

REPORT

# AUTONOMY IN THE RIGHT PLACE

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE REFORM IN SCOTLAND



Jessica Shields  
and Russell Gunson

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Institute for Public Policy Research

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# SUMMARY

## 60-SECOND SUMMARY

In the Scottish education system, there is a persistent and entrenched gap in attainment between pupils from the highest and lowest income households. Closing this poverty-related attainment gap is a national priority for the Scottish government. While Scotland has not experienced the substantial changes in school governance and structure which we have seen in recent years in the rest of the UK, there have been reforms to the curriculum and assessment. The Scottish government is reviewing the governance structures and processes of Scottish schools, with the aim of implementing reform focussed on increasing attainment and equity, and this may herald major structural and governance changes for the first time since devolution.

We looked at which school governance changes could have a positive effect on attainment and which have no evidence of effect, or evidence of a negative effect. In addition, we looked at the two main school types in Scotland, denominational and non-denominational, and found, when controlling for intake, that there is no evidence to suggest that school type in Scotland, has an effect on attainment. There is greater evidence to support parental and pupil involvement in the classroom, targeted funding, an evidence-led culture from the classroom up, and encouraging collaboration across schools and regions. However, as our evidence shows, not all types of autonomy would contribute to attainment.

We recommend devolution of decision-making power to the local level as default, and increased accountability. This would see newly strengthened parent and pupil councils, regional education partnerships (REPs), and a further shift within the school system to outcomes-based funding, through school attainment outcome agreements, and evidence-led interventions through a new impact framework.

## KEY FINDINGS

There is evidence of a sustained and entrenched gap in educational attainment between children from the richest and poorest households in Scotland. This inequality in educational outcomes starts in early life and persists and widens through childhood into adulthood. Children from low-income households tend to have lower scores in literacy and numeracy and leave school with fewer qualifications.

Closing the income related attainment gap has been set as a national priority by the Scottish government. In 2015, first minister Nicola Sturgeon launched the Attainment Challenge Fund as part of a commitment to devote £750 million of additional funding to closing the attainment gap. While Scotland has not experienced the depth and breadth of reforms to school structure and governance seen in the rest of the UK, there has been reform in recent years focussed on closing the attainment gap, including the introduction of a National Improvement Framework. This sets out the

Scottish government's vision for a school system that delivers excellence and equity, and aligns improvement work across the education system. In 2017, the Scottish government began the process of reforming school governance with a view to reducing educational inequality.

We looked at the two main school types in Scotland, denominational and non-denominational, to consider whether school types in Scotland have an effect on attainment. Our analysis indicated that, when controlling for intake, overall attainment does not differ significantly between denominational and non-denominational schools, and there is no evidence to suggest that one school type or the other has better performance.

We also considered the evidence base to gain an insight into which governance changes may have the best impact on attainment. We found that there is the potential for reforms to school governance to contribute to narrowing the attainment gap, through the devolution of power out from local authorities to headteachers, classroom teachers, parents and pupils. This would support and promote increased collaboration across schools and regions, and embed an evidence-informed and evidence-generation approach to activities aimed at closing the attainment gap. We also found that, with increased autonomy of the right type and in the right place, should come increased accountability to ensure we focus on outcomes and evidence of impact from the local to the national level.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Just as the attainment gap is influenced by many factors outside school – such as household income, health and housing – it cannot be sustainably and definitively closed by school-based activity alone. Schools can play an important role in mitigating the effect of systemic inequalities on educational attainment, but must be supported by a coordinated and sustained whole-system approach. We set out our recommendations for action that can be taken within the school system, and that can contribute most meaningfully to reducing the attainment gap.

1. Decisions in the school system should be made at the most local level possible, with decision-making power devolved to headteachers, classroom teachers, parents and pupils, and only retained at local authority, regional or national level when there is a strong case for doing so.
2. Teachers in the classroom should be empowered and enabled to collect and respond to pupil data in real time, supported by improvements to data collection and use.
3. New parent and pupil councils should be placed at the heart of decisions in relation to the funding and design of activity to close the attainment gap.
4. School attainment outcome agreements should be introduced for Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity funding to promote greater accountability alongside greater autonomy.
5. A new impact framework should be developed which outlines the principles and attributes of best-practice activity on closing the attainment gap in order to reduce low impact activities.

6. As part of the Attainment Challenge Fund, consideration should be given to increasing professionally designed and evaluated wrap-around provision including breakfast, after-school, weekend and holiday provision.
7. Regional education partnerships should be created above the level of local authorities to lead on workforce planning, teachers' continuing professional development and to take responsibility for funding, evaluating and measuring the impact of attainment activity in schools at a regional level.
8. Encouraging schools to work together in clusters on a more formal basis to close the attainment gap could help to spread best practice, positive culture and classroom innovation.
9. The Scottish government, in collaboration with key stakeholders, should review the current learning routes on offer to become a qualified teacher in Scotland, including exploring new fast-track routes into the profession for the highest performing graduates, together with new work-based routes to qualification.
10. The Scottish government, alongside key stakeholders within school education, should develop plans to ensure the school day, school week and school year is poverty-proofed to remove financial barriers to attainment within the school system.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

School performance, attainment and educational inequity hold a higher position on the Scottish political agenda than ever before. Since becoming first minister in November 2014, Nicola Sturgeon has set educational inequalities as both a personal and Scottish government priority, focussing her attention not only on schools, but also on early-years and post-compulsory education in Scotland. The Scottish government's efforts to reduce the gap in academic performance between children from the richest and poorest households have involved consideration of, and consultation on, a number of potential reforms, including the introduction of a National Improvement Framework, standardised national assessments in Scotland's schools, the introduction of funding focussed on narrowing the attainment gap, and, most recently, a review of school governance.

How schools are governed, who is involved in decision-making processes and the level at which decisions are made within the education system could have significant effects on the attainment gap. We therefore considered which forms of governance reform are likely to have the most positive impact on reducing educational inequalities within school education in Scotland.

In this report, we considered the current governance arrangements in Scotland and the policy, background and recent innovations in Scotland. We undertook statistical analysis in relation to the current key governance distinction within Scotland's public school system to consider any current governance differences that may be already affecting attainment, before undertaking an evidence review of other changes that may have a positive effect on attainment. Our analysis focusses on secondary schools and differences in attainment between the two main governance categories within publicly funded secondary education: denominational and non-denominational schools.

We conclude the report with key recommendations for school governance in Scotland in light of the Scottish government's ongoing school governance review.

## 2. SCHOOL GOVERNANCE IN SCOTLAND

In considering whether school governance reform can have an effect on improving school quality, or in narrowing the attainment gap between the most deprived and least deprived pupils, we first need to consider the current governance arrangements within school-level education in Scotland. In chapter 3, we consider the policy context to governance reform within Scotland and across the UK, before considering evidence in relation to the relationship between governance and attainment in chapter 4.

The Scottish government provides around £5 billion of funding for early-years and school education, funded through local authorities in Scotland. As of December 2016, over 684,000 pupils were enrolled at publicly funded schools in Scotland, with almost 281,000 of these attending secondary school. Nearly 50,000 teachers were employed in publicly funded schools, and 24,000 of these worked in secondary schools.

### 2.1 NATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES IN SCOTLAND

In Scotland, schools are currently governed by a multi-level system with different roles played by the Scottish government, local government, and national and local bodies in governing and supporting the delivery of education.

#### **Scottish government**

The Scottish government has overall responsibility to set the direction of, and to legislate for, national education policy. The Scottish government provides funding to local authorities for the provision of education.

#### **Local authorities**

Scotland is split into 32 local authorities, which cover specified geographical areas. Local authorities receive funding from the Scottish government and act as education authorities. As such, they have direct responsibility for the provision of education. They also retain control over staffing and employment, the provision of educational services, and the implementation of Scottish government educational policies. Local authorities have a duty of improvement. As funding from the Scottish government is not ring-fenced, education budgets for each area, including school-level budgets, are set by the local authority. Local authorities also have responsibility for a range of other services including child protection, social services and housing.

#### **Education Scotland**

Education Scotland is a Scottish government executive agency with a responsibility to support quality and improvement in Scottish education. Its role is to inspect schools, provide guidance on curriculum development, and provide professional and shared learning opportunities. Education Scotland

was created in July 2011 through the merger of the former inspection (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education) and curriculum development (Learning and Teaching Scotland) agencies to form a new integrated improvement agency for the education sector.

### **Scottish Qualifications Authority**

The Scottish Qualifications Authority is the body responsible for devising and developing, reviewing, validating and awarding qualifications below degree level which are used by schools and colleges.

### **Teacher standards and education**

Initial teacher education is provided by universities in Scotland in partnership with local authorities, which provide practical placement opportunities. Professional teaching standards are overseen by an independent professional body, the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), and the Scottish College for Educational Leadership provides leadership programmes for the school education system.

### **Care services**

The Care Inspectorate holds responsibility for regulating and inspecting care services in Scotland, including residential schools, and the local authority provides school hostels. The Scottish social care workforce, including childcare, is regulated by the Scottish Social Services Council.

## **2.2 SCHOOL STRUCTURES IN SCOTLAND**

The majority of schools in Scotland are publicly funded, with funding controlled by the local authority. Of the 2,531 publicly funded schools in Scotland, 2,031 are primary schools, 359 are secondary schools and 141 are special schools for pupils with additional support needs (Scottish government 2016a). A very small number of grant-maintained schools operate in Scotland. These schools are funded directly by the Scottish government and operate outside local authority control. One secondary school, Jordanhill in Glasgow, was attached to a former teacher training college, but since merging with another institution has been funded directly by the Scottish government. An alternative model of school governance is provided by Newlands Junior College, which caters to young people over the age of 14 who are not engaged in formal education but who could benefit from intensive support and vocational training. The college is registered as an independent school, governed by a board of trustees, and sponsored by large private sector businesses to provide scholarships for all pupils.

The current model of school governance in the Scottish education system is based on 32 local authorities. Local authorities act as education authorities, with the provision of education as one of their main remits. The Scottish government devolves funding for education to local authorities in the form of a central government grant. Under the current system of devolved school management, around 90 per cent of this sum is further devolved to the school level, with a small proportion reserved at local authority level for capital expenditure, the provision of free school meals and support for pupils with additional learning needs. Control of teacher recruitment and terms and conditions of employment is retained by the local authority, and staffing levels are set nationally. As such, much of the devolved school

budget is accounted for by staffing costs, and the extent to which individual headteachers have control over budgets is limited.

As set out in the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006, Scottish schools are required to appoint a parent council as a statutory body (Scottish Executive 2006). The parent council has the right to access information and provide advice on matters affecting their children's education. Parent councils also play a role in the appointment of headteachers and deputy headteachers.

### **Denominational and non-denominational schools**

The biggest distinction in school type and governance arrangements within Scotland's publicly funded education system is between denominational and non-denominational schools. All state schools are to a degree 'faith schools'. Most schools in Scotland are non-denominational Christian schools. There is no provision for secular schooling in the Scottish state school system.

There are 370 state-funded denominational schools in Scotland, of which 51 are secondary schools. This represents around 18 per cent of primary schools and a slightly smaller proportion of secondary schools. Of these denominational schools, 366 are Roman Catholic, one is Jewish and three are Episcopalian. Around 20 per cent of Scottish school pupils are educated in Roman Catholic schools. Scottish schools operate a system of 'catchment areas' whereby children are assigned a school based on its proximity to their home. Denominational schools represent an element of parental school choice, as parents can apply for a place at a denominational school based on their faith.

Under the Curriculum for Excellence, Scotland's national curriculum, all schools have autonomy over the frequency and nature of religious observance. Denominational schools may provide more frequent opportunity for religious observance, such as daily prayers or mass. Initial teacher education for those wishing to teach in Catholic schools is only available in Scotland through the University of Glasgow. Teachers who wish to teach religious education in a Catholic school must hold a Catholic Teacher's Certificate in religious education. Teachers who are recruited to posts at denominational schools by the local authority must be approved by representatives of the church or denominational body relevant to the faith of the school.

