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Our ref: Education and Skills Inquiry – Scottish Attainment Challenge

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Dear James

**Response to the Education and Skills Committee Inquiry: What support works?
Inquiry into attainment and achievement of school children experiencing poverty**

Thank you for your letter of 12 July which enclosed the Education and Skills Committee's report on the inquiry into the attainment and achievement of school aged children experiencing poverty. I welcome the report from the committee on this crucial issue. I was glad to see the wide range of people and organisations from whom evidence was provided, many of whom the Scottish Government are already engaged with, and the many positive reflections on the work being undertaken. The report chimes with my understanding of the issues faced, and I will use it to further inform the significant work already underway as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

I accept or partly accept the majority of the recommendations made, and in many cases work is already underway. For ease, my response is set out as an annex to this letter, using the paragraph numbers where the recommendation first appears in the report. There are, however, a couple broader points I would wish to make.

Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) was launched last year, and early indicators show that planning and implementation of the fund has been positive. Later this week I will publish results from a survey conducted with Local Authorities regarding the Attainment Scotland Fund. The findings from the report tell us:

- Authorities reported a greater focus on deprivation as a result of the funding.
- Amongst most authorities, closing the poverty related attainment gap appears now to be embedded not just in those activities supported through the fund, but also through core education budgets and wider partnership agreements.
- There is a general belief that this change in culture / ethos with a stronger focus on poverty and equity will maximise sustainability of improvements already achieved.

The Committee remarked particularly on the importance of supporting headteachers and their teams to make the most of the opportunity presented by PEF. The Scottish Government agrees that headteachers must be properly supported as well as empowered to lead learning and teaching in their school. We will continue to work with partners – as we have done already – to ensure headteachers and their teams have access to clear national advice, professional learning resources and opportunities to further enhance their skills. Local authorities, as the employer and with overall responsibility for the delivery of education, have an important role to play in ensuring their employees are supported and resourced appropriately to meet the needs of the children and young people in their school.

At the start of a new school year I once again look forward to continuing our progress on the journey to close the poverty related attainment gap, and to ensure we are getting it right for every child.

JOHN SWINNEY

Annex A

Response to the Education and Skills Committee's Recommendations from the report 'What support works? Inquiry into attainment and achievement of school children experiencing poverty'.

The Poverty Related Attainment Gap

15 - Given the reliance on two indicators of deprivation as the basis for the allocation of substantial amounts of targeted Scottish Government funding, both of which may under-report rural poverty, the Committee considers it is preferable under the current system of funding that swift progress is made towards developing more sophisticated indicators.

16 - The Committee notes that the creation of a "bespoke" measure of deprivation is identified in the Scottish Government's education research strategy. The Committee seeks an update from the Scottish Government on the progress of this work.

17 - In the meantime, the impact of using the current indicators as a basis for funding allocation should be explored further. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government assess the extent to which individuals and areas are disadvantaged by using SIMD and free school meals registration as indicators of deprivation. This includes exploring the extent of the "urban bias" highlighted in evidence from the Northern Alliance.

The Scottish Government have developed a draft paper investigating the options for the development of an alternative to current measures of deprivation, to try and overcome the limitations of the area based Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) and individual but binary Free School Meals (FSM) measures. The paper looks at options for a new index of social background, based on individual circumstances, which can be used to better target interventions for disadvantaged pupils in order to reduce the attainment gap (including financial allocations such as pupil equity funding) as well as measuring progress against reducing the attainment gap.

Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) is allocated based on FSM to minimise the potential 'urban bias' that Northern Alliance raised in their evidence, and the paper considers the issue of rural poverty in its analysis. The development of an alternative measure has the potential to address rural poverty funding.

The paper will be considered by the NIF programme board. The committee will be informed of the outcome of those considerations in due course.

How does poverty impact on children and their education?

20 - The Committee notes that since 2016, education authorities have had a legal duty to have regard to social disadvantage in new strategic decisions. However, this does not cover either existing policies such as the structure of the school year or more operational decisions such as the increasing use of digital platforms. The Committee recommends that during standard review processes of their schools, education authorities should undertake impact assessments on existing policies and associated practices to assess the impact on low-income families.

21 - The Committee further recommends that education authorities ensure that school leaders are mindful of potential impacts of school practice on families with low incomes and are equipped to undertake equality impact assessments if necessary.

23 - The Committee is concerned that Joseph Rowntree Foundation found a significant difference in the outcomes for young people from deprived communities depending on where they live, specifically which local authority they live in. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government and COSLA work together to analyse these findings and report back to the Committee by the end of 2018 on the basis for this disparity and the actions that require to be taken.

The Scottish Government considered socio-economic circumstances in our Equalities Impact Assessment when developing the Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy (DLT) in 2016. It noted the potential negative impact of increasing use of digital and made sure that the strategy sets an expectation on schools/LAs that all pupils have equity of access to digital when in school. The scope of the DLT Strategy does not extend to digital access outside of school.

