



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru **The National Assembly for Wales**

Y Pwyllgor Plant a Phobl Ifanc **The Children and Young People Committee**

Dydd Mercher, 27 Chwefror 2013
Wednesday, 27 February 2013

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Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog Rhif 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r Cyfarfod
Motion under Standing Order No. 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the Meeting

Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol **Committee members in attendance**

Angela Burns	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Christine Chapman	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Suzy Davies	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives

Rebecca Evans	Llafur Labour
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Julie Morgan	Llafur Labour
Lynne Neagle	Llafur Labour
Jenny Rathbone	Llafur Labour
Aled Roberts	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Simon Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

Eraill yn bresennol**Others in attendance**

Uwch- arolygydd/Superintendent	Cymdeithas Prif Swyddogion Heddlu Cymru Association of Chief Police Officers Cymru
Liane Bartlett	
Robin Brown	Pennaeth Cynhwysiant Addysgol, Dinas a Sir Abertawe Head of Education Inclusion, City and County of Swansea
Ian James	Cyfarwyddwr Addysg Interim, Dinas a Sir Abertawe Interim Director of Education, City and County of Swansea
Arwyn Thomas	Cyfarwyddwr Cynorthwyol Gwasanaethau Addysg a Chymunedol, Cyngor Sir Ceredigion Assistant Director of Education and Community Services, Ceredigion County Council

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol**National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance**

Ffion Emyr Bourton	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Claire Morris	Clerc Clerk
Sian Thomas	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.16 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.16 a.m.*

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions**

[1] **Christine Chapman:** Good morning and welcome to the Assembly's Children and Young People Committee. I remind Members to turn off any mobile phones or BlackBerrys, because they affect the transmission. We have not had any apologies this morning.

**Ymchwiliad i Bresenoldeb ac Ymddygiad—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth
Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour—Evidence Session**

[2] **Christine Chapman:** The first item on the agenda is the inquiry into attendance and behaviour. This morning, we are going to take evidence from the City and County of Swansea. I welcome our witnesses: Ian James, interim director of education in Swansea, and

Robin Brown, head of education inclusion in Swansea. Thank you for your paper. Members will have read the paper, so if you are happy, we will go straight into questions.

[3] **Mr James:** Sure.

[4] **Christine Chapman:** I will start. You say in your paper that schools are responsible for taking the lead on attendance. Do you have a local-authority-wide strategy on attendance and behaviour?

[5] **Mr James:** Yes. In the paper, it states quite clearly that we see attendance at school as one of the key factors that lead to school improvement and, therefore, we work with the schools to address issues around attendance. As is outlined briefly in the paper, we provide a comprehensive set of data and analysis for schools, which compare their attendance data with similar schools locally, regionally and nationally. At the heart of our work with each school in the authority is an annual dialogue and review of attendance in the school between the education welfare officer and the headteacher and other teachers, if appropriate. That then leads to an annual action plan, which outlines the responsibilities of the school in addressing certain priorities and also indicates the support that the local authority will give to that school in addressing those priorities.

[6] The other part of our support and challenge to schools is the self-evaluation tool, which we have developed and asked schools to use prior to those dialogues in looking at attendance. We run regular updates of good practice through seminars and headteacher meetings. There are examples of where schools have taken specific actions to address particular attendance issues and so on. We are looking at improving attendance and increasing schools' outcomes in terms of school improvement through adopting and rolling out various wellbeing measures in schools. In terms of policy, yes, it is a whole-school approach that we see as important to increasing attendance and we are very satisfied.

[7] **Christine Chapman:** You are obviously monitoring the process, but what if there are schools that are clearly displaying unacceptable levels of attendance? How strong is the monitoring process?

[8] **Mr James:** Those schools that we identify as causing concern with regard to attendance will have the particular focus of our staff, both from the advisory service and the education welfare service. So, there will be a joint visit initially with the school link adviser and the EWO to specifically work through issues with the headteacher and other staff in the school, to say, 'Where are the issues? Looking at the comparative data, you're well below—

[9] **Christine Chapman:** Is it just done once a year? Is that what you said?

[10] **Mr James:** No. All schools receive the visit or the discussion, so every school will have that discussion, but there will be additional visits to those schools that are causing concern relating to attendance, as we would have additional visits and challenges regarding other aspects of the school.

[11] **Mr Brown:** On top of that, the EWOs are in regular contact with their schools, so it fits with a continuum. What Ian has outlined is the core main approach, which is embedded in a school improvement plan. We have an annual discussion around their data with the welfare officer, and the action plan that comes out of that also fits in with the ongoing work of the welfare officer. We try to join that up and, within that, if there are specific issues, we do targeted work to particular schools that are of concern, but that would have come out in our analysis of data and what particular issues we want to address with them. We also monitor the impact of that to see the difference it makes.

[12] **Jenny Rathbone:** You expect each school to have a policy on managing absence. What do you look for when you look at those policies? Do you, for example, expect all schools to have specific policies around calling the house if nobody turns up for school? Can you give us a bit more detail about what your expectations are for schools in terms of managing attendance?

[13] **Mr Brown:** The policy is to try to bring some consistency and a framework to get good or effective practice in place. That is also linked to the monitoring out of that work from the welfare officers in the annual discussion to see what is working in those settings. Swansea has a diversity of schools and areas, like everywhere, and it is about trying to find and generalise the practice that is affecting those different settings. A key part of it also is to demonstrate where that is actually working, which we do through our good practice seminars. In the last one, we picked two schools, a primary and a secondary, that were showing year-on-year improvements in behaviour. That was linked with a clear rationale and approach, which was effectively implementing their policy.

[14] In those seminars, it is clear that it is not just one thing that is done and a head saying it to other heads is always more powerful. It is also more powerful evidencing with their team, to demonstrate how they looked at data, what actions they took and why. It is the story behind the data that is the key bit and why we think these improvements have been made. Both heads have done it in a slightly different way, but there was a common theme: effective leadership with a clear vision as to where they were going on the issue of attendance and how it fits into the wider curriculum, linked into clear management, which is then linked into a clear set of actions that are taken. The first day follow-up is one of those actions. In the secondary school, it is done slightly differently to the primary school. The secondary school has set up a small team that follows that up. Primaries do it in a different way, but that is a key thing, that you follow that through. Everyone would say, 'Oh yes, we do that', but those effective schools keep checking if they are doing it—'Are we doing that every day; is it with every case as we say in our policy, or is it slipping?' So, you see that knitting together of it. They are also monitoring and asking which are the particular year groups where patterns are coming up and whether that is linked to the curriculum or to something in the school.

[15] In some ways, that is the aim of what we are trying to do. The key is to try to get everybody to implement what is effective, and that is the challenge. If you could do that and bottle it, you would be successful. That is one of the ways in which we try to do it. It is not just about policies; it is about effective policies and actions and implementing them so that we can see some impact and then trying to transfer that to all the schools. For those schools where we see that there is a similar situation but they are not making as much progress, we try to back it up to say, 'Well, this is the support and this is a school in our own setting of Swansea that is doing that'.

[16] You received evidence from Estyn and its good practice case study on attendance was one of the schools in Swansea that we used in our last good practice guide. That gives you a summary of the things that it outlines, and it is comprehensive. If you go to its annual awards evening, what strikes you is the ethos of that school. It acknowledges its breadth of learners, including their attendance. You will find the welfare officer there presenting awards in the school. There are pamphlets with the awards. It is woven in with an appreciation of the support of the parents in managing attendance. It links together and has a whole feel that this is a vision with a purpose. It has been implemented coherently.

[17] **Aled Roberts:** Rydych wedi sôn am arweiniad. Rwyf eisiau troi at arweiniad cenedlaethol, i ryw raddau, a gofyn i chi ynghylch polisiau a strategaethau Llywodraeth Cymru. **Aled Roberts:** You have mentioned leadership. I would like to turn to national leadership, in a way, and ask you about the policies and strategies of the Welsh Government. What do you see as the benefits

gweld fel y manteision a'r gwendidau o ran y and weaknesses of the national policies that
 polisiau cenedlaethol sy'n eich cefnogi chi i support your work to improve attendance and
 wella presenoldeb a rheoli ymddygiad o fewn manage behaviour in schools in Swansea?
 ysgolion yn Abertawe?

[18] **Mr Brown:** To pick up on some of the points, I looked at what you have been doing as a committee to see what, in the recent developments from the Welsh Government, is working well and what can be built on. I have drawn out various things that I think that it can do to help and to build on this. The first is that attendance data are used for a variety of purposes and are very important, because you want to see whether you are improving your absolutes, and compare how well you are doing. To be able to do that, you need to be sure of your data, and it is about consistency across the board, particularly with comparisons of all-Wales data. That is increasingly important, because of the consequences of comparisons in inspections of schools and local authorities.

[19] A positive thing is that the all-Wales attendance framework had lots of good things in it. It brought together a whole set of measures and things that should be in place. It also reviewed the coding of attendance. I know that, as an authority, in the local review that we did, we submitted views before it did that about things that could help. It took a lot of those on board. It reviewed the coding and guidance for that, and that has come out and been implemented.

[20] Electronic registration has also enabled it to have a greater view of what is going on, even at school level. When its representatives came out last year for an annual visit to each authority, they used those data to analyse them. It has gone from the high-level data of the authority right down to the school level. With those two things, they have the ability to look at the patterns of coding. It is all right to say that you put out guidance, and I know that we held seminars for our heads and spoke with them, but are you sure that you are always interpreting it in the same way? If you do not interpret it in the same way, your comparisons will not necessarily be on a level playing field. So, I would suggest that it would be helpful to ensure that we have a level playing field and that the Welsh Government uses those data to look for patterns in them, particularly on the coding, namely that it is being implemented as intended, and the assumptions that it draws from that.

[21] Secondly, we had an issue in one of the codings that it could look at, which concerned study leave. In the new codings, it is marked as an authorised absence for a set number of days. We have had some parents contact us to say that they are unhappy that when pupils are coming up to exams and during the exam period, when they are at home, working and revising, it is recorded as an authorised absence. They feel that that is unfair. In answer to queries from headteachers in our area—I think that this was in the evidence that you received from the NAHT and the Association of School and College Leaders—the Welsh Government said that the rationale was that students work better under school supervision. The schools felt that that was not the same for everyone. All that I am saying is that that is an area that could be looked at, because I do not think that it is one that we have bottomed out entirely. Again, it could look at how that is coded.

[22] Thirdly, on the effective practice case studies that Estyn has publicised and so on, I think that that has been a good development. The Welsh Government, as you will see if you look at the all-Wales attendance framework, aimed to try to bring together effective procedures that should go into policies. At the moment, its work going around every authority, which it did last year for the first time, looking at the differences and having a debate with them, must be picking out themes. It sent a letter back to us and to the region about its views. It could beef up some of that by picking up and giving what I would call effective practice case studies to show that they are finding that something works particularly well in a certain area because of A, B and C. Linked to that, they are in a great position, if you

look at particularly tricky areas to get to work effectively, like managed moves between schools. If they are saying that this is working well in certain areas, they are in a great position to draw that out, to have protocols and to say, 'These are exemplars that could work.'

9.30 a.m.

[23] In Swansea, for example, we visited this matter on two or three occasions to try to refresh it and make it work, but the devil is always in the detail and it is always great if you can find out who solved the little problems that can undermine things. For us, one issue on the managed moves is that across our schools—and they are mainly secondary schools—not everyone has vacant places, so you are limited in terms of where you can move youngsters. Even though all of the headteachers may be co-operative, you end up overloading certain schools.

[24] How have other places managed that? We talk about that issue in networks. Furthermore, if you have trial periods in a managed move, what happens if they do not work? Someone has to go back to the school and, if that was part of a particularly emotive exclusion, which was dealt with as a fixed-term exclusion, you then end up with the victims there. Issues come up and people say, 'We cannot take them back', whereas it was all done with good intentions. So, in some ways, that is an example where they could build on the all-Wales attendance framework by building up effective practice case studies to supplement that and develop that further.

[25] Another factor that I wish to raise for your awareness is the shift in resourcing to schools. I am not saying that that is wrong, because that is not my point, but the shift in grants to schools, such as the PDG grant that goes directly to schools, and the protection by local authorities of schools' delegated budgets to keep the focus on that, all come at a cost to the central delegated services. That is how our support services are funded, including, for example, our welfare services and our management of oversight of exclusions and admissions—it all comes out of that budget. Those are the people of whom others ask, 'Why do you not ask this and why do you not do that?' Someone has got to do that work.

[26] At the moment, that shift is putting a lot of pressure on the central staff expected to do that work and that is where savings and efficiencies are made, because everyone looks to do things in a different way. However, it is a drift that needs to be recognised at an early stage, because when it comes to protecting schools for the right reasons—and there are budgets there—and you need to deal with attendance and behaviour, often you need the capacity to deal with those sensitive issues, but it is that capacity that is under threat and pressure. We have reminded our schools of the procedure on exclusions and the management of exclusions. On our linkage with the support in panels to access EOTAS provision, in order to make all of that work, you need capacity and to be joined-up. We work with our schools to ensure that, but we acknowledge that if we cannot do that fast enough and do not have the capacity to do so, then it causes a risk in the system. So, that is in the mix and is important in terms of not only having policies filtered down from national leadership, but of implementing those. That needs to be acknowledged so that we have an effective, coherent approach.

[27] **Aled Roberts:** A oes gwendid hefyd o ran y ffaith bod 22 o bolisiâu unigol o fewn llywodraeth leol ynghylch presenoldeb a rheoli ymddygiad? Pam mae angen 22 gwahanol bolisi? **Aled Roberts:** Is there also a weakness in terms of the fact that there are 22 individual policies at a local authority level in relation to attendance and managing behaviour? Why is there a need for 22 different policies?

