



## **Effective school support for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils - Case studies of good practice**

<p><b>Report title:</b></p> <p>Effective school support for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils - Case studies of good practice</p>
<p><b>Report details</b></p> <p>The report was commissioned by the Welsh Government's Education Directorate to understand more about how disadvantaged and vulnerable learners are being supported in schools and to highlight best practice case studies to be shared across Wales.</p>
<p><b>Summary of main findings.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In the majority of schools, leaders understand the importance of supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils to overcome barriers to learning. In the most effective schools, staff do not just focus on the challenges that pupils face, but identify individual pupils' interests and talents, and build on these positives.</li><li>• The majority of schools focus strongly on trying to reduce the impact of poverty with the PDG being a key driver. As we know, despite the funding, eFSM pupils continue to perform less well than other pupils. The proportion of primary and secondary schools that make effective use of the PDG remains at around two-thirds. Impact is variable across strategies undertaken in schools.</li><li>• In the schools that best use their PDG, leaders use the grant strategically to ensure that all pupils make good progress towards their targets and improve their wellbeing – this work is a priority for them. Schools that best support disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils place the wellbeing of every child at the heart of their work. In these schools, there is a strong focus on providing a safe and nurturing environment where pupils and staff feel secure.</li><li>• Leaders in successful schools place great importance on recruiting staff who share their school's vision for nurturing pupils and building positive relationships with families and the community. Where this strategy is in place, schools develop a whole-school approach to supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils.</li><li>• Research suggests that classroom teaching has the greatest influence on pupils' learning of all education factors and that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds will benefit even more than their peers from high-quality teaching.</li></ul>

- Inspection evidence shows that, in the most effective schools, teachers have high expectations of the achievement of all pupils, including those most disadvantaged and vulnerable. They do not see poverty and disadvantage as a reason for pupils not to succeed and they strive to find approaches and teaching strategies that help remove barriers to pupils' learning.
- In many successful schools, staff have designed a curriculum that meets pupils' interests and engages vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils effectively in their learning.
- Many schools support disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils to develop their talents and to widen their experiences by providing financial assistance, for example for music lessons, sporting activities and residential visits.
- The attendance of eFSM pupils is a concern at all phases of learning. There is a gap in overall attendance between eFSM pupils and other pupils. In primary schools this gap is widening. In both primary and secondary schools, there has been no reduction in the rate of exclusions of eFSM pupils over time. These pupils are still much more likely to be permanently excluded or to receive fixed-term exclusions than other pupils.
- Evidence suggests that the absence of eFSM pupils has a substantially more negative impact on their attainment than on other pupils. These pupils often find it harder to catch up on their learning and then can potentially fall behind their peers.
- The most successful schools know their community well and work closely with other agencies and services that will benefit their pupils and their families.

**The Welsh Government should:**

**There are no recommendations for the Welsh Government but there is one recommendation for schools as follows:**

**R1 Consider the best practice outlined in the case studies contained in this report**

Welsh Government response:

**Accept:** The Welsh Government accepts the findings of the Estyn report.

The report outlines good practice in schools already delivering positive actions for our most disadvantaged learners and we welcome the case studies undertaken by ESTYN and will ensure that they are disseminated and promoted to all educational settings.

It is totally unacceptable for children's success to be determined by their social or economic circumstances. Underpinning all of our work is a belief that someone's ability to benefit from education should not be determined by where they live, what their background is or what the income of their parents is.

Breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage is a long term commitment and we have been clear on this Government's commitment to the PDG for the remainder of this Assembly term.

Year on year, we have extended the PDG. It now supports even more of our most vulnerable learners. As well as the free school meals element; the PDG suite now includes looked after children, those in the early years, those in pupil referral units and education other than at school provision.

Since its introduction in 2012, we have made available more than £475 million through the PDG, which has supported the equivalent of over 530,000 children and young people to reach their potential.

We continue to work with our partners to maximise the impact of the PDG and extract learning from practice so we can support our vulnerable learners.

#### **Publication details.**

The report will be published on or after 18 February on ESTYN's website <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports>

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.



Digital ISBN 978-1-80038-185-8

© Crown copyright February 2020  
WG40144