# Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation - Headteacher Survey Report 2019

**CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS**

social research

# Headteacher Survey 2019

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# Key Findings

This report presents findings from a recent survey of headteachers of schools in receipt of support from the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF).

The Attainment Scotland Fund supports the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC), launched in 2015 with a focus on improving literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing of children adversely affected by poverty. The SAC has developed over time to include: the Challenge Authority (CA) programme providing additional resource to nine local authorities with the highest levels of deprivation; Schools Programme (SP) supporting 74 schools outwith those authorities with a high concentration of deprivation; Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) providing funds directly to more than 95% of Scottish schools for use in initiatives to help close the poverty related attainment gap; and Care Experienced Children and Young People funding for targeted initiatives designed to improve the educational outcomes of this group.

This is the fourth survey of headteachers, previous surveys having been conducted in 2016, 2017 and 2018. The survey was issued to all schools in receipt of ASF support (via CA, SP and/or PEF). A total of 1,102 responses were received by survey close, equivalent to an overall response rate of 47%. Key findings are set out below in relation to each of the five survey themes in turn.

## ASF supported approaches

A great majority of headteachers (96%) felt they understood the challenges and barriers faced by pupils affected by poverty, had good awareness of the range of approaches that can help to close the poverty-related attainment gap (96%), and were confident in selecting approaches that would be most effective in their school (93%). A large majority (84%) indicated that the approach to achieving equity in education is embedded within their school.

> 96% of headteachers understand the barriers for pupils affected by poverty

Most schools (67%) reported some change in their approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap over the last year, most commonly a scaling up from the previous year. Monitoring and evaluation of impact appears to have been the key factor influencing schools' decisions around any change in approach. For those who have changed approach this was most commonly based on use of evidence to identify approaches that are not having the anticipated impact. Similarly, evaluation and being able to demonstrate positive impacts were the

most common reasons for schools choosing to leave their approach unchanged.

> 84% of headteachers felt the approach to achieving equity is embedded within their school

Schools had a relatively broad focus in their approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Targeted support for individual pupils was the most common; three quarters of schools included a 'strong emphasis' on targeted support as part of their approach. However, most schools had multiple areas of focus with development of teaching skills and practice, dedicated staff time and culture/ethos also referenced by a substantial proportion of schools.

## Use of data and evaluation

> 93% of headteachers feel confident using data/evidence

The great majority (93%) of headteachers felt confident using data and evidence to inform development of their approach, a statistically significant (nine point) increase from 2017.

A large majority (90%) indicated that they always used evidence to measure the impact of their approaches. A lower proportion of headteachers were confident in selecting the most appropriate measures to evidence the impact of their approaches (77% were confident in this). However, most (66%) felt that they had improved their skills and knowledge in use of data for planning, evaluation and development through the Fund.

## Impact

> 91% of headteachers have seen improvement in closing the gap, 98% expect improvement in the next five years

A large majority (91%) of schools had seen an improvement in closing the poverty-related gap in literacy attainment, numeracy attainment, or health and wellbeing as a result of ASF supported approaches, a 13 point increase since 2017. Nearly all (98%) expected to see improvement over the next five years. More than a third (37%) of schools had seen 'a lot' of improvement to date (19%) and/or expected to see 'a lot' of improvement over the next five years (34%).

In addition to variation across funding streams, survey analysis also indicates that the headteachers most likely to report improvement in closing the gap were those who had seen a change in culture or ethos (more collaborative working and/or embedding the approach to equity) or have improved understanding of barriers faced by pupils and families. Those who were confident using evidence to develop and measure their approaches, and who felt they had sufficient support to develop their plan for PEF were also more likely to have seen improvement to date.

The survey also asked for headteachers' views on factors that support or hinder the success of ASF supported approaches. The ability to implement approaches relevant to the school context and having sufficient teaching and staffing resources were the most commonly cited factors contributing to progress. Staff time/workload and reduction in other resources were seen as the main factors limiting progress.

> 53% of headteachers expect progress and/ or the focus on closing the gap to be sustainable

Headteachers were asked for their views on the sustainability of (a) ASF-supported progress achieved to date and (b) the focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap within their school. Around half (53%) expected progress to date and/or the focus on closing the gap to be sustainable beyond funding. There was considerable overlap between these groups; 41% expected progress to date to be sustainable (a 17 point reduction from 2017) and 41% expected the focus on closing the gap to be sustainable. Staff skills and development, staffing levels and embedding practice were seen as the most important factors for the sustainability of progress to date and/or the focus on closing the poverty-related gap.

Most schools (64%) had seen an increase in collaborative working as a result of ASF support, a seven point reduction from 2018. Challenge Authority and Schools Programme schools were most likely to report increased collaboration. PEF-only schools and those with a lower PEF allocation were less likely to have seen increased collaboration.

## Pupil Equity Funding

> 74% of headteachers felt they had sufficient support for PEF plans

Most schools (74%) felt they had sufficient support to develop and implement school plans for PEF, an 18 point increase on 2017.

Guidance to develop plans, practical advice and practice examples were key areas where schools would have welcomed more support.

> 91% of headteachers felt they had autonomy for PEF

The great majority (91%) felt they had the autonomy to tailor PEF plans to local context and needs. Views were also positive on whether PEF has provided the additional resource needed to address the poverty-related attainment gap; 86% felt this was the case although PEF-only schools with a lower PEF allocation were less positive.

> 86% of headteachers felt PEF provided additional resource to address the attainment gap

Most schools had used multiple sources in developing plans for PEF. The most commonly used were information from teachers within the school, local guidance, parents, children and young people, and Scottish Government national operational guidance.

# 1. Introduction

1.1. This report presents findings from the 2019 survey of headteachers of schools in receipt of support from the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF). The survey was commissioned by Scottish Government's Learning Analysis Unit to inform the wider evaluation of ASF.

1.2. This section summarises the background and objectives for the survey. The remainder of this report sets out the fieldwork approach, level and profile of survey response, and findings across the key themes addressed through the survey:

- Development of ASF supported approaches
- An overview of supported approaches;
- Use of data and evaluation;
- Impact, including sustainability; and
- Pupil Equity Funding.

## Background

1.3. The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) was launched by the First Minister in February 2015 to help close the poverty-related attainment gap. It is underpinned by the National Improvement Framework, Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it Right for Every Child. Backed by the £750 million Attainment Scotland Fund over the course of this Parliament, it prioritises improvements in literacy, numeracy, health and well-being of those children adversely affected by poverty in Scotland's schools. Achieving excellence and equity in education is the key aim.

1.4. The Attainment Challenge leads system change through a tripartite shared leadership of national government, local government and the executive improvement agency, Education Scotland. The core aims of the programme are to support and empower headteachers, schools, local authorities and their partners to develop their own approaches, reflecting their own local circumstances.

1.5. The Scottish Attainment Challenge has the following main strands:

- **Pupil Equity Funding (PEF)** provides £120m directly to schools for headteachers to use at their discretion on initiatives that they consider will help close the poverty related attainment gap. Over 95% of schools in Scotland have been allocated funding for pupils in Primary 1 through to

third year of secondary school, based on the estimated numbers of pupils registered for free school meals.

- **The Challenge Authority and Schools Programmes** provide additional resource to nine local authorities, and 73[1] schools outwith those local authorities with the highest levels of deprivation. Each Challenge Authority/Schools Programme school receives funding and support to deliver improvement plans focused on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing to tackle the poverty related attainment gap.

- **Care Experienced Children and Young People** funding for targeted initiatives, activities, and resources, designed to improve the educational outcomes of this group.

1.6.  These strands have developed over the period of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Challenge Authority and Schools Programme were the initial funding streams which commenced in 2015, followed by the introduction of Pupil Equity Funding in 2017/18.  Finally, the Care Experienced Children and Young People grant was introduced in 2018/19. Additionally, the Scottish Attainment Challenge supports a number of national programmes including staffing supply and capacity; professional learning and school leadership; investment in Regional Improvement Collaboratives; and a small number of third sector led initiatives.

1.7.  The government's 2019/20 Programme for Government included a commitment to continue funding the Scottish Attainment Challenge at current levels in 2021/22, reinforcing their sustained focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

1.8.  This is the fourth survey of headteachers of schools in receipt of ASF support. Surveys in 2016 and 2017 included headteachers across the Challenge Authorities and Schools Programmes, and a sample of PEF-only schools was included for the first time in the 2018 survey.[2]  For the present survey, the sample was expanded to include all schools in receipt of PEF, and therefore all schools in receipt of ASF support. The 2019 survey explores views of Challenge Authorities, Schools Programme and Pupil Equity Fund.

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[1] At the start of the 2018/19 financial year, 74 schools were in receipt of Schools' Programme funding. During the course of the financial year one school closed and, therefore, did not have a full year's spend.  At the end of the financial year there were 73 schools in receipt of Schools' Programme funding, resulting in 73 schools in receipt of funding for the remainder of the 2018/19 financial year.

[2] Attainment Scotland Fund evaluation: headteacher survey 2018
www.gov.scot/publications/evaluation-attainment-scotland-fund-headteacher-survey-2018

An exploration of views on the Care Experienced Children and Young People fund was outwith the scope of the survey.

1.9. The figure below summarises development of the ASF, and surveys of headteachers conducted to date.

**Attainment Scotland Fund timeline**

| 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 CA<br>57 SP<br>(primary only) | Secondaries added to CA and SP<br>9 CA, 74 SP | CA & SP continue, PEF introduced (95% claim) | Continuation of all 3 ASF streams | Continuation of all 3 ASF streams |
| | **2016 survey**<br>Focus on 15/16, CA & SP schools | **2017 survey**<br>Focus on 16/17, CA & SP schools | **2018 survey**<br>CA & SP, PEF-only for first time | **Present survey**<br>CA & SP, 100% sample PEF-only for first time |

1.10. As the Scottish Attainment Challenge has evolved, the focus of the evidence being collected through the Headteacher survey has moved from primarily being about processes towards a greater focus on progress and impact of approaches being delivered. This evidence is helping to inform the progress being made towards delivering the long-term outcomes of the programme. Information is being used to sharpen the government's focus and inform how support and challenge will be enhanced over the next period to the end of this Parliament.

## Study objectives

1.11. The ASF Headteacher survey is a Scottish Government commissioned survey which includes headteachers of schools in receipt of Challenge Authority, Schools Programme and/or Pupil Equity Funding. The overall aim 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. This included the following specific objectives:

- Provide insight on the experience of headteachers benefiting through each of the ASF streams, identifying any variation in experience or views across schools;

- Build on longitudinal data to monitor changes over time; and

- Provide evidence of what is working and what is not working well to inform ongoing delivery of the ASF.

# 2. Methodology

2.1.    This section summarises the survey fieldwork approach, and the level and profile of response.

## Survey design and fieldwork

2.2.    The survey content was adapted from previous exercises to maintain longitudinal data, streamlined in response to feedback during the 2018 survey, and new questions added to reflect the focus of ongoing evaluation of ASF. These included questions on:

- Understanding of the challenges and barriers faced by pupils affected by poverty;
- Awareness of the range of approaches that could be used to close the poverty-related attainment gap, and confidence in selecting the approach(es) that would be most effective;
- The extent to which achieving equity in education, specifically in relation to the poverty-related attainment gap, is embedded within school communities;
- The extent to which the approach taken by schools has changed over the previous year;
- Views on the sustainability of the focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap; and
- Views on PEF timescales and additionality.

2.3.    The survey was issued to headteachers of all schools in receipt of ASF support via Challenge Authority, Schools Programme, and/or Pupil Equity Fund. The profile of schools across the three ASF streams and urban/rural geography[3] is summarised below.

**Survey population by ASF stream**

| | Challenge Authority | Schools Programme | PEF-only | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban area | 537 | 57 | 712 | **1,306 (55%)** |
| Small town | 60 | 9 | 219 | **288 (12%)** |
| Rural area | 57 | 8 | 703 | **768 (33%)** |
| **Total** | **654 (28%)** | **74 (3%)** | **1,634 (69%)** | **2,362** |

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[3] Urban/rural classification of schools was adapted from the 6-fold classification published by the Scottish Government, based on the location of the school building.

2.4. Consistent with previous surveys, survey invites were issued directly to schools, supported by promotion via Education Scotland and local authorities. The survey was issued in September 2019 and the fieldwork period maximised to enable the broadest possible response, running for eight weeks to early November 2019. The survey response and approach to survey weighting is summarised over the following pages, with further detail provided in a Technical Report included in the Supporting Documents.

