

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee
Cyllid wedi'i dargedu i wella canlyniadau addysgol | Targeted Funding to
Improve Educational Outcomes
TF 01
Ymateb gan: Adoption UK
Response from: Adoption UK

What is Adoption UK?

Adoption UK is a national adoption support charity, empowering families to build bright futures for vulnerable children who are unable to live with their birth parents.

There are at least 3,500 adopted children currently attending school in Wales today and in common with other children who have experienced broken attachments with their main carers and early abuse, neglect and trauma, many of those children struggle to cope with their experience of school. We know from a very recent Adoption UK survey that adopted children from across the UK in the survey were nearly 20 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than non adopted children and that nearly one third of the children had had to change schools because their needs were not being adequately met.

Adoption UK is leading the way in Wales, working closely with the Vulnerable Learners section of Welsh Government, to raise awareness of the difficulties that children who have had a tough start in life experience in relation to their education and we promote evidence based strategies which help. We have very much welcomed the way in which the Pupil Development Grant for children looked after has been extended to include previously looked after children who are now adopted.

Adoption UK welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation and will base our evidence on our work with adoptive parents, education consortia and schools across Wales over the last 2 years using this grant funding.

We will only be commenting on the use by Consortia of the PDG funding for children who are looked after or previously looked after.

What changes have been made?

In April 2015 the decision was taken to make the four Education Consortia responsible for the distribution and use of the PDG LAC funding. At the same time it was decided that it could be used for work which would benefit previously looked after children who are now adopted. These changes marked the start of a period of rapidly increasing awareness amongst LACE teams across Wales of the needs of adopted children which was very welcome indeed. Since then the way the money itself has been used seems to have varied greatly across Wales with some consortia dividing it up and giving it to local authority LACE teams who then also varied in their approach to its use.

The most effective use of the funding in our judgement has been by the ERW consortia where there was a well articulated and strategic plan from the start which started with awareness raising training which reached all schools, followed by more in depth training for some staff and schools who recognised the need for it. The LACE teams in ERW have been encouraged to use some of the funding to build their service enabling them to provide individual advice and support to schools to meet the individual needs of children in those schools and those are the areas where we have found the most effective practice to exist. In Neath Port Talbot for example adopted children are now accepted as part of the larger cohort of children who are looked after who may need additional support in school and that support is provided by a highly knowledgeable central team of teachers and support workers who help schools develop strategies to fit the needs of the children. The ability to include adopted children alongside children looked after in this provision is critical.

Other consortia have not been so quick to develop and implement strategic plans and in some local authorities there are very few resources available to the LACE team and staff have not been given responsibility for children who are looked after and are now adopted. This means that adoptive families in those local authorities have no one to turn to when schools are not able to meet the needs of their children. Some local authorities are still offering portions of the PDG LAC grant to individual schools for their own use although they now have to apply for the money and explain how it will be used. In our view this approach is not as effective as having a central, well resourced LAC team who can provide training and support to schools where and when it is needed.

Is it improving outcomes?

Outcomes in education take several years to show up and adopted children's educational data cannot be separated out from that of their non adopted peers which makes it difficult to measure outcomes. However it is clear that far more schools have heard of attachment and early trauma and realise that they need to understand better the needs of those children. In the absence of hard data we feel that a greater involvement by adoptive parents and foster carers in how this money is used by education consortia would be helpful. Parents and carers could be playing a valuable role in advising on and scrutinising the spending plans of the PDG LAC grant by each consortia and this sort of co-production of plans would we feel both add value to the effectiveness of the grant and answer the criticisms often heard about the absence of Pupil Premium Plus funding in Wales.

In Conclusion

In the view of Adoption UK the targeting of education funding is an effective way to ensure vulnerable learners are better supported in school. In the case of children looked after and those now adopted the change from funding going directly to schools to funding going to the consortia with some clear guidelines as to how it is spent has led to it being used more effectively. However in our view there is still scope to be more prescriptive about how strategic plans are developed to improve outcomes for adopted children, and opportunities to involve parents in those plans.