At present, education authorities must reserve three non-elected seats on education boards for religious representatives, as set out in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. One seat is reserved for a representative of the Church of Scotland, and (with the exception of Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands and Western Isles) one representative from the Roman Catholic Church. Local authorities are then required to appoint an additional 'third representative' based on the 'comparative strength within their area of all the churches and denominational bodies'. Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands and Western Isles appoint two representatives on this basis.

### **Independent schools**

There are 102 independent, fee-paying schools in Scotland which cater to around 5 per cent of the pupils in Scotland (Scottish Government 2016b). These schools sit outside local authority control. They tend to be selective and are clustered around the larger cities, with the majority situated in and around Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen.

Independent schools tend to be governed by a board of governors, which is responsible for the safeguarding of pupils and must be registered with the Scottish government. Independent schools are subject to inspections by Education Scotland, and residential schools and schools with nursery provision are also inspected by the Care Inspectorate. The 2016 Education (Scotland) Bill requires all teachers – including those who work in independent schools – to be registered with and regulated by the GTCS. The number of teachers within the 102 independent schools who were not GTCS registered was 732 (18 per cent) in September 2013. The Scottish government stated: ‘It is anticipated that around 240 of those teachers may find it more difficult to meet the GTCS criteria’ (Scottish Government 2016c).

## 3.

# POLICY CONTEXT

The attainment gap in Scotland has become one of the most prominent government priorities. In addition, recent years have seen a number of policy changes, within Scotland and across the UK, that are of relevance to school governance. This chapter sets out the current record on attainment in Scotland, recent trends and considers them in the current context of school governance reform in Scotland.

While Scotland has not experienced large-scale structural reforms to the school system as seen in the rest of the UK, there has nevertheless been substantial reform of the Scottish school curriculum and of the policies which surround education and its support services. These policies are also summarised in this chapter.

### 3.1 THE SCALE AND NATURE OF THE ATTAINMENT GAP IN SCOTLAND

There is clear evidence of a persistent gap in attainment between pupils from the richest and poorest households in Scotland. The attainment gap in Scotland is pervasive throughout the life course, starting in the earliest years of childhood and with far-reaching negative effects that persist into outcomes for adulthood. The 2015 Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) survey (OECD 2016) showed that Scotland's gap in attainment, identified as related to socioeconomic factors, is around the OECD average. In 2012, Scotland performed slightly better than the other UK nations in relation to how much of performance variation between pupils was related to socioeconomic factors. However, in previous PISA studies Scotland's record has been poorer than the rest of the UK (PISA 2012).

Further evidence of the growing attainment gap throughout primary and early secondary school years is provided by the annual Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy (SSLN), a survey which assesses attainment in Primary 4, Primary 7 and S2, the second year of secondary school. Literacy and numeracy are assessed in alternate years (Scottish Government 2016d, Scottish Government 2015). The SSLN shows a significant attainment gap between the most and least deprived pupils for each age group in both numeracy and literacy. The proportion of most deprived pupils performing well and very well in terms of numeracy at P4, P7 and S2 was 55 per cent (compared with 76 per cent for the least deprived), 54 per cent (compared with 77 per cent for least deprived), and 25 per cent (compared with 53 per cent for the least deprived) respectively. Similar trends are found for literacy (reading, writing, and listening and talking), although with narrower gaps between the most and least deprived pupils.

The attainment gaps found throughout school translate into gaps between the most and least deprived in terms of qualifications achieved and post-school destinations. In 2013/14, the proportion of school

leavers who attained at least one qualification at Higher level (grade A–C) was 39 per cent for the most deprived pupils, compared with 79.7 per cent for the least deprived. This represents a marginal narrowing of the gap compared with previous years. Average tariff score shows a similar trend with a substantial gap, but one that has narrowed marginally in recent years (Scottish Government 2016e). In 2012/13, 82.6 per cent of the most deprived school leavers were in a positive destination six months after leaving, compared to 95.7 per cent of the least deprived. In terms of access to higher education (in both a college and university setting), in 2012/13, 18.1 per cent of the most deprived school leavers were in higher education six months after leaving school compared with 61 per cent of the least deprived (Scottish Government 2016f).

### **3.2 RECENT POLICY CONTEXT**

In recent years, access to education has been placed at the front and centre of the political agenda. Since the Scottish parliamentary election, a number of strategies have been introduced to tackle the attainment gap, including targeted funding for schools which are particularly affected by the poverty-related attainment gap and a new National Improvement Framework. These recent developments are described below.

#### **Scottish government priorities**

Following the election of Nicola Sturgeon to first minister in November 2014, the Scottish government has placed the attainment gap and widening access at the heart of its agenda. The Scottish government announced an independent Commission on Widening Access, and, early in 2015, published its National Improvement Framework for schools in Scotland, which will see the introduction of national standardised school assessments at P1, P4, P7 and S3, to measure progress against the excellence and equity agenda (Scottish Government 2016g).

The 2016 Scottish parliament election campaign saw education given significant prominence by all parties. The SNP manifesto proposals to push forward with the National Improvement Framework, to place greater amounts of funding into the hands of schools directly, and to increase funding for the Scottish government's attainment fund to £150 million per year are being delivered by the current SNP government. The SNP manifesto also included a number of provisions around information, transparency and school governance. These included proposals for the publication of information school by school on performance against key curriculum levels; greater responsibilities for headteachers, parents and communities for schools in their area; the encouragement of schools to organise into clusters; empowerment of local schools; diversification of school models (away from a 'one size fits all' approach); and the creation of educational regions to 'decentralise management and support'.

#### **Improving schools in Scotland: an OECD perspective**

In 2015, following a decade of work to establish a new educational curriculum for Scotland, the Scottish government commissioned the OECD to conduct an independent review into the direction of Curriculum for Excellence and its impact on quality and equity in the Scottish school system, with a particular focus on the broad general education stage (from age 3 up to age 15). A number of positive outcomes were identified

in *Improving Scotland's Schools: An OECD Perspective* (2015), including upward trends in attainment and positive leaver destinations, levels of academic achievement above international averages, positive attitudes towards school, and decreased levels of risk-taking behaviour such as drinking and smoking. However, some challenges were highlighted in the decline in attainment in mathematics in recent years compared with other countries, and a decrease in reading performance in recent years compared with previous levels in Scotland. A crucial finding in the report is the lack of reliable data for evaluation of the impact of Curriculum for Excellence. The current system of assessment does not provide sufficiently robust data for evidence-based policy-making at the system, local authority or school level. In addition, the differing approaches to assessment at local authority level carry a risk of duplication of information, and do not provide a clear picture of attainment across Scotland. While the National Improvement Framework goes some way towards addressing this problem, there is a need for large-scale research and evaluation into the implementation and impact of Curriculum for Excellence on attainment and educational inequality. This work could be supported by universities and independent research bodies.

The recommendations made by the OECD for the future of Curriculum for Excellence include:

- a clearer focus on improving attainment while decreasing educational inequality through an evidence-informed strategic approach
- development of a clearer system of metrics, to capture both the full range of capacities and provide a balance between formative and summative assessment, which can be used for robust measurement of quality and equity, outcomes and progression
- an evaluation focus on the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence in schools and communities
- greater engagement, innovation and collaboration within and across secondary schools
- more robust and reliable evaluation and research, including independent knowledge creation.

### **The Scottish Attainment Challenge**

As part of a commitment to devote £750 million of additional funding to address the poverty-related attainment gap in Scottish education and promote equity across the Scottish education sector, first minister Nicola Sturgeon launched the Attainment Challenge in 2015. Underpinned by the principles of Curriculum for Excellence, Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) and the National Improvement Framework, the Attainment Challenge Fund was established as an initiative to support pupils and provide targeted improvement activity in numeracy, literacy and health and wellbeing in the local authority areas with the highest levels of deprivation. The 'challenge authorities' are currently Glasgow, Dundee, Inverclyde, West Dunbartonshire, North Ayrshire, Clackmannanshire, North Lanarkshire, East Ayrshire and Renfrewshire. The £50 million Attainment Challenge Fund was originally available to primary schools but is currently being rolled out to secondary schools and provides a source of funding for schools and local authorities to identify, fund and

evaluate creative and innovative projects that will raise attainment in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. In addition, the Scottish government has announced a £120 million Pupil Equity Fund which is to be allocated directly to schools, targeted at those children most affected by the poverty-related attainment gap, and distributed on the basis of the numbers of pupils in P1 to S3 known to be eligible and registered for free school meals. This fund is supplied directly to headteachers for use in additional staffing or resources they consider to be effective and appropriate in reducing the poverty-related attainment gap. This brings the total additional funding for 2017 targeted at reducing educational inequality to £170 million.

### **National Improvement Framework**

In response to the recommendations made by the OECD in their 2015 report, *Improving Scotland's Schools: An OECD Perspective*, that greater coherence was needed in developing a national assessment, evaluation and improvement framework, the Scottish government developed the National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education. This sets out the vision for a school system which delivers excellence and equity and aligns improvement work across partners in the education sector. The priorities for improvement identified in the framework include improving attainment with a focus on literacy and numeracy, closing the attainment gap, improving wellbeing across children and young people in Scotland, and improving employability skills and positive leaver destinations. The drivers for improvements in these key areas are defined in the framework as:

- school leadership
- teacher professionalism
- parental engagement
- assessment of children's progress
- school improvement
- performance information.

For each of these drivers, the National Improvement Framework sets out a suite of methods for gathering evidence related to the proposed improvements, including more robust data on pupil attainment in literacy and numeracy, pupil wellbeing and school leaver destination. This data will be used for a range of purposes, from communicating feedback to pupils and parents on pupil progress, to informing education policy based on a clear understanding of attainment and equity in Scotland. Annual reports on the National Improvement Framework will be published to provide an ongoing evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of improvement in the Scottish education system based on a coherent and integrated set of measures.

### **School governance review**

In 2016, the Scottish government launched *Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve excellence and equity in education*, a review of school governance. It aimed to explore the structural and systematic changes required to deliver on Scottish government commitments to empower schools, decentralise management and increase support through the encouragement of school clusters and the creation of new educational regions. This is the first step in a planned series of reforms designed to

promote engagement with parents, colleges and local employers in raising attainment and promoting positive destinations for school leavers. The Scottish government makes clear its objective of devolving decision-making and funding to schools and communities, stating that they want to see more decisions about school life driven by schools themselves. However, a number of public bodies and third sector organisations have questioned the assumption that devolving greater power to the school level will have a positive effect on attainment and equity. In the review, the Scottish government also commits to the development of a transparent needs-based funding formula for schools, to allow schools to have greater control over decision-making.

The consultation on the review closed to responses in January 2017.

### **2.3 LONGER-TERM PAST REFORM IN SCOTLAND**

The recent focus on excellence and equity in Scottish educational policy builds on a series of educational reforms over the last 15 years, beginning with the development of a new curriculum and continuing through reviews of parental involvement in education, initial teacher training and continuing professional development, reforms to school funding autonomy and new approaches for a joined-up service for children and young people. These developments are outlined in the following section.

#### **Curriculum for Excellence**

Scotland's national curriculum, Curriculum for Excellence, was developed in response to the then Scottish Executive's national debate on education in 2002 and the review of the 3–18 curriculum in 2003. Curriculum for Excellence was designed to provide greater flexibility and adaptability within a curriculum which is co-created by schools and teachers, and focusses on developing four educational capacities through classroom teaching, which supports pupils to develop as:

1. successful learners
2. confident individuals
3. responsible citizens
4. effective contributors.

Following an extensive process of development, Curriculum for Excellence was implemented in 2010, with the first group of pupils sitting the new National 4 and National 5 qualifications in 2014. For pupils from pre-school to third year, Curriculum for Excellence is assessed against a series of outcomes and experiences across a range of core subjects referred to as broad general education. In addition, literacy, numeracy and wellbeing are embedded across the curriculum. At the time of implementation, concerns were raised regarding the lack of specificity and guidance in delivering the new curriculum (SPICe 2013).