## Survey response

2.5. A total of 1,102 responses were received by survey close, equivalent to an overall response rate of 47%. This represents a seven-point increase in survey response since 2018, primarily due to a 14-point increase in response from PEF-only schools (43% compared to 29% in 2018).

2.6. It should also be noted that the larger survey population in 2019 (including all PEF-only schools for the first time) means that the volume of responses is nearly twice that achieved by the 2018 survey; 1,102 compared to 553 responses. The larger volume of responses has enabled more detailed analysis to identify variation across key respondent groups.

**Survey response 2016 to 2019**



Overall survey response

**Time series: Survey response by ASF stream**

Schools Programme, 62%
Challenge Authorities, 55%
PEF-only, 43%
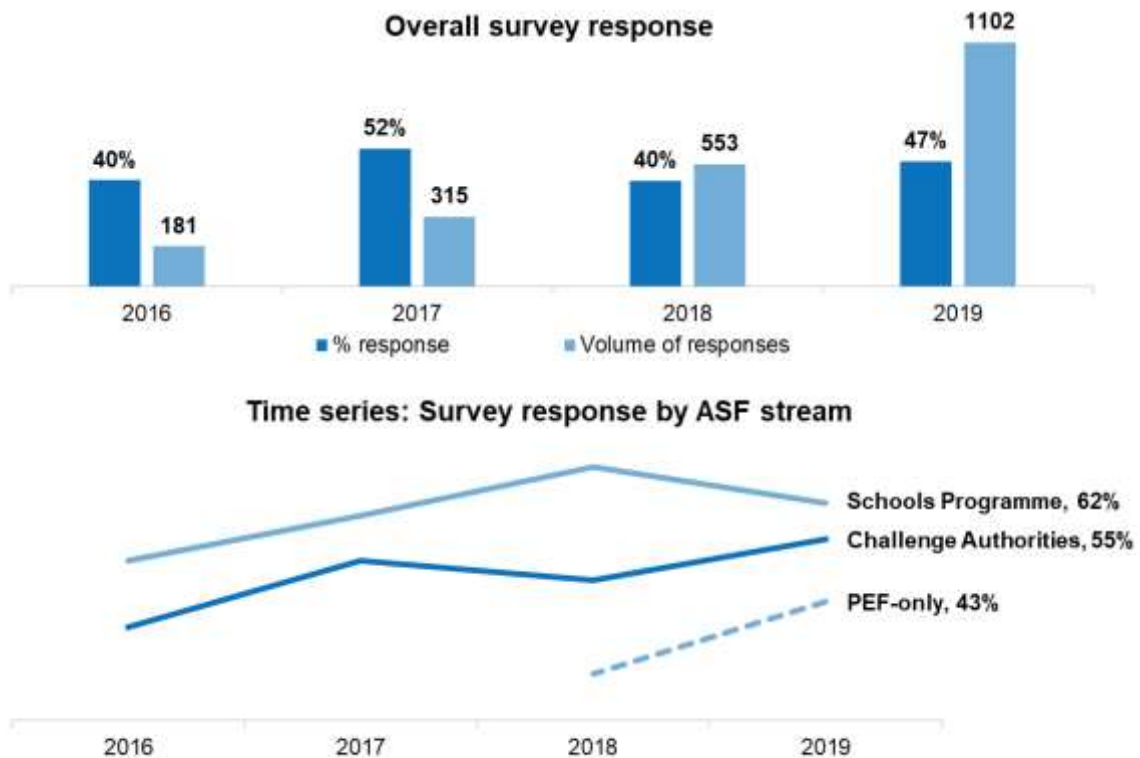
2.7. The table below summarises the profile of survey respondents, and compares this with all schools in receipt of ASF support. In terms of the profile of respondents, the largest groups are PEF-only schools, primary schools and schools in urban areas. This is broadly consistent with the profile of all schools in receipt of ASF support, although there are some areas of minor over and under-representation. The main points of note are:

- Challenge authority schools are over-represented (by five points) and PEF-only schools under-represented (by six points). This is due to the lower survey response rate for PEF-only schools. Survey weighting has been used to correct for this response bias.

- Schools in rural areas are under-represented (by four points). Again survey weighting has been used to correct for this.

**Profile of survey respondents**

| | Respondents (n=1102) | All schools in receipt of ASF | Differential |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Attainment Scotland Fund** | | | |
| Challenge Authorities | 33% | 28% | +5% |
| Schools' Programme | 4% | 3% | +1% |
| PEF-only | 63% | 69% | -6% |
| **PEF allocation[4]** | | | |
| Lower | 32% | 35% | -3% |
| Middle | 44% | 43% | +1% |
| Higher | 23% | 22% | +1% |
| Unknown | 1% | 0.2% | - |
| **School sector** | | | |
| Primary schools | 79% | 81% | -2% |
| Secondary schools | 17% | 15% | +2% |
| Special schools | 3% | 4% | -1% |
| Unknown | 1% | - | - |
| **Urban/rural location** | | | |
| Urban | 57% | 55% | +2% |
| Small town | 13% | 12% | +1% |
| Rural | 29% | 33% | -4% |
| Unknown | 1% | - | - |

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[4] 'Lower', 'middle' and 'higher' ranges of PEF allocation are based, respectively, on the lower 25% of schools, middle 50% of schools, and upper 25% of schools in terms of PEF allocation in 2018/19.

# Follow-up engagement

2.8.   Additional written responses were requested from a small subset of survey respondents, to gather examples of how schools have experienced key themes around the development, implementation and impact of ASF supported approaches.

2.9.   This follow-up engagement was focused around the broad themes noted below, with each participant asked to consider one of the six themes. A purposive sampling[5] approach was used, using survey responses to ensure a mix of positive and negative experiences across the six themes. Selection of schools also included primary and secondary sectors, and urban/rural locations.

2.10.   A total of 24 schools were invited to provide additional feedback, with 15 responses achieved. This included a mix of positive and negative experiences for most themes, with the exception of collaboration where the only response was from a school with a negative experience (although positive comments on collaboration were provided by schools responding to other themes). As such, follow-up engagement provides a mix of illustrative examples of schools' positive and negative experiences across these themes.

**Follow-up engagement selection criteria and response**

| Theme | Selection criteria | Invited | Responses |
|---|---|---|---|
| School culture and ethos | Addressing poverty-related attainment gap is fully embedded | 2 | 1 |
| | Addressing poverty-related attainment gap is more relevant to other schools | 2 | 1 |
| Use of data and evidence | Feel confident using data to shape approach | 2 | 2 |
| | Do not feel confident using data to shape approach | 2 | 1 |
| Progress in closing the poverty related gap | Expecting to see a lot of improvement | 2 | 1 |
| | Not expecting to see improvement | 2 | 2 |
| Family engagement | Parental/family engagement has supported progress | 2 | 1 |
| | Parental/family engagement has been a barrier to progress | 2 | 1 |
| Sustainability of progress | Expect improvement to be sustainable | 2 | 2 |
| | Do not expect improvement to be sustainable | 2 | 2 |
| Collaboration | Large increase in collaborative working | 2 | 0 |
| | No increase in collaborative working | 2 | 1 |
| **Total** | | **24** | **15** |

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[5] Purposive sampling refers to selection of a sample based on characteristics of the population and objectives of the study. In this case, participants were selected based on aspects of their experience of ASF support.

## Analysis and reporting

2.11. Survey data showed some inconsistency between responses and data on ASF support provided to schools. For example, 47 Challenge Authority and two Schools Programme respondents indicated their school received only Pupil Equity Funding. The categorisation of respondents used in our analysis has been based on Scottish Government records rather than self-reporting.

2.12. Survey responses have been weighted by ASF stream and urban/rural location to adjust for response bias; all results presented in the remainder of this report are weighted. Base numbers for each survey question vary due to question non-response – i.e. they results exclude non-respondents to the question unless stated otherwise.

2.13. Survey analysis has used hypothesis tests with a 5% significance level to identify significant differences from previous survey findings, and across key respondent groups. These included:

- ASF stream;
- PEF allocation;
- School sector; and
- Urban/rural location.

2.14. Where variation across these groups is noted in the body of the report, this is based on a statistically significant difference between groups.

2.15. Qualitative feedback gathered through the follow-up engagement with schools is presented alongside survey results under the relevant themes. This includes direct quotes drawn from written comments provided by survey respondents, and follow-up engagement. This direct feedback has been edited for brevity and to ensure anonymity.

2.16. A full list of survey questions, tabular survey results and follow-up pro forma are provided in an associated Technical Report included in the Supporting Documents for this report.

# 3.  ASF supported approaches

3.1.  This section summarises survey findings on schools' experience in developing their approach, provides an overview of funded approaches, and considers the focus of schools' approach to achieving equity in education.

## Developing approaches

3.2.  A great majority of headteachers felt they understood the challenges and barriers faced by pupils affected by poverty; 96%, including 73% who felt they understood this 'to a great extent'. This finding was consistent across most respondent groups, although those in rural areas were less likely to feel that they understood these challenges.

**Understanding of challenges/barriers faced by pupils affected by poverty in your school**



Understand challenges/barriers...

73%      22%      4% 1%

• To a great extent   • To a moderate extent   ○ To some extent   • Not very well   • Not at all



By Urban/Rural area: To a great/moderate extent

Urban — 98%
Small town — 96%
Rural — 91%
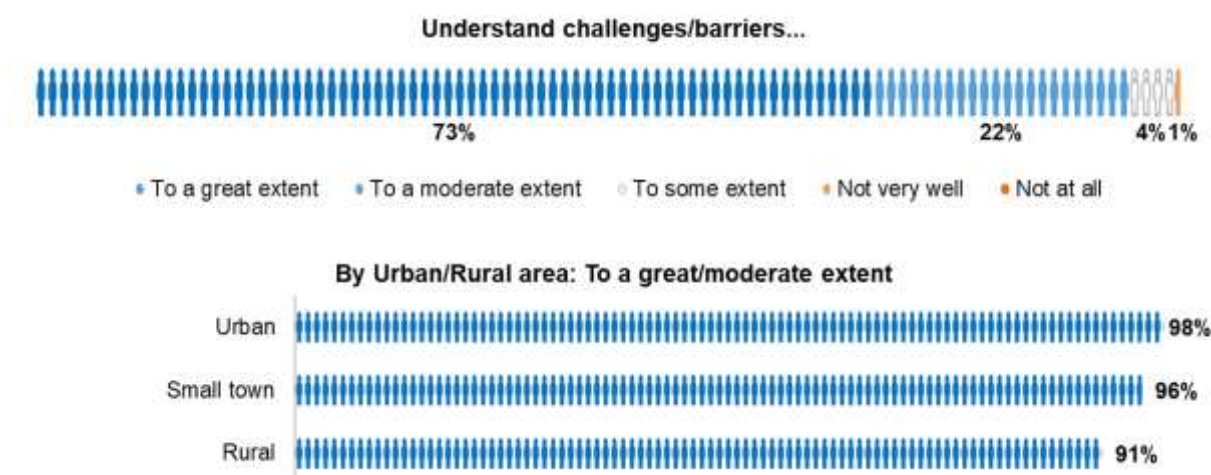
3.3.  A great majority of headteachers also felt they had a good awareness of the range of approaches that can help to close the poverty-related attainment gap; 96% including 60% who felt they were 'very aware' of the range of approaches. Survey findings again indicated variation in views across urban and rural areas, with headteachers of schools in rural areas less likely to feel that they were aware of the range of potential approaches.

