



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

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

Dydd Mercher, 20 Tachwedd 2013
Wednesday, 20 November 2013

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Motion under Standing Order 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
Keith Davies	Llafur Labour
Suzy Davies	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Rebecca Evans	Llafur Labour
Ann Jones	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Chair of the Committee)
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
David Rees	Llafur Labour
Aled Roberts	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Simon Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Trudy Aspinwall	Achub y Plant Save the Children
Mary Powell-Chandler	Achub y Plant Save the Children
Dr Victoria Winckler	Sefydliad Bevan Bevan Foundation

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

Sarah Bartlett	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Marc Wyn Jones	Clerc Clerk
Sian Thomas	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:34.
The meeting began at 09:34.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Ann Jones:** Good morning, everybody, and welcome to the Children and Young People Committee. We have had apologies this morning from Lynne Neagle. There is no substitution. Other than that, I think people will join us later for our evidence session. I remind people of the usual housekeeping rules. Please switch your mobile phones off, as it affects the broadcasting and translation equipment. If you need the translation equipment, channel 1 is for translation from Welsh to English, and channel 0 is the floor language should

you need it for amplification. We do not expect the fire alarm to operate, so, if it does, we shall take our instructions from the ushers and, if it is safe to do so, we will proceed to the Pierhead building, where the assembly point is.

[2] I asked at the start of the last meeting, because it was the start of a new inquiry, but does anyone need to declare anything on the register of Members' interests that they have not already declared? No; that is fine.

09:35

**Ymchwiliad i Ganlyniadau Addysgol Plant o Gartrefi Incwm Isel—Sesiwn
Dystiolaeth 3
Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income
Households—Evidence Session 3**

[3] **Ann Jones:** We are delighted to have with us, for the morning's first session, Victoria Winckler, director of the Bevan Foundation. Welcome, Victoria, and thank you very much for your written evidence. We will go straight into the set of questions that we have. The first set of questions is on the Welsh Government's policy and strategy. David, you are taking those.

[4] **David Rees:** Good morning, and thank you for your paper. In your paper, you state that the Bevan Foundation identified a number of ways in which tackling poverty plans could be strengthened. You identified four of those aspects. The fourth aspect was about making breaking the link between low income and poor-quality public services a high priority, including breaking the link between low income and low educational attainment. Based on that statement, do you think that the Government has done enough to identify in its strategy how to break that link?

[5] **Dr Winckler:** That statement does not suggest that. There is possibly an argument for that, but I will come to that separately. Across the UK, not just in Wales, there is a close relationship between low income and poor educational outcomes. One of the pieces of work that I have been involved in with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has been to think about what a world without poverty, or a world where we no longer have that connection, might look like. It is quite instructive to ask ourselves why schools in disadvantaged areas have such low attainment rates, and whether it is possible to have a position, perhaps many years in the future, where a school in a disadvantaged community has the best results, and where parents are fighting to get their child sent to any number of the schools—I am not going to name names—that have low attainment rates at the moment.

[6] It is making that break that is at the heart of improving educational outcomes for children from low income families. So, that statement in itself was not a criticism of Welsh Government. It is not alone in struggling with that problem.

[7] **David Rees:** Do you believe that the Welsh Government's strategy for tackling poverty released in the summer, 'Building Resilient Communities: Taking Forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan', is the right way forward?

[8] **Dr Winckler:** The refreshed version of the tackling poverty action plan is, in my view, a welcome improvement on the previous version. A study has just been published that commends it very highly compared with other tackling poverty strategies in the UK. That said, I do not think that anyone can rest on their laurels. All forecasts are that poverty will increase quite dramatically. One of the ways in which we have suggested that the plan could be strengthened quite considerably is by understanding much more about the characteristics

of people on low incomes in Wales—not treating them all as a big lump, but understanding that different people are in different positions. For example, a large proportion of people living on low incomes—I cannot remember the figure off the top of my head—are disabled. The kinds of strategies that you might adopt in respect of disabled people and disabled children might be quite different to the strategies that you might adopt for people who are in work but on low pay. So, I think that it is about developing the strategy and nuancing it, becoming more sophisticated and more targeted in the interventions.

[9] **Simon Thomas:** On the broad theme, the recent report of Alan Milburn’s commission, which is a Great Britain report, identified that there had been no significant improvement in the position of children in poverty and from deprived backgrounds in Wales over the last 15 years. Do you agree with the conclusion of that report?

[10] **Dr Winckler:** The evidence is clear that the proportion of children in poverty across the UK has remained virtually static since the early 2000s. That suggests to me that there is probably something in UK public policy, probably around tax and benefits policy, that has not reached children to the extent that it did in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

[11] **Simon Thomas:** We do not quite have tax-varying powers yet, so we cannot particularly pursue that, but I just wanted to get clarity on it.

[12] **David Rees:** We have talked about the low income side of things, and you mentioned that it is actually about low income, not just worklessness. We have looked at the gap in educational attainment; do you see that policies are going more towards improving low attainment generally across the board, rather than focusing on low attainment and the existence of the link with poverty or low income?

[13] **Dr Winckler:** That is an interesting question. I think that the question of any child who does not achieve his or her full potential is one that should be of concern to Government and, indeed, local authorities and governing bodies as well. I think that, where that gap is caused simply because a household has a low income, that is a particular cause of concern, because it means that your background—a child’s parents—shapes the child’s future. I do not know, to be honest, what proportion of low attainment can be attributed to low income. I do not ever think that low income is an excuse: ‘Oh well, they are poor children, so that is okay, then’. I do not think that that is acceptable.

[14] **David Rees:** I have just one final question, Chair. We had discussions with Estyn last week on the question of community schools and how the community benefits of working as a collective can help educational attainment. What is your view on community schools having more involvement in the community, to ensure that the parents, as you say, can help to support children as well?

[15] **Dr Winckler:** Two main ways of improving attainment have been identified by researchers. One is what happens in the school, and the other is what happens outside the school. I think that it is fair to say that most of the academic and policy attention has been on what happens inside the school. It is quite recently that people have started to look at what happens outside the school. If you look at the different elements of what happens outside the school, one of them is the extent to which parents are engaged in their children’s education, whether it involves contact with the school or at home. It is also about the extent to which the wider community is involved with learning.

[16] There is some evidence that parental involvement and engagement of the community improves outcomes in general, although the evidence on improving attainment is not so strong. That is not to say that it does not improve attainment; it is more an issue about those types of interventions not being given enough attention. Those findings are set out in a report

on a big project commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. What is clear from some local examples is that, where you have very active involvement of parents and the community in education, you can get significant improvement, not just in attainment but in behaviour, progression, attendance rates and so on. As I said in my evidence, the problem is that we do not have a good evidence base for knowing exactly what it is of those sorts of things that works.

[17] I just wanted to flag up briefly, if I may, a point about co-operative schools. We have done some work recently with the Co-operative Group that has looked at whether a co-operative ethos, even if not co-operative governance, in a school can improve outcomes. The evidence seems to suggest that it does. Your engagement is not just a bolt on; it is actually embedded in the school. You might have multiple stakeholders on the governing body, for example. There is some evidence suggesting that that can be quite successful.

[18] **Ann Jones:** We will move on to monitoring, targeting and benchmarking. We will start with Aled, then Simon, and I think that David may want to come back in.

[19] **Aled Roberts:** Rwyf eisiau gofyn fy nghwestiwn yn Gymraeg. Rwy'n clywed beth rydych yn ei ddweud ynglŷn â'r strategaethau hyn yn cael eu gweld i fod yn ffafriol yng Nghymru, ond mae un ffigur sy'n eich taro pan rydych yn darllen unrhyw adroddiad. Mae'n ymwneud â'r ffaith bod 50% yn fwy o ddisgyblion o gefndiroedd difreintiedig yn Lloegr yn ennill pump TGAU, gradd A* i C, nag yng Nghymru. Hoffwn ofyn beth yw eich barn chi am y gwahaniaeth hwnnw rhwng Cymru a Lloegr.

Aled Roberts: I will be asking my question in Welsh. I heard what you said about the strategies being seen as favourable in Wales, but there is one figure that strikes you when you read any report. It is to do with the fact that 50% more pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in England have five GCSEs, A* to C, than in Wales. I want to ask you what your opinion is about that difference between Wales and England.

09:45

[20] Hefyd, nid wyf yn siŵr a ydych wedi cael cyfle i weld Atodiad B ein hadroddiad. Mae gwahaniaethau mawr hefyd yng Nghymru, o sir i sir. Dyma'r hyn sy'n fy nharo i: yn sir y Fflint yn y gogledd, mae 33% o blant sy'n cael prydau am ddim yn cyrraedd lefel 2 mewn TGAU, ac eto, i lawr y ffordd yn Wrecsam, mae'r ffigur yn 18%. Beth sy'n gyfrifol am y gwahaniaeth hwnnw, pan rydych yn cymharu cymunedau digon tebyg yn y gogledd-ddwyrain? Mae'r un patrwm i'w weld mewn ardaloedd yn y de-ddwyrain.

I am not sure if you have had an opportunity to see Annex B to our report. There are great differences in Wales, from county to county. This is what strikes me: in Flintshire, in north Wales, 33% of children who have free school meals reach level 2 GCSE, but down the road in Wrexham, it is only 18%. What is responsible for that difference, when you are comparing communities that are quite similar in north-east Wales? The same pattern is to be seen in parts of south-east Wales.

[21] **Dr Winckler:** In terms of the difference from county to county, I have to be honest: I cannot offer an explanation for that. That is a matter of considerable concern. The differences that you highlighted are dramatic. Certainly, that is something that, if I were you, I would want some answers to. I cannot offer an explanation for it. As you said, it is also the case that pupils in England from low-income families are doing better. Again, it is not clear why that is. What I would say is that, when I said earlier that the Welsh strategy had been commended, there is a massive gap between a good strategy and having good implementation on the ground. I do not know whether you are going to go on to ask about some of the targets in the tackling poverty plan, but there are some issues there.

[22] **Aled Roberts:** Roeddwn am ofyn am un o'r targedau hynny, a dweud y gwir. Fel rydych yn dweud, mae'n eithaf hawdd cael strategaeth, a chredaf y dylem gael targedau uchelgeisiol. Fodd bynnag, mae'n rhaid i'r targedau hynny fod yn realistig hefyd, i ryw raddau. Credaf eu bod yn cael eu galw'n '*stretch targets*' yn y Saesneg. Mae un targed sydd wedi fy nharo i. Yn 2012, dim ond 23.4% o blant Cymru a gafodd lefel 2 yng nghyfnod allweddol 4. Fodd bynnag, mae targed y Llywodraeth, o fewn pedair blynedd, yn dweud y dylai'r ffigur hwnnw gynyddu i 37%. A yw hynny'n realistig, o gofio faint o'r targedau hyn a fethwyd yn y gorffennol?

Aled Roberts: I wanted to ask about one of those targets, to be honest. As you have said, it is quite easy to have a strategy, and I think that we should have ambitious targets. However, those targets have to be realistic as well, to a certain extent. I think that they are called '*stretch targets*'. There is one target that has struck me. In 2012, only 23.4% of pupils in Wales achieved level 2 in key stage 4. However, the Government's target, within four years, says that that should increase to 37%. Is that realistic, given how many of these targets have failed to have been reached in the past?

