



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

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

**Dydd Mercher, 9 Gorffennaf 2008
Wednesday, 9 July 2008**

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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.
These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Eleanor Burnham	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Angela Burns	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Christine Chapman	Llafur Labour
Ann Jones	Llafur (yn dirprwyo ar ran Lynne Neagle) Labour (substitute for Lynne Neagle)
Helen Mary Jones	Plaid Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) The Party of Wales (Committee Chair)

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Grŵp Pobl Ifanc Young People's Group	Trefnwyd gan Achub y Plant Facilitated by Save the Children
Grŵp Gofalwyr Ifanc Young Carers' Group	Trefnwyd gan NCH Cymru Facilitated by NCH Cymru

Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Seneddol y Cynulliad yn bresennol
Assembly Parliamentary Service officials in attendance

Claire Griffiths	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Tom Jackson	Clerc Clerk
Kathryn Potter	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Yr Aelodau Members Research Service
Helen Roberts	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.49 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.49 a.m.

Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Helen Mary Jones:** Mae'n amser inni gychwyn. Yr wyf yn croesawu pawb i'r cyfarfod ac yn atgoffa Aelodau ac aelodau'r cyhoedd i ddiffodd unrhyw ddyfeisiau electronig fel ffonau symudol, BlackBerrys ac yn y blaen. Nid yw'n ddigon da i'w gosod ar 'tawel', achos byddant yn parhau i amharu ar yr offer cyfieithu a'r offer darlledu, felly dylech eu diffodd. Os clywn larwm tân, bydd y tywysyddion yn ein harwain allan yn ddiogel, felly dylem eu dilyn a derbyn eu cyfarwyddiadau. Mae clustffonau ar gael i glywed y cyfieithiad neu i glywed yn well os oes angen hynny.

Helen Mary Jones: It is time for us to make a start. I welcome everyone to this meeting and remind Members and members of the public to switch off any electronic devices, such as mobile phones, BlackBerrys and so on. It is not good enough to put them on silent mode, because they will still interfere with the translation and broadcasting equipment, so please switch them off completely. If a fire alarm sounds, the ushers will lead us out safely, so we should follow them and their instructions. Headsets are available for interpretation or for amplification if required.

9.50 a.m.

[2] A oes datganiadau o fuddiant? Are there any declarations of interest? I see
Gwelaif nad oes. that there are not.

[3] Yr ydym wedi cael ymddiheuriadau We have received apologies from Lynne
oddi wrth Lynne Neagle, a byddwn y parhau Neagle, and we will continue to receive
i gael ymddiheuriadau oddi wrthi dros y apologies from her over the coming months.
misoedd nesaf. Croeso eto i Ann. Yr ydym yn We welcome Ann once again. We are very
hynod ddiolchgar ei bod yn medru ymuno â grateful that she can join us regularly.
ni yn rheolaidd.

9.51 a.m.

**Cynnig Trefniadol o dan Reol Sefydlog Rhif 10.37 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y
Cyhoedd o'r Cyfarfod yn ystod Eitem 7
Procedural Motion under Standing Order No. 10.37 to Resolve to Exclude the
Public from the Meeting for Item 7**

[4] **Helen Mary Jones:** Ymhen cwpl o **Helen Mary Jones:** In a few minutes' time,
funudau, byddwn yn croesawu dau grŵp o we will welcome two groups of young
bobl ifanc i'r cyfarfod, un yn eu tro. Fodd people, one at a time, to the meeting.
bynag, cyn hynny, ceisiaf gytundeb yr However, before that, I seek Members'
Aelodau inni wahardd y cyhoedd o'r cyfarfod agreement to excluding the public from the
nes ymlaen, ar gyfer eitem 7, er mwyn inni meeting a little later on, for item 7, so that we
drafod yr adroddiad ar dlodi plant. can discuss the report on child poverty.

