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Scrutiny

in Carmarthenshire

Education & Children Scrutiny Committee

Task & Finish Review 2015/16 Final Report

Narrowing the Attainment Gap: Learners eligible for free school meals



Contents

<i>Section</i>	<i>Page</i>
<i>Members of the Task & Finish Group</i>	3
<i>Chair's Foreword</i>	4
1.0 The Task & Finish Review	5
1.1 Background	5
1.2 Objectives and Scope	5
1.3 Approach	5
2.0 Key Findings	7
2.1 Introduction	7
2.2 Policy Context	15
2.3 Other guidance and research	19
2.4 What is happening in Carmarthenshire?	21
3.0 Conclusion	36
4.0 Recommendations	37
5.0 Appendices	38
6.0 Bibliography / References	46
7.0 Glossary of Terms	50

Members of the Task and Finish Group



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Mr. Simon Pearson
Co-opted Member –
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Representative (*until 31st
March 2016*)



Cllr. Hugh Richards
Felinfoel
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Cllr. Tom Theophilus
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Independent
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Rhagair y Cadeirydd

Mae'n bleser gennyf gyflwyno adroddiad terfynol Grŵp Gorchwyl a Gorffen y Pwyllgor Craffu Addysg a Phlant a sefydlwyd i ymchwilio ac adolygu'r bwch cyrhaeddiad rhwng dysgwyr sy'n gymwys am brydau ysgol am ddim, a'i cyd-disgyblion sydd ddim yn gymwys.

Ein nod fel grŵp oedd canfod y rhesymau y tu cefn i'r bwch annerbyniol yma a dod o hyd i dulliau i'w gau. At y diben hwn, rwy'n ddiolchgar iawn am gyngor a chyfeiriad cychwynnol yr Athro David Egan, o Ganolfan Cymru er Cydraddoldeb mewn Addysg.

Fel grŵp mae dyled arnom hefyd i benaethiaid a staff nifer o ysgolion a wnaeth ddarparu cyflwyniadau gwerthfawr a llawn gwybodaeth ynghylch dulliau arloesol ac effeithiol o wella cyrhaeddiad.

Rwy'n gobeithio y bydd yr argymhellion yr ydym wedi datblygu yn gwneud cyfraniad positif a fydd yn galluogi ysgolion yn Sir Gaerfyrddin a thu hwnt, i gau'r bwch annheg yma.

Rwy'n ddiolchgar dros ben i'm cyd-aelodau ac i aelodau cyfetholedig y grŵp am eu mewnbwn a'i brwdfrydedd yn ystod yr adolygiad. Hoffwn ddiolch yn benodol i Simon Pearson (ein cyn rhiant-lywodraethwr a ddaeth i ddiwedd ei gyfnod yn y rôl yn Mawrth 2016) am ei gyfraniad gwerthfawr, ynghyd â chydabod gyda thristwch, cyfraniad y diweddar Tom Theophilus, a fu farw ar ddiwedd ein adolygiad.

Hoffwn estyn diolch yn ogystal i'r swyddogion a wnaeth ddarparu cyngor a chefnogaeth arbenigol trwy gydol yr adolygiad.

Cyng. Eirwyn Williams
Cadeirydd y Grŵp Gorchwyl a Gorffen

Chair's Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to present the final report of the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee's Task and Finish Group established to research and review the attainment gap between e-FSM learners and their non-eligible classmates.

Our aim as a group was to identify the reasons behind this unacceptable gap and then find ways of closing it. To this end, I am very grateful for the initial advice and direction given by Professor David Egan, Wales Centre for Equality in Education.

As a group we are also indebted to the heads and staff of several schools who gave us extremely valuable and informative presentations regarding innovative and very effective methods of improving attainment.

I hope that the recommendations that we have made will make a positive contribution that will enable all schools in Carmarthenshire and beyond to close this inequitable gap.

I am very grateful to my fellow members and co-opted members of this group for their input and for the enthusiasm they have demonstrated during this review. I would particularly like to thank Simon Pearson (our former Parent Governor Member whose period in the role came to an end in March 2016) for his valuable contribution as well as acknowledging the contribution of the late Tom Theophilus, who sadly passed away at the end of our review.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the officers who have provided specialist advice and support throughout the review.

*Cllr. Eirwyn Williams
Chair of the Task and Finish Group*

1.0 The Task & Finish Review

1.1 Background

The Education & Children Scrutiny Committee has a key role to play in monitoring services, development of key policies and strategies, as well as identifying areas for improvement or development.

At its meeting on 24th September 2015, the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee considered provisional Examination and Teacher Assessment Results. During consideration of this item, the Committee noted that one of the priorities for the Authority during the 2015/16 academic year was to improve the performance of those learners eligible for free school meals (e-FSM learners) and that this was a national as well as a local priority. The Committee then agreed to establish a task and finish group to research and review the attainment gap for e-FSM learners.

1.2 Objectives and Scope

Following its first meeting, the Group agreed that the scope for the review would be:

- Learners eligible for free school meals, including Looked After Children, and the attainment gap in Carmarthenshire.

The Group agreed that the main aims of the review would be:

- To research the attainment gap for learners eligible for free school meals in Carmarthenshire.
- To identify trends at all key stages and key indicators.
- To review how the Pupil Deprivation Grant is being used in our schools.
- To identify best practice interventions in the County's schools, across ERW, the rest of Wales and the UK.
- To raise the profile of the challenge of overcoming the attainment gap in the midst of shrinking budgets, other priorities and curriculum changes.
- To formulate recommendations for consideration by the Executive Board.

1.3 Approach

The Task and Finish Group's membership was as follows:

County Councillors

- Cllr. Ryan Bartlett
- Cllr. Peter Hughes-Griffiths
- Cllr. John James
- Cllr. Hugh Richards
- Cllr. Tom Theophilus (*until 5th July 2016*)
- Cllr. Eirwyn Williams (Chair)

Co-opted Members

- Mr. Simon Pearson – Parent Governor Representative (*until 31st March 2016*)
- Mrs. Vera Kenny – Roman Catholic Church Representative

The Democratic Services Unit based in the Chief Executive's Department, provided research and general support to the Group.

The following officers provided specialist advice and support during the Group's review:

- Gareth Morgans – Chief Education Officer / Head of Education Services
- Aeron Rees – Head of Learner Programmes
- David Astins – Strategic Development Manager
- Glenn Evans – Senior Education Consultant
- Mary Parry – Consortium Associate School Improvement Officer

A total of 7 meetings were held between December 2015 and November 2016 (see Appendices 1-2) during which the Group considered evidence and information from a wide variety of sources. The sessions were designed to provide the Group with the relevant information, context and background to the topic.

In addition to officers from the Education & Children's Department, the Group received evidence from the following individuals during its review:

- Mr. Joe Cudd – Head Teacher of Maes-y-Morfa CP School, Llanelli
- Mrs. Rhian Evans – Head Teacher of Carwe, Gwynfryn and Ponthenri School Federation
- Ms. Lisa Davies – Teacher at Carwe School
- Professor David Egan – Director of Wales Centre for Equity in Education
- Mrs. Betsan O'Connor – Managing Director of ERW
- Mrs. Tracy Senchal – Head Teacher of Coedcae Secondary School, Llanelli

2.0 Key Findings

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Poverty and its impact on education attainment

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation defines poverty as: *“When a person’s resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation).”*¹

UNICEF suggests that: *“children experience poverty as an environment that is damaging to their mental, physical, emotional and spiritual development”* and that: *“expanding the definition of child poverty beyond traditional conceptualizations, such as low household income or low levels of consumption, is particularly important.”*²

In Wales, the Welsh Government in its Child Poverty Strategy, defines poverty as: *“a long-term state of not having sufficient resources to afford food, reasonable living conditions or amenities or to participate in activities (such as access to attractive neighbourhoods and open spaces) which are taken for granted by others in their society.”*³

The Welsh Government acknowledges that: *“children growing up and living in low income households are much more at risk of having poorer physical and mental health outcomes, are less likely to reach cognitive and developmental milestones in the early years, have poorer educational attainment, are more likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) between the age of 16 and 24, and more likely to be unemployed and living in poverty as an adult.”*⁴

Impact of poverty on Education – Child Poverty Action Group

- Children from poorer backgrounds lag at all stages of education.
- By the age of three, poorer children are estimated to be, on average, nine months behind children from more wealthy backgrounds.
- According to Department for Education statistics, by the end of primary school, pupils receiving free school meals are estimated to be almost three terms behind their more affluent peers.
- By 14, this gap grows to over five terms.
- By 16, children receiving free school meals achieve 1.7 grades lower at GCSE.

Source: Child Poverty Action Group - <http://cpag.org.uk/content/impact-poverty>

The impact of poverty can and does lead to a difference in academic achievement and progress between different groups of learners, particularly between those from

¹ A definition of poverty: An explanation of Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s definition of poverty and the terms used in it (September 2014)

² Children Living in Poverty: A review of child poverty definitions, measurements, and policies, UNICEF Division of Policy and Planning and Graduate Program in International Affairs, New School University (April 2005)

³ Child Poverty Strategy for Wales – Welsh Government (March 2015)

⁴ Child Poverty Strategy for Wales – Welsh Government (March 2015)

high-income and those from low-income households. This difference or disparity is commonly referred to as the 'attainment gap'.

The Welsh Government states that: *"the impact of deprivation on educational attainment is neither a new phenomenon nor one unique to Wales."* It adds that *"there's no need to look far from home to see that the impact is greater and progress to tackle it slower in Wales than elsewhere"*.⁵

2.1.2 Free School Meals

Pupils in Wales, who attend school on a full time basis, might be entitled to receive free school meals. A pupil will be eligible to receive a free school meal should their parent(s) or guardian(s) be receiving one of the following benefits or payments:

- Income Support
- Income Based Jobseekers Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Child Tax Credit, provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and their annual income does not exceed £16,190
- Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Working Tax Credit 'run-on' – the payment someone may receive for a further four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit.

The Welsh Government also states that: *"young people who receive Income Related Employment and Support Allowance, Universal Credit, Income Support or Income Based Job Seekers Allowance in their own right, may also be eligible to receive free school meals"*.⁶

In order to receive free school meals, parents or guardians will need to make an application to their relevant local authority. In Carmarthenshire, the application is simple and made via the County Council's website. Young people studying at further education colleges institutions are not eligible to claim for free school meals. However, the Welsh Government advises that students contact the student support office to ascertain whether there is other support that could be accessed to contribute to or cover the cost of meals.

The Welsh Government acknowledges the concern that some pupils are not taking advantage of their entitlement to free school meals. This is an issue that Carmarthenshire's Education & Children Scrutiny Committee has noted on a number of occasions during its school visits. One of the main factors is the stigma associated with being in receipt of a 'hand-out' and many parents or guardians may feel embarrassed about asking for assistance in this way.

Research published by the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex in 2012 suggested that: *"every day in the UK, almost 300,000*

⁵ Rewriting the future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools – Welsh Government (June 2014)

⁶ Welsh Government Free School Meals –

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolhome/foodanddrink/freeschoolmeals/?lang=en>

entitled children do not participate in the Free School Meals (FSM) programme, foregoing a transfer worth up to £400 per year”.⁷

In 2013, the Welsh Government, in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association, published a ‘Free school meals case studies report’ which outlined a number of factors that influenced the take up of free school meals as well as suggesting potential measures to address these. The main findings of the report were that pupils entitled to free school meals were mostly concerned about queuing, the types of foods available, cost (which the report authors presumed meant the local authority ‘allowance’ for their meals) and what their friends were doing (specifically those pupils eligible for free meals but not taking up their entitlement). The report authors also noted that the concerns voiced regarding the food appeared to relate to whether the options available were not healthy enough or too healthy. The authors also discovered that those pupils eligible to receive free school meals were not overly concerned about the payment systems used by their school.

