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Evaluation of the Implementation of the Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant

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Evaluation of the Implementation of the Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant

NFER

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Table of contents

List of tables.....	2
Glossary.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
1. Executive Summary	5
2. Introduction/Background	11
3. Methodology.....	17
4. Findings.....	19
5. Examples of emerging best practice	42
6. Potential for a future impact evaluation	49
7. Discussion and conclusion	55
8. References.....	60
Appendix 1: Survey of early years settings	61
Appendix 2: The case study visits.....	72

List of tables

Table 1: What is your understanding of the purposes of the EYPDG?	22
Table 2: Children’s learning, monitoring and staff training	24
Table 3: Resources and links with other agencies	24
Table 4: Which groups did you target?	27
Table 5: Sources of support and guidance used	34
Table 6: What would you say have been the main benefits of the EYPDG?	37
Table 7: What outcomes are you hoping to achieve by using the EYPDG?	51
Table 8: How do you measure the effect of the approaches that you have implemented on children’s outcomes?.....	51
Table 9: External monitoring of EYPDG.....	52

Glossary

EYPDG	Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant
REC	Regional Education Consortia
LA	Local Authority
PDG	Pupil Deprivation Grant
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SDP	School Development Plan
e-FSM	Eligible for free school meals
EYAT	Early Years Advisory Teachers
HLTA	Higher Level Teaching Assistant
TA	Teaching Assistant
FE	Further Education
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
CSSIW	Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant (EYPDG) was introduced in 2015/16 to improve outcomes for learners from low income families receiving Foundation Phase early years education for 10 hours or more per week in an approved setting. It is intended to overcome the additional barriers that prevent learners from disadvantaged backgrounds achieving their full potential. The EYPDG was allocated on the basis that early education providers in maintained and non-maintained settings (including schools, nurseries, playgroups and childminders) would receive £300 per eligible learner.
- 1.2 This early process evaluation took place during the second year of the EYPDG implementation. Its primary aim was to evaluate how the EYPDG is being implemented by practitioners across the different settings, whether it is being implemented as intended and to identify any emerging best practice.
- 1.3 The fieldwork for the study took place from July 2016 to May 2017. It used three main methods:
- an online survey sent to a final sample of 1,526 early years settings, which were contacted by the study team; of those contacted, 376 both identified themselves as in receipt of the EYPDG and responded to the survey during the administration period (18th January to 3rd March 2017)
 - interviews with the policy leads in all four Regional Education Consortia (REC) and discussions with four officers in three Local Authorities (LAs) (an officer with strategic responsibilities together with an officer with operational responsibilities in one LA, and one officer with operational roles in the other two LAs)
 - case-study interviews in 20 settings selected to represent a range of different types of setting located across Wales through interviews with 20 headteachers/head of settings (eight primary school heads, six nursery school heads, and six heads of non-maintained settings) and 17 other staff (seven teachers in primary schools, six teachers in maintained nurseries, and four members of staff in non-maintained settings).
- 1.4 The research team did not have details of all non-maintained settings in receipt of the EYPDG, and therefore it is likely that non-maintained settings are not fully represented in this evaluation

Key findings

Understanding and use of the EYPDG

- 1.5 This study examined how stakeholders (especially staff from REC, LAs and early years settings) understood the aims of the EYPDG and how they used the funding it provides.
- 1.6 Almost all settings (94 per cent) correctly identified the main aim of the EYPDG as 'To support children from low income households to fulfil their potential'. A minority identified other aims which are not intended purposes of the EYPDG, namely: supporting children who are falling behind (13 per cent), supporting children with Additional Learning Needs (12 per cent) and providing additional funding for their settings (ten per cent).
- 1.7 Settings reported using the EYPDG for purposes recommended by Welsh Government guidance, especially supporting children's early language development (94 per cent); staff training (87 per cent); buying new learning resources (88 per cent); work on systems (78 per cent); and parenting support (75 per cent).
- 1.8 Most settings had used a variety of sources of support and guidance, especially the range of guidance produced by Welsh Government on how to use the EYPDG.
- 1.9 Settings identified the main benefits of the EYPDG as: being able to begin supporting disadvantaged children a year earlier and that it was flexible to their needs (i.e. settings could decide how best to use it).
- 1.10 The main drawback identified by settings was that the value of the EYPDG was too small, especially for settings with low numbers of eligible children. To mitigate this, in some instances LAs were pooling resources to provide training (a practice supported by some but not all non-maintained settings). A few settings said that the uncertainty about the future existence and level of their EYPDG allocations limited their ability to plan ahead. Some non-maintained settings reported that their LA had not distributed the EYPDG directly to settings and would have preferred them to do so.
- 1.11 There were few statistically significant differences between settings in their responses to the survey, although non-maintained settings had used fewer sources of guidance and support.

Examples of emerging best practice

1.12 The Welsh Government's 'What really works for early years?' guidance (Learning Wales, 2015) supports practitioners in their use of the EYPDG funding. The guidance identified the following six areas of good practice that settings should consider when planning the use of the EYPDG:

- professional development
- use of evidence-based interventions
- partnership work with parents/carers
- collaboration between settings
- multi-agency working
- work to monitor and evaluate the approaches being used.

1.13 The evaluation considered these areas and identified the following examples of good practice in case-study settings;

- Taking part in training on the EYPDG had reinforced staff awareness of the need to support children from low income families to fulfil their potential. It had also increased settings' capacity to deliver effective strategies in response to the needs of this group of children.
- Settings used examples of evidence informed practice when deciding on the approaches they used to support children and meet their needs. They used information provided by the Welsh Government (including Learning Wales) and in the training they accessed.
- Several settings were implementing parenting and family programmes. These focused on engaging parents, developing positive relationships between settings and parents, helping parents to support their children's development and signposting parents to other services and sources of support.
- Settings engaged with other service providers as part of a multi-agency approach to meeting the needs of children from low income backgrounds.
- In some cases the work funded by the EYPDG had strengthened transition arrangements from early years provision into the school system.

Settings' approaches to monitoring and evaluation

- 1.14 Settings were asked what they were hoping to achieve by using the EYPDG and how they were measuring its impact. The study also asked who collected information about settings' use of the EYPDG and gathered views on how the impact of the EYPDG could be measured.
- 1.15 Settings identified three main outcomes they were aiming to achieve by using the EYPDG: improving children's speech and language skills (86 per cent); improving children's readiness to learn (77 per cent); and improving readiness for learning at the Foundation Phase (from Year 1) (76 per cent).
- 1.16 Most settings measured the effects of their approaches on children's outcomes (such as improving children's speech and language skills; improving children's readiness to learn, and improving readiness for learning in the Foundation Phase), in a variety of ways. These included monitoring development against expectations for their age; assessing children's outcomes; using tracking systems; and observing children's responses to activities.
- 1.17 Most settings provided monitoring information on their use of the EYPDG to outside authorities, such as the LA and/or the REC. Most commonly they provided information about spend identified within their School Improvement Plan (SIP)/School Development Plan (SDP); past and planned expenditure; and/or a written description of their use of the EYPDG.
- 1.18 Case-study interviews showed that practitioners recognised the need to try to measure the impact of the EYPDG but wanted to ensure that any evaluation was manageable for them and suitable for young children. They saw the potential to build on evaluation systems developed for Flying Start and the PDG.

Conclusion and recommendations

- 1.19 This early process evaluation suggests that a primary strength of the EYPDG is that it has helped to raise the profile of the impact of deprivation on children's learning and development. It has encouraged settings to develop their practice in identifying children from disadvantaged backgrounds and diagnosing their needs. Settings have put in place strategies to support these children to realise their potential. In a broader policy context, the EYPDG provides an important bridge from initiatives to support children and their families from birth, and the support provided by schools via the PDG.

1.20 The study indicates that the EYPDG is largely being interpreted and implemented as intended. It has identified some examples of emerging best practice that show potential for further investigation, particularly in relation to parenting support and small group work with children. The main priorities for the future should be to ensure even greater clarity around the purpose of the EYPDG and to ensure greater sustainability. There would also appear to be a need to focus more on developing capacity within the system to meet the needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds through the development of professional practice, particularly in relation to settings in the non-maintained sector.

1.21 The evaluation has identified the following recommendations for the Welsh Government, REC and Local Authorities. In certain cases the division of responsibility between LA and REC will depend on local arrangements to support settings and this is reflected in the wording used below.

1. Continue to provide the EYPDG to enable early years' settings to support children from deprived backgrounds and their families. If possible, Welsh Government should confirm the amount of funding that will be available in future (for example, over a three-year period) to enable settings to plan their use of the EYPDG in the longer term.
2. Focus more specifically on the support needs of non-maintained settings. Welsh Government should clarify the distribution of EYPDG funding to non-maintained settings and communicate effectively with settings about the rationale and arrangements for pooling the EYPDG in cases where it is not distributed to settings. Where LAs decide to pool the EYPDG in order to make more efficient use of the funding, non-maintained settings should be consulted about all decisions on how it should be used. In order to do this, LAs would need to collect data on which non-maintained settings have benefited from the EYPDG.
3. Review the different programmes aimed at supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds at different ages, including Flying Start, the EYPDG and the PDG, in order to identify common learning points and areas of continuity/discontinuity, including whether certain children from disadvantaged backgrounds are 'falling through the net' (for example, because they do not attend early years settings or are not being effectively identified as eligible for support).

4. Continue explaining the rationale for providing additional funding to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Address any confusion from settings about the focus on children from disadvantaged backgrounds, rather than on children who are falling behind or children with Additional Learning Needs.
5. Ensure that the professional development needs of practitioners in maintained and non-maintained settings are met through on-going opportunities to enhance practice and keep abreast with evolving practice.
6. Provide guidance for staff in early years settings on appropriate methods of identifying children eligible for the EYPDG, and on which measures and indicators settings can use for diagnosing support needs, measuring progression and evaluating the effectiveness of their provision.
7. In light of the evidence gathered as part of this evaluation, Welsh Government and the REC should work with settings to examine and test the methods they have found effective in identifying eligible children. They should then disseminate proven good practice in this area of work.
8. Identify settings which demonstrate best practice so that it can be shared more widely.
9. Support maintained and non-maintained settings to forge closer links to ensure greater sharing of information and practice.
10. Work more closely with Flying Start in order to increase communication and strengthen transition processes.
11. Welsh Government and REC should monitor the impact of the decision to increase the quantum funding to £600 per eligible child, especially in settings serving a small number of children from deprived backgrounds.
12. Welsh Government should consider the feasibility and appropriateness of commissioning an impact evaluation, given the requirement to identify and track the progress of children who have received the EYPDG, while also minimising the burdens on settings and schools.

2. Introduction/Background

Policy Context

- 2.1 The early years of a child's life establish vital foundations for their physical, psychological and social development, crucially impacting on later life outcomes. The Welsh Government has a longstanding commitment to reversing the impact of economic deprivation on children and young people's life chances, and to ensuring that all learners are supported to fulfil their potential irrespective of their social background as demonstrated most recently in '[Education in Wales: Our national mission, Action Plan 2017-2021](#)'.
- 2.2 '[Building a Brighter Future](#)' the early years and childcare plan for Wales (Welsh Government, 2013), acknowledged that early intervention and investment in the early years pays off. It specifically referred to evidence that attending a high-quality early education and childcare setting is a critical factor in influencing the positive outcomes for children in the longer term.
- 2.3 Flying Start is the Welsh Government's early years programme for families with children under four years of age living in disadvantaged areas of Wales (Welsh Government, 2017). It is geographically targeted and comprises four key elements:
- Quality part-time childcare for all two- to three-year-olds in Flying Start areas
 - Enhanced Health Visiting service with 1:110 caseloads
 - Parenting programmes and support
 - Early language development.
- 2.4 It also emphasises the need for early years settings and schools to have effective transitional arrangements in place to support children aged three and four as they move from home, childcare and Flying Start into the Foundation Phase.
- 2.5 The Welsh Government allocates Flying Start funding to each LA, based on an assessment of need in each area.
- 2.6 The [Foundation Phase](#) sets out the curriculum for all three- to seven-year-olds in Wales, in both maintained and non-maintained settings (Welsh Government, 2016). Welsh Government commissioned an independent stocktake of the [Foundation Phase](#) (Siraj and Kingston, 2014). This identified the need to consolidate the policy's implementation and recommended measures to strengthen the way it is delivered.