**Awareness of approaches that can help to close the poverty-related attainment gap**

### Aware of approaches...



60%  36%  4% 1%

• Very aware • Moderately aware ○ Somewhat aware • Slightly aware • Not at all aware

### By Urban/Rural area: Very/moderately aware

| | |
|---|---|
| Urban | 97% |
| Small town | 96% |
| Rural | 92% |
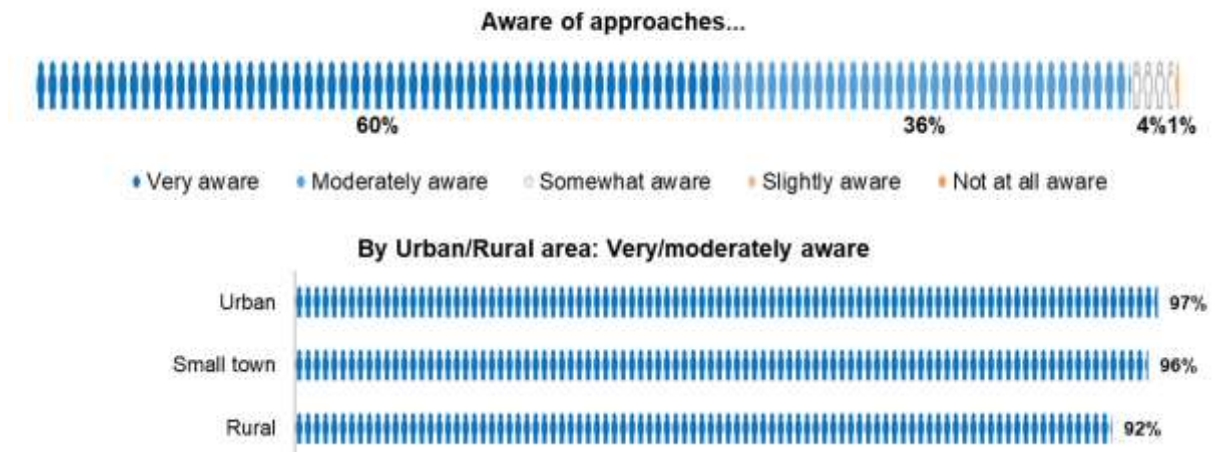
3.4.  A great majority of headteachers felt confident in selecting approaches to close the poverty-related attainment gap that would be most effective in their school; 93% with around half of these feeling confident 'to a great extent'.

**Whether feel confident selecting approaches that would be most effective in your school**

### Feel confident...



48%  45%  6% 1%

• To a great extent • To a moderate extent ○ To some extent • Not very well • Not at all

### By ASF stream: Feel confident to a great/moderate extent

| | |
|---|---|
| Challenge Authorities | 95% |
| Schools Programme | 100% |
| PEF-only | 92% |
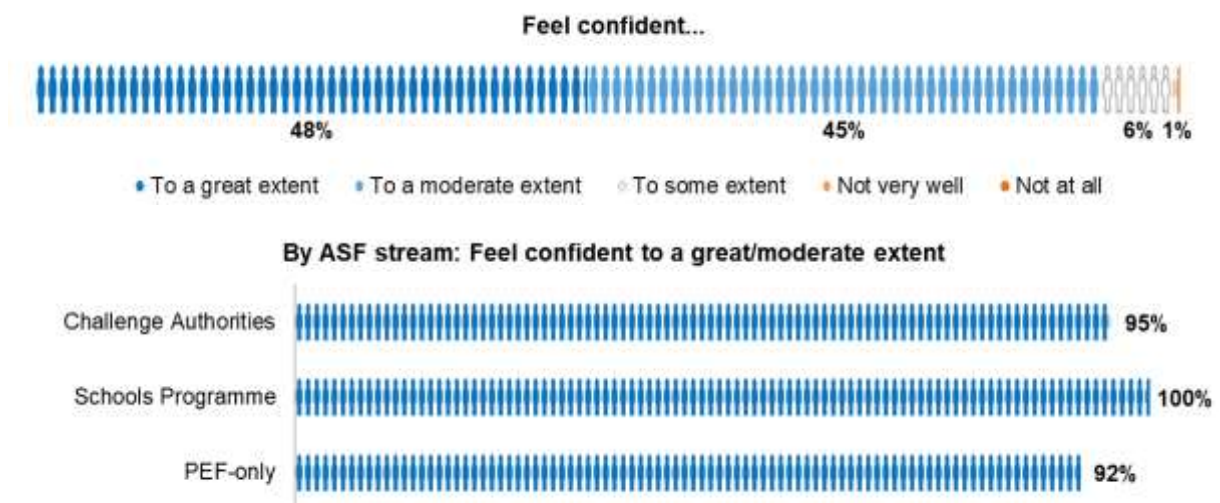
3.5.  A large majority of headteachers indicated that the approach to achieving equity in education is embedded within their school community; 84% agreed that this was the case and only 2% disagreed.

3.6.  There was some variation in views across key respondent groups. In particular, headteachers of PEF-only schools and those with lower PEF allocations were significantly less likely to feel that the approach to achieving equity is embedded.

**Whether approach to achieving equity is embedded within the school community**

Approach is embedded...



37%  47%  14%  2%

• To a great extent  • To a moderate extent  ○ To some extent  • Not very well  • Not at all

By ASF stream: To a great/moderate extent

| | |
|---|---|
| Challenge Authorities | 92% |
| Schools Programme | 92% |
| PEF-only | 80% |
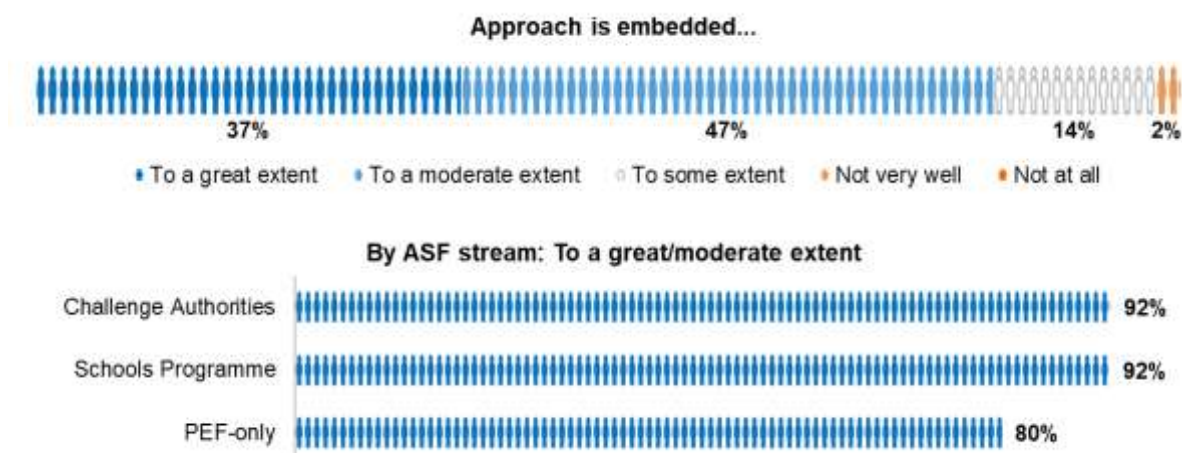
3.7. **Follow-up qualitative feedback** highlighted the perceived importance of ensuring the approach to achieving equity is fully embedded in schools.[6]

3.8. These schools noted the complexity involved in identifying what equity means in the context of a diverse school population. Some noted that their approach had sought to ensure that equal value is given to each pupil's skills and progress, while recognising that pupils' personal progress will vary. While some suggested that a focus on equity was already a key aspect of their approach, it was recognised that ASF had encouraged more focussed staff discussions around how to deliver the required impact for individual pupils, and encouraged pupils to be more supportive of their peers' individual progress.

> *"ASF support has opened the equity conversation out among the wider parent body, through dialogue with school staff and pupils. It has built staff awareness of the pupils most at risk, and what we can do long-term to make a positive impact."*

## Overview of ASF supported approaches

3.9. More than half (58%) of schools indicated that their approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap in 2018/19 had been scaled-up from the previous year. A further 31% indicated that their approach had continued at the same level from the previous year,

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[6] Note that follow-up engagement findings are based on a small number of schools, and are intended to provide illustrative examples of schools' experiences across key survey themes.

and around 1 in 10 (11%) had newly introduced their approach in 2018/19.

3.10. Most schools reported some change during the last year in their approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap, although relatively few indicated that their approach was newly introduced in 2018/19. Around 2 in 3 (67%) indicated that there has been some change in approach, including 8% whose approach had changed significantly. Survey results show that PEF-only schools, particularly those with lower funding allocations, were less likely than Challenge Authority and Schools programme schools to have changed their approach over the past 12 months. A little more than half (54%) of schools with a lower PEF allocation had changed approach, compared to 80% of those with a higher allocation.

> "We have seen such successes that we have not felt the need to change the fundamental aspects of the project. But the flexibility to respond to the changing needs of families has been key, and we continue to build on our relationships with partners and agencies so that we can continue to provide the best support."

**To what extent approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap has changed over the last 12 months[7]**
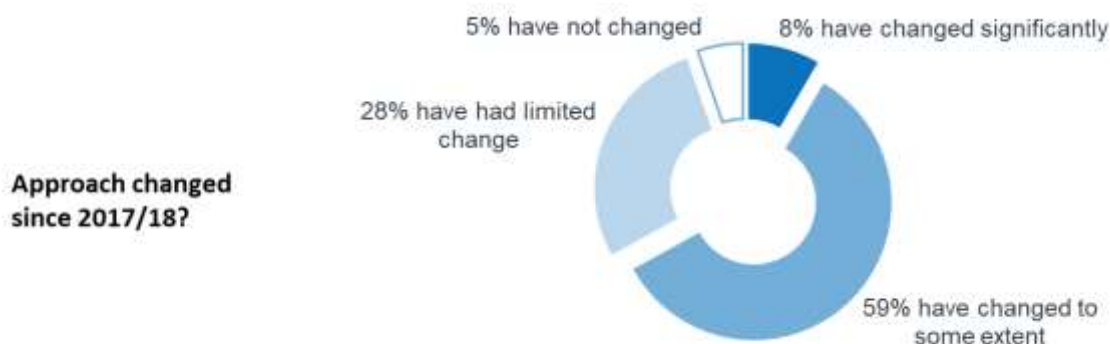
Approach changed since 2017/18?

5% have not changed

8% have changed significantly

28% have had limited change

59% have changed to some extent

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[7] 'Lower', 'middle' and 'higher' ranges of PEF allocation are based, respectively, on the lower 25% of schools, middle 50% of schools, and upper 25% of schools in terms of PEF allocation in 2018/19.

**By PEF quartile: To a great/moderate extent**

| | |
|---|---|
| Quartile 1 | 74% |
| Quartile 2/3 | 88% |
| Quartile 4 | 90% |
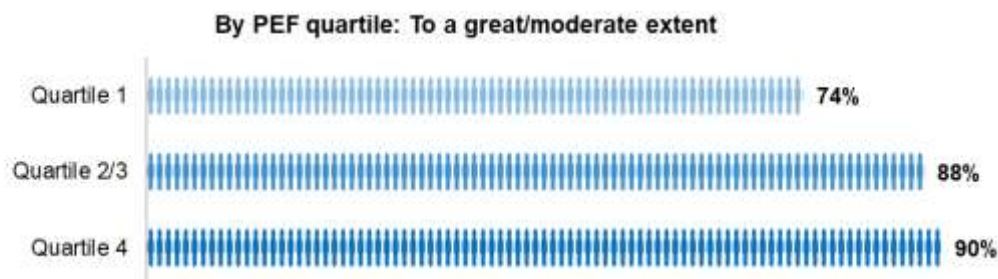
3.11. Written responses referred to a range of factors having influenced schools choosing to change their approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap, or for schools maintaining a consistent approach. Qualitative analysis of these responses has been undertaken to identify the key factors mentioned by respondents. These are summarised over the page.

3.12. This analysis indicated that evaluation and measuring of impact was, by some margin, the most common reason for schools changing their approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Around 2 in 5 of those who had changed approach indicated this had been in response to evidence collated through monitoring and evaluation. This ranged from schools making relatively minor refinements, to specific approaches or interventions being stopped where they were not delivering the anticipated impacts.

*"As we have been running for a few years we are heavily data driven, so approaches are driven by the vast data we now have…we are able to focus on very specific groups and set targets."*

3.13. Evaluation and use of evidence was also the most common reason for schools choosing to continue their approach unchanged. Around 2 in 5 of those who had made little or no change to their approach indicated that this was based on their evaluation work having demonstrated positive impacts.

3.14. As is discussed in the next section, the majority of schools felt that their skills in use of data and evidence had improved through the fund. This was also evident in comments indicating that improved skills had given schools the confidence to change their approach in light of insufficient improvement, or retain their approach where they were able to demonstrate positive impacts.

