

# Exploring teacher perceptions and the measured impacts of a progressive curriculum reform for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds

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## Abstract

The Foundation Phase is a pioneering early years education reform that was introduced across Wales in 2008. Based on a progressive, child-centred design, this reform aimed to improve educational outcomes in Wales and reduce achievement gaps for young learners. This paper reports a number of findings from a mixed-methods study that assessed the impact of the Foundation Phase on pupil outcomes. The study paid particular attention to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and responded to a gap in the empirical literature on the impact of progressive early years reforms on pupil outcomes. The findings reveal a disconnect between teachers' positive perceptions of the programme for learners disadvantaged by poverty and its more modest impact on measured attainment. This disconnect is explored in the paper, with the aim of helping to better understand the impact of progressive reforms like the Foundation Phase for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, providing valuable insights for similar programmes and the new curriculum being rolled out in Wales.

## KEYWORDS

attainment, curriculum, evaluation, inequity and social justice

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## Key insights

### What is the main issue that the paper addresses?

The paper evaluates the impact of Wales' Foundation Phase, a progressive early years curriculum reform, particularly its effectiveness in reducing educational inequalities for disadvantaged learners. It examines the disconnect between teachers' positive perceptions of its benefits and the modest improvements in traditional academic outcomes for pupils affected by poverty.

### What are the main insights that the paper provides?

While teachers value the Foundation Phase for fostering broader skills and learning dispositions, its success in mitigating poverty's impact on maths and literacy attainment was limited. The study also highlights how misalignments between curriculum aims, philosophy and assessment metrics create tensions in interpreting achievement and translating the curriculum.

## INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the Foundation Phase statutory curriculum represented a significant shift in the education of 3 to 7-year-olds in Wales. Embracing a markedly different approach to its predecessor, it emphasised child-centredness, developmental, experiential and active learning, and aimed to improve children's life chances, especially children disadvantaged by poverty (Maynard et al., 2013). Contrasting with teacher-centred, traditional or didactic curricula, the approach is indicative of 'progressive' curricula, a term often used in the research literature to convey a common set of goals and pedagogies associated with particular educational theorists and philosophers (e.g., see Howlett, 2013; OECD, 2001, 2006; Schweisfurth, 2013; Tippet & Lee, 2019). It is therefore similarly used here. The implementation of progressive or child-centred curricula has long been promoted as a means of improving outcomes for learners disadvantaged by poverty (e.g., Dewey, 1938; Edwards et al., 2012; Freire, 1970; McMillan, 1904; Meier, 2002) and a growing body of research has demonstrated the role that good early years provision can play (e.g., Burger, 2010; Heckman et al., 2013; OECD, 2020; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). While the Foundation Phase shared these ambitions, its effectiveness in mitigating the impact of poverty on educational attainment remains a subject of debate.

This paper reports findings from a mixed-methods evaluation of the Foundation Phase over time. Responding to the literature on progressive approaches, the study investigated both teacher perceptions of the Foundation Phase, its enactment and impact, alongside changes in measured attainment and attainment gaps using administrative data. The findings suggest the question of impact for learners disadvantaged by poverty is a complex one. Despite some progress in overall educational attainment and reduced poverty-based gaps in certain outcomes in Wales, the findings suggest that the impact of poverty on educational outcomes remains a significant challenge. While an increasing proportion of teachers perceived that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds particularly benefited from the programme, the measured attainment outcomes suggested a more modest effect. By exploring the disconnect between teacher perceptions and attainment data, and the nuances of the programme's impact, valuable insights can be gained to inform future policy

decisions aimed at mitigating the detrimental effects of poverty on educational achievement. Moreover, these insights are especially timely as Wales rolls out its new curriculum (the Curriculum for Wales, CfW), which embraces a similar approach to the Foundation Phase for pupils up to the age of 16.

The paper draws on attainment, interview and survey data to discuss the efficacy of this type of curriculum for learners disadvantaged by poverty in Wales. It begins by describing the design of the Foundation Phase and its empirical foundations, drawing attention to the literature (or lack of it) on the effectiveness of progressive education models for learners affected by poverty. It then outlines the study's methodological design, before exploring its key findings. The paper concludes with a discussion of the study's implications, particularly for Wales's new curriculum, contributing to our understanding of the impact of similar progressive reforms implemented on a systemwide scale.

## THE WELSH FOUNDATION PHASE AND ITS EMPIRICAL FOUNDATIONS

### The Foundation Phase

The Welsh Government's Foundation Phase was rolled out nationwide in 2008 and represented a radical overhaul of early years education in Wales. The reform was part of a broader effort to improve educational outcomes and address systemic inequalities, particularly for children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (see NAFW, 2001, 2003; Welsh Government, 2016a, 2016b). Focusing on play-based, child-centred, experiential learning, it aimed to foster a more engaging and effective learning environment for children in Wales. Its design drew explicitly on the progressive practices of New Zealand, Reggio Emilia and Scandinavia (see Maynard et al., 2013) and, with clear differences in curriculum and pedagogy, represented a significant shift from the more formal, teacher-directed methods that had previously characterised early years education in Wales (Taylor et al., 2016).

This shift away from more formal, teacher-centred, highly prescribed education has now been extended to learners up to the age of 16, as Wales embarks on a larger-scale reform in the CfW. The reform is closely aligned with the Foundation Phase and adopts a holistic approach to learning (Power et al., 2020; Sinnema et al., 2020). With an emphasis on equity, it has similar lofty ambitions, which include achieving 'high standards and aspirations for all' and 'tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment' (Welsh Government, 2023, p. 3; 2020), and as the pedagogical approach of the Foundation Phase remains the same for 3 to 7-year-olds,<sup>1</sup> much can be learned from the current study for the new curriculum going forwards.

The Foundation Phase is similar to the models it was based on, in its broadly progressive aims, which include greater motivation, concentration and enhanced learning dispositions by age 7 and increased engagement, enjoyment and, particularly for those disadvantaged by poverty, improved wellbeing, social and emotional development and learning dispositions (see Maynard et al., 2013). It also emphasises the use of pedagogies associated with progressivism (see Jones, 2023 for a more detailed account). These include play-based, child-centred, experiential learning, individual and group activity, peer-to-peer learning and family engagement, with the environment playing an important educative role (see Welsh Government, 2016a). Similarly, like other progressive approaches, the teacher is positioned as an 'observer' and 'facilitator', learning 'alongside' and 'responding' to the needs of individual children while prompting, challenging and supporting them as they initiate and direct their own learning (DCELLS, 2008a, p. 32; 2008b; Welsh Government, 2016a, p. 8).