About the Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant (EYPDG)

- 2.7 The Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant (EYPDG) is an extension of the Pupil Deprivation Grant (now renamed the Pupil Development Grant - PDG). The PDG was created in December 2011 to support children eligible for free school meals and looked after children. Eligibility for free school meals (e-FSM) is used as a proxy for 'deprivation'. This was in response to evidence of a systematic difference in performance between children from disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged backgrounds (often referred to as 'the attainment gap'). In 2016 the attainment gap between eFSM and non-eFSM pupils was 14 percentage points for the Foundation Phase; 14 percentage points at key stage 2; 20 percentage points at key stage 3; and 31 percentage points at key stage 4¹. This represented a steady reduction in the attainment gap since 2006.
- 2.8 The PDG is paid to schools for each eFSM learner aged five to 15 and to the four REC for each child that is looked-after aged three to 15². In the financial year 2016-17 schools received £1,150 for every pupil with eFSM and the REC received £1,150 for each looked after child.
- 2.9 In April 2015 the Welsh Government introduced the Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant (EYPDG). The EYPDG extended eligibility to funding to three- and four-year-olds attending an Early Years Foundation Phase setting. As with the PDG, the aim of the EYPDG is to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners. It is intended to overcome the additional barriers that prevent learners from disadvantaged backgrounds achieving their full potential. The Welsh Government [provided official guidance](#) to early years settings outlining the aims, eligible uses and effective practice and accountability for use of the EYPDG. At the same time a Welsh Government guidance document was also published on Learning Wales called '[What really works for the early years](#)'. In this, Foundation Phase providers were encouraged to consider the following:
- Invest in professional development that will help staff to tackle the impacts of deprivation, with a particular consideration for staff training to support learners' speech, language and communication skills.

¹ These figures are taken from [performance data published in December 2016](#). The gap is measured by the difference in the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level in the Core Subject Indicator (CSI).

² Prior to 2017/18 looked after children aged four to 15.

- Employ interventions that are evidentially the most effective, such as small group work, self-regulation, a focus on communication and language, and interventions to support social and emotional learning.
- Work with parents/carers as partners in their child's learning and help them to support that learning through simple things they can do at home.
- Pool resources and work collaboratively with other schools and settings to make the most of your Grant.
- Adopt a multi-agency approach and engage with programmes such as Flying Start, Families First and Communities First.
- Monitor and evaluate your interventions to make sure you are getting the results you hoped for.

2.10 According to the official guidance issued by WG the four REC are responsible for ensuring that the EYPDG is used for the purposes for which it is intended. The funding was allocated on the basis that early education providers (including schools, nurseries, and playgroups) would receive £300 per eligible learner³. To be eligible, learners must be receiving Foundation Phase early education for a minimum of ten hours per week in an approved setting.

2.11 As there is no determination of eFSM status in early years settings, the Welsh Government enlisted the Welsh Local Government Association to provide advice on a suitable mechanism for allocating the funding following the introduction of the EYPDG. The EYPDG is allocated to schools in the maintained sector on the basis of the number of three- and four-year-olds in the Foundation Phase multiplied by the proportion of five-year-olds who are eligible for free school meals (eFSM) in that school. For nursery schools with no five-year-olds the eFSM average for the feeder primary school(s) is applied. The EYPDG is paid via REC with the stipulation that it must be delegated to schools and nursery schools at a rate of 100 per cent.

2.12 For settings in the non-maintained sector the amount of EYPDG is based on the number of funded Foundation Phase learners in non-maintained settings multiplied by the overall level of free school meals eligibility for five-year-olds in the LA. The REC are expected to work with the LAs and their Early Years Advisory Teachers

³ In December 2016, Education Secretary Kirsty Williams announced an increase in EYPDG funding from £300 to £600 for 2017-18.

(EYATs) to direct funding to non-maintained settings based on local intelligence and a needs assessment undertaken by Foundation Phase advisory teachers.

2.13 The guidance document also stated:

‘Regional consortia and local authorities should strongly encourage the pooling of EYPDG funding where this would mean it would be used most effectively; particularly for settings with small allocations, for example, to purchase in-service professional development, such as access to speech therapists.’ (Welsh Government, 2015)

2.14 The [final report of an independent evaluation of the PDG](#) was published in December 2017. This found that the PDG had raised the profile and needs of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds within schools. However, the study identified some confusion between the intended focus on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and a focus on lower attaining pupils, which could imply that the funding is not always being directed entirely as intended.

2.15 Key findings from the PDG evaluation were:

- PDG represents a significant source of funding for schools to invest in approaches to tackle disadvantage and is considered an ‘invaluable’ source of funding for specific types of activity to reduce the attainment gap.
- Case study schools were using sophisticated tracking systems alongside their own knowledge of pupils’ circumstances to identify pupils they considered disadvantaged and/or in need of targeted additional support.
- Recent case studies highlight many examples of very effective practice in closing the attainment gap. Across the case studies there were many examples of schools developing innovative approaches to engaging with pupils and parents.
- Case study schools noted that while quantifiable evidence of impact is a long-term goal that will need time to emerge, in the short term they identified substantial improvements in ‘softer outcomes’ such as pupil well-being, confidence and self-esteem.

- In general the impact analysis found that the gap between eFSM and non-FSM pupils has narrowed over the past five years; it acknowledges an emerging pattern of success in reducing the ‘effect’ of being eligible for free school meals on measures of educational progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 in English, Maths and Science.

2.16 Taken together, this evidence shows that there are common influences on learning settings’ success in providing support to children and families that contribute to improving their educational outcomes. However, the fact that the most disadvantaged children still do not achieve comparable educational outcomes to their non-disadvantaged peers means that efforts need to continue.

Study aims and objectives

2.17 This evaluation of the EYPDG was awarded to NFER in June 2016 and sought to examine the interpretation and early implementation of the EYPDG by relevant stakeholders. Beyond this overarching aim, it was also intended to strengthen the wider body of evidence on settings’ successful implementation of targeted funding for disadvantaged pupils, and thereby provide further insights into how it might be best to address the persistent shortfall in educational outcomes experienced by children in poverty.

2.18 The study was a process evaluation, designed to investigate how the EYPDG was working in practice. The aims and objectives of the evaluation are set out below.

Main aim

- To evaluate how the EYPDG is being interpreted and implemented by practitioners across the different settings, whether it is being implemented as intended and to identify any emerging best practice.

Objectives

1. Assess the extent to which settings are aware of and/or are following the ‘What really works for the early years’ guidance. Explore how this is being interpreted and any constraints or issues that the settings are experiencing.
2. Identify (based on stakeholder perceptions) changes to pedagogy and setting systems and any long-term capacity-building in improving the educational attainment of socio-economically disadvantaged pupils.

3. Identify where settings are going for information, support and advice on how to implement the EYPDG and whether they are making their spending plans based on evidence. Identify how effective local authorities (LAs), REC and clusters have been in ensuring that the EYPDG is used effectively.
4. Assess the nature and degree of any differences between the three types of setting (primary schools, maintained nurseries, non-maintained settings) in their understanding of the EYPDG and the way they have used the funding it provides.
5. Bearing in mind that the EYPDG is a new grant, assess early indications of its key strengths and any experience of constraints or issues that may have impeded its effectiveness.
6. Provide recommendations as to how the Welsh Government, LAs and settings can use the 'early lessons learned' to help meet Welsh Government's priority that every child deserves the best start in life.

Subsidiary aims and objectives

- Discussing with settings whether they are currently evaluating the impact of the work funded through the EYPDG and the implications of doing so.
- To scope out the potential for an impact evaluation to be undertaken in future.

3. Methodology

- 3.1 The study used three main methods: an online survey of early years settings; interviews with the policy leads in all four REC and one LA as well as with operational staff in three LAs; and case-study interviews in 20 settings. The interviewees included 20 headteachers/heads of settings (eight primary school heads, six nursery school heads, and six heads of non-maintained settings) and 17 other staff (seven teachers in primary schools, six teachers in maintained nurseries, and four members of staff in non-maintained settings).
- 3.2 The survey was intended to be sent to all heads of settings in receipt of the EYPDG. The Welsh Government provided details of all maintained schools and nursery schools in receipt of the EYPDG. Details of non-maintained settings are held by LAs and were requested from the REC, who collected the information from the LAs. However, approximately half of the LAs did not supply details of non-maintained settings in receipt of the EYPDG. The implication of this for the evaluation is that it is likely to under-represent the views of non-maintained settings. In other cases, LAs provided details for all non-maintained settings in their areas, irrespective of whether they were in receipt of the EYPDG or not⁴. The final sample comprised 1,526 early years settings, which were contacted by the study team. Of those contacted, 376 both identified themselves as in receipt of the EYPDG and responded to the survey during the administration period (18th January to 3rd March 2017).
- 3.3 The interviews with the four REC took place in July-September 2016. These discussions were held at the outset of the work to help inform the approach adopted for the evaluation. Discussions were held with nine consortia officials and were supplemented by telephone interviews in three LAs (four officers were interviewed: an officer with strategic responsibilities together with an officer with operational responsibilities in one LA; and one officer with operational roles in the other two LAs) to discuss how they had supported the implementation of the EYPDG in non-maintained settings.

⁴ The evaluation team addressed this by sending the survey to all settings and they asking potential respondents whether they received the Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant. Only those that received the Grant were invited to complete the rest of the survey.

3.4 The 20 selected case study settings comprised eight maintained primary schools, six maintained nursery schools, and six non-maintained settings. Six of the 20 settings were Welsh medium settings. The sample was selected to obtain a spread of characteristics using the following criteria.

Primary schools

- percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals
- geographical location
- language medium
- outcomes of previous Estyn inspection (overall judgements of 'good' or 'excellent').

Maintained nursery schools and non-maintained settings

- percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in the catchment area primary schools
- geographical location
- language medium
- outcomes of previous Estyn inspection (overall judgements of 'good' or 'excellent').

4. Findings

How the EYPDG is implemented

4.1 This chapter reports findings from the survey, interviews and case studies regarding the implementation of the EYPDG. It starts by describing how the REC and LAs are implementing the EYPDG before focusing on the views of setting staff who responded to the survey or took part in the case studies.

Key points on implementation

- Most (94 per cent) of early years settings in receipt of the EYPDG correctly identified its main aim as: 'To support children from low income households to fulfil their potential'. A minority identified other aims (either instead or in addition) which are not intended purposes of the EYPDG, namely: supporting children who are falling behind (13 per cent), supporting children with Additional Learning Needs (12 per cent) and providing additional funding for their settings (ten per cent).
- The most common use of the EYPDG was to support children's early language development: 94 per cent of settings said they had used it for this purpose. Other uses identified by the majority of settings were: staff training (88 per cent); buying new learning resources (88 per cent); paying for additional staff hours (86 per cent); work on assessment/tracking systems (78 per cent); and parenting support (75 per cent).
- Most settings (76 per cent) said they used the EYPDG to meet the needs of specific groups of children, primarily children from low income backgrounds. Other groups targeted for EYPDG expenditure were: children whose learning is below expectations for their age; and children with additional learning needs.
- Most settings (69 per cent) said they had made parents/guardians aware that the EYPDG was being paid to their settings. Most settings had used a variety of sources of support and guidance, especially the Welsh Government's guidance on how to use the EYPDG.
- Compared with maintained settings, statistically significantly fewer non-maintained settings said they had used a number of the sources of support and guidance listed in the survey. However, when they did access support, non-maintained settings rated it as more useful than maintained settings.

