

Analysing family circumstances and education

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents more than 18,500 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million young people in more than 90 per cent of the secondary and tertiary phases, and in an increasing proportion of the primary phase. This places the association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.
- 2 ASCL welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation, aimed at increasing understanding of ordinary working families and the link to the educational outcomes of the children and young people in those families.
- 3 The broad intention of the consultation, which takes a more wide-ranging view of poverty and low income than is currently the case, is helpful. We note that the position taken in the consultation is that more work will be done using the data linking methodology outlined, and poses questions focussed on how that would best be achieved. It will be for other organisations to respond on the details of methodology, but ASCL's view is that further exploration of what could be learnt this way is worthwhile.
- 4 The Pupil Premium, introduced in 2011, changed the approach to recognising deprivation and the appropriate funding of schools from the highly simplistic free school meals entitlement. By capturing entitlement to FSM over any, or all, of the previous 6 years it acknowledged that poverty persists for a longer term than simple eligibility for a particular benefit at a fixed time would imply.
- 5 This methodology, known as 'Ever 6', has brought its own weaknesses, particularly in relation to accountability. Those students whose eligibility tails off during Year 11 are not counted in performance tables as disadvantaged, despite the secondary school receiving funding for the overwhelming majority of the pupil's time at the school and making considerable investment through intervention in such a pupil. Other pupils who become eligible for FSM for the first time in Year 11 *do* count in performance tables, but the school gets hardly any time to intervene. These two difficulties are both inevitable consequences of what is still a binary definition of poverty.
- 6 Research carried out by Fisher Family Trust (FFT) shows that pupils whose pupil premium entitlement elapsed well before starting secondary school (who therefore would have been entitled to FSM at some stage during Key Stage 1) perform noticeably less well than pupils who have never received FSM. This group (which could be described as Ever NOT 6) is therefore a good indication of the persistent long-term link between poverty and attainment which is the point of this consultation. There is a strong case that pupil premium entitlement should reflect this by using 'FSM Ever' as the criterion, although this would clearly have funding implications.

- 7 It is likely that many of the pupils which would be captured by using this extended definition are the same pupils identified by this consultation, but with a much simpler methodology. We would recommend that the DfE explores this, because if the ends are similar, the means would be far less complex.
- 8 We have some concerns about the use of housing costs throughout the paper as being one dimensional. Other organisations such as UNICEF consider a broader set of variables in their research, such as food and clothing costs. We do of course understand that there needs to be a source of data available with which to operate, but nevertheless would encourage a wider view on low income than is evident in the work so far.
- 9 We agree strongly with the repeated cautionary tone of the consultation that it is too early to draw robust conclusions from this work. We would recommend independent scrutiny of the methodology by the UK Statistics Authority before more resource is devoted to the questions raised by the consultation. We were dismayed to note the use of some of the analyses in this consultation used in a recent publication without these same caveats.
- 10 I hope that this is of value to your consultation, ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

Martin Ward
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Association of School and College Leaders
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