

EIS Evidence to the Education and Skills Committee Enquiry into the Attainment and Achievement of School Aged Children Experiencing Poverty

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), Scotland's largest teacher trade union, representing more than 50,000 members at all levels in the career structure and in all sectors of school education, has been a long-standing campaigner on the issue of poverty and its detrimental impact on the lives and educational outcomes of Scotland's children and young people.

EIS position on child poverty

The stark injustice that a young person's ability to thrive, to learn, to benefit from the myriad of opportunities that education has to offer, is stunted as a consequence of socio-economic deprivation, has never been acceptable to the EIS. For this reason, we welcome the opportunity to provide evidence to this Enquiry to inform what we hope will be more effective, strongly evidence-based policy and resource responses that reach all of the 260,000¹ children and young people across Scotland who are living in poverty, regardless of postcode.

The EIS is clear that the key levers for reducing inequality of educational outcome lie within other policy domains than education- most importantly, social security and tax credits, employment and fair work, and taxation and housing, since these are the factors that determine the income levels of the families of Scottish school children and young people. Familial income, is, of course, the most influential factor in children's in-school attainment and wider achievement; therefore, closing the poverty-related attainment gap requires an honest commitment to addressing the structural inequalities that emerge from policy decisions in those areas that are beyond the locus of the education system but which must be equally and fully aligned to social justice principles.

Extract from EIS Face Up to Child Poverty Survey Report, Session 2016-17²

59% of respondents indicated that they had seen an increase in the number of children attending their schools who are experiencing poverty. This is consistent with the findings of the Scottish Government's Annual Report on the Child Poverty Strategy which highlights that both relative and absolute child poverty levels have risen in Scotland since the last annual report was published.

'Making it harder for people who are on low wages to access financial support – so hiding the real extent of poverty – especially among communities/families who want to work and will take any work regardless of the low nature of pay/poor long-term security, and see it as shameful to apply for assistance – the

¹ <http://www.cpag.org.uk/scotland/child-poverty-facts-and-figures>

² <http://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/campaigns/poverty/Child%20Poverty%20Survey%202017.pdf>

government are playing on this and children are the victims.' (Respondent comment)³

While factors external to education are of essential importance, the EIS is clear that all parts of the education system must be enabled to mitigate as far as possible, the impact of poverty on children's and young people's daily experiences of school and on their outcomes at each stage in their education. This can only be achieved by greater investment of financial, including human, resource in the education system, to enhance the quality of children's and young people's learning experiences since attainment and achievement are, in terms of in-school factors, a by-product of these.

Current context: more policy; less resource

This Enquiry is seeking views on the effectiveness of current policy and resource interventions towards closing the attainment and achievement gap caused by poverty. In providing evidence, the EIS would wish to underline for the Committee, the condition of the system. While the design intentions of the current policy and legislative frameworks are designed to support the realisation of more equitable outcomes from the education system for Scotland's children and young people, the levels of investment in education since the onset of austerity politics, and arguably even before, have fallen far short of ensuring this.

Simultaneous to the development of progressive education policy and the passing of associated legislation, both of which require more, not less, resourcing, teacher numbers have fallen overall by more than 4000 since 2007; the numbers of qualified teachers in Nursery have been decimated- at least a 39% reduction in the past decade; class sizes have risen; additional support needs provision has become ever-more sparse; the case-loads of Pupil Support Teachers have burgeoned; teacher salaries have eroded and workload generally is at an all-time high with the consequence that we now face significant recruitment and retention challenges.

It is imperative that all who have an interest in the policy measures that are being and may be applied in the future, are fully aware of and honest about, this contextual reality.

