

**IWA Annual Education Conference 2014**  
**Poverty and Performance**  
9<sup>th</sup> April 2014

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Sefydliad Materion Cymreig  
Institute of Welsh Affairs

## **Poverty and Performance**

**A report of the IWA Annual Education Conference**

**9 April 2014**

The background to the conference was the link between poverty and attainment, focusing on two Welsh Government initiatives to tackle this, the Pupil Deprivation Grant and Schools Challenge Cymru. The latter was announced by the Welsh Government in February, and comes as the latest in a long line of initiatives aimed at raising school standards in Wales. It will invest an additional £20 million a year over three years in 40 secondary schools across the country, starting this September. The aim is to break the link between poverty and low attainment by driving up teaching standards and pupil performance. The new programme will closely follow similar Challenge projects in London and Greater Manchester in the past decade that have been highly successful in improving school standards.

Schools Challenge Cymru comes after the Pupil Deprivation grant was this year doubled providing £918 worth of extra funding for each pupil across Wales receiving Free School Meals.

There is a stark gap in school achievement between children from different backgrounds in Wales. On average only around 25 per cent of children who receive free school meals achieve grades of 5 GCSEs A\* to C. The equivalent for children not in receipt of free school meals is about 60 per cent.

Key to the Schools Challenge Cymru initiative will be the appointment of ten Advisers, likely to be former headteachers. They will co-ordinate working between the 40 schools, local government, the four Regional Consortia, and the Welsh Government. Their role will include creating partnerships between better and poorer performing schools involving teacher exchanges to promote new ways of working. The participating schools will be closely monitored and if their performance does not improve quickly enough they could be stripped of their Challenge status

Vaughan Gething AM, Deputy Minister in the Welsh Government responsible for tackling poverty, told the conference it was unacceptable that one in three children and one in four adults in Wales are living in poverty. He said Schools Challenge Cymru was a central part of the government's strategy in combatting these statistics. "We're looking for a new outcome," he said.

“There is a strong commitment within Government from the First Minister down.”

Greater coherence was being sought across the various programmes the Welsh Government is implementing – Families First, Communities First, Flying Start, the Pupil Deprivation Grant<sup>1</sup>, the Early Years framework, and now Schools Challenge Cymru. “A continuing challenge is information sharing, but we have to get past that,” Vaughan Gething added. “We need to change the culture. For instance Flying Start information collected in primary schools must be passed on to the receiving secondary schools.

“We’re confident that Schools Challenge Cymru can make a difference, building on the experience of London and Manchester. The sharing of knowledge and excellence between schools has been seen to make a difference. Schools must be part of the engine of change. Education is getting more money and a statement of intent. We’re in this for the long term. But we have to have an assessment of what works. The London and Greater Manchester Schools Challenge projects were able to show they were making a difference. I’d like us to be in that position by 2016.”

David Reynolds, Professor of Education at Southampton University and an adviser to the Welsh Government’s Education Department, said there was an assumption that if we improve schools as a whole this helps disadvantaged children catch up. “But it isn’t the case,” he said. “Everyone improves so the gap does not narrow.” An additional problem was that the Pupil Deprivation Grant was generally not being used for what it was intended. Instead of focusing on children in receipt of free school meals and looked after children, much of it was being used for whole school programmes.

Professor Reynolds said the overriding priority should be an understanding that it is teachers in the classroom who make the largest contribution to raising standards. “Research has shown that for disadvantaged children the difference between having a poor rather than good teacher in terms of literacy achievement is to fall behind by three to four months over a year. Over two years the gap doubles to eight months. Middle class children can catch up at home. This is not an option for disadvantaged children.

“So we should focus on teaching in the classroom. Again, research shows that this has a 20 per cent impact in explaining variations in outcomes, compared with just 5 per cent for whole school approaches. Even in what are classed as

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<sup>1</sup> The Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) £450 per pupil allocation came to £32.4 million across Wales during 2012-13 when it was first established. In 2014–15 the per-pupil allocation will rise to £918. This will be for one year only and will return to £450 in 2015–16. Schools are expected to use this funding to bring about changes for learners eligible for free school meals (FSM) or who are looked after children (LAC). Employing additional staff is only a sustainable use of funding where schools identify how they will continue to employ staff beyond the period of the grant. The PDG may be used for whole-school initiatives that will particularly benefit learners who are FSM and LAC. These include whole staff development activities such as INSET days which focus on the impact of deprivation on attainment and train staff to use strategies which are known to be particularly effective. The funding is not for tackling underachievement across the school.

good schools you get huge variations in outcomes within them, depending on the calibre of teachers.”

