

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATION ADVISERS

**ATTAINMENT SCOTLAND FUND – INTERIM EVALUATION RESULTS AND
NEXT STEPS**

PAPER BY THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Introduction

1. The Scottish Attainment Challenge was launched by the First Minister in February 2015. Backed by a commitment of £750 million over the course of this parliament it prioritises improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing of those children adversely affected by the poverty related attainment gap in Scotland's primary and secondary schools.

2. The evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund aims to provide learning about the overall implementation of the Fund and the extent to which its aims have been met. It draws on multiple sources of data.

3. Evidence on levels of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, and the poverty related attainment gap have been taken from the measures set out in the [2018 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan](#).

4. The interim evaluation report focuses on the first two years of the Attainment Scotland Fund (2015/16 and 2016/17). This provided targeted resources to nine local authorities in Scotland with the highest concentrations of deprivation, and to an additional 74 schools outwith these nine authorities with the highest concentrations of pupils living in SIMD 1 and 2. It does not include any evaluation of Pupil Equity Funding, which commenced in Year 3. The next evaluation report will be published in 2020.

Findings – interim evaluation report

5. The evaluation uncovered a number of highlights, including:

- The Fund appeared to be a driver for change and cohesion. Stakeholders reported an increased understanding and shared commitment to address the impact of poverty on attainment.
- Widespread agreement that the Fund had made a positive impact on professional development and leadership opportunities; use of data to drive improvements; and the level of collaboration both within schools and with external partners.

- Confidence in the sustainability of improvements beyond the funding increased over time. This was linked to a belief that the Fund had created significant change in practice and culture.
- Some evidence at local level of the positive impact of interventions initiated as a result of the Fund, particularly for literacy and health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Support provided to schools by Attainment Advisors and local authorities appeared pivotal to the success of the Fund.

6. Some challenges were also identified, including:

- A perception in some areas that levels of bureaucracy and tight timescales for planning and spending could be further improved.
- Significant challenges around the recruitment of staff, leading to frustration and underspend.
- A need for greater collaboration at a local authority level (within and across authorities).
- Emphasis from stakeholders that poverty was a wider issue and that its impact could not be mitigated by educational interventions alone.
- Some concerns around measures of poverty, and how to appropriately and sensitively identify children that need extra support.

7. While significant progress has been achieved over the first two years, the poverty related attainment gap continues to exist. In terms of the impact of the fund on attainment, the evaluation found:

- The majority of headteachers believe that improvements in attainment will be achieved and confidence in the sustainability of the impact increased over time.
- At local authority level, stakeholders reported positive evidence from small scale interventions, particularly for literacy and health and wellbeing.
- Across all attainment and health and wellbeing measures, pupils from the least deprived areas consistently outperformed pupils from the most deprived areas.
- Overall, pupils living in areas of highest deprivation performed better in Challenge Authorities than non-Challenge Authorities.

Actions already taken

8. Scottish Government and Education Scotland have been working directly with both Challenge Authorities and Schools Programme schools to reduce the level of bureaucracy in the programme. In close collaboration with stakeholders monitoring and reporting processes have been refined and streamlined. The frequency and volume of reporting has been reduced and has been aligned with the academic year, making the process simpler and less time consuming for local authorities and schools.

9. A total of 666 additional teachers have been recruited through the Attainment Scotland Fund to support the Challenge. The Fund has also enabled schools to employ a range of staff across other roles (e.g. Educational Psychologists, Home Link Workers, Mental Health Counsellors or Speech and Language Therapists).

10. Furthermore, over £1 million is going to universities to help develop new routes into teaching, including a focus on increasing the number of STEM teachers.

11. The establishment of Regional Improvement Collaboratives is expected to facilitate the sharing of practice and expertise across local authorities.

Next steps

12. Evidence on levels of attainment and health and wellbeing across Scotland will continue to be monitored in order to further develop understanding of the association between deprivation and education outcomes.

13. A second evaluation report will be conducted at the end of year 4 (2018/19), to consider how the Fund has evolved over time. It will also include evidence regarding Pupil Equity Funding.

Scottish Government
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