The People and Work Unit

A Brighter Future

Young People's Transitions in the South Wales Valleys

Dr Duncan Holtom &
Dr Sarah Lloyd-Jones

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32 Monmouth Road
Abergavenny
Monmouthshire
NP7 5HL

Tel: 01873 850975
Fax: 01873 855190
E-mail:peoplework@btconnect.com

Uned Pobl a Gwaith

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All references to the communities, counties and schools involved have been changed to protect the identities of those involved in this study.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Brynefydd[1] is a small community in the South Wales Valleys. The area has suffered economic decline and in common with many other disadvantaged areas, members of the community and the schools are concerned that unless the educational attainment of young people from the community can be increased, the decline cannot be reversed.

Research in other parts of the UK has identified a strong educational and experiential gap between children and young people from disadvantaged communities, such as Brynefydd and those from more advantaged communities. The differences include:

- Lower levels of cognitive and social and emotional skills (Feinstein, et al, 2007) and the difficulties young people with poorer social and emotional skills have coping with the more challenging environment of a secondary school (Qualter, et al, 2007);
- lower levels of parental support, encouragement and challenge (Feinstein, et al, 2004), a tendency for parents from more disadvantaged backgrounds to become less engaged in their children's education when their children progress to secondary school (Gewitz, et al, 1995);
- the difficulties that schools with a high proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds face in providing a quality education (Lupton, 2005);
- Peer group pressures in disadvantaged communities (Lloyd-Jones, 2005);
- lower levels of participation in extra curricular activities (Wilkley, 2008); and
- Lower aspirations amongst pupils from more disadvantaged communities

In response, this study, led by the People and Work Unit in partnership with the Brynefydd Communities First Partnership and the Centre for Applied Education Research at UWIC, sought to explore the extent to which these experiential and educational gaps applied to pupils from the two primary schools, Cwmarain and Trellinos Primary School, serving Brynefydd. In order to compare and contrast their experiences and educational achievement with those of pupils from other schools in the catchment area of Cwmavr High School, the local high school, this study:

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[1] Not its real name. The names of all the schools, communities and counties in this study have been changed to protect the identities of those involved.

- Analysed data on pupil performance;
- surveyed all the young people in year 7 in Cwmavr High School in November 2008 (n=160);
- interviewed eight young people from Brynefydd in year 7 of Cwmavr High School;
- interviewed seven parents/guardians of young people from Brynefydd in year 7 of Cwmavr High School; and
- Organised a focus group of primary and secondary teachers drawn from the two schools and interviewed the head teachers of the three schools.

The study found that there was some evidence that the cognitive and social and emotional skills of children and young people from Brynefydd was lower than that of pupils from other primary schools. There was also evidence that their expectations of success were lower and that in primary school, they found the work harder than pupils from other schools. However, there was little evidence those pupils' experiences of secondary school were more negative as a consequence, nor was there evidence that they got less support or had markedly lower levels of participation in extra curricular activities; indeed, pupils from Brynefydd reported enjoying school more and reported higher levels of support than pupils from other schools.

Overall, the study suggested that the prime causes of the educational gap were lower levels of literacy amongst some, but by no means all, pupils from Brynefydd, and a sense of fatalism. Poor literacy meant pupils struggled in secondary school and this was compounded by fatalism, which reduced their motivation. Their fatalism was linked to a lack of both self-knowledge (and self-awareness) of their own attitudes and capabilities and of what they might need to do to achieve their aspirations, such as how they might need to change their behaviour, and what grades they needed to continue into further and higher education. Therefore, they often had high aspirations, but little knowledge of how to realise them. This was often compounded by weakness in their social and emotional skills and a lack of knowledge, support, and challenge from their parents.

1. THE STUDY

1.1.   This is a joint study led by the People and Work Unit working in partnership with the Brynefydd Communities First Partnership and Professor David Egan from the Centre for Applied Education Research at UWIC. The study was funded by the Welsh Assembly Government's New Ideas Fund and focused upon the experiences of young people from Brynefydd[2], one of Wales' most disadvantaged communities, as they progressed from primary to secondary school.

2. BRYNEFYDD

2.1.   Brynefydd is a small community (population around 3000) in the South Wales valleys. The area was developed as a council housing estate in the late 1950s and early 60s but tenure became more mixed since the 'Right to Buy' scheme was introduced in the late 1980s. The area has suffered economic decline and Brynefydd is at the frontline of efforts to eliminate child poverty in the UK. Part of the community of Brynefydd is ranked as the 30th most deprived area in Wales (out of a total 1896 areas), on the 2008 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, a measure of the relative deprivation of an area, and over half the children in this area live in households that receive income related benefits; a much higher rate than the average for county as whole (see figure 2.1).

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[2] Not its real name. The names of all the schools, communities and counties in this study have been changed to protect the identities of those involved.

Figure 2.1: % of Children (0-15) Living in Families Dependent on Workless Benefits

	2006	2007
B	44.7%	38.2%
S	33.4%	34.4%
F	32.1%	27.5%
C	29.0%	25.2%
T	25.6%	23.2%
D	20.6%	21.7%
R	24.8%	19.1%
W	16.8%	11.7%
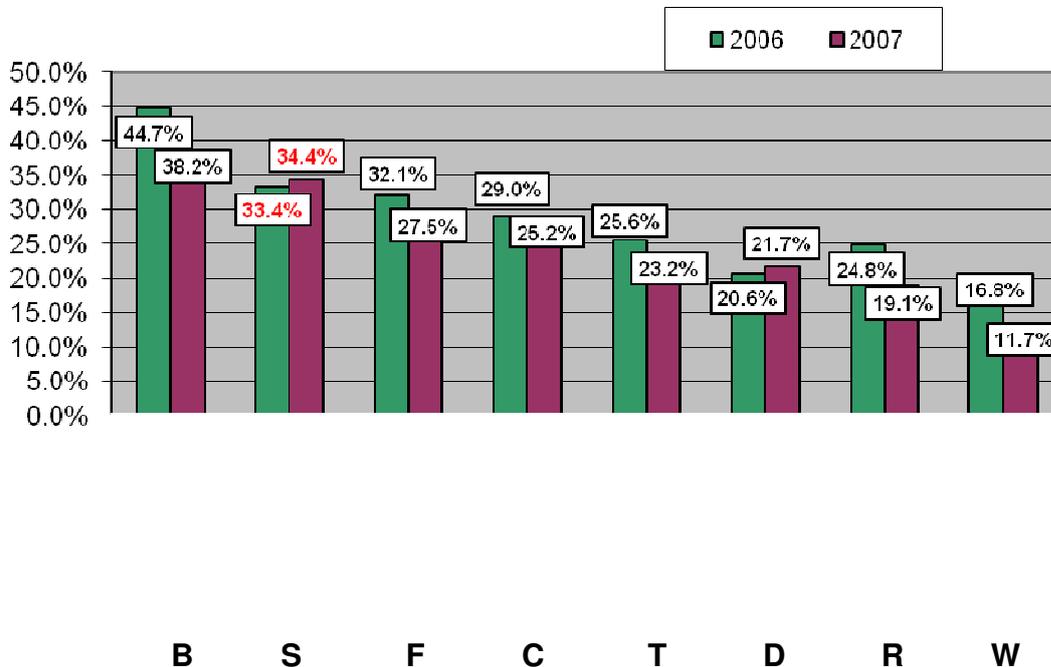
Source: Local Authority Data

2.2.　Consultation with local people over the last three years indicates that they feel that their community is stigmatised and agencies describe the community as having a strong culture of low self-esteem and low aspirations. However, in many ways Brynefydd is a strong and active community with local people contributing over 37,000 hours per year (Brynefydd Partnership 2007) to community life. This strong commitment to making a difference amongst local people gives a sense of the potential of the community to transform itself, given the right support.

2.3.　There are two primary schools that serve the community. Cwmarian Primary School (known within the community as the 'top school' as it is situated at the top of the estate) has a special needs unit that draws in pupils from beyond Brynefydd, while Trellinos primary school attracts some pupils from Cwmefydd, a neighbouring community. A small number of Brynefydd's pupils attend a Welsh Medium primary

school. Most pupils from the two local primary schools move on to Cwmavr High School, with a minority going to faith or Welsh Medium schools. Brynefydd is the only Communities First ward in Cwmavr High School's catchment area.

2.4.   There are low levels of educational attainment and literacy amongst many, but by no means all, young people from Brynefydd This is a long standing concern of parents and community groups in Brynefydd and was brought sharply into focus by the head teachers from Cwmarain and Trellinos Primary Schools at an education programme-bending workshop organised by Brynefydd Communities First Partnership in 2008. They highlighted their concern about those pupils who achieved the appropriate core subject indicators at age 11 but who were failing to do so at age 16 (this represents the 'expected' level of performance in Mathematics, English and Science). Whilst this is a phenomena experienced widely in the education system in Wales, particularly in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage, the perception was that the problem was particularly marked for pupils from Brynefydd. This a key concern for Brynefydd's Communities First partnership and the leadership teams in Cwmarain and Trellinos Primary School Schools and Cwmavr High School, who are all committed to improving pupil's results in order to enhance their life chances and to help regenerate Brynefydd.

3. AREAS TAKING PART

3.1.   In total, there are eight primary schools in the cluster that feeds into Cwmavr. As table 3.1 illustrates, pupils from Cwmarain and Trellinos Primary Schools make up between 25-30% of the total population of Cwmavr.

Table 3.1: The School Roll Figures for the Areas taking Part Schools in 2006 – 2008			
	School Roll		
School name	2006	2007	2008
Cwmarain Primary School	153	167	147
T Primary School	209	198	189
G Primary School	111	113	125
Trellinos Primary School	96	104	113
J Infants School	44	43	47
M Primary School	247	313	309
P Primary School	99	98	104
L Primary School	271	259	242
Cwmavr High School	1011	940	927

Source: Local Authority data

3.2.   As table 3.2 below shows, the percentage of pupils' eligible for free school meals; the most widely used indicator of pupil poverty, is markedly higher in Cwmarain primary school than any other school in the cluster. The rate in Trellinos is also relatively high, but is comparable to that of L Primary School (and J Infants School). As a consequence, over half of the pupils in Cwmavr High School who are eligible for FSMs are likely to have attended either Cwmarain or Trellinos Primary School.

Table 3.2: The percentage of pupils with free school meals across the cluster 2006-2008

	2006	2007	2008
Cwmarain Primary School	54%	53%	52%
T Primary School	9%	11%	17%
G Primary School	11%	13%	12%
Trellinos Primary School	24%	27%	28%
J Infants School	30%	28%	21%
M Primary School	13%	14%	16%
P Primary School	13%	16%	23%
L Primary School	30%	30%	27%
Cwmavr High School	**20%**	**22%**	**18%**

Source: Local Authority Data

4. RESEARCH INTO YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOLS

4.1.   The correlation between eligibility for free school meals, as already noted, the most commonly used proxy indicator of child poverty, and low educational attainment in communities like Brynefydd, is well established (Bramley & Watkins, 2007; Cassen & Kingdon, 2008; NAfW, 2006, 2007; Kenway et al, 2005). Studies show that children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to start behind their more advantaged peers and to fall further behind as they progress through school (Feinstein, et al, 2007; Cassen & Kingdon, 2007).

4.2.   Although the correlation is stark, the causal relationship is less clear. Research (across the UK) suggests a range of factors including:

- Lower levels of cognitive, social and emotional development amongst children growing up in poverty (Feinstein, et al, 2007);

- Lower levels of parental support, encouragement and challenge, for children growing up in poverty (Feinstein, et al, 2004); and

- The problems that most schools with a high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals have in consistently achieving high levels of quantitative educational outcomes (Lupton, 2005).

All of these factors contribute to low levels of educational attainment, which has been found to be "the strongest predictor of later academic performance". That is to say, those pupils who are low attainers early on tend to remain low attainers throughout their school career (Duckworth, et al, 2009).

4.3. Looking specifically at the primary to secondary school transition, research suggests a number of reasons why children in poverty may struggle more than children from more advantaged backgrounds. These include:

- The cultural differences between primary and secondary schools, and the increasing demands they place upon pupils; and

- The changes in parents' and guardians' attitudes toward, and relationships with, the school.

4.4. The environment and structures of primary and secondary schools are very different. The primary school is typically relatively small and based within the local community, with learning centred around a single classroom, with a generalist teacher whom all the children get to know very well. The secondary school is much larger, often sited outside the community. Learning takes place in multiple classrooms, sometimes in different buildings, with different teachers, exposing children to many different styles of teaching and personalities.

