Strategy for Reducing the Impact of Poverty on Educational Outcomes

2015 – 2018
**Introduction**

This strategy has been prepared by ERW’s constituent LAs in partnership with our schools and key partners. Its purpose is to show our vision for reducing the impact of poverty on educational outcomes as outlined in the ERW Business Plan 2015-18 and Strategy.

ERW’s vision is for a consistently high performing school network across the region with every school a good school offering high standards of teaching under good leadership resulting in all learners achieving their maximum potential.

We recognise the national context. Freedom from Poverty is core aim 7 of the Welsh Government and responsibilities for public bodies are set out in Tackling Child Poverty: Guidance and regulation for Welsh authorities.

Building Resilient Communities: Taking forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan sets out the targets and actions that are being taken to tackle and mitigate for the impact of poverty on people of all ages in Wales.

The Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (Feb 2011) uses the percentage of pupils who achieve the Level 2 Inclusive threshold to measure progress against the objectives of the strategy.

The School Effectiveness Grant and Pupil Deprivation Grant 2013-5 document outlines the case for improving the educational outcomes for learners who are eligible for free school meals (FSM pupils).

Tackling Poverty is at the heart of Welsh Government Policy and Strategy.

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The Welsh Government’s seventh core aim for all children and young people is that they “are not disadvantaged by poverty”. Nevertheless it is the case that too many pupils, at present, continue to be disadvantaged by poverty. Schools with high proportions of pupils entitled to free schools meals do not currently perform as well as those with pupils from more advantaged backgrounds. The Minister for Education and Skills has made addressing the impact of poverty on attainment a particular priority and the allocation of pupil deprivation grants to schools should help to support new initiatives.

Mitigating the impact of poverty has to go beyond making decisions about how a school will use the grant itself. In order to make a difference, tackling the impact of poverty has to be central to whole-school planning. School leaders do not currently put a high enough priority on this. Although most schools provide staff with extensive training on teaching literacy to all pupils, fewer prioritise numeracy and very few plan training on how to alleviate the effects of poverty on individual learners for whom disadvantage creates barriers to learning.

There are many reasons why disadvantaged learners underachieve, and schools need to address these simultaneously if they are to succeed in helping these pupils to do well at school. Taking a ‘whole-school’ approach means that all staff need to understand the role
they have to play in the overall plan. Schools should have a suite of distinct initiatives to support disadvantaged learners as well as general policies and practices that apply to all pupils, in terms of:

- tracking pupil progress;
- coaching and mentoring individuals;
- improving literacy and critical thinking skills;
- developing social and emotional skills;
- support for wellbeing including attendance and behaviour;
- offering a relevant and motivating curriculum;
- listening to learners; and
- engaging with parents.

The multiple strands of a team approach to disadvantage should go beyond the school to include its local authority and regional consortia as well as relevant external organisations, specialist services and agencies, such as youth, health and social services. Establishing mutual understanding and aligning initiatives so they all pull in the same direction are key elements of this process. High-level leadership skills are required for setting up these networks of agencies, enabling them to collaborate, and getting co-operation to achieve common goals. Currently, there are not enough leadership development opportunities available for headteachers and other senior school leaders to help them develop these leadership skills. Leaders lack a one-stop-shop of leadership expertise that they can call on for guidance and informal advice, sourcing of training courses, and the matching of partners for coaching and mentoring.

**ERW’s Business Plan priorities**

ERW’s mission is to ensure effective performance in all schools across the region by:

- Robustly and consistently challenging the performance schools and the outcomes achieved by all their learners
- Developing a differentiated system of professional support to schools in proportion to need that is identified through a nationally agreed assessment and categorisation framework applied consistently across the region
- Supporting the deployment of national and regional strategies to develop the literacy and numeracy skills of learners and to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners
- Facilitating and developing effective school to school support in order to improve performance and outcomes through the development of experienced and successful lead practitioners
- Managing and deploying well trained Challenge Advisers across the region and within the hubs to challenge performance and signpost appropriate relevant support
- Triggering formal interventions in schools that fail to perform to the required standard
- Building capacity and resilience within schools so that we will enable a self-improving system within the region
Improved attainment for all is a core principle throughout our work and is embedded in our Business Plan priorities.

