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Data Insight

UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINS OF LABOUR MARKET DISADVANTAGE IN WALES

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Chapters

1. Introduction

In the UK, the transition from learning to work is becoming increasingly complex and young people face a daunting array of challenges. First, they have to navigate a complex range of educational and vocational choices as they progress towards their working lives (Dorsett and Lucchino 2015; Hutchinson and Kettlewell 2015). Furthermore, the period of transition from learning to work is increasing and once these individuals enter the workplace, they are faced with a dynamic labour market where their capacity to adapt and make appropriate career changes remains critical (Bimrose and Brown 2015; Ohme and Zacher 2015). Given the complexity of the transition between school to work, school to post-compulsory education, and the demands of contemporary labour market, the provision of adequate and timely careers guidance plays a critical role.

Research has shown that careers guidance is particularly important to young people who belong to families who have a history of unemployment or low-skilled employment and/or no experience of higher education (Haynes et al. 2013). Children's aspirations and careers choices are influenced by their experiences at home and school, exposure to employment, and encouragement from significant adults (Moote and Archer 2018; Archer et al. 2012). Parents of lower socio-economic status have been demonstrated to have lower aspirations for their children (Bandura et al. 2001) and are generally less well informed about particular career routes (Wikeley and Stables 1999). Careers guidance can help to fill these gaps by increasing occupational knowledge, self-esteem and raising aspirations (Otte and Sharp 1979, Watts and Kidd 2000).

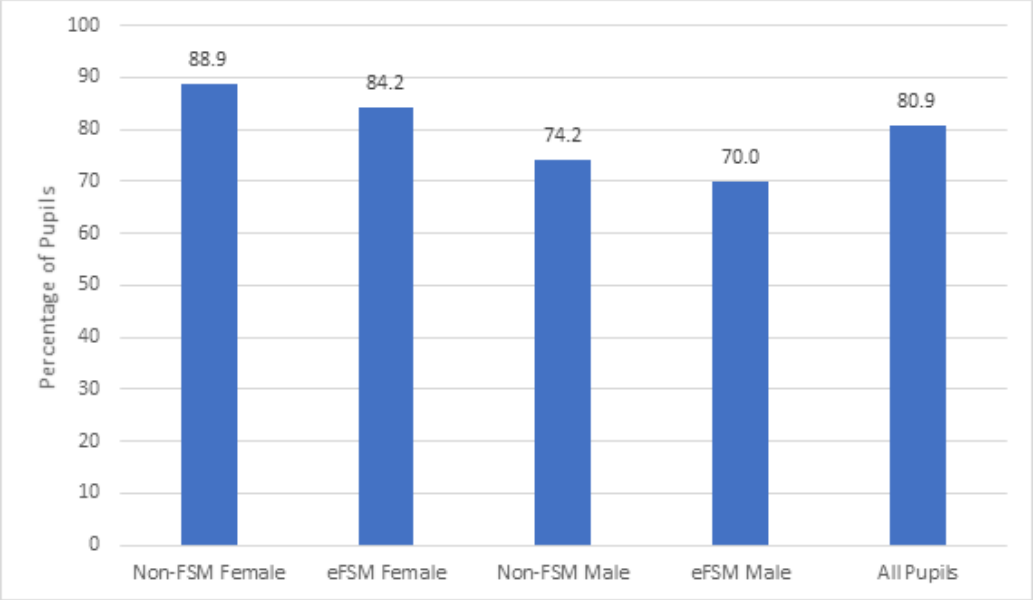
Within Wales, Careers Wales is responsible for providing an independent and impartial careers information, advice and guidance service. Careers Wales is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government. Established in 2012, its focus has been to support the Welsh Government's strategic objectives of ensuring the sustained progression of youth through education and into employment or further education/training, prioritising those who are most at risk of becoming disengaged and falling outside the education, training or employment system. ADR Wales has been working with Careers Wales to explore how the data it collects through the course of its work can be combined with routinely collected administrative data to provide new insights as to the different circumstances and capabilities of its clients.

