

Education, Children and Young People Committee  
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Our ref:

17 June 2022

Dear Convenor,

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence and take questions from Committee members on the Scottish Attainment Challenge at the Education, Children and Young People Committee on 18 May.

As I stated during the session, without underplaying the challenges both the pandemic and cost of living crisis present, I expect to see significant progress in closing the poverty related attainment gap during this parliamentary session. The 2016/17 Programme for Government made clear our commitment to closing the poverty related attainment gap and to “substantially eliminate” it over the course of the decade since then. Nothing has changed and whilst this remains a complex and long-term endeavour, I am fully committed to that ambition and to making more progress, faster.

The refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge programme, backed by an increased £1 billion investment over this parliamentary term, aims to address the challenges still faced by children and young people impacted by poverty and ensure that equity lies at the heart of the education experience for all. This includes our commitment of over £520 million Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) over four years, which represents more than £130 million per year including an uplift of PEF per pupil to £1,225, helping aid headteachers to plan over the short and longer term. It also includes funding going to all 32 Local Authorities for the first time through the Strategic Equity Fund, with these allocations also committed for four years. Care Experienced Children and Young People Funding will also continue, enabling Local Authorities to provide additional support to care experienced children and young people aged between 0-26. In addition, a number of national programmes will provide targeted support for children and young people.

The Committee will be pleased to see that, as set out in our [year 6 evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund](#) published on 16 June, headteachers are seeing progress being made in closing the poverty related attainment gap. Almost 9 out of 10 headteachers who responded to the 2021 Headteacher Survey said that improvements have been made in

closing the gap, despite the impact of Covid-19, while 94% expect to see improvements over the next few years as a result of approaches supported by the Attainment Scotland Fund.

During my appearance at the Committee session I undertook to provide further information around three issues. I have set out information on each further below which I hope is helpful:

1. How the £1 billion Scottish Attainment Challenge funding allocated during this session has been spent.
2. Minutes of my meetings with Education Scotland to discuss the Scottish Attainment Challenge.
3. Positive destination data: how does the Scottish Government and its agencies track the journey of young people in a meaningful way once they have left school - over a longer period of time?

## **How Scottish Attainment Challenge funding has been invested**

We distribute the vast majority of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding direct to schools and local authorities. We undertake careful analysis of the impact of this funding through the annual Attainment Scotland Fund evaluation. Our report entitled [\*Closing the poverty-related attainment gap: A report on progress 2016:21\*](#), which was published in March 2021, provides some specific examples of how this investment has helped support children and young people between 2016 and 2021. Further to this, in March 2022, Education Scotland published the [\*"Pupil Equity Funding: Looking inwards, outwards, forwards"\*](#) resource, which details a range of effective practice in the use of PEF to maximise progress.

In summary, Scottish Attainment Challenge funding has been used by schools and Local Authorities to implement a wide variety of approaches designed to drive up improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The variety of approaches implemented by schools and Challenge Authorities reflects their diverse contexts and the circumstances in which they have made decisions to benefit their pupils. Challenge Authorities, which have collectively had a total of £255 million made available to them through the Attainment Scotland Fund since 2015, have used funding to develop strategic approaches at local authority level.

Funding to local authorities has been used in a variety of ways to undertake strategic approaches to closing the gap, including:

- the appointment of additional Principal Teachers posts for literacy and numeracy, SAC funded teaching posts, Speech and Language Therapists, Pupil Wellbeing Officers and Home Link Worker posts.
- a strong focus on family engagement eg through the work of Family Learning Teams, and posts such as family learning/home link workers.
- promoting health and wellbeing: for example, whole school nurture approaches and the appointment of Health and Wellbeing Officers.
- partnerships with national, local and community organisations, including, for example, signposting to other services such as foodbanks.
- a range of approaches to reducing the cost of the school day.
- professional learning and leadership development with specific focus on equity.
- greater use of data and evidence, for example the development of bespoke tools within local authorities, data coach posts to support the use of data and evidence for improvement, and many examples of schools and local authorities making good use of data and evidence to adapt interventions for improvement.