[5] Cynigiaf fod I propose that

*y pwyllgor yn penderfynu gwahardd y the committee resolves to exclude the public
cyhoedd o'r cyfarfod ar gyfer eitem 7 ar yr from the meeting for item 7 on the agenda, in
agenda, yn unol â Rheol Sefydlog Rhif accordance with Standing Order No.
10.37(vi). 10.37(vi).*

[6] Gwelaif fod y pwyllgor yn gytún. I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion carried.*

9.51 a.m.

**Rhaglen Waith y Pwyllgor
Committee's Work Programme**

[7] **Helen Mary Jones:** We have a couple of minutes before the young people are due to
arrive, so we will take this item now.

[8] Mae gydag Ann rywbeth i'w Ann has something to add.
ychwanegu.

[9] So I will bring Ann in first, followed by Eleanor.

[10] **Ann Jones:** Thank you, Chair. I was just wondering about something in the forward
work programme. Although I am a substitute member on this committee, I will be attending

these meetings for quite a long time, I would like to ask whether we could look at the child immunisation programme. The vaccination for meningitis, Prevenar—I only know its trade name—has seen huge take-up in Wales. Take-up of the booster at 13 months is not as good, however. Can we do a short piece of work on why that should be? I have a suggestion that it may be because working mums are back in work 12 months after giving birth, trying to juggle their priorities, as we all know. Can we look at some way of getting the nurseries or other childcare providers involved in booster take-up? The first task is to know who is not receiving the booster, and the second is to find out how we can then address that in the interests of the children.

[11] **Helen Mary Jones:** What are other Members' views?

[12] **Angela Burns:** I would be content to proceed with that; it is an excellent idea.

[13] **Helen Mary Jones:** Just for the record, Ann, while you are here, you are a full member of the committee with as much right to interfere in the forward work programme as anybody else.

[14] **Ann Jones:** Thank you.

[15] **Helen Mary Jones:** As a way forward on that, I suggest that we begin by writing to the Minister, drawing her attention to our concerns about that failure to take up the booster. It is crucial. We shall see what response we get and specifically ask her what is being done already to look at who is not getting the vaccine booster. Then, depending on her response, we could hold a short evidence-taking session or something early in the new term. We will make the decision early in the new term about when to do that. Is that okay with everybody? I see that it is.

[16] Eleanor, mae gennyh rywbeth i'w ychwanegu hefyd. Eleanor, you also have something to add.

[17] **Eleanor Burnham:** Hoffwn inni edrych ar y cydweithio sydd yn bodoli, neu nad yw'n bodoli, rhwng Cymunedau yn Gyntaf, neu Cymunedau Nesaf, a Cychwyn Cadarn, sy'n gwneud gwaith da. Cafwyd tipyn o dystiolaeth am bryder rai o staff Cychwyn Cadarn nad oes digon o gydweithio rhyngddynt hwy a staff Cymunedau yn Gyntaf a Cymunedau Nesaf. Mae'n bwysig bod gwerth am arian. Yn eu tystiolaeth, mae tystion wedi dweud pa mor dda yw Cychwyn Cadarn, a rhaid inni sicrhau bod cydweithio â Cymunedau yn Gyntaf.

Eleanor Burnham: I would like us to look at the co-operation that exists, or does not exist, between Communities First, or Communities Next, and Flying Start, which does good work. Evidence has been received on the concern that some Flying Start staff have about inadequate levels of co-operation between them and Communities First and Communities Next staff. It is important that there is value for money. Witnesses, in their evidence, have said how good Flying Start is, and we need to ensure that there is co-operation with Communities First.

[18] **Helen Mary Jones:** Members may have had a bit of trouble picking the translation up. Eleanor is suggesting that, as part of our work on child poverty, we might want to look at how well some of the child poverty programmes, such as Flying Start—or programmes that partly address child poverty—are integrating with the Communities First programme.