4.5.   Whilst many children thrive in the new situation of the secondary school, benefiting from the additional facilities and specialist curriculum and subject teaching that it offers, others do not adapt so well to this new context for learning. ==Many children from more disadvantaged communities struggle because of their lower levels of attainment and weaker basic skills.== More broadly, the secondary school can be a new and challenging context for young people and their social and emotional skills become increasingly important factors in determining academic success or failure (Qualter, et al, 2007).   ==Pupils need to be able to relate to and forge relationships with new teachers, cope with the stresses of new situations and respond positively to new challenges.==

4.6.   In this new and challenging context, young people may bond more tightly to those they know in search of safety and security. Travel to school via school buses, as is the norm for most pupils from Brynefydd, and parental school choice based typically on considerations of where children will be happiest (Gewitz, et al, 1995) may facilitate this bonding. ==In disadvantaged communities, this may draw children into groups whose attainment tends be low and who often reject school== (Lloyd-Jones, 2005; see also McDonald & Marsh, 2005; Mac an Ghail, 1994; Reay 2002 and Willis' seminal 1977 work on "counter-school" sub-groups).

4.7.   ==In disadvantaged communities, parents, whose own experiences of secondary school may have been negative, may be intimidated by the much larger secondary school that is physically and psychologically distant to their community. They may lack the skills and confidence to engage with teachers they do not know and if their own skills and knowledge are poor, they may also find it increasingly difficult to help their children with homework. As a consequence, they may become increasingly disengaged from their children's learning, reducing the level of support, encouragement and challenge they offer their children (Seaman, et al, 2005).==

5. THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

5.1. In response to the context outlined in chapters two and three of this report, the **aim** of the study was to identify how young people in Brynefydd could be supported as they make the transition from primary to secondary school. The **objectives** of the study were to:

- Explore in depth and document the attitudes & experiences of young people from Brynefydd as they make the transition from primary to secondary school (e.g. how do their attitudes toward primary and secondary school compare? Has their behaviour changed? Have their relationships with teachers changed?);
- Document and consider similarities and differences in the attitudes and experiences of young people from Brynefydd with those of young people from other communities in Cwmavr High School's catchment area;
- Document and consider similarities and differences in the ways in which primary and secondary school teachers view and respond to young people from Brynefydd and from those from other communities (including approaches to pedagogy, expectations of success, attitudes and behaviour);
- Assess the scale of the Brynefydd attainment gap ; and
- To strengthen support for young people making the transition from primary to secondary school.

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1. The study was designed to be collaborative, working in partnership with the three schools, Cwmarain and Trellinos Primary Schools and Cwmavr High School, whilst retaining objectivity. The head teachers of the three schools were consulted about the research together with teachers, have been participants in the research, and have been involved in discussions about the research findings.

6.2. The study set out to explore a set of researched findings, outlined in chapter 3, about the impact of child poverty and identify how helpful these would be in understanding the experiences of children in one disadvantaged community, Brynefydd. In order to explore these hypotheses the study integrated a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. This included:

- an analysis of data on pupil and performance;
- a self completion questionnaire of all young people in year 7 in Cwmavr High School in November 2008 (n=161);
- Semi-structured interviews with young people in year 7 in Cwmavr High School from Brynefydd (n=8);
- Semi-structured interviews with the parents/guardians of young people in year 7 from Brynefydd (n=7);
- On-going reflective observations from the study's fieldwork team over the course of 9 months (three of the team are based full-time in Brynefydd);
- A focus group of primary and secondary teachers drawn from the two schools including the Deputy Heads of the primary schools, Year 6 teachers, the Literacy Coordinators each of the primary schools, the Head of Year 7, and acting Head of English and SENCO from the Secondary school;
- Semi-structured interviews with the Head teacher in each of the three schools; and
- Workshops with Brynefydd's Community first Partnership to discuss key findings and inform current and future work.

6.3. The research was structured to enable triangulation, so that the problem of young people's educational attainment could be examined from multiple perspectives, including those of children and young people themselves, their families, the school and those working with them, such as tutors and community development workers.

6.4. Interviews with families and young people were used to explore in greater depth some of the survey findings. Respondents were purposely selected for the insights they could offer on issues identified through the survey.

6.5. In interpreting the findings from the survey, there are a number of considerations that need to be borne in mind:

- because we surveyed all the pupils in year 7, we can be confident that the findings apply to the whole year group;
- because we only surveyed pupils from one year group and the characteristics of a year group are likely to vary from year to year, we cannot be confident that the findings will necessarily apply to other year groups; and
- because the numbers of pupils who had attended Cwmarain and Trellinos Primary Schools (23) in the survey was low, some of the figures, which are presented in this report as percentages, must be treated with some caution, as each pupil from Cwmarain and Trellinos Primary Schools may account for just over 4 percentage points of the total. Given these small numbers, in some cases responses from pupils have been grouped together over a series of 'types' of questions in order to make the identification of patterns clearer.

6.6. We can have the most confidence that the difference in responses is significant, that is to say, the difference is not simply a chance finding, where the difference between the responses from pupils from Brynefydd and the responses from pupils from other communities is large; where the trends in responses are consistent; and when the survey findings are supported by others sources of evidence, such as teachers perceptions or observations from the study team.

6.7. This report sets out the findings of the research and considers some implications of this for school effectiveness and community regeneration work.

SECTION 2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

7. THE SKILLS AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FROM BRYNEFYDD

Theory 1. The cognitive and social and emotional skills of children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to be lower than the skills of children from more advantaged backgrounds, so they struggle in school (Feinstein, et al, 2007).

In order to test this hypothesis, we analysed teacher assessments of pupils in Cwmarain and Trellinos Primary Schools and compared the responses of pupils from these two schools with those of other pupils, on selected questions in the survey

7.1.   **The cognitive skills of pupils from Brynefydd:** Teacher assessments provide an indication of cognitive development of children from Brynefydd, but cannot provide an exact measure though, because cognitive skills (skills that enable learning) are only one of a number of factors that influence educational attainment (Feinstein, et al, 2007). Moreover, as outlined in chapter 2 of this report, not all pupils attending these two schools are from Brynefydd and not all pupils from Brynefydd attend these two schools.

7.2.   Over the last three years (2006-2008), the educational attainment of pupils at the two schools at key stage 1 and 2 has tended to be below the average for the Local Authority. Because, as outlined in chapter 4 of this report, educational attainment in disadvantaged areas tends to be lower than educational attainment in more advantaged areas, it could be predicted therefore that the educational attainment of pupils in the two schools was likely to be below the average for the local authority, given the very high levels of deprivation in Brynefydd. Teachers at the two schools have also highlighted changes in the pupil population in recent years, which has become increasingly transient, as families move in and out of the area, and which is reported to have further depressed the average attainment of pupils. These changes in the pupil population may help explain some of the variation in pupil

attainment in each of the three years. A three year average has therefore been calculated to help 'smooth' out the yearly variations.

7.3.   Table 7.1. and figure 7.1. illustrates the percentage of girls and boys in each school achieving the core subject indicator[3] at Key Stage 1 compared to the average for all pupils in the Local Authority**.**

Table 7.1. Achievement of CSI target at Key Stage 1, for Cwmarian and Brynefydd Primary School, and the average for the Local Authority, 2006, 2007, 2008 and the average for 2006-2008					
School		**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**Av. 2006-08**
Cwmarain Primary	Boys	**83.3**	41.7	40	55.0
	Girls	100	71.4	88.9	86.8
	Total	**94.1**	**52.6**	**63.2**	**70.0**
Trellinos Primary	Boys	80	33.3	75	62.8
	Girls	100	75	71.4	82.1
	Total	87.5	50	72.7	**70.1**
Local Authority	Boys	74.7	72.8	75	74.2
	Girls	85.2	84.6	81.5	83.8
	Total	**80**	**78.6**	**78.1**	**78.9**

Source: Local Authority Data

Figure 7.1. Achievement of CSI target at Key Stage 1, for Cwmarain and Trellinos Primary Schools and the average for the local authority, 2006- 2008

%
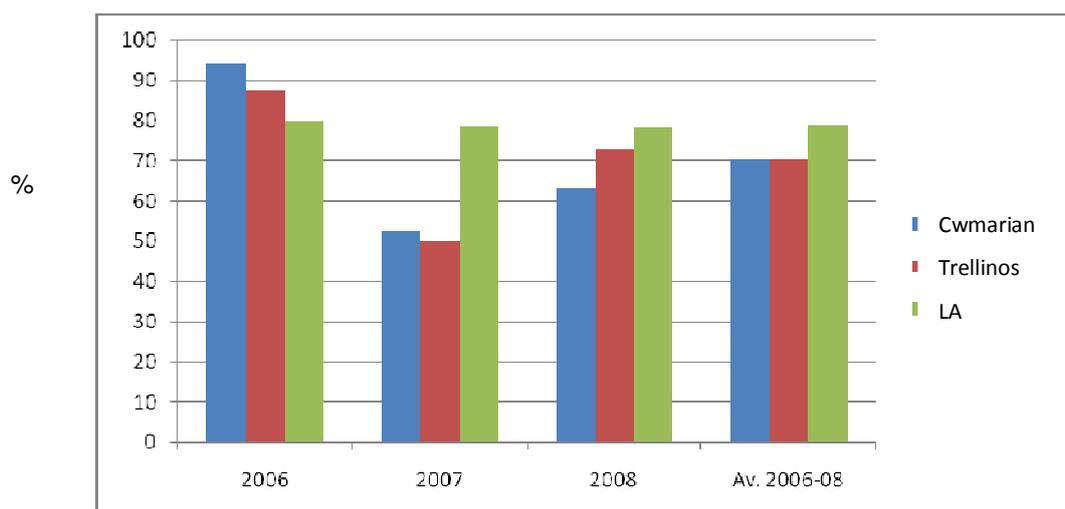
Source: Local Authority Data

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[3] Children at Key Stage 1 are aged 5-7 years and the target ("expected") level of attainment at the end of the key stage is level 2. To achieve the core subject indicator (CSI) children needed to have achieved a level 2 in English, Maths and Science.

7.4.   Table 7.2 illustrates the percentage of girls and boys in each school achieving the core subject indicator[4] at Key Stage 2, compared to the average for all pupils in the Local Authority

Table 7.2. Achievement of CSI target at Key Stage 2, for Cwmarian Primary School, Trellinos Primary School and the average for the Local Authority, 2006, 2007, 2008 and the average for 2006-2008					
School		**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**Av. 2006-08**
Cwmarain Primary	Boys	71.4	41.7	20	44.4
	Girls	75	25	75	58.3
	Total	**72.7**	**35**	**53.8**	**53.8**
Trellinos Primary	Boys	40	62.5	38.5	47.0
	Girls	66.7	83.3	50	66.7
	Total	**54.5**	**71.4**	**42.1**	**56.0**
Local Authority	Boys	68.7	66.5	71.6	68.9
	Girls	79	76.5	79.6	78.4
	Total	**73.6**	**71.5**	**75.5**	**73.5**

Figure 7.2. Achievement of CSI target at Key Stage 2, for Cwmarain Primary School, Trellinos Primary School and the average for the Local Authority, 2006-2008
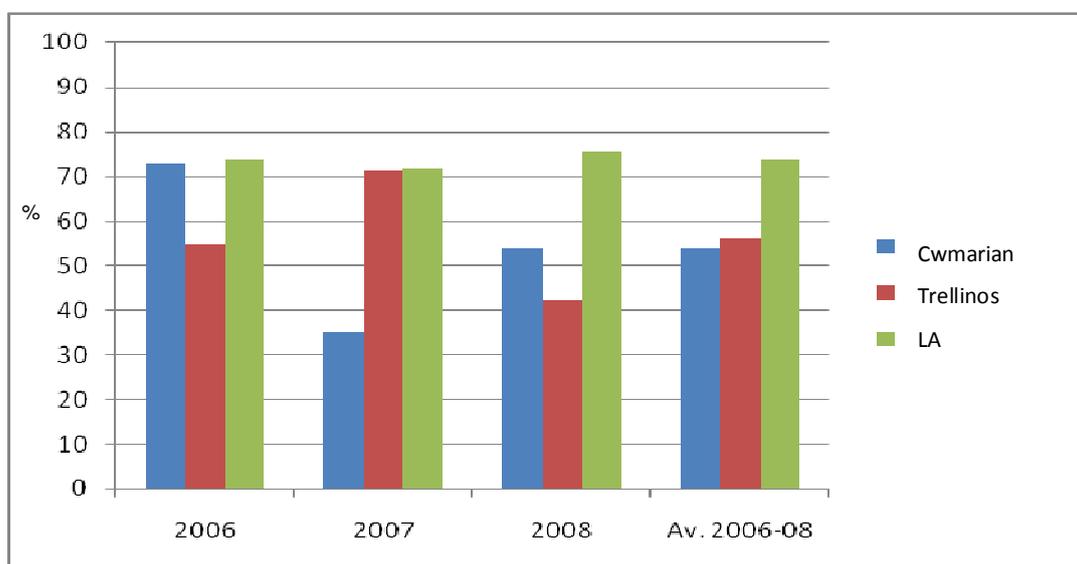

Source: Local Authority Data

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[4] Children at Key Stage 2 are aged 7-11 years and the target ("expected") level of attainment at the end of the key stage is level 4. To achieve the core subject indicator (CSI) children needed to have achieved a level 4 in English, Maths and Science.

