Supplementary guidance: inspecting the approaches taken by non-maintained settings, schools, PRUs and local government education services to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment and well-being

September 2024

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ⚲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- ⚲ primary schools
- ⚲ secondary schools
- ⚲ all-age schools
- ⚲ special schools
- ⚲ pupil referral units
- ⚲ independent schools
- ⚲ further education
- ⚲ independent specialist colleges
- ⚲ adult community learning
- ⚲ local authority education services for children and young people
- ⚲ teacher education and training
- ⚲ Welsh for adults
- ⚲ work-based learning
- ⚲ learning in the justice sector

Estyn also:

- ⚲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others
- ⚲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence

What is the purpose?

To provide guidance for inspectors on evaluating approaches to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment

For whom is it intended?

Inspectors of maintained primary, secondary, all-age and special schools, pupil referral units, non-maintained settings, and local government education services

From when should the guidance be used?

September 2024

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Supplementary guidance

The key Estyn documents that guide inspection activity are the inspection guidance handbooks for each sector. However, we also produce supplementary guidance to help inspectors to consider specific aspects of education and training further.

The supplementary guidance documents set out some key principles, considerations and resources for inspectors. They relate to all sectors that Estyn inspects, unless they state that they are for a specific sector. They expand on certain aspects of education/training (e.g. the inspection of literacy) or on ways of conducting inspections (e.g. the use of learning walks) or specific inspection arrangements (e.g. guidance on inspecting church schools).

Inspectors may find supplementary guidance documents useful when responding to specific emerging questions that arise during inspections or when they wish to reflect or investigate further.

Inspectors are not required to work through them exhaustively when covering any specific aspect on an inspection and they are not a definitive and comprehensive document. The supplementary guidance documents may help providers gain an understanding of our inspection arrangements. They may also be helpful to providers in evaluating specific aspects of their own provision.

Our inspection work is based on the following principles:

- Inspectors will approach inspection with a positive mindset to ensure it is the best possible professional learning experience for the staff in each provider
- Inspectors will take a learner-focused approach to inspection
- Inspectors will always focus strongly on the quality of teaching and learning
- Inspectors will seek out well-considered innovative practice
- Inspectors will tailor the inspection activities according to the circumstances in each provider as far as possible
- Inspectors will be agile and responsive to emerging findings and will use the increased range of inspection tools and approaches available
- Inspectors will consider everything in the inspection framework, but will only report on the key strengths and weaknesses within each provider

1 Introduction

This document contains guidance on inspecting how effectively non-maintained settings, maintained schools, PRUs and local government education services reduce the impact of poverty on the educational attainment and well-being of pupils eligible for free school meals (e-fsm) and/or those from low-income households.

Part 2 of the guidance provides a commentary and questions for inspectors and is divided into two sections which look at 'What we inspect' and 'How we inspect'. The section on 'What we inspect' sets out what inspectors need to consider regarding tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment in relation to each inspection area. It should be read in conjunction with the section on 'How we inspect' which explains the approaches inspectors might take when they consider how well schools tackle the impact of poverty on educational attainment.

Part 3 of the guidance provides a commentary and questions for inspectors who jointly inspect non-maintained settings that provide part-time education.

The Welsh Government has placed tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment at the heart of the national mission for education, 'High Standard and Aspiration for All.' This is underpinned by two key principles:

- The need for a whole system approach that involves early childhood and care, primary and secondary education and post-16 education, training and lifelong learning.
- The central importance of high-quality learning and teaching and of schools adopting a community focused school approach that reaches out to families, a wide range of agencies and all parts of the education and lifelong learning system.

This includes:

- High quality learning and teaching
- Community schools
- Early childhood education and care
- The health and well-being of children and young people
- Developing high aspirations through strong relationships
- The Curriculum for Wales and Qualifications
- Leadership
- Post-16 progression

When inspecting the approaches taken by schools, PRUs and local government education services to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment and well-being, it is important that these are considered in the relevant inspection area of the Inspection Framework.

Currently, the nationally agreed measure of disadvantage, in a school context, is whether a pupil is eligible to receive free school meals. Normally, schools with higher

proportions of pupils that are eligible for free school meals serve communities with higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage. This guidance also refers to pupils from low-income families, recognising that not all pupils living in poverty are eligible for free school meals but experience the effects of living in poverty. It also reflects the introduction of [Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM)](). The Welsh Government aims for all primary age pupils to be in receipt of free school meals by 2024 during school term time.

The guidance should be read in conjunction with the useful sources of information listed in Annex 4.

2. Estyn Inspection Framework (for schools and PRUs)

How we inspect

Our approach to inspecting how well schools address the impact of poverty on educational attainment should be holistic across each inspection area and as part of any discussions around equity. Inspectors should consider the effectiveness of the actions schools are taking to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment in each inspection area.

Inspection teams should:

- consider asking for pupil book samples from pupils eligible for free school meals (efsm) or from low-income households
- consider how well the school monitors and evaluates progress of this group of pupils
- consider how well the school evaluates the impact of its actions in promoting pupil progress and well-being (including attendance) including spend of EYPDG and PDG grants
- evaluate the attendance of pupils who are efsm
- ask for details of any interventions that the school carries out to support pupils who are efsm

We should begin with a conversation with school leaders about the context of the school and levels of socio-economic need in the community. Headteachers and senior leaders should have a strong understanding of the context of the wider school community, including an insight into the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and those who are in low-income households. They should understand the challenges these pupils face in the context of their community and how these have an impact on the progress and attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals and those living in low-income households. Inspectors may find it helpful to consider other information about the local community such as the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Providers should make information available to the inspection team about the progress made by pupils eligible for free school meals or from low-income families, particularly the

results of any initial screening tests and other relevant assessments. This will help inspectors to evaluate pupils' learning, to come to a view about the progress pupils make compared to their starting-points and the way teachers use the information from assessment to influence their planning and their lessons.

