

Education, Children and Young People Committee

11th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 20 April 2022

Scottish Attainment Challenge

Introduction

The Committee is scrutinising the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the Scottish Government's policy commitment to close the poverty-related attainment gap.

Evidence taken as part of its inquiry thus far has included written evidence received in response to the Committee's [call for views](#), which closed on 8 February. The Committee has also held two formal evidence sessions, on [9 February](#) and [23 February](#).

During these sessions, the Committee took evidence from—

- academics and policy experts who have researched the Scottish Attainment Challenge, on 9 February, and
- third sector organisations that provide services funded through the Attainment Challenge, on 23 February.

The Committee has also held informal engagement sessions with children at Sidlaw Primary School, care experienced young people and young people supported by Barnardo's in Greenock. The notes of these sessions are attached at annexe D.

Committee meeting

At its meeting today, the Committee will take evidence from trade unions who represent teachers, deposes and head teachers—

- Greg Dempster, General Secretary, Association of Heads and Deposes Scotland (AHDS).
- Andrea Bradley, Assistant Secretary, Education and Equality, Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS);
- Mike Corbett, National Official (Scotland), NASUWT; and
- Jim Thewliss, General Secretary, School Leaders Scotland.

Supporting Information

- [EIS](#) and [NASUWT](#) provided written submissions, when responding to the call for views.
- SPICe briefings, prepared for this session, are included in the Annexes to this paper. These briefings provide information on—
 - the issues being considered at this evidence session ([Annexe A](#));
 - some of the themes which came out of the responses to the call for views ([Annexe B](#)); and
 - work and examples of approaches being applied in other jurisdictions ([Annexe C](#)).
 - Notes from informal engagement with children and care experienced young people (**Annexe D**)

**Education, Children and Young People Committee Clerks
14 April 2022**

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Education, Children and Young People Committee

Poverty-related attainment gap – Trade unions

20 April 2022

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. This week the Committee will take evidence from—

- Greg Dempster, General Secretary, AHDS;
- Andrea Bradley, Assistant Secretary, Education and Equality, Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS);
- Mike Corbett, National Official (Scotland), NASUWT;
- Jim Thewliss, General Secretary, School Leaders Scotland.

The Committee has undertaken two formal sessions with experts and third sector bodies. The official reports and papers are linked below.

- [9 February 2022, Academics and experts](#)
- [23 February 2022, Third Sector](#)

The Committee is also undertaking a number of informal sessions with young people, teachers and parent/carers.

The Committee issued [a call for views](#) which ran from 18 January 2022 to 8 February 2022. The Committee has [published 29 responses](#) including submissions from [EIS](#) and [NASUWT](#). A briefing on some of the themes from those submissions is included in Members' papers (Annexe B)

The Convener sought information on approaches and evidence from other jurisdictions. A short paper outlining some work and examples is also included in members' papers. (Annexe C).

This paper will set out some areas of interest which the Committee may wish explore with the panel.

Refreshed approach to the Scottish Attainment Challenge

In November 2021, the Cabinet Secretary announced a refreshed approach to the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Perhaps the biggest structural change was a move away from specific funding of the nine Challenge Authorities which, were determined on the basis of density of SIMD20 neighbourhoods, to that funding being spread across all local authorities based on the DWP's [Children in Low Income Families data](#) for the 2019/20 financial year. The revised funding approach is called the Strategic Equity Fund. The Challenge Schools Programme has also stopped, with the funding from that programme supporting the increased funding of PEF.

On 30 March, the Scottish Government published a number of documents setting out its new approach.

- [Framework for recovery and accelerating progress](#) ("the Framework")
 - The framework included a refreshed [logic model](#), covering national, regional, and school level activities.
- [Pupil Equity Fund national guidance](#) and [allocations](#).
- [Strategic Equity Fund national guidance](#).
- [Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund national guidance](#)

PEF and SEF Allocations to schools and local authorities have been set out for the 2022-23 to 2025-26 financial years. The intention is that greater certainty of funding will encourage longer term planning, guidance for local authorities on the SEF stated, "in line with the agreement on multiyear funding, it would be beneficial to prepare a 4 year strategic plan."

The Government also published a number of impact assessments in relation to its refreshed approach.

The Framework sets out the overall approach. It stated that the refreshed challenge will have a new 'mission'. This is:

"to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap"

The Framework contextualises the continuing work of the Scottish Attainment Challenge within—

- A need to continue progress, and to speed up progress and to tackle variation in outcomes between and within local authority areas.
- A need to address the negative impact of Covid-19 on children's health and wellbeing and learning.

It also stated—

“Improving leadership, learning and teaching and the quality of support for families and communities and targeted support for those impacted by poverty remain the key levers to improve outcomes for children and young people.”

The Framework states that work in support of improving outcomes for children and young people will not be achieved by schools alone. It said—

“Prior learning and research evidence shows us that schools and education services alone will not reduce the poverty-related attainment gap. The mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge is one that must be supported by ‘collective agency’ – the range of services, third sector organisations and community partners working together with families, with a clear focus on improving the educational experiences, health and wellbeing and outcomes of children and young people. In this way educators, who are at the heart of these collaborations, will play a vital role in breaking the cycle of poverty and make a long-term contribution to Scotland's national mission to tackle child poverty.”

The Framework has a focus on planning processes and ensuring that there is strategic coherence in local authority areas. The role of headteachers to determine PEF activities in their school remains but this is “freedom within a framework”. Local authorities will be expected to work with schools to develop annual ‘stretch aims’ on improving educational and health and wellbeing outcomes and closing the attainment gap. The stretch aims will include certain measures in common (“core”) and others that will be determined locally – in both cases the expected annual improvement will be determined at each local authority level and guidance on how to set these aims is included in the Framework. These aims should be included within the existing local authority education service improvement planning processes.

The Framework sets out monitoring and accountability processes. These will include—

- schools will “explicitly report on the impact on outcomes for learners impacted by poverty” to parent councils and their parent forum
- Scottish Government and Education Scotland will sample these reports annually to continue to inform our understanding of the approaches to tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.
- on-going and regular dialogue between local authorities and Education Scotland
- Local authorities' local education quality and improvement reports should include specific information on how SAC funds are delivering on the agreed

aims. These reports will be shared with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland.

COSLA's submission which was written before the publication of the refreshed approach stated—

“COSLA also agreed a series of principles with the Scottish Government to inform further work on roles, responsibilities, accountability, and progress for the next stage of SAC. COSLA will continue to advocate for reporting which is meaningful to schools and practitioners whilst avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy. This must take account of the broad range of existing reporting duties on local authorities.

“We believe there are tensions that need to be considered and resolved as part of this work. This will include ensuring that we avoid top-down setting of expectations and determining where the refreshed SAC fits the ongoing commitment to the school empowerment agenda.”

The Framework sets out the roles and responsibilities for local authorities, Regional Improvement Collaboratives, Education Scotland, the Scottish Government, the Inspectorate (which is listed separately to Education Scotland), and other services and partners.

Alongside the Framework was published a [Logic Model for the SAC](#). A logic model is a visual planning tool which represents the theory of how an intervention produces its outcomes. It represents, in a simplified way, a hypothesis or ‘theory of change’ about how an intervention works.

The SAC logic model sets out the inputs, activities and the short, medium and long-term outcomes from the programmes. There are four iterations of the logic model, the school/community level, the local/regional level, the national level and the programme overall. A logic model might be expected¹ to be clear about how the theory of change works, ie how the inputs cause the expected outcomes. However, the links between the inputs and outcomes in the SAC logic models are not clearly set out.

The logic model's long term outcomes include closing the attainment gap, recognising a wide range of achievements and professional and systemic outcomes. Short and medium term outcomes includes outcomes on readiness of pupils to learn, but are largely focused on the capacity, practice and culture of the professions.

