National Assembly for Wales' <u>Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee</u> inquiry into poverty in Wales

Response from Estyn

This is a response to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee's invitation to Estyn to share our views on the terms of reference for Strand 1 of the inquiry into poverty in Wales: **poverty and inequality**.

The impacts of poverty, particularly destitution and extreme poverty, on different groups of people

1. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is the key indicator in identifying the level of poverty and social disadvantage within an educational setting. In general, pupils in educational settings with higher percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals are located in areas with higher levels of poverty and social disadvantage. Estyn does not have access to information about the depth of poverty or social disadvantage experienced by individual students beyond eligibility to free school meals and we therefore have limited evidence about the impact of destitution and extreme poverty specifically on the educational attainment of different groups of learners.

2. The overall impacts of poverty and social disadvantage on educational attainment and levels of wellbeing is well documented and is supported by our inspection evidence. We know that socially disadvantaged children and young people are vulnerable in many ways. They are more at risk of doing poorly in school. They usually enter school with significantly lower levels of skills, knowledge and understanding than their peers and seldom catch up. They are more likely to be absent, to behave badly, to be excluded and to be taught somewhere other than in a school. They may not have access to the same resources, such as a computer or a quiet place to work, that are available to their peers. Their parents may not be able to help them with their schoolwork because the parents themselves have a negative perception and experience of education. In adulthood, they are more likely to be low paid, be unemployed and have poorer health.

3. In recent HMCI annual reports, we have shown that learners who are eligible for free school meals perform significantly less well than other learners against a range of performance indicators. The most recent data shows that the performance of both pupils eligible for free-school meals and non-free school meal learners has improved over the last five years. However, the gap between them remains too wide, increases with each successive key stage and is not closing significantly. There is a strong statistical link between poverty and low educational attainment. The following paragraphs exemplify the impact of poverty on key indicators for academic attainment and wellbeing.

4. The data below shows the performance gap for attainment of the Foundation Phase indicator (FPI) and core subject indicator (CSI) between learners eligible for free school meals and those who are not over a three year period. The data shows that at key stages 2 and 3 the gap in percentages has decreased very slightly during this period. At key stage 4, the difference in performance between those learners eligible for free school meals and those who are not has stayed at around 32 percentage points.
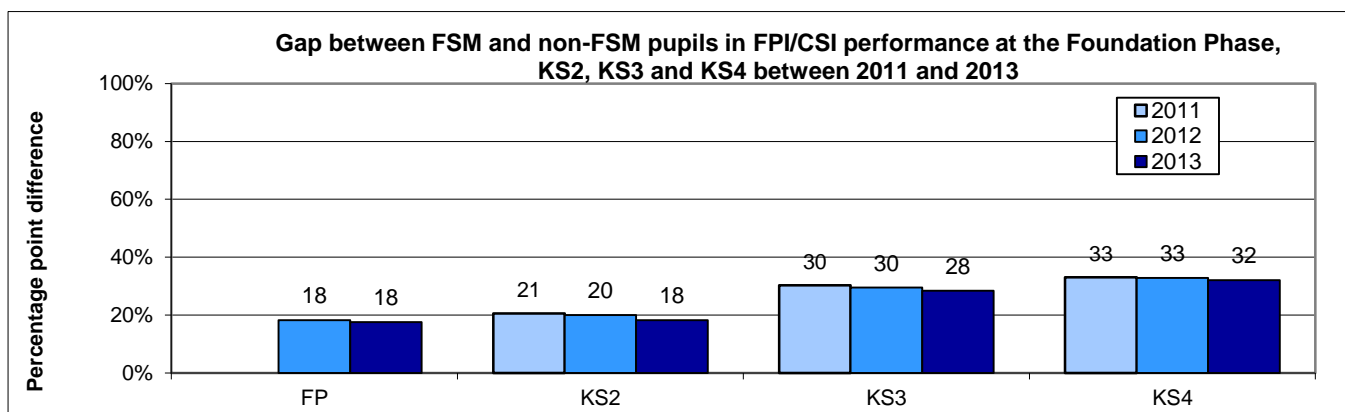

