seen us engage in some small tests of change, which are currently ongoing.

It is our ambition that every Young Person who lives with us will have a positive learning experience – and where this cannot be provided within a traditional school-based programme, that Aberlour can provide a responsive service which is based on the Young Person's interests, skills, capabilities, and ambitions.

Tests of Change

The Learning Service Review is led by our Director, Children's Services, Jim Wallace, and supported by team members from across the organisation, representing the wider Sycamore Residential and Education services; Volunteering; Participation; Business Development; and Digital Transformation. We also have the involvement of Clinical Psychologist and an external expert in education (Private Tutor), as consultants.

The involvement of young people themselves is critical to the review – we need to listen to their views, concerns, and ideas in determining how their learning needs can be met.

The Approach to Test of Change

In May 2021, Aberlour began consultations with PS (Private Tutor) regarding developing a bespoke learning plan that incorporated the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) whilst holding the Young Person at the centre.

Discussions identified, as key factors of each Test of Change:

- Motivation
- Educational level
- Known interests
- Involvement of the Young Person
- Relationship with Young Person, ESW, LEC and PS including fortnightly meetings to discuss the Young Person's engagement levels; achievements; and next steps.
- Flexibility re duration of Test of Change
- Co-operation of host school (mainstream)
- Develop a Learning Service Path (*Appendix 1*)

PS identifies each benchmark that has been met by the Young Person and aligns these to CfE – this is shared with the school and recorded against the child's achievement. This is a crucial element of the work. An example of the paperwork used is attached as *Appendix 2*.

Young Person 'A'

'A' had been disengaged with formal education for some time, even prior to lockdown. We would normally discuss options for learning with the young person concerned, but 'A' would disengage at any mention of learning so any initiative would need to be carried out in a natural way with no mention of education or training.

An Inter-Disciplinary Plan (IDL) was created by PS around Outdoor Learning and Wider Achievement – linked to CfE and containing elements including:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Listening/Talking/Reading
- Numeracy
- Social Subjects
- Expressive Arts, and
- Science & Technology

With learning outcomes being met through a focus (area of interest) of Scottish football.

A recent visit to Celtic Park offered opportunities to link Scottish history, technology, budgeting, and communication within the day, all relevant to the CfE and meeting specific benchmarks. Highlighting the benefits and opportunities real-world learning provides.

This approach over the last 3 months has resulted in the Young Person being able to take initial steps back to school after a 7-month period. The test of Change will continue to be available to the child as a support measure.

The second Test of Change is at a much earlier stage and relates to a Young Person who is still awaiting a host school, with inconsistent messages from the Local Authority around where the Young Person's learning will take place

Young Person B

We have included the Young Person in discussions around the Test of Change approach – with the Young Person engaged and involved in the initial meeting with PS who has developed an IDL, around Outdoor Learning and Wider Achievement – linked to CfE and containing elements including:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Listening/Talking/Reading
- Numeracy
- Social Subjects
- Expressive Arts, and
- Science & Technology

With learning outcomes being met through a focus (area of interest) of Farming and Cycling (which has also included planning a proposal for the John Muir Award, offering suggestions based on Ecology)

There have been positive indications that the Young Person is willing to engage in conversations around planned learning, for the first time, asking to be informed each evening as to the plan for the next day – which is their preference – stating that to have a whole week's plan at once would result in the Young Person 'digging my heels in'

Further Tests of Change are planned with individual Young People - the evidence from this will be further documented and will help inform the Learning Service Review going forward.

Listening to the voices of our children

Our Participation Team member spent time with the Young People and the adults who care for them, in one of our residential houses overnight – she had ad hoc, informal chats with the Young People around their views on the Learning Service Review.

Core themes arising from this:

1. A need to nurture existing passions, interests, and talents

As an example – a Young Person with a passion for creative writing shared that he had written over 100 books – but found it challenging when the English teacher missed out the creative writing element of the curriculum as she had a particular liking for poetry – the Young Person felt that there

should be a bit of everything so you can find out what you like or are good at – he didn't feel listened to or included

2. The learning of life skills is essential:

For example – one young person was being supported to learn life skills such as cooking before moving on to a more independent living situation. In this instance, it was felt that bespoke, additional support was required, and perhaps this was the kind of thing a learning service could help with.

Separation from home and formal aspects of learning/education

There was reflection on the 'old' Sycamore school model – with both adults and Young People recognising that it just didn't work – one Young Person summing it up as “living, learning, and doing activities in between with the same young people from his house was 'overwhelming'. The only time he really got to himself was when he went to bed, and even then, this was sometimes difficult” He suggested that it would be better to “attend a school without other children from the house and also remove the pressure around having to do well in school”

3. Pressure, stress, and anxiety

There were several comments relating to pressure to 'do well' at school and how that followed the Young Person back to the home; there's also a recognition that anxiety about large class sizes or settling in first thing in the morning is a challenge for many. One Young Person reflected on his own experience “As you know I missed out on a lot of school, some due to the fact that I just didn't want to go, but most due to the fact that I was feeling very low, it's one of my biggest regrets and seeing other young people go through the same thing is hard to see”

4. Other points for consideration:

- a) Tutor/instructor training bank – bringing people in with a range of talents and expertise – matched to the Young Person – nurture passion and skill – this could include expanding our volunteering/buddy offer who are matched with a Young Person depending on both their interests
- b) Approved provider/partner bank for work experience – to allow Young People to try a range of job roles – and to secure placements at the right time – not have the Young Person wait for months whilst a relevant placement is found
- c) New multispace for learning and other activities – this should not replicate a school but should be a flexible, welcoming environment with both 'common' areas and quiet areas for those who like to work alone

Our Young People's voices are crucial to the success of any revised Learning Service in Aberlour – so their inclusion in forward discussions should be at the core of the work.

Conclusion

We commenced our learning service review to afford us the opportunity to explore with children and young people what a different learning service might look like, one which is able to flexibly accommodate the needs of children who have had complex early life experiences during which their formal education has been significantly disrupted - our children have told us consistently that they want to learn and that they actually do want to attend school, but that the schools need to really understand them, be patient and deliver individual learning activities that give our children the best possible chance to succeed - in simple terms, meaning that they experience a curriculum for excellence, relevant to them as individuals.

This paper sets out our learning, and our ambitions, for what change could look like - that would see our children being educated in a trauma sensitive and responsive system – we will continue to develop individual Tests of Change with the aim of developing meaningful links with like-minded partners, whether that be Local Authorities or other Residential providers – to ensure we are giving access to appropriate learning opportunities for all our children.

Name

Date



Aberlour Childcare Trust

Scottish Charity No: SC007991 | Company Reg No: SC312912

Registered Head Office: Kintail House | Forthside Way | Stirling FK8 1QZ



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Learning Service Path - Proposal

<p style="text-align: center;">Introduction Phase</p> <p>Planning meeting with the system covering the following:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Introduction to learning service (doc 1) Introduction to monitoring paperwork (doc 2) Explanation of assessment phase – dev paperwork (doc 3), obstacles to learning (doc 4), learning zone (5) Initial goals drawn up with young person (doc 6) Initial weekly plan drawn up with young person (doc 6)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Assessment Phase</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Developmental paperwork completed with keyteam in care (doc 3) Obstacles to learning completed with child and / or keyteam (doc 4) Identification of learning zone completed with child and keyteam (doc 5)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Goals and Planning Phase</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Goals agreed with child and child’s team (ESW to email system) Weekly plan agreed with child and child’s team (ESW to email system)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Daily Monitoring</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Daily Log completed by ESW – existing paperwork Young person’s log of daily achievement – format agreed with young person (diary etc)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Weekly Monitoring</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Goals and Plan reviewed at the end of every week with child – how’s this week gone? What have you enjoyed / not enjoyed, what’s working / not working (doc 6 – incorporated into existing documentation)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Planning for 8 weekly Review</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ESW has discussion with child – what’s working what’s not working ESW and Marc meet to complete monitoring success document (doc 7) ESW and Marc review current plan to reflect YP views</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Monitoring Success Phase</p> <p style="text-align: center;">8 Weekly SHANARRI Meeting ESW and / or Marc attends to offer feedback of assessment at first SHANARRI meeting ESW / Marc to feedback monitoring success document (doc 7) at each subsequent meeting Goals agreed with system for next 8 weeks Plan agreed with system for next 8 weeks</p>

Introduction Phase:

Introduction to the Learning Service (doc 1)

Introduction to Monitoring Paperwork (doc 2)

- Developmental Paperwork (completed by ESW, Marc and Keyteam)
- Obstacles to learning (completed with child and system)
- Learning Zone (ESW and child completes)
- Daily Log (ESW)
- Young person's daily achievement Log (ESW and young person)
- Weekly review of plan – goals, planning and check-in (ESW and young person)
- Monitoring Success Document (completed 8 weekly with ESW, Keyteam and Marc before SHANARRI meeting)

Assessment Phase

Developmental Paperwork (doc 3) – on dynamics

Obstacles to Learning Paperwork (doc 4)

Learning Zone (doc 5)

Obstacles to Learning (doc 4)