#### **Parental involvement in Scottish schools**

The right of parents and guardians to be meaningfully engaged in the education of their children and the wider school community is set out in the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. The act required each local authority to produce a strategy document setting out their policies for parental involvement including the establishment of a

parent council for each school. The role of these parent councils is to represent the views of parents in a range of educational matters, both at school level and local authority level. In 2009, the National Parent Forum of Scotland was established to bring together parent councils and parents to discuss educational matters at a national level. Now an influential national organisation, the National Parent Forum comprises one representative from each of the 32 local authority areas in Scotland. Representatives of the National Parent Forum sit on a number of national bodies and committees.

The National Parent Forum of Scotland is currently undertaking a review of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 involving a range of stakeholders to assess progress, identify areas of good practice and provide policy recommendations for the future of parental involvement in Scotland.

### **Teaching Scotland's Future**

In 2010, the Scottish government commissioned a review of teacher education in Scotland in the context of the reform of the Scottish curriculum and assessment process. The review process was led by Professor Graham Donaldson and the resulting report, *Teaching Scotland's Future*, set out the two most important avenues for improving pupil attainment as strengthening and supporting both the quality of teaching and the quality of leadership (Donaldson 2010). Evidence is presented in the report as to the essential skills and qualities of a teacher joining and progressing through the profession in the 21st century, along with a consideration of the selection process for those entering the teacher training programme and strategies for developing leadership at the early stages of a teaching career and embedding career-long learning across the profession. The fifty recommendations made in the report showed a strong focus on increasing teaching expertise across the career, with specific recommendations for improving the quality and experience of initial and early-stage teacher training and for increasing the impact of continuous professional development (CPD) activities. All of these recommendations were accepted, in full or in part, by the Scottish government which established a national partnership group to take these forward, resulting in the implementation of a number of projects by the National Implementation Board for Teacher Education.

The impact of the implementation of *Teaching Scotland's Future* was evaluated in 2015 by Ipsos MORI, commissioned by the Scottish government (Ipsos MORI 2015). The evaluation was based on an online questionnaire of a representative sample of teachers, albeit with a very low response rate, focus groups and interviews with teachers and interviews with representatives from local authorities and other key stakeholders. The findings from the evaluation showed that the implementation of *Teaching Scotland's Future* had been successful in creating a change in teaching culture towards greater engagement with professional learning, greater focus on the impact of professional learning on pupils, greater teacher engagement in sharing professional experiences and more willingness to try new and innovative approaches. It was found that while *Teaching Scotland's Future* had been instrumental in driving forward some of these changes, it was not wholly responsible for all of the positive progress made. Other

key drivers of these positive changes which were identified were the introduction of the professional update, a re-accreditation scheme which builds on the professional learning record of teachers, and new GTCS standards and the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence and GIRFEC, which required teachers to keep up to date with professional learning. In addition, a background of constrained funding for external courses and local authority support for professional learning had contributed to strengthened collaboration and shared learning. However, it is acknowledged in the report that widespread challenges remain, particularly around the lack of available supply teachers to cover class teaching time to allow teachers to access professional learning, and the time required for both new and established teachers to become familiar with vast range and number of national priorities for education. Overcoming these challenges will require significant collaboration across schools, universities, local authorities and national bodies.

### **Devolved school management review**

The system of devolved school management was originally developed in 1993, and reviewed in 2006 and again in 2011 by David Cameron on behalf of the Scottish government (Cameron 2011). The scheme was devised with the aim of granting more flexibility in local expenditure to schools and communities based on their local needs. The scheme originally required authorities to devolve 80 per cent of budgets to schools, to give headteachers more autonomy over finances and decision-making. This figure was increased to 90 per cent following the 2006 review. The Scottish government issued statutory guidance, and each authority established its own devolved school management scheme based on this. Excluded from devolved school management are capital funding and expenditure on individual pupils. As staffing levels and salaries for school staff are set at national level, staffing costs account for the majority of the devolved budget, limiting the autonomy that schools have over their spending. In addition, some local authority procurement systems place restrictions on the suppliers and providers to which headteachers have access.

### **Children and Young People's Act**

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 became law on 27 March 2014, and introduced several significant changes to care for children and young people in Scotland (Scottish Government 2014a). The aim of the act was to protect and enhance the wellbeing and strengthen the rights of children and young people, by encouraging Scottish ministers and public bodies to consider their rights throughout their work. The act also introduced GIRFEC, a national framework for improving outcomes for children and young people by placing children's rights at the heart of all of their interactions with services and ensuring that all children and young people can access appropriate services at the right time (Scottish Government 2012). GIRFEC places central importance on the promotion of wellbeing through all the services with which children and young people may come into contact, including early-years services, schools and the NHS. Identified in this approach are eight indicators of wellbeing, known as SHANARRI indicators, which are important for children to do well now and to progress in the future. These are: safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured,

active, respected, responsible and included. These eight areas are set in the context of the four capacities on which Curriculum for Excellence is based.

### 3.4 SCHOOL REFORM IN THE REST OF THE UK

In contrast with the relatively limited reform to school governance and structures which has taken place in Scotland, the last 20 years have seen extensive changes to the way that the school system is organised in the rest of the UK.

The first city academies were created in England in 2002 and were originally intended to improve attainment by granting greater autonomy and freedom to poorly performing secondary schools. These city academies, known as sponsored academies, were funded and regulated through individually negotiated contractual agreements with the secretary of state. This model grew in popularity, in part due to the improved outcomes associated with the changes in governance structure. Following the passing of the Academies Act 2010 by the Coalition government, the academies programme was rapidly expanded and its remit extended to include well-performing schools with proven track records in running their own affairs. These schools are known as converter academies. In August 2015, the then prime minister David Cameron set out his plan for educational reform, stating: 'I want every school to be an academy'. However, proposed legislation, which would allow poorly performing schools to be forcibly converted into academies, has been scrapped by the current prime minister, Theresa May. Instead, May has proposed removing the obstacles to selective grammar schools and faith schools, with the aim of expanding the number of 'good' school places to all school children.

Wales retains a school governance structure more similar to that of Scotland; four geographical education consortia are responsible for school improvement services including literacy, numeracy and reducing poverty-related educational inequality.

### 3.5 WIDER EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN SCOTLAND

The previously described changes to educational policy in Scotland over the last 20 years have taken place in the context of wider reform to the post-compulsory education, skills and training system, including fairer access to higher and further education and programmes to tackle youth unemployment.

#### **Developing Scotland's young workforce**

Following the financial crash in 2008 and in response to rising levels of youth unemployment in Scotland, the Scottish government prioritised the provision for education and training for young people. This included the opportunities for all guarantee to provide a training or learning opportunity for all 16–19 year olds not already in employment, education or training. Additionally, the Scottish government committed to expanding the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme and increasing the number of new modern apprenticeship starts from 21,000 in 2010/11 to 30,000 by 2020.

In June 2014, the Independent Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce, chaired by Sir Ian Wood, published its report, *Education Working for All!* (Scottish Government 2014b). The report highlighted

the need for action to be taken to counter structural and recurring youth unemployment, and made recommendations on how the Scottish skills and education sector could better equip young people with the skills relevant to modern employment opportunities. The commission's report informed the Scottish government youth employment strategy, *Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy* (2014c), which outlines a seven-year programme to reduce unemployment, invest in the funding of the Scottish education and skills programme, engage with employers and those who work with young people themselves, and provide fair access to training and employment opportunities.

### **Commission on Widening Access**

In line with the Scottish government's agenda to reduce educational inequality, the Commission on Widening Access, chaired by Dame Ruth Silver, was established to explore the changes necessary to meet the Scottish government's ambition that every child should have an equal chance of accessing higher education, irrespective of socioeconomic background. The commission's final report, *A Blueprint for Fairness* (Scottish Government 2016h), sets out a series of recommendations for increasing equity in access to further study. These include the appointment of a commissioner for fair access, the establishments for a Scottish Framework for Fair Access by 2018, a more coordinated approach to access with collaboration across universities, colleges, schools and access programmes, and a more flexible approach to learning routes and admission processes. In December 2016, Sir Peter Scott was appointed as commissioner for fair access to higher education in Scotland.

## 4.

# ATTAINMENT AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES IN SCHOOLS IN SCOTLAND

This chapter outlines statistical analysis of the relationship between school performance, including attainment, and school structure and governance. The attainment gap in Scotland is significant, and, despite many years of focus, has only marginally narrowed over time. This chapter considers any differences in attainment between the two key governance differences in Scotland: denominational and non-denominational schools. This chapter presents the results of a quantitative analysis of the impact of school factors on attainment during secondary school, considering denominational and non-denominational status, proportion of pupils who receive free school meals, and school demand. The analysis focusses on secondary schools due to the availability of attainment and performance data. It does not consider other school types (such as Jordanhill or Newlands Junior College) due to too small a sample of schools with alternative governance arrangements. The findings suggest that differences in school structure have little or no effect on overall attainment in Scotland. They also suggest that there is no evidence that denominational schools have higher levels of performance than non-denominational schools, but they do suggest that low income has a negative effect on overall attainment.

### 4.1 ANALYSIS OF FACTORS IN SCOTTISH SECONDARY EDUCATION AND THEIR EFFECT ON ATTAINMENT

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the attainment gap in Scotland and the impact of current differences in school structure, we undertook a quantitative analysis of the available Scottish education statistics. Unlike the English educational system, where comparable data is gathered and analysed to prove comparisons across schools and is readily available to parents and the public, relatively little data is publicly available regarding attainment at the school level for Scotland. Within this limitation, we were able to access data on attendance at denominational and non-denominational schools, registration for free school meals and school subscription, and to draw out the relationship between these factors.

#### Data

All data was extracted from the Scottish education datasets published by the Scottish government or Education Scotland, and we used 2014–16 datasets. All data was school level. We performed the analysis using STATA and graphs were produced in Excel.

For analysis on school performance, we used two measures of attainment: the literacy and numeracy levels of school pupils and the proportion of students passing three or more Highers. The measure

used to quantify literacy and numeracy is the proportion of school leavers who have been assessed as achieving literacy and numeracy at SCQF level 5. These two metrics closely track one another. Positive destination could not be used as a measure of pupil attainment as the only outcome not classified as positive is ‘actively looking for work’, meaning that 93 per cent of school leavers in Scotland access positive destinations, with little variation across schools.

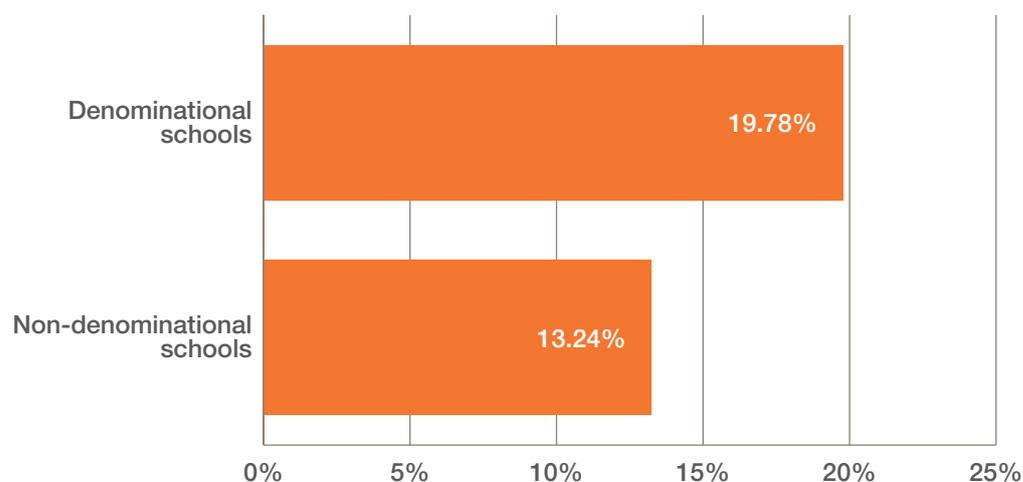
Free school meal registration was used as a proxy for disadvantage and household income. This data can only be used at secondary level because all children in Scotland in the first three years of primary school are eligible for free school meals. School subscription – that is, the proportion of the school capacity which is met by the school roll – was used to give an indication of school demand. While Scottish schools operate a system of catchment areas, in which pupils are assigned to a school based on its proximity to their home, denominational schools operate a system of school choice on the basis of religious faith. In addition, we explored the impact on attainment of attending a denominational or non-denominational school.