The logic model is intended to be used to support:

- Planning e.g. support development and monitoring of stretch aims, school improvement plans
- Communicating the Scottish Attainment Challenge Mission
- Promoting system wide understanding of short, medium and long term outcomes

¹ See Public Health England's [Introduction to logic models](#)

- Collaboration and engagement with wider stakeholders on activities and the outcomes of the programme
- Forming the basis for evaluation
- Celebrating success

How interventions are decided upon

Nationally

In developing education policy and implementation plans, the Scottish Government takes advice from a number of bodies and fora. These include the [Scottish Education Council](#), the [Teacher Panel](#), the [International Council of Education Advisers](#), a Children and Young People's Education Council, Education Scotland, Local Government and external advice such as from the OECD. The Government will also take account of recommendations of the Parliament and Audit Scotland.

The [Scottish Government states](#)—

“This next phase of the SAC has been developed in partnership with and agreed by COSLA and builds on the evidence set out in the Scottish Government and Education Scotland 5 year report on progress towards closing the poverty related attainment gap, the Equity Audit, the Audit Scotland report on educational outcomes, and the OECD review.”

COSLA's submission to the Committee discussed its view on the process of agreeing the renewed approach to SAC. It said—

“Throughout 2021 we engaged in an open and constructive dialogue with the Scottish Government around the next phase of the Scottish Attainment, resulting in COSLA Leaders agreeing the refreshed structure of SAC funding last year. In particular we welcomed the much clearer links between tackling poverty directly and efforts to tackle the poverty related attainment gap, the multi-year allocation for SAC funding and the funding for all local authorities, in recognition of their strategic role in the programme.”

It is not clear to what extent the Government has consulted with teaching representatives in developing its refreshed approach to SAC, either through the Scottish Education Council or directly with trade unions.

Locally

Commenting on the existing (pre-refresh) SAC model, COSLA's submission stated—

“The structure of funding under the original SAC resulted in a lack of clarity in the role of local authorities, with a greater expectation placed upon Challenge Authorities in line with the additional funding they received from the Scottish Government. However, the role of 'Non-Challenge Authorities' was unclear, regarding their role in supporting schools to use their Pupil Equity Fund, and the Challenge Schools in their use of additional funding.”

The Framework provides details on the expected role of the central local authority in setting the local strategic plans and aims, supporting schools and reflecting on schools' plans in developing their improvement plans (including the SAC aspects of those) in a two way process.

The Guidance for Strategic Equity Funding states—

“Local authorities should work strategically across their school communities, which includes children and young people and their families, and collaboratively with their school leaders and with Regional Improvement Collaboratives to develop approaches to improving the health and wellbeing and educational attainment and achievement of children and young people impacted by poverty.

“Consideration should be given to how the local authority can work with wider local services, such as Community Learning and Development, Social Work or Family Services, and with community or third sector partners to support the health and wellbeing, attainment and outcomes of children and young people impacted by poverty.

“The three organisers of learning and teaching; leadership; and, families and communities should shape local approaches.”

The Guidance also states—

“When planning for the use of Strategic Equity Funding consideration should be given to the totality of Attainment Scotland Funding in local authorities and how the plans read across to wider local service plans to support children and young people impacted by poverty.

“Local authorities should also consider how the plans for the use of Strategic Equity Funding will support the six priority family types identified by the Scottish Government as being at highest risk of experiencing child poverty:

- Lone parent families
- Minority ethnic families
- Families with a disabled adult or child
- Families with a young mother (under 25)
- Families with a child under one
- Larger families (3+ children)”

The Framework states that planning for SEF should encompass all of the SAC funding in the area. It stated—

“In planning strategic local approaches to achieving the Scottish Attainment Challenge mission, local authorities should **consider the totality of Attainment Scotland Funding** coming into the local authority and, working with headteachers in recognition of their decision making role in the use of

PEF, consider how this is best utilised to enhance local plans to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. Local authorities should co-create plans with stakeholders.”

The NASUWT’s submission stated—

“The Union recommends that procedures set out a clear process for consultation with workforce unions on spending decisions both at Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (LNCT) level and school level. Ideally, any guidance should operationalise the expected collaboration.”

A key aspect of the planning by local authorities will be the setting of local stretch aims. These are expected to be set collaboratively with schools. The Framework describes the process of setting the aims as being a “result of robust evidence-informed self-evaluation, supported and challenged through professional dialogue with Education Scotland.”

Updated national PEF guidance says, “Local authorities are advised to issue specific complementary guidance about how the funding will operate locally.”

In schools

The revised key principles of the new PEF guidance have changed, albeit not substantially, from previous iterations. These principles include—

- A requirement that PEF be spent on activities, approaches or resources that are clearly additional and aimed at supporting children and young people (and their families if appropriate) affected by poverty to achieve their full potential.
- Teachers, parents and carers, children and young people and other key stakeholders should be meaningfully involved throughout the processes of planning, implementing and evaluating approaches. The guidance highlights a [participatory budgeting approach](#).
- Headteachers must develop a clear rationale for use of the funding, based on a robust contextual analysis of relevant data which identifies the poverty-related attainment gap in their schools and learning communities and plans must be grounded in evidence of what is known to be effective at raising attainment for children affected by poverty.
- These interventions should focus on targeted improvement activity in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.
- 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.
- The operation of the Pupil Equity Funding should be included within existing planning procedures and should be easily accessible to stakeholders. This must provide clarity to stakeholders on how Pupil Equity Funding is being used and its expected impact.

As with previous years, the guidance highlights a number of resources which can support schools in deciding how to spend PEF monies. These include—

- [Scottish Attainment Challenge – Self-evaluation resource](#)
- [Getting It Right For All Learners during COVID-19](#)
- [Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit](#)
- [Guidance on working with the third sector](#)
- Accessing advice from Attainment Advisors who “can be integral to facilitating good communication between headteachers, helping to share best practice and provide guidance on effective planning, implementation and evaluation of interventions in schools, local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives.”

The guidance stated that Education Scotland are in the process of developing an Equity Toolkit which is expected to be available from the summer of 2022. It also highlights CPAG Scotland’s Cost of the School Day work which explores barriers to learning and participation.

In addition to the updated guidance on PEF, Education Scotland recently published [Pupil Equity Funding: Looking inwards, outwards, forwards](#). This publication was based on field work across the country and is intended to share practice and to “help staff involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of PEF to reflect and build on their current practice as we enter the next phase of the Scottish Attainment Challenge”. This work reported that “local authorities identified a number of areas they would like to further develop including updating local guidance, supporting increased collaboration with stakeholders, continuing to develop data literacy in staff and the way data is used to measure the impact of PEF.” It concluded—

“In light of the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge it will be important for school leaders and local authority staff to work together to consider how they will build on current practice to:

- report robustly on the impact of PEF on children and young people affected by poverty
- ensure clear roles and responsibilities for headteachers, local authority officers and attainment advisors in relation to PEF
- develop longer-term planning which will maximise funding and allow engagement with partners to deliver the most appropriate approaches for closing poverty-related gaps
- meaningfully involve children, young people and their parents in the planning, implementation and evaluation of PEF”

The final bullet is reflected in some of the submissions the Committee received. Connect reported patchy engagement with parents and carers in planning PEF interventions. The EIS' submission stated—

“There could be efforts made in the context of the Empowerment agenda to encourage properly collegiate dialogue and decision-making at school level as to how PEF money and/or any other funds disbursed individually to schools through SAC should be spent. The 2018-19 EIS research found that teachers are not universally involved in such discussions, this underlined by the fact that more than 10% were not only excluded from discussions but unaware of how PEF was being spent in their schools.”

One change in the PEF guidance between 2021 and 2022 is that the meaningful involvement of “teachers, parents and carers, children and young people and other key stakeholders” includes “implementing and evaluating” as well as planning approaches funded by PEF.