A further priority, he said, was to turn all secondary schools into community schools that work closely with the families of deprived children. “We have a fair understanding of what makes a good comprehensive school, but there is less understanding of what defines a community school. Why don’t we have a national programme to transform all our schools into community schools, as has happened, for example with some schools in the USA?” Other effective interventions included:

- Peer tutoring – having a friend in the class matters.
- After school clubs at the end of the school day and in the holidays.

These should happen routinely and not be optional extras. “Both are reliant on teacher engagement and are based on the classroom rather than the school,” Professor Reynolds concluded. “It is the teacher who is most important in determining outcomes. Yet we have had constant interventions by improvement schemes operating at the levels of consortia, local authorities and at the school level. We don’t have a programme line that goes direct to the teachers.”

Meilyr Rowlands, Strategic Director at Estyn for inspection policy, told the conference that since 2007 the organisation had produced a series of reports, on how schools should tackle poverty and disadvantage. For instance, its 2012 report *Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools* has ten main recommendations that good schools should follow as a matter of course:

1. Adopting a whole school approach
2. Use of data to identify and track individual student progress
3. Literacy and learning skills
4. Social and emotional skills
5. Attendance, punctuality and behavior
6. Tailoring the curriculum
7. Enriching experience
8. Listening to learners
9. Engaging parents
10. Developing staff expertise

As Meilyr Rowlands said, “The evidence is that schools which are good overall tend also to be good at dealing with their disadvantaged children. This is not surprising. It is unlikely that a school will be good at communicating with specific groups of disadvantaged children and their parents if generally their communications are poor.”

However, it was the case that good schools can find they are following good practice but still failing to tackle poverty and disadvantage amongst their pupils. In such circumstances they needed to dig deeper and identify the

underlying causation, which for example might be low attendance rates amongst disadvantaged children. This would require engagement with parents and with other agencies outside the school.

“Schools cannot do it alone,” Rowlands said. “As well as in-school strategies, they need to work with partners outside, in the context of a strategy set by their local authority.” Estyn’s 2013 poverty and deprivation report recommended that all schools should become community-focused and included the following recommendations, on:

1. Leadership
2. Multi-agency working
3. Team focused on giving specialised support for families of vulnerable pupils
4. Out-of-school-hours learning
5. Community participation
6. Nurture groups
7. Family learning
8. Parenting programmes
9. Pooling resources and use of the Pupil Deprivation Grant
10. Evaluation

Rowlands said there less evidence of good practice being put into effect around these kinds of issues compared with in-school interventions. “Senior managers find coordinating multi-agency partnerships in the wider community outside the school more difficult than leading internal programmes,” he said. “These skills need to be included in leadership training.”

What are the key performance indicators and how should they be measured? “Just concentrating on closing the performance gap between the cohort as a whole and those within it who are disadvantaged is not enough,” Rowlands said. “We need to look at a greater range of indicators. The main focus should be on achievement rather than attainment. Therefore, inspectors should give more weight to those analyses that present comparisons with similar schools.”

He agreed with Professor Reynolds that the Pupil Deprivation Grant was not being used in a sufficiently targeted way. “Schools tend to spend it on the lower ability range in a general way,” he said. “For example, in one instance we saw a separated out classroom of just boys, reflecting the fact that boys tend to perform less well than girls.”

A discussion followed on how better use could be made of the grant. Cerys Furlong, Director of NIACE Cymru, said it could be put to good use in improving family learning programmes. However, there was a lack of a joined up approach between initiatives for different age groups. She said there was a disconnect between the cutting of support for adult education and giving emphasis to children’s initiatives. “Both should be used to reinforce each other.”

Lizzie Swaffield, Manager at the University of Wales Trinity St David's Centre for Equity in Education, said, "School improvement needs a broader definition to embrace parental engagement and strengthening community links. We need a more joined up approach between the Pupil Deprivation Grant and other initiatives such as Communities First and Flying Start."

