The Welsh Government welcomes the report produced by the Children, Young People and Education Committee following its inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households.

The Committee’s findings, together with its set of recommendations and conclusions are generally in line with the Welsh Government’s approach and will help inform our ongoing drive to mitigate the impact of poverty on educational attainment.

The Welsh Government has already made further progress since the inquiry took place, detail of which is set out in the recommendation responses below.

Statistics released in January 2015 show the gap in attainment between pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and their counterparts have reduced at Foundation Phase level, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, eFSM attainment of level 2 inclusive has improved by 2 percentage points this year (The Level 2 inclusive is the performance indicator which measures achievement in learning equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C and which must include a GCSE in both English or Welsh and Mathematics)

A closer look at this year’s data on eFSM attainment shows that some schools have made remarkable progress in closing the gap between eFSM and nonFSM learners. We are exploring the reasons for this and where there is good practice which has led to these successes we will ensure that it is disseminated.

There is no room for complacency and work on strengthening our schools’ ability to deliver improved outcomes for children from low income households is continuing. We will be publishing the first annual report of the Rewriting the Future programme in June 2015 and we are expecting the Ipsos Mori evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant second annual report in the autumn. We look forward to receiving both of these and will implement any recommendations arising from them.
Detailed Responses to the report’s recommendations are set out below:

**Recommendation 1** The Minister should review and clarify the role of the Foundation Phase to ensure that it can contribute to improved outcomes for children from low-income families.

**Response: Accept**

The government remains committed to the Foundation Phase and its approach to teaching and learning. Professor Donaldson’s curriculum and assessment review “Successful Futures” (2015) reports that the Foundation Phase is one of the “best things” about education in Wales.

The findings of the evaluation to date show that the Foundation Phase is achieving its main aim – to raise the attainment of all pupils – including that of learners disadvantaged by poverty. Recent evaluation findings “Outcomes for Learners” highlight that the Foundation Phase is linked to an improvement in pupil attendance and Key Stage 2 attainment in key areas such as English and Science. Earlier evaluation findings noted that the Foundation Phase is having a reported positive impact on boys, on those with SEN and on child involvement and well-being. Estyn’s annual report also states that where the Foundation Phase is being delivered well, it has the potential to have an enormously positive impact on our youngest learners. This is all good evidence that the Foundation Phase approach is working. We now have to build on that progress and make sure that all schools and nurseries are adopting it fully. That’s how we will maximise the positive impact for our learners.

Evidence from “Successful Futures” suggests continuing stakeholder support for the Foundation Phase. This reinforces the recommendation made last year by Professor Siraj’s “Independent stocktake of the Foundation Phase in Wales” (2014) report for the development of a longer term plan, to embed good practice in the Foundation Phase consistently across the whole of Wales. Going forward, I expect Foundation Phase pedagogy for our youngest learners to be strengthened across all schools and settings.

The government has appointed an Expert Group to support this process. They will develop a strategic plan, over the short, medium and longer term, using the evidence from these reviews and reports to identify areas for improvement. The Group has already recognised that reducing inequalities has to be a key focus of their work and particularly reducing the effect of poverty.

**Financial Implications:** None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.
**Recommendation 2.** The Minister should revise the target for 7 year olds (the Foundation Phase indicator) to make it more challenging, in order to deliver the Welsh Government’s ambitions.

**Response: Accept**

The latest figures released at the end of January show that we are reducing the gap between the attainment of pupils from deprived backgrounds and their peers. For the Foundation Phase the Welsh Government has already met and exceeded its target to reduce the attainment gap by 10% against 2012 levels by 2017, and has secured an 11.1% reduction by the end of 2014.

We recognise that there is more to be done on reducing the gap between learners from deprived and non-deprived backgrounds. I have already said that I will take steps to ensure that the target for reducing this gap is even more stretching, but not unachievable. The revised Areas of Learning become statutory from September 2015 and this creates a natural point to refresh our expectations. I will review the target and publish a revised target at the end of the summer term (2015). That said, the existing target should not be seen as a ceiling or constraining factor for the attainment of pupils on free school meals in the Foundation Phase.

**Financial Implications:** None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.
Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government should ensure that evidence-based approaches, such as the Sutton Trust Toolkit, are always used.