How the Scottish Attainment Challenge is impacting on outcomes

Nationally

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 evaluation highlighted a mixed picture in terms of the quantitative data. It says—

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

The evaluation also reported that the majority of headteachers observed an improvement in closing the attainment gap. The evaluation also found evidence of continuing culture change in terms of greater collaboration, understanding the barriers faced by pupils and families affected by poverty, and embedding approaches to equity in practice.

The evaluation also noted the complexity of this area and that “it remains difficult to assess the reasons behind any observed improvement in attainment or closing the poverty-related attainment gap, and whether these changes have occurred as a direct result of the fund.”

At the same time as the fourth annual progress report, the Scottish Government published [Closing the poverty-related attainment gap: progress report 2016 to 2021](#) looking at progress across the last Parliament. Unsurprisingly, similar themes were explored as in the fourth annual evaluation. It said—

“Over the 5-year time period a number of key elements have been put in place that provide strong foundations for on-going progress. Important strengths of the Scottish approach include: a systemic change in terms of culture, ethos and leadership; a strengthened awareness of the barriers facing children and young people adversely affected by socio-economic disadvantage; the significant role of local authorities in driving forward a strategic vision for equity at local level.” (p6)

Audit Scotland published its report [Improving outcomes for young people through school education](#) in March 2021. The Audit Scotland report stated—

“The poverty-related attainment gap remains wide and inequalities have been exacerbated by Covid-19. Progress on closing the gap has been limited and falls short of the Scottish Government’s aims. Improvement needs to happen more quickly and there needs to be greater consistency across the country. The government and councils recognise that addressing inequalities must be at the heart of the response to Covid-19, longer-term recovery and improving education.”

It also stated—

“Given the level of resource that has been targeted through the ASF and the slow rate of improvement in attainment, if the ASF continues in some form beyond the current funding period the Scottish Government needs to be clearer about the anticipated pace of change, identify and measure against appropriate milestones, and consider the lessons about what works in determining how funding is directed.”

The Framework setting out the refreshed approach began by acknowledging that more progress is required. It said—

“The first five years of the Scottish Attainment Challenge saw much progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap but at a limited pace. The pandemic disrupted the learning of our children and young people and had a disproportionate impact on children affected by poverty. The refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge programme, backed by a further commitment of £1 billion from Scottish Government through the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF), aims to address these challenges and ensure that equity lies at the heart of the education experience for all.”

Locally and at school levels

Education Scotland's recently published [Pupil Equity Funding: Looking inwards, outwards, forwards](#) provides details of how local authorities and schools are delivering PEF funded activities in practice. It discusses how local authorities are supporting better data literacy in schools as well as "a wide range of professional learning to support the planning, use, monitoring and reporting of PEF".

Education Scotland reported—

"All local authorities report that PEF is contributing to improving outcomes for children and young people experiencing poverty. However, several pointed out that it was difficult to attribute improvements to PEF alone.

...

"Headteachers described a wide range of positive impacts as a result of approaches and interventions funded by PEF. Those that were mentioned most often included increased engagement with families, improved attainment, increased awareness of poverty-related barriers, reduced costs associated with school, improvements in health and well-being and increased staff capacity. Other successes mentioned included increased positive destinations, increased attendance and changes in culture."

The Framework reiterated how schools ought to report outcomes of PEF activity. It also stated that these reports would be sampled and reported on nationally. It said—

"In line with arrangements for Pupil Equity Funding since its roll-out in 2017/18, schools are expected to incorporate details of their Pupil Equity Funding plans and explicitly report on the impact on outcomes for learners impacted by poverty within existing reporting processes to their Parent Council and Forum, including in their annual Standards and Quality Reports.

"These reports should be made publicly available so that parents can understand what is happening in their school.

"Scottish Government and Education Scotland will sample these reports annually to continue to inform our understanding of the approaches to tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.

"Key findings from this sampling will be made available to local authorities and schools."

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.

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 Framework and new suite guidance for PEF and SEF reiterate that funding should be used for additional purposes. The Framework stated—

“This is additional resource to enhance or up-scale existing, or support new or additional, targeted approaches to tackling the poverty-related attainment gap and improving outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty.”

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

8 April 2022

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The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP www.parliament.scot

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Education, Children and Young People Committee

Poverty-related attainment gap - Submissions

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?

The Committee's call for views was structured around these questions. The [Committee has published 29 responses](#) from a range of organisations and individuals.

This paper is intended to provide members with a flavour of the responses and the themes from those submissions.

What has worked well

Respondents support the broad policy aim of improving outcomes for pupils from more deprived backgrounds.

Some respondents suggested that the SAC had led to better awareness and focus on supporting children from lower income families. NASUWT stated—

“The SAC, and associated Pupil Equity Funding (PEF), has successfully provided additional targeted resources aimed at tackling the poverty-related attainment gap and further increased awareness politically, socially and within the education sector of the damaging impact of poverty upon children.”

Some supported the devolution of spending. CELCIS' submission stated—

We support the ethos of funding being targeted as close to the needs of children and families as possible and decisions around how funding can best support them being made by the people who know them best.”

A number of respondents highlighted the interaction between SAC and other policy aims, such as improving collaboration and empowering teachers, schools and local authorities to develop their own approaches. Save the Children's submission stated—

“We welcome the commitment to continued action, investment and the efforts of services and professionals across Scotland. Our experience suggests that different funding streams have enabled collaboration between schools and local authority Community Learning and Development (CLD) teams, encouraging partnership working, innovation and facilitating signposting to other services.”

And, in terms of impact, Save the Children's submission continued—

It has increased capacity, provided direct financial support to enable children from low-income families to participate more fully in school activities with additional cost, and provided an initial way to support pupils with digital devices in the early stages of the pandemic. By investing directly in schools, school leaders were enabled and trusted to develop solutions that worked in their specific context, while local authority investment in the Attainment Challenge authorities provided an additional focus that complemented schools with communities most affected by poverty. This investment was necessary to enable school based and local authority wide initiatives and there have been some positive impacts. Despite positive signs and the dedicated efforts of professionals and services we're not yet seeing this translate into reducing the gap in children's outcomes at key stages.”

Schools-based policy intervention

A number of respondents suggested that the focus on closing the attainment gap needs to extend beyond schools.

Children in Scotland's highlighted the importance of early years. Connect's submission stated—

“[A] limitation is that PEF excludes dedicated early years settings: this flies in the face of clear evidence about the positive impact of early learning and childcare for all children, particularly those whose life experience is impacted by poverty.”

Colleges Scotland highlighted the role of colleges in supporting the learning of young people from more deprived areas. It suggested that there is a missed opportunity “in not allocating elements of the Attainment Challenge Funding towards the college sector”.

Universities Scotland also suggested that there could be greater policy alignment with other sectors. Its submission stated—

“It is our view that all parts of Scotland’s education sector need to be thought of as an entire ecosystem. This is entirely different from taking a homogenous approach to all parts of the system, which would be inappropriate. We strongly believe that we can achieve more in addressing educational inequality as a country if our efforts are strategically aligned and joined-up. We also think there is potential to take a whole-ecosystem approach far more successfully than has been achieved so far.”

The Robertson Trust’s submission argued that the policy aim to support education outcomes of children from deprived families should be considered within the wider policy of reducing child poverty. It said—

“Firstly, it’s worth remembering the bigger picture. The poverty-related attainment gap has one key cause: poverty. The work of schools can address this gap, but schools cannot work in isolation. There is a wider system of support, cutting across a number of statutory sectors, that families in poverty need to bridge gaps in attainment. Children only spend a small proportion of their time in school. Focusing on school-based solutions to the poverty-related attainment gap misses a significant part of the landscape of children’s life. There is a need for a wider focus on the role that families, communities, and wider society plays in addressing the attainment gap, such as strategies that are underpinned by parental engagement and whole-family support.”