Janet Hayward, headteacher at Cadoxton Primary in Barry, told how the school was collaborating with two other primary schools and a secondary school in the town, to get Communities First match funding for a Club Innovate project to promote technical learning between them. But she said there was concern as to how long the Pupil Deprivation Grant would last to enable this to continue. As she put it, "We want to ensure that the initiatives we are promoting will be sustainable." Cadoxton Primary has 360 pupils of whom 40 per cent are entitled to free school meals. Its Pupil Deprivation Grant programme also includes:

- Targeting individual pupils and their families: teachers giving special attention to home/school relations, with eight-week family literacy and numeracy programmes to build confidence.
- Enriching the curriculum with outside cultural visits, for example, taking the entire year 6 class to see War Horse at the Wales Millennium Centre, which is an experience few would have considered otherwise.

"We have to accept that many of our parents didn't have a good experience when they were at school and so have to be enticed and attracted in," Janet Hayward said. "So coffee mornings have their place." Some parents suffered from depression. "We've noticed that their outlook has improved since becoming part of a network of families at the school," she said. "Groups are getting together to organize events and trips of their own. For instance 15 families are organizing a trip to Folly Farm. All this can be quite empowering."

The keynote address at the conference was delivered by Mel Ainscow, Professor of Education at the University of Manchester. He was adviser to the Greater Manchester City Challenge programme and has just been appointed by the Welsh Government as Challenge Champion of its Schools Challenge Cymru. He explained that the Manchester programme began in April 2008, with £50 million allocated for a three-year period. Many of the poorest wards in the UK are concentrated in Greater Manchester where 27 per cent of the population lives in poverty. In 150 schools across Greater Manchester's ten local authorities free school meals are claimed by 75 per cent of the pupils. In the City of Manchester itself 150 languages are spoken. Most children in its schools are bilingual.

"Our approach was to say that we had already had all the expertise we needed in the schools," Ainscow said. "The task was to move knowledge around. It was not about doing more of the same, but doing it differently."

A team of part-time Advisers was appointed, most of them former headteachers. At the heart of the programme were 200 schools in deprived

areas designated as 'Keys to success Schools'. "This meant they were under-performing, but eventually the designation became a badge of honour," Ainscow said. "Most of them made enormous progress over the three years. Our most powerful intervention was to partner each of the schools with another school that had qualities our Advisers decided they needed – and invariably they were schools in another local authority. This removed a large element of competition. In effect our advisers operated as a dating agency for schools. And the remarkable thing was that we found that the relationships had a positive impact on both schools involved. Strong schools benefited from being in a partnership with a failing school."

In addition, the project put together 58 'families' of primary schools and 11 of secondary schools that shared a similar socio-economic background. The aim was for them to collaborate and share best practice. "A key factor was a collective will to make change happen," Ainscow said.

Local authorities were given a role in developing initiatives around school governance, raising aspirations, and involving parents, although Ainscow conceded some of this investment was wasted. Efforts were also made to engage the wider community. The project worked with the four universities in the Manchester region, its two major football clubs, the BBC, the Halle Orchestra, and a range of third sector and voluntary organisations.

However, Ainscow said the most effective arena for improving standards was in the classroom. "You have to begin at the school gate," was the way he put it. "We focused on building up leadership from within the system, identifying headteachers who became system leaders across the families of schools. "In this process we created hub schools, which developed expertise in particular, areas of expertise, which was then a resource for the whole system. So, for example, one school in Rochdale developed good practice in working with bilingual learners.

"The overall objective was to create a self-improving system across the schools, using the internet as a means for communication and developing, in effect, an education 'Trip Adviser' website where good practice could be disseminated." The major lessons he took from the Manchester Challenge were:

- Education systems have untapped potential to improve themselves.
- Networking is a means of sharing effective ways of working.
- Carefully brokered school partnerships are a powerful means of fostering improvements.
- Leadership has to come from within schools.
- Local authorities have to make sure this happens.

"Leadership has to come from within the system, otherwise the change process will simply stop after the Challenge funding ends and the Advisers disappear," he said. "In Wales it is possible that the Regional Consortia have

the potential to step into the Advisers role once the Challenge Cymru period is over.