ERW is a single integrated regional professional school effectiveness service driving school improvement and learner achievement across the combined area of six local authorities in the South West and Mid Wales region within three hubs:

- Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire (Western Hub)
- Ceredigion and Powys (Northern Hub)
- Neath Port Talbot and Swansea (Eastern Hub)

This model of regional strategy delivered through the three hubs has been developed to ensure effective delivery across the large geographical area, the full diverse range of schools that mirrors the regional context and the bilingual nature of the region.

ERW recognises that poverty is a major influence on the extent to which children in Wales can achieve their potential.

Poverty is not having enough money, clothes, play, food, support, services or other things that are needed for a healthy life. Almost a third of children who live in Wales live in poverty. Growing up in poverty can make life very difficult. Children and young people growing up in poverty may have more health problems, not do as well at school and have fewer skills. They may expect less out of life. They may not get a job, or have a job that pays less and end up depending on benefits; and have fewer opportunities and be disadvantaged all their life. Poverty and child poverty which affects one in three of all children in Wales is the major cause of low achievement in disadvantaged students. Low educational achievement is a major cause of poverty and poverty the most important reason for low educational achievement. Poverty is concentrated in particular areas and schools in Wales most of which faced the collapse of their local economies and sources of employment in the 1980s, but there is not a consistent correlation between high concentrations of poverty and school performance. The reason why the low performance of FSM students accelerates in secondary schools is likely to be caused mainly by personal and social factors. In disadvantaged communities parents, peer groups and communities generally do not have the positive influence they could on the achievement of students. The reasons why schools are not able to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students can be identified.

The gap between the achievements of disadvantaged compared to advantaged children is present at 9 months old, is significant by the age of 3, grows in the primary years and accelerates particularly in secondary education. By the time that students complete their ‘compulsory’ education at the age of fifteen the gap is at its biggest: it is two and a half times more likely that a student not living in poverty will achieve a high outcome than one living in poverty. There is a very low chance that disadvantaged students who have not achieved to a high level at the age of 15 will go into further and higher education and achieve any further qualifications by the age of 19.

Whilst those students living and not living in poverty have improved their educational performance over time, the poverty gap has not narrowed. Large concentrations of FSM students in a school have an adverse effect on the performance of non-FSM students: the evidence is less clear on a possible obverse effect.
Nevertheless, we recognise that enabling our most disadvantaged learners to achieve well will support them to, and help us deliver the required improvements within the system.

We are therefore working systematically to build school level capacity to self-improve. We are supporting schools in their use of evidence based approaches to tackling school improvement e.g. The Sutton Toolkit which was showcased at the regional conference;

The use of wellbeing tools such as PASS and the SUPASurvey as a measure of learner wellbeing;

Identifying schools who have effectively closed gaps in attainment and sharing their practice;

Supporting schools and system leaders through providing a toolkit of effective practice and evaluation tools; and crucially

Continuing to reduce the gap in attainment of FSM and non FSM learners whilst overall performance across ERW continues to exceed the Welsh average.

**Current action/ position??**

Overall the progress of e-FSM learners does not compare well with their peers;
While the gap in attainment between e-FSM learners and their peers in primary schools has narrowed slightly, it has widened in secondary schools since 2008; and
This growth in the gap in attainment highlights the need to take targeted action.
Some important trends underpin the national measures:
In primary schools, English / Welsh is weaker than mathematics and within English/Welsh, writing is weaker than reading and oracy, especially for boys.
In secondary schools, mathematics is weaker than English/Welsh:

There are ‘gaps’ in performance between learner groups such as looked after children compared with all learners: 10% attain the expected level in secondary school compared with 50% for all learners.

While Achievement and Entitlement to Free School Meals in Wales 2012 notes that:

The performance of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than their counterparts at all key stages and in all performance measures;

The gap in performance has narrowed over the last six years at KS2 and 3. However, at KS4 the gap at L2 Inclusive had widened every year to 2010 before narrowing in the past two years; and that

The gap in performance gets wider as pupils get older.
We also recognize the need to improve the attainment of specific groups of learners. For those in receipt of FSM we will support schools to make best and targeted use of the additional resources for these pupils. In addition, we will encourage schools where interventions to reduce the impact of poverty on educational outcome are working well, and capitalise on their experiences to support others. We also aim to raise standards and tackle risk of underachievement for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds in particular those learning English (and /or Welsh) as an additional language (EAL). Specialist advice, support, guidance, continuing professional development and training is a pivotal element of this work to make sure that pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds are: fully included and happy in school; attend school regularly; have their language and learning needs appropriately assessed and met; achieve within the National Curriculum (NC) at levels in line with their starting point/fluency in English; and achieve their individual academic potential. This means that we need to make sure that all schools know their pupils well, and support them accordingly.

