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ASSIGNMENT TITLE: Responding to the effects of
poverty and disadvantage in education – Portfolio assignment

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ECEW7015

Portfolio assignment

Part1: Reflective report: 1967 words

Part 2: Action plan: 2199 words

Total word count: 4166

Part 1: Reflective report

Poverty and disadvantage affect multiple children and their families within our primary setting. Poverty is described as a household having insufficient access to resources over an extended period (Welsh Government, 2024). Whilst resources include technology access, housing quality and conditions, lack of time for parental involvement or lack of resources, socio-economic (SE) factors at household, local and national levels also contribute to poverty and disadvantage (Taylor, Zubrick and Christensen, 2016; Mann, Silver and Stein, 2021; Terzi, Unterhalter and Suissa, 2023; Children in Wales, 2024). Examples of SE disadvantage experienced at home include English as an additional language, experiencing homelessness, or having an additional learning need (ALN) (Herbers et al., 2012; Department for Education, 2013; Morris and Dobson, 2021). Local SE factors include job availability and transport within the local area, whilst low wages, rising living costs and geographical location contribute from a national level (Hutchinson, Reader and Akhal, 2020; Children in Wales, 2024). This highlights the variety of factors impacting children and their experiences before entering the school building, emphasising that these factors are interconnected across systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1981; Goldfeld et al., 2018).

The Welsh government (2024) utilises relative child poverty to measure the number of children in households earning less than 60% of the median UK household income. Between 2020-2022, 28% of children lived in relative poverty, whilst this increased to 32% between 2023-2025 (Welsh Government, 2023c; 2026b). However, the documentation notes that data collection changes were made between the publishing of both reports, altering the threshold for some of the results presented (Welsh Government, 2026b).

Reducing and mitigating the impacts of poverty and disadvantage is critical in reducing the persistent attainment gap experienced by learners (Dolean et al., 2019; Hutchinson, Reader and Akhal, 2020; Morris and Dobson, 2021). The Welsh Government (2026a) identified that

children eligible for free school meals (eFSM) had lower school attendance compared to their peers not entitled to free school meals, of 7.3%. The same report indicated that one third of children experiencing high social disadvantage had some form of speech and language difficulty, whilst children as young as 5 with an individual development plan in place had attainments of approximately 15 months behind their peers (Gorard and Siddiqui, 2019; Hutchinson, Reader and Akhal, 2020). These statistics highlight how uncontrollable factors play a substantial part in education access, and why support systems and interventions are critical in attempting to mitigate these factors.

By including the United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child as part of Welsh legislation, the Government highlights its importance for all decisions and support offered to benefit children in a holistic and equitable way (Welsh Government, 2024). Specific articles highlight the need for support and intervention opportunities to ensure that children have equitable access to opportunities to thrive, specifically articles 3, 6, 18, 26 and 28 (United Nations, 1989).

Within our setting, poverty and disadvantage impacts on children's literacy skills. Skill variation has been observed throughout the primary school, with poverty and disadvantage impacting how pupils display these skills. Children's early reading predicts their attainment as they progress through school, with lower literacy skills potentially identifying lower attainment (Herbers et al., 2012). Difficulty reading significantly impacts how children access the curriculum as they progress through school, indicating why supporting these skills is paramount for development and disadvantage mitigation (Pretorius and Currin, 2010).

Whilst some children within the setting are entitled to eFSM, a proportion of pupils are not entitled to this support, due to family income being marginally over the government threshold (Terzi, Unterhalter and Suissa, 2023; Children in Wales, 2024). This indicates that for some families money is an issue, where limited disposable income is available. A lack of disposable income can mean that families are unable to support their child's literacy skills through the purchasing or utilisation of resources, such as books, activity guides or games (Pretorius and Currin, 2010; Taylor, Zubrick and Christensen, 2016; Gay et al., 2021; Terzi, Unterhalter and Suissa, 2023). Reducing the access that children have to these resources in the home learning environment (HLE) can result in reduced opportunities for vocabulary development compared to peers, and a reduction in school readiness for the younger learners due to a lack

of cognitive stimulation in the home environment (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Taylor, Zubrick and Christensen, 2016; Lervåg et al., 2019; Jang et al., 2025).