### Findings

On average, the proportion of secondary school pupils receiving free school meals was higher in denominational schools than in non-denominational schools. Figure 4.1 shows that the average proportion of secondary school pupils registered for free school meals was 19.78 per cent in denominational schools and 13.24 per cent in non-denominational schools. Given that the 51 denominational secondary schools represent a small proportion of the 367 secondary schools in Scotland, this difference is not statistically significant.

**FIGURE 4.1**

**The proportion of secondary school pupils receiving free school meals was higher in denominational schools than in non-denominational schools**  
*Proportion of secondary school pupils receiving free school meals, by school type*



Source: Data accessed from Scottish government Free School Meals Survey 2016.

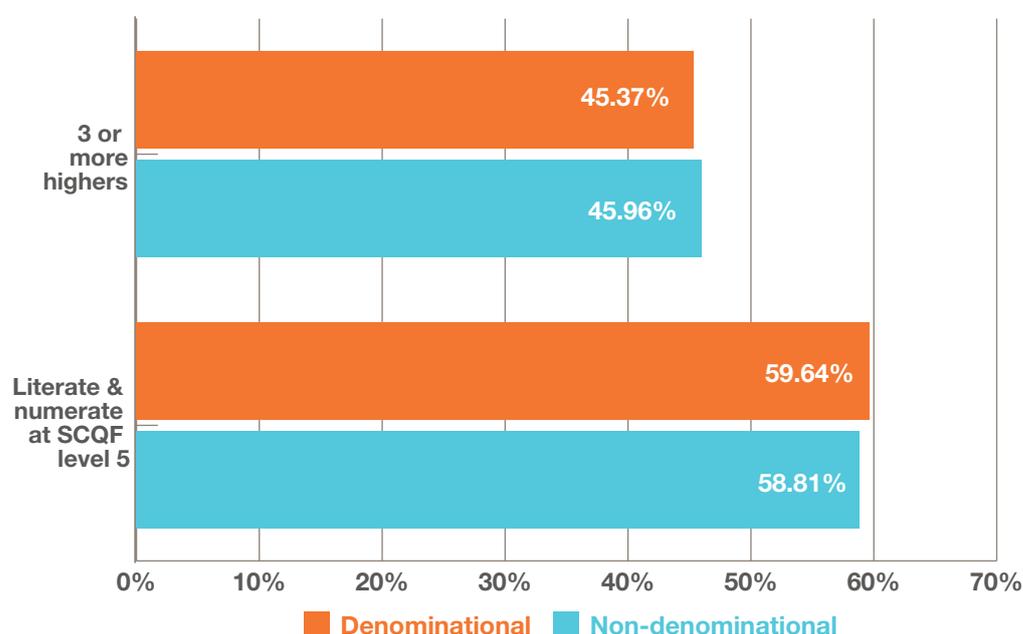
Note: Where denominational and non-denominational schools occupy the same building and free school meal registration could not be separated by school type (as in the case of St Stephen's High and Port Glasgow High, and St Ambrose High and Buchanan High) these schools have been excluded from the analysis.

The average proportion of pupils leaving with three or more Higher grades at grade A–C is 45.37 per cent for denominational schools and 45.96 per cent for non-denominational schools. The mean proportion of school leavers who had achieved literacy and numeracy at SCQF level 5 or above is 58.81 per cent for non-denominational schools, and 59.64 per cent for denominational schools, as shown in figure 4.2.

**FIGURE 4.2**

**The denominational or non-denominational status of a school had no significant impact on attainment**

*Mean proportion of secondary school pupils passing three or more Highers and proportion of secondary school pupils assessed as literate and numerate at SCQF level 5 or above, by school type*



Source: IPPR analysis

Using a regression analysis, we found that the denominational or non-denominational status of a school had no significant impact on school performance as measured by the two attainment outcomes. The analysis found no evidence to suggest that whether a school was denominational or non-denominational was a factor in school performance or attainment. There is therefore no evidence in this analysis to suggest that promoting either of these school structure types would have an effect on attainment, or on closing the attainment gap.

The analysis did indicate that the proportion of students registered for free school meals is lower in schools where attainment is higher. A 1 per cent higher population of children registered for free school meals is associated with a 0.5 per cent lower overall attainment: 0.41 per cent for literacy and 0.51 per cent for passing three or more Highers. This is to be expected, as free school meal eligibility is correlated with multiple socioeconomic factors which are known to affect attainment. The results also suggest a correlation between more heavily subscribed schools and

higher attainment scores. Variation by local authority did not affect the results for these parameters.

### **Limitations and implications**

Given that only limited data was available at school level, and, given the small sample size and the small proportion of denominational schools, further work would be required to investigate in greater depth any statistical relationship between school type and attainment in Scotland. These results must be interpreted with caution, even if a larger sample could be accessed. This approach assumes that there is no qualitative difference between pupils who attend denominational and non-denominational schools.

One potential response to this limitation is to construct a value-added model for school similar to those used in the English school system, based on pupil-level data. However, the current level and availability of data on education accessed for this analysis does not support the development and would require far greater access to data on both pupil characteristics and outcomes, which is not currently collated and published in Scotland.

## 5.

# REFORM FOR ATTAINMENT IN SCOTLAND

The findings of the statistical analysis outlined in chapter 4 imply that, based on the available data and controlling for school intake, there is no difference between overall attainment between denomination and non-denominational Secondary schools in Scotland. This finding raises questions around the types of differences in school structure, governance and autonomy that do have an effect on school attainment, particularly with respect to excellence and equity. This chapter presents an overview of evidence regarding attainment in relation to school governance, with a particular focus on:

- parental involvement and engagement
- pupil involvement and participation in decision-making
- data and an evidence-informed approach
- effective school leadership
- teacher empowerment
- regional governance
- school collaboration
- the cost of school holidays.

Where possible, examples of successful interventions or promising practice from Scotland have been included.

### 5.1 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

Increased and effective parental engagement in children's learning has been shown to be effective in narrowing the attainment gap. Parents from low-income families may require increased support in engaging with their children to improve their attainment.

Parental involvement initiatives which have proven to be the most effective in closing or narrowing the attainment gap are those which help parents to support their children's learning at home (Sosu and Ellis 2014). This is supported by findings from the UK Millennium Cohort Study, which suggest that parents from low-income households are as likely to help their children with school work as parents from higher income households, but that help is less likely to be effective, particularly when parental educational attainment is low (Hartas 2011). Parents who are least likely to be confident in supporting their children with their homework are non-resident parents, parents with English as an additional language and parents who had left school at a young age (O'Mara et al 2011).

Much of the evidence around parental involvement centres on narrowing the attainment gap in literacy. Examples of parental involvement programmes which have been particularly effective include supporting parents to tutor their children, creating a good space in which to do homework and providing enjoyable books. From their consideration of the evidence, Sosu and Ellis (2014) suggest that parental involvement makes a significant impact on the attainment gap, while interventions which address parental aspirations and expectations or parenting styles are less effective due to pre-existing high expectations across income groups. The most effective interventions combine these approaches.

Effective interventions to support parents in engaging in their children's education are those which clearly delineate the aims of the intervention and the criteria for success or failure, and are informed by the evidence base and research into the local context and need, as well as an understanding of the potential barriers which may prevent parents from fully accessing the intervention. In addition, interventions are more likely to be successful when they are appropriately resourced and have buy-in at senior staff level at the school. Finally, interventions must build in robust evaluation and plans to develop sustainability beyond the end of the specific project.

When applying this approach to the Scottish context, some key issues regarding equity of access must be considered. Demanding and time-intensive parental involvement programmes are often subject to high levels of drop out, particularly among parents who experience poverty. When developing any parental involvement programmes, schools, local authorities and the Scottish government must give careful consideration to the inherent assumptions they make about involvement, particularly around time demands and availability and access to technology and the internet. In their review of research on the role of family engagement in addressing the attainment gap, evidence from which was presented to the Scottish parliament Education and Culture Committee, Sheill-Davies and Morton (2015) identify projects which have been effective in engaging vulnerable families. These include developing and providing additional materials and resources for home working, employing additional staff such as home-school partnership workers or link workers to facilitate communication and provide support to families, targeting support over transition periods and providing family learning environments with help to build parental capacity such as parent and child homework clubs.

## **5.2 PUPIL INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING**

Curriculum for Excellence provides opportunities for young people to be involved in decision-making about what and how they learn. Greater pupil involvement in the life of the school can increase life skills and improve self-esteem and pupil-staff relationships. The extent to which pupils are involved in school-level decision-making varies across schools in Scotland.

A systematic review of evidence regarding pupil participation in decision-making at the school level found strongest evidence of a positive impact on school ethos, life skills, democratic process and adult-student relationships, but limited evidence of positive impact

on academic attainment, and a need for a more robust and sustained approach to evaluation of pupil involvement (Mager and Nowak 2012).

The importance of valuing the pupil voice and involving young people in their education is acknowledged in the school governance consultation document, as is a commitment to a stronger role in school life for children and young people. In Scotland, pupil participation is understood and operationalised in a variety of ways in different schools and by different teachers. Cross et al (2009), in their review of *Pupil Participation in Scottish Schools*, found that teachers tended to conceptualise pupil participation as encompassing a range of practices at pupil level, classroom level, school community level and wider community level, designed to promote critical enquiry, collaborative learning and positive relationships, with an importance placed on the capacity to create positive change. Pupils tended to talk about participation in terms of decision-making in their own learning and beyond formal classroom learning, participation with the pupil council, charitable fundraising, expressive arts activities, and a range of mentoring, buddying and coaching activities. The schools involved in this review identified a range of benefits to pupil participation, including increased pupil attainment and confidence, improved school ethos and better classroom relationships. All of the schools included in the review had some form of pupil council and opportunities for pupils to feed into school decisions. However, many of the pupils involved felt that the pupil councils had limited power and limited effect in the school. It was concluded from the findings in the review that a rights-based approach to education was inextricably linked to pupil involvement in all areas of school life. More recent research has been carried out on behalf of the children and young people's commissioner in Scotland (2015) into pupil participation practices in seven schools in Scotland. It found that pupils felt that they were able to participate in their formal learning and in their extended curriculum and have their voice heard in decisions which affect them.

### **5.3 DATA AND AN EVIDENCE-INFORMED APPROACH**

The use of robust data is of great importance in developing successful or promising interventions to reduce educational inequality. The most effective approaches to tackling educational inequality have consistently been found to be those which make best use of both local and national data and evidence regarding what works, such as the London Challenge.

A comprehensive understanding of the scale and nature of the problem, and evidence from research and evaluations of interventions, can guide educational leaders, policy makers and teachers to make the best decision on what is most likely to work and for whom in narrowing the attainment gap. Sosu and Ellis (2014) suggest that a basis in high quality evidence is necessary but not sufficient for the success of educational interventions to close the attainment gap. Successful interventions should also include robust monitoring and evaluation processes with clear criteria for success.