Complete with reference to the developmental paperwork

Systemic Obstacles	
Placement stability	
New placement	
New relationships	
Breakdown in relationships with adults / family	
Family contact	
Review meetings / hearings	
Other:	
Emotional Obstacles	
Low mood	
Low motivation	
High levels of anxiety	
Struggling to manage emotions safely	
Shame associated with ability	
Struggling to ask for help or respond to support from adults	
Other:	
Social Obstacles	
Feelings of Isolation	
No positive connections with adults / ESW	
Lack of peer group	
Negative experiences with peers	
Negative experiences within a learning environment	
Other:	
Cognitive Obstacles	
Challenges with attention	
Challenges with literacy	
Challenges with numeracy	
Emotionally reactive to demands	
Negative perception of ability	
Other:	
Experience of School so far	
Gaps in attendance	
Multiple school placements	
Negative experience of learning	
History of Bullying or social conflict	
School exclusions	
Other:	
Beliefs about school, learning and the future	
Negative beliefs about school in the family	
Negative perception of school	
Negative perception of self as a learner	
Negative perception of the future	
Limited / absent future plans	
Other:	

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Learning Zone (doc 5)

Zone	Example Support Offered
Resisting engagement with adults	ESW focus relationship building
Resisting engagement in daily structure	ESW focus relationship building, creating basic routine / structure and understanding interests
Resisting engagement in discussions about learning	ESW focus relationship building, maintaining basic routine and structure and understanding interests
Will discuss learning but resisting engagement in daily structure	ESW with educational / psychological consultation
Can discuss learning and is motivated to engage in daily structure	ESW with educational consultant – consideration of alternative informal learning experiences with fortnightly review with EC
Can discuss learning, and is motivated to attend structured activities with support (willowgate, lochore meadows, cadets etc)	ESW with educational consultant development of informal learning experiences with fortnightly review with EC
Can discuss learning and is motivated to attend school but obstacles exist	ESW and school work together to overcome obstacles, close monitoring and reviewing
Can discuss learning and attends part-time school with support	ESW and school work closely together
Attends school part-time without support	
Attends school full-time with support	ESW and school work closely together
Attends school full-time without support	
In Employment	

Systemic Involvement

Regardless of the zone in which the child is currently working, the child’s system, to include their named school will be informed of the child’s progress throughout. Sycamore welcomes any input the child’s named school can offer that will support a child to move through the zones, particularly when a child is refusing to attend. However, there is also acknowledgement that this must be at a pace that feels safe for the child, particularly if previous contact with the formal learning environment has been negative or traumatic

Educational and Psychological Consultation

Sycamore has access to both a clinical psychologist and an educational consultant who can support adults and young people within each zone to build an understanding with the team about where the child is at and to consider / advise forward planning. Advice can be offered ESWs around how to support the development of cognitive skills, emotional literacy skills, social skills and building confidence and self-esteem.

Goals and Planning Phase




Weekly Goals, Planning and Check-in (doc 6)

Weekly Check-in (doc 6)

Example Biggest Obstacles.....


<p>Feeling fed up, not believing I can do it, falling out with mum, not eating properly, not being good at reading and writing</p>

Example Goals

For Now 	In 8 weeks. 	Long Term. 
Enjoy climbing	Attend climbing wall on a Sat	Join climbing group
Go to favourite subjects at school	Attend planned classes	Go to school every day
Eat at mealtimes	Eat breakfast everyday and help make lunch Mon-Fri	Get into a better eating pattern
See mum every week	Stick to the plan on a Saturday	See more of mum

Example Plan (plan stays consistent for 8 weeks)

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Up at 8am	Up at 9am	Up at 9am	Up at 8 am	Up at 9am	Up at 9am	Lie In!!!!!!
Brekkie	Brekkie	Brekkie	Brekkie	Brekkie	Brekkie	Brekkie
School - PE	English Tutor at 10.30	Make packed lunch	School – Music	Make packed lunch	Climbing Wall	CHILL
Back for Lunch Make Lunch	Make Lunch	Stables all day from 11am	Make Lunch	Volunteer Work from 11am	Lunch at Subway	
Cycling	School for Woodwork		Tutor - Maths		Go and meet mum	

Example Check-in

<p>How has this week gone? You got up at the right time every day apart for Thursday – brilliant! You are loving climbing and the stables You are finding it hard to choose healthy lunches You have made it to school for your classes</p> <p>What can we try next week? Talk to your music teacher and tell her you don't want to sing in class</p>
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Talk to the climbing wall about classes

Monitoring Success Phase

Monitoring Success Document (doc 7)

Obstacles to learning document (doc 4) can be reviewed too if necessary

Monitoring Success Document (doc 7)

(Completed every 8 weeks with Marc, ESW and Keyteam in advance of 8 weekly SHANARRI meeting)

Date:

Completed By:

Summary of Obstacles to Learning:

	Limited			Excellent	
Stability (are there factors compromising stability? Eg placement, argument at home, family contact)	0	1	2	3	4
Engagement with adults	0	1	2	3	4
Motivation to discuss the plan	0	1	2	3	4
Engagement in daily structure / the plan	0	1	2	3	4
Engagement in weekly check-in	0	1	2	3	4
Achievement of goals	0	1	2	3	4

	Limited			Excellent	
Overall emotional wellbeing	0	1	2	3	4
Ability to talk about feelings	0	1	2	3	4
Ability to express emotions safely	0	1	2	3	4
Ability to reflect on emotions	0	1	2	3	4
Ability to ask for help	0	1	2	3	4
Ability to connect positively with other young people	0	1	2	3	4
Ability to connect positively with external groups	0	1	2	3	4
Engagement in activities	0	1	2	3	4
Engagement in informal learning activities	0	1	2	3	4
Progress with numeracy / literacy	0	1	2	3	4
Confidence	0	1	2	3	4
Self Esteem	0	1	2	3	4
	Negative			Positive	
Perception of ability	0	1	2	3	4
Perception of school	0	1	2	3	4
Perception of self as learner	0	1	2	3	4

Needs:

Changes Required to Existing Plan:

Barnardo's Scotland – February 2022

About Barnardo's Scotland work on closing the attainment gap

Barnardo's Scotland has a long history of working in partnership with families, schools and communities, however, the introduction of the Scottish Attainment Challenge in 2015 to tackle the poverty related attainment gap, has enabled us to extend our work to reach over 400 schools, which is 16% of the Scottish education estate.

We recognise that there are a number of complex issues which can affect children and young people's educational outcomes, however, those living in poverty often face the greatest challenge reaching their full potential. The impact of Covid-19 has only heightened this.

Living on a low income is not just about the struggle to pay bills. Families in poverty can find it difficult to be fully emotionally available to their children when their resources are absorbed by the stress of not being able to afford necessities like housing, food and fuel.

Barnardo's Scotland Children's Service Manager: "...first and foremost, it's just about daily living conditions and because so many of our families are on Universal Credit, that does not allow a standard of living that meets the needs of those adults and children within the household, it simply does not."

The psychological burden placed on families under pressure financially cannot be overstated. An inadequate income combined with the complex systems they need to navigate to survive leave many people feeling depleted and hopeless. This in turn affects their mental health and can result in isolation and loss of support networks.

Children living in poverty are more likely to be delayed in terms of language development

Barnardo's Scotland Children's Service Manager: "I think the impact of the system on people's wellbeing is massive. So a lot of our families see it as these huge hurdles that they'll never be able to overcome."

and have a higher incidence of behavioural problems than their more affluent peers. We also now understand more fully the impact that the stress caused by adversity and early trauma can have on a child's development, their ability to learn and their mental health and wellbeing.

Schools are increasingly on the frontline of responding to children and young people who come through their gates with a range of unmet material and emotional needs.

What has worked and what could be improved

The development of the attainment challenge since 2015 has allowed Barnardo's Scotland to expand our support and reach more pupils in Scottish schools. Through the Scottish Attainment Challenge Fund and the Pupil Equity Fund, Barnardo's school-based support workers have been able to get alongside children, young people and their families to support them in the challenges they are experiencing.

The poverty-related attainment gap goes beyond the school gates. Being able to strengthen the links between home, school and the community by providing financial, emotional and practical support to children, young people and their families has been one of the key benefits of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

In Barnardo's Scotland, we believe in a trauma-informed, relationship-based approach to support – we want to see all schools have the opportunity to embed a holistic approach to supporting children and young people to thrive and fulfil their potential. Funding from the Scottish Attainment Challenge has undoubtedly extended the availability of family centred resource in schools which address issues that lie beyond the school gates.

One of our Barnardo's school-based staff in Falkirk described the benefits of being embedded within the school environment:

“The best bit is to see young people enjoying school again and getting something out of their education. They know I am there for them and they pop in, they know there is a person in that school who can take time and look out for them. Just having those relationships with the kids is so good.”

In May 2019 we produced [a report on our early learning from our partnership with schools and communities across Scotland](#). This outlined some of the challenges we have had. Our view of what could be improved is outlined below:

- i. Relationships are central, but developing and sustaining relationships takes time, consistency and resources. The time limited nature of much of the PEF investment (often annually allocated) has woven insecurity into decision making in some settings, impacting the capacity of third sector and other partner organisations to effectively plan longer term and recruit and retain skilled staff.

We welcome the commitment to advise schools of PEF allocations for the full parliamentary term but it is not clear whether this will result in longer term, more sustainable arrangements for partner organisations commissioned by individual schools.

- ii. Health and wellbeing interventions make a vital contribution to reducing the poverty related attainment gap and are of equal importance to literacy and numeracy interventions.

However, these are not always given equal weighting and there is a risk we prioritise measurement of what we can count rather than what makes the greatest difference. Headteachers interviewed in our *Challenges from the Frontline* research underlined the critical importance of approaches which focused on removing barriers to participation in learning and build a strong relational foundation which supports wellbeing.

- iii. In our experience, working and allocating funding strategically, with clear

linkage between local children's service planning processes and individual school decisions, delivers the greatest impact. Heavily weighting investment to individual schools allows for flexibility and innovation to meet locally identified need but presents challenges in securing equity in available provision, transferring learning between settings and scaling up successes across the education estate. In Barnardo's Scotland we previously had contracts in some areas which were local authority wide, however, these have now gone and therefore, it is only the children in schools where they have purchased a service who can now access support. This results in a lot of inequity.

