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Barnardo's
Cymru

WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO EDUCATION OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN FROM LOW INCOME FAMILIES

SUBMITTED BY:

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BARNARDO'S CYMRU EVIDENCE TO INQUIRY ON EDUCATION OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN FROM LOW INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

INTRODUCTION

Barnardo's Cymru has been working with children, young people and families in Wales for over 100 years and is one of the largest children's charities working in the country. We currently run 82 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with 19 of the 22 local authorities. Last year, we supported approximately 8,500 children, young people and families in Wales.

Barnardo's Cymru services in Wales include: care leavers and youth homelessness projects, young carers' schemes, specialist fostering and adoption schemes, family centres and family support, parenting support, community development projects, short breaks and inclusive services for disabled children and young people, assessment and treatment for young people who exhibit sexually harmful or concerning behaviour and specialist services for children and young people at risk of, or abused through, child sexual exploitation.

Every Barnardo's Cymru service is different but each believes that every child and young person deserves the best start in life, no matter who they are, what they have done or what they have been through. We use the knowledge gained from our direct work with children to campaign for better childcare policy and to champion the rights of every child. We believe that with the right help, committed support and a little belief, even the most vulnerable children can turn their lives around.

BARNARDO'S, EDUCATION AND POVERTY MITIGATION

Throughout all our work the effects on children, young people and families of living on low incomes is evident. Poverty can affect parenting ability and family relations from early years into adulthood, increasing likelihood of poor mental health and substance misuse. Poverty inhibits children and young people's opportunities to gain life experiences that other people take for granted and can interfere with children and young people's ability to achieve academically in school. Much of our family support, parenting work and community based provision works with families on low incomes and, to some extent, all of this work is mitigating the effects of poverty. We have services that work directly with schools in order to support vulnerable pupils. These include behaviour management support at primary and secondary level, school counselling services, and diversity education and anti bullying work. Our black and minority ethnic family support services and disability projects enable our organisation to work first hand with some of the issues that link diversities to poverty. This written evidence is based upon our organisation's expertise as a service

provider and the research experience and policy knowledge of Barnardo's Cymru Policy and Research Unit.

EVIDENCE TO INQUIRY

Barnardo's Cymru welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Committee's Inquiry. We have framed our evidence within the questions set in the Committee letter of 21st June 2013, which invited evidence to the Inquiry.

We recognise that Wales has experienced a period of difficult economic conditions coupled with welfare reform, which, when combined, have created declining living standards and lowering household incomes. Within this context we know that money available for services is stretched, with many statutory and voluntary services trying to do more with fewer resources. Within this context, four issues are paramount:

1. Welsh anti poverty initiatives take account of the problems of in work poverty, which may require a different response to out of work poverty and long term poverty. NB: links to economic development and longer term sustainability of training and jobs creation.
2. Anti poverty initiatives are mainstreamed across universal services and require all sectors to work together to increase educational attainment and build resilient families and communities.
3. Links are made between the patterns of poverty and low educational attainment as they affect different individuals with different protected statuses. Poverty and education attainment affects different groups of people in different ways and, therefore, initiatives should include gender analysis, be culturally aware and address specific issues facing SEN pupils.
4. Attainment is not just perceived in terms of qualifications but includes social skills and aspirations. To this end, it is not feasible to expect schools to be able to raise achievement alone as they will need to work in partnership with other statutory and voluntary agencies and parents.

1. The effectiveness of the Welsh Government's policy and strategy in mitigating the link between poverty and educational outcomes, including the 'Tackling poverty action plan', relevant education policy, and broader Welsh Government policies in this regards, for example Communities First.

We have points to make regarding separate policies, strategies and initiatives which we make below under sub-headings, and then more general comments regarding how they interlink.

Communities First
Communities First provides for the 10% most deprived communities in Wales according to WIMD 2011. Flying Start also follows lower super output areas but has different criteria to Communities First. Whilst geography and quota based initiatives will tackle poverty in areas where there are high levels of multiple deprivation, they will not reach certain communities, specifically:

- Non homogeneous communities i.e. small pockets of deprivation that are within geographical areas of average or higher income
- Disparate groups. It is known that certain groups of people experience poverty more than others e.g. single female parents, Bangladeshi community, care leavers. However, specific disadvantaged groups are not easily reached via geographical initiatives.
- Rural areas where there are sparsely populated areas with isolated pockets of deprivation.

