

Independent review of school funding in Jersey

This briefing provides observations on the school funding system.

We all are working to make a difference on something that really matters to us all - championing the futures of all children. Most children in Jersey do well, but some have disadvantages that are often only noticed, and then addressed when they become more complex. Sometimes their parents/carers know there is a problem but struggle to know how to get the right help. Sometimes teachers and support staff notice that there is a problem that school cannot deal with alone. We want to be able to identify these children earlier and help them before things reach crisis point. These crisis or trigger points usually manifest in the form of exclusion from school or poor attendance. In order to identify need early and in order to intervene at an earlier stage, we need everyone whose job involves working with children to keep an eye out for their well-being and being prepared to take responsibility and help if something is going wrong.

Excellent teaching and learning to unlock the potential of every child must continue to be the core business of schools. But schools can and do also make a significant contribution to other aspects of well-being, both because these are important in their own right for a good childhood and because they impact on children's ability to learn and develop.

In considering their contribution to pupil well-being, schools will need to pay particular attention to the needs of vulnerable children – those with special educational needs, looked after children, school age parents, and any groups that are under-achieving or presenting a challenge in terms of integrating within the school community. In order to do this, schools need to have more control over their budgets and the school funding formula needs to adequately reflect the additional needs of the pupils in each school.

The Research Case

According to the Public Health England report into the link between well-being and attainment, schools that have programmes that directly improve students' social and emotional learning demonstrate 11% higher results in exam results.¹

The key points from the report are:

- Pupils with better health and wellbeing are likely to achieve better academically.
- Effective social and emotional competencies are associated with greater health and wellbeing, and better achievement.
- The culture, ethos and environment of a school influence the health and wellbeing of pupils and their readiness to learn.
- A positive association exists between academic attainment and physical activity levels of pupils.

The key evidence from the report is:

- Successfully attaining GCSEs (five or more A*-C) is strongly associated with higher levels of life satisfaction among young people

¹ The link between pupil health and wellbeing and attainment Nov 2014 Public Health England

- A UK study published by the Department for Education found that pupil wellbeing predicted their later academic progression and engagement in school. For example, pupils with better emotional wellbeing at age seven had a value-added key stage 2 score 2.46 points higher (equivalent to more than one term's progress) than pupils with poorer emotional wellbeing
- DfE research also found that pupils with better attention skills also make more progress across the four key stages. For example, pupils with no attention problems at age 13 had a total value-added GCSE score that was equivalent to more than one extra GCSE at grade A* (63.38 points higher)
- A systematic review of coordinated school health programmes (that promote health through explicit teaching in the curriculum and broader work to promote a healthier school environment) suggests positive effects on attainment

The current school funding system in Jersey

The current school funding situation is inequitable, and that Government must do something to ensure that in future, the most disadvantaged pupils are no longer put at further disadvantage in our schools. Tackling inequity should be at the heart of the Government's agenda in order that every child can succeed in school. This is putting children first.

In some of our town schools over half of the children qualify for Jersey Premium and over two thirds speak English as an additional language. The average child starts school with a development level that is very far behind age-related expectations.

We know that children and young people living in our town parishes (St Helier and St Clement) do significantly worse at all levels of the education system than those from our the more rural parishes. I believe the 'attainment gap' at GSCE is around 40%. This is unacceptable. Tackling the attainment gap requires the Government to relentlessly focus efforts on reducing the impacts of deprivation on educational outcomes.

Currently, there is insufficient weighting of funding to ensure that schools can put in place evidence-based strategies to close the attainment gap, particularly in the early years. Resources are not correlated to need.

Funding per pupil has fallen in real terms and continues to force schools to make substantial cuts just when we need more investment in schools.

Additional money – the Jersey Premium – is available to schools to support the learning of disadvantaged pupils. Criteria on how this is spent means that how schools use their Jersey Pupil Premium allocation is not entirely up to them. This restricts how schools can use the extra funding. Valuable as the Pupil Premium is in helping schools to target support towards their disadvantaged pupils, it represents a relatively small part of a school's overall budget.

Quality of teaching is one of the biggest drivers of pupil attainment, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is crucial, therefore, that schools focus all their resources (not just the Jersey Premium) on proven ways of improving teaching. By being clear about the issues facing disadvantaged pupils, using evidence to identify the solutions most likely to work, and thinking hard about these are implemented, schools will be in the best position to deploy their resources effectively – but they need the resources and more autonomy to do that.

The Government must support any new funding formula with enough extra money to ensure that the funding increases which many schools need are not paid for through cuts to funding for schools in other areas. No school can afford to lose funding without it affecting the life chances of children.