According to Welsh Government figures, approximately one in five primary school pupils are eligible for free school meals. The data suggests that at the end of Key Stage 2, under 70% of these pupils will achieve expected results when compared with 88% of pupils from better off families. The Welsh Government states that: *“by age 16, children from better off families are more than twice as likely to achieve five good GCSEs, as those from disadvantaged homes”* and that: *“this means that roughly one in five pupils are failing to get good results, not because of lack of ability, but because they are from a poor background”*.⁸

In 2014/15, Ceredigion had the lowest percentage of compulsory aged school pupils (5-15) eligible for free meals at 10.9% and Blaenau Gwent had the highest at 29.2%.

- The number of compulsory aged school pupils (5-15) eligible for free meals has decreased from 69,418 pupils in January 2014 to 68,388 pupils in January 2015.
- The percentage of compulsory aged school pupils (5-15) known to be eligible for free meals has decreased from 19.1% in January 2014 to 18.8% in January 2015
- The number of compulsory aged school pupils (5-15) eligible for free meals was highest in Cardiff at 9,055 and lowest in Ceredigion at 875.

Figure 1 on the following page outlines Welsh pupils aged 5-15 who are eligible for free school meals, according to local authority area, as at January 2016. This data shows Carmarthenshire on 17.3%, below the Welsh average of 18.4% and on a par with the ERW region (also 17.3%).

Figure 2 shows a gradual increase of 1.3% in Carmarthenshire of those pupils eligible for free school meals, rising from 16% in 2013 to 17.3% in 2016.

⁷ Take-up of Free School Meals: Price Effects and Peer Effects by Angus Holford, Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex (July 2012)

⁸ Guidance for using the Pupil Deprivation Grant: What really works? by the Welsh Government (2014)

Figure 1: Welsh pupils aged 5-15 who are eligible for free school meals by local authority – January 2016 (PLASC data)

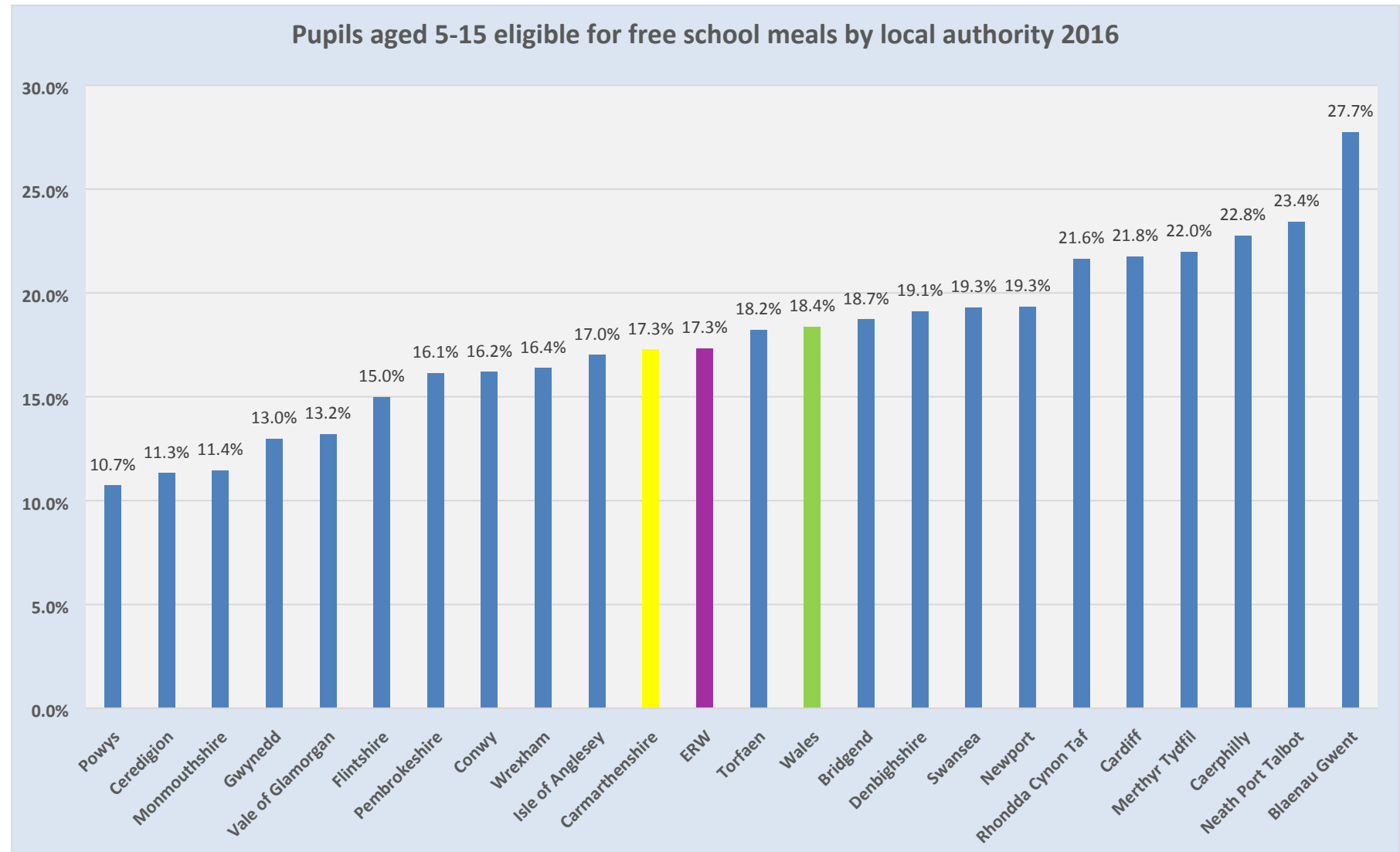
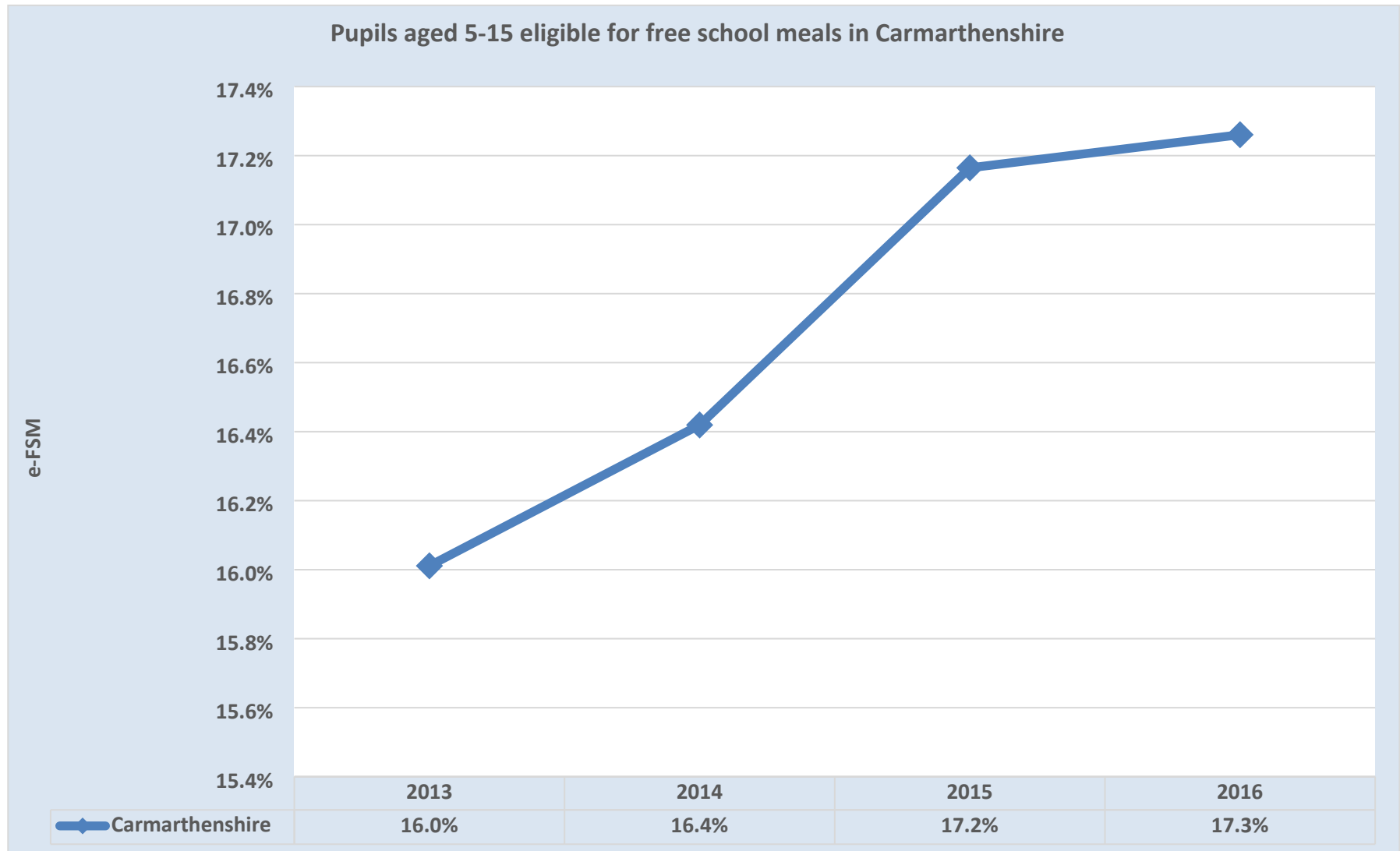


Figure 2: Carmarthenshire pupils aged 5-15 eligible for free school meals January 2016 (PLASC data)



2.1.3 Performance of pupils eligible for free school meals (e-FSM)

Research shows that the performance of pupils who are eligible to receive free school meals (e-FSM) is lower than their non-eligible counterparts at all key stages and in all performance measures. The Welsh Government states that: *“there is also a strong link between achievement and the level of entitlement to free school meals”* and that: *“as the level of free school meal entitlement increases, the level of achievement decreases”*.⁹

Achievement is measured against the following indicators:

- *The **Foundation Phase Indicator (FPI)** represents the percentage of pupils achieving the expected outcome or above in ‘Language, literacy and communication skills’ (in English (LCE) or Welsh (LCW)), ‘Personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity’ (PSD) and “Mathematical development” (MDT) in combination.*
- *Core subject indicator at **Key Stages 2-3** is defined as achieving the expected level in both Maths and Science and either English or Welsh first language. The expected level of the majority of pupils is level 4 at Key Stage 2 and level 5 at Key Stage 3.*
- *At **Key Stage 4** it is defined as achieving five GCSEs at level 2 inclusive qualification, grade A*-C in Maths and either English or Welsh first language.*¹⁰

When considering the core subject indicators, the gap in performance across Wales has narrowed overall during the last four years at Key Stages 2 and 3. At Key Stage 4, the gap in performance in the Level 2 threshold including a GCSE A*-C in English/Welsh and Mathematics widened every year to 2009-10 before narrowing in the following three years, but the gap has widened again between 2012/13 and 2013/14. The provisional data for 2015/16, shows that 35.5% of Key Stage 4 pupils who were eligible for free school meals achieved the Level 2+ threshold and that the gap between this group of pupils and those not eligible for free school meals, is 31.2%.

2.1.4 Pupil Deprivation Grant

In 2012, the Welsh Government launched the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) scheme to provide additional funding to schools based on the number of pupils on their roll eligible for Free School Meals or who are Looked After Children. The aim of the Grant is to improve outcomes for these learners by overcoming the additional barriers that prevent learners from disadvantaged backgrounds achieving their full potential.