To facilitate the more responsive interactions, the programme also came with increased adult-to-child ratios.

While the Foundation Phase emphasised wellbeing and the development of the 'whole child' (beyond academic skills), there was a particular focus and expectation of improving outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and reducing achievement gaps based on socioeconomic disadvantage (e.g., see Maynard et al., 2013; Welsh Government, 2016a). Indeed, in 2016, narrowing gaps between learners became a main priority in the Foundation Phase (Welsh Government, 2016a) and a central goal of the country's wider 'national mission' (Welsh Government, 2017a). Unlike most child-centred, play-based early years approaches, there is a requirement for children to develop key skills and outcomes, particularly in literacy and numeracy by the age of 7 (the end of the Foundation Phase). To this end, and for the purposes of monitoring school performance in these areas, attainment data for all pupils in Wales based on teacher assessments are collected in Year 2, the end of the Foundation Phase. The availability of this administrative data provides a useful opportunity for evaluative research, an advantage exploited by Taylor et al. (2015) and the present study.

Taylor et al.'s (2015) research was commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2012 and conducted during the reform's infancy. It was a comprehensive evaluation that found evidence that the programme's core principles and practices were not being consistently applied, and implementation was very uneven. Furthermore, Taylor et al.'s research raised concerns about the programme's efficacy for learners disadvantaged by poverty, and doubts about whether it could significantly impact attainment gaps (e.g., see Power et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2015). However, given the newness of the reform at the time of their study, it was difficult to determine what might be achieved if it were implemented as intended across Wales. Research suggests, for example, that major reforms require at least 3 years to become well-enough implemented to effect outcomes, and complicated designs even longer (e.g., see Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Felner et al., 2001; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). As the Foundation Phase embraced a markedly different, more sophisticated approach than its predecessor, it was likely that it required longer to embed, and practitioners more training before it could take full effect (Taylor et al., 2015). However, despite the provision of additional training and guidance by the Welsh Government, little evaluative work has followed since.

## **Empirical literature on the efficacy of progressive approaches**

Rather than being informed by robust empirical studies validating the specific models the Foundation Phase drew inspiration from, its design appeared to be guided by a set of shared pedagogical principles associated with progressive approaches (e.g., teacher as facilitator, environment as teacher, child-centred, play-based, etc.). However, a review of the literature reveals a lack of large-scale evidence supporting the effectiveness of these models in reducing educational inequalities, and therefore little to indicate that the Foundation Phase would succeed in this regard (Jones, 2023). Very few studies have evaluated the impact of these curricula on core outcomes like maths and literacy in the originating countries (New Zealand, Reggio Emilia and Scandinavia), especially for disadvantaged groups. This is something upon which many commentators remark (e.g., Blaiklock, 2010, 2013, 2017; Nuttall, 2005 on New Zealand; Biroli et al., 2017; Dodd-Nufrio, 2011; Emerson & Linder, 2021 on Reggio Emilia; Jensen, 2009; Sommer, 2019 on Scandinavia).

Instead, the research on progressive approaches predominantly investigates localised programmes or specific interventions rather than large-scale system reforms, especially with regard to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., see Abbott et al., 2003; Burger, 2010; Chambers et al., 2010; Elango et al., 2015; Feinstein et al., 2017; Grudnoff et al., 2017; Jensen et al., 2013; Payler et al., 2017; Sosu & Ellis, 2014). This appears to be

the result of two main tensions, which complicate the evaluation of large-scale progressive reforms. First, the gap between the written curriculum and its translation into classroom practice can undermine the validity of findings, especially for pedagogical models defined by loosely structured, complex concepts. This first tension has long been acknowledged in the research literature (e.g., see Blignaut, 2007; Braun et al., 2011; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Fullan, 1993, 2000; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Priestley & Minty, 2013; Priestley et al., 2021; Spillane et al., 2002; Stenhouse, 1975; Supovitz, 2008). The second tension relates to the emphasis on the broader developmental goals (rather than traditional academic outcomes) of these curricula and their underlying philosophy, both of which complicate the use of conventional attainment data for assessing their success (Jones, 2023). For example, their goals and softer outcomes are less easily measurable, and the traditional collection of administrative attainment data is seen as antithetical to the goals and philosophy of progressivism (see Jones, 2023). This means little system data exists for evaluative research.

These tensions underscore the importance of teacher perceptions to evaluations of progressive reforms, an approach supported by an extensive body of research. For example, attention is drawn to teachers' position as major stakeholders, at the forefront of school practice where they contextualise curricula and associated outcomes within the unique socioeconomic, social, cultural and structural realities of their classrooms (e.g., see Biesta et al., 2015; Priestley et al., 2015, 2016, 2021). Research suggests that teachers interpret curriculum reforms and their impacts subjectively (Fullan, 2007), and that their perceptions of reforms and buy-in, shaped by their experiences, beliefs and classroom realities, can either facilitate or hinder enactment and, therefore, effective implementation and learning outcomes (e.g., Arrellano et al., 2022; Ball et al., 2012; Brown & McIntyre, 1982; Datnow & Castellano, 2000; Datnow et al., 2002; Fullan, 2007; Priestley & Biesta, 2013; Roorda et al., 2020; Spillane, 1999).

Collectively, this body of research positions teachers' perceptions and engagement with reforms as critical to reform success. Investigating them can offer critical, additional insights into the curriculum's efficacy in different circumstances. In a country with wide-ranging contextual diversity such as Wales, examining teacher experiences and accounts of practice in different settings is especially important to understanding the efficacy of this programme for learners disadvantaged by poverty. Moreover, research suggests that teachers may have a broader view of learning and development than that captured in traditional attainment data, since they can reflect on a child's engagement, critical thinking, collaboration skills and other outcomes they deem important (Priestley & Minty, 2013). Indeed, studies have found discrepancies between teacher perceptions of educational programmes and a programme's impact on attainment measured by test scores (e.g., see Priestley & Miller, 2012), and it is important to explore these before drawing conclusions.