[19] That, too, would be something to write to Ministers about, to see what response we get. We might then want to consider the matter, because we have agreed to do several pieces of work on child poverty over the next couple of years. That might very well be the next thing for us to look at. When we had Leighton Andrews in, there were things that he could tell us and things that he could not tell us, because things were changing as part of the move from

Communities First to Communities Next. People will correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that he said that addressing child poverty is one of the key things that Communities Next is explicitly being asked to do, and perhaps that was not as explicit in Communities First. So, next term might be a good time to look at that, because I understand that the consultation on Communities Next will be over, and the Government will have decided its direction on that. Is that okay with everyone?

[20] Is there anything else to consider for the forward work programme? In terms of timing, we might want to consider when we want to publish this particular piece of work on child poverty. I will bring Tom in to mention our initial thoughts about that.

[21] **Mr Jackson:** The likelihood is that Members will want to consider in private the draft report on child poverty and the education portfolio. In that case, the report itself would not be agreed until the second meeting of term on 9 October. Given the time that it takes to then produce a fully published report, the launch would probably be in early November, but obviously that can be adjusted, depending on Members' thoughts.

[22] **Helen Mary Jones:** Does that seem sensible to everyone?

[23] **Angela Burns:** Do you think that we need a meeting, or could we consider the draft via e-mail, and perhaps knock it on the head during the recess?

[24] **Mr Jackson:** I was going to suggest that, ahead of that private session, Members might want to discuss issues through electronic correspondence. However, we have found in the past that it is sometimes easier to bring everything together at a meeting. We can probably do the bulk of the work electronically, but it may be that there is some fine detail that needs to be discussed at a meeting.

[25] **Eleanor Burnham:** I would agree, because many things ensue during recess, such as catching up on what is happening back in the constituency or region—we are there so little these days.

[26] **Helen Mary Jones:** I think, Angela, that we will have a better idea about how achievable that is when we have had our private session on the document, and see whether there are any big differences of opinion about emphasis. However, it would certainly be good to do as much work as we can by email—fully taking on board Eleanor's comments, and hoping that people will take a bit of time off in recess as well. We may be able to agree the bulk of it, but I think that it is probably easier if we have a formal session to sign it off, even if we are all pretty much agreed.

[27] **Angela Burns:** I am absolutely happy with that. I just have one other point that I would like to have considered for the forward work programme.

[28] One of the things that struck me most in all of the evidence that we have heard over the last few months was the contention by David Egan that a child from a deprived background can catch up at primary school and reach the attainment level of 80 per cent of his or her peers, but in the first year or two at secondary school, slips right back. I am interested to find out why that happens, and whether that is just Professor Egan's opinion, or is empirical evidence. Are there recommendations that we could make to the Government on that? Losing those children at 12 and 13 is having the most enormous knock-on effect. We have the 14-19 pathways, and all the rest of it, but there is a gap where those children make the transition from small school to big school, and if we can keep them along the right path at that point, they will be able to move on much better as adults.

[29] **Christine Chapman:** I agree with that. Other witnesses mentioned that gender issues

start to come into play at that critical time, particularly around the underachievement of boys—so, I would support that.

[30] **Helen Mary Jones:** Perhaps we can talk about that in a bit more detail when we come to discuss the report, because there is an area for recommendation on that, but that is quite general at the moment. We might want to seek more evidence to make that a bit more specific. Is it okay with everyone if we come back to that in the private session at the end, when we discuss the areas that are covered in the report? It seems to me that, when we do that, we might also address the areas where we want to go back to witnesses and ask for more detail on their evidence—examples, perhaps, or explanations on certain points. I absolutely agree that Professor Egan’s point was one of the most interesting—that primary schools are not failing our poorest children, but secondary schools are. That is a sweeping generalisation; there are some comprehensive schools that do terribly well. However, we need to know what is happening in those schools that work as opposed to what goes wrong.

10.00 a.m.