Schools have used the flexibility of Pupil Equity Funding of over £630 million, and in some cases additional funding received through the Schools Programme, to develop a range of different approaches tailored to their specific needs. In light of the disruption caused by the pandemic, in 2021/22 schools received an additional uplift to their PEF, known as a £20million PEF Premium, to support education recovery efforts for children and young people impacted by poverty. This proved particularly important during the pandemic, where greater flexibility in the use of PEF funding allowed schools to rapidly adjust approaches to continue to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people. For PEF, we have been very clear that this is available to schools and school leaders to empower them to take approaches that suit their context – and have been equally clear that we do not want to increase demands on teachers time with unnecessary bureaucracy, so we trust them – working within local financial management and governance frameworks – to invest that funding appropriately to benefit their most disadvantaged children and young people.

Since PEF was introduced in 2017-18, there has been a broad range of different approaches implemented to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap:

**Family link workers/ family support workers** - A proportion of the funds have been used across local authorities to employ family link workers or family support workers. This resource is used to provide support to children and young people in areas of their life which may be affecting their attendance or performance in school. For example, Fife Council funded family support workers through PEF, which helped address practical issues such as food resilience. In Dundee the work of school and family development officers supporting parents has resulted in improved attendance for learners.

**To support collaboration between schools** - Many schools have collaborated around joint PEF projects. In most cases this collaborative approach is across clusters or associated school groups. This type of collaboration of schools sees them analysing data, planning, developing and implement strategies together as a unit. As a result, targeted support from education attainment workers, who can work across schools, supports health and wellbeing and attainment in numeracy and literacy. For example, the headteacher of St Mark's Primary School in East Renfrewshire highlighted the continued benefit of cluster working in relation to PEF. A PEF-funded maths teacher from the associated secondary works with teachers and pupils from P6 and P7 to build capacity, address gaps resulting from lockdown and raise attainment in numeracy and maths. In addition, a collective decision was taken by five South Ayrshire schools to amalgamate their respective PEF funding so that they could implement interventions that individually they would not have been able to fund. These interventions included creating a numeracy lead who worked across the five schools.

**Engagement beyond the school gates** - PEF can help to provide the right foundations for learning, reaching beyond the school gate to improve the lives of families impacted by poverty. Approaches have included providing a budget for family cooking sessions, digital devices provided for children to work from home when required, a budget for art and crafts for holiday clubs and transport support for holiday clubs and after school clubs.

**Cost of the School Day** - Many schools use PEF to reduce the cost of the school day. For example, a 'zero cost' school has been established in South Lanarkshire. The headteacher noted that Scottish Attainment Challenge Funding, including PEF, has supported the positive implementation of their Cost of the School Day priorities. Similarly, senior leaders at St Joseph's Primary in Inverclyde have eliminated any cost of the school day and use some of their PEF to support this. No cost is attributed to extra-curricular activities, residential trips, theatre experiences or outdoor learning clothing for all learners. This has resulted in children having more opportunities to learn outdoors and experience nature.

**Health and wellbeing** - Health and wellbeing is being improved with the use of PEF. This can be evidenced by improved confidence, more positive interactions and increased participation. For example, a Highlands Primary School PEF-funded an intervention focused on outdoor play which has had a positive impact on language and on health and wellbeing. This improvement was also supported by the introduction of restorative approaches to playground disputes, the number of which has decreased since the introduction of the intervention. In an Aberdeenshire primary school, the engagement of a PEF-funded wellbeing coach has had a positive impact on the wellbeing of children and families. In an Angus Primary School, PEF is supporting work to improve relationships. The school has continued to develop and adapt this work, which has significantly enhanced the learning environment. They note that this has improved the attendance and engagement of a number of learners and reduced the number of exclusions.

Care Experienced Children and Young People funding aims to improve educational outcomes care experienced young people through additional Attainment Scotland Funding of over £45m to date. Projects as diverse as mentoring programmes, outdoor and play-based education and a network of virtual school headteachers were supported through the Care Experienced Children and Young People fund last year. Another key intervention utilised across Scotland has been the provision of transitional support for learners towards positive destinations. This support helps young people transition from school into college, work experience and future destinations while providing consistent mentoring support, including employability and workplace skills.