- Settings identified the main benefits of the EYPDG as: being able to begin supporting disadvantaged children a year earlier and that it was flexible (i.e. settings could decide how best to use it).
- The main drawback identified by settings was that the value of the EYPDG was too small, especially for settings with low numbers of eligible children. A few settings also said that the uncertainty about the future existence and level of their EYPDG allocations limited their ability to plan ahead. Some non-maintained settings reported that their LA had not distributed the EYPDG directly to settings and would have preferred them to do so.

Implementation by REC and LAs

- 4.2 The evaluation team interviewed representatives of the four REC. These interviewees described their role in supporting the delivery of work funded by the EYPDG in both maintained and non-maintained settings. In the case of maintained schools and nursery schools, the Consortia had built on their existing strategies to address the impact of deprivation on educational attainment, especially their experience of supporting the implementation of the PDG. The structures for doing so varied, reflecting the way each Consortium is constituted and the operational practices which they have developed. For example, interviewees from three Consortia described the role played by their central teams while one outlined how staff in the constituent LAs supported the use of the EYPDG in schools. At the same time, one Consortium noted that it had devolved more responsibility to groups of schools (but not to non-maintained settings) as part of a school-led model of improvement.
- 4.3 Representatives from REC emphasised that the EYPDG offered an opportunity to develop staff capacity to meet the needs of children from low income backgrounds. They felt that it was important that the EYPDG strengthened the quality of pedagogy within early years settings, especially those in the non-maintained sector which had been more traditionally focused on providing care.
- 4.4 The REC used their existing systems to monitor the way maintained settings used the EYPDG. They set up data collection systems (including on-line data capture). Support and challenge work is the responsibility of Challenge Advisors.

- 4.5 Individual LAs monitored the use of the EYPDG in non-maintained settings although in some areas the work was supported by the relevant consortium. The type of arrangements include the following:
- in one consortium area, for what were described as reasons of accessibility, LAs collect data from non-maintained settings using a paper version of the on-line proforma that the consortium used to collect information from the maintained settings
 - one consortium kept an overview of the non-maintained sector by taking a sample of their EYPDG plans and collecting monitoring information.
- 4.6 Interviewees explained that individual LAs are responsible for the administration and monitoring of the EYPDG in non-maintained settings. They said that LAs' early years teams used their local knowledge when allocating the funding to non-maintained settings, subject to the proviso that all of the funding was to be used for the intended purpose. In all of the areas where non-maintained settings were visited as part of this evaluation, the respective LAs had pooled the EYPDG funding for non-maintained settings in order to obtain value for money and improve outcomes.
- 4.7 REC noted that individual LAs were working from different starting points when meeting the training needs of non-maintained settings: some were beginning to offer courses which others had provided for many years. This meant that non-maintained settings had very different previous experiences in terms of training and support. Two of the interviewees from consortia felt that there was a need to consider how different LAs could work more effectively by collaborating to deliver certain types of training and other staff development work for non-maintained settings.

Practitioners' understanding and use of the EYPDG

- 4.8 The evaluation set out to consider whether there were differences between early years settings in their survey responses. The team considered the following four characteristics as a basis for analysing these differences: type of setting (maintained school; maintained nursery school; non-maintained setting); location (rural, suburban/mixed, urban); language medium (Welsh, Welsh and English, English with some bilingual elements; English medium); and deprivation (based on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation for the setting's post code and divided into quartiles). This analysis used Chi Squared tests and set an overall significance level

of $p < 0.05$, which means that there is less than a one-in-twenty probability of the result occurring by chance⁵.

4.9 This analysis identified a small number of statistically significant differences related to the type of setting and the language medium. There were no statistically significant differences in survey responses related to the settings' location or deprivation which means that there was no evidence that these characteristics were influencing respondents' answers. We have reported all the results where differences were statistically significant.

Understanding the EYPDG aims

4.10 The main aim of the EYPDG is to support children from low income households to fulfil their potential. This aim was included in a survey question along with three other feasible but incorrect answers. Respondents were invited to select as many responses as applied and their answers can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: What is your understanding of the purposes of the EYPDG?

Possible purposes	%
To support children from low income households to fulfil their potential	94
To support work with children who are falling behind	13
To support children with Additional Learning Needs	12
To provide additional funding for my setting	10
No response	0

N = 376

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100.

Source: NFER survey of Welsh Early Years Settings.

4.11 The table shows that almost all respondents correctly identified the main aim of the EYPDG as supporting children from low income households to fulfil their potential. A minority identified additional aims, with similar proportions selecting: 'to support work with children who are falling behind'; and 'to support children with Additional Learning Needs'. Ten per cent of respondents thought that one of the aims of the EYPDG was to provide additional funding for their settings.

⁵ We applied a Bonferonni correction to adjust for the significance level across the whole analysis, which helps to reduce the risk of false positive results.

- 4.12 There were two statistically significant differences according to the language medium used in the setting;
- A lower proportion of respondents from Welsh medium settings (84 per cent) said the purpose of the EYPDG was to ‘support children from low income households to fulfil their potential’ compared with respondents from Welsh and English medium settings (94 per cent), English medium settings with some bilingual elements (97 per cent), or English medium settings (99 per cent).
 - A higher proportion of respondents from Welsh medium settings (23 per cent) said that the purpose of the EYPDG was to ‘provide additional funding for my setting’ compared to Welsh and English medium settings (18 per cent), English medium settings with some bilingual elements (seven per cent) or English medium settings (four per cent).
- 4.13 The findings from the survey were echoed in the interviews with the 20 case study settings. Practitioners recognised the purpose of the EYPDG as being to support children from low income backgrounds (broadly defined). It was seen as a way of ensuring that their needs are met by providing the necessary support for them to progress successfully both in terms of their learning and wider development. Respondents felt that the EYPDG had raised the profile of this group of children and that it has encouraged practitioners to reflect on which strategies would be most effective in meeting their needs.

Use of the EYPDG

- 4.14 The survey included a series of questions about how settings had used the EYPDG funding between September 2015 and March 2017 (the survey administration period ran from January to March 2017). These focused on broad areas of possible expenditure: direct support for children’s learning; monitoring systems and staff training; and resources and links with other agencies. Settings were also invited to state any other ways in which they had used the funding.
- 4.15 Table 2 shows how settings had used the EYPDG to support children’s learning, monitoring and staff training⁶.

⁶ Please see Appendix 1 for full details of the question wording.

Table 2: Children’s learning, monitoring and staff training

Purpose	%
Early language development	94
Staff training to help staff work with disadvantaged children	88
Work on systems (e.g. for assessment or tracking)	78
Parenting support	74
Supporting children’s transition to the Foundation Phase	73
No response	2

N = 376

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100. A total of 369 respondents answered at least one item in this question.

Source: NFER survey of Welsh Early Years Settings.

4.16 The table shows that the EYPDG was used by a majority of settings to support children’s learning in each of the ways listed in the survey.

4.17 Almost all settings (94 per cent) had used the EYPDG to support children’s early language development. This was clearly the highest priority for settings, and 61 per cent said they had used the EYPDG ‘to a great extent’ for this purpose (see Appendix 1).

4.18 Table 3 shows how settings had used the EYPDG for buying resources and making links with other agencies.

Table 3: Resources and links with other agencies

Purpose	%
Buying new learning resources and programmes	78
Paying for additional staff hours	76
Links with other agencies	70
Improving the physical environment	55
Paying for IT resources	46
Extending the time your setting is open	12
Another purpose	30
No response	4

N = 376

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100. A total of 360 respondents answered at least one item.

Source: NFER survey of Welsh Early Years Settings.

4.19 The table shows that settings used the EYPDG to purchase new learning resources, pay for additional staff time and make links with other agencies. Over half (55 per cent) used it for improving the physical environment and a substantial minority (46 per cent) used it to purchase IT resources. Fewer settings used the EYPDG to extend their opening times. There were two statistically significant differences in the answers to this question from respondents in different types of setting. These are set out below.

- All non-maintained settings reported using the EYPDG for buying new learning resources and programmes compared to 76 per cent of maintained schools and 73 per cent of maintained nurseries.
- A higher proportion of respondents in maintained schools (84 per cent) said they had used the EYPDG to pay for additional staff hours, compared to respondents in maintained nursery schools (67 per cent) or non-maintained settings (53 per cent).

4.20 As can be seen in Table 3, about a third (30 per cent) of respondents indicated that they used the EYPDG for another purpose, and the survey invited them to provide further details. The most common additional uses of the EYPDG were; to employ more staff especially those with a specialist role (such as a pastoral support worker, wellbeing officer or family liaison officer); or to extend the number of hours they could offer. Several respondents provided more detail on items listed in the question, for example by explaining the use of additional staff hours, the nature of staff training, or describing their work with parents.

Expenditure themes

4.21 During the case study visits, settings' representatives said that they were constantly changing the type of work they did in response to need. They emphasised that they conceptualised the EYPDG broadly, and felt that it should be used to address the needs of the whole child, including supporting their personal, social and communication skills rather than focusing exclusively on learning. Most maintained settings said they were using the EYPDG to fund more of the activities they were already offering. Others said that the EYPDG enabled them to provide a greater amount of attention and intensity of support to children in addition to what they already provided. A representative comment was: 'We could have done it [i.e. they could have done the activity without additional funding], but it would have meant other children, other parts of the school, would have suffered.'

4.22 Some indicated that the EYPDG allowed them to offer new opportunities to children and/or families such as more individual attention and support, new interventions to support learning, family outreach or parenting programmes.

4.23 Interviewees emphasised that developing children's confidence and social skills was essential if children were to succeed later in school. They gave examples of using the EYPDG to support children's development of the following skills:

- communication skills, including listening and speaking
- behaving appropriately
- self-confidence in their ability to learn
- social skills: interacting with other children in a range of different contexts
- fine motor skills such as holding a pencil and being able to manipulate a variety of objects
- personal skills such as dressing themselves, using plates, knives and forks; and using the toilet.

4.24 The way the funding had been used by the LAs to support the work of the non-maintained settings meant that they had less autonomy over expenditure themes. They had accessed training provided by their LA. This focused on specific programmes or approaches to supporting children from low income backgrounds, providing family and parenting support, and other themes identified by the LAs. Staff from the non-maintained settings who attended the training felt that it had deepened their understanding of these issues rather than introducing totally new areas of work.

Targeting specific groups of children

4.25 The survey asked whether settings had used the EYPDG funding to meet the needs of specific groups of children, and if so which ones. A majority of respondents (76 per cent) said they had targeted the funding on specific groups of children. The responses to this question differed by the type of setting: 29 per cent of non-maintained settings said they targeted the EYPDG funding on specific groups of children compared with 71 per cent of nursery schools and 87 per cent of primary schools, suggesting that targeting was more common practice in the maintained sector.

4.26 The 286 respondents who said they targeted the funding were asked which groups of children they targeted. The responses to this question are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Which groups did you target?

Groups targeted	%
Children from low income backgrounds	90
Children whose learning is below expectations for their age	57
Children with additional learning needs	36
Looked after children	23
Children with English/Welsh as an additional language	12
Another group of children	12
No response	0

N = 286

A filter question, based on responses from the 286 settings that targeted specific groups.