Inspection teams will need to have access to samples of work specifically from pupils eligible for free school meals or those from low-income households.

Inspectors should look at evidence about groupings of pupils, for example, those based on attainment or groups of pupils accessing specialist provision/off site provision. The school should be able to provide information on the spread of pupils eligible for free school meals/ from low-income families across different pupil groupings or classes.

Inspectors will need to meet with any staff responsible for family and community engagement work to find out about the support they provide to pupils eligible for free school meals and from low-income families. They should discuss how they establish positive working relationships with families and the community. These meetings should also provide useful information about the types of intervention and support provided and the impact that they are having on reducing the impact of poverty on pupil attainment and well-being.

If the provider works with multi-agency teams and other community groups, the inspection team should arrange to meet with a focus group of professionals to evaluate the impact of this work.

If there is a governor responsible for the impact of poverty on attainment and well-being, then the inspection team should aim to meet with them.

See also 'How We Inspect - 2024 maintained schools and PRUs (gov.wales)'

What we inspect

In our new inspection framework (2024-2030), poverty is a thread that permeates all inspection areas. (See 'What we inspect 2024-2030').

Inspectors should ensure that an evaluation of the three inspection areas includes consideration of the outcomes and provision for all pupils, including those where poverty is a barrier to learning. **Inspection teams should ensure that supporting evidence in each inspection area captures what the school does to support pupils from low-income households. Where appropriate, inspectors should report on the school's work in mitigating the impact of poverty on pupils' attainment and wellbeing.**

Inspection area 1: Teaching and learning

How effectively does the school's/PRU's curriculum, teaching and assessment support all learners, including those learners with ALN and learners who are adversely affected by poverty and disadvantage to:

- **learn and make progress**

- **develop their knowledge, skills and understanding**
- **develop positive attitudes to learning**
- **develop their Welsh language skills**

Evaluations on the progress of pupils who are adversely affected by poverty will need to take account of the information available on their individual needs and abilities. Evaluations will take account of their attainments and achievements in relation to agreed learning goals and the impact of any interventions that supports this group of pupils to make progress from their individual starting points.

Inspectors should consider the school's analysis of the performance and progress of pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households covering a period, normally over the last three years. Inspectors should consider this information alongside their own evidence from lesson observations, discussions with these pupils, if appropriate, and scrutiny of their written, practical and digital work.

- Are pupils making good progress in their learning from their individual starting points?
- How do completion rates of courses and qualifications compare for pupils who are impacted by poverty to those of other learners? How is teaching and the curriculum ensuring that this group of pupils makes progress?
- How well does the school combat the difficulties of gaps in learning and repeated curriculum for pupils who have had numerous placement moves?
- How well does the curriculum provide opportunities to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in relation to individual starting points?
- To what extent does the curriculum enable pupils to develop skills that prepare them well for the next stage of learning and life? For example, independence, self-care or money management.
- Are the teaching methods used successful in engaging all pupils?
- Do practitioners intervene appropriately in pupils' play and independent learning to develop their skills at a suitable level?
- How effective is the use of targeted individual/group sessions for pupils?
- To what extent does teaching consider the needs of individual pupils?
- Is work suitably challenging and demanding for all pupils, taking into account their prior attainment?
- To what extent does teaching enhance pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills?
- Do staff have high expectations and provide demanding work to meet the needs of all pupils?
- Do staff provide feedback in ways that are meaningful to pupils? Does this feedback meet their individual needs?
- To what extent are pupils engaged in meaningful activities that demonstrate an understanding of their own performance and the steps they need to take to improve?

Reporting and supporting evidence examples:

Where possible, inspectors should aim to reflect their findings with a cause-and-effect approach linking provision to pupil progress.

'Pupils eligible for free school meals make progress at a pace similar to their peers. This is due to the high-quality teaching and learning that every pupil receives.'

'There is a whole school approach to tackling poverty and ensuring that there is equity for all. As they move through the school, most pupils, including those who are eligible for free school meals, those with additional learning needs and those with English as an additional language make strong progress from their starting points.'

'Leaders know pupils and their families well and understand the challenges they face. The school's sensitive approach to ensuring pupils' well-being and support for families, together with a rich and engaging curriculum, and high-quality teaching, ensures all pupils, including those from low-income families make strong progress.'

'Learning experiences across the school interest all pupils including those eligible for free school meals and pupils of all abilities make good progress'

Inspection area 2: Care, support and well-being

How effective is the care, support and guidance the school/PRU provides in ensuring that all learners, including those learners with ALN and learners who are adversely affected by poverty and disadvantage:

- **are safe and secure**
- **attend school regularly**
- **are respected and fairly treated**

Attendance

Inspectors should pay particular attention to the attendance and engagement rates of these pupils and report these by exception, i.e. where there is a clear trend of weak or very strong attendance or where it has improved or declined notably. They should consider any notable variations between the attendance of these pupils and other pupils. They should focus particularly on the rate of persistent absence and consider how many e-fsm pupils/those from low-income households have absence rates well above other pupils in the school. Inspectors should consider how exclusion rates of those who are e-fsm and other groups of pupils in the school. When considering the attendance rates of pupils impacted adversely by poverty, it is important to consider factors such as the impact of events in the family home and the level of support the school provides to help pupils and their families overcome any barriers to good attendance.

When evaluating participation and enjoyment in learning, inspectors should use evidence from lessons, scrutiny of work, discussion with pupils who are e-fsm/those from low-income households and consider their engagement in lunchtime, after-school clubs and activities that enhance their learning and experience. They should pay particular attention to pupils' aspirations.

With pupils who have emotional or behavioural difficulties, it is more important to consider their improved attendance over time. In many cases, these pupils will have a poor attendance history and may have attended several different schools.