7.5. This analysis suggests that lower levels of cognitive skills are likely to be a key factor that contributes to the educational gap between pupils from more disadvantaged communities, such as Brynefydd, compared to pupils from more affluent communities. Analysis of school results (see tables 7.1. and 7.2) suggests that the gap is already opening up at key stages 1 and 2. As outlined in chapter 4, other studies indicate that low educational attainment is powerful predictor of low attainment later in a pupils' school career (Duckworth, et al, 2009) and a follow up study will track the attainment of pupils from Brynefydd as they progress through Key Stages 3 and 4 at Cwmavr High School, to monitor their progress and see if they can buck the trend.

7.6. **The social and emotional skills of pupils from Brynefydd**: In order to identify differences in social and emotional development (their "emotional intelligence" - see boxed text), pupils were asked a small number of questions directly linked to different aspects of emotional intelligence: "I worked hard", a measure of their self-motivation; "I expect to do well at school", a measure of their self-efficacy, and "I get angry a lot", a measure of their ability to manage their moods. The survey also asked pupils to respond to a series of questions that required them to reflect on themselves, their behaviour and their relationships with others in their primary school years.

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Domains of Emotional Intelligence

- **Self-awareness –** Understanding of your self, your abilities (leading to self-confidence and self-efficacy) and your emotions and feelings – the key to 'self-mastery' feeling in control of yourself and your passions and emotions.

- **Mood-Management** - Capacity to control your emotions (e.g. calm yourself down, shake off anxiety) and to respond appropriately to others (e.g. not getting angry/irritated with them).

- **Empathy** - Understanding of others, recognising their emotions and responding appropriately (e.g. offering support).

- **Handling Relationships** - 'Social competence' ability to work (team-working), communicate and socialise with others, negotiate, persuade and achieve consensus; and

- **Self-motivation** - The ability to focus upon a task, show interest, put in effort, not to get distracted, to defer gratification (Goleman, 1995).

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7.7. The reflective questions in the survey asked pupils to:

- To make **subjective judgements on the quality of their relationship with teachers**. This was based upon an analysis of pupils' responses to four questions: 'The teachers knew me well'; 'I knew the teachers well'; 'I liked the teachers'; 'the teachers liked me' and was intended to explore if there were any differences in the ability of pupils from Brynefydd and pupils from other areas to accurately perceive emotions in themselves and others (a measure of their empathy);

- To report on their own **behaviour**. This was based upon an analysis of pupils' responses to four questions: I worked hard'; 'I used to get angry a lot'; 'I got into trouble a lot'; and 'I sometimes 'mitched'' and was intended to explore if there were any differences in the ability of pupils from Brynefydd and pupils from other areas to motivate themselves and to control and moderate their emotions and behaviour; and

- To **identify feelings.** This was based upon an analysis of pupils' responses to three questions: 'I enjoyed school most days'; 'I liked the way I was taught'; and 'I felt unhappy at most lunch times' and was intended to explore if there were any differences in the ability of pupils from Brynefydd and pupils from other areas to understand themselves and their feeling (self-awareness).

7.8.   These are only proxy indicators and in some cases measure both pupils experiences and their ability to recognise and identify their experiences. So, for example, 'I enjoyed school most days', is a measure of both pupil's enjoyment of school and a measure of their ability to recognise and reflect upon their enjoyment.

7.9.   As table 7.4 and graph 7.4 illustrate, on the three direct measures of emotional intelligence, there was a marked difference in the responses of pupils from Brynefydd compared to pupils from other schools.

Table 7.4: Pupils assessments of their self-motivation, self-efficacy and ability to manage their moods in primary school, based upon the percentage of pupils who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement			
Pupils in schools in	**I worked hard**	**I expected to do well at school**	**I used to get angry a lot**
Brynefydd	70%	65%	43%
Other	84%	85%	26%

Figure 7.4. Pupils assessments of their self-motivation, self-efficacy and ability to manage their moods in primary school
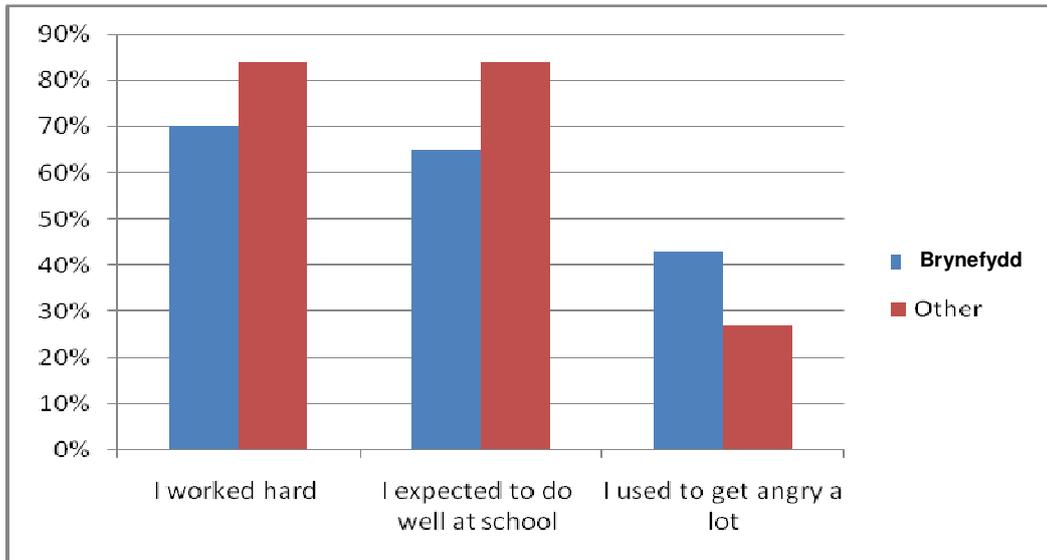
7.10. In contrast, no clear or conclusive patterns were found when the responses of pupils from Brynefydd were compared with the responses from pupils from other schools, although there were indications of trends that we plan to continue to monitor. In particular, in all three categories of reflective questions on primary school (see Tables 7.5., 7.6 and 7.7), responses from pupils from the community A schools tended to be more polarised. They were more likely to respond at the extreme ends of the scale and, in most cases, were more likely to indicate that they did not know or to not respond to the questions. The question that pupils found it hardest to respond to was on whether they thought that their primary school teachers had liked them, with 39% of Brynefydd pupils and 35% of other pupils answering that they did not know.

Table 7.5: Reflections assessing the quality of own relationships with teachers in primary school*						
Pupils in primary schools in	Strongly positive	Positive	Don't know	Negative	Strongly negative	No response
Brynefydd	38%	28%	22%	2%	4%	5%
Others	33%	41%	19%	3%	2%	2%

*Based upon 4 questions – 'The teachers knew me well'; 'I knew the teachers well'; 'I liked the teachers'; 'the teachers liked me' (total responses analysed = 92 for Brynefydd and 548 for others).

Figure 7.5. Reflections assessing the quality of pupils' relationships with teachers in primary school*
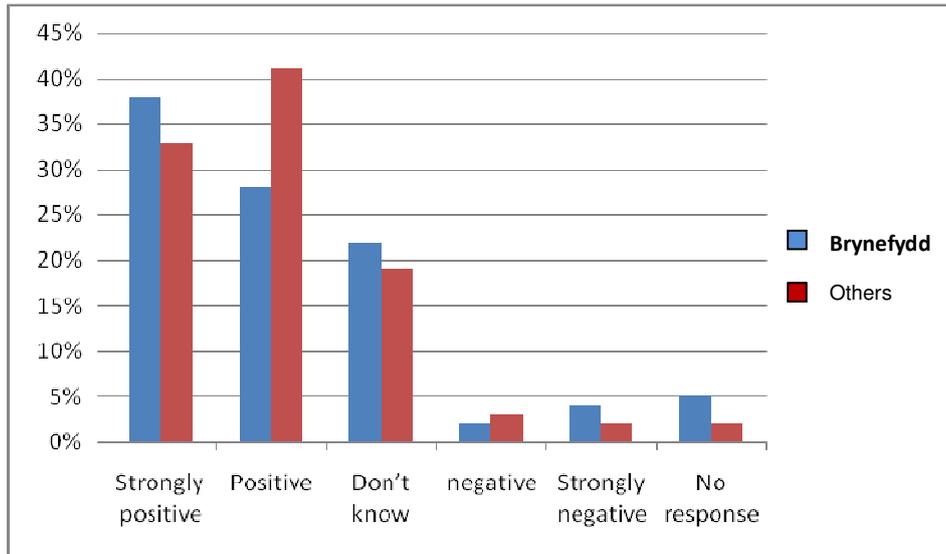
Table 7.6: Reflections on own behaviour in primary school						
Primary schools in	**Strongly positive**	**Positive**	**Don't know**	**Negative**	**Strongly negative**	**No response**
Brynefydd	42%	20%	18%	14%	5%	1%
Others	44%	30%	11%	9%	5%	1%

* 4 questions: 'I worked hard'; 'I used to get angry a lot'; 'I got into trouble a lot'; 'I sometimes 'mitched'' (n.b. a strongly disagree response to a question like 'I got into trouble a lot' is treated here as a positive reflection). (total responses analysed = 92 for Brynefydd and 548 for others

Figure 7.6. Reflections assessing the quality of pupils' behaviour in primary school*
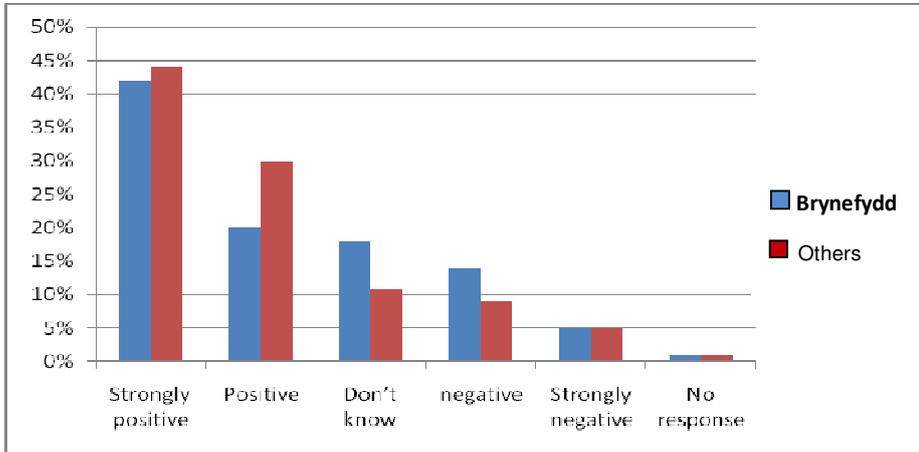
Table 7.7: Reflections on feelings in primary school*

Primary schools in	Strongly positive	Positive	Don't know	Negative	Strongly negative	No response
Brynefydd	45%	29%	11%	6%	9%	0%
Others	36%	35%	12%	7%	8%	2%

* Based upon 3 questions: 'I enjoyed school most days'; 'I liked the way I was taught'; 'I felt unhappy at most lunch times' (total responses analysed = 69 for Brynefydd and 411 for others)

Figure 7.7. Reflections on how pupils felt in primary school
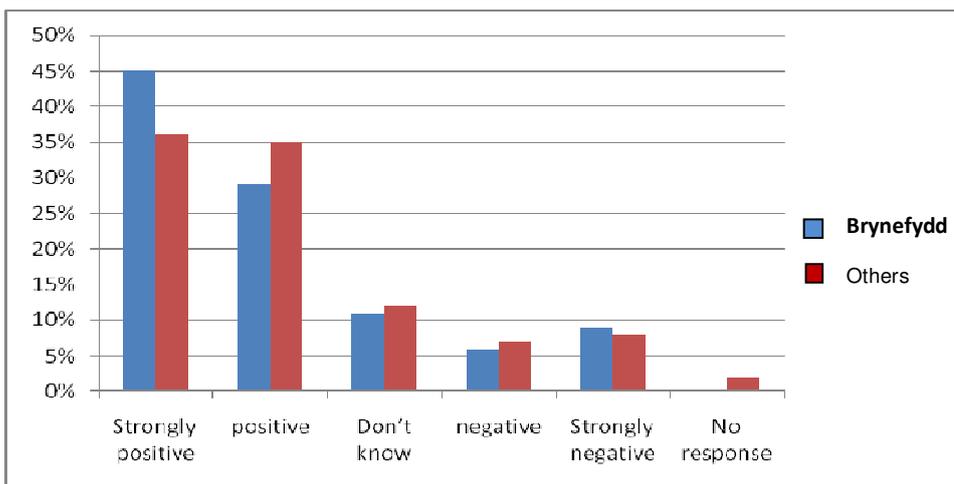
7.11. <mark>Overall, the evidence on whether weaker social and emotional skills are contributory factor in the attainment gap is more mixed than the evidence for the importance of weaker cognitive skills.</mark>

7.12. Figure 7.8 provides an overview of the responses to each question for pupils from the two Brynefydd schools, Cwmarian and Trellinos compared to the responses from pupils from the other schools in the Cwmavr High School Cluster.

