



Estyn

Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

The impact of RAISE

Evaluation of the impact of RAISE funding on schools' effectiveness in
tackling the link between socio-economic disadvantage and underachievement.

An interim report after the first 18 months

July 2008



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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 (LAs);
- ▲ primary schools;
- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ adult community-based learning;
- ▲ youth support services;
- ▲ youth and community work training;
- ▲ LAs;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ work-based learning;
- ▲ careers companies;
- ▲ offender learning; and
- ▲ the education, guidance and training elements of the Department for Work and Pensions funded training programmes.

Estyn also:

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

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.uk

© Crown Copyright 2008: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the document/publication specified.

Contents	Page
Introduction	1
Welsh Assembly Government policies	1
Pupils entitled to free school meals	1
The RAISE initiative	2
The purpose of the report	5
Main findings	6
Recommendations	8
The impact on standards	9
The impact on achievement and progress	9
The impact on attitude, behaviour and skills	10
The overall performance of free school meal pupils	11
GCSE performance of free-school-meal pupils in local authorities	13
The implementation of RAISE in schools	15
The planning and management of the RAISE initiative	15
The focus on socio-economic disadvantage	15
Monitoring and evaluating	16
Sustaining the benefits	17
The involvement of parents and governors	18
National, regional and local authority issues	19
Sharing good practice	19
Co-ordination at local and regional level	19
The allocation of RAISE funding to schools	20

Introduction

Welsh Assembly Government policies

- 1 In February 2005, the Welsh Assembly Government produced a strategic policy to tackle child poverty, called 'A fair future for our children'. This committed the government to reduce child poverty in Wales by half by 2010 and to eradicate it entirely by 2020.
- 2 In 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government published an implementation plan (Child Poverty Implementation Plan: Phase 1 Proposals) which included a general proposal to steer initiatives and spending proposals towards the eradication of child poverty so as to benefit the poorest children and their families.
- 3 Many educational policies and initiatives have derived from this overall drive to tackle socio-economic disadvantage, including the RAISE initiative. These include:
 - 'Flying Start', aimed at 0-3 year olds and their families;
 - the introduction of the foundation phase for 3-7 year olds;
 - the development of integrated children's services in local authorities;
 - the provision of educational maintenance allowances to 16-19 year olds from lower income homes;
 - Learning Pathways 14-19; and
 - the establishment of national targets for child poverty, including reducing the proportion of 16-18 year olds who are not in employment, education or training.

Pupils entitled to free school meals

- 4 The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is often used as a proxy for relative deprivation because pupils can receive free school meals if their families get a designated state benefit, such as income support or job seeker's allowance, as a result of relatively low income.
- 5 Pupils entitled to free school meals form a relatively large proportion of the school population. In 2006/2007, 17.4% of pupils of statutory school age were entitled to free school meals (67,559 pupils). Of these, 55% were in primary schools, 43% in secondary schools and 2% in special schools.¹
- 6 Entitlement to free school meals does not mean that a child is destined to underachieve. Children from relatively poor backgrounds can and do achieve at the highest level and schools serving poor neighborhoods can also outperform schools with more affluent catchment areas.

¹'Schools in Wales: General Statistics', Statistical Directorate, The Welsh Assembly Government 2007

- 7 However, in broad terms, there is a strong statistical link between poverty and low educational attainment. Overall, pupils from poorer families or who are in care are far more likely to attain at lower levels than other pupils. As a result, it is often harder for these pupils to gain high skilled employment or to engage in further or higher education later on.
- 8 End Child Poverty Network Cymru and Children in Wales have noted that children from unskilled backgrounds are five times less likely to go on to further and higher education than those from more affluent backgrounds.² They set out the following factors, which they believe hinder effective learning in poorer homes:³
- comparative lack of access to resources, activities and opportunities outside school;
 - living in overcrowded and inadequate housing;
 - limited parental involvement in education;
 - the expectations and influences of the peer group;
 - the impact of stigma, bullying and not feeling respected;
 - emotional and behavioural difficulties;
 - higher levels of additional learning needs;
 - disengagement from secondary schooling; and
 - increased likelihood of teenage pregnancy.
- 9 Overall, the underachievement of children from poorer families is a significant factor in limiting both the achievement and life chances of these young people and also the success of Wales as a learning country.

The RAISE initiative

- 10 In May 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government announced plans to release funding to target disadvantaged pupils in order to raise their level of performance. This grant is known by the acronym RAISE which stands for 'Raise Attainment and Individual Standards in Education'. The total grant to schools from the RAISE initiative in 2006-2007 was £14.6m and in 2007-2008 it was £14.4m. There was also £1m allocated for looked after children.
- 11 The Welsh Assembly Government based the selection of schools to receive RAISE funding on data for free school meal entitlement. The funding was not directed at all schools in Wales where there were pupils entitled to free school meals. Schools with 20% or more pupils entitled to free school meals would receive funding as long as they had 50 or more pupils of statutory school age.