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100.

Source: NFER survey of Welsh Early Years Settings.

4.27 The table shows that the majority of respondents (90 per cent) who targeted their EYPDG expenditure focused it on children from low income backgrounds, which is entirely consistent with the primary aim of the EYPDG. In addition, over half (57 per cent) said they were targeting children whose learning was below expectations for their age, about a third (36 per cent) targeted it on children with additional learning needs and just under a quarter (23 per cent) targeted it on looked after children. A small minority (12 per cent) said they targeted children whose home language was not English/Welsh. These findings are similar to those reported by Pye et al., (2015) in relation to targeting of the PDG.

4.28 The 12 per cent of respondents (35 people) who indicated that they targeted 'another group of children' were asked to provide further information. The most common answers were: children eligible for Free School Meals (nine respondents); children with poor communication skills (seven respondents); and 'vulnerable' children (four respondents).

4.29 The case studies interviews asked staff what systems they used to identify the children they felt needed additional support funded through the EYPDG. Staff pointed out that their task was complex because, unlike the PDG, they could not use eFSM as a means of identifying deprivation. In the absence of such formal indicators, staff had to rely on their own systems and knowledge of their families. Most said that they used their existing monitoring systems which some had refined

to focus specifically on children who were considered to be ‘vulnerable’ (in terms of their learning and development) or those who had developmental needs. Some settings had developed systems related to Flying Start and their experience of the PDG. Some settings said that they tracked children from Flying Start while others used established links with health visitors to identify children from low income households. A few schools reported that they had cross-referenced the names of the children they had identified with older siblings who were identified as eligible for free school meals.

- 4.30 While none of the settings said that they had developed completely new systems to identify children who needed support in response to the EYPDG, some noted that they had increased the amount of diagnostic assessment and monitoring in the early years. This meant that they were much more confident that children were not ‘falling through the net’ and that their needs were being identified more effectively than in the past.

Communication with parents

- 4.31 The survey asked settings whether they had made parents/guardians aware that the EYPDG was being paid to their settings. A majority (69 per cent) said they had made parents aware (54 per cent said they had informed all parents and 15 per cent said they had informed some parents). About a quarter (26 per cent) said they had not informed parents that the setting was receiving the EYPDG.
- 4.32 The case-study interviews found that few of the settings had discussed the EYPDG with parents because they felt that it was not something that was widely known about in the wider community. Responses to the survey suggested school staff tended not to make any distinction between the EYPDG and the PDG when discussing their approaches with parents and this impression was confirmed during the interviews.

Nature of expenditure: maintained settings

Additional staff

- 4.33 Staff in most of the maintained settings we visited said that they had used the EYPDG to fund additional staff hours either by increasing the hours they worked or by employing additional staff to release others. The EYPDG was seen as something which offered opportunities for schools to develop more personalised learning experiences for children. As one headteacher noted, the EYPDG ‘allows us to tailor

the curriculum to meet the needs of those who need it to be delivered in a different way’.

- 4.34 Where the EYPDG was used to obtain additional staff capacity, interviewees said they deployed those practitioners to concentrate on work with individuals or groups of children. They referred to evidence (mostly disseminated through the REC structures) which suggested that the PDG had been most effective where it had been used to purchase additional staff time and they translated this approach to their use of the EYPDG. For example, the headteacher of one school described how they had been able to release a member of staff to work with a small group of children to develop their speech and language skills. The work involved adults spending time with those children to model language skills during play-based activities.
- 4.35 Others adapted practice to deliver specific whole-class interventions by buying resources such as books, materials to support work in speaking and listening, or tablets that they used to obtain reading materials that were tailored to the children’s stage of development, that they could not have accessed otherwise.
- 4.36 One setting had identified the need to support children, particularly those from low income backgrounds, to become more active learners and to engage more with the outdoor learning environment. They used the EYPDG funding to release a member of staff to support children to develop greater independence and confidence so that they could become more active learners. The member of staff helped children in a variety of ways including:
- learning how to put on outdoor clothing to access the outdoor learning environment
 - developing their fine motor skills in non-formal situations for example by making bread and working with dough.
- 4.37 These approaches helped to nurture the children’s desire to seek out new experiences and increased their interest in exploring their surroundings.
- 4.38 Settings also used the EYPDG to help children from low income backgrounds who did not have well developed social skills. Staff referred to examples where previous childcare arrangements or family isolation had limited those children’s opportunities to develop socially. In some settings the EYPDG was used to enable staff to give these children more individual attention and support them to integrate with others. The settings which used this approach said that it would not have been possible

without the funding, because they would not have had enough staff to offer individualised support.

Outdoor learning

- 4.39 Some settings had observed that children from disadvantaged backgrounds had less confidence in using the outdoor learning environment which they attributed to a limited experience of playing outside. For example, this was described by a Foundation Phase Coordinator who noted 'The children often lack experience of the outside. We provide them with those chances and the EYPDG has helped us to offer those kinds of experiences and opportunities'. This had prompted several maintained settings to use the EYPDG to enhance outdoor learning by making improvements to outside facilities, such as buying materials which meant that children could play outside all year round. This had enabled settings to improve the way they implemented the Foundation Phase curriculum. As one Foundation Phase Coordinator noted 'We are now able to use the outdoor area all year round which has taken the FP work to a different level'. The settings who reported that they had used the funding in this way argued that although such changes benefited all children, they held particular benefits for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This was because the practitioners believed that those children had not been encouraged to access outdoor play before going to their settings.

Staff training

- 4.40 During the interviews, representatives from REC emphasised that the EYPDG offered an opportunity to develop staff skills to meet the needs of children from low income backgrounds. They felt that it was important that the EYPDG strengthened the quality of pedagogy within early years settings, especially those which were more traditionally focused on providing care. Some schools used the EYPDG to fund training for their staff. They released staff to attend training to prepare for a specific role (such as family liaison) or to train to support specific groups of children (such as those with developmental needs or those whose siblings were in receipt of free meals in school).
- 4.41 Settings often focused training on Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) or Teaching Assistants (TAs) who were deployed to work more intensively with small groups of children. As one headteacher noted: 'This has opened our eyes to what the TAs can do and it has opened the TAs' eyes to what they have the ability to be doing.'

Parenting programmes

- 4.42 Several of the 14 maintained case-study settings had used the EYPDG funding to develop parenting programmes and family liaison work. Maintained nursery schools in particular indicated that they had used the funding in this way. They had used the EYPDG to release staff to work with parents; to develop their relationships and identify what type of support families needed. For example, one nursery released a member of staff to develop relationships with parents informally by conversing with them at the school gate. The nursery felt that this had helped parents to gain the confidence to engage with the setting and had helped to address negative perceptions about educational settings that might have stemmed from parents' previous experiences. In some cases, nursery schools made weekly telephone calls to engage parents, especially those they had not seen and those they felt needed support. Settings also worked with parents to develop an understanding of the way the setting worked and to understand the policies in place and the rationale for these.
- 4.43 More broadly, the type of work which settings undertook as part of their parenting programmes included work to develop 'confident parents', organising social activities such as craft workshops (such as Easter or Christmas themed events), café events, and teddy bears' picnics, to build these relationships. One setting used the funding to release a member of staff to work as a home-school coordinator, leading workshop and drop-in sessions with parents, and conducting home visits as appropriate. These contacts often led to agreed action plans being created which guided parents to be able to support their children in the setting.
- 4.44 Staff from the settings described how their work had changed. For example, one setting described how they signposted parents to other services which had forged closer working relationship with health visitors. Another setting worked with parents to help them take the first steps towards entering FE provision and attend job interviews. They also signposted parents to other services such as doctors, dentists, and the police.
- 4.45 The EYPDG-funded engagement and parental support work occurred alongside specific activities designed to strengthen parents' ability to support their children's development. This aspect of the work has included helping parents to develop their skills in areas such as:

- diet/healthy eating
- appropriate use of dummies
- dealing with sibling rivalry
- showing parents how they could use play resources at home to help their children to make progress in their development.

Synergy with PDG

4.46 The discussions with school representatives suggested that there was considerable synergy in the way the EYPDG and PDG are understood and implemented. Primary schools tended not to make a distinction between the two grants although the EYPDG was always used to meet the needs of the specific age group for which it was intended. Schools which used the EYPDG to fund staff costs, usually supplemented this with funding from the school's core budget and/or from the PDG. An example was provided by a school which used some of the EYPDG and PDG to support a dedicated member of staff to undertake family liaison work. The school's headteacher commented 'This means we can work with the families and target potentially vulnerable children earlier by making the connections with their families and encouraging them to [ensure their children] attend the nursery.'

Nature of expenditure: non-maintained settings

4.47 In the case of the six non-maintained settings involved in the case studies, staff training was the main way in which the EYPDG had been used. This was because their respective LAs had retained the funding allocated to non-maintained settings centrally and used it to deliver training sessions for staff from non-maintained settings. This approach was designed to obtain economies of scale, and interviewees in both the LAs and in the non-maintained case-study settings agreed that it would not have been appropriate to sub-divide the amount paid to each setting. Interviewees from non-maintained settings said it would not have been possible for their staff to have accessed the training had it not been provided free of charge. They also noted that they would not be able to release staff to access training. They rarely had access to training from the LAs/REC and therefore the EYPDG provided a good opportunity for them.

- 4.48 However, staff in two non-maintained settings expressed disquiet because initially they had not been invited to training events and they had only been included after making representations to LA staff.
- 4.49 The non-maintained settings reported that the training had been an opportunity to develop their skills. Examples are set out below.
- Delivering specific programmes such as NUMICON (a numeracy scheme) and the SALLEY (language and literacy) programme
 - Training from a language therapist on speech and language development
 - Training on how to use the Foundation Phase Profiles (summative assessments to be undertaken to provide a consistent method for scoring the Foundation Phase outcomes and progress data)
 - Training on how to use resources to support children’s development (which were given to the settings as part of the training package) which they then used in the setting
 - Training (and associated materials) to engage parents better in order to support their children’s development.
- 4.50 Representatives from the participating non-maintained settings said that the training funded by the EYPDG (for example, NUMICON and SALLEY training) had given them new ideas which they had then cascaded to other staff within their settings. Most felt that the quality of the training had been high and that it had developed capacity and introduced them to new ideas and enabled them to take some existing work to new dimensions.
- 4.51 However, a few of the interviewees in non-maintained settings queried whether the training offered to them was appropriate and felt that it had not addressed the themes they wanted to pursue. For example, the head of one non-maintained setting felt that training in parental engagement would have been more beneficial to them than training on NUMICON (which is designed for children from nursery upwards), but which the interviewee considered to be too advanced for three-year-olds.
- 4.52 A small number of non-maintained settings had been given funding to buy additional resources. They had used this for several purposes, including: equipment for children and templates that could be used to create booklets for parents to help

them understand how the setting worked and to support their children’s development.

Sources of support and guidance used by settings

4.53 The survey listed some of the sources of support and guidance available to help schools/settings to use the EYPDG and asked which they had used. Their responses are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Sources of support and guidance used

Source	%
Welsh Government’s guidance on how to use the EYPDG	85
Local authority early years staff	74
Help from other schools/settings	73
Welsh Government Pupil Deprivation Grant flowchart	69
Other local authority staff	68
EEF/Sutton Trust Early Years Toolkit	65
Regional consortia	64
Specialist consultant	45
Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW)	43
Other support/guidance	44
No response	7

N = 376

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100. A total of 348 respondents answered at least one item.

Source: NFER survey of Welsh Early Years Settings

4.54 The source of support used by most settings was the Welsh Government’s guidance on the EYPDG. This was also rated as the most useful (see Appendix 1 for further information on ratings of usefulness).