[31] **Angela Burns:** I think that that is the key, because, as a society, we are always talking about lost generations, and young people’s lack of engagement with society, particularly boys. If we can build on the great work that primary schools do in bringing children from deprived homes into a better place in terms of their emotional, social, and intellectual attainment, and we can keep them on that pathway, we might have a sniff as to how we can improve society a little later on when these children reach the ages of 18, 20, and 25.

[32] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is the key to social mobility and to people being able to get work and get out of cycles of poverty, is it not?

[33] **Eleanor Burnham:** As is mentioned in this paper, perhaps some of them need to be taught—as they were in primary school—by one teacher rather than moving around the school.

[34] **Helen Mary Jones:** We may want to get some more evidence about how schools that are managing to keep those standards up for children from the poorest homes are doing so. I am sure that some of it will be to do with less of a sudden transition into moving from one class to another, and so on. We may very well need to take some more evidence on that.

[35] The only other comment that I have on the forward work programme is that we have two full committee meetings down to scrutinise the children’s commissioner’s annual report. Do Members think that this will be sufficient? It is one of the big jobs that this committee has to do, but, on the other hand, there are other things that we need to do. So, it is a major balancing act. Do Members have any views on that?

[36] **Eleanor Burnham:** I would imagine that that would be sufficient, because the office of the children’s commissioner is well established. We know what it has been saying over the last few years, and I am sure that we will be able to cope with assimilating the latest information.

[37] **Helen Mary Jones:** I suggest that we leave those there, but perhaps give ourselves some leeway a bit further down the line, because there may be issues raised in the commissioner’s report that we want to take up with Ministers as a committee. If we use those two sessions to examine that, we may then identify something that we will want to ask a Minister or Ministers to come in on 27 November to discuss. We may want to come back early in the term after Christmas if the children’s commissioner tells us again that things have not moved, or whatever.

[38] **Eleanor Burnham:** Such as school loos, which is one of our favourite topics.

[39] **Helen Mary Jones:** Among many other things. I will be interested to see what his views are about young people's mental health, because we have had some big issues related to that. We might then want to pursue some of what he raises, and that may have an effect on the work programme after Christmas. I am also looking at our secretariat when I ask whether that seems reasonable and manageable.

[40] On the work on the parenting action plan, Children in Wales facilitates a group of organisations—some voluntary organisations and local groups—which have used resources through the parenting action plan to work on parenting issues. It has been in touch and, as part of our work and perhaps to launch the work on the parenting action plan, has volunteered to facilitate a visit of a lobby of parents and children who have benefited from or have participated in parenting groups and various work that has gone on. It has offered to bring them to the Assembly for a social event at a lunchtime or straight after Plenary to talk to us about their experiences. We could also invite other Assembly Members to that. It would be a combination of celebrating what has been achieved and giving them a chance to talk informally about some of the problems that might exist. I wanted to check that Members are happy for us to pursue that.

[41] **Ann Jones:** In addition to that, yesterday Joyce Watson hosted the launch of a toolkit, which single parents have looked at. It is a proofing kit for those returning to work, and considers the level of flexibility. Could we look at that as part of the parenting action plan?

[42] **Helen Mary Jones:** That sounds like a very good idea.

[43] **Ann Jones:** It was done by lone parents. It used evidence from them as well as from agencies. I will ensure that a copy of the toolkit is sent to the secretariat, and perhaps we could look at that as well.

[44] **Helen Mary Jones:** That seems like a good idea. Is everyone happy with that? I see that you are. The other thing that I have talked about in theory with the secretariat is whether, in terms of taking evidence on the parenting action plan, we might want to formally take the committee out of Cardiff for one of those sessions. We know that parents with young children are among the least mobile people, in terms of being able to travel long distances.

[45] **Eleanor Burnham:** Could we go to north Wales, perhaps?