Lack of income has implications for many elements within the household. A lack of quality or quantity food can result in children reduced concentration throughout the day, preventing skills and understanding from developing (Terzi, Unterhalter and Suissa, 2023; Children in Wales, 2024). Whilst the inclusion of free breakfast clubs goes someway in mitigating these effects, limited supervision and spaces restrict children from accessing this service, potentially preventing those who may benefit the most from attending (Department for Education, 2013; Children in Wales, 2024). Access to library services, which provide a range of educational resources and activities, can also be impacted by a lack of money.

Transportation costs can be a barrier to accessing these services, particularly if more than one household member wants to access the service (Terzi, Unterhalter and Suissa, 2023). This prevents children from accessing a range of suitable materials with educational benefits but also reduces the scope of the HLE (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Terzi, Unterhalter and Suissa, 2023). Children's home environment can be impacted by financial situation.

Households may be overcrowded with extended family members or building issues resulting in the environment being uncomfortable to live or work in (Children in Wales, 2024). Whilst a positive home environment is critical for children's success, undesirable environments may prevent children from concentrating or developing skills to the best of their ability (Gay et al., 2021).

Family situation and involvement can also have significant impacts on literacy skills. Supportive home environments enable many SE impacts to be mitigated to some degree, which is beneficial for attainment (Welsh Government, 2026a). Lack of time for parents to spend with their children also impacts on children's reading skills (Estyn, 2018). This may be due to families being single parent or having multiple children in the household, reducing time that parents can spend with each child individually due to other needs in the household (Welsh Government, 2026b). Welsh Government (2026b) identified that 45% of children in relative poverty were part of single parent households, whilst 75% of children were part of multi-child households. Reduced frequency of reading has been observed in disadvantaged households, potentially due to a lack of time, reducing the complexity and variety of vocabulary that children are exposed to compared to peers (Mann, Silver and Stein, 2021; Jang et al., 2025). Family involvement can also be affected by parents' basic skills and confidence, particularly if parents feel these are lacking (Estyn, 2018). Parents may have

difficulties with reading and need support themselves in this area, which prevents or minimises their ability to support their child in developing these skills. The stigma associated with this may also prevent parents from seeking support, meaning that they are less likely to engage with these activities with their child.

Personalised testing is one method that measures children's literacy skills and their attainment. Reading accounts for one of the three tests that are administered by the Welsh Government (2025) for children in years 2-9. Once completed, educators have access to children's results in relation to the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) (2022). Results can be compared between individuals, classes or specific groups of children, such as those with reading difficulties, disadvantaged children or those with another form of additional learning need. Tests are completed online and independently. The independent nature of the test is detrimental to children with low reading abilities or comprehension skills, due to them being unable to comprehend what they must do as the functional skill of reading has not been developed (Terzi, Unterhalter and Suissa, 2023). Despite providing children with simpler questions if they get one incorrect, this has little impact on children who are unable to read what is expected of them, making this method of assessment inaccessible (Welsh Government, 2025). This has the potential to stigmatise children, particularly if they have finished the assessments within a short timeframe compared to others within the classroom.

Alternatively, some children may get good results from the personalised assessments from pressing various answers on the assessment. This is equally as detrimental, as it does not show that children have understood the task, or show similar development traits to other reading data collected from the child from other sources, such as work examples. Whilst the results can steer whole class instruction moving forward, the results may also indicate areas that would be beneficial for children to work on to support their development in literacy skills, such as through an intervention. Personalised assessments also do not consider factors surrounding the individual, such as whether they have slept enough or how they felt having to read this test independently, and only report on the academic skills noted at that time. These tests showcase individuals from an academic perspective, but not from a holistic, whole child approach.

