



Estyn

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a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

Tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools: working with the community and other services

July 2011



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Summary

The link between disadvantage and educational underachievement is still strong. Most schools still fail to target support specifically at disadvantaged learners and only a few analyse data effectively enough to identify disadvantaged learners. Most schools do not use their assessment and tracking systems well enough to monitor the progress of disadvantaged learners.

The few schools that support their disadvantaged learners well implement systematic, whole-school approaches for teaching and learning that benefit all learners and support individual disadvantaged learners by providing mentoring or help with basic skills and homework.

Nearly all schools see themselves as community-focused and work with a range of agencies. However, school leaders do not usually co-ordinate multi-agency working systematically enough to ensure that disadvantaged learners are supported in the most effective and timely way.

Only a few schools plan explicitly to raise disadvantaged learners' aspirations. Although many schools offer a range of out-of-hours learning, only in a few are these extra activities carefully planned to increase disadvantaged learners' confidence, motivation and self-esteem. Where schools have had the greatest impact on raising learners' achievement, staff plan out-of-hours learning to match the needs of learners and to complement the curriculum.

School leaders generally have not received enough training on working with the community or services, or on using data to evaluate initiatives to tackle disadvantage. Schools do not share best practice or collaborate effectively with each other in this area.

Most local authorities do not do enough to offer schools practical guidance on how to work with local communities and services, or how best to analyse outcome data for disadvantaged learners. Local authorities that work systematically with schools to tackle poverty and disadvantage have the greatest impact on learner achievement.

Main findings

- 1 The link between disadvantage and educational underachievement is still strong. In general, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds do not achieve as well as their peers. Most schools still fail to target support specifically at disadvantaged learners, particularly those who attain at average or above average levels. Schools are better at identifying and supporting low performing learners, whether they are disadvantaged or not.
- 2 Only a few schools have effective mechanisms to identify disadvantaged learners. These learners include those eligible for free school meals, those from minority groups, such as looked-after and gypsy traveller children, and those identified as being in need of additional support by the school's pastoral system or by services working with the school.
- 3 Most schools do not use their assessment and tracking systems well enough to identify the specific needs of disadvantaged learners or to monitor their progress. Most local authorities are beginning to analyse data to identify trends and patterns in the progress made by learners who are eligible for free school meals.
- 4 The few schools that support their disadvantaged learners well analyse data rigorously to plan and implement systematic, whole-school approaches for supporting disadvantaged learners. They have tailored the curriculum to meet the needs of all learners and have raised the achievement of disadvantaged learners by providing effective skills-based teaching and activities that support individual learners, such as mentoring or help with basic skills and homework.
- 5 Only a few schools plan explicitly to raise disadvantaged learners' aspirations. Although learners are offered a range of out-of-hours learning in many schools, only in the few best examples are these extra activities carefully designed to increase learners' confidence, motivation and self-esteem. Where schools have had the greatest impact on raising learners' achievement, staff plan out-of-hours learning to match the needs of learners and to complement the curriculum.
- 6 Nearly all schools see themselves as community-focused. However, schools do not have a common understanding of what it means to be community-focused. A few schools in disadvantaged areas have identified challenges in their local community and have strengthened community links to, for example, raise attendance rates, improve behaviour, raise the level of parental support and reduce the incidence of vandalism in the locality. However, too few schools are able to identify how community-based work has made a positive impact on learners' achievement.
- 7 Although most schools work with a range of agencies, school leaders do not co-ordinate multi-agency working systematically enough to ensure that disadvantaged learners are supported in the most effective and timely way. The few schools that engage most effectively in multi-agency working have established protocols and processes for this work, including setting up multi-agency panels. In this way, the schools can co-ordinate the ways in which partners can support disadvantaged learners. The most useful approaches encourage the sharing of

information and the removal of unnecessary duplication of support.

- 8 Most schools identify engaging parents as the biggest challenge in tackling the under-achievement of disadvantaged learners. Many schools, especially primary schools, have a good awareness of the range of problems facing the families of their learners, and a few schools work with parents strategically to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners. However, a significant minority of schools do not employ a broad enough range of strategies to engage parents.
- 9 Only a few schools have a specific objective to identify and target support at disadvantaged learners in their work on transition between key stage 2 and key stage 3. In too many cases, information about disadvantaged learners is not transferred effectively between primary and secondary schools. Generally, schools do not build on the links they have with other schools well enough to share and develop their strategies to tackle disadvantage.
- 10 Leaders and managers in schools that raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils successfully have a good understanding of the relationship between wellbeing and standards. They know that disadvantaged learners are more likely to feel anxious about school and that learners need to feel safe and confident before they are able to learn effectively. They know that they need to work with the community and with other services to tackle the effects of cultural disadvantage and poverty of aspiration.
- 11 Leaders in the few schools that support disadvantaged learners effectively evaluate how well each project or intervention raises learners' achievement. However, many schools do not evaluate the strategies used to raise the achievement of disadvantaged learners well enough to show whether they have been effective. Few schools have robust evidence of how their work has raised learners' standards of achievement.
- 12 Very few school leaders have been trained in the skills needed to tackle the impact of disadvantage, the skills involved in partnership working, engaging the community, or using distributed leadership in these contexts.
- 13 Most local authorities do not do enough to offer schools practical guidance on how to work with local communities and services to tackle disadvantage. Local authorities, like Neath Port Talbot, that work systematically with schools to tackle poverty and disadvantage, have the greatest impact on learner achievement. These local authorities are aware that simply producing policy documents and encouraging schools to meet targets is not enough, so they have established processes and systems that support and challenge schools more actively.
- 14 In too many cases, the different services within local authorities use their own tracking systems to monitor the progress of disadvantaged learners. Often local authorities do not share this information effectively enough across services or with schools to help schools with their own tracking and monitoring.

Recommendations

In order to continue improving the performance of disadvantaged learners, schools should:

- R1 use the findings of this report to plan ways of reducing the impact of poverty and disadvantage on achievement;
- R2 develop a more systematic approach to improving the standards of disadvantaged learners that includes identifying these learners, supporting them, and tracking and monitoring their progress;
- R3 make sure that the whole curriculum, including out-of hours provision, supports the needs of disadvantaged learners;
- R4 work with partners to develop solutions to the problems of disadvantage, including working with other schools more effectively; and
- R5 evaluate the impact of strategies to tackle disadvantage on learners' achievement.

Local authorities should:

- R6 challenge and support schools to use data to identify and monitor the progress of disadvantaged learners;
- R7 develop systems to share information about disadvantaged learners with schools and across services;
- R8 support school leaders to become better leaders of community-focused schools and to manage multi-agency working; and
- R9 develop a model of multi-agency working that helps schools to work strategically with a variety of agencies.

The Welsh Government should:

- R10 work with schools and local authorities to agree a more specific remit for community-focused schools.

Context

- 15 This report is the first of a series produced in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit to Estyn for 2010-2011. It looks at how schools are tackling child poverty and disadvantage to improve learners' achievement and wellbeing in Wales. It focuses particularly on the effectiveness of partnership approaches and community-focused schooling. The report aims to set the context for further Estyn reports on this topic over the next few years. These reports will look in more detail at the ways that schools are raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners.
- 16 There is a strong statistical link between poverty and low educational attainment. Overall, learners from poorer families or who are in care are more likely to attain at lower levels than other learners. As a result, it is often harder for these learners to gain high-skilled employment or to continue into further or higher education.
- 17 The proportion of learners eligible for free school meals is often used as a useful measure of the socio-economic conditions of a school's population¹. There is a strong correlation between the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and performance. At all key stages in Wales, learners who are eligible for free school meals tend to perform significantly less well than those not eligible for free school meals against a range of performance indicators (Tackling Child Poverty and Disadvantage in Schools, Estyn 2010). The gap in performance is larger in secondary schools than in primary schools (see appendix 3).
- 18 However, other factors also affect school assessment outcomes and examination results and being eligible for free school meals does not mean that a child is destined to underachieve. Children from relatively poor backgrounds can and do achieve at the highest level and schools serving poor neighbourhoods can outperform schools with more affluent catchment areas (Tackling Child Poverty and Disadvantage in Schools, Estyn 2010).
- 19 The 2010 Welsh Assembly Government statistics² indicate that after a peak in the mid-1990s, there had been a declining trend in the percentage of learners eligible for free school meals. However, in the last two years this percentage has increased:

¹ Learners are eligible for free school meals if their parents or carers are in receipt of certain benefits, and claim an entitlement to free school meals through their local authority. It is, however, an imperfect measure of poverty and disadvantage because not all families claim the benefits or the school meals to which they are entitled.