[46] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes, I was thinking about the north. Interesting work has been done in various counties. I know that Gwynedd Council, for example, has piloted a programme that combines teaching emotional intelligence in school to tiny children with offering parenting support; Gwynedd now does that in all its primary schools. I am sure that, through Children in Wales, we could get in touch with the voluntary organisations up there and find out what is going on.

[47] We were thinking that, if we are going to undertake that kind of journey, in order to make it worthwhile, it might be good to have a formal committee session and then perhaps do some associated visits as a committee. I know that quite a few of us have gone out as individuals, but it might be good, if we have made the journey and have taken all the team and resources out, that perhaps we do not just have a formal committee meeting, but visit people on the ground, which, for this sort of thing, is much the best way of getting evidence. Does that seem acceptable to people, subject to our being able to make all the arrangements, and so on?

[48] **Eleanor Burnham:** Do we have to have permission from the Business Committee to do that?

[49] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes, we have to have permission from the Business Committee—I say, sighing. [*Laughter.*] However, in fairness, it has to work like that, because there are big resource implications. If we are taking out all our Record of Proceedings people, research people, and secretariat, for what amounts to two days by the time that you have got there and back, it is only fair that we have to check that with the Business Committee to ensure that it works. It might be worth making an approach now to the Business Committee and letting it know that we will be making that request formally at the beginning of next term, once we have decided which of the committee's slots we should take out.

[50] **Ann Jones:** Will this committee meet on a Thursday morning during the next term?

[51] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is what we understand. Is that right, Tom?

[52] **Mr Jackson:** Yes.

[53] **Eleanor Burnham:** Will that be all through the term?

[54] **Mr Jackson:** It will be fortnightly.

[55] **Eleanor Burnham:** I thought that we were following rotas of half terms.

[56] **Mr Jackson:** Our understanding, at this stage, is that that will be for the whole term, rather than it rotating at half term.

[57] **Helen Mary Jones:** It will then change again after Christmas—that is what we believe will happen. Members might therefore want to put those dates in their diaries now for autumn; if anything changes, we will let people know at once. Therefore, are we happy with those additions and caveats to the forward work programme? I assume that that is agreed.

[58] The other item that we have down to discuss, or to begin discussing briefly, before we bring our witnesses in, is the Government's consultation on child poverty, which is going out now, and I believe closes on 30 September. There are some questions that we might want to think about. For example, do we want to make a response as a committee? I see that Members wish to do so. In that case, we have to sort out how we are going to do that. We have the evidence to make a response on the education issues. Do we have a suggested way forward—what have we been thinking in terms of how that might be done, Tom?

[59] **Mr Jackson:** It might be useful if Members were to indicate any particular areas on which they would be keen to make a response, perhaps within the consultation.

[60] **Eleanor Burnham:** The work of Communities First is one of my pet issues. How efficacious and effective is the work of Communities First, particularly as we are probably going to ask questions relating to the partnership between Communities First, Communities Next and Flying Start.

[61] **Helen Mary Jones:** Are Members happy that we ask the Government about that?

[62] **Ms Potter:** There is a list of consultation questions on page 33, so it might be as well to organise our response around specific questions.

[63] **Helen Mary Jones:** We have about 20 minutes now, so we could take a look at those

questions now and see whether Members have any initial thoughts. Would that be helpful?

10.10 a.m.

[64] **Ann Jones:** If we were to respond to the consultation document, how would that affect us if we wanted to scrutinise the final policy document? Would it be better to keep our powder dry and then scrutinise the Welsh Assembly Government?

[65] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is an option.

[66] **Ann Jones:** There would be nothing to stop us, as individuals, from submitting a consultation response, I would not have thought, but if the committee was also to respond, how would we then scrutinise our own thoughts? I will just throw that one in, as a pedant who likes to know what the options are.

[67] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is a good point, which I had not considered. Another question that occurred to me related to the basis on which we would be making our response as a committee, rather than as individuals. We have taken evidence on the education issues, and we are in a position, hopefully, to make some strong recommendations on those, but we have not taken evidence on some of the broader issues. So, perhaps, it would not make sense for us to respond to those. Do you have a particular point to make, Tom?