- iv. The attainment gap starts long before and exists beyond the school gates, therefore we believe families across Scotland should have access to holistic practical, financial and emotional supports from birth and through the early years as well as when a child reaches school.

Children spend over 80% of their time outside school in families and communities and what happens there has a significant impact on their capacity to engage in education. We need to move from compartmentalising issues (and the funding of these) - e.g. attainment, mental health, domestic abuse, substance use - to planning access to holistic supports for children and families irrespective of their presenting need.

Finally, it appears to be 'mission impossible' to ask schools to reduce the poverty related attainment gap while child poverty levels continue to rise in our communities. We know from the research conducted pre-pandemic for our joint report with the NSPCC, *Challenges from the Frontline*¹ an increasing number of families were experiencing *destitution*. This will only have deteriorated further through the last two years, with even greater challenges ahead as we prepare for the cost of living crisis spreading and deepening. High quality teaching and learning cannot mitigate the significant harm caused by structural inequalities and will continue to erode capacity of children and young people being 'ready to learn'.

¹ [Challenges from the Frontline: Revisited](#)

How is the impact of funding measured?

Barnardo's Scotland has a robust Outcomes Framework which is used to evaluate and measure impact. This framework is underpinned by the Scottish Government's Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) framework with specific measurable outcomes that capture progress across the wellbeing indicators; Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included. This framework ensures that we are outcomes focused and forms the basis of the reports we

develop and share with schools so there is a clear record of our activities and impact.

As part of any evaluation process we include reflections from children, young people and families themselves, feedback from professionals, including education staff. Our staff also capture their observations of changes and improvements in family relationships and circumstances. Where appropriate we use tools including Outcomes Star, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires, Parenting Daily Hassles, Adult Wellbeing Scale to support dialogue with families about their needs and where they are on their journey.

We always work in partnership with local education staff to produce data which they can use to evidence our approach, adding this to their schools-based evidence.

At Barnardo's Scotland, our staff know that the impact we have on the lives of pupils and their families cannot always be translated directly or overnight into measurable education attainment, and there is often not enough recognition of the 'soft' impacts of the type of support that the attainment challenge can provide which have a positive impact over the longer term.

It can be more challenging to capture softer outcomes like a reduced number of children sitting outside the Headteachers office day to day, more children remaining in school for full days, children moving from just attending to engaging meaningfully in learning, developing and sustaining friendships, managing transitions, arriving on time and feeling 'ready to learn' as a result of support around morning routines and management of anxiety. One Headteacher told us: "if someone said to me 'but he's still not meeting his benchmarks, I'd say 'but he's in class.'"

We would therefore like to see better mechanisms to recognise progression issues like preventing 'informal' exclusions and increasing capacity to manage peer relationships across the school day.

Areas for measurement we would also like to strengthen include trying to capture what has been prevented, e.g. school exclusions, referrals to social work, CAMHS and the Children's Reporter.

What has been the impact of the pandemic on attainment and achievement in schools?

We surveyed our school-based staff in Autumn 2021 to find out the challenges affecting young people to understand their emerging needs as they transitioned back into education. The main findings from Barnardo's staff were that:

- 76% identified poor mental health and wellbeing outcomes as the **greatest concern** facing children and young people who had returned to full-time education in August, following Covid-19 lockdowns.
- 94% agreed that children and young people have more worries now than compared with pre-pandemic.
- 77% agreed that children and young people were anxious about the need to 'catch up' on missed schooling.²

The social isolation due to the Covid-19 pandemic continues to be a source of concern to Barnardo's Scotland schools-based staff working with children and young people as they attempt to adjust to a 'new normal'. This relates to parents also as they have missed opportunities to access school buildings, see where their children are learning and meet the adults who care for their child during the school day and experience bonding community events like Christmas nativity plays and sports events. The absence or reduction of in-person opportunities to build strong, trusting relationships with education staff has made it more difficult in some instances for parents, resulting in increased misunderstandings or conflicts which would be easy to de-escalate if normal arrangements and levels of contact were in place.

We are also aware of an increased level of need since early 2020, with a greater number of referrals from a more diverse range of families to our services. Many families who prior to the pandemic were managing have experienced tumultuous disruption to routines and support networks. An example of this are many families where there is a child with an additional support need, who have reach out and asked for support after services they relied on were reduced or removed through periods of lockdown.

² [Barnardo's Scotland: Snapshot report into issues facing children and young people returning to school after Covid-19 lockdowns](#)

Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland

Submission to the Education, Children and Young People Committee Scottish Attainment Challenge inquiry

17 February 2021

[Cost of the School Day](#) (CoSD) at Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland works with schools, local authorities and partners around Scotland to tackle financial barriers to learning, participation and wellbeing at school for children and young people on low incomes. We focus on national development, awareness raising and professional learning, resource development, good practice sharing and evidence to inform policy. The project grew from work in Glasgow schools and is now recognised as a Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) national programme.¹

From uniform, food, trips and clubs to fun events, friendships and access to resources and devices, we know that a range of poverty related barriers exist at school for children and young people. CoSD approaches can contribute to increased understanding of child poverty and school costs, the development of poverty sensitive school policies and practices, reduced cost barriers and increased participation in school and after school activities, reduced financial pressures for families and improved promotion and uptake of entitlements.²

Tackling the cost of the school day helps to build the right foundations and conditions for attainment. When schools are actively removing poverty related barriers, children and young people are better able to benefit from the wide range of other interventions designed to improve outcomes and narrow the poverty related attainment gap. And as well as providing crucial support for children and their families in the here and now, action on the cost of the school day helps to reduce living costs and boost incomes, contributing to the wider national mission to end child poverty.

Action on the cost of the school day in schools and local authorities across Scotland has been an important part of progress made towards the current strategic aims of SAC and will be crucial to its refreshed mission from 2022/23 onwards. This submission sets out what we see as key progress made so far and the areas where we believe progress can be strengthened in the coming years.

The SAC, child poverty and joined up approaches

The SAC has been operating against a backdrop of unacceptably high levels of child poverty. Even before the Covid crisis, child poverty rates in Scotland were rising

¹ The CoSD project has been supported through the SAC PEF Policy Unit since 2018. Local authority SAC funding supported a partnership with Dundee City Council 2017-20. We are currently working in Moray Council schools with Lottery funding as part of our GB CoSD project in England and Wales.

² [Evaluation of the Cost of the School Day programme - Publications - Public Health Scotland](#)

gradually with over one in four (260,000) children in Scotland living in poverty in 2019/20.³ The challenges today for families on low incomes are greater than ever. Covid job losses and drops in income have deepened the hardship many families were already facing and pushed others into new financial insecurity. We are currently experiencing a cost of living crisis with inflation predicted to peak at 7.25% in April and only a 3.1% increase in universal credit.⁴ Families living in poverty who have little or nothing to cut back on will be among the worst hit by soaring supermarket prices and energy bills.

It is important that SAC is judged within this wider context for families. Evaluation of interventions should take into account the bigger picture of 'poverty' in the 'poverty related attainment gap' and acknowledge the immense pressure that this places on families and, in turn, their schools. Success or otherwise in closing the attainment gap is inextricably linked with child poverty prevalence and wider policy in areas like social security, housing, transport and childcare that impact on child poverty.⁵

Schools can't be expected to solve or fully mitigate the effects of child poverty single handedly and we think it is right that the refreshed SAC mission has an emphasis on partnership with other agencies and places schools alongside other partners within the national mission to end child poverty. Further progress in reducing educational inequity will require action at all levels of government and joined up work across all sectors to reduce child poverty.

However, alongside this, we should also celebrate and build on the important contribution that schools can and do make to child poverty reduction. Schools working hard to reduce costs and help with entitlements are removing barriers for families living in poverty, reducing their household costs and boosting incomes, all key actions against the main drivers of child poverty.⁶ Ensuring clear links are made between SAC and child poverty reduction will help practitioners understand this wider impact they are having when they make ostensibly small cost of the school day improvements in their own schools.

National policy commitments

We welcome recent Cost of the School Day related policy commitments in areas such as digital inclusion, curriculum cost removal, trips and activities, an increase in minimum school clothing grant levels and statutory uniform policy guidance, automation of financial entitlements and financial advice in schools. These are areas that we have consistently highlighted as common challenges for children and families and their delivery will support schools in driving forward equity for low income learners.

Children, parents and staff in schools we have worked with recently are noticing and benefiting from policies delivered so far.

³ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/poverty-and-social-justice/child-poverty/>

⁴ CPAG briefing [Nothing Left to Cut Back: rising living costs and universal credit](#), February 2022

⁵ Information on the wider employment, childcare, housing and social security interventions needed to end child poverty can be found in [CPAG in Scotland's Programme for Government 2021-26](#)

⁶ Scottish Government, [Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022](#)

“It’s better now. If it’s a subject, you shouldn’t have to pay for it.”

“You shouldn’t have had to pay for it, especially if you enjoy it.”

“If you couldn’t afford it [in the past] maybe you would have been asked to choose a different subject.” (Three S5 students discussing Home Economics costs being removed)

“Really happy to see curriculum costs removed. If we are serious about equity this has to continue.” (Staff)

“The government is doing this thing where everyone from P1-P7 will get a free school meal which I think is right.” (Student, P7)

If we want to accelerate progress towards equity in the SAC then the delivery of remaining commitments must be funded appropriately and delivered sooner rather than later in this parliamentary term.