So, while administrative attainment data is clearly important to impact evaluations, incorporating teachers' views and experiences can offer critical and additional insights that an examination of attainment data alone might miss. This is the intention of this paper, which responds to the many calls made for high-quality quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods research to investigate the benefits or effectiveness of large-scale progressive approaches (e.g., Dietrichson et al., 2020; Emerson & Linder, 2021; OECD, 2004; Schweisfurth, 2013; Taylor et al., 2015), especially for learners affected by poverty (e.g., Chambers et al., 2010; Francis, 2015; OECD, 2004; Semel et al., 2016). The following section describes how.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The research literature, together with an official evaluation for the Welsh Government (Taylor et al., 2015), informed the study's design. The literature suggested there was significant

variation in how progressive approaches are understood and enacted in schools and that outcomes can be 'softer' and less easily measured than traditional attainment. Given this, and the crucial role that teachers play in how the Foundation Phase is enacted, this study examined both the programme's impact on measured attainment *and* teachers' experiences, including their perceptions of its impact. This helped to capture the different ways achievement and gaps between learners can be understood. The study therefore adopted a multi-faceted approach investigating both quantitative outcomes and qualitative teacher perspectives.

This study, which was part of a larger investigation that explored the efficacy of this type of curriculum for learners disadvantaged by poverty, was based on a three-phased sequential mixed-methods design (see Jones, 2023). It aimed to explore the discrepancy between measured attainment derived from administrative data for all Year 2 cohorts over 6 years (2011/2012 to 2016/2017) and teacher perceptions based on 361 survey responses from Taylor et al.'s (2015) evaluation, a national online survey of Foundation Phase Lead Practitioners for this study (289 responses representing approximately 24% of schools) and semi-structured interviews of 21 teachers drawn from seven case-study schools in predominantly socioeconomically disadvantaged areas.

Measured attainment had been quantified using externally prescribed criteria and pertains to grades based on summative assessments recorded by practitioners at the end of the Foundation Phase (Year 2). The grades relate to a perceived level of development based on detailed criteria or 'skills ladders' set out in the curriculum documentation (see Welsh Government, 2015b, 2017b). Teachers use a range of evidence over time, including observations and formative assessments, providing a holistic view of a range of skills. Attainment data for the core subjects of Language, Literacy and Communication (called literacy in this paper) and Mathematical Development (called maths) are the variables of interest here. Reference is made to Outcome 5, which reflects the level of development that is broadly aligned with what is 'expected' of a child aged 6–7 years and Outcome 6, the expected level of development for a 7 to 8-year-old (Welsh Government, 2017b). At the end of the Foundation Phase, the majority of pupils are aged 7. In this paper, 'lower levels' relates to Outcome 5 and 'higher levels' to Outcome 6.

In the study, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds were broadly conceived as children from families who are likely to experience detrimental circumstances related to poverty. However, eligibility for free school meals (FSM) is used as a proxy measure for these children when analysing pupil attainment data. While this represents a narrower group of children, the approach was dictated by the way that administrative data is collected in Wales and relates to explicit goals within the Foundation Phase and the way that the Welsh Government assesses gaps between learners related to socioeconomic disadvantage. Furthermore, even though FSM eligibility fails to capture all children impacted by poverty (e.g., see Gorard, 2012; Taylor, 2018), it is commonly used by researchers as a proxy for low parental income in attainment gap studies and is framed as a useful and reliable indicator of low socioeconomic status by academics (e.g., see Gorard, 2012; Ilie et al., 2017; Taylor, 2018).

Recognising the limitations of FSM eligibility, the study tried to capture a broader understanding in the survey and interviews, by referring to 'children affected by poverty' or 'children from disadvantaged backgrounds' without specific definition, leaving the concept open to the subjective interpretations of participants. This allowed for broader groups of children to be considered, which is important from a social justice perspective. The administrative attainment data pertains to a whole population: all Year 2 cohorts in Wales from the first year the Foundation Phase was fully rolled out (2011/2012) to 2016/2017. The analysis focused on changes in measured attainment, attainment gaps and the influence of poverty on pupil outcomes between 2011/2012 and 2016/2017. It embraced both descriptive and predictive analyses using multivariate techniques.



Most schools have a 'Foundation Phase Lead Practitioner' or a member of staff who is responsible for leading the Foundation Phase. Using a database compiled of all available school email addresses in Wales, 1197 schools were approached and their Foundation Phase lead invited to participate in an anonymous online survey in 2019. A total of 289 responses were received, which represented roughly 24%. The survey repeated questions used in the Taylor et al. (2015) research to enable direct comparisons of perceptions between two time points to be made. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the results.

The addition of semi-structured interviews allowed the investigation to delve deeper into the patterns identified in the survey and administrative data and enabled more nuanced insights into the thoughts, opinions and lived experiences of Foundation Phase teachers, particularly relating to learners disadvantaged by poverty. Schools were recruited from a subsample of Taylor et al.'s (2015) 41 case-study settings using multiple selection criteria, including attainment, cohort characteristics (year size and number of pupils eligible for FSM) and the type of pedagogical practice observed by Taylor et al., in 2012. Seven schools were identified in predominantly disadvantaged areas across South Wales to reflect the attainment of pupils eligible for FSM that had improved, regressed and remained relatively unchanged during the study period, and a range of pedagogical practice in terms of alignment with Foundation Phase pedagogical principles, according to Taylor et al.'s classroom observations. Using Taylor et al.'s scores of pedagogical alignment, effectively a scale representing little alignment to very close alignment, the sampling strategy ensured that schools with high and low scores and some in between were included in the sample (see Jones, 2023 for further details). All schools agreed to take part and semi-structured interviews of 21 teachers were undertaken, including 3 headteachers, 8 Foundation Phase leads and 11 Foundation Phase classroom teachers.

Both the surveys and the interviews were of teachers responsible for translating the Foundation Phase into practice. The questions investigated teacher perceptions of the impacts and benefits of this curriculum, particularly in relation to learners affected by poverty. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was undertaken broadly following the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2020). An enactment lens (e.g., Braun et al., 2011; Priestley et al., 2012, 2021) was used to make sense of how practitioners translated the curriculum into classroom practice, its impacts for learners disadvantaged by poverty and how these related to more objective measurements of traditional attainment. This approach offers the advantage of helping to create a more dynamic and locally specific understanding of teachers' experiences (Bragg et al., 2022). Analytical observations mapped onto key themes identified in the enactment literature relating to the professional, situational, external and material contexts of practice (e.g., see Braun et al., 2011; Priestley et al., 2012, 2021).