**Factors influencing a change of approach (n=632)**[8]

| | |
|---|---|
| Evaluation, measuring impact, refining focus/ approach | 41% |
| Pupil and/or parent feedback, changing profile of needs | 14% |
| Change in funding or resourcing, including change in PEF allocation | 11% |
| Staffing and recruitment | 9% |
| Opportunities arising, including change of leadership | 8% |
| Staff feedback, increased awareness of impact of poverty | 6% |
| Change of focus over time (e.g. between literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing) | 5% |
| Focus on sustainability | 4% |
| Value for money | 3% |
| Local authority strategy or direction | 3% |

**Reasons for little or no change of approach (n=269)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Evaluation, demonstrating impact | 38% |
| Limited funding or resourcing | 16% |
| Pupil and/or parent feedback | 8% |
| Staffing and recruitment | 7% |
| Focus on sustainability | 4% |
| Long-term planning | 3% |
| Staff feedback | 3% |
| Local authority strategy or direction | 3% |

# Schools' focus for achieving equity in education

3.15. Survey responses indicated that the great majority of schools included a focus on the most deprived pupils and/or parents of the most deprived pupils as part of their approach to achieving equity in education. Nearly 9 in 10 (88%) of schools indicated this, and around 1 in 10 (9%) reported that their focus was solely on the most deprived. Most schools (61%) have taken a mixed approach, with a focus on the most deprived alongside other 'universal' approaches.

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[8] Percentage results are based on those answering the question. Respondents can be assigned to multiple themes.

3.16.   The survey indicated that the focus of approach varied somewhat across funding streams, most notably with Schools Programme respondents being more likely than others to focus only on the most deprived pupils and parents.

**Focus of funded approaches: pupils and parents**

3% focus on other disadvantage, rather than poverty

18% focus on other disadvantage, in addition to poverty

9% focus on the most deprived

9% are universal, focus on all pupils/parents/teachers

Targeting of approaches

61% are mixed, focus on most deprived alongside universal
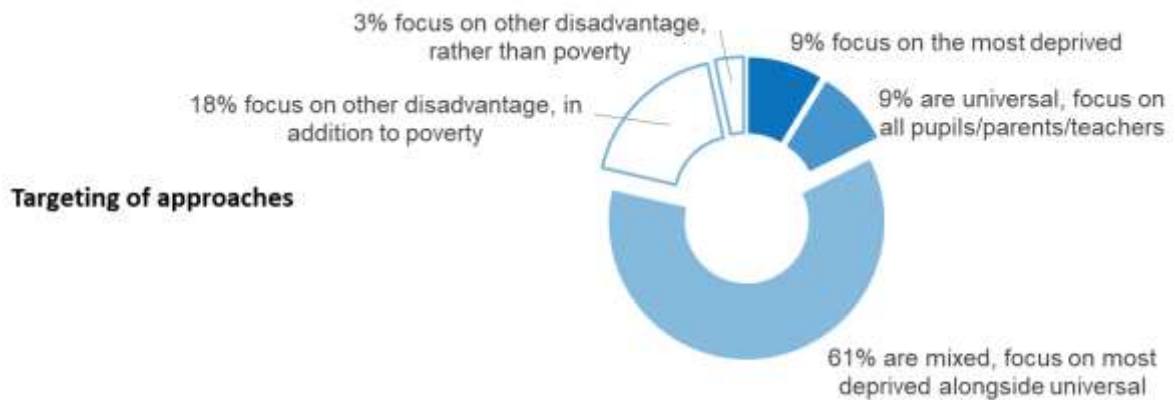
3.17.   The survey also asked about the main themes around which schools' approach has been focused. The survey provided a list of potential areas of focus, and these are summarised below.

3.18.   Responses indicated that schools had a relatively broad focus, with the great majority referring to multiple themes. Targeted support for individual pupils was the most common focus; around 3 in 4 schools (76%) indicated that their approach included a 'strong emphasis' on targeted support. Other common areas of focus included teaching skills or practice (52% with a strong emphasis), dedicated staff time (46%), culture and ethos (45%), resources or tools for teaching and learning (41%), and self-improvement or improvement planning (41%).

**Focus of funded approaches: key themes**

| Theme | Strong emphasis | Some emphasis |
|---|---|---|
| Targeted support for individual pupils | 76% | 22% |
| Teaching skills or practice | 52% | 40% |
| Resources or tools for teaching and… | 41% | 48% |
| Self-improvement/improvement planning | 41% | 47% |
| Dedicated staff time | 46% | 40% |
| Data skills or use | 39% | 46% |
| Culture and ethos | 45% | 36% |
| Collaboration within/across schools | 30% | 50% |
| The learning environment | 36% | 44% |
| Leadership skills | 27% | 52% |
| Parental or community engagement with… | 27% | 49% |
| Family learning | 19% | 47% |

• Strong emphasis   • Some emphasis

15

3.19. A small number of respondents (around 1 in 10) mentioned a focus on other themes, including:

- attendance and disengaged pupils;
- mental and physical health;
- building a sense of community and belonging within school;
- addressing school-related costs and financial exclusion;
- partnership working; and
- creating new opportunities and experiences for pupils and families.

# 4.   Use of data and evaluation

4.1.   This section summarises survey findings on schools' use of data and evaluation in relation to ASF supported approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap. The survey asked about the extent to which headteachers feel confident using data in this way, use of evidence in evaluating approaches, and the extent to which receipt of ASF support has impacted on their skills.

> *"Over time we have expanded data gathering to include participation, attendance, attainment, etc. We use this to stop or adapt interventions which we had previously felt would be valuable."*

4.2.   The great majority of headteachers felt confident using data and evidence to inform development of their approach; 93% indicated this which represented a nine-point increase from 84% in 2017 (90% in 2018).

**Using data to develop approaches**

'I feel confident using evidence to inform the development of approaches'



| 29% | 63% | 6% | 1% |

• Strongly agree    • Agree    ○ Neither agree nor disagree    • Disagree    • Strongly disagree

Time series: Strongly agree/Agree

| 2019 | 93% |
| 2018 | 91% |
| 2017 | 84% |
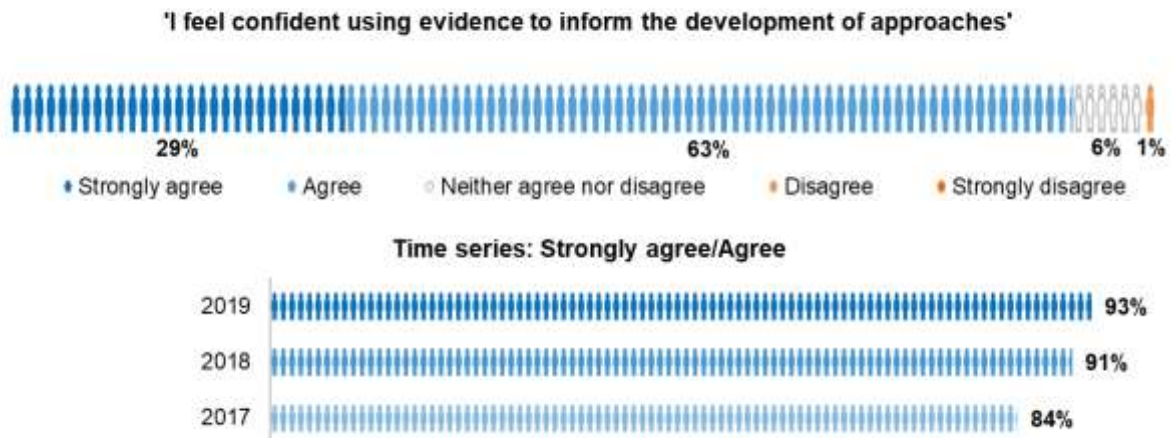
4.3.   A large majority (90%) also indicated they always use evidence to measure the impact of their interventions and approaches. This was consistent with findings of the 2018 survey. Headteachers were less positive about their confidence in selecting the most appropriate measures to evidence the impact of their approaches; 77% agreed that they felt confident doing this; 15% 'strongly' agreed. It was notable that Schools Programme respondents were more positive than others across both measures.

*"Year 1 was a challenge but years 2 and 3 were much better and my knowledge of providers has increased. I feel I am more confident about interventions that help. I know I will learn much more this year too."*

## Using data to measure impact

**'I always use available evidence to measure the extent to which interventions are having a desired impact'**

| 26% | 64% | 8% | 2% |

• Strongly agree  • Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  • Disagree  • Strongly disagree

**'I feel confident in selecting the most appropriate measure(s) to evidence the impact of approaches'**

| 15% | 61% | 18% | 6% |

• Strongly agree  • Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  • Disagree  • Strongly disagree

4.4. Most respondents felt that their skills and knowledge in using data for planning, evaluation and improvement had significantly improved through the Fund. Around 2 in 3 (66%) respondents indicated this, and fewer than 1 in 10 disagreed. The proportion of headteachers indicating this has fluctuated from year to year with no consistent upward or downward trend (60% in 2018 and 69% in 2017). As was found in relation to headteachers' confidence in using evidence, Schools Programme respondents were typically more positive than others on the extent to which their skills and knowledge had improved.

## Impact of Fund on ability to use data for planning, evaluation and improvement

**'Through the fund I feel my skills/knowledge of how to use data for teaching planning, evaluation and improvement at a school level have been significantly improved'**

| 21% | 45% | 25% | 7% | 1% |

• Strongly agree  • Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  • Disagree  • Strongly disagree
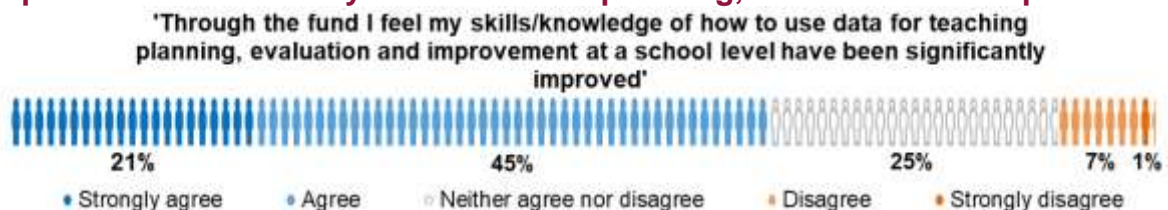
4.5. A great majority of schools (95%) had an evaluation plan in place to measure the impact of ASF-supported approaches. This finding was consistent across key respondent groups.

4.6.    The small minority of respondents (around 1 in 20) indicating that their school did not have an evaluation plan in place were asked about the reasons for this. These schools referred to changes of approach and indicators requiring production of a new evaluation plan, change of leadership or staffing constraints delaying production of a current evaluation plan, difficulty identifying success measures for the approaches being used, and schools with a relatively small PEF allocation using qualitative evaluation.

4.7.    **Follow-up qualitative feedback** also highlighted aspects of schools' practice in use of data to evaluate and measure impact.[9] This included use of data tools such as Insight in developing approaches and assessing impact for specific pupil groups, alongside broader measures looking at the BGE stages and regular collation of other evidence such as participation rates, attendance, and progress through specific ASF programmes.

4.8.    Follow-up participants also described this increased use of data as part of a wider change of culture and approach for schools. ASF was seen as having provided schools with an opportunity to reflect on and change their practice, building a robust evidence base to support these changes and measure their impact.

> *"The National Improvement Framework has changed the approach in schools, in focusing on evidence-based decision making and created a culture where we can challenge traditional approaches. Increased use of data has given us the confidence to innovate, knowing that there is an evidence base for the changes we are making."*

4.9.    Qualitative feedback also highlighted challenges around the evaluation of impact for specific interventions. Schools noted the difficulty in evidencing a direct causal link between a specific intervention and positive impacts for pupils, given the wide range of factors that can influence attainment, attendance and other indicators of progress. This included examples of the specific challenges faced by small schools, where evidencing individual stories and progress were described as a more appropriate approach to evaluation.

> *"Evaluating impact on attainment is quite hard as a whole range of factors affect attainment…it is hard to isolate one intervention as the reason for success. Health and*

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[9] Note that follow-up engagement findings are based on a small number of schools, and are intended to provide illustrative examples of schools' experiences across key survey themes.

*wellbeing is also difficult to evaluate, beyond numbers engaging with programmes and 'soft' indicators via surveys."*

4.10.  Despite these challenges in evaluating impact, qualitative feedback provided examples of schools having improved their understanding and skills in use of data to inform approaches and measure impact.