“It’s good it’s being paid for (practical subjects) but where is the support for other subjects, where is the recognition that field trips and other learning experiences outwith the school associated with our subject are vital?” (Staff)

“All students accessing FSM use their card so no stigma. There is however students who are probably on the cusp of FSM but cannot access the funding.” (Staff)

Increased poverty awareness and action across Scotland

“I try really hard for it not to show to the other kids that my son is from a low-income family by making sure he takes part and contributes to everything, however there is times that I think the school could be more sensitive to people’s situation.” (Parent)

A range of SAC partners have been involved in raising awareness of poverty and its impacts. The SAC and Attainment Scotland Fund evaluations highlight ‘*strengthened awareness of the barriers facing children and young people adversely affected by socio-economic disadvantage.*’⁷ We agree that this is something that there has been progress on in recent years. This needs to be maintained, reinforced and kept up to date to ensure that this reaches all practitioners, particularly those new to teaching and those in areas and schools where staff say they are less likely to feel they understand the challenges.

Awareness needs to be tied to practical action. The SAC has been critical in driving the development of Cost of the School Day approaches across Scotland. We have been able to work with school communities and local authority partners to facilitate action and to capture and share good practice. As part of this we have heard countless examples of impactful work to reduce costs and boost incomes: affordable uniform policies, statements setting out costs and support available to families,⁸ reviewing and subsidising trips, taking consistent approaches to lending resources, strengthening promotion and support to apply for free meals, clothing grants and

⁷ Scottish Government [Closing the poverty-related attainment gap: A report on progress 2016-2021](#)

⁸ All South Lanarkshire schools have a CoSD position statement or policy on their websites for parents and carers – here is an example from [St John Ogilvie High School](#)

EMA, chuck it in a bucket donations, Take What you Need trolleys, universal breakfast clubs, free after school clubs, welfare rights referrals and many more. Action can be at the level of policy, procedure, practice or entitlements and while some have required funding other are simply about awareness and doing things in a different way.

Often action on a particular cost barrier can happen at all of these levels – for example, at Keith Grammar in Moray, when young people and families identified school uniform affordability as a concern, they consulted pupils and families on a new policy, simplified colours and removed logos, supplied ties for all using Parent Council funds, improved school clothing grant promotion, used PEF to buy a stock of jumpers and shirts, encouraged families to let school know of any uniform difficulties and replaced the old discipline policy with a relational approach.⁹ Action at a range of levels and involving their school community led to an affordable and inclusive policy.

All of these examples promote participation, inclusion and good relationships and lay the foundations for other interventions designed to raise attainment. For example, HM inspectors identified highly effective practice on Cost of the School Day at Glenrothes High School in Fife¹⁰ where whole school poverty awareness and action on cost barriers provided solid foundations for further work in areas like nurture and family learning with overall positive impact on attendance and attainment.¹¹

“We really notice when the school pays attention to these sorts of things.”
(Parent)

In our experience, good practice sharing and promoting solutions that help to reduce costs and support children and families has been highly valued so far, both within and between local authorities. Effective practice to reduce financial barriers is happening across Scotland and we need to continue to capture these examples and support their replication.¹² Forums and opportunities to share practice on anti-poverty work in schools are important to maintain momentum in this area. This can be driven by a range of partners including the CoSD project, at school, cluster and local authority level and through RICs and Education Scotland.

Pupil Equity Funding

CoSD is cited in national PEF operational guidance as an approach to mitigate the impact of poverty. Many schools use PEF to ensure that children and young people on low incomes are able to participate in the same way as their peers – examples include uniform provision, trip subsidies and free wider achievement opportunities. However, there can still be reluctance or uncertainty around spending PEF on ‘just’ covering costs for children and young people on low incomes when it will be difficult or impossible to prove direct impact on attendance or attainment. It is important to

⁹ [Simple, affordable and inclusive uniform policies](#) – blog post from Keith Grammar School in Moray

¹⁰ Education Scotland [Highly effective practice on Cost of the School Day from Glenrothes High School in Fife](#)

¹¹ [The school’s approach to reducing the Cost of the School Day](#) – blog post from Glenrothes HS on National Improvement Hub

¹² Case studies of effective communication with families about costs and financial support are included in [Talking about Costs and Money at School](#). Films featuring learners and staff talking about Cost of the School Day changes and impact can be found [here](#).

keep making links between improved participation and how children and young people feel and learn and then ultimately attain at school. It is also important to keep evaluating and demonstrating the impact of PEF spending in areas like improved participation, sense of belonging, exposure to new experiences, skills development and confidence.

“If all of your friends or people you know go to the after school clubs, school trips, that kind of isolates you from them. You're singled out, you're not with them, just a spare person.” (Student, S4)

While PEF is currently allocated on the basis of FSM registration there is scope for head teachers to use professional judgment in including other children and young people in targeted interventions. It is even more important in the current climate to avoid a narrow focus and take a wide view of who could benefit from support. Awareness of changing financial circumstances for families is crucial, as is awareness that children and families may hide financial difficulties and may not show up in FSM or SIMD data.

“I think they offer more help to some families that seem poorer, but they sometimes assume some families are ok financially when they're not.” (Parent)

“I know that my HT thinks she knows which families need support and targets them but this is a terrible strategy as many families will be struggling but not appear so.” (Parent)

Local approaches

Local approaches to tackling the cost of the school day will inevitably differ according to local contexts and needs. However, our independent CoSD evaluation¹³ gives insight into 'what works' to sustain and develop local approaches.¹⁴

We can see this learning in action in local authorities with visible and strategic CoSD approaches. Dundee City Council, building on a 3 year local SAC funded partnership with CPAG in Scotland and [local authority wide statements of intent](#), now has an Education Officer leading a citywide CoSD steering group, a requirement for annual CoSD action planning and review in schools, regular professional learning and input to NQTs with regular updates to [schools](#) and [council committees](#). North Ayrshire Council has developed an ambitious [CoSD policy](#) with schools, young people and partners, invested in local authority wide solutions to support schools, committed to using the CoSD Toolkit in every school and are holding annual CoSD conferences to review progress and share practice.

Strategic local approaches to cost of the school day helps to support schools in their efforts and make sure that action is not happening in silos. It also makes clearer in

¹³ [Cost of the School Day Evaluation - briefing for local authorities \(healthscotland.scot\)](#)

¹⁴ Recommendations include senior leadership to champion the work and take strategic responsibility for it, clear guidance, central staff with CoSD on their remit to support schools, local authority-wide actions that will support the work across schools, support for PEF spend in this area, ongoing professional learning opportunities, regular review of CoSD activities built into planning cycles and review or audit processes and local governance structures to monitor progress and impact.

local child poverty action reporting the wider impact of these approaches. Learning on what works locally could be shared more widely to encourage coordination and consistency in local authorities not currently taking this strategic approach.

Data based on lived experience: children's and parent's voices

"It shouldn't really matter if you are poor or rich... but that doesn't always help." (S3 student)

At the heart of CoSD approaches¹⁵ are the voices and experiences of children, young people and their families. Their involvement in identifying cost barriers and solutions helps to ensure that the right issues are being addressed and in an appropriate way.

Schools are continually using data to inform school improvement, interventions and support and the gathering of data directly from children and families is crucial within this. CoSD approaches and tools have been useful in self-evaluation for equity¹⁶, leading to data on how well school policies and procedures mitigate against barriers to participation, how well staff and partners respond to the needs of children and families, the extent to which staff have a sound understanding of cost barriers and inclusive approaches, how well children, parents and partners are involved in reviewing the cost of the school day and supporting tracking and monitoring of progress.

Insights into all of these areas are crucial to achieving equity and ensuring that data and improvements are based on lived experience will remain crucial within this going forward.

"It gave us such detailed information so was very helpful for us as a school. We're adding the priorities to next year's School Improvement Plan."
(Headteacher)

"It really helped to formalise our thinking about ways of removing barriers."
(Headteacher)

Children's rights and participation

As well as involving children and young people in identifying barriers and solutions at school, there is huge scope to strengthen children and young people's participation and leadership on these issues in their own schools and communities. There are great examples across Scotland of pupil voice groups working on social justice issues and some specifically on poverty and the cost of the school day – for example, the CoSD pupil group at [Braes High School in Falkirk](#) has developed an action plan to 'be the pupil voice around cost of the school day and reduce costs for pupils and families, improve communication and increase uptake of support and look for opportunities to provide further support to our school community.'

Pupil voice, participation and leadership on equity can be built on and further developed. Children and young people's involvement – at school level, locally and

¹⁵ Resources to involve school communities in understanding and taking action on barriers to participation are provided in the [Cost of the School Day Toolkit](#)

¹⁶ Education Scotland [Scottish Attainment Challenge self evaluation resource](#)

nationally - in decision making and poverty related education policy will be valuable to the SAC and even more critical following UNCRC incorporation.

Learning from Covid

“School has been a great support, phoning asking if there is anything they can do to help you support the kids and speak to the kids. We got offered help with devices. The primary school, I think they applied for extra iPads and the school were able to shortfall anybody that was struggling.” (Parent)

School building closures during lockdowns in 2020 and early 2021 had a negative effect on pupil progress and attainment, particularly for children and young people affected by poverty.¹⁷ Cost of the School Day research with parents and learners¹⁸ found families on low incomes struggling to meet the additional costs of resources and devices required for learning at home. For some, lack of equipment and space to study led to frustration, feeling cut off and worries about keeping up with learning. Family wellbeing was affected by stress and, for many, new financial worries. Schools responded to their families’ needs in an emergency situation and in different ways.