[28] **Mr James:** Each local authority will use national guidance and national requirements to inform its policy. Therefore, there would not be fundamentally any great difference between the 22 policies of each local authority. The fact is that each is an entity in its own

right and has to have a policy in respect of various issues, and not just attendance. However, it is essential that the policy of any local authority reflects the local situation and, therefore, there will be differences between the authorities and a need for individual authorities to have that policy. So, as long as there are 22 authorities, there will be 22 policies.

[29] **Angela Burns:** Thank you for your paper. I have a series of questions to ask about attendance. You have answered a few of them already, so I will do a random pick. I will pick up, first of all, on the point that Aled has just made. You talk about the 22 local authorities reflecting on their local situations. Can you give us an overview of the specific challenges facing the City and County of Swansea and, therefore, why you have adopted the methodology that you have?

[30] **Mr Brown:** In the evidence that Estyn gave you, there was a chart about the impact of deprivation. That used to be in the Welsh Government publication on attendance; it is no longer a section. There is a correlation between levels of deprivation and levels of attendance. However, as Estyn rightly points out in its scattergram, schools' performance on attendance varies. Deprivation should never be an excuse, but it is a challenge. Swansea has significant levels of deprivation; on free school meals, we are always around sixteenth or seventeenth. So, when someone comes in and says that they will be No. 1 on attendance, you immediately think that that is a big challenge and ask if it is realistic. It is a challenge to be met and improved on. In many ways, we take that on board. Our approach is to make sure that we motivate other schools when we have identified practice that meets that challenge well.

[31] The two schools we used in our last good practice seminar were schools in areas with a high level of deprivation, at the primary and secondary level. One of them has been inspected by Estyn, as we have seen. One of our challenges is a high level of deprivation. We have a spread of it. How do we meet that challenge and adapt to it? Other points were mentioned about the range of things that are important. It is about working with communities and getting parents on board. Study leave is a different issue but is part of how we fit with that.

[32] Through discussions, we have heard that another element that heads feel is affecting their attendance is families taking holidays in term time. That can also become an excuse, so we had to think about what we were going to do about it. Collectively, we put a task group together to share views, create a set of letters and share an approach to this. We wanted to embed it in the conversation between the head, the school and the family so that it was not just approved, but that parents have to ask, apply and have a debate. It is in there and gives the school an opportunity to say, 'Yes, but do you know the impact that this will have on your child?' It allows them to raise particular issues. We worked with a publicity campaign around that time to try to tackle that on the basis of asking 'What do we think affects our situation? What can we do that is in our control? What can we do to mitigate things?'. We used the data to challenge some of our schools that it was not as big an issue in their school as they were saying, but that it was other factors. In many ways, it is looking at what the local situation is. Ours is one of significant deprivation and significant variation across the area. We are trying to find the principles that work and have an approach that will support and challenge schools.

[33] **Angela Burns:** Is there a significant difference between the reasons for non-attendance in primary and secondary schools? Can you encapsulate quickly what outcomes your programmes have achieved? Have you seen a rapid drop off in non-attendance?

[34] **Mr James:** On the first part of the question, there are common factors between the primary and secondary phases in terms of attendance. Robin has just touched on some of them, such as holidays during school term time and so on. Issues can become more challenging in the secondary phase because young people are approaching and going through adolescence and are questioning, in some cases, the appropriateness of the provision that has

been made for them in secondary school. National policy and our local policy is that we want to ensure that there is an appropriate curriculum for young people in the secondary phase.

[35] **Angela Burns:** Sorry, may I come in there for a second? Perhaps I can rephrase my question slightly: are there students who choose not to attend secondary school who actually attended well in primary school? In other words, by the time they have gone through primary initiatives to get attendance up, are they sorted and therefore moving into secondary school and you have won that battle? Or is it the same cohort with which you are carrying on the battle in secondary school, or are there more students in secondary school who have now become disengaged for whatever reason?

[36] **Mr Brown:** You never crack that at primary level through early intervention and prevention and do not have problems. It is actually a mixed bag. Early work is important to get people into patterns of attendance. So, it is important that we do not want people slipping into patterns of non-attendance. That is why there is early intervention. Across the picture, you get variations. With our welfare officers, during their regular visits and looking at registers, it is not just a matter of looking for who has the lowest attendance. That is part of it, but if someone has dropped from an average of 94% to 86%, it is a matter of asking what is going on and looking at the welfare issues there. So, it is a range of things.

[37] Levels of attendance percentage-wise are slightly lower in secondary schools. As you go up, you will see that it is around 93% for primary attendance and it is slightly lower at secondary. So, clearly, it goes down, but that is not unexpected for the reasons that Ian mentioned. Teenagers tend to vote with their feet. Those at the secondary level, after being in the school system so far, if the curriculum is not there or if it is not worth going to, are older youngsters who make their views known. That is why teaching is never easy. If you have challenging pupils, it is not an easy task. If you go along the continuum to those who either get involved in exclusions or become disengaged, it is not an easy task to engage them. We always value people who can do that well, because we never take that for granted. We have had to adapt and change our range of provision over the years.

[38] As Ian said, schools are looking at their curriculum and looking at the appropriate curriculum. The 14-19 agenda has helped in starting to look at alternatives. We have looked at our education-other-than-at-school range of provision. We developed the EOTAS pathways for years 10 and 11, which link with a range of providers. They remain on the school roll but, where schools have struggled to find enough to manage those—and they might exclude at that point—we want to step in and try to do something slightly different with the curriculum. It is about mentoring and coaching. We have a small team that we have developed around that. With the pathways, we have developed a framework and invited providers to contribute so that we have a range of things to offer. It is offering a fresh start to those youngsters, saying, ‘You are still in school. You are doing this, but we could supplement it with A, B or C. What are your particular interests? What are you going to be involved in?’, and then supporting them into that. It is a matter of finding something that meets that full range. That is something that we have developed. Probably nine years ago, that cohort was coming out with no accreditation. Last year, I think, around 89% came out with some form accreditation. They will not come out with five GCSEs, but these youngsters have dropped off enough. They are now getting back on that; they are now getting something, and we will link that to post-16 education. It is the transition.

[39] So, we work with our NEETs strategy and keep that in touch, because they will be very high risk. Our view is that if you get them engaged again, and if you have them beginning to achieve something, that is then helping them to the next step. We have done simple things. For example, on results day, parents will turn up for the results. You are the parent in the car park waiting for your child to come out. It is that unique experience. We asked, ‘Why don’t we do that with our EOTAS provision?’; so, we do exactly the same. We

use one of our centres; we have everyone turn up on that day. They do not turn up all at the same time at 9 a.m. like you see in your leafy-suburb schools, but we give them the same experience. We give those parents the pleasure of seeing their youngsters coming out with something. We also link in with partners such as careers and support workers. We make sure that we have covered all the small things that help us to try to engage those people in that part of the continuum who have been particularly problematic. That is something that we have developed in Swansea. Edinburgh university has been commissioned to do some research. Someone came down to look at this and were impressed with it. So, I think that it will be in their report. However, it is only a part of it. So, to answer your question, that is the part we have done with the most disengaged, but it is a continuum as to how we do that, because patterns do change and it is about keeping them on board.

9.45 a.m.

[40] I also manage lifelong learning with a very significant work-based learning provider. When I started working with it, I saw that, with adults who are disengaged, it is easier to just prevent people from dropping out, so, it is the same principle.

[41] **Christine Chapman:** I would just remind people that we have a quarter of an hour left and there are some key areas that we need to cover.

[42] **Angela Burns:** Very quickly, given what you have just said, and given how difficult it is to capture these people, how useful is the inclusion of attendance in the school banding data as a driver for change?

[43] **Mr James:** Sorry, is the question about the inclusion of the attendance factor in banding?

[44] **Angela Burns:** That is right. It is—

[45] **Mr James:** So, it is not about the banding system itself.

[46] **Angela Burns:** No.

[47] **Simon Thomas:** We all have views on that.

[48] **Mr James:** Quite. Otherwise—

[49] **Angela Burns:** No, no; it is about including attendance as a measure in the banding data.

[50] **Mr James:** It is a factor that schools are taking note of, because of the impact it has on the banding. Am I making myself clear? So, by including attendance in the banding system, if there is to be a banding system, schools are taking note of it.

[51] **Angela Burns:** So, it is a driver for change.

[52] **Mr James:** It is.

[53] **Angela Burns:** Are you saying that, without it in the banding system, schools would perhaps not focus so much attention on attendance?

[54] **Mr James:** No. I am not saying that schools are focusing on attendance just because of banding. They will take note of attendance in their overall analysis of data—that is, pupil outcomes at any of the four key stages. Coming back to the initial point that I made, schools

will see attendance as part of what will support school improvement and support individual learners to achieve their full potential. That is where they will be coming from, and not from the basis that, in secondary schools, it is a factor with a weighting of a half in the banding system.

[55] **Julie Morgan:** I am going to concentrate on behaviour. What are the main behavioural issues that you face?

[56] **Mr Brown:** With behavioural issues, again, there is a continuum of challenges. In schools, it does not just start by looking at behaviour around permanent and fixed-term exclusions; you want to be embedded in having orderly schools in which pupils feel safe, and where order is kept for the curriculum. What we want to encourage is that schools have appropriate policies in place, which are implemented, that prevent problems and that we have good classroom management around that. We do have challenges in the system and, if you do not have that in place, you move very quickly to exclusions or to schools saying that they cannot engage. So, what we have in support with regard to schools and the challenge of the data—it is a school improvement issue—is to look at their patterns of attendance and challenge if things are out of sync, to make sure that they have the bedrock in place.

[57] **Julie Morgan:** It was behaviour that I was particularly referring to, not attendance. What is the behaviour that you find you have to deal with—what are the challenges with behaviour?

[58] **Mr Brown:** The challenges in behaviour, if you have a look at the statistics around exclusions, are those who are bucking the system, challenging the school rules and not fitting in. Also, those that are particularly difficult—we have these small numbers of cases—are where it involves other pupils who have been victims of that, and their views. It is very easy to come up with a simple solution, but you must always balance all the factors.

[59] We have a small number of issues where you try your best to help a youngster to re-engage, but their actions had an impact on other people, who then say, ‘No, we don’t want them here’. You cannot then just say that they have to go elsewhere; you have to look at the wider package of what is available. Those cases are particularly problematic, and that is why it is about having a range of things there.

[60] **Julie Morgan:** What sort of actions are you talking about?

[61] **Mr Brown:** What we described before regarding the EOTAS pathways is working with people who have become very disengaged, and we have to use that with our most problematic challenging pupils. We have some who have come back from out of county, and some are in the looked-after system, have changed accommodation arrangements, and they come in and are not quite fitting into the school, and there are pupils who have become so disruptive that schools say that they cannot manage them. That has been a key part for us, because it is helping us to engage with something constructive for people who are not wanting to engage in anything—they are at an age where they are not wanting to engage in anything. So, it is about coming in not only with an appropriate curriculum, but a setting of coaching and the support to try to get them engaged. If they are doing that, they cannot be doing the other things that cause disruption. Also, if they are not in school, the behaviour can be linked to getting into the criminal justice system. So it is using things such as that constructively to actually engage them in things and put them on a different path.

[62] **Julie Morgan:** Have you seen a change in the pattern of behaviour over your period working in education?

[63] **Mr Brown:** On changes in patterns of behaviour, people always talk as if everything

was perfect in the past, and it never was. There have always been challenges. One of the challenges is the pressure on schools; their tolerance level changes. That fluctuates—if you look at it over history, that changes. It is about looking at that picture as well. That is why it is about the support and challenges to schools as well. It is not just about asking, ‘Is it that pupils have changed, what is it about the systems? Are schools managing that?’ If you see schools going through particular difficulties, with changes of staff and so on, if the systems break down, and they do not have the bedrock in place, that spills out into behaviour and then it is said, ‘Oh, the youngsters have changed, families are not supporting them’. It is important to keep that in perspective and look at that also. Schools are under tremendous pressures; there are pressures under the inspection regime and all those things, and the results thing. It is about how we keep an inclusive agenda and keep people focusing on that. What is interesting is that, if you look at the good case studies, the schools that manage keep that as a focus and meet that challenge, but it is not easy.

[64] **Julie Morgan:** What about social media and pupils’ use of it? Does that cause any additional issues?

[65] **Mr Brown:** The world moves on, and youngsters have a habit of moving on faster than some others. Social media, and bullying through social media and through text messaging, is something that we came out with advice on very early on. We immediately put out advice to schools about that. It is put into the curriculum. It is like everything: everything just becomes a new thing, and it is about appropriate and inappropriate use of it.

[66] **Julie Morgan:** For my last question, UCAC told us that school staff need general and specific guidance on physical intervention. Has that come up as an issue in your area?

[67] **Mr Brown:** Yes. It is particularly sensitive because, again, you have a range of provision, and we have some very high-risk pupils, like any authority. When you have children who are very challenging—I am not just talking about in our pupil referral units; we have some specialist provision for youngsters with extreme autism—you have high-risk pupils who are not going to be the run of the mill. We have a planned approach and we have an accredited training scheme through the Crisis Prevention Institute. It is a programme of accredited training. We target that at our high-risk places and we have accredited trainers and we renew that. So, that is part of it. However, that fits within our expectation of schools having a range of training. We did have an issue where some schools wanted physical intervention training for all staff. We said, ‘No, you do not do that unless you have all the other things in place’. We are not training people just to move straight to that. It is about good classroom management skills and de-escalation, and what we do then is target those areas where there may well be a high risk of that to make sure we have proper training, and people who do any investigations around that are trained so that they have the context of it. So, again, we do have an approach on that, and it is important to keep an eye on that, because you start doing those things when there is a particular crisis, but you need to keep an eye on having the accredited trainers, and keep a rolling programme and register of people. It takes central capacity to make sure that you are doing that. We take that seriously and see that as an important preventative measure.