² 'Tackling Child Poverty in Wales: A good practice guide for schools', End Child Poverty Cymru and Children in Wales, 2006

³ See above and 'Combating child poverty in Wales', Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2007

- 12 In the second year of the initiative, 467 primary schools, 63 secondary schools and 32 special schools were eligible for RAISE funding. This represents about 30% of primary schools, 28% of secondary schools and 75% of special schools.
- 13 Schools receive varying amounts of funding depending on the number of learners entitled to free school meals. The funding in primary schools ranges from £11,000 to £30,000 per school, in special schools from £16,000 to £22,000 per school, and in secondary schools from £47,000 to £220,000 per school.
- 14 Each local authority in Wales has schools that receive RAISE funding. The total amount of RAISE funding to schools within each local authority ranges from about £113k (Monmouthshire) to about £2.2m (Cardiff). Four local authorities (Gwynedd, Monmouthshire, Powys and Vale of Glamorgan) have no secondary schools that receive funding because none meets the criteria for receiving RAISE funding.
- 15 In May 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government sent a letter to all local authorities giving details of the schools selected and the funding individual schools would receive. It asked schools to prepare two year plans for the use of the grant and to agree the proposed use of the funding with their local authority. There was also a list of eligible uses of the funding and a set of criteria against which the Welsh Assembly Government would evaluate each bid.
- 16 For the second year of the initiative (2007-2008), schools were notified in the summer term 2007 of the RAISE funding they would receive. Except where there were school closures or amalgamations, the funding went to the same schools as in 2006-2007, though the amounts increased in those cases where there had been an increase in the number of learners entitled to free school meals. Those schools involved in the first year whose proportion of free school meal pupils fell below 20% at the start of the second year continued to receive funding to fulfil their two year plans.
- 17 Overall, schools have developed a wide range and large number of activities through the RAISE funding. Each school responded to the opportunity of RAISE funding in individual ways and many developed a range of diverse activities to suit their own context and the needs of their pupils.
- 18 For example, the following three schools received about £18k each last year. In one, there are three projects aimed at improving the skills of pupils as they start school. The school also uses the funding to employ an extra teacher so it can offer nursery places alongside a parent support programme on learning through play. In another, the funding helps to fund a member of staff to work with identified pupils in small groups on a daily basis to boost their literacy skills. In another, the school has appointed a teaching assistant to undertake 'first day' tracking of absence and monitoring of lateness in order to improve overall attendance and punctuality.
- 19 In most secondary schools, the funding supports a large number and wide range of activities within each school. For example, in one secondary school that received about £130k last year there are 10 projects. These include: raising boys' achievements through mentoring by older pupils; funding a learning support assistant to help pupils with moderate learning difficulties; increasing the provision of an alternative curriculum for older pupils; appointing an attendance officer and installing

an electronic attendance system; training a pupil support worker in behaviour support methods; providing study skills seminars for under achieving pupils in Year 11; and establishing an ASDAN course for the less able. With the previous year's funding, the school established a centre for developing pupils' engineering skills.

- 20 By far the most common use of RAISE funding is to buy in additional learning support, often with the aim of improving pupils' literacy skills. In many cases, this leads to more small group work in classes. Many schools focus on strengthening pupils' personal, social and study skills, improving their behaviour and attitude to learning, and raising their aspirations. Many schools use the funding to develop and train staff, especially learning support assistants. Many buy additional educational resources to support the activities.
- 21 In reviewing the RAISE-funded work of its schools, one local authority included the following selection of activities as examples of effective practice. The list gives some impression of the diverse range of work undertaken across a local authority:
- developing new pupil tracking systems to identify underperformance of pupils in literacy and numeracy;
 - appointing a play therapist to develop pupils' social and emotional skills;
 - engaging more with parents to raise their awareness of the importance of attendance;
 - setting up activities to encourage problem-solving and the application of new skills in mathematics;
 - setting up outreach programmes to develop the speaking and listening skills of pupils;
 - establishing critical thinking sessions with pupils;
 - developing pupils' emotional literacy in key stage 2;
 - supporting intensive intervention by staff over relatively short periods to boost pupils' literacy and numeracy skills;
 - using 'learning coaches' to help pupils 'at the margins' in key stage 3;
 - funding additional teaching support to improve pupils' mathematical skills in key stages 3 and 4;
 - using a teaching assistant to support the transition of pupils from primary to secondary school; and
 - developing a nurture group in Year 9 to improve pupils' social skills, self-confidence and their ability to benefit from group work.

The purpose of the report

- 22 The Welsh Assembly Government asked Estyn to review the impact of the RAISE funding with a particular focus on how effective it was in helping schools and local authorities to tackle the underachievement of pupils with socio-economic disadvantage.
- 23 Estyn produced a preliminary report on its findings in June 2007.⁴ The report focused mainly on the roles of schools, local authorities and the Welsh Assembly Government in planning and implementing the RAISE work in its initial phase.
- 24 This report moves on from the earlier report and focuses on the impact and effectiveness of the RAISE work after the first 18 months of funding to schools.
- 25 The report is based on findings from the visits of HM Inspectors to a sample of schools and local authorities to investigate and evaluate the RAISE work. HM Inspectors visited 19 primary schools, 10 secondary schools, six specials schools and five local authorities.

⁴ 'The impact of RAISE funding: an interim report', Estyn, 2007 (available at www.estyn.gov.uk)

Main findings

Impact on standards

- 26 Learners taking part in RAISE activities are making good progress in two thirds of the schools visited in the survey. Many learners are enjoying and benefiting from RAISE-funded activities and resources. In many schools, a few pupils make very strong progress as a result of their involvement in RAISE work. Pupils are making limited progress in about a third of schools visited.
- 27 Learners often benefit from working alongside a supportive adult in small group activities, where the focus is on meeting their individual needs in a nurturing, protective environment. Older learners in secondary and special schools have benefited a lot from involvement in more vocational opportunities and out of school activities.
- 28 Many learners have also improved their behaviour and attitude to learning as a result of their involvement in RAISE work. This often has a favourable impact on whole-class learning for all pupils. Many schools do not measure these gains as much as they could.
- 29 Nationally, there is still a large gap between the performance of learners entitled to free school meals and other learners, and this gap widens as learners progress through the school system. Free school meal learners as a group are far more likely to have poor levels of attainment than other pupils.
- 30 Over the last three years, the performance of free school meal learners in key stages 1-3 has stalled with little change from year to year. The overall picture at the end of key stage 4 is slightly more positive. More free school meal learners are now gaining at least one GCSE compared to three years ago and more are achieving a higher point's score at GCSE.
- 31 However, there is no evidence of an overall step-change in performance by free-school-meal learners in gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C and in gaining the core subject indicator. In about a third of local authorities, the rate of improvement has stalled or reversed over the last three years. Overall, there is far too much variation in the rate of improvement of free school meal learners at GCSE between local authorities across Wales.
- 32 The RAISE initiative has not run for long enough to judge whether it will have a long-term impact on these performance indicators.