- How do attendance rates of pupils from that are eligible for free school meals and those low-income households compare to those of other pupils?
- Do pupils with poor attendance improve their attendance over time?
- Do pupils have opportunities to develop resilience in their learning?
- Do all pupils show interest in their work and engage well in tasks?
- Are all pupils making progress in taking responsibility for their actions and their work?
- How well do the school's intervention strategies, the mentoring or coaching of individuals or specific support for their well-being help these pupils to make progress in their learning?
- How well does the school support pupils that are eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households to engage positively with the school and benefit from everything that it can offer?
- How well does the school support pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income backgrounds that also have an additional learning need?
- How well does the school support pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income backgrounds who are more able?
- How well does the school provides access to resources that may not be available at home for these pupils, for example, access to a computer or a quiet place to work?
- How well does the school work with the families of e-fsm pupils and those from low-income households to help them support their children well and raise any issues that may affect their child's learning and well-being? (In particular, inspectors should consider the impact of role of the school's family engagement officer or similar in this work.)
- How well does the school work with the community and local organisations to support the needs and aspirations of these pupils?
- How well does the school works in partnership with specialist services and agencies to support the needs of pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households?
- How well does the school support pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income backgrounds to make well-informed choices such as when older pupils consider courses in key stage 4, the sixth form and for further or higher education?
- What is the quality of impartial guidance and advice for these pupils and how does this help them to achieve their goals and aspirations relating to future career choices?
- How well does the school attend to developing the confidence, motivation and self-esteem of pupils eligible for free school meals?

Reporting and supporting evidence examples:

'Staff have positive relationships with families and work with them sensitively to provide support to overcome any obstacles to regular attendance. However, despite improvement in the overall attendance rates of pupils, the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals remains a cause for concern.'

'The school ensures that all pupils including those from low-income households are

given worthwhile opportunities to become members of a range of pupil voice committees and make decisions on how to improve the school.'

'A particularly strong aspect of the school's work is its nurture provision. Skilled staff monitor the well-being of pupils and provide high quality support when needed. Carefully planned sessions meet the individual needs of vulnerable pupils including those who are eligible for free school meals effectively. As a result, pupils deepen their understanding of emotions, form friendships and build their self-esteem successfully through this support.'

Inspection area 3: Leading and improving

How effectively do leaders:

- **develop a culture, inclusive ethos and strategic direction that support the progress and well-being of all learners**
- **identify and address areas for improvement, management and governance**
- **ensure that professional learning supports school improvement and equips all staff to carry out their roles effectively**
- **manage the school's/PRU's resources**

Leaders should pay due regard to the need to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment. Under inspection area 3, inspectors should consider the follwing:

- How well do school leaders establish a clear purpose and vision to address the impact of poverty on educational attainment?
- How well do leaders establish a strong culture of high expectations for all and a shared understanding across the school that poverty will not be an excuse for low attainment?
- How effective is the strategic and operational approach to this challenge?
- How determinedly do leaders pursue the best interests of pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households?
- How well do all staff understand and demonstrate their responsibility to tackle the impact of poverty on educational attainment?
- How rigorously do leaders manage the performance of staff to support and improve their work to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment, particularly in relation to the quality of teaching?
- How effectively do leaders ensure that all decision making about strategic and operational matters considers the impact that any decision will have on pupils eligible for free school meals or from low-income households, for example on pupil groupings, use of funding, deployment of staff?
- How well do leaders use community knowledge to identify potential issues that could affect pupils impacted by poverty, for example, availability of healthcare?
- How effectively do leaders strategically plan provision to support pupils from low-income households or who are eligible for free school meals paying due regard to the national mission?

- How effectively do leaders establish strong partnerships with families, the community and a range of agencies and services to support pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households to help them meet their potential and achieve their aspirations?
- How well do leaders collaborate with partners to support seamless transitions from early education through to college and career?
- How well do leaders manage financial resources, including grant funding, to ensure that they are used effectively to address the impact of poverty on attainment?
- How well do leaders ensure access to professional learning and research about how best to reduce the impact of poverty on attainment and evaluates the impact of this learning?
- How well do leaders systematically evaluate strategies, initiatives and core provision to consider their effectiveness and impact on the educational attainment of pupils eligible for free-school meals and those from low-income households?

Reporting and supporting evidence examples:

'Leaders have a comprehensive understanding of the context of the wider school community and the challenges many of their pupils and families face. This, combined with the school's holistic approach to ensuring pupils' well-being and support for families, the provision of a rich and engaging curriculum, and high-quality teaching, pupils eligible for free school meals or low-income families make strong progress.'

'The headteacher has been highly successful in developing a clear, shared strategic vision for the school which focuses sharply on ensuring excellent teaching and learning experiences as an entitlement for all pupils.

'School leaders and staff have a strong understanding of the needs of the pupils and the local community. They work passionately and with commitment to meet these needs paying due regard to managing the impact of poverty on educational attainment. As a result, the school is a vibrant learning community where all pupils including those eligible for free school meals feel a secure sense of belonging and develop the confidence and skills to engage positively with learning experiences.'

'Leaders have a clear understanding of pupils' barriers to learning including the impact of poverty on attainment. Effective use is made of The Pupil Development Grant (PDG) and the Early Years PDG to provide worthwhile teaching interventions in literacy and numeracy. Leaders carefully track the impact of actions and adjust provision carefully to meet pupil needs. This ensures that most pupils from low-income households make strong progress in their learning.'

'The school manages and deploys its resources to tackle the impact of poverty well, including the use of the pupil development grant. Leaders monitor planned spending against criteria of the grant well. This has enabled the school to provide appropriate literacy, numeracy and well-being support for its vulnerable learners, including those who are eligible for free school meals. Governors pay attention to closing the poverty gap and note the positive impact that the school pop-up shop has on supporting families in financial need'.

Statutory compliance

The reporting inspector will identify whether the school complies with statutory requirements with regard to leaders' management of school finances including use of the pupil development grant. Depending on inspection findings the following statements will be included:

'Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, **including use of the pupil development grant. '   or,**

'Leaders and governors do not manage the school's finances appropriately, **including use of the pupil development grant.'**

Where the school's use of the PDG is less effective, inspectors will comment on this in the body of the report and might choose to give a recommendation related to this.