During Key Stage 4, pupils in Wales are given the opportunity to complete Careers Wales' 'Career Check' survey. Mostly completed during Year 10, this diagnostic tool helps Careers Advisors to identify those pupils who are most in need of support and their likely service requirements. By combining data from the National Data Collection (NDC, formerly the National Pupil Database, NPD) with responses from the Career Check survey, we have created a database that enables us to look at the Career Check responses for over 90,000 pupils, covering four pupil cohorts from the academic years 2015/16 to 2018/19 (see Annex 1 for details). This report utilises this linked data set to examine the particular difficulties faced by pupils from low-income households in making the transition from compulsory education. The analysis examines intended pathways of pupils, the kinds of jobs that pupils want to do, perceived barriers to their choices and their assessments of their own competencies with respect to decision making.

2. What next? Education and career aspirations

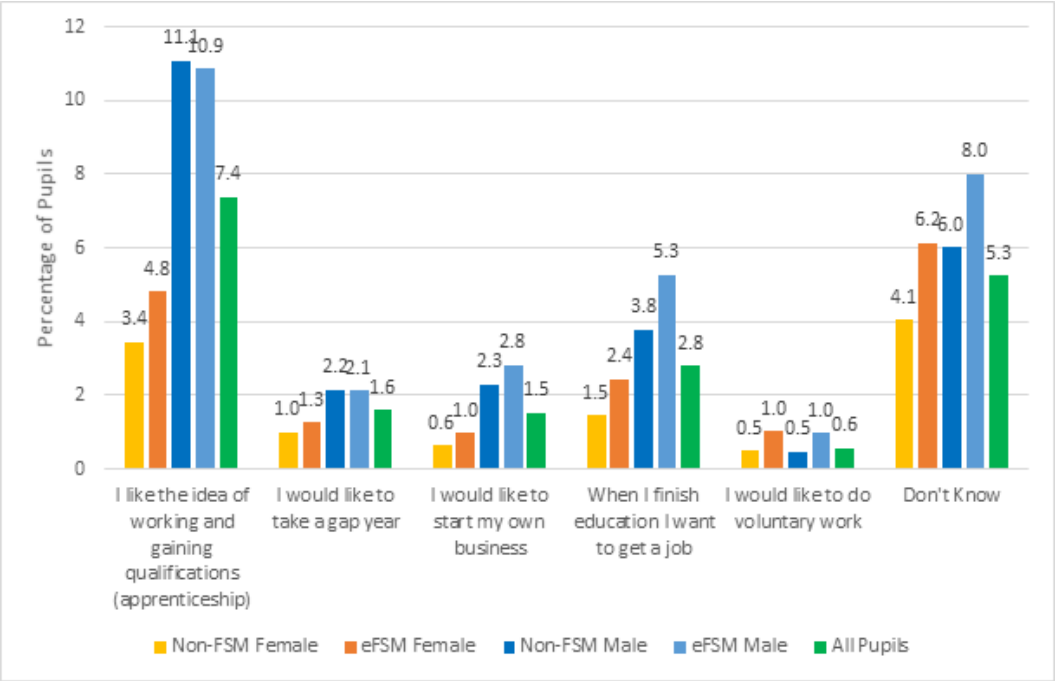
Within Career Check, pupils are asked to state what they would like to do after Year 11 and are able to choose from the following options: continuing in education, working and gaining a qualification (such as an apprenticeship), starting their own business, getting a job, doing voluntary work, or they can state that they don't know what they want to do. As shown in Figure 1 below, the majority of pupils (80%) want to remain in education. Females are more likely to report that they would like to remain in education than males. However, among both males and females those who are eligible for Free School Meals (eFSM) are less likely to report that that wish to remain in education. Among females, whilst 84% of those eligible for Free School Meals report that they wish to remain in education, this figure increases to almost 89% among those who are not eligible. A similar differential with respect to Free School Meal eligibility is observed among males where 70% of those eligible for Free School Meals report that they wish to remain in education compared to 74% among those who are not eligible (non-FSM). Both gender and socio-economic background appear to be playing a role here.