[23] **Dr Winckler:** That is a very good point. I share your points. There are a number of issues here. The first one is: why that target? Is that target the right one? Is it the only one? I suspect that it may be one of the right ones, but that it is by no means the only one. In particular, it is a very short time frame. If you look at the measures, they are all long-term ones. So, that is the first thing: is the target the right one? The second thing is: how on earth have those targets been arrived at? It is not at all clear to me why 37% has been chosen. Why not 39%? Why not 32%? I have no idea. Is it feasible? I do not know. So, I would suggest that there needs to be much more justification for that. Following on from that, is it clear how you are going to achieve that target? How many children is that? Where are they? What needs to be done? At the end of the day, those children are in year 8, are they not? It is either year 7 or year 8. They are the first years in secondary school. What is happening to them that is different to what happened to the 23.4%? I would like to see that broken down much more and have a much more sophisticated and nuanced analysis. Then, I think, the question is this: 'Are the rest of the measures in the tackling poverty programme sufficient to reach that target?' While the measures in the tackling poverty action plan are fine, there is nothing in the list that follows that specifically addresses that target. So, yes, we do have a bit of a mismatch—a disconnect.

[24] **Simon Thomas:** Mae gennyf gwestiwn ar hyd yr un llinellau, a dweud y gwir. Mae'n ymddangos i mi nad oes modd i ni ateb y cwestiynau hyn os na allwn ni ateb y cwestiwn ynglŷn â'r gwahaniaeth sydd rhwng beth mae'r siroedd yn ei wneud. Mae'n iawn cael strategaeth genedlaethol sy'n gallu cyflawni gwyrthiau mewn pedair blynedd, ond os na allwn ddeall pam fod y siroedd eu hunain mor wahanol, yna mae hynny'n darged diystyr, a dweud y gwir.

Simon Thomas: I have a question along the same lines, really. It appears to me that we cannot answer these questions if we cannot answer the question regarding the difference between what the counties are doing. It is fine to have a national strategy that can achieve miracles in four years, but if we cannot understand why the counties themselves are so different, then that is a meaningless target, really.

[25] Rwyf ond am ddeall os oes gennych unrhyw beth mwy i'w ddweud ynglŷn â'r ffaith bod cyrhaeddiad o ran incwm wedi'i fesur gymaint yn well yn Lloegr. Mae hyn yn awgrymu i mi fod ystyriaethau a chymariaethau eraill yn Lloegr sy'n cael effaith ar ddeilliannau; mae'n rhaid nad incwm yn unig sy'n gyfrifol am hyn os yw

I just want to understand whether you have anything further to say on the fact that attainment is measured far better in terms of income in England. This suggests to me that there are other considerations and comparisons in England that have an effect on outcomes; it is not just income that is responsible for this if attainment in England

cyrhaeddiad yn Lloegr gymaint yn well. Beth is so much better. What is the additional yw'r peth ychwanegol sy'n digwydd yn thing that happens in England and what are Lloegr a beth yw'r meincnodau ychwanegol the additional benchmarks that cause the sy'n peri i'r canlyniadau fod cymaint gwell results to be so much better there? Unless we yno? Os na allwn ddeall hynny, ni allwn understand that, we will not be able to wella ein ffigurau yng Nghymru ychwaith. improve our figures in Wales either.

[26] **Dr Winckler:** I think that that is right, but I am not an expert—I said at the outset that I am not an educationalist. There are others who could probably answer that better than me. So, I am sorry, I cannot really answer that, and I do not want to waffle on.

[27] **Simon Thomas:** That is fair enough. We are having an inquiry and these are the lines that we need to follow through. Therefore, in your experience, from more of a policy point of view, if we have these benchmarks but we do not have the steps set out on how to reach these benchmarks, how realistic is it ever going to be that we hit them? Even if we hit the occasional target, we would not understand why we have hit the target, and therefore we will never replicate hitting the target again. Am I being thick here or is this what has been happening?

[28] **Dr Winckler:** A target without a plan to achieve it is wishful thinking.

[29] **Simon Thomas:** Okay. Thank you.

[30] **David Rees:** I think that you highlighted this point. The question is this: what is the purpose of the target? Do you have any views on the type of targets that we should be looking at? Simon pointed to various issues, but we are also talking about free school meals. You mentioned low-income families, whose children may not get free school meals. It is not as straightforward as looking at some of those figures, is it? I am talking about looking at the percentage, how we can improve and what targets and benchmarks we will need to get.

[31] **Dr Winckler:** Absolutely, it seems to me that you have your target, which has to be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and so forth. Then you need benchmarks and you need to be very clear about what you have to do to achieve that target. How many children are we talking about? What do we know is effective for improving those children's attainment? It might well be that that is somewhere in the Welsh Government's interest and not in the plan. I do not know, but it seems to me that that kind of really focused intervention is what is needed.

[32] **David Rees:** As part of your work for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, have you looked at that issue?

[33] **Dr Winckler:** Not yet, no, but it is in our work programme.

[34] **Aled Roberts:** Do you have any overall view on the Communities First match funding, which was given within geographical areas, and how decisions regarding the use of that funding have been made, whether they have been made locally or whether they have been subject to quite rigid national guidance?

[35] **Dr Winckler:** I do not know.

[36] **Ann Jones:** We will move on to Rebecca and parental engagement.

[37] **Rebecca Evans:** Taking you back to your previous answer to David Rees, I was wondering whether you could give us successful examples of where schools have engaged with parents of disadvantaged children, and perhaps outline what you see as the major barriers to that taking place.

[38] **Dr Winckler:** The example that I know best—and if you have not done so already, there is an enormous amount to be learned from it—is in Glyncoch near Pontypridd, where the People and Work Unit, which is an educational research centre that does action on the ground, has worked very closely with the residents association and with Communities First there in a long-term programme around improving children’s educational attainment. One of the key things that they have done is parental engagement. It has employed people in the community to work with the school, and people in the school to work with the community. It has found that the barriers to be broken down have been immense. There have been barriers within the school in terms of not welcoming parents in the early days, and seeing parents as something on the other side of the school gate rather than people with resources to bring, to offer and to share, and as partners in their children’s learning. Also, parents have had to overcome sometimes quite long-standing antipathy to learning and schools—a lot of them hated school and could not get away quick enough—to see that it does not have to be like that. Some of the things that the People and Work Unit has done have been very practical; they have been around managing the transition to high school, taking children for visits, developing transition programmes, developing learning in the school, and developing non-school activities in the school. It is really exciting stuff, and even then, the time that it has taken to improve children’s attainment has been lengthy. This is not a short-term quick fix.

[39] **Rebecca Evans:** Do you know whether those people who are employed in the community and at school are there as part of the pupil deprivation grant?

[40] **Dr Winckler:** No, this has been going on for some time, and it used funding from the Rank Foundation and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

[41] **Rebecca Evans:** To what extent is communication a barrier for parents engaging with schools? For example, the use of new technologies might not be available to everyone, some parents may not be able to read, or English and Welsh might not be their first language.

[42] **Dr Winckler:** I am not aware of any research that has been done on that, but there is certainly a mismatch between the way in which schools communicate with parents and parents’ own preferences. I think that the literacy point is particularly important. We know what high levels of illiteracy there are in the adult population. Anecdotally, my own experience of the notes that come home from school is that they are not always the easiest to read. However, I am not aware of evidence on that, sorry.

[43] **Rebecca Evans:** Professor Egan told us that parental engagement is the way to bring about the step change that is needed to close the attainment gap. What I understand from what you have said is that there is not actually an evidence base for that yet. Are you aware of any research that is taking place in that field?

[44] **Dr Winckler:** The Joseph Rowntree Foundation did a huge programme reviewing all of the evidence on what it calls its attitudes, aspirations and behaviours programme. What came out of that was that there was not much evidence; however, whatever evidence there was did point to parental engagement being a factor. We found in our work with the educational poverty network—we simply facilitate meetings and bring speakers and schools together—that there is a huge appetite to know what works. Lots of schools are trying out different things and they like talking to each other, saying things like, ‘That worked for me, but it did not work for them’ and so on, but they want more firm evidence on such statements as, ‘This is a good idea’, ‘This isn’t a good idea’, ‘We know that this doesn’t work from best practice’, and ‘We’re doing our best, but we’re not in a position to give that’. So, there is an appetite out there to know more.

[45] **Rebecca Evans:** Are there international examples that we could learn from?

[46] **Dr Winckler:** I do not know, sorry.

[47] **Ann Jones:** Do you wish to come in on this, Simon?

10:00

[48] **Simon Thomas:** I just want to go back to Glyncoch. I understand that you say that it has taken a considerable period of time, and we can understand why, but has there been a measurable improvement in attainment among children from that primary school?

[49] **Dr Winckler:** My understanding, and I would like to check this, please, is that the main, early improvements were softer measures in terms of attendance and—

[50] **Simon Thomas:** So, we are talking attendance and behaviour, mainly.

[51] **Dr Winckler:** Yes. My understanding is that there has also been a small increase in attainment as well. These things take time to work through. If your work is with 8 to 10-year-olds, you are looking at seven or eight years before it filters through.

[52] **Simon Thomas:** I accept that point. I just think that it is important—we understand that there is a link, and the evidence is there for the Government to have the confidence or the courage, if necessary, to continue with programmes even though they are not showing any immediate effect. However, we need the evidence that they are going to have some sort of effect.

[53] **Dr Winckler:** Yes, they certainly have—there is proof that those sorts of interventions improve other outcomes, and those other outcomes in themselves are desirable. It is just the attainment one—there is not yet, as I understand it, the hard evidence.

[54] **David Rees:** I just want to go back to one thing. Aled Roberts mentioned Communities First earlier in the questioning, and I wanted to ask whether the Bevan Foundation has looked at the role of Communities First programmes in improving literacy in adults. That will be crucial to engagement.

[55] **Dr Winckler:** Unfortunately, no. The nature of our funding means that we follow the cash, and we have not had cash to do that, sorry.

[56] **David Rees:** I will not ask my next question, then. [*Laughter.*]

[57] **Ann Jones:** We will move on to Angela and the costs associated with education.

[58] **Angela Burns:** Thank you very much for your paper, Victoria. I just wanted to look at this from a child's viewpoint. I was really surprised about the commentary on the report of the child poverty task group, and the fact that a number of children aged between 6 and 26 saw primary and secondary schools as expensive and elitist. I found that interesting, because you normally need a benchmark to judge whether something is good or bad, and a school is a school. I wondered whether you could just expand on that a little for us.

[59] **Dr Winckler:** The work that we did with Save the Children Fund, which goes back some years, actually identified that children do not have a free education. There are all sorts of costs that are either expected or asked of parents, from uniforms to text books to school trips to photos, the chocolate catalogue and all those other things where moral pressure is put on parents. I was not involved with the child poverty task group, so I am not aware of how that statement was arrived at, sorry.

[60] **Angela Burns:** May I just add, as the parent of two primary school children, that I could not agree with you more. It is not just that, it is the, 'Oh, we're doing an eco day today; could you put a pound in?' It must be very difficult, and if you have three or four children all at the same school, I can really see that.