The Grant can be utilised to support a range of interventions in order to improve the outcomes of those pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Welsh Government expects schools to outline their rationale for how they will spend the Grant in their School Development Plans. It states that these should: *“demonstrate their priorities*

⁹ Achievement and entitlement to free school meals – Welsh Government Statistics and Research (December 2015)

¹⁰ Achievement and entitlement to free school meals in Wales, 2013 – Welsh Government Statistics and Research (January 2014)

and targets; how they identify pupils' needs and what staff development will be put in place to meet those needs".¹¹

As of September 2014, ESTYN inspectors, as part of their school inspections, have been giving consideration to how pupils eligible for free school meals are supported to improve their rates of attainment. They have also been considering how schools' resources (e.g. the PDG) are being used to further this agenda.

Grant allocations are paid through the regional school improvement consortia on a bi-annual basis. The grant is delegated in full to schools/early years providers other than the Looked After Children portion which is managed on a regional basis by the relevant consortia. The allocation of the grant for the 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years is outlined in the table below.

Table 1: Allocation of Pupil Deprivation Grant

Year	Allocation of Grant
2015/16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For each child aged 5 to 15 who is eligible for free school meals (e-FSM), as reported in the January 2014 Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) return, their school will receive £1,050. • For each child who was Looked After (LAC) as reported in the April 2014 Children in Need census, the regional consortium will receive £1,050. • For each eligible child aged 3 to 4 in in the Foundation Phase in maintained and non-maintained settings, an allocation of £300 will be made.
2016/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For each child aged 5 to 15 who is eligible for free school meals (e-FSM), as reported in the January 2015 Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) return, their school will receive £1,150. • For each child who was Looked After (LAC) as reported in the April 2015 Children in Need census, the regional consortium will receive £1,150. • For each eligible child aged 3 to 4 in in the Foundation Phase in maintained and non-maintained settings, an allocation of £300 will be made.

For the 2015/16 and 2016/17, the Welsh Government introduced the Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant (EYPDG) which extends the eligibility to three and four-year-olds who are in funded Foundation Phase education. For 2017/18, the allocation for each eligible pupil in the Foundation Phase will increase to £600.

Making effective use of the Pupil Deprivation Grant is an important issue for the Welsh Government. In December 2015, the Welsh Government published its second evaluation report on the use of the Pupil Deprivation Grant. The report included a

¹¹ Guidance for using the Pupil Deprivation Grant: What really works? by the Welsh Government (2014)

series of case studies as well as findings from its analysis of data from the National Pupil Database. The Welsh Government's main findings for Year 2 (2014/15) are outlined below:¹²

- *Case study schools were using sophisticated data systems to identify individual pupils to receive additional support via PDG-funded interventions. The PDG has helped to instigate improvements in the way some case study schools collect and use data.*
- *All schools monitored pupil-level data against individual targets. A few schools explained that they had not previously monitored eFree School Meal pupils separately, or that they had not previously monitored the impact of specific interventions.*
- *There are examples of schools making spending decisions, and changing the way in which interventions operate, on the basis of the data they have collected to improve effectiveness.*
- *The case studies suggest that the biggest impact of the PDG on staffing has been to increase the number and the skills of Teaching Assistants (TAs) employed by schools. TAs are often trained on implementing and evaluating the impact of the interventions they deliver and as a result are becoming highly skilled members of the school staff. The PDG has led to an increase in the size of the school staff in virtually all case study schools.*
- *The way the PDG is spent by schools appears to have evolved over the grant's lifetime. Several case study schools explained they had initially invested in resources and establishing data monitoring systems to track pupils' progress using the funds, but that funds are now concentrated on the delivery of interventions, and specifically on funding staff time to deliver them.*

The Welsh Government has also published guidance entitled 'Guidance for using the Pupil Deprivation Grant: What really works?' as a means of assisting schools on how they can make the best and most effective use of the Grant.

The Local Authority utilises the work of ERW Challenge Advisers for monitoring the effective use of PDG funding within our schools. The content of the 'ERW Core Visit One' (undertaken with every school during the Autumn Term) contains a specific element focused on PDG funding. Schools are required to demonstrate the use and impact of their funding (captured within the content of their individual School Development Plan) on pupil outcomes. Rigorous analysis and discussion with school leaders results in an agreed statement, supported by any appropriate actions deemed necessary, to enhance a school's work.

Details of the Pupil Deprivation Grant allocated to schools in Carmarthenshire are outlined in Appendix 2.

2.2 Policy Context

¹² Welsh Government's Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) – <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/evaluation-pupil-deprivation-grant/?lang=en>

2.2.1 Welsh Government

In its strategy 'Rewriting the future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools', Huw Lewis AM, the then Welsh Government Minister for Education & Skills stated that: *"no child in Wales should be disadvantaged by poverty and inequality"* and that was why he: *"made tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment [his] top priority"*.¹³

The strategy goes on to state that the Welsh Government's vision is to have: *"high expectations for all learners, regardless of their socio-economic background, and ensure that they have an equal chance of achieving those expectations"*.¹⁴

It is the Welsh Government's view that there is a direct correlation between educational attainment and economic prosperity and that a significant number of children across Wales are not fulfilling their potential. The Welsh Government is also eager to tackle this particular problem as it sees Wales as lagging behind other parts of the UK. In 'Rewriting the Future', figures published by the Welsh Government state that:

- *e-FSM learners in England are around 50% more likely to achieve the Level 2 inclusive than e-FSM learners in Wales at age 15.*
- *The North East of England region is the most socio-economically comparable to Wales. Here, e-FSM learners are over a third more likely to achieve Level 2 inclusive than their peers in Wales.*
- *In every region in England the rate of improvement for the performance of e-FSM learners has been significantly faster than in Wales.*¹⁵

2.2.2 The Qualified for Life (QfL) Agenda and the Donaldson Review

Instigated by the Welsh Government's 'Qualified for Life' report in 2014, Professor Graham Donaldson's independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales, entitled, 'Successful Futures' (published in February 2015), heralds a new dawn for school curriculum design. Described as: *"the most far reaching and exciting set of proposals for a generation"*,¹⁶ the 68 recommendations received full ministerial approval and have been accompanied by an implementation plan, namely 'A curriculum for Wales – A curriculum for life' (also published in 2015).

Donaldson notes a number of fundamental design principles, stating that curricula should be: *"inclusive...encompassing and entitlement to high quality education for every child and young person."*¹⁷ Inclusivity is also mentioned in the implementation plan as one of the: *"four enablers of the new curriculum"*.¹⁸

By extension of these ideals, Carmarthenshire curriculum planners are considering how this agenda can be 'for the many, not the few' and a curriculum 'for all learners

¹³ Rewriting the Future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools by the Welsh Government

¹⁴ Rewriting the Future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools by the Welsh Government

¹⁵ Rewriting the Future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools by the Welsh Government

¹⁶ Lewis, H (Welsh Government Minister for Education – March 2015)

¹⁷ Donaldson, G (2015): Successful Futures, p14

¹⁸ Welsh Government (2015): A curriculum for Wales – a curriculum for life, p14

in all schools and settings'. Donaldson augers to provide a 'Pupil Offer,'¹⁹ modelled on School Challenge Cymru principles, which will address barriers to learning and facilitate access to learning for the disadvantaged – as the Council strives to enrich the areas of learning and experiences of pupils in Carmarthenshire. This will help the Council reach its aim of ensuring the holistic development of well-rounded young people, fully prepared for life, living and the world of work.

2.2.3 Regional Consortia

In 2011, the then Welsh Government Minister for Education & Skills outlined twenty priorities aimed at transforming educational achievement standards across Wales. One of the priorities outlined the Government's desire for local authorities to join forces as part of regional school improvement consortia which would: *"identify system leaders, who will support and challenge the Professional Learning Communities, which will have a focus on literacy and numeracy"*.²⁰ There are four education consortia in Wales, with Carmarthenshire part of the 'Education through Regional Working' (ERW) Consortium.

All four consortia have identified reducing the attainment gap for e-FSM learners as a key priority and have included this as a priority within their respective business plans. In addition, ERW and the Central South Consortium (CSC) have published strategies to address this particular issue. The consortia also provide the schools within their areas with additional online advice and guidance on making the most effective use of the PDG funding as well as case studies.

More details of the ERW Consortium's role are outlined in Section 2.4.4.

2.2.4 UK Context

In **England**, the Westminster Government introduced the 'Pupil Premium' in 2011 which is: *"additional funding for publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers"*.

²¹ The funding is made available to the following educational establishments:

- Local-authority-maintained schools, including special schools and pupil referral units
- Voluntary sector alternative provision (with local authority agreement)
- Special schools not maintained by local authorities
- Academies and free schools (including special and AP academies)

For the 2016/17 financial year, schools in England will be eligible to receive the following figures for every child that is registered as being eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years:

- £1,320 for pupils in Reception to Year 6
- £935 for pupils in Years 7 to 11

¹⁹ Welsh Government (2015): A curriculum for Wales – a curriculum for life, p13

²⁰ 'Teaching makes a difference' by Huw Lewis (February 2011)

²¹ Pupil Premium: Funding and accountability for schools – Guidance by the Department for Education and Education Funding Agency

The Group considered the Pupil Premium during its review and learnt that in the autumn of 2012, Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills in England) had visited 68 primary and secondary schools to evaluate how effectively they were spending their Pupil Premium allocations in order to maximise achievement. Ofsted found that where schools had spent the Pupil Premium funding successfully to improve achievement, specific actions and behaviours were evident including the ring-fencing of funding, use of research and allocating the best teachers to teach intervention groups. Details of Ofsted’s findings are outlined in more detail in Appendix 1.

As part of this review, Ofsted also found that where schools were less successful in spending the funding, there was a lack of action and leadership evident including a lack of clarity in relation to the spending of the grant, lack of monitoring and of good performance management systems. Details of these findings are also outlined in more detail in Appendix 1.

The Group noted that Ofsted had published a further update in 2014 stating that where schools were spending the Premium successfully, there was:

- A clear vision and high expectations were set.
- Good or outstanding leadership and a school-wide commitment to raising achievement for e-FSM pupils.
- An association between the overall effectiveness of a school and the impact of the pupil premium.
- Improvement showing due to a commitment to ‘closing the gap’ and the use of robust tracking systems.
- A comprehensive package of support responds to a wide range of specific needs.
- Successful governors who were very actively involved in holding leaders to account for achievement of pupils eligible for the pupil premium.

In **Northern Ireland**, schools are allocated ‘Additional Social Deprivation Funding’ (in addition to the standard funding received from the Education Authority) as part of the ‘Targeting Social Need’ (TSN) initiative, first introduced in 1991 by the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. This measure provides for the distribution of funding to schools: *“using a social deprivation element which recognises the additional costs faced by schools in educating children from socially deprived backgrounds, regardless of ability, and the particular challenges faced in schools with high proportions of children from such backgrounds”*.²² The level of additional funding is determined by the number of pupils eligible for free school meals (referred to as ‘FSME’ in Northern Ireland), although for nurseries or pupils in school-based nursery classes, funding is also determined by whether parents are receiving income-based Job Seekers Allowance or Income Support.

²² Local management of schools: Common Funding Scheme 2014/15 – Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2014)

In the post-primary sector in Northern Ireland (secondary), the Additional Social Deprivation Funding is allocated in two ways. Firstly, the social deprivation element, determined by the numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals and secondly, an 'educational attainment element' in recognition of the additional support that is required for those pupils who are performing below their expected level for their age, irrespective of their social background. Attainment at Key Stage 2 (or Key Stage 3 for Senior High schools) is the measure used for distribution of this funding.

All schools which receive the additional social deprivation funding are required to record and justify its use as part of their Every School a Good School (ESaGS), Schools Development Planning process.