The implementation of RAISE in schools

- 33 In many schools, RAISE work is not focused directly enough on tackling socio-economic disadvantage. Schools appear more comfortable addressing learners' low educational performance than their socio-economic disadvantage. They often do not measure and analyse the performance of free school meal learners enough to know how well they are supporting this group of learners and

helping them to achieve. Few are using the funding to boost the performance of free school meal learners who are already making moderate or good progress, especially girls.

- 34 Most schools are using their RAISE funds appropriately, but a few are spending the grant on staffing or learning resources that have little direct benefit to RAISE learners. Many schools have not planned systematically to sustain the benefits of RAISE activities when the grant funding ends.

National, regional and local authority issues

- 35 Too many schools involved in RAISE are working in isolation from each other. The proposed website to facilitate sharing of ideas and best practice is well behind schedule.
- 36 Most local authorities visited have supported the RAISE work in schools well. However, in one local authority visited, the work is fragmented and there is little co-ordination of activities.
- 37 Overall, the co-ordination between local authorities and regional consortia varies considerably across Wales. In most areas, the arrangements work well and there is little duplication of effort or roles. However, in a few areas, the co-ordination is weaker overall.
- 38 The Welsh Assembly Government has not set a national target to improve the educational performance of free school meal learners. Local authorities and schools are not setting themselves targets in relation to the performance of free school meal learners.
- 39 The allocation of funds to schools using the criteria of 20% of pupils eligible for free school meals and more than 50 pupils of statutory school age is simple and straightforward to administer. It means that the schools with relatively large proportions of free school meal learners can potentially benefit from the funding, and schools receive an amount of funding that can support one or more useful projects. However, this policy also means that about a third of free school meal learners in primary schools and just over half in secondary schools do not benefit from RAISE funding. Small schools (with less than 50 pupils) with large proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals also receive no funding.

Recommendations

40 In order to improve the benefits of the RAISE initiative:

schools should:

- R1 measure and analyse the performance of free-school-meal learners more systematically in terms of attainment, behaviour and attitudes to learning;
- R2 set targets for reporting on trends in the performance of free school meal learners to their governing bodies and to their local authority;
- R3 make sure they negotiate and discuss with learners the individual targets they set them;
- R4 make sure they use RAISE funds in ways that have a direct benefit to free-school-meal learners and they can report on the specific impact they have made;
- R5 plan more systematically to sustain the benefits of RAISE activities beyond the period of the RAISE grant; and
- R6 make sure they are maximising the achievement of free school meal learners who are already making moderate or good progress, especially girls;

the local authority should:

- R7 challenge schools to report more specific and measurable benefits of the RAISE work;
- R8 monitor more closely the RAISE work in schools where the local authority knows that leadership and management are weak;
- R9 measure and analyse the performance of free school meal learners more systematically and use the outcomes as one measure of their success in tackling the link between poverty and low attainment;
- R10 disseminate information and best practice in relation to RAISE more effectively within and between local authorities; and
- R11 forge more systematic links between the RAISE work and the work of other local authority services aimed at tackling child poverty; and

the Welsh Assembly Government should:

- R12 set a national target to improve the overall performance of free school meal learners and bring it closer to that of the rest of the cohort; and
- R13 establish the delayed website to support and to showcase RAISE activities as soon as possible.

The impact on standards

The impact on achievement and progress

- 41 In all schools, it is difficult for teachers, managers, local authorities and inspectors to assess the direct impact of RAISE funded activities on the achievement and attainment of the targeted pupils. The very diversity of the RAISE funded activities poses significant challenges in gaining a full overview of the RAISE funded work and judging its overall effectiveness. Pupils involved in the RAISE initiative are often participating in a range of strategies and interventions, each of which may contribute to improved progress and attainment. It is often difficult to isolate one activity or intervention as the main cause of any improvement in pupil performance. It is also difficult to assess the impact of many RAISE activities in terms of improved standards because many have not run for long enough to see clear trends in outcomes.
- 42 However, during visits to schools, inspectors looked at the available evidence provided by the schools, considered the work of pupils and spoke to them about their work in order to come to a view about the impact of the RAISE activities.
- 43 Overall, inspectors judge the progress of RAISE pupils to be at least good in just over two-thirds of the schools visited. For most, this means that the learners involved are progressing at a rate that is slightly better than expected given their age and previous learning. Many learners started from a long way behind their peers and had a lot of ground to make up. Their progress has been good even though at the end of the project learners may still be below average or behind their chronological age in terms of numeracy and literacy tests or other measures. Many learners are making reasonable progress towards meeting the individual targets set for them at the start of RAISE projects. However, just under a third of pupils are making limited progress despite their involvement in RAISE work.
- 44 In many schools visited, engagement in RAISE activities has led to significant improvements in the work of individual learners and their attitude to learning. It is far less common to see similar improvements across entire groups of RAISE pupils, but whole group improvements do occur in a few schools.
- 45 Most of the individual pupils who benefit strongly from the initiatives are those who are clearly able to progress, but whose performance in the past has been held back by lack of confidence, poor organisational skills or the inability to engage fully in whole-class activities. In primary and secondary schools, such pupils have often experienced behavioural problems in class which has exacerbated their difficulty in trying to learn. These learners benefit most from more focused and individual attention from adults. For older pupils in secondary and special schools, learners often benefit most from new ways of learning, either through vocational opportunities or out of school activities.
- 46 Overall, boys outnumber girls by a considerable margin in RAISE projects in primary, secondary and special schools. However, overall in Wales, there are about the same number of girls as boys who are entitled to free school meals.