[61] You also go on in your report to talk about some of the unseen things that people do not think about, but which I know we have tackled before in this committee, for example children feeling very uneasy about not wearing the right school uniform. There is an enormous amount of peer pressure if you do not have the right trainers, or if you do not have your hair the right way. I just wonder whether you might be able to expand on that a bit more.

[62] **Dr Winckler:** Again, the work that we did with Save the Children a little while ago, which I am sure that it could update you on, highlighted exactly that point. That is why we recommended a very simple, low-cost uniform that parents could buy in supermarkets and not have to go to expensive blazer shops. If the school wanted logos or badges, they could be sewn on, like Scout and Guide badges. I think that that is more common in primary schools. It has certainly not been widely adopted, as far as I am aware, in secondary schools. Parents are under huge pressure. I was reading on the train on the way here a report about siblings and parents coming to school breakfast clubs so that they can have a meal. The delays that people are getting with their social security benefits, and the uncertainty around wages with things like zero-hour contracts, make it very difficult. So, with anything that we identified five years ago, there is no reason to believe that it has disappeared and every reason to think that the issues have increased.

[63] **Angela Burns:** Do you think that schools are paying enough attention to this? The reason that I ask is that I have been present in some of the big secondary schools when pupils have been ripped to shreds because they do not have clean clothes or they are not wearing the appropriate jumper, and you hear the voice coming back, saying, 'Well, I haven't got it, sir', or, 'It's in the wash and I've only got the one'. I have seen schools send a child home for not wearing the right jumper. I just wondered whether you could perhaps expand on that and on what we can do to teachers and heads to make them understand this situation.

[64] **Dr Winckler:** My own experience and anecdotes from other parents are exactly that—I find it unbelievable myself, but never mind. I am not aware that there has been research on that. I think that you are absolutely right: there is a lack of understanding in schools, not just about the low incomes that many families live on, but the unpredictability of incomes as well, and the pressure of having to find a lump sum of money, not just for one child, but for several children. Regarding the consequences of that for household budgeting, my instinct and my anecdotal experience is that there is real pressure there.

[65] **Angela Burns:** Is the Welsh Government doing anything at all in terms of guidance to try to change some of these views or to ameliorate this in any way?

[66] **Dr Winckler:** I am not aware of anything, no.

[67] **Angela Burns:** Shall I just move on to free school meals? They are connected.

[68] **Ann Jones:** Yes, please.

[69] **Angela Burns:** I read with interest the commentary in your report about the fact that you felt that free school meals were not the best measure of poverty, and that universal credit might be able to give a better benchmark. Could I ask you to expand on that little bit more?

[70] **Dr Winckler:** I think that free school meals are hugely problematic. I understand

why they are used, because they are very easy to measure. However, about 17% of children currently receive free school meals, whereas we know that the child poverty rate is around 30%. The difficulty is that eligibility for free school meals is mostly based on out-of-work benefits. So, parents who are on low incomes but who are in work are not eligible for free school meals for their children. Therefore, they are not being picked up as a measure of school poverty, if you like. That is a real issue, because it means that when you look at the educational attainment of free-school-meals children, what you are looking at is the educational attainment of, for the most part, children from workless families. It might even be a product of worklessness; we just do not know. It means that parents who are working but who are on very low incomes miss out on a whole lot, as well as having to pay for school dinners. It also means that we are under-counting the numbers, and it possibly means that resources are not being targeted in quite the right way.

[71] That said, I do not know what the alternative is in the short term. As we move into universal credit, that distinction between working and non-working will mostly go, and I think that there is an opportunity to adjust the eligibility criteria for free school meals.

[72] **Angela Burns:** I do not know much about the availability of the data. I know that this is something that we have raised queries about here: when free school meals go, how will we be able to make the transition? So much of Welsh Government policy is predicated on whether you are in receipt of free school meals or not. Of course, you make the point that some 3%—

[73] **Dr Winckler:** Plus under-claiming.

[74] **Angela Burns:** Will we be able to access those data, and do you think that the Welsh Government will be able to make that step change of removing free school meals as the benchmark and putting in universal credit? This may not be it, but I just do not know how the system works.

[75] **Dr Winckler:** The system works, as I understand it, because—and this is why it is a useful measure—the claim is attached to the child. So, you know that when the parent claims free school meals from the local authority, that child has a label on them as a free-school-meals child, and you therefore know that at least that family's income is below the threshold. When that goes, there is no other way of knowing, unless you ask the child's parents, what their income is, and nobody wants to do that. I do not have an answer to that, I am sorry. It is very difficult, and some work needs to be done on it pretty quickly.

[76] **Angela Burns:** I would like to ask one last question, which is about the stigma of claiming free school meals. I know that we have, in previous years, taken evidence that that is there. However, on my travels around secondary schools and primary schools in Wales, I have never seen a child have to give in a label or a ticket, or stand in a different queue because they receive free school meals. So, do you think that that might be a bit of an urban myth that has now been disposed of? Have the systems caught up, or are there still areas where children in receipt of free school meals have to have a label on them somewhere in order to be identified?

[77] **Dr Winckler:** Schools have made an effort to make free-school-meals children less identifiable. They still know, a lot of them, in my experience, but it is not an issue. Certainly, in schools where there are large proportions of children claiming, it is just how it is. However, the real issue is in schools where there are not as many claimants and it is less common. I feel that I am saying this too often, but we just do not know what the position is, I am sorry.

[78] **Angela Burns:** Where is the leak? I honestly cannot believe that a couple of nine-year-olds are standing in the playgrounds, saying, 'Who pays for your school meals, then?'

So, how do these children get labelled? Is it the children who talk among themselves, or is it the school being a bit casual with how they identify them?

[79] **Dr Winckler:** I do not know. In secondary school, they talk. This is just anecdotal evidence from my own children, but they have to put money in a machine to top up their lunch cards, and the children on free school meals do not. I do not know how it works in other schools. Certainly, post-16, they know who is getting the education maintenance allowance and who is not, because they know who has a bit more cash, and they talk.

[80] **Angela Burns:** Thanks for the information.

[81] **Ann Jones:** Simon has a point, and then we will bring in Aled on this issue.

[82] **Simon Thomas:** I would like to ask a couple of questions, if I may. Children talk, in my experience; that is half of it. However, I would like to go back to free school meals being a designator of worklessness, and then there is the extra layer of low income before we get into, if you like, the more—well, I do not know what you would call the rest. Do we have any evidence on the difference between the free school meals band and the low-income band, or are we tending to pile them all together?

[83] **Dr Winckler:** The only evidence that I am aware of is the distinction between free school meals and not free school meals.

[84] **Simon Thomas:** Okay. I would just like to follow that up. Going forward, it is very clear that free school meals are only a proxy anyway. They are used because they are properly identifiable and robust in those terms. Even the slight 3% is quite a low non-take-up, in benefit terms. So, what is your view on the fact that the Welsh Government is waiting for universal benefit to redesign its anti-poverty systems, rather than doing some qualitative work now on what might be a Welsh indicator for low income that might be more useful in the long term for policy making in Wales?

[85] **Dr Winckler:** It would be very helpful to be doing some work on that now. I do not think that that would be easy, because a lot of the data are held elsewhere. However, it would be helpful in understanding more what the determinants of attainment are and what the link is in order then to try to break that link. Yes, that would be helpful.

[86] **Aled Roberts:** The Department for Education in England has set up a working group to deal with an alternative measure to free school meals. Are you aware of whether that group has reported at all, and whether there has been any Welsh Government input?

[87] **Dr Winckler:** I am sorry, I do not know about that.

[88] **Ann Jones:** Okay. We will move on to the curriculum review.

10:15

[89] We have some issues—I know that you are not an educationalist, but I think that they are general issues. Keith?

[90] **Keith Davies:** Byddaf yn gofyn fy nghwestiwn yn y Gymraeg. Bore da i chi. Y cwestiwn yw—cwestiwn sylfaenol, rwyf yn credu—a yw'r cwricwlwm presennol yn effeithio ar y ffordd y mae plant o aelwydydd incwm isel yn ymdopi? A oes angen newid
Keith Davies: I will ask my question in Welsh. Good morning to you. The question is—a fundamental question, I think—does the current curriculum impact on the way in which children from low-income households cope? Do we need to change things? Do you

pethau? A oes gennych chi unrhyw have any information on that?
wybodaeth ar y mater hwnnw?

[91] **Dr Winckler:** I have put in evidence that, during the course of the work that we have done on other issues, many times people have made comments about the curriculum not necessarily being the best fit for children from low-income families. I am sure that there is a vast body of work. Those comments fall into a number of areas. The first of these is that the curriculum—or, rather, the way that it is delivered in schools—makes assumptions about the resources and experiences of children at home. There are assumptions, for example, about having a computer or a printer available, and that you can print your homework and take it to school; or that you are able to provide ingredients for a home economics class. There are loads of things that are assumed, perhaps without an understanding that the child might not have those resources, or might be unwilling to reveal the lack of resources in their home. It is that dreaded ‘What did you do in your holidays?’ question. That is where the differences in where children went and how much it cost come out. So, there are issues like that.

[92] There are also issues about whether some life skills—for want of a better word—that are not necessarily taught in schools, could be taught, for example, around financial capability, around job search and around understanding the job market. I certainly think that there are questions around the careers advice and awareness given to children, particularly in secondary school. This is just anecdotal, but I have seen for myself the very limited opportunities that are available for children in areas that themselves have limited job opportunities. So, the idea that you might go and do a placement in a law firm or in a media business is just not in the frame. It is admin, retail and care.

[93] **Keith Davies:** Byddaf yn siarad eto yn y Gymraeg. Ar bwyllgor arall yr wyf yn aelod ohono, rydym yn edrych ar brentisiaethau. Mae'n amlwg, pan fyddwch chi'n siarad â phobl ifanc, nad ydynt wedi cael unrhyw gefnogaeth yn yr ysgol. Maen nhw'n gorfod dewis y pynciau y byddant yn eu dilyn ym mlwyddyn 10 ac 11, ond nid oes neb yn trafod pethau fel swyddi a phrentisiaethau â nhw. Dyna'r dystiolaeth yr oeddem wedi ei chael.

Keith Davies: I will speak again in Welsh. In another committee on which I sit, we are looking at apprenticeships. It is evident when you talk to young people that they have not had any support at school. They have to choose the subjects that they will pursue in years 10 and 11, but nobody is discussing things like jobs and apprenticeships with them. That was the evidence that we had.

[94] **Dr Winckler:** Yes, absolutely. The research that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation did found that there was no difference in aspirations between children from low-income families and high-income families. This is not about wanting to be footballers and models. They had reasonable aspirations about being police officers, nurses, teachers, and those kinds of roles. The big difference was that children from low-income families did not know how to get there. So, they took decisions very early in their school lives—either about not paying attention and not working hard, or by choosing the wrong mix of subjects. For example, they chose to do combined science rather than the single sciences, not realising that that choice for GCSE closed doors and that, if they wanted to be a doctor or a vet, that was the wrong choice. They were not getting that advice. You are absolutely right.