Research and data regarding the attainment gap must be made accessible to those who can make use of it. In Scotland, all teachers are provided with access to academic education journals through their registration with the GTCS. This allows all teachers the opportunity to stay up to date with the

most recent developments in their field. The Education Endowment Fund (EEF) is an independent charity set up by the Sutton Trust and the Impetus Trust with the specific aim of breaking the link between family income and educational attainment. The EEF has published a toolkit (Higgins et al 2013) which summarises the evidence regarding the efficacy, impact and cost of particular interventions in increasing attainment in low-income households and addressing the attainment gap. However, the evidence presented has a narrow focus on randomised controlled trials, and therefore omits some contextual and qualitative evidence which could be of value in designing interventions. A Scotland-specific version of the Learning and Teaching Toolkit is currently in development in partnership with the EEF, Durham University and Education Scotland. This toolkit will include links to Scotland-based projects and research.

The London Challenge Fund provides as example of an intervention which has used evidence and data to great effect.<sup>1</sup> Early in its development, an in-depth analysis was undertaken to determine the features of underperformance in London schools, and to identify patterns of poor performance which could indicate potential areas for intervention. Rigorous data was made available to the department to break down attainment by a range of school characteristics, as well as their intakes and their local areas. Interventions which used evidence to inform their approach were the most successful in reducing educational inequality (Hutchings et al 2012).

Availability of useful data regarding attainment in Scotland has been identified by Sosu and Ellis (2014) as an area in which the Scottish education system could make improvements. This is echoed by the OECD in *Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective* (2015), which highlights a lack of large-scale research and evaluation regarding the implementation and impact of Curriculum for Excellence. From August 2017, new national standardised assessments will be introduced as part of the National Improvement Framework. This will allow greater comparison across schools and clusters and give a more comprehensive overview of the attainment gap in Scotland. However, it is equally important that individual schools and interventions develop their own systems of data collection and evaluation, taking a contextual, value-added approach to evaluating their activities, and empowering teachers to collect and use data in real time at the classroom level. There are also some risks associated with focussing the evaluation of a multi-faceted national intervention on a fairly narrow set of educational indicators. Attribution of any change in attainment, whether positive or negative, is likely to be influenced by a range of factors, including poverty rates and funding for public services.

#### **5.4 EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

The role of the headteacher can have an important indirect effect on improving attainment and reducing inequality through setting high standards, supporting and empowering staff to innovate, driving an improvement ethos and creating an equal school culture.

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<sup>1</sup> The London Challenge was originally introduced in 2003 by the Labour government, and was extended in 2008 to provide funding of around £160 million of targeted funding to schools in London, Greater Manchester and the Black Country City Challenges with the aim of reducing educational inequality.

In *Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland*, the Scottish government identified school leadership as one of the key drivers for achieving improvement in schools, stating that: *'Highly effective leadership is key in ensuring the highest possible standards and expectations are shared across schools to achieve excellence and equity for all'* (Scottish Government 2016i: 13). However, it is not made clear in the delivery plan what constitutes effective leadership or the contribution that leadership can make to closing the achievement gap.

In their far-ranging evidence review, Leithwood et al (2006) bring together the literature regarding successful school leadership and its impact on pupil learning. Through consideration of the evidence, they concluded that school leadership has a significant effect on school quality and pupil learning. They find that effective school leaders clearly articulate a vision of improvement with a focus on academic progress, communicating this goal and placing it at the centre of activity while supporting staff to innovate. They identified effective behaviour for headteachers which includes recognising and rewarding staff for their achievements, retaining an awareness of the personal lives and motivations of staff, promoting opportunities for staff learning, and modelling the highest standard of practice expected of staff. In order for staff to meet the goals set out in the vision for the school, Leithwood et al argue, the culture and conditions of the workplace must meet their needs. In promoting a culture of collaboration within and across schools, school leaders can nurture respect, shared learning and improved communication across the staff team. Improving school culture may include an element of restructuring, and common practices include creating team and group structures for problem solving, devolving leadership on particular tasks and increasing the role of teachers in decision-making at the school level. As schools are situated in wider family and community structures, it is important the leaders maintain communication with wider networks that can inform them about local and national issues. It is acknowledged that teaching staff are subject to multiple distractions and competing demands from pupils, parents and a range of other individuals and groups. School leaders setting out protected teaching time and acting as a buffer to these demands is suggested as an effective solution.

More recent research on the successful leadership of schools from an international perspective is drawn from the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP), which has been actively conducting research about the work of successful principals since 2001. Gurr (2015) presents results from case studies of successful school leaders in seven countries to identify common practices which support effective headship. These include: setting high expectations for pupils, contextualised against their own potentials rather than external accountability; a pragmatic approach to leadership, working to develop leadership among their staff and devolving decision-making to them; and a commitment to developing staff through continuous professional learning. Gurr (2015) also identifies a number of personal attributes which are central to effective leadership, including trustworthiness, persistence, empathy and curiosity.

The effect of school leadership outside of the classroom on pupil learning is likely to be indirect. In order to improve student outcomes, these leaders must have a positive effect on colleagues who do have

a direct influence on pupil attainment, particularly classroom teachers. It is therefore the role of school leaders, particularly the headteachers, to establish a reflexive school culture and environment which allows teachers to be most effective. While the role of school leadership in reducing educational inequalities is not explicitly covered in Leithwood et al's (2006) review or in the work of the ISSPP, their findings have clear relevance to closing the attainment gap in schools through the articulation of a clear vision for equity in school, supporting and developing teachers to directly address this in classroom teaching and reforming school structures to best meet this aim. It would be useful to extend this research to develop a model of effective leadership for closing the attainment gap in schools.

In Scotland, a new master's qualification for headteachers became available in 2015 as part of the Attainment Challenge, with the aim of developing leadership in schools. The qualification is currently optional, but will become mandatory for all new headteachers by 2018/19, the end of the current Attainment Challenge period.

### **5.5 TEACHER EMPOWERMENT, EXPERTISE AND LEADERSHIP**

Teacher leadership can democratise decision-making processes within schools and ensure that decisions are informed by experiential knowledge, as well as providing additional capacity for school management. Teachers can be empowered to lead activity that promotes equality through a range of formal and informal mechanisms, and should be supported by training and professional development.

Teacher leadership encompasses a range of practices within a school. Traditional leadership roles for teachers were highly defined and include department heads and union representatives. However, there has been a more recent movement to recognise teachers as co-creators of school culture, and to democratise the decision-making processes within schools to more fully involve and engage classroom teachers in a way which values their expertise, knowledge and experience. This more inclusive, democratic approach to leadership has not been fully or comprehensively defined in the literature, but overlaps with other theories of leadership. Spillane et al (2005) introduced the term 'distributed leadership' to define leadership practice as the interactions between multiple school leaders with and without formal leadership roles, followers and the context in which they operate.

There is a strong rationale for involving and engaging classroom teachers in school leadership processes and, in a number of cases, devolving decision-making powers to teachers, as set out by York-Barr and Duke (2004) in their review of over 20 years of evidence regarding teacher leadership. Teacher leadership can provide additional capacity for managing large and complex school systems and support more effective decision-making, informed by a situated knowledge of the issues affecting the day-to-day running of the school. In addition, teacher leadership can promote greater ownership over decisions and greater empowerment of teachers. Teacher expertise is crucial to educational reform, as teachers have both knowledge of the issues facing classroom teachers and the best strategies for supporting them in their work.

York-Barr and Duke also identify benefits to pupils of greater leadership by teachers, such as the opportunity for students to observe participatory democracy, and the positive impact of higher teacher morale.

In practice, teacher leadership need not be formalised through the creation of specialised roles. While teachers can lead in this way, shared governance practices can allow teachers to remain embedded in classroom teaching while informing the decisions that affect them and their students. York-Barr and Duke identify factors from the literature which are common to teacher leaders. Teacher leaders tend to be established and experienced teachers who are respected by their colleagues, who are committed to life-long learning and who are skilled in negotiation and mediation.

In the context of the Scottish education sector, recent consultation has been carried out by the Scottish College of Educational Leadership (SCEL) on the development of teacher leadership (Kelly 2016). Through an engagement process involving 27 workshops with teachers and two pupil engagement sessions, SCEL engaged over 1,000 people in discussions to co-construct approaches to supporting teacher leadership in Scotland. Those who were engaged in the workshops tended to give definitions of teacher leadership which were in line with that used by the SCEL:

*'Teacher leaders are passionate about learning and teaching. Through informed and innovative practice, close scrutiny of pupils' learning needs and high expectations they play a fundamental role in improving outcomes for children and young people. Teacher leaders are effective communicators who collaborate with colleagues, demonstrate integrity and have a positive impact on their school community. They model career-long professional learning.'*

Kelly 2016: 18

Barriers to effective teacher leadership were identified as time, workload and confidence to take up leadership roles. Concerns were raised around the equity of leadership roles and the lack of transparency in assigning these. It is claimed in the report that the culture of Scottish education is not always conducive to developing teacher leadership. Those involved in the engagement process also identified a lack of recognition and formal leadership roles which allow excellent teachers to contribute to leadership while remaining in the classroom, highlighting the loss of assistant principal teacher role and the chartered teacher scheme. However, the report highlighted an enthusiasm and receptiveness for the greater utilisation of teacher leadership in school governance in Scotland.

### **Classroom approaches to reducing the attainment gap**

Sosu and Ellis (2014) identify a number of strategies which can be effective in contributing to narrowing the attainment gap when applied at classroom level. Most of these target inequalities in literacy and numeracy. Structured group work and collaborative learning in mixed ability groups has been shown to be effective, as long as it is taught across the school and is facilitated by teachers (Sharples et al 2011). Peer tutoring has been found to have a positive impact on raising attainment in Scottish education (Topping et al 2011, Tymms et al 2011),

including the peer-assisted learning strategy and cross-age tutoring, as has formative assessment and feedback (Higgins et al 2013). This is reflected in the use of 'assessment is for learning' in the Scottish education system, in which students are provided with specific feedback on their work, comparative examples and the opportunity to identify how they can improve and to set clear targets. There has been no recent evaluation of the efficacy of assessment is for learning in addressing the attainment gap. Metacognitive and self-regulation strategies, involving teaching children from low-income households to understand and improve their own learning, have also been shown to support young people from low-income households to increase their attainment. These strategies can have a direct impact on the attainment gap but require training and support for teachers to develop the skills and knowledge required to deliver these techniques.

When applied to closing the attainment gap, these findings indicate that teachers have an important role to play in leading the development for school-based strategies. In addition, the vast knowledge and expertise of teachers is essential in informing wider education policies. It is important that a range of varied leadership opportunities are available to harness this expertise, and that support and resources are put in place to allow teacher leadership across decision-making processes. Crucially, teacher leadership should be encouraged to voice dissident views and to reflect honestly, openly and productively on school practices without fear of recrimination.

### **5.6 WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP**

Inclusive leadership, which brings together student leadership, teacher leadership, community involvement and theoretical and critical work on leadership may provide a helpful structure for developing a vision for democratised school leadership practices in Scottish education (Ryan 2007).

Emancipatory leadership, which criticises traditional leadership structures as exclusive and unequal and advocates for recognising these inequalities and working collaboratively to challenge them, may be useful in considering school leadership in the context of attainment inequity. As those who experience the negative effects of educational inequality are often the least likely to be involved in leadership processes, it is crucial that any interventions to democratise decision-making are inclusive and targeted to ensure that they are accessible to those to whom they will be of greatest benefit.

### **5.7 THE REGIONAL LEVEL OF SCHOOL GOVERNANCE**

In the Scottish government's school governance review consultation document, *Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve excellence and equity in education* (2016j), reference is made to 'strengthening the middle', with 'the middle' described in the consultation document as:

*‘Strengthening the middle means, among other things, considering what happens above the level of the individual school or early learning and childcare setting and beneath the level of national government in Scottish education.’*

*Scottish Government 2016j*

While not clearly defined in the consultation document, 'strengthening the middle' appears to refer to increasing opportunities for collaborative work and learning across Scottish education, and for developing and reforming the role of local authorities and other partners in supporting this. This echoes the recommendations made by the OECD (2015) that a strengthened middle is integral to closing the attainment gap and that, while local authorities are an important component of this middle, action must also be taken to review differences in performance across local authorities. This definition differs from that used in discussions of the 'missing middle' in English educational reform, which address the lack of a transparent governance system to act as an intermediary between government and schools (Muir and Clifton 2014).