*"Over time we have expanded our data gathering to include participation rates, attendance at support classes, attainment from literacy programmes. Support in use of Insight has been significant in developing a deeper understanding of how this sort of data can inform our approach. Reflecting on the range of evidence has resulted in our stopping or adapting interventions which we had previously felt would be valuable."*

# 5.  Impact

5.1.   This section summarises views on the impact of ASF supported approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap. This includes views on the factors that contribute to or limit success, whether impacts are likely to be sustainable, and the extent to which ASF support has contributed to an increase in collaborative working.

## Progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap

5.2.   Around 9 in 10 (91%) schools reported seeing an improvement in closing the poverty-related gap in attainment and/or health and wellbeing as a result of ASF supported approaches. This included 19% that had seen 'a lot' of improvement to date.

5.3.   Nearly all schools (98%) expected to see improvement in closing the gap over the next five years. This included 34% who expected to see 'a lot' of improvement, and a total of 37% who had seen or were expecting to see a lot of improvement. Survey responses indicated that those who have seen some improvement to date were more likely to expect further improvement over the next five years.

> *"Our ethos is more nurturing and strengthens inclusion. Teaching quality has improved as has leadership at all levels. There has been encouraging data [on results] although more time is needed for predictable trends."*

5.4.   There has been a 13-point increase since 2017 in the proportion of schools reporting an improvement in closing the gap; from 78% in 2017, to 88% in 2018 and 91% in 2019. There has been no statistically significant change in the proportion of schools expecting to see improvement.

5.5.   The survey also showed some variation in views across funding streams, with Schools Programme respondents most likely to report an improvement in closing the gap. PEF-only schools, particularly those with a lower PEF allocation, were least likely to report an improvement.

**Perceived improvement in closing the poverty-related gap in attainment or health/wellbeing[10]**



Improvement to date: 19% Yes, a lot, 72% Yes, a little

Improvement expected in next 5 years: 34% Yes, a lot, 63% Yes, a little

• Yes, a lot          • Yes, a little

Time series: Perceived and expected improvement

Improvement expected, 98%
Improvement to date, 91%

2016    2017    2018    2019

By PEF allocation: Seen 'a lot' of improvement

Lower: 84%
Middle: 94%
Higher: 96%
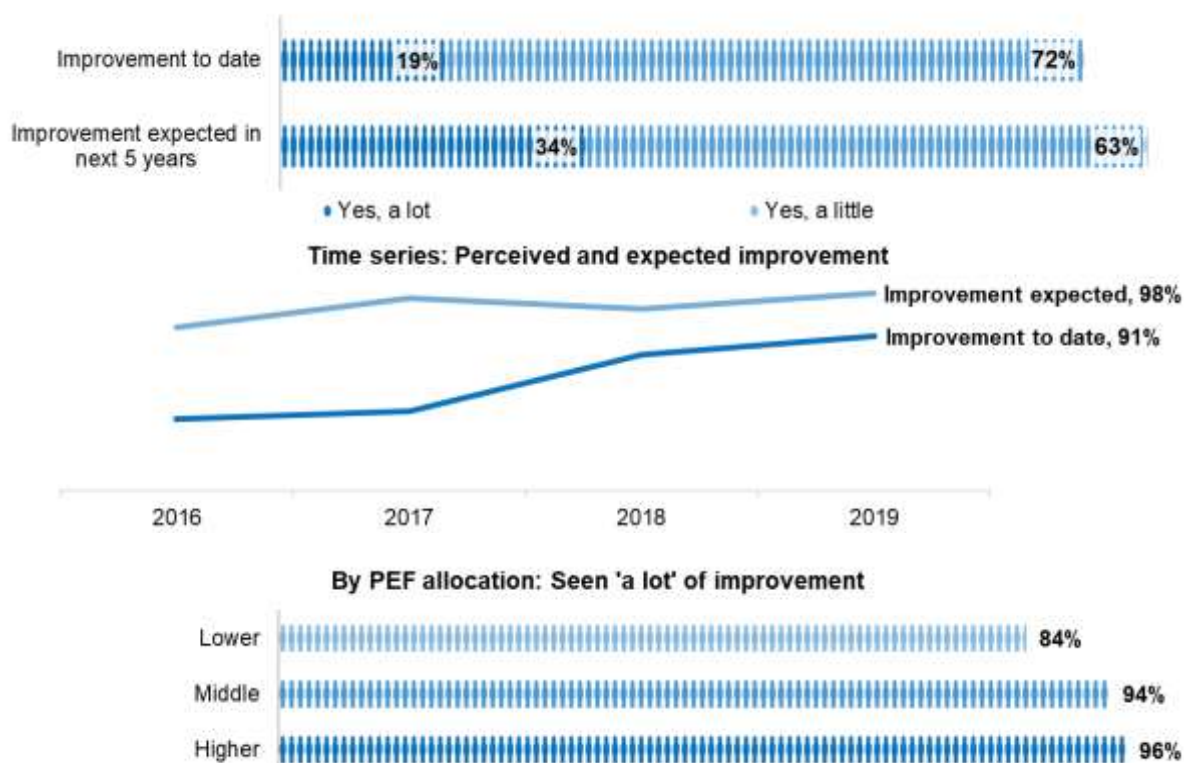
## Factors influencing progress

5.6. In addition to variation across respondent groups (such as funding stream, PEF allocation and urban/rural geography), survey analysis also considered correlation between perceived progress in closing the gap and other aspects of headteacher views and experiences. This considered a wide range of factors including schools' approach to closing the gap, headteachers' understanding and awareness in shaping that approach, embedding equity, use of evidence, improvement in evidence skills, collaborative working, and views on availability of support for PEF.

5.7. Analysis indicates that the headteachers most likely to have seen progress in closing the gap were those who had seen a change in culture or ethos (more collaborative working and/or embedding the approach to equity) or have improved their understanding of barriers faced by pupils and families. In particular, the following

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[10] 'Lower', 'middle' and 'higher' ranges of PEF allocation are based, respectively, on the lower 25% of schools, middle 50% of schools, and upper 25% of schools in terms of PEF allocation in 2018/19.

subgroups were statistically significantly more likely to have seen improvement as a result of ASF supported approaches:

**Respondents most likely to have seen progress in closing the gap**

Have seen an increase in collaborative working

Feel the approach to equity is embedded in the school community

Feel they understand the challenges and barriers faced by pupils and parents affected by poverty

Feel confident using evidence to inform development of their approach

Feel they had sufficient support to develop their school plan for PEF

Always use available evidence to measure the impact of approaches

5.8.   The survey also asked for headteachers' views on the factors that contribute to or hinder the success of ASF supported approaches. Respondents were asked to identify the top three supporting factors and barriers from pre-defined lists.

5.9.   Ability to implement approaches relevant to the school context, and teaching and staffing resources were the most commonly cited factors supporting schools' progress. More than half of respondents felt that these have contributed to their progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap (58% and 52% respectively). Other key factors included higher quality learning and teaching, and use of evidence and the approach to evaluation.

**Factors supporting progress towards closing the poverty-related gap in attainment or health/wellbeing**

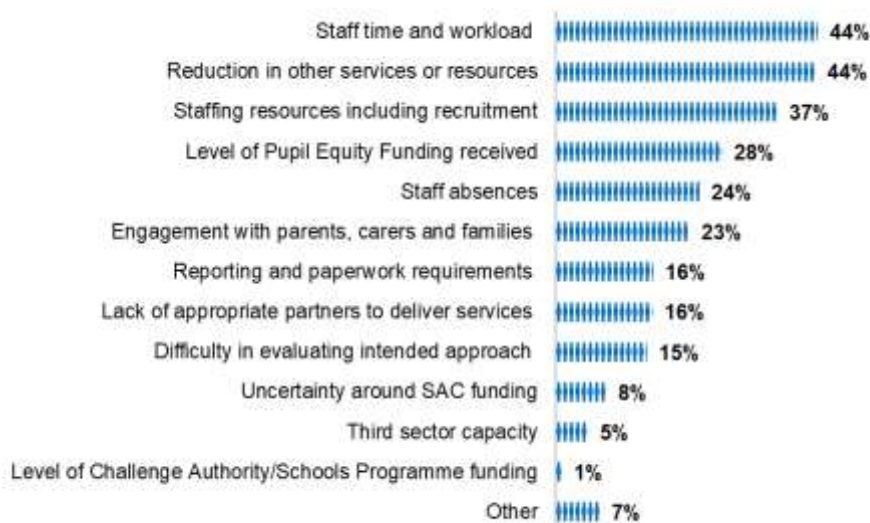| Factor | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Ability to implement approaches relevant to school | 58% |
| Teaching and staffing resources | 52% |
| Higher quality learning and teaching | 45% |
| Use of evidence/data and approach to evaluation | 40% |
| Engagement with parents, carers and families | 30% |
| Shared commitment to achieving equity in education | 25% |
| Collaboration with other schools, professionals, partners | 20% |
| Opportunities to undertake relevant CLPL | 12% |
| Support and guidance from local authority | 6% |
| Support and guidance from Attainment Advisors | 3% |
| Other | 2% |

5.10.  Staff time and workload, and reduction in other services/resources were seen as the main factors limiting progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Each were mentioned by 44% of respondents. Other commonly mentioned factors included staffing

resources and recruitment, level of PEF received and staff absences.

5.11. Survey results indicated some variation across respondent groups in the barriers seen as limiting progress. For example, primary schools were more likely to mention staff absences as a barrier, while secondary schools were more likely to mention staffing resources and recruitment. Staff absences were also a key barrier for schools with a higher PEF allocation, while the level of PEF received was the second most commonly mentioned barrier for schools with a lower allocation.

**Factors limiting progress towards closing the poverty-related gap in attainment or health/wellbeing**

| Factor | % |
|---|---|
| Staff time and workload | 44% |
| Reduction in other services or resources | 44% |
| Staffing resources including recruitment | 37% |
| Level of Pupil Equity Funding received | 28% |
| Staff absences | 24% |
| Engagement with parents, carers and families | 23% |
| Reporting and paperwork requirements | 16% |
| Lack of appropriate partners to deliver services | 16% |
| Difficulty in evaluating intended approach | 15% |
| Uncertainty around SAC funding | 8% |
| Third sector capacity | 5% |
| Level of Challenge Authority/Schools Programme funding | 1% |
| Other | 7% |

5.12. **Follow-up qualitative feedback** was consistent with survey findings in relation to the factors seen as limiting schools' progress in closing the poverty-related gap.[11]

5.13. In particular, follow-up participants referred to ongoing reduction in wider school resourcing as limiting the extent to which ASF support has enabled them to make 'additional' progress. Participants also suggested that schools are limited in the impact they can deliver for pupils, and that investment to close the poverty-related gap in schools must be supported by wider investment in communities and families. This was in terms of improving quality of life and experiences for pupils outside school, but also building more positive attitudes towards education and raising aspirations.

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[11] Note that follow-up engagement findings are based on a small number of schools, and are intended to provide illustrative examples of schools' experiences across key survey themes.

*"We expect overall attainment figures to continue to change and have already seen lots of other positive impacts. But I am sceptical about 'sustainability as many real issues still remain within education in Scotland in terms of cutbacks in resources, staffing and workload. Communities and families need to be given funding and resources too - the issue will not be solved until schools, communities and government work together."*
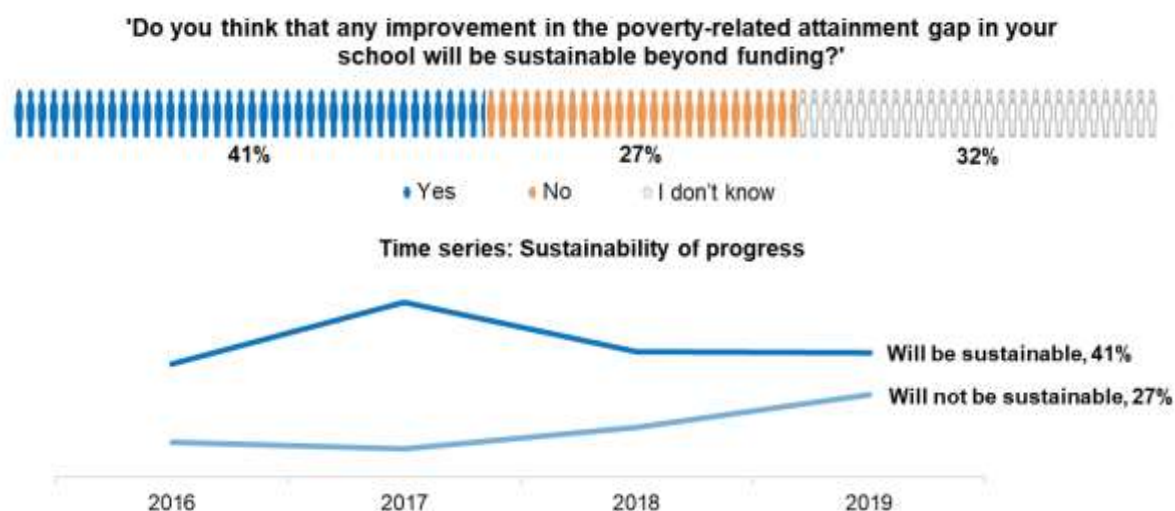
## Sustainability

5.14.  The survey included a series of questions to explore headteachers' views on the sustainability of their approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap. This included whether headteachers felt any improvement achieved to date would be sustainable beyond the years of funding, and whether they expected the focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap to be sustainable beyond funding.