There is valuable learning on what families valued most during this period which can help inform Covid recovery in schools and approaches to equity in the next phase of the SAC.

For example, the importance of having the resources needed to learn were sharply highlighted. Parents valued straightforward provision and being asked what resources are needed without assumptions about financial circumstances and what they did or did not have at home. The importance of free school meals was also highlighted with free school meal replacements keeping many families afloat financially - families used to receiving universal free school meals but not entitled to alternative provision noted the significant increase to their costs – and parents appreciated clear information and support from their schools on entitlements with straightforward application or automated processes from local authorities.

Parents were clear about the difference their schools were making when they showed that they understood financial difficulties and wanted to make life easier – and about the challenges which existed when this support wasn’t in place in their schools. While the benefits of poverty awareness, resource provision, good communication and help with entitlements are most obvious in times of crisis, they’re no less important in more ‘normal’ times. We need to learn from the schools who excelled at providing support during the pandemic and think about how this practice can be shared and adopted during recovery and beyond.

Stigma and good communication

We know that maximising family incomes through school aged entitlements and other benefits has a direct impact on children’s development, outcomes and

¹⁷ Education Scotland and Scottish Government [Equity Audit](#), 2021

¹⁸ The Cost of Learning in Lockdown, [June 2020](#) and [March 2021](#). CPAG in Scotland.

attainment.¹⁹ More money in family pockets is likely to have a positive impact on SAC progress.

School aged entitlements like free school meals, school clothing grants, education EMA and Best Start Grants are available to support eligible families with the costs of school. Valuable support to apply for these entitlements is often available from Home Link Workers and other school staff. In addition, many schools readily offer support with costs associated with trips, clubs, resources and other activities, either through PEF or other sources. However, there can be barriers to uptake of both entitlements and school level support because parents and carers may not know what exists and/or there is stigma and fear of judgement involved in talking about costs and money.

Parents taking part in our Talking about Costs and Money at School resource²⁰ were asked how it had felt approaching their schools for support around costs and money. The responses below from a range of parents across Scotland show the powerful sense of shame and stigma which can stop families seeking and benefiting from support.

I was uncomfortable asking for help... It's not easy talking about money problems... Guilt, embarrassment, shame... It was embarrassing to admit that I was struggling! It's just degrading... I felt ashamed that I couldn't provide for my kids... Felt judged... Patronised and made me feel awful and that we were abnormal... I sometimes feel like I am looked down upon for receiving school meals... Embarrassed as an affluent school and area... I was worried my child would find out and that people would make fun of them... It is hard to talk about not being able to afford it.

Talking about Costs and Money at School features advice from parents and carers on good communication that can reach families and help to overcome stigma. This includes poverty awareness, leadership and visible approaches, regular and universal communication about support available, avoiding assumptions about finances and reducing costs across the school day. The resource also includes case studies from schools overcoming stigma and communicating effectively with clear impact.²¹

"I feel less embarrassed about financial worries. I am so grateful for this simple but powerful thing: I feel we are not alone." (Parent)

"They helped me apply for free school meals and clothing grants as well as other grants/schemes to help with school costs." (Parent)

"It's the way they talk to you, you don't feel embarrassed or small." (Parent)

If we want to remove barriers and make sure that families are benefiting from support available, then there must be a focus on clear and consistent financial

¹⁹ Cooper and Stewart. (2017) [Does money affect children's outcomes? An update](#)

²⁰ CPAG in Scotland [Talking about Costs and Money at School](#)

²¹ Case studies of effective communication with families about costs and financial support are included in [Talking about Costs and Money at School](#).

information for schools from their local authorities²² and on tackling poverty stigma more widely. Simplifying and automating processes for applying for school age entitlements is also a priority.

Boosting incomes

In our lockdown research²³, one in three parents who tried to access financial support found it 'difficult' or 'very difficult'. Given the current climate, it is more crucial than ever that all families are receiving all of the support they need. Income maximisation has the potential to play an important role in improving outcomes for children affected by poverty and schools can play an important role in progressing this with local partners.

The [FISO](#) (Financial Inclusion Support Officer) project in Glasgow shows how schools can move beyond signposting families to advice to effectively working in partnership with outside income maximisation agencies. FISO project workers in schools help parents and carers to claim social security benefits and school aged entitlements, offer debt and financial capability support and refer to energy, digital inclusion and employability services. In one school alone, Bellahouston Academy, this has led to financial gains of £664k for parents, largely from missed benefits and entitlements. Staff say that its success is due to clear standard financial information for all families, convenience and flexibility in how parents contact the financial inclusion service officer (FISO) and strong partnerships with the school promoting it regularly to parents and the FISO having a presence in the school. As the FISO at Bellahouston Academy says: *"Trust is a big thing and the more the school puts out about it the more it resonates. Parents do trust schools so if the service is being promoted by the school then they trust you."*²⁴

Conclusions

The SAC has been critical in driving forward awareness and action on equity in recent years. However, while financial barriers to participation, learning and wellbeing at school remain there are key opportunities to build on progress made.

- SAC progress will always be hindered by wider levels of child poverty. All levels of government must prioritise investment in meeting our child poverty reduction targets.
- National policy to reduce the cost of the school day is benefiting families already and implementation of remaining commitments in areas such as wider digital inclusion, support for trips and activities, statutory uniform policy guidance, automation of financial entitlements and financial advice in schools must be a priority, Specifically the roll out of universal free school meals to all P6 and P7 originally promised for August 2022 needs to go ahead as a matter of urgency
- Key opportunities exist to build on existing poverty awareness and on sharing the great practice currently underway in schools across Scotland to reduce

²² This is an [example from Edinburgh](#) which could be easily replicated in other areas.

²³ The Cost of Learning in Lockdown, [June 2020](#) and [March 2021](#). CPAG in Scotland.

²⁴ The FISO project is included as one of the case studies in our [Talking about Costs and Money at School](#) resource

costs and support families. This work in schools can be supported and enhanced by more ambitious strategic local approaches to reducing the cost of the school day.

- At all levels, school, locally and nationally, we need to keep children's and parent's involvement, voices and lived experiences central to how we proceed and, alongside this, make the most of opportunities to have children and young people taking the lead on equity in their schools and communities.
- We know the difference that increased incomes make to children's outcomes and attainment. Further action on tackling stigma surrounding uptake of entitlements, clear and consistent financial information for families in every school in Scotland and partnerships with financial inclusion services are needed.

The Prince's Trust Scotland

The Impact of the Scottish Attainment Challenge on the attainment gap:

The Prince's Trust is the UK's leading youth charity, supporting young people to transform their lives. We help disadvantaged young people aged 11 to 30 to build their confidence, increase their motivation and improve their employability and enterprise skills.

We support over 7,000 of the most excluded young Scots who are the furthest from education and employment in work each year. We've helped them to overcome their personal barriers and develop life and social skills. Three in four young people supported by The Prince's Trust move into work, education and training.

In partnership with nearly 120 secondary schools across Scotland we helped over 2,000 vulnerable young people through our education offer last year and aim to support even more in 2022 and beyond. We also leverage direct support from many of Scotland's leading businesses, working with them to identify skills gaps and ensure that young people are job ready when they leave school.

Our youth workers across Scotland work with staff in local schools and other education settings to run **Prince's Trust Education** clubs and enrichment opportunities. Working on a needs-led basis, teachers refer young people who are struggling with mainstream education, suffering adverse life events (such as bullying, difficulties at home, or being at risk of youth violence) and facing barriers such as disability, wellbeing concerns or living in a deprived area.

We bring a youth work approach to school learning and most of those who benefit from our support are aged 14-15 – we make a difference at the critical turning point, when compulsory education is coming to an end. Many of the young people we support gain our accredited qualifications, giving them a valuable asset, they can use in an application for their next step in education, or on their first CV.

Introduction

The Prince's Trust Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Education, Children and Young People committee inquiry into the impact of the Scottish Attainment Challenge on the attainment gap. Our vision is that every young person should have the chance to succeed. It's important that all young people are given opportunities from a young age to ensure that they can reach their full potential, irrespective their background.

Response to consultation questions

Q1: What has worked well?

The Prince's Trust Scotland agrees with the objective that young people across Scotland have, and continue to benefit, from additional funding and resources: improving their opportunities to achieve equity and address the national priority: closing the attainment gap between young people living in our most and least deprived communities. It also aims to bring a focus and accelerate targeted improvement in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

As a charity supporting thousands of young people with few or no qualifications, we know the impact that low attainment can have on future prospects and social mobility. We strongly believe that key to improving attainment is improving young people's confidence, behaviour and attitudes to learning.

The Education Recovery Fund was a positive example of the youth work sector working in partnership with local government as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. A partnership between The Prince's Trust and Venture Trust has provided disengaged young people in Dundee secondary schools with a new opportunity to develop their personal and social development.

A teacher at Baldrigon Academy in Dundee believes that the partnership helped participants to improve their engagement in school – **“This has been such a brilliant opportunity. All of the kids who have completed the course said they thoroughly enjoyed it and have come back having improved their core skills which will be useful to them in future. It has been a much-needed pick-me-up...and has hopefully reset a few attitudes towards learning. It has also broadened the learners' horizons on their future. We would love to take up this opportunity again should the offer be available.”**

We know that poor engagement at school limits future life chances and The Prince's Trust is determined to grow our intervention support, promoting activity which reflects evolving priorities throughout the secondary school journey. We are acutely aware of the need for an enhanced delivery package for 16-17-year-olds who return to school largely due to it being the only option to avoid a negative destination. The partnership in Dundee offered solutions to individual schools who struggled to ensure alternative youth work focused activities due to the multiple knock-on effects of Covid. During Covid at a time of prolonged uncertainty, fear and lack of control, this was a chance for participants to improve their wellbeing and discover new possibilities.