CELCIS noted that some funding under the Attainment Scotland Fund is available to other departments. For example, local authorities have flexibility over the spending of the Care Experienced Young People Fund. CELCIS stated—

“We are supportive of the recognition that school alone cannot, and should not, seek to close the ‘poverty related gap’, and the approach of disbursing some of the Attainment Challenge Funding jointly to education and social work in recognition of this is helpful, and one that we would be keen to see continue.”

Save the Children’s submission highlighted the importance of parental engagement in children’s learning. It also said—

“What happens at home, in communities, before children start school, and beyond the school gate matters. The policy landscape allows for holistic action that encompasses the full experience of the child from birth to leaving school, yet often this opportunity is not fully realised.”

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.

“To achieve equity in education, we are clear that local authorities and schools’ need full flexibility to work collaboratively with pupils, parents/carers, and partners well beyond the “school gate” in relation to how they deploy the totality of funding - working with services and partners out with education.”

Measuring impact

The EIS, suggested that, at the time of a survey it undertook in 2019, there were mixed views about the impacts of interventions funded through PEF. The EIS reported—

“When asked if they thought that PEF funding was raising attainment among the most deprived children and young people, 26% answered yes; 31% no; and 43% said that they didn’t know.

“Respondents were also asked about their overall perception of the success of the additional PEF funding for their school. Just under half (47%) of respondents thought that the PEF funding had been successfully used albeit that robust evaluation of the projects it had funded had not been possible within such short timescales.

“Some specifically commented that whilst increased attainment may not have been evident within short the timescales in which interventions had been set up, for those who had been targeted, social skills, confidence and self-esteem, and attendance had improved.”

The EIS also provided details of how impact has been measured. It reported that its members had identified the following methods—

- Established quality assurance processes
- Tests of change
- Pupil tracking, including using systems that enable drill-down to relevant individual qualitative data (It is felt in some cases that the amount of tracking and monitoring is disproportionate and burdensome-‘ death by spreadsheet’ type scenarios)
- Attendance figures
- Benchmarking assessments for Literacy and Numeracy
- SNSAs in some areas

The Auditor General for Scotland said—

“Schools and councils are getting better at identifying needs, reviewing what works, and determining the impact on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. They are being supported in this by the Regional Improvement Collaboratives and Education Scotland. But there is scope to achieve greater

consistency and impact across the system through evaluation and transfer of learning. ...

“It is hard to identify the long-term impact of SAC and the ASF on outcomes at this stage as it will take time for changes to filter through. Performance data suggests that the impact of the funding on attainment is limited so far.”

The Robertson Trust suggested that the Scottish Government be clear on how the additional funding is being spent, which interventions or strategies are successful and “how, where, when and for whom, do these strategies work best”, and how are schools and local authorities taking a participative approach.

The NASUWT submission said—

“There have been isolated examples of good practice from individual schools utilising the SAC funding streams; however, these are often isolated, and insufficient opportunity has been taken to share these successes and facilitate any learning where the results have been disappointing.”

The NASUWT also argued that the onus on undertaking evaluation ought to fall on the Scottish Government and local authorities rather than schools. One individual set out some of the challenges in determining impact at a school-level. Louise Moir’s submission stated—

“Within school the challenge with a small number of young people involved is how to show progress and be able to pinpoint it to particular interventions. We find that it tends to be part of a bigger picture which can prove problematic so perhaps some further support for schools in this position from a central resource would be useful and would aid in this effort to show impact from the funds provided?”

Some submissions argued 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.

Some respondents argued that measures of health and wellbeing need to be improved. The AGS stated—

“There is a lack of consistent and robust national data in the National Improvement Framework on wider outcomes, such as wellbeing, that have been identified as priorities for education in Scotland. This makes it difficult to assess if the Scottish Government is achieving its priorities. It is always important that national and local policy sets out what outcomes it intends to achieve, and that data and evidence are available to measure progress and take further action if needed.”

Children in Scotland’s submission argued that wellbeing should be “the central focus of the curriculum”.

Additional resource

Funding through the Attainment Scotland Fund is intended to be additional. 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.”

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.”

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.

Decision making

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.

For example in relation to PEF funding, [heads and senior leaders are expected to](#)—

“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.”

Heads should also include “parents and carers, children and young people and other key stakeholders” meaningfully in the planning process.

The EIS' submission stated—

“There could be efforts made in the context of the Empowerment agenda to encourage properly collegiate dialogue and decision-making at school level as to how PEF money and/or any other funds disbursed individually to schools through SAC should be spent. The 2018-19 EIS research found that teachers are not universally involved in such discussions, this underlined by the fact that more than 10% were not only excluded from discussions but unaware of how PEF was being spent in their schools.”

Connect’s submission stated—

“From our work with parents and parent groups, we know that some schools involve parents/Parent Councils on decisions around Pupil Equity Funding, while others do not.”

COSLA’s submission suggested that the accountability structures and the role of some local authorities had been unclear. It said—

“The structure of funding under the original SAC resulted in a lack of clarity in the role of local authorities, with a greater expectation placed upon Challenge Authorities in line with the additional funding they received from the Scottish Government. However, the role of ‘Non-Challenge Authorities’ was unclear, regarding their role in supporting schools to use their Pupil Equity Fund, and the Challenge Schools in their use of additional funding.

“We are clear that local authorities are essential in providing strategic leadership and support. This includes support for improvement, addressing recruitment challenges and ensuring Best Value, for example in more strategic approaches to procurement and commission. It is key to recognise and value this role, and we have advocated for an appropriate balance between strategic (Local Authority) and local (school/headteacher) allocation of SAC funding.”

Impact of Covid

The Scottish Government places the continuing focus on closing the attainment gap as part of the recovery from the pandemic. The themes of submissions cover similar ground to the Committee’s work on the impact of Covid in late 2021. The Committee will be familiar with these issues and in the interests of brevity, the themes are not summarised here.

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

6 April 2022

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.

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Some Examples of work and research to close the poverty related attainment gap

The relationship between family income and educational outcomes affects education systems across the globe.

A [2017 publication of the OECD](#) stated—

“As inequality both impacts education and is impacted by it, it is important to better understand how best to help ensure that all students, irrespective of social background, succeed in school and beyond.” ([OECD Spotlight 8](#), 2017)

This paper highlights findings from international datasets and also explores three individual policy approaches in England, the USA and Canada.

OECD

Equity and Quality in Education (2012)

In 2012, the OECD published [Equity and Quality in Education, Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools](#). This influential report contained a comparative analysis which sought to provide “evidence on the policy levers that can help overcome school failure and reduce inequities in OECD education systems”.

It made recommendations in two areas: “eliminating system level practices that hinder equity; and targeting low performing disadvantaged schools.”

At a system level, the report recommended—

- Eliminate grade repetition
- Avoid early tracking and defer student selection to upper secondary
- Manage school choice to avoid segregation and increased inequities
- Make funding strategies responsive to students’ and schools’ needs
- Design equivalent upper secondary education pathways to ensure completion

The fourth bullet may require some additional explanation. The OECD stated—

“To ensure equity and quality across education systems, funding strategies should: guarantee access to quality early childhood education and care, especially for disadvantaged families; use funding strategies, such as

weighted funding formula, that take into consideration that the instructional costs of disadvantaged students may be higher. In addition it is important to balance decentralisation/local autonomy with resource accountability to ensure support to the most disadvantaged students and schools.”

Some of these recommendations are more relevant to the Scottish system than others.. Scotland doesn't routinely practice grade repetition and mainstream schools are not selective. While parental choice does occur through placement requests, generally most children attend their local schools. The aim the recommendation is to avoid segregation, and to ensure “a diverse distribution of students” – this might lead one to consider the recommendation in a different light as schools may be as diverse or segregated as their respective catchment areas.²

In other areas, we can see Government action which fits with these recommendations. For example, the expansion of funded ELC and funding programmes aimed at schools with higher densities of pupils from deprived backgrounds. There is ongoing work to broaden choices in senior phase.