5.15.  Around 2 in 5 (41%) survey respondents expected that ASF supported improvement will be sustainable beyond the years of funding. This represented a 17-point reduction from the 2017 survey; from 58% in 2017, to 42% in 2018 and 41% in 2019. There has been a corresponding 17-point increase in the proportion who feel that impacts will not be sustainable.

*"The ethos will remain, and the focus on the use of data and data analysis. However, budget cuts mean that PEF is not providing the additionality intended."*

5.16.  Survey findings also suggested a correlation between views on sustainability and perceived improvement to date. Those who had seen improvement to date in the poverty-related attainment gap were statistically significantly more likely to expect improvements to be sustainable beyond funding.

**Views on sustainability of progress towards closing the poverty-related gap**

'Do you think that any improvement in the poverty-related attainment gap in your school will be sustainable beyond funding?'



41%          27%          32%

• Yes     • No     ◦ I don't know

Time series: Sustainability of progress



Will be sustainable, 41%

Will not be sustainable, 27%

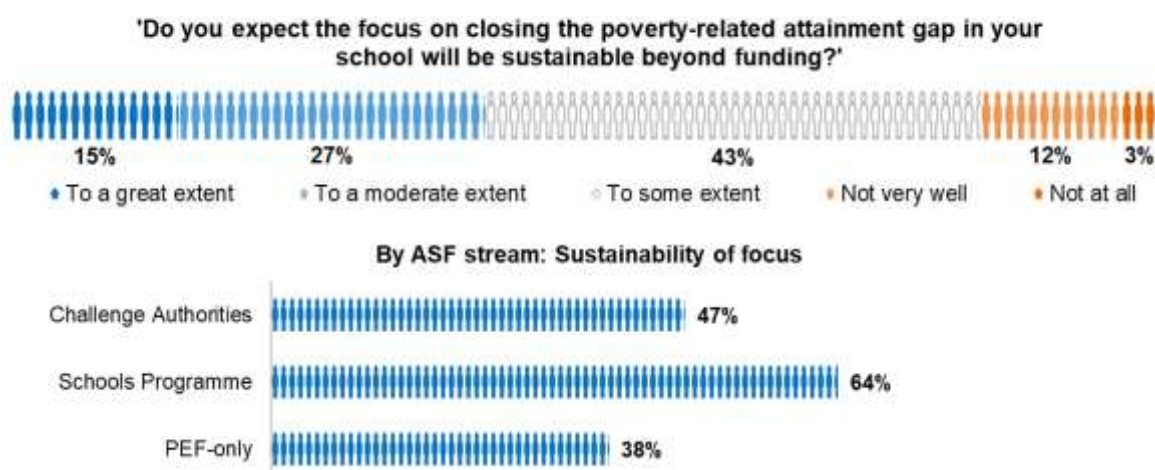2016          2017          2018          2019

5.17. In addition to sustainability of progress made to date, the survey also asked about sustainability of the focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Around 2 in 5 expected the focus to be sustainable to a 'great' or 'moderate' extent (41%). A further 43% felt that the focus on closing the gap may be sustainable 'to some extent', and 15% felt that the focus would not be sustainable.

> *"Extra staffing could not be sustained, but other elements will. As a school we are much more aware of the barriers our children face, we are implementing whole school strategies which we hope can be embedded. Staff training will continue to influence practice, collaboration across school and with partners will continue."*

5.18. Survey results suggested that Schools Programme schools were more positive than others on the sustainability of the focus on closing the gap (as was the case for sustainability of progress to date). There was also considerable overlap between headteachers who felt that progress achieved to date would be sustainable, and those who felt that the focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap within their school would be sustainable. A little more than half (53%) expected progress and/or the focus on closing the gap to be sustainable beyond funding.

**Views on sustainability of focus on equity and closing the poverty-related gap**

'Do you expect the focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap in your school will be sustainable beyond funding?'

| 15% | 27% | 43% | 12% | 3% |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| • To a great extent | • To a moderate extent | ○ To some extent | ▪ Not very well | • Not at all |

By ASF stream: Sustainability of focus

Challenge Authorities    47%

Schools Programme    64%

PEF-only    38%

5.19. The survey asked headteachers to expand on why they expected improvements and/or focus on equity to be sustainable, or why they do not expect these to be sustainable. Qualitative analysis of these responses has been undertaken to identify the key factors mentioned by respondents. These are summarised below.

5.20. This analysis indicated that staff training and development was, by some margin, the most common factor for schools who expect their improvement and/or focus on equity to be sustainable. More than half of those who expect their approach to be sustainable referred to staff training, development and capacity building. This included reference to schools having a specific focus on development of existing staff (including embedding practice) to ensure the sustainability of their approach, and to developing capacity for provision of training and development to ensure new staff can support their approach.

5.21. The importance of staff is also reflected in 'loss of staffing and skills' being by far the most common reason for schools who feel their approach will not be sustainable; loss of staff and skills was mentioned by a large majority of these schools. This included a view that schools would lose staff capacity in the absence of ASF support, and that this would have an inevitable negative impact on their ability to maintain their approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

**Why feel improvement/focus will be sustainable (n=556)**[12]

| | |
|---|---|
| Staff training, skills development and capacity building | 57% |
| Embedded practice, pedagogy development | 26% |
| Raising awareness and change of ethos/culture | 16% |
| Ongoing access to resources | 13% |
| Developed capacity to use data/evidence to inform approaches | 12% |
| Collaboration within school, with partners and parents | 10% |
| Longer-term health and wellbeing impacts | 7% |
| Developed a collective, shared focus | 4% |

**Why feel improvement/focus will not be sustainable (n=364)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Loss of staffing and skills | 85% |
| Loss of initiatives and approaches/interventions | 28% |
| Reduction in wider budgets/resourcing | 14% |
| Loss of external support and access to services | 8% |
| Pupils' health and wellbeing needs | 6% |

5.22. **Follow-up qualitative feedback** reflected these findings in highlighting staff capacity and resources as supporting the sustainability of improvement, and a key risk that improvement to date will not be sustainable.[13]

5.23. Follow-up participants highlighted the positive impact of dedicated, often specialist, staff input in delivering effective approaches and achieving progress in closing the gap. Participants also referred to difficulties recruiting the required staff as having limited their progress to date, and noted that loss of staff time in the event of funding being withdrawn would lead to some loss of progress.

5.24. Qualitative feedback also highlighted the importance of the focus on equity, and a shared understanding of what equity means, as key to the sustainability of their approach. These participants referred to the positive impact of having developed a clear overall vision and master plan to guide their approach to closing the poverty-related gap, and noted that this vision will remain in place post-funding. Reference was also made to ASF support having

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[12] Percentage results are based on those answering the question.

[13] Note that follow-up engagement findings are based on a small number of schools, and are intended to provide illustrative examples of schools' experiences across key survey themes.

enabled schools to try innovative approaches, and for those that prove most effective to be integrated into their ongoing approach.

> *"Having an overall vision/master plan is key for sustainability, avoiding the idea that one year will "fix" the issues that exist. Our plan is based on the central idea that we need to build the school's capacity, and this will take time to develop. We have used funding as a foundation to try innovative approaches, and integrated what works into the core business of the school."*
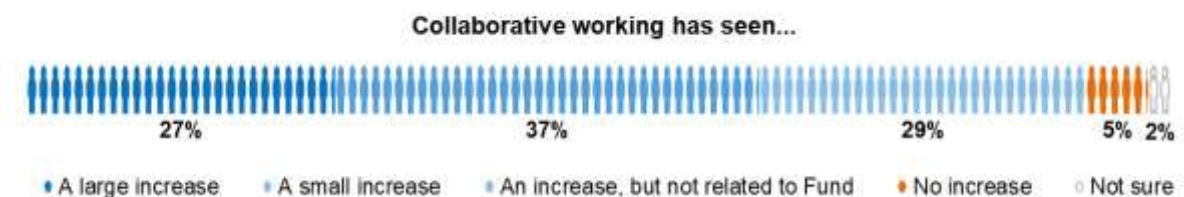
## Collaborative working

5.25. The majority of headteachers had seen an increase in collaborative working in their school as a result of ASF support. Nearly 2 in 3 (64%) indicated this, including around 1 in 4 (27%) who had seen a large increase in collaborative working. This represented a 13-point reduction since 2017 in the proportion of respondents who had seen some increase in collaborative working, although the 2017 result represented a peak following 2016 (71% in 2016, 77% in 2017, 71% in 2018).

> *"We have had a huge emphasis on collaboration amongst staff over the last three years. This has resulted in significant culture/ethos change."*
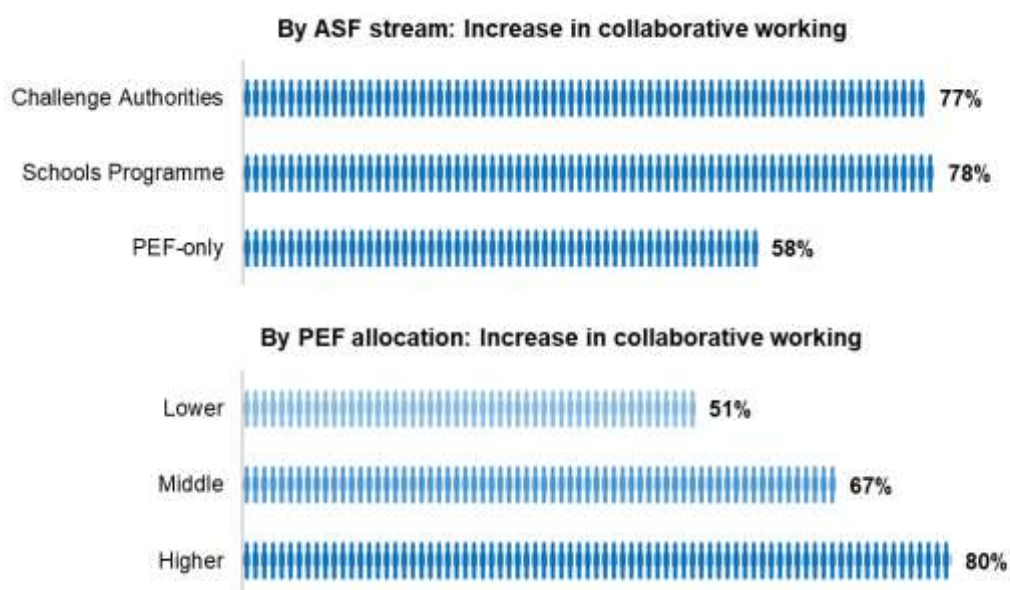
5.26. Survey responses indicated statistically significant variation across funding streams in the extent to which ASF support has led to an increase in collaborative working. Challenge Authority and Schools Programme respondents were more likely to have seen an increase in collaborative working (77% and 78% respectively), while PEF-only schools were least likely to have seen such a change (58%). Schools with a lower PEF allocation were also statistically significantly less likely than others to have seen an increase in collaborative working.

