

# Deprived pupils 18 months behind in literacy levels

Education gap highlighted as new body makes tackling inequality its top priority

## EXCLUSIVE

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CHILDREN from the most deprived communities in Scotland are as much as 18 months behind in the development of their vocabulary compared with those from the most affluent areas by the time they go to school.

In addition, disadvantaged pupils can be as much as 13 months behind when tested on basic problem-solving skills.

The shocking revelations have been highlighted by the country's new education quango as it sets out its priorities for the next few years.

Education Scotland, formed from the merger of the country's schools inspectorate and its curriculum support body, will make tackling inequality a key focus of its work.

Dr Bill Maxwell, the body's chief executive, said evidence of the attainment gap – taken from the 2011 Growing Up in Scotland Survey – was a powerful motivation for change.

He said Education Scotland would be asked to examine the best strategies for tackling inequality from across the world, as well as from within Scotland.

Schools inspectors and the organisation as a whole would then use that knowledge to drive improvements.

"You can see the kinds of challenges teachers are facing when pupils are arriving in school," he said. "It clearly tells



**BILL MAXWELL:** Said teachers face big classroom challenges.

**“You really need to start intervening early because it can be too late by the time children go to secondary school**

you there is a big issue to be dealt with right from birth and one thing I hope the new agency will be able to do is put new impetus in nursery to find what works to close that gap and ensure it is available across Scotland.”

Mr Maxwell said that, despite previous efforts to deal with the education gap, Scotland was still “average” at achieving those aims.

“It is a persistent problem, and one which every country in the developed world has to a greater or lesser degree, but some countries, such as Norway, are much more successful in countering the association between



**CONCERN:** Figures show pupils from disadvantaged areas are way behind in the development of their vocabulary. Picture: Getty Images

deprivation and attainment than we are,” he said.

“You need to start intervening early to close these gaps because it can be too late by the time children go to secondary school.”

Possible solutions already discussed by the organisation include a greater focus on parental involvement from birth with strong support

throughout nursery school years. In primary and secondary school, Mr Maxwell supports close tracking of pupil achievement to ensure that when a pupil begins to lag behind, the signs are caught early.

The opportunity for teachers continually to update their skills throughout their career rather than “going through training

and then resting on their laurels” will also be a focus.

“There is no single magic bullet strategy. To some degree the right sort of practice is already available within our system, but we need to learn better about what is having the greatest impact in addressing this problem and more systematically feed out information

about what works to teachers on the frontline,” said Mr Maxwell.

“That is what we can do really well because we link together the inspection work where we see and evaluate what is happening in schools and feed that back into the development work that is done support schools.”