Regionally, the teaching and learning of boys needs attention. Currently performance is weaker than that of other regions. A clear analysis is required as well as a focus on successful strategies. Already we have established priorities to make sure that our resource development takes full account of their needs and that we can build on schools’ best practice.

Raising standards of teaching for all will be a key priority for the region. We strive for every teacher to be a good teacher over time, and for pupils to receive good or better teaching every day in every lesson.

We therefore need to consistently and with a common approach recognise and reward the increasing excellence by some teachers, as well as tackle underperformance, across our six local authorities. The proportion of adequate or unsatisfactory teaching is increasing at a quicker pace than the proportion of excellent teaching. This means that we must tackle this issue now. Estyn also reports that ‘improving teaching’ is one of the most common recommendations in school inspections. In ERW the percentage of schools with this as a recommendation is nearly 10%. This is an important aspect for us to consider, even in good or better schools, where inter department and inter school variation affect the standards of teaching.

Supporting and delivering the Minister’s New Deal to support teachers and school leaders will dovetail with our work on improving teaching. ERW will support teachers to strive for excellence and support teachers with new areas of work and curricular changes.

We are committed to leading a changing climate in education, in light of the Donaldson review of the curriculum and as the role of technology in pedagogy becomes increasingly essential. Raising our digital competency across all areas of delivery is key to more efficient and effective working. We will work to demonstrate improved use of skills in line with the requirements of the new GCSEs, and PISA. We will engage with schools through EIG funded programmes to prioritise and focus our work in the right areas.

Building our capacity to lead the most effective departments and subject areas will means additional support where we have identified areas for development. The changes to science
for example will lead to a retraining programme in some schools, making sure all staff have the skills for future curriculum delivery.

Supporting the development of Welsh medium education with appropriate access to bespoke data analysis for core visits and high quality resources at all key stages will be a priority early in the year. This will enable our teachers to have improved access and consistent access to resources they need to support learners.

Our role in fully embedding the LNF across all key stages in welcomed and will be planned in line with the work already underway at a regional level. Securing a good foundation for learners in the Foundation Phase to build the literacy and numeracy skills will be prioritised.

Towards the end of 2014, ERW refreshed its self-evaluation report in preparation for a number of internal and external reviews. This plan takes account of the recommendations from key reviews and the useful feedback from inspection, audit and regulatory bodies.

From September 2015, we will formally implement our regional strategy for a self-improving system, building on work underway to strengthen interschool support and school to school work. This will signify a key step forward in the region’s work towards a self-improving system.

This Minister set out clearly his vision for Wales in Qualified for life. ERW will support the implementation of key government policies. The themes of the plan are closely aligned to our priorities. We want to support our regional workforce, to regain confidence in teaching as a profession through effective support and challenge; we want to build leadership capacity from the inside out and work together to capitalise on the region’s strengths to share this together; we seek a rich curriculum with valued outcomes for all. This picture will change as we await the Minister’s response to reviews; we are committed to change for improvement.

Sustained planning and improvement over three years is a goal which we aim to deliver in the second part of the plan. This section outlines the internal and organisational ways that ERW must strengthen accountability, communication, systems and processes to enable greater efficiency and yield to learner outcomes. Identifying how we deliver value for money in improving learner outcomes is key to a successful partnership.

The Business Plan will highlight and take action to mitigate pressures, national and local priorities, risks and areas for development. Key strengths and effective practice will be built upon.
Next steps

This strategy has three/ or more overarching aims.

1. **To build an effective and efficient knowledge and experience base of successful strategies ...**
   - Describe what we have and what we can enhance
   - Do we need to start doing something new?
   - Using resources right

2. **To clarify roles**

   This has implications for all parts of the school system, wider support services and LAs, and parents community

   Key roles are summarised below.

   **Schools and their governing bodies**

   Schools have had many years of working successfully in partnership with other schools for a variety of purposes. Sector led improvement as the principal vehicle for school improvement will require an even greater willingness to collaborate.

   Schools will engage with the self-improving system in different ways but the premise is that all have something to offer. Schools will:

   - share expertise
   - work together when it makes sense to do so
   - ensure that school to school support addresses improvement priorities for this targeted group of learners as identified in ACV.