Children's reading records are another method used to measure progress for those with a reading difficulty. Once children have completed a reading test at the beginning of the year, the most appropriate stage of book is provided for them to work through over the course of

the academic year. Reading records give children guided and independent experience in line with the LNF and Descriptions of Learning for Languages, Literacy and Communication (Welsh Government, 2022; 2023b) Reading records are used by individuals who read with children, such as school staff, family members or the child themselves, to record any misconceptions, pronunciation corrections or words that children found difficult (Estyn, 2022). As the reading records go home daily, dialogue written from school staff in relation to their child's reading can be seen by parents and vice versa, creating a dialogue that informs both parties and ensures that this information is passed between both systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1981; Mann, Silver and Stein, 2021; Children in Wales, 2024). This also enables schools to identify how frequently a child is being read with outside of the setting, and equally, whether this has changed over time. This information could be used in conjunction with other information about the child's circumstances to suggest whether a change in the child's home or family circumstances has occurred. It may indicate that additional time needs to be spent with a staff member to support the child's reading skills in this format.

Children may also be conscious of the specific book or level that they are reading at, especially since the scheme is utilised throughout the whole school. Whilst progress is measured through completing books and stages, older children with reading difficulties may be more reluctant to read and record their progress in reading records if they are on lower stage books compared to their peers, out of concern for judgement or stigmatisation. Where children have difficulty with word blending, a book scheme is utilised and recorded in the same way through the reading record, as well as in teacher-kept class documentation. Whilst the intention behind utilising additional book resources and associated questions or activities is to build and develop the child's skillset and confidence, there is also potential for parents and the child to feel overwhelmed and fatigued through these methods. Using reading records to identify a child's progress in reading is not something that can be used alone. The narrative nature of the document shows progression over time with skills and provides specific examples of vocabulary or skills to be worked on. It utilises a more holistic approach than personalised assessments, due to the opportunity for recording and discussion, but needs to be combined with other methods to create a fuller picture of the child.

Part 2: Action plan

Community focused schools (CFS) are one way in which a whole school approach can be utilised within the school setting (Clifford, Mars and Hamer, 2025; Formby, 2026). The setup enables schools to work with their immediate community, such as the children and their families, and the local community, including organisations and local spaces (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Thomas, 2020; Evans et al., 2025). Wider elements of the community, such as council or NHS teams and services, are also included in the CFS model (Estyn, 2018; Evans et al., 2025; Welsh Government, 2026a).

The National Assembly for Wales (2003) recognised that utilising CFS to support children from disadvantaged or SE difficulty was necessary for reducing the attainment gap and supporting individuals in developing skills to enable them to leave poverty. This report identified eight ways in which schools could be identified as CFS, including engaging with families and the wider community, and utilising the school environment for learning to benefit pupils and the community (National Assembly for Wales, 2003). The same eight factors were noted in Estyn's (2018) report, indicating the importance of these factors in creating a CFS that is fit for its purpose.

A positive aspect of CFS is how it works with other support systems and methods to mitigate disadvantage in pupils, emphasising the characteristics relating to leader vision and gaps in the community through education (Estyn, 2020). The Pupil Development Grant (PDG) is provided to school to support learners entitled to eFSM or looked after children in the setting (Welsh Government, 2015). The main criteria attached to this funding is that it must be utilised to support disadvantaged groups or those experiencing poverty, with schools independently identifying the best ways to support their learners (Welsh Government, 2023a). This may include trialling new interventions to develop a specific skill, inviting in guest speakers to INSET days for professional development or hiring specific professionals to work with groups of pupils (Welsh Government, 2015; Morris and Dobson, 2021). Many schools utilise programmes that benefit all disadvantaged pupils, not just those eligible for PDG (Department for Education, 2013). However, the Welsh Government (2023d) recognise that funding is not obtained for all disadvantaged pupils, due to pupil households being over the income threshold, or households being unaware or uncertainty around applying for eFSM (Children in Wales, 2024). The amount of PDG awarded to schools also varies between schools across the locality, which potentially causes variation in the observed success and

longevity of any interventions put in place (Department for Education, 2013). This amount also fluctuates yearly, as pupils enter or leave the school, and individual pupil eligibility for eFSM changes (Department for Education, 2013; Goldfeld et al., 2018; Gorard and Siddiqui, 2019).