Response: Accept in Principle

The Government has consistently recommended the use of evidence-based approaches and an ongoing communications strategy is beginning to bear fruit; evidence of a sea-change in approach can be seen. Estyn reports that schools are now implementing the kinds of strategies advocated in the EEF-Sutton Trust toolkit; The Wales Centre for Equity in Education report, Good News - What schools in Wales are doing to reduce the impact of Poverty on pupil’s achievement includes a number of case studies which indicate that practitioners are using programmes that have a proven track record of success; and the Raising Attainment Advocate, in his March 2015 update to the Minister for Education and Skills has also noted an increase in good practice.

We will continue to encourage the use of evidence-based approaches and we have produced guidance, resources and support to schools and to the regional consortia. In December 2014 the consortia were given £50,000 each to build their capacity to support schools to plan effectively for tackling the impact of poverty and their understanding of evidence-based approaches. The terms and conditions of the grant require consortia to:

- Support schools to adopt an evidence-based approach to developing their School Development Plans in relation to reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment. Where these are not identified in Rewriting the Future, PDG Guidance or the Sutton Trust Toolkit, a clear rationale for their use and evidence of impact must be provided.

We do not wish to stifle teachers’ creativity and innovation by being overly prescriptive so we only insist that the PDG is used in ways which have a proven track record of improving attainment,

To support the extension of PDG to the under fives, guidance has been produced for Foundation Phase providers on how best to make use of their Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant allocation, referencing the newly developed Education Endowment Fund’s Early Years Toolkit. Officials continue to explore a range of options to further improve educational outcomes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, drawing on practice in other parts of the UK and beyond.

Financial Implications: None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.
Recommendation 4. The Minister should report back to the Committee as soon as possible on progress towards meeting Welsh Government’s requirement that schools are required to publish details on their use of PDG on their (or the relevant consortium’s) website.

Response: Accept

PDG Essential Guidance (March 2015) states unequivocally that:

All schools must publish on line their PDG allocation and an outline of their plans to use the funding to improve outcomes for deprived children.

Where a school does not have a dedicated website it must make the information available via the local authority or consortium web site or as part of school information published in hard copy.

The consortia have been asked to confirm in their PDG Support Plans that each school will publish their use of the PDG on line. They are reminded in grant offer letter for 2015-16 that a condition of receiving the grant is that they will ensure transparency of the schools’ use of the PDG by confirming that every school will make accessible to parents and the wider community, details of their PDG allocation, how they have used the grant, the grant spend and its impact by publishing these on line. Where a school does not have a dedicated website, consortia are required to facilitate the school in making the information available via their local authority or consortium web site or as part of their school information published in hard copy.

Financial Implications: None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.
**Recommendation 5.** The Welsh Government should provide evidence to the Committee relating to the decision about the quantum of funding per pupil for 3 and 4 year olds.

**Response: Accept**

Socio-economic status begins to exert an influence on educational outcomes by the time children enter primary school (Feinstein 2003) and the effects are cumulative. By the time they are four years old the difference in the number of words children from disadvantaged backgrounds hear is 19 million (Hart, B., & Risley, R T, 1995).

Flying Start supports families with children aged 0-3 in deprived areas, but without the introduction of the Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant (EYPDG) there has been little support for children graduating from Flying Start before they enter compulsory schooling. Investment at this age can be more cost-effective than remedial action later in a child’s life (see for example J Heckman (2008), Return on Investment: Costs vs Benefits, University of Chicago).

The grant is available for pupils in Foundation Phase-funded education. Most children aged three and four receive part time education; the funding level reflects the part time nature of provision for this age range and is comparable to that in England for the Early Years Pupil Premium.

The most recent evidence from Estyn, and also reported by Sir Alasdair MacDonald, the Raising Attainment Advocate, shows that schools are now beginning to use their PDG far more effectively. Results from 2014 show the attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals is at historically high levels. Since 87% of three-year-olds and 97% of four-year-olds are in maintained schools we can have a measure of confidence that those schools will be well prepared for making use of the EYPDG.

To support schools in receipt of the EYPDG, as well as stand-alone nurseries and non-maintained settings, we have commissioned the Wales Centre of Equity in Education to produce guidance for settings on the most useful interventions. This will supplement support given by the regional educational consortia, and Foundation Phase advisers.

**Financial Implications** – The Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant formed part of the budget agreement for 2015-16. Other elements to support effective use of the grant will be drawn from existing programme budgets.
**Recommendation 6.** The Welsh Government should ensure that the PDG is delivering both the intended outcomes for pupils and value for money. It should respond quickly where there is limited evidence of impact.