## RESULTS

### The impact of the Foundation Phase on measured attainment in maths and literacy

The findings suggest that the Foundation Phase's impact on reducing poverty's influence on attainment was disappointing. Here, logistic regression, a multivariate technique, was employed to control for the effect of other variables that may influence outcomes, such as interactions between poverty and having special educational needs (SEN) or gender. For example, a significantly higher proportion of FSM-eligible pupils are known to have SEN compared with non-eligible pupils (non-eFSM) (41% compared with 20% in 2016/2017), so this method was particularly helpful. Logistic regression is also useful when the dependent variable, such as whether a pupil achieves an outcome or not, is dichotomous, and offers a

more accurate picture of poverty's individual impact than simple attainment gaps (e.g., see Gorard, 2021). The resulting models from a series of binary logistic regressions estimate the influence or 'effect' of being eligible for FSM on attaining core Foundation Phase outcomes in maths (MDT) and literacy (LLC), by controlling for the influence of several other pupil and school-level characteristics (predictor variables). The pupil-level variables included in the analyses were gender, ethnicity and whether a pupil is eligible for FSM or is known to have SEN. Five school-level or contextual variables were also controlled for, relating to the composition of the Year 2 cohort within the school attended. These included the size of the Year 2 cohort and the percentage of pupils who were male, eligible for FSM, known to have SEN and not White British.

The models estimate the likelihood of a pupil achieving the outcome of interest, by generating odds ratios (labelled 'OR') using the same predictor variables in each model. The odds ratios of concern in this research indicate the likelihood or probability of a pupil eligible for FSM achieving the outcome of interest, compared with a similar pupil who is not eligible.  $OR < 1$  indicates a reduced likelihood of a pupil eligible for FSM achieving the outcome, compared with peers with similar characteristics but not eligible for FSM. Conversely,  $OR > 1$  indicates an increased likelihood of a pupil eligible for FSM achieving the outcome, compared with similar non-eFSM pupils. As regression models were generated for each outcome during the study period, this equated to four models per cohort, 24 in total for all study years. Table 1 presents a summary of the results from these analyses for the most recent (2016/2017) cohort, while the results for the remaining cohorts can be found in the Appendix. The odds ratios that represent the likelihood of a pupil eligible for FSM achieving each outcome are highlighted in bold.

The results presented in Table 1 suggest that, in 2017, after controlling for the other pupil and school-level characteristics described above, poverty was found to exert a considerable influence on the pupil outcomes examined, particularly at higher levels of attainment. For example, the models estimate that a pupil eligible for FSM was 27% less likely to achieve Outcome 5 or higher in MDT and 27% less likely to achieve LLC at this level than a similar pupil not eligible for FSM, after controlling for the other pupil and school-level characteristics ( $OR = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, at higher levels of attainment in these subjects, the influence of being eligible for FSM was even greater. The data suggest that pupils eligible for FSM were 51% less likely to attain MDT O6+ ( $OR = 0.49$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and 56% less likely to achieve LLC O6+ ( $OR = 0.44$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) than similar non-eFSM peers.

Whilst the influence of socioeconomic circumstances on attainment in the Foundation Phase appears substantial, it is important to consider whether it has changed over time. If the odds of a pupil eligible for FSM achieving the core outcomes have improved, for example, this might suggest that the influence of poverty on attainment in the Foundation Phase had potentially weakened, possibly as practitioners became more skilled in its implementation. The findings of the 24 models were therefore used to compare the relative influence of being eligible for FSM over the 6 years. Essentially, the purpose was to find out whether the odds improved, worsened or remained relatively unchanged over time. Tables 2 and 3 present summaries of all the models for each year of the study period using the odds ratios for being eligible for FSM. Table 2 summarises the findings for its influence on the core subjects at expected levels or higher (O5+), while Table 3 summarises the findings for higher levels only (O6+). Odds ratios in bold indicate that the odds have improved compared with the previous year, while those not in bold indicate that they have worsened.

The results summarised in Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate that the influence of poverty has fluctuated in both directions over time. They suggest that compared with the baseline year (the shaded column 2011/2012), the influence of poverty at expected levels of MDT remained relatively unchanged at the end of the study period, but for LLC was notably weaker



**TABLE 1** Estimating the likelihood of achieving each outcome in 2016/2017.

Binary logistic regression	MDT O5+	MDT O6+	LLC O5+	LLC O6+
Valid cases	35,266	35,266	35,266	35,266
Missing cases	5	5	5	5
Cox & Snell $R^2$	0.168	0.14	0.188	0.166
Nagelkerke $R^2$	0.359	0.19	0.374	0.226
	Exp(B) (odds ratios)			
Variable	MDT O5+	MDT O6+	LLC O5+	LLC O6+
Constant	43.455***	0.749*	39.379***	0.8
<i>Gender</i>				
Female				
Male	1.05	1.222*	0.745***	0.670***
<i>Free school meals</i>				
Non-FSM eligible				
FSM eligible	<b>0.633***</b>	<b>0.497***</b>	<b>0.636***</b>	<b>0.447***</b>
<i>Special educational needs provision</i>				
No SEN				
SEN	0.047***	0.123***	0.050***	0.098***
<i>Ethnicity</i>				
White British				
Not White British	1.011	1.236	0.96	1.179***
% of school cohort who are male	0.984***	0.995***	0.986***	1
% of school cohort who are eligible for FSM	0.988***	0.998***	0.987***	0.989***
% of school cohort with SEN provision	1.002	1.007***	1.004**	1.006***
% of school cohort who are White British	1.009***	1.003**	1.008***	1.003**
School year size	1.009***	1.001	1.009***	1.002**

*Note:* O5+ includes both Outcome 5 and higher attainment (while inferential statistics are used, it must be noted that the data are whole population rather than sample based). Therefore,  $p$  values are stated purely for information purposes. Cohort percentage odds ratios in the bottom section of the table relate to the increase in the likelihood of a pupil achieving the outcome associated with a 1% increase in the cohort composition variable, when all other characteristics are equal. For example, a percentage increase in the number of pupils eligible for FSM in the Year 2 cohort is associated with a 2% reduction in the likelihood of a pupil achieving MDT O5.

Abbreviations: LLC, language, literacy and communication; MD, mathematical development.