² StatsWales 2010

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Primary school learners eligible for free school meals	18.0%	16.9%	16.8%	16.2%	17.1%	18.3%
Secondary school learners eligible for free school meals	15.3%	14.7%	14.6%	14.2%	14.8%	15.6%

- 20 There is considerable variation between local authorities in the proportions of learners eligible for free school meals. This ranges from 24.1% in Blaenau Gwent to 8.7% in Powys. Over 20% of learners in Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent and Cardiff are eligible for free school meals.
- 21 The Welsh Assembly Government has implemented a range of policy initiatives in education and training in Wales over recent years aimed at tackling the impact of poverty and disadvantage on educational outcomes. These include the School Effectiveness Framework (Welsh Assembly Government 2008), Community Focused Schools and Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education (RAISE).
- 22 Research shows that socio-economic disadvantage is the single biggest obstacle to achievement in education and that poverty currently affects one in three children and young people in Wales. The latest child poverty figures estimate that 32% of children in Wales are living in households below 60% of the median income after housing costs have been taken into account. This represents approximately 200,000 children (Welsh Assembly Government 2010).
- 23 The Children and Families (Wales) Measure, which became law in February 2010, places a duty on Welsh Ministers to publish a strategy to reduce child poverty. The scope of the broad aims of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 reflects that the causes and the effects of child poverty are complex, multifaceted and cut across a number of policy areas. The Child Poverty Strategy sets out the Welsh Assembly Government's vision for tackling child poverty in Wales and focuses specifically on the need for 'integrated', 'family focused' and 'local' partnership working.
- 24 The 2003 policy document Community Focused Schools (Welsh Assembly Government 2003) describes a community focused school as one that "provides a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of its learners, their families and the wider community". The document specifically noted schools' engagement with their local communities as a key factor "that contributed to the success of schools working in challenging circumstances". However, our report on Community Focused Schools (Estyn 2008) found that only a few community schemes realise the full potential of bringing significant benefits to the whole community and there has been limited evaluation of the impact of

community-focused schooling on learners' achievement in Wales.

- 25 The School Effectiveness Framework re-emphasises the need for schools to work together with parents, the local community, local authorities, services and voluntary organisations to break the link between disadvantage and poor learning outcomes.
- 26 In 2010, Leighton Andrews, Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning identified three inter-related priorities on which the School Effectiveness Framework would focus:
- improved literacy levels;
 - improved numeracy levels; and
 - reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment.³
- 27 Between 2006 and 2010, the Welsh Assembly Government funded schools to deal with issues of poverty and disadvantage through its RAISE programme (see appendix 4 for details). The aim of RAISE was to “target the link between deprivation and attainment and to enhance the educational expectations and attainment of pupils of all ages”.⁴
- 28 In our survey on RAISE (Estyn 2009) we have found that, in most schools, the achievement of learners involved in RAISE-funded work improved a great deal. However, nearly all schools involved in the RAISE programme targeted learners by using criteria other than disadvantage.
- 29 The Welsh Assembly Government produced a strategy for the use of RAISE funding in 2009-2010 in consultation with local consortia of local authorities, the Welsh Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Education Wales. The aim, in doing this, has been to build on and consolidate the gains of the previous three years of substantial RAISE grants. The Welsh Assembly Government identified key emerging themes as a focus for future action. The themes were:
- multi-agency working;
 - schools' involvement with the wider community;
 - engaging parents;
 - nurture groups;
 - developing language and improving learning;
 - broadening the curriculum;
 - motivation, behaviour, attendance and self-esteem; and
 - support at transition.

³ Statement by the Welsh Assembly Government: School Effectiveness Framework, 29 June 2010

⁴ Welsh Assembly Government Notification letter to local authorities 2006

1 Do schools recognise the need to tackle child poverty?

Do schools identify their disadvantaged learners?

- 30 In the report on Tackling Child Poverty and Disadvantage in Schools (Estyn 2010), we found that schools are generally effective in identifying where learners are not achieving as well as they should, but do not always ensure that disadvantaged learners receive the support that they need. This is because the distinction between disadvantaged learners and underachieving learners is not well understood. Since that report, schools have made limited progress in this area, and only a few schools identify disadvantaged learners well enough to enable them to consider the most appropriate strategies to improve their performance.
- 31 Schools identify disadvantage in a variety of ways. Most schools identify their most disadvantaged learners as those who are eligible for free school meals. Many schools also use a broader range of criteria than eligibility for free school meals alone to identify disadvantaged learners. For example, these extra criteria include learners in families on low income, looked-after children, traveller children and data on where learners live (postcode or area-based data). However, most schools do not have good enough systems to identify individual needs.
- 32 Many leaders and managers in schools in areas of high socio-economic deprivation rely heavily on staff knowledge of the local community, families and the individual circumstances of learners to identify those who are most disadvantaged. A few schools use this local knowledge effectively and, in these cases, staff support learners sensitively and have a good understanding of their individual needs.
- 33 A few schools, mainly primary schools, use their close relationships with a variety of agencies and services to identify individuals in particularly disadvantaged situations. However, in too many primary schools there is not enough sharing of information between services which means that learners are not always supported in the most timely and effective way.
- 34 A few primary schools with Flying Start provision identify their disadvantaged learners as soon as they enter education. These schools get to know their families early on and this enables the school to support individual learners' needs and encourages good relationships with parents. However, this means of identifying disadvantaged learners relies heavily on the quality of liaison between the Flying Start manager and nursery teachers, which is not consistently good.
- 35 A minority of schools in our survey have established nurture groups to support vulnerable learners. Most of these schools use Boxall profiling⁵ to identify learners who have social, emotional and behavioural problems. This is a useful means of identifying a group of disadvantaged learners with specific needs.

⁵ Boxall profiling provides a framework for structured observation of children in the classroom. It enables teachers to assess the areas of difficulty of disadvantaged children and to plan focused interventions.

- 36 Many teachers use routine target-setting processes and termly reviews of learners' progress as a means to identify learners' individual needs. However, many schools target learners only on the basis of academic underachievement, not on the basis of socio-economic disadvantage. Through these strategies a high proportion of disadvantaged learners may be identified as in need of support, because disadvantaged learners often perform significantly less well than their more advantaged peers. However, these approaches do not ensure that all disadvantaged learners, including those of average or above average ability, receive the support they need to fulfil their potential.

How do schools monitor the progress of their disadvantaged learners?

- 37 In Tackling Child Poverty and Disadvantage in Schools (Estyn 2010) we recommended that schools should establish systems to monitor and report on the standards achieved by disadvantaged learners.
- 38 This survey found that most schools have effective systems to track the progress of various groups and individuals. Leaders and managers use data from a variety of sources to analyse learners' progress. In the few best cases, teachers use tracking systems effectively to check the progress of individual learners and intervene when specific support is required. However, most schools do not use their tracking systems well enough to focus on the specific needs of disadvantaged learners, such as poor self-esteem, lack of aspiration or material needs, or to monitor their progress.
- 39 A few schools use information on educational and pastoral outcomes so that they can track improvements in learners' wellbeing and their academic achievement to assess the impact of their work in tackling disadvantage more effectively.
- 40 The standards of disadvantaged learners improve quickest in the schools with comprehensive data analysis and tracking systems. Schools that analyse information from a broad range of data and other sources gain a fuller picture of learners' progress and are more effective at bringing together a range of strategies to help individual learners. For example, a few schools use information from tools such as 'Pupil Attitude to Self and School' (PASS) alongside achievement data, to identify the range of needs that a disadvantaged learner might have.
- 41 In only a few schools do leaders and managers analyse learners' performance data to track the progress of groups of learners. In most cases the groups are identified by free school meals but, in a few schools, groups are identified by other characteristics, which include traveller learners or looked-after children. These schools identify the trends in performance of these groups and tailor teaching to meet identified needs. By tracking groups, these schools can target resources and strategies more specifically (see appendix 2, case study 1).
- 42 In most schools, the proportion of learners who are eligible for free school meals and are identified as more able and talented is very low. The few schools that identify high-performing learners from disadvantaged backgrounds have effective processes to identify their disadvantaged learners and use a broad range of means to recognise learners who are more able and talented in a variety of ways. These schools employ effective strategies to build learners' self-confidence and help these learners to

overcome barriers to their progress such as transport difficulties and access to specialist materials and equipment.

- 43 In the few schools where the provision for disadvantaged more able and talented learners is good, these learners achieve significant success. In the few very effective examples, schools use more able and talented learners from disadvantaged backgrounds who have achieved success as role models for other learners.

How do local authorities help schools to identify and monitor the progress of disadvantaged learners?
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- 44 Most local authorities are only beginning to analyse data to identify trends and patterns in the standards achieved by free school meals learners. A few authorities recognise the need to collect information to measure improvements in learners' wellbeing and are developing work in this area too.
- 45 All local authorities advise schools to monitor and track the performance of groups of learners. However, only a few authorities have good strategies to support schools to identify their disadvantaged learners. Local authorities that support their schools well share key data on the performance of disadvantaged learners with schools and train school staff to use the data effectively.
- 46 In the few best examples, workers from different agencies and services work together to identify learners at risk of underachieving. Schools benefit most where the local authority co-ordinates the work of different agencies to help schools to identify and target their disadvantaged learners. The various agencies pool their resources and information to identify these learners effectively, taking good account of their range of needs.
- 47 For example, Cardiff local authority is currently undertaking a pilot project to gather evidence about individual learners from multi-agency sources. This information is then mapped across all the authority's services to identify those learners most at risk of disengagement and underachievement and to enable resources to be targeted more specifically at the learners.
- 48 In local authorities like Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taf, 'community-focused' officers work directly with schools to collect information and data on a range of issues including attainment, attendance and exclusion rates, health and social care, work and employment, basic skills and crime. They share this information with the school and this broad information base gives school leaders a more comprehensive understanding of the current issues facing the communities that they serve.
- 49 Where local authorities have supported schools with their RAISE-funded work to provide baseline and other data on the performance of disadvantaged learners, they have given schools a good platform from which to evaluate the impact of the work they have done to support these learners.
- 50 In too many cases, the different services within the local authority use their own tracking systems to monitor the progress of disadvantaged learners. Often local authorities do not share this information effectively enough across services or with schools to help schools with their own tracking and monitoring.