In line with the recommendation, we would of course encourage schools to consider the home circumstances of learners (including socio-economic circumstances) when deciding on digital approaches E.g. ensuring other options beyond digital are available for homework tasks or that access to devices and the internet at the school outside of normal school hours.

The issue of school leaders being mindful of potential impacts of policy and practice on those on low incomes is a matter for Local Authorities. However, we have increased the school uniform grant to a minimum of £100 and provided additional funding awarded to the Child Poverty Action Group to help raise awareness and understanding of cost of the school issues, as well as continuing the £120m Pupil Equity Funding and providing £1m to support children experiencing food insecurity during the school holidays.

The duty in the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 amended the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000. This duty requires education authorities to have due regard to the need to carry out school education functions in a way designed to reduce inequalities of outcome for those pupils experiencing them as a result of socio-economic disadvantage.

The Scottish Government and COSLA will together to look at the findings of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report and will respond by the end of the year.

Leadership and teaching approaches

25 - The Committee acknowledges that effective leadership can take many forms at many different levels in schools. Regardless of which leadership model is adopted by a school, it is vital that the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and education authorities ensure there is a structure in place that supports and fosters that high quality leadership.

The Scottish Government agrees that effective leadership is key to improving outcomes for children and young people. The Scottish College for Educational Leadership, which became part of Education Scotland in April this year, has developed a Framework for Educational Leadership. The Framework supports professional learning in leadership for educators at all stages of their careers. Those who aspire to headship can take part in the fully-funded Masters-level Into Headship programme, leading to the award of the Standard for Headship. Once in post, headteachers can continue to access high

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quality professional learning in leadership through the In Headship and Excellence in Headship programmes. This is in addition to the professional learning and development opportunities available locally through councils and Regional Improvement Collaboratives.

Teaching

28 - The Committee also recognises that there can be resource implications arising from the adoption of best practice and its adaptation to meet the needs of individuals in each classroom. The Committee reiterates its view that "a continued emphasis on reducing teacher workload is vital"

In August 2016, Education Scotland published clear, practical advice on what teachers should and should not do when planning teaching and assessment. In September 2016, the Deputy First Minister announced mandatory unit assessments would be removed from the National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications. Education Scotland has published definitive benchmark guidance for all curriculum areas that helps support teachers' judgement when assessing learner progress from pre-school through to S3.

Reporting and monitoring in the Scottish Attainment Challenge has been streamlined to reduce bureaucracy and schools are expected to incorporate details of their Pupil Equity Funding into existing reporting and planning processes, including their School Improvement Plans and Standards and Quality reports. The new Care Experienced Children and Young People Attainment Funding also relies on existing reporting mechanisms for reporting the impact of the funding, and the guidance and terms in the grant offer letter were developed in conjunction with COSLA, Social Work Scotland and the Association of Directors of Education.

Resources and additionality

30 - The Committee wishes to highlight that many schools do not receive PEF and are undertaking valuable work to improve attainment using core funding. For completeness any system used to evaluate the impact of targeted Government funding must reflect progress in attainment achieved using core funding. An effective evaluation must reflect how attainment is improving, why and where the challenges, including funding levels, remain.

32 - The Committee recommends that as part of the next stage of this evaluation, the Scottish Government assess the extent to which PEF is used for additional purposes rather than for purposes that would be considered to be candidates to be covered from core funding.

33 - In addition, the Committee recommends that the Scottish Government widens the evaluation to assess the separate impacts on the poverty-related attainment gap of programmes and interventions that are totally or primarily funded by: the Pupil Equity Fund; other aspects of the Attainment Scotland Fund; or schools' core budgets.

Over ninety six percent of schools are receiving PEF in 2018/19. The evaluation of Attainment Scotland Fund necessarily focuses on those that have received targeted funding. However, we are considering any impact of the fund on the larger core funding. Our evaluation questions for Years 3 and 4 have been expanded to consider how local authorities are using their core funding towards equitable outcomes.

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It is important for schools to consider how they use all their resources to reduce the impact of deprivation. With this in mind, as part of the evaluation on the Attainment Scotland Fund, we are asking local authorities (as detailed above) about their use of core funding. PEF is part of the whole proposition to close the attainment gap.

Further, the Scottish Government is clear that PEF must be used to deliver activities, interventions and resources that are clearly additional to those which were already planned. This is part of the terms of the grant that were agreed to by LAs.

Disentangling the impact of separate funding streams, alongside the impact of core funding is outwith the scope of the evaluation, and would unnecessarily serve to increase bureaucracy and the burdens placed on schools.

