

Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Children, Young People and Education Committee entitled Inquiry report into the Education Improvement Grant: Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic Children.

The Welsh Government is committed to ensuring that all children and young people are supported to achieve their potential regardless of their background or personal circumstances. The Welsh Government is grateful to the Committee for giving its attention to the educational outcomes of these learners.

The Committee's report recognises that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller and Minority Ethnic learners do not form one homogenous group and that these learners have different needs and significantly varied educational attainment levels. A number of ethnic minority learners outperform the national averages and the Committee's report recognises the recent improvements in performance for the vast majority of these learner groups. The Welsh Government fully recognises there is more to do, in particular for those groups whose performance remains significantly and stubbornly below the national averages in Wales.

The challenge is significant. The evidence provided to the Committee identifies a number of long-standing issues which pre-date the introduction of the Education Improvement Grant for Schools (EIG), and which have been subject to action by our services and schools for some time. There is a delicate balance between encouraging and supporting all learners to access educational opportunities to achieve their academic and vocational potential, and respecting the diverse values within our communities which contribute to the modern and progressive Wales in which we live.

The Welsh Government recognises the commitment and contribution the sector, our services and schools have given to support these learners over many years. The Committee's recommendations provide a clear focus for action and the Welsh Government thanks the Committee for giving its attention to this important matter.

Detailed responses to the report's recommendations are set out below. Please note in some cases responses are grouped together:

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should keep under review the best model for funding activity to support the educational outcomes of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners. It should revisit this question later in the Fifth Assembly and consider whether the introduction of the Education Improvement Grant has improved outcomes for these groups of learners. In the meantime, the Welsh Government should improve its monitoring and evaluation arrangements for the Education Improvement Grant through the courses of action set out in recommendations 2 to 7 and address this overarching recommendation by the end of 2020.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should review the arrangements it has put in place to monitor the use of the Education Improvement Grant and evaluate its impact, specifically in relation to the educational outcomes of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners.

Response: Accept recommendations 1 and 2

The Welsh Government has committed to review the EIG in its third year and will strengthen the current arrangements for monitoring the impact of the grant in the 2017-18 financial year.

The EIG was introduced in April 2015 following the rationalisation of a number of individual education grant funding streams in response to calls from schools, Local Authorities and regional consortia to simplify grant funding arrangements and improve access to Welsh Government education grant funding. The EIG supports our education strategy Qualified for Life and the funding arrangements exist within the context of the National Model for Regional Working which outlines how Local Authorities work in partnership with each other and deliver their school improvement services on a regional basis through Local Authority regional education consortia.

In advance of the publication of the Committee's report, the Cabinet Secretary for Education committed to put in place a strengthened outcomes framework to support the grant in 2017-18. Once in place, the Welsh Government will consider how this approach could support other funding linked to the delivery of our education strategy.

The Welsh Government recognises that the significant funding provided through the EIG does not exist in isolation of other school improvement grant funding and support and core provision in schools. In the 16/17 financial year, the EIG at £134million represents a small percentage of the total £2.519billion gross schools budgeted expenditure, of which £2.123billion is delegated to schools. In that context the Welsh Government will work to ensure greater understanding of the impact of the EIG and its contribution to improvements in outcomes for learners.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should take a more strategic lead in providing guidance on how the Education Improvement Grant should be used to benefit Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should provide greater clarity on the specific role of the Welsh Government, regional consortia, local authorities and schools in monitoring and tracking outcomes for these groups of learners.

Response: Accept recommendations 3 and 5

The Welsh Government will work collaboratively with partners through established mechanisms to build a better understanding of how the EIG can be used to benefit Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners.

The Welsh Government recognises the extensive expertise, knowledge and experience within our schools, Local Authorities and their service providers and

Local Authority regional education consortia. A pillar of the National Model for Regional Working, which outlines how school improvements services are delivered in Wales, is a self-improving system. This approach has a critical role to play in sharing and mainstreaming good practice.