As part of our education provision, young people are encouraged to explore personal and social development, life skills and prepare themselves for work. We offer formal SQA-accredited qualifications which seek to ensure learners have every opportunity to gain formal recognition of their skills and achievements. We also equip young people with a Certificate in Personal Development and Employability Skills (PDE) which recognises the breadth of personal skills, qualities and attitudes required by employers across a range of sectors.

We collaborate with secondary schools, local authorities and other third sector partners to address school attainment challenges. Our education provision offers flexibility to create a more bespoke offering which can cater for different needs on a school-by-school basis. This model has proved very popular; the programme is now

active in a third of all Scottish secondary schools. Our PDE qualification is an excellent example of our work in schools directly improving attainment.

Q2. What could improve?

We believe the third sector has a significant role to play in closing the attainment gap. However, there is a disconnect in engagement between youth work organisations and regional and national education partners. Despite supporting over 2,000 young people to improve their attainment each year, we are not involved in, or aware of, any regional or national forums which review local needs and shares best practice.

We understand that priorities are diverse and, in some cases, competing. This is especially true in terms of effecting policy which has resulted in a lack of cohesion, particularly in the youth work sector, as well as national engagement around attainment and provision of services and resources to schools and disadvantaged pupils. We are supporting Youthlink Scotland to build engagement with regional and national education bodies to bridge the gap with youth work organisations.

The education space is a complex environment. While there are many fantastic initiatives that ensure young people living in poverty get the education they deserve, they are often unsighted. The Prince's Trust is an advocate of working closely with similar youth organisations and advocate for more joint working across Scotland and the UK. We can share best practice, learn from one another and often provide a young person with far more tools to succeed.

Currently active in almost 120 secondary schools, we could expand our presence in areas of under-representation where a significant number of young people can benefit from support. The Prince's Trust Scotland does not claim to be able to offer solutions to every challenge facing each young person but is able to work at scale and a willing partner to other providers who could be better placed to support a young person access the right opportunity for them.

We strongly encourage organisations and local authorities helping young people, to share their best practice with each other, and to strengthen relationships with the youth work sector. While there is not a one size fits all approach, it is often worthwhile for stakeholders to share initiatives that have both successful and unsuccessful outcomes.

We also need to focus more on closing the gap between those children who have core skills needed for education and employment, and those who do not. Young people need to be confident, engaged and motivated if they are attending school in order to have the right foundation for their futures. The Prince's Trust Achieve programme can provide that support to young people to help them fulfil their potential at school, despite a potentially challenging home life.

Q3. How is the impact of funding measured?

The Prince's Trust's education provision is funded through a combination of local authority investment, trusts and foundations, and philanthropy. We work with local authorities to understand local priorities and agree a package of support based on

school needs. Reporting requirements can vary but we endeavour to demonstrate an improvement in a participant's personal and social development using 'distance-travelled' methodology and attainment through our SQA accredited qualification at SCQF level 3-5.

We fully recognise the advantages of transferring responsibility for decision making and funding from local government to head teachers. However, this model does impede the implementation of scalable interventions which can be adapted to the needs of individual schools.

While we have strong and long-standing investment partnerships with some local authorities our shared ambition to enhance quality support to young people is regularly challenged by single year local government budgets and persistent funding uncertainty. The Trust acknowledges the prominence of the Pupil Equity Fund and its merits. However, its introduction presents a sizeable challenge to ensure that we have the resource and capacity to sustain our current delivery across Scotland. With almost 120 existing school partnerships and an additional 230+ schools to engage it is nigh impossible to develop and co-ordinate strategic activity without quickly losing momentum.

Q4. What has been the impact of the pandemic on attainment and achievement in schools?

The pandemic has placed a significant strain on young people who were already struggling to improve their attainment, manage their wellbeing and secure a positive pathway out of school.

A common theme across all our work is addressing a lack of self-belief in young people. In the Prince's Trust 2021 Youth Index report 47% of young Scots said their mental health had worsened since the start of the pandemic, with more than a quarter admitting they felt 'unable to cope with life'. The toll of Covid-19 is likely to have a lasting impact on the lives of young people and we believe evidence-based solutions, such as those supported by the Youth Work Education Recovery Fund should be sustained to address the legacy of this unprecedented crisis.

We are concerned that young people could be held back without the right platform and confidence to achieve, showing just how important core skill development is, including motivation, focus and determination. Any negative feelings will undoubtedly impact on a young person's education, attainment and development at school, whether they are in poverty or not.

An alternative youth work approach is a powerful early intervention to understand young people's needs and empower them to develop the skills and coping mechanisms they need to succeed in education, which will also help them later in life when they come to look for training and work opportunities.

By continuing to work within schools and local communities, youth work and The Prince's Trust has a vital role to play in a whole education system approach to support disadvantaged young people, and we look forward to continuing our work with key partners to ultimately close Scotland's poverty-related attainment gap.

The logo for SPICe, featuring the letters 'SPICe' in a white, sans-serif font on a dark purple background.The logo for The Information Centre, featuring the text 'The Information Centre' and 'An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh' in a white, sans-serif font on a dark blue background.

Education, Children and Young People Committee

23 February 2022

Poverty-related attainment gap

Introduction

The Committee has agreed to undertake an inquiry into the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the Scottish Government's policy commitment to close the poverty-related attainment gap.

Through the inquiry, the Committee has set out to explore—

- What has worked well?
- What could improve?
- How is the impact of funding measured?
- What has been the impact of the pandemic on attainment and achievement in schools?

Closing the attainment gap is central part of the Scottish Government's school policy.

This meeting, the Committee will take evidence from a range of third sector organisations. Third sector organisations can be contracted by local authorities to deliver projects through different streams of the Attainment Scotland Fund. Some members would have had the opportunity to talk directly to young people in advance of this meeting.

On 9 February, the Committee took evidence from a panel of academics and experts.

This paper explores how third sector organisations have supported the Scottish Attainment Challenge and how third sector organisations work in and alongside schools to support better outcomes for young people.

Third sector collaborations

The design of the Attainment Scotland Fund intends to promote local decision-making and a focus on closing the attainment gap. How to use Pupil Equity Funding is a matter for the individual school or head. This means that individual schools, or groups of schools had the opportunity to directly contract third sector organisations to undertake work.

Last March, the Scottish Government published [Closing the poverty-related attainment gap: progress report 2016 to 2021](#) looking at progress across the last Parliament of closing the attainment gap. in the context of the challenge schools programme, it said—

“Partnerships with third sector organisations tended to be related to the contracting and delivery of specific interventions or projects, and were seen across a whole range of areas with many different partner organisations. Partnerships appeared particularly prevalent in relation to health and wellbeing-related activities and interventions.” (p40)

The 2020 [Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation: Headteacher Survey](#) found that 43% of respondents²⁵ were working with third sector organisations. The report stated—

“Survey findings show some variation in experience of collaboration across key respondent groups. This was particularly notable for collaboration with third sector organisations; Challenge Authority schools, secondary schools, and those in urban areas or small towns were most likely to have built collaborative working with third sector organisations.” (p35)

CPAG’s Cost of the school day project is an example of a third sector organisation working at a local authority level. CPAG worked in a number of local authorities and identified areas where barriers to participation could be reduced. These barriers can be money spent on uniforms, trips, school lunches, gym kits, pencils and pens, and dress down days. The project was conducted in Glasgow and reported in 2015. Since then CPAG has worked in a number of other local authorities.

The Robertson Trust’s submission to the Committee reflected on its research and experience of supporting third sector organisations and suggested that creating partnerships with schools is the correct approach but that this requires capacity in the system to do so. It said—

“Addressing the attainment-gap is strengthened by taking a multi-sector view. The Scottish Government has pursued what it describes as a notional ‘empowerment’ agenda by allowing Schools and Local Authorities to make decisions about how attainment funding is spent in a way that best supports their communities. However, without sufficient support, autonomy risks disempowering schools and local authorities, and leaving them without the ability to link to other actors and to spend on the most impactful activity.

²⁵ Members should note that the survey received 420 responses equivalent to an overall response rate of 27%. SG researchers weighted responses to match the wider population of schools.

“Schools should be empowered and encouraged to establish stronger links with supportive organisations. These could be third-sector organisations providing a diverse range of services such as whole-family support work, mentoring, or youth work. It could also be the college or university sector who deliver tutoring as part of their widening access activities to raise attainment. Both charities and universities have told us that they find it difficult to get access to schools and form collaborations. We would like to see the Scottish Government incentivising schools to spend attainment funding through working in collaborative partnerships with other agencies. As a third sector funder we know the strength of charities in adding value to the schools.”

The Robertson Trust also suggested that schools should not be the only bodies responsible for developing collaboration with the aim of closing the attainment gap. It argued that investment and support should be aimed at the Third Sector and the FE/HE sectors to help broker these relationships.

A theme from the Committee’s submissions has been that inequality and poverty are the key drivers for the attainment gap and therefore policies to reduce child poverty and attainment gap should be better aligned. COSLA’s submission stated—

“Fundamental to the attainment gap is tackling child poverty, and its symptoms, directly. The original SAC had placed schools at the centre of tackling the attainment gap, and our view was that there were not sufficient links made between the strategic approach to tackling child poverty, and tackling the attainment gap. This would have included the flexibility for councils and schools to use SAC resources across a wider range of services which support children and families.”