**Response: Accept in Principle**

As reported in response to recommendation 3 and 6, we are beginning to see evidence that the PDG is delivering outcomes for pupils.

The consortia have been required to submit PDG support plans to demonstrate how they will ensure schools make effective use of the PDG and how they will hold them to account. Their business plans also report the support and challenge they will offer to schools to tackle the impact of deprivation on educational attainment.

We have strengthened the terms and conditions attached to the PDG award letter to the consortia making it absolutely clear that they should ensure the accountability of their schools’ use of the PDG. Consortia are required to address inappropriate or ineffective use of the PDG and recover funding where there is clear evidence that it has been knowingly used for purposes other than to improve outcomes for eFSM pupils.

Officials are continually monitoring the effectiveness of the PDG in raising the attainment of pupils from deprived backgrounds and we will be producing a Rewriting the Future Annual report in June 2015 which will examine how successful our overall strategy, including the deployment of the grant, has been.

**Financial Implications:** None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.
**Recommendation 7.** The Minister should report back to the Committee as a matter of urgency about funding the £7.9 million element of the Challenge fund from existing education and skills budget, with specific reference to the budget lines from which allocations have been transferred.

**Response: Accept in principle**

Of the £20 million allocated to the Schools Challenge Cymru programme, the remaining £7.9 million was identified as part of a wider review of in-year budgets to support priorities both within my portfolio and the wider Welsh Government. As there was not a one-to-one relationship between the pressures, savings and cuts as part of the line by line exercise (for example a cut has not been identified to fund a specific commitment), all savings and cuts were transferred to the Delivery Support Action within the Education and Skills MEG and then re-distributed from this Action to fund identified commitments, including the £7.9million commitment for Schools Challenge Cymru.

Any decision to increase spending in one area, however, has inevitably meant difficult decisions elsewhere. As a result, there were reductions to budgets in a number of areas, including post-16 education (Further Education and Work Based Learning) and Careers Wales.

**Financial Implications:** There were no additional financial implications in relation to £7.9million, as the funding was found from reductions within the Education and Skills MEG. The budget transfers as part of the line-by-line budget review, including £7.9m for Schools Challenge Cymru, were formalised in the Second Supplementary Budget 2014-15, which was agreed by Cabinet on 2 February and published on 10 February.
Recommendation 8. The Minister should report back to the Committee on the amounts and usage of the funding that has been allocated specifically to Consortium from the Schools Challenge Wales fund.

Response: Accept in principle

All of our Pathways to Success Schools have received an allocation of funding which has been routed through regional education consortia. I have already committed to publishing final funding allocations for year 1 of the programme for each of the schools at the end of the summer term in 2015. This was in recognition of the need for the programme to remain fluid, responding to additional needs as they emerge or require further action. To manage this, and to ensure that the Challenge maintains pace, the allocation of funding has had to remain dynamic.

These allocations were agreed following a period of consideration and close scrutiny of each school’s plan by the Schools Challenge Cymru Champions and my officials. The allocations are based on each school’s individual needs and support the implementation of a bespoke package of improvement activity.

In addition to this, approximately £3.9m has been allocated specifically to consortia for the purposes of building capacity for improvement and driving collaboration within the system. The types of activity funded include investing in Improvement Hubs, developing school to school partnerships and continuing professional development for leaders and practitioners. This investment is designed to ensure that SCC will have a positive impact on the wider education system, leading to an emphasis on school-led self improvement.

Financial Implications: None. Funding allocated specifically to the consortia will be drawn from the existing Schools Challenge Wales fund.
**Recommendation 9.** The Minister should strengthen and clarify guidance for schools on charging for activities relating to education. If the Minister is not satisfied that current guidance has had the necessary effect, he should introduce statutory guidance.

**Response: Accept in principle**

In schools other than independent schools, the education provided wholly or mainly during school hours is free. This means that headteachers may not impose a charge on parents for any visit that occurs during school hours or any transport that is associated with them. The school, however, may still invite parents to make voluntary contributions to the cost of activities. These requests must make clear that there is no legal obligation to make a voluntary contribution, and that those pupils will not be treated differently from those whose parents have made a contribution.

Schools may charge for the actual cost of board and lodging for residential trips. However, parents and carers who are in receipt of the benefits that form the eligibility criteria for Free School Meals are exempt from paying the cost of board and lodging.