The Welsh Government and the Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) have put in place a direct line of contact between Local Authority service providers and their Directors of Education through the Minority Ethnic Achievement Local Authority group (MEALA) and the Gypsy Traveller Forum. The service leads are in close contact with schools and provide support to schools and to individual learners.

The Welsh Government facilitates meetings of the MEALA and the Gypsy Traveller Forum. These fora are primarily made up of Local Authority service providers and operate under the auspices of the ADEW Inclusion network. They contain a wealth of practice experience and expertise in providing support for these vulnerable learners and we must ensure that this resource operates effectively to support practice and learners across Wales.

The Welsh Government will discuss with ADEW Inclusion and the Chair of the group options to widen membership of the group to include regional education consortia representatives to ensure a full and consistent understanding across education services of the needs of these learners.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should urgently review the effectiveness of the education performance framework it is expecting regional consortia and local authorities to use to evaluate outcomes from the Education Improvement Grant. The framework should make far more specific reference to the intended outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners so that all involved in providing services for these learners have a clear understanding of what is expected from the Education Improvement Grant.

Response: Accept in Principle

The Welsh Government has committed to strengthen the existing arrangements and working with regional education consortia, put in place a more robust outcomes framework for the grant in 2017-18. Once in place, the Welsh Government will consider how this approach could support other funding linked to delivery of our education strategy.

To reflect on our priorities and visions, we are in the process of developing our new education improvement strategy. . The revised strategy will have a greater focus on equity and wellbeing, providing a clear national expectation for equity of opportunity for all learners and the strengthening of support for those who have barriers to learning. This will ensure our national input to the middle tier (Local Authorities and Local Authority regional education consortia) school improvement business planning is clear in respect of supporting all learners, including those with barriers, to achieve their potential.

Regional education consortia business plans follow a three level model. In developing their more detailed level 2 and 3 business plans the Welsh Government expects Local Authorities and Local Authority regional education consortia to plan for education improvements for all learners, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners.

Local Authorities and regional consortia will continue to be responsible for determining appropriate outcome measures, programmes and activities to improve educational outcomes for learners. The Welsh Government will challenge Local Authorities and regional education consortia against our national expectations through the Welsh Government's established Review and Challenge cycle. This cycle provides a two-way challenge and will provide Welsh Government with a means to gain assurance and provide Local Authorities and regional education consortia with a further mechanism to formally raise issues which can most appropriately be resolved or influenced at a national level in Wales.

Recommendation 6

The Welsh Government should undertake a thorough, updated impact assessment of the decision to amalgamate the previous grants into the Education Improvement Grant from 2015-16, with specific reference to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners. This assessment should have regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Welsh Government's statutory responsibilities regarding children's rights and equalities. The impact assessment should also consider how successful the Welsh Government's action to mitigate any risks of negative impact from the decision has been.

Response: Reject

In the context of the Committee's full report and recommendations, the Welsh Government does not consider that any benefit would be served in revisiting the impact assessments undertaken in the previous Assembly term in 2014/15.

Equality Impact Assessments on the rationalisation of the two grants into the EIG were undertaken in August 2014. This was subsequently revisited and revised in April 2015 at which time the assessments were published. The earlier versions were not published as the final budget had not, at that time been announced.

The Welsh Government does not believe there were deficiencies in undertaking the equality impact assessments which led to significant impact on services and which justifiably call for officials to revisit the original assessments. In its report, the Committee reflected on the range of views presented in the evidence about the impact the change of grant arrangements has had on services. Estyn, for example, considered that they had seen little discernible impact in the way that Local Authority minority ethnic achievement and Gypsy Traveller education services were delivered. These remained for the most part fundamentally as they had been prior to the changes to grant arrangements. Some changes had been made – in Cardiff, for example, where delegating more of the funding to schools rather than in centrally maintained services was considered a more effective approach to meet the circumstances that prevailed within the authority area.