Figure 7.8 Survey of Year 7 pupils, Cwmavr High school, analysis of Brynefydd pupil responses about their primary school years against pupils from other schools.
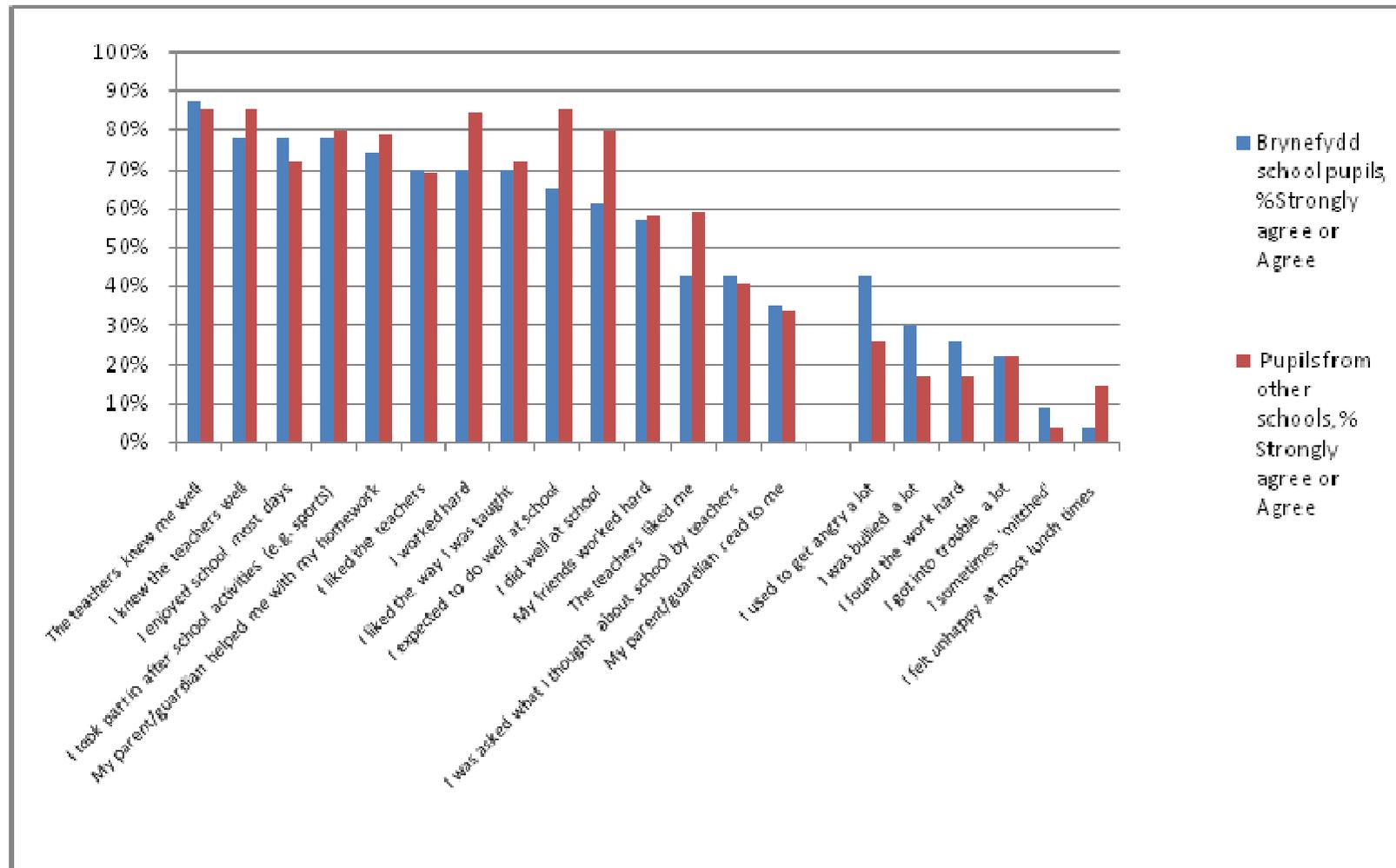
8. THE TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

Theory 2: In the new and challenging context of the secondary school, young people's social and emotional skills become increasingly important factors in determining academic success or failure (Qualter, et al, 2007).

In order to explore this hypothesis we compared the assessment of the social and emotional skills of pupils from Brynefydd schools with those of pupils in other schools and explored their experience of transition.

8.1. Pupils had been in the secondary school for less than a term when surveyed and so their experiences of the school environment were still forming, but could provide an insight into the experience of transition and their judgments about their social and emotional skills in the new setting.

8.2. Pupils were asked the same questions about secondary school as they were about primary school (see chapter 7) including the three direct questions about their social emotional skills "I worked hard", "I expect to do well at school" and "I get angry a lot", and their responses to a series of questions about their judgments on the quality of their relationship with teachers, their behavior and their feelings.

8.3. As table 8.1 and graph 8.1 illustrate, on the three direct measures of emotional intelligence, as in primary school, there was a marked difference in the responses of pupils from Brynefydd compared to pupils from other schools.

Table 8.1: Pupils assessments of their self-motivation, self-efficacy and ability to manage their moods in secondary school, based upon the percentage of pupils who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement			
Pupils in schools in	**I work hard**	**I expect to do well at school**	**I get angry a lot**
Brynefydd	70%	74%	30%
Other	78%	84%	16%

Figure 8.1. Pupils assessments of their self-motivation, self-efficacy and ability to manage their moods in primary school
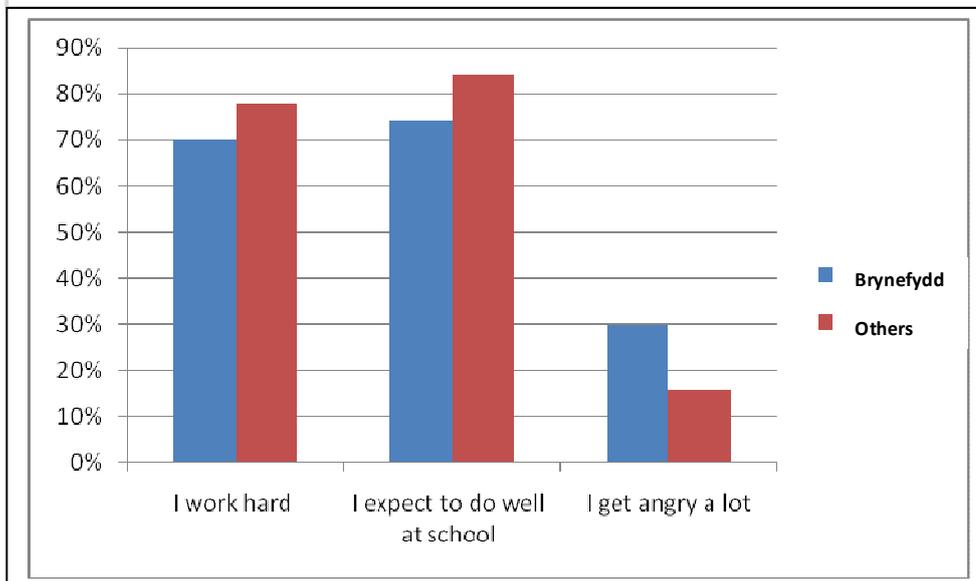
8.4. In contrast, as tables 8.2 to 8.4 illustrate when pupils' responses to the three reflective questions were compared, the responses from pupils from the two Brynefydd schools on Cymavr High School were less likely to be as grouped around the extremes of the scale than their reflections on primary school years had been. However, it is worth noting that although a large group of all pupils indicated that they did not know what the quality of their relationships with teachers was in the secondary school, this trend was even more marked in pupils from Brynefydd schools.

8.5. As tables 8.2 to 8.4. show, overall, although pupils were much less confident about their relationships with teachers than they had been in primary school, over 70% were happy and over two thirds judged that their behaviour was good. The tables also show that whilst pupils from Brynefydd were broadly speaking as positive as pupils from other schools when talking about how they felt in school (table 8.4) they were less positive when judging their relationship with teachers (table 8.2.) and their behaviour (table 8.3).

Table 8.2.: Assessments on the quality of own relationship with teachers in secondary school						
Primary schools in	Strongly positive	Positive	Don't know	Negative	Strongly negative	No response
Brynefydd	12%	26%	40%	12%	10%	0%
Others	14%	33%	31%	11%	2%	8%

*4 questions – 'The teachers know me well'; 'I know the teachers well'; 'I like the teachers'; 'the teachers like me' (total responses analysed = 92 for Brynefydd and 548 for others)

Figure 8.2. reflections assessing the quality of pupils' relationships with teachers in secondary school
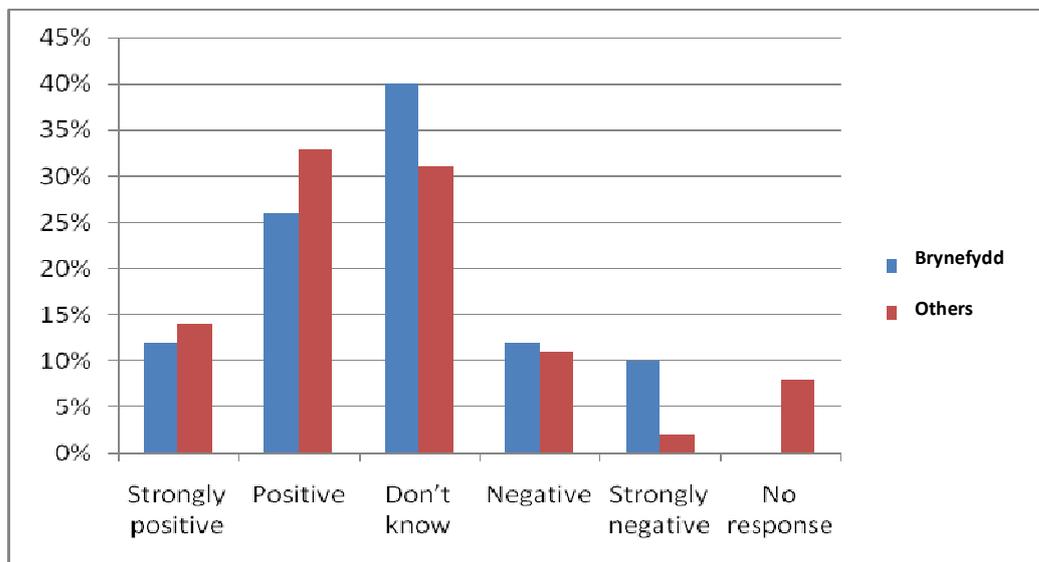
Table 8.3.: Assessments on own behaviour in secondary school						
Primary schools in	Strongly positive	Positive	Don't know	Negative	Strongly negative	No response
Brynefydd	39%	27%	12%	11%	8%	3%
Others	47%	26%	9%	6%	3%	9%

* Based upon responses to 4 questions: 'I work hard'; 'I get angry a lot'; 'I get into trouble a lot'; 'I sometimes 'mitch'' (n.b. a strongly disagree response to a question like 'I get into trouble a lot' is treated here as a positive reflection). (total responses analysed = 92 for Brynefydd and 548 for others)