Inspecting schools with a community school approach

The development of a community school approach is an integral part of the national strategy to tackle the impact of poverty on educational attainment. (See Community Focused Schools [HTML] | GOV.WALES)

Inspectors might comment on aspects of this approach as part of the supporting evidence for inspection areas 2 and 3 in particular.

Reporting and supporting evidence examples:

'The school adopts a Community Focused Schools approach to supporting its pupils, parents and wider community. This supports the fully inclusive ethos of the school effectively.'

Schools will be at different stages in developing their approach.

The following points are intended to support inspectors to evaluate the actions schools might be taking to develop their approach:

- How well leaders establish a culture that places the community at the heart of school life?
- How well the school works with strategic partners and collaborates with a range of agencies to reduce the impact of poverty on the educational attainment and well-being of pupils eligible for free school meals?
- How effectively leaders involve the school and the wider community, including parents in the ongoing review of vision, aims and values particularly related to the approach the school takes to addressing disadvantage?
- How effectively leaders strategically plan, including through use of grant funds, to address inequity such as use of the PDG, EYPDG

- How well the school develops the knowledge and expertise of staff on strategies to meet the needs of pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households and their families?
- How well the school uses specialist family engagement staff such as family engagement officers and those with a role in supporting community engagement and meeting the needs of pupils eligible for free school meals or from low-income families?
- How well the school collaborates with a range of professionals to provide early intervention for children from low-income families for example through close links with Flying Start, Health visitors and non-maintained settings?
- How effectively the school deploys a range of professionals to support pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households, for example, youth workers, careers advisers or professionals from third sector organisations.
- How effectively leaders expand on the use of the school's own assets working in collaboration with the community and promoting adult and community learning?
- How effectively school leaders in the most disadvantaged communities partner with other agencies to provide integrated support services which target health and well-being, physical, cognitive and social needs ?
- How well leaders evaluate their Community Focused Schools approach and the impact it has on addressing disadvantage?

3. Estyn joint inspection arrangements (for regulated non-maintained settings eligible for funding for part-time education)

Estyn carries out joint inspections with Care Inspectorate Wales of non-maintained settings that provide funded part-time education for 3–4-year-olds. The guidance for these inspections can be found here:

[Guidance handbook for inspecting care and education in regulated non school settings eligible for funding for part-time education (gov.wales)](#)

This guidance outlines a joint inspection framework covering 6 themes as follows:

1. Well-being
2. Learning
3. Care and development
4. Teaching and assessment
5. Environment
6. Leadership and management

Inspectors will explore the setting's work to mitigate the impact of poverty on children's well-being and learning through theme 6, leadership and management.

Inspectors should consider:

1. Does the setting have an inclusive vision with high expectations of all children irrespective of their background?
2. How knowledgeable are setting leads about the needs of its children and families?
3. How has the setting used grant funding such as The Early Years Pupil Development Grant to support children from low-income households? (EYPDG)
4. How do leaders ensure that practitioners have an understanding of child development including their emotional and social wellbeing, their physical and learning development needs?
5. How do leaders monitor and evaluate the impact of grant spend?

Reporting and supporting evidence examples:

'Leaders use the Early Years Pupil Development Grant (EYPDG) effectively to ensure that practitioners have a strong understanding of child development. This has enabled staff to identify the needs of all pupils including those from low-income households successfully.'

'Leaders have high expectations of practitioners and children. They lead by example and take an active part in all aspects of setting life. This means that, in addition to providing inspirational leadership, they are constantly monitoring the quality of the provision and ensuring that everyone and everything meets their high standards. Leaders consider well the impact of poverty on children's well-being and have introduced systems to mitigate against this, for example sharing resources and introducing a uniform bank.'

'Leaders use grant funding such as the EYPDG well. For example, funding has been used to improve access to outdoor learning opportunities. This ensures that children, including those from low-income households, develop their physical skills appropriately.

'Good use is made of grant funding including the EYPDG to support and improve children's learning and well-being. This includes the installation of a good range of play equipment to develop children's creativity and imagination and the provision of appropriate training ensuring that practitioners understand how to adapt provision effectively.

Appendix 1: Sample of questions to ask about the approach to reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment

The list of questions is not exhaustive and are just examples that could be used in discussions with pupils, staff and leaders to gather information about how the school reduces the impact of poverty on educational attainment. We don't expect inspectors to ask all of these questions and should refer to individual sector toolkits for a steer on the questions to focus on.

Inspection area 1- Teaching and learning

Examples of questions for use with leaders about pupil progress:

1   How does the progress of pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households compare with other pupils? Do they make as much progress as they should? Are their progress rates accelerated?

Examples of questions for use with staff about pupil progress:

2   What progress do pupils who are eligible for free school meals or from low-income households make? How does this compare with other pupils?

Examples of questions for use with leaders and staff about teaching and the curriculum

1.   How have you organised the curriculum and pupil grouping/setting arrangements so that pupils disadvantaged by poverty have equal access? / Have you considered how organisation of the curriculum and pupil grouping/setting might have an impact on pupils disadvantaged by poverty? How do you allocate teaching staff to groups or sets?
2.   How do you adapt provision for the youngest pupils (age 3-4) from low-income households?
3.   How do all staff ensure that teaching and provision supports all e-fsm pupils to be aspirational for the future, including those with ALN and the more able?
4.   What interventions do you use to improve e-fsm pupils' literacy and numeracy skills? What's the impact of this?
5.   How do you put additional provision in place to enrich the curriculum without placing financial demands on low-income families?
6.   How do you ensure that pupils from low-income families are not disadvantaged by access to digital resources?
7.   How do you ensure equal access to enrichment activities such as the arts, musical activities and sport?
8.   How do you adapt your planning to ensure that e-fsm pupils have the best chance of succeeding? How do you inspire these pupils and raise their aspirations?
9.   How do you assess the progress that this group of pupils make?