5. In 2013, at key stage 4, the performance of all learners at the level 2 threshold improved at a slightly better rate than in previous years. The gap in attainment between those eligible for free school meals and other learners narrowed slightly in the last two years. However, at the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics, the performance gap has stayed the same at around 33 percentage points over the five year period between 2009 and 2013.
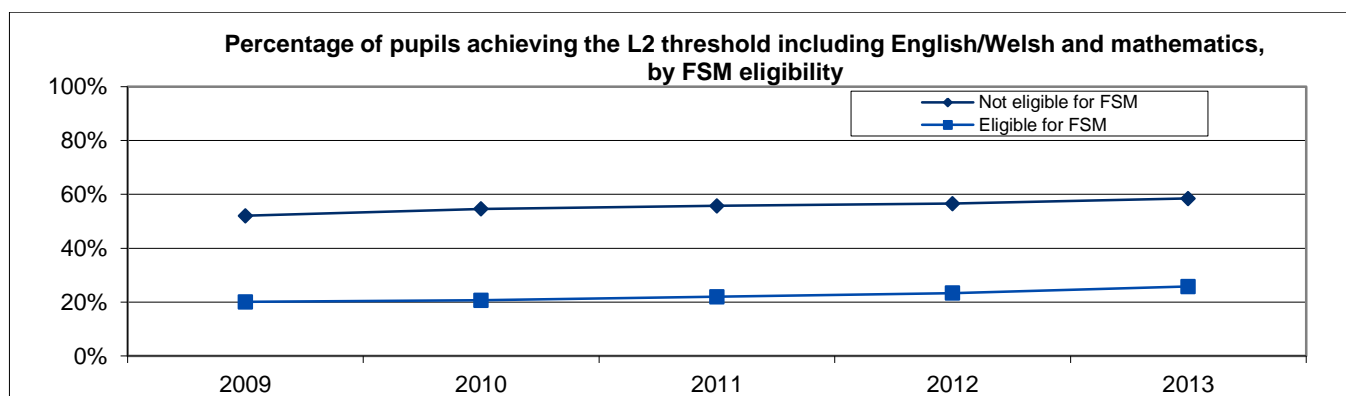
6. There is considerable variation in the performance of pupils eligible and not eligible for free school meals between different local authorities in Wales. For example, when considering the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics for 2013, the performance gap ranges from as low as 19% to as high as 40%.

7. Pupils eligible for free school meals are much less likely to achieve the higher performance levels. For example, under 1% of all pupils achieving 5 A* grades at GCSE in 2013 were eligible for free school meals.

8. Absence from school has a clear impact on educational performance. Attainment decreases as absence increases. There is also a strong relationship between the

proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and absenteeism. Pupils eligible for free school meals have a higher rate of authorised absence and unauthorised absence as demonstrated in the figure below.

Absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age in maintained secondary schools, by free school meal eligibility and type of absence
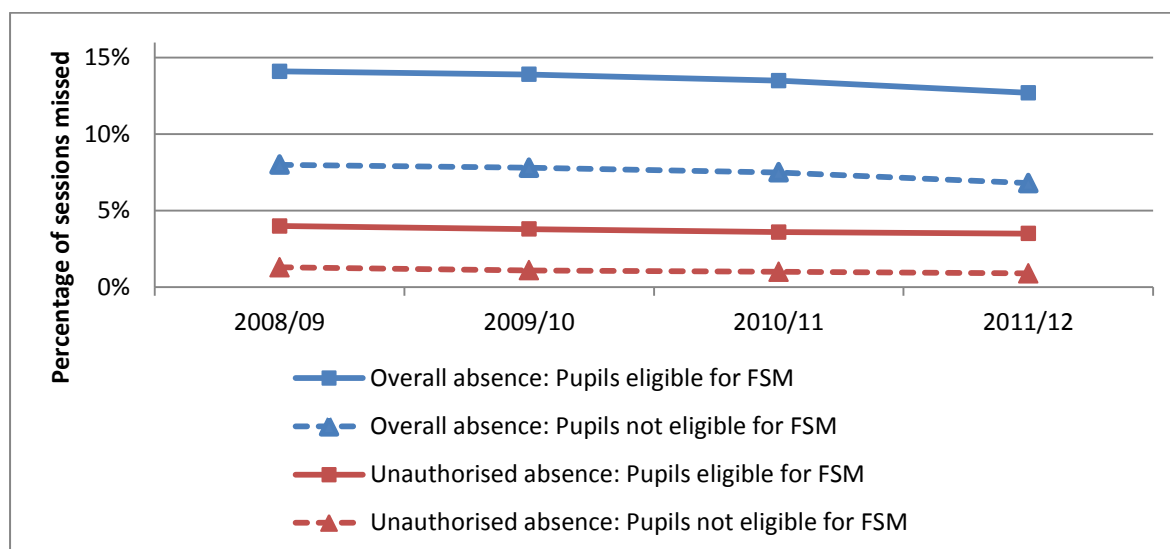
Overall, therefore, inspection and other evidence show that poverty has a consistently negative impact on outcomes for pupils across Wales. However, Estyn has identified a range of providers in different stages of the education system who are very successful in securing high standards of learning, achievement and wellbeing for learners who experience poverty or social disadvantage. For further information see http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/best-practice/tackling-deprivation-and-raising-standards/

How effectively the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, Strategic Equality Plan and other government strategies work together/How legislation, policy and budgets targeted at tackling poverty and reducing inequality are co-ordinated and prioritised across the Welsh Government.

1. Estyn's work relates to education, including evaluating how effectively educational providers work in partnership with other agencies, such as local authorities, for the benefit of learners. In addition, Estyn evaluates the use of grant funding and the impact of strategies implemented by educational providers on the standards of learning, teaching and leadership. A summary of evidence from the current cycle of inspections relating to the effectiveness of approaches to mitigating the impact of poverty and social disadvantage is given below.