In February 2015, the **Scottish** Government launched its Attainment Challenge with the aim of achieving equity in educational outcomes for all pupils in Scotland. This is the Scottish Government's Curriculum for Excellence, Getting it Right for Every Child initiative and the National Improvement Framework, which was launched in January 2016. The Framework, developed by the Scottish Government in conjunction with practitioners, parents and children is considered a central initiative in driving improvement and closing the attainment gap.

The Scottish Government has also established the Attainment Scotland Fund, a targeted initiative worth £750m whose purpose is to be used in supporting pupils in local authority areas with the highest concentrations of deprivation. These 'Challenge Authorities' as they are known are currently, Glasgow, Dundee, Inverclyde, West Dunbartonshire, North Ayrshire, Clackmannanshire, North Lanarkshire, East Ayrshire and Renfrewshire. The Fund was initially aimed at primary schools in order to target improvement in literacy and numeracy, as well as general health and well-being. However, the Fund is available for schools in deprived areas, outside these Challenge Authorities. The programme has been extended in 2016 to another 133 secondary schools across Scotland. In 2017/18, an additional £100m, raised from council tax reforms, is due to be allocated directly to schools, based on the numbers of pupils in both primary and secondary schools who meet the eligibility criteria for free school meals. The Scottish Government is expected to introduce a new framework in late 2016 which will outline proven and evidenced strategies for improving educational attainment.

The Scottish Government also hosts an 'Attainment Challenge Innovation Fund' which allows schools as well as local authorities to fund as well as evaluate innovative projects they may have developed to improve standards and attainment.

The Group learnt that officers from Education Services had attended a conference in Edinburgh where useful links had been established with other educational practitioners and experts in the field of educational inequality.

2.3 Other guidance and research

2.3.1 Wales Centre for Equity in Education (WCEE) – The WCEE is based at the University of Wales and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David and is a joint venture between this university and the University of Wales. It was established to be: “a leading national policy and applied research centre, focusing on all forms of disadvantage associated with low educational achievement in Wales”.²³

The Centre has produced a number of publications relating to the impact of poverty on educational attainment as well as the use of the Pupil Deprivation Grant in Wales. In its publication ‘The Good News... what schools in Wales are doing to reduce the impact of poverty on pupils’, it suggests that where schools are successfully tackling poverty and reducing the impact of poverty and inequality, three key elements are evident, namely effective leadership, quality teaching and parental engagement. The key aspects of these three elements are outlined in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Successfully tackling poverty and reducing impact of poverty

Effective Leadership	Quality Teaching	Parental Engagement
Whole-school commitment Rigorous use of data Strategic planning	Rich pedagogy Tailored Curriculum Effective feedback	Welcoming Schools Parents as co-educators Tailored projects

The Group received evidence from Professor David Egan, one of the report authors, at its meeting in February 2016. In addition to reaffirming the findings of ‘The Good News’ report, he also stressed that perseverance was required by all interested parties and that instances of success where schools had narrowed or closed the attainment gap: “*did not happen overnight*” but “*required planning, teamwork and determination.*”²⁴

2.3.2 ESTYN – In 2012, ESTYN (Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales) published the second in a series of reports in response to the Welsh Government Minister’s annual remit to the inspectorate for 2011/12. The reports considered how Welsh schools were: “*tackling child poverty and disadvantage to improve learners’ achievement and wellbeing*”.²⁵ In its report entitled ‘Effective Practice in Tackling Poverty and Disadvantage in Schools’, ESTYN outlines ten strategies that effective schools in challenging circumstances use. Its top 10 strategies for addressing poverty and disadvantage in schools are:

1. *Taking a whole-school, strategic approach to tackling disadvantage*
2. *Using data to track the progress of disadvantaged pupils*
3. *Improving disadvantaged pupils’ literacy and learning skills*

²³ Wales Centre for Equity in Education – www.uwtsd.ac.uk/wcee

²⁴ The Good News... what schools in Wales are doing to reduce the impact of poverty on pupils (WCEE, 2014)

²⁵ Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools (ESTYN, 2012)

4. *Improving the social and emotional skills of disadvantaged pupils*
5. *Improving the attendance, punctuality and behaviour of disadvantaged pupils*
6. *Tailoring the curriculum to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils*
7. *Providing enriched experiences and a variety of extra-curricular activities and trips*
8. *Listening to pupils and encouraging participation*
9. *Engaging with parents and carers of disadvantaged pupils*
10. *Developing the expertise of staff to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils* ²⁶

2.3.3 The Sutton Trust Teaching and Learning Toolkit – The Sutton Trust’s toolkit is a: *“summary of educational research which provides guidance for teachers and schools on how to use their resources to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils”*. ²⁷ This online resource covers more than thirty ‘strands’ or topics ranging from behaviour interventions, feedback, sports participation, homework, learning styles, peer tutoring, reading and comprehension strategies. The toolkit provides practitioners with the average impact on attainment, the research evidence supporting these interventions as well as potential costs. For example, for ‘feedback’ the Toolkit lists this as an intervention with ‘high impact for very low cost, based on moderate evidence’ whilst listing the option for a pupil to repeat a year as having ‘negative impact for very high cost based on extensive evidence’. The Toolkit was developed by the Trust and published as the ‘Pupil Premium Toolkit’ by Durham University in 2011.

²⁶ Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools by ESTYN (2012)

²⁷ Sutton Trust’s Teaching & Learning Toolkit - <http://www.suttontrust.com/about-us/education-endowment-foundation/teaching-learning-toolkit>

2.4 What is happening in Carmarthenshire?

2.4.1 Pupils numbers in Carmarthenshire

The Group noted that when investigating the attainment gap in Carmarthenshire and the performance of the County's schools with neighbouring authority areas, it was important to consider pupil numbers. Carmarthenshire has the second highest number of primary aged pupils within the ERW region, as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of pupils in Primary Schools within the ERW region (2015/16)

	Boys	Girls	Total
Ceredigion	2,619	2,533	5,152
Powys	5,256	5,067	10,323
Pembrokeshire	5,484	5,288	10,772
Neath Port Talbot	6,618	6,203	12,821
Carmarthenshire	8,193	7,712	15,905
Swansea	11,565	10,639	22,204
ERW total	39,735	37,442	77,177

In the secondary sector, Carmarthenshire again has the second highest number of pupils at 11,332, behind Swansea. Table 3 outlines the numbers of across the region in secondary education.

Table 3: Number of pupils in Secondary Schools within the ERW region (2015/16)

	Boys	Girls	Total
Ceredigion	2,181	2,206	4,387
Pembrokeshire	3,511	3,431	6,942
Powys	3,914	3,759	7,673
Neath Port Talbot	4,040	3,890	7,930
Carmarthenshire	5,726	5,477	11,203
Swansea	7,009	6,605	13,614
ERW total	26,381	25,368	51,749

With 17.5% of the learner cohort, Carmarthenshire has a significant role to play in the delivery of educational standards within ERW.

2.4.2 e-FSM and the attainment gap in Carmarthenshire

As part of its review, the Group received a wide range of data outlining the performance of Carmarthenshire schools during the 2014/15 academic year. It should be noted that the data for the 2015/16 academic year was not available by the end of the Group's review.

Tables 4 and 5 outline the e-FSM data for the local authorities within the ERW region and show Carmarthenshire placed third behind Neath Port Talbot and Swansea in

terms of the percentage of pupils in receipt of free school meals, both in the primary and secondary sectors.

Table 4: Percentage of primary e-FSM pupils (3 years average)

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Neath Port Talbot	26.5	26.6	26.4	25.6	25.4	25.3
Swansea	22.3	21.8	21.9	21.2	20.8	20.4
Carmarthenshire	18.9	18.1	18.0	17.4	17.6	17.8
Pembrokeshire	19.3	19.0	19.6	19.6	18.7	17.1
Ceredigion	14.5	13.3	13.1	12.5	12.3	12.0
Powys	12	11.8	11.8	11.6	11.3	11.0
ERW	18.5	19.4	19.4	18.9	18.6	18.3
WALES					19.6	

Table 5: Percentage of secondary e-FSM pupils (3 years average)

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Neath Port Talbot	20.1	20.8	21.3	21.7	21.8	22.0
Swansea	20.7	19.8	20.0	19.5	19.1	18.5
Carmarthenshire	15.5	14.9	14.9	14.8	15.2	15.8
Pembrokeshire	15.5	15.2	15.5	15.6	15.8	15.5
Ceredigion	12	12.0	11.9	11.6	11.5	11.2
Powys	8.9	9.3	9	9.2	10	10.1
ERW	15.6	16.0	16.2	16.1	16.2	16.2
WALES					17.4	

Whilst trends in e-FSM percentages are relatively stable over time, it's worth noting that around a fifth of our learners are still within this category – in raw terms for 2015/16 equating to c.2,765 learners in the primary phase and c.1,097 in the secondary sector.

It could be argued that Carmarthenshire has a slightly lower than average regional e-FSM challenge in both primary sector and secondary sector. Being ranked third in challenge, it would be expected therefore that average pupil performance would be expected for Carmarthenshire.

The Group noted that challenge, support and intervention activities across all the county's schools continued to focus on improving provision and outcomes for all Carmarthenshire learners. It noted that in 2014/15, performance of e-FSM pupils in the Foundation Phase Indicator and Level 2 inclusive continued to improve but that more needed to be done to enhance the performance of Free School Meals pupils. This would be a key priority for the Education & Children Department for the 2015/16 academic year and beyond.

Figures 3 to 6 outline the trends in performance at the different key stages in Carmarthenshire between 2010 and 2015.