In terms of supporting disadvantaged schools, the OECD recommended—

- Strengthen and support school leadership
- Stimulate a supportive school climate and environment for learning
- Attract, support and retain high quality teachers
- Ensure effective classroom learning strategies
- Prioritise linking schools with parents and communities

This report also argued—

“Education policies need to be aligned with other government policies, such as housing or welfare, to ensure student success.”

The OECD noted that the recommendations aimed at school-level support would be applicable to supporting all schools but, “are particularly relevant for low performing disadvantaged schools, where they may be harder to achieve but can deliver improvements”. All of these recommendations are areas of work that the Scottish Government and its agencies are working towards, and there is overlap with six drivers of improvement outlined in the [National Improvement Framework](#).

PISA

PISA is the only large-scale international study of school-aged pupils' abilities that Scotland participates in. The OECD PISA survey provides data on 15 year olds performance in Reading, Maths and Science.

Reporting on the [2018 PISA results](#), the OECD said—

² For more reading on this, the Sutton Trust commissioned a report by NFER on the access to top performing schools for disadvantaged pupils in Scotland, Wales and England. [Selective Comprehensives: Great Britain](#) (2019)

“PISA shows that the impact of social background on success in education varies greatly across countries. The most impressive outcome of world-class school systems is that they deliver high-quality education across the entire system. In Australia, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hong Kong (China), Japan, Korea, Macao (China), Norway and the United Kingdom, for example, average reading performance was higher than the OECD average while the relationship between socio-economic status and reading performance was weaker than the OECD average.”

The OECD also discussed the interplay between socio-economic status and access to educational opportunities. It said—

“In many countries, the school’s socio-economic context influences the kind of education children are acquiring, and the quality of schooling can shape the socio-economic contexts of schools. If schools are popular, house prices in their catchment areas can rise, further segregating the population. People with fewer assets, lower income and less education end up finding housing where education and social opportunities are poorer. The result is that in most countries, differences in education outcomes related to social inequalities are stubbornly persistent, and too much talent remains latent. Although private schools tend to be more selective, which contributes to social segregation in the school system, in many countries most of the social segregation across schools comes from within the public sector rather than from social segregation between public and private schools.”

The Scottish Government’s research service [produce a summary of the survey in Scotland](#). Two measures are presented, **percentage share** of the variation in performance explained by social background (how strong the relationship is), and the **gradient**, how much score varies on average with each step (one point) in social background. The OECD analyse social background using the Index of Economic, Social and Cultural Status (ESCS) – this is an individualised measure based on responses to questions. Below I highlight some quotes looking at these measures for the 2018 survey.

In Reading—

- **The *strength* of relationship between social disadvantage and a pupil’s score was lower in Scotland than the OECD average.** About 8 per cent of the variation in Scotland could be explained by socio-economic factors. This was similar to the position for reading in 2015 (9 per cent) and 2012 (11 per cent), but less than 2009 (14 per cent). 17 countries had a stronger relationship than Scotland, 20 countries had a similar relationship and one country (Wales) had a weaker relationship.
- **The *extent* of the relationship between deprivation and reading performance (or “gradient”) in Scotland was lower than the OECD average** at around 32 points. This is similar to 2015 (32 points) and 2012 (35 points) but better than 2009 (44 points). Scotland’s gradient was lower than 16 countries, similar to 20 countries and higher than two countries.

In Maths—

- **The *strength* of relationship between social disadvantage and a pupil's score in Scotland was lower than the OECD average.** About 8 per cent of the variation in Scotland could be explained by socio-economic factors. This was similar to the position for maths in 2015 (11 per cent) and 2012 (13 per cent), but represents an improvement on 2009 (16 per cent). 18 countries had a stronger relationship than Scotland, 21 had a similar relationship and no countries had a weaker relationship.
- **The *extent* to which disadvantage was related to performance (or “gradient”) in Scotland was similar to the average across OECD countries** and amounted to around 31 points. This is similar to 2015 and 2012, but **still represents an improvement on 2009** when the effect of deprivation was larger (45 points). Scotland's gradient was lower than nine countries, similar to 30 countries and higher than no countries.

In Science—

- **The *strength* of relationship between social disadvantage and a pupil's score in Scotland was similar to the OECD average.** About 10 per cent of the variation in Scotland could be explained by socio-economic factors. This was similar to 2015 and 2012, but an improvement on 2009 (16 per cent). Nine countries had a stronger relationship than Scotland, 30 had a similar relationship and no countries had a weaker relationship.
- The *extent* to which disadvantage was related to performance (or “gradient”) in Scotland was also similar to the average across OECD countries and amounts to around 36 points. This is similar to 2015 and 2012 **but still represents an improvement on 2009** when the effect of deprivation was larger (47 points). Scotland's gradient was lower than four countries, similar to 30 countries and higher than five countries.

You might be interested in the comments of Professor Lindsay Paterson on this issue. [Writing in TES](#), he said—

“Inequality also fell in England, mainly by raising the low-status students while also raising high-status students. Scotland raised low-status students by less and depressed high-status students. It would not be reasonable to describe this as better progress towards equality of outcome in Scotland than in England.”

Eurydice

[Eurydice](#) is a network of 40 national units based in 37 countries of the Erasmus+ programme. It seeks to explain how education systems are organised in Europe and how they work.

In 2020, Eurydice published [Equity in school education in Europe](#). This report looked at education system-level factors that could potentially affect the socio-economic attainment gap. It drew on a range of data sources, including PIRLS, PISA and TIMSS databases.

An [accompanying blog](#) noted that variable influencing levels of equity varied between the primary and secondary sectors. In the Primary Sector, the report identified public funding per student and the “size of the (government-dependent) private schools sector”. The second of those factors refers to systems where there are private providers in the public system, the blog offers an explanation of how these two factors can contribute to equity in primary schools—

“More public funding and a smaller private schools sector associates with a lower degree of academic segregation (i.e. student performance variance between schools is smaller than variance within schools) which in turn associates with lower gap between top and bottom performers.”

In the Secondary sector, again the blog focuses on segregation, but in this sector it identifies how early or late the learner journeys of vocational and academic tracks diverge as being a key factor. The blog stated—

“The later tracking starts and the smaller the vocational education sector, the more limited the academic segregation, leading to a smaller achievement gap.”

Again the report had five recommendations or key messages—

- Increase public funding for primary level education
- Apply uniform school choice and admission rules
- Delay tracking as long as possible
- Spread low-performing students across schools
- Reduce grade repetition rates

City Challenge

The City Challenge began as the London Challenge in 2003 before expanding to include Greater Manchester and the Black Country in 2008.

The objectives of this work were—

- to reduce the number of underperforming schools, especially in relation to English and maths;
- to increase the number of Good and Outstanding schools;
- to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children.

An [evaluation of the London/City Challenge was published by the DfE in 2012](#). This sets out the aims, approach and outcomes. In terms of its approach, the evaluation explained—

“City Challenge was distinctive in a number of ways. It was underpinned by a belief that the educational problems facing urban areas should be addressed at area level, and that Local Authorities (LAs) and schools need to work

together to do this. Thus it aimed to improve educational provision and school performance across broad geographical areas, not simply in a specific group of participating schools. City Challenge focused on all aspects of the education system: working strategically at area level and with LAs, community organisations, parents and pupils and developing a range of specific school interventions which were closely focused on the intended outcomes of City Challenge. There was no single view of what schools needed to do to improve; all the interventions involved local solutions with key stakeholders (including headteachers and LAs) centrally involved in the decisions. The various activities and interventions were characterised by a belief that school-to-school collaboration has a central role to play in school improvement; a recognition of the importance of school leadership; and a data-rich approach to tackling issues and sharing learning.”

Interventions could be aimed at individual schools, for example through the Keys to Success programme. This would be bespoke support provided by ‘Challenge Advisors’ and National and Local Leaders of Education to support leadership, teaching, data literacy, and potentially structural changes. the evaluation stated—

“Overall, the most effective aspect of [Keys to Success] seemed to be that it was a highly supportive and encouraging intervention in which headteachers and teachers came to feel more valued, more confident and more effective. Pupils in KTS schools also talked positively about the changes in the schools they attended.