[68] **Christine Chapman:** I have a supplementary question from Bethan.

[69] **Bethan Jenkins:** Mae gennyf achos ar hyn o bryd yn ardal Abertawe, fel mae’n digwydd, lle bu nifer fawr o athrawon cyflewni mewn ysgol. Mae hynny wedi creu problemau ymysg y disgyblion gan nad oes unrhyw fath o *continuum* yn y dysgu neu’r athrawon. Gan nad yw athrawon cyflenwi **Bethan Jenkins:** I have a case at the moment in the Swansea area, as it happens, where there has been a large number of supply teachers in a school. That has created problems among the pupils because there is not any kind of continuum in the learning or teachers. Since supply teachers do not usually

gan amlaf yn derbyn hyfforddiant o fewn yr ysgolion penodedig hynny, sut a ydych yn cwmpasu hynny o fewn eich strategaethau, yn enwedig os yw'r athrawon hynny yn dod o asiantaethau penodol lle nad ydynt yn derbyn unrhyw hyfforddiant? Weithiau, nid yw'r athrawon hynny yn gymwys i ddysgu mewn ysgol gynradd, a dylent fod yn dysgu mewn ysgol uwchradd, er enghraifft.

receive training within those specific schools, how do you encompass that within your strategies, particularly if those teachers come from specific agencies where they do not receive any training? Those teachers are sometimes not qualified to teach in a primary school, and should be teaching in a secondary school, for example.

[70] **Christine Chapman:** You do not need to comment on the individual circumstances, just the general principles.

[71] **Mr James:** The training that we provide for teachers is open to supply teachers if they are engaged or employed by one of our schools. So, if it is the case that the supply teacher was on a half-term, term-long or even a two-term contract, because it does vary—you have supply teachers that will be covering for a day or so, because a teacher was unexpectedly taken ill and will be back within a day or two. In a number of cases in schools we would have planned absences for various reasons, such as long-term sickness and so on. The headteacher could nominate those supply teachers to be sent on the training that we provide.

[72] We work with the initial teacher training institutions in Swansea and outside of Swansea, and support the training that those teachers are receiving. A number of those teachers go on to become supply teachers, therefore we are working with the training institutions to provide that basic training, in addition to the training that the higher education institution provides. So, the training is open to some, but not to all—it is not open to everyone that would be on a supply register or signed up with a supply agency.

[73] **Bethan Jenkins:** I just wondered—sorry, Chair, I am indulging this—whether you see that it increases behavioural difficulties in some schools if there is a predominance of supply teachers coming in and that it may unduly affect the classroom activities and the classroom environment.

[74] **Mr James:** There is a danger that that will happen, given that there is a new face. Children and young people will size up the teacher in front of them, shall we say, and, if there is a different teacher in front of them every day, that can be unsettling, irrespective of the attitude that those children take to the teachers in front of them.

[75] It comes back to the point that we have been making that, if the school is focused on meeting the needs of that child or young person, that school should be providing an appropriate support package for supply teachers coming in. Therefore, you will find that the majority of schools will use a given pool of supply teachers whom they know and who they see can work with the children in that particular school. It is very much a school's responsibility to identify and to make sure that those teachers who are going in front of the children on a particular morning or afternoon understand the approach that is being taken to deliver the curriculum and to deliver the learning skills to those children.

[76] **Christine Chapman:** We have only a few minutes left, but Simon wants to come in on this.

[77] **Simon Thomas:** Mae gen i dri chwestiwn byr i chi. Yn gyntaf, a fedrwrch sôn ychydig mwy am symudiadau o dan reolaeth, a sut mae'r rheini yn cael eu defnyddio yn eich awdurdod? Rydych wedi

Simon Thomas: I have three brief questions for you. First, can you say a bit more about managed moves, and how those are used in your authority? You have already referred to them once. How are they used, and what are

cyfeirio atynt unwaith eisoes. Ym mha ffordd the advantages and disadvantages of the
maent yn cael eu defnyddio, a beth yw current system in terms of managed moves?
manteision ac anfanteision y system
bresennol o ran symudiadau o dan reolaeth?

[78] **Mr Brown:** We have looked at this in our authority on various occasions. We make a distinction between a managed move and a fresh start. A fresh start is where everything has broken down, there is a total move to a new school and we move on. Managed moves is a variation of that, which is, if this situation is building up in any particular school, it is for that school to identify it and to say, 'This is heading in this way, what we want is a managed move to another school and for another school to take that on before things have broken down too badly'. It sounds great in theory, but it is about the detail in these things. It comes down to such things as the geography and the practicalities of it.

10.00 a.m.

[79] Our big issue is the availability of spaces in schools. All our heads, when you get them in one room, will agree in principle, because they have come into this because they want to be supportive. Everybody wants fairness, in some ways, and everyone will say, 'Yes, we will do this because we are interested in youngsters.' However, practically, some of our schools cannot take any because they are full, which limits this. Some schools have to take more than others. You reach a tipping point where they will say, 'I have been flexible so far, but I am not getting them all.' So, in some ways, it is just a fact of the system to realise that, but we have to make sure that we use it judiciously. Secondly, it is about having the detail sorted out. If they go, is it a trial period? If so, how long will that period be? What are the criteria?

[80] **Simon Thomas:** Who provides the detail? Is it the schools or do you have a role in that?

[81] **Mr Brown:** We have developed a protocol, developed with schools, to support schools. That is why we are on our third variation; we are always trying to build on that. So, it is done now, but it is then done by the schools in the school system. They will raise it and say, 'We feel that this should be a managed move; we have a protocol and we will follow that'. Schools will do that successfully between themselves. The problem is, if things do not work out well, and you want to go back to the school, if they have been involved in fixed-term exclusions, the school will say, 'With hindsight, we can't take them back'. Under the guidance, you are stuck with that and you cannot change that, because you need a new incident of behaviour. So, it is about the practical detail, and that is why we are interested to see how people can correct that. I think that there is a lot of benefit in it, because you are trying to productively do something for somebody, before you reach total breakdown. That is very much part of our overall view. We looked at our exclusions figures, and we use the phrase 'tackling the issues of exclusions'. So, it is part of the range that we deal with.

[82] **Simon Thomas:** You have talked of schools that are full, so they cannot offer a place for somebody coming in. However, they may have difficulties with behaviour in their schools. So, presumably, at some stage, somebody will move out. So, if there has been a managed move, should that school at least take one back in?

[83] **Mr Brown:** That is part of it. If you could make it work like that, that would really help. However, it does not quite work like that in practice for us because our full schools are the popular schools, and they may well have different criteria for behaviour, but it just does not work out for us to have a quota system. We looked at that sort of thing. Other areas may have that, but it is just a quirk of our geography and numbers. However, that would be a key factor if that could be done.

[84] **Simon Thomas:** Can you inform the committee about what we have been told are unlawful exclusions? SNAP Cymru and the children's commissioner have given us evidence, which has been publicised by the BBC today as it happens, that there are moves where parents are basically told, 'Don't bring your child in for a fortnight', and that that is unlawful as they are not formally recorded as exclusions. We are told that this practice happens and there is evidence that this happens. However, unions tell us that they have never heard of it. What is your experience? Does that happen? How do you deal with that in Swansea?

[85] **Mr Brown:** We regularly challenge and remind schools of the procedures. We have refreshed our guidance to schools on procedures to explain what should be done. We provide the standard letters and we remind people of that. We use our admissions officer to track what is happening, and we insist that schools tell us about admissions so that we can track that. We challenge that by monitoring the patterns. Also, key to this is the delays in being able to get the support packages.

[86] **Simon Thomas:** Yes, for example—[*Inaudible.*]—and something like that.

[87] **Mr Brown:** That is why it is about having effective schools that we try to support with that. However, we also have the EOTAS pathways, which link to a panel system when things are swamped because we have to define the resources. We make sure that there is linking up so that we can get decisions quickly to feed back into that. We try to be preventive. Having read the news story, it seems to be creating some of the delays. It is often difficult. We have seen situations where a family has one view about the situation and what they want to see happening to their child, and the victim has another. You get into those situations, which can result in protracted processes. It is about trying to minimise that. However, we monitor our patterns of exclusions and challenge schools.

[88] **Mr James:** It is also about operating a system whereby we work with schools and encourage them to give us an early warning, encouraging staff in the local authority to talk to us—not necessarily Robin or me—if they are experiencing difficulties with a particular young person or child, so that we can work together to look at appropriate support or packages, rather than leaving it to the point where a response cannot be delivered. So, it is about working with schools, developing the partnership and trust of schools and local authorities, and working in partnership with parents. It is about working together, so that we are addressing the issues, before they become major issues.

[89] **Simon Thomas:** So, it is fair to say that you are aware that this could happen and you would try to nip it in the bud, using the procedures that you have in place.

[90] **Mr James:** Yes.

[91] **Simon Thomas:** I have a final, open question. If there was one thing that you could do in Swansea that could be helped by national policy or any other policy, which could further reduce exclusions, what would it be? Is there something that the Welsh Government should or could do for you?

[92] **Mr Brown:** I would say that one thing in reducing exclusions—I always use the phrase 'tackling exclusions'—is the resourcing. For example, EOTAS pathways service is not cheap. We understand the economic situation, but resourcing and prioritising that is vital. There are new pressures every day and we must prioritise that.

[93] **Simon Thomas:** What you have been describing is staff-intensive.

[94] **Mr Brown:** It is staff-intensive; nothing comes cheaply in this area. It is fundamental

in life that you get what you pay for, and you want to ensure that you use it well. That is crucial, because it is about increased staffing and mentoring, and lower ratios if you are using providers. So, resourcing is one of the crucial issues in this area.

[95] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. Thank you. We now have to draw this session to a close. I thank you both for attending and answering Members' questions. Members wanted to ask you some further questions, so if you are happy for me to do so, I will send those to you and perhaps you could reply in writing.

[96] **Mr Brown:** Yes, of course.

[97] **Christine Chapman:** Thank you for attending. We will send you a transcript of the meeting, so that you can check it for factual accuracy.

[98] **Mr James:** Thank you for the invitation.

[99] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. Thank you. We will now take a short break and reconvene at 10.15 a.m.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10.07 a.m. ac 10.20 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 10.07 a.m. and 10.20 a.m.*

[100] **Christine Chapman:** Welcome back to the committee. I welcome Arwyn Thomas, assistant director of education and community services, Ceredigion County Council. Thank you very much for coming in. Members will have read the paper that you sent to us. If you are happy to do so, we will go straight into to a questioning session.

[101] **Mr Thomas:** Yes. That is fine.

[102] **Christine Chapman:** What has been the main driver for the emphasis that your council has placed on improving pupil attendance and behaviour?

[103] **Mr Thomas:** In 2007, as you see in the information pack, we were the worst placed of Wales's 22 authorities in terms of permanent exclusions and the rate of exclusions, which naturally has an impact on attendance and on pupils' achievement. Also, we were sending too many pupils out of the authority. We are a very inclusive authority; we have no special school. The mantra is that Ceredigion pupils should stay within Ceredigion and that council tax payers' money should be used locally, rather than to educate children outside the authority, and for money from the public sector to stay in the public sector and not go into the private sector. Those were key drivers from members. However, in 2009, when we looked at the notion of inclusiveness across the authority, we made attendance, behaviour, literacy and numeracy priorities and key drivers to move the system forward. Also, historically, as with a lot of authorities, with regard to school improvement, the curriculum, achievement and attainment arm are here and attendance and behaviour are a bit of a cinderella over there—basically, catching the ones who are not succeeding. What we have done is put an integrated team together, and attendance and behaviour are equally as important as the level 2 threshold or core subject indicator. It is about being clear that we want to be a successful authority that has high attendance and excellent behaviour. At the end of the day, these young people will be Ceredigion citizens when they are aged 18 and 16 plus.

[104] **Christine Chapman:** It has obviously been a high priority. We will pick up some of the detail on that now. Other Members will ask you about that.

[105] **Simon Thomas:** Rwy'n datgan **Simon Thomas:** I declare an interest, as my diddordeb, gan fod fy mab yn dal yn yr ysgol son is still in school in Ceredigion. However,

yng Ngheredigion. Fodd bynnag, gan edrych ar y strategaeth genedlaethol, beth ydych yn credu yw cryfderau'r hyn mae Llywodraeth Cymru yn ei wneud i'ch helpu chi yn y gwaith rydych yn ei wneud yng Ngheredigion? Beth yw'r gwendidau, neu'r pethau y byddech eisiau eu gweld yn gwella er mwyn gwella'r cyfraddau presenoldeb a rheoli ymddygiad?