This proposal for increased collaboration across schools, local authorities and regions is supported by the OECD in their review, *Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective* (2015), which acknowledges the current culture of collaboration within the Curriculum for Excellence as bringing together a range of professional networks and working groups involving classroom teachers, headteachers, subject principal teachers, parents, college and higher education and third sector organisations. The role of local authorities is recognised as a 'linchpin' in supporting this collaboration to drive positive change. The OECD review (2015) also acknowledges the need for clarity regarding the types of collaboration which are most effective in improving student outcomes and creating sustainable networks of shared enquiry and learning.

## **5.8 SCHOOL COLLABORATION**

Some evidence of the aspects of collaboration which support improved pupil outcomes in general can be taken from research regarding school federation in England. There are a range of ways in which schools in England can operate within a federation, from two or more schools sharing a governing body (termed a 'hard federation'), to two or more schools which work together under collaborative governance structures and joint committees, but retain their individual governing bodies (termed 'soft federations'). Chapham et al (2011) found that, in general, federation and collaborative schools outperform non-federation schools, but that this effect was not seen until at least two years following federation. Their evidence suggests performance federations, which consist of two or more schools, some of which are high performing and some of which are low performing, have the greatest impact on pupil outcomes. Findings from Chapham et al's (2011) qualitative research indicate that federations can have a positive impact on leadership, with staff feeling that they were educational leaders rather than school leaders and that they were united behind a common purpose. Those working in federation schools felt that greater collaboration between schools had also improved the quality of teaching and learning, as access to a larger pool of knowledge and experience meant that good practice could be more easily shared

across schools. The creation of opportunities for continuing professional development which would not have otherwise been available was also identified as a benefit of school federation.

At present, there is little evidence of a coordinated approach to school collaboration in the Scottish education system. Collaborative structures across primary and secondary education differ by local authority and are known by various names, including school clusters, quality improvement groups and learning communities. Some local authorities publish information about school collaboration on their websites, while information on collaboration in others is only available through freedom of information requests. Where information is available, school collaboration groups include a number of primary schools, or several primary schools and one secondary school. In some local authorities, each cluster has a named lead. In others, there is no identified lead and the schools work together collaboratively.

An example of promising practice in school collaboration in the Scottish context is the School Improvement Partnership Programme, a school improvement strategy which prioritises the use of data and collaborative enquiry in developing solutions to educational inequality. It supports a range of programmes across Scotland which involve collaboration within local authorities, across authorities and multi-agency partnerships to work together on the shared aim of tackling inequity. The programme is supported by researchers from the Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change at the University of Glasgow who provide external evaluation support. The purpose of the support is to build practitioner's collaborative enquiry capacity, to find out what works in closing the attainment gap and develop a rigorous research and evidence base to inform future work.

## **5.9 SCHOOL AUTONOMY**

The premise that increased school autonomy over staff employment and management, funding, curriculum, length of the school day and other aspects of school management can increase performance and attainment is the basis for the academies system in England, charter schools in America and free schools in Sweden. These countries operate a system which has an element of parental school choice; parents can apply for a place for a child in a particular school within a set of admission criteria set by the school, such as living in the local area, attending a feeder school or being in care or looked after. In England, schools are assessed on the basis of standard examinations and results are published in league tables to allow for comparison across schools and parents and governing bodies to identify well-performing and poorly performing schools.

A survey of the UK-based literature regarding school autonomy and attainment for pupils with the lowest levels of achievement was carried out in 2013 by Machin and Silva at the Centre for Economic Performance. Machin and Silva identified the main ingredients of models of education centred on autonomy and choice as accountability for school performance and school autonomy to respond to competitive pressures introduced by school choice. It is theorised that school choice and accountability are associated with increased educational attainment through better matching of schools and pupils and the market incentive

for schools to perform well in order to attract pupils. An important distinction is drawn between sponsored academies, which are schools that were identified as poorly performing and became academies under a Labour government intervention strategy, and converter academies, which are well-performing schools which became academies voluntarily under the Coalition government.

Machin and Silva (2013) present substantial evidence to support this model, in that well-performing schools attract greater numbers of pupils and headteachers respond to this competitive pressure (Bradley et al 2000, Levacic 2010). There is some limited evidence that sponsored academy school structure has a positive impact on pupil attainment and the rate of improvement, although achievement is variable across schools, with the greatest improvement seen in schools which have been sponsored academies for longest (Worth 2014, DfE 2012). There is far less research on the performance of converter academies which attained academy status after 2010.

However, this evidence does not address the issue of educational inequality. In examining the effects of school autonomy in the context of school choice, it is important to consider the impact on the lowest achieving pupils through a contextual value-added model rather than through a comparison of average results. This model of school autonomy has been criticised in that the accountability to league table ranking increases the potential for teachers to focus their attention towards those most likely to achieve higher marks, and away from those who need additional support and input, in order to increase average school results. There is some research to support these concerns. In order to identify who benefits most and least from the academy system, Burgess et al (2005) examined the distributional impact of threshold passing rates for schools. Their findings indicate that performance is increased for pupils who are closer to the margin of meeting the threshold pass rate, particularly in the context of local school competition, but that for poorly performing students, as the number of marginal pupils increases, the poorer performing students get less value added and have a lower chance of getting the qualification required for post-16 study. Further analysis by Machin and Silva (2013) found that, irrespective of ranking by school or national distribution, there was no significant effect of academy conversion on pupils in the bottom 10 per cent and 20 per cent of the ability distribution, suggesting no benefit to the poorest performing students of attending academy schools. In their analysis of the impact of academy chains, that is multi-academy trusts whereby a school or organisation sponsors a group of schools, on low-income students, Hutchings et al (2015) found that while a few chains had succeeded in substantially improving educational attainment of the students who experience greatest disadvantage, a larger group of academy chains were not improving attainment and may even be harming the future prospects of the lowest achieving pupils. This stratification of schools has become more pronounced over time, with the gap between the best and worst performing schools in terms of attainment of the most disadvantaged students widening between 2012 and 2014.

It must be noted that, in the Scottish context, parents have little or no choice as to which publicly-funded schools their child attends, as Scotland operates a system of catchment areas, in which children are assigned a school based on its proximity to their home. Concerns have been raised in England and Wales regarding the practice of ‘cream-skimming’, when faith schools select pupils based on their prior attainment or residential area in order to increase their performance on measures such as league tables (Sahlgren 2013). However, school admissions in Scotland are strictly governed and places in oversubscribed denominational schools are allocated on the basis of demonstrable commitment to the faith; for example a certificate of baptism into the Roman Catholic Church.

The relationship between school autonomy and attainment is complex and difficult to extricate from the context of school choice. However, greater autonomy in a system based on improvement rather than school choice may allow schools to better respond to local need by taking action to tackle the issues facing their school as informed by the evidence. More freedom over staff training, leadership structures, school collaboration and parental engagement may have a positive influence on the attainment gap and allow schools to take a more targeted approach. PISA data indicates that countries with greater numbers of schools that are able to define their own curricula and assessment tend to have better performing school systems (PISA 2012). However, this finding could reflect the greater proportion of independent schools in wealthier countries. As the data for the UK is taken together, it is not possible to determine the effect of autonomy on Scottish schools.

### **5.10 TARGETED FUNDING**

Providing schools with additional funding, targeted at reducing inequality and increasing attainment, can be highly effective when the funds are used to develop impactful activity based on evidence and local data.

In their report, *Closing the Attainment Gap in Scottish Education*, Sosu and Ellis (2014) highlight practices that have been successful, and identify projects that are accompanied by targeted and dedicated funding. However, targeted funding in and of itself is not sufficient for the success of programmes designed to decrease the attainment gap, as illustrated by the Title I programme in the US. Title I is a funding scheme set up in 1965 which provides financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families, and is used to provide supplementary reading and mathematics education. Evaluation of the programme found that the practice of linking funding availability with attainment levels acted as a disincentive for schools to raise attainment as it would mean that their funding was reduced. While the programme was reformed and attainment-linked funding removed, further evaluation found that the provision of Title I funding did not increase direct funding for pupils from low-income families, as schools and local authorities redistributed spend and that the pedagogical practices used were associated with segregation and increased stigmatisation of poorly performing students (van der Klaauw 2008).

A different approach to reducing the attainment gap was taken by the London and City Challenges.<sup>2</sup> The London Challenge was originally introduced in 2003 by the Labour government, and was extended in 2008 to provide around £160 million of targeted funding to schools in London, Greater Manchester and the Black Country City Challenges. The programme facilitated whole-school reforms, with the aim of improving educational attainment among pupils from low-income backgrounds, and was based on developing shared vision and partnership between schools, providing support and moving away from a stigmatising ‘name and shame’ approach. The London Challenge had a strong focus on the use of evidence to inform approaches, collaboration between schools, strengthening school leadership and built-in evaluation processes. The City Challenge scheme adopted these principles in part but was also tailored to meet local needs. While the London Challenge set out specific activities that funding should be used for, the greater flexibility of the City Challenge meant that schools had more autonomy to use the funding in different ways. The London and City Challenges were found to be effective in increasing attainment, albeit it to different extents across primary and secondary schools and across geographical areas. Evaluation of the programmes found that specific approaches adopted by each of the schools resulted in different effects on overall attainment and on narrowing the attainment gap. Short-term, focussed activities, such as external examination, produced short-term effects while longer term strategies such as greater parental involvement produced more sustained improvements. Approaches that encouraged and supported collaboration between schools and used evidence to inform their approach were the most successful in reducing educational inequality (Hutchings et al 2012).

The most recent targeted funding strategy aimed at closing the attainment gap in English schools is the pupil premium, which was launched in 2011. Based on a model of allocating additional funds for each pupil who is eligible to receive free school meals or has been in care or looked after for more than six months, schools were given £935 per pupil per year for the 2016/17 academic year (increasing from £488 in 2011/12, £623 in 2013/14 and £900 in 2014/15). This corresponds to a total national spend of over £2.5 billion per year: over 6 per cent of the total schools budget. Schools have some flexibility over how the grant is used but are required to report on the impact on pupil attainment. While the full effect of this scheme on the attainment gap is yet to be fully realised, initial evaluation of the programme suggests that the funds are being used to support activities which would not otherwise have been possible (Carpenter et al 2013). The evaluation highlights potential issues with the implementation of the pupil premium which may impact on its effectiveness in closing the attainment gap. These include reductions in funding overall and withdrawal of funding for existing initiatives, which then had to be paid for out of the pupil premium and an inward-looking approach to determine best practice for closing the attainment gap, rather than an outward-looking focus on evidence and collaborative knowledge. A summit on the future of the pupil premium held in July 2015 and hosted by the Sutton Trust and the Education Endowment

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2 The City Challenge was launched in 2008 following the targeted funding model used in the London Challenge. Approximately £160 million of funding was provided to schools in London, Manchester and the Black Country (Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton) to improve educational outcomes for children from low-income families.

Foundation presented evidence of the ways in which schools have implemented the pupil premium and made recommendations for the future of the scheme. These include continuing to fund the scheme on the basis of free school meals rather than prior attainment, committing to the promotion and production of the evidence base regarding what works in narrowing the attainment gap, and providing teacher training and professional development to enable school leaders and classroom teachers to make effective use of data (Sutton Trust and EEF 2015).

These findings have obvious implications for the implementation of the Attainment Challenge Fund and Pupil Equity Fund in Scotland. While targeted funding for initiatives has the potential to be effective in increasing attainment among pupils from low-income households, these funds must represent a genuine increase in school funding, and should not come at the expense of funding for existing initiatives, and equally must be spent on impactful activity; targeted funding in and of itself may not have the desired effect on school performance and pupil attainment. This is likely to be of particular importance at a time of cuts to local authority and public service funding. In addition, targeted funding must be supported by collaboration between schools, evidence-informed strategies, the use of robust data, and a strong focus of evaluation in order to learn what works and why.