The Welsh Government understands there was anxiety on the part of some stakeholders about the impact that the changes would have, particularly on the delivery of Local Authority services, and Welsh Government officials worked with the WLGA and Local Authority officers, including lead Directors of Education through the development of the new arrangements

The Welsh Government has committed to keep under review the most appropriate funding mechanism. On this basis, we consider that a separate impact assessment at this stage would not be beneficial and will instead focus efforts on supporting the Committee's other recommendations.

Recommendation 7

The Welsh Government should remit Estyn to undertake a thematic review of educational provision for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners, providing an update on the position since its last thematic report in 2011. Estyn's review should consider the impact of the new funding arrangements since 2015-16 and also consider the wider issue of how well the "middle tier" of education (regional consortia and local authorities) monitor and evaluate outcomes for particular groups of learners. Estyn should be remitted to undertake this review in 2017-18 or the earliest year in which this is practical.

Recommendation 9

The Welsh Government should work with regional consortia and local authorities to assess the impact of long-term funding trends and the new grant funding arrangements on relevant service areas within local authority.

Response: Agree recommendations 7 and 9

Following discussion with the Welsh Government, Estyn has agreed to carry out a short review of this area in 2018-2019. The review will focus on progress since Estyn's 2011 report and consider the impact of the current educational services and support on the educational outcomes of these learners. In preparation for this work, Estyn has agreed to gather evidence on how regional consortia monitor and evaluate outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners in its follow up inspection work with consortia in autumn 2017.

Recommendation 8

The Welsh Government should work with regional consortia and Local Authorities to gain a clearer understanding on how much funding is being made available to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners. It should also consider the number of learners supported by this funding, particularly in light of increases in asylum seeking and refugee children, and provide the Committee with an assessment of per pupil funding levels.

Response: Agree in principle

The Welsh Government will work with Local Authorities and regional education consortia to gain a clearer understand of the overall funding provided for Minority Ethnic achievement and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller education services over the period prior to and following the introduction of the EIG and will provide an assessment of funding levels to the Committee.

Unlike the Pupil Deprivation Grant, now Pupil Development Grant, the EIG does not fund on a per pupil basis and therefore it will not be possible to provide an assessment on these terms. It is however important to note the discretion afforded to Local Authorities and regional education consortia through the EIG to distribute the grant funding in accordance with local and regional needs. The Welsh Government does not direct how much funding must be directed to individual services or programmes and therefore, whilst recognising the challenges our public services are under, Local Authorities have the flexibility to direct a greater proportion of the EIG to individual services in line with their local and regional priorities and the needs of their communities.

Recommendation 10

The Welsh Government should consider how more reliable, accurate data on numbers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners can be recorded. The Welsh Government should ensure allocations of the Education Improvement Grant in respect of these groups of learners are based on the most up to date, reliable data.

Response: Agree

The Welsh Government recognises the important role Local Authority Minority Ethnic and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller services can play in improving the reliability of PLASC data. The Welsh Government will work with service leads through the MEALA and Gypsy Traveller Forum to identify how best our services can continue to support schools to collect more accurate PLASC data on these groups of learners. A review of the current ethnicity codes is taking place to better define Gypsy, Roma and Traveller codes to encourage accurate ascription.

The EIG has an annual budget which we allocate in full to regional education consortia. PLASC data informs the funding methodologies and regional allocations under the EIG, and in accordance with the funding arrangements Local Authorities and regional consortia have discretion to determine how much of the funding they direct to their services in accordance with their priorities and the needs of their communities. Consortia and Local Authorities already have the flexibility to direct more of the funding they receive to areas of greater need.

Recommendation 11

The Welsh Government should do more to improve educational outcomes amongst Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners and work to close the gap between them and their peers. This should include a specific focus on them as a particular group of learners and not rely solely on more general initiatives to raise attainment across the board.

Recommendation 12

The Welsh Government should do more to improve educational outcomes of specific minority ethnic groups who attain lower than the average for all pupils, particularly Black or Black British, and mixed ethnicity White and Black Caribbean pupils. This should include a specific focus on them as particular groups of learners and not rely solely on more general initiatives to raise attainment across the board.