CFS also aligns with the Curriculum for Wales, further emphasising its intention and purpose to mitigate disadvantage and provide equitable education. The leadership element of CFS is further highlighted through schools having opportunities to design and implement their own curriculum, which can be adapted to suit the needs of their learners, whilst also integrating elements of the community and locality to support learners in developing a broader knowledge base whilst providing experiences that aim to reduce the attainment gap (Welsh Government, 2021; 2026a; Estyn, 2022). This local knowledge also integrates in with PDG expenditure, as an awareness of the learner need and community support can be integrated into several learning experiences within the curriculum (Morris and Dobson, 2021).

Opportunities to integrate with families and the community are another positive aspect that is integral to the success of CFS. This aspect is mentioned throughout the Welsh Government (2024) Child Poverty Strategy, indicating its importance as a support system for children, but also in developing our locality and country. Integration with families and communities can take multiple forms, including face-to-face workshops, phone calls or drop-in sessions throughout the school day (Estyn, 2018). Recognition that integration and access look different for each family and school is an essential element in developing CFS (Thomas, 2020). Utilising a family engagement officer (FEO) ensures that families have an additional person alongside class teachers and senior management who can provide support, guidance and essential information, to support their circumstances and their child's learning (Estyn, 2020; Evans et al., 2025; Welsh Government, 2026a). In addition to developing supportive relationships, FEOs can provide support directly to adult family members through the workshop hosting, based on suggestions or community need, or through outside agencies utilising the school to further community learning opportunities (Estyn, 2018; Children in Wales, 2024). In addition to increasing interactions with the school and engagement in learning, the links between the child's micro and mesosystems are strengthened, creating a cohesive system that supports significantly more than just the children in it (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Dearing et al., 2004; Gay et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2025).

It should be noted that not every method or option used to engage with families will be suitable for all (Terzi, Unterhalter and Suissa, 2023). Timings of workshops or session may be an issue for some families, with work or caring responsibilities preventing some from engaging either during or after the school day (Terzi, Unterhalter and Suissa, 2023). Barriers for other family members may include negative perceptions from their own school experiences or not believing that they have the required skillsets to participate in some workshops (Estyn, 2018; Children in Wales, 2024).

To support children's literacy skills from a CFS perspective, two proposed solutions have been identified that could be implemented within the primary school setting. These are:

1. Lending library creation
2. Community workshops for adults - reading skill development

Lending library creation

Creating a lending library would enable parents, families and the wider community to have access to a range of provisions that aim to increase the resources that families have available in the HLE to promote literacy engagement (Hannon, Nutbrown and Morgan, 2020). Creating a service like this recognises the needs of the community, from educational and social perspectives, and provides increased opportunities for type 4 parental involvement: focussing on learning that takes place within the HLE (Epstein, 1995; Buller, 2017). This service would also support the CFS strategy, due to being driven by community need (Estyn, 2020). Whilst books in a range of genres, age ranges and reading levels would be available through the service, additional resources to support literacy skill development, such as literacy games, posters, themed photograph packs and manipulative items, would also be available for parents and adults in the community to utilise and provide children with varied experiences to develop vocabulary and literacy skills (Witmer, 1999; Hannon, Nutbrown and Morgan, 2020; Högman, Wagnsson and Bellander, 2024). A range of resources also ensures that parents have different methods of engaging with literacy at home, with the intention of supporting further development of literacy (Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2009; Gay et al., 2021). This service would be accessible to all within the school community, with families entitled to eFSM or those experiencing disadvantage being the main groups aiming to be engaged with.

Service impact would be measured through engagement and use, both from the whole school community and those identified as having SE disadvantage, as the service aims to support

this group. Recognising the frequency and quantity of user visits, as well as the type and number of items borrowed ensures that the service contains items that families feel have an impact on learning in the HLE (Hannon, Nutbrown and Morgan, 2020). Surveys can be utilised from those using the service and the school community, identifying thoughts and practical considerations that can support the running of the service, such as item suggestions from families on available items or timing of the service being open, in addition to gaining an insight into family perception of the service. In school testing results for children whose parents have engaged with the service can also be viewed to identify any progression in skills. However, as children utilising this service will be predominantly school aged, there will be considerable difficulty in distinguishing impact from this service to regular educational input from lessons.