- 47 The presence of far more boys than girls in RAISE groups reflects the way that schools have focused on underachievement rather than socio-economic disadvantage. As girls perform better overall as a group than boys, schools see them as less educationally disadvantaged and therefore less in need of RAISE related intervention than boys. However, funding is based on free school meals as a proxy for socio-economic deprivation, and many girls who are entitled to free school meals have not benefited from the RAISE funded work as much as they should.
- 48 Most schools have directed RAISE funded activities at those pupils who have relatively low achievement and who are falling behind their peers in terms of their progress, in other words those suffering from educational disadvantage. Relatively few activities funded through RAISE have targeted free school meal pupils, especially girls, who are achieving moderately well, or even at a level above their peers, in order to boost their achievement even further. The impact of the RAISE funding on this group of free-school-meal pupils appears limited overall.

The impact on attitude, behaviour and skills

- 49 Many learners develop an improved attitude towards learning and to school life in general as a result of involvement in RAISE projects. In most cases, learners attend school more regularly and there is often a significant improvement in their behaviour.
- 50 In many schools, evidence for improvements in learners' attitude and behaviour remains fairly anecdotal and schools often do not analyse all relevant data systematically enough to gauge the success of initiatives. A few schools have a secure grasp of the impact on learners because they have gathered simple, but relevant information and analysed it carefully. For example, one secondary school noted a 50% reduction in the number of pupils being excluded from school after the RAISE initiatives began, and another measured a significant increase in the involvement of ethnic minority parents, and the number of learners using the learning resource centre, as a result of specific RAISE initiatives.
- 51 For most pupils, the greatest benefit of the project work stems from more regular and closer engagement with an adult, usually a classroom assistant, but sometimes another teacher. Occasionally, the benefit stems from linking with an older pupil who acts a mentor. One primary school evaluation report commented: 'what has become demonstrably clear...is that young children who are struggling with school, for whatever reason, will make progress if they are taught in smaller groups by a teacher assistant who has the time to prioritise pupils' needs'.
- 52 In many cases, RAISE learners benefit from opportunities to develop their skills and to rehearse their learning in a small group with a supportive adult. This appears to increase their confidence as they can make mistakes and try out their skills in speaking, reading or writing in an environment that is more sheltered and protective than in a whole class. The impact of learning mentors was also strong in many secondary schools where learners were helped to develop personal learning targets and to organise and manage their work better.

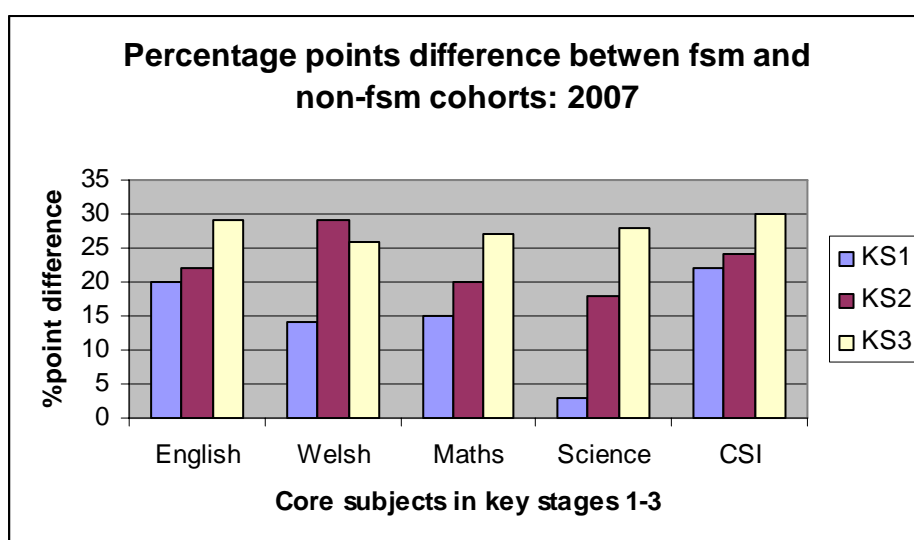
- 53 Research on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Trust⁵ suggests that learners from more affluent backgrounds often have far easier access to opportunities to develop 'private confidence' through supportive environments within the home for private learning, such as places for quiet reading and easy access to books and adults who take an active interest in their children's learning. The small group work alongside a learning support assistant in many RAISE projects appears to create a school-based environment that helps to compensate for what may be lacking at home for many children.
- 54 Many primary schools focus on developing the early language and social skills of their youngest learners in an attempt to remedy the lack of support for this early development of skills in the learners' homes. This attention on the development of early learning and social skills works well in many primary schools and learners improve well from the starting point of their baseline profile on entry. Many improve their ability to benefit from whole class and small group work. This often has a positive knock-on impact on the class as a whole.
- 55 Teaching assistants work best when they act as learning coaches and support the learners not only in doing the work in front of them but also in organising their work more generally and helping them to get through the school day in a purposeful and managed way. In the best lessons, the teacher adapts the work to meet the needs of individual RAISE learners, liaises well with the teaching assistant in doing this, and provides the environment in the classroom where the teaching assistant can take full account of pupils' personal and social needs and circumstances.
- 56 In many secondary and special schools visited, learners who have begun to get disillusioned with learning and school life in general are benefiting from working in non-school settings, for example in off-site vocational provision, and with non-school personnel, such as youth workers. In most cases, in secondary and special schools, the RAISE funded arrangements for providing curricular alternatives are working well with most pupils enjoying and benefiting from vocational and out-of-school learning opportunities.
- 57 In a few cases, mainly in secondary schools, learners do not feel fully engaged by the RAISE activities. Often this relates to weaknesses in the project activity itself, especially where the teaching or management of the activity have shortcomings. A few learners talk about the imposition of targets by teachers and co-ordinators in RAISE projects rather than any negotiation or discussion about them. This lack of autonomy and involvement limits the quality of outcomes in a few RAISE groups in secondary schools.