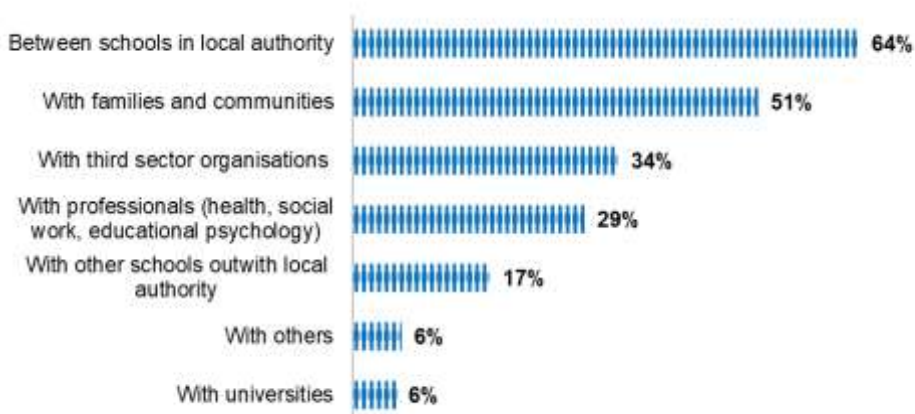**Whether seen an increase in collaborative working as a result of the Fund**

Collaborative working has seen...

| 27% | 37% | 29% | 5% | 2% |

- A large increase
- A small increase
- An increase, but not related to Fund
- No increase
- Not sure

**Whether seen an increase in collaborative working as a result of the Fund[14]**

### By ASF stream: Increase in collaborative working

| | |
|---|---|
| Challenge Authorities | 77% |
| Schools Programme | 78% |
| PEF-only | 58% |

### By PEF allocation: Increase in collaborative working

| | |
|---|---|
| Lower | 51% |
| Middle | 67% |
| Higher | 80% |

5.27. Schools were most likely to have seen an increase in collaborative working with other schools in their local authority, particularly for Challenge Authority schools. Schools also reported increased collaborative working with families and communities, with third sector organisations (particularly Challenge Authority or Schools Programme schools) and with professionals.

**Where seen an increase in collaborative working as a result of the Fund**

| | |
|---|---|
| Between schools in local authority | 64% |
| With families and communities | 51% |
| With third sector organisations | 34% |
| With professionals (health, social work, educational psychology) | 29% |
| With other schools outwith local authority | 17% |
| With others | 6% |
| With universities | 6% |

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[14] 'Lower', 'middle' and 'higher' ranges of PEF allocation are based, respectively, on the lower 25% of schools, middle 50% of schools, and upper 25% of schools in terms of PEF allocation in 2018/19.

5.28. **Follow-up qualitative feedback** highlighted factors that may influence the extent to which ASF has supported an increase in collaborative working within and across schools.[15]

5.29. A shared vision for the school and set of common values were seen by some as crucial in facilitating greater collaboration. Follow-up participants referred to a unified understanding of the school's purpose, and shared commitment from staff to improve outcomes for young people, as key elements in ensuring collaborative working if effective in supporting these improved outcomes:

> *"It is only through establishing a shared vision of what our school community is for that we can work together to achieve positive outcomes for pupils. Staff understand their role in this process - every strategy employed within the school can be linked back to the vision."*

5.30. This qualitative feedback also provided examples where schools felt that their collaborative working had developed in recent years to be a key strength, such that this was not necessarily seen as a key focus for further improvement:

> *"Collaboration is already working at a high level within our school. I would say that this is not an area which requires improvement, but we are constantly on the lookout for further opportunities to enhance our already strong collaborative approach."*

## Parental and family engagement

5.31. As noted earlier in this section, survey respondents saw parental and family engagement as a key element for progress in closing the poverty-related gap. Nearly 1 in 3 respondents noted parental engagement as a factor in their success to date, although nearly 1 in 4 also suggested that challenges in engaging parents had been a barrier to their progress.

5.32. Comments from these schools highlighted the importance of parents and families in supporting improvement for pupils affected by poverty. This was particularly in terms of supporting pupil attendance and engagement (parental engagement has formed a key part of the approach to supporting disengaged pupils for some schools) and improving pupil aspirations.

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[15] Note that follow-up engagement findings are based on a small number of schools, and are intended to provide illustrative examples of schools' experiences across key survey themes.

5.33. Schools noted that a clear commitment to, and recognition of the value of, parental engagement is required. This was particularly in the context of substantial time often being required to build relationships with families. Schools referred to some parents having negative associations with the school environment and cited examples of parental engagement having been built gradually, including through word-of-mouth. Several schools noted that, through ongoing engagement, parents have come to see themselves as part of the school community. Benefits were also reported around parents being more willing to volunteer and engage with school activities, and seeing the school as a source of help and support.

> *"Family engagement and our family engagement programme has been evaluated positively by parents. Vulnerable families are open and actively seeking out help. I feel we know our families and have gone from being a school to a community and source of help and support."*

5.34. Comments from schools also highlighted a number of specific approaches to achieving and maintaining parental engagement. These included use of extra-curricular and physical/sports activities designed to engage parents' interests – and ensuring free access to activities for parents and pupils. Comments also referred to the importance of ensuring parents are able to engage with the school in a way they are comfortable with; ensuring parental engagement events are welcoming and informal (including details such as providing refreshments), and providing opportunities for individual engagement or feedback if this is preferred.

5.35. **Follow-up qualitative feedback** also included reference to the value of a clear message around the positive impact that parental engagement can have for pupils, and on what is (and is not) expected of parents and carers.[16]

5.36. Follow-up participants raised concerns that parents can feel overwhelmed with messages around their role in their child's education, and may see 'parental engagement' as an additional expectation on their time. Some schools perceived a need for greater clarity, nationally and locally, on how parents can positively

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[16] Note that follow-up engagement findings are based on a small number of schools, and are intended to provide illustrative examples of schools' experiences across key survey themes.

support their child's learning, without this being seen as an undue burden.

## Unintended consequences

5.37. The survey asked headteachers about any unintended consequences of ASF support. Around 1 in 3 (33%) respondents had seen unintended positive consequences as a result of their receipt of ASF funding, and around 1 in 8 (13%) had seen unintended negative consequences. These findings were broadly consistent across key respondent groups, although Schools Programme respondents were more likely than others to have seen unintended consequences.

5.38. The survey provided an opportunity for respondents to expand on the unintended consequences they had seen as a result of ASF support. Responses are summarised below.

5.39. Headteachers were asked to highlight consequences which were not intended or anticipated by their own planning, rather than commenting on the wider policy intentions of the Attainment Scotland Fund. It is notable that a number of the consequences mentioned by respondents – such as improved collaboration and partnership working – are key policy intentions for the Fund.

5.40. Headteacher responses were also broadly consistent with unintended consequences reported in previous surveys. For example, the two most commonly mentioned positive (improved partnership working and staff training/skills development) and negative (additional workload and reporting requirements) consequences remained unchanged from the 2018 survey.

**Unintended positive consequences (n=310)**[17]

| | |
|---|---|
| More and better collaboration and partnership working | 25% |
| Training and skills development for staff | 15% |
| More leadership opportunities for staff | 13% |
| Improved engagement with parents/families | 13% |
| Improved pupil engagement and attendance | 12% |
| Change in school ethos/culture, a shared focus | 9% |
| Better awareness and understanding of the impact of poverty on attainment/wellbeing, and what 'equity' means | 7% |
| More and better use of data/evidence | 6% |

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[17] Percentage results are based on those answering the question.

**Unintended negative consequences (n=144)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Additional workload for leadership, management and administrative roles | 26% |
| Reduction in wider school budgets and external supports, loss of free access to 3<sup>rd</sup> sector support | 15% |
| Difficulties in staff recruitment and retention | 11% |
| Potential for schools, pupils or parents to feel excluded, difficulty around what 'equity' means | 8% |
| Reporting/evaluation requirements and timescales, pressure to demonstrate improvement | 5% |
| Concerns around stigma for pupils/families | 4% |
| A lack of autonomy in planning/implementation | 2% |

# 6. Pupil Equity Funding

6.1. This section summarises schools' experience around application for and receipt of PEF. This includes views on information and support available to support development of school plans for PEF, on the implementation of PEF within schools, and on the processes around the allocation of PEF.

## Developing schools' approach

6.2. Nearly 3 in 4 (74%) schools felt there was sufficient support in place to develop and implement their school plan for PEF. This represented an 18-point increase on the 2017 survey where 56% felt there was sufficient support (66% in 2018). Views were broadly similar across funding streams, but there was variation across geographic areas. In particular, headteachers of schools in rural areas were less likely to feel they had access to sufficient support (66% compared to 78% of urban schools).

> *"I feel our authority provided a variety of helpful support. A PEF Showcase Event was a useful opportunity to share and celebrate good practice with schools from across the area."*

6.3. There remained around 1 in 7 (14%) who felt there was insufficient support available. Written comments indicated this was most commonly related to the substantial time commitment required for planning, implementation and ongoing evaluation of approaches.

> *"We appreciated the autonomy to spend funding in a way that was best suited to our school. Examples of research based best practice would have been helpful."*
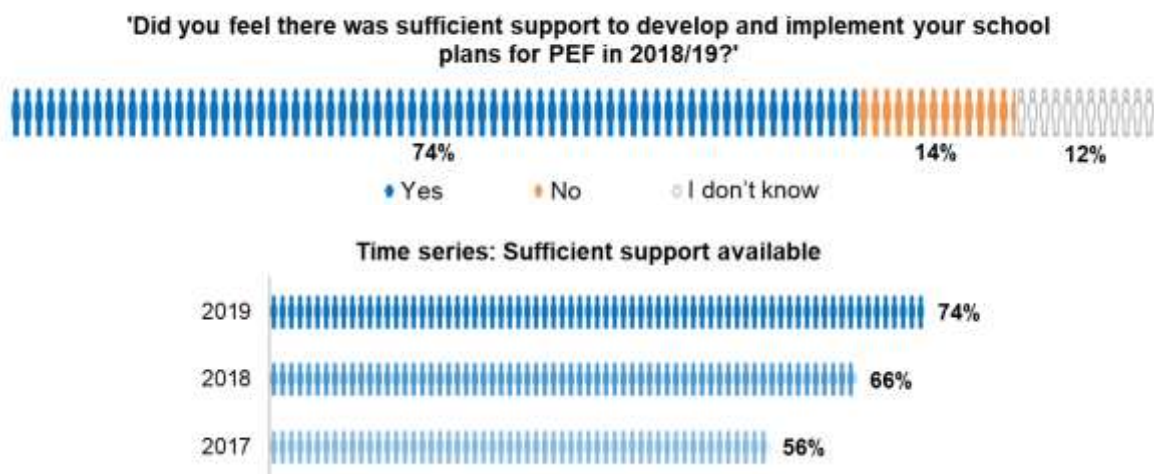
6.4. This included reference to the administrative 'burden' associated with PEF and the development/implementation of approaches, and the time required for recruitment and procurement to support these. Some suggested there was insufficient support where schools experienced recruitment and staffing difficulties. It was also suggested that there was insufficient guidance and training

available to support schools in budget management and tracking. This included reference to a lack of clarity around staffing and other costs at the planning stage.

> *"It is all related to staffing and time. It is impossible to properly analyse where money should be spent and find the time to look through procurement material, providers, etc when staffing issues have dominated."*

**Whether felt sufficient support to develop and implement school plan for PEF**

'Did you feel there was sufficient support to develop and implement your school plans for PEF in 2018/19?'