Figure 3: e-FSM v n-FSM Foundation Phase Indicator

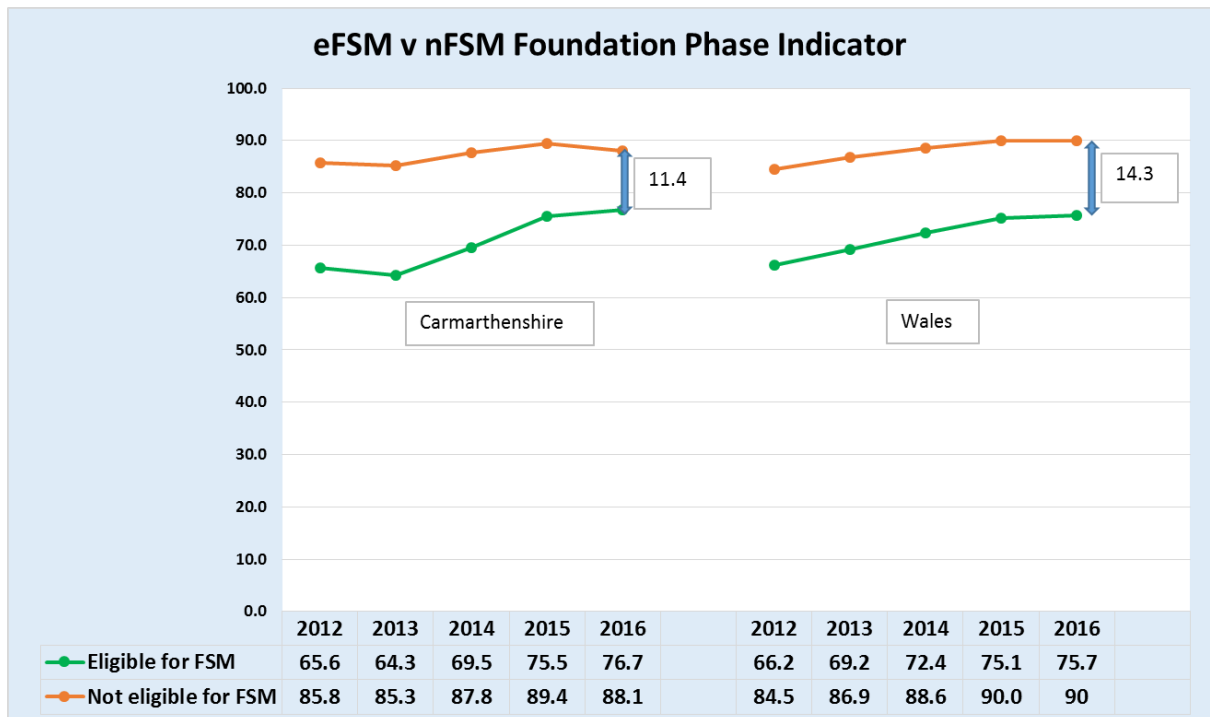


Figure 4: e-FSM v n-FSM KS2 Core Subject Indicator

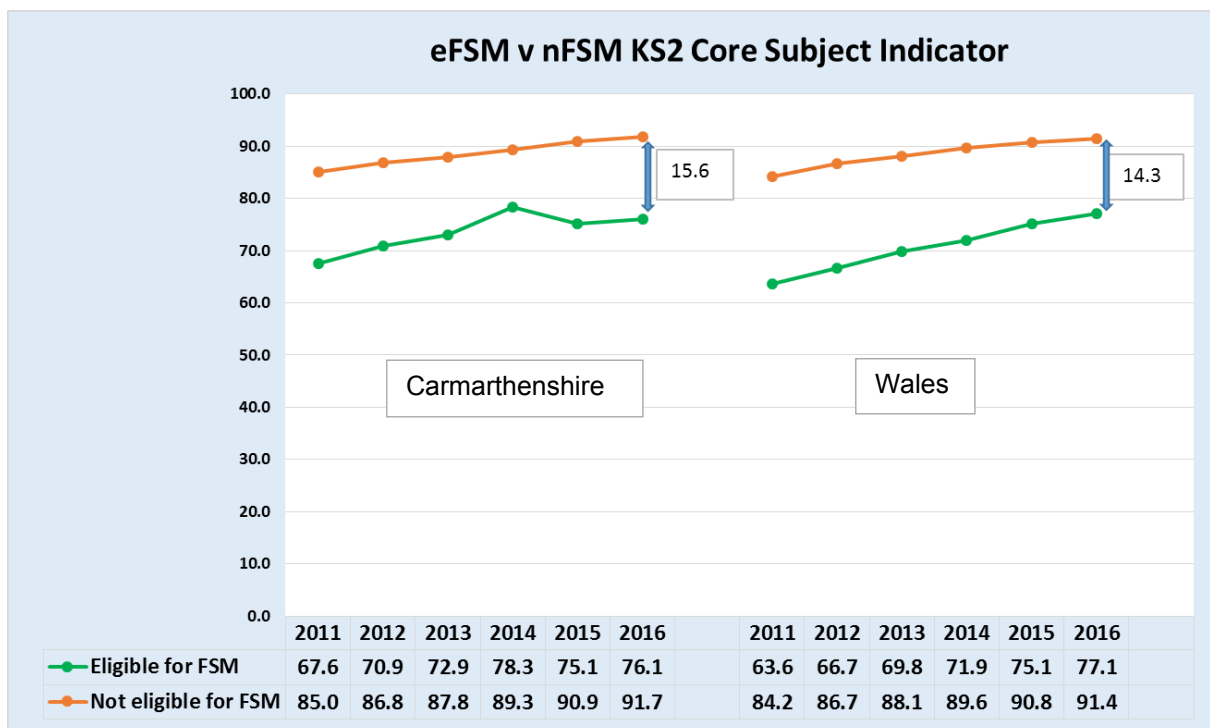


Figure 5: e-FSM v n-FSM KS3 Core Subject Indicator

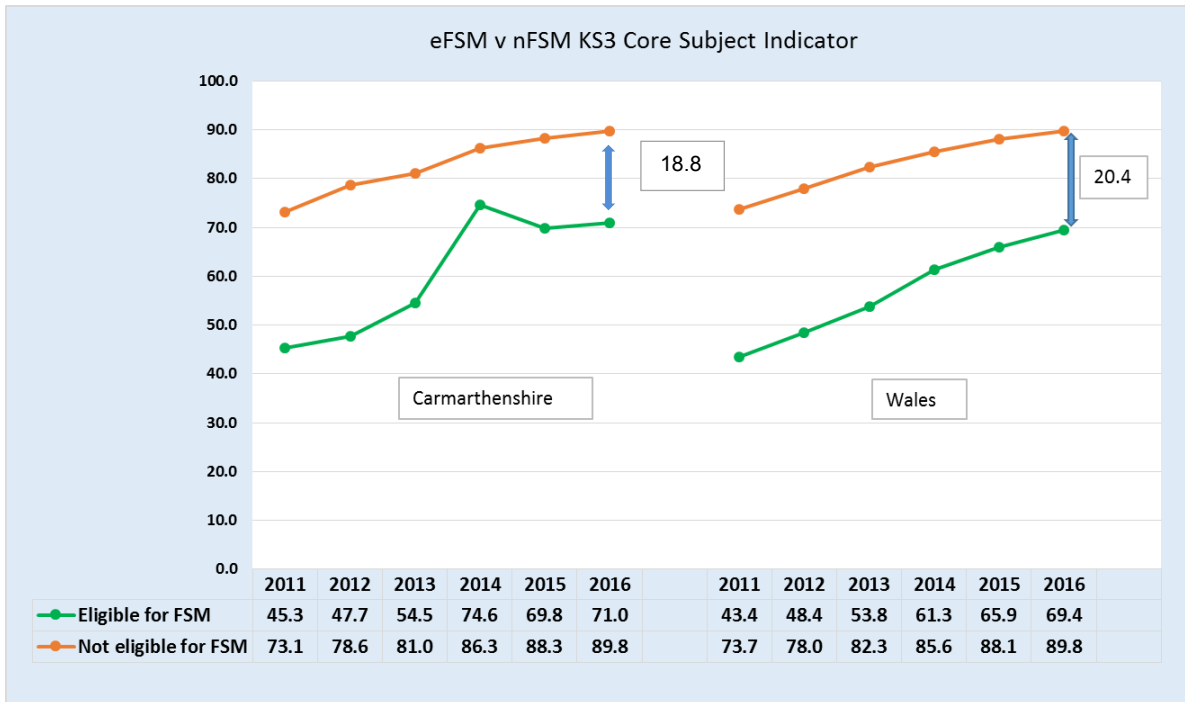
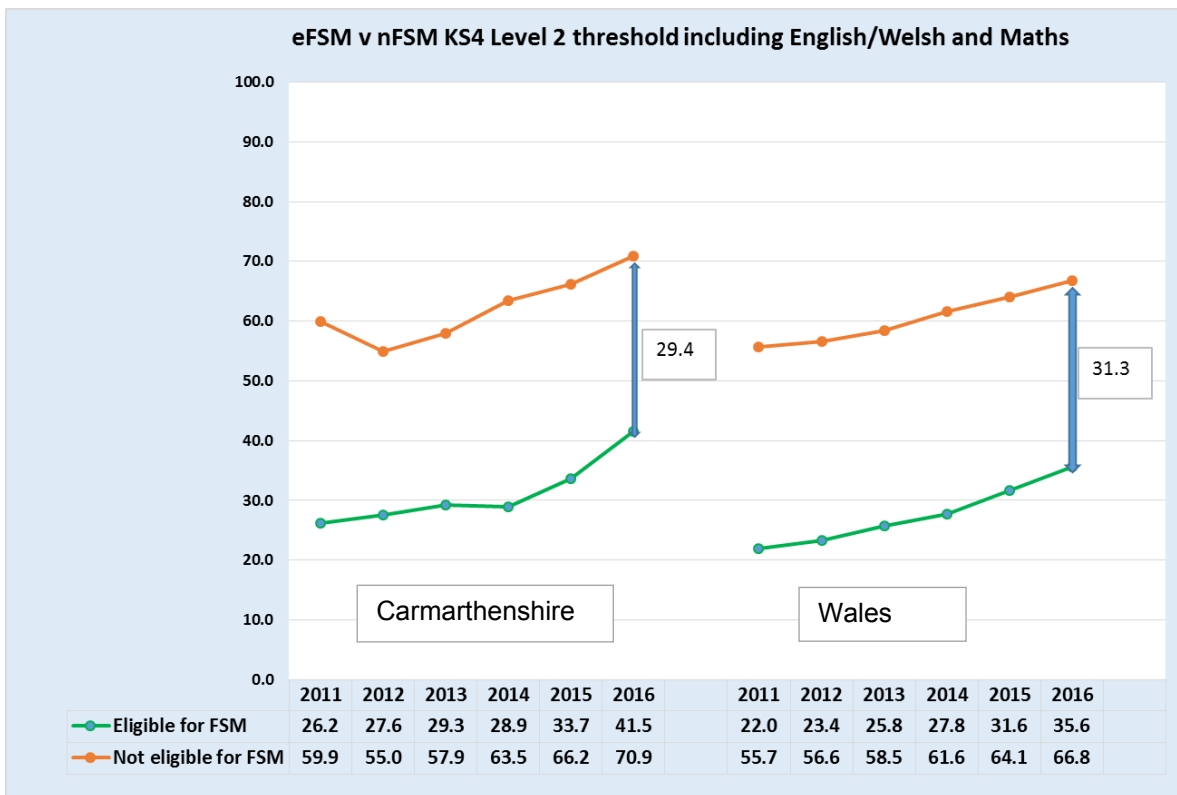


Figure 6: e-FSM v n-FSM KS4 Level 2 threshold including English / Welsh and Maths



Analysis of Figures 4-6 above demonstrates that standards continue to rise at all key stages for e-FSM and n-FSM learners (broadly consistent with the national picture); gaps have been closing slightly, but opened most recently at Key Stages 2 and 3.

Furthermore, attainment gaps in key indicators are wider in the older age groups as starkly demonstrated at Key Stage 4 with the L2i indicator.

The Group was reminded that not all pupils in receipt of free school meals were necessarily under-achieving. The Welsh Government also acknowledges this stating that: *“exceptionally able pupils”* may be in receipt of support from the PDG but *“because of their family background are not achieving their full personal potential, even though they appear to be holding their own in comparison with their peers”*.²⁸

2.4.3 Free School Meal Service

In Carmarthenshire, the Free School Meals Service is administered by the Department for Education & Children. The Department introduced an online application system in 2013 and whilst there was an initial concern due to lack of internet access in some homes, very often, schools will assist parents in applying and this is done on the school premises.