Response: Agree recommendations 11 and 12

The Welsh Government provides considerable focus through guidance, resources and tools to education practitioners to support attainment of these learners. However, we do recognise that for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners and some groups of Ethnic Minority learners more needs to be done.

Travelling Together promotes Gypsy and Traveller culture and heritage within the national curriculum and provides guidance for schools by collating resources produced by the Traveller Education Services and specialised websites for the Gypsy and Traveller community. The resource was developed to support achievement, provide a culturally affirming curriculum, encourage transition and reduce the marginalisation of Gypsy and Traveller learners. Separately, *Gypsy and Traveller Education: Engaging Gypsy and Traveller Families - A Research Report* provides detailed accounts of what works in engaging Gypsy and Traveller families in education with a specific focus on attainment, school attendance, transition and retention.

We have also worked with Show Racism the Red Card to develop *Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in the Welsh education system: Promoting Equality and Tackling Racism* which provides information and activities to help settle Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners in school. It was developed in consultation with members of the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities to help remove barriers, promote understanding, and create a welcoming, inclusive school experience.

The EIG supports delivery of our education strategy, *Qualified for Life* and the terms and conditions of the grant contain specific reference to focus educational support for these learners. This needs to be supported by a direct link between Local Authority and regional education consortia business plans and the objectives set out in the new *Qualified for Life* in particular in consideration of the enhanced focus on equity.

Recommendation 13

The Welsh Government should consider what more can be done to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people, and young people from Minority Ethnic backgrounds at risk of underachievement or disengagement, to participate in further and higher education. The Welsh Government should consider how this could be taken forward under the new student finance arrangements following the Diamond Review

Response: Agree in principle

The Diamond Review recommended an enhanced package of support for students who want to study part time or on post graduate courses. The Welsh Government is implementing, with only minor modification, the full Diamond package. . This package will be unique in the UK and the Welsh Government considers the proposed system will introduce flexibility and will encourage students from all backgrounds to enter higher education. At the heart of our proposals for student support is a shift in focus in undergraduate support towards support for maintenance (with the cost of tuition fees being met in full through loans). This will see maintenance support improved for all Welsh-domiciled students, with the highest level of grant directed towards those most in need.

The Welsh Government's response to the Diamond Review recommendations builds on several key principles:

- maintains the principle of universalism within a progressive system;
- for the first time anywhere in the UK, ensures a fair and consistent approach across levels and modes of study;
- ensures shared investment between government and those who directly benefit; and
- enhances accessibility, reducing barriers to study such as living costs.

The important issue is the overall cost to the student, overall debt levels and timing of contributions. Every student in Wales will be guaranteed a minimum level of support, will be better off than their equivalents in England, and will receive a non means tested maintenance grant of £1,000 per annum.

The Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015, which will be implemented fully from academic year 2017/18, requires that all higher education providers, that wish for their courses to be automatically designated for statutory student support, commit to activities and investments in support of objectives related to the promotion of equality of opportunity in connection with access to higher education and promotion of higher education. Higher education providers are required to set out these activities and investments in fee and access plans which are submitted to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) for approval. In this context promotion of equality of opportunity in connection with access to higher education relates to removing barriers to higher education that members of under-represented groups experience. Groups that are under-represented in higher education may include Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people, and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Recommendation 14

The Welsh Government should consider the report of the young people working with Save the Children's Travelling Ahead project, Good Practice in Education: Peer Research Project (2016) and take forward their recommendations. The Welsh Government should disseminate the report across regional consortia and local authorities and request that they follow the recommendations as far as possible. The Welsh Government should report on progress within the next 12 months.

Response: Agree in principle

Welsh Government officials will make the report available on Hwb, our electronic platform available to all schools in Wales and raise awareness of it via our all-school newsletter Dysg, asking education professionals and service providers to consider the recommendations put forward by the young people in their provision.

Financial Implications (recommendations 1 to 14)

None, any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Kirsty Williams AM, Cabinet Secretary for Education