[106] **Mr Thomas:** Mae'r her yn fwy na'r hyn sydd yn y strategaeth. Mae'r her o ddatganoli 85% o'r arian yn gynyddol i ysgolion yn gwanhau'r canol. Pan fyddwch yn sôn am ymddygiad, heb ganol cryf, mae her o ran y plant mwyaf difreintiedig. Rydym eisiau gwella presenoldeb ac ymddygiad ac rydym eisiau codi trothwy lefel 2 a phump TGAU gan gynnwys Cymraeg a Saesneg, ond ni fydd nifer o'r disgyblion hyn yn cael pump TGAU. Felly, mae tensiwn naturiol yn codi ac mae her wirioneddol ar lefel awdurdodau ac ysgolion i wneud yn siŵr bod y disgyblion hyn yn cael eu cyfrif yn rhan o'r gymdeithas addysg. Mae'n rhy hawdd i addysgu'r plant rydym ni'n meddwl fydd yn llwyddo a gwella'n canrannau a symud i fyny drwy'r system fandio ac yn y blaen, ond rydym yn gwahardd llawer. Nid wyf eisiau sôn gormod am y system fandio—nid wyf wedi sôn amdani yn y papur—ond o ran y bandio, mae trothwy lefel 2 yn gyfwerth ag 1 ac mae presenoldeb gyfwerth â 0.5. Felly, yn syth, mae neges yno nad yw presenoldeb mor bwysig. Nid oes sôn am ymddygiad yn y system fandio. Rwy'n gwybod ei fod yn beth cymhleth i fesur, ond os yw llythrennedd a rhifedd ar un llaw a phresenoldeb ac ymddygiad ar y llaw arall yn wir flaenoriaethau cenedlaethol, dylent gael eu cydnabod gyda'r un statws.

[107] Yr her arall yw cau'r bwlch tloidi. Ond ni allwn gael y ddau beth. Rhaid inni roi statws cyfartal i'r disgyblion mwyaf bregus a'r disgyblion y mae eu cyrhaeddiad yn uchel. Nes y bydd hyn yn cael ei wneud yn wastad, i fod yn hollol blaen am y peth, nid yw polisi cenedlaethol yn helpu.

[108] **Simon Thomas:** Gan eich bod wedi codi'r cwestiwn, a ydych wedi gweld unrhyw dystiolaeth hyd yma bod y ffordd y mae'r pethau hynny yn cael eu mesur yn y system fandio yn cael effaith ar y ffordd y mae

looking at the national strategy, what do you think are the strengths of what the Welsh Government is doing in supporting your work in Ceredigion? What do you view as weaknesses or things that you would want to see improved in order to improve the attendance rates and management of behaviour?

Mr Thomas: The challenge is more than that. The challenge of increasingly devolving 85% of funding to schools presents a challenge. When you talk about behaviour, without a strong centre, the most disadvantaged children present a challenge. We want to raise attendance and manage behaviour and we want to raise the threshold of level 2 and five GCSEs, including English and Welsh, but many of these pupils will not get five GCSEs. So a natural tension arises and there is a real challenge at authority and school level to ensure that these pupils are included in the education community. It is too easy to say that we will teach the children who we think will succeed, to improve those percentages and move up through the banding and so on, but the exclusion levels are high. I do not want to talk too much about the banding system—I have not mentioned it in the paper—but in the banding system, level 2 threshold is worth 1 and attendance is worth 0.5. So, there is, straight away, a message being conveyed that attendance is not as important. No mention is made of behaviour in the banding. I know that it is very difficult to measure, but if literacy and numeracy are included on the one hand and attendance and behaviour on the other are true national priorities, they should be acknowledged with the same status.

The other challenge is closing the poverty gap. However, we cannot have both. We need to give equal status to the most vulnerable pupils and the pupils whose attainment is high. Until this is levelled out, to be frank about it, national policy does not help.

Simon Thomas: As you have raised the question, have you seen any evidence to date that how these things are measured in the banding system is having an impact on how schools behave, or on how they prioritise the

ysgolion yn ymddwyn, neu'r ffordd y maent yn blaenoriaethu'r adnoddau sydd ganddynt?

[109] **Mr Thomas:** Mae ysgolion yn gweld, os ydynt yn cynyddu presenoldeb, bod hynny'n cael ei gyfrif yn y bandiau. Er enghraifft, maent yn gallu dadansoddi a dweud, 'Os gallwn symud o'r chwarterel hwn i'r chwarterel hwn, bydd hynny'n ein helpu i symud i fyny lefel yn y bandiau'. Maent yn gweld hynny, ac mae'n eu gyrru.

[110] **Simon Thomas:** Mae'n hawdd gweld bod *input* yn arwain at rywbeth yn y pen draw.

[111] **Mr Thomas:** Gwaith arall sydd wedi bod yn hynod o drawiadol o'r canol yn y fan hon yw bod swyddogion, pan fyddant yn dod i drafod cyfraddau presenoldeb gyda'r awdurdodau, yn mynd drwy bob ysgol yn unigol ac yn ein gosod gyda *statistical neighbours* yn Lloegr. Gan ein bod yn sir sy'n naturiol gystadleuol, mae rhywun eisiau cyrraedd y brig. I'w roi mewn cyd-destun, o edrych ar y siroedd o 1 i 22, dylai Ceredigion fod yn drydydd neu'n bedwerydd o ran y nifer sy'n cael cinio am ddim—rydych yn sôn am Bowys, y Fro, Mynwy ac yna Ceredigion. Dyna'r *rankings*; rydym o gwmpas pedwerydd o ran cinio am ddim. Os ydym yn cyrraedd y pedwerydd safle o ran perfformiad, mae hynny'n ddisgwyliadwy. Felly, os ydym yn perfformio'n well na hynny, rydym yn gwneud yn dda.

[112] Hefyd, yr hyn sydd wedi ein taro yw cymaint yn well roedd siroedd tebyg yn Lloegr yn ei wneud. Mae hynny wedi bod yn agoriad llygad inni, o ran presenoldeb yn y lle cyntaf—nid yw'n wir o ran ymddygiad, ond mae'n wir o ran presenoldeb. Mae hynny wedi ein helpu i godi disgwyliadau yn lleol ac ysgolion i roi'r her ychwanegol. Os ydynt yn gallu ei wneud yn Northumberland neu East Sussex, pam na allwn ei wneud yng Ngheredigion? Felly, mae'r ddeialog honno wedi codi ein disgwyliadau. Dair blynedd yn ôl, 91.8% oedd cyfartaledd presenoldeb y sir orau yng Nghymru. Yna, aethom ni i 92.6%. a chael ein herio o weld bod siroedd yn Lloegr yn cyrraedd 93.5%. Eleni, roedd ein cyfartaledd yn 93.7%, oherwydd ein bod yn codi'r bar yn uwch yn lleol ac yn codi'r her, ac oherwydd bod y prifathrawon yn derbyn

resources that they have?

Mr Thomas: Schools see that, if they improve attendance, it is accounted for within the banding. For example, they can analyse and say, 'If we can move from this quartile to this quartile, that will help us to move up a level in the banding'. They do see it and it does drive them.

Simon Thomas: It is easy to see that an input ultimately leads to something.

Mr Thomas: The other work that has been quite striking from the centre here is that, when officials come to discuss attendance rates with the authorities, they go through each school individually and place us with our statistical neighbours in England. As a county that is naturally competitive, we want to reach the top. To put it in context, looking at the counties from 1 to 22, Ceredigion should be third or fourth in terms of free school meals—you are talking about Powys, the Vale, Monmouthshire and then Ceredigion. Those are the rankings; we are around fourth in terms of free school meals. If we achieve fourth place, that is expected of us. So, if we are performing better than that, we are doing well.

What struck us too was how much better similar counties in England were doing. That has been an eye opener for us, in terms of attendance in the first instance—it is not true in terms of behaviour, but it is true of attendance. That has helped us to raise expectations locally and schools to give that extra challenge. If they can do it in Northumberland or East Sussex, why can we not do it in Ceredigion? So, that dialogue has raised our expectations. Three years ago, the average attendance rate was 91.8% for the best county in Wales. Then, we went to 92.6% and were challenged by seeing that authorities in England were reaching 93.5%. This year, our average was 93.7%, because we were raising the bar locally and raising the challenge, which headteachers accepted. When the banding kicks in, they move

hynny. Pan mae'r bandio yn cicio i mewn, maent yn symud drwy'r bandiau. O'r saith ysgol uwchradd, mae pump ohonynt yn y chwarter uchaf ac mae dwy yn yr ail chwarter. Felly, byddwn yn dadlau bod achos ac effaith.

[113] **Simon Thomas:** Rydym wedi derbyn tystiolaeth, er enghraifft gan yr Athro Ken Reid, mai un o'r pethau sy'n helpu wrth wella presenoldeb yn rhyngwladol—nid wyf yn siŵr am Lloegr—mewn ysgolion o bob math yw ymyrraeth gynnwys gyda theuluoedd. A yw hynny'n ffactor sydd wedi eich helpu chi yng Ngheredigion i wella, ynteu a ydych wedi llwyddo i wella gydag *interventions* eraill?

[114] **Mr Thomas:** Y cam cyntaf yw cael yr ysgolion i dderbyn eu cyfrifoldeb am bob plentyn yn yr ysgol. Yn y pecyn tystiolaeth, rydym wedi rhoi ffurflen hunan arfarnu y mae pob ysgol yn ei llenwi yn flynyddol, gyda system sgorio. Yna, mae gennym swyddogion sy'n mynd allan i gael y drafodaeth honno. Gosod polisi neu strategaeth yw'r darn rhwydd. Y darn anodd yw sicrhau cysondeb, a sicrhau bod pawb yn cynnal hynny.

[115] **Simon Thomas:** Yn eich tystiolaeth, rydych hefyd yn sôn am gytundebau partneriaeth. Ai dyna beth rydych yn sôn amdanynt fan hyn?

[116] **Mr Thomas:** Na.

[117] **Christine Chapman:** Sorry, I will stop you there. There is a sound coming through on the headsets. I think that someone has a mobile phone on. If you do, can you switch it off?

[118] **Mr Thomas:** It is probably me.

[119] **Christine Chapman:** I thought that it might have been, actually. [*Laughter.*] It does affect the sound.

10.30 a.m.

[120] **Simon Thomas:** Yr hyn roeddwn yn ceisio ei ddarganfod oedd sut roeddech yn cael yr ysgolion i gytuno â chi am eu rôl nhw a sut rydych yn gweithio gyda nhw i gyrraedd y nod hwnnw.

[121] **Mr Thomas:** Mae sawl elfen. Mae'r cytundeb partneriaeth yn y testun. Ar dudalen

through the bands. Of our seven secondary schools, five are in the highest quartile and two are in the second quartile. So, I would argue that there is cause and effect there.

Simon Thomas: We have heard evidence, for example from Professor Ken Reid, that one of the things that helps to improve attendance internationally—I am not sure about England—in schools of all kinds is early intervention with families. Is that a factor that has helped you in Ceredigion to improve, or have you succeeded to improve with other interventions?

Mr Thomas: The first step is to get the schools to accept their responsibility for all children in the school. In the evidence pack, we have included a self-evaluation form, which each school fills in on an annual basis, with a scoring system. Then, we have officers who go out to have that discussion. Setting a policy or a strategy is the easy part. The difficult part is ensuring consistency and ensuring that everyone maintains that.

Simon Thomas: In your evidence, you talk about partnership agreements. Is that what you are talking about here?

Mr Thomas: No.

Simon Thomas: What I was trying to see was how you get the schools to agree with you about their role and how you work with them to achieve that.

Mr Thomas: There are many elements. The partnership agreement is in the text. On page

27, mae'r ffurflen sy'n graddio'r elfennau sydd yn y cytundeb partneriaeth, ac elfen o bolisi. Yna, mae pob ysgol yn cael sgôr o ddim i bedwar neu o bump i 10, gan ddefnyddio'r un eirfa ag Estyn, sef, rhagorol, da, digonol ac anfoddhaol. Os trowch i dudalen 28, rydym yn trosglwyddo hynny i fatrics ac rydym yn gosod yr ysgolion yn y matrices. Rydym yn gwneud hynny â phob un o'n gwasanaethau. Ar ddiwedd pob blwyddyn, rydym yn anfon llythyr at gadeirydd y llywodraethwyr a'r pennaeth yn dweud ym mha feysydd y mae'r ysgol yn gwneud yn dda ac ym mha feysydd y mae angen gwella. Os yw presenoldeb yn codi fel rhywbeth annigonol, mae hwnnw'n cael ei roi fel un o'r pethau y mae angen iddynt ei wella. Yna, drwy ein proses lywodraethol, rydym yn gwneud yn siŵr bod presenoldeb ar agenda pob corff llywodraethol bob tymor a bod adroddiad ar hynny hefyd. Mae'r cylch hwnnw yn bwydo i mewn i'r gwaith.

[122] Rydym hefyd yn cael cyfarfodydd busnes gyda'r prifathrawon i drafod pob elfen o'r gwasanaethau unwaith bob hanner tymor. Rydym yn rhoi adroddiadau cyson iddynt am eu sefyllfa. Oherwydd y system fatrics, mae'r swyddogion yn gwybod pa ysgolion i fynd ar eu holau.

[123] I ateb eich cwestiwn penodol, dyna'r system, ond 90% oedd y trothwy i ddechrau. Os mai 90% oedd y norm, byddech yn derbyn ei fod yn foddhaol i blentyn fethu diwrnod bob pythefnos. Nid yw hynny'n dda. Pe bai rhywun sy'n gweithio yma yn methu diwrnod bob pythefnos, byddai rheolwr yn cael sgwrs am hynny'n weddol fuan. Felly, pam fo'r norm hwnnw'n ddigon da yn ein hysgolion? Rydym wedi symud bellach i ddweud nad yw 90% yn dderbyniol. Rydym wedi codi'r trothwy i 92.5%, felly diwrnod bob tair wythnos yw'r trothwy gwaelod rydym yn edrych amdano. Os ydych eisiau gwneud gwahaniaeth i bresenoldeb, mae'n sicr bod angen ymyrraeth gynnar, ond o edrych ar y patrymau, os ydych yn mynd o 92.5% i rywbeth fel 85% ac yn gweithio ar y *cohort* hwnnw, mae'n rhwydd i'w symud—rydym wedi gweld hynny. Yna, mae'r tîm cynhwysiant yn gallu gwneud dau beth: herio'r ysgol i fynd â'r 85% drosodd a delio â'r achosion heriol o fynd ar ôl disgyblion a theuluoedd sy'n anodd eu cyrraedd. Mae

27, you see the form that grades the elements in the partnership agreement and an element of policy. Every school is then scored from zero to four or five to 10, using the same vocabulary as Estyn: excellent, good, adequate and unsatisfactory. If you turn to page 28, we transfer that into a matrix and we place the schools in the matrix. We do that with each of our services. At the end of each year, we send a letter to the chair of governors and the headteacher stating in what fields the school is doing well and where it needs to improve. If attendance comes up as inadequate, that is noted as something that needs to be improved. Then, through our governance process, we ensure that attendance is on the agenda of every governing body every term and that that is reported upon, too. That cycle feeds into the process.