[68] **Mr Jackson:** I would endorse your point that the committee has welcomed evidence, for example, on issues around the child poverty duty on public agencies, but that it has not, perhaps, taken a great deal of evidence on the specifics of those issues.

[69] **Helen Mary Jones:** What is the reaction of other people to Ann's point?

[70] **Eleanor Burnham:** The consultation questions are very prescribed, from the Government's point of view, and I am concerned about Communities First projects—I will keep my finger on this—because we are spending a lot of money but I am receiving a lot of evidence that they are not working in partnership or that they are not as effective as they could be. That is the point that I made earlier, and is why I asked the question about their efficacy and the partnership working between Communities First projects and others. I have been particularly taken by the evidence that we have received and the evidence that I have gathered from people who are working on these other efficacious programmes. We are talking about a lot of public money and, yet, child poverty is not being eradicated and we need to ensure that we are driving in the right direction and being as effective as possible.

[71] **Helen Mary Jones:** I do not think that anyone would disagree with that, but Ann's question deals with the right time for us to make an impact on this, not whether we ought to impact—when will we get the most out of it?

[72] **Angela Burns:** I agree with both. As these questions are prescribed, I feel that, if we just answer them, we are giving up our right to proper independent scrutiny. After the consultation period we should, perhaps, have a jolly good look at what has been said and done.

[73] **Helen Mary Jones:** Chris, what do you think?

[74] **Christine Chapman:** We could have a quick discussion now, but that would not do this justice.

[75] **Helen Mary Jones:** It would not.

[76] **Christine Chapman:** I have written a few things down and I am going to respond as an individual. However, we need to explain why we have decided not to respond at this time, because we would not do it justice now. We have looked at evidence on the education issues, which would be okay, but, other than that, it will look as if we have not really thought about it.

[77] **Helen Mary Jones:** The concern is about the quality. We have already agreed, Eleanor, to look at this issue once Communities Next policy is in place, which might be in 12 months' time, when the Communities Next projects have been working for 12 months to a specific child poverty responsibility. It seems to me, having listened to Members, that what we would be doing would be asking more questions.

[78] **Eleanor Burnham:** However, we can respond as individuals.

[79] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes, and I would encourage individuals to respond, particularly if you have local experiences that can illustrate some of these issues. Of course everyone is supportive of the first question, which asks whether we are supportive of the partnership approach proposed in the joint agreement, but the question is how well it works and how we can be sure that that partnership is not just taking up a lot of people's time without leading to more effective service delivery.

[80] I sense that we do not feel that we should make a formal response. Am I reflecting people's views at this stage? I see that I am. Brian Gibbons is the lead Minister on this, so I will write to Brian to explain why we are not doing that at this stage and that what we want is to scrutinise on delivery once the document is in place. I will also say that we do not feel that we have sufficient evidence, but that committee members may respond individually with their own perspective or as representatives of party groups. Does that seem sensible? That is a nice sigh of relief from the committee secretariat. We already have enough work to do with our specific child poverty work on education. I suppose that that is another point—we are going to have some clear and strong things to say about that. If we try to respond to all of these questions, we might dilute the message on the specific issue on which we have an evidence base to make some suggestions to Ministers and to challenge them. Are you content with that way forward? I see that you are. Tom, is there anything else that we can do in the next 15 minutes?

[81] **Mr Jackson:** The young people from the group facilitated by Save the Children are in the public gallery.