Extract from EIS Face Up to Child Poverty Survey Report, Session 2016-17⁴

'There have been so many cut backs within the school that the simple needs cannot be met with stationery, printing. Pupils not getting enough support due to legislation stating they don't require it. Lots of information is reported back to the school through our attendance officer who is now losing her job due to cut

³<http://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/campaigns/poverty/Child%20Poverty%20Appendix.pdf>

⁴<http://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/campaigns/poverty/Child%20Poverty%20Appendix.pdf>

backs. This vital information such as children's houses having no carpets only floor boards, will not be reported back... (Respondent comment)

Early years education

A principal element of education policy intended to reduce the impact of poverty in recent years, has been commitment to investment in the early years of children's lives. Resources have been channelled into offering 600 hours of free childcare for all 3, 4 and vulnerable 2-year olds, with entitlement soon to be doubled. This is impressive and welcome as the importance of high quality pre-school care and education has never been better understood. Within the pre-5 service, however, it is crucial that the role of education is given adequate attention. The EIS believes that the quality of nursery education is being compromised by the scaling back of trained teachers in these settings, thus ignoring the wealth of research evidence that extols the impact of fully trained teachers, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁵

While the Scottish Government has committed to ensuring 'access to a teacher', some local authorities, with legal impunity, have been removing teachers from Nursery classrooms to reduce costs. The EIS concurs with the view of the wider education community that efforts to close the achievement gap must begin before formal schooling begins when the gaps in the development of children from poorer and more affluent families are already significant. Further, in line with international and Education Scotland's own evidence, the EIS is of the view that the pedagogical input of qualified degree-educated teacher professionals, as part of a pre-5 workforce, is an essential ingredient to the CfE 3-18 curriculum if it is to lead to more equitable outcomes as intended.

In October 2015, the Scottish Government, seemingly persuaded that quality of early years provision is as important as quantity, announced its intention to provide additional qualified teachers or degree educated childcare workers for nurseries in the most deprived areas⁶. Though welcome, the pledge reveals a misunderstanding of the roles of teachers and childcare workers, a lack of awareness of the value of qualified teachers in the early years of education as evidenced in recent research by the Child's Curriculum Group⁷, and in terms of increasing 'access to a teacher', can only be a starting point. Without universally extending the commitment to a guaranteed minimum (and adequate) access to a nursery teacher, for all Scotland's early learners, it will fall short of that required to meet the needs of the thousands of nursery-aged children living in poverty in homes whose postcodes lie outwith the SIMD zones targeted by the current policy.

⁵ <http://eppe.ioe.ac.uk/eppe/eppepdfs/RBTec1223sept0412.pdf>

⁶ <http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Developing-potential-1e71.aspx>

⁷ http://www.childscurriculum.org.uk/images/Sustaining_the_Ambition_Executive_Summary.pdf

GIRFEC and Named Person

Within the GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child) framework, inclusion is defined as children and young people 'having help to overcome social, educational, physical and economic inequalities'. GIRFEC, having been implemented to varying degrees across local authorities in the past decade, is now enshrined in statute within the Children and Young People Act (CYP), with education authorities now bound to consider the effect of socio-economic disadvantage on wellbeing. The extent to which education authorities can act to mitigate the adverse impact of poverty on wellbeing, for example, through funding nurture groups, pupil counselling services, providing access to extra-curricular activities, is, however, resource dependent.

The EIS has been clear from the outset and has repeatedly stressed that the Named Person (NP) service will not succeed in the delivery of its functions through the passing of legislation by national government alone. The introduction of such legislation, should the existing legal hurdles be overcome, cannot be cost-free, it having significant resource implications in those hundreds of thousands of cases in which a school is expected to be the provider of the NP.

The workload of teachers in Scotland is currently at a record high. In Secondary schools, Pupil Support Teachers are struggling with large, often unmanageable, caseloads; while in Primary, the workload of Headteachers, and where schools are fortunate enough to have them, Depute Head Teachers, is unsustainably demanding. It is therefore unacceptable to place additional workload burden generated by the associated administration of NP on the staff who will be acting in the capacity of Named Persons. It is the firm view of the EIS, therefore, that schools will need additional administrative staff to manage the increased record-keeping and inter-agency liaison demanded by NP.

Furthermore, the level of support to children, young people and their families that Named Persons will be expected to provide, is not yet universally clear. The system therefore requires to be resourced such that Named Persons have time to consider information sharing in the interests of children's wellbeing, to share it when judged to be appropriate, to meet existing needs, and to be responsive to changing and unforeseen needs arising from alterations to children's and young people's family circumstances or emerging emotional needs linked to their experiences of living in poverty, for example.