We also have business meetings with headteachers to discuss every element of services every half term. We report back to them regularly on their position. As a result of the matrix system, officers know which schools to pursue.

To answer your specific question, that is the system, but the threshold at the outset was 90%. If 90% was the norm, you would accept that it was satisfactory for a child to miss a day every fortnight. That is not good. If someone working here missed a day every fortnight, their managers would address that quite quickly. Therefore, why is that norm good enough in our schools? We have now moved to say that 90% is no longer acceptable. We have raised the threshold to 92.5%, so a day every three weeks is the baseline that we are looking for. If you want to make a difference to attendance, early intervention is certainly needed, but when looking at the patterns, if you go from 92.5% to something like 85% and work on that cohort, it is easy to move—we have seen that. The inclusion team can then do two things: challenge the school to take the 85% over and then take on the challenging cases of dealing with the hard-to-reach pupils and families. Intensive intervention happens at that level.

gwaith ymyrraeth ddwys yn digwydd ar y lefel honno.

[124] **Julie Morgan:** What you have said about how you have improved is impressive. What are the remaining challenges? What is the main challenge that remains for you to tackle in relation to attendance?

[125] **Mr Thomas:** This year, the challenge will be to sustain it. Locally, we had the most incredible set of viruses and flu from November to February, so we know that we are about 0.4% down from last year already. We have banned anybody from taking any absences. No, seriously, the challenge is now sustainability. We have reached 93.7% in secondary schools and nearly 95% in primary schools. Had you asked us two years ago whether we could achieve those figures, we would have seen them as ambitious targets. Having got there, we are looking to sustain them and for small, incremental differences.

[126] **Julie Morgan:** You probably could not get much higher, given illness and things like that.

[127] **Mr Thomas:** That is the key point. There are individual schools that could improve and we know which ones they are, and there are individual families and children who could improve, and we know who they are, but it is a matter of continually working with them. However, we cannot avoid the general illness that we have had. There is a pretty robust system in place, and it is electronic.

[128] **Julie Morgan:** How effective is the electronic system? Does the whole of Ceredigion have that?

[129] **Mr Thomas:** Yes. We can go into a school and check. For example, we can pinpoint which class has not filled in its register at a particular point during the morning. So, it is pretty sophisticated. If we want to monitor a particular individual, we can do that from base.

[130] **Julie Morgan:** If a register has not been taken, you could get on to them and ask 'Why haven't you taken the register?'

[131] **Mr Thomas:** Hopefully, this will not go into the transcript, but you can put bets on which classes in which schools will be the last ones to fill in the electronic register. [*Laughter.*] You have perennials in every field. [*Interruption.*] However, I did not name anybody.

[132] **Julie Morgan:** In any case, it works.

[133] **Mr Thomas:** Yes. There is accountability and we can pick up the phone. You realise that so-and-so in such-and-such class has not filled their register over the last couple of days. What is the issue? It could be a supply issue; there could be a range of issues, but at least we can monitor what is happening.

[134] **Christine Chapman:** Suzy has a short supplementary question.

[135] **Suzy Davies:** Yes, I have a short question. You said earlier, and Julie mentioned it, that it will be incredibly difficult for you to improve on these results. Are you worried that that might affect your banding next year?

[136] **Mr Thomas:** Not really. The third year of the banding will be quite interesting, because there has been quite a bit of to-ing and fro-ing during this year. So, there will be a real test of how statistically reliable they will be in the third year. There are double, triple and

quadruple whammies in some instances.

[137] **Julie Morgan:** The Welsh Government is giving money to the consortium to help with attendance rates. Have you had any discussion about that?

[138] **Mr Thomas:** Swansea will be the banking authority, but we will be the lead-practitioner authority. That is as far as the conversation has gone.

[139] **Julie Morgan:** I see. That is all you know so far.

[140] **Mr Thomas:** The difficulty with both issues that we are looking at this morning is that you cannot just cherry pick one or two things out of this system. You have to do the whole system, or you will only reap part of the benefit. You have to do the whole and have accountability on different levels. Once you take an accountability strand out, there is pressure either up or down. So, again, it is about having a whole-authority approach, from the director to the smaller schools, the class teacher and the register. It is about everybody working together.

[141] **Jenny Rathbone:** You obviously have an excellent and fully functioning behaviour-support service, doing things that we know from the evidence base are effective, such as the Webster-Stratton programme, assertive discipline, et cetera. Is this service at risk as a result of the increasing devolution of budgets to schools, or are schools collectively signed up to this approach of having an excellent support mechanism for dealing with behaviour?

[142] **Mr Thomas:** I will go back a few steps first. You have heard the phrase ‘early intervention’ bandied around, and we have put a lot of emphasis on training. We have trained over 300 school support staff on behaviour support strategies in primary and secondary schools. The other thing that is key in the secondary schools is that we have what we call *hafan ac encil*, which are seclusion and nurture, which have been fundamental in building capacity, because attendance is a lot to do with nurture. Low-level behaviour problems can be managed by seclusion, so you can then build school capacity to manage those elements. For the really challenging individuals, you need a strong central support service and a flexible alternative curriculum. Without that flexibility and that alternative curriculum, you do not have pathways. Put simply, it is not rocket science. The main reasons why children’s behaviour is challenging is that they find schools, basically, boring; there is nothing there for them. If you look at key stage 3 in particular, you will find that boys and literacy in key stage 3 is a challenge. We have to bring more flexibility into the key stage 3 curriculum, and give them more options. If you keep giving them the same, we can expect the same results, which, again, start at a low level.

[143] When you get to adolescence, you do not want your peers to know that you cannot read. It is that simple. So, you have to give them support, mechanisms and areas where they can succeed. That is the big central challenge. If you are going to be delegating more to schools they will then be expecting to take more and more responsibility. In this instance, who takes the responsibility then for the very vulnerable, the ones who cannot behave, the ones who want to be outside the system, and the people who we want to work really hard to keep them within the system?

[144] We have success stories on individuals who have been very challenging in schools. We have a lad in a pupil referral unit at the moment who, going through key stage 3, was very difficult. We put in a flexible curriculum for him. He is now getting to the end of key stage 4 and he is working very hard in key stage 4 to go back to sixth form. He has been kept within the system. Four years ago he would probably have been permanently excluded. He would have had a minimal curriculum.

[145] We also do not realise that, in the last three years, we have seen reduced youth crime, reduced reoffending, and the age of offending has gone up. It is quite simple really, from our perspective, if they are in school, behaving well, learning, then they are doing things that they should be doing rather than being outside, on the street, doing things that they should not be doing. There is a significant challenge.

[146] **Christine Chapman:** Obviously, we have talked in terms of data-gathering, targets et cetera for attendance behaviour, but is this not something that is integral to teaching anyway? That is, that you identify the individual's needs. Does it always need all of these top-down targets or strategies? Is that not something that is covered by teachers—the profession?

[147] **Mr Thomas:** If it was that simple, why were we where we were in 2007? You can get a culture in some schools. I know, from my previous life, that there are schools—and I can name a few, although I will not name them this morning—where there is such a stringent behaviour policy that after three strikes you are out. The strike could be a high-level strike or a very low-level strike. You also have pupils, because they are disaffected in schools, who will play to that policy. They will look for three strikes because they would prefer the short-term exclusion, playing on the PlayStation at home, to being in lessons at school. This is where we have to be very careful in this area. Unless there is a strong central accountability framework, the most vulnerable are always going to suffer and the ones who do not want to be in the system will be allowed to be outside the system. You might be looking at savings in one area, but there will be a cost to society in other areas.

[148] **Jenny Rathbone:** How are you going to sustain that central direction in the context of devolved budgets?

[149] **Mr Thomas:** It will be extremely challenging. I do not think that people realise, perhaps, that all authorities, by statute, have to educate. If we are going to be devolving more and more, what will we have left then to support the statutory bit that we have centrally? The other challenge is that, by reducing the level of what is done centrally, perhaps there is a danger of going right back to where we started, moving children outside the authority into the private sector to be educated because we still do not have the resource.

10.45 a.m.

[150] So, the local authority budgets must pay for these pupils to be educated. There will be a significant tension there. Once you have devolved the money to schools, they have the perfect right to manage that budget as they see fit. This is where we have a strong partnership with our secondary schools—we have put specific lines in schools' budgets to say that this money is for this area. We have put a line in for a seclusion and nurture unit in each school, so the money has to be spent in those areas and we have consistency across the seven secondary schools. Again, using the same kind of matrix framework, we are challenging schools to see how effectively they are using the budgets as well.

[151] I cannot directly answer your question as to what the future will look like until we have gone through the delegation process. A big challenge for us locally is the amount spent on transport in a rural authority. If we were in Cardiff, that transport budget would easily be part of the whole budget, but we have got to get children from A to B, and from A to B to C in some instances, so unless transport is seen as part of delegation, it puts even more pressure on the central resource.

[152] **Jenny Rathbone:** I think that linked to—

[153] **Christine Chapman:** I will ask you to be brief because we have a quarter of an hour to get through other questions.

[154] **Jenny Rathbone:** Linked to that, though, is the question of how much the fact that you are geographically separate, compared with an urban area, means that it is less likely that schools are thinking that they can exclude and somebody else will pick up the tab? In a city, that is a much—

[155] **Mr Thomas:** It is a culture thing. We were the highest excluders in Wales four years ago. It is not a rural or urban problem, it is a cultural problem. Once you get the culture right, and the accountability right, it does not matter what size the authority, or the level of deprivation or affluence—it is all about culture, responsibility and ownership. Whose children are these? They are Ceredigion children, and if you do not educate them, your colleagues have to educate them. We put all the data in front of the heads, sharing them with the seven heads, so that they all know the score as to what is happening in each other's schools. There is frank and open dialogue. There are no hidden agendas or passing the buck from A to B. It is everybody's problem.

[156] **Rebecca Evans:** I think I am right in saying that Ceredigion has the highest number of home-schooled children in local authorities in Wales. To what extent can your exclusions data be explained by the fact that parents might take their children out of school before things escalate to exclusion? To demonstrate that, has the number of children who are home-schooled in Ceredigion since 2007 increased or decreased?

[157] **Mr Thomas:** The one thing that is good about a rural authority or a small authority is that everybody knows who the next door neighbour is, and that is key. We have a firm grasp, because one of the education welfare officers has the responsibility for monitoring and tracking elective home education children. I was in another authority a few months ago at a conference for elective home education, and it had a number that it was expecting at the conference—I will not quote it, because it would enable you to identify the authority—and when it held the conference, double the expected number turned up. We have a firm grasp of who our home-educated children are, and we know the reasons—we are clear why they are being educated at home.

[158] Going back to the direct question of whether parents have pulled them out of school because they are disenchanted with it, there are examples of individual children being disenchanted, and parents, but it is not to do with exclusion, and that side of things. 'You can be educated at home, or you can be permanently excluded'—that dialogue does not happen because, again, we are back to the previous question: because of the system that we have, we know very clearly where there is tension in each school regarding individuals. We emphasise to schools, as part of the culture, that they should share that with us at a very early stage, because once it starts boiling and it spills over, it can be too far down the road to build bridges. This is why pastoral leaders in our secondary schools and the behaviour support inclusion services work very closely together so that they know the names of potential issues. On a daily basis, there are discussions on how so-and-so is getting on and whether there is an issue or tension there. It is about identifying early and doing something about it, rather than waiting for the problem to spill over.

[159] **Rebecca Evans:** Has there been a change since 2007 in the number of children who are home-schooled?

[160] **Mr Thomas:** The number has gone up and down. It is down this year, but it was up last year. Off the top of my head, I cannot remember the actual number, to be honest with you.

[161] **Rebecca Evans:** We heard this morning in the media from the Children's Commissioner for Wales about illegal, unlawful or unofficial exclusions, however you term

them. Are you aware of that taking place in Ceredigion? We also had some surprising evidence from SNAP Cymru that although officials might think that it does not happen, it is taking place on the ground.

[162] **Mr Thomas:** We are going back to the culture thing again. It is about local services knowing the people who are responsible for behaviour in the secondary schools. You have to remember what we have put into the schools. They have internal seclusions and the pupil referral unit portfolio at key stage 2, key stage 3 and key stage 4. If there is tension there, the school will say, 'This individual has been in our internal seclusion three times; we need to have a conversation'. The conversation takes place and the pupil might spend six weeks to a couple of months in the PRU, is turned round and goes back in. That is the system that we use. Unless you have resources to help schools along the different levels, I can see that happening, but I would be very disappointed if it is happening locally, because we have built a system that is incremental to the needs of the pupils and the schools, and they complement one another.