2 How can schools raise the achievement of disadvantaged learners?

- 51 There is no single explanation for why learners from disadvantaged backgrounds perform less well than their peers. Schools that successfully tackle the educational impact of disadvantage use a range of approaches and interventions that address a complex set of problems. Estyn's report on Tackling Child Poverty and Disadvantage in Schools (2010) emphasises the importance of taking a whole-school approach to using a variety of strategies to engage learners to boost their self-esteem and achievement.
- 52 Material deprivation means that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds may not have access to books, computers, a quiet place to work, visits to interesting places and experience the wider world. Children living in deprived communities are also more likely to have low aspirations, low self-esteem and a negative opinion of schools and education.
- 53 All schools visited provide some interventions aimed at supporting particular groups of learners. Most of these interventions are aimed at improving the skills and abilities of learners who are identified as having, for example, low self-esteem or poor basic skills. Only a few schools in our survey identify approaches to teaching and learning across the whole school as a means to improve the achievement of disadvantaged learners.
- 54 The few schools that have raised the achievement of their disadvantaged learners employ a range of strategies well. These schools share common aspects to their success such as individual mentoring, an emphasis on skills-based teaching and the importance of whole-school approaches, for example, to teaching reading. These schools have collected evidence to show that these approaches have a positive impact on achievement (see case studies in appendix 2).
- 55 However, a few schools provide nothing more than interventions to improve learners' basic skills. Although raising learners' achievement in literacy and numeracy is important in tackling disadvantage, focusing only on basic skills is not enough to raise the achievement of all disadvantaged learners. Schools that successfully tackle disadvantage understand that a focus on basic skills needs to be balanced with other strategies such as raising learners' aspirations, developing learners' social, emotional and behavioural skills and ensuring that teaching engages all learners.

Learning experiences

- 56 Most schools in our survey have adapted the curriculum they offer to make it more relevant to all learners. In doing this, they have taken account of the Foundation Phase, the revised National Curriculum and Learning Pathways 14-19, which outline a core of prescribed knowledge, skills and understanding appropriate to learners' age. The Skills Framework for 3 to 19-year-olds underpins these statutory frameworks to suggest how transferable skills can be developed.

- 57 In many primary schools, cross-curricular approaches, along with an emphasis on literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), are allowing teachers to tailor their teaching to the needs of all learners. In the few best cases, schools make a very positive response to the needs and of their learners. They take full account of their ideas and involve all learners in planning thematic projects. This approach boosts the confidence of disadvantaged learners and engages them more successfully in their learning.
- 58 A few schools in the survey have changed their teaching and learning strategies to account for the difference in learners' preferred styles of learning. In a few schools, these strategies cater specifically for the different approaches preferred by boys and girls, while in a few others teachers have consulted learners to find out how they felt they learn best. In this way, learners feel that they have more control over what and how they are taught, and this helps to improve their confidence that the school is helping them to achieve their goals.
- 59 A few schools have responded positively to learners' views by changing the time spent on different activities, for example by introducing shorter tasks, or by altering the timetable to extend and develop project work over longer periods. This has helped many disadvantaged learners to achieve better results (see case study 2, appendix 2).
- 60 A minority of secondary schools in our survey enable learners in key stage 3 to take essential skills qualifications. This strategy motivates learners and can develop their self-esteem. Learners say that it is valuable to get the qualifications before they move on to key stage 4 and that they feel more confident about what they are able to achieve.
- 61 A few schools have taken opportunities in the curriculum to explore issues of poverty and disadvantage and how learners may be affected in different ways. They have explored these themes in a range of subject areas, for example in English, drama, art and personal and social education. Teachers in these schools have helped learners consider how positive action can remove or reduce the stigma of poverty and to confront negative attitudes. For example, in Herbert Thompson primary school, which is situated in a significantly economically and socially disadvantaged area of Cardiff, learners made a study of the locality of the school, took photographs of things they would like to change, interviewed local residents and made plans to improve their environment.

Raising aspirations

- 62 Learners from poorer backgrounds are less likely to experience a rich home learning environment than children from better-off backgrounds. They are more likely to have a negative attitude towards school and to have lower expectations about what education may help them to achieve.⁶
- 63 Only a few secondary schools and very few primary schools have tried to raise

⁶ Poorer children's educational attainment: how important are attitudes and behaviour?
Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2010

learners' aspirations for educational success as a specific strategy to support disadvantaged learners. Although many schools work to enhance learners' self-esteem, structured initiatives to help learners to develop a positive attitude to education, strengthen belief in their own ability and consider their potential did not feature strongly. Even in schools where disadvantaged learners were generally well supported and happy in school, many did not have high-enough aspirations and those who did were unsure about what they needed to do to realise these ambitions. Many learners in the schools surveyed were unsure about the option choices they needed to make and did not think that the school did enough to help them plan for their future careers.

- 64 A few secondary schools visited emphasised low aspirations as a feature of parents, peers and the local community generally. However, these schools had not planned how they could address this issue.

Out-of-school-hours learning

- 65 Disadvantaged learners are less likely than their more advantaged peers to become involved in a broad range of cultural, sporting and other learning experiences. Hence, participation in a range of out-of-school hours learning activities is particularly important to disadvantaged learners. Such activities build learners' confidence, develop their ability to relate positively to adults and their peers, and improve their attitude to learning. When planned and implemented well, and monitored for quality and participation, learning outside the classroom contributes significantly to raising standards and improving learners' wellbeing.
- 66 Effective schools in disadvantaged areas attach great importance to extra-curricular and out-of-school-hours provision, including cultural and sport enrichment, as well as extra educational support such as homework clubs, held at lunch times or after school. Many schools in disadvantaged areas offer a good range of extra-curricular and out-of-school hours provision. A few schools' provision is limited to sports and performing arts activities, and such activities do not meet the needs of all learners.
- 67 Most schools in disadvantaged areas run breakfast clubs. In the few best examples, the breakfast club is structured and planned to include learning experiences. A majority of primary schools have found that their breakfast club has resulted in improvement in attendance and punctuality, and teachers have noticed that learners are more able to concentrate in lessons.
- 68 A few schools target specific learners who they encourage to join a club that would be of benefit to them. In Risca Community Comprehensive School, for example, learners with low self-esteem are encouraged to join a gardening club where they develop their social skills well. In most cases, these learners are identified through the pastoral system. In another secondary school, learners who have been identified through the PASS survey as at risk of exclusion have been targeted to benefit from after school provision. This has improved behaviour and attendance. However, there is no structured system to identify such pupils in most schools. This means that not all learners who would benefit from this support are included.

- 69 Out-of-school-hours learning can only have an impact on disadvantaged learners if these learners participate. Many secondary schools, where specific learners were not targeted, found that it was difficult to encourage a range of learners to participate in extra-curricular activities. There is a tendency for the same learners to participate in many activities.
- 70 Schools that offer activities that are specifically aimed at raising standards, such as homework clubs, often monitor take-up and assess the impact of the activity on learners' achievement. Where schools have had the most positive impact on raising learners' attainment, staff have planned out-of-hours learning to complement the curriculum. The case study below gives an example of this learning.

The E3+ programme

Context

The E3+ programme, 'Enrich, Extend, Excite', works with schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf where approximately 23% of learners of school age are eligible for free school meals.

Strategy

The programme actively targets groups of young people with particular needs because they are at risk of exclusion, or have low self-esteem and poor social skills. The groups also include looked-after children or those who are more able and talented. The programme works with a range of partners to accept learners who are referred onto the provision from various agencies.

Action

E3+ workers consult with learners to adapt and improve the programme. A wide range of activities is offered including hockey, art, trampolining, street dance, creative crafts, sign language, netball, photography, theatrical make up, ballroom dancing, journalism, kick boxing, skiing, horse riding, golf, quad biking and cooking, as well as room where young people can relax in a safe and caring environment.

Outreach E3+ activities have been developed in isolated and deprived communities within school clusters. The provision is targeted at marginalised communities, groups and young people who are disinclined to attend activities that are located in school premises. The E3+ programme has provided transport, subsidised mid-evening meals, free activities and community-based activities to overcome barriers to participation.

Outcomes

Learners involved in the programme identify the skills, such as team working and communication, that they have learnt through the activities. These activities engage learners and foster a sense of worth and belonging in the school community, and enhance feelings of self-esteem and wellbeing.

The number of learners engaged in E3+ provision has increased as the provision has expanded. In 2007-2008 there were a total of 101,360 contacts with young people engaged in E3+. In 2008-2009 the number of contacts rose to 227,405.

The percentage of 15-year-olds who reach the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics in Rhondda Cynon Taf has improved at a much faster rate than that of Wales as a whole. Over the last three years, this performance indicator has increased by six percentage points.

In many of the schools visited, learners benefit from involvement in out-of-hours learning which increases their confidence, motivation and self-esteem. Many schools monitor learners' attendance clubs in out-of-hours learning, but very few schools evaluate what learners learn in extra-curricular sessions. This lack of thorough monitoring and evaluation means that schools are unable to:

- assess the inclusiveness of these activities;
- exploit the full potential of out-of-hours learning; or
- measure the impact that this provision is having on learners' achievement and wellbeing or evaluate value for money.

Developing a community focus

- 71 Recent policy documents in Wales have emphasised the need for schools to work closely with their community to improve learners' wellbeing and standards. This community focus is particularly beneficial to communities suffering high socio-economic disadvantage (Welsh Assembly Government 2008). Our inspection evidence shows that schools that are successful in disadvantaged areas have strong links to their local community.
- 72 There is a lack of clarity and guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government on the role of community-focused schools in improving the education and services for disadvantaged learners in the most deprived areas (Tackling Child Poverty and Disadvantage in Schools, Estyn 2010). The Welsh Assembly Government circular, 'Community Focused Schools' (Welsh Assembly Government 2003) identifies "higher levels of learner achievement" as one of the benefits of community-focused schooling. However, it does not explain how the school providing community services can result in raised standards for learners.
- 73 As a result, schools do not have a common definition or understanding of what it means to be community-focused, even though nearly all primary headteachers and most secondary headteachers in our survey described their school as community focused. Primary headteachers who did not consider their school to be a community-focused school felt that their school was becoming more community-focused and that this was an important strategic aim of the school. A few secondary headteachers explained that their school was not community-focused because the majority of learners in the school did not live in the community in which the school was situated. However this explanation fails to recognise the importance of the community or communities that the school serves.