[95] **Keith Davies:** Mae'n rhaid imi anghytuno'n llwyr â chi. Roeddwn i ar bwyllgor cwricwlwm mewn ysgol, ac roeddwn am iddynt wneud gwyddoniaeth—cemeg, bywydeg, ffiseg—ond fe fethais yn y pwyllgor hwnnw. Roedd y bleidlais saith i un yn fy erbyn. Y broblem oedd bod yr adran

Keith Davies: I have to disagree with you entirely there. I was on the curriculum committee at a school, and I wanted them to do sciences—chemistry, biology, physics—but I failed in that committee. The vote was seven to one against me. The problem was that the science department in that school was

wyddoniaeth yn yr ysgol honno yn un wael. Pan fo plant yn mynd i'r chweched, wrth gwrs, maent yn gweithio wrth eu hunain ac maent yn gwneud cemeg, ffiseg a bywydeg. Mae'n mynd yn ôl i'r ysgol: mae problemau mewn ambell i ysgol.

poor. When children go to the sixth form, of course, they work on their own and they do chemistry, physics and biology. It goes back to the school: there are problems in some schools.

[96] **Ann Jones:** That was more of a comment than something for you to come back on. We will move on to the last area that we want to touch on, which is the role of schools, local authorities and regional consortia, and the funding around the pupil deprivation grant as well. As you can imagine, there are a number of people on that. We will start with Aled.

[97] **Aled Roberts:** Ble rydych chi'n credu y dylai'r cyfrifoldeb dros fesur gwelliannau o fewn cyrhaeddiad fod—yn yr ysgolion, neu yn yr awdurdod lleol? Os yr ydym yn edrych ar y ffigwr cyfeiriais ato yn gynharach, nid yw'n amlwg bod yr awdurdodau lleol yn cymryd unrhyw fath o sylw o'r broblem hon sydd gennym gyda phlant o gefndiroedd difreintiedig yn methu â chyrraedd lefel 2.

Aled Roberts: Where do you think that the responsibility for measuring improvements in attainment should lie—with schools, or local authorities? If we look at the figure that I referred to earlier, it is not apparent that the local authorities are taking any notice of this problem that we are facing with children from deprived backgrounds failing to attain level 2.

[98] **Dr Winckler:** The first responsibility has to be at the school. I think that it is the school's responsibility to monitor the performance of their pupils and then for successive tiers to take an overview of that. I strongly suspect that, within a local authority, you will have the same level of difference. For example, within Flintshire, I am sure that not all Flintshire schools are achieving that 33%. I would be surprised if they were, because that is just the nature of distributions. So, the first duty has to be on the school. The overview is then for the bodies with different responsibilities, and, as it is the regional consortia that are driving school improvement, then that is where the intervention needs to be. They need to spot where the problems are and intervene.

[99] **Aled Roberts:** I carried out a survey in the summer of all headteachers in Wales. I note what you say regarding the various levels having responsibility. Is there an issue regarding the guidance that has been issued by the Government? I would agree that it should not be prescriptive as regards the use that school leaders make of the fund, but what struck me was that there were instances where the headteacher had not shared any of the strategies with staff. If the staff do not understand that a major effort needs to be made in the school to reach pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds or improve their attainment, what chance do we have? Should the Welsh Government have made it clearer that there needed to be an all-school approach in that situation?

[100] **Dr Winckler:** We have clearly identified a failure of communication and leadership within the school. To be honest, I do not know enough about the guidance that the Welsh Government issued to the schools and how that was received to comment. It would not be fair.

[101] **Ann Jones:** Keith, do you have anything to add to this?

[102] **Keith Davies:** Wrth ddarllen adroddiad Estyn ar gyfer y flwyddyn sydd newydd fod, gwelais fod Estyn yn feirniadol iawn o'r awdurdodau lleol, gan ddweud bod nifer ohonynt yn rhy fach i gefnogi ysgolion.

Keith Davies: From reading Estyn's report for the year that has just been, I saw that Estyn was very critical of the local authorities, saying that many of them were too small to support schools. Do you think

A ydych yn meddwl yr oedd Estyn yn iawn i that Estyn was correct in that view?
ddweud hynny?

[103] **Dr Winckler:** Ah, yes, well. [*Laughter.*] I think what is more important is the effectiveness of the support that is given to schools. I am not 100% persuaded that size is everything. I think that there are issues about size, because, clearly, bigger authorities can have both more staff and more specialist staff, but they may not necessarily be better. I would be nervous about jumping to conclusions—particularly ones that resulted in huge shake-ups, having lived through the 1996 reorganisation—on the basis of assumptions. We might expect a bigger size to be slightly better, simply because of the economies of scale and resources, but it is not necessarily the case. I do not think that just shuffling the deck chairs will bring about an instant improvement.

[104] **Ann Jones:** Simon is next.

[105] **Simon Thomas:** Rwyf am symud o'r persbectif macro hwnnw, fel petai, i lawr i'r micro yn awr, cyn i ni sôn am ail-drefnu a'r consortia a phethau felly. Nid wyf yn gallu deall pam y mae mor anodd i ni ddeall beth sydd wir yn gweithio ar lefel ysgol. Mae arian sylweddol ychwanegol yn awr yn mynd i mewn i'r grant amddifadedd disgyblion, ond, fel y cyfeiriodd Aled ato, mae cymaint o amrywiaeth yn y ffordd mae'r arian yn cael ei ddefnyddio, cymaint o wahanol dechnegau a dulliau yn cael eu profi neu eu defnyddio. Nid wyf yn deall pam nad oes rhyw fath o gasgliad cenedlaethol gennym o'r prif ddulliau mwyaf effeithlon. Rwy'n gwybod bod Estyn yn mynd i edrych ar hwn, a bod y Llywodraeth wedi rhoi canllawiau, ond, i fi, mae perygl ein bod yn gwario arian heb weld y canlyniadau gorau. A ydych chi'n rhannu'r pryderon hynny? Os nad oes gennych atebion, a oes gennych chi, o'ch profiad chi, atebion i sut y gallem gyrraedd yr atebion hynny? Gobeithiaf fod hynny'n glir.

Simon Thomas: I want to move from the macro perspective, as it were, right down to the micro now, before we talk about reorganisation and consortia and so on. I cannot understand why it is so difficult for us to understand what really works at the school level. There is substantial additional funding available now going into the pupil deprivation grant, but, as Aled said, there is so much variety in the way that that money is used, and so many different techniques and methods being tested or used. I cannot understand why there is not a national conclusion on the most effective methods. I know that Estyn is going to look into this, and that the Government has set out guidelines, but, to my mind, there is a danger that we are spending money without seeing the best possible results. Do you share those concerns? If you do not have answers, do you have, from your experience, answers with regard to how we can find those solutions? I hope that that is clear.

[106] **Dr Winckler:** In education, as in lots of policy areas, there is a huge amount of throwing money over the wall and hoping that it lands in the right place. To some extent, that is inevitable, I think, because how else do you ever develop policy? If you only ever do anything on the basis of evidence, where someone else has tried something out, you will always be, in my view, lagging behind. I think there is evidence, and there are others who are far better placed than I am to talk about what works in schools. I had limited involvement with a project in the Heads of the Valleys that was led by Professor David Egan, which was beginning to pilot some of those approaches in schools—and evaluate them, which was the crucial thing.

[107] So, not only are we not necessarily evaluating what works, even if we do evaluate it, we are not always disseminating it. Even if we disseminate it, you still need other teachers and headteachers to pick it up and implement it. So, there is a whole chain; the problem is not just in the evaluation. Understanding what is effective, and what is not, is a big challenge. I think that we should be doing it, but it is a big challenge.

[108] **Simon Thomas:** In general terms, what holds back the ownership of that? What is it, not just in education, but in all our anti-poverty interventions it seems to me, that stops organisations and bodies from taking ownership of something that might have been developed elsewhere, but is actually proven to be an effective tool? We always seem to reinvent the wheel every time we have a new strategy or a new plan.

[109] **Dr Winckler:** I do not know. If I knew the answer to that, perhaps I would not be here. [*Laughter.*]

[110] **Simon Thomas:** Do you agree that it is a problem? That is one of the features of why we are not getting the maximum effectiveness out of our investment in this area and other areas.

[111] **Dr Winckler:** What is the expression—‘Good practice is a bad traveller’? I think that that is right. I think that the culture is changing, but schools have not always been the best learners.

[112] **Keith Davies:** May I go back to the Glyncoch unit that you were talking about and the parental engagement? To me, it is obviously quite an important aspect of the work. I remember going to a reception class in a Valleys school and asking the teacher there, ‘What is the most difficult thing that you have with this class?’ The answer from the teacher was, ‘Getting the children to listen, because the parents do not speak to their children at home, or read to them’ and that kind of thing. However, you say that this research in Glyncoch is quite good. Is that to do with schools in the Glyncoch area, or in Ynysybwl—where was the research undertaken?

[113] **Dr Winckler:** It was actually in Glyncoch primary school, or whatever its proper name is; I do not know its proper name. It links with Pontypridd High School, which is the secondary school that most children there go to.

[114] **Keith Davies:** So, it was run by the school in the end, then?

[115] **Dr Winckler:** No, the project is run by the People and Work Unit, which has worked with the school and with Communities First, but has come in as an independent third party, and managed to make it work.

[116] **Ann Jones:** Do Members have anything else to add? No? I thank you, Victoria, for coming and for the evidence session. We will send you a copy of the transcript for you to check for accuracy. Thank you for that; it was very useful.

[117] **Dr Winckler:** Thank you very much.

[118] **Ann Jones:** We will break for 10 minutes or so.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10:30 a 10:42
The meeting adjourned between 10:30 and 10:42*

**Ymchwiliad i Ganlyniadau Addysgol Plant o Gartrefi Incwm Isel—Sesiwn
Dystiolaeth 4
Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income
Households—Evidence Session 4**

[119] **Ann Jones:** If you switched your mobile phone on during that short break, please switch it off again. We now move on to our next session. I am delighted to have with us now

for our next session Mary Powell-Chandler, who is the head of Save the Children in Wales—so it tells me in my papers. I always look up at that point, and, when you smile, I know it is right. So, that is good. Also with us is Trudy Aspinwall, who is the programme officer for the Travelling Ahead project for Save the Children.

[120] **Ms Aspinwall:** That is right.

[121] **Ann Jones:** That is good. We have had your two pieces of written evidence. Thanks very much for those. One was on your overall work programme, and one on the Travelling Ahead project. We have a set of questions, and we will go straight into them. We have quite a few questions that we need to go through.

[122] The first set of questions is around Welsh Government policy and strategy. David, do you want to start and then Bethan can come in?

[123] **David Rees:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning. Thank you for your written evidence. In that evidence, you highlight that you support the strategic direction that the Welsh Government is taking, but you highlight concerns over low incomes and the poverty-in-work situation. Do you think, therefore, that the Government has the strategy to deliver on those areas in particular? You have also highlighted the fact that direction is needed, alongside the resources and guidance from the Welsh Government. Is it actually doing that as well?

[124] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Just to clarify up front, I will answer the more general questions, and then, if you could direct the questions about the Gypsy/Traveller project to Trudy, I will help where I can on that. In terms of the strategies and so on that the Welsh Government has produced, the best way to describe it is that, when I am in meetings with Save the Children UK, I am very proud of the strategies that we have here, and it makes my job a lot easier. Recently, Save the Children produced a report called ‘Too Young to Fail’; some of you may have not even seen it, because we did not push it in Wales at all, because a lot of the calls in it are for things that we already know are a priority in Wales, so, we have taken a slightly different approach to how we bring this forward.