Figure 8.3. Reflections on pupils' behaviour in secondary school
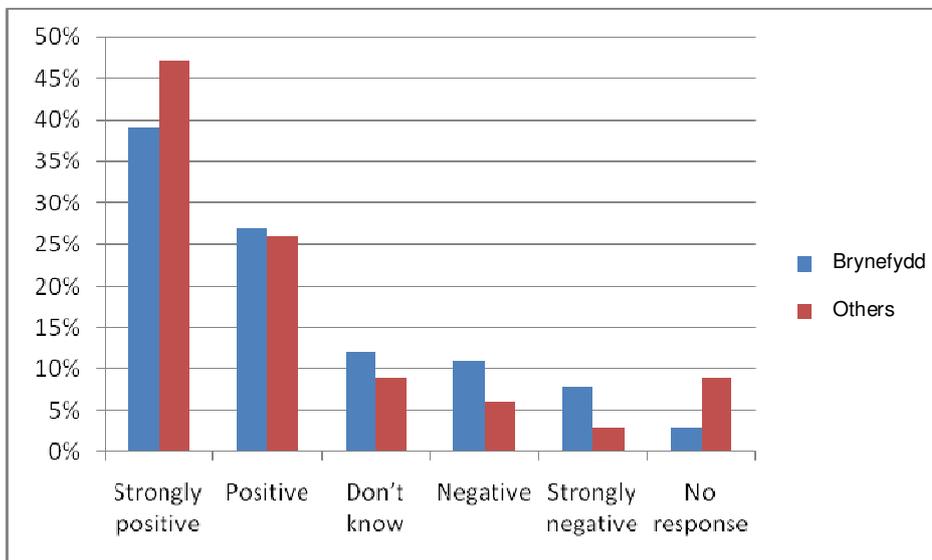
Table 8.4 : Reflections on feelings in secondary school						
Primary schools in	Strongly positive	positive	Don't know	Negative	Strongly negative	No response
Brynefydd	36%	39%	12%	7%	4%	2%
Others	39%	32%	9%	6%	4%	10%

* Based upon responses to 3 questions: 'I enjoy school most days'; 'I like the way I am taught'; 'I feel unhappy at most lunch times' (total responses analysed = 69 for Brynefydd and 411 for others)

Figure 8.4. Reflections on how pupils' felt in secondary school
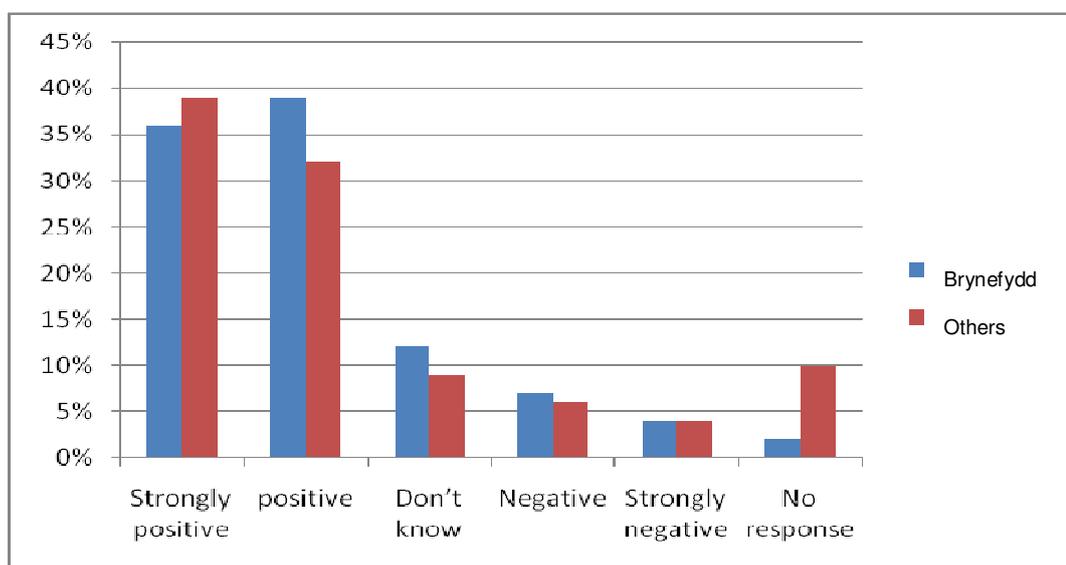
8.6.   Teachers cited deterioration in behaviour as a prime cause of pupils' poor performance; although their stated perception was that the behaviour of the majority of pupils from Brynefydd was very good. Observations and interviews identified that amongst a minority of year 7 pupils from Brynefydd there was already, by the summer term, a pattern of poor attendance and examples of short term exclusions resulting from poor behaviour.

8.7.   Figure 8.4. Compares the responses from pupils from the two Brynefydd schools, with the responses from pupils from others schools in the Cwmavr High School Cluster. Given the small numbers of pupils from Brynefydd, conclusions must be drawn with caution (see methodology section). Subject to this, responses suggest that overall pupils from Brynefydd primary schools enjoy and like school as much as

their peers in other schools, but are less likely to work hard and are more stressed (indicated by responses to the question on how often they felt angry) and describe themselves as having poorer behaviour. This indicates that their social and emotional skills are poorer than those of pupils from other schools. This finding is consistent with other research, which has found that levels of social and emotional skills are lower amongst children from more disadvantaged backgrounds (Feinstein, et al, 2007). It is also likely that these lower levels of emotional and social skills are connected to the previously low levels of performance of these children, particularly with regard to literacy.

8.8.   The evidence from the survey and from discussion with teachers suggests that the slow progress that some pupils from Brynefydd make in key stages 3 and 4 may be linked to the difficulties that some pupils face in coping with the new and challenging environment of a secondary school.

Figure 8.4 Survey of Year 7, Cwmavr High School. Analysis of Brynefydd pupil responses about their secondary school experience compared to pupils from other schools in the Cwmavr High School Cluster.
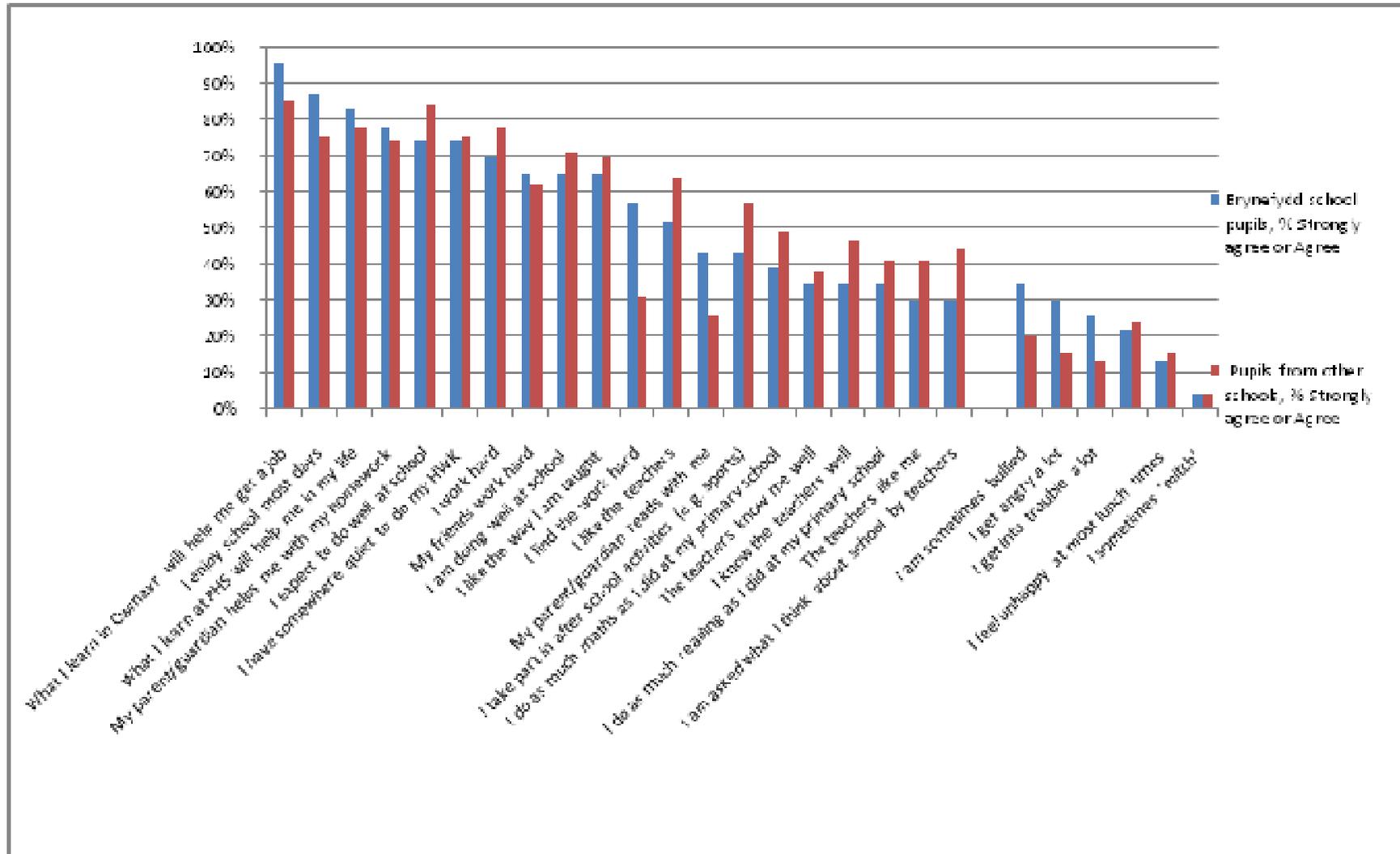
9. PARENTAL SUPPORT AND INFLUENCE

Theory 3: There are lower levels of parental support, encouragement and challenge, for children growing up in poverty (Feinstein, et al, 2004).

Theory 4: Parents may become increasingly disengaged from their children's learning as they progress to secondary school, reducing the level of support, encouragement and challenge they offer their children (Seaman, et al, 2005).

In order to test these hypotheses, we compared responses from pupils from the Brynefydd cluster with responses from pupils from other schools in the Cwmavr cluster on the support they received from their parents for both primary and secondary school. Interviews with parents and teachers enabled us to explore in greater depth the types of support parents offered and their attitudes toward school.

9.1. **Are there differences in parental support?** The pupil survey asked about the education support pupils had received from their parents when they were in primary school and what support they were receiving now. As figure 9.1. shows over two thirds of pupils reported that their parents helped them with homework of pupils and there was little difference between pupils from Brynefydd and those from elsewhere. In both cases parents were much more likely to help with homework than they were to have read to their children

Figure 9.1. Parental support in primary and secondary school
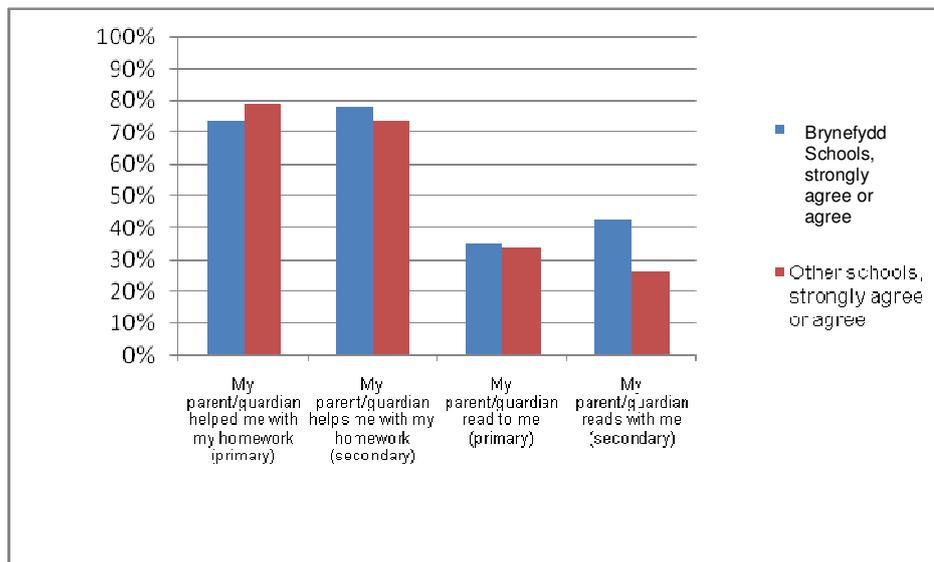
9.2. <mark>The fieldwork explored the role of control, autonomy and responsibility in parenting. Five parents</mark> talked about seeing it as being 'up to the children' whether or not they worked at school and were supportive but offered no practical encouragement or management of their child's education. However, these parents do not see a lack of intervention as a lack of control. Rather it was seen as a natural 'rolling back' of parental control as their child grows up. They saw their child' success or lack of it, as being purely down to the child. In contrast was <mark>a parent</mark> who felt strongly that her child would only do well if she pushed and who took a very controlling role. Finally, there was a <mark>third group of parents</mark> who felt unable to take control, even where there are problems of discipline at home. These parents gave examples of children being violent in the house or staying out late and felt unable to stop this behaviour. Teenage behaviour was described as a problem both in the home and the community by a minority of parents.