4.55 Other sources of information or support used by most early years settings were: LA staff (both early years and other staff); other schools/settings; a Welsh Government flowchart concerning the Pupil Deprivation Grant; the EEF/Sutton Trust Early Years Toolkit; and REC.

4.56 A substantial minority of settings also indicated that they had used other sources of support and guidance. (The survey did not request any further information about these.)

4.57 There were several statistically significant differences in responses to this question from different types of setting and respondents from settings using different language mediums. These are set out below.

- A higher proportion of maintained settings (95 per cent) had used the Welsh Government's guidance compared to nursery schools (86 per cent) and non-maintained settings (67 per cent).
- A lower proportion of non-maintained settings (17 per cent) had used the EEF/Sutton Trust Early Years Toolkit to help them use the EYPDG compared with maintained nursery schools (59 per cent). Schools were the most likely to say they had used this resource (76 per cent).
- A lower proportion of non-maintained settings (17 per cent) had used support from the REC to help them use the EYPDG, compared with maintained nursery schools (56 per cent) or schools (75 per cent).
- A lower proportion of non-maintained settings (17 per cent) had used a specialist consultant to advise them on EYPDG, compared with maintained nursery schools (47 per cent) or schools (51 per cent).
- A higher proportion of maintained schools and nursery schools (77 and 68 per cent respectively) had used the Welsh Government Pupil Deprivation Grant flowchart than non-maintained settings (29 per cent).

4.58 There were some further statistically significant relationships between the type of setting and their views of the usefulness of the support received.

- Of those who had received support⁷ from LA early years staff, 83 per cent of non-maintained settings rated this as useful/very useful⁸ compared with 52 per cent of maintained nursery schools and 36 per cent of schools.
- Of those who had received support from other LA staff, 76 per cent of non-maintained settings rated this as useful/very useful, compared with 33 per cent of schools and 52 per cent of maintained nursery schools.

⁷ This analysis included all those who indicated they had used the source of support/guidance, excluding 'not used' and no response. Ratings of usefulness on a five-point scale where 1 = not useful at all and 5 = very useful were grouped into not useful (rating of 1 or 2), some use (3) and useful (4 or 5) (see Appendix 1).

⁸ This refers to a rating of 4 or 5 on a five-point scale.

- Of those who had received support from the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW⁹), 64 per cent of non-maintained settings rated this as useful/very useful, compared with 33 per cent of nurseries and 13 per cent of schools.

4.59 In summary, these findings suggest that most settings drew on a range of support and guidance but non-maintained settings were less likely to have accessed several sources of guidance and support about the EYPDG than maintained nursery schools or schools. However, non-maintained settings were more likely to rate the support they received from LA early years staff, other staff and CSSIW as useful/very useful than staff in maintained settings.

4.60 There was one statistically significant difference in responses to this question from settings using different language mediums:

- A lower proportion of English Medium settings (49 per cent) and English Medium settings with some bilingual elements (33 per cent) had used support from a specialist consultant to help them use the EYPDG, compared with Welsh and English Medium (53 per cent) and Welsh Medium settings (65 per cent).

4.61 During the case study interviews, some of the school interviewees said that they had followed their own assessment of need and already had a clear view of their priorities for working with children from low income households. This was because diagnostic work undertaken to determine how they would use the PDG had identified priorities for the early years and the EYPDG was helping schools to address those issues. Those who said they had accessed support referred to valuable advice provided by the REC and the Welsh Government flowchart. A small number of the maintained settings visited (mainly nursery schools) said that they had liaised with other settings and had shared practice with them.

Benefits and drawbacks of the EYPDG

Benefits of the EYPDG

4.62 The survey asked about the benefits and drawbacks of the EYPDG. The question on benefits provided a number of options, together with the opportunity for settings to report other benefits unprompted. The responses to this question are shown in Table 6.

⁹ Now named Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

Table 6: What would you say have been the main benefits of the EYPDG?

Benefits	%
Beginning the work with children from disadvantaged backgrounds a year earlier	57
Flexibility about the ways we could use it	52
Enabling staff to be trained to work with children from disadvantaged backgrounds	47
Enabling us to work (more) with families	36
Enabling us to collaborate with other schools/settings to use the EYPDG	13
Another benefit	8
No response	5

N = 376

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100.

Source: NFER survey of Welsh Early Years Settings

- 4.63 The table shows that a majority of settings (57 per cent) identified the main benefit of the EYPDG as being able to begin work with children from disadvantaged backgrounds a year earlier. Settings also appreciated the fact that they were able to use the EYPDG flexibly to support disadvantaged children and the opportunity for staff training on working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 4.64 There was one statistically significant difference in the answers to this question by type of setting: fewer non-maintained settings (31 per cent) identified 'beginning the work with children from disadvantaged backgrounds a year earlier' than maintained nursery schools (59 per cent) or schools (62 per cent).
- 4.65 The eight per cent of settings (30 respondents) who identified another benefit made a wide variety of suggestions, the most common of which were: providing additional resources; enabling earlier intervention; and the ability to support 'vulnerable' children.
- 4.66 The case study interviews revealed that most interviewees felt it was not yet possible to identify the impact of work which was funded through the EYPDG. This was partly because the EYPDG had only been in existence for a short period and because the effect of that work might only be seen later in a child's education. Interviewees said that social skills will take time to develop and that the impact of work to develop children's speaking and listening skills should become evident as the children progressed through the school. One headteacher of a maintained school expected the investment to pay off over the longer term in terms of children's

behaviour, saying that staff expected to be 'seeing less disrupted children on entry to their education'.

- 4.67 Most maintained settings acknowledged that the work funded by the EYPDG had not been embedded sufficiently for them to come to firm judgements about its impact. At the same time however, interviewees were confident that the work supported by the EYPDG would lead to positive benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. They referred to wider research evidence about the effectiveness of approaches such as work to develop children's social skills, oracy, personal skills, and programmes to support parenting skills, to support the case for implementing their chosen strategies.
- 4.68 Interviewees from maintained settings felt that one of the main benefits of the EYPDG was that it had helped to raise the profile of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Even so, the schools we visited as part of the case study work emphasised that as far as they were concerned the PDG was probably the main driver of their work in this respect. The importance of the EYPDG was that it has focused their minds much more on the need of the younger children. Nurseries and non-maintained settings agreed that the EYPDG had led them to sharpen their focus on this group of learners. This was because the professional training and awareness-raising work which had accompanied the EYPDG had prompted them to give special attention to certain children (such as those whose siblings were eligible for FSM).
- 4.69 Settings of all types believed that the EYPDG offered a way of identifying needs and of intervening early in a child's journey through the education system. They believed that they could ensure children were on the right track (and prevent problems escalating) by putting the right interventions and support in place during the early years.
- 4.70 Interviewees felt that the EYPDG had made an important contribution to staff development by refining their expertise in supporting children and focusing on work to develop their speaking and listening skills and their social skills. This included conducting observations and other work to assess children's needs and delivering special support or bespoke packages (for example, oracy) in response to those needs.

- 4.71 Interviewees provided examples where the EYPDG work was seen to have enhanced children's creative skills, and where children had become more confident about relating to other children because a member of staff had worked with them to develop the confidence and skills they needed. For example, a nursery school representative noted;
- ‘The improvement in their communication and social skills is very pleasing to see. ... We are very pleased with the impact the resource is having on the children's communication and social skills. It is very pleasing to see them now taking turns.’
- 4.72 School staff felt the connection with Flying Start had improved because the EYPDG had enabled schools to release staff to work more closely with Flying Start providers. This had increased the communication between them and improved the transition processes by allowing more detailed discussions of individual children and their needs. As a representative of one maintained setting noted ‘having the extra body made a big impact’ because there had been more dialogue between practitioners than had been the case before the EYPDG. Other maintained settings reported that the EYPDG had had a limited impact on the quality of their transition work because this was already an area of strength for them.
- 4.73 A minority of interviewees from the non-maintained settings suggested that the work supported by the EYPDG had helped to strengthen transition processes. For example, one member of staff described how they had met the Reception class teacher to discuss the Foundation Phase profile. However, this was by no means common practice and several non-maintained settings said that they felt the schools their children subsequently attended made little use of the information they had gathered. Some also reported that schools had repeated assessment activities without referring to information provided by the early years settings.
- 4.74 Maintained settings reported that families had become more willing to engage with school life and that the quality of their relationships had improved as a result of specific parenting work funded by the EYPDG. For example, they described how parents were more likely to visit the school or talk to staff when bringing or collecting their children. They also referred to qualitative evidence that:
- parenting skills had improved
 - parents were more aware of where they could access advice on matters like budgeting and benefits

- families were offering support to other, more vulnerable families.

- 4.75 However, many maintained settings insisted that their work to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds (including early intervention, work with small groups of children, links with Flying start, transition, and parenting/family programmes) was in its infancy and that they needed to refine what they are doing in light of experience.
- 4.76 Non-maintained case-study settings felt that the training funded through the EYPDG had impacted positively on their settings. They described how they had used ideas from the training to add to what they were already doing. A representative comment was: 'The training was useful because it enabled us to reflect and talk to other settings [otherwise] ... you feel isolated in your own spot.'

Drawbacks of the EYPDG

- 4.77 The survey contained an open-response question asking about the main drawbacks of the EYPDG. A total of 156 people (41 per cent) responded to this question. Their comments covered a variety of issues, the most common of which was that the value of the EYPDG was insufficient to support disadvantaged children's learning.
- 4.78 This appeared to be a particular issue for settings with a small number of children from deprived backgrounds, as one respondent said: 'As a school with low deprivation levels, we don't really receive enough money to make a great difference to the children who need it.' Some schools pointed out that at £300 per child, it compared unfavourably with the value of the Pupil Deprivation Grant (£1,150 per child).
- 4.79 Several survey respondents from non-maintained settings complained that the LA had decided what to do with the funding rather than distributing it to their settings. As one said:

The questions appear to assume that we received the grant at the setting. However, as far as I am aware the local authority gave it to our Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships and they organised us a training event and bought us a Numicom pack as a resource for the group. I would have preferred to know exactly how much the grant was and choose where the money for my group went by consulting my staff and committee. (Non-maintained setting manager survey response).

- 4.80 Some respondents raised issues with the use of e-FSM to qualify for the EYPDG. These included: the difficulty of getting parents to register for FSM and the fact that some low paid working parents did not qualify. Some commented that children other than those eligible for the EYPDG also had additional support needs.
- 4.81 A few respondents also pointed out that the fluctuations in the amount they received made it difficult to use the EYPDG efficiently or plan ahead. One respondent commented:
- ‘As the amount of funding is not constant [we have] no ability to plan. E.g. in the first year I was able to fund a parent engagement teacher two days a week. This year there is not enough funding to continue that for even half a day a week.’ (Non-maintained setting manager survey response).
- 4.82 Case-study interviewees identified few drawbacks of the EYPDG, and those they raised echoed the survey responses. The main constraint highlighted by interviewees in maintained settings was their concern about its sustainability and what would happen if the funding was withdrawn. They indicated that this was a concern about other work that was grant-funded (notably the PDG) and highlighted the number of posts and specific programmes or projects which were being funded with these grants.
- 4.83 Some interviewees questioned the reliability eFSM as a proxy for deprivation. Others noted that some of the families using their settings were ‘borderline’ in terms of their eligibility for FSM and that the system in general did not capture their needs.
- 4.84 Some interviewees from maintained nursery schools reported that they had been required to claim the EYPDG from the LAs after it had been used. This meant that they had to take a leap of faith in anticipation that the money would be recouped and this practice had caused cash-flow problems for them¹⁰.