10:45

[125] Having as a third national priority the impact of poverty on educational attainment is really important, and I think that the strategies are there. The question is, probably, around the delivery of that. As somebody who previously worked on the Communities First programme, I always remember, in my first year, great excitement that we were really going to change things. Somebody said to me ‘Ah, but these areas in Cardiff are the areas that have always been the most disadvantaged, with the lowest health and educational outcomes’ and so on. You start to question the funding that goes into these projects. The idealism is really good, and we all welcome that, but there is this question around the delivery and making change.

[126] That said, we see really good examples of it working. Certainly, in these last 12 months—I came into this post in December of last year—some of the joint working that has been happening with us, Communities First, local authorities and, indeed, the Welsh Government, as well, has been really encouraging in terms of working together to make a difference. I do not think that that has directly answered your question about in-work poverty.

[127] **David Rees:** We have not come to that yet.

[128] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I just want to say that, overall, it is not a picture of gloom and doom for me; it is really positive. I think that it is important to acknowledge that. In preparing to come today, I was thinking ‘What is the answer—what would really make a difference?’ I am from Barry, and when the press release went out to say that I had got this job, the paper

that picked it up with the most space—column inches or whatever—was, unsurprisingly, the *Barry and District News*. The whole press release went in there, and it talked about our desire to change educational outcomes for children living in poverty and so on. The following week, I was really disappointed to see a letter in there saying ‘This is all rubbish’. It was from an elderly lady, who I know of. She was saying ‘We came from poor families, from working-class backgrounds. You just get on, you work hard and you get the results, and Save the Children is totally exaggerating the issue.’ I think that that is a real problem, because so many people do not recognise it; they do not recognise that this issue is very real.

[129] It also begs the question: is she right, and, if so, what is different? I will probably come on to things about that later on. However, I think that to find a strategy that can really sort this out, once and for all, is so challenging, and yet it has to be right that it is about community schools, families—all of us—together, and not just the schools. She mentioned, ‘I worked hard, I did my homework and I went to Barry grammar school’. So did I, actually, but I think that the key difference, in my own life, was parental involvement. I was encouraged from a very early age. That is what I think that we are seeing in Save the Children; it is about that family influence. We know that it is not just about tackling the issues in the school. It is about how we encourage parents to become more involved with the schools, if they may have had bad experiences themselves.

[130] **David Rees:** I think that my colleagues will come on to parental engagement.

[131] **Ann Jones:** Before you move on, David, Keith wants to jump in.

[132] **Keith Davies:** In your report, you refer to what the Welsh Government is doing, and you say about the Sutton Trust, which the Welsh Government is pushing, that the list of programmes, as stated on the website, is not exhaustive.

[133] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Yes.

[134] **Keith Davies:** What is the issue with the Sutton Trust, because it is being pushed as something to do?

[135] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I have gone through the Sutton toolkit myself, and I think that it is really helpful. I wonder how well supported schools are in how to apply the Sutton toolkit; maybe they are, maybe they are not. I do not think that it is the easiest thing in the world to navigate. The reason that I said that it was not exhaustive is that Save the Children, before my time, had done extensive research on what works and what does not. Of course, it came up with the FAST—Families and Schools Together—programme. That programme is not in the Sutton toolkit, so what I was trying to say there is that it is not just about the Sutton toolkit. It is a start, but look at what works in Wales, in other areas, and use those things as well.

[136] **Ann Jones:** We have opened it all up now, Aled. Sorry, David; we will come back to you.

[137] **Aled Roberts:** Rwyf am ofyn fy nghwestiwn yn Gymraeg. Wrth gwrs, roedd adroddiad gan y Sutton Trust—achos beth rydym yn edrych arno yn awr yw gwella cyrhaeddiad plant, nid gwella ymddygiad na phresenoldeb yn yr ysgol na dim byd felly—yn cwstynnu pa mor llwyddiannus yr oedd rhai rhaglenni, fel FAST, o ran gwella cyrhaeddiad yn benodol.

Aled Roberts: I will be asking my question in Welsh. Of course, there was a report by the Sutton Trust—because what we are looking at now is improving children’s attainment, not their behaviour, their school attendance or anything like that—questioning how successful some programmes, such as FAST, were specifically at improving attainment.

[138] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Yes, exactly. I would not sit here today and say that FAST is the best programme for improving academic competence, because it is an eight-week programme. It is such a shame that you do not have the founder of FAST here—

[139] **Ann Jones:** We are going on a visit next week to see a FAST programme in operation.

[140] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Fabulous.

[141] **Ann Jones:** Yes. I am sure that that will raise more points and more questions than it will answer.

[142] **Keith Davies:** It is in Barry as well.

[143] **Ann Jones:** It is in Barry, so there we go.

[144] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Oh, I will see you—it is in Cadoxton, is it not?

[145] **Ann Jones:** Yes.

[146] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** In answer to your question, seriously, the research that Save the Children did—and I have done subsequent stuff myself—shows fantastic improvement. The document that I am holding shows the size of the report that every school gets after it has run a FAST programme, and there are so many indicators, because, as I said earlier, the impact of poverty on educational attainment is a really complex issue, and FAST is therefore a really complex programme. It is hard to say exactly what it is; it is so many different things. Mainly, however, it is about social capital, and it is about parental involvement. It is about parents talking to one another, and about knowing who in the community they should go to. It is about not being scared to cross the threshold of the school. It is about getting involved in the school. These reports show fabulous increases in parental involvement—on the parent-teacher association, as a governor—and parents going on to further education themselves.

[147] So, in an eight-week programme, the measure for before and after in educational competence is not what I would call significant. What is significant is the behaviour of the children over a period of time. In the United States, where it was developed in 1988, they have done longitudinal studies, and that is what we need in the UK as well, which Save the Children has committed to very recently. It is something that I know this committee will be interested in, and once we have that, we can send it out. In the States, when they followed up with children after a year, that is where they started to see the difference between the control group and the FAST group. So, these things have been done; there have been four randomised controlled trials.

[148] Yes, the Sutton toolkit is fine, but I think that in each school—this is what I was trying to say, I guess; I am not an educationalist—if each headteacher is able to look at the needs of the community, they are going to be bespoke. Cadoxton is a really good example, because the headteacher there, Janet Hayward, is amazing. When I went to meet her, I did not go to talk about FAST at all; I went to see what they were doing in Cadoxton. She showed me the Apple Mac, the fantastic studio that they have, the engagement with the children, and I said, ‘Oh, I’m not going to even mention the FAST programme that we are doing; it’s not on the scale of digital technology’, and she said, ‘Well, no; do tell me about it’. So I did, and I said, ‘In short, if you have parents you cannot engage with, this programme succeeds, and it has an 82% retention rate’. She just snapped my arm off, really, and they have run the programme, and it finishes next week. I met with her two weeks ago and she was saying things like, ‘It’s been a revelation’, and, ‘We’ve got the parents in we couldn’t get in before’.

So, it is a complex jigsaw, I think, and I am sure that, although the particular children may not have made a significant increase in their reading and writing ability after eight weeks, bringing their parents in and involving them is going to make a massive difference overall.

[149] **Ann Jones:** We have strayed into the area of parental engagement under FAST. I wonder, Bethan, whether you want to ask your questions—I will come back to you, David.

[150] **Bethan Jenkins:** Following on from that, from reading about the work that you have done through FAST, I know that 26 Welsh schools have engaged with it. When we met Professor David Egan, he was saying how that can be grown and enhanced in Wales so that they have value for the future. How would you see that happening? Will it be able to happen within the budgetary confines that schools find themselves in? If schemes like this work, how can they be enhanced for the future so that we can really get parents involved in the school setting who would not otherwise have been?

[151] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Since coming into this post, because I headed programmes before, which was delivery of FAST and so on, from the outset I have been thinking how we sustain this. I remember working in Groundwork years ago, and I remember saying then, ‘We cannot parachute into communities and get back out again. We have to do something that makes a sustainable difference.’ So, with FAST, I think that the option that I have come to the conclusion would work is to train people in Wales to deliver FAST across Wales. I have had conversations with Communities First senior officials at Welsh Government to talk about the potential to train up Communities First officers and other staff in other agencies so that they can deliver the FAST programme. With all of the schools across Wales that want to run FAST, as long as there is a pool of qualified FAST certified trainers, this can go on and on, even when Save the Children has stepped back from it. The advantage at the moment of schools doing FAST is that Save the Children pays for it all through corporate funding.

[152] Where we need to get to in the future is where a school like Janet Hayward’s in Cadoxton can say, ‘We want to run the FAST programme; how do we pay for it?’ That would mean paying Middlesex University. The goal that I would see is around the pupil deprivation grant and that sort of thing. If we can break down a cost per child for FAST—we know that the pupil deprivation grant has increased, since we submitted our evidence, which is something that we welcome—the school can pay for the programme and there will be local people who can deliver it. There is even the opportunity for parents who have been on the programme to be, at stage 2, parent partners on the next programme, and they might want to become trainers in the future. That would not be for everyone, but it keeps that community engagement going.

[153] **Ann Jones:** I have Rebecca wishing to speak first, and I will then come back to you, Bethan.

[154] **Rebecca Evans:** We heard earlier in our evidence session that there is no strong evidence to support the fact that parental engagement leads to better attainment outcomes for children, although it does lead to better overall general outcomes for the pupils. Is there any evidence from the FAST scheme on that?

[155] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I think that that comes back to what we were saying earlier about longitudinal studies. At the moment, we only have the States as an example, but there, Professor Lynn McDonald, who founded FAST, has a stack of evidence. They have used various random control trials and control groups that show that, mainly through the parents building social capital, it has made a difference to the way that their child approaches school, their aspirations and so on. It is quite sad if there is no specific evidence and if you are hearing to the contrary, but I come back to my question: how is it that we are in this situation? I think that the old lady who was not happy with me talking about poverty and low

educational attainment has a point. If we break it down, where is it different? Surely it is to do with a loss of aspiration, with less work and with people.

[156] A father walked into a primary school in the Valleys one day, bringing his child in really late. I looked at the headteacher and said, 'It is 11 a.m.' She said, in front of the child, 'This is an improvement; normally he does not bring her at all.' He says, 'What's the point? I don't have a job; my dad didn't have a job; she won't get a job either.'" So, I think that parental involvement and support will make a massive difference. Not only that, I just think about the research that we did earlier this year—I know that you have supported us with this—on small voice, big story. With the children interviewed as part of that research, that support from families was something that they wanted. They saw that their circumstances were different to than those with better-off parents. They talked about having somewhere safe and quiet to do their homework, and where they were not getting support, they were asking for peer support and mentoring. I just feel that it is vitally important. Perhaps time will tell.

[157] **Ann Jones:** I now call on Aled, and then I will come back to Bethan.

11:00

[158] **Aled Roberts:** I went to west Cardiff to see a FAST programme around 18 months ago, and I would agree with everything you said regarding the positives of the programme. However, the schools will be subject to the measuring of success by Estyn, on the basis of improvement and attainment. So, it may be difficult for you to convince the schools or the school leaders that they should invest in the programme. There have been moneys released under the Communities First programme, as far as match funding is concerned. Has there been any take-up of FAST using those Communities First moneys, given that some of the issues that you mentioned might be more easily achieved under that programme?