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

(demonstrated by the odds becoming closer to one). However, for higher levels of attainment (Table 3), the results imply that compared to baseline, the influence of poverty was slightly greater (demonstrated by the odds moving further away from one). The data suggest then that compared to pupils eligible for FSM in 2011/2012, pupils eligible for FSM in 2016/2017 appeared to do relatively better in literacy at expected levels and slightly worse at higher ones (based on how they compared to non-eFSM pupils in each respective year). However, fluctuations in both directions between years are acknowledged and some caution is advised over the interpretation of yearly odds ratio comparisons of different cohorts of pupils. That said, the results were generally aligned with overall patterns in the attainment gap data using absolute differences in the study, which implied that the gap between learners narrowed at expected levels but grew at higher ones. While these findings raise important questions about the

**TABLE 2** Summary of the effect of being eFSM on achievement of core outcomes at O5+ over time.

Outcome	Odds ratios for the effect of the variable 'FSM' for each cohort					
	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
MDT O5+	0.634	0.601	0.591	<b>0.651</b>	0.612	<b>0.633</b>
LLC O5+	0.573	<b>0.577</b>	<b>0.584</b>	<b>0.624</b>	0.608	<b>0.636</b>

*Note:*  $p < 0.001$  for all odds ratios.  
Abbreviations: LLC, language, literacy and communication; MD, mathematical development.

**TABLE 3** Summary of the effect of being eFSM on achievement of core outcomes at O6+ over time.

Outcome	Odds ratios for the effect of the variable 'FSM' for each cohort					
	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
MDT O6+	0.51	<b>0.541</b>	0.5	0.488	<b>0.514</b>	0.497
LLC O6+	0.477	0.462	<b>0.474</b>	<b>0.476</b>	<b>0.509</b>	0.447

*Note:*  $p < 0.001$  for all odds ratios.  
Abbreviations: LLC, language, literacy and communication; MD, mathematical development.

ability of the Foundation Phase to achieve its goals related to attainment equity, particularly at higher levels, it is important to explore teacher perceptions about this curriculum for learners affected by poverty, which at face value appear to contradict the quantitative data.

### Teacher perceptions of the Foundation Phase and its benefit for learners disadvantaged by poverty

As foregrounded earlier, a substantial body of research highlights discrepancies between policy as written and policy as lived. Collectively, this body of work emphasises the importance of obtaining insights from teacher perceptions based on their experiences of policy implementation in evaluations of education reforms (e.g., see Ball et al., 2012; Priestley & Biesta, 2013; Priestley et al., 2012; Spillane et al., 2002). This section therefore explores how the strengths of this curriculum have been understood by teachers charged with its enactment.

Interestingly, despite the programme's limited success in reducing poverty's influence on measured attainment, perceptions of its impact among teachers were generally positive. Both Taylor et al.'s (2015) early study and this later research found that teachers held a generally positive view of the Foundation Phase as a curriculum, *especially* for learners affected by poverty. In the current study, for example, 67% of teachers ( $n=280$ ) felt that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds were especially advantaged by the Foundation Phase, up from 54% in 2012 ( $n=281$ ). Fewer, however, believed that the Foundation Phase positively benefited attainment gaps between learners. This had reduced from 54% of surveyed teachers in 2012 ( $n=280$ ) to 44% in 2019 ( $n=284$ ). The findings that fewer practitioners felt the policy helped narrow attainment gaps but more that it especially advantaged pupils affected by poverty were thus seemingly in tension with each other. While it must be acknowledged that responses to the 'attainment gap' question in the survey may have related to gaps other than those associated with poverty, the point remains that many did not perceive the policy as having an especially positive impact on differential attainment based on shared characteristics, such as socioeconomic background, ethnicity or gender.

Figure 1 and Table 4 provide a quantitative illustration of the way in which the teachers framed the benefits of the Foundation Phase (defined as something of consequential

benefit to learners) in their interviews. This was derived from responses to several open-ended questions asked of all interview participants, including whether they felt any groups of learners had particularly benefited from the Foundation Phase and their opinions concerning its impact on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and attainment gaps. Teachers were also asked if they felt the benefits of learning in the Foundation Phase were captured by the end-of-phase assessments in Year 2 and their opinion of the programme's strengths. The answers to these questions provided key information about their understanding of what were considered as the benefits of this curriculum, including type of developmental outcome.

Figure 1 visually illustrates the frequency with which teachers mentioned these benefits, each bar representing the number of practitioners referring to each stated item. As the most frequently cited benefits were the experiential, resource-rich nature of the curriculum and independence, social skills and attitudes to learning, there is a clear emphasis on broader skills beyond traditional attainment and the programme's pedagogical approach. Table 4 illustrates the range of domains that each of the benefits referred to appear to be drawn from. Skills are separated according to whether they are cognitive or non-cognitive. In this analysis, cognitive skills pertain to mental processes like reasoning, critical thinking and language development, which are necessary for communication, understanding and solving problems. Although traditional subjects like literacy and numeracy remain core areas of the Foundation Phase, the responses of teachers in this research suggest that the programme had a more notable impact on broader cognitive development, such as critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The responses also suggested a perceived impact on non-cognitive skills, including social, emotional and interpersonal skills, which teachers valued highly. For example, Table 4 illustrates that teachers noted positive impacts on children's independence and social skills in addition to physical and creative development. These were seen to particularly benefit children from disadvantaged backgrounds and align with the Foundation

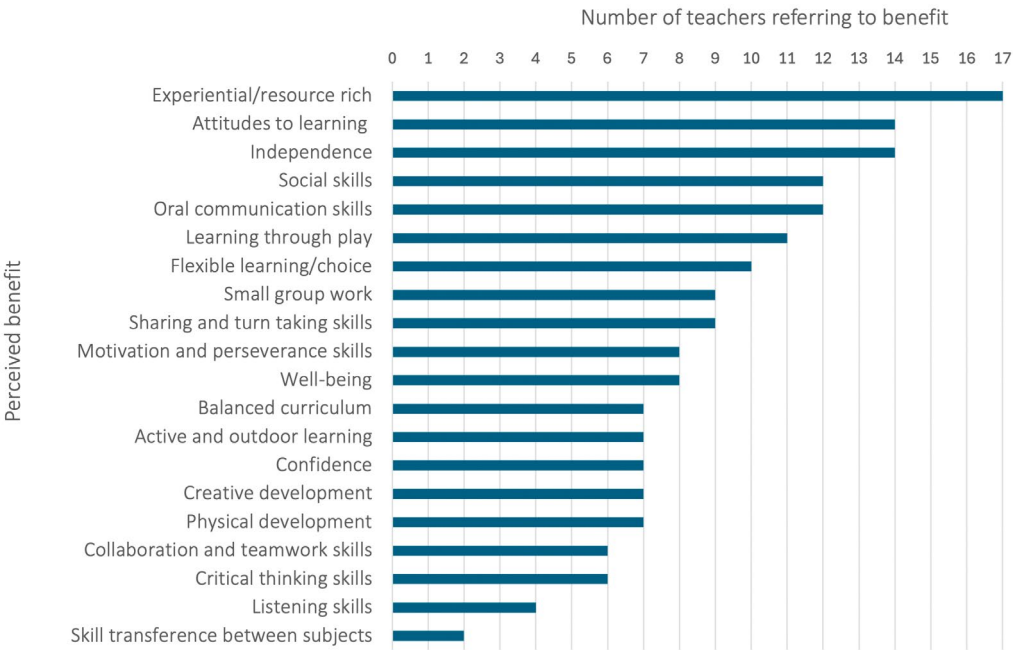


FIGURE 1 Perceived benefits of the Foundation Phase for learners.