The overall performance of free-school-meal pupils

- 58 Overall, in all key stages, the cohort of pupils entitled to free school meals performs significantly worse than the cohort of pupils not eligible for free school meals against a range of performance indicators.

⁵ 'Children researching links between poverty and literacy' by Mary Kellett and Aqsa Dar, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, September 2007

- 59 In 2007, 63% of free school meal pupils in their last year of primary school (Year 6) attained the expected level in the core subject indicator.⁶ This compares to 85% of non-free school meal pupils.
- 60 In 2007, 27% of free-school-meals pupils in their last year of compulsory education (Year 11) gained 5 or more GCSEs at grade A*-C. This compares to 56% of non-free school meal pupils. Only 16% of the free school meal cohort gained the core subject indicator at the end of Year 11 compared to 41% of those not entitled to free school meals.⁷
- 61 The difference in performance increases as pupils progress through primary and secondary school. The following graph shows the percentage points difference between the performance of the free-school-meal pupils (fsm) and the rest of their peers (non-fsm). It shows that the gap between the free school meal pupils and the rest generally grows wider in nearly all subjects as pupils move through the school system. By the end of key stage 3, there is a gap of 25-30 percentage points between the two groups in the proportion gaining the expected level in the core subjects of the National Curriculum.

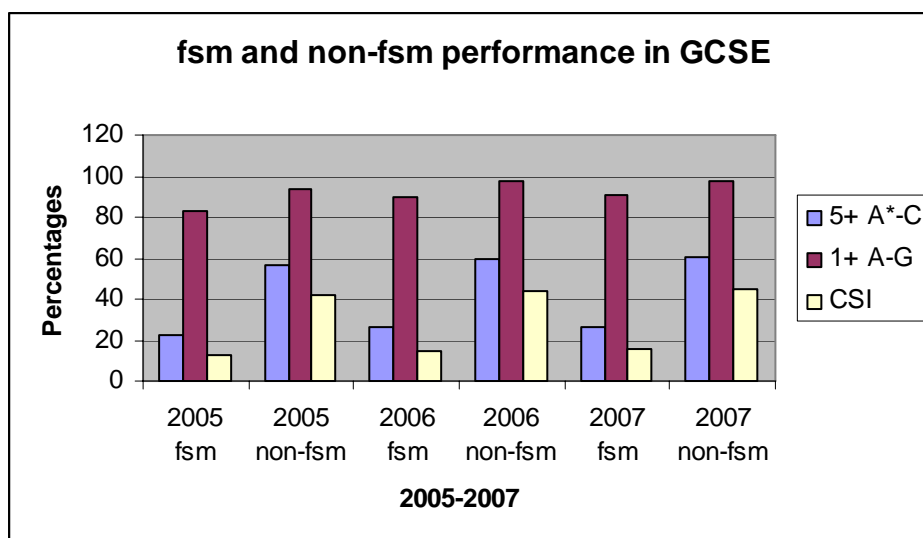


- 62 Over the last three years, the performance of all pupils in relation to the main performance indicators in key stages 1 to 3 has stalled. The performance of free school meal pupils has only gone up or down by small amounts in relation to the main performance indicators.
- 63 Overall, there is no indication as yet of any major step-change in performance in key stages 1 to 3 as a result of initiatives aimed at improving the performance of free school meal learners. In fact, the overall picture in 2007 looks static or represents a small decline in performance for pupils when compared to outcomes in 2005.

⁶ The core subject indicator relates to performance in English or Welsh, Mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum.

⁷ 'Academic achievement and entitlement to free school meals, 2007', Statistical Directorate, Welsh Assembly Government 2008

- 64 The outcomes at GCSE over the last three years show a more positive picture in terms of improvement, though it is difficult to identify any specific link between this improvement and the RAISE initiative. The following graph shows that, overall, there has been a modest increase in the performance of both the free school meal (fsm) and non free school meal (non-fsm) cohorts across the main performance indicators (ie five or more GCSEs at A*-C grades, one or more GCSE at A*-G and the achievement of the core subject indicator).