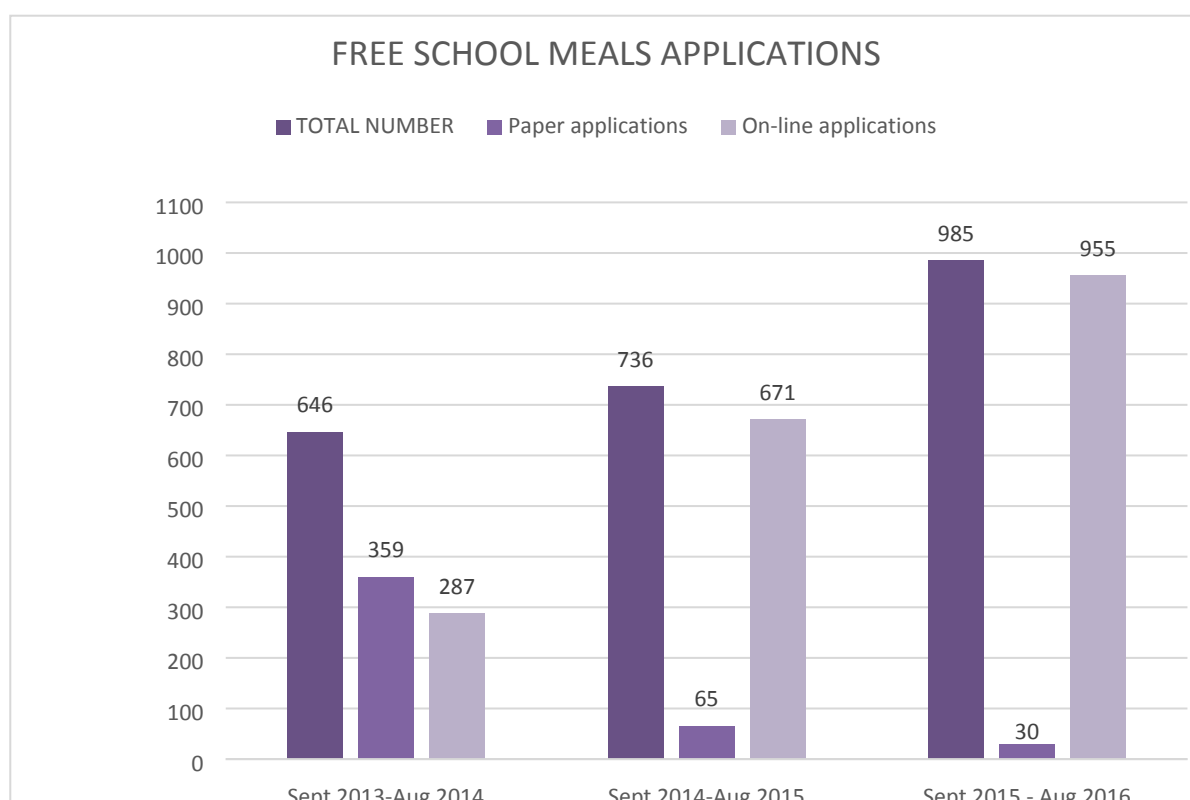
The previous system was paper-based and repeated on an annual basis. The new system does not require a new application to be submitted annually, although there is a duty on the parents to inform the Authority once their circumstances change (and the Authority undertakes regular spot checks). Once an application is received, applicants are checked via an ‘eligibility hub’ run by the Department of Work & Pensions. This will confirm whether a family is eligible or not.

Prior to September 2013, the Department would receive approximately 2,500 paper-based applications each year for approximately 4,300 pupils. Since the introduction of the online system in September 2013 and that parents are no longer required to apply for each new academic year, the numbers of applications have decreased overall with a total of 2,367 applications received between September 2013 and August 2016.

With the introduction of the online system, paper-based applications have dropped year on year since 2013 and now only a handful are received annually.

²⁸ Guidance for using the Pupil Deprivation Grant: What really works? by the Welsh Government (April 2014)

Figure 7: Numbers of Free School Meal applications between September 2013 and August 2016



The Group found that the Authority does not know how many residents are eligible for school meals. Officers had proposed accessing other departmental databases to target those who might be eligible (e.g. those in receipt of Housing Benefit) but this was not possible due to data protection issues.

The Group also learnt that:

- Some schools are very proactive in terms of encouraging parents to apply for free school meals.
- In all the secondary schools where the Authority provides meals (apart from Dyffryn Taf), a cashless system is in place and this had reduced the stigma associated with free school meals and increased take-up.
- There had been discussions with other departments (specifically Housing Benefits Service) about staff encouraging those in receipt or applying for other benefits, to apply for free school meals. However, it was not clear whether this was actually happening or not.

The free school meals are paid for from the Department's Catering Services budget, with the budget set using data on free school meal eligibility at school level.

In Carmarthenshire, the primary and secondary schools with the highest percentage of statutory e-FSM pupils in 2014/15 are listed in the following tables.

Table 6: Carmarthenshire’s Primary Schools with highest percentage of statutory e-FSM pupils

School	Total of statutory age pupils	Total of statutory e-FSM pupils	% of statutory e-FSM pupils
Copperworks Infants, Llanelli	47	22	46.8%
Carwe	39	18	46.2%
Bryn Teg, Llwynhendy	195	86	44.1%
Myrddin, Carmarthen	78	33	42.3%
Old Road, Llanelli	140	58	41.4%

Table 7: Carmarthenshire’s Secondary Schools with highest percentage of statutory e-FSM pupils

School	Total of statutory age pupils	Total of statutory e-FSM pupils	% of statutory e-FSM pupils
Glan-y-Môr, Burry Port	444	132	29.7%
Coedcae, Llanelli	881	227	25.8%
Bryngwyn, Llanelli	995	206	20.7%
St. John Lloyd, Llanelli	517	101	19.5%
QE High, Carmarthen	1203	221	18.4%

2.4.4 The regional picture and the role of ERW

Carmarthenshire is part of the ‘Education through Regional Working’ (ERW) School Improvement Consortium. The ERW region covers six local authority areas and is split into three ‘hubs’, namely:

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

ERW’s aim is to ensure effective performance in all schools across the region and it does this through a variety of ways including:

- *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*
- *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* ²⁹

In addition to its main business plan, ERW has published a strategy for ‘Reducing the Impact of Poverty on Educational Outcomes’ for 2015-18. This strategy has been developed in conjunction with the region’s schools and partner agencies. ERW also has a dedicated ‘Strategic Lead for Reducing the Impact of Poverty on Attainment’ as part of its wider team of officers.

Recent examples of ERW’s work in relation to the poverty agenda has included its Governor Support Team training and supporting governors to identify the priority needed for e-FSM learners in their schools, particularly in light of the Welsh Government’s new categorisation model. The Consortium’s Looked After Children PDG Work Group also contributes to addressing the attainment gap by planning the delivery of: *“high quality services to schools and pupils through effective collaboration”* ³⁰ and utilising best practice. This Work Group also monitors the use and records the impact of the PDG across the region.

During its review, the Group also received evidence from the Managing Director of the ERW Consortium which included a specific focus on the success of schools in the region’s Eastern ‘Hub’ (Swansea and Neath Port Talbot) in tackling the attainment gap (see two case studies on page 29).

The Group was informed that across the region, PDG plans for improving outcomes for e-FSM learners were monitored closely by ERW challenge advisers. Schools often publish separate plans on their websites and a few schools have included their plans into their statutory school development plans. The Group was informed that the use of grant monies by schools had been challenged from time to time in relation to the appropriate use of the funding. Sustainable, whole school approaches are emphasised and guidance for practitioners as well as ESTYN best practice are shared systematically.

The Group noted that those schools who, according to ERW, were effectively reducing the attainment gap, exhibited the following common characteristics. These schools will have:

1. Clear, precise planning for use of the PDG
2. Effective tracking systems to ensure pupil progress
3. Targeted interventions
4. Engagement with parents
5. Effective formative feedback to pupils
6. Little within-school variation

It is ERW’s view that dealing with the impact of poverty must go beyond decisions on how a school’s PDG allocation is spent and that tackling the impact of poverty must be central to whole-school planning.

²⁹ ERW Poverty Strategy 2015-18

³⁰ ERW Poverty Strategy 2015-18

ERW Eastern Region Case Study – Cwmrhydyceirw CP School

This school, located in the Morriston area of Swansea, has an effective plan in place that outlines how PDG funding is used to support e-FSM pupils and pupils identified as vulnerable. There are no LAC pupils in the school at present.

- Nursery PDG is used to support e-FSM for early identification of SEN especially in speech and language. Pupils are screened using the programme 'Language Link' and appropriate interventions and support allocated to individuals. The plan was available for scrutiny. It is costed carefully and each strategy/activity is linked to improved attainment and achievement of pupils. The school is allocated £58,800.
- Analysis of Free School Meals data suggests the gap between FSM and Non FSM pupils was eliminated at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2014-15 for the first time and actually turned in favour of FSM pupils. The CSI for FSM pupils was 100% and Science, literacy and numeracy interventions will continue as will the Nurture group for pupils with social and emotional difficulties. The Nurture group (a few of which are FSM) is successful in supporting identified pupils to manage their social and emotional issues, thereby raising their self-esteem and confidence, improving their social skills and removing barriers to learning. Further in-class support is provided by highly skilled Teaching Assistants, a few funded through PDG. The school can evidence the impact such provision is having on pupil behaviour and attainment through pupil, parent and staff questionnaires, pupil tracking and Nurture records.
- PDG is also used to support families of vulnerable children through using ICT to engage parents in supporting their child at home and improving their child's attendance and punctuality.
- There has been an improvement in attendance for FSM pupils and identified vulnerable pupils and the fact these children are in school more regularly and being targeted for intervention is impacting positively on raising their attainment

ERW Eastern Region Case Study – Cwmtawe Community School

This secondary school located in Pontardawe, has an effective and comprehensive PDG plan that is regularly reviewed to ensure value for money. The school utilises its tracking system to target this group of pupils with a range of appropriate intervention activities used to address the needs of these learners. At the end of KS3 76.3% of e-FSM pupils (29/38) achieved the CSI, whilst 88.1% of N-FSM pupils achieved the same indicator. This has enabled the school to reduce the gap in performance to its lowest level in the past 5 years. A similar pattern is seen in English and maths. In Science the performance of e-FSM pupils is excellent with all gaining L5+.

Similarly at KS4 the performance of e-FSM pupils whilst showing a very slight dip against the 2014 figure remains excellent. Outcomes of e-FSM pupils are above comparative averages in nearly all core indicators and in some cases significantly above. The gap in performance between e-FSM and N-FSM pupils is less than comparative averages. At KS4 money has been used to create additional time for key staff in English and maths to develop resources and provide additional support for e-FSM pupils. The focus for the school is not just those on the C/D borderline but time is invested with those e-FSM pupils who are MAT, thus securing improved outcomes for these. Additional staff have been appointed which has enabled the school to provide smaller classes at KS4 to support improved outcomes.

Additional staff have also been employed to provide English and maths tutoring for e-FSM pupils in Year 11. After school maths classes are scheduled for Year 11 e-FSM learners and the school was able to demonstrate the impact that this is having on improving GCSE outcomes. As a direct consequence of this money and the additional support for e-FSM pupils the school has been able to secure excellent outcomes at both key stages.

The school also provides mentoring sessions for these pupils with the focus being on improving self-belief and raising confidence levels to ensure improved outcomes.

During its review, the Group expressed concern at the impact of poverty on the attainment of pupils in more rural areas of the County. Members suggested that whilst poverty was often more prevalent and visible in the County's urban areas, it was as much of a concern for rural schools as for their urban counterparts. The Group was encouraged to learn that ERW, in conjunction with the GwE Consortium in North Wales, had commissioned research on poverty and limited educational achievement by pupils in rural and isolated areas. A team from Bangor University had won the tender to undertake the research and the key aims of the project would be to:

- *To identify any features that may be attributable to factors of rural poverty and contribute to schools' ability to overcome the hurdles of poverty*
- *Engage with shareholders in education in those areas to identify the hurdles*
- *To assess the validity of FSM as a proxy for poverty in schools*
- *Identify schools that have implemented successful strategies to reduce the impact of poverty and rural isolation on pupil achievement*
- *Digital Features*
- *The research focuses on schools in coastal areas, valleys and rural hinterlands*³¹

The Group noted that a final report was scheduled to be presented to ERW and GwE in July 2017 and members suggested that its findings be considered further by the Local Authority in order to ascertain how Carmarthenshire might assist schools and pupils in its rural communities.

2.4.5 Good Practice in Carmarthenshire

³¹ Research on the impact of poverty and rural isolation on educational achievement – ERW

During the review, the Group received evidence outlining good practice in Carmarthenshire as well as presentations from a selection of schools on the different initiatives being undertaken across the county in order to reduce the impact of poverty and reduce the attainment gap.