Another aspect was that schools would learn from other schools, including those from other areas and with similar characteristics. A strong emphasis here was on the use of data. Comparative data was published in which schools were grouped into Families with similar intakes. A further aspect was supporting local authorities to build capacity and work together. Objectives were tailored to each area to meet local needs and to ensure they were achievable and had local buy-in.

In terms of outcomes, the evaluation stated that the City Challenge areas achieved the majority of their initial targets:

- The fall in number of schools below the floor target was greater in City Challenge areas than elsewhere, and the percentage of primary and secondary pupils reaching the expected level also improved more than elsewhere.
- In London, schools in each quintile of 2008 attainment improved significantly more between 2008 and 2011 than in areas outside City Challenge (with the exception of the highest quintile of secondary schools). In Greater Manchester and the Black Country, the picture was more patchy; schools in the lowest quintiles of attainment (and in some other quintiles) improved by significantly more than those outside City Challenge areas.
- The attainment of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) increased by more than the national figure in all areas (with the exception of Greater Manchester primary pupils).

- The attainment gap between pupils eligible for FSM narrowed for London primary and secondary pupils, and Greater Manchester primary pupils.
- The proportion of Good and Outstanding schools increased in all three areas, despite the introduction of a more challenging Ofsted inspection framework.

The evaluation identified a wide range of learning points that arise from the experiences of City Challenge. These included:

- It is important for area and school level strategies to have clear and achievable objectives, and also to recognise that targets can have perverse effects;
- Tackling school improvement at area level has considerable benefits.
- It takes time to bring about sustainable improvement across an area, and three years was perhaps too short.
- Different forms of support are effective in schools at different stages on their improvement journey.
- There is a role for a team of school improvement experts, based on the challenge advisors, both in working in the weakest schools, and in working with LAs and at strategic level. Expertise can also be found in LA officers, Local and National Leaders in Education and other headteachers, and consultants.
- The system leadership role of Local and National Leaders in Education is an effective one, and benefits both the schools that they support and their own schools and staff.
- Bespoke solutions are important both in tackling the specific issues faced in each school, and in giving school leaders and staff a sense of ownership rather than 'being done to'.
- Arrangements that enable school leaders and teachers to share effective practice are extremely beneficial. These include conferences; a stronger school supporting a weaker one (which may also include soft Federations); groups of three, led by the headteacher of a more successful school; Families of Schools which had similar intakes; hub schools or knowledge centres; and the Improving Teacher Programme and the Outstanding Teacher Programme.
- The most effective strategies to improve teaching and learning take place in schools, and involve observing excellent teaching; opportunities to reflect with colleagues; and coaching in the teacher's own classroom.
- Weak leaders can be supported through coaching, mentoring and other development opportunities. However, in cases where the leader does not develop sufficiently, there is a need for a transparent and structured process to decide a way forward. Should the head leave, it is important that permanent arrangements for school leadership are put in place rapidly, as interim arrangements tend to delay school improvement.

- Perhaps the most effective aspect of City Challenge was that it recognised that people, and schools, tend to thrive when they feel trusted, supported and encouraged. The ethos of the programme, in which successes were celebrated and it was recognised that if teachers are to inspire pupils they themselves need to be motivated and inspired, was a key factor in its success.

The programmes overall were also characterised by flexible approaches from Ministers and the civil service. The Institute of Government published an assessment of the policy, [Implementing the London Challenge](#), in 2014. This highlighted the roles and personal attributes of policy actors in the success of the policy and developing trust the profession, schools and local authorities. It drew five lessons—

“Understand the existing assets in the system you can work with

While the combination of measures that made up the London Challenge model was novel, those designing and implementing it were not isolated from what was already happening within the London education system. The extensive contextual analysis that was undertaken by [the civil service team], and the early involvement of Tim Brighouse [London Schools Commissioner] and David Woods [former headteacher and the first London Challenge adviser], allowed them to shape the policy around some of the strengths that existed in London schools rather than having a narrow deficit focus. This included networks between local authority education officers, the existing development products of the National College, and the policy stock of the department itself.

“Keep the policy focused until you have a clear model to implement

The London Challenge was focused only on London secondary schools for almost five years before it was fully extended to primary schools and two new cities. This tightly-defined mission is regarded by many as a necessary condition for having a transformative effect, because – as Lord Adonis claims – ‘if you diluted the focus on secondary schools, you would massively dilute the impact’. Having a policy that was aimed at around 400 secondaries in London, and focused most closely on a subset of these, helped to make the problem tractable and to maximise the chances for in-depth learning by the adviser team and consultant heads. Had they gone to scale sooner or more rapidly, it is unlikely that these strengths would have had time to bed down.

“Create an ‘authorising environment’ that supports rapid but accountable decision-making

There was, in the early years, almost complete shared purpose between the leadership team. Relationships between [the minister, the senior civil servant and the London Schools Commissioner] were characterised by extremely high levels of trust, enabled by excellent communication and a sense of each being able to ‘play to his strengths’. To make the most of short feedback loops between officials and schools, the minister had to be willing to give officials significant discretion over day-to-day decision making to avoid bottlenecks, while also being brought in for more ‘political’ decisions. For both officials and the advisers, professional accountability was centred on regular, face-to-face

meetings, rigorous analysis of the data, and a learning culture – all backed up by strong project management routines. Ministers like Twigg and Lord Adonis were interested in the details of progress, but created conditions in which others felt accountable for the more granular choices in implementation.

“Give credible people the responsibility and means to move knowledge around the system

The involvement of respected figures such as Tim Brighouse, David Woods, George Berwick, Sue John and many others was crucial to being able to implement a policy that tapped into the expertise of the profession and had credibility with target schools. The London Challenge advisers acted as ‘connectors’ in a system that joined successful heads to struggling schools and between them shared insights into what was happening in different schools. Over time, the number of leaders working across the system grew, through investment in the London Leadership Strategy, and the connections within the system became denser – facilitating the shift towards a sustainable, practitioner-focused model. The department supported these networks, later extending consultant headship through the Local and National Leaders in Education programmes.

“Invest in creating shared purpose and strong relationships

A key characteristic of the way London Challenge was implemented was the proximity of civil servants and advisers. Regular contact, reasonable stability in personnel, and the fostering of mutual respect and humility in these relationships were essential ingredients, and time was taken to develop them. The civil servants who worked on the policy admitted to having an unusual ‘project-first’ mentality that set them apart from the wider culture of their department. Focusing on getting support to schools rapidly as problems emerged helped to build trust with Keys to Success schools and the attention of the London Challenge team became valued rather than resisted. This system relied on relationships, and in turn those relationships built on a sense of ‘moral purpose’ among the profession. This was constantly reinforced and tapped into by the positive framing that had been applied to the policy from the outset by Tim Brighouse.”

Harlem Children Zone and Promise Neighbourhoods

Harlem Children Zone

The [Harlem Children Zone](#) is a non-profit organisation that funds and operates a neighbourhood-based set of education community programmes for children of low-income families in a 97 block area in Harlem, New York.

The approach includes or has included—

- early childhood programmes with parenting classes;

- public charter schools;
- academic advisors and afterschool programmes;
- a support system for former students who have enrolled in college;
- fitness and wellbeing;
- supporting tenant associations
- counselling to families
- community centres; and
- employability schemes.

The HCZ takes a holistic and place-based approach to meet its aim of ending “intergenerational poverty in Central Harlem and lead the way for other long-distressed communities nationwide and around the world to do the same.”