However, the evaluation does allow us to compare PEF only schools with those within the Challenge Authority, particularly with regard to the implementation of the fund.

Procurement

34 - The Committee welcomes the work schools are doing to tackle the attainment gap. The Committee notes that headteachers are being asked to undertake new tasks as part of PEF processes, such as procurement exercises, with little preparation before they took on these new responsibilities. The Committee recommends that Education Scotland ensures that there is universally available and high quality training for headteachers on how to identify need and commission services through PEF.

35 - Furthermore, the Committee recommends that in advance of any additional responsibilities being placed on headteachers in the future, the Scottish Government must ensure that they are provided with the necessary training and resources to undertake their expanded role. The impact on headteachers' workload of these new responsibilities should be acknowledged. When introducing new responsibilities, the Scottish Government through Education Scotland, should seek to identify ways to alleviate workload in other parts of the headteacher role.

Pupil Equity Funding - National Operational Guidance has been published to support headteachers and schools to plan how they will most effectively invest their Pupil Equity Fund to improve education outcomes of children affected by poverty. Many local authorities have also issued complementary guidance about how this will operate locally. This guidance is universally available.

In addition, attainment advisors provide support and guidance to schools and local authorities. Scottish Government believe that local authorities are best placed to take forward training in procurement and commissioning services as these processes vary at local levels. However, the Scottish Government are involved with a project being taken forward for North Ayrshire by Scotland Excel looking at procurement issues, and will look to see the outcomes of this work and the wider learning that can be shared. SCEL's enhanced leadership offer will consider additional professional learning required in areas of financial planning.

The Scottish Government agrees that headteachers must be properly supported as well as empowered to lead learning and teaching in their school. We will continue to work with partners – as we have done already – to ensure headteachers and their teams have access to clear national advice, professional learning resources and opportunities to further enhance their skills. Local

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authorities, as the employer and with overall responsibility for the delivery of education, have an important role to play in ensuring their employees are supported and resourced appropriately to meet the needs of the children and young people in their school.

Staffing

The Committee notes that headteachers may employ additional teachers through PEF for the remainder of the current parliamentary session. However, some headteachers believe they are not able to do so. For example, there are conditions on employing teachers using PEF in the Scottish Government's guidance and it is unclear whether the requirement to "fill core staffing posts first" before employing teachers through PEF refers to the local authority or the school and this may be cause for confusion. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government makes clear in guidance the circumstances in which a headteacher may and may not employ a teacher through PEF.

Headteachers can employ extra teachers of other staff with PEF. As set out in the National operational guidance, headteachers need to work closely with their local authorities (LAs) and take full account of local HR policies and procedures.

The only requirement set out in the grant terms and conditions is that it is essential to fill core staffing posts first before recruiting additional teachers. Teachers recruited through PEF are excluded from national teacher ratio commitment. Many LAs provide local guidance, but we will continue to work with stakeholders to review the National operations guidance in 2019, including COSLA and ADES.

Accountability

37 - The Committee seeks further clarity on lines of accountability from the Scottish Government between headteachers and education authorities on PEF spending. The Committee also questions how a headteacher is in practice accountable to the school community, as suggested by Education Scotland. The Committee expects Education Scotland to clarify this.

39 - The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government update its guidance to clarify the role of local authorities in ensuring headteachers are accountable for the outcomes resulting from PEF activities. In doing so, the Scottish Government may wish to reflect on the approach taken in Fife.

As part of the annual refresh of the national operational guidance we will work with stakeholders to consider whether the guidance should be updated to clarify the role of LAs in ensuring HTs are accountable for the outcomes resulting from PEF activities. In doing so we will take account of this recommendation of the committee and reflect on the approach taken in Fife.

In addition, as outlined in How Good is Our School 4, (https://education.gov.scot/improvement/documents/frameworks_selfevaluation/frwk2_nihedithgi/os/frwk2_hgios4.pdf) schools should work in partnership with their local communities to ensure collaborative decision making with parents and communities.

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The Scottish Government and Education Scotland will continue to work to ensure this is understood at school level.

Cost of the School Day

40 - The starting point to address this issue of charging for access to school education is to assess the extent of this practice. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government surveys all education authorities to establish which authorities sanction charging for in-school activities and the level of these charges.

41 - The Committee also recommends that the Scottish Government undertake a review of which elements of the experiences offered by schools may attract a charge and the cumulative impact of these charges.

The Scottish Government is aware of the challenges related to some schools and local authorities charging for some educational experiences. That is why we fund the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland to investigate and respond to this issue. In light of the Committee's recommendations we will explore these challenges further with COSLA.

Hunger

42 - The Committee commends local authority initiatives to tackle hunger including North Lanarkshire offering free meals during holidays and Glasgow planning to provide free school meals for all pupils up to P4. The Committee appreciates the value of this work and urges the Scottish Government to support and evaluate such initiatives.