The guidance was updated in 2011 and model letters were drafted to emphasise the essential point that education provided wholly or mainly during school hours is free and that all requests to parents for voluntary contributions must make it clear that the contribution is voluntary and that no pupil may be left out of an activity because his or her parents cannot, or will not, make a contribution.

The guidance was last updated in November 2013 when the Education (Remission of Charges Relating to Residential Trips) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2003 was amended to allow free board and lodging on a residential trip for those in receipt of Universal Credit.

When the guidance is updated it is placed on the ‘Welsh Government’ website and ‘Governors Wales’ website; e-mails are sent to governor support officers of all local authorities drawing attention to the change and attaching a link to the updated guidance which they send on to all schools in their authorities. An article on the changes and link to the guidance is also published in Dysg. Schools are informed in this way each time there is a change to legislation or the guidance is updated.

Officials could write to governor support officers at local authorities asking them to contact their schools to draw further attention to the guidance.
Financial Implications: None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budget.
**Recommendation 10.** The Minister should issue guidance to schools to ensure that they make clear to parents the educational purposes of proposed school trips.

**Response: Accept in principle**

The Government’s position on this matter has been clearly set out in the response to Recommendation 9. Future revisions to the ‘Guidance for Governing Bodies on Charging for School Activities’ will consider the inclusion of specific advice on the purpose of activities relating to education.

In addition, the Welsh Government has published guidance in relation to ‘Out of classroom learning’. This guidance sets out a code of practice for schools in planning and undertaking out of classroom learning – link attached:


Any revisions to associated curriculum and assessment guidance will be considered as part of the implementation of new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

**Financial Implications:** None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.
**Recommendation 11.** The Minister should report back to the Committee on his work to evaluate the use of non-teaching staff, such as school liaison officers.

**Accept in principle**

Many non-teaching staff involved in this kind of work are employed through different funding mechanisms, principally the Communities First Pupil Deprivation Grant matched fund. My officials have discussed with the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty’s officials the need to ensure that the evaluation of that grant includes an assessment of particular aspects of funded projects such as the use of family support officers.

We commissioned the Wales Centre for Equality in Education to conduct a review of best practice and to draw up case studies. One of these features Flintshire’s Parenting and Delivery Strategy, which includes the use of Family Support Workers. The case study can be viewed here: [http://learning.wales.gov.uk/docs/learningwales/publications/141219-case-study-12.pdf](http://learning.wales.gov.uk/docs/learningwales/publications/141219-case-study-12.pdf)

We have identified programmes which include supporting schools to work with families and which have been well evaluated. These include Achievement for All’s Three As programme, and Save the Children’s Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme. In view of its positive evaluation we commissioned Achievement for All to adapt its programme to the Welsh context and have promoted this to schools. We have also included the FAST programme in a soon to be published catalogue for schools of evaluated and promising programmes offered by the third and private sectors.

My officials are currently exploring options for a review of non-teaching staff in order to understand the effectiveness of family support officers and to share good practice as part of ongoing work to support schools through provision of guidance, resources and best practice examples.

**Financial Implications:** None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.
**Recommendation 12.** The Minister should report back to the Committee within 6 months on the progress of initiatives to promote parental engagement, including the Family and Community engagement toolkit.

**Response: Accept**

We have made very good progress on initiatives to promote family and community engagement which will be reported in detail in our *Rewriting the Future* Annual Report in June 2015. Our draft Family and Community Engagement Guidance and Toolkit has received positive feedback from Estyn and from the group of head teachers of primary, secondary and special schools across Wales which we consulted. It has also received very positive peer reviews from two leading academics in the field, Professor Charles Desforges and Dr Janet Goodall. Following its launch, a webinar and targeted workshops with schools are planned for later this year. Our guidance will be published as a collection on Learning Wales later this year and will link closely with the Welsh Government’s ‘Education Begins at Home’ campaign.

We put a number of measures in place to identify progress on family and community engagement in schools:
- Web diagnostics, tracking views and downloads of the family and community engagement toolkit.
- The Ipsos Mori PDG evaluation, which will establish the extent to which schools have used the toolkit, and/or are spending the Pupil Deprivation Grant on family and community engagement activities.
- School performance indicators that track, using Estyn inspection data, schools’ performance on partnership working, and also track responses to Estyn’s parent questionnaire.
- Four focus groups with teaching practitioners, whom we have met with already to discuss tackling the impacts of deprivation, including through family and community engagement approaches, and with whom we will meet again in six months.

**Financial Implications:** None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Huw Lewis AM, Minister for Education and Skills.