   **ERW’s role**

   The local authority will seek to work in partnership with schools to help maximise the impact of school to school support on outcomes for children and young people. This will involve:

   - facilitation – supporting the sharing of success
   - brokering - matching need with provision
   - signposting - providing clear direction to appropriate support
   - training and development
   - analysis
Activities and actions already in place include;

- In line with the new requirements, which largely focus on best practice, we have supported schools to improve their plans this year in preparation.
- Those schools where planning is less focused and strong have been targeted for additional support in line with the Ladder of Support and Challenge or through a local training programme.
- Provision of a data set to schools highlighting the evidence required to target pupils.
- The ERW Ladder of support and Intervention* sets out a clear annual process through the ACV where we work with schools to challenge their targets consistently.
- In addition, the work of the Governor Support team to train and support governors to identify the priority required for e FSM learners has been heightened following the new categorisation model.
- Governor Support services are changing regionally and will be part of the brokered support given to schools annually. Governors should take a lead responsibility in challenging the process.
- ERW's LAC PDG work group have worked together to agree a plan to deliver a high quality service o schools, and pupils through effective collaboration and building on best practice. This means that a regional strategic approach will guide our approach to the delivery. In principle – we will build in school resilience to respond proactively to need and dovetail this with regional capacity to quality assure the arrangements.
- Effective pupil tracking is a key strength in ERW’s schools, and this aids effective challenge at a regional level as well as effective focused interventions to pupils. This is a significant factor in enabling focused interventions where and when they are required.

Partners

LAs - SS

charities

Partners will therefore need to:

- define their role clearly
- identify the value they can bring to reduce the impact of poverty
- be prepared to work in collaboration with a range of partners
- understand and focus on local priorities

3. To identify what needs and success looks like

Given the unique strengths and needs of ERW’s schools, it is important to establish success criteria which exactly match local circumstances. In general terms, the strategies will be different as the needs and impact of poverty is so varied.
Evaluation and impact

Sector led improvement cannot be judged a success unless it has a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people. Planning for impact should be integral to all school to school support work.

The important thing is that it is done, that learning is fed back into the planning process and that success is celebrated.

What will success look like?

2015 – 2016

- Are schools fully utilising PDG to target right intervention at right pupils
- Do we have successful pathfinders which can share effective strategies for the next two years?
- Are we able to evidence improved outcomes for fsm learners due to effective school to school support?
- Are pupils on FSM showing accelerated progress to narrow the gap at all levels to NFSM?
- Do we have a common Vulnerable Assessment Profile across the region?
- Has good practice in transition at all phases been identified and signposted? Learners make informed choices that raise aspiration in family.
- Do we have a common data toolkit that identifies successful schools in closing the gap?
- To narrow the attainment gap at the end of Foundation Phase by 15% by the end of 2016.
- To raise attainment by 15 year olds eligible for FSM of the level 2 inclusive of E/W and Maths to 30% by 2016.
- To reduce the number of young people who are NEET across the ERW region on leaving Year 11 to 3.5% of cohort.

2016 – 2017

- Is the proportion of learners gaining lev2+ increasing at the planned pace?
- Are all green and yellow schools engaging in supportive arrangements where they can build their own capacity to effectively support those in poverty whilst supporting others?
- Do we have confident schools taking risks to strive for excellence?
- Are we strengthening the focus on good outcomes for fsm pupils?
- Schools take a central role in coordinating and planning early interventions within the community, working with all agencies.
- Do all schools self-evaluate; plan and deliver the appropriate curriculum for all learners.
- To narrow the attainment gap at the end of the Foundation Phase by 10% by 2017.
- To raise attainment by 15 year olds eligible for FSM of the level 2 inclusive of E/W and Maths to 37% by 2016.
- To reduce the number of young people who are NEET across the ERW region on leaving Year 11 to 3.3% of cohort.
2017 – 2018

- Are there children in poverty accessing better support with learning to close the gap? ..... 
- Have standards accelerated at a quicker pace than in the previous three years and at a faster pace than other regions?
- Learners from deprived backgrounds benefit from the highest teaching and learning.
- Successful schools have active and effective leadership and deploy staff appropriately and effectively to tackle poverty.
- To narrow the attainment gap at the end of the Foundation Phase by 8% by 2017.
- To raise attainment by 15 year olds eligible for FSM of the level 2 inclusive of E/W and Maths to 40% by 2016.
- To reduce the number of young people who are NEET across the ERW region on leaving Year 11 to 3.1% of cohort.