10. What professional learning have you had to support you in understanding poverty? As a result of this, have you adapted your teaching or provision for this group of pupils?

Inspection area 2 – Care, support and well-being

Examples of questions for use with leaders:

1. How do attendance levels for pupils from low-income households compare to other pupils? What are exclusion rates like for these pupils? What do you to support these pupils to improve their attendance?
2. Do many pupils who are eligible for free school meals or from low-income households take on leadership roles or positions of responsibility?
3. What type of additional support do you provide for pupils from low-income families?
4. How do you assess, determine and prioritise pupil need?
5. Does the school currently have an FEO role or similar i.e. a staff role with specific responsibility for family and community engagement? Can you outline what they do and the impact of their role?

Examples of questions for use with staff:

1. Do pupils eligible for free school meals contribute well to lessons and discussions? How does their contribution compare to other pupils?
2. Do you have any concerns about the well-being of pupils eligible for free school meals?
3. How do you ensure that pupils from low-income families have a voice in school?
4. What opportunities do you provide for pupils from low-income families to develop their own understanding of career pathways? What impact does this have on the development of their aspirations?
5. How do you ensure equal access to digital technology intervention support? For example, do all pupils have equal access to computers or digital devices when doing home learning?

Examples of questions for use with staff who support family and community engagement

Use the same high-level questions as highlighted above. During the course of the inspection, you may wish to consider some of the aspects mentioned below.

1. Explain your work with low-income families. How do you build relationships with low-income families?
2. What other agencies support you in this work?
3. What interventions do you provide for pupils and families who have low income?
4. Are you aware of the PDG Access Grant? How have you made families aware of this? How else do you support pupils and families?
5. How do you keep costs down for pupils from low-income families, for example, when organising school trips?
6. Do you run any training or support for families on financial awareness?
7. How do you support families who are struggling financially?

8. How do you support low-income families to help their children with their education at home?
9. Do you run any specific initiatives to support pupils and their families who have low incomes, such as parenting programmes?
10. In what ways do you currently consult with all parents to ensure their voice is heard, for example, a parent forum / body or similar?
11. Does the school currently open its facilities for any community use? If so, what are these?
12. Does your school currently offer any services and activities to children and families beyond the school day?

Inspection area 3 – Leading and improving

Examples of questions for use with staff:

1. What's the school's vision and strategy for overcoming pupil's barriers to learning such as the impact of poverty? How were you involved in the development of this?

2. What does the vision look like in practice in your classroom, particularly for those pupils from low-income households?

3. How do you support leaders to monitor and evaluate the impact of strategies to support pupil progress?

Examples of questions for use with leaders:

1. What's the vision for raising attainment and reducing barriers to learning for pupils who are eligible for free school meals or from low-income families?
2. How do you identify pupils and families from low-income households? (e.g. grant funding, local knowledge)
3. What do you know about the local community? What sources do you use to help you? (e.g. Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation)
4. What's the school's overall strategy for removing barriers to learning such as the impact of poverty on attainment?
5. What teaching strategies do you promote to ensure that all pupils including those from low-income households are supported effectively?
6. How do you monitor the progress of these pupils?
7. What professional learning do you provide to ensure that all pupils including those from low-income households receive high-quality teaching?
8. What professional learning is in place to enable staff to understand the most effective strategies for raising attainment of all pupils, regardless of their background?
9. How do you make use of the Pupil Development Grant and Early Years Pupil Development Grant? How do you monitor and track the impact of this and explain how you evaluate its impact? How is this reported to Governors and the community? (Ask to see PDG statement on the school's tackling poverty strategy and ask where this is published)

10. Do you have a family engagement officer? Can you talk about their role in supporting families from low-income households and how this is helping and supporting their children's engagement and progress in learning in school.
11. How do you work with the LA and external agencies to support these pupils and families? How is this work coordinated? Does the school partner with other schools or organisations to tackle the impact of poverty? Explain the nature and impact of this work.
12. How do you evaluate the work of the school aimed at addressing the impact of poverty on pupil attainment and well-being?
13. Do you have a named governor for tackling poverty? How are they involved in the work of the school? (It would be useful to include this governor in a meeting.)
14. As governors what can you tell me about the school's work on tackling the impact of poverty on pupil attainment and well-being? What is the impact of this work?
15. As governors, are you aware of the school's use of any grants or additional funding to support the school's work on tackling poverty?

Annex 2: Eligibility for free school meals and defining low-income households

Free school meals are available to eligible children who attend a maintained school in Wales. **Universal primary free school meals** has been rolled out across all primary schools in Wales,

Free School Meal (FSM)

Eligibility for a free school meal (FSM) depends on household income and whether parents receive certain benefits. Children whose parents receive the following support payments may be eligible to receive free school meals:

- Income Support
- Income Based Jobseekers Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Child Tax Credit, provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and their annual income, as assessed by HM Revenue and Customs, does not exceed £16,190
- Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Working Tax Credit 'run-on' – the payment someone may receive for a further four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- From 1st April 2019, Universal Credit, provided the household has an annualised net earned income of no more than £7,400 (as assessed by earnings from up to three of their most recent assessment periods)

Beyond primary school, free schools meals are awarded where the parent or pupil meets the eligibility criteria and a request for free school meals has been made by, or on behalf of, the parent.

Young people who receive Income Related Employment and Support Allowance, Universal Credit, Income Support or Income Based Job Seekers Allowance in their own right may also be eligible to receive FSM.

The child will also need to be attending school full time, which can include full days at nursery and sixth form students.

Information on eligibility for free school meals for 2024/25 can be found here.

Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM)

The Welsh Government has committed to extending the availability of free school meals, beginning with the youngest learners. From September 2024, every primary school pupil is able to have a free school meal.

The Universal Primary Free School Meal (UPFSM) offer does not depend on household income or whether parents receive any benefits, every child in these year groups is eligible to take up the offer. The meal is only available during the school term and not during the school holidays.