**TABLE 4** The different domains of perceived benefits for learners.

	No.
<b><i>Cognitive skills</i></b>	
Oral communication	12
Critical thinking	6
Listening	4
Skill transference	2
<b><i>Non-cognitive skills</i></b>	
Independence	14
Social	12
Sharing and turn-taking	9
Physical development	7
Creative development	7
Collaboration and teamwork	6
<b><i>Dispositions</i></b>	
Attitudes to learning	14
Wellbeing	8
Motivation and perseverance	8
Confidence	7
<b><i>Curriculum characteristic</i></b>	
Experiential/resource-rich	17
Learning through play	11
Flexible learning/choice	10
Small group work	9
Active and outdoor learning	7
Balanced curriculum	7

*Note:* 'No.' = Number of practitioners referring to each benefit out of 21 interviewed.

Phase's holistic aims. Indeed, the frequency with which broader outcomes were mentioned in teachers' discourse about the programme's benefits, rather than more traditional academic attainment, was especially notable, particularly in relation to pupils disadvantaged by poverty. While a universal assumption that the Foundation Phase has benefited attainment in maths or reading and writing is possible, their absence in teachers' discussions is interesting. Teachers also described benefits in terms of learning attitudes and behaviours (labelled dispositions). Positive dispositions, such as attitudes to learning, enthusiasm and engagement, in addition to improved wellbeing, self-esteem and confidence, were frequently mentioned as valuable outcomes of the Foundation Phase. These outcomes may be overlooked by traditional curricula but were especially valued in the Foundation Phase and aligned with the Welsh Government's ambition of fostering lifelong learners.

The final domain of perceived benefits for learners relates to specific structural or pedagogical elements of the Foundation Phase (labelled 'curriculum characteristic' in [Table 4](#)). Teachers felt that the experiential, resource-rich, play-based nature of the programme, and the ability of pupils to exercise choice and access the curriculum in multiple ways, particularly benefited children disadvantaged by poverty. These benefits align with the Foundation Phase's child-centred, pedagogical approach. The distribution in [Figure 1](#) and range of domains in [Table 4](#) thus underscore teachers' positive perceptions of the broad ambition and pedagogical approach of the Foundation Phase.

Indeed, teacher discourse suggested that the Foundation Phase was perceived to have many benefits, as the following extracts illustrate:

*The children get a lot out of it, you know socially, emotionally, for their wellbeing. [...] Obviously, it makes them become an independent learner, it gives them the autonomy to make choices for themselves [...] it ... builds their confidence and self-esteem.*

Megan, Dalestowe)

*It helps them to become ... better at working together as part of a team [...] you get a far better, positive attitude towards learning.*

(Andy, Maes Bach)

*It was benefiting the children, it was you know promoting their independence and perseverance skills and everything that you want them to be in a good learner.*

(Mari, Cartref)

*It builds their confidence, greatly.* (Debbie, Dalestowe)

These benefits were often positioned as particularly relevant for learners affected by poverty, as were the specific pedagogical features of this curriculum. Heather at Dalestowe, for example, explained: 'You get a far better, positive attitude towards learning from disadvantaged learners because of the opportunities you can give them in Foundation Phase.' There was a clear association between the experiential, play-based approach and the improved attitudes to learning.

Teachers also attached particular importance to the way in which the Foundation Phase supported personal, social and emotional development and wellbeing, particularly for pupils from deprived backgrounds. Others felt that the programme's pedagogical approach fostered a deeper understanding of and closer relationships with children. For example:

*It is ideally suited to children from deprived backgrounds because you are able to work more with the children in the moment at their level and also because a lot of what they need is nurture, so I think that by playing basically with the children, you know, a massive amount of what we do in the first term is all personal and social development.*

(Jane, Maes Bach)

*It's the language development as well, being able to sit with the children and talk and to listen to them.*

(Mari, Cartref)

*Because of the nature of our school we need to look at the wellbeing of our children, because they're not ready for learning when they come into school. The reason I'm saying that is because the Foundation Phase philosophy lends itself to that wellbeing far more than the didactic approach of chalk and talk. [...] It actually gives teachers time to actually work with those children and time to understand where they're coming from.*

(George, Cartref)

Furthermore, the following extracts illustrate how teachers identify benefits that are less likely to be associated with a more traditional curriculum:

*That creativity and that talent wouldn't have been identified if we had just strictly been right English, maths, English, maths, English maths, you know, the children have got so many different talents and I think the Foundation Phase does enable them to nurture those perhaps more.*

(Sarah, Cartref)

*Not everyone is academic in the sense of I'm gonna be a mathematician or a writer for things, but you might have an artist or somebody who's really good at drama and go down that route which I think is nice, you know to be able to offer those experiences as well and allow those to grow.*

(Megan, Dalestowe)

*It's not all about numbers and maths d'you know what I mean? It's about their creative side, it's allowing them to go off and do what they need to do.*

(Elen, Foundation Phase lead, Llanover Fawr)

Their accounts suggested that they prized the opportunity to develop such broader outcomes rather than focus more narrowly on traditional attainment. These broader, non-academic outcomes also related to conceptualisations of how gaps may have narrowed between learners. For example:

*Maybe it doesn't, I don't know, narrow the gap in attainment, but the purposes, with the focus on wellbeing, the pupils will be more happy to come to school, they'll learn how to build relationships, they'll learn key life skills, they'll learn through play and they will achieve and they will make their own individual progress, but their progress may not be that they are achieving CSI.<sup>2</sup>*

(Jen, Cartref)

It's certainly narrowed the gap in the aspect of those children who are coming from poverty, and you know that sort of ... they're now getting experiences that they wouldn't necessarily have at home, so it's allowed for the gap to be narrowed in that sense.