“There are many differences between the English and Welsh education systems and for it to be successful Challenge Cymru will have to develop its own responses to its own situation. One of the differences is that in England a greater proportion of money goes directly to schools. If Welsh schools are going to be self-improving then they are going to need a greater proportion of the money available for education than is presently the case – that will be a big challenge.”

The conference closed with a roundtable discussion on the prospects for Schools Challenge Cymru fulfilling the Welsh Government’s aspirations. Philip Dixon, Director of ATL Cymru, commented that coming in the wake of a long line of initiatives, there was a sense that this was a last chance. “As one Welsh Government official put it to me, ‘For years we’ve given you initiatives without any cash. Now here’s the cash without any initiative’.”

Nonetheless, he thought this could be a positive since it meant Schools Challenge Cymru will demand a bottom-up approach. As he said, “It’s the schools themselves that are going to have to make this scheme work. Another top-down initiative would fail.” He added school leadership should be a key dimension of the Challenge Cymru process and that should be about far more than just what the headteacher does. “The classroom teacher is a leader as well,” he said, “In this area we’re playing catch-up in Wales.”

Dixon also observed that there was a lack of clarity on responsibility between local authorities and the Regional Consortia. “There’s only one area in Wales where there is a good working relationship with schools and that is in southeast Wales,” he said. As to the budget, he noted that £20 million divided by 40 schools means an average of £500,000 per school, which would bring them close to the average spend in England, which is about £800 per pupil a year higher than in Wales.

Chris Howard, Acting Director of NAHT Cymru, asked whether headteachers would buy into Schools Challenge Cymru. “Our members have heard a great deal about challenge and not much about support,” he said. “The attainment problem has to be cracked in the schools themselves. Effective intervention has been missing. We haven’t appreciated the extent of the mess we’re in. We began by thinking we would do well in the PISA tests. When the first bad results were recorded in 2008 we ignored them. In 2012 some argued that they weren’t that relevant because you couldn’t accurately compare across systems. But now the message has got across. PISA results matter because the world thinks they do. We haven’t given effective targeted teaching of the key skills of accuracy in reading, numeracy, and problem solving.

“Challenge Cymru will work if we allow the schools sufficient autonomy. We need to invest in the autonomy of our schools. Above all we need to stop talking about failing schools. We need to build up self-esteem and confidence.



“If Challenge Cymru is to be a success schools will have to work together. A key question is the extent to which schools will be able to work with other schools outside their local authority areas. This may only be really practical in southeast Wales. But out-of-county working will be key to success, given that we’re so competitive and tribal in Wales.”

Martin Grimes, headteacher of Dyffryn Secondary School in Port Talbot, said his teachers were already working with several other schools. “We’ve derived great benefit, certainly in what the teachers get from it,” he said. “After all, teachers are at the heart of learning and they can learn from each other. We need to get beyond training programmes. The key is having the right people in place. And a key to that is involving pupils in the selection process. Pupils interview the candidates and their view is critical to appointments.”

The views of pupils seems the right note on which to end this report. At the beginning of the conference delegates were shown a short film *Small Voice Big Story* made by members of Young Welsh Researchers, a group of 25 young people brought together by Save the Children’s Participation Unit and the Big Learning Company Wales. Research for the film and accompanying report, which was published in January 2013, comprised interviews with 178 children aged 11-14, involving questionnaires and focus groups. There were six main conclusions:

1. Every school should establish a CIC – Cartref i Cartref (Home to Home) study centre, a safe place where children can go to study and gain extra educational help and support, which feels like a home from home.
2. One to one support from other students: schools should set up a peer-learning support system. Older students would be the teachers and they would get accreditation for helping younger children out.
3. Every school should have someone to talk to about home and school – a key worker who is a regular point of contact, able to bridge the gap between home and school.
4. The Welsh Government should set up a fund to help children in poverty pay for things like books, stationery, travel and equipment, to support advanced learning in after-school clubs, and for school trips.
5. Schools should set up schemes where community role models could come into school to give real-life carers advice. A free ‘app’, designed by young people, should be developed for children in Wales to provide information about access to training and their future education and career needs.
6. Further research should be conducted to provide a voice for children and young people in Wales.