### **5.11 COST OF THE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS**

Long school holidays can bring additional challenges for low-income households. Alexander et al (2001) found US-based evidence that the skills of children from higher income households advanced over the school break, whereas children from low-income households saw no increases to their skills, suggesting that the gap in educational inequality may become more entrenched during school holidays. Work carried out by the Child Poverty Action Group for Scotland (2011), commissioned by Glasgow Life, on the impact of school holidays on low-income families highlights the challenges faced by families as cost pressures associated with providing food for children who are eligible for free school meals, difficulties in sourcing appropriate and affordable childcare, and the emotional pressure of being unable to provide the same holiday experiences for their children as are available to their peers such as trips, treats and travel abroad. While limited to the Glasgow area, they identify financial barriers to accessing local authority holiday care provision, including the cost of block bookings and additional hidden costs for trips and packed lunches. Provision of free or low-cost activities was found to be patchy across the Glasgow area and parents lacked timely information about what was available. In addition, some activities do not cover the full age range of children, are not suitable for children with additional support needs or do not integrate with the timings of the working day.

## 6.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE REFORM

While Scotland has not experienced the major structural reforms to the way schools are run and managed that has been seen in the rest of the UK, a suite of reforms has been made to the curriculum, exam structure, employment and wider skills system, as well as the introduction of targeted funding to address the attainment gap. In this report, we have reviewed national level data and identified a clear and persistent gap in attainment between those from low-income and high-income households. We also considered any evidence of attainment differences within Scotland's two major school types: denominational and non-denominational schools. Our analysis indicated that, when controlling for intake, overall attainment does not differ significantly between denominational and non-denominational schools, and there is no evidence of higher performance of one or the other school type. We also considered the evidence for effective governance or changes for increasing attainment and reducing the attainment gap. In this chapter, we set out recommendations for the use of these findings in developing an evidence-informed approach to school governance reform.

### 6.1 A WHOLE-SYSTEM AND LONG-TERM APPROACH

First, it must be stated that the attainment gap exists due to factors outside as well as inside school. It is unlikely that the gap can be sustainably and definitively closed by school-based activity alone. There are many deeply rooted systemic inequalities which impact families in low-income households and outcomes for children, including poverty, housing and health. While schools cannot directly impact all of these factors of multiple deprivation, they can play an important role in mitigating their effect on educational outcomes. They could also, given catchment area-based selection, be instrumental in galvanising the wider community to deliver change. They can provide a structure within which young people at risk of falling behind can be effectively identified and targeted for additional support. Schools can also provide a route for increased parental engagement, and an avenue for families to link with other services. The following recommendations set out what can be done at secondary school, local authority, regional and national level to contribute to narrowing the attainment gap in the context of the proposed school governance reform.

To be successful in closing the attainment gap for good, support must be provided within a coordinated and sustained whole-system approach, which includes early-years services, social work, housing, maternal

and public health, jobs and skills, and many other bodies and systems. This report has not considered what could potentially be achieved in these areas and how. To achieve the excellence and equity called for by the Scottish government, this must become a national priority and these systems must work together towards a clearly articulated aim of reducing income-related equality with commonly understood and shared indicators for success. A fragmented approach to tackling the attainment gap, in our view, will not be successful.

Care must be taken in the attribution of changes in narrowly defined measures of attainment, either positive or negative, to the short-term interventions. Educational inequality is affected by multiple factors, and tax and welfare reform, cuts to public service funding and even Brexit are likely to have far-reaching consequences that will disproportionately affect the poorest in Scottish society, with the potential for negative effects on attainment. The inequalities that lead to the attainment gap begin in early childhood, with effects that persist throughout the life course. These are unlikely to be fully resolved in the timescale of one-year or even four-year funding cycles. However, progress can and must be made in the short term.

## 6.2 AUTONOMY IN THE RIGHT PLACE

Effective school leadership and improving the school culture are of great importance in supporting improved attainment of pupils from low-income households. Through the devolved school management mechanism, many headteachers already have a significant level of financial devolution. However, often there is less devolution and autonomy in relation to curriculum and assessment. We believe that decisions, as a default, are best devolved to school level to allow locally informed decisions to be made in the best interests of all pupils, within parameters which ensure comparability and high levels of quality across the school system. Powers should be retained at an education authority, regional, or national level only where justified; for example, in order to reduce needless regulation, to gain significant financial efficiencies, to maintain quality and sufficient levels of scrutiny and accountability, and to retain coherence with national ambitions and parameters. We strongly believe that further devolution should also be considered for interventions targeted at narrowing the attainment gap. However, it is crucial that devolution does not stop at the level of school head. The evidence suggests that it is the classroom that will have the greatest impact on the attainment gap and, therefore, teachers should play a central role in informing these decisions to make use of their situated expertise.

### **Recommendation 1: Autonomy in the right place: devolution as a default within the education system**

We believe that the principle of subsidiarity should hold within the school system. Decisions should be made at the most local level where possible. The devolution of power to schools to respond to their attainment gap should therefore be the default within the education system in Scotland, with further devolution to the local level. However, it is important that, firstly, devolution does not end with the headteacher. The contribution a school can make to closing the attainment gap will be delivered in the classroom, and so ensuring teachers are empowered, supported

and enabled to respond to developing attainment problems is critical. Secondly, increasing devolution to schools must come hand in hand with accountability, both to parents and pupils, to local authorities, and to the regional or national level for the public funding provided. Thirdly, while devolution to the local level should be the default, there are many aspects that will make sense to be held at the local authority, regional and national level. It is imperative that the models of devolution that are pursued are with the purpose of improving school performance and closing the attainment gap. As our evidence shows, not all types of autonomy would contribute to attainment, and so devolution in and of itself will not have the desired effect.

### **6.3 EMPOWERING TEACHERS TO CREATE AN EVIDENCE-LED CLASSROOM**

Devolution of power to the school level should not stop with devolution to headteachers. In devolving further decision-making to the local level it is crucial that we empower, support and enable teachers in the classroom to collect and respond to data on pupil performance in real time, augmenting teacher-led judgements in relation to pupils who are falling behind and who are in need of intervention to avoid, prevent or minimise a developing attainment gap. This will require improvements to data collection and use, including, but not restricted to, the new standardised national assessments beginning in Scotland in 2017. It will also require recognition of the potential increased workload this would bring, and therefore either reductions in workload elsewhere, replacing existing metrics, or increased investment in additional support or teaching capacity. However, just as importantly, it will require prioritisation within school culture and more widely, and support for improving and increasing teachers' skills in collecting and responding to evidence. This is imperative if we are to build evidence and impact into the heart of the system.

In addition to the empowerment of teachers within the classroom outlined above, in order to tackle the attainment gap, it is important to give the voice of teachers a direct route to offer constructive engagement, feedback and criticism to decisions made elsewhere in the system. In constructing new regional educational authorities (as outlined below), and in devolving further power to schools, it is important that teachers are empowered and have routes to contribute to, engage with and challenge decisions made at the school, local authority, regional or national level. This should be considered and built in to the heart of any school governance changes in Scotland.

#### **Recommendation 2: Empowering teachers in the classroom**

Devolution of power to the school level should not stop with devolution to headteachers. Teachers must be empowered, supported and enabled in the classroom to collect and respond to data on pupil performance in real time, allowing their judgements to be augmented with data to make interventions to avoid, prevent or minimise a developing attainment gap. Empowering teachers will require improvements to data collection and use. It will also require recognition of the potential increased workload this would bring, and therefore either reductions in workload elsewhere, or increased investment in additional support or teaching capacity. However, just as importantly, it will require prioritisation within school culture and more widely, and support for improving and increasing teachers' skills in collecting and responding to evidence. Enabling

teachers to create an evidence-led classroom would help to build evidence and impact into the heart of the school system in Scotland.

#### **6.4 A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO INVOLVING PUPILS IN DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEM**

Involving pupils in decision-making processes about their own learning and the culture of their school has been shown to increase motivation, self-esteem and self-efficacy among pupils, and to promote attainment, improve relationships with peers and education staff and to promote greater ownership over learning. In addition, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 12 assures ‘to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child’. A rights-based approach to involving learners in their education at the classroom and school level would be of particular benefit to pupils at the lower end of the attainment spectrum who may be less likely to engage in traditional forms of pupil involvement such as pupil councils. Opportunities for involvement must be targeted and accessible and should include a programme of education to promote understanding of rights in practice and provide routes from meaningful involvement in decision-making, potentially making use of digital technology.

#### **6.5 ENGAGING AND INVOLVING PARENTS IN DESIGNING INTERVENTIONS IN RELATION TO THE ATTAINMENT GAP**

Interventions which are aimed at increasing parental engagement in education have been found to be effective in improving attainment. Ensuring parents are fully and genuinely engaged in decisions around interventions to close the attainment gap (and in particular in relation to how additional funding from the Attainment Challenge Fund and Pupil Equity Fund is spent) could open opportunities to engage parents at the pupil and classroom level. We believe consideration should be given to devolving decision-making power over the spending of at least a portion of this attainment funding to parents and pupils, provided that the activity has evaluation built in and that there is an evidence base in relation to its likely impact. This could include the provision and design of breakfast clubs, parent–child homework clubs and Saturday school. Equally, it could include summer, winter and spring holiday wrap-around provision. The make-up of parent (and pupil) councils must be monitored to ensure a representative selection of parents (and pupils). Equally, barriers to engagement from low-income households should be minimised, and should be taken into account in developing accessible and sustainable routes for involving parents, which may require setting up meetings during school hours or in the evening, using digital technology for engagement, meeting in a neutral community space, or working with a home–school partnership worker to support engagement.

#### **Recommendation 3: Democratising school provision through new parent and pupil councils**

We believe new parent and pupil councils should be developed and placed at the heart of decisions in relation to the funding and design of activity to close the attainment gap in Scotland. Parent and pupil

councils would operate within national parameters (including the impact framework recommended below) and within nationally set ambitions and priorities, and would have a particular focus on the Attainment Challenge Fund and Pupil Equity Fund devolved to schools (through the proposed school attainment outcome agreements recommended below). This could include devolving a proportion of these funds to parents and pupils to make decisions in relation to pre- and post-school activity, weekend and holiday activity, that provides interventions to contribute to closing the attainment gap provided that key evidence-led and impact principles are built into this provision, and that provision is in keeping with national and regional ambitions around closing the attainment gap.

Parent and pupil councils should explore new forms of recruitment of parents to ensure a balanced participation by background, and where possible, the avoidance of self-selection (through the exploration of an opt-out lottery or random selection process). To reduce and remove barriers for parents from lower-income backgrounds, engagement should be sought with local employers to ensure participation on parent and pupil councils is valued. Equally, funding should be provided to remove financial barriers for lower income parents, and potentially pupils, to being involved.

## **6.6 ACCOUNTABILITY, ADDITIONALITY AND A FOCUS ON OUTCOMES**

As further devolution takes place to the school level, it is important that accountability must also be devolved, and cannot begin and end at the school head level. Schools are subject to restrictions on funding, staffing and exams which are set at local and national levels. If, as proposed, greater accountability is devolved to headteachers and teachers, this must be supported by accountability and transparency at all levels of school governance. This is currently not the case. In our view, considering an outcome-based approach to Attainment Challenge Fund monies could be an important contribution to closing the attainment gap. In return for receiving additional funding for closing the attainment gap, schools would agree outcomes, ambitions and targets for improvement.

Furthermore, the devolution of decision-making should not lead to the withdrawal from funding from existing actors within the school system. It is crucial that the Attainment Challenge Fund, Pupil Equity Fund, and devolution of wider funds to school heads, is done with the principle of additionality at its core. It would not be impactful for the devolution of funds and power to become the devolution of cuts, as has been seen with the pupil premium in England.