Schools are funded separately for pupils eligible for free school meals that also come from low-income households.

Low-income households

A person is considered to be in poverty if their [household income](#) falls below 60% of the UK median (which is the middle value in a list of numbers that have been arranged from smallest to largest).

The median weekly household income in the UK is £476 after housing costs, and 60% of this is around £286.

We define a person to be living in relative income poverty if they live in a household where the total household income from all sources is less than 60% of the average UK household income (as given by the median). The figures below relate to relative poverty in Wales after housing costs such as mortgage interest payments/rent, water rates and structural house insurance were paid.

https://gov.wales/measures-poverty-april-2020-march-2021-html

Annex 3: Local government education services (LGES)

The Welsh Government PDG guidance document (updated in April 2024) outlines how PDG funding is distributed and the expectations of the role of local authorities.

The guidance states that PDG funding is paid directly to local authorities and distributed to schools and settings. The expectation is that local authorities work closely with regional consortia and partnerships (where relevant) as well as schools and settings to ensure the grant is used for its intended purposes. Activity and impact of spend is reported to the Welsh Government by PDG Advisors (and PDG-LAC Regional Coordinators where relevant) and local authorities. The Welsh Government PDG guidance also outlines the responsibilities of local authorities in relation to PDG funding as follows:

PDG

Local authorities are required to passport PDG funding in full to schools and settings as set out in the **school and settings level allocations**. They are also required to distribute in full any additional funding. This will smooth the impact of reductions to PDG funding following PLASC 2023 data revalidation, in line with local needs. The guidance states that flexibility is important to enable the local authority to respond to needs in their area but it is expected that the PDG allocation is devolved in full to schools and settings.

Local authorities must also:

- ensure that schools and settings are informed of this information, PDG guidance and relevant grant terms and conditions for the PDG
- support schools and settings to engage with PDG Advisors in planning and evaluating PDG spend as set out in the PDG guidance – this includes ensuring that they publish their PDG strategy statement on their website
- continue to fund, work with, and enable the effective delivery of activity of, the PDG Advisor, and PDG-LAC Regional Coordinator (where relevant), to report to Welsh Government on schools, settings, local authority and regional activity and impact of PDG spend

Local authorities are required to set out plans and report back on PDG funding via PDG Advisors and in regular returns. These should include which schools and settings have been targeted or have benefitted from additional funds, and the reasoning behind this. This helps to ensure that PDG funding is spent on initiatives or support backed up by evidence for children and young people from low-income households and those who are care-experienced.

Early Years PDG

Local authorities are responsible for distributing the PDG funding for early years to schools and settings. The guidance outlines how local authorities will work with both maintained and non-maintained Early Childhood Education and Carer providers to ensure they are making effective use of the PDG in supporting the eight elements, whilst strengthening links with the non-maintained settings (in line with the terms and conditions outlined above).

PDG-LAC

From 2024 to 2025, local authorities receive the PDG funding given to schools and settings for children and young people who are care-experienced. Local authorities should consider how they will use the grant effectively to plan, set targets for and support learners who looked after and care-experienced.

Based on local needs, local authorities can choose to:

- pass all the funding on to schools, settings and clusters
- keep some of the funding for activities that will benefit a group of, or all of, the authority's children and young people who are care-experienced
- keep parts of the funding to employ PDG-LAC local authority or Regional Coordinators (where regional posts exist, there is an expectation these continue to be funded for a transitional period)

In 2024-2025 the guidance states that PDG funding can continue to be used to meet the costs associated with strategic coordination and oversight of the grant. These costs can be related to the local authority or the existing regional arrangements.

EOTAS PDG

Local authorities are responsible for allocating PDG funding for EOTAS. The guidance on PDG outlines how local authorities will work with PRUs and local authorities to ensure they are making effective use of the EOTAS element of the grant.

Suggested lines of inquiry/local inspection questions for inspections of LGES

- What is your strategy for addressing the impact of poverty and how is this shared with schools? To what extent is this understood by all schools?
- How early do you identify which children and families are in low-income households? How well do you work with the local health board to identify these families?
- How do you evaluate the attainment, progress and well-being of pupils eligible for free school meals/pupils from low-income households in this authority?
- What arrangements are in place to monitor the performance, progress and well-being of e-FSM pupils/pupils in low-income households? What evidence do you use

to inform your view? For example, do you track these young people into post 16 education and training?

- What can you tell us about the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals/pupils from low-income households within the authority at each stage of learning? What are the trends over time? And for different groups of learners from low-income households such as those with ALN, the more able, minority ethnic groups and others?
- How well do pupils from low-income households educated other than at school make progress in their learning?
- How do you use this information to plan strategically to improve provision and outcomes for these pupils?
- How effective is this strategy and what impact is it having on outcomes for pupils?
- Is there a designated person with responsibility for monitoring the performance of this group or is this responsibility with the regional consortium? If with the regional consortium, how does the authority know that its pupils' needs are met?
- How successful has this role been in improving the progress, well-being and success of e-fsm pupils/pupils from low-income households? Can you give specific examples?
- How are you working across directorates to join up the support for these pupils? What examples are there of successful cross directorate or service working?
- How do you ensure that all schools get the support and challenge they need in relation to improving provision and outcomes for these pupils?
- What professional support/development do school leaders, teachers and support staff receive? How effective is this in improving outcomes?
- How do you monitor the use of the EYPDG/ PDG?

    i) How effectively do schools in your authority use grant funding for disadvantaged pupils and how do you know? Overall, what are the strengths and weaknesses? What approaches are having the most impact on learning?
    ii) Are there arrangements to monitor the quality and effectiveness of plans to spend the PDG? Do you monitor any evaluations of previous grant spending?
    iii) What happens if a school does not use the funding appropriately?
    iv) What happens if there is particularly good practice?
    v) Can you identify any particularly good practice in the use of grant funding?
    vi) Are there any arrangements to support schools with smaller amounts of grant funding to work collaboratively to maximise the impact of funding?

