

Strategies and initiatives to raise attainment in Wales

Literature review for the Wales
Centre for Equity in Education

Social mobility

- Britain and the United States have the lowest levels of intergenerational mobility
- The Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland) and Canada tend to have high rates of social mobility
- The 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were decades of great social change with a perception of social mobility but studies demonstrate a sustained picture of a social gap in exam results

Child poverty

- In Wales, nearly one child in three lives in poverty and there are more children living in poverty here than in other parts of the UK
- The educational achievement of these poor children is lower when compared with that of more prosperous groups
- Adult literacy levels are also lower in Wales than in England
- International and national studies confirm the poorest children continue to underperform in schools - this is linked with low levels of equity in society

Attainment

- The most recent Pisa results in 2013 demonstrate Wales has the worst scores of all the nations in the UK
- The 2014 annual report on school standards published by Estyn confirms that standards in Wales have not improved over the years
- Estyn has drawn attention to the challenges faced by schools in raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. “Tackling deprivation and raising standards” (Estyn 2014) is a summary of three earlier reports, each of which details strategies to tackle the impact of poverty on pupils’ achievements in school.

Same old escalator



A selection from the escalator...

- Dunning (1976) 24% pupils uncommitted to Scottish Leaving Certificate
- Munn (1976) 20% courses unsuited to pupils' needs
- NFER (1996) identifies the 'long tail of underachievement' in Britain
- Barber (1996) calls for more community involvement to tackle the long tail of underachievement
- New Scottish parliament in 1999 identifies the lowest performing 20% of pupils as one of its priorities

And yet more....

- One in five children born at the turn of the millennium who are at risk of being branded a NEET when they leave school
- Ofsted reports (1993 and 2013) *Unseen children.....20 years on* identifies 20% of poor children let down by schools.....invisible children

And finally.

- House of Commons Education Select Committee (2014) states:
- *White working class underachievement in education is real and persistent. White children who are eligible for free school meals are consistently the lowest performing group in the country, and the difference between their educational performance and that of their less deprived white peers is larger than for any other ethnic group. The gap exists at age five and widens as children get older.”*

Improving attainment for the disadvantaged

- In Wales:
- RAISE (Raise Attainment and Individual Standards in Education) programme to support disadvantaged pupils (1996)
- Estyn suggests additional funds given to schools often not used to tackle specific needs of the disadvantage
- Pupil Deprivation Grant (2011)
- Tackling Poverty Action Plan (2012)

In addition to extra government funding two main strategies are used to tackle disadvantage.....

- The school improvement strategy – this is **important** but not **sufficient** as a focus on closing the attainment gap within the school gates as it does not tackle the underlying disadvantage
- However, great success from London Challenge programme and to lesser extent from City Schools Challenge programmes
- Now in Wales: The Schools Challenge Cymru
- Different contexts make direct transfer of an initiative difficult

The second strand...

- The second strand of how to influence pupils' experiences in school to improve educational outcomes focuses on student-family-community enhancements
- When links in the student-family-community strategy are sought between an initiative and its impact on achievement and educational outcome then it is difficult to pinpoint such a link.
- The interventions often suffer from an overall lack of quantity or quality of robust research evidence.

Parental/family involvement



Parental involvement works....

- *“Parental involvement has long been considered a vital ingredient in promoting good outcomes for pupils and the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement in the primary age range is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools.”*
- (Deforges and Abouchaar 2003)

However...

- It is not parental involvement *per se* which is good but the quality and scope which is important
- Now referred to as **Parental Engagement**
- Also now a recognition that parental engagement in children's learning in the home makes the greatest difference to achievement

Tackling disadvantage from all corners.....

- The Welsh Government recognises that attempts to redress inequality through school-based education **alone** are insufficient unless policies are found to support children's learning **before** they enter school and to promote effective links between home and school **throughout** schooling.

So before they start school.....

- Families First promotes the development by local authorities of multi-agency systems and support with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention for families, particularly those living in poverty
- It is part of a continuum of provision for children, young people and families that includes:
- Flying Start, for children aged three and under in the most disadvantage local area;
- Communities First, targeting the prospects of the most disadvantaged communities; and
- Integrated Family Support Teams, which provide a holistic approach to families with high level of needs (Estyn 2013)
- These have enabled a focus on parenting strategies and raising aspirations to be developed.

Redressing inequality by promoting effective links between home and school throughout schooling.

- Estyn (2013) *Working together to tackle the impact of poverty* highlights that only a few schools succeed in raising standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners
- Focus on the needs of each individual learner
- Identify a senior member of staff to co-ordinate the work of partners
- Pupils benefit from an approach called 'Team around the family'

Key factors for success in school and home engagement....

- defining and evaluating the expected change;
- evidence-based planning that takes account of local circumstances
- properly resourcing any activities undertaken
- ensuring senior staff support and involvement
- anticipating and dealing with barriers to potential participation
- ensuring sustainability is addressed

Ofsted says.....

- Not just formal parent-teacher meetings
- use new technologies
- arrange regular consultation with parents
- ensure no family is considered impossible to reach
- go the extra mile and get to know their parents well
- harness for the school any parental expertise or specialism
- collect data on the outcomes of their parental engagement activities
- analyse any data collected

Others say.....

- Multi-agency works as schools cannot do this alone
- But they have a key role to play in coordinating provision of services
- Should act a local hub for delivery of services

What works then....

- Overwhelmingly, the family learning, literacy and numeracy (FLLN) programmes have been shown to have the greatest potential of having a positive impact on disadvantaged families and bringing benefits that outlast the duration of the intervention
- But in Wales Estyn found there is insufficient tracking of the impact of FLLN programmes on the standards achieved by children
- So these programmes need to improve this aspect by gathering robust evidence drawn from rigorous research and evaluation (Egan 2013)

What is out there.....

- Families First/Cymroth
- Flying start
- Communities First
- Fathers in Demand
- Professional learning communities
- FLLN
- Investors in Families;
- FAST;
- Achievement for all
- Incredible Years Wales
- Sure start/language in play
- Signature Family Learning
- and many more

More on family learning and schools....

- Out-of-hours clubs
- Parent classes
- Complements rather than competes with school activities
- Outreach work
- Improving parental and their children's skills
- Voluntary rather than compulsory engagement
- Emphasis on school transition points
- No one-size-fits all solutions out there

What next.....

- Findings suggest that the following initiatives at present taking place in parts of Wales merit further research and longitudinal investigation with a view to a more evidence-based take up:
- Family Learning, Literacy and Numeracy (FLLN)
- Families and School Together (FAST)
- Family Learning Signature (FLS)
- There may be others.....?