Figure 1: Continuing in education, by gender and FSM status



The remaining responses for 'next steps' excluding education are shown in Figure 2. As female pupils are more likely to report that they want to remain in education than males, it can be seen that male pupils are more likely to express an interest in a variety of alternative destinations following their completion of compulsory education. For example, males were more likely to report an interest in undertaking an apprenticeship (around 11%) compared to females (around 4%). This finding reflects long standing concerns that little progress has been made in terms of addressing the gender imbalance in the take-up of apprenticeships in Wales (Colegua Cymru, 2017). Similarly, males were also more likely to report that they would like to take a gap year, start their own business or that they would want to get a job when they finish education. Differences were also notable for those who stated that they did not know what they wanted to do or those who did not respond to the question. Overall, 5% of pupils did not know what they wanted to do after Year 11. FSM eligible males were the most likely to report that they do not know (8%), followed by non-FSM eligible males (6%), FSM eligible females (6%) and non-FSM eligible females (4%).

Figure 2: Next steps, by gender and FSM status



Among both males and females, pupils eligible for FSM appear more likely to report that they don't know what to do after leaving school. This could indicate that FSM eligibility has a direct effect on the likelihood that a pupil does not know what they want to do after school. Alternatively, this finding could be a by-product of other characteristics of FSM eligible pupils, such as their lower levels of attainment. Multivariate analysis (logistic regression) was therefore undertaken to explore whether FSM status had a separate and additional effect on the likelihood of not knowing what pupils want to do after school after controlling for the influence of other pupil and school characteristics. Being male, having lower levels of attainment at Key Stage 4, having special educational needs and attending a school with a Sixth Form were each found to be associated with an increased risk of pupils reporting that they did not know what they wanted to do. Eligibility for Free School Meals was not demonstrated to have a separate influence on the likelihood of pupils reporting that they did not know what they wanted to do after school. This indicates that the higher rate with which FSM pupils report that they do not know what they want to do can be accounted for by the other characteristics of these pupils, such as their lower levels of educational attainment.

3. Occupational aspirations

Gender is fundamental to understanding the occupational aspirations of Key Stage 4 pupils. Whilst previous research has demonstrated that parents of lower socio-economic status have lower aspirations for their children (Bandura et al. 2001) and that there is significant cross-generational correlation in the types of jobs undertaken by parents and their children (D'Addio 2007), these issues have to be examined in the context of the gendered occupational stereotypes that exist among children (Miller and Budd 1999).

Respondents to Career Check are asked to select what career areas are of interest to them by selecting from a list of thirty categories. Pupils can select up to four options, representing their first to fourth choices. Table 1 shows the top 15 first choice career choices selected by children in Wales. Approximately 85% of the children responding to the survey selected one of these 15 categories as their first-choice career area. Overall, the top three career areas are Health and Medical (10%); Leisure, Sports and Tourism (9%) and Engineering (8%). The table also demonstrates whether these 15 career areas were either over or under-represented in the choices of males and females. A heat map has been applied which shows the highest rated occupations in green, middle ranking occupations in yellow or orange, and the lowest ranked occupations in red. The shading of the heatmaps reveal that employment within Health and Medical related areas was of particular importance to females (15%), whilst males were more likely to express a preference for working in the areas of Leisure, Sports and Tourism (14%), Engineering (14%) and Computers, Software and IT (12%).

