



BETTER ODDS AT SCHOOL

Targeted investment to help close the educational achievement gap

It is unacceptable that at every stage of schooling Scotland's poorest children do worse and make less progress than their better off classmates. The stark educational achievement gap reinforces and perpetuates existing patterns of poverty. Save the Children believes that every child should have a fair chance to succeed at school. To break the cycles of deprivation, children from the poorest homes must be given high quality and sustained additional support to ensure they can overcome disadvantage and realise their potential.

There is no 'magic bullet' to resolve the systemic nature of educational underachievement by children in poverty. Save the Children believes that one part of the solution is to invest in additional school spending targeted at children living in poverty. This briefing sets out the case for introducing a Pupil Premium to directly assist schools to help children from the poorest households realise their potential.

Save the Children is calling on the Scottish Government and the main political parties in Scotland to commit to:

- **Target extra resources at pupils living in poverty to enable them to succeed at school.**
- **Introduce a Pupil Premium that provides *additional* money to schools to fund extra support to help the poorest children realise their potential.**
- **Make schools accountable for the impact a Pupil Premium has on enabling children living in poverty to realise their potential.**



An unacceptable achievement gap

There is little disagreement within Scottish society about the scale or persistence of under-achievement by the poorest children within the education system. An influential report examining Scottish education recorded the many strengths and high standard of performance in Scottish education. However, it also noted serious inequalities associated with socio-economic status, poverty and deprivation.¹

Children growing up in poverty are less likely to do well at school. Low income in a family is a strong predictor of poor educational achievement.² At every stage of schooling children living in poverty do worse and make less progress than their better off classmates. The persistence in the achievement gap is of great concern. There has been no improvement in addressing the achievement gap in recent years.

- **Inequalities in educational outcomes become apparent from the early years.** Children living in poverty arrive at school with significant disadvantages. By the age of 6, initially low achieving children from more advantaged homes will tend to outperform initially high achieving children from less advantaged homes.³
- **Inequalities associated with poverty and area deprivation widen by the time a child leaves primary school.** Evidence has shown that the impact of poverty on attainment levels is more extreme by the age of ten.⁴
- **By the time the most disadvantaged young people leave school, there is a considerable gap in attainment.** The 2008/9 tariff performance scores of S4 pupils in public examinations showed a large difference between children living in the least deprived areas (**230**) in comparison with those living in the most deprived areas (**124**). Tariff scores increase as deprivation decreases. In the last six years there has only been a one point reduction in the gap in the average tariff scores between the least and most deprived areas.⁵

- **The failure to achieve in public examinations damages future job or training opportunities.** In 2009, 22% of school leavers moved into unemployment from the most deprived areas of Scotland in comparison with 6% from the least deprived areas.⁶

Child poverty

Addressing the achievement gap is vital to enable individual children to succeed at school and reach their potential. It should also be seen in the broader context of eradicating child poverty. 21% of the child population is living in poverty in Scotland.⁷ This is an unacceptably high level of poverty. We have a national commitment, through the Child Poverty Act 2010, to eradicate child poverty by 2020 and reduce socio-economic disadvantage. The Scottish Government has to produce a strategy setting out the actions that it will take to meet the target. The role of education and eradicating the achievement gap is central to this goal. In a report setting out what is needed to end child poverty, it was noted that *'only by reversing the historic trend in the poorest achieving least at school can the government deliver the kind of impact needed to tackle child poverty and the intergenerational cycle of poverty'*.⁸

Addressing the gap

Existing trends in the achievement gap do not need to be set in stone. The Scottish education system caters well for the majority of students. But the persistence in the achievement gap suggests that a review of current approaches and/or additional policy measures are required. There is no explicit commitment or target to address the achievement gap. However, the adoption of two major Scottish Government strategies – *The Early Years Framework* and *Curriculum for Excellence* – are acknowledgements of the need to change

current delivery and achievement methods to improve outcomes for children.