Johnstown CP School, Carmarthen – The school’s priority for e-FSM pupils in 2015-16 was that they performed as well as non-FSM pupils at Outcome 5 and 6 Foundation Phase Outcome Indicator and at Level 4 and 5 Core Subject Indicator in Key Stage 2. This includes equitable placement on the ‘More Able and Talented (MAT) register. The school introduced a ‘Peer Mentoring Scheme’ in 2012 and since this time, e-FSM learners have been trained as ‘Techi-Tutors’. This has been very effective in improving self-esteem and developing a deeper understanding of their own learning through teaching other pupils. It is based on a strategy recommended by the Welsh Government and the Sutton Trust. The school’s ‘Johnstown Journal Project’ further develops this, placing high expectations of high standards for e-FSM learners. The e-FSM pupils work alongside MAT pupils as ‘Chief Journalists’, thus ensuring continuous exposure to high quality literacy skills. Year 6 Chief Journals receive ICT training by specialists on relevant advanced technologies and on news reporting.

Bryngwyn Secondary School, Llanelli – The core aims of the school are to improve attendance, attitude and the achievement of disadvantaged learners. ESTYN acknowledges that the School’s: *“successful strategy using a skills-based curriculum has seen a marked improvement in many areas such as attendance, literacy, mathematics and English”*.³²

The School has a highly effective and extremely well attended out-of-school-hours programme. It provides enriching experiences that more advantaged learners take for granted by offering a varied menu of clubs, activities and cultural and educational trips. The programme supports pupils and their families through activities such as homework clubs, catch-up and revision sessions. The school also employs a ‘Learning Coach’ to support both pupils and parents, occasionally liaising with external agencies to provide support to families where needed. Both one to one and group support is offered to pupils preparing for GCSE exams and the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (WBQ). Transition projects are also run in conjunction with feeder primary schools which enables the school to ascertain the needs of new pupils, prior to their first day in the secondary school.


Hendy CP School – As a means of engaging with parents and carers, the school developed a scheme as a result of its weekly numeracy classes held for parents. The scheme was written by parents for parents and carers and provides tips and advice on how they can support their child/children’s in their development of numeracy and mathematics



³² A whole-school approach to supporting disadvantaged learners at Bryngwyn School – Best Practice Case Study by ESTYN

skills as they walk around the village. The booklet is aimed at the junior department and “Numeracy around the village has been written by parents for parents and carers, and will give you tips and suggestions to help you support your child in numeracy and mathematics as you walk around Hendy village and beyond.” The booklet is generally aimed at children in the junior department and includes examples of numbers and mathematical problems that can be found in everyday objects and shops within the village (e.g. the menu at the local fish and chips shop).

Ysgol Y Bedol (CP), Garnant – As part of the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee’s school visit programme, members of the Group visited Ysgol Y Bedol in Garnant. During the visit, members learnt of the numerous and varied interventions funded in part by the PDG and used by the school to reduce the impact of poverty on the attainment of its pupils. Initiatives include:

- The Special Educational Needs and CADY Team – Three members of staff facilitate Early Intervention Programmes (e.g. reading, CHATT, Speech and Language, Mathematics), leading Positive Play and ‘Talk About’ sessions, are responsible for late comers to the school ensuring pupils settle successfully, assessing pupils on entry (e.g. reading tests, spelling, reasoning tests), writing reports for outside agencies and run ‘Y Cwtsh Cynnes’ (Peacemakers Project), a lunchtime problem solving centre for pupils.
- 
- Employing an Attendance Officer on a part-time basis whose responsibilities include attendance data collection, liaising and working with parents, tracking patterns in absence and working with outside agencies (e.g. Team Around the Family, County Attendance Officer, school nurse).
 - Establishing a Family Support Officer role (an existing member of staff) whose responsibilities include work alongside agencies (e.g. Team Around the Family, Flying Start, Cylch Meithrin, Plant Dewi and the Health Board), holding transition meetings with Cylch Meithrin, undertaking home visits with new families (e.g. getting to know and understand their backgrounds) and offering support to families during difficult times such as bereavement, illness etc. The officer will also meet with parents when personal issues involving pupils arise (e.g. personal hygiene or school uniform).
 - Establishing ‘Gwobr Y Bedol’ (The Bedol Prize), a programme unique to the school. This graded programme for pupils of Years 2 to 6 is based on the principles of the Duke of Edinburgh Award and offer a variety of experiences, develop an ethos of global and community citizenship as well fostering ambition, skills and a sense of achievement.
 - The ‘Teulu Hapus’ School Community Programme held during the course of a year which includes a variety of sessions relating to topics such as language and

play, cooking, community safety, health and well-being and training which are run by different agencies (e.g. Family Information Service, Dyfed-Powys Police, Menter Iaith Dinefwr, Coleg Sir Gâr and the Health Board).

Maes-y-Morfa CP School, Llanelli – The school is located in one of the County’s most deprived ward areas. 97% of the school’s pupils live in the top 10% of the most deprived communities in Wales with a high percentage of unemployment and of residents with no qualifications. The school, under its former head teacher has made significant efforts to engage with parents and the wider community as it is of the opinion that about 50% of student achievement is due to home and community factors. Three key actions adopted by the school have been to:

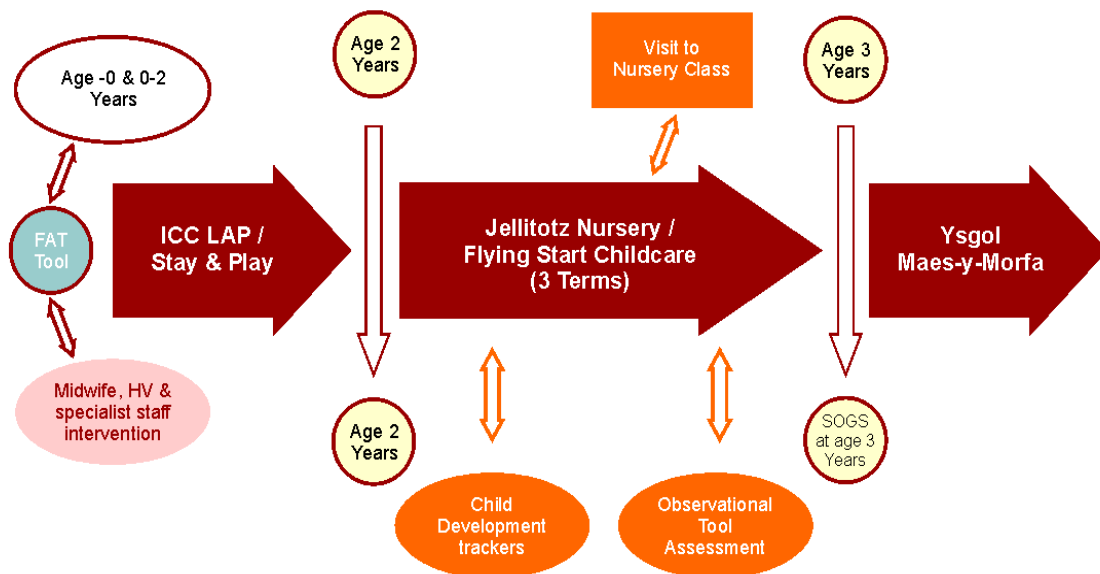
- Build positive home-school relationships through parental engagement
- Adapt pedagogy and the curriculum
- Ensure strategic planning and leadership

It views family, school and community engagement as an integral part of school improvement acknowledging that children live complex lives...in a family as well as in a community. The school has termed this the ‘Big Bag of Worries’ and each child has one or several of these influences which impact on their learning.

The school views the PDG an opportunity and not a ‘gap closing initiative’ and the e-FSM as a coarse and unreliable measure of deprivation. The school has developed its own measures based on data which is available to all schools and working closely in conjunction with other agencies such as Flying Start.

This strategic approach is a context driven model directly measuring and driving the school’s approach to deprivation. The school seeks to capture as much of this data as possible prior to initiating the curriculum.

Figure 8: Maes-y-Morfa Engagement / Data Model



This strategic approach is a context driven model directly measuring and driving the school’s approach to deprivation. The school seeks to capture as much of this data as possible prior to initiating the curriculum.

The school has a ‘Flying Start’ group within its own tracking system which enables it to know which pupils have been supported and at what level of need. This informs its strategic approach to and tracking of pupils in order to inform its approach to deprivation.

Carwe, Gwynfryn and Ponthenri Federation – This federation of schools, located in the lower Gwendraeth Valley has sought to utilise the PDG to run projects that support pupils’ classwork. The aim of the projects are to:

- Provide fun and interesting experiences
- Encourage pupils to work in small groups
- Develop pupils’ confidence
- Encourage pupils’ speaking and listening skills
- Support and develop literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum
- Reinforce literacy, numeracy and ICT skills which are taught in the classroom

Projects run by the individual schools within the federation have included:

- Dewiniaid Darllen – Reading project (‘reading wizards’) to change attitudes of parents and pupils to reading and books.
- Golf project – Assists with addressing personal, behavioural and social issues (e.g. how to behave, how to receive instruction on learning new skills).
- Fferm Torcefn – This has enabled children to grow fruit and vegetables, be involved in agricultural and environmental projects, as well as serving customers in the farm shop.

- Criw Mentro Mentrus – This initiative (‘entrepreneurial crew’) challenges pupils to run stalls for Christmas events and coffee mornings, teaching financial skills and life skills such as cooking.
- Walking bus – This long-term initiative in Carwe was first introduced in 2006 where children are ‘picked-up’ by volunteers on their way through the village. The ‘bus’ travels whatever the weather, ensuring that the pupils arrive in school on time for breakfast club. It has had an extremely positive effect on the attendance and punctuality of pupils in addition to developing their road safety skills. The school’s walking bus has won five awards over the past decade including two national awards from Road Safety Wales and Asda’s Health for Kids.

The Group concluded that with so many examples of good practice across the County, not to mention across the ERW region and beyond, it would be useful to produce guidance or a good practice guide for the County’s schools in order that all schools had access to the most up-to-date and effective methods of addressing this issue.

3.0 Conclusion

- The impact of poverty on attainment is a well-known and well researched phenomenon, indeed, there is a wide range of research and good practice available from across the UK to inform and assist the County's schools in targeting the problem. Carmarthenshire needs to build and enhance on this research and good practice.
- There is evidence of much good practice within Carmarthenshire itself, as testified by the narrowing gap over a number of years. However, the good practice in Carmarthenshire and across the ERW region needs to be promoted and implemented by all schools.
- Minimising the impact of poverty on education attainment and reducing the attainment gap requires long term strategies and commitment from all agencies and organisations involved. There is no quick fix solution.
- Free School Meals Service has developed effective electronic and online systems. However, ensuring that those eligible for free school meals take up that opportunity, remains a challenge
- It is essential that rural poverty is not forgotten, especially, as the Public Policy Institute for Wales states: "there is evidence that rural poverty can be masked by the relative affluence of rural areas and by a culture of self-reliance in rural communities".³³
- It is clear that good leadership in schools as well as giving e-FSM learners a high priority in a school's development plan, is essential to ensure success in dealing with this matter as well as regular tracking and monitoring of pupils.
- Successful schools find creative ways of using the Pupil Deprivation Grant effectively.
- Engagement with parents is important and successful schools share information with and support them.
- The greatest impact of some of these initiatives undertaken by schools is not necessarily an improvement in standards but often is seen in the well-being of the pupils.
- School governors have a key role in monitoring and challenging the way in which their schools spend the PDG and seek to minimise the impact of poverty on education attainment.
- The loss of the PDG would have a significant impact on schools' ability to cater for and support e-FSM pupils.