¹⁰ Note that the grant must be paid in full to maintained settings.

5. Examples of emerging best practice

5.1 As noted in Chapter 2 the Welsh Government produced a number of guidance documents to support practitioners in their use of the EYPDG funding. This chapter explores the extent to which this guidance has influenced practice in the 20 case study settings. It contains detailed vignettes, describing practice observed in case-study settings to highlight particular approaches.

Key points on emerging best practice

- The way that the case study settings used the EYPDG funding aligned with guidance produced by the Welsh Government. REC and LA staff played an important role in assisting settings to develop strategies and select interventions which had been identified as good practice. Settings were also developing their own monitoring and evaluation processes.
- Staff training had highlighted the need to support children from low income families to fulfil their potential and it increased capacity within settings to deliver effective strategies in response to the needs of this group of children.
- Several settings were implementing parenting and family programmes. These focused on engaging parents, developing positive relationships, helping parents to support their children's development and signposting parents to other services and sources of support.
- In some cases the work funded by the EYPDG had strengthened transition arrangements from early years provision into the school system.
- Settings engaged with other service providers as part of a multi-agency approach to meeting the needs of children from low income backgrounds. In particular, some had forged closer links with Flying Start or had built on existing effective collaboration.

Awareness and use of guidance

5.2 As noted in Chapter 2, during the case study research leaders at settings said that they used a range of guidance (including the Welsh Government's PDG flowchart and materials produced by Estyn and the REC) when planning their use of the EYPDG. This influenced the kind of approaches developed which included changing pedagogy, working with parents, forging closer links with other public service providers, and staff training and professional development.

5.3 Moreover, the principles underpinning the six themes outlined in the WG 'What really works for the early years' guidance were evident in the practice which the case study settings described. Maintained settings (including maintained nursery schools) did not identify any major constraints in following the guidance which they felt aligned well with the broader PDG guidance. Non-maintained settings enjoyed less freedom of choice because LAs had used the EYPDG to provide training. However, there was evidence that practices they implemented following training focused on some of the areas of practice issues highlighted in the 'What really works for the early years' guidance

5.4 The extent to which these practices are embedded across all settings, and its impact, are issues which will need to be considered further in any future evaluation of the EYPDG.

Professional development to tackle the impacts of deprivation

5.5 The evaluation found evidence that settings had used the EYPDG to develop staff understanding and skills to tackle the impact of deprivation both on educational attainment and on children's life chances more broadly.

5.6 They developed staff capacity to deliver support programmes and to carry out in-depth work with small groups of children. Such training had been a major focus of the work funded by the EYPDG in non-maintained settings and was also evident in both maintained nurseries and schools. A great deal of this work concentrated on supporting children's speech and language and communication skills as well as work to nurture children's personal and social skills.

5.7 This staff development was already having an impact on some settings' ability to respond to the needs of children from low income backgrounds: settings reported that their staff had been able to develop the skills and understanding that was required to take responsibility for work with small groups of children and that they had acquired a better understanding of how to monitor and identify the outcomes of the work.

5.8 This professional development was influencing settings' pedagogical approaches in three distinct ways:

1. It encouraged them to examine evidence of what works in supporting children from low income backgrounds to fulfil their potential.
2. It developed their capacity to deliver specific interventions effectively.

3. It developed capacity for professional reflection more broadly.

Using evidence-based interventions

5.9 Case study settings reported that they had based their decisions about what strategies to use largely on the published evidence from the Welsh Government, REC, and Estyn. These resources provided signposting to evidence of good practice and provided examples where different strategies had been used successfully to support children from low income families to fulfil their potential. Maintained settings and maintained nurseries reported that a key role had been played by REC staff, in particular their Challenge Advisors, in identifying evidence-based strategies and discussing them with settings.¹¹ A primary school headteacher gave an example of this:

‘We held cluster discussions within [name of town] as part of our collaborative discussion of what works ... The Challenge Advisor monitors and is interested in this because it is a way of bringing things closer together and getting greater synergy in approaches.’ (Primary school headteacher)

5.10 Likewise, non-maintained settings commented that the training provided by LAs had signposted effective practice that had been externally validated.

5.11 In addition, the research found that settings had developed their own evidence base about what works in different situations. Settings were using existing tracking systems to identify individual learners’ needs. Staff gave examples of how they used the information to inform decisions about how to support learners, and said they were reviewing their pedagogy accordingly.

5.12 Settings adopted interventions to assist children from low income backgrounds to develop their skills and confidence. As mentioned in Chapter 2, there was evidence settings were using the EYPDG to support children to develop the skills and confidence to be active, self-directed learners.

5.13 Several case study settings had used the EYPDG to enable staff to work with small groups of children in order to give them the individual support they needed in order to develop their speech and language and personal and social skills. They gave examples where the EYPDG had enabled teachers or HLTAs to be released to concentrate on this work. This approach was more prevalent in schools than in the

¹¹ The main role of Challenge Advisers is to develop capacity in schools to drive and sustain their own improvement in order to raise standards and provide high quality educational provision. The role was co-constructed by the Welsh Government and Regional Consortia and is outlined in [national standards](#).

maintained nurseries and non-maintained settings visited. An example of this approach is presented in the case study below.

Example 1: Tailoring provision to meet children's needs

This primary school has over 300 children, two-fifths of whom are eligible for free school meals. The school has received a significant amount of PDG and EYPDG funding which had enabled it to double its staffing levels.

Staff described their tracking systems as 'robust', enabling them to identify children from low income backgrounds so they could establish what kind of support was needed. Staff built on their links with Flying Start to establish a baseline for children on entry to school at the age of three. The tracking system collected evidence of children's progress in learning. Staff had developed the school's existing tracking system to capture the learning of three-year-olds and added some additional indicators which focused on wellbeing.

The school had developed a joint Nursery-Reception unit where children were set in groups according to their stage of development rather than their age. The additional staffing enabled the school to have much smaller teaching groups than would otherwise have been the case.

Staff said both the EYPDG and the PDG funding had raised the profile of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds among school staff. Their tracking systems indicated that the smaller teaching groups had resulted in improvements in children's speaking and listening skills. Moreover, staff argued that the practice of grouping children by stage rather than age had helped to improve social skills. The school reported that all children had achieved their targets the previous year, something which was attributed directly to the additional work funded by the EYPDG.

Work with parents/carers as partners in their child's learning

- 5.14 The case studies suggested that settings were engaging with parents and families. A typical comment that encapsulates the approach adopted by many of the settings was made by one headteacher who noted that:

‘Many of our parents had negative experiences during their school days. They now see us as a supportive, caring environment. There is no longer an ‘us and them’ mentality. There has been a breaking down of barriers’.

- 5.15 Settings used various approaches, which were tailored to address the particular challenges they faced. The work included building relationships, engaging parents, identifying what support they needed and signposting them to available resources. Another aim was to encourage parents to play a fuller role in improving the home learning environment and supporting the settings’ work, as outlined in the case study below.

Example 2: Helping parents to support their children

A non-maintained setting accessed training provided by the LA which helped them to forge closer links with parents. The setting had a mixed catchment and was located in a rural area. Those attending the training were given six bags of resources, each containing materials to support work in a particular focus area such as literacy, numeracy, physical development and communication. At the start they used the resources in the setting itself to engage the children before giving them to the children to take home on a rota basis. Each bag contained at least one resource that was designed specifically to meet each child’s individual needs.

The training given to the setting’s leader included guidance on what she needed to do to enable parents to use the resources to best effect. The setting leader used this training to engage parents and discuss how to use the materials with their children. She gave particular attention to supporting individual parents to use the specific items that were tailored to the needs of their children.

The training and implementation of the scheme increased the amount of dialogue between parents and the setting. It also placed a sharper focus on what children were able to do. This enabled parents and practitioners to develop a more thorough understanding of each child’s developmental needs.

Pooling resources and working collaboratively

- 5.16 As a result of the decision taken by several of the LAs, resources were pooled to provide training for staff from non-maintained settings. Interviewees from non-maintained settings recognised the benefits of the training itself and the opportunity to step out of their setting and discuss things with other practitioners.
- 5.17 None of the case study settings worked with other settings to use the EYPDG, although schools sought to ensure synergy between the work undertaken through the EYPDG and the broader PDG.
- 5.18 Although the maintained settings included in the case study sample had not pooled their budgets, individual case studies provided some evidence that the work funded by the EYPDG had strengthened the transition arrangements as children moved from early years settings into the formal school system. Staff at settings gave examples where practitioners from different settings had met and shared information about children and their needs. Settings gave examples where particular attention was paid to the needs of children from low income households during these discussions. However, it is clear that these processes reflected a wider emphasis on such dialogue and was not solely a consequence of the influence of the EYPDG. Moreover, some interviewees complained that schools still did not build sufficiently on the experience of staff in early years settings.

Adopting a multi-agency approach

- 5.19 The evaluation identified some examples where practitioners working in the Foundation Phase were working closely with other organisations as part of a multi-agency approach to support children from low income backgrounds. Respondents regularly talked about the way they collaborated with Health Visitors, speech and language professionals, and other practitioners working as part of Flying Start. They also described how they signposted parents to a range of support services, including health, the police, LA services, and community support networks such as food banks.

Example 3: Using the EYPDG to help parents to access support services

This setting was a maintained nursery school providing 80 places in morning and afternoon sessions in an economically disadvantaged area. The headteacher used the EYPDG funding to release a member of staff to develop a community programme for parents. The member of staff established a parent nurture group based in local leisure centres. The aim of the group was to support parenting skills and to help families to access support services. The nursery targeted low income families (identified through their own evaluation) but also included other families because they wanted people from different backgrounds to support one another.

The member of staff made links with local dentists, doctors and the police alongside agencies who offered advice on finance and benefits. They also drew attention to facilities such as a local Food Co-op. The work increased the nursery school's links with external providers such as the library service which visited the school to share resources for staff and children.

The nursery school's existing tracking systems indicated that children's social skills had improved as measured by 'soft' indicators such as taking turns, behaviour, and other social skills. EYPDG - funded activities were also perceived to have had a positive influence on parenting skills and to have improved parents' knowledge of support services.

Monitor and evaluate interventions

- 5.20 The case study interviews revealed that in schools and maintained nurseries, headteachers or senior leaders responsible for the Foundation Phase were actively supervising the work and had a thorough grasp of the strategies being used in their settings. They usually used their school's existing monitoring systems to ensure that interventions were being implemented as intended and to measure emerging signs of impact. The management structure in non-maintained settings was less formal/extensive and in those cases the head of the setting usually took responsibility for planning and monitoring the use of EYPDG.

6. Potential for a future impact evaluation

6.1 As part of the study, NFER were asked to consider the issues inherent in whether the impact of the EYPDG could be evaluated in the future. This included considering what monitoring and evaluation activity was already being done by settings and what outcomes the settings were hoping to achieve with their use of the EYPDG. This chapter examines these issues.

Key points on future impact evaluation

- Requirements for an impact evaluation would include the ability to identify which children had received the EYPDG, establishing valid and reliable baseline and outcome measures and the ability to track children's movement between settings and schools.
- Settings identified three main outcomes they were aiming to achieve by using the EYPDG: improving children's speech and language skills (86 per cent); improving children's readiness to learn (77 per cent) and improving readiness for learning in the Foundation Phase (76 per cent).
- Most settings (94 per cent) measured the effects of their approaches on children's outcomes in a variety of ways, including: monitoring development against expectations for their age, assessing children's outcomes, using tracking systems and observing their responses to activities.
- Most settings (90 per cent) provided information on their use of the EYPDG to outside authorities, such as the LA and/or the REC. Most commonly they provided information about the spend identified within the SSIP/SDP.
- Case-study interviews revealed that practitioners recognised the need to measure the impact of the EYPDG but wanted to ensure that any evaluation was manageable for them and suitable for young children. They saw the potential to build on evaluation systems developed for Flying Start and the PDG.