One barrier of this service could be linked to initial startup costs. Communication with families, local businesses and organisations could be established to gather donations to support the creation of a library catalogue (Högman, Wagnsson and Bellander, 2024). This could be completed through a variety of communication methods already utilised by the school (Estyn, 2018). This ensures that funds utilised for the service are kept minimal, meaning that funds, such as the PDG, are not diverted from other crucial activities (Welsh Government, 2023a). Another potential barrier may be due to availability of the lending library. Considerations will need to be made for times when it is most suitable to be open for families to access, as this may inadvertently limit those who can utilise the service (Department for Education, 2013). Family members may have caring responsibilities, work schedules or medical requirements that prevent use of the service, which ultimately prevents it from being accessible to those families who need to utilise it most (Taylor, Zubrick and Christensen, 2016; Högman, Wagnsson and Bellander, 2024; Welsh Government, 2026a). This could be mitigated when surveying families about the lending library, where a question could be asked to identify timeframes or days when engagement may be best.

This service would need to be trialled over an extended period, to develop into a service that is utilised by many families in the community. Utilising the service for approximately 18 months would enable time for the lending library to be setup, families to utilise and the school to collect information surrounding logistics and resources deemed appropriate from family perspectives (Epstein, 1995; Saracho, 2017). It would also enable a greater range of families to utilise the service, as well as having multiple internal school reading tests taken,

which could support in identifying whether introducing resources into the HLE has benefited those from disadvantaged homes.

Community workshops for adults – reading skill development

Sessions dedicated to developing familiarity and confidence with reading skills would also benefit families in supporting their children in the HLE, particularly if a lack of engagement is related to a lack of either of these areas (Dearing et al., 2004; Taylor, Zubrick and Christensen, 2016). Parent groups are advantageous in supporting skill development in children by using various strategies, and by also encouraging families to take a facilitative approach when supporting their child's skill development (Borisova et al., 2017; Saracho, 2017; Hannon, Nutbrown and Morgan, 2020). Workshops enable families to be further welcomed into the school environment, providing them with opportunities to engage with the school FEO and other parents, and find out about additional community services to support reading development, whilst also supporting parents who may have reading difficulties themselves (Hannon, Nutbrown and Morgan, 2020; Nikoloudaki, Manolitsis and Grammatikopoulos, 2026). In addition to being beneficial for parents own confidence, it enables them to become familiar with methods aiming to improve reading skills for their children (Lervåg et al., 2019; Mann, Silver and Stein, 2021). Further engagement with the community would occur through integrating with the library or additional needs service, who could provide further support to families or children who may benefit (Welsh Government, 2026a). This would support both Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory and the CFS initiative; enabling collaboration of multiple systems to support the learner (Estyn, 2020). Whilst workshops aim to support disadvantaged and eFSM learners, all families would be welcome to attend due to the potential benefits for all children.

Workshop impact would be measured through parent surveys prior to and at completion of the workshops. This would enable data to be collected on perception, knowledge and understanding of the strategies and methods delivered to families throughout the workshops. Parental attendance, and in particular parents of those recognised as disadvantaged, would enable engagement to be identified in addition to completion rates of the workshop. This would be advantageous if running additional workshops, as advertising or timing of the workshops may be altered to develop engagement further.

One barrier to engagement with reading skill workshops could be parent's perceptions of attending a programme such as this, potentially due to stigmatisation. Concern may stem

from how parents feel others may perceive them for attending, or from prior experiences of education or support received. Parents may feel reluctant to engage due to personal circumstances (Dearing et al., 2004). This highlights the need for positive relationships to be developed by the school, ensuring that the environment is supportive for parents and welcoming for development opportunities (Terzi, Unterhalter and Suissa, 2023; Welsh Government, 2026a). As with the lending library, session timing may also be an issue that impacts engagement. However, this may be more of an issue due to the involvement of outside agencies, who would also need to make sure that timings are appropriate for their attendance (Estyn, 2020).

Workshop sessions would be run over the course of a school year. This would provide time to organise and provide notification to agencies to attention, as well as plan and identify the various strategies that would be suitable to include for parents. Time would also be sufficient to review completed surveys, which would be needed to make any changes for future workshop sessions.

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