[159] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Definitely. Now that we are getting our voice out there and more and more schools are now running the programme, Communities First is seeing—. In fact, I have a meeting tomorrow with the cluster managers in Cardiff to look at how we can take forward the sustainability issue and how match funding can be used to enable that. In west Cardiff, the Ely and Caerau Communities First programme is brilliant. We had a conference two weeks ago, and the cluster manager from Ely and Caerau, John Hallett, spoke about the links between FAST and Communities First, and why we should be bringing these two things together. There is great scope, but these are very early days. Communities First varies from area to area in Wales, does it not? Regarding the realignment of Communities First priorities, it is probably a bit soon to say whether that has been effective or not. There are some really great examples, and Ely and Caerau stands out for me. It is not called that now, is it? It is the west Cardiff cluster, I think. It is about learning lessons, is it not? I am sure that other people who have given evidence have said that. Where you have something that works, and you know that it works, it is about replicating that.

[160] **Ann Jones:** Bethan, would you like to come back in?

[161] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have a quick question to end. Have you looked at any other schemes? We were given an example last week of a school in Swansea that, instead of having a parents' evening, closes the school for the day and asks parents to come in randomly, when it suits them, so that they are not feeling pressured by the structures of the school. I was wondering if there is any research showing not only that the FAST programme works, but that other similar programmes work—programmes that schools would want to try, but currently do not know about because they are so busy with other things.

[162] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Exactly. I suppose that is where the Sutton Trust toolkit helps because it gives—although I know that I said it was not exhaustive—a good list of the types

of interventions that schools can adopt, and can rate them and cost them, and so on. I am sure that, at the time when FAST was chosen as the model that we would go for, they must have looked at a whole range of different programmes. In terms of what we would say about FAST, the main message really is that it is an evidence-based programme. So, there is something at the end of it. You mentioned Estyn, and you are right. However, Estyn also looks at the engagement of the school with the community. So, it does tick some of the boxes for Estyn. I have forgotten the point that I was going to make.

[163] **Ann Jones:** While you think about it, Rebecca has one final question in this section, and we will then come back to David, who is still on Welsh Government policy.

[164] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I know what it was.

[165] **Ann Jones:** Go on.

[166] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** It was only to say that FAST—

[167] **Bethan Jenkins:** It was Aled's fault.

[168] **Ann Jones:** Yes, it was Aled's fault. [*Laughter.*]

[169] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** FAST can sit alongside so many other programmes, and that is what we are always at pains to say. If you ran a FAST programme in Swansea, which we are going to do in the spring—the first one in Swansea—the parents going through that programme, whom we call 'parent graduates', would be ideal to get really engaged and get the most out of the sort of scheme that you mention. It is all complementary.

[170] **Rebecca Evans:** To what extent is communication a barrier to parental engagement, particularly parental literacy, language issues or access to technologies?

[171] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I will say a little bit about this, but I think that I will then pass it on to Trudy, because I think that the Gypsy/Traveller community is a good example to talk about that a bit more. Is that okay, Trudy?

[172] **Ms Aspinwall:** Yes, that is fine.

[173] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** In terms of communication, we just have to be aware of the barriers that prevent parents from getting involved with schools. I have talked to headteachers, and I will mention Cadoxton again—I keep on coming back to it; she will kill me. It makes you wonder. They had managed to engage with so many parents through so many innovative ways, using digital technology, iPads and so on. Yet, there were still what are always termed the 'hard to reach', which we never liked in Communities First. It is more about how we engage with them. Again, we use innovative approaches, and face-to-face is probably best. When we are trying to get parents involved with FAST, there are coffee mornings and there are approaches in the playground in the morning. It is not all reliant on a letter being sent home, or on e-mails. Everything is complex. It is about looking at a whole range of different ways of engaging with people. The beauty of FAST is that the headteachers and schools tend to know who they really want to engage with and, indirectly, we will give them some tips on how we can do this. FAST families love to come to FAST because they get told that every week that there is a lottery and that somebody will win a luxury hamper. That has been crucial in getting people to sign up. What they do not know at the time of signing up is that it is rigged so that every week, yes, a family in each hub will win a luxury hamper, but it is a reciprocal—I can never say that word—arrangement. The family that wins the hamper has to cook the family meal for all the families the following week. Every little thing in FAST has got a psychological reason behind it, although it seems like fun at the time. It is difficult

to engage with some parents, yes, and I think it is about looking at the approaches that work best. On Gypsy/Traveller communities would it be fair to ask you to deal with those?

[174] **Ms Aspinwall:** Yes, sure. I do not know how aware people are of some of the issues facing Gypsy/Traveller pupils.

[175] **Ann Jones:** There is a section on Gypsy/Traveller pupils. Can you just look at the barriers to communication and we will come back to that section later?

[176] **Ms Aspinwall:** It is really clear that communication and good communication is what is needed to ensure that parental engagement happens. In relation to Gypsy and Traveller parents, traditionally, communication and engagement with schools has been low. The trust has been low and that is something that Traveller education services have worked really hard to overcome and have been very successful in doing so. Our concern is that it is often the Traveller education services that are undertaking that role and the whole school often leaves it to the Traveller education services. That, for us, is a real issue. Obviously, Traveller education services are seen as the kind of experts. They have the relationships and their knowledge about how to communicate with those parents is not necessarily taken up by the wider schools. Literacy and basic skills are often a problem for Gypsy and Traveller parents. So, information in written form such as letters may not be the most appropriate for everybody. With the increased use of the internet and digital communication, there will be plenty of Gypsy and Traveller families who have access to computers, but there will be many, particularly even on council-run sites, who do not have WiFi or do not have a laptop. The kind of internet-based engagement that a lot of schools use now for families is just not working for some of those groups of parents. I think that is really important to acknowledge. While it is inclusive and easy for all sorts of people, there are some for whom it is not. A lot of young Gypsy/Travellers do not have iPhones for instance; it partly a poverty issue, but also a protection issue because parents will not allow their children to have that sort of digital internet access. That is perhaps a bit of a difference from the rest of the community. I think that there are lots of issues around the way in which schools communicate as well as the approaches that they use with Gypsies and Travellers. If, traditionally, Gypsies and Travellers have not engaged well with school, then they will also find it hard to engage with the engagement programmes that schools are putting forward.

[177] **Ann Jones:** I think that Rebecca has got a section, but I want to get back to finish off on the Welsh Government policy and strategy, and David has sat there very patiently.

[178] **David Rees:** I think most of it has been done, Chair. I have just a couple of points. Your responses and enthusiasm for FAST, for example, clearly reflect your belief in the importance of the community-focused school. Therefore, I also assume that you believe that it is important that we do not dismantle those which are in existence, because of their importance in the wider parental engagement aspect. Save the Children conducts research, but some figures that we have received show that 50% more pupils achieve 5 A* to C grades in England than in Wales. These are pupils with a background of poverty. Has Save the Children done any research on contributing factors in this area and on why Wales is not doing as well as England?

[179] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** 'No' is the short answer to that. We have been going through a lot of change and so on and I think that the time is probably right now for us to be able to do that and commission some research, but we have not done it, yet. However, I have listened to some of the evidence that has already been given. Listening to Professor Egan's evidence, I thought that it was very interesting to hear information about the London schools, and so on. So, we have the opportunity to do that, going forward, and it is something that we need to do.

[180] **Ann Jones:** We will move on to monitoring, targeting and benchmarking. We will

have questions from Aled, Simon and then whoever else wants to come in on this point.

[181] **Aled Roberts:** Hoffwn ofyn cwestiwn unwaith eto ynglŷn â thargedau. Rydych yn sôn yn eich tystiolaeth am y cynllun gweithredu ar gyfer trechu tlodi, a gafodd ei fabwysiadu ym mis Gorffennaf eleni. Gwnaethoch y pwynt nad y strategaeth sy'n bwysig ond yr hyn sy'n cael ei weithredu o dan y strategaeth. Nid wyf yn gwybod os wnaethoch glywed y tyst olaf, ond un pwynt sy'n fy nharo i yw bod targed o fewn y cynllun sy'n dweud y dylai 37% o'n plant ni, erbyn 2017, gyrraedd lefel 2 yng nghyfnod allweddol 4, gan gynnwys Saesneg, Cymraeg a mathemateg. Llynedd, dim ond 23.4% oedd y ffigur yng Nghymru. Nid wyf yn deall yn union sut y cyrhaeddwyd y ffigur hwnnw nag ychwaith sut y byddwn yn cynyddu'r cyrhaeddiad gymaint mewn pum mlynedd. A yw'r Llywodraeth mewn perygl o gael targed sy'n afrealistig yn hytrach nag yn un uchelgeisiol?

Aled Roberts: I would like to ask questions once again on targets. You mention in your evidence the action plan for tackling poverty, which was adopted in July this year. You made the point that it is not the strategy that is important, but what is implemented under that strategy. I do not know whether you heard the last witness, but one point that strikes me is that there is a target within the plan that states that 37% of our children, by 2017, should achieve level 2 at key stage 4, including in English, Welsh and mathematics. Last year, the figure in Wales was only 23.4%. I do not understand exactly how that figure was reached or how we would improve attainment levels so much in five years. Is the Government in danger of having a target that is unrealistic rather than one that is ambitious?

[182] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** That is an interesting question. I suppose that the Save the Children response to that would be that having that ambitious target is the right thing to do, in order to strive for that, but, as you said, the strategies are good and we are going to have to do a lot of work between now and then to get the attainment levels up. I did not hear Victoria; we arrived while she was on. There are so many interventions. This comes back to what I said in my opening response. It is about harnessing all of those and somehow joining things up. That is the part that I sometimes think is missing. There are really good interventions, such as the one that Bethan mentioned in Swansea, and to get the attainment levels up to the ambitious target in the plan, it probably is about being smarter about how we are doing that and working together.

[183] **Aled Roberts:** So, how are we going to be smarter? You are involved in this field, and I believe that Victoria made the point that money is being thrown over the wall—

[184] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Yes, I heard that bit.

[185] **Aled Roberts:** It is quite a significant amount of money being thrown over the wall, to be honest. Do you have an understanding of how we get from 23.4% in 2012 to 37% in 2017, or, do we just print a figure in a strategy and then give excuses in 2017 as to why we have not reached where we wanted to reach?

[186] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I would certainly hope that that is not the case. I am not an expert with regard to what I am about to say, but there probably are a lot of lessons to be learned, as you mentioned a moment ago, from England, looking at those areas where it has made really fantastic success. There are new models, such as Teach First in Wales, are there not? This will be about close monitoring, more than anything else and looking at what works. I used to find with Communities First was that there were lots of good things going on across Wales, but I used to wonder why we were not getting the best of them, the ones that really get the outcomes, and just replicating those. So, I cannot help but feel that there is something like that here. There are some really good things out there, and it is probably about honing in on the ones that really work and really make a difference.

[187] In terms of joining things up, Save the Children has been looking at—I have done a little bit of work with Professor Egan on this, but only as a very exploratory point—Harlem Children’s Zone and how that would work in Wales. We are looking at a small community, not the whole local authority area, and all the partners there who have a part to play, but ensuring that we are all talking to each other, so that a child born into disadvantaged circumstances in that community gets the full range of available interventions that could make a difference to that child.