74%        14%        12%

• Yes        • No        ○ I don't know

Time series: Sufficient support available

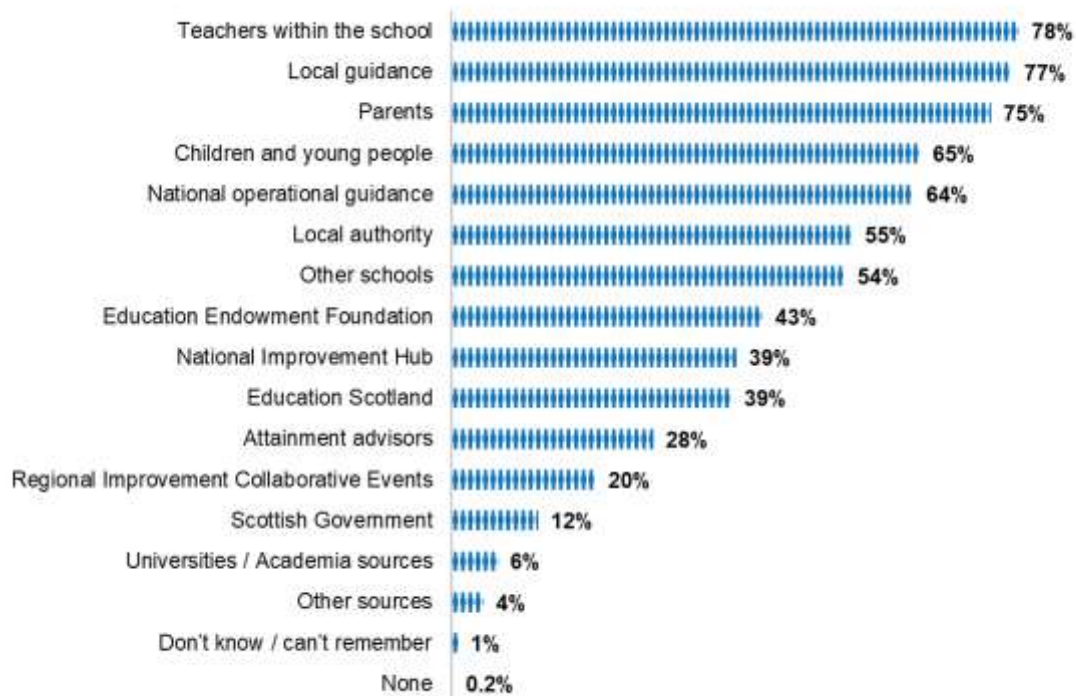| Year | |
|------|------|
| 2019 | 74% |
| 2018 | 66% |
| 2017 | 56% |

6.5. The survey asked headteachers to suggest any additional support that would have been helpful for them in developing school plans for PEF. Qualitative analysis of these responses has been undertaken to identify the key supports mentioned by respondents. These are summarised below.

6.6. This analysis indicated that guidance, support and sharing of practice were the key areas where schools feel they would benefit from additional input. Around 3 in 10 of those providing comment wished to see more guidance and support in developing school plans for PEF, including specific reference to practical advice in development of plans and to identify specific approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap. The focus on practical advice was also evident in schools' wish to see more sharing of ideas and practice examples, and support for collaboration between schools (and other stakeholders). Sharing of practice and collaboration was mentioned by around 1 in 4 of those providing comment.

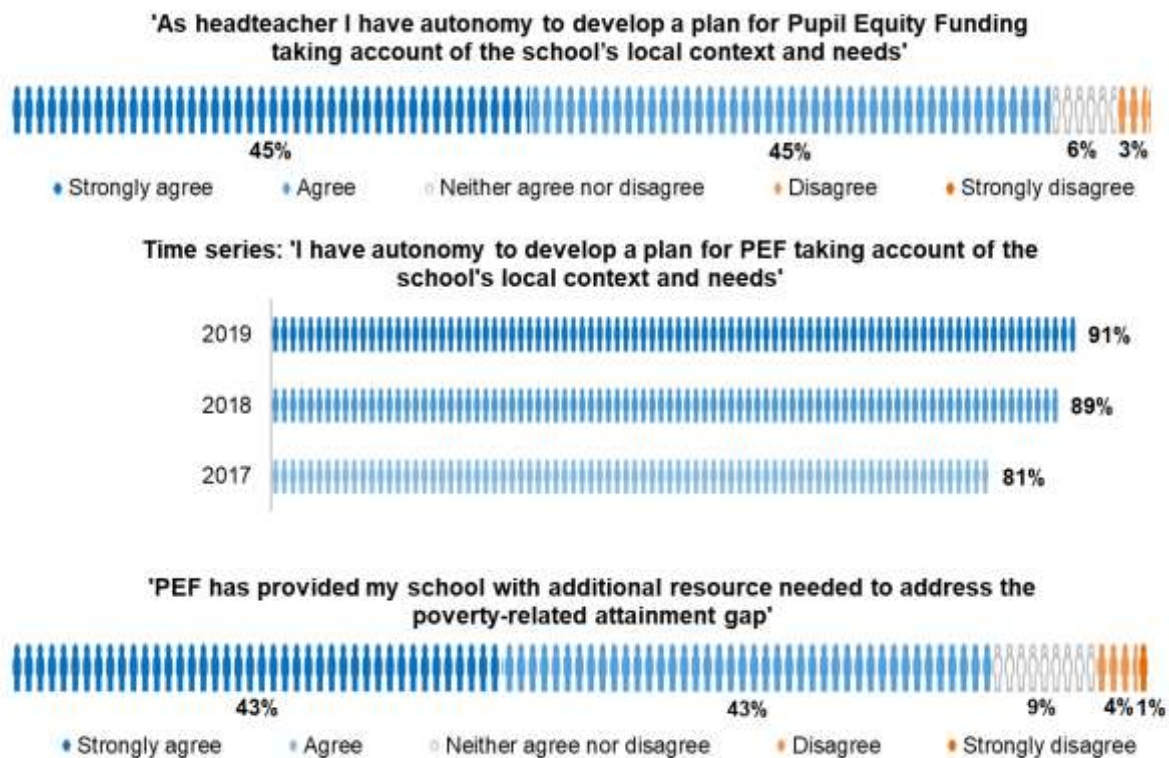| Guidance and support to develop plans, practical advice | 30% |
| Sharing ideas and practice examples, supporting collaboration | 26% |
| Guidance and support to use data and evaluate | 19% |
| Clearer strategic direction | 12% |
| Clarity on costs, support for financial planning | 10% |
| Additional time and resourcing to develop plans | 10% |
| Help with recruitment/ procurement | 8% |
| More time, less admin and bureaucracy | 4% |
| Greater autonomy | 1% |

N=420

6.7. Most respondents indicated that they had used multiple information sources in developing plans for PEF. The most commonly used were teachers within the school (used by 78%), local guidance published by local authorities (77%), parents (75%), children and young people (65%) and Scottish Government national operational guidance (64%).

**Information sources used when developing plans for PEF**



| Teachers within the school | 78% |
| Local guidance | 77% |
| Parents | 75% |
| Children and young people | 65% |
| National operational guidance | 64% |
| Local authority | 55% |
| Other schools | 54% |
| Education Endowment Foundation | 43% |
| National Improvement Hub | 39% |
| Education Scotland | 39% |
| Attainment advisors | 28% |
| Regional Improvement Collaborative Events | 20% |
| Scottish Government | 12% |
| Universities / Academia sources | 6% |
| Other sources | 4% |
| Don't know / can't remember | 1% |
| None | 0.2% |

6.8.	In terms of the process of developing school plans for PEF, the great majority of headteachers felt they had autonomy to develop PEF plans that are responsive to their local context and needs (91%). This view was broadly consistent across key respondent groups, and represents a 10-point increase since the 2017 survey in the proportion of headteachers who feel they have autonomy (two point increase since 2018).

6.9.	Headteachers were also positive in their views on whether PEF had provided additional resource needed to address the poverty-related attainment gap; 86% felt this has been the case. Survey results showed some variation across key respondent groups, with PEF-only schools (particularly those with lower allocations) less likely to feel that PEF has provided additional resource.

**Views on development and implementation of PEF in school**

'As headteacher I have autonomy to develop a plan for Pupil Equity Funding taking account of the school's local context and needs'

45%           45%           6%   3%

• Strongly agree     • Agree     Neither agree nor disagree     • Disagree     • Strongly disagree

Time series: 'I have autonomy to develop a plan for PEF taking account of the school's local context and needs'

2019     91%

2018     89%

2017     81%

'PEF has provided my school with additional resource needed to address the poverty-related attainment gap'

43%           43%           9%   4%  1%

• Strongly agree     • Agree     Neither agree nor disagree     • Disagree     • Strongly disagree

## Views on PEF processes

6.10.	Finally in relation to Pupil Equity Funding, views were generally positive in relation to processes around the allocation of funding. Most headteachers (62%) felt that reporting requirements associated with PEF were reasonable, and a similar proportion felt that timescales for planning for PEF have been sufficient (62%).

6.11. There was some variation across funding streams; PEF-only schools, particularly those in receipt of a lower PEF allocation, were less positive about reporting requirements and planning timescales.

**Views on processes around Pupil Equity Funding allocation**

'Reporting requirements associated with PEF funding are reasonable'

| 7% | 55% | 22% | 11% | 3% |

● Strongly agree  ● Agree  ○ Neither agree nor disagree  ● Disagree  ● Strongly disagree

'Timescales for planning for implementation of PEF have been adequate'

| 5% | 57% | 19% | 15% | 2% |

● Strongly agree  ● Agree  ○ Neither agree nor disagree  ● Disagree  ● Strongly disagree

# 7. Concluding remarks

7.1. This report has presented findings from a recent survey of headteachers of schools in receipt of support from the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF), and associated follow-up qualitative engagement with schools. ASF supports the Scottish Attainment Challenge focus on improving literacy, numeracy, health and well-being of children adversely affected by poverty, and incorporates a number of specific strands to support schools to close the poverty-related gap in attainment and wellbeing.

7.2. As the fourth survey of headteachers, findings continue to demonstrate positive impacts being delivered with ASF support. Moreover, development of the survey evidence base over time shows a number of positive trends. For example, the 91% of schools that have seen improvement in closing the poverty-related gap in literacy, numeracy or health and wellbeing represents a 13 point improvement since 2017. Nearly all schools (98%) also expect further improvement in closing the gap in the next five years.

7.3. Survey findings highlight a number of factors that appear linked to the progress achieved by schools in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. In particular, the headteachers most likely to report improvement were those who (a) have seen a change in ethos through more collaborative working and/or embedding the approach to equity, (b) have improved understanding of barriers faced by pupils and their families, (c) were confident using evidence to develop and measure approaches, and (d) who felt they had sufficient support to develop their plan for PEF.

7.4. The particular importance of changing culture and ethos, and improving understanding of the barriers to be addressed, was reinforced across survey findings and qualitative feedback. In addition to responses continuing to highlight the importance of collaborative working, a large majority responded positively to a new set of questions relating to wider school culture and improved understanding of barriers faced by pupils and families. Survey results and qualitative feedback highlighted the importance of ASF supporting a change of culture and approach. This included ASF encouraging a greater focus on data and evidence in developing and evaluating approaches, and schools reflecting on the role of parental and community engagement in developing a shared school ethos.

7.5. Variation in experience across respondent subgroups also appears to reinforce the importance of culture and ethos (including more collaborative working), an embedded approach to equity, and use of evidence in supporting progress in closing the gap. For example, Schools Programme respondents were more likely than others to report positive impacts to date, and were also more confident in use of data. Conversely, PEF-only schools, and particularly those with a lower PEF allocation, were least likely to report improvement - and were also less likely to feel that the approach to equity is embedded in their school, and were less aware of potential approaches to achieving equity.

7.6. Survey findings provide a number of positive indicators in terms of the impact delivered to date, and the factors that appear to support these positive impacts. For example, there has been a nine point increase since 2017 in schools who are confident using data, and an 18 point increase in schools who feel they had sufficient support to develop their plan for PEF. Qualitative feedback also referred to ASF being used to embed the approach to equity and effect a change in school culture, as means of achieving progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

7.7. However, survey findings suggest that questions remain regarding the extent to which progress to date may be sustainable beyond funding. For example, less than half of schools feel the improvement they have made to date will be sustainable, and this represents a 17 point fall since 2017. This view appears to reflect the importance of dedicated staff input in achieving positive impacts, and concerns amongst schools regarding potential loss of staff resources as a result of any reduction in funding.

7.8. A substantial proportion of schools appeared to be of the view that loss of ASF support would inevitably lead to some loss of progress achieved to date, particularly in the context of ongoing resource pressures. However, schools were not suggesting that positive impacts supported by ASF would be wholly lost when funding ends. For example, a large majority of respondents felt that the focus on equity in their school would be sustainable to some extent and, as noted earlier, this embedding of equity appears to be a driver of progress in closing the gap. Qualitative feedback suggests that schools recognise this, and have sought to establish a shared understanding of equity and a common approach to achieving equity as key elements in their work to ensure that ASF can deliver lasting benefits for pupils and families.

# Annex 1: Acronyms used

| | |
|---|---|
| ASF | Attainment Scotland Fund |
| BGE | Broad General Education |
| CA | Challenge Authority |
| PEF | Pupil Equity Fund |
| SAC | Scottish Attainment Challenge |
| SIMD | Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation |
| SP | Schools Programme |

# social research

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