- 74 However, schools identified common features in how they saw their own community focus. These included:
- being at the heart of the community;
 - having a welcoming ethos;
 - involvement with community groups;
 - sharing facilities with the community;
 - working together on community projects; and
 - engagement in multi-agency working to provide a range of services for both learners and their families.
- 75 A few schools considered their community-focused work in the more narrow terms of the community-focused schools' grant from the Welsh Assembly Government. In general, most schools are very open and positive about developing closer links to their local community, even if they could not define this approach in specific terms.
- 76 Primary schools in disadvantaged areas are more likely than secondary schools to recognise a broader range of strategies to engage with their local community. Many primary school headteachers work together with the local community in a way that is mutually beneficial. They aim to create close links with parents and place a high value on good multi-agency working.
- 77 Most secondary schools in our survey have a limited understanding of what it means to be community-focused. Most secondary schools have a good range of out-of-hours activities and many make the school facilities available for community learning and leisure activities. Around half of secondary school headteachers described their approach to community focus in the ways that the school might provide resources for the community rather than in terms of engagement with the community with the ultimate intention of developing an understanding of the importance of education and raising expectations.

Working with the local community

- 78 Nearly all headteachers believed that community links were very important and impacted strongly on the development of learners' social skills, their ability to interact with adults and their self-esteem. Many headteachers valued community links because they gave learners pride in their school, gave them a sense of belonging and helped to raise the profile of the school in the local area. However, only a few schools have considered how community-focused work has an impact on learners' achievement.
- 79 Most schools in disadvantaged areas have good links to the local community, for example to local businesses, the police, care homes, and places of worship. In many cases these are well established and are linked, for example, to charity work, personal and social education and work-focused education activities. Many schools, however, do not fully exploit these links to improve learners' achievements. The following case study describes how a secondary school working in partnership with a voluntary organisation has made valuable links to its local community.

Good partnership working with a voluntary group in the community

Context

Learners in Bishop Gore Comprehensive school in Swansea come from a wide range of backgrounds. Approximately 25% of learners are entitled to free school meals.

Strategy

To raise the achievement of a specific group of disadvantaged learners by offering learning support and establishing closer links to the local community

Action

The school identified a group of ethnic minority learners who are also disadvantaged and at risk of underachievement. The school works closely with the Ethnic Youth Support Team, a voluntary organisation which supports young ethnic males in the Swansea area.

Ethnic Youth Support Team provides a coursework and revision programme in English, mathematics and science to support this group of learners.

Outcomes

This strategy has had a significant impact on the achievement of these learners. In addition, the exclusion rates of minority ethnic learners are negligible as a result of the school's working partnership with Ethnic Youth Support Team.

The work with Ethnic Youth Support Team has had a positive effect on the learners and the school. Team workers are available to respond to different ethnic groups, improve understanding and tolerance, and build learners' self-esteem. The team works in the school every week, and this helps the school to make effective links to the local community, and to support its ethnic minority learners well. The school is also more aware of any issues in the local community that might affect learners' achievement.

Over the last four years, the gap between the achievement of learners eligible for free school meals and those who are not has narrowed in Bishop Gore. The performance of all learners has increased over the same period and all key performance indicators are above the average for similar schools.

- 80 A few schools are developing innovative projects that make links to local residents, for example by establishing a 'skills swap', where retired people and learners exchange skills such as knitting and computer skills. These activities strengthen the links between the school and its community.
- 81 Through the evaluation of their RAISE-funded projects, a few individual schools identified the positive impact of specific community-focused strategies. These schools identified challenges in their local community and strengthened community

links to, for example, raise attendance and improve behaviour. They raised the level of parental support and lessened the incidents of vandalism in the locality. However, too few schools are able to identify how community-based work has made an impact on learners' achievement or behaviour. Blaengwawr Primary school has developed a successful community-focused project that is mutually beneficial to its learners and the community:

The impact of partnership between a primary school and a residential care home for the elderly

Context

Blaengwawr Primary is a community school situated on the outskirts of Aberdare. Approximately 34% of its learners are eligible for free school meals.

Strategy

The aim was to create strong links between the school and a residential care home for the elderly after residents expressed worries about anti-social behaviour near their home. They did this by planning a joint project.

Action

Year 5 and Year 6 learners work with the residents in their home on local history, literacy and creative projects. The school has worked effectively with the health service, children's services and older people's services to ensure the success of the project.

Outcomes

Learners have learnt about communicating sensitively with the residents and have developed their social skills very well.

The school and the residential home evaluated the project thoroughly. The project was mutually beneficial. The learners helped the residents to engage in a range of activities, and learners improved their oracy and writing skills as well as developing their motivation and self-confidence.

The school has effectively integrated the community link into the curriculum to create a 'community classroom'. The project forms a significant part of the school's range of strategies to raise achievement.

Learners achieve very well in the school. The key stage 2 core subject indicator is well above the average for similar schools and has improved over the last three years. The gap between the performance of learners eligible for free school meals and those who are not has narrowed steadily over the last three years. Learners' results in English at key stage 2 are above those of similar schools, and the percentage of learners who achieve level 5 in English is significantly above that of similar schools and has improved over the last three years.

- 82 A few schools have good systems in place to evaluate the impact of their community activities on learners' social skills and wellbeing. These include learner and parental questionnaires, and teacher and support staff structured observation of learning. This makes it easier for these schools to allocate time and resources in an efficient and effective way.

Working with parents

- 83 The report on parental involvement in primary schools showed that closer links between home and school has a significant impact on learners' wellbeing (Estyn 2009). Most schools see engaging parents as the biggest challenge to becoming more community-focused and tackling the underachievement of disadvantaged learners.
- 84 Many schools actively engage parents and use newsletters and the school website as means of communication. One primary school has parents' handbooks on its website that give information about the curriculum, out of hours learning, school events and other useful information. This provides a valuable way for parents to become more engaged in their children's learning. However, not all disadvantaged families have access to ICT.
- 85 A few schools use text messaging to contact parents and this is an effective way to convey information and remind parents of forthcoming school events. Most schools are well supported by many of their parents, especially through involvement in school productions, charity activities and sports days.
- 86 Many schools place an appropriate emphasis on the details of parental engagement, for example notifying parents well in advance of meetings and open days and following up when parents do not respond to letters and telephone calls. Activities such as these have a positive impact on the school's relationship with its parents.
- 87 Nearly all schools in this survey have an 'open door' policy. Many schools also find ways to make parents feel more comfortable in the school. A few schools have reorganised the reception area of the school to make sure that parents and other visitors feel more welcome. In the few best examples, schools have carefully designated quiet, comfortable spaces in school where parents can feel more relaxed and, in a few cases, access specialist services. This is particularly effective when schools are engaging with parents who had poor experiences of school themselves. However, a significant minority of schools do not employ a good enough range of strategies to engage parents, particularly those of disadvantaged learners, and do little more than create an 'open door' policy.
- 88 A few schools have developed more formal links with parents through parents' associations. In the best cases, these organisations ensure not only that parents find out more about school provision but also that the school takes good account of the views of parents. Effective parents' associations also help to engage parents in the work of the school, for example in healthy eating or enterprise activities, as the following case study illustrates.

The parent council

Context

Herbert Thompson Primary School is situated in a deprived area of Cardiff and approximately 58% of learners are eligible for free school meals.

Strategy

To encourage parents to play an active part in the life of the school and to take a close interest in their children's education. A particularly good feature is the parent council. The objectives of the council are to:

- work in partnership with the school to create a school which is inclusive for all parents;
- promote partnership between the school, its staff, its learners and all its parents;
- develop and engage in activities which support the education and welfare of its learners;
- identify and represent the views of parents on the education and welfare of the learners; and
- consider other matters affecting the education and welfare of the learners.

The council provides an effective way to ensure that the school engages effectively with its parents by listening to parents' views and ensuring that parents feel valued.

Action

The effective parental links and knowledge of learners' family backgrounds informs the learner tracking system so that the school is able to identify specific strategies to improve learners' achievement. The school collects and analyses data very well to provide evidence that strategies such as the parent council has an impact on learners' wellbeing and academic progress.

Outcomes

The key stage 2 outcomes for core subjects have improved significantly over the past four years and the core subject indicator is well above the average for similar schools. The gap between the achievement of learners eligible for free school meals and those who are not has narrowed over the past four years and is now smaller than the average for similar schools and the national average.

- 89 Many schools work effectively with their educational welfare officers to make links with 'hard to reach' parents. In the best examples, the officer has a good knowledge of the local community and helps the school to identify trends and patterns of disadvantage. This work gives school staff a good understanding of the problems facing some families and helps parents to engage with the school more effectively.
- 90 A few schools in our survey have community provision, such as a learning centre, leisure centre or health centre, on site or located nearby. In the best examples,

schools use these facilities very well to engage parents, for example by holding events for parents and learners within this provision. A few schools have located community resources within the school. This has had a positive impact on the school's opportunities to engage with parents. For example, in Penpych Primary School in Rhondda Cynon Taf, the school police liaison officer has an office in the school. The officer contributes to the school's personal and social education programme but also forms a close link between the school and the local community. In particular, the officer forms a good relationship with parents, who can receive support without the inconvenience or perceived stigma of a visit to the local police station. This enables learners and parents to understand what the acceptable standards of behaviour are.