This has implications for the numbers of teaching staff employed within schools. For example, a Physics teacher in a Secondary school who is also a Pupil Support teacher and who has been identified as the Named Person for 250 children in the school, is likely to have less time available for the teaching of Physics than prior to the introduction of the NP service. Considering information, the wellbeing implications of sharing it, the wider legal landscape, and then, where judged appropriate, actively sharing the information with others, will take Named Persons away from the classroom or from other duties such as in the case of Primary Headteachers. In the case of the Secondary example, the gap would require to be filled with additional teaching staff whose specialism is Physics; in the Primary example, the requisite additional management time would have to be resourced with additional staffing.

If the GIRFEC approach in schools is to be effective in addressing the wellbeing needs of children experiencing poverty, additional staffing resource, both teaching and administrative, is essential.

Additional support needs provision

The Additional Support for Learning Act (2009) has the potential to be a strong lever in tackling the effects of poverty on children's learning and achievement since a disproportionate number of learners with additional support needs are from deprived socio-economic backgrounds.

In 2016, 170,329 pupils⁸ (24.9% of all pupils), were identified as having additional support needs and 95% spent at least some of their time in mainstream classes. In 2011, the overall number was 98,523. The increase over those five years is 73%.

Against a backdrop of increasing numbers of children being identified as having additional support needs, and increasing numbers of children presenting with complex social, emotional, behavioural and mental health issues, and rising numbers of children in poverty, there have been reductions in the numbers of essential specialist staff. Between 2012⁹ and 2016¹⁰ (per teacher census data) there were only five more staff categorised as 'Additional support needs auxiliary or care assistant' in Primary schools. In the same period, the number of Behaviour Support staff in Primaries declined from 45 to 19, a decline of 58%. In Secondary schools, the figures also show decline – 20% fewer ASN assistants and 4% fewer Behaviour Support staff.

Overall, the number of teachers with Additional Support for Learning as their main subject fell by 166 between 2007 and 2016, a fall of 5.4%. The reduction since 2009, when the number of such teachers peaked, is starker – a fall of 14.8%, with ASN teacher numbers falling in 16 out of Scotland's 32 local authorities over the period 2007 to 2016.

Cuts to English as an Additional Language services are also of concern. As one might expect, this issue is particularly acute in areas of the country where there have been significantly high levels of migration of families for whom English is an additional language. Similarly alarming is the reduction in Educational Psychological services. The number of Educational Psychologists practising in Scotland fell by 10% in the three years from 2012 to 2015. There were 370 trained educational psychologists practising in Scottish local authorities in 2015 – 10% fewer than the 411 in 2012. These staff provide valuable support to children with additional needs and can be of assistance to teachers in meeting children's diverse needs. Reduced funding training of EPs is undoubtedly a factor in this erosion.

What is now required is a review of the resourcing of additional support needs provision in Scotland. There must be genuine endeavour to ensure that what is promised in the ASL legislation is deliverable for the quarter of Scotland's children and young people, a large proportion of whom live in poverty, and who

⁸ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/TrendSpecialEducation>

⁹ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/Summarystatsforschools/teachcensus2012>

¹⁰ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/teachcensusupdata/teachcensus2015/teachercensus2016>

require extra, often specialist support; and that the commitment to include all young people in mainstream education as far as possible, is fully honoured.

Class sizes

The EIS has campaigned for some time towards class size reduction, not least because of the positive effect that being taught within smaller classes has on the outcomes of children and young people from poorer backgrounds and those who have additional support needs.

Notably, Finland, which measures high in international comparisons of excellence and equity, staffs its schools to ensure that children and young people are taught in classes whose sizes are favourable to producing such strong and equitable outcomes. The average class size is 19¹¹. Compare that figure with Scotland's where in Primary 23.5 is the average, with a maxima of 33 other than in P1 which is set at 25. Secondary BGE, non-practical classes, frequently have 33 pupils in them- more than a third more students than in the Finnish equivalent; in the senior phase as students undertake National Qualifications, non-practical class sizes extend to 30.