- 65 The modest improvements in gaining five or more 'good' GCSEs or the core subject indicator often represent a larger proportional increase for free school meal pupils than for those not entitled to free school meals. While the proportion of free school meal pupils gaining five 'good' GCSEs in 2007 is low at 26.7%, this actually represents a 17% improvement compared to 2005 (22.9%). By comparison, the non free school meal group improved only by about 7% over the same period. This suggests that the changes that have taken place in schools over the last three years have had a small but positive effect overall on the attainment of free school meal pupils. It also tends to reflect the lower starting point and the larger scope for improvement of the free-school-meal cohort overall.
- 66 After 18 months, the RAISE initiative has not run for long enough to discern major changes in the performance of free school meal learners against the main performance measures. Outcomes for 2008 and 2009 will provide evidence of long-term trends and help to judge whether the initiative has had an impact on the attainment levels of free school meal learners. However, as many of the benefits relate to improved behavior and attitude, they may not feed through directly to improved performance against national benchmarks.

GCSE performance of free-school-meal pupils in local authorities

- 67 While there is no evidence of a major step change in the performance of free school meal pupils at GCSE overall, there is evidence of more significant improvement in the attainment of free school meal pupils in specific local authorities.

- 68 The largest increase in the attainment of five or more 'good' GCSEs by free school meal pupils over the last three years has occurred in Neath Port Talbot and Swansea. The proportion has increased from about 24% to 38% in Neath Port Talbot and from about 22% to 32% in Swansea. By contrast, the proportion did not improve at all or declined in eight local authorities over the same period. Of these, six had one or more secondary schools involved in the RAISE initiative (Newport, Torfaen, Bridgend, Carmarthenshire, Wrexham and Denbighshire).
- 69 Free-school-meal pupils in many local authorities struggle as a group to achieve the core subject indicator in Year 11 (three 'good' GCSEs in English or Welsh, mathematics and science). Only one local authority (Neath Port Talbot) manages to get more than 25% of its free-school-meal pupils to gain the GCSE core subject indicator. By contrast, the figure is less than 20% in 15 local authorities and less than 10% in two (Newport and Denbighshire) in 2007.
- 70 Overall, the most significant improvement has occurred in the attainment of at least one GCSE at grades A*-G.
- 71 In 2005, about 1,000 free school meal pupils left school without one or more GCSEs. Over the last three years, this has reduced by about a half to around 480 pupils. During the same period, the proportion of free school meal pupils gaining at least one GCSE increased in every local authority in Wales. In 2005, only two local authorities managed to get 90% or more of their free school meal pupils to attain at least one GCSE. By 2007, this had increased to 13.
- 72 Overall, there is far too much variation in the rate of improvement of free school meal pupils at GCSE between local authorities in Wales.

The implementation of RAISE in schools

The planning and management of the RAISE initiative

- 73 The drive and commitment of headteachers and RAISE co-ordinators are often key elements in the success of RAISE activities in schools. The projects work best where headteachers and co-ordinators have a 'hands-on' approach, drive the projects forward, monitor their outcomes regularly and celebrate their success.
- 74 Overall, the projects have been driven on and managed well in most schools. Inspectors judge the drive, commitment and vision of managers to be good in all secondary schools and most primary and special schools in the survey. There are shortcomings in a few primary and special schools, where headteachers take little interest in the project work and it has been allowed to drift for too long.
- 75 In most cases, schools set up RAISE projects in areas where they were already planning development, but where the lack of funds had made progress slow or where initiatives had failed to get off the ground. For most, this led to a close correspondence between their planned development and the use of the RAISE funding. In a few schools, the funding led to rushed implementation of project work and some of these projects are failing to make the progress expected because of the lack of adequate planning at the start.

The focus on socio-economic disadvantage

- 76 Staff generally have a sound understanding in broad terms of the link between poverty and limited educational progress and attainment. Many have detailed knowledge about their local communities. On occasions, staff may have taught the parents of the children they are now teaching and have a long-standing appreciation of their family background and current circumstances.
- 77 However, many schools have struggled to untangle educational disadvantage from socio-economic disadvantage in their thinking and approach to RAISE funded initiatives. Most schools have mainly targeted pupils with educational disadvantages, that is, those falling behind and struggling to engage fully with education.
- 78 As a result, many schools have established projects or groups that benefit a larger group of learners than just those entitled to free school meals. Usually, these projects and groups include many free school meal pupils, but, in a few cases, the groups do not contain many or all learners eligible for free school meals.
- 79 In many cases, the lack of a firm definition of categories of approved spending from the Welsh Assembly Government has led some schools to use RAISE funding for a wide range of purposes which are not always closely allied to the aims of the RAISE initiative. In a few cases in the schools visited, a lack of clarity about the purpose of RAISE funding has led schools to purchase a wide range of items on the basis that they were of potential benefit to the teaching and learning of disadvantaged learners.

- 80 Many schools, especially those secondary schools in a relatively weak financial position, have used the funding to provide resources that are common in other schools, for example using classroom support assistants to support weak readers or providing interactive whiteboards. In one secondary school, a fund of £50k (about a quarter of the school's total RAISE funding) was allocated for departments to bid for resources. This led to departments bidding for specialist equipment, for example computers for media studies lessons, lighting for drama classes and software licences for art and graphics work. The bids used RAISE criteria, but the link to the achievement of RAISE objectives was weak.