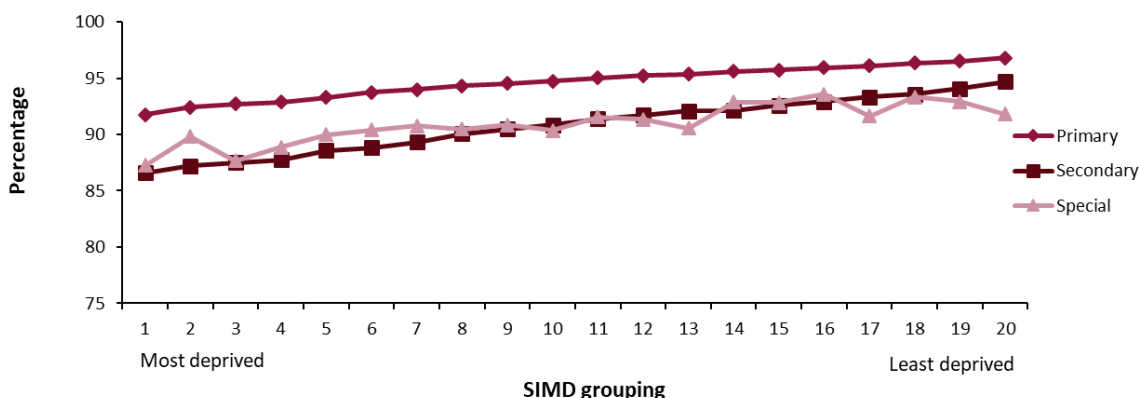
Barnardo’s Scotland’s submission agreed that linking wider local authority services with school-level decision-making provides greatest impact. Laura Robertson from the Poverty Alliance explored issues of access to community-based activities, she told the [Committee on 9 February](#)—

“The main issue is a lack of resource within families. We have done research that shows that families face barriers to accessing support outwith school because they just do not have the financial resource. Extracurricular activities such as clubs are just not feasible for families that are living on low incomes. For me, as I mentioned, it is about sustainable funding for third sector community organisations. We have seen this week that a lot of small community organisations in Scotland are really going to be hit by the cost-of-living crisis. We will have to see what the impacts of that are, but it is likely that many organisations will have to close. That is an important issue for a lot of young people, as 80 per cent of their time is spent outwith school and it is those organisations that provide a lot of family support. I hope that that answers your question.” (Col 36)

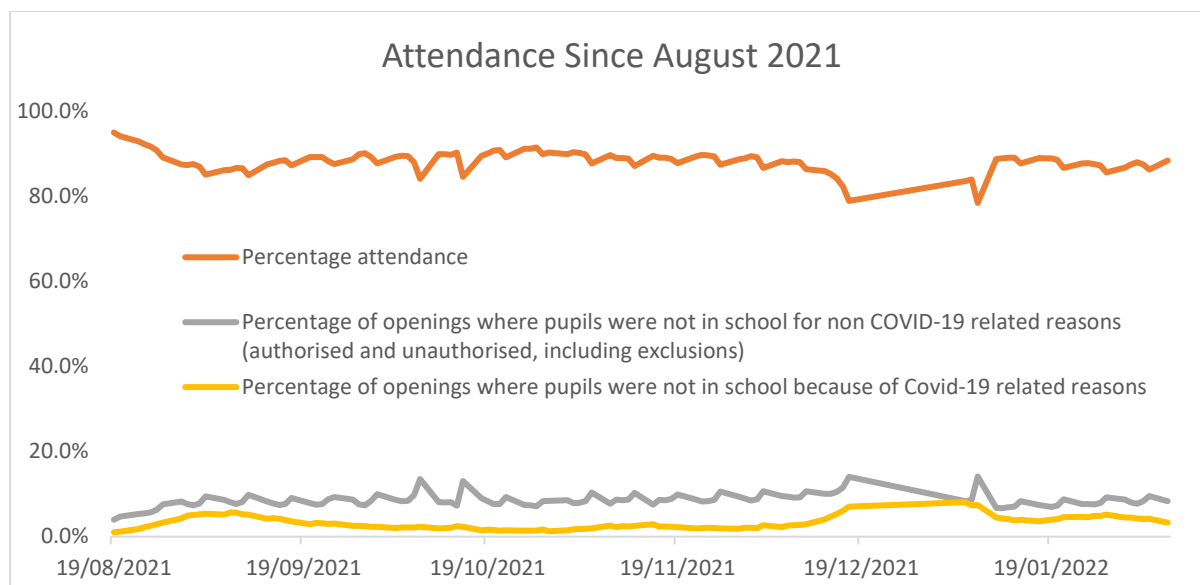
In [a response to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee’s inquiry into the Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People](#), Includem critiqued the Scottish Government’s approach to supporting young people experiencing poverty. It said—

“Currently, the development of policy and support services do not hear from those most impacted, resulting in mitigation that is not targeted effectively or at the right scale ... As a result, policy solutions do not reach those intended. For example, while the ‘improvement in children and young people’s health and wellbeing’ is included in the National Improvement Framework, there is a lack of conclusive evidence for how school-based interventions contribute to a reduction in health and wellbeing inequalities. This is particularly visible in the narrow focus on the attainment gap and in-school solutions. As set out above, children and young people who experience poverty, particularly those most disadvantaged, have a considerably higher rate in absenteeism and barriers to learning.”

The importance of supporting attendance, particularly after the lockdowns has been raised by witnesses previously. [Statistics on school pupil attendance and absence are normally collected and published biennially](#) – the last publication is from 2018-19. The average attendance in the past five releases has been between 93% and 94%. The chart below is from the 18/19 data and shows the correlation between the SIMD vigintile (every 5th percentile) and attendance. It also shows that attendance is higher in primary school than in secondary.



The [Scottish Government has regularly published attendance data](#) throughout the pandemic. Members should note that it is difficult to compare data covering two years pre-pandemic to data covering smaller periods of time during the pandemic. The chart below shows attendance since August 2021. Average attendance in that period was 88.3%, the average absences not attributable to COVID-19 was 8.5%. The chart below illustrates this data.



Professor Ainscow [explained to the Committee on 9 February](#) that work he is undertaking in Dundee is focusing on “three Ps”, presence, participation and progress. He said—

“Presence means regular attendance; participation means being involved, recognised, welcomed and valued; and progress is about attainment, of course, as well as other things with regard to the future. The issue that needs to be looked at is presence. Prior to the pandemic, attendance across Scotland was, frankly, pretty awful. If the kids are not in school, how the hell are they going to participate and make progress? There needs to be a push on presence, but it tends to come down to cultural issues and traditions in particular places.” (Col 6)

The Scottish Government’s [Closing the poverty-related attainment gap: progress report 2016 to 2021](#), contextualised attendance within parental and family engagement. It said—

“A focus on parental and family engagement has formed a key part of the approach developed in many schools. This has included, for example, approaches aimed at supporting pupil attendance and engagement, and improving children and young people’s aspirations.” (p35)

It also stated that there is recognition of a “steady or persistent gap in the attendance of children and young people affected by poverty and those who are not.” It also reported that in some local authorities focused approaches to attendance have “successfully improved the attendance of targeted learners, increasing attendance and positively impacting upon attainment.” It noted one example of improving participation among care-experienced children and young people “through supported curricular and wider experiences such as school equipment, excursions and access to leisure facilities.” (p61)

Save the Children’s submission stated—

“Parental engagement is a key driver for reducing the ‘attainment gap’ especially in the earlier years and needs to be prioritised from pre-birth. There

is a significant body of evidence that shows when parents are actively engaged in their child's learning, children have better outcomes regardless of the socio-economic or even educational background of parents. Increasing parental engagement in children's play and learning is therefore an effective way to close the attainment gap.

"While parental engagement has been recognised as a key driver for closing the attainment gap, and there are some signs of progress, this is not yet translated into consistent good parental engagement practice and improved outcomes for children."

Barnardo's Scotland's submission said that "funding from the Scottish Attainment Challenge has undoubtedly extended the availability of family centred resource in schools which address issues that lie beyond the school gates."

Collaboration is a key part of the practice highlighted by The Robert Owen Centre in [Educational Equity, Pathways to Success](#). Professor Ainscow argued that this includes the 'problematism of established practice'; ie the recognition that something one is doing can be improved. Professor Ainscow also highlights the concept of Communities of Practice – practitioners can prefer the language, knowledge and approaches of their own professions. Using this concept, the implication is that relationships between teachers and professionals/practitioners from other fields, such as educational researchers or CLD may take time to bed-in. These processes are exemplified by other researchers writing in the book. More broadly, the ROC's manifesto stated—

"[Our findings] show how local pathways to success can be determined that fit the challenges that exist within specific contexts. They also point to the importance of giving practitioners much more opportunities to lead this process."

Evidence and outcomes

The Scottish Government has commissioned evaluations of the ASF. [The fourth was published in March 2021](#) . This set out the long-term outcomes it measured progress against. These are—

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

The pandemic and the responses to the pandemic is considered to have exacerbated existing inequalities in educational outcomes. The 2021 ACEL data,

which only covered primary schools, the gap between those living in the most and least deprived communities grew. In literacy the gap between primary pupils from the 20% most deprived areas and those from the 20% least deprived areas was 24.7 percentage points in 2020/21 – up from 20.7 percentage points in 2018/19. The equivalent gap in numeracy was 21.4 percentage points in 2020/21 – up from 16.8 percentage points in 2018/19.

At the Committee’s meeting on 9 February, Professor Becky Francis from the Education Endowment Foundation argued that there is a need to “diagnose where there has been learning loss during the pandemic and then think of short-term means to address the gap.” (Col 7) She also expressed surprise that in Scotland there had not been an externally sourced tests to “assess their learning loss against generalisable prior cohorts” (Col 28). However, finding a base-line for such work in Scotland would not be straightforward and ACEL is likely to be the best data available.