There is no 'magic bullet' to resolve the systemic nature of educational underachievement by children in poverty. The focus of this briefing is on addressing some of the school factors that prevent the poorest children from achieving. However, evidence shows that to address this problem there is a need to focus on the school *and* non school factors. The home learning environment, particularly the ability of parents to engage in their children's learning has been shown to make a significant difference in helping children to reach their educational potential.⁹ A specific focus on the early years, to address problems early and prevent poorer educational outcomes is also a key part of the strategy. Therefore, we are not calling for additional investment to schools in isolation, but as part of a wider approach. We are calling for a national commitment to raising the educational achievement of children living in poverty. There are three key elements to the approach:

- Invest in extra resources for schools to support children in poverty to succeed at school.
- Invest in high quality early education and care, particularly in disadvantaged areas. Full implementation of *The Early Years Framework* is a key part of this.
- Invest in parenting support programmes that support parents to engage in their children's learning.

The need for targeted extra resources

Save the Children believes that additional resources for the poorest pupils through the introduction of a Pupil Premium is one part of the solution to address the educational achievement gap. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that to realise their potential the poorest children need higher levels of school funding.

- A recent report on *Poverty and Education* by The Educational Institute of Scotland concluded that targeting expenditure and restoring ring fencing for education is essential to address specific issues of poverty and that a more targeted and focused approach to funding should be taken, especially for schools in areas of deprivation.¹⁰
- A study by the Institute of Fiscal Studies on Pupil Premiums concluded that increasing resources (spent on initiatives proven to work) is likely to have a direct impact on pupils' attainment. As the extra resources will be targeted at schools with disadvantaged pupils, they seem likely to decrease the attainment gap between rich and poor pupils.¹¹
- Increasing resources directed at certain groups of pupils has been proven to work in Scotland. A £6 million fund was committed to improve the educational attainment of looked after children in 18 local authorities between 2005–07. The evaluation in 2008 noted that '*about 40% of the young people participating in the pilots advanced by one 5–14 National Assessment level, much better than the average progress reported for all looked after children and similar to advances made by non-looked after children nationally... This is encouraging because it also suggests that providing targeted additional support can raise attainment.*'¹²

The introduction of dedicated resources may alter the spirit of the current Concordat agreement between central and local government in Scotland but there is precedent within existing Scottish programmes for ring fenced budgets, separate from the general allocation. These include extra staff for *Curriculum for Excellence* and allocations for probationer teachers. If a Pupil Premium fund achieved change in an area where improvement has stalled, then the introduction of dedicated resources would be justified. In addition, a commitment of resources from central government would give a clear signal of intent to address the problem.



The role of a Pupil Premium

Evidence shows that, in Scotland, the difference between individual students' performance *within* schools is stark, and is significantly higher than the difference in students' performance *between* schools. This suggests that the '*problem is not unequal access to good schools but the unequal capacity to benefit from good schools.*'¹³ Therefore policy responses require more of a focus on individual pupils.

Save the Children believes that a Pupil Premium could provide a vehicle for targeting extra investment at the poorest pupils in Scotland. It could have a significant impact on supporting the poorest children to succeed at school. The introduction of a Pupil Premium in Scotland could:

1. Provide extra resources (for in school and home learning support) to support the poorest children to overcome disadvantage and reach their full potential.
2. Help to reduce the educational achievement gap between children living in poverty and more affluent children.
3. Act as a catalyst, providing much needed impetus in supporting children living in poverty to succeed at school. It could help to focus the attention of key stakeholders at national and local level and create a structure for focusing on this group of children.
4. Increase accountability for the performance of the poorest pupils at national and local level.
5. Clearly articulate the role of education as an essential part of the strategy to eradicate child poverty.

A Pupil Premium

A Pupil Premium should include the following essential elements:

Additional spend from outside the schools budget, delivered direct to schools A Pupil Premium would supplement existing school funding by targeting extra resources at children living in poverty. It would be allocated on a per pupil basis. It is *additional* to the implicit deprivation weighting already factored into school funding. A premium must be delivered separately from base per-pupil funding – either straight to schools, or passed on in full by local authorities. It must be absolutely clear to schools that this money is earmarked for raising the achievement of the poorest pupils.

Focused on improving educational outcomes for the poorest pupils The criteria for determining how a Pupil Premium would be allocated should be as broad as possible to reach all children living in poverty. Save the Children believes that the best indicator of poverty amongst individual pupils at present is entitlement to free school meals.