- 91 Estyn has reported that family learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy, can raise educational attainment for children and parents (Good Practice in Parental Involvement, Estyn 2009). Family-learning schemes which focus on improving the basic skills of parents and their children are an effective tool in breaking the cycle of underachievement by improving the literacy and numeracy skills in the community. These courses also raise parents' awareness of teaching and learning strategies in the school and give them an understanding of how they might help their children in their learning. In schools where the provider and the school work together closely to share information and evaluate the provision, family learning has a greater impact on both learners' and parents' learning.
- 92 However, these courses only provide support for a small number of parents, and the impact of family learning on tackling poverty and disadvantage is dependent on targeting these parents carefully. A few local authorities depend on schools alone to identify parents with poor basic skills and then to signpost these parents towards local provision. A few local authorities offer to provide courses in schools that show an interest in this work. By themselves, neither of these is an effective strategy to target and engage parents successfully in disadvantaged communities.
- 93 Cardiff local authority has trained parents, teachers, school support staff and community-focused schools co-ordinators to lead parenting courses. This is a useful strategy because it makes sure that there is a consistent approach in each school and it also helps to ensure this provision is sustainable.

Working with other agencies

- 94 Most schools work with a range of agencies, including health services, social services, community groups and voluntary agencies. Where this work is co-ordinated successfully, this has improved disadvantaged learners' confidence, self-esteem and general wellbeing.
- 95 A few local authorities link the work of agencies and services well. These include initiatives such as 'Team Around the Child' and 'Team Around the Cluster', which are designed to integrate planning and delivery of services for children and young people. In the best examples, local authorities employ someone to act as a 'single point of contact' to co-ordinate multi-agency work.

- 96 A few local authorities have shifted the emphasis of their work with schools away from the work identified with the Welsh Assembly Government community-focused schools' grant towards a more cohesive way of schools and communities working together. Local authorities such as Neath Port Talbot focus specifically on improving the achievement of disadvantaged learners.
- 97 Many schools recognise that being community focused is not about doing everything themselves. In order to tackle disadvantage and underachievement they need to be more active in developing services and activities in partnership with others. However, headteachers have few systems for managing multi-agency working effectively. Where schools engage positively in multi-agency working, they have established protocols and processes for this work, for example by setting up multi-agency panels. These panels include representatives from a variety of local authority services and voluntary agencies. In this way, the school co-ordinates the ways in which these partners are able to support disadvantaged learners. This is useful because it encourages the sharing of information and reduces unnecessary overlap or gaps in service provision. However, there are occasions when panel members may not be able to make clear and decisive action to support learners because they might need to report back to their superiors, or when they are not allowed to act independently. This means that the panel may not be able to make clear and decisive action to support learners in the most timely and effective way.
- 98 Various agencies have systems to evaluate their provision in terms of participation rather than improvements in learners' achievement or wellbeing. This means that schools do not have an accurate picture of how well the work with other agencies tackles disadvantage. Local authorities promote partnership between schools, school improvement services, children's social services and other statutory and voluntary sector agencies. The few best authorities monitor partnership working and have secure evidence of the positive impact on groups of disadvantaged learners at risk of disengagement from education. However, in our report on Ensuring all Learners Reach their Potential (Estyn 2010), we have found that joint working between services and agencies is not robust enough at present to support all learners effectively.

Sharing best practice with other schools

- 99 Generally, schools do not exploit the links they have with other schools well enough to learn from one another and share effective ways to tackle disadvantage.
- 100 The most common way that all schools in our survey work with other schools is through their local cluster school activity. However, these ways of working do not always focus specifically enough on improving the achievement of all disadvantaged learners or explore fully enough the integration of a range of strategies to tackle disadvantage.
- 101 Many local authorities organise meetings across the authority and school clusters for particular staff, for example Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme co-ordinators or basic skills co-ordinators. These meetings provide opportunities for staff to share ideas and expertise, but they do not always encourage approaches to teaching and learning that focus specifically enough on tackling

disadvantage.

- 102 In the secondary schools in the survey, the development of the Learning Pathways 14-19 curriculum is more relevant to all learners. However, very few secondary schools use their work with partner providers in the 14-19 network to share experiences of tackling issues of disadvantage with other schools.
- 103 A few schools develop partnerships with other schools in their family⁷. Although schools in the same family face similar challenges, very few work with their family to explore how to tackle disadvantage or work in a more community-focused way.
- 104 In the fourth year of the RAISE project in 2010-2011, the Welsh Assembly Government provided schools with additional funding to work collaboratively with other schools. This encouraged many schools to work outside their familiar groupings and across local authority boundaries. Through this work, many schools developed valuable networks with other schools. These professional learning communities are a useful initiative to investigate strategies to improve the achievement and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners.

Transition from primary to secondary school

- 105 In our report on the impact of transition plans, we found transition planning is now a strong feature of the life and work of most secondary schools and their partner primary schools. In many school clusters, there has been good progress in helping learners make the transition from primary to secondary schools (Estyn 2010). Most schools have transition plans that include both pastoral and academic aspects of transfer from primary to secondary school. However, only a few schools have a specific objective in their transition planning to identify and target support at disadvantaged learners.
- 106 A significant minority of schools in our survey highlighted problems with learners' transition from primary to secondary school. In a few cases, disadvantaged learners who had been supported throughout their time in primary school had been excluded from secondary school. In too many cases, information about disadvantaged learners is not transferred effectively. This means that secondary school staff do not receive the advice and guidance they need to help these learners as they move from the primary to the secondary school and the learners lose the support they require. In a few cases, there is also insufficient tracking of learners who move to schools outside the cluster.
- 107 A few local authorities have specific schemes to support disadvantaged learners during the transition from primary to secondary school. For example, support workers such as learning mentors, family support workers or looked-after children co-ordinators help to ensure a smooth transfer across phases. In Bridgend local authority the Communities First teams work well in partnership with schools to identify how to improve outcomes for children and young people from within their target areas. As a result of this partnership working, a transition programme has been established in the partner primary schools to support children from the

⁷ A system used by the Welsh Assembly Government to group of schools with similar characteristics

Communities First wards to make the transition from primary to secondary school. This is good practice because these support workers have a good understanding of the needs of these learners and are able to oversee the move from primary to secondary school. They help learners to attend and settle into secondary education.

3 How effective are leaders and managers in tackling disadvantage and developing community-focused schooling?

108 Nearly all successful schools in disadvantaged areas have high-quality and consistent leadership. Leaders in these schools have a clear vision and provide a sense of direction that leaves no-one in any doubt about what the school needs to achieve (Tackling Child Poverty and Disadvantage, Estyn 2010). In these schools, leadership structures, roles and responsibilities are organised to ensure that the school achieves its vision. The vision drives school self-evaluation, development planning and provision. These leaders understand the particular needs of their learners and community, and are sensitive to the fact that there is no 'one-size fits all' approach to tackling the problems they face. A successful approach in one school or context will not necessarily succeed in another.

Clear strategic direction

109 Many headteachers of schools in disadvantaged areas understand the needs of their learners and potential barriers to their progress in learning. In the best cases, headteachers have a very good understanding of the local community that the school serves and its complexities.

110 However, very few schools we visited refer specifically to disadvantaged learners in their strategic planning. Many headteachers in our survey believed that tackling disadvantage was implicit in their planning, but they had no explicit plan, with specific and measurable targets, to improve the outcomes for disadvantaged learners. In many schools, an absence of an explicit reference to poverty and disadvantaged learners in strategic planning is linked to a lack of definite actions aimed at disadvantaged learners. This means that many schools do not have a structured approach to raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners.

111 Where headteachers have a clear vision to tackle disadvantage and strategic planning and processes to tackle the underperformance of disadvantaged learners, they are more confident about the sustainability of their work. These headteachers are more aware of the full range of grants available to support disadvantaged learners and have been successful, often in partnership with the local authority, in taking advantage of additional funding. This results in better planning for and support of disadvantaged learners.

112 A significant minority of headteachers identify a lack of funding or financial uncertainty as a barrier to progress in tackling the underachievement of disadvantaged learners. For example, they believe a withdrawal of RAISE funding might result in the loss of support strategies for learners. Most of these schools do not plan effectively for the long-term support of their disadvantaged learners.

113 Most schools have an intention to become more community-focused. A few clearly express this vision in terms of how community-focused approaches are beneficial to all learners. However, few schools translate this vision into clear aims and objectives in their school development plans. In many cases, where community-focused

approaches are outlined in strategic planning, they are not linked specifically enough to measurable targets or focused clearly on improving learners' achievement.

Leadership roles and responsibilities

- 114 Schools in our survey allocated roles and responsibilities in a variety of ways. In a majority of schools, responsibility for disadvantaged learners is part of the role of the special educational needs co-ordinator or basic skills co-ordinator. One risk of this approach is that it associates the underachievement of disadvantaged learners too closely with a particular range of needs. Although a high proportion of learners with special educational needs or basic skills needs are eligible for free school meals, underperformance among disadvantaged learners exists across the full range of needs and abilities.
- 115 In a few schools, school improvement projects have helped to improve the leadership skills of members of staff where they have taken on responsibility for a specific project. Where headteachers have given these key members of staff the freedom to develop the strategy within defined parameters, and the support to develop monitoring and evaluation skills, there is more effective support from all staff for strategies to tackle disadvantage. In a few schools where staff felt that tasks are delegated without discussion, strategies were developed less effectively.