Professor Ainscow argued that local context is very important and that “schools have to understand their own context—the context of the school, the classroom and the local community—so that they can understand the barriers that some of their children are experiencing.” (Col 9) This is reflected in Education Scotland’s [Recalibrating Equity and Social Justice in Scottish Education: Bouncing forward after COVID-19 lockdowns](#). This is guidance aimed at schools and local authorities and it identified “six broad principles which can be used to help schools and local authorities consider their use of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding and supports to recalibrate equity and help learners to bounce forward after COVID-19 lockdowns and school closures.” One of the principles was to identify learners most impacted by poverty & COVID-19 and the guidance stated—

“Local authority and school data should be utilised to explore the impact of school closures on the above groups as a start. Knowledge of community context will support further data investigations needed.”

The guidance advises that short-term intensive support will be needed for learners most affected by COVID-19 and school closures and that this “should be on targeted supports for core literacy and numeracy, language development, social learning, physical skills or concentration.” It is for local authorities and schools themselves to identify learning gaps and to put in place short term measures to address these. The extent to which third sector partners are involved in these processes is likely to differ from place to place.

During the [Committee meeting on 9 February](#), witnesses discussed the roles of local authorities and Education Scotland’s Attainment Advisers in supporting schools to choose evidence-led policies and interventions. There is a further role in expanding the evidence base of what outcomes can be improved, for whom, and in what contexts. (Cols 17 & 18) Emma Congreve from the Fraser of Allander Institute suggested that an area of inquiry should be how schools robustly evaluate their own programmes. She said—

“We should also think about how schools can best monitor and evaluate their own programmes so that they can come up with robust evidence on what

works for them in their context. That is not just about gathering metrics on a programme in isolation; it is also about benchmarking with other programmes and constructing control groups that allow you to get into the detail of what is happening and what is succeeding for pupils. That has a resource dimension; it is expensive to do that sort of thing well, and in the current climate it will be difficult to carve money out for that purpose. In the long run, however, such an approach is incredibly important for building on success.” (Col 19)

Later Ms Congreve argued that targets to reduce the attainment gap are important as they drive activity, but understanding what is improving outcomes is also vital. She stated—

“Understanding the mechanisms that take us towards the targets is incredibly important. If we have been knocked off course by Covid, which I totally understand, that will be borne out in the data in the coming years. If, in four years, we have a really good understanding about what works and how we will get to the targets although we have been knocked off course, that will be a massive step forward. That requires evidence, evaluation, analysis and knowledge of what the issues are, how we will address them and what the impact of policies will be.” (Col 21)

Schools ought to be able to access support and expertise from their local authorities, wider networks of professionals, attainment advisers and others. The relationship of third sector organisations with local authorities and schools is one step removed and can be contractual. It is not clear to what extent third sector organisations contribute to and have access to these sources of support.

Barnardo’s submission stated—

“As part of any evaluation process we include reflections from children, young people and families themselves, feedback from professionals, including education staff. Our staff also capture their observations of changes and improvements in family relationships and circumstances. Where appropriate we use tools including Outcomes Star, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires, Parenting Daily Hassles, Adult Wellbeing Scale to support dialogue with families about their needs and where they are on their journey.

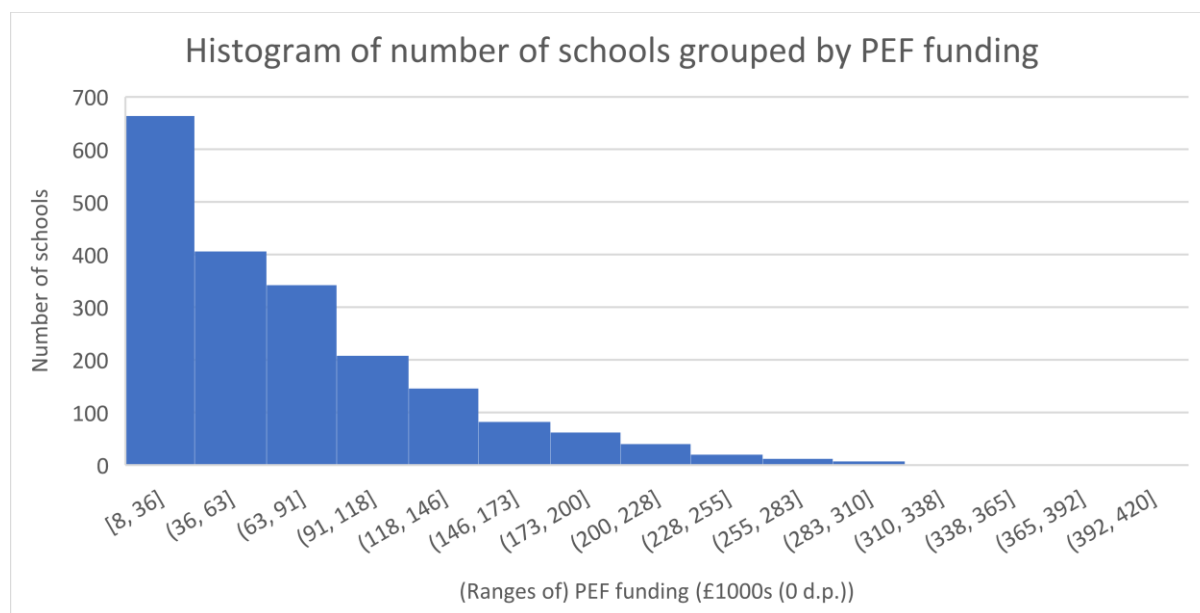
“We always work in partnership with local education staff to produce data which they can use to evidence our approach, adding this to their schools-based evidence.”

Interventions led by third sector organisations are often focused on the health and wellbeing of young people and their families. At a national level, there has been criticism that the breadth of learning and the aims of the curriculum are not reflected in the focus given to measures of academic (or more precisely, certificated) learning. The focus of the Scottish Attainment Challenge is threefold: literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. This reflects the structure of Broad general Education, which highlights these three areas as being the responsibility of all staff, ie should be mainstreamed throughout the learning experience. These three areas have been described as fundamental to learning and accessing the curriculum.

Evaluation is a key part of the SAC. For example, [current PEF guidance](#) states—

- Headteachers must develop a clear rationale for use of the funding, based on a robust contextual analysis, including relevant data which identifies the poverty-related attainment gap in their schools and plans must be grounded in evidence of what is known to be effective at raising attainment for children affected by poverty.
- Schools must have plans in place at the outset to evaluate the impact of the funding. These plans should outline clear outcomes to be achieved and how progress towards these, and the impact on closing the poverty-related attainment gap, will be measured. If, as a result of this ongoing monitoring, the plans are not achieving the results intended, these plans should be amended. Plans for sustainability should be considered as part of this.

There will be a balance to be struck between ensuring that there is a robust evaluation and a proportionate level of resource to undertake the evaluation, particularly when there is a relatively small amount of funding. The chart below²⁶ is a histogram showing the numbers of schools receiving certain levels of PEF funding. As one would expect there is a clear inverse relationship between the amount of funding and the number of schools receiving funding – the final three bins (ranges) with the highest ranges appear empty but have one or two schools in them.



Additionality

Funding through the Attainment Scotland Fund is intended to be additional. That is, it should not simply displace what the school or local authority would have had in place without the funding. [Current PEF guidance](#) states—

“Pupil Equity Funding must enable schools to deliver activities, interventions or resources which are clearly additional to those which were already planned.”

²⁶ Data from <https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-equity-funding-school-allocations-2021-to-2022/>

The [Attainment Scotland Fund evaluation: fourth interim report](#) stated—

“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.” (p61)

The formulation of the question in the quote above is arguably narrower than concept of additionality in the guidance, simply focusing on resource, rather than “activities, interventions or resources”. I.e. it appears to be about additional inputs rather than outputs. The EIS’ submission highlighted findings from a survey it conducted in 2018-19; in terms of additionality it said—

“A number of positive responses also referenced that the PEF funding had been used (contrary to Scottish Government guidance) to ‘plug gaps’ arising from other funding cuts. This reflects the strain that schools are otherwise under as a result of financial cuts and budget constraints to maintain support for children and young people whose outcomes in school are being impacted by poverty at home and related disadvantage.”

The Robertson Trust’s submission reported that there had been some displacement within the third sector with larger charities taking over where there had been existing relationships with smaller organisations. It said—

“We would like to see better judgement used when employing large charities for interventions that address the poverty-related attainment gap. Small charities report a displacement effect when larger organisations are funded or commissioned to work in an area where they have established relationships. We advocate that commissioners and funders use collaborative funding approaches so that new or scaled-up services add value in an area by filling gaps in the existing landscapes.

Barnardo’s Scotland’s submission is positive about the additional work it has been able to undertake as a result of the ASF. Its submission stated—

“The development of the attainment challenge since 2015 has allowed Barnardo’s Scotland to expand our support and reach more pupils in Scottish schools. Through the Scottish Attainment Challenge Fund and the Pupil Equity Fund, Barnardo’s school-based support workers have been able to get alongside children, young people and their families to support them in the challenges they are experiencing.”

There are mixed views and viewpoints on the level of additionality produced by the Scottish Government funding to close the attainment gap. Clearly there is more money going into the education system for this purpose. There is an added layer of complexity where those projects engage third sector organisations which work in the

community and with families, potentially roles that would not have been funded through schools in the past.

Ned Sharratt, Senior Researcher (Education, Culture), SPICe Research

16 February 2022

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