### **Recommendation 4: School attainment outcome agreements**

Greater devolution and autonomy for schools in relation to narrowing the attainment gap should be accompanied by greater accountability for progress. The introduction of school attainment outcome agreements would introduce an outcome-based approach to Attainment Challenge funding and Pupil Equity Fund investment, providing a mechanism to devolve decision-making power to schools while ensuring schools can contribute to the national priorities in a way that responds to local need and the local characteristics of the Attainment Challenge. Parents and pupils should be fully engaged and included in the attainment outcome agreement negotiation (through the

parent and pupil councils outlined above). Funding should be provided on condition of progress on narrowing the attainment gap, and funding should be focussed on impactful, evidence-based, provision. Funding should also be additional, rather than simply making up for spending cuts to education budgets elsewhere.

### **6.7 BUILD EVALUATION AND EVIDENCE INTO THE ATTAINMENT CHALLENGE FUND AND PUPIL EQUITY FUND ACTIVITY**

Activity designed to close the attainment gap, both within the traditional school day and through wrap-around provision outside the school day, should focus on interventions with the strongest evidence of impact and should build evaluation and impact measurement in from the start. Over time, we would like to see impactful activity within schools begin to crowd out activity for which there is little or no evidence of impact. This principle should apply to activity provided by schools, or through the new parent and pupil councils, as much as to third-party activity in school (through, for example, the voluntary sector, businesses, universities and colleges). There is an opportunity cost in undertaking activity within schools, and as such only the most impactful activity should be welcomed.

The Scottish government's announcement of the development of a Scotland-specific learning and teaching toolkit is welcome. We believe that this, along with what has been learned from the London Challenge and City Challenge, could form part of a new impact framework.

#### **Recommendation 5: A new impact framework for attainment gap activity**

A new impact framework would help to encourage schools to undertake and welcome the most impactful activity to close the attainment gap in Scotland. The framework would outline the principles and attributes of best-practice activity within schools on closing the attainment gap, both within the classroom and through extra-curricular wrap-around provision, and provide a benchmark of quality assurance. Over time, the framework would begin to crowd out activity for which there is little or no evidence of impact, and scale up activity with the most evidence of impact. This could be accelerated through the school attainment outcome agreement process and the stipulation that Attainment Challenge Fund must be spent on interventions that sit on the impact framework. The framework would be designed to ensure local flexibility but would build a core of impactful activity.

As part of the development of the impact framework, we would see strengthened classroom-level evidence collection, empowering teachers to collect and respond to data on pupil performance in real time, and augmenting teacher-led judgements in relation to pupils who are falling behind and in need of intervention to avoid, prevent or minimise a developing attainment gap (as outlined in recommendation 2).

### **6.8 INCREASED WRAP-AROUND SCHOOL PROVISION**

Evidence has suggested that long school holidays pose additional challenges for low-income households and may further entrench educational inequity. Learning activities which provide additional opportunities outside the school day and school term, whether formal classroom-based learning or otherwise, can be effective in topping up attainment for pupils from low-

income households, and contribute towards attainment levels. Many schools and local authorities already provide activity of this sort but it is not provided in a systematic way, on an entitlement basis, and does not always have evidence and impact measurement at its heart in terms of its contribution to closing the attainment gap.

Attainment Challenge funding could be used to provide this additional provision, in addition to provision that already exists. Wrap-around provision could include breakfast clubs, parent-child homework clubs and Saturday school, as well as supported study and summer, winter and spring holiday wrap-around provision for secondary school pupils. This provision should be accessible to all pupils on a school-based approach to prevent stigma of attending becoming a barrier to low-income families, but should provide support for children from low-income families to attend, including engaging with parents, support with travel, and provision of free meals for those eligible. Once established, this wrap-around provision could provide a hub for parents to access additional interventions and services to address inequalities, food poverty and employment. In addition, this provision should be designed with a built-in system of monitoring and evaluation to provide robust evidence of impact on attainment.

There are many examples of these interventions which are currently running in schools and it is important to note the concerns which have been expressed that the Attainment Challenge Fund will now be used to fund these existing interventions, rather than representing a real increase in funding for new initiatives.

This increased wrap-around provision should not necessarily extend the working year for teachers, at least on existing contractual arrangements. However, this provision should be professionally supervised and designed (if not necessarily teacher-delivered). Utilising retired teachers, supply teachers, and teachers wishing to gain additional income outside of the school day should be considered, in a similar approach to the Open University for university lecturers.

#### **Recommendation 6: Increased wrap-around provision for Attainment Challenge Fund schools**

As part of the Attainment Challenge funding, consideration should be given to increasing wrap-around provision, including breakfast, after-school, weekend and holiday provision – over and above what is already provided by schools and local authorities. This increased provision would be professionally designed, with evaluation and impact measurement at its heart, and with a core objective of contributing to the closing of the attainment gap. However, this need not take the form of formal learning in the classroom. Provision planning would be supervised by qualified teachers and innovative delivery would be encouraged, including through parents, community and business involvement.

This increased wrap-around provision would have the effect of extending learning hours, if not formal learning hours, for pupils at risk of falling behind, and could potentially increase the school week and year for pupils from more deprived backgrounds, without asking more of teachers.

## 6.9 REGIONAL EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

In recent years, we have seen an increasing regionalisation of education and skills in Scotland. From college regions, regional skills investment plans, regional skills assessments and the regional groupings stemming from the Developing Scotland's Young Workforce work there are now a number of overlapping regions in relation to education and skills provision in Scotland. In addition, community planning partnerships, integrated health and social care bodies, and NHS health boards offer related, but non-education, regional bodies.

While some local authority education authorities exist on a regional scale, other education authorities operate on a smaller scale with potential risks around duplication and the ability to share good practice. A number of local authorities have begun to bring together regional bodies, including the West Partnership and Northern Alliance, to coordinate and improve education across the regional level.

We believe it is time to consider regional education partnerships (REPs) operating above the level of the current education authorities. This would potentially offer some financial savings, and the potential for greater efficiencies in investment for school provision. It would also offer a route to bring together responsibility for workforce planning at the regional level, meaning teacher number targets, teacher training places, and aggregate teacher employment decisions could be held in one place, helping to tackle recruitment gaps and problems in planning for future workforce needs. It could also take the lead for continuing professional development of teachers across regions, gaining greater impact for the investment in teachers once in the profession.

Furthermore, and crucially, this could provide greater impact for attainment funding. By investing attainment funding from the regional level, and with REPs negotiating school attainment outcome agreements (see recommendation above) with schools or school clusters, we could help to drive greater impact for the investment made, improving attainment and narrowing the attainment gap.

Over time, the introduction of REPs could offer opportunities for aligning education and skills provision at the regional level, integrating funding and provision decisions, starting with the senior phase of school, at one regional level through alignment with other regional bodies, such as college regions. In addition, REPs, combined with school-level devolution (to heads, to teachers and to pupils and parents) could strengthen the middle layer of school governance in Scotland, helping to support performance across local authorities, improve recruitment capabilities and reduce recruitment gaps, and further prioritise closing the attainment gap in Scotland.

In creating REPs, attention should be focussed on the most appropriate members that would take up positions on the regional body. This should not simply replicate current members of education authorities as currently constituted. In our view, places should be reserved for teachers, parents and pupils together with local authority representatives, and other education and skills representatives. Crucially, where democratic

decisions need to be taken, these should be reserved for only those members with a democratic mandate.

### **Recommendation 7: Regional education partnerships**

REPs should be created above the level of most local authorities. They should lead on teacher workforce planning (including teacher training numbers, teacher number targets, and aggregate teacher recruitment), continuing professional development for teachers already in the profession, and leading on the investment and outcomes from the attainment funding invested in schools. This would include leading on negotiating school attainment outcome agreements with schools or school clusters, evaluating impact from attainment activity, and measuring impact at a regional level. REPs could encourage local authorities to pool wider decisions on funding and provision across regions.

REPs would have the aim of reducing administrative barriers across education and skills in Scotland, creating efficiencies within the system, supporting school performance across local authority areas, helping to strengthen teacher recruitment processes (by bringing workforce planning into one place), and enabling the sharing of good practice and a focus on impact in relation to attainment. Combined with greater devolution to schools, and the formation of new parent and pupil councils, this would see a combination of devolution to the local level and increased power in the 'middle' between government and schools.

REPs should see refreshed membership, as compared to the current make-up of education authorities, with reserved places for pupils, parents and teachers, with representatives of local authorities and wider education and skills representatives. It is our view that where democratic decisions and votes are to be made through REPs, only those members with a democratic mandate should be tasked with making those decisions.

New REPs could allow opportunities for greater integration and coherence with regional colleges, and other skills and education regions (such as youth employment regions). Over time consideration could be given to how REPs could help to integrate funding and provision decisions across the senior phase of school, skills (including apprenticeships), colleges and universities.

## **6.10 SCHOOL COLLABORATION: FORMALISED SCHOOL CLUSTERS AND FEDERATIONS**

School collaboration is important to achieving greater school attainment, and the narrowing of the attainment gap. With our proposal to create new regional education authorities, together with the devolution of decision-making to school heads and teachers, and pupils and parents, it is crucial that we do not see a fragmentation of provision. Indeed, the strengthening of the middle will only succeed if, in doing so, we open new opportunities for collaboration between schools, heads and teachers across schools, across existing local authority areas, and across regions at the national level.

School clusters do currently exist in some local areas. However, in many cases these are of an informal nature, with varying objectives. More formal school clusters and federations could be explored in Scotland to spread positive leadership, positive school cultures and good practice within the classroom. School attainment outcome agreements (outlined

above) could be negotiated jointly by school federations or clusters to encourage collaboration between schools, heads and teachers.

### **Recommendation 8: School clusters**

While school clusters currently exist in some local areas, these are often informal in nature with varying objectives. The recommendation of school attainment outcome agreements, to focus funding on outcomes, and to deliver an evidence-led approach to closing the attainment gap could also be used to foster formal school collaborations. Encouraging schools to work together on a more formal basis to close the attainment gap could help to spread best practice, positive culture and classroom innovation. Where formal clusters exist, these clusters could negotiate one single school attainment outcome agreement.

## **6.11 DIVERSIFYING LEARNING ROUTES INTO THE TEACHING PROFESSION**

We believe we need to refresh routes into the teaching profession in order to maximise the potential to continue to recruit the best possible teachers into the profession. Consideration should be given for fast-track routes for the highest performing graduates, work-based routes outside of traditional degree learning routes, and other new learner routes in between. In particular, consideration should be given to how the apprenticeship system (including graduate apprenticeships) could deliver new learning routes into teaching. Reviewing these routes could open up additional sources of talent, help to tackle teacher shortages, and in doing so, enable the teaching profession to increase its already high status, and empower the profession in the most appropriate way within the system.

### **Recommendation 9: Review of learning routes into the teaching profession**

The Scottish government, in collaboration with key stakeholders, should review the current learning routes on offer to become a qualified teacher in Scotland, including exploring offering new fast-track routes into the profession for the highest performing graduates, together with new work-based routes to qualification.

## **6.12 POVERTY-PROOFING THE SCHOOL DAY, SCHOOL WEEK AND SCHOOL YEAR**

With the forthcoming introduction of the child poverty bill into the Scottish parliament, it is imperative that poverty-proofing becomes integral to public services in Scotland. In relation to school education, there is a developing body of evidence to demonstrate that the expenses incurred by pupils and parents during the school day, before and after school, and during the school holidays can become financial barriers to attainment. School governance reform offers an opportunity to tackle these barriers.

### **Recommendation 10: Poverty-proof the school day, school week and school year**

The Scottish government, alongside key stakeholders within school education, should develop plans to ensure the school day, school week and school year is properly poverty-proofed to remove financial barriers to attainment within the school system. School attainment outcome agreements (recommendation 4) could build in this principle.

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