Monitoring and evaluating

- 81 All schools know the performance of certain distinct groups of learners, especially the performance of boys compared to girls. Many also know a good deal about the performance of their ethnic minority learners. However, very few routinely and systematically consider statistics about the attainment of their free school meal pupils. Most do not compare the attainment of free school meal pupils to the average attainment of free school meal pupils in their local authority or in Wales, or whether their performance is improving or deteriorating from year to year. The same is often true at local authority level.
- 82 The Welsh Assembly Government has not set a national target to improve the educational performance of free school meal learners. There is scope also for local authorities and schools to do more to establish clear targets for free school meal learners, to monitor them and to report on them more systematically.
- 83 Even so, many schools have established baselines, for example standardised reading test scores, at the start of RAISE initiatives, and have looked at the progress of learners along the way to gauge the progress they are making. Many schools have set learners in the initiatives individual targets to achieve within a set period. A few have used profiles of learners at the start of projects to gauge more systematically their progress in developing improved personal skills and attitudes. However, overall, schools do not gather as much information as they could on the development of these 'softer' skills, for example by using learner focus groups, and questionnaires that allow staff to monitor and measure improvements in behaviour, attitude and interpersonal skills.
- 84 Most schools have evaluated their RAISE work in line with requirements. Many schools have completed evaluations based on a template devised by the Welsh Assembly Government, though a few have used their own self-evaluation form. The quality of monitoring and evaluation of projects varies a great deal between schools. In about half the schools visited, the evaluations are detailed, thorough, and evaluative. They use data well, where possible, and often involve case studies of individuals or groups and raise issues and problems that need to be addressed. However, in the rest, the quality of evaluation and monitoring has important shortcomings. In these cases, evaluations are often too descriptive, too focused on processes and anecdotal in nature. In a few cases, individual projects run for long periods with only anecdotal accounts about their success and with little detailed evaluation.

- 85 There is little LEA wide evaluation of the impact of RAISE projects based on common baseline measures. The variety of RAISE activities, approaches and baselines means that it is often difficult to establish the impact of RAISE work in robust, analytical terms across a local education authority. This makes it difficult for local authorities and schools to decide what works well and what does not, what may be worthy of wider emulation by others, and what is worth sustaining after the funding stops.
- 86 At secondary level and for older learners in special schools, the impact of RAISE funded activities may require longer to feed through into measurable improvements in attainment. Many secondary schools have focused at least some RAISE activities on improving the work of learners who are currently predicted to gain D or E grades at GCSE. The aim is to help them to attain at least a grade C. However, the benefits of RAISE activities on developing 'softer' skills, for example in terms of improved social skills and personal confidence, may take a long time to feed through into improved learning, often because of ingrained notions of failure and lack of confidence amongst this older age group. In a few cases, schools have focused too much on what the school needs from RAISE to meet its targets than on what the learners require to meet their needs.

Sustaining the benefits

- 87 Overall, planning for the sustainability of the project work once the RAISE funding ends is weak. Half the primary and special schools and about a third of the secondary schools have not planned their exit strategies or ways to embed successful features of the RAISE work within their mainstream budgets at the end of RAISE funding. Even in these schools, most headteachers and co-ordinators can identify those elements of the projects that they believe have worked well and that they wish to sustain, but they cannot see a viable way forward for RAISE related work without additional funding. This is especially the case where funding has been used to expand staffing capacity to support small-group work by lowering the pupil-teacher ratio.
- 88 Many schools wish to continue to fund the additional staff they have put in place with the RAISE money. For many, the impact of teaching assistants has been very positive in terms of improved attainment, behaviour and attitude of learners. They have allowed schools to give more focused and more personal support to the RAISE learners. Non-RAISE learners have also benefited as a result, either directly through contact with the teaching assistant or through the better behaviour of RAISE learners who previously disrupted whole-class learning.
- 89 Overall, the more money a school receives, the more it can do with the money. When the funding is sufficient to fund an extra member of staff, such as a learning support assistant, then the return to the school appears to increase significantly as this often leads to improved pupil-teacher ratios, closer management of RAISE pupils' learning and extra direct engagement with learners at the point of their learning.
- 90 A few schools are using the funding to support more institutional change, for example revamping the vocational curriculum or creating a theme based curriculum in Year 7

to aid transition and to revitalise the curriculum. In cases like these, the lessons learned are having more lasting effects. Many schools have used RAISE funding for the professional development of teaching staff and this allows the benefits of RAISE to become more embedded in schools and for the impact to last beyond the funding period.

- 91 Many schools have purchased additional equipment and resources with their RAISE funds and these will remain, even though they may depreciate over time. Where schools have appointed extra staff, some schools will retain them by reallocating funds from the school's general budget. Secondary schools generally have more flexibility in doing this than primary schools. In many primary schools, where head teachers have used the funding to appoint new teaching assistants or to extend the hours of existing staff, the arrangements may not continue beyond the period of funding. Many heads in primary and secondary schools see many of the RAISE projects as 'one-offs', sustained by and dependent upon the separate funding stream. They do not work to mainstream the benefits and methodologies employed.
- 92 A few schools in all sectors fail to seek value for money in the project work, for example, primary schools do not look at the most cost-effective ways to fund support staff; they do not ensure that staff sent on RAISE-funded training deliver benefits back to the school; or they use the funding to protect staff from redundancy in an area of falling rolls by redeploying them to RAISE work.