The former Communities First programme attempted to redress some of these difficulties via the inclusion of Areas of Special Interests but the current configuration does not have any mechanisms for accommodating these communities.

Flying Start
We welcome the additional funding of £55 million for the Flying Start programme and the expansion of the service to enable more children and parents in low income areas to benefit. Given the difficulties cited above regarding population quota programmes, we would encourage the Welsh Government to explore ways in which entitlement can be extended to poorer families beyond the existing catchment areas.

Experience from a variety of our services suggests that Flying Start helps lessen the gap between children who are raised in poverty and their peers when they start school – they are used to routine, have become familiar with the Foundation Phase and any additional learning needs have been identified earlier. Needs such as language delay and behaviour difficulties can be addressed through the child care and support/courses for parents. If Flying Start child care provisions can build a good rapport with parents

and be encouraging rather than judgemental, this can give parents relevant experience and confidence to communicate with teachers when their child starts school. We have found that community crèches with Flying Start places are successful because there is no stigma to a child attending. The universal nature of Flying Start within a geographical area is a strength because parents don't feel they have failed before they use the service. Anecdotally, some primary schools that we work with believe they can see the positive impact that Flying Start has had on pupils from deprived communities.

We feel that whilst Flying Start does impact upon a child's ability to start school and learn, it is not easy to 'prove' the effect it has on mitigating poverty. It does appear to be a programme that supports children in their development and parents in positive parenting and skills of resilience. However, it will take a longitudinal view before any impact on families' economic poverty can be determined.

Families First
We are unsure as to how there will be data applicable nation-wide regarding the effectiveness of Families First upon children and young people's lives. Our experience is that Families First has been set up differently across local authorities and there are few authorities collecting the data consistently enough to be able to give any robust correlation between Families First and education outcomes. Even where the Education Department is the lead, the education data tends to focus upon attendance and rates of exclusion as opposed to outcomes.

Foundation Phase
Both the Flying Start and the Foundation Phase early education programmes are key policies that are giving children a better start to their education in Wales. Inequalities in children's educational outcomes become apparent from the early years. By age three, poorer children can already be a year behind their better off peers. We are concerned at the reports from the WISERD evaluation annual report 2013 that the aims of the programme are being undermined by varied interpretation and application of the programme across Wales. Qualitative research with younger children which Barnardo's Cymru undertook during the pilot stages of the Foundation Phase anecdotally suggests that children were aware of the changes in the style of their learning and enjoyed the active nature of the Foundation Phase. We do have concerns that there is a significant transition between key stage 1 and 2 as pupils leave the Foundation Phase and would welcome more research on whether this poses a difficulty, particularly to pupils who are from low income households or who may find more traditional styles of learning difficult.

Joint working between these initiatives
There is some overlap between Communities First and Flying Start areas which, in areas where there is not good joint working, results in repetition of services for people in certain post code areas, and no service for those in another post code, even though they may live in adjacent streets.

Aligning Families First with Flying Start can be challenging in that one is focussed on the child whilst the other is looking at the whole family's needs and where they do not work together, there are divisions in service and, therefore, not a holistic approach. When a Flying Start family is referred to Families First for additional services there is often a requirement for bringing additional people, forms and systems into families' lives which often replicate some of the services they have already received.

We are aware that there are large differences between the local authorities in the way in which Communities First, Flying Start and Families First interface and jointly work together. Anecdotally, our experience has been that managers from the three programmes will often meet at the strategic level to discuss joint working but that this does not always translate on the ground to operational coherence. Additionally, the Welsh Government's own reporting mechanisms are very different for all three programmes, which, in itself, precipitates some frustrations.

Two courses of action which we believe would improve these programmes are:
- Firstly, we feel that all these programmes need to be more aligned with schools, health and children's social care services, but with better interface with statutory social services provision.
- More long term funding and planning. One of the successes of Communities First is its long term strategic overview, and other programmes would benefit from not having short term commissioning and partnership arrangements.

Child poverty and economic policy
One policy area that may warrant a child poverty perspective is that of economic development. There are many policies and programmes that aim to address child poverty but these do not necessarily link to current policies regarding economic development. We feel that these two areas of government jurisdiction need to be linked to enable families to have access to long term work that offers a living wage, to secure work for young people who have completed apprenticeships or work based learning and to ensure that mitigating child poverty is at the forefront of all government policy.