The HCZ approach has garnered support and has been replicated in other areas across the USA and elsewhere. The impact of the programmes has been the subject of some debate. A 2011 paper ([Dobbie and Fryer](#)) discussed whether any positive impacts of the programme arose from only attending the HCZ Charter schools (privately run public schools) or if the schools and the wider community programmes improved outcomes. The paper found—

“Effects of attending an HCZ middle school are enough to close the black-white achievement gap in mathematics. The effects in elementary school are large enough to close the racial achievement gap in both mathematics and [English Language Arts]. We conclude with evidence that suggests high-quality schools are enough to significantly increase academic achievement among the poor. Community programs appear neither necessary nor sufficient.”

The paper described the school’s approach—

“Like many charter schools in New York City, the Promise Academy has an extended school day and year, with coordinated after-school tutoring and additional classes on Saturdays for children who need remediation in mathematics and English Language Arts skills. Our rough estimate is that Promise Academy students that are behind grade level are in school for twice as many hours as a traditional public school student in New York City. Students who are at or above grade level still attend the equivalent of about 50 percent more school in a calendar year.

“The Promise Academy emphasizes the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers and uses a test-score value-added measure to incentivize and evaluate current teachers. The schools have had high teacher turnover: 48 percent of Promise Academy teachers did not return for the 2005–2006 school year, 32 percent left before 2006–2007, and 14 percent left before 2007–2008. Each teacher has an annual meeting with [senior management in

the HCZ] to discuss their performance, and is supported by myriad behind-the-scenes efforts to make sure their time is spent primarily on teaching and not administrative tasks.

“The schools provide free medical, dental, and mental health services (students are screened upon entry and receive regular checkups through a partnership with the Children’s Health Fund); student incentives for achievement; nutritious cafeteria meals; support for parents in the form of food baskets, meals, bus fare, and so forth; and less tangible benefits, such as the support of a committed staff. The schools also make a concerted effort to change the culture of achievement, emphasizing the importance of hard work in achieving success.”

A [Brookings Study](#) published in 2010 analysed test scores and found that—

“The HCZ Promise Academy is a middling New York City charter school ... New York City are strong performers as a group, producing superior gains for students compared to traditional schools in that city. Thus the HCZ Promise Academy is up against strong competition. That it is in the middle of the pack is not an indictment of its effectiveness by any means ... students attending the HCZ Promise Academy are doing impressively better than students of their backgrounds attending a typical public school in NYC.”

The Brookings Study concluded that while the schools performed well, it was not convinced that the wider programmes contributed to this success.

A blog on the HCZ published by Yale noted that these conclusions have been [criticised on the basis of the limited data or metrics and how the data is contextualised](#). The purpose of the HCZ is intended to be holistic, the blog stated—

“To evaluate the Zone fully, the cumulative social impact of the organization on the entire Harlem community, not just specific results of the Zone schools ought to be measured. While academic success is an important factor in rebuilding a community, it is just one piece in the overall puzzle, not the puzzle itself.”

Promise Neighborhoods

Under the Obama administration, the USA’s Federal Department for Education developed the Promise Neighbourhood programme. This was part of a wider policy shift to support place-based initiatives. In a [2012 report on place-based policy](#), the DoE stated—

“In the education world, the focus on place is particularly important, as it gives the Department a mechanism to see how its investments focused on “in-school” levers of change interact with “out of school” conditions that affect learning and the interventions meant to address them ... With research showing that out-of-school factors influence kids’ experiences in the classroom, the place-based framework helps the Department move to “both-and” solutions.”

[Promise Neighborhoods](#) were a flagship policy intervention under this policy and 68 communities have been supported by programme funds since 2010. [The DoE stated](#)—

“The purpose of Promise Neighborhoods is to significantly improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children and youth in our most distressed communities, and to transform those communities by—

- Identifying and increasing the capacity of eligible entities that are focused on achieving results for children and youth throughout an entire neighborhood;
- Building a complete continuum of cradle-to-career solutions of both educational programs and family and community supports, with great schools at the center;
- Integrating programs and breaking down agency “silos” so that solutions are implemented effectively and efficiently across agencies;
- Developing the local infrastructure of systems and resources needed to sustain and scale up proven, effective solutions across the broader region beyond the initial neighborhood; and
- Learning about the overall impact of the Promise Neighborhoods program and about the relationship between particular strategies in Promise Neighborhoods and student outcomes, including through a rigorous evaluation of the program.”

The program is continuing and is supported by the [Place Neighborhoods Institute](#). In [a document explaining the approach](#) the PNI notes that economic mobility is a complex problem and “solitary, one-off programs struggle to move the needle”, a community-wide effort is required. However, the PNI notes that collaboration is not an end in itself and it highlights the role of leadership, accountability and data to support collective impact.

The PNI [highlights some positive early results of the programmes](#). The DoE began a [national evaluation of the programme](#) in 2021.

Ontario

Ontario has had a longstanding commitment to equity and inclusivity in education. It’s [Ministry of Education](#) states—

“Ensuring equity is a necessary foundation for improving student achievement, promoting student and staff well-being, and it’s a critical component of the student experience. The Ontario government is committed to the success of every child and student across the province, and it will ensure that linking student achievement, well-being and equity is the top priority in all Ontario schools.”

[Dr Carol Campbell](#), a Professor at the University of Toronto and a Member of the Scottish Government’s International Council of Education Advisers, has [published a useful paper setting out the Ontario Government’s “strategies and actions to advance excellence and equity for students”](#).

Dr Campbell’s paper focuses on the policy development between 2003 and 2018. She argues that there are two interrelated strands—

- a focus on closing the gaps in educational achievement and improving student success; and
- developing strategies and actions to advance an equitable and inclusive education system.

Under the first bullet, Dr Campbell discusses policies and strategies aimed at improving literacy and numeracy. She outlines a number of policy actions; a thread to many of these are supporting high quality leadership. Other themes are improving capacity, knowledge and focus at all levels of the system. Dr Campbell explains that the Government provided additional resource to create “Student Success Leaders” who operated at a senior management level in every school district focusing on improved numeracy and literacy outcomes and “Student Success Teachers” working in secondary schools who were allowed specific time to directly support students who were struggling.

In terms of outcomes, Dr Campbell stated—

“In examining the impact of these strategies and practices for the goals of increasing student achievement and reducing gaps in achievement; although results fluctuated over time and for specific grades and student groups, the overall trend was one of improvement.”

Under the second bullet, Dr Campbell’s paper explores policy development to support commitments for equitable and inclusive education. This covers issues such as bullying, positive destinations, exclusions, the demography of the workforce, better data collection, and the curriculum.

Ned Sharratt
SPICe Research
31 March 2022

Annexe D

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Attainment inquiry visit to Sidlaw View Primary School

Monday 21 February 2022

In attendance:

Kaukab Stewart MSP

Willie Rennie MSP

Michael Marra MSP

6 pupils from P2-P7

The pupils involved in the session have a diverse range of additional support needs and have accessed Aberlour support. This ranges from sibling sessions to support effective relationships, seasons for growth groups focussing on change and transition, 1-1 sessions focussing on understanding of health needs or family circumstances and building of strategies to support emotional regulation and understanding of emotions.

The session was led by the pupils as much as possible and focused on some preparatory work they had done together in advance.

Note of discussion:

The pupils chose to begin with the question ‘What do you think about school?’

Some felt that during the pandemic it was really confusing and hard to get their heads around what learning during lockdown was like. There was some help from the school to make it less confusing.

Others liked the quiet the lockdowns provided, it wasn’t as rowdy or disruptive as being in class. This made them feel better and able to get on with their work.

Being back in school feels noisier and distracting again. Aberlour has helped with this, for example by providing ear defenders. Being in lockdown has made some of the pupils realise they need quiet and peace to be able to get on with learning.

The school used Zoom and SeeSaw during the pandemic to continue learning and to communicate with pupils and families. Most pupils found this helpful, especially being able to direct message their teachers.

One pupil thought it was much better being able to work at their own pace during the pandemic, and not have to wait for classmates to finish their work before moving on.