Table 1 also examines the influence of eligibility for Free School Meals on the stated career preferences of Key Stage 4 children. The analysis reveals that the gender stereotyping of career preferences is greater among children who are eligible for Free School Meals. For example, whilst 9% of females stated that their first-choice career area was Childcare, this increased to 14% among those eligible for Free School Meals – making it the most commonly selected career area among that group. A similar finding emerges for Hair and Beauty. Whilst 8% of females stated this as their first choice career area (ranked fourth), this increased to 13% among those eligible for Free School Meals (ranked second). Interestingly, females eligible for Free School Meals express less of an interest in working in Health and Medical, an area that arguably offers more opportunities for career progression than Childcare and Hair and Beauty. Among males, the influence of FSM eligibility on career preferences is arguably less. Nonetheless, it can be seen that the proportion of males who express an interest in working in Building and Construction is higher among those eligible for Free School Meals (12%) than those who are not (8%). The analysis has therefore demonstrated how gender and socio-economic background interact to influence the career expectations of children in Wales.

Table 1: Career preferences of Key Stage 4 children in Wales

	Females			Males			All KS4
Job	Non-FSM	eFSM	All	Non-FSM	eFSM	All	
Health and Medical	15.4	11.6	14.9	4.4	2.8	4.2	9.5
Leisure, Sports & Tourism	5.1	3.3	4.8	13.8	11.2	13.5	9.2
Engineering	1.4	1.3	1.4	14.1	14.1	14.1	7.8
Computers, Software & IT	1.2	1.0	1.1	11.5	12.0	11.6	6.4
Art & Design	8.6	9.6	8.7	3.5	3.9	3.6	6.1
Emergency, Security and Armed Services	3.5	3.9	3.6	6.9	7.6	7.0	5.3
Law	6.8	5.8	6.7	3.7	2.8	3.6	5.1
Teaching & Education	7.8	5.6	7.5	2.6	2.3	2.5	5.0
Animal Care	7.5	7.7	7.5	1.8	2.3	1.9	4.7
Building & Construction	0.4	0.5	0.4	8.2	12.2	8.7	4.6
TV, Film and Media	4.4	3.3	4.2	4.7	4.3	4.6	4.4
Childcare	7.8	14.1	8.7	0.2	0.3	0.2	4.4
Science &; Research	4.0	2.5	3.8	4.9	2.8	4.6	4.2
Hair & Beauty	7.0	12.6	7.7	0.4	0.5	0.4	4.0
Performing Arts	5.4	4.0	5.2	2.3	2.4	2.3	3.7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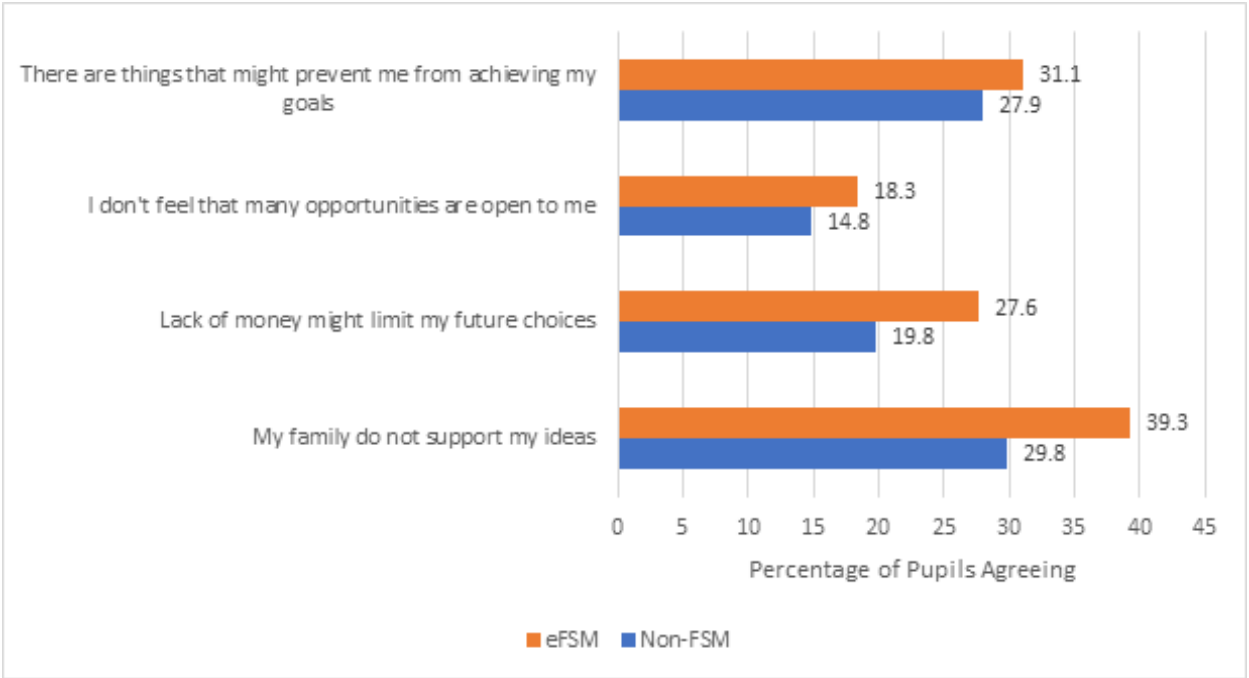
4. Barriers to achievement