- Are there any examples of innovative practice to support harder to reach learners such as EOTAS pupils? Any examples of innovative partnerships between school and youth/ voluntary organisations?
- We are aware that the strategic planning responsibility for the LAC PDG currently lies with the regional consortium. However, the authority remains the corporate parent. With this in mind, how do you monitor the planning and provision through the PDG for LAC in your care?
- How effectively do you use the LAC PDG and how do you know?

Possible specifics:

- What are the rates of persistent absence amongst e-fsm pupils/pupils from low-income families? Does the authority monitor these? What are you doing to support/ challenge schools to reduce rates of persistent absence amongst e-fsm pupils?
- What arrangements are in place to improve family and community engagement in your schools?
- What early intervention strategies do you have to support this group of pupils and families?
- What is your on-entry information telling you about e-fsm pupils when they begin school? What use are you making of this information?
- Are you involved in any research partnerships, for example with a university? What has happened as a result?
- What is the local authority strategy to support the development of Community Focused Schools? How has this influence the LA 21st Century Schools Programme?
- What is the approach to using WG funding to support the development of Family Engagement Officers and Community Managers?

Annex 4: Grant funding

The Welsh Government has produced a range of guidance on the education of disadvantaged children. This includes guidance on the PDG and on the Pupil Development Access Grant which can be used for school uniform, equipment, sports kit and activities. This guidance is available at https://gov.wales/education-of-disadvantaged-children.

The Welsh Government PDG guidance document (updated in April 2024) outlines what Welsh Government spending criteria include.

PDG

The guidance states that PDG should focus on pupils between 5 and 15 and be used to focus on:

- **high-quality learning and teaching**
- **Community Focused Schools**
- early childhood play, learning and care
- high aspirations supported by strong relationships
- health and wellbeing
- leadership
- Curriculum for Wales and qualifications
- supporting post-16 progression

Spend should focus particularly on supporting high quality teaching and learning and community focused schools. Schools can use the grant funding to support professional learning for teachers and to tailor learning and teaching interventions.

EYPDG

Similarly, the guidance notes that EYPDG should be used to support pupils aged 3-4 years. Funding should focus on children's:

- emotional and social wellbeing - valuing quality interactions and relationships
- physical development - focussing on a strong understanding of child development
- learning and development needs - placing high priority on speech, language and communication development

The guidance sets out that the EYPDG should focus on early identification and effective approaches aligned with foundation learning pedagogy that support child development. This includes high quality nursery education with enabling adults that have a thorough understanding of child development. The guidance highlights the importance of the successful pedagogy described in the curriculum design guidance 'Enabling learning'

Enabling learning sets out the key features of successful pedagogy particularly for younger learners. Effective, child-centred pedagogy, which is responsive, dynamic and embedded in strong relationships, is essential. This is particularly the case with a child's language development. Children need time to develop good speaking and listening skills. High-quality experiences are essential to supporting children to develop social and communication skills. Environments should be communication rich. Play is fundamental to physical, intellectual and creative development. Through play-based learning, a child's experiences can be focused on creative and problem-solving activities. Children should be active participants in their learning.

PDG-LAC

This supports the educational attainment of:

- looked after children (LAC or CLA)
- children who have been adopted
- children who are subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

The expectation remains that PDG-LAC spend should focus on

- benefitting looked after and care-experienced children, contributing to the development of inclusive schools and settings committed to equity and wellbeing,
- funding to clusters of schools and settings to build capacity and to provide bespoke interventions which should meet individual learners' needs and be based on robust evidence of positive impact for their learning outcomes,
- and a person-centred approach which captures the views of the learner to be used to inform school, setting and cluster plans and the LA/regional strategy

Publication of PDG

- All schools must publish online their PDG allocation and an outline of their latest plans to use the funding to improve outcomes for deprived children. Where a school does not have a dedicated website, it must make the information available via the local authority or consortium website or as part of school information published in hard copy.
- Where a school has fewer than five e-FSM learners it should publish a statement about the use and impact of the grant but should not disclose the number of e-FSM learners or the amount of PDG allocation.
- Schools do not have to produce a separate plan for the PDG. It may be produced as part of a wider school improvement plan.

School self-evaluation should be used to both identify appropriate priorities for the use of PDG and to capture its impact. The guide to the PDG document recommends that schools take an evidenced-informed approach to this work. See: Guide to the Pupil Development Grant [HTML] | GOV.WALES

Current individual school allocations for PDG, EYPDG and local authority EOTAS grants can be found here: Pupil Development Grant and Early Years Pupil Development Grant: allocations | GOV.WALES

Annex 5: The impact of grant funding

Inspectors should consider the extent to which schools/settings use their grant funding appropriately and the effectiveness of self-evaluation of grant use.

Key Question: How well do leaders use and evaluate the impact of grant funding on the progress of pupils eligible for free school meals or from low-income households?

Key considerations:

- Do leaders have a clear understanding of the needs of their pupils and their barriers to learning? Is this information shared effectively with relevant staff?
- Is grant funding used to support a whole school approach to effective teaching and learning?
- Is grant funding used to support a community school approach?
- Does the school/setting/local authority have a clear strategy for tackling the impact of poverty on attainment? How does it target use of PDG/ EYPDG/PDG-LAC to support it in this aim? Does the school publish its strategy on its website?
- How effectively do leaders monitor the impact of PDG spend? Is this an implicit part of the whole school self-evaluation process?
- How reflective are leaders? Do they adapt and refine approaches based on self-evaluation?
- What impact does grant spend have on improving the progress of efsm pupils or pupils from low-income households?