Education policy regarding standards
We welcome the criteria for schools bands including progress made by the school and issues such as percentage of pupil population receiving free school meals etc. However, we think that measuring pupil achievement solely by five GCSEs grades A-C masks other achievements of vulnerable pupils. There are two clear current drivers within education policy. One of these is to support vulnerable pupils through, for example, the pupil deprivation grant, improving the SEN process, school counselling services, etc and the other is to improve standards and academic achievement. Undoubtedly, both of these areas need concerted focus, but there appears to be little that combines them. We would welcome a more holistic approach which recognises issues such as the importance of whole school ethos and inclusivity, raising pupil aspiration, level of pupil participation and achievement of social and life skills as well as crucial exam results.

2. The respective roles of the Welsh Government, education regional consortia, local authorities, schools and governing bodies in addressing this issue and why there is variation between schools in mitigating the link between poverty and educational outcomes.

Barnardo's Cymru does not feel in a position to be able to definitively answer why there is variation between schools in mitigating the link between poverty and educational attainment. However, there are some points of discussion we can raise that may contribute to finding the answer to this question.

1. Whole school ethos
There are large variations between schools in their implementation of whole school ethos. Our service experience and research regarding bullying suggests that where schools are able to reduce stigma between pupils in terms of 'difference', be that economic or between protected statuses, the impact of living in a family on a low income is reduced. There is also variation between schools in how they manage what is referred to by sociologists as 'the hidden curriculum'. For clarity, this is the informal elements of learning that occur between peer groups and includes things such as social skills, peer relationships and class differences. To an extent, schools can influence the hidden curriculum and levels of inclusiveness via strong PSE lessons, planned implementation of whole school ethos initiatives and pupil participation.

2. Extra curricula activities and aspirations
There is anecdotal evidence from qualitative research that access to extra curricula activities can raise pupils' aspirations and aid their educational outcomes. We are not aware of research that substantiates our experience, but where schools have a variety of different after school clubs, have good links with youth workers, offer challenges such as Duke

of Edinburgh and ensure all of these are accessible to the most vulnerable pupils, the pupils benefit from having wide life experiences which can offset the experience of having limited family income for leisure opportunities. Schools vary widely in the extent to which they have extra curricula activities (particularly in evenings or at weekends) and the extent to which they enable pupils with low family incomes to access these opportunities.

3. Schools joint working with other agencies

We are not aware of research defining the affect of inter agency working upon pupils living in poverty and educational attainment, but we think that where schools have close links with community groups, voluntary agencies and other statutory bodies, there is better pastoral support and wider learning opportunities, which may not all be classroom based. This point links to the importance of key theme 3 within the 'Child poverty in Wales: Eradication through education' report November 2008 which makes the point that schools cannot improve education outcomes for pupils living in low income households alone. There is an imperative need for holistic approaches, joint agency working and mainstreamed practices of anti poverty work.

4. Meaningful work experience

We welcome the Welsh Baccalaureate as a qualification that includes a wide spread of skills. It is also welcoming in that it includes both a volunteering element and some work experience. Research suggests that meaningful work placements can have a large impact upon young people recognising the links between academic study, gaining qualifications and earning a living wage. It is not known whether variations between schools are due to the implementation of meaningful work experience placements. However, it is known that there are links between meaningful work experience and aspirations, particularly for pupils who have had limited life experiences. Therefore schools need to specifically ensure good placements for pupils from low income families.

3. Whether Welsh Government policy sufficiently takes forward issues relating to parental engagement in respect of the educational outcomes of children from low income households, and whether it addresses the views and experiences of children and young people from such households in this regard.

Community engagement

We believe that community schools are highly variable in their community focus and engagement and that there needs to be stronger criteria regarding what a 'community focus' means with some stipulation for engaging with community groups, parental learning opportunities and out of hours opening. Good joint working between agencies would enable

schools to achieve a community focus more easily, although we are not wishing to underplay the practical barriers that schools face.