Pupils said they were offered devices to take home with them to help with school work. One said they had to get help from a friend to learn how to use their device. All the pupils agreed devices are useful for learning but shouldn't be the only way.

Pupils thought there was more work to catch up on now they are back in school but they all agreed they feel ok about it.

The pupils also talked about the support they receive from Aberlour. They spoke about how the staff from Aberlour have helped give them tools to be able to regulate their emotions, such as anger and frustration. The pupils demonstrated techniques they use such as slow breathing, kit bags and 5 senses to help them calm and shift focus. Pupils mentioned that some teachers don't like them using the kit bag in class because it's distracting.

Pupils spoke about how these techniques have prevented them from getting in fights, or from becoming angry and frustrated with getting answers wrong in their work. One pupil spoke about tearing their work up and storming out of the classroom. Now, they can calm themselves, rub out the wrong answers, and try again.

Support from Aberlour is both 1-2-1 and in small groups or pairs. Pupils spoke about going with other people to begin with but building up to going on their own. They have set days and times they meet with staff from Aberlour, but there are some adhoc sessions and the length of time of each session varies. Pupils like having someone to talk to who listens and helps give them ways to deal with things that are going on.

Pupils spoke about how the techniques they have learned in school with Aberlour are also helpful when coping with home life, such as when they feel angry or are not getting along with siblings.

Pupils mentioned the classroom having a 'calm corner' where they can go to help them focus on their learning and get rid of distractions.

At the end of the discussion, the pupils were asked for a star and a wish – something positive they get through support from Aberlour, and something they wished was better. Stars were that they are helped to feel calm when they are upset or angry, the kit bags and the good support they get from Killy and Jade (Aberlour staff). Wishes were about being able to see Jade and Killy more often and get more support from them when they need it.

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Attainment inquiry virtual engagement session with care experienced young people (via MS Teams)

Monday 21 February 2022

In attendance:

Two young people supported by Aberlour

Stephen Kerr MSP

Ross Greer MSP

Note of discussion:

The discussion began with one of the young people talking about the support they received in school through the support base. This was a quiet, calming space without disruption or distraction, which helped them to focus on their learning. The other young person agreed with this and thinks the support base is really important for pupils who struggle in the classroom.

The young people spoke about the importance of the need for a flexible approach in schools about when pupils are in class and when they can access the support base. Pupils can ask to go there if they are finding it difficult in class but feel there is a stigma attached to this and pupils going to the base are seen as 'bad kids'. Sometimes pupils are sent there if teachers 'can't handle them' which again adds to the stigma. Teachers do sometimes look out for pupils struggling who might benefit from going to the support base, but not all teachers encourage this and sometimes pupils are not allowed to go when they ask.

They described the support base as a large room, with separate rooms off to the side, with desks, bookcases and windows. Support staff are based there and everyone who goes to the base has to check in with them. The separate rooms can be used by pupils needing 'chill time' or a quiet space, and the main area for pupils needing more support. They talked about the base being a place to see people you wouldn't usually see during the school day, and there was less of a boundary between learning and socialising which helped with building relationships. You could stay in there after you finish your work.

One of the young people also talked about their school having a sensory room which was great for all pupils.

They talked about the importance of Educational Support Workers, for both learning support and emotional support. Having that extra person there to support you if you need it and to help others see you are not a bad kid.

One of the young people spoke about not feeling supported enough with their learning during the pandemic, especially in relation to exams. This meant they left

early as a result, which they didn't want to do. They enjoyed school and think many care experienced young people do. It is an escape and a familiar, consistent safe space where you can be yourself with no judgement. They felt they discovered themselves through school life rather than home life. But there was too much confusion and uncertainty, so they spoke to one of their teachers and they helped them decide not to continue with school if it no longer felt right for them. The young person recognised the difference that good teacher support can make, this was a teacher they had a good relationship with since S1.

Both young people talked about the importance of conversations with support staff and that having someone to talk to is sometimes the most useful thing. This could be about problems with learning or if they are not getting on with a teacher. Sometimes just having a conversation helps them to go back to the classroom.

They spoke about coming back to school after lockdown and what that was like. One of the young people thought that online learning helped them get through work more quickly than in school. It supports pupils to work at their own pace and teachers in class can spend more time focusing on those needing extra support. The other young person mentioned that the school still sometimes puts work on Teams, not everything is classroom based now.

One of the young people spoke about the difficulties of online learning during the first lockdown. They went for 5 or 6 months without being able to access it, and had to go out of their way to apply for a laptop. They felt alienated from the rest of their class. The offer of technology and support did get better, but they had to use their Christmas holidays to catch up on everything they had missed. They said they felt lucky because they had some access but they know lots of people had none at all. The other young person talked about having no WiFi access during the first lockdown and needing to use data on their phone. This made joining meetings really difficult.

One of the young people spoke about choosing subjects for S3 during the pandemic, and that they had good support with this and it was explained really well.

The young people were asked about the attainment gap – what support works and what is missing. They agreed that every pupil who needs extra help and support should have an Educational Support Worker. Support should be designed to fit each individual pupil and not a one size fits all. Smaller class sizes also help. School should be a place where everyone can learn equally, with extra support as needed. Teachers should be more supported to know and understand when extra help is needed and what this can look like. They need more support in classrooms.

They spoke more about the importance of Educational Support Workers – sometimes they are the person to encourage a pupil to get up and go to school, or attend evening appointments. It's not just about the support they provide in school. It's helping with the other things that impact on learning. This again helps with the relationship and you are more likely to ask for help with your learning from someone you have a good relationship with. Getting access to this help and support outside of school can help with the stigma faced in school.

The discussion ended with the young people talking about the language used about pupils needing additional support and how this needs to change. The 'bad kid' label doesn't come from children. But the way adults talk about children can affect self-esteem. Anyone, child or adult, can have a bad day and some cope with this better than others. Support should be available to everyone equally to help change stigma.

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Attainment inquiry visit to Barnardo's Centre, Greenock

Monday 28 March 2022

In attendance:

Stephen Kerr MSP

Kaukab Stewart MSP

Stephanie Callaghan MSP

7 pupils from S1-S4

Note of discussion:

Group 1

- The young people spoke about their desire for more guidance teachers or support workers in school who have a specific job of supporting young people.
- Discussed the challenges of lockdown learning, specifically challenges with online lessons with little face to face contact, unreasonable deadlines being set out without enough support or understanding for circumstances at the home.
- Young people felt there was sometimes a lack of subject choice or opportunities for extracurricular activities.
- Extra support is needed for pupils with dyslexia – young people described not having access to their own laptop or individual scribe to assist with dyslexia because of lack of resources.
- Discussion was had about the desire for more practical subjects as well as active learning – young people commented that everyone is different so assessment and learning should be adapted.
- Young people want to be treated with respect but they emphasised that they are still young people – not adults - and they also want fun/outdoor learning to be incorporated into their lessons.

Group 2

- Young people spoke about the extra support needed for pupils with autism and how they have benefitted from this, helping them to understand how life is different for someone with autism and how important it is to have someone helping them that they can trust and open up to.
- Discussed the importance of relationships, having a support worker to listen and to help, to accept and understand. Not just in school but in community and at home too. Direct contact important to help build relationship and trust, as well as contact with parents.
- Building relationships takes time, took one young person a year to open up to their support worker. Need resources and services that are more sustainable to support this.
- Choice is important for the young people to get the right support – for example, when and where sessions with support workers happen. School can be a very draining place for people with autism and having choice helps to manage this better. It's good when schools support this in a flexible way.
- Schools need to look at altering bullying policies to make sure staff are aware and can manage situations appropriately. Needs a restorative approach. Bullying makes pupils not want to be in school and acceptance is not ok.
- There is concern for the young people at the thought of services being taken away and what will happen when they turn 16.
- School has a hub for 'cool downs' or others who need support to be out of class. But, some pupils have been abusing it which has ruined it for others. Not as easy to access this support now.