11:15

[188] I had thought, when I was working in the Cardiff local authority on the Communities First programme, that the local service board would be able to do that. That was its aim, was it not? It was to join everything up, so that people got a better service. However, our figures are telling us that, in this particular area, we have not cracked it. So, I wonder whether we should be doing a little more work on these smaller areas, joining them up and putting investment into that approach, which is something that they are going to trial in four areas in England next year. So, I am keen that, if there is funding going into trialling that, we could try to do something around that in Wales as well, to see if we can get the figures up by using a lot of interventions together.

[189] **Aled Roberts:** Rydych yn gyfrifol am Gymru gyfan. Pam nad oes rhannu arfer da? Rwyf wedi bod yn edrych ar y ffigurau hyn, ac mae gwahaniaeth rhwng Cymru a Lloegr, ond mae gwahaniaeth hefyd o un sir i’r sir drws nesaf. Mae ffigurau’n dangos bod 33% o blant yn sir y Fflint sy’n cael prydau am ddim yn cyrraedd lefel 2, ond eto, yn y sir drws nesaf, Wrecsam, dim ond 18% sy’n cyrraedd yr un lefel. Felly, mae angen inni ddysgu o wledydd eraill, ond o feddwl am yr holl raglenni a fu mewn bodolaeth am nifer o flynyddoedd ers datganoli, sut mae’r sefyllfa mor ddifrifol â’r hyn rydym yn ei weld yn y ffigurau hyn?

Aled Roberts: You are responsible for all of Wales. Why is there no sharing of good practice? I have been looking at these figures, and there is a difference between England and Wales, but there is also a difference from one county to the adjacent county. The figures show that 33% of children in Flintshire who receive free school meals achieve level 2, yet in the adjacent county of Wrexham, only 18% achieve the same level. So, we need to learn from other countries, but bearing in mind all of the programmes that have been in place for many years since devolution began, how is the situation as poor as what is reflected in these figures?

[190] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** The first thing to look at is the situation within Wales. Coming from a Communities First background, I have talked about replicating things, but every community is unique. Sharing good practice within Wales—with an adjacent county—absolutely makes sense, and I do not understand why that has not happened. Since I have come into post with Save the Children, it is not a priority that we could deal with this year. In answer to the question earlier about looking at research and what works and what does not, it is something that we should invest in, which would help Welsh Government as well.

[191] I was heartened by the guidance that came out on the pupil deprivation grant, saying that from January—I think that I put this in the written evidence—schools would need to publicise on the website what they had done and whether it works or not. I would think that that is a way of addressing the issue that you have just raised. However, somebody else—I think that it was Bethan—mentioned whether schools have time to do all of these things. It is definitely a massive issue, and one that needs time, energy and money. People need to be doing that sort of research. If Save the Children can help with that by doing some research of that nature, maybe that would be something that would be really helpful. However, you are right—there is really good practice, and for neighbouring local authorities to have such different levels is quite shocking.

[192] **Simon Thomas:** I gario ymlaen yn yr un modd, mae'n bryder mawr i mi ein bod yn gosod strategaethau a thargedau yn eu lle ac yn sôn am feincnodi, ac ati, ond, yn y bôn, mae'n dod yn fwyfwy amlwg i mi ein bod yn ailddyfeisio pethau dro ar ôl tro. Nid ydym yn dysgu o'r hyn sydd wedi digwydd yn y gorffennol, nid ydym yn lledu'r wybodaeth honno ac rydym yn annog nifer o fentrau eraill i ddigwydd, gan feddwl y bydd yr un nesaf yn torri'r ddolen ac yn llwyddo. Rydych wedi sôn heddiw am gynllun newydd eto—cynllun Harlem—sydd yn grêt, efallai, ond pryd y cawn syniad gwell yn genedlaethol o'r hyn sy'n wir yn gweithio a beth sy'n wir werth ei wneud, yn enwedig mewn perthynas â chyrhaeddiad plant? Nid oes amheuaeth gen i fod nifer o ymyraethau yn llesol ac yn arwain at ymddygiad gwell gan blant neu bresenoldeb gwell, neu efallai mwy o rieni yn gwirfoddoli yn y PTA neu beth bynnag. Mae'r holl bethau hynny yn gallu bod yn llesol, ond rydym i gyd yn derbyn nad ydym wedi symud dim yn y 15 mlynedd diwethaf i dorri'r cyswllt rhwng tloidi a chyrhaeddiad plant yng Nghymru, a bod hynny ar draul yr holl system economaidd sydd gennym. Mae'r genedl yn cael ei dal yn ôl oherwydd hynny. Felly, y cwestiwn—gan mai sylw oedd hwnnw, wrth gwrs—yw: beth yr ydych chi yn Achub y Plant yn ei wneud fel partner i'r Llywodraeth i sicrhau bod y pethau hyn yn digwydd? A ydych yn gyfaill beirniadol o'r hyn y mae'r Llywodraeth yn ei wneud, neu a ydych yn derbyn arian ac yn gweithredu polisïau lle bo hynny'n bosibl?

Simon Thomas: To continue in that vein, it is a great concern to me that we put strategies and targets in place and talk about benchmarking, and so forth, but, basically, it is becoming more apparent to me that we are reinventing things time after time. We are not learning from what has happened in the past, we are not spreading that information and we are encouraging many other initiatives to happen, thinking that the next one will break the link and succeed. You have mentioned today a new scheme—the Harlem scheme—which is great, perhaps, but when will we have a better idea nationally of what really works and what is really worth doing, particularly in relation to children's attainment? I have no doubt that a number of interventions are beneficial and lead to better behaviour or attendance among children, or perhaps more parents volunteering for the PTA and so on. All those things can be beneficial, but we all accept that we have not moved at all in the last 15 years towards breaking the link between poverty and children's attainment in Wales, and that this is at the expense of the whole economic system. The nation is being held back because of that. Therefore, the question—as that was a comment, of course—is: what are you doing at Save the Children as a partner to the Government to ensure that those things are happening? Are you a critical friend of what the Government is doing, or do you accept money and implement policies where that is possible?

[193] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I do not think that we have accepted a lot of money from the Welsh Government. I am just trying to think. We have had some support.

[194] **Simon Thomas:** I did not mean this Government. Are you in a position to critique what governments or other interventions are doing, or are you administering programmes and therefore content to continue to do so?

[195] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I think that we are in a different position to some of the other children's charities that are delivering services that have been commissioned and so on. That is not the case with us. Apart from Trudy's project, Travelling Ahead, which is Welsh-Government funded, any Save the Children programmes are funded through corporate partners. In terms of being a critical friend, I find it really helpful when I meet Welsh Government officials, particularly officials that I knew in my Communities First days, because we can talk quite frankly with each other. I am careful; I will admit that. I am passionate about the FAST programme, for example. So, when I talk to them, what I am talking about is sustainability and the opportunities to prove things and to get people out there

to see what works and what does not. However, that does not prevent us from being a critical friend.

[196] Sitting here this morning, you have convinced me of the research that we need to do next. In that scenario, if we were to do what has been suggested, and look at what works and does not work in Wales, and why it works in some areas and not others, with reference to England as well, we would certainly be very useful to the Welsh Government in our meetings and discussions. When we published ‘Small Voice: Big Story’ in the spring of this year, that was a great opportunity to have some very good conversations with Welsh Government officials and the Minister at the time. What we can bring to the Welsh Government is the voices of the children and young people that we work with and their families. I remember that, when I first took this job on, I did this mind map thing, and that is what I came down to as our unique selling point: we are out there and we are hearing stories. We collect case studies from FAST, from Eat, Sleep, Learn, Play! and from any of our programmes. That is what we need to be feeding back to the Welsh Government. I feel very strongly about the issue of educational attainment, and I want to understand it better. We have research that does that. Sometimes, perhaps we are not as critical because we are pushing at an open door, in many respects, which is good because there is an opportunity to get these things off the ground.

[197] **Simon Thomas:** Does it frustrate you as much as it frustrates me to see strategies such as the tackling poverty action plan in place, with everything written and looking good, but not to be able to discern the individual steps that are going to be taken to achieve them? You talk about the interventions that you do, and I am sure that they are positive things—I am sure that other charities and third sector organisations do similar things, as does local government—however, when you look at Wales as a whole, this is not happening. There is not a signal change or a step forward. This is the big question: what is the bit that is missing? Is it proper evaluation and delivery? Or, is it that we have reinvented so many different programmes over the years in the name of anti-poverty that, each time we do that, we start afresh, in effect?

[198] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I cannot speak with definite knowledge about how often we have done that; I do not know. In answer to your first question about whether it is frustrating, of course it is. I guess that it is also what makes me get up in the mornings, to try to do something to make a difference for children and families in Wales. I really mean that. I cannot help thinking that—and I am repeating what I have already said—it is about joining things up. Yes, it is about a thorough evaluation of what works. We have just had an evaluation of Flying Start, which was very positive. We now see how our programme links in with Flying Start, for example. It has to be around two things, I guess: thorough evaluation of the programmes, and what really makes a difference; and then joining those things up. There is probably still an element of people going at things in a similar—

[199] **Simon Thomas:** I know that you said earlier that every community is unique, and I accept that. Nevertheless, the techniques that we use to intervene have to be proven. Do we need a bit more of the big stick being wielded—not literally—in terms of leadership and guidance? Perhaps we should be saying, ‘These are the programmes that are proven to work, so please use these programmes. Before you devise your own, please do this, because we know that it works in this area, that area and in rural areas’. There might be tweaks needed to take into account certain things, particularly in a sector like Gypsy/Traveller children; there would be certain things that would be needed to take into account those communities. The general principles surely need to be much more defined nationally, so that we—not just the Government and local government, but yourselves as the third sector—are working to the same pace and towards the same kinds of things that we know can deliver.

[200] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Yes, I agree with that. When a problem just seems so

complex, I take a really simplistic view and use that old helicopter thing about looking at it from as far away as possible. You cannot help but think, ‘Yeah, what are we doing? We know the things that work’. However, at the same time, we want to give people the freedom to do what is right for their area.

[201] **Simon Thomas:** They can be wrong sometimes.

[202] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Yes. I cannot help but agree about having a thorough evaluation of things. The Sutton Trust toolkit in itself is a step in the right direction. I think that it was initially used to advise schools in England on how to use the pupil premium. So, it is a step in the right direction, but maybe we need something that is more Wales-specific, and we should ask what has worked here.

[203] **Simon Thomas:** Should we be brave enough to pull funding from projects that are not working sometimes?

[204] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Do I have to answer that?

[205] **Simon Thomas:** In principle.

[206] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** In principle, I think that we should monitor things very carefully and make sure that we are funding things that work.

[207] **Bethan Jenkins:** That is a politician’s answer.

[208] **Ann Jones:** Yes, that is fine. We are fast running out of time, given that we have quite a lot of areas left. One, in particular, is Gypsy and Traveller children, which we will do now. I think that if we have already said things, could we not go back over them? We want to look at Gypsy and Traveller children, costs associated with education and free school meals. We also have a couple of questions around the role of schools and regional consortia, and the pupil deprivation grant. Those are the areas that we are going to cover. Could we try to condense it all? I want to come on to Gypsy and Traveller children. Rebecca, do you want to do that one?