(Anna, Maycroft)

The suggestion that gaps may have narrowed in broader terms is a view echoed by other practitioners who discussed them in terms of access to experiences, opportunities and resources or some of the non-academic skills described above. Indeed, only two practitioners out of 21 interviewed were confident that poverty-based gaps in traditional attainment had narrowed in the Foundation Phase. Most of the teachers interviewed, while very positive about the programme's benefits for learners disadvantaged by poverty, were uncertain about gaps in measured attainment.

## **Tensions between the curriculum's design and the assessment of attainment**

However, tensions were identified between the perceived outcomes and benefits of the Foundation Phase and the way that attainment and progress was measured and understood by key external stakeholders. For instance, a headteacher, George, described his school's deliberate withdrawal from their philosophically and pedagogically aligned practice following an Estyn inspection, which found levels of pupil attainment at the end of the



Foundation Phase to be lacking. George explained that the *'ideology'* behind the inspection *'was very much results driven, data driven'* but maintained, *'our philosophy was about the wellbeing of the children'*. He depicted a clear misalignment of values and positioned this as necessitating a need to *'withdraw'* Foundation Phase pedagogies *'to fit into almost the chalk and talk style of we need to get our data up'*. George described a *'paradigm shift'* in the way staff discussed children during this period, to *'a very narrow, data-driven context'*. His belief that the withdrawal of Foundation Phase practice led to the desired improvements in attainment for learners disadvantaged by poverty was evidenced in the school's attainment data.

The case illustrates a conflict between some of the aims and pedagogies of the Foundation Phase and the values and interpretations of representatives of the wider accountability and assessment framework. George depicted the difficulty of navigating contradictory policy imperatives as analogous to trying to *'put a square peg in a round hole'*. He described struggling to both *'hang onto the Foundation Phase principles ... but then also try to meet the expectations of a test and marrying in the assessment process for an outcome'*. He felt that *'attainment'* was an inappropriate measure of standards in the Foundation Phase and that *'some of the philosophies of the Foundation Phase don't fit into the attainment process that was being indoctrinated into the school from external agencies'*. George describes *'looking at achievement rather than attainment'* and there is a suggestion that outcomes, articulated in terms of *'achievement'*, seem to capture the *'soft'* outcomes not captured in the attainment data. The Foundation Phase lead, for example, explains:

*You can have a child leaving say Year 2 at Outcome 4 and think right they're underachieving, but what about everything else, what about all the other things they've achieved throughout the year?*

(Mari, Foundation Phase lead, Cartref)

George's use of the word *'indoctrinated'* suggests an ideological conflict between the Foundation Phase and its assessment, a view implicit in other teachers' discourses. Anwen, the Foundation Phase lead at another school, explains:

*The practical problem solving, it's brilliant in the Foundation Phase, but it's difficult to have the formal work as well, with the standard of you know the writing and the maths and things.*

Teachers' narratives suggest that the Foundation Phase pedagogies, whilst regarded positively, are not seen to lend themselves to the higher *'standards'* of attainment in maths and literacy, which are perceived to require a more formal approach. Anna, the Foundation Phase lead at Maycroft Primary, for example, describes pressures from a history of *'high expectations'* and *'levels'* of attainment from leadership within the school and its external context (including representatives of the accountability framework and the parent community), as contributing to the *'more formal'* practice adopted. She explained how staff tended to *'cling'* to formal elements, *'rather than being wholly experiential, you know, play based, to be honest'*. She expands:

*Being pushed to get a certain percentage of children to a certain level, actually takes a lot of that Foundation Phase practice out, because of where you're expected to get them by the end of Year 2.*

*The accessibility for that good Foundation Phase practice then has to be withdrawn in order to be able to get them to those expectations.*

Similarly, at another school, Heathbrook, staff described adopting a formal literacy scheme in the Foundation Phase because, according to their data, literacy standards were dropping. Jess, the Foundation Phase lead, explained that the scheme was '*not very Foundation Phasey at all*', but defended it because it made '*a huge difference*' for her learners. Here, teachers described the need for a more formal approach than that associated with the Foundation Phase in order to improve standards in literacy. These findings are significant and, as the next section explains, speak to the disconnect between practitioners' positive perceptions of the programme and the measured impact of the programme derived from administrative attainment data.

## DISCUSSION

### Bridging the disconnect between teacher perceptions of the programme and its measured impact

The tensions identified in teachers' discourse about the Foundation Phase's progressive philosophical and pedagogical design, and the way attainment and progress are understood and measured, appear to underlie the disconnect between practitioners' positive perceptions of the programme and the administrative attainment data. Teachers were clearly enthusiastic about the pedagogical approach of the written curriculum, with its emphasis on wellbeing and play-based, developmental and experiential learning. This they associated with a wide range of benefits and positive pupil outcomes, particularly for learners disadvantaged by poverty. These findings resonate with those from early research on the new curriculum (CfW) currently rolling out in Wales. For example, Newton et al. (2019) found that the range of benefits that practitioners anticipated for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds included CfW's increased focus on wellbeing, emphasis on experiential learning and greater curricula relevance, and more favourable attitudes towards the reform were identified in high-eFSM schools (Newton et al., 2019; Power et al., 2020).

The important point to note about these curricula is that the benefits perceived by teachers are broader than traditional attainment in academic subjects like maths and literacy, and are not therefore automatically reflected in the administrative attainment data. In the Foundation Phase, these softer outcomes appear to be in tension with the way achievement was officially measured and reported, and therefore explain the disconnect between positive perceptions of the programme and its limited success in mitigating the impact of poverty on measured attainment.

The findings also suggest that some teachers oppose what they perceived as a narrow, traditional curriculum, and reframe the policy discourse on attainment and 'gaps' between learners. Their narratives suggest an alternative understanding of achievement and development that contrasts with traditional definitions seen as too narrow to capture the benefits of the Foundation Phase. This is important, since early research on CfW suggests that there is an appetite among teachers, especially within high-eFSM schools, to shape provision according to what they consider to be more relevant, beneficial or engaging for their learners and the curriculum affords teachers greater flexibility to do this (e.g., see Newton et al., 2019; Power et al., 2020). For example, under CfW, all schools are charged with designing both the curriculum *and* assessment for their learners.

However, while a shift towards learner-centred curricula emphasising local decision-making and flexibility may align with global trends associated with a 'curricular turn' in educational policy (see Priestley & Sinnema, 2014; Sinnema et al., 2020), fears have been voiced by Welsh practitioners and academics alike about the potential for significant disparities

in provision, assessment and, therefore, outcomes under CfW (e.g., Duggan et al., 2022; Evans, 2023; Newton et al., 2019; Power et al., 2020). The differences in interpretation of outcomes and provision described in the present study, and indeed inconsistent translations of the Foundation Phase observed by Taylor et al. (2015) and Power et al. (2019), add significant weight to these fears about equity under CfW.