Evaluation of impact on standards and wellbeing

- 116 Leaders and managers in schools that support disadvantaged pupils well understand the relationship between wellbeing and standards. They plan a range of strategies and evaluate these to show how well every intervention raises learners' achievement.
- 117 Many schools in our survey who have undertaken RAISE-funded work use quantitative data to measure the impact of the RAISE projects, for example by collecting data to show improvements in relation to reading and writing assessments, behaviour and exclusion targets and attendance figures. A majority of these schools are also developing ways in which they might gather qualitative evidence to demonstrate the impact of work to improve learners' self-esteem and social and emotional wellbeing.
- 118 However, although all schools believe that they are collecting rigorous data that is allowing them to measure the impact of their work, their analysis of this data is often too limited to evaluate fully the impact of their work or to inform future practice. The most successful evaluation strategies were undertaken by teachers who have a good understanding of research methods through their own professional development, for example through masters' degree study or leadership courses.
- 119 However, in too many schools, good evaluation is restricted to specific projects such as RAISE-funded work, and too many strategies used to raise the achievement of disadvantaged learners are not evaluated well enough to show if they have been effective or not.
- 120 Too many teachers rely too heavily on anecdotal evidence and the subjective observation of learners at work and play to assess the impact of teaching, learning

and support. They do not gather and analyse qualitative and quantitative data to measure improvements in learners' outcomes. This means that they do not have clear evidence for the effectiveness of strategies or interventions, and cannot effectively improve their work to tackle poverty and disadvantage.

- 121 In a few schools, headteachers ensure that teachers and support staff pilot, monitor and evaluate initiatives before introducing new approaches to teaching and learning to the whole school. In this way the headteacher has a secure overview of the impact of new ideas.
- 122 In the few best examples, schools use a good range of questionnaires, observation sheets and profiling to gather and analyse qualitative evidence. However, few schools take account of the views of learners when evaluating projects.

The role of the local authority in supporting schools to tackle disadvantage and develop community-focused schooling

- 123 Some local authorities play an important role in co-ordinating community-focused schooling to help schools improve learners' standards and wellbeing. Disadvantaged learners do relatively well in a few local authorities, for example in Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. Those that actively engage with schools to tackle poverty and disadvantage have a more positive impact on learner achievement (Tackling Child Poverty and Disadvantage, Estyn 2010).
- 124 The most effective local authorities have a clearly articulated and strategic drive to tackle the issues of disadvantage. They have processes and systems that help to engage schools with this aim. These local authorities are also aware that simply producing policy documents and encouraging schools to meet targets is not enough. Instead, they work directly with schools to ensure:
- comprehensive data analyses are shared with schools;
 - effective training in data management;
 - efficient operational and strategic partnership working that makes sure that partners have joint targets for performance;
 - effective self-evaluation;
 - a thorough understanding of how to introduce, monitor and evaluate new approaches;
 - pro-active strategies to engage parents and families;
 - the ability to prioritise and streamline work; and
 - effective locating of services or officers in schools.
- 125 In a few authorities, even though strategies emphasise provision and support for all children and young people, community-focused and multi-agency schemes in schools only focus on learners with basic skills needs and 'challenging learners', such as those who exhibit anti-social behaviour. These schemes to support disaffected learners and those with basic skills deficiencies are an important aspect of tackling disadvantage. However, there is not enough focus on ensuring that all disadvantaged learners reach their potential. Local authorities do not always work with schools to address broader issues of disadvantage, including dealing with the causes as well as the symptoms of poverty.

- 126 A few authorities, such as Cardiff, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Carmarthenshire, use cluster workers or co-ordinators to support secondary schools and their partner primary schools in developing community links. This approach is particularly effective in areas of social or economic disadvantage where schools can tailor their approaches to meet the needs of the community. The impact that good co-ordinators can have is illustrated below.

The impact of community-focused schools co-ordinators

Context

Cardiff is the sixth most deprived local authority in Wales where about 22% of learners in schools are eligible for free school meals.

Strategy

Cardiff local authority has identified community-focused school co-ordinators in each of the secondary schools. Their remit is to co-ordinate, develop and monitor school and community provision across a transition cluster.

Action

The co-ordinators meet on a regular basis in a local authority team for training and to share practice. These meetings also give the opportunity for key partners from the community and other agencies to attend and inform co-ordinators of strategies, interventions and programmes that can support the different community focused school provision in particular communities. The community-focused schools co-ordinators also run practical workshops to develop the leadership skills of senior school staff.

The co-ordinators have developed a 'Quality Development Framework' to enable schools to self-evaluate their community-focused provision and to develop a portfolio of evidence to exemplify effective practice. This work has helped to strengthen schools' community focus. Many schools have developed closer links to various community projects, for example work with residents' groups and playgroups.

Outcomes

Schools have seen increased levels of participation from disengaged learners, and many learners have improved their social skills and self-esteem through these community-focused schools projects.

Cardiff continues to perform at a better level in most key stages, and particularly at key stages 1 and 3, than might be expected on the basis of comparative free school meals ranking when compared to other local authorities. Learners in Cardiff schools achieve above the expected performance in all key performance indicators.

- 127 All local authorities in our survey recognise the need to plan carefully to ensure that strategies to support disadvantaged learners are sustainable. In the few most effective local authorities, strategies to tackle disadvantage are a high priority and regularly evaluated with all partners against shared targets to improve the outcomes of disadvantaged learners.

How local authorities support leadership development for tackling poverty and disadvantage

- 128 Most local authorities are aware of the need to develop the leadership skills of headteachers, senior and middle leaders in schools in relation to tackling poverty and disadvantage. Many local authorities organise headteacher meetings, conferences and training events that explore aspects of disadvantage and community-focused schooling. These activities help to raise school leaders' awareness of the need to improve outcomes disadvantaged learners. However, very few school leaders have received training that is specifically focused on the skills of, for example, partnership working, engaging the community, or tackling disadvantage generally.
- 129 A few authorities in our survey employ 'link officers' to work with schools to develop their community focus. This work is important because it enables school leaders to develop approaches to community-focused schooling and the development of multi-agency working. These officers support schools to deliver community initiatives, and evaluate and audit their provision.
- 130 However, many local authorities have no specific programmes to support school leaders to develop their community-focused work and rely too heavily on schools to respond to local authority strategies with little targeted support or practical assistance for leaders to develop their skills.

Appendix 1: Evidence base

This report is based on evidence from visits to schools, interviews and previous inspections.

The sample of 24 schools included English-medium and Welsh-medium schools, bilingual schools, and schools in rural and urban areas. All the schools in the survey have at least 15% of their learners eligible for free school meals and many are situated in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage.

The report also draws upon information from local authorities across Wales, inspection reports on schools and local authorities, and interviews with a range of people involved in groups and agencies who work to tackle disadvantage, for example Child Poverty Action Group, ContinYou Cymru, Save the Children and RAISE (Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education) Co-ordinators.

Appendix 2: Case studies

Case study 1 – Lliswerry Primary School: a whole school approach to support disadvantaged learners

Context

Lliswerry Primary School is situated in a semi-industrial area just over a mile south east of the centre of Newport. There are 524 full time learners in the school. They come from a wide range of family backgrounds and approximately 25% of the learners are entitled to free school meals.

Strategy

The school uses a number of interrelated strategies across the whole school to tackle the underachievement of its disadvantaged learners, as illustrated below.

Actions

Identifying and tracking the underachievement of disadvantaged learners

The school used RAISE funding to develop an assessment tracking and monitoring system. This has been effective in identifying disadvantaged learners who are underachieving and in raising their achievement. The school tracks the progress of individual learners, groups and classes. This allows the senior leadership team to analyse the data to (a) consider the impact of teaching and learning and (b) monitor teaching. This second activity is linked to performance management and to continuous professional development (CPD) to ensure that teachers receive the support they need to teach most effectively.

The senior team also analyses other data sets to inform the tracking system and target setting process. National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) data is used to analyse the learners' progress in literacy and numeracy to highlight good features and shortcomings in both teaching and learning. Information from Cognitive Ability Tests (CATs) which are taken in Year 4 is used to inform target setting.

At the end of the year the analysis is passed on to the receiving teacher to inform planning and to set targets for each pupil. Learners are given realistic and challenging targets and each child's achievement towards these goals is tracked.

The tracking and target setting process is used to group learners effectively according to their learning needs. The school allows flexibility for learners to move between groups, if this is more beneficial for their learning.

Teachers use the analysis of data to inform their planning. They pay close attention to the teaching and learning of literacy, numeracy and thinking skills to ensure continuity throughout the school.

A whole-school approach to reading

There is a whole school strategy for guided reading. All staff have been trained in this approach and older learners are trained so that they can support younger learners to read. This consistency has had a positive impact on learners' reading skills.

A strong emphasis on staff training

There is a 'research approach' to improvement strategies whereby all initiatives are piloted, monitored and evaluated before being introduced to the whole school.

Leading and/or implementing new initiatives is part of teachers' performance management targets. This ensures that all staff take responsibility for tackling disadvantage.

The school places an emphasis on teachers working together to improve their practice. Teachers use the outcomes of pupil tracking to share ideas and plan together in teams in Planning Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time.

The senior team work together to develop innovative practice. They demonstrate new elements of practice to staff, for example through teaching 'demonstration lessons' with the class teacher observing. The class teacher then has allocated time to develop particular teaching and learning strategies, and a member of the senior team observes them again to give feedback and support. The senior team monitors planning and collects examples of good practice to share amongst the staff.