The Finnish approach is underpinned by a consistent, undisputed commitment to equity as a fundamental aim of the education system. Regardless of the political administration, this remains a constant. The Finns mean it and they invest in ensuring it. They act on the evidence which shows that smaller classes have a positive impact on the attainment of children from more deprived backgrounds. Smaller classes enable each individual pupil to spend more time with their teacher, building relationships with their teachers and their peers, all of which can provide a major boost for their learning and attainment. This is one of the reasons why some parents in Scotland pay for private education- instinct and perhaps their own past experience tells them that smaller classes offer a more favourable learning environment for their children.

As Scottish education works hard to mitigate against the impact poverty on education – a situation that has grown worse in recent years and which is forecast to worsen still – reducing class sizes in our schools must remain high on the political agenda. All of our pupils, and particularly those who are disadvantaged by poverty, deserve the improved opportunities that smaller class sizes will afford them.

Progressive Pedagogy

Linked to smaller classes is progressive pedagogy. Having fewer pupils and students in a class opens up the space- both in terms of the physical space and classroom dynamics- in ways that are most conducive to learning and teaching approaches that encourage collaboration and creativity among pupils and students, and which are tailored more closely to the needs of individuals and small groups of learners. Curriculum for Excellence in its design was intended to encourage such approaches.

¹¹ http://www.oph.fi/download/180148_Compulsory_education_in_Finland.pdf

The EIS has been a longstanding exponent of mixed ability teaching, this shown to benefit learners from deprived socio-economic backgrounds in particular. The alternative- arranging pupils and students who are following the same course of study in classes or groups within classes by apparent 'ability'- amounts to a 'fixed ability' approach which best serves the more affluent pupils and students whose socio-economic background has resulted in their relative advantage in terms of achievement and attainment. We recommend that the Committee encourages serious consideration of the manner in which classes and groupings are arranged in Scotland's schools. School education in Finland is delivered entirely on a mixed ability basis for the reasons previously outlined. Again, though, this requires significant investment of additional resource.

A commitment to greater equity of outcome between the most and least deprived in our school communities must extend to assessment methodology. What we teach and how we assess the resultant learning must be aligned to social justice principles. An important CfE design principle was avoidance of the testing, targets and league-tables culture that characterised the previous 5-14 curriculum, and which international evidence shows, has the effect of compounding educational inequality. Formative assessment practice- teachers making well-informed judgments of children's progress in the natural course of their learning, supporting children to understand their own progress and teaching them how to evaluate that of their peers, is a key way of enhancing the learning of all children. It is characterised by support and challenge, rather than the fear, anxiety, sense of failure and shame that can feature in the experiences, particularly of poorer children, amidst a high-stakes assessment culture.

Formal, high-stakes testing and examinations, and over-emphasis on and publication of the accompanying data, disadvantage children and young people from deprived socio-economic backgrounds. Yet, the Scottish Government, rather than challenge the blanket standardised assessment use by some local authorities in recent years, has introduced National Standardised Assessments and a system of school by school data collection and publication, which evidence shows, works to the disadvantage of the children and young people on whose behalf the government says that it wishes to intervene. The EIS is clear that the Scottish Government must act now to support the system around sound, progressive assessment practice and in the medium term, seek independent evaluation of the SNSAs and publication of CfE levels data in terms of the effect on the educational outcomes of Scotland's less affluent children.

Free School Meals

Since January 2015, the extension of free school meals eligibility for all P1 to P3s has mitigated some of the impact of food poverty for our youngest school children. While our 5-7 year-olds have a degree of protection from the misery and negative health impacts brought about by not having enough to eat, EIS members report growing incidence of hunger in their classrooms, which knows no age boundaries. For older children whose families' incomes are just above the threshold of entitlement to free school meals, hunger pangs accompanied by inability to concentrate and low energy, are a daily experience that hinder their participation in, enjoyment of, and outcomes from, school.

It is the view of the EIS that this is wholly unacceptable. It is imperative that the Scottish Government responds with universal provision of free meals for all

children of school age. Hunger and poor nutrition cannot be allowed to mar the school experiences of any pupil or student, nor can the stigma of collecting a free meal in the school canteen while classmates pay for theirs.