Furthermore, the findings of the present study suggest that the way attainment and progress was measured and reported at the end of the Foundation Phase, and the expectation of achieving certain 'levels' of progress in core outcomes, did not align well with its progressive, developmental approach or underlying philosophy. The evidence linking a pressure to secure high standards of attainment based on a narrower interpretation of outcomes with practice that deviated from the curriculum's design is illustrative of a perceived conflict between these measured outcomes and the curriculum's more informal, pedagogical and philosophical approach. The examples seemed to reflect a belief that high attainment in the narrower outcomes of literacy and maths could not be achieved by a philosophically and pedagogically loyal translation of the programme and speak to tensions surrounding which outcomes are valued in this phase of learning.

The recent relaxation of accountability metrics, change in assessment and removed requirement to report attainment data may help ease some of these pressures and tensions. However, there are still important implications for Wales' new curriculum, since the goal of raising standards in these core areas remains.<sup>3</sup> This means that the described tension between the pursuit of high standards in literacy and numeracy and loyal translations of the approach may continue, even though CfW's statutory guidance outlines a duty for all schools to cover 'the same core learning' with a 'consistency in approach' for all learners (Welsh Government, 2020). Given the findings of the present study, it is difficult to imagine how this will be achieved. Furthermore, as schools devise their own methods of assessment guided by progression steps that only loosely relate to expectations of development at key ages, there is much scope for disparities in practice to arise. Concern about this has already been noted among the workforce (see Duggan et al., 2022). Moreover, the combined lack of standardisation in assessment and removed duty to report outcomes may mean that gaps between learners in these key areas go undetected, especially if, as suggested by this research, different practitioners choose to focus more heavily on different outcomes or approaches in their enactments of CfW.

Commentators on CfW have already raised fears about the consequences of reduced accountability and standardisation for tracking educational inequalities in Wales, with some fearing that inequalities may be exacerbated (e.g., Duggan et al., 2022; Power et al., 2020). Scholars suggest that there is a need for intelligent accountability or rigorous monitoring and scrutiny, and a range of other measures to ensure that pupils from impoverished backgrounds are not placed at a disadvantage either in terms of the type of curriculum they have access to or their progression/developmental outcomes within it (e.g., see Evans, 2023; Newton et al., 2019; Power et al., 2020). Such suggestions are supported by the findings of this research.

Thus, while the disconnect described in this study reflects both the essence and complexity of the Foundation Phase and its multiple aims for learners, the findings add weight to current concerns about Wales' similarly complex and ambitious new curriculum (e.g., Evans, 2023; Power et al., 2020; Sinnema et al., 2020). Indeed, they suggest that a loyal translation of the curriculum's design may not achieve Wales' ambition to mitigate the impact of poverty on attainment in the core areas of literacy and numeracy. That said, the study has also illustrated how teachers have translated the broad aims and pedagogical approach of the programme as providing a wide range of benefits for learners affected by poverty, which are especially valued even though these are not captured in core attainment.

## CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the efficacy of the Foundation Phase, a progressive early years curriculum in Wales, and contributed new insights into the reform's impact. The paper revealed a disconnect between administrative attainment data and teachers' perceptions of the programme's benefits based on their experiences of implementing the reform. While overall pupil attainment improved, the Foundation Phase had only limited success in mitigating the impact of poverty on measured outcomes in subjects like maths and literacy. However, teachers reported broader benefits of the programme, especially for pupils disadvantaged by poverty. These included improved social skills, wellbeing and positive attitudes towards learning—outcomes not captured in traditional assessment metrics but valued by practitioners, nonetheless. Thus, while poverty's influence on attainment in traditional subjects remains strong, the research has shown how a sole focus on attainment in these areas may potentially obscure some of the broader benefits of this curriculum perceived by practitioners.

The study's findings further our understanding of the potential impact of progressive system-wide reforms like the Foundation Phase, especially in supporting the development of learners disadvantaged by poverty. They provide valuable insights to consider when designing reforms, and particularly in the ongoing development of the new curriculum for Wales. These include the potential tensions in how achievement in the early years is understood and measured, between pedagogical approach and different outcomes, and that misalignments between programme aims, pedagogy, philosophy and measurement metrics can dilute a programme's enactment.

The implications of the findings are twofold. On the one hand, the research supports the recognition and potential measurement of these broader benefits in curriculum evaluations, as they represent what are perceived as important, developmental outcomes, especially for learners disadvantaged by poverty. On the other hand, the disconnect raises concerns about the lack of alignment between perceived benefits and traditional attainment. This misalignment invites questions about whether perceived gains translate into long-term academic success or life outcomes. For instance, should university admissions or policy reforms and their evaluations prioritise teacher-reported benefits over standard attainment data? If broader benefits fail to measurably enhance academic or economic mobility, their weight in policy decisions may require reconsideration.

Future reforms can address some of the issues this research raises by clarifying curriculum aims and ensuring their alignment with pedagogical approaches, philosophy and assessment frameworks. Incorporating multidimensional measures of achievement might better capture both academic and non-academic gains. Simultaneously, the potential risks of overemphasising perceived broader benefits must be evaluated to safeguard academic standards and equity. Finally, perhaps through addressing some of the tensions and questions raised by this study in the new curriculum (CfW), Wales may move closer to realising its ambition of educational equity and social justice.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data cannot be made available due to restrictions outlined in the study's ethics agreements.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

The research reported in this paper was conducted in accordance with the British Educational Research Association's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018). Ethical approval was secured from Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee in August 2018 for the collection and analyses of administrative data, February 2019 for the online survey and December 2019 for the practitioner interviews.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The central aims, organisation and approach of the Foundation Phase remain, while assessment is now designed by each school using progression steps which only loosely relate to expected development at key ages. Schools are no longer required to report attainment, either locally or nationally (see Welsh Government, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> CSI (core subject indicator) is a reference to the three 'core' subjects of the Foundation Phase, which together make up the indicator. These are Mathematical Development; Language Literacy and Communication; Personal and Social Development, Wellbeing and Cultural Diversity.

<sup>3</sup> Literacy and numeracy continue as two of six mandatory areas of learning and experience and have become two of three mandatory 'cross-curricula' drivers.

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