Requirements for an impact evaluation

6.2 In order to determine whether an initiative has had its intended impact, an evaluation would have to establish which children had received it, how to measure progress and what would have happened if the initiative had not been in place.

6.3 The evidence from the survey and the qualitative research indicate that respondents recognise there would be benefits in developing a means of conducting an impact evaluation of the EYPDG. This would provide valuable evidence for accountability and could help to identify which children are benefiting most. In order to do so, it would be necessary to ensure that the data gathered fulfils the requirements of a robust impact evaluation. The survey and the qualitative research suggests that the following issues would need to be addressed before this could be undertaken:

- The Early Years Development and Assessment Framework (EYDAF) would need to be fully developed and there would need to be a statutory requirement on relevant stakeholders or a very high voluntary level of participation from a representative group of settings to collect sufficient information to establish a meaningful baseline.
- It would be important to identify which settings were in receipt of the EYPDG.
- In order to measure children's progress, settings (maintained and non-maintained) would need to have capacity to undertake baseline assessments of individual children to an equivalent standard. To do so, they would need access to relevant professional development opportunities.
- A suitable outcome measure would need to be identified.
- The systems used to track individual children between settings (all maintained and non-maintained settings providing for three- and four-year-olds) and primary schools must be robust.
- Providers receiving data will need to have confidence in the reliability of the assessments and be prepared to use them as a baseline for their own work.

6.4 Such an approach would build on and enhance the quality of existing monitoring and enable a broad range of children's developmental characteristics to be assessed.

6.5 However, it is also important to consider the proportionality of any such data collection and weigh its potential benefits against consideration of burdening early years staff and potentially distracting them from the key aim of providing a high quality learning environment for young children.

Current evaluation practice in settings

- 6.6 The survey asked settings which outcomes they were hoping to achieve by using the EYPDG and how they were measuring its impact. It also asked about external monitoring of their use of the EYPDG.
- 6.7 Table 7 shows what outcomes settings were hoping to achieve from their use of the EYPDG.

Table 7: What outcomes are you hoping to achieve by using the EYPDG?

Outcomes	%
Improvements to children's speech and language skills	86
Improvements to children's readiness to learn	77
Readiness for learning at the Foundation Phase	76
Greater family involvement with children's learning	54
Improvements to children's behaviour	50
Greater family engagement with the setting	46
No response	6

N = 376

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100.

Source: NFER survey of Welsh Early Years Settings

- 6.8 Three outcomes were identified by over 75 per cent of settings: improvements to children's speech and language skills; improvements to children's readiness to learn; and readiness for learning in the Foundation Phase.
- 6.9 Table 8 shows the methods settings said they were using to measure the effects of their approaches on children's outcomes.

Table 8: How do you measure the effect of the approaches that you have implemented on children's outcomes?

Methods	%
Monitor individual children's development against expectations for their age group	81
Assess children's outcomes	79
Use tracking systems/audit trail to measure impact	78
Observe children's responses to activities	76
No response	6

N = 376

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100.

Source: NFER survey of Welsh Early Years Settings

- 6.10 The table shows that each of the listed approaches were being used by over 75 per cent of settings: monitoring against expectations for their age, assessing their outcomes, using tracking systems and observing children’s responses to activities.
- 6.11 There was one statistically significant difference in the answers to this question. Fewer non-maintained settings (48 per cent) said they used tracking systems/audit trails to measure the impact of their approaches on children’s outcomes, compared with maintained nursery schools (74 per cent) or schools (85 per cent).
- 6.12 The survey also asked whether they provided information about their use of the EYPDG to external authorities, namely: the LA, REC, Early Years Partnership or ‘someone else’. The types of information provided are shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9: External monitoring of EYPDG

Purpose	%
Spend identified within SIP/SDP	85
EYPDG spending plans	82
Written description of the use of the EYPDG	78
Spreadsheet of EYPDG expenditure	72
No response	10

N = 376

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100. A total of 337 respondents answered at least one item in this question.

Source: NFER survey of Welsh Early Years Settings.

- 6.13 The table shows that the majority of settings reported their use of the EYPDG and future spending plans, including financial information and a description of the activities for which it was used. Information was most commonly reported to the LA and/or the REC (see Appendix 1).
- 6.14 There were some statistically significant differences in the answers to this question in relation to the type of setting. These are listed below.
- Non-maintained settings were least likely to report that they provided EYPDG spending plans. Schools (91 per cent) and nursery schools (87 per cent) were more likely to have provided these plans than non-maintained settings (71 per cent).
 - Non-maintained settings were also least likely to report that they provided spend identified within SIP/SDP. Almost all schools (98 per cent) and most (81 per cent) nursery schools said they did this, compared with 64 per cent of non-maintained settings who did so.

- 6.15 The above differences are perhaps not surprising, given that many non-maintained settings accessed pooled resources held by the LA rather than receiving direct funding from the EYPDG.
- 6.16 The settings that were visited as part of the case study research indicated that they used existing monitoring and tracking methods to measure the impact of the work funded by the EYPDG. This was something which was encouraged by the REC who were keen that existing systems should be used to avoid additional workload.
- 6.17 Both maintained and non-maintained settings said that they tracked progress using their existing tracking or monitoring systems. However, they were unable to use those methods to differentiate between children eligible for free school meals and those not eligible, with this age group (three- to four- year olds) because there is no recognised proxy indicator for deprivation for children before compulsory school age. Some schools said that they used Foundation Phase Profiles to establish a baseline and measure progression.
- 6.18 Non-maintained settings invariably used existing monitoring systems, primarily observation techniques, to monitor the effect of new approaches introduced through the work funded by the EYPDG and some said that they were also using the Foundation Phase Profiles to monitor individual children's progress. However, none of the non-maintained settings said they were measuring the specific impact of the work funded by the EYPDG (possibly because they were accessing staff training provided by LAs, rather than receiving direct funding). REC representatives believed there was a need to develop capacity for evaluation within non-maintained settings. This would support those settings to strengthen the way they collect and record evidence about children's progress. They felt that training on evaluation should feature as part of a broader strategy to develop the skills of staff in the non-maintained sector.

Practitioners' views on how the impact of EYPDG funded activity might be monitored and measured in future

- 6.19 Settings recognised the need to be able to measure the impact of the EYPDG but insisted that any monitoring should be manageable and should take into account other monitoring work. They also emphasised the need for support for them to monitor and evaluate their strategies, echoing the conclusions of the evaluation of the Foundation Phase (Taylor et al, 2015).

- 6.20 They noted the need to take account of the age of the children for whom the EYPDG was being paid and that any impact measurement needed to be appropriate to this age group. There was a strong message that measurement of impact should take account of developmental indicators, social and personal skills, and parents' willingness to engage with the setting.
- 6.21 A minority (two settings) referred to the potential to build on the profiling undertaken by health visitors for the Flying Start programme, by focusing on indicators such as:
- height and weight
 - speech and language
 - use of bottles or dummies
 - behaviour
 - physical activity and confidence playing outside.
- 6.22 At the same time, they insisted that there was a need to take account of factors such as the lack of an official indicator for deprivation for children below compulsory school age (see above) and the fact that non-maintained settings in particular (and also some maintained nurseries) drew children from a wide geographical area, which made it difficult to come to judgements based on neighbourhood data.

7. Discussion and conclusion

Discussion

- 7.1 This study set out to evaluate how the EYPDG is being interpreted and implemented by practitioners across different settings, whether it is being implemented as intended and to identify any emerging best practice. It took place at a relatively early stage, in the second year of the EYPDG being made available to early years settings.
- 7.2 Our findings indicate that settings in receipt of the EYPDG are well aware that the main purpose of the EYPDG is to support children from low income households to fulfil their potential, although some also thought it had additional aims, including supporting children who are falling behind. While it is understandable for practitioners to wish to focus additional resources on children who are lagging behind, this does represent a misunderstanding of the purpose of the EYPDG. As a consequence, it is possible that practitioners could target resources on children who are not from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or fail to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds whose development is as expected or in advance of expectations for their age.
- 7.3 The survey analysis also found that fewer respondents from Welsh language medium settings correctly identified the intended purpose and more of them thought that one of the purposes of the EYPDG was to provide additional funding for their settings.
- 7.4 The evaluation found that settings were largely following the recommendations set out in the 'What really works in the early years' guidance documents. Settings had chosen to focus primarily on using the EYPDG to support early language development and professional development. A majority of settings were also using the EYPDG to provide parental support and to strengthen their work with other agencies. The case studies provided examples of good practice in relation to these aspects, along with support for children's social and emotional development. They also identified a need to focus on children's behaviour, physical development (including fine motor skills) and personal care.
- 7.5 A majority of settings responding to the survey said they had used the EYPDG to work on systems, for example to assess children's needs or track their progress.

- 7.6 The study found that settings are primarily using the Welsh Government's guidance, LA early years staff and other settings to help them decide how to implement the EYPDG. The case-study settings also mentioned referring to Estyn publications.
- 7.7 There were relatively few statistically significant differences between different types of settings in their responses to the survey. However, the findings suggested that non-maintained settings which received support from LA staff found this particularly useful. This could be because they were less used to receiving support from LA staff.
- 7.8 Early indications of the EYPDG's key strengths suggest that a primary strength is that it has helped to raise the profile of the impact of deprivation on children's learning and development. It has encouraged settings to develop their practice in identifying children from disadvantaged backgrounds and diagnosing their needs. Settings have put in place strategies to support these children to realise their potential. In a broader policy context, the EYPDG provides an important bridge from initiatives to support children and their families from birth, and the support provided by schools via the PDG.
- 7.9 The main constraints mentioned by respondents relate to the level of funding, its distribution to non-maintained settings and the methods for identification of eligible children. Early years practitioners argued that the amount of the EYPDG (£300 per eligible child) was too small to make a difference, especially in settings with few eligible children. The announcement from Welsh Government of the intention to double the value of the EYPDG in future and assurances that the EYPDG will be available for the rest of the Assembly term will no doubt be welcomed by settings, some of whom also made the point that uncertainty about the future made it difficult for them to plan in the longer term.
- 7.10 The second issue relates to the distribution of the EYPDG to non-maintained settings. Representatives from REC identified non-maintained settings as in particular need of support, but small settings with few eligible children would only be due a small amount of EYPDG. This provided a rationale for LAs to fund training which they offered to non-maintained settings, rather than distributing the EYPDG to the settings. While some of the practitioners we interviewed agreed with the principle of 'pooling' the EYPDG to make the most effective use of the money, the survey identified that others were angry that they had not received the EYPDG or felt they had not had an opportunity to influence its use. The evaluation also identified instances where some settings had not been invited to take part in the

training or felt the training was not appropriate. This practice may have contributed to the fact that some LAs were unable to identify which non-maintained settings had received services funded by the EYPDG, which poses challenges for accountability, including the ability of this evaluation to adequately investigate the use of the EYPDG in non-maintained settings.