[163] **Christine Chapman:** I know that other Members want to come in on that provision, which I think is really good, but how would you know if what Rebecca Evans mentioned was happening? If it is down to schools, how would you know as an authority about the illegal exclusions that we have heard evidence of?

[164] **Mr Thomas:** We would expect parents to get in touch.

[165] **Christine Chapman:** So, there would be some indication of that. Lynne, did you want to come in on this point?

[166] **Lynne Neagle:** I want to ask about the specific role of the seclusion and nurture units that you referred to in your evidence. Are you able to say a little bit more about the particular role that they play in delivering in Ceredigion?

[167] **Mr Thomas:** All seven secondary schools have a nurture group. The nurture group covers a range of things, including counselling, because individuals could be feeling fragile, someone might have had a very bad night, something may have happened at home, they may not be feeling up to going to lessons or they may have not been fed in the morning. It goes down to the basics of providing a breakfast for some individuals because they have not been fed. There are others who are not in school uniform, so there is school uniform there. There are also PE kits. It is about all these soft support structures. Something may have happened the day before and the pupil may need to talk it through with someone. Why send someone to a class to create havoc? They can come into the nurture group and do their coursework or homework. So, the group covers a range of things, and it is a very supportive environment and a supportive culture. In some schools, pupils can self-refer, but there also has to be senior management overview to ensure that pupils do not just say, 'I don't fancy going to the next lesson, so I'll drop in'. That has to be managed carefully within each of the schools.

[168] The seclusion centre is what it says it is. It is a room where you go if you misbehave. In the past, pupils who misbehaved would have been sent home for a fixed period of two or three days. There was no learning in that at all for anybody. The only positive was that that individual was offsite for two or three days. It is part of the school partnership and therefore parents are fully aware before any seclusion takes place. They are there for the duration, whether it is for one, two or three days. They are in there doing work from noon to night. Predominantly, for the majority, it is not an experience that they wish to have because they are there during break time and they get their lunches there. It does what it says on the tin: it is seclusion. Once they come out of it, they go back to Hafan for a conversation about what happened, what will happen next time and how they can stop such a situation from reoccurring. Again, it is not a matter of pupils being sent there and then letting them go: there

is a conversation and discussion on how that behaviour can be improved and not repeated. Usually, for the majority, the one-off experience is enough, but there are hardy perennials who are tough enough to go through that system. That is where the PRU comes in to provide further support.

[169] **Lynne Neagle:** It sounds like a fantastic system. You referred to the fact that some children go around and around the system. What do you do to monitor the effectiveness of that for individual pupils?

[170] **Mr Thomas:** The schools are responsible for monitoring progress from the seclusion centre, through Hafan and into the mainstream. If they are coming out of the PRU, we have a peripatetic behaviour support assistant who will go back into the schools with those individuals to undertake an integration programme back into school. It is not a matter of going straight from PRU back into school: it is a gradual integration with a formal meeting at the beginning with clear targets and clear support mechanisms in place. After a period of time, there will be another meeting to review how that reintegration has taken place. Evidence shows that, over time, if you expect somebody's behaviour to improve from A to B without support mechanisms, it dips. Therefore, to sustain pupils' behaviour, you have to put the scaffolding under them to ensure that they can sustain their behaviour. Some pupils have a flexible curriculum by the time they come into key stage 4; some are partly in the PRU and partly in school, and some are wholly in the PRU.

[171] **Lynne Neagle:** I have one final question. I presume that it is quite an expensive system. Is that the case?

[172] **Mr Thomas:** We reconfigured the behaviour support system four years ago. We had three PRUs for key stage 4, and if you look at the top of the triangle of need, all the energy was in the wrong place. We have restructured and recycled that money into the schools, rather than into that higher level there. From a cost basis, it is cost neutral to the authority: it was a matter of recycling what we had previously.

[173] **Aled Roberts:** Pa mor rheolaidd y mae'r cyngor sir yn monitro ansawdd y ddarpariaeth o fewn yr unedau Hafan ac Encil? **Aled Roberts:** How regularly does the county council monitor the quality of the provision in the Hafan and Encil centres?

[174] **Mr Thomas:** Mae'n digwydd fel rhan o'r ymweliadau bugeiliol â'r ysgolion, ond bu inni baratoi adroddiad y llynedd ar sut y mae wedi gweithio yn y saith ysgol. Yr ydym wedi paratoi adroddiad lle roedd ein staff yn edrych ar y ddarpariaeth a beth sydd ynddi. **Mr Thomas:** That happens as part of pastoral visits to schools, but we produced a report last year on how it has worked in the seven schools. We produced a report where our staff looked at the provision and what is included in it.

11.00 a.m.

[175] Hefyd, rydym wedi rhoi holiaduron i blant yn yr ysgolion i weld beth maen nhw'n ei feddwl o'r defnydd o Hafan ac Encil. Felly, mae'r wybodaeth honno gennym ni i'w bwydo yn ôl i'r ysgolion. Cawsom dros 4,000 o holiaduron yn ôl gan y plant yn dweud beth yr oeddent yn ei feddwl am Hafan ac Encil a'u defnydd iddyn nhw yn benodol ac i'r ysgol. **Mr Thomas:** We have also given questionnaires to children in the schools to see what they think of the use of the Hafan and Encil centres. Therefore, we have that information to feed back to the schools. We received over 4,000 questionnaires from children saying what they thought of the Hafan and Encil centres and their use for them specifically and for the school.

[176] Daw hyn â ni yn ôl at y cwestiwn cychwynnol a gawsom y bore yma—hynny yw, mae'n rhaid inni gael cysondeb ar draws y saith ysgol. Mae'n rhaid i bob ysgol ddefnyddio'r ddarpariaeth hon mewn ffordd ychydig yn wahanol i siwtio'r *clientele* sydd ganddynt yn lleol, ond mae'n rhaid i ni wneud yn siŵr bod pawb yn glir ynglŷn â beth yw pwrpas Hafan ac Encil a pha gefnogaeth sydd o'u cwmpas yn sirol. Mae'r ddeialog a'r atebolrwydd yno, oherwydd un peth yw sicrhau bod yr ysgolion yn atebol, ond mae'r ysgolion yn dal y canol yn atebol hefyd, sy'n deg iawn. Os yw'r pot yn berwi efo unigolion, mae disgwyl i ni fedru cefnogi'r ysgolion hynny—nid oes gwerth mewn gosod targedau lefel uchel, fel y dywedodd Christine, o gael dim gwaharddiadau parhaol a lleihau gwaharddiadau, os nad oes gennym yr isadeiledd i gefnogi'r ysgolion hefyd.

That brings us back to the initial question that we had this morning—that is, we have to have consistency across the seven schools. Every school has to use the provision in a slightly different way to suit the clientele that they have locally, but we have to ensure that everyone is clear about the purpose of Hafan and Encil and what support is around them on a county basis. The dialogue and the accountability are there, because it is one thing to ensure that the schools are accountable, but the schools hold the centre to account too, which is very fair. Therefore, if the pot is boiling with individuals, we are expected to be able to support those schools—there is no point setting high-level targets, as Christine said, to say that there will be no permanent exclusions and that we want to reduce exclusions, if we do not have the infrastructure in place to support those schools.

[177] **Christine Chapman:** Thank you, Arwyn. We are going to have to draw this session to a close, but thank you for your evidence. It has been a very interesting session. Members did have other questions, so we will send you those questions so that you can respond in writing, if you are happy with that.

[178] **Mr Thomas:** As long as they are simple.

[179] **Christine Chapman:** We will send you a transcript of the meeting so that you can check it for factual accuracy. Thank you for attending.

11.02 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i Bresenoldeb ac Ymddygiad—Sesiwn Graffu Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour—Scrutiny Session

[180] **Christine Chapman:** We will now take evidence from Superintendent Liane Bartlett, from the Association of Chief Police Officers Cymru. Welcome, Liane, to this morning's session. You provided a paper in advance, which Members will have read, so are you happy for us to move straight into questions?

[181] **Ms Bartlett:** Yes, I am. Thank you, and good morning.

[182] **Christine Chapman:** Good morning. I will start with something that is to do with police involvement in schools. What do you think has been the most successful model of working with which you and the police have been involved that has resulted in improved pupil behaviour in schools?

[183] **Ms Bartlett:** The all-Wales schools core programme is the envy of colleagues across the water—the fact that we are able to access as many schools as we do in a consistent and clear manner. That level of engagement has brought its rewards. Today, I am speaking on behalf of the programme and the Association of Chief Police Officers Cymru. We have recently linked the programme to crime reduction statistics. We have looked to see how that

benefits in terms of reducing the number of first-time entrants into the criminal justice system. In terms of behaviour, it is a long-term aspect around the schools programme, but there is evidence to suggest that that is very positive.

[184] **Angela Burns:** Thank you for paper. I was interested to read about the Pupils Understanding Problems in their Locality scheme and the all-Wales school liaison core programme. These schemes are obviously up and running and successful but, those aside, what barriers do you still encounter, as a police force, to being able to engage with young pupils who are in this situation?

[185] **Ms Bartlett:** For me, there are a few different aspects to this. I will keep this quite succinct for you. In those schools, we are interacting with people who want to be there. The issue is the people who do not want to be there, and that presents problems of its own. There is a plethora of examples of good practice from Families First, community engagement at the local authority level, to the single integrated plans, which have children and young people writ large throughout them. They are the pluses, because we are parochial, to say, 'We know what they are doing, but we are doing this', and that is a difficulty. So, we need to adopt a less parochial attitude, find out what works and layer that up. They are the barriers, really: people's willingness to do everything but the basics.

[186] They are the pluses. The issue for us is to bring that together with a more consistent, sticky glue that binds those good practices together. Having recently spoken to a colleague about this, for me, there is an opportunity throughout the police forces of Wales, together with local commanders and their counterparts at local authority and education levels, to come up with a consistent delivery plan that brings together all of the local good practice. The issue for me is that they are not joined up sufficiently to provide that holistic picture. A school is a community and the neighbourhood policing team members and their local authority colleagues are another community, and they seem to be working in isolation as opposed to being joined up, so there needs to be a better integration of those local services. Does that answer your question?

[187] **Angela Burns:** Yes, it does.

[188] **Aled Roberts:** How dependent are these models on local policing policies? We moved from a neighbourhood policing model in north Wales to a more hub-based system. Is there a danger that that has weakened this programme? At a local level, we moved from the neighbourhood police officers to school liaison officers having the responsibility for individual schools, so the children see it as a relationship with the school officer and not necessarily with the neighbourhood officer whom they come across at, say, 3.30 p.m..

[189] **Ms Bartlett:** You make a good point and, in relation to that, the whole ethos of MOSSS—the model of secondary school support—is designed to bring together the school officer and the neighbourhood policing teams. For example, while that is operating successfully, there has always been a question of who owns whom. Simply, when the schools officers have tried to work more closely with neighbourhoods, they have almost said, 'You need to stop what you're doing and you need to do what we are doing'. Conversely, I have now said, 'No, we need to bring that together, and rather than you trying to adopt a different role, you need to meet in the middle and you need to discuss the children and what is happening in the broader community.' So, there is an operational local issue, but north Wales has a particularly good pilot scheme that we have been running under the all-Wales schools programme, which involves a more holistic, problem-solving approach from schools officers in the schools. There has been a good take-up around early intervention and prevention, safeguarding and parents coming in, having looked at SchoolBeat.org and some of the advice there and contacted schools officers. The issue that you have raised is valid, but it is something that we could iron out during the course of the programme and in how we further

embed that local flavour of problem solving.

[190] **Lynne Neagle:** In practice, how much involvement do the police have with individual children and families in school?

[191] **Ms Bartlett:** That varies. Some schools are very large with a lot of feeder schools; there is little doubt about that. It is about school councils and the whole teaching staff having confidence in the police officers to be able to contact them, and there is good evidence of that. Once the schools officers start working more closely with neighbourhood teams, they can build that resilience back up to get that glue to bind those things together. There is very good evidence—and I know this from personal contact with people—that the schools officers are known quite well by a lot of the pupils, and that is something that we have probably not truly enhanced, thought about or used in a more holistic way. We have almost taken for granted the lovely relationship that has developed, and there is a way of further embracing that and doing more with it.

[192] Schools are large communities, but they do see other schools officers. We could do that through more social networking and on SchoolBeat.org. A lot of schools officers—and this comes from the pilot in north Wales—are holding more surgeries. They cannot be there all the time, because they are out at different schools, so they hold surgeries at times that are appropriate for pupils. Day by day, we are thinking about other ways in which pupils can communicate in a confidential way, should they want to, with schools officers. Those are the types of things that we need to further develop and embed. We need a good-practice handbook for schools officers, to make sure that everyone has minimum standards in engagement.

[193] **Rebecca Evans:** What can be done to improve joint working between agencies to support pupils whose behaviour needs managing?

[194] **Ms Bartlett:** Sorry, I did not catch the last part.

[195] **Rebecca Evans:** What can be done to improve joint working between agencies to support pupils who have behaviour problems, and their families?

[196] **Ms Bartlett:** For me, it hinges on referral and problem solving at a local level. In the past, what has happened in school has stayed in school. School officers very much need to have sessions with their local policing teams. There are multi-agency meetings. So, anti-social behaviour officers, education welfare officers, people from youth access teams, and local, third-sector support, such as Flying Start and that type of organisation, sit down as a multi-agency problem-solving group and discuss who the problem children are to get that lead across. You could have a type of multi-agency risk assessment conference about the children who are starting to show patterns of behaviour and regular absenteeism.