Spent on support that is proven to make a difference Decisions on how to use the Pupil Premium within schools should be at the discretion of headteachers based on guidance that sets out what works in improving achievement of disadvantaged children. A comprehensive guide on the best proven ways of raising the achievement of the poorest pupils must be available for all schools to help with internal planning. There is already a good body of evidence of the types of approaches that provide the most effective approaches to improve attainment.¹⁴ Examples include:

- One to one support or catch up tuition
- Targeted extra curricular activities or after school/holiday study programmes
- Learning mentors
- Extra teachers
- Engaging parents in children's learning
- Family interventions such as nurture groups

A sufficient level to make a difference The level of the premium should be set at an amount that would enable schools to introduce the necessary package of additional support for the poorest pupils that will make a difference to their education.

Include strong monitoring and accountability mechanisms Schools should be required to monitor and report on the impact the dedicated funding has made on the achievement of the poorest pupils in their school. School, Local Authority and Scottish level data should be available on the progress made by the poorest pupils. HMIE should assess schools on the allocation, monitoring and impact of the Pupil Premium. This model would help drive a move from 'input' to 'outcome' measurement of education funding and achievement.

Conclusion

Save the Children believes that more resources for the poorest pupils through the introduction of an explicit Pupil Premium is one part of the solution to closing the educational achievement gap between children living in poverty and more affluent children. We are calling on the Scottish Government and the main political parties in Scotland to commit to:

- **Target extra resources for pupils living in poverty to enable them to succeed at school.**
- **Introduce a Pupil Premium that provides *additional* money to schools to fund extra support to help the poorest children realise their potential.**
- **Make schools accountable for the impact a Pupil Premium has on enabling children living in poverty to realise their potential.**

We recognise that a range of policy measures are required to help ensure that children living in poverty can fulfil their educational potential. This requires a strong national lead and long term cross party commitment. Therefore, we are also calling for a national commitment to raising the educational achievement of children living in poverty. In addition to the introduction of a Pupil Premium, we are calling on the Scottish Government and the main political parties in Scotland to commit to:

- **Invest in high quality early education and care, particularly in disadvantaged areas. Full implementation of *The Early Years Framework* is a key part of this.**
- **Invest in parenting support programmes that support parents to engage in their children's learning.**

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Notes

¹ Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (2007), *Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland*.

² Hirsch D (2007), *Experiences of poverty and educational disadvantage*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

³ Feinstein L (2003), 'Inequality in the Early Cognitive Development of British Children in the 1970 Cohort', *Economica*, 70, 277.

⁴ Feinstein L (2003), 'Inequality in the Early Cognitive Development of British Children in the 1970 Cohort', *Economica*, 70, 277.

⁵ Scottish Government (2010), *SQA attainment and school leaver qualifications in Scotland 2008/9*.

⁶ Scottish Government (2010), *Destinations of Leavers from Scottish Schools 2008/9*.

⁷ Scottish Government (2010), *Poverty and income inequality in Scotland: 2008/09*.

⁸ Hirsch, D (2006), *What will it take to end child poverty*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

⁹ Cassen, R (2007), *Tackling low educational achievement*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

¹⁰ The Educational Institute of Scotland (2010), *Poverty and Education: Breaking down barriers*.

¹¹ Chowdry, Greaves, Sibieta (2010), *The Pupil Premium: Assessing the Options*, Institute of Fiscal Studies.

¹² Scottish Government (2008), *The educational attainment of looked after children – local authority pilot projects*.

¹³ Damme D (2010), Presentation to Centre for Scottish Public Policy Conference 'Raising our Game' on 24 June 2010 in Edinburgh, *Challenges ahead for Scottish education – an international perspective*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

¹⁴ For example, Desforges, C & Abouchar, A (2003), *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family*, Department of Families, Education, and Schools and Harris A & Goodall J (2009), *Supporting families to impact on their children's education*.

Save the Children fights for vulnerable children in the UK and around the world who suffer from poverty, disease, injustice and violence. We work with them to find lifelong answers to the problems they face.

We work to ensure that the rights of children in the UK and around the world are protected, promoted and respected in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and other international human rights instruments, with a particular focus on poverty and educational attainment.

In the UK we work directly with children and families experiencing poverty and provide expertise, research and policy support to key partners including local authorities and national government. We are members of the End Child Poverty coalition and take a lead role in the campaign to end child poverty.