9.3. Observations and interviews illustrated the range of family approaches to education existing within Brynefydd. <mark>The study team identified three broad 'categories' of family approaches which we have characterised here as that of education, school or behaviour focused.</mark>

Family orientation to education in Brynefydd	
Category	**Characteristics**
Education focused	• Parent makes an assessment of local schools and identifies preferred option. • Parent moves child to another school if dissatisfied or problems occur. • Parents attend school events and meetings with teachers. • Family/school involvement continues in secondary school. • Parent critically assesses school's educational provision. • Parent supervises homework. • Child attends after school activities. • Child prefers secondary school. • Parent co-manages child's education with the school.
School focused	• Child attends local primary automatically. • School moves child to another local primary school if problems occur • Close relationship between school and family in primary, family attends school events and meetings with teachers. • Family/school involvement lessens with secondary school • Family non-critical of school. • Family will help with some aspects of homework – e.g. making costumes or listening to reading. • Child attends out of school activities. • School manages child's education.

Behaviour focused	• Child attends local primary automatically.
	• School moves child to other local primary or behaviour support provision if problems occur.
	• Poor relationship between school and family, parents only attend meetings with teachers if there are problems.
	• Negative contact with school continues into secondary school.
	• Family critical of school's management of behaviour.
	• Family not involved with homework.
	• Child does not attend out of school activities.
	• Child's education not managed.

9.4. The interviews and observations also suggested a stark contrast between pupils from what could be described as a nurturing family and those left to their own devices. For example, two of the seven pupils interviewed report that their parent/s do not get up in the morning so that they have to get themselves to school; others have parents who wake them and give them breakfast and one even drives the child to school to avoid bullying on the bus.

9.5. Teachers in both primary and secondary schools saw parental attitudes and aspirations as a key factor that contributed to the gap between the attainment of many pupils from Brynefydd compared to pupils from other communities. There was a perception amongst teachers that parental attitudes towards secondary school are negative and derived from their own (negative) experience. They also reported that getting parents involved is difficult in primary schools and worsens in secondary. To some extent these views were backed up by the fieldwork. Five of the seven parents interviewed have bad memories of school, five have no school qualifications and one parent says he cannot read. However, not all of these had failed to move on from their negative experiences and some described how well their children were doing in comparison to them and how they now felt comfortable going into school. There were also examples of parents returning to learning.

9.6. Interviews explored parental aspirations for their children and how these were formed. All the parents wanted their children to be happy and to be in work as adults. Most focused on employment as more important than qualifications but nearly all parents and pupils saw school as important in securing employment. The education focused families talked about planning a route through education and a future that might involve higher education. They saw themselves actively involved in supporting their child to achieve this. The school focused families wanted to see their children happy in school but were less worried about whether they would do well, they were not *expecting* academic success. If success was to be achieved they saw it as coming from an innate ability in the child. The most common aspiration amongst this group was to see their child become a happy and well-behaved adult in a steady job. Consequently, their assessment of a school was not based on academic achievements. For example, one family described Cwmavr as a very good school, even though two sons left with no qualifications.

9.7. Those in 'behaviour focused' families saw no reason why their child should not succeed in any field as long as the school did what they saw as its job, but were cynical that it would. They were inclined to see it as the school's failure if the child did not succeed and had little understanding of what would be required if academic success were to be achieved. For example, an interviewee who had very poor attendance in year 7 expected to join the sixth form in future years and did not see how his current behaviour might impact on that.

9.8. As noted above, the teachers' views that parents had not got over their own negative experiences of school and were allowing that to colour how they approached their child's education was illustrated in some, but not all, interviews. There were examples of parents whose own school experiences had been negative but who saw their child's experience as very different to their own and were pleased with this. There were also examples of parents who had enjoyed school very much, even if they had not gained qualifications, whose children had rebelled against school.

9.9 **Do parents become more disengaged at secondary school**? As figure 9.1. shows, the survey did not find any evidence that those pupils from Brynefydd who had support from their parents felt their parents were lessening their support as they went on to the secondary school. Indeed, there was a slight increase.

10. PEER GROUP & SCHOOL EFFECTS

Theory 5: Schools with a high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals find it more difficult to provide a quality education (see Lupton, 2005).

Theory 6: The peer group effect can be damaging because in poor communities, young people are more likely to associate in groups whose attainment tends be low and who often reject school (Lloyd-Jones, 2005; see also McDonald & Marsh, 2005; Mac an Ghail, 1994; Reay 2002; Willis, 1977).

Theory 7: In the new and unfamiliar context of secondary school, young people may bond more tightly to those they know in search of safety and security. Parental school choice based typically on considerations of where children will be happiest (Gewitz, et al, 1995) may facilitate this bonding.

In order to explore these hypotheses we analysed response from pupils on how hard they worked, compared to their peers, and used interviews and discussions with pupils and teachers to explore peer group influences.

10.1. School staff were conscious of a strong community identity amongst students from Brynefydd within Cwmavr and cite peer pressure as a core factor in the underachievement of pupils from Brynefydd. There was some evidence from the other fieldwork to support this view but it suggested a more complex picture. Primary teachers noted that when outside their community, pupils have a strong

and cohesive common community identity ('us against the world') but that within the community there are sub-groups relating to the upper and lower areas of Brynefydd and there has been ongoing animosity between pupils from the two primary schools. In the High School despite shows of bravado, they report that students are embarrassed about where they come from.

10.2. Peer groups within poor communities are usually described as inhibitors to school success (see for example Willis 1997 or Mac and Ghaill 1994). Pupils were asked to assess how hard their friends had worked in primary school and were working now. The aim here was to identify the extent to which there was any evidence that pupils were associating with others who they assessed were working as hard, or as little, as themselves. Figure 10.1 shows how pupils from Brynefydd and those from other schools evaluate their performance in school against that of their friends. In primary schools, all pupils were judged that they worked harder than their friends, suggesting a potential for peer groups to hold them back. However, at secondary school they were more likely to say that their friends worked as hard as them. These findings give some cautious cause for optimism that the extent to which pupils from Brynefydd are associating with friendship groups that may influence them to work less hard in school is small.

Figure 10.1: Judgments about how hard pupils worked and how hard their friends worked in primary and secondary school
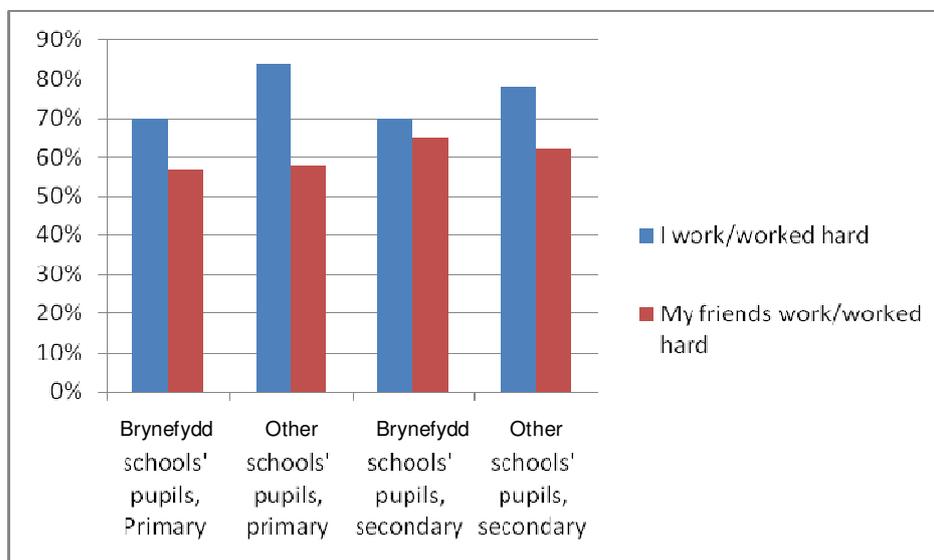
10.3. However, the interviews did identify other types of evidence that local peer groups may have a negative effect on achievement in school. One interviewee, for example, described how her friends had started to make fun of her for wanting to do well and how she had decided to make friends in school who lived in other areas. It was also noticeable that amongst 'education focused' families children tended to be discouraged from playing out in the community and were driven by parents to activities away from the community.

10.4. Observations in the community also raised a concern about the impact of year 7 Brynefydd pupils associating with others from the community who are in older year groups and who are viewed as impacting negatively on their attitude to school. One of the study team, for example, observed how during a transition visit of pupils from the primary school to the secondary much older pupils from the community were keen to take charge and help to 'initiate' the new pupils and that this was viewed as a potentially negative thing by the adults involved. There was no evidence from the survey or interviews that this mixing of year groups had yet had any significant impact but there is a perception within the community that it does.

10.5. The study illustrated how parents from Brynefydd approach school selection very differently (see 9.3) according to their orientation. Interviews included a parent who described a deliberate selection and review process of choosing a primary school and moving the child when dissatisfied and others with parents who had always assumed their children would attend the school they themselves had attended and who never considered an alternative. This latter group was in the majority and interviews with families and young people in Brynefydd showed that few had undertaken any assessment or review of local schools in selecting which one to attend and that, for most, there was an assumption of progression from the local primary schools to the nearest secondary school. There are pupils from the primary schools each year that go to one of at least three other secondary schools in the district. Nevertheless, the majority of pupils progress from Cwmarian and Trellinos Primary Schools to Cwmavr High School and many of the pupils did talk about how it helped that they were going to a school where siblings or friends from the community were already there.

10.6. As figure 10.2. shows, the survey indicates that pupils' experiences of secondary school to date are very positive and that pupils from Brynefydd tend to enjoy school more than pupils from other schools. The interviews broadly support this, with 7 of the 8 young people who were interviewed reporting that Cwmavr High School was a "good" school (or similar). Most preferred it to primary school and most were very positive about the teachers and lessons. This is an interesting finding and may reflect the relative strength of Cwmavr High School, recently judged to be an outstanding school by Estyn (2009). It may also be a feature of the newness of the secondary school experience. In her study on mapping the education, training and employment experiences of young people who left school with few or no qualifications, Lloyd-Jones (2005) found that there was a nostalgia for the primary school that was shaped by young people's difficulties in their final years in compulsory education and which appeared at odds with the educational outcomes achieved, suggesting that these young people had forgotten the problems they

clearly must have had in primary school. For the survey respondents, however, primary school was still a fresh memory and being contrasted with what was still a new and exciting secondary school experience.

Figure 10.2. Enjoyment of primary and secondary school (based upon response to the question "I enjoyed school most days")
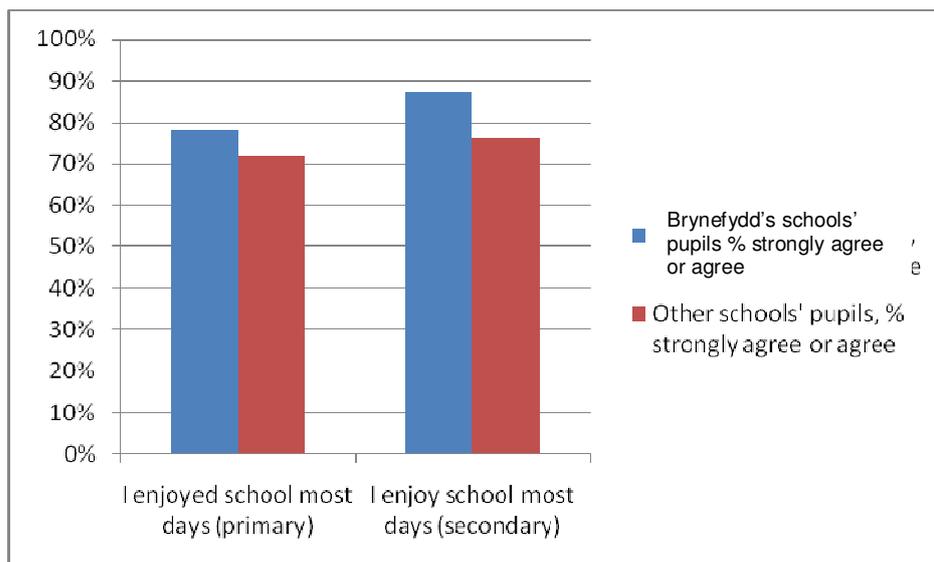
10.7.   Nevertheless, as chapters 7 and 8 illustrates, whilst pupils from the Brynefydd schools are, like pupils from other schools, very positive about their school experience overall, on a number of measures, they are less positive than pupils from other schools. For example, pupils from Brynefydd tend to be:

- less confident about their prospects for success (based upon the percentages who agree or strongly agree that "I expect/ed to do well in school);
- less likely to work hard ((based upon the percentages who agree or strongly agree that "I work/ed hard");   and
- more stressed (based upon the percentages who agree or strongly agree that "I used to get angry a lot").

11. ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Theory 8: Children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have lower aspirations and because they do not aspire, or expect, to continue into further and higher education, success in school is considered less important.

In order to test this hypothesis we compared responses from pupils from the two Brynefydd *schools with pupils from other schools in the Cwmavr High School cluster to questions on their future aspirations and discussed pupils' aspirations with both teachers and pupils.*

11.1. Teachers identify lack of aspiration within families and amongst pupils as an important factor in underachievement. The survey found that the aspirations and expectations of the young people from Brynefydd are both low and limited but, broadly, little different from other pupils in year 7. Indeed, pupils from Brynefydd primary schools were slightly more likely to show an interest in a job that would require a degree than those from the most affluent catchment area. They were also more optimistic about school helping them get a job, with all but one pupil from Brynefydd Primary Schools stating that what they learned at school would help them get a job (compared to 85% of pupils from elsewhere). Nevertheless, as figure 8.1. shows, pupils from Brynefydd are 10 percentage points less likely to expect that they will do well in secondary school (74% as opposed to 84% of pupils from other schools).

11.2. Interviews illustrated how Ideas about the future were tailored to the life people wanted to lead and, although this view of 'the good life' was clearly bounded by what was known, it tended to focus on community cohesion (a wish not to move away or have your children move away), family bonds and a sound work ethic, all factors that did not require qualifications. So, for example, a mother described how her husband and three sons worked together in a factory, her sons having bought houses in the same street, and her hopes that her son in year 7 will join them one

day. A young girl talked about wanting to work with two older sisters who are hairdressers. Family life was, for many, the most important aspect of life and there were many examples of extended families through fostering or multi-generations that came together at the weekend. These were, in the main, families we have categorised as 'school focused'. They tended not to be too concerned about academic success in school, especially for their sons, but were not opposed to school or its structures, seeing it as part of their child's preparation for adulthood. They did believe, however, that some children (again mostly boys) are just not suited to the school environment and that they were powerless to influence this. For example, one parent was pleasantly surprised at how well her daughter appeared to have fitted into the High School having had the experience of two sons whose attendance record had led to her being fined on more than one occasion. She was very optimistic about what would happen to her daughter but was clear that she would have little part in it other than to get her up in the morning and see her on her way.

11.3. In contrast, another mother who had herself recently completed a degree expected her son to go to university although his aspiration was to be a professional footballer. This 'education focused' mother saw her role as being to continually promote other options with her son. She was not a native of Brynefydd, having moved in when her son was young and she hoped to leave soon. At the other extreme within the community, members of 'behaviour focused' families interviewed also talked about wanting to leave Brynefydd. These family members felt they had little control over their lives and what was happening to them and this shaped how they responded to school and other services. They were either unable to say what they expected or aspired to, or to have aspirations with very little understanding of what would be needed in order to achieve them.

11.4. The research team identified that an experience of some post school training programmes was helping to undermine the importance of school performance, since they appeared to some young people and families to offer an easier option to

gaining school qualifications. These parents described how some young people were seeing others in the community leave school with no qualifications then go onto a scheme that paid a training allowance and provided some vocational skills. They were aware that this was undermining efforts to convince younger children of the importance of working in school. This issue illustrates a finding in Lloyd-Jones's (2005) research about how a locally-formed understanding of the role and value of qualifications can strip credibility from the messages school seeks to embed.

12. OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS LEARNING

Theory 9: Participation in 'structured' out of school activities helps children and young people develop social and emotional skills they need in school and that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to participate in these types of activity (Wilkley, 2008).

In order to test this hypothesis we compared responses from pupils from the two Brynefydd *schools with pupils from other schools in the Cwmavr cluster to questions on their participation in out of school activities.*

12.1. The school survey asked pupils in year 7 in Cwmavr High School how they spent their time outside school hours. As Figure 12.1 illustrates, the survey suggests that overall the associational life of pupils who attended Brynefydd primary schools is very similar to that of pupils who attended other schools.

Figure 12.1: Out of school activities
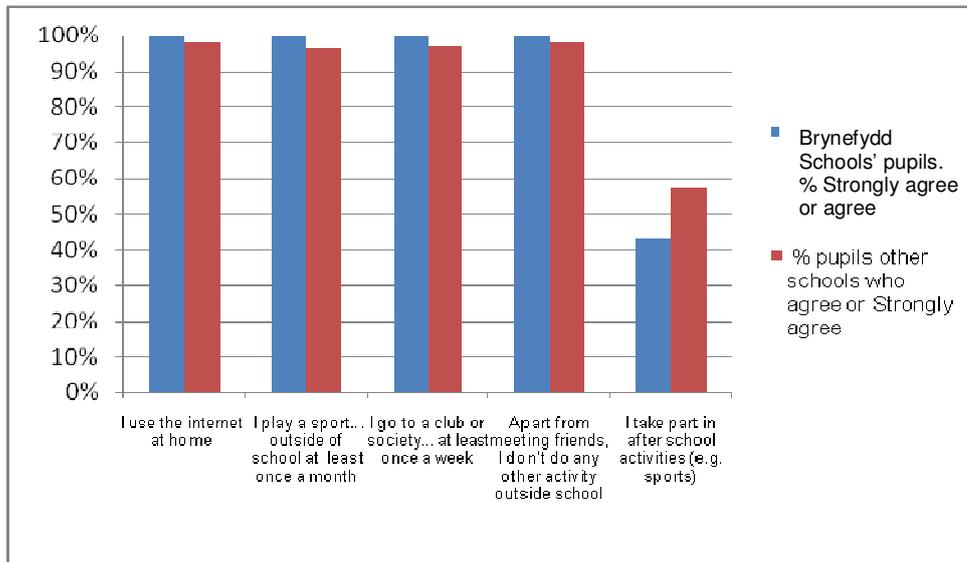
12.2. Nevertheless, as table 12.1. illustrates there is some difference in emphasis in that pupils from the Brynefydd schools are less likely to strongly agree that they go to a youth club or play sports at least one a month.

Table 12.1 Out of school activities				
	Brynefydd schools' pupils strongly agree	Other schools' pupils strongly agree	Brynefydd schools pupils', agree	Other schools' pupils, agree
I use the internet at home	78%	89%	22%	9%
I go to a youth club at least once a month	17%	30%	74%	65%
I play a sport (e.g. football or rugby) outside of school at least once a month	52%	69%	48%	27%
I go to a club or society (like the Scouts or Girl Guides) at least once a week	17%	15%	83%	82%
I go to a music or dance group at least once a month	22%	22%	74%	75%
Apart from meeting friends, I don't do any other activity outside school	22%	30%	78%	68%

12.3. There is an after-school activities programme run through both the primary and secondary schools and pupils were asked if they attended. Figure 12.2. shows that pupils from Brynefydd were as likely to have taken part in after school activities in primary school as those from other schools but are markedly less likely to be involved in such activity now they are in the secondary school than pupils from other schools. It shows that overall participation in after school activities drops in secondary school but the drop from Brynefydd is greater. Interviews suggest that pupils do not want to stay after school because of missing the bus home, although alternative transport is provided.

Figure 12.2. Participation in after school activities in primary and secondary school
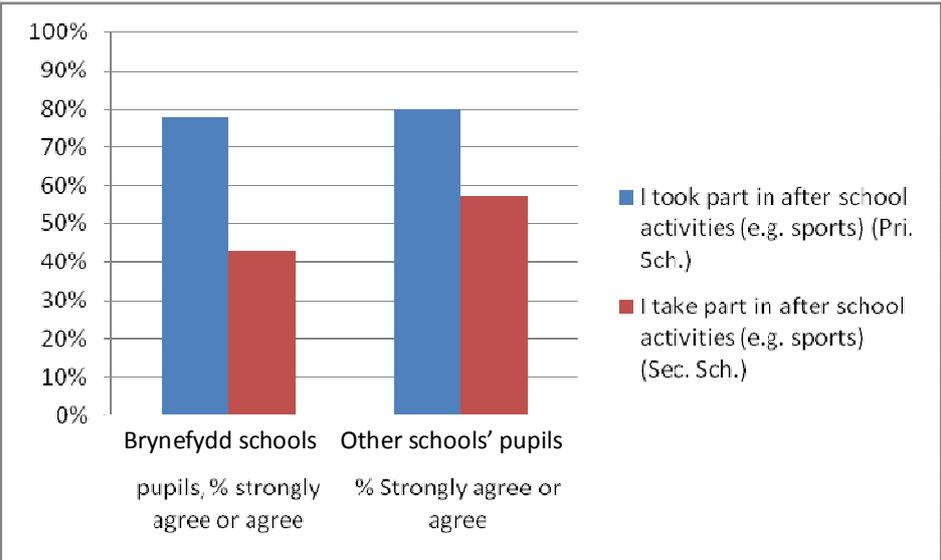
12.4. Interviews and observations illustrated the same range of family orientation to out of school activity as noted with school orientation, from the parent who facilitated and managed involvement in activities, to families that left it to the child to chose what to do but would get involved if behaviour issues came up and a third group who say that they do not know what their child does when out and even if they expressed concerns about safety or behaviour did not become involved in addressing these concerns.

Section 3. Conclusions

13. THE SCALE AND CAUSES OF THE BRYNEFYDD ATTAINMENT GAP

13.1. Given the very strong link between disadvantage and poor educational attainment it might be expected that the performance of pupils from Brynefydd would be lower than that of pupils from other areas. The research suggests that pupils tend to start primary school at a lower level than pupils in other areas, and that many of those who make a good start at primary school, tend to fall behind, in relative terms, later. This trend is consistent with other research in the UK (Feinstein, et al, 2007; Cassen & Kingdon, 2007). This is consistent with our analysis of pupil performance in Brynefydd In order to better understand the causes of this attainment gap, this study considered the evidence for and against a series hypothesis based upon research in other parts of the UK.

13.2. We found that the problems facing children (and later young people) from Brynefydd are identifiable from a very early age. They tend to start school with relatively lower levels of skills than most other children of their age and the two local primary schools are unable to close the gap, which continues to grow. Transition arrangements between primary and secondary school are judged to be good by school staff, young people and families, and this study does not indicate that the transition from primary to secondary school is particularly significant or traumatic for pupils from Brynefydd. Although there is no formally shared pedagogy of learning and teaching between the two schools, most of the pupils were, by the end of their first term there, happy in the High School and liked the teachers and many of the subjects at this stage. Despite this, Cwmavr High School has struggled to enable young people from Brynefydd to make up lost ground and many will leave with no or low qualifications.

13.3. Teachers, and attainment data, suggest that there are at least two groups of children and young people in Brynefydd whose achievement is particularly low and who experience problems at two different points:

- The first group includes children with poor literacy who continue to make progress, but who fall markedly behind other pupils in years 5 and year 6 (the end of Key Stage 2) because their rate of progress is slower than that of other pupils. The decline in performance continues into Key Stage 3 and beyond, as they struggle with a more demanding curriculum, and find they often are in trouble, become excluded or regular absentees; and

- The second group includes those young people who have kept up with school work and/or conformed to the requirements of school from Year 6 into Year 7 but are seen to fall away in Years 8 and 9 (Key Stage 3) and it is in Key Stage 4 that their low achievement becomes apparent. However, unlike the first group, these young people often go unnoticed if they do not exhibit behavioural problems.

13.4. The research suggests that a key factor for both groups is low levels of prior achievement, particularly in literacy (cf. Duckworth, et al, 2009). However, the research found that issues around social and emotional development and ambivalence about the value and importance of school act as both causal factors and exacerbate the impact of attainment gaps. Family behaviour is also a key factor, reinforced by peer group pressure.

13.5. Looking specifically at young people's thinking and behaviour, the study illustrated the range of aspirations and behaviour towards education that exists within Brynefydd and makes it clear that no effect or norm can be safely assumed to be community wide. However, the fieldwork in Brynefydd and research in comparable communities (Lloyd-Jones, 2005; see also Jones, 2006), suggest that for a significant group of young people, thinking and behaviour around education

and school is shaped by a range factors, that contribute to a failure in school, including:

- **A sense of optimistic fatalism** - a belief that they will do reasonably well in school and go on to find work, but that they are passive actors in this. This view assumes that while at school, everyone is on a common path that will take them through exams and then into the 6th form, college and/or work. This is reflected in sentiments such as 'nothing's going to stop me', when asked what might stop them achieving their aspirations, even though to an observer it is clear that unless they change, their own behaviour will make progression impossible;

- **A conditional commitment to learning** – which is balanced by higher priorities outside school and education and means that school and teachers are judged by the extent to which they contribute to, or at least do not clash with, these competing priorities; and

- **A credibility gap** - that leads to a generalised acceptance that education is somehow important, but a lack of understanding of exactly how and why it matters, making the belief somewhat shallow and vulnerable to challenge.