43- The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government review its current policies for funding free food in schools, taking into account evaluations of the outcomes achieved by expanded free provision of food at local authority and school levels. To take account of these developments, which are at very early stages, the review cannot take place immediately, and so the Committee recommends that it is concluded and published by the end of the current parliamentary session. This review should also examine ways to improve the uptake of existing provision by families who are eligible.

The Fair Food Fund already supports some third sector organisations that provide meals to children outwith school hours, including breakfast and supper clubs. The Fund has been increased to £3.5 million for 2019-20, £2 million of which will be focused on reducing food insecurity during the school holidays through community based food and activities. Many Challenge Authorities are also using Attainment Scotland Funds to address the issue of holiday hunger as part of their planning.

In terms of evaluation, officials have already begun exploring scope to evaluate initiatives that seek to address holiday hunger. Scottish Government analysts have completed a brief literature review that looked at the extent and impact of food insecurity during school holidays in Scotland, and the available evaluations of programmes to help us understand what works in delivering effective solutions. COSLA have undertaken a mapping exercise to understand what initiatives local authorities have in place and where there are gaps.

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Additionally, for the first time food insecurity will be measured as part of the Scottish Health Survey this year. While this isn't specifically a measure of holiday hunger, it will give a picture of how many families are experiencing food insecurity in Scotland. Statistics are due to be released in September, and are likely to show that food insecurity is far greater than Trussell Trust figures have previously shown. (Trussell Trust figures show that food bank use has grown by 2400% since 2011-12).

Free School Meals have been available to all children in the first three years of primary at all publicly-funded schools in Scotland since January 2015. The Scottish Government continues to provide local authorities with £54 million in 2018-19 to deliver this policy. Delivery of this policy helps to make sure that every child in Scotland gets the best start to school life, with every chance to flourish. Targeting our resources to provide for the youngest school children gives them the opportunity to benefit from a nutritious meal at a crucial stage of their education and encourages the development of healthy eating habits, which can be sustained as they grow older.

Education Authorities already have a requirement under the The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 to promote the availability of school lunches at all publically funded schools, and other educational establishments under their management. We work very closely with Local Authorities to promote uptake of existing provision by families who are eligible. We recently wrote a letter to all Local Authority Directors of Education to urge them to do all that they can to assist families who are facing financial difficulties, even where they may not be eligible for free school meals.

Uniforms

46 - The Committee also recommends that education authorities should consider carefully the evidence received during this inquiry of children who cannot afford to purchase or maintain school uniforms being sent home or chastised for their appearance at school. The Committee hopes this is a limited issue but considers that no pupil should be denied access to education due to the inability to afford school uniform. Schools should have an emphasis on supportive policies that are mindful of young people who, due to poverty, do not have the full school uniform.

The Scottish Government agrees that lack of a school uniform should not be a barrier to learning. That is why we worked in partnership with Local Authorities to agree a national minimum school clothing grant level of £100 for all eligible families. We will continue to work in partnership with COSLA to ensure that the level of national grant for school clothing is in line with the costs of living, that is why when we agreed the grant level of £100 we committed to review this every two years.

Community based support and youth work in schools

48 - The Committee recognises the distinct and important role that youth work plays in the education of our young people. The Committee recommends that the national youth work strategy currently being developed has a strong focus on how youth work and school based education can complement and support each other.

Education Scotland are currently working with Youthlink Scotland to build capacity for improving youth work partnerships with schools. The Scottish Government have agreed funding over three years to Youthlink Scotland to support the delivery of a capacity building programme entitled 'Tackling the poverty-related attainment gap through youth work'. This project will be based on

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partnership working, informed by a clear analysis of local need and working towards a creating a sustainable improvement partnership.

Parental Involvement

50 - The Committee acknowledges that there are schools with excellent parental engagement but which do not have a parent council. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government examine the impact of not having a parent council on the funding available to schools and whether state funding, through either local authorities or the Attainment Scotland Fund, takes account of schools where it has proven difficult to establish a parent council.

The Curriculum Unit will discuss the issue with the National Parent Forum, COSLA and ADES to understand how many schools do/don't have parent councils and what kind of additional funds parent councils typically bring into schools - and the impact this has.

Home and School partnerships

51 - The Committee highlights the notable impact of income maximisation for some of the families where schools have acted as an initial hub and directed families towards support. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government undertakes a cost-benefit analysis of rolling out a system of using more schools as hubs for income maximisation advisory services.

Whilst there are number of examples of schools acting as multi-agency hubs to apparent good effect, the Scottish Government do not feel the focus on schools would be appropriate here and could have potentially far reaching implications for the education sector as well as the social care, health and social security/welfare sectors. Any success of multi-agency hubs can and should be shared as best practice amongst RICs and LAs.