[82] **Helen Mary Jones:** Bore da. Good morning, everyone; it is nice to see you. We have managed to finish the first part of our meeting a little earlier, so would you be happy to join us now? I see that you are. We will take a quick comfort break, if people want to stretch legs and so on, while we bring the young people in. That will give us an extra 15 minutes or so with the young people, which is probably more useful than trying to respond to a Government consultation.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10.17 a.m. ac 10.21 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 10.17 a.m. a 10.21 a.m.*

Tlodi Plant Child Poverty

[83] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you all for coming. The committee's job is to check that the Government is doing what it promises that it will do, and one of the things that is supposed to be a top priority for the Government is to try to ensure that children do not live in

poverty—getting rid of child poverty. Some good things have happened, but we are trying to find out whether schools and colleges and those types of services, which all young people come into contact with at some point or another, are doing their job in helping to deal with this issue. We do not have a formal list of questions, but you have been sent a list of the types of things that we might want to ask you, and you have been doing some talking with each other and with your support workers about what you might want to say. Is that okay? I see that it is.

[84] It is over to you, Members. This is Christine, Eleanor, Angela and Ann. We use first names, and everyone has a name plate. My job, as Chair, is to try to keep you all under control, which is always a problem with this lot, but I am sure that you will be fine. We will take it from there, and see which Member wishes to start with some questions.

[85] **Angela Burns:** May I start by asking you to tell us what are the things that you have particularly noticed, or things that you are particularly cross about or particularly disappointed about, and would like to see made different? Rather than listen to us blather on, we would much rather listen to you.

[86] **Matthew:** When I was in secondary school, I was picked out because of my sister's behaviour when she was in school. They thought that I was going to be bad in school, so I decided that I was going to be bad, and that I would prove them right.

[87] **Angela Burns:** You were blamed for what your sister did?

[88] **Matthew:** Yes, I was singled out.

[89] **Angela Burns:** I am glad that I was not blamed for anything that my brother did—he did a lot of things. That is a very good point.

[90] **Helen Mary Jones:** Do other people think that that happens? If you come from a particular family or a particular area, the school thinks that it knows about you before it has got to know you?

[91] **Jamie:** One of the things as well is that teachers teach us rules, but they do not follow them themselves, such as with people being illegally excluded. When a letter is sent home to say that you have been excluded, you have the right to appeal, but with our school you do not have the right to appeal. It happens in most schools in Wales, and many people have been illegally excluded.

[92] **Angela Burns:** Are you all from the same school?

[93] **Jamie:** Yes.

[94] **Helen Mary Jones:** Angela is one of the Assembly Members for your area.

[95] **Angela Burns:** May I ask what school it is?

[96] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes, you can ask what school that is, but I think that Angela is also prepared to have a longer chat with you to see what we can do about that particular school.

[97] **Angela Burns:** Which school is it?

[98] **Jamie:** Pembroke school.

[99] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, the way in which the exclusion system works does not help if families are not told what rights they have, and so on?

[100] **Matthew:** All of us have been illegally excluded as well, not just Jamie.

[101] **Angela Burns:** Have you all been permanently excluded?

[102] **Matthew:** Yes, except that it has been done illegally. The school has not sent letters home.

[103] **Angela Burns:** Good Lord.

[104] **Jamie:** Only the headmaster can exclude you, but some people have even been excluded by teachers.

[105] **Helen Mary Jones:** Those are things that Angela will need to pick up, as one of your local Assembly Members, so we will come back to that. However, we need to talk about the broader issues of how schools deal with or help people who may not have the advantages that other people have. Eleanor, what did you want to ask about?

[106] **Eleanor Burnham:** I used to work with young people like you, across north-east Wales, who were excluded or who were on the verge of being excluded, to get them back into the system. At the time, I was a magistrate and I did all kinds of other stuff, so I had a lot of input into the activities that led to the exclusions. I was always very interested in when or why you decided that everything was boring for you. Very often, in my experience, that does not help when it comes to you guys switching off and then getting excluded. Can you explain when you were at the end of your experience, so to speak?

[107] **Helen Mary Jones:** When did you get fed up with school, if you did get fed up, or do you feel that school got fed up with you?