What inspectors can expect to see in schools or settings that use PDG funding well:

- An inclusive vision focused on ensuring equality for all
- A whole-school approach to tackling poverty with a clear focus on developing high quality teaching and learning and a Community Focused School approach.
- A leader with responsibility for PDG-eligible learners (PDG cannot be used to fund this role)
- Effective engagement and collaboration with the local authority PDG advisor and/or LA/regional consortia and other settings/organisations.
- Successful use of self-evaluation to evaluate the impact of grant spend and to determine new needs/approaches.
- Publication of annual PDG school strategy statements on school website on the use of PDG and its impact

The Welsh Government PDG guidance contains a number of anonymous case studies that Estyn have published related to effective use of PDG through teaching and learning and a community school approach. In addition, Estyn's website has a number of useful examples. These include:

[Poverty Proofing the School Day | Estyn (gov.wales)](#)[Greenhill school's approach to ensuring equity | Estyn (gov.wales)](#)

[Tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment, including the development of the community school | Estyn (gov.wales)](#)

[The impact of the whole school approach to remove barriers to learning. | Estyn (gov.wales)](#)

[The leadership of effective school support for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils | Estyn (gov.wales)](#)

[Reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment | Estyn (gov.wales)](#)

[Supporting vulnerable young people through integrated service working | Estyn (gov.wales)](#)

[How Llanishen High School works to ensure equitable access to learning experiences for all pupils | Estyn (gov.wales)](#)

[Supporting families through the cost of living crisis | Estyn (gov.wales)](#)

This list is not exhaustive. Published inspection reports highlight numerous examples of good practice across sectors. See our website for details: [Latest inspection reports | Estyn (gov.wales)](#)

Annex 6: Inclusive language

Inspectors strive to ensure that the language used in the report is inclusive. Estyn's writing guide provides useful information in its appendix on use of inclusive language. See Annex 6 of Estyn writing guide: English language (gov.wales)

The following is also helpful:

Yes	No	Reason
Pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households	Low-income backgrounds or low-income families.	The term low-income households is used widely to describe poverty and is based on the UK definition of poverty. Households are considered to be below the UK poverty line/relative low income if their income is 60% below the median household income after housing costs. Use the word household rather than backgrounds or families which can be more subjective.
Children/learners/pupils living in poverty and the impact this has on their educational attainment	Deprived backgrounds. Living in deprivation.	Refers clearly to the impact of poverty directly and makes the link with educational attainment
Children/learners/pupils experiencing poverty and the impact this has on their educational attainment	Deprived backgrounds.	As above but refers to the broader experience of poverty – an alternative to the above.
Socio-economically disadvantaged contexts.	Disadvantaged pupils. Pupils disadvantaged by poverty. Deprived pupils Pupils living in deprivation.	Avoid attributing negative values to pupils and their lives.
The impact of poverty	The impact of deprivation	Avoid negative language associated with poverty.

Annex 7: Useful sources of information

Estyn publications related to poverty and social disadvantage can be found at
https://www.estyn.gov.wales/

Other useful documents:

Guide to the Pupil Development Grant [HTML] | GOV.WALES

Pupil Development Grant (PDG): overview [HTML] | GOV.WALES (April, 2024)

Community Focused Schools [HTML] | GOV.WALES

Children in Wales | Price of Pupil Poverty

UK Poverty 2022: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK | JRF

WIMD - Home Page (gov.wales)

Children in Wales | End Child Poverty - Child Poverty Statistics

A snapshot of poverty in Summer 2022 - Bevan Foundation

Oral Statement: High Standards and Aspirations for All (22 March 2022) | GOV.WALES

Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant: Final report (gov.wales)

Evaluation of the implementation of the Pupil Development Grant for looked after children | GOV.WALES

Evaluation of the implementation of the Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant - NFER

Estyn writing guide: English language (gov.wales)

Supplementary guidance: inspecting the approaches taken by schools and local government education services to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment and well-being

Annex 8: Inspection summary

Inspection area	What to consider	Possible sources of evidence
Inspection area 1 (IA1)	• What progress do pupils from low-income households make over time? • Does the school prioritise high quality teaching and learning for all pupils? Is there an inclusive approach? • How is teaching and the curriculum ensuring that this group of pupils makes progress? • Do staff provide feedback in ways that are meaningful to pupils? Does this feedback meet their individual needs?	• Sample pupils work across the curriculum to see if they are making progress in line with all pupils • Learning walks (joint) • Lesson observations • Discussion with pupils • Samples of pupil tracking/monitoring data • Meetings with Poverty lead/other relevant leaders • Scrutiny of data (where relevant) • Meeting with staff
Inspection area 2 (IA2)	• How do attendance rates of pupils from low-income households compare to those of other pupils? How does the school support pupils and families to achieve better attendance? • How well do the school's intervention strategies, or specific support for their well-being help these pupils to make progress? • How effectively does the school establish strong partnerships with families, the community and a range of agencies and services to support pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households to help them meet their potential and achieve their aspirations?	• Scrutiny of data (attendance and well-being) • Meeting with attendance and well-being leads – this might include a Family Engagement Officer. • Discussion with pupils • Parent questionnaire and parent meeting • Learning walk (how do pupils enter school?) • Meeting with staff
Inspection area 3 (IA3)	• How well do school leaders establish a clear purpose and vision to address the impact of poverty on educational attainment? • How effectively do leaders strategically plan provision to support pupils from low-income households or who are eligible for free school meals paying due regard to the national mission? • How well do leaders manage financial resources, including grant funding, to ensure that they are used effectively to address the impact of poverty on attainment? • How well do leaders ensure access to professional learning and research about how best to reduce the impact of poverty on attainment and evaluates the impact of this learning? • How well do leaders systematically evaluate strategies, initiatives and core provision to consider their effectiveness and impact on the educational attainment of pupils eligible for free-school meals and those from low-income households?	• Meetings with staff • Scrutiny of documentation such as PDG plans, SIP and evaluations • Meeting with key leaders including the headteacher • Governor questionnaire • Meeting with governors • Meeting with parents • Scrutiny of data (where relevant) • Scrutiny of PL logs • Scrutiny of PDG and EYPDG documents