Improving learners emotional wellbeing through SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning)

The school has identified that many of their disadvantaged learners need to develop their emotional wellbeing. The deputy headteacher introduced Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) to the whole school to support these learners.

With support from the local authority, all staff are trained in SEAL approaches and specific strategies such as 'circle time' and 'stop, think, do'. SEAL activities are integrated into a two-year rolling programme of personal and social education and planned assemblies, so that all learners experience SEAL.

In addition, RAISE money was used to fund extra withdrawal groups of particularly vulnerable disadvantaged learners who would benefit most from more extensive SEAL work. Small groups of learners are chosen for this support and are identified using the NFER emotional intelligence test. The learners are then grouped according to need, for example social skills, anger management, and self-esteem. Teachers worked with these learners using the SEAL plus materials, plus school facilities such as the Forest School. The school also has a designated 'Friendship Room' designed and decorated by learners, as a 'sanctuary' for learners, when they feel vulnerable.

Learners are reassessed at the end of the period against the NFER emotional intelligence test to ascertain whether they have made progress.

The development of learners' leadership skills

The school takes opportunities to develop learners' leadership skills. For example, learners take responsibility for organising school play and school sponsored events. This has a very positive impact on disadvantaged learners and contributes well to raising their self esteem and aspirations.

Assertive discipline

There is a whole school strategy for assertive discipline where expectations of behaviour are consistent. Learners who exhibit very bad behaviour go to 'lunchtime club' to reflect on their actions. Lunchtime club reinforces the idea of positive discipline.

Good and excellent features

- Motivational leadership to raise awareness of the importance of tackling poverty and disadvantage.
- Processes to ensure that all staff take responsibility for improving the achievement of disadvantaged learners.
- Emphasis on the professional development of all staff with a focus on raising the achievement of all learners.
- Use of a wide range of interrelated strategies tackle disadvantage, including academic achievement, self-esteem and emotional wellbeing.
- Whole-school approach to teaching skills.
- Monitoring, analysis and evaluation of all strategies to assess their impact on the achievement of all learners.
- Learners benefit from support across the school and all staff are aware of the needs of disadvantaged learners.

Outcomes

Together, these strategies provide a whole school approach that has significant impact on learners in Lliswerry Primary school.

- Learners make significant progress and achieve results in all key indicators that are consistently above those of similar schools.
- Over the last four years at least 88% of learners achieved level 4 in English. This is above the average for similar schools and the national average.
- The number of learners who achieve level 5 in English shows an improving trend over the last four years. In 2009/10, 43% of Year 6 learners achieved at least a level 5 in English. This is 15 percentage points above the average achieved by similar schools and 15 percentage points above the Welsh average.
- The gap in achievement between learners who are eligible for free school meals and those who are not is significantly narrower than the national average and that of similar schools.
- The school has analysed referrals to lunchtime club against the NFER emotional intelligence test and noted that there has been an increase in social awareness and a decrease in aggressive behaviour over the last year. There has been a significant decrease in numbers of learners referred to the lunchtime club.

Case study 2 – Bryngwyn Comprehensive school: a whole school approach to supporting disadvantaged learners

Context

Bryngwyn School is an 11-16 community school situated in Dafen, on the north-eastern side of Llanelli, and draws its learners from parts of the town centre and from a number of outlying villages. There are 834 learners on roll. Overall, the catchment area is disadvantaged. Twenty-two per cent of learners are entitled to free school meals.

Strategy

The core aims of the school are to focus on improving the attendance, attitude and achievement of disadvantaged learners. In order to achieve these aims, the school has decided to focus on a skills-driven curriculum supported by key skills qualifications.

Actions

The school identifies its disadvantaged learners and tracks individual learners' progress against baseline data on a termly basis. The progress of disadvantaged learners is analysed specifically at the end of key stages 3 and 4 to inform planning. Leaders and managers use a good range of processes to analyse a range of performance data, such as school tracking data and information from Cognitive Ability Tests (CATs) and National Federation for Educational Research (NFER) tests, to evaluate the impact of strategies on disadvantaged learners.

Strategies for improving key skills, among disadvantaged learners, include the following:

- identifying two members of the senior team dedicated to improving outcomes for learners in communication and numeracy;
- increasing the numbers of sets for English and mathematics for Years 9, 10 and 11;
- creating withdrawal groups for numeracy and literacy in Years 7 and 8;
- introducing key Skills qualifications in Application of Number and Communication spanning levels 1-3;
- introducing a transition literacy project for key stages 2 and 3. Learners from Years 6 and 7 were identified from data analysis to receive one-to-one 'catch up' sessions every week, plus early morning reading sessions every day;
- introducing a key stage 2/3 transition numeracy project. Learners in Years 6, 7 and 8 were identified using data and small intervention groups were created. These learners receive a weekly one hour session – following 'number workout programme'; and
- using key skills qualifications in key stage 3 to motivate learners.

Other strategies for tackling disadvantage include the following:

- an emotional literacy project for key stage 3 learners who were identified by the head of year as disadvantaged learners in need of support. This group benefited from a range of intervention strategies to suit individual needs. Extra support for the project was given through links with other support services and voluntary agencies;
- a strong emphasis on learner voice to make changes to the curriculum. This has resulted in some learning being based on short 'task and finish' projects to motivate learners, and in other instances to setting a week-long project that included visits so that learners could have a richer learning experience;
- engaging boys more successfully in reading by developing a project linking football to reading. Learners involved in the project then took leadership of the task by mentoring Year 6 learners from the school's feeder primary schools;
- an attendance officer working with the school to ensure effective contact with parents. This officer also works with an identified group of learners whose attendance is poor to reduce the number of unauthorised absences;
- providing a base for social services in the school. This has resulted in better communication and an effective exchange of information between social services and the school and has a positive impact on the school's ability to support disadvantaged learners; and
- working effectively with the Carmarthenshire Youth and Children's Association to provide activities a wide range of out-of-hours provision for learners and their families.

Good and excellent features

The school is very successful at engaging learners from disadvantaged backgrounds as a result of:

- the very effective development of learners' key skills in their programmes of study;
- listening to feedback from disadvantaged learners and acting very effectively upon this information;
- successfully adapting teaching and learning strategies to motivate learners and allow them to complete their work successfully;
- the careful monitoring of the impact of these strategies on disadvantaged learners; and
- the highly effective and extremely well attended out-of-school-hours programme.

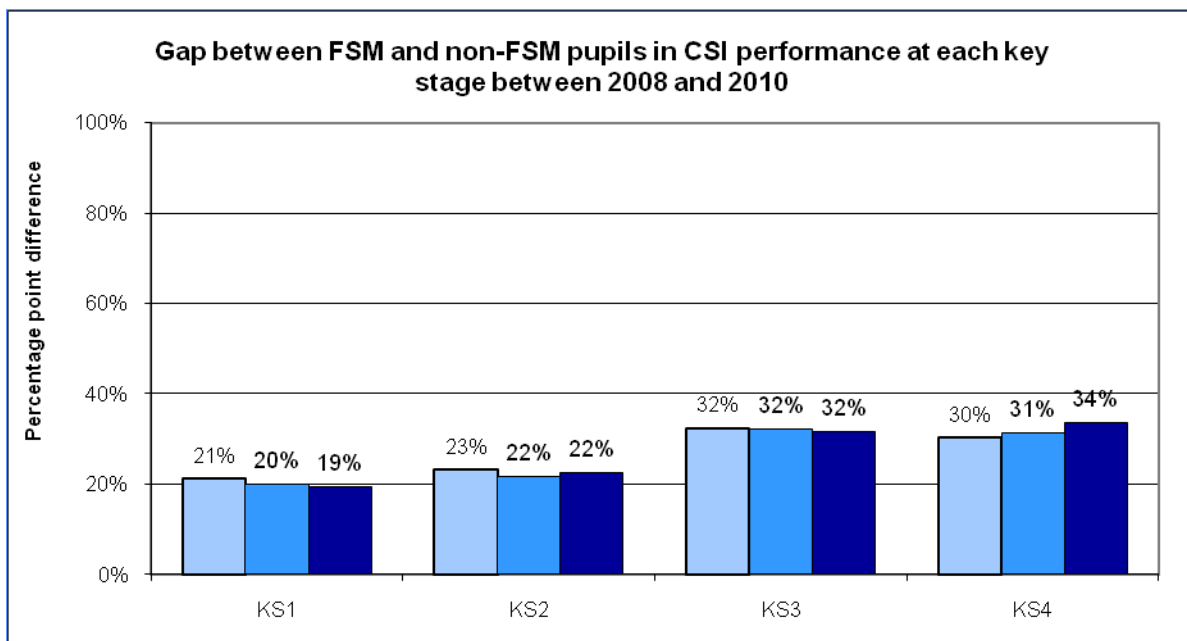
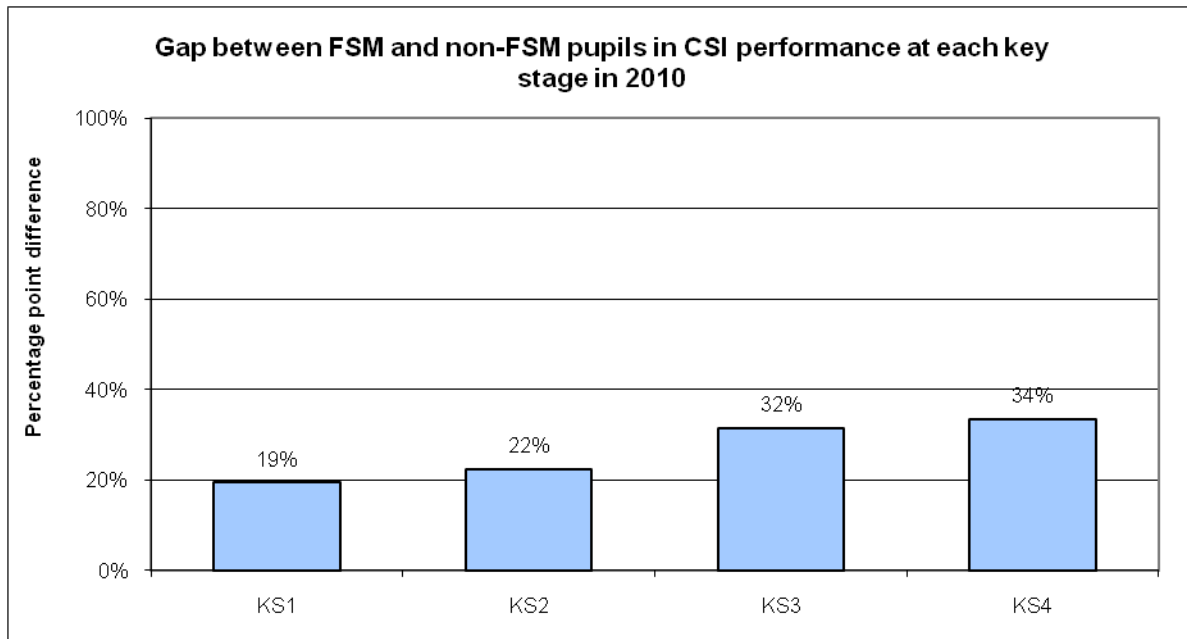
Outcomes