## **2. Minutes of the Cabinet Secretary's meetings with Education Scotland to discuss the Scottish Attainment Challenge.**

Please find attached in the Annex to this letter the minutes from the quarterly meeting of 27 April.

## **3. Positive destination data: how does the Scottish Government and its agencies track the journey of young people in a meaningful way once they have left school - over a longer period of time?**

The committee members quite rightly highlighted the importance of understanding young people's outcomes and experiences after they leave school. The Skills Development Scotland Annual Participation Measure is one of the 11 NIF measures used to measure the progress being made to close the poverty-related attainment gap. This measure shows that the proportion of 16-19-year olds participating in education, training or employment has been improving since 2017, from 91.1 percent in 2017 to 92.2 percent in 2021. The gap between the proportion of 16-19-year olds in the most and least deprived areas participating in education, training, and employment has narrowed from 11.5 percentage points to 9.3 percentage points over the same period. This narrowing of the gap is due to the proportion of 16-19-year olds participating in education, training or employment increasing by 2.3 percentage points for those in the most deprived areas, whilst remaining largely unchanged for those from the least deprived areas.

As the Committee also noted, more school leavers in Scotland are in education, employment or training 3 months after the end of the school year: 95.5% in 2020/21 compared to 93.3% in 2019/20 and a record high since consistent records began in 2009/10. Statistics on the follow-up destinations of 2020/21 school leavers – nine months after the end of the school year – will be published on 14 June 2022.

The priorities and actions in the 2022 National Improvement Framework build on those from last year, and also take account of existing and new data in order to ensure that we have a coherent delivery plan to secure improvement. A formal consultation on enhanced data collection for improvement, and the key measures to assess progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap was published on Monday 9 May. It will run until 18 July. The responses to the consultation will ensure that the key measures provide an accurate understanding of the wide range of learners' achievement and support a fuller understanding of the gaps in achievement and life chances between different groups of learners.

Growing Up in Scotland – Scottish Government's flagship longitudinal study following a nationally representative cohort of children – may also offer us useful information in the future on young people who have left school. Information is currently being collected on participants aged 17 and, depending on response rates, will most likely follow up again with this group of young people when they are aged 20 or, alternatively, to use data linkage to track their progress using administrative data.

I trust this is helpful and look forward to my next appearance at Committee in due course.

**SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE**

## Scottish Attainment Challenge – quarterly meeting with Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills – Note of meeting

27 April 2022

### Attendance:

Graeme Logan	Gayle Gorman
Alison Taylor	Patricia Watson
Joe Griffin	Alison Cumming
Gillian Hamilton	

### Note:

- Discussed data for use at future meetings. **ACTION:** Education Scotland and Scottish Government officials to consider the range of qualitative and quantitative data that can be used to support discussions at future quarterly meetings.
- Discussed Education Scotland approach to universal, targeted and intensive support. **ACTION:** Education Scotland to provide further advice on the process for that and the specific types of support provided in each of those categories, including specific action plans and support already in place in authorities receiving intensive support. This should include consideration on the role of wider Government at both local and national levels – poverty related barriers to learning won't all be overcome by education services.
- Discussed potential for progress where local authorities may be provided targeted or intensive support and the escalation routes if that support were not to result in progress – recognising that the barriers to progress may not be solely caused by education related issues. The 2018 Joint Agreement is the starting point for any such escalation. **ACTION:** Education Scotland & Scottish Government officials to provide the Cabinet Secretary with further advice on escalation processes/routes, including the role of local government and COSLA.
- Discussed importance of considering attainment and the narrowing of the attainment gap across the whole learner journey, starting with Early Learning and Childcare, recognising that the CfE starts for children age 3 and that we need to be able to evidence the impact of ELC and 1140 on school-aged attainment and outcomes for young people.
- Brief discussion on the Collaborative Improvement programme led by Education Scotland & ADES, noting reports on that process should be available in May. **ACTION:** Cabinet Secretary to be updated by ES on those reports and the impact of the programme to date. Consideration also on the role of RICs.