There are a number of ways in which children from low income households may experience difficulties

that affect their ability to make decisions about their futures. Most obvious in this respect are the lower levels of educational attainment of children from low-income households (Schoon et al. 2012) which will directly limit the options that are available to them following school. However, these children also face other disadvantages. Their parents are less likely to have knowledge about possible options following school and will be less able to support them in making decisions about particular career routes (Wikeley and Stables 1999). The lower levels of self-esteem among children from low-income households can also contribute to lower levels of confidence with respect to decision making (Otte and Sharp, 1979). The choices of those from low-income households can also be directly effected by financial constraints. For example, those from poorer backgrounds are more likely to attend less prestigious universities that are located closer to home (Callender and Jackson 2008). Finally, the development of ambition, commitment and aspiration relate to levels of opportunity within local labour markets (Ashton and Maguire, 1986).

The Career Check survey asks pupils to consider a number of issues that might affect their ability to make decisions about their future. Pupils are asked to read the following statements and tick any that apply to them: There are things that prevent me from achieving my goals; I don't feel that many opportunities are open to me; Lack of money might limit my future choices; and my family support my ideas. The responses to these questions are displayed by FSM status in Figure 3. We can see that for each of the statements FSM eligible pupils are more likely report that these statements apply to them. The largest differentials between FSM eligible and non-FSM eligible pupils are related to family not supporting their ideas (a 10-percentage point differential) and a lack of money limiting future choices (8 percentage point differential).

Figure 3: Factors affecting the decisions of Key Stage 4 pupils



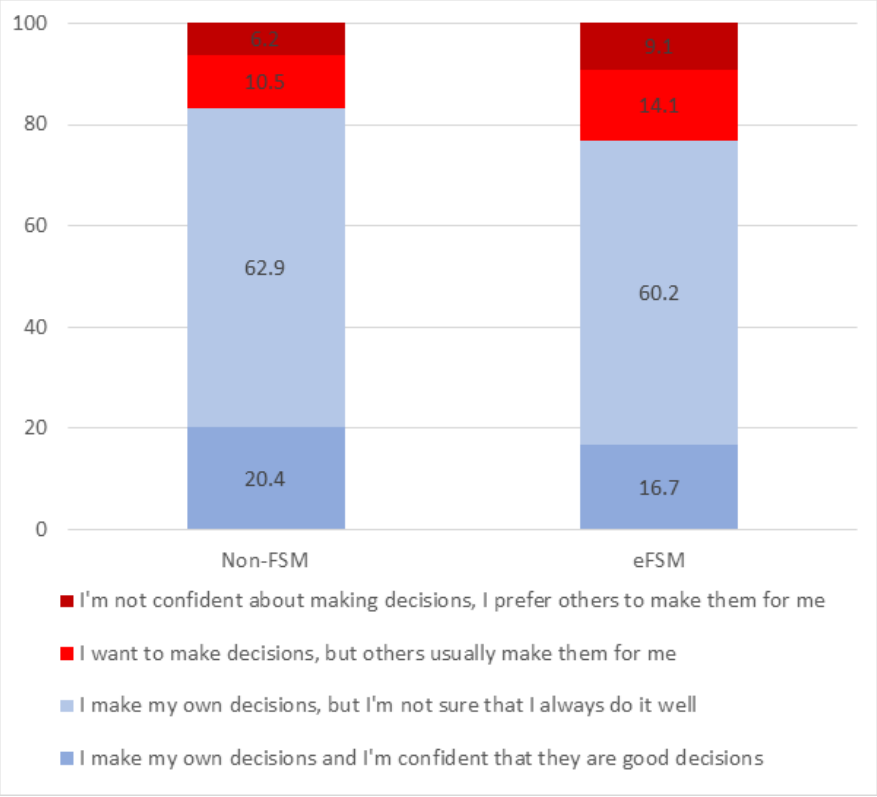
These findings indicate that FSM eligible pupils are more likely to report that their decisions are adversely affected in a variety of ways. What is not clear from this analysis is whether FSM eligibility has a direct influence on decision making or whether these results are the result of the other characteristics of FSM eligible pupils, such as their lower levels of educational attainment. To explore whether FSM status is