The school has improved outcomes for disadvantaged learners in the following areas:

- the core subject indicator at key stage 4 has improved significantly over the past four years. In the last 2 years the school has been in the top 25% of similar schools in this performance indicator;

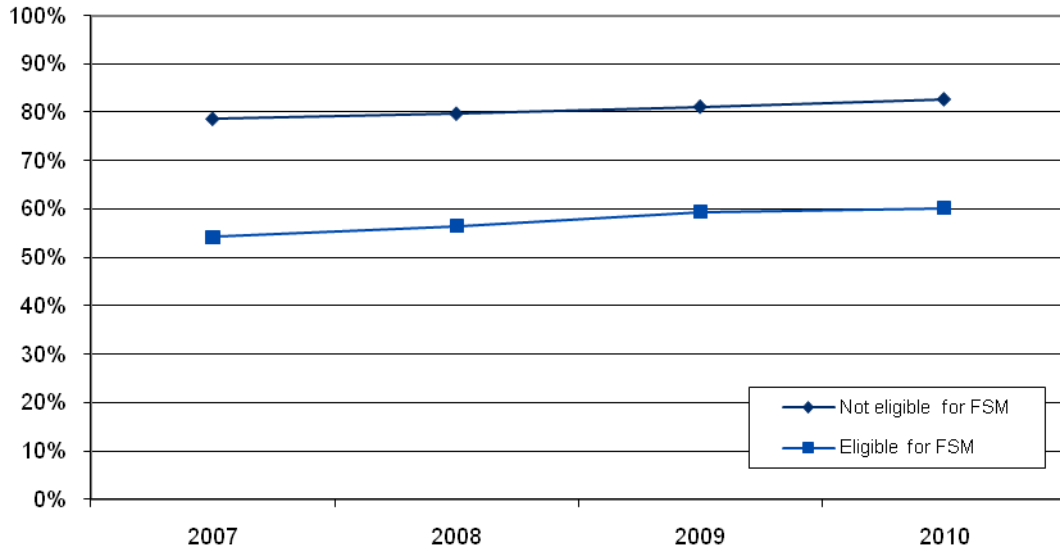
- in literacy the school has improved learners' reading accuracy and comprehension skills significantly;
- in 2009/10, 69% of 15-year-olds achieved level 2 in English. This was above the average for similar schools (62%) and the national average (63%);
- in numeracy, Year 7 and Year 8 learners improved their skills significantly, achieving results higher than predicted;
- in 2009-2010, 68% of 15-year-olds achieved level 2 in mathematics. This is well above the average for similar schools (55%) and the national average (56%);
- there has been a marked improvement in the achievement of disadvantaged boys generally. At key stage 3, there is little difference between the performance of boys and girls. The headteacher attributes this success to changes in learning and teaching strategies;
- GCSE results for all learners were significantly higher than predicted by the Cognitive Ability Test (CAT) data;
- the number of learners achieving the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics has improved over the last three years and is now the highest within Bryngwyn's family of similar schools;
- the average wider points score for 15-year-olds in the school has improved significantly over the past four years and is now the highest in Bryngwyn's family of schools; and
- attendance has improved for learners entitled to free school meals and the school recorded a fall in unauthorised absences.

Appendix 3: Performance of learners eligible for free school meals

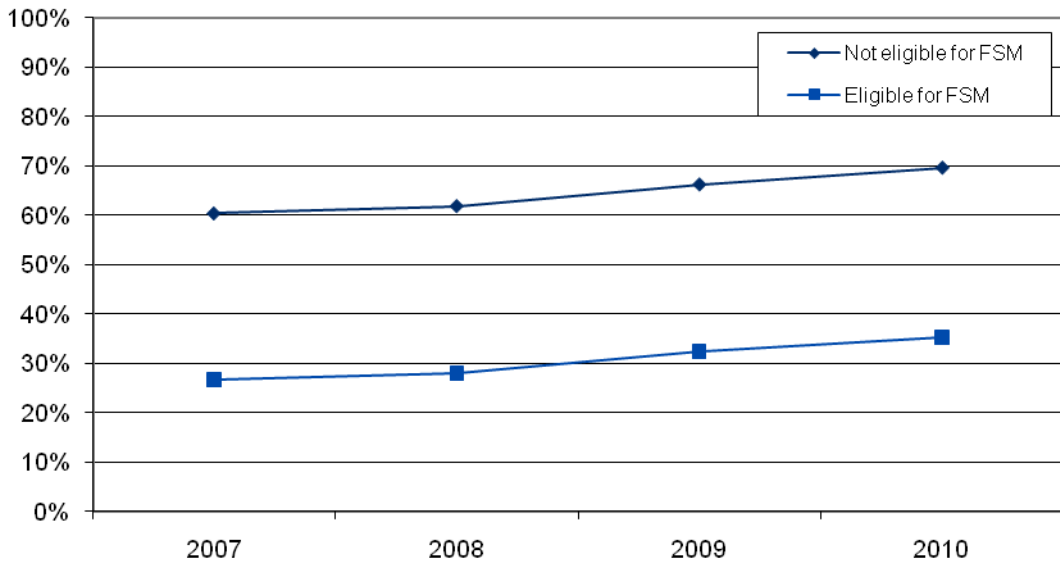


2008	
2009	
2010	

Percentage of pupils achieving the KS2 CSI, by FSM eligibility



Percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, by FSM eligibility



Appendix 4: RAISE

In spring 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government agreed to fund a programme to support the social justice agenda in education. Schools were eligible for a RAISE (Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education) grant, if they had 50 or more learners of statutory school age, at least 20% of which were eligible for free school meals.

In the first three years of the project, the Welsh Assembly Government distributed around £14.5 million each year to RAISE schools. In 2009-2010 £4.5 million was allocated to RAISE schools. This money was designated for tackling the link between socio-economic disadvantage and educational under-achievement. In addition, local authorities have received £1 million a year to support the education of looked-after children.

In our reports on the RAISE initiative, we have found that, in most schools, the achievement of learners involved in specific RAISE-funded work improved a great deal. In nearly all the primary and special schools and in many secondary schools we surveyed, most gains were in learners' literacy, especially reading. In many secondary schools, learners' attendance and behaviour also improved after the RAISE-funded work. However, in the schools visited as part of the survey, many learners who are disadvantaged did not directly benefit from RAISE-funded work. This is because nearly all the schools that received RAISE funding identified their targeted learners by using criteria other than disadvantage.

RAISE-funded work has a strong positive impact on learners' attitudes to learning and on the development of their personal, learning and social skills. In many schools, learners' involvement in the RAISE-funded work has given them increased confidence and self-esteem. However, RAISE has had limited impact on improving the attainment of disadvantaged learners when measured by key performance indicators, for example improvement in the core subject indicator (CSI).⁸

The limited impact on standards is shown by the overall achievement data on the performance of disadvantaged learners at every key stage over a number of years and illustrates the scale of the challenge facing the education system in Wales. An evaluation of the first three years of RAISE⁹ found that from 2006-2008, in key stage 2, learners eligible for free school meals in RAISE schools did better than free-school-meals learners in non-RAISE schools, and the gap in attainment fell from 10.2 percentage points to 4.4 percentage points. However, in key stage 3 and key stage 4 the attainment gap between free-school-meals learners in RAISE schools and non-RAISE schools increased. In key stage 1 there was little change in the gap. The report concluded that 'the measurable impact upon headline indicators has been limited to key stage 2, and even here the evidence is not conclusive'.

However, as a result of their involvement over four years with the RAISE initiative,

⁸ The core subject indicator relates to performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum.

⁹ Evaluation of the first three years of RAISE, The People and Work Unit: to be published.

many schools have a clearer understanding of the link between socio-economic disadvantage and educational underachievement. RAISE work has given many schools in disadvantaged communities a framework to discuss poverty and disadvantage and with which to design a range of strategies to improve the achievement of disadvantaged learners.

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