[209] **Rebecca Evans:** Okay, thank you. In your written evidence, you identify teaching styles and curriculum content as problems that affect the attainment of Gypsy and Traveller children. Is that about poverty and access to technology, or are there cultural issues at play? Related to that—if I may ask both questions together—is there any evidence as to where the balance lies between cultural barriers and barriers relating to low income, in respect of attainment?

[210] **Ms Aspinwall:** Okay, thank you. First of all, going back to the first question around Welsh policy and strategy, as Mary said, from the perspective of working with Gypsy and Traveller children and young people, we think that the Welsh Government has made really good strides in terms of the education of Gypsy and Traveller children and young people, certainly over the past five years. It is acknowledged in the tackling poverty action plan that Gypsy and Traveller children are likely to come from families that experience poverty, for example. What I have said in the written evidence is very much that good progress has been made because a lot of the cultural barriers have been recognised and acknowledged.

11:30

[211] A lot of the focus of Traveller education services and others has gone towards overcoming those cultural barriers. Where I think that there is a weakness is that, while the tackling poverty action plan mentions Gypsies and Travellers, all the work around increasing

attainment is around cultural barriers, it is not acknowledging the fact that many Gypsy and Traveller children are living in situations of quite extreme poverty—not just income poverty, but often poverty of access to other services. It is well documented in terms of health and in terms of access to employment and skills and economic participation that the Gypsy and Traveller community has traditionally been very excluded and discriminated against.

[212] So, while we really welcome the approaches around education and attainment that Traveller education services have taken, I think that there is a gap there where the wider responsibilities of schools in looking at pupils from more deprived backgrounds may not be focused on the economic issues that Gypsy and Traveller families are experiencing and that there is also a gap there, where other agencies may not be—because Gypsies and Travellers are often very excluded, they are excluded from those other agencies as well, so other anti-poverty or tackling poverty services are not necessarily reaching those families. There has been really good progress with the cultural barriers, but there are still lots of issues and problems.

[213] Something that I wrote down when you were speaking earlier was that we are talking about attainment here. With Gypsy and Traveller pupils, a lot of the time, we are still talking about attendance and inclusion, and attainment is something that Traveller education services have only recently been in a position to focus on. I would not at all want to see a lack of aspiration for Gypsy and Traveller children, because there are plenty who are doing really well with the right support and who are going on to training, further education and, in a couple of situations, higher education as well. However, we are still struggling to support young people to access education and to build up relationships with parents so that they feel safe and trusting of schools, to actually allow children to go there. In some areas, there are examples of really good practice where that is working, and in other areas, where, even despite very big efforts, there are still real issues. So, this is a group for whom attainment, of course, is a really key issue, because it is the aspirational question of what is the point of education, in terms of coming out of education and school with something to show for it: your skills, your confidence and your qualifications. However, we are really struggling with the inclusion of those children.

[214] You ask whether or not we are a critical friend. My project is directly and solely funded by the Welsh Government at the moment. It is not an education project, but a participation project to support the voices and views of children and young people, and we are very critical of the fact that there are large groups of children and young people from Gypsy and Traveller families who are not accessing education; their right to an education in Wales has not been realised. That is shocking, it really is. So, attainment is massively important, but so is actually getting children into school, and also getting the right education, because a lot of those young people are not in school, so how do we make sure that resources are focused on those young people who are not in school when all the resources are coming through the schools? Those, for me, are the key issues.

[215] **Keith Davies:** May I just follow that point up? There are grants from the Welsh Government for schools for Traveller children. What percentage of Traveller children is in schools through that grant?

[216] **Ms Aspinwall:** That is interesting. I am not sure that we know the answer to that question. We know how many Traveller children there are through how many grants are accessed by the Traveller education services in schools to support them, but because there is an issue, more broadly, about collecting data and monitoring the number of Gypsies and Travellers, adults and children, in Wales, we cannot really say exactly how many Gypsy and Traveller children and young people of school age there are in Wales. We know that the census has only just begun to monitor Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers. We know that the caravan count is fairly arbitrary, not very accurate and is an underrepresentation and, of

course, lots of Gypsies and Travellers live in houses as well, so they are not counted as part of the caravan count. We know that many families do not like to self-identify as Gypsies and Travellers and, when their children are in school, schools may not be aware that they have a Gypsy or Traveller background. We know that professionals also write down ethnicity wrongly. In many ways—and it is the same with the adult community—there are issues around invisibility and whether or not we can collect data on this particular group of children and young people, questions such as who is in school and who is not, and who is accessing money and who is not. That is something that we would welcome further research into.

[217] **Ann Jones:** Aled, do you have a very brief point?

[218] **Aled Roberts:** You mentioned a couple of times progress over the last five years, but going back five years, there was a smaller number of authorities that had very well-developed Traveller education services. The decision was taken that the same grant would be divided between all 22 authorities, which led to a diminution of service in those areas. Do you have any knowledge regarding what the attainment and attendance levels had been in those areas where the Traveller education service was quite drastically reduced?

[219] **Ms Aspinwall:** The short answer is ‘no’. If you wanted to know that, I could put you in touch directly with people who are still running those services, many of whom have been there through that period of time. However, we would say that those long-established services have continued to work extremely positively with the majority of parents, and in that way have supported children into school.

[220] In places like Pembrokeshire, Cardiff and Torfaen, where there have been services over a very long period of time, we know that the change is generational. Five years is not enough; it is of course five years of a child’s school life. However, in Pembrokeshire, where they have not just been running Traveller education services, but they have brought in additional funding to make sure that parents and whole-family learning is part of the project, they are seeing that there has been a generational change. There are teaching staff there running that project who taught the parents of children who are coming into school now and they are beginning to see the aspirations changing. They are beginning to see the confidence and the trust in schools changing and young people not just attending school, but staying in school, sitting some exams and going on to run businesses and get qualifications, and one young woman last year went on to university. However, that was not achieved in the lifetime of a Government; that has been achieved over 20 years. That would be the same for other communities as well.

[221] It is important that we recognise with the Gypsy and Traveller community that there is too much parachuting in and disappearing again, and too much, ‘Oh, we can come and run this project for you’ and then going away again. What works is those long-standing relationships to build up the trust, skills and confidence, and that has a direct impact on those children and young people’s aspirations, attendance, inclusion and attainment.

[222] **Ann Jones:** We are out of time, but I want to get a flavour of what you think about the associated cost of education and free school meals. On the rest of it, I think that we will have to write to you with specific details. Angela, could you—

[223] **Angela Burns:** Yes, I will try to be really speedy. We have talked about parental engagement quite a lot and David Egan made it very clear that he sees this as a three-legged stool; it is the school, the parents and peer groups. Could you explain a bit more on your thinking, some of which we have read in your report, about the importance of ensuring that children from poverty-stricken households are able to engage meaningfully with their peers and not feel left out? There is also the impact that feeling left out and feeling that they do not have the latest of this, that and the other, or they cannot go on trips or access sports services,

is having upon them aspirationally.

[224] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** You have covered a lot of what came out of the ‘Small Voice: Big Story’ research, so I will keep it short, because I know that time is running out. We trained young people to be researchers who then interviewed other young people. What came out of that—and this is what I said earlier—was that we can bring to the table the views of the children directly and the things that concerned us. There were things like children worrying about their families not having money and a child of a single parent saying, ‘I know that I need new trainers, but I am not asking for them’. So, they are very conscious of money at a very young age.

[225] Within school, there is always that peer pressure—the stigmatisation of not being able to go on school trips and so on. They may not even ask to go. The thing that hit me the most was children’s awareness of the financial situation and sometimes trying to protect their parents from feeling bad about things. There is no doubt in my mind that if you are not able to join in the full range of extra-curricular stuff that goes on at a school, it is going to disadvantage you—even in terms of aspiration, I guess. It is the feeling of ‘What’s the point if I can’t do this, that or the other?’ The young people we worked with—I cannot remember their age range, but I think that the young researchers were interviewing 14 to 19-year-olds—talked about a peer mentor, because they felt that they would find it a lot easier to engage with them, and to have someone like that who has been through circumstances. That particular study was interesting because, of our four lead researchers, three went on to further education and one went into a job.

[226] There is an impact. I think that it probably goes back to the fact that if you are not being specifically encouraged at home, then education is important. You can go to school and you can feel that it is not just the privileged few who can do that. This will take its toll—well, that is what we are hearing in terms of how people feel.

[227] **Angela Burns:** May I just ask very quickly about your idea to have a fund that children or families could apply to? How would you see that working in practice? Trust me, to get £20 off a Government body, a non-governmental organisation or anything like that, you have to fill in reams of paperwork. We are talking about families that are not familiar with that kind of methodology. How would that actually work? I think that there are some legs in that somewhere. For example, in rural places—and I know that Bethan cited some inner-city examples a couple of sessions ago—children go back to their farms, they are not very well off, they cannot get back into the school for the trips or to take part in the football club, et cetera. How would the kind of concept that you have here really work in practice?

[228] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Well, I will emphasise that the concept came from the young people themselves. I will also emphasise that if I had the answer to that, I would have put something in writing—

[229] **Angela Burns:** So, it was not a Save the Children idea.

[230] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** No, it came from the children themselves, but it resonated with Huw Lewis who had spoken about a life chances fund. I have written and said, ‘We would be happy to work with you on this’. However, it would have to be simple, you are right. I am just thinking about the Communities First days when we found a way of giving small grants from the sports council, and we just requested a very limited amount of evidence and accountancy. It is going to have to be something simple like that, but I am afraid that I do not have the answer today.

[231] **Bethan Jenkins:** Sorry, can I ask about the grants? I have done some work on financial literacy, for example encouraging more parents to set up a credit union at school

with their children, so that there is parental engagement. Lots of schools do it for the children, but not so much for the parents. The parents can then plan to budget, six or seven months in advance, so it is less of a giving out. Some parents will not want that. They will not want to say 'Give me a grant'; they will feel better that they can save the money themselves.

[232] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** That is a very good point. It is about that whole empowerment issue again, is it not?

[233] **Ann Jones:** [*Inaudible*] Yes, probably. [*Laughter.*] We will write to you. We have run out of time, so I do apologise for that. There are issues around free school meals and what happens with the introduction of universal credit. There is quite a good part in your report that we will look at and I think that we touched on the Sutton Trust toolkit. There are also a couple of issues around the pupil deprivation grant. May we write to you about those?

[234] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Absolutely.

[235] **Ann Jones:** Thank you very much for your evidence. You have obviously engaged with the committee, because we have run out of time. We will send you a copy of the record of the meeting for you to check for accuracy, as you know. Thank you very much for your evidence today.

[236] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Thank you for inviting us. I am sorry if we were a bit long-winded.

[237] **Ann Jones:** No, that is fine. It was just because it was all very interesting and will always provoke more questions from Members. Thank you very much.

[238] **Angela Burns:** People with passion are always very welcome here; we see too many who are passionless.

[239] **Ann Jones:** Yes, we do.

[240] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Well, we have plenty of that, do we not? Thank you very much.

11:44

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r
Cyfarfod
Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the
Meeting**

[241] **Ann Jones:** I move that

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 17.42(vi).

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

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 11:44.
The public part of the meeting ended at 11:44.*