Parental engagement
It is known that parents, carers and families play a vital role in a child's educational success and that parental involvement is increasingly found to be central to children's academic performance. It is, therefore, crucial that schools engage with parents, possibly working with third sector partners to support and promote initiatives that focus on increasing parental improvement in children's learning. We also feel that schools could link more with Communities First and Families First in order to enable parental engagement alongside learning opportunities and training.

Pupil participation
We welcome the development of school councils but find that there is huge variation in the mechanisms schools use for pupils to be selected and limited focus upon teaching a representative model which, often, results in the most articulate and popular pupils being on the school council. The difficulties with school councils could be reduced if there were other means of pupil participation within schools; if they were the starting point of participative practice rather than the only form. We would welcome new mechanisms based upon a participative model rather than representative elected model, which enabled pupils to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing actions. Whilst such mechanisms would enable realisation of participation rights within the UNCRC, they would also play a practical role. Further participation in schools would enable pupils to learn negotiation skills, social skills, and increased confidence and could enable better participation of all pupils.

4. Relevant funding issues, including the effectiveness of the pupil deprivation grant and any anticipated effects of the recently issued guidance for 2013- 2015.

Not being a direct education provider, we are not able to fully answer this question. We would welcome more strategic pooling of budgets across programmes such as between Communities First, Flying Start and Families First in delivery of, for example, parenting support or childcare; within sectors such as between youth work and schools; and between sectors such as the third sector, schools and social services.

5. The costs associated with education (trips, uniforms, sporting equipment etc) and the effectiveness of the Welsh Government's approach in ensuring that children from low income households are not disadvantaged in this regard.

The costs of education
We welcome the duty placed upon schools and local authorities in the
Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 to eliminate the costs
associated with education. However, children and young people living in
poverty still tell us that they are charged for curriculum based trips, and
miss out on non curriculum trips even when curriculum ones are free. We
are aware that some schools do not provide expensive curriculum items
for subjects such as home economics, D.T. and art. We are also aware
that where schools do provide for these subjects it is on an ad hoc basis,
so some pupils are always concerned that they will be unable to
participate within the class due to a lack of materials. Not all eligible
families are aware of the uniform grant.

The increased use of e-learning can pose problems for pupils who do not
have access to a computer or a printer. Whilst schools have their own
computers for classes such as Maths and ICT, these are not always
available for pupils to undertake their homework on and there are not
enough computers in libraries for pupils to be able to reliably use them for
homework purposes. Where pupils do not have printers but have to
submit hard copies of homework, they are reliant on school IT systems
allowing attachments to emails which has been reported as problematic.

The costs of extra curricula learning
Extra-curricula learning is also important for school life and pupil learning.
Qualitative research details how some families send siblings to activities
fortnightly rather than weekly because they can only afford one activity
per week and how free travel is only available straight after school. This
means poorer pupils miss out on after school activities because they
cannot afford a bus fare. It is well documented that extra curricula
learning enables the development of social skills, aspirations, and
personal achievement.

Post 16 financing
Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in Wales and initiatives such as
the Assembly Learning Grant for Further Education (19+) are important
for enabling young people over 16 from low income families to remain in
full time education and adults over 19 to access further education.

**6. Issues relevant to free school meals within this context, such
as take up rates, perceived stigma of claiming free school meals,
the use of free school meals as a proxy indicator for child poverty
and the impact of the need to revise eligibility criteria from the
introduction of universal credit.**

Breakfast clubs and free school meals
We would strongly urge for the continuation of free breakfast clubs at
primary level and are concerned that the ring fenced money for this will

move to RSG within the Schools Standards and Organisations Act 2013. Families tell us that breakfast clubs can act as a lifeline both to parents who work and to families on low incomes who may be struggling to feed their children. With the criteria for free school meals changing owing to the introduction of universal credit, we would urge that entitlement is not reduced and would welcome a mechanism that could take account for the growing problems of in-work poverty.

Systems in secondary schools for free school meals
Different secondary schools implement different systems for free school meals - some of which are anonymous and some of which serve to stigmatise. There are problems where year 11s are allowed off premises because pupils receiving free school meals are singled out to eat on school premises or skip lunch to be with their friends.

7. Views on the Welsh Government's response in taking forward the recommendations of the Children and Young People's Committee of the Third Assembly in respect of the 'Child poverty: eradication through education' report.