- 7.11 One of the additional difficulties facing practitioners is how best to identify children from disadvantaged backgrounds, in the absence of a measure such as eFSM. Despite the method for allocation of the EYPDG practitioners are left to make decisions about how best to identify eligible children. Some of the case-study settings had found some creative ways of identifying eligible children: this is an area where there is potential for Welsh Government, REC and/or LAs to help share best practice.
- 7.12 Many settings said they are currently evaluating the impact of the work funded by the EYPDG, using many of the techniques currently in place to monitor children's progress and through reporting on their use of the EYPDG. However, they pointed out that it is inherently challenging to isolate the impact of a particular activity on children's outcomes and that many of the interventions are designed to benefit children indirectly (in the case of work with families) and in the longer-term (when the children have left the setting).
- 7.13 Staff at settings had largely developed their own measures of children's development and progress, including drawing on those used in Flying Start and by schools to evaluate the PDG. Interviewees stressed that any potential future measure needed to take account of a range of developmental indicators but should also be practical for staff to implement.
- 7.14 Most of the case-study settings had used the EYPDG to extend the work they already had in place, although some had funded new areas of work. Their use of the EYPDG reflected both their size/capacity and individual histories. For example, some welcomed the opportunity for staff training or to provide small-group support, whereas others already had these in place. Again, the relatively small value of the EYPDG and uncertainty about future income meant that settings were hesitant to make larger investments in new streams of activity.

Conclusion

- 7.15 This process evaluation indicates that the EYPDG is largely being interpreted and implemented as intended. It has identified some examples of emerging best practice, particularly in relation to parenting support and small group work with children. The main priorities for the future should be to ensure even greater clarity around the purpose of the EYPDG and to ensure greater sustainability. There would also appear to be a need to focus more on developing capacity within the system, particularly in relation to settings in the non-maintained sector.

Recommendations

- 7.16 The evaluation has identified the following recommendations for the Welsh Government, REC and LAs.
1. Continue to provide the EYPDG to enable early years' settings to support children from deprived backgrounds and their families. If possible, Welsh Government should confirm the amount of funding that will be available in future (for example, over a three-year period) to enable settings to plan their use of the EYPDG in the longer term.
 2. Focus more specifically on the support needs of non-maintained settings. Welsh Government should clarify the distribution of EYPDG funding to non-maintained settings and communicate effectively with settings about the rationale and arrangements for pooling the EYPDG in cases where it is not distributed to settings. Where LAs decide to pool the EYPDG in order to make more efficient use of the funding, non-maintained settings should be consulted about all decisions on how it should be used. In order to do this, LAs would need to collect data on which non-maintained settings have benefited from the EYPDG.
 3. Review the different programmes aimed at supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds at different ages, including Flying Start, the EYPDG and the PDG, in order to identify common learning points and areas of continuity/discontinuity, including whether certain children from disadvantaged backgrounds are 'falling through the net' (for example, because they do not attend early years settings or are not being effectively identified as eligible for support).

4. Continue explaining the rationale for providing additional funding to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Address any confusion from settings about the focus on children from disadvantaged backgrounds, rather than on children who are falling behind or children with Additional Learning Needs.
5. Ensure that the professional development needs of practitioners in maintained and non-maintained settings are met through on-going opportunities to enhance practice and keep abreast with evolving practice.
6. Provide guidance for staff in early years settings on appropriate methods of identifying children eligible for the EYPDG, and on which measures and indicators settings can use for diagnosing support needs, measuring progression and evaluating the effectiveness of their provision.
7. In light of the evidence gathered as part of this evaluation, Welsh Government and the REC should work with settings to examine and test the methods they have found effective in identifying eligible children. They should then disseminate proven good practice in this area of work.
8. Identify settings which demonstrate best practice so that it can be shared more widely.
9. Support maintained and non-maintained settings to forge closer links to ensure greater sharing of information and practice.
10. Work more closely with Flying Start in order to increase communication and strengthen transition processes.
11. Welsh Government and REC should monitor the impact of the decision to increase the quantum funding to £600 per eligible child, especially in settings serving a small number of children from deprived backgrounds.
12. Welsh Government should consider the feasibility and appropriateness of commissioning an impact evaluation, given the requirement to identify and track the progress of children who have received the EYPDG, while also minimising the burdens on settings and schools.

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Appendix 1: Survey of early years settings

Evaluation of the Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant Survey for Early Years Settings (2017)

This research considers how the Welsh Government's Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant (EYPDG) is being used in Wales. It is being undertaken by the NFER on behalf of the Welsh Government.

The survey should only take about **10 minutes** to complete. It is designed to be answered by a member of your setting's senior management team (such as a head of early years, head of setting or headteacher). Your answers will be treated confidentially and we will not identify any individuals or settings in our reports.

Your answers will remain confidential to the NFER, we will not share your data or identify any individuals or settings in our reports.

If you have any queries about the completion of this survey, or would like further information about the evaluation exercise, please do not hesitate to contact XXXX at NFER on XXXX, or by email to XXXX

Thank you for your help with this important research.

Please use the buttons at the bottom of the page to move through the survey, please do not use your browser's forward and back buttons.

Please note that if the survey is left inactive for over 20 minutes you will be timed out. Please use your personalised link in your email to resume completion. If you exit the survey before the end, any answers that you have given may still be analysed.

Note that the order in which items within a question appeared was randomised in the online version, to avoid response bias.

1. Select the language that you would like to take the survey in:

English

Cymraeg

2. Does your school/setting receive the Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant?

%

Yes 72

No 28

N=521

About your early years setting

3. Which of the following best describes your setting:

(Please select one only)

	%
maintained primary, infant or all-through school (including middle deemed primary)	75
local authority maintained nursery school	9
non-maintained early years setting	16
no response	1

N=376

4. Would you describe your catchment area as largely:
(Please select one only)

	%
rural	24
suburban/mixed urban and rural	36
urban	39
no response	1

N=376

5. Is your setting:
(Please select one only)

	%
Welsh Medium Setting	23
Welsh Medium and English Medium Setting	5
English Medium Setting with some bilingual elements	50
English Medium Setting	22
no response	

N=376

6. What is the postcode for your setting? (Open response)

Aims of the grant

7. What is your understanding of the purposes of the EYPDG?
(Please select any that apply)

	%
To provide additional funding for my setting	10
To support work with children who are falling behind	13
To support children from low income households to fulfil their potential	94
To support children with Additional Learning Needs	12
no response	0
N=376	

How the grant is used

Supporting children's learning

8. Thinking about the way that you have used the EYPDG funding since September 2015 to support children's learning, to what extent have you used it for each of the following purposes?

(Please select one answer per row)

	To a great extent %	To some extent %	To a little extent %	Not at all %	no response %
Early language development: work to develop the language skills that children will need so that they are prepared for learning when they begin school	61	28	5	5	1
Parenting support	18	29	27	24	1
Transitional arrangements: supporting children as they move into the Foundation Phase	18	33	23	26	1
Work on systems, for example, to assess children's needs, or tracking systems	16	36	26	21	1
Staff training and development to help staff to work with disadvantaged children	25	40	22	11	1

N=376

Other expenditure

9. Thinking about other ways that you have used the EYPDG funding since September 2015, to what extent have you used it for each of the following purposes? (Please select one answer per row)

	To a great extent %	To some extent %	To a little extent %	Not at all %	no response %
Buying new learning resources and programmes	19	36	22	20	2
Paying for additional staff hours	37	26	13	22	2
Extending the time your setting is open	2	5	5	86	2
Paying for IT resources	7	21	18	52	2
Strengthening your setting's links with other agencies to support the development of the whole child, their families and carers	13	28	29	28	2
Improving the physical environment of your setting	11	26	19	43	2
Other	3	14	13	68	2

N=376

10. Please tell us about any other important ways in which your setting uses the EYPDG funding (Open response)

11. Have you used the EYPDG funding to meet the needs of specific groups of children?

(Please select one only)

	%
Yes	76
No, we are not targeting funding on any groups in particular	21
no response	3

N=376

12. If yes, which groups did you target? (Please select all that apply)

	%
Children from low income backgrounds	90
Looked after children	23
Children whose learning is below expectation for their age	57
Children with English/Welsh as an additional language	12
Children with Additional Learning Needs	36
Another group of children (please specify)	12
No response	0

N=286

13. Have you made parents/guardians aware that the EYPDG is being paid to your setting? (Please select one only)

	%
Yes, all	54
Yes, some	15
No	26
No response	5

N=376

14. What would you say have been the main benefits of the EYPDG?
(Please select all that apply)

	%
Flexibility about the ways we could use it	52
Enabling staff to be trained to work with children from disadvantaged backgrounds	47
Beginning the work with children from disadvantaged backgrounds a year earlier	57
Enabling us to work (more) with families	36
Enabling us to collaborate with other schools/settings to use the EYPDG	13
Other (please specify)	8
No response	5

N=376

15. What would you say have been the main drawbacks of the EYPDG? (*Open response*)

Sources of support and advice

16. We have listed some of the sources of support and guidance that are available to help schools/settings to use the EYPDG.

For each one you have used, please rate how useful you found it on a scale where 5 = very useful, 3 = quite useful and 1 = not useful at all. If you have not used it, please select the option 'We have not used this support/guidance'.

(Please select one answer in each row)

	Not useful at all 1 %	2 %	Quite useful 3 %	4 %	Very useful 5 %	We have not used this support /guidance [0] %	No response %
Welsh Government's guidance on how to use the EYPDG	2	4	27	25	26	9	6
EEF/Sutton Trust Early Years Toolkit	5	9	18	18	16	28	6
Local authority early years staff	8	11	22	14	19	19	6
Other local authority staff	10	11	20	14	13	26	6
Regional Consortia Specialist consultant Care and Social Services	8	12	24	16	5	30	6
Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW)	16	7	9	8	5	49	6
Help from other schools/settings	19	6	9	6	4	51	6
Welsh Government Pupil Deprivation Grant flowchart	6	9	20	21	16	21	6
Other support/guidance	5	7	26	19	11	25	6
N=376	13	6	13	7	4	50	6

How the grant is monitored

17. We would like to know who collects information from you about the way you use the EYPDG and what type of information they collect. Please tell us who, if anyone, collects the different types of information listed below.

	Local authority %	Regional Consortium %	Early Years Partnership %	Someone else %	Not collected %	No response %
EYPDG spending plans	57	45	5	3	11	6
Spend identified within SIP/SDP	57	53	5	2	8	6
Written description of use of the Grant	51	43	6	4	15	6
Spreadsheet of EYPDG expenditure	57	28	5	4	22	6

N=376

Impact of the grant

18. What outcomes are you hoping to achieve by using the EYPDG?
(Please select all that apply)

	%
Improvements to children's speech and language skills	86
Improvements to children's behaviour	50
Improvements to children's readiness to learn	77
Greater family engagement with the setting	46
Greater family involvement with children's learning	54
Readiness for learning at the Foundation Phase	76
No response	6

N=376

Measuring the grant's impact

19. How do you measure the effect of the approaches that you have implemented on children's outcomes?

(Please select all that apply)

	%
Use tracking systems/audit trail to measure impact	78
Observe children's responses to activities	76
Monitor individual children's development against expectations for their age group	81
Assess children's outcomes	79
no response	6
N=376	

Appendix 2: The case study visits

Case study visits took place in 20 early years settings during January – March 2017. The sample comprised eight primary schools, six maintained nursery schools, and six non-maintained settings. In each case we interviewed the head of the setting and other staff with leadership roles in relation to the EYPDG.

Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with participants, using generic research instruments that were tailored to settings' specific contexts to ensure that individuals could comment appropriately on their experience of the EYPDG. Each visit generally lasted for half of one day.

The research was carried out in accordance with NFER's Code of Practice (2012). In particular, the team used the following procedures:

- Research participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research and were informed of how their data would be used and stored.
- The research team asked all participants for their active consent to take part.
- Interviewees were asked for their permission for the interviews to be recorded.
- The research team has produced findings and judgements based on sound research evidence.
- The team preserved confidentiality by not naming the settings or individuals that participated.
- All NFER staff that had access to the project folders and data have undergone Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.
- All personal data was kept confidential and not divulged to anyone outside the research team.