[197] That information could be shared with neighbourhood teams. It would say who is vulnerable and likely to be on the periphery of crime and anti-social behaviour. When the neighbourhood teams are out on patrol and come across the young people on the list, they could do something positive about that, which I would suggest includes them, or their colleagues, considering going to the family. That is the basis for me. If you were to give them a one-off telling off or a sanction, whatever that may be, or say that you need to go to their house and speak to their family, you will not get to the nub of what is the core issue, at a grass-roots level, of that child's different behaviour. We need to know what the pattern is and how it starts. I do not think that that has happened yet. Schools officers have dealt with things in a school way and neighbourhood teams have dealt with things in a neighbourhood way. We have not yet made that link.

[198] Similarly, EWOs sometimes conduct their duties, albeit with the police, looking at absenteeism when parents are out shopping with their children. I am more concerned about the children who are absent without parental involvement and are becoming almost feral. They are the children the EWOs need to target. As those operations develop at a local level, and if they said, for example, that they were doing a truancy operation, I would want to know how they were intending to target it and what their top 10 was. We must prioritise the children we really want to get to, rather than doing a general sweep. We have to target the children that we need to.

[199] **Suzy Davies:** I do not need a long answer to this, but something you said earlier struck me. When you make a decision to speak to families, do you need to take a different approach with looked-after children who may not be placed with their families?

[200] **Ms Bartlett:** Absolutely. That would be considered at referral. First of all, you ask whether they are on the looked-after register. Then, you consider what the best way forward is and whether something would be a barrier. In a little group, in a small huddle, you decide that the schools officer may not be the best person to do it, or that the schools officer could come in plain clothes and you could go together. There needs to be a flexible approach. It is no good having a one-size-fits-all approach. You need that intelligent dialogue to decide who would be the best and how.

[201] 11.15 a.m.

[202] **Rebecca Evans:** Some families might not be keen to have the police on their doorstep, and you might find it difficult to engage with them. How do you get around that for the benefit of children and their attendance at school?

[203] **Ms Bartlett:** To be really frank, it does not happen that often; that is my issue. I do not think that that is happening as often as it should. I have spoken to a couple of people and, as you say, police turning up on doorstep are not always welcomed. I am not sure that we take advantage of the opportunities to engage with parents in other ways, for example, by phone, e-mail, text, or whatever it might be. I think that we must try to develop ourselves and be more intelligent about how we communicate with people, but how many times do we do that? You are right; we have to ask, 'Who are the best people to do this?'.

[204] If you consider older children, you have a multi-agency activity and you call parents in to collect their children, for example, for anti-social behavioural issues or drunkenness, or we turn up on their doorstep and say, 'Sort your children out.' What we might have to ask now is, 'Who are the best people to do this?' To my mind, this is more about education than enforcement. So, we need to have the opportunity, not to frighten parents off, but to engage them and ask whether they are having problems with parenting. I would consider a third sector party in the decision about who goes to the houses. Health and safety issues would always have to be considered in that situation, but they could easily be negated. In every aspect, even in partnership work, this is sometimes a barrier, so, I would ask who the best person is to go along and make that initial contact and, often, to offer an olive branch and say, 'We have got your child; is he or she having problems, or are you having parenting problems, if so, what do you need?'.

[205] After all, we are the police and we tend to go in with very large boots on and tell them what they need to do, which is not always well received. So, we, the police, can take that away and come up with a softer model where that is needed and escalate it as and when the course requires it. Often, that would be welcomed and it is a way to reduce demand on all public services; to ask who the best people are to go, rather than us all going and perhaps causing more offence and harm than we initially intended.

[206] **Christine Chapman:** You have highlighted what you think is the best practice, but what is stopping it from happening? It seems like common sense and a good approach, so where is the resistance to this with other organisations? Why does it not happen more often?

[207] **Ms Bartlett:** A lot of it is down to the busyness of organisations. Organisational strategic objectives are paramount to people. So, in all of our organisations, our purpose is to fulfil that and to do the right thing. Sometimes that gets in the way of actually doing the right thing. I am becoming more of a convert to this point that we need to listen from the bottom up rather than the top down. We need to ask what works locally and replicate that, and develop that local, organic approach. Rather than evidence-based practice, having practice-based evidence is probably more effective. We have been almost reluctant to take on other people's good practice, because it is not our own. That is the barrier to doing good work. Really, the first thing that we must do is adopt what we know works. So, we end up with a level of activity that works and an opportunity to try other things. However, we tend to say, for example, 'This is working in Ceredigion'. We have to ask whether it can work here and try it, then perhaps make a slight alteration and, if it works, let us do it. We all have a tendency, because we are parochial, to say, 'We know what they are doing, but we are doing this', and that is a difficulty. So, we need to adopt a less parochial attitude, find out what works and layer that up. They are the barriers, really: people's willingness to do everything but the basics.

[208] **Aled Roberts:** Os dywedwch fod angen i'r holl asiantaethau gydweithio er mwyn mynd i'r afael â gwraidd y broblem, beth ydych yn ei feddwl o'r syniad o ddirwyo teuluoedd sydd â phroblem ag absenoldeb? Mae fel petai'n mynd yn erbyn yr hyn yr ydych wedi ei ddweud y bore yma.

Aled Roberts: If you are saying that all the agencies need to work together in order to get to the root of the problem, what do you think of the idea of fining families who have a problem with absences? That seems to go against what you have said this morning.

[209] **Ms Bartlett:** Far be it from me to offer a personal opinion, because I am conscious that I am speaking on behalf of the Welsh police forces, but I also speak for a very large element of my work, which covers fixed-penalty tickets for road safety—something in the region of 130,000 tickets are processed. I think that that is great. My issue for young people is that more wealthy families would be quite happy to pay—it is a cut-and-run: 'Thanks very much, ta-ra! Next. I'm busy with my shopping, my social media, my going out', or whatever, and it will not be an issue. Families in a less fortunate financial position may struggle, however. Therefore, unless there is an educational element involved in that for the families—something that gets to the problem and the cause of that behaviour/absenteeism—then it will raise money, but to what end? That is, unless there is something that coerces families into a course of action that asks how they are addressing it, in a similar vein to what you would do on speed awareness courses, where you are asked, 'Do you know about speeding? Do you know what danger you are posing? Are you familiar with *The Highway Code*? How are you going to change your pattern of behaviour?' Unless you have something that tackles the course of conduct, to my mind, it would be a way of raising money, but it may not in the longer term indirectly benefit the children, and I am sure that the intention is to look at how we support the children and young people. I am not sure that we would be doing that if we took a single approach.

[210] **Simon Thomas:** I want to ask about something that you have just mentioned, actually. The similarity with traffic offences would be that you can mitigate the fine by undergoing some education. Government is not consulting on that, but, in your experience, could that work, if that was the application of this? Would it be possible to get the families or the parents to participate in such a scheme?

[211] **Ms Bartlett:** I think that you could try it. I would prefer to try and fail than not to try.

Similarly, I have some colleagues, from a south Wales perspective, who are considering doing exactly that with alcohol. There is little point in just giving people a ticket. They will just say, 'Well, I've come out with £120 tonight; here's my money. Thanks'. When we have tried other interventions, we have found that they prefer to pay the fine, because it is a cut-and-run: 'Here's my money; I'm off', and that is it. It is finished with.

[212] **Simon Thomas:** And the slate gets wiped clean each time.

[213] **Ms Bartlett:** Absolutely, so there is no recourse—'I'll just pay the fine. Have my money and I'm gone'. The whole point, for me, is that we need to inconvenience people. That is the only way—to stop life's constant cycle of busyness. We need to say to people, 'This is going to be an inconvenience, but that inconvenience may make you stop and think and change your course of conduct.' We live such busy 24/7 lifestyles that, if you were to say to me, 'You will have to empty your purse now and give me the money', I would say, 'All right, then—as long as I don't have to come back', and that is the attitude. That is why I think that, yes, it could work, and, while I understand that the Government is not consulting on that particular aspect, for it not to try would be a failure. To try and fail is okay. If we then have the evidence to suggest that this clearly does not work, it can inform us to take a different course of action in any event. However, it is something that is perhaps worthy of consideration.

[214] **Jenny Rathbone:** The witness from Ceredigion talked about the need for a cultural change, and clearly that is needed here in Cardiff, where I represent one of the constituencies. What is the role of the police in enforcing the law? It is an obligation to send your child to school, yet some people seem to think it is an optional extra. What is your role in enforcing the law? Sometimes, schools will have gone out to a house and done all the persuasions, et cetera, but they do not actually have the power to enforce the law.

[215] **Ms Bartlett:** 'A cultural change'—. I think there is a need to reinforce that it is an obligation and that there is a legality behind it. The police obviously conduct their truancy operations with education welfare officers, and they do it in partnership. To my mind, that needs to be far more robust.

[216] **Jenny Rathbone:** So why is it not—[*Inaudible.*]

[217] **Ms Bartlett:** It is because we do it in partnership. Unless you work in partnership, you would just be rounding up gangs of young children. Again, there would be little purpose in doing that unless you did it in partnership to effect a change. It does take place, but perhaps not as often as it should. That stems from the understanding of the cycle that takes place, and that whole continuum from low-level absenteeism to a pattern of absenteeism, to being on the periphery of anti-social behaviour and crime. It is about educating police officers in a different context to say, 'We have a tendency to do what we see in front of us. We have to take a different tack on this now. We need to look at this as a continuum, and we need to start early, making changes in the pattern of behaviour'.

[218] The busyness of police forces does not necessarily deal with that. They deal with the effects. It is the role of the neighbourhood teams and the schools officers to work more closely together. That would certainly be something that I would advocate, and I will do with colleagues who work in the geographical areas, and say, 'We need to do this in a more frequent and practised manner'. That is the only barrier: the volume of work.

[219] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, a police community support officer out on patrol in the community will know where the non-attenders are going to hang out, et cetera. What are the instructions for the PCSOs when they come across a child out of school who is not with a parent? What do they then do?

[220] **Ms Bartlett:** I do not think that there is a clear instruction. I think it is implicit, and that is the issue for me. It is an implicit, 'If you come across something, and you think it is not right'—bear in mind that they do not have the same training, knowledge or powers as police officers, so I think it is implicit. They know that it is not right, and they try to do the best thing they can, but it is about the education that we give them. It is about saying, along this continuum, what you do next. You may take the child back today or something, but that will only solve today's problem. Are you making a referral? Are you discussing this with the neighbourhood team? Is the team speaking about that to colleagues in a periodic young people multi-agency group meeting? As time goes on, there will be a call at a multi-agency meeting: 'We are going to have a truancy operation.' It almost seems plucked out of the air: 'We're going to have one'. That is lovely, but how has that happened? Where is the context? Has it been organised on the evidence base? Why are we doing it? I just want to make sure that it is not something about thinking that we have to do something, but about where the need is and how the response is being developed in an intelligent way.

[221] For the sake of the PCSOs, who do a fantastic job, we need to be very explicit and very clear about what happens, and I do not think that that happens. I am being very frank and honest there. You cannot tell everybody everything. That perhaps goes right back to the initial part of the evidence, which says, 'We think we know what is going on', but do we really? That would certainly be something that I could take away as a very early action, and ask, 'What exactly are we telling them, and are we sure that they know exactly what they should do with that?'

11.30 a.m.

[222] **Christine Chapman:** In terms of a whole community response to this, do you get calls from members of the public to say, 'There's a group of youngsters who perhaps should be in school'? Is that happening enough? Is the importance of attending school seen as an issue for the whole community or not?

[223] **Ms Bartlett:** I do not think that it is, unless those children are causing a nuisance. I go back to life's busyness. It is almost subliminal—'There are children'. I do not think that that matters, and I think that that is the cultural issue. It should be about saying, 'We live in a structured society; we know that children should be in school at specific times.' However, that is sometimes exacerbated by, 'Is this school off today? Is your school on half term? Are you having an INSET day?' There is that confusion, even within our staff. I ask, 'When is half term?', and the response is, 'It's this time for us', and I think, 'Right, okay', because half term is a time when we tend to think, 'It's no good having a meeting at half term, because you're not going to get people there'. However, because that is not clear, that does not help, but I think that a cultural change is required within Wales to cement people's understanding of that level of engagement, and that children should be in school and that parents have an obligation to send their children to school.

[224] **Bethan Jenkins:** Rwyf am ofyn cwestiwn ynglŷn â'r protocol Trechu Trosedd. Rydych wedi defnyddio agweddau adferol ar gyfer plant ifanc mewn 777 o achosion, ond roedd 3,011 ohonynt yn cael eu delio â hwy drwy'r gyfraith. Nid wyf yn gallu gweld cyfeiriad yn eich tystiolaeth at agweddau adferol yr ydych yn eu defnyddio. A allwch ehangu ar beth ydynt? Pam nad ydych yn eu defnyddio ym mhob achos, a pha ymdrech ydych chi yn ei roi i ehangu ar y

Bethan Jenkins: I want to ask a question about the SchoolBeat protocol. You used a restorative approach for young people in 777 cases, but 3,011 were dealt with through the justice system. I cannot see mentioned in your evidence which restorative approaches you use. Can you expand on what those are? Why do you not use those in every case, and what efforts are you putting into expanding these systems, rather than penalising young people who may, as we have just discussed,

systemau hyn, yn hytrach na chosbi pobl ifanc sydd efallai, fel rydym newydd ei drafod, yn cael problemau y tu allan i'r ysgol ac sydd angen help yn fwy nag maent angen cael eu cosbi am yr hyn sy'n digwydd yn eu bywydau? be experiencing problems outside of school and need help rather than being penalised for what is happening in their lives?

[225] **Ms Bartlett:** Thank you for that. [*Laughter.*]

[226] **Bethan Jenkins:** I hope you got it.