Extract from EIS Face Up to Child Poverty Survey Report, Session 2016-17¹²

In relation to food, nutrition and hunger, more than 50%, of those who took part in the survey reported an increase in the number of children coming to school without play-pieces, snacks or money for the tuck-shop, while almost a quarter signalled increased attendance at breakfast clubs and more than 10% highlighted that a greater number of families were requesting local foodbank referrals.

However more than 11% of respondents reported seeing families who were entitled to access free school meals, not doing so. This points to issues of stigma among both parents and children, and to lack of understanding of how to access entitlements.

Respondent comments¹³

'Children being hungry and needing fed before learning. Families struggling with Christmas. Universal Credit impacting on families so they have less money.'

'School has closer links with foodbank – they know certain families and deal with older children. This arises from difficulties accessing social security.'

'Breakfast club funded by 3rd sector.'

'Lots of food groups; breakfast clubs, after school study sessions with food on offer.'

'Left-over food from lunches given to some children to take home. Teachers providing biscuits for children at break time.'

'Have breakfast cereal and snacks available in office for those who come to school without.'

Cost barriers

The EIS continues its campaigning work in relation to the cost barriers associated with children's attendance at school faced by families on low income. In 2015, the EIS issued guidance to members on this issue, seeking to raise awareness among members of the nature, causes and consequences of poverty and what might be done at school level to address the costs associated with school uniform, equipment and resources, homework, school trips, charity and

¹²<http://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/campaigns/poverty/Child%20Poverty%20Survey%202017.pdf>

¹³<http://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/campaigns/poverty/Child%20Poverty%20Appendix.pdf>

fundraising events¹⁴. The EIS Face Up to Child Poverty publication was shared with and all schools, local authorities and MSPs, and was well-received.

That said, the EIS is aware of continuing practice in some areas which perpetuates cost barriers and unwittingly limits children's and young people's participation in school life, both in terms of accessing the curriculum and taking part in the wider social and cultural activities that schools arrange. For example, the practice of charging Secondary school students for ingredients for cooking in Home Economics classes and for materials in Art continues in some schools, with some families accumulating 'debt' to the school because they are unable to pay. Not only does this carry stigma for the young people affected, it discourages them from choosing certain subjects for further study because they are aware of the associated costs and their family's inability to meet them. The EIS has written to local authorities, MSPs and Scottish Government recently, requesting that each plays their part in addressing such inequality within what is supposed to be a system of comprehensive education offering equal opportunity for all to participate and succeed.

In the same letter, we raised the issue of school clothing and clothing grants and the continuing variance across schools in terms of the costs of uniform, and across local authorities in terms of entitlement thresholds for clothing grants and adequacy of payments. The EIS has called on all to ensure that where school dress codes are stipulated, that all requisite clothing is widely affordable, with costs kept to a minimum, and for families on low income, that thresholds of entitlement are consistent across the country and the level of payment adequate. (The Poverty Truth Commission currently estimates the minimum cost of school uniform for a year to be £129.50.¹⁵)

Extract from EIS Face Up to Child Poverty Survey Report, Session 2016-17¹⁶

In terms of clothing, two thirds of respondents indicated greater frequency of pupils coming to school inappropriately dressed for weather conditions, while 36% reported increased incidence of children not wearing uniform in schools where it is the norm to do so.

Respondent comments¹⁷

'Children not coming to school because they have grown out of uniform and parents don't have money to buy new shoes, etc..'

'The payment of £1.00 for non-uniform days; the number of children embarrassed by not having a pound.'

'Not taking part in dress up days, non-uniform days and Christmas parties due to lack of fashionable clothing.'

'An increasing number of pupils taking part time jobs while still at school and then missing school to accept more working hours and / or too tired to attend'

¹⁴<http://www.eis.org.uk/Policy-And-Publications/2015-Childpovadvice>

¹⁵ http://www.opfs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/SchoolClothingGrant_-Briefing_April-17.pdf

¹⁶<http://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/campaigns/poverty/Child%20Poverty%20Survey%202017.pdf>

¹⁷<http://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/campaigns/poverty/Child%20Poverty%20Appendix.pdf>

and not completing homework or revising/preparing adequately for assessments and their exams.'