4.0 Recommendations

³³ Rural Poverty in Wales: Existing Research and Evidence Gaps by the Public Policy Institute for Wales (2016)

The Group recommends that:

- Carmarthenshire County Council continues to consider the attainment gap as a matter of priority whilst acknowledging that it requires perseverance from all interested parties over a long period of time to ensure success.
- The County Council develops and publishes a good practice guide for Carmarthenshire schools, outlining effective methods and solutions to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment and reduce the attainment gap.
- In developing a good practice guide, the County Council utilises existing and online systems to share with schools and practitioners (e.g. HWB).
- The County Council support an event to launch the good practice guide / promote the deprivation agenda be arranged in Carmarthenshire, in association with the University of Wales Trinity St. David and the European Forum for Freedom in Education (EFFE).
- That the County Council considers and responds to the findings and implications of ERW's rural poverty research, when it is published in 2017.
- That the County Council lobbies the Welsh Government on the importance of the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) and encourages the relevant minister to safeguard the grant for the long term.
- In light of on-going financial pressures, the County Council should urge and support schools to make interventions such as those funded by the PDG, as sustainable as possible for the longer term as well as integrating such initiatives into everyday teaching practice.
- County Council departments be requested to ensure the promotion of the Free School Meals Service to eligible families through front line services (e.g. Housing Benefits Service), encouraging those in receipt of or applying for other benefits, to apply for free school meals.

5.0 Appendices

- 5.1 Appendix 1 – Ofsted’s main findings on how schools in England are spending the Pupil Premium
- 5.2 Appendix 2 – PDG allocation for Carmarthenshire schools (2012/13 – 2016/17)
- 5.3 Appendix 3 – Task & Finish Group meetings and attendance
- 5.2 Appendix 4 – List of those giving evidence at the Group’s meetings

5.1 Appendix 1 – Ofsted’s main findings on how schools in England are spending the Pupil Premium

In the autumn of 2012, Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills in England) visited 68 primary and secondary schools to evaluate how effectively they were spending their Pupil Premium allocations in order to maximise achievement. Ofsted found that where schools had spent the Pupil Premium funding successfully to improve achievement, the following characteristics were evident. These schools:

- *Carefully ring-fenced the funding so that they always spent it on the target group of pupils*
- *Never confused eligibility for the Pupil Premium with low ability, and focused on supporting their disadvantaged pupils to achieve the highest levels.*
- *Thoroughly analysed which pupils were underachieving, particularly in English and mathematics, and why.*
- *Drew on research evidence (such as the Sutton Trust toolkit) and evidence from their own and others’ experience to allocate the funding to the activities that were most likely to have an impact on improving achievement.*
- *Allocated their best teachers to teach intervention groups to improve mathematics and English, or employed new teachers who had a good track record in raising attainment in those subjects.*
- *Used achievement data frequently to check whether interventions or techniques were working and made adjustments accordingly, rather than just using the data retrospectively to see if something had worked.*
- *Made sure that support staff, particularly teaching assistants, were highly trained and understood their role in helping pupils to achieve.*
- *Systematically focused on giving pupils clear, useful feedback about their work, and ways that they could improve it.*
- *Ensured that a designated senior leader had a clear overview of how the funding was being allocated and the difference it was making to the outcomes for pupils.*
- *Ensured that class and subject teachers knew which pupils were eligible for the Pupil Premium so that they could take responsibility for accelerating their progress.*
- *Had a clear policy on spending the Pupil Premium, agreed by governors and publicised on the school website.*
- *Provided well-targeted support to improve attendance, behaviour or links with families where these were barriers to a pupil’s learning.*

- *Had a clear and robust performance management system for all staff, and included discussions about pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium in performance management meetings.*
- *Were able, through careful monitoring and evaluation, to demonstrate the impact of each aspect of their spending on the outcomes for pupils.*³⁴

Ofsted also found that where schools were less successful in spending the funding, they tended to have at least some of the following characteristics. These schools:

- *Had a lack of clarity about the intended impact of the spending.*
- *Spent the funding indiscriminately on teaching assistants, with little impact.*
- *Did not monitor the quality and impact of interventions well enough, even where other monitoring was effective.*
- *Did not have a good performance management system for teaching assistants and other support staff.*
- *Did not have a clear audit trail for where the funding had been spent.*
- *Focused on pupils attaining the nationally expected level at the end of the key stage (Level 4, five A* to C grades at GCSE) but did not go beyond these expectations, so some more able eligible pupils underachieved.*
- *Planned their Pupil Premium spending in isolation to their other planning, for example, it was not part of the school development plan.*
- *Compared their performance to local rather than national data, which suppressed expectations if they were in a low-performing local authority.*
- *Did not focus their pastoral work on the desired outcomes for pupils and did not have any evidence to show themselves whether the work had or had not been effective.*
- *Did not have governors involved in making decisions about the Pupil Premium, or challenging the way in which it was allocated.*³⁵

³⁴ The Pupil Premium: How schools are spending the funding successfully to maximise achievement by Ofsted

³⁵ The Pupil Premium: How schools are spending the funding successfully to maximise achievement by Ofsted

5.2 Appendix 2 – PDG allocation for Carmarthenshire schools (2012/13 – 2016/17)

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Nursery Total	0	0	0	3,000	2,700
Primary Total	936,594	930,260	1,870,993	2,278,800	2,653,100
Secondary Total	753,275	781,572	1,466,504	1,587,600	1,757,200
Special Total	26,022	10,828	22,665	18,150	46,000
Grand Total	1,715,891	1,722,659	3,360,161	3,887,550	4,459,000

5.3 Appendix 3 – Task & Finish Group meetings and attendance

Meeting	Councillors Present	Officers / Visitors Present
<p>Tuesday 8th December 2015 10:00am Meeting Room 6, Parc Dewi Sant, Carmarthen</p>	<p>Cllr. Eirwyn Williams (Chair) Cllr. Ryan Bartlett Cllr. John James Cllr. Hugh Richards Cllr. Tom Theophilus Mrs. Vera Kenny Mr. Simon Pearson</p>	<p>David Astins Glenn Evans Gareth Morgans Aeron Rees Bernadette Dolan Matthew Hughes Michelle Evans Thomas</p>
<p>Monday 18th January 2016 10:00am Meeting Room 6, Parc Dewi Sant, Carmarthen</p>	<p>Cllr. Eirwyn Williams (Chair) Cllr. Ryan Bartlett Cllr. John James Cllr. Tom Theophilus Mrs. Vera Kenny Mr. Simon Pearson</p>	<p>Joe Cudd Glenn Evans Gareth Morgans Mary Parry Aeron Rees Matthew Hughes Michelle Evans Thomas</p>
<p>Friday 5th February 2016 10:00am Democratic Services Committee Room, County Hall, Carmarthen</p>	<p>Cllr. Eirwyn Williams (Chair) Cllr. Ryan Bartlett Cllr. Peter Hughes-Griffiths Cllr. John James Cllr. Hugh Richards Cllr. Tom Theophilus Mrs. Vera Kenny Mr. Simon Pearson</p>	<p>Rhian Evans Lisa Davies Professor David Egan Glenn Evans Robert Sully Gareth Morgans Matthew Hughes Michelle Evans Thomas</p>

Meeting	Councillors Present	Officers / Visitors Present
Monday 25th April 2016 10:00am Meeting Room 6, Parc Dewi Sant, Carmarthen	Cllr. Eirwyn Williams (Chair) Cllr. Ryan Bartlett Cllr. John James Cllr. Hugh Richards Cllr. Tom Theophilus Mrs. Vera Kenny	Betsan O'Connor Glenn Evans Gareth Morgans Aeron Rees Matthew Hughes
Tuesday 17th May 2016 10:00am Meeting Room 6, Parc Dewi Sant, Carmarthen	Cllr. Eirwyn Williams (Chair) Cllr. Ryan Bartlett Cllr. Hugh Richards Cllr. Tom Theophilus Mrs. Vera Kenny	Tracy Senchal Gareth Morgans Michelle Evans Thomas
Tuesday 21st June 2016 10:00am Meeting Room 6, Parc Dewi Sant, Carmarthen	Cllr. Eirwyn Williams (Chair) Cllr. Ryan Bartlett Cllr. Peter Hughes-Griffiths Cllr. John James Cllr. Hugh Richards Cllr. Tom Theophilus Mrs. Vera Kenny	Aeron Rees Matthew Hughes
Friday 25th November 2016 10:00am Meeting Room 2, Parc Dewi Sant, Carmarthen	Cllr. Eirwyn Williams (Chair) Cllr. Ryan Bartlett Cllr. Peter Hughes-Griffiths Cllr. John James Cllr. Hugh Richards Mrs. Vera Kenny	Gareth Morgans Aeron Rees Matthew Hughes

5.4 Appendix 4 – List of those giving evidence at Group meetings

Meeting	Attendees	Discussion Topic
December 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Astins (E&C Department, Carmarthenshire County Council) • Gareth Morgans / Glenn Evans / Aeron Rees (E&C Department, Carmarthenshire County Council) 	<p>Free School Meals Service</p> <p>e-FSM / Attainment data</p>
January 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joe Cudd – Head Teacher of Maes-y-Morfa CP School, Llanelli • Mary Parry – Consortium Associate School Improvement Officer (E&C Department, Carmarthenshire County Council) 	<p>Approach to e-FSM learners at Maes-y-Morfa School</p> <p>Authority’s approach to E-FSM learners and case studies from County’s schools</p>
February 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhian Evans – Head Teacher of Carwe, Gwynfryn and Ponthenri School Federation • Lisa Davies – Teacher at Carwe School • Professor David Egan – Director of Wales Centre for Equity in Education 	<p>Approach to e-FSM learners in Carwe, Gwynfryn and Ponthenri units</p> <p>Overview of e-FSM / attainment gap / poverty agenda in Wales and UK</p>

Meeting	Attendees	Discussion Topic
April 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="544 268 1227 304">• Betsan O'Connor – Managing Director, ERW <li data-bbox="544 421 1088 491">• Gareth Morgans (E&C Department, Carmarthenshire County Council) 	<p data-bbox="1321 268 2051 373">ERW's approach to e-FSM learners and attainment gap, as well as case study examples, specifically from Eastern Region Hub</p> <p data-bbox="1321 453 1951 489">Welsh Government School banding for 2016</p>
May 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="544 571 1178 641">• Tracy Senchal – Head Teacher, Coedcae Secondary School, Llanelli 	<p data-bbox="1321 571 2002 608">Approach to e-FSM learners at Coedcae School</p>

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(Ctrl+Click to follow the hyperlinks and read the documents)

7. Glossary of Terms

CADY	Cydlynnydd Anghenion Dysgu Ychwanegol (Additional Educational Needs Co-ordinator)
CHaTT	Programme to support children's underlying pre-learning skills in preparation for the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 curriculum
CSC	Central South (Wales) School Improvement Consortium
CSI	Core Subject Indicator
EFFE	European Forum for Freedom in Education
e-FSM	Eligible for Free School Meals
ERW	Ein Rhanbarth ar Waith – Regional Consortium
ESaGS	Every School a Good School
ESTYN	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education & Training in Wales
EYPDG	Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant
FPI	Foundation Phase Indicator
FSME	Free School Meal Entitlement (Northern Ireland)
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GwE	School Effectiveness and Improvement Service for North Wales
HWB	Welsh Government's National Digital Content Repository for Education
ICC	Integrated Children's Centre
ICT	Information & Communications Technology
KS	Key Stage (e.g. KS3 is Key Stage 3)
LAC	Looked After Children
LCE	Language, literacy and communication skills in English
LCW	Language, literacy and communication skills in Welsh

L2i	Level 2 Inclusive
MAT	More Able and Talented
MDT	Mathematical Development
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
n-FSM	Not eligible for Free School Meals
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (in England)
PDG	Pupil Deprivation Grant
PLASC	Pupil Level Annual School Census
PSD	Personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity
SEN	Special Educational Needs
TA	Teaching Assistant
TSN	Targeting Social Need
UK	United Kingdom
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WBQ	Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification
WCEE	Welsh Centre for Equality in Education