associated with a separate and additional effect on the likelihood of pupils reporting factors that adversely affect their decisions, we undertook further analysis to control for the influence of pupil and school characteristics. The analysis revealed that higher levels of GCSE attainment was associated with a reduced likelihood of pupils reporting factors that were adversely affecting their decisions and that the differentials presented in Figure 3 can therefore largely be accounted for by the lower levels of attainment among FSM pupils. Nonetheless, it remains the case that FSM pupils were more likely to report that there are things that prevent achievement of goals (10% more likely) and that their family did not support their ideas (10% more likely) after controlling for other characteristics. Being FSM eligible did not influence the perception of a lack of opportunity after controlling for other characteristics. The lack of opportunities that are perceived by pupils who are eligible for FSM can therefore be accounted for by their lower levels of attainment. However, it is important to remember that their low levels of attainment are in themselves an outcome of being brought up within a low-income household.

After simultaneously controlling for other pupil and school characteristics, it remained the case that FSM eligibility was associated with an increased likelihood that a lack of money might limit choices (by 55% compared to non-FSM eligible pupils). This differential is comparable to the unadjusted difference between FSM eligible and non-FSM eligible pupils in Figure 3, indicating that the concerns regarding money expressed by pupils from low-income households cannot be otherwise accounted for. Whilst previous research has demonstrated how pupils from low-income households feel restricted in their choice of university (Callender and Jackson 2008), this analysis confirms that these concerns are already being expressed among school pupils during Key Stage 4.

Finally, Career Check asks a series of questions that ask respondents about how they make decisions, including issues such as knowing their strengths, awareness of options and awareness of who they can turn to if they need help. Given the difficulties that pupils from low-income households may have with respect to self-esteem, Figure 4 considers how confidence in decision making varies by FMS eligibility. The analysis confirms that FSM eligible pupils are more likely to report that they are not confident in making their own decision and prefer others to make them on their behalf (9% compared to 6%) or that they want to make decisions but usually let others make decisions for them (14% compared to 11%).

Figure 4: Confidence with decision making



5. Conclusions

By linking data from the National Pupil Database with responses of the Key Stage 4 pupils to the Careers Wales 'Career Check Survey', analysis has been able to provide new insights into the difficulties faced by pupils from low income households in making the transition from compulsory education. The results indicate that there are significant barriers for pupils from low-income families. In some cases, these barriers can be related to the lower levels of educational attainment of pupils from low-income households (see also Hobbs and Vignoles 2010). For example, the higher proportion of FSM eligible pupils who did not know what they wanted to do after school and the higher proportion who perceived a lack of available opportunities could both be accounted for by their lower levels of educational attainment during Year 11. Nonetheless, it remains the case that FSM pupils were more likely to report that there are things that prevent achievement of goals; that their family did not support their ideas and, most significantly, that a lack of money might limit their future choices. Children from low-income households also appear to be less confident in terms of making their own decisions and instead rely on others to make their decisions for them, despite their parents being generally less well informed about how to navigate complex educational and vocational choices.