'We have seen a marked decrease in youngsters taking opportunities to take part in trips to theatre and other cultural activities. Due to location and costs a contribution is asked for but parents and carers are struggling to contribute. We are looking at having to cancel a trip to the panto in Glasgow at Christmas as not enough youngsters have brought in £15 – a heavily subsidised cost. Letters were distributed at the beginning of October with options to pay by instalments. Only ¼ of the number required to be viable have returned payment.'

'Pupils unable to access homework, assignments, revision materials...The response is that pupils access the information in the libraries at schools - again cutting these poor pupils off from their peers and the stigma of not being able to do the work at home. So, possible indicators of poverty - pupils sitting in the library or spare classrooms to access homework etc. when other young people are socialising at lunchtime. Some of these children do not take any lunch so that they can get the work done.'

Instrumental music tuition

The EIS has a particular concern at present regarding access by children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds to instrumental music tuition. The EIS believes that this service should be universally and freely available to all pupils, the emotional, social, cultural and cognitive benefits of learning to play a musical instrument being widely known. Children attending independent schools are commonly recipients of school-based or other private instrumental music education. For several years now, music education across Scotland's comprehensive school sector has been under threat, due to budget cutbacks.

With regards to this Enquiry the main concern of the EIS is the increasing emergence of a 'who pays, plays' approach to music lessons. Many authorities have introduced charging regimes and the EIS fears that Scotland is rapidly moving towards a scenario in which only children from well-off families can learn to play an instrument. This would be unjust and unacceptable.

The EIS has gathered recent evidence in relation to local authority instrumental music provision as follows:

- Eleven local authorities across Scotland increased their music tuition rates for the academic year 2017/18.¹⁸
- Four authorities increased fees roughly in line with inflation, but other increases to the cost of a group lesson ranged from 3.7% (Shetland) to 22% (Fife).
- Among local authorities that charge for tuition, the average fee for group lessons in 2017/18, **£212 per pupil**, per year, increased by

¹⁸ Improvement Service: <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/documents/research/IMS-survey-report-2017.pdf>

approximately 4.7% on 2016/17 fees; this follows an increase of 10.5% the previous year.

- The current cost of tuition for group lessons, among charging local authorities, ranges from **£117 to £378 per year**.
- Two music services charge an additional fee (from **£30 to £83 per year**) for hiring an instrument.
- Application of concessionary rates varies widely, from a low of 15% of pupils in Argyll and Bute, to 80% in Inverclyde. The average proportion of pupils receiving a concession is 36% and the mean is 34%. The criteria used vary substantially.

Charges for lessons and instrument hire limit access to music, and levy a high price on the development of young people's talent- a price that for families of the 260,000 children living in poverty, is simply unaffordable. The EIS would urge the Committee to consider this growing inequality and the array of opportunity brought by instrumental music education which is increasingly well beyond the reach of a sizeable proportion of our school population.

Conclusion

The EIS would reiterate the view that genuine commitment to ensuring more equal educational outcomes requires the alignment of all policy both external and internal to education, with social justice principles, including that related to assessment practice; the removal of cost barriers associated with children's and young people's school attendance; and adequate and sustained resourcing.

In terms of resourcing, that means, at the very least, enough teachers who have ongoing access to high quality CPD, including inputs on the nature, causes and consequences of poverty. It means increasing teacher numbers to deliver smaller class sizes arranged on the basis of mixed ability for the particular benefit of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. It means adequate specialist support for learners with additional support needs, including regular and sustained support for learners at all stages who have English as an additional language.

Tackling the impact of poverty on children's school experience requires adequate time for Pupil Support staff to attend to pupils' pastoral care needs; enough time for schools to plan and deliver approaches to enhance links between school and home, crucially supporting vulnerable parents to be involved in their children's learning; allowing maximum time for teachers to engage in meaningful professional reflection and collaboration around what works in improving outcomes for children living in poverty; and the provision of classroom resources and equipment that facilitate learning that has creativity and learner collaboration at the core of it.

There is no cheap way of delivering an education system that is both excellent and equitable. Only long-term, protected investment will deliver that worthy ambition.