[227] **Ms Bartlett:** I did. Quite simply, restorative justice and restorative approaches are different within schools than within the general community. However, that is likely to change. Within schools, the use of SchoolBeat has been developed organically within the school to cover a range of instances. Those instances depend on specific legislation, ages of criminal responsibility and the seriousness of the offences.

[228] The cases where restorative approaches are used have been risk-assessed as ones able to be dealt with in a 'sit down, discuss, mediation' type of approach. Some of the cases where this approach has not been used, and which have therefore entered the criminal justice system, would have been risk-assessed as such according to their seriousness, their repetitive nature, aggravating factors, et cetera. However, there are opportunities to reconsider that. Certain papers and documents have come out now from the Ministry of Justice on looking further at restorative approaches to make sure that we safeguard children—16 to 18-year-olds, for example—so that they have the opportunity to engage in this type of activity. With regard to the approaches used under SchoolBeat in the past, I just want to make sure that they are consistent across all the forces in Wales.

[229] **Bethan Jenkins:** So, at the moment you are saying that the approaches would vary from school to school, are you? I am not clear what types of restorative approaches you would use if they are not those that would be used in the wider criminal justice system. Why, if they were repeat offenders, would they not apply, and not be able to access that? I think that that is what you were saying: they would not access it automatically at this stage. Is that what you want to change?

[230] **Ms Bartlett:** There are a couple of points there, really. The restorative approaches that you were referring to would be the ones in schools. I do not have any particular examples of this, but in the pilot scheme that we did in north Wales—and I am thinking now from memory—there were small instances of bullying. At the very earliest opportunity, children were sat down and spoken to, and there were discussions with them, and a bit of mediation. Teachers were involved and parents were informed. That had not got to a level of criminality, where assaults were taking place et cetera. The SchoolBeat policy is designed to try to deal with what we would probably say were very low-level assaults, where there would be almost an agreement to write those off. Therefore, they did not enter the police statistics for the British crime survey—they were kept out of that—and they did not enter the criminal justice system.

[231] There is a need to ensure a level of consistency. I am sure that, if the national co-ordinator were here now, she would say, 'Yes, there definitely is'. From a policing perspective, I would want to reinforce and check on that.

[232] **Bethan Jenkins:** Why is that not happening, then, if you think that there may not be consistency in the system now?

[233] **Ms Bartlett:** I think that there is consistency, because all of the crime would be dealt

with in exactly the same manner. I would want to check what levels determined people's—what is the word I am looking for?—interpretation of the risks. They would have a matrix to work to, but sometimes it is about going back and saying, 'Is that relevant? Does there need to be another level below that?' Does that make sense?

[234] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am trying to make sense of it, but it is difficult because I have not seen the evidence. If you could perhaps write to us with examples of what you do, that would help.

[235] **Ms Bartlett:** Absolutely.

[236] **Bethan Jenkins:** Time and again we see the punishment approach used as opposed to perhaps the approach of helping and putting a team around the individual. It would help us to understand that.

[237] **Christine Chapman:** Could you send us a note on that?

[238] **Ms Bartlett:** I could, definitely. If I could just give you one example, where you have something like the Swansea Youth Bureau—the youth justice system that operates in the Swansea area—a child is, say, arrested for an offence, they are bailed from police custody, and there is a multi-agency meeting to determine absenteeism, family history, circumstance, et cetera. Even at that stage, there is the ability to say, 'We may not be taking prosecution on this, because we will be doing that whole "What does this look like?" '. That happens already with every youth offending team at every criminal justice opportunity in order to defer young people from the system. So, that happens at that level. In the schools, it also happens. Now, having considered it, I want to make sure that there is that clear line or continuity between both, so that that happens on every occasion. It is a point well raised, and I shall write in with some evidence.

[239] **Bethan Jenkins:** That would be useful.

[240] **Christine Chapman:** Do you have any other points, Bethan? I see that you do not. Jenny, do you have any other questions?

[241] **Jenny Rathbone:** I wanted to come back on this issue of how the law is not being enforced, or is not being enforced consistently. From what you were telling us earlier, do you feel that we need the sort of push on safeguarding children that we had earlier on making tackling domestic violence a higher priority for the police force? We know that, in the past, domestic violence was not even considered a crime, and now it has a very high profile. If you are trying to tell us that there is no consistency of practice by your staff when they find children out of school, then there needs to be. That is not just because children are putting themselves at risk, and they are not getting an education, but because some children are being used to peddle drugs, or being trafficked, along with all sorts of other issues. Anyway, if they are on their own, all sorts of things can happen to them.

[242] **Ms Bartlett:** I agree. I would not sit here and defend a position that I thought was indefensible. I suggest that, as we develop a bit more of an intelligent way of doing our business and making links, there is every opportunity, in my mind, to consider truancy as an element of safeguarding. We have not done that before. You have raised a very good point. I always think of ways to bring forward things that some would consider to be community safety, fluffy-end things into operational policing and things that are really important.

[243] If we take the continuum of looked-after children, children out alone, children who are vulnerable, missing children and children who fall within the safeguarding arena, I would say that truancy is probably one of the very early interventions that we can put into place

robustly with colleagues—I would not want to do this alone. It is a multi-agency issue, but it is an issue that could be flagged up with safeguarding boards. That is a mechanism of saying that, at a lower level, it will go back up onto what is seen as currently a very important agenda, and rightly so. The point you raise is very well made in that this is a link that could be strengthened further in order to look at this in a different context. Truancy is a very early indication of patterns of behaviour that could lead to further danger, but there is this whole ‘What does this really have to do with us?’ attitude—I am not saying that that is the case; it clearly is not. So, I am just wondering whether we could deal with truancy in a more intelligent way. I will write some documents and papers, consult and raise the issue that if we think differently, we might see the significance and that joining the dots could further benefit young people. Dealing with truancy might well prevent the need for safeguarding at a different age.

[244] In terms of enforcing the law, I have colleagues who are probably running around hastily finding out the truancy figures and the operations. I will use those as a platform to take back to the four forces and say that maybe there is an opportunity to revisit this issue with today’s context about whether this is a mechanism of early intervention that we perhaps have not seen in its broadest context.

[245] **Christine Chapman:** If you have any further information in addition to the note, perhaps you could provide us with that information. What you say is quite apt, because one of our earlier witnesses, Professor Ken Reid, who is an expert on attendance, said that truancy is often a cry for help. What you have said has reinforced that. Aled, did you want to come in on this issue?

[246] **Aled Roberts:** Hoffwn symud ymlaen at waharddiadau answyddogol neu anghyfreithlon. Rydym wedi derbyn tystiolaeth, ac mae’r comisiynydd plant wedi gwneud datganiad heddiw, ynghylch y broblem bod rhieni yn cael eu hargymell i gadw plant o’r ysgol cyn iddynt gael eu gwahardd. Mae rhai o’r undebau llafur wedi dweud nad ydynt yn ymwybodol o’r sefyllfa, a chawsom dystiolaeth debyg gan rai o’r swyddogion addysg y bore yma. A ydych yn ymwybodol, o’ch profiad chi fel heddweision, bod hynny’n digwydd? Os yw hynny’n digwydd, beth fyddai’r broses ynghylch yr hyn sy’n cael ei wneud ynglŷn â’r broblem? A ydych yn mynd i’r ysgol, neu a ydych yn codi’r problemau hyn yn y cyfarfodydd amlasiantaethol? Mae’n anodd credu sut mae’r cynghorau hyn yn dweud nad yw’r sefyllfa yn digwydd os ydyw’n digwydd ar lawr gwlad.

Aled Roberts: I want to move on to unofficial or illegal exclusions. We have received evidence, and the children’s commissioner made a statement today, about the problem that it is recommended to parents that they should keep their children away from school before they are excluded. Some trade unions have said that they are not aware of the situation, and we received similar evidence from some of the education officials this morning. Are you aware, from your experience as police officers, that that is happening? If that is happening, what would the process be in terms of what is done to address the problem? Do you go to the school, or do you raise these problems in multi-agency meetings? It is difficult to believe how these councils say that the situation does not take place if it is happening at grass-root level.

11.45 a.m.

[247] **Ms Bartlett:** Again, I do not have a body of evidence that I can refer to, but perhaps I could use some of my personal experience having been a commander in Merthyr Tydfil. These instances are discussed at children and young people’s boards. There will be figures available because, given the children and young people’s boards and plans, this will be documented in every local authority. Obviously, while there is an opportunity with the single integrated plans to bring all these plans together, in a fashion that galvanises and draws

together elements of what were separate plans, we cannot afford to have any of those elements drop off the table.

[248] I cannot for a minute believe that there are no official figures to say that there are x amount of children whose parents have been informed that they should not send their young son or daughter to a school. There must be. If there are none, I would find that strange. It is then a matter of what we do with those young people whose parents are told, ‘Don’t bring your son or daughter to school’. What mechanisms are in place to assess what is happening to those young people during that time? I would imagine that the cycle of the household does not actually change. So, whether the children are in school or not may or may not affect the cycle of that household during that period of time. Are those children then involved in the referral units, or is this a stage before that? Not being completely au fait with this, I have to say that I do not know the answer to that question. To my mind, there seems to be a transitional issue there. First, local authorities surely must have that information, and schools need to be saying, ‘I have told the parents of Aled Roberts not to bring him to school today’. That period of time will surely be documented somewhere, and during that course of time there should be an opportunity to engage with parents to see what is intended for a child during that time. For example, there may be an opportunity for the child to go to another type of social exclusion unit or system. If I cast my mind back, there were one or two programmes running in the Merthyr Tydfil area that allowed one or two hours a week for excluded children to engage.

[249] **Aled Roberts:** These are the ones who have not been excluded and may be creating problems within the school—

[250] **Ms Bartlett:** But parents are told not to—

[251] **Aled Roberts:** We have heard examples—in fact, one of the SNAP Cymru representatives said that she had experience of parents being told before Estyn inspections to keep their children away. The difficulty that we have, as a committee, is that we are being told that some people do not recognise that that is an issue. So, although we have official figures regarding exclusions, we are trying to establish whether there are unofficial exclusions, before the formal proceedings, where parents of children who are perhaps presenting behavioural difficulties, but where there are no support services yet in place, are asked, ‘Until we get them in place can you keep them from here?’ Are you aware of that type of scenario? In your experience in Merthyr, would that have been discussed at a children’s board level?

[252] **Ms Bartlett:** I think that that probably does take place, although I do not have any evidence to suggest that. I think that that is probably the case because it takes time to put the provision in place. There is little doubt about that. If there is some activity taking place in order to present a more favourable picture—if I can put it in those terms—then there must be some attendance statistics around that. If a child is away for a period of time, unless there is a medical reason for that, which should be noted, or if there is another form of absenteeism that is graded, I would be asking, ‘How do we account for these three weeks of absence for this particular child?’

[253] **Aled Roberts:** Would you collate any evidence, as police forces, if you came across these children within communities who were creating problems, and you recognised that they were not in school? In each case, are you establishing whether they have been excluded or whether there has been some kind of informal arrangement where there has been a kind of—wink, wink—‘Keep them away’ scenario?

[254] **Ms Bartlett:** I think that you raise a good point. Sometimes they would say, ‘I am excluded’ and sometimes they would say ‘I am not excluded’. What then needs to happen is

the referral. There needs to be a check and balance when a young person is stopped by an officer or a PCSO. There is a question about whether that young person has been referred and there is an opportunity to cross-reference with schools, the education welfare officer et cetera in order to be able to have that independent check and balance. Why were they not in school? Was it an official exclusion, or was it temporary gardening leave?

[255] **Bethan Jenkins:** To clarify, does that actually happen?

[256] **Ms Bartlett:** No.

[257] **Bethan Jenkins:** Are you saying that you need to go back—

[258] **Ms Bartlett:** It does not happen. You can imagine the number of people. It may happen in pockets, but it is not standard practice. There is an enormous amount of administrative issues with that, but it could be achieved by sitting down in monthly meetings and running through some of the lists. Are there some recurring names on those lists? How has that happened? To say that you would pick up every single child's absenteeism is not feasible, but to say that you could identify a few, or identify a pattern, is feasible and may provide that check and balance. That is certainly a point at which we could say, 'Have you considered making a referral? What does that look like?'.

[259] Some 20 years ago, probably, each time that you had an interaction with a young person you would put in a referral. To be frank, the level of activity within policing and law has vastly expanded and that just would not be feasible today. For example, if I or my colleagues were to stop you three times, or if your name came up three times, I would start to think about doing something. I guess that the other way around that would be dip-sampling, which are unofficial inspections. I think that we call them 'unannounced inspections'. Sometimes, that is the only way to uncover practices and might lead to a more favourable position. As in the case with most organisations, we know well in advance when an inspection is likely to take place, and we are well prepared. So, that does not always give a committee of this nature the evidence that it needs to uncover those practices.

[260] **Christine Chapman:** We have run over our time now. There were a few other questions, but we will write to you, Liane, if you are happy with that.

[261] **Ms Bartlett:** Absolutely.

[262] **Christine Chapman:** I thank you, on behalf of the other Members, for your attendance. It has been a very good session this morning, and there have been some very interesting discussions. We will send you a transcript of the meeting so that you can check it for factual accuracy. Thank you once again for attending.

[263] **Ms Bartlett:** Thank you very much. I shall take those points and transport them into an operational context.

[264] **Christine Chapman:** That would be brilliant. Thank you.

11.54 a.m.

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog Rhif 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r
Cyfarfod**
**Motion under Standing Order No. 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from
the Meeting**

[265] **Christine Chapman:** I move that

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 17.42(vi).

[266] I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 11.54 a.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 11.54 a.m.*