Under the three key themes from previous inquiries, we wish to make the following points:

1. The need for a coherent national direction
'Building coherent communities: taking forward the tackling poverty action plan' makes some steps towards a national strategic direction through bringing together a variety of programmes and initiatives, setting targets and having measurable outcomes. However, with so many piecemeal programmes with each operating for different lengths of time, it is not possible to see a full national coherent approach. This may also be hampered by the lack of prescriptive measurements regarding the effectiveness of Families First which may result in localised successes rather than national ones. Additionally, there are few initiatives that successfully tackle in-work poverty.

There is a clear commitment from the Welsh Government to both tackling poverty and raising education standards, but the policies between these two commitments do not appear to be coherently joined up. Additionally, their success could be further undermined by geographical based programmes and a lack of robust planning with regards to poverty and education achievement as it affects those with protected statuses and other vulnerable groups. The links between poverty, education attainment and protected statuses and other vulnerable groups are yet to be fully made and acted upon.

2. *The role of schools in mitigating against the effects of child poverty*
There is wide variation in the effectiveness of schools to mitigate child poverty. We feel that there are some concrete steps that schools can take to begin to mitigate poverty, such as ensuring pupil and parent participation, enabling accessible extra curricula activity and fostering a whole school ethos. However, these elements of school life and pupil learning need to be included in inspection criteria and gauging pupil attainment.

3. *'Schools cannot do it alone', and the need for greater emphasis on a range of out-of-school and community-based services to support young people*
Progress towards this theme is patchy with some schools undertaking excellent joint working and a community focus and others appearing to remain insular. Since the last report in 2011, we are concerned at the rising variations within structured play and leisure opportunities with a lack of provision in rural areas and a reduction in schemes with the ending of the Cymorth grants.

We are also concerned at the lack of joined up work regarding protected status and the delivery of education. Support services for young carers, young people in care, pupils with SEN but no diagnosis, disabled pupils, pupils from black and minority ethnic communities, asylum seekers and pupils with poor mental health all vary widely, and although it is well documented that many of these pupils will be living in households with low incomes, there is little work that has systematically aimed to raise their educational attainment.

Additional evidence: Low income, protected status and education achievement

Education outcomes and protected characteristics
Our evidence above highlights the importance of including protected status within programmes that aim to tackle poverty and the shortcomings of only having geographically based initiatives. We can comment upon gender and disability owing to our service experience and research we have undertaken. However, from working with other organisations, we believe that other protected status will also impact upon education achievement but do not have the direct experience to be able to expand upon this issue further.

Gender
It is widely known that there are large gender differences between education achievement and school exclusion rates and that boys from low income families have low levels of educational attainment. Whilst some schools focus upon gender differences in attainment, there is no national

programme that focuses upon gender differences and low income in educational outcomes.

Disability
According to the report 'An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in Wales' 2011 (EHRC), pupils eligible for free school meals are 2.5 times less likely to achieve grades A* to C in core subjects, whilst people defined as either DDA disabled or having a work limiting condition are 3 times as likely to have no formal qualifications than their non disabled peers. The national statistics for Wales February 2013 cites that pupils with SEN account for more than half of all permanent and fixed term exclusions and that those pupils who access school action and have an SEN have the highest rates of exclusion. This suggests that any initiatives to increase educational attainment must address the attainment gaps experienced by disabled young people and those living in poverty.

Additional evidence: Bullying
Children and young people experience bullying on the grounds of being stigmatised, such as having a cheap or second hand uniform, accessing free school meals, missing out on school trips etc., and for their identities, such as belonging to, or perceived to belong to, one of the protected characteristics groups. Without the need for schools to use a universal recording system for incidents of bullying, it is not possible to know when pupils are bullied on grounds of identity or low income or where they live and the links between these issues cannot be uncovered. We have concerns regarding the number of children and young people who report identity related bullying and would welcome a statutory consistent approach for recording bullying within schools so that data is available regarding the level and types of bullying pupils are experiencing. This would be consistent with the ethos of the Single Equalities Act 2010 and its subsequent action plan. Bullying has significant consequences on all pupils - those who exhibit bullying behaviour, those who are targets of bullying behaviour and those who witness bullying during the course of the school day. Additionally, bullying is known to link to absenteeism, exclusion and impacts upon ability to learn. Without recording incidents consistently, we do not know how much bullying takes place and for what reasons.

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