2. Although many schools have recently become more focused on the importance of improving the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged pupils, tackling poverty is still not a high enough priority for all schools. For example, only a minority of schools had specific plans for in-service training on reducing the impact of poverty on attainment in 2012-2013.

3.   The few schools that succeed in raising the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners focus on the needs of each individual learner. Where learners have complex needs that the school cannot meet on its own, these schools work with agencies to provide broad family-related services to meet those needs or they may work with specialist services to meet specific health or wellbeing needs. For example, a few schools host clinics and drop-in centres for health, counselling and social services on the school site.

4.   Some schools with vulnerable new pupils, such as those who do not speak English or Welsh, engage families by creating an environment that is particularly welcoming. These schools establish family or nurture rooms where children can learn with their families for a period. Working in these rooms can provide the social and emotional support that the children and their families need when settling into a new school or community.

5.   Pupils in schools that are involved in 'Team around the family' approaches benefit from multi-agency working. The pool of skills within the team means that the health, domestic and social welfare concerns of learners and their families can be addressed. Many schools identify positive outcomes for learners who have been supported through this initiative. A minority of schools we visited identified shortcomings in the implementation of this model, including failing to ensure that all agencies are represented at meetings to discuss progress and agree strategies.

6.   It is a challenge for schools to co-ordinate and manage the work of several external partners. The few schools that raise the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners significantly identify a senior member of staff to co-ordinate the work with partners. These schools know about and understand the support that the pupil receives from an external partner and staff monitor progress carefully.

7.   Some schools pool their resources in joint strategies and training to address disadvantage, but few 'professional learning communities' of teachers from a cluster of schools focus on poverty directly. A few schools have designed approaches to improving outcomes for disadvantaged learners across phases through their cluster work. This has helped the pupils to make the transition from primary to secondary school by supporting them, for instance in their social and emotional learning, and in literacy.

8.   In a few clusters, pooling resources, such as funding from the Pupil Deprivation Grant, has helped teachers from secondary and primary schools to understand each other's issues. A few secondary school headteachers in our survey commented that this arrangement had raised their awareness of the importance of interventions in the early years.

9.   In the best cases, schools evaluate their own work and that of external agencies against clear measures of learner performance. These schools use data to evaluate the impact of new initiatives and share performance information with partners to help to join up the school's approaches with other interventions.

10. The introduction of the Pupil Deprivation Grant has widened the range of strategies to raise the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners. However, in many

schools, the grant is used to raise the achievement of all lower-ability learners and is not specifically directed towards disadvantaged learners, although the spend will still benefit them if they are low-achieving. In these schools, there are shortcomings in how the Pupil Deprivation Grant is spent that are similar to those that Estyn identified in relation to RAISE funding in the past.

11. Although local authorities have a focus on tackling the impact of poverty, only a few have significantly improved the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners. The few local authorities that do raise the standards and wellbeing of disadvantaged learners take a preventative approach to tackling the impact of poverty. They start with a thorough needs-analysis to identify the impact of deprivation on local families. Mapping the needs of disadvantaged families means that the local authority can share intelligence with schools and partners and provide a baseline from which to measure the impact of new initiatives.

12. Local authorities do not always share information about disadvantaged learners with other agencies and services. Different services compile their own lists of disadvantaged children and young people. A few local authorities are planning a single, comprehensive database of information on learners and groups of learners. Such a database would enable staff to gain a fuller picture of the needs of individual learners and could be used to underpin a common approach.

13. A few local authorities have been successful in bringing together service plans for education, youth, and social services to develop a comprehensive strategy for tackling poverty. They have produced an integrated plan to co-ordinate services and avoid duplication. Generally, however, different services in a local authority or consortia do not align their plans or use common performance indicators for tackling poverty. This means that it is difficult to measure progress jointly.

14. A minority of local authorities have specific targets and performance indicators related to closing the gap in outcomes between advantaged and disadvantaged learners. These local authorities measure progress against these targets. However, many local authorities do not have such specific objectives or measurable targets. They do not use the information they collect well enough to challenge schools to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

15. A majority of local authorities provide some training to schools on how to address poverty and disadvantage and other guidance on how to use grant funding. However, only a few local authorities give good advice to schools about how to use their Pupil Deprivation Grant money. There are too few training opportunities for school leaders to learn about strategic approaches to tackling the impact of poverty, including how to plan and evaluate different approaches and how well they work.

16. Overall, there is a growing awareness of the need to tackle poverty and disadvantage in schools and local authorities across Wales. However, practice is still too variable and does not have enough impact on outcomes for children and young people.

17. For a summary of practical ways forward for schools, partnerships and local authorities see our report at
http://www.estyn.gov.uk/download/publication/309390.9/pupil-deprivation-may-2014/