The involvement of parents and governors

- 93 Schools generally communicate well with parents and keep them informed about their child's involvement in special projects and groups. However, very few schools mention to parents that their child is involved in a project aimed at learners entitled to free school meals. Schools generally feel that this would create problems of stigmatisation, which they wish to avoid.
- 94 Generally, schools are not involving parents directly in RAISE work. In the sample we inspected, few have used the RAISE funding to engage with parents or to develop projects that aim to help parents to support the learning of their children at home, for example by making them fully aware of what they can do to help their child learn better.
- 95 Most schools understand the importance of learners' home circumstances for the progress and life-chances of learners, but few have used the funding to try to influence the family and home environment. Most have not used the RAISE funding to engage actively with other local authority services, agencies and professionals to influence and improve the home environment. This reflects the messages in Estyn's recent report on the provision of community focused services and facilities by schools.⁸

⁸ 'Many local authority departments have a relatively narrow view of multi-agency working. Most commonly, they do not have effective partnership arrangements with community health and social services.' 'Provision of community-focused services and facilities by schools', Estyn, 2007, p4 available at www.estyn.gov.uk

National, regional and local authority issues

Sharing good practice

- 96 The Welsh Assembly Government has funded conferences to support the RAISE work. These have allowed staff involved in RAISE to share good practice, to network with each other and to hear a wide range of speakers on a range of relevant topics. The conferences for local authority staff and for regional co-ordinators have proved particularly beneficial in raising issues and clarifying messages about the RAISE work.
- 97 Overall, however, too many staff in schools are working in isolation in relation to RAISE. Many staff directly involved in RAISE work in their own school are unable to refer to practice elsewhere, either within their own local area or more widely, and many have not attended a RAISE conference.
- 98 The Welsh Assembly Government planned to establish a website, through the National Grid for Learning, to give schools information on the range of RAISE projects throughout Wales, to showcase individual RAISE projects and to help schools to link with each other. Progress in establishing the website has been slow and its implementation is behind schedule. This has limited the ability of schools to link with each other, particularly beyond their own local authority, or to share good practice and relevant information about their RAISE activities.

Co-ordination at local and regional level

- 99 Most local authorities visited show real enthusiasm and drive in taking the RAISE work forward. Some have established RAISE co-ordinators with the time and resources to make an impact on developing the work in schools. This is more the case in authorities where the RAISE work involves many schools, less so in authorities where only a few schools are involved. Many local authorities have established conferences to discuss RAISE and to showcase examples of good practice. A few have RAISE case studies on their websites. Many are providing good support for the training of learning support assistants.
- 100 Local authorities are dovetailing RAISE to other projects within local authorities, such as the development of nurture groups, 14-19 learning area networks and so on. In many cases, schools through their RAISE work are building upon initiatives already established within local authorities, for example Catch-Up literacy work and Spotlight work in mathematics. However, the work is more fragmented in one local authority visited where there is little overall co-ordination of activities aimed at tackling the link between poverty and educational disadvantage.
- 101 Local education authorities have monitored the RAISE projects reasonably well with school link advisers making regular, often termly, visits to schools where they have considered the RAISE work as part of the agenda for discussion with the headteacher. However, the diversity of the projects and the variety of baselines used by schools have made it hard for local authorities to gauge the overall progress made by learners. They have relied instead on regular reports from individual schools on the progress made by learners. In many cases, these include data on progression, but too many remain anecdotal and lack rigorous analysis.

- 102 The local authorities have made an important contribution to the initial planning for RAISE at school-level in many settings. More recently, they are beginning to urge schools to be more radical in their approaches and to adapt existing plans, if required, or to establish new ones, if necessary.
- 103 Most local authorities challenge schools in relation to their RAISE work. However, most help schools to sustain the project work rather than focusing actively on rooting out weak or ineffective activity. A few schools with inefficient and ineffective projects have received no challenge from the local authority or regional co-ordinator. Capacity and staffing issues in a few local authorities limit their impact on monitoring and driving on the RAISE work in schools. In a few primary schools, leadership and management are weak, but the schools have had no direct contact with the local authority's RAISE co-ordinator or the regional co-ordinator.
- 104 Generally, there is not enough collaboration between RAISE schools across local authorities. Some secondary schools are too isolated in developing the RAISE work, especially where they are the only secondary school in a local authority (this occurs in six local authorities). Local authorities have generally not identified enough the opportunities for linking RAISE with other children's services, projects and plans (for example Cymorth).
- 105 The consortium arrangements in a few local authorities are generally positive and have improved efficiency and consistency within the RAISE project work as a whole. However, whereas the consortium has the capacity and receives funding from WAG to support the RAISE schools, the local education authorities are expected to provide the direct in-school support. In a few cases, this has placed a great deal of strain on local authority resources where advisory/school improvement staff have had to take on new RAISE related work on top of their existing responsibilities.
- 106 Overall, the co-ordination between local authorities and regional consortia varies considerably across Wales. In most areas, the arrangements work well and there is little duplication of effort or roles. However, in a few areas, the co-ordination is weaker overall and there is too much overlap and duplication.

The allocation of RAISE funding to schools

- 107 The Welsh Assembly Government allocated RAISE funding to schools where the proportion of free school meal learners was more than 20% and where there were more than 50 pupils of statutory school age on roll. Overall, the 20% trigger is a relatively simple and straightforward mechanism for allocating funding to schools for RAISE purposes. It means the funding gets to the schools with relatively large proportions of free-school-meal pupils and individual schools receive an amount of funding that can support one or more useful initiatives.
- 108 However, the mechanism has a number of negative effects. It excludes large numbers of free-school-meal pupils from the potential benefits of RAISE funded activities. In primary schools, about a third of free-school-meal pupils are in schools that do not receive RAISE funding and in secondary schools it is just over half the free-school-meal pupils. This means that about 13,000 free-school-meal pupils in primary schools and about 15,750 in secondary schools do not benefit directly from the RAISE funding.

109 There are also about 75 primary schools with fewer than 50 pupils that have 20% or more pupils entitled to free school meals. Thirty-two of these have more than 30% and 12 more than 50% of their pupils entitled to free school meals. In one primary school, 25 of the 36 pupils of statutory school age are entitled to free school meals (69%) and in another 17 of the 25 pupils are entitled to free school meals (68%), but neither school receives any RAISE funding.