13.6. At their root, the three factors reflect a lack of knowledge and a lack of awareness, understanding and/or self-belief in the role that they as individual agents play in shaping their own future. They suggest that while at this age the young people from Brynefydd, like their peers from more advantaged communities, may have high aspirations they will be less likely to achieve them. Many of them want to do well in life, to become people with status, such as footballers, police or doctors but lack understanding of what is needed, such as the qualifications, skills and career pathways (knowledge); of what they will have to do to secure what is needed (agency); and also, most crucially, the self efficacy that would make it feel worth the effort and risk of trying to secure it (impetus). Very tellingly, a young pupil from Brynefydd speaking to one of the research team said 'I have been put into the top

stream, but I don't understand it. I am from Brynefydd'. In order to achieve the potential clearly already spotted by the school, this pupil needs to develop her own self image as someone who can achieve academically and who is expected by others to do so. (cf. Princes Trust, 2003)[5].

13.7.   The study did find some young people and their families in Brynefydd who had low aspirations, but for the majority the problem was less about low aspirations *per se*, nor is it a lack of self-belief (self-efficacy) *per se*. Young people's lack of knowledge and self-knowledge means that they do not understand what is needed, and therefore cannot make judgments about whether they are able to achieve it or not (e.g. whether they have the skills and temperament needed). They may, therefore, expect to achieve, even though their teachers may quite reasonably expect them to fail, given their difficulties in school and limited opportunities outside of school.

13.8.   This lack of understanding of what is required, together with the somewhat shallow belief in the value of learning, contributes to the conditional commitment to learning. At its extreme, this can lead to school and teachers being seen as responsible for getting them, or even giving them, the qualifications they need. If they fail, this is often blamed upon the school and teachers, rather than themselves. This in turn contributes to the sense of fatalism, that there is little that they can or indeed need to do, to either succeed or fail.

13.9.   Research shows that, as they progress through the secondary school the social and emotional skills that build self-knowledge and faith in self will become increasingly important. Over time, young people's sense of optimism may fade. Failure at school when not linked to an acknowledgement of why it happened and how it can be reversed, can damage self-identity and lead people to think of themselves as non-learners (Gorard & Rees, 2002).

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[5] The study found that the aims and aspirations of disadvantaged young people were very similar to young people who were not disadvantaged and that they were aware that failure at school could hold them back, but that they did not fully understand the impact of this failure until they were much older.

13.10. Parents who share and help reinforce these attitudes and beliefs see qualifications as important in theory but in practice are unconvinced of its relevance to *their* lives and that of *their* children. They may also be unconvinced that schools can do much to shape outcomes, so that they see success as a result of talent and ability, rather than hard work and good teaching. In interviews parents sometimes explained that their child was 'creative' or 'good with his hands' as a way of explaining why they were not academically successful. The implication was that there were 'types' of children who were suited to the work school offered and others that were not. This was seen particularly in discussions around gender, where the school 'offer' was seen by some parents to be more appropriate for their daughters than sons.

13.11. The research identified that in a minority of families parents may put their own interests over their children's but more common was a placing of their children's short term wellbeing over other considerations. In the absence of a strong faith in schooling as a way of securing a 'good' adult life, a parent is more likely to prioritise happiness today.

13.12. The study found that the research findings we explored did provide a useful framework for understanding the attainment gap between pupils from Brynefydd and those of pupils from other communities in the Cwmavr High School catchment area. However, the findings, at this point, are indicative rather than conclusive. If the effect is as the research suggests, over the next few years the difference in social and emotional skills, parental support for education and peer group impacts between pupils from Brynefydd and those from more affluent areas will become more marked.

14.   THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY FOR BRYNEFYDD

14.1.   The research shows how most (but not all) families and pupils are proud of being from Brynefydd. The community is seen as the key strength of the area with many people having networks of family and neighbours that make them feel safe and included. However, the study has illustrated the layers within the community of Brynefydd and how inequalities operate within these layers as well as between this community and others. We have characterised parental approaches to school in three broad bands – the education focused, school focused and behaviour focused families – which illustrate the different cultures operating within the community. The key point here is to recognise the differences that exist within the community and that responses will need to be shaped in such a way as to ensure they work with each group according to their different needs. For example:

- **Education focused**: the children of education focused families need peer groups that they can feel comfortable with and struggle to find them in Brynefydd. They need exposure to different kinds of careers so that they can make their own informed choices – frequently such children have aspirations for careers but these are limited to what they can see around them such as teaching and public services.

- **School focused:** the children of school focused families need support to build their cognitive, social and emotional skills. They need support to see themselves as effective learners and for them and their families to gain a fuller understanding of how learning and qualifications can help them build a good life. They also need exposure to different types of careers. They may also need some 'catch-up' academic support to boost their literacy skills.

- **Behaviour focused:** children in behaviour-focused families' need the range of support identified above but may need more intensive support to develop cognitive, social and emotional skills. They are more likely to see themselves as outside, and even opposed to, the school culture and need help in both understanding its relevance to them *and* finding a way to re-engage with it. Their parents may also need support in developing a similar range of skills.

15. AREAS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

15.1. The study has identified a need to understand more about the needs of pupils from Brynefydd including:

- The students who fall away in their achievement, especially after year 7.
- How young people, schools and other outside agencies can be helped to develop a more positive image of Brynefydd How parents can be better engaged in their children's education.
- How a more cohesive pedagogy of learning and teaching can be developed between the two primary schools and the High School.
- How social and emotional skills impact on learning.
- How families can be supported to build more robust and effective social and emotional skills.

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APPENDIX: SELECTED RESULTS FROM THE SURVEY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN YEAR 7 AT CWMAVR HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

In December 2008 all pupils in Year 7 at Cwmavr High School were asked to complete a questionnaire about their school experience to date. The questionnaire was administered simultaneously to pupils in seven different classes with members of the research team introducing it to each class and talking pupils through the questions.

The key purpose in collecting the data was to identify any differences between the attitudes, expectations or experiences of pupils coming from Brynefydd to those of pupils from other parts of the Cwmavr High School catchment area. Brynefydd is the only part of the catchment area that has been identified as a Communities First area, that is, one of the poorest communities in Wales. This analysis of the survey results was done both to identify pupil experiences and to compare those of pupils from Community A with those of other areas.

160 pupils completed the questionnaire, of which 102 were male and 55 female (three did not complete this question).

Pupils were asked which primary schools they had attended before coming to the secondary school and they identified a total of 21 different schools. However, 85% of the pupils came from 7 primary schools, all within the core catchment area for the school and 40% come from just 2 schools, M and L Primary Schools. Brynefydd pupils come mainly from 2 primary schools, Cwmarain and Trellinos, and the pupils from these schools made up a total of 15% of the whole survey responses (23 pupils).

Pupils were asked where they lived. They identified 18 communities or villages. Pupils from Brynefydd make up one of the largest community groups (18 pupils) in the school with only C (32 pupils) and T (19 pupils) providing more pupils. There are the same numbers of pupils from M as from Community Brynefydd

Key	
SA	Strongly Agree
A	Agree
Don't know	DK
D	Disagree
SD	Strongly Disagree
NA	No Answer

Primary school responses									
	Brynefydd schools pupils (n=23)					**Pupils from other schools (n=136)**			
Questions	% SA or A	% DK	% D or SD	% NA		% SA or A	% DK	% D or SD	% NA
The teachers knew me well	87%	9%	0%	4%		85%	12%	2%	1%
I knew the teachers well	78%	9%	4%	9%		85%	10%	4%	1%
I liked the teachers	70%	17%	13%	0%		69%	18%	10%	1%
The teachers liked me	43%	39%	9%	9%		59%	35%	3%	2%
I worked hard	70%	26%	4%	0%		84%	10%	5%	1%
My friends worked hard	57%	26%	13%	0%		58%	29%	12%	1%
I found the work hard	26%	17%	52%	4%		17%	15%	63%	4%
I enjoyed school most days	78%	9%	13%	0%		72%	9%	18%	1%
I expected to do well at school	65%	17%	17%	0%		85%	12%	1%	1%
I did well at school	61%	22%	17%	0%		80%	15%	4%	1%
I used to get angry a lot	43%	17%	39%	0%		26%	13%	60%	1%
I was bullied a lot	30%	9%	61%	0%		17%	9%	72%	2%
I got into trouble a lot	22%	22%	57%	0%		22%	15%	61%	1%
I sometimes 'mitched'	9%	9%	83%	0%		4%	4%	90%	2%
I liked the way I was taught	70%	17%	13%	0%		72%	15%	12%	1%
I was asked what I thought about school by teachers	43%	17%	39%	0%		41%	24%	33%	2%
My parent/guardian helped me with my homework	74%	13%	13%	0%		79%	5%	14%	1%
My parent/guardian read to me	35%	22%	43%	0%		34%	10%	53%	2%
I took part in after school activities (e.g. sports)	78%	0%	22%	0%		80%	2%	16%	1%
I felt unhappy at most lunch times	4%	13%	83%	0%		15%	13%	70%	1%

Note: Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Secondary school responses								
	Brynefydd school pupils (n=23)					Pupils from other schools (n=136)			
Questions	% SA or A	% DK	% D or SD	% NA		% SA or A	% DK	% D or SD	% NA
The teachers know me well	35%	52%	13%	0%		38%	40%	15%	6%
I know the teachers well	35%	26%	39%	0%		47%	21%	25%	6%
I like the teachers	52%	26%	22%	0%		64%	18%	8%	9%
The teachers like me	30%	57%	13%	0%		41%	45%	5%	7%
I work hard	70%	17%	13%	0%		78%	12%	3%	6%
My friends work hard	65%	30%	4%	0%		62%	27%	4%	6%
I find the work hard	57%	17%	26%	0%		31%	23%	38%	7%
I enjoy school most days	87%	4%	9%	0%		76%	4%	10%	9%
I expect to do well at school	74%	17%	9%	0%		84%	7%	2%	6%
I am doing well at school	65%	17%	13%	4%		71%	17%	3%	6%
I get angry a lot	30%	17%	52%	0%		16%	13%	61%	8%
I am sometimes bullied	35%	9%	52%	4%		20%	7%	65%	6%
I get into trouble a lot	26%	13%	57%	4%		13%	8%	68%	8%
I sometimes 'mitch'	4%	0%	87%	4%		4%	3%	83%	7%
I like the way I am taught	65%	17%	13%	4%		70%	15%	5%	7%
I am asked what I think about school by teachers	30%	22%	48%	0%		44%	24%	24%	6%
My parent/guardian helps me with my homework	78%	13%	9%	0%		74%	7%	11%	6%
My parent/guardian reads with me	43%	0%	57%	0%		26%	10%	53%	8%
I take part in after school activities (e.g. sports)	43%	0%	57%	0%		57%	4%	29%	6%
I feel unhappy at most lunch times	13%	13%	74%	0%		16%	7%	67%	8%
I do as much reading as I did at my primary school	35%	13%	52%	0%		41%	13%	44%	1%
I do as much maths as I did at my primary school	39%	9%	48%	4%		49%	13%	36%	1%
What I learn at Cymavr High School will help me in my life	83%	9%	9%	0%		78%	17%	2%	2%
What I learn in Cwmavr School will help me get	96%	4%	0%	0%		85%	12%	1%	2%

a job								
I have somewhere quiet to do my homework eg at home or at school	74%	4%	22%	0%		76%	12%	10%	1%
I feel embarrassed if a teacher tells me in class that I have done well	22%	17%	61%	0%		24%	15%	59%	1%
I use the internet at home	100%	0%	0%	0%		98%	0%	0%	2%
I go to a youth club at least once a month	91%	0%	0%	9%		96%	0%	0%	3%
I play a sport (e.g. football or rugby) outside of school at least once a month	100%	0%	0%	0%		96%	0%	0%	3%
I go to a club or society (like the Scouts or Girl Guides) at least once a week	100%	0%	0%	0%		97%	0%	0%	2%
I go to a music or dance group at least once a month	96%	0%	0%	4%		97%	0%	0%	2%
Apart from meeting friends, I don't do any other activity outside school	100%	0%	0%	0%		98%	0%	0%	2%

Note: Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding