Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation: School Case Studies

CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation: School Case Studies

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Contents

Acronyms used in the report

ACEs	Adverse childhood experiences
ASF	Attainment Scotland Fund
ASN	Additional support needs
BGE	Broad general education
CLPL	Career-Long Professional Learning
CPD	Continuous professional development
DYW	Developing the young workforce
EAL	English as an additional language
FSM	Free school meals
HWB	Health and wellbeing
PEF	Pupil Equity Funding
PSA	Pupil Support Assistant
SALT	Speech and language therapy
SEAL	Stages of early arithmetical learning
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TLC	Teacher learning communities
TLQ	Talking, listening and questions

1. Introduction

1.1. This report presents findings from recent case study visits to 12 schools in receipt of Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF) support. This introductory section summarises the background and study approach.

1.2. The case studies were commissioned as part of the recent 2018 headteacher survey, to inform wider evaluation of the ASF. The overall aim of the study was to build on learning from previous surveys to further improve operation of the ASF, and to maximise the impact of programmes supported by the ASF. The specific objective of the case study element of the study was to provide a more detailed understanding of how the ASF has been used by schools, and to gather qualitative feedback on schools' experience to date.

1.3. A total of 12 schools were included in the case studies, selected from respondents to the headteacher survey. Case study sampling was designed to ensure a cross-section of schools in terms of:

    i.   ASF funding stream - Challenge Authority, Schools Programme and/or Pupil Equity Funding (PEF);

    ii.   Level of PEF allocation;

    iii.   Primary and secondary sector; and

    iv.   Urban/rural location.

1.4. Fieldwork involved one-day visits by Craigforth researchers to each school. The programme for each visit was tailored to schools' circumstances, to include input from a range of senior management, teaching and support staff involved in ASF supported work. A mix of individual interview and group discussion approaches was used.

1.5. Further detail on the sampling and fieldwork approach, and profile of case study schools, is provided in Section 3.

1.6. This report provides an overview of key findings from across the 12 case studies. The appendices are provided as separate documents. Appendix 1 provides findings for each of the case studies. The case study topic guide is provided at Appendix 2.

2. Case Study Findings

2.1.   The following pages provide an overview of common themes emerging through the case studies. These findings are based on qualitative feedback from schools, and should be read within this context. Summaries of each of the 12 case studies are provided at Appendix 1.

How has funding been used?

2.2.   The ASF has supported a broad range of interventions across case study schools. Specific examples have included the ASF enabling lower pupil:staff ratios to accelerate existing approaches; appointing dedicated positions to develop new approaches; and development of 'hub' resources such as nurture hubs or family support hubs as bases from which ASF interventions are delivered and whole-school approaches developed.

2.3.   Funding additional staffing or providing existing staff with additional time has been a common focus. Several schools noted this was based on a view that dedicated time from skilled staff can achieve the most significant impact for pupils. Schools also emphasised the importance of Career-Long Professional Learning (CLPL) and funding has been used to provide additional training opportunities.

2.4.   Funded interventions have incorporated a strong focus on numeracy and literacy, including use of a broad range of specific approaches and resources. Most case studies have also funded dedicated health and wellbeing interventions. Nurture and emotional wellbeing have been a common focus, as have areas such as family engagement and outdoor learning.

2.5.   Several case study schools noted that their approaches and interventions had developed over the period of funding, particularly for Challenge Authority or Schools Programme schools who had been in receipt of support for a longer period.

2.6.   The number and scope of supported interventions within each school clearly reflected the level of funding received. Those with higher allocations reported the largest number and broadest scope of funded interventions, while those with lower allocations have been more likely to use this to enhance existing initiatives and provide additional staff training or time.

How have funded interventions been targeted?

2.7.   Some schools used the ASF to build on and develop their existing focus on addressing the impact of poverty on deprivation. Others noted that funding had contributed to improved awareness amongst staff of the extent and nature of deprivation, and served as an opportunity to develop skills and confidence in using evidence to select those who would benefit most from the intervention.

2.8.   In some cases, interventions were focused exclusively on free school meal (FSM) entitlement. However, most schools indicated using additional criteria to extend the scope of ASF supported work. Some schools have also targeted specific year groups, such as at the transition and broad general education (BGE) stages for secondary schools.

2.9.   Some schools also noted the limitations of FSM as an indicator of pupil need. Where a large proportion of pupils met FSM and SIMD criteria, schools felt additional criteria helped to focus targeted interventions to those perceived as the most vulnerable, and where the greatest impact could be achieved. This was also in the context of more universal, school-wide ASF approaches which have the ability to support all pupils experiencing disadvantage.

What was the schools' approach to planning?

2.10. Case study feedback highlights the value of a coordinated approach to ASF interventions, and the substantial planning time required. This was reflected in several schools appointing dedicated ASF roles to coordinate supported interventions. Some schools (typically primary schools and smaller secondary schools) had used the ASF to appoint a single role to coordinate activities, while others had introduced dedicated leads for specific areas. These schools identified benefits in dedicated staff members having the time required to support delivery, to ensure a more coherent approach across the school, and to support development of whole-school approaches. Some smaller schools reported difficulty resourcing planning and implementation without a dedicated staff member.

2.11. The autonomy provided to those in receipt of PEF was perceived by schools as a positive factor for planning, enabling approaches to be tailored to local needs. These schools recognised the value of a strategic local authority-wide approach, including for example the more coordinated approach to Challenge Authority and Schools Programme support. However, all case study schools noted the

additional scope provided by PEF for schools to tailor interventions around their circumstances and needs.

2.12. Input from teaching staff, parents and pupils was identified as an important element in ensuring interventions were based on an accurate understanding of pupils and the local community. Schools also noted that pupils and parents often identified a different set of priorities to those identified by staff, demonstrating the value of ensuring a broad range of perspectives. Examples of pupil and parent input included consultation exercises to develop priorities, use of participatory budgeting with pupils, and ongoing engagement through pupil representative groups.

2.13. Planning at the school level has also drawn on external information and support. Case studies referred to external inputs such as local or national guidance, research evidence, the National Improvement Hub and Education Endowment Foundation. Planning has also drawn on experience across other schools, including some use of cluster-level planning to identify shared priorities, and pooling of resources.

2.14. Local authorities and Attainment Advisors appear to have played a significant role for some case study schools. Specific input from local authorities included examples of support around recruitment, advice to inform procurement, and sharing practice across schools. Input from Attainment Advisors included signposting to relevant practice, and advice on selection of specific approaches or resources.

How did schools evaluate activities?

2.15. Case study feedback indicates that ASF support has helped to improve capacity for tracking and evaluation of impact, with schools gathering a substantial volume of evidence around intervention. Some schools noted that their local authority had made a positive contribution to their efforts to evaluate ASF activity. However, some felt pressure from the local authority to demonstrate impacts more quickly and suggested this had influenced planning. Some smaller schools described challenges resourcing the work required for tracking and evaluation of impact.

2.16. Most schools reported adapting their interventions in response to emerging monitoring data. Schools also reported feeling more confident about trialling new approaches on the basis that findings from their ongoing evaluation activities could be used to refine the approach over time.

What has worked well for schools?

2.17. A range of factors were perceived as contributing to positive impacts achieved to date, including increased staffing and staff time, more sharing of practice within schools and across school clusters, and a stronger focus on tailoring approaches to pupils' needs. These are considered in further detail below:

- More dedicated staff time to support planning and delivery of interventions, including some schools having appointed dedicated ASF roles to ensure consistency of staffing over time.

- Commitment to school objectives to improve equity and tackle poverty-related gaps in attainment and wellbeing. Investment in interventions has helped to demonstrate schools' commitment to staff, pupils and parents. This has also been evident in staff willingness to review and change practice. A shared commitment has also been important in developing a more positive ethos for some schools.

- Funding CPD to develop skills and build capacity. This included CPD around numeracy, literacy, nurture and emotional wellbeing, and development of staff capacity to deliver ongoing training to support the development of whole-school approaches.

- Enhanced collaborative working and sharing of practice within and between schools. Most had seen an increase in collaboration within schools and felt this had supported a greater focus on inquiry and improving practice, for example through professional reading groups and Teacher Learning Communities. Case study feedback also highlighted examples of partnership with external agencies to support interventions.

- Autonomy and flexibility provided by PEF has enabled schools to tailor approaches to their specific needs. This has included schools who particularly valued the autonomy of PEF, where this was alongside a more coordinated local authority-wide approach to Challenge Authority or Schools Programme support.

- Spaces outwith the classroom may provide an environment where pupils feel more comfortable engaging with learning activities. Schools reflected that this had a number of positive benefits, including helping to build confidence and developing strong relationships.

- Providing new experiences and pathways to positive destinations has helped to secure 'buy-in' from pupils, for

example use of outdoor learning, accredited interventions and paths to positive destinations such as further education, apprenticeships and employment. These incentives were seen as crucial in securing pupils' participation, and maintaining the ongoing engagement required to achieve positive impacts.

- Parental engagement and community learning have been a key focus for some schools. This has included examples of parental engagement being used to develop more positive attitudes to reading in support of literacy interventions, and parents engaged in community learning programmes going on to contribute to delivery of these interventions.

What challenges have schools encountered?

2.18. Schools also experienced a range of challenges that may have limited the impact of ASF support. These included challenges around staff recruitment, training and capacity building, and the resources required for initial planning:

- Staff recruitment has been a challenge for some, including concerns that limiting recruitment to temporary contracts may have compounded longer-term shortages of candidates. Some schools felt that excessive local authority bureaucracy around recruitment had delayed the introduction of interventions in some instances.

- Limited timescales and staffing resources impacted on initial planning for some. Several schools would have welcomed more support and training from local authorities and Attainment Advisors to facilitate planning. Some also felt that notification of the 2017/18 PEF allocation limited planning time available. Whilst feedback also indicated that planning for 2018/19 had benefited from longer timescales, there remained a belief that provision of funding on an annual basis may limit the scope for longer-term planning.

- Resourcing of staff training and development. Whilst CPD and capacity building were seen by case studies as key success factors, some schools noted they had struggled to provide the required staff time and cover in the context of wider resource pressures.

- ASF support in the context of wider resourcing pressures was referenced by several case studies. These schools perceived ongoing reduction in resourcing as limiting the extent to which ASF interventions were 'additional' to where schools expected to be. For example, some indicated that the impact of targeted

interventions was offset by an overall reduction in pupil support, and that some targeted interventions were meeting needs that schools had expected to be provided through core funding.

What were the reported impacts of funded interventions?

2.19. Case study schools gathered a range of evidence on the perceived impact of funded interventions. Several schools felt that it would take time to develop robust evidence of closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

2.20. Case study evidence suggests that schools typically observed improvements around emotional wellbeing and pupil engagement more quickly than, for example, attainment. In addition to quantitative measures of pupil attendance, these included more qualitative changes such as improved pupil confidence and engagement, which schools noted can be more difficult to measure.

2.21. Perceived improvements in emotional wellbeing and engagement were also consistent with a focus on these as underlying issues affecting attainment. For example, several schools noted that work to embed nurture approaches across the curriculum had been informed by a perceived need to improve emotional wellbeing and develop a more positive school ethos. Case studies suggested that schools' experience of implementing these approaches has reinforced the importance of these factors for improved attainment.

2.22. Schools also reported improvements in literacy and numeracy attainment for pupils involved in specific interventions. Some schools had observed a narrowing of the attainment gap, as the rate of improvement for targeted pupils outstripped others.

2.23. Schools also reported wider impacts associated with ASF support. Most felt there had been an increase in collaborative working and development of a more positive and collegiate ethos, and saw these as key to maximising the value of the ASF through sharing of practice across the school.

2.24. Increased collaborative working included collaboration around specific interventions or priorities (such as between teaching and support staff to develop a tailored curriculum for targeted pupils), and wider collaboration as part of a stronger focus on inquiry and improving practice. This collaboration was primarily within schools, but some had also used collaboration and pooling of resources with cluster schools to maximise the value of funding, and felt that in

particular the autonomy provided by PEF had enabled this kind of collaboration around shared priorities.

2.25. Case study feedback suggested that some schools had also seen a wider change of culture or ethos as a result of ASF support. This included schools where targeted interventions had required a change of approach and development of data skills for staff, a more nuanced understanding of what 'equity' means for teaching practice, and a more inclusive ethos (for example a stronger role for pupils and families in planning and delivery of approaches). Culture change was also evident in some schools' use of the ASF as an opportunity to develop whole-school approaches, for example embedding nurture across the curriculum and whole-school approaches to numeracy and literacy.

2.26. Schools expected a large part of the positive impacts for ethos and collaborative working to be sustainable beyond funding. The majority of case study schools had incorporated sustainability as part of their planning work, and this has informed a focus on building staff skills and capacity, sharing and embedding of practice, and improving use of evidence in planning and evaluation. However, it was also perceived that providing quality time from skilled staff has been key to achieving positive impacts, particularly for the most disadvantaged pupils. There was a common view across case studies that should funding be withdrawn, this would result in a significant reduction in staff time available to support interventions. Schools also felt that time would be required to plan for any significant change in ASF support, and the resulting impact on ASF interventions and approaches.

3. Methodology

Case study approach

3.1. Case studies were conducted as a follow-up to the recent 2018 survey of headteachers in receipt of ASF support. The overall aim of the study was to build on learning from previous surveys to further improve operation of the ASF, and to maximise the impact of programmes supported by the Fund. The specific objectives for the case study approach were to provide a more detailed understanding of how the ASF has been used by schools, and to gather qualitative feedback on schools' experience to date.

3.2. Case study schools were selected from survey respondents who had indicated a willingness to take part in further qualitative research; from a total of 109 respondents willing to take part, 12 schools were selected. The selection of case studies was designed to ensure a cross-section of schools in terms of:

- ASF funding stream (Challenge Authority, Schools Programme and/or PEF funding);

- Level of PEF allocation, with schools divided into quartiles (separately for primary and secondary sector) based on their PEF allocation during 2017/18 to identify those with a low (quartile 1), mid-range (quartiles 2 and 3) or high (quartile 4) allocation;

- Primary and secondary sector; and

- Urban/rural location based on the Scottish Government 6-fold urban/rural classification: 'urban' schools in areas classified as 'large urban' or 'other urban', 'small town' in areas classified as 'accessible small town' or 'remote small town', and 'rural' in areas classified as 'accessible rural areas' or 'remote rural areas.[1]

3.3. A long list of potential case study schools was drawn up and agreed with the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government secured approval from local authority Directors of Education prior to approaches being made to selected schools. The table below summarises the achieved sample of case study schools.

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[1] www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/About/Methodology/UrbanRuralClassification

Case study sampling

	TOTAL	Urban	Small Town	Rural	Primary	Secondary
Challenge Authority	**2**	1		1	1	1
Schools Programme	**2**	1		1	1	1
PEF only: lower allocation	**3**	1		2	1	2
PEF only: mid allocation	**3**	2	1		2	1
PEF only: upper allocation	**2**	2			1	1
TOTAL	**12**	**7**	**1**	**4**	**6**	**6**

3.4. Fieldwork involved a one-day visit by Craigforth researchers to each school, conducted during December 2018 and January 2019. A programme was agreed in advance with each school, tailored to reflect the school's approach to the ASF and to include a cross-section of senior management, teaching and other staff involved in ASF interventions. Visits involved a mix of individual interviews and group discussions with staff to gather information on how funding has been used, and feedback on experience to date. Assurances of confidentiality were given to all participants; the identity of those taking part has not been shared with the Scottish Government, and each case study summary disclosure checked to maintain anonymity. This has included schools having sight of their summary to identify any concerns regarding disclosure or factual accuracy.

3.5. A case study topic guide was developed in collaboration with Scottish Government to ensure consistency of feedback, although the focus of each case study was tailored to reflect the school's approach. A copy of the topic guide is provided at Appendix 2.

3.6. Findings presented in this report are primarily based on qualitative feedback gathered through case study visits to schools, and should be considered in this context. The report also takes account of additional information provided by some schools (e.g. on the profile of the school roll and any attainment impacts) and case study schools' responses to the headteacher survey (e.g. in describing the range of funded interventions for each school). Case study summaries draw on the following data sources:

- Proportion of pupils living in 20% most deprived areas from SIMD2016 (www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD)

- Urban/Rural classification based on Scottish Government 6-fold classification (www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-urban-rural-classification-2016)

- Pupil Equity Funding allocations for 2017/18 available at www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-equity-fund-school-allocations-2017-to-2018.

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