Pupils eligible for Free School Meals appear to be particularly vulnerable to expressing preferences for work that align with traditional stereotypes of what constitutes 'male' and 'female' work. Girls from low-income backgrounds appear to be particularly vulnerable to this. In part, these preferences for areas of work will reflect the availability of low skilled jobs that are more likely to provide opportunities that are commensurate with the levels of educational attainment that they expect to achieve by the end of Key Stage 4. Nonetheless, the analysis confirms the importance of the provision of careers-related services within schools in helping to shape the thinking of children about possible careers by challenging deeply embedded attitudes and perceptions and raising awareness of the diverse range of educational and employment opportunities that are available.

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Gyrfa Cymru
Careers Wales

Annex 1: Response to Career Check among Year 11 pupils

	Year			
	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/12019
Gender				
Female	69.1%	69.2%	82.3%	86.4%
Male	69.0%	68.3%	81.1%	85.1%
Welsh Speaking				
Fluent in Welsh	75.9%	77.9%	86.9%	92.2%
Speaks Welsh but not fluently	68.5%	68.1%	84.0%	84.8%
Cannot speak Welsh	66.7%	65.3%	77.5%	84.1%
Information refused/missing	76.4%	74.6%	75.5%	81.8%
FSM				
No	71.3%	70.3%	83.4%	87.5%
Yes	58.7%	59.8%	71.8%	75.9%
SEN Provision				
No SEN status	72.7%	71.4%	84.7%	88.8%
Action	62.7%	64.6%	78.6%	83.2%
Action Plus (P+Q)	51.5%	53.9%	63.9%	67.9%
Statement	51.2%	53.8%	63.5%	65.2%
Ethnicity				
White – British	70.2%	69.5%	81.9%	86.2%
White – Other	57.3%	62.0%	78.1%	80.8%
Asian	63.0%	60.5%	83.4%	84.7%
Black	50.7%	59.8%	78.0%	77.1%
Mixed	61.5%	59.0%	77.9%	82.9%
Other	65.2%	62.0%	79.9%	84.6%
Year 10/11 Absenteeism (% of half days absent)				
0-2.5%	74.9%	74.9%	86.9%	90.8%
2.5-5%	74.8%	72.7%	86.1%	90.0%

5-7.5%	70.6%	69.4%	83.4%	87.6%
7.5-10%	66.0%	65.1%	81.2%	84.1%
10-15%	61.7%	59.8%	74.8%	78.7%
15%+	44.3%	43.2%	53.3%	61.9%
GCSE Points				
0-250	33.0%	46.1%	58.7%	64.4%
250-300	57.5%	64.2%	78.8%	83.3%
300-350	65.7%	68.5%	81.7%	86.4%
350-400	70.7%	72.4%	85.7%	89.8%
400-450	75.6%	75.1%	88.6%	92.2%
450+	76.6%	74.8%	88.3%	93.7%
Medium of Provision				
Welsh	80.6%	78.8%	88.5%	92.6%
English	68.0%	66.8%	80.4%	84.4%
Bilingual	71.8%	75.6%	86.1%	90.6%
School Type				
Secondary school without post-16 provision	68.7%	72.6%	83.9%	87.3%
Secondary school with post-16 provision	69.5%	67.4%	80.9%	85.3%
Religious Status				
No religious character	69.4%	68.8%	81.7%	85.8%
Religious character	68.0%	67.7%	81.5%	85.3%
FSM Percentage, quartiles				
First quartile (Lowest)	75.0%	75.3%	85.2%	88.4%
Second	73.0%	69.2%	82.1%	85.9%
Third	63.7%	67.1%	79.7%	84.9%
Fourth (Highest)	65.5%	62.9%	79.8%	84.6%
All Pupils	69.3% 21,211	68.7% 20,198	81.7% 22,931	85.8% 24,243

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