[108] **Jamie:** I think that you get different types of people. Some people like to get their heads in a book or learn verbally and others learn by using their hands. Luke does the woodland project and he is very good at carpentry. He started that in year 9 and he wants to be a carpenter or a brickie.

[109] **Angela Burns:** Do you think that school does not actually cater for that? Does school say that you have to do all your learning through books and you are not really given much chance to explore different ways?

[110] **Jamie:** They brought in Green Links last year, but it is not open to some of us in the later years or to some other people.

[111] **Eleanor Burnham:** Did you follow a trend, all of you, where you had been ever so happy at primary school and then, when you got up to big school, perhaps things were not quite the same?

[112] **Jamie:** Yes, and your education drops.

[113] **Eleanor Burnham:** Can you explain why you lost interest? Why did you fall?

[114] **Helen Mary Jones:** Perhaps we can turn that question on its head. What was it about primary school that was better? You were all saying that you were happier there and then things started to go wrong when you got to comprehensive school.

[115] **Eleanor Burnham:** Was it the size of the place, for a start, which is so different from your—

[116] **Helen Mary Jones:** Eleanor, shall we let them answer? I can see that somebody is bursting to speak.

[117] **Kelly:** In primary school, there were fewer people in the class. You had one or two teachers who could teach you everything, but then when we moved up to secondary school, there were 30 people in a class and not enough teachers to help you when you needed help.

[118] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is very interesting. Does everyone agree with that? I see that you do.

[119] **Eleanor Burnham:** Did you feel that, at primary school, you were getting more help and more support, but when you got to secondary school, it was not there when you had problems?

[120] **Jamie:** You do not have a lot of learning support assistants in Pembroke school, but you always had an LSA in your class in primary school, I found.

[121] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is interesting that those people were really helpful to you when you were younger, but then they were not there any more. I have several people who want to come in. Ann can go first, then Angela and then Chris.

[122] **Ann Jones:** I wanted to pick up on the bit about Luke doing a project and wanting to be a carpenter. As politicians, we always talk about pathways to learning for young people. As you have all been excluded or you do not like the school atmosphere, would you look at going to a local college if it would give you those skills to become a carpenter without having to put your head in a book, and if you could then perhaps pick up the academic side of it later? Is that the sort of thing that you would like to do, so that, rather than be excluded from school, you could go to a local college and learn a practical skill first?

[123] **Luke:** Yes.

[124] **Ann Jones:** Then, perhaps, from that, you could get back into the school ethos. Is that the sort of thing that you think that you would like to do?

[125] **Luke:** Yes.

[126] **Ann Jones:** What sort of thing would you like to see? I know that Luke wants to be a carpenter, but are there other things that you are interested in? What about mechanics?

[127] **Kelly:** Bricklaying.

[128] **Ann Jones:** Yes, bricklaying. So, those are the things that you want to do rather than being excluded from school. There might be a way for you to do that. Do you think that that would work? I see that you do.

[129] **Angela Burns:** I just wondered what you do, as you are not able to go to school. What do you do to fill up your days?

10.30 a.m.

[130] **Luke:** Sometimes, we are at the Poppy project or getting home tuition; otherwise, we are lounging around town doing nothing.

[131] **Angela Burns:** What do your mums and dads think about it all? Do you guys just hang around at home?

[132] **Connor:** We just walk the streets, really.

[133] **Angela Burns:** May I ask how old you are?

[134] **Connor:** I am 14.

[135] **Jamie:** What happens then is that the police target young people. Did you know that the police get the same amount of points for taking a young person as they do for a murderer? That is a fact.

[136] **Angela Burns:** I am so, so sorry that we have let you down so badly. I really am.

[137] **Helen Mary Jones:** It is plain that something is going badly wrong, and that is what we are here to try to sort out.

[138] **Christine Chapman:** First of all, thank you for coming here today, because it is good to talk to you all. You have talked about different things, such as not being happy in school, and you have told us about some of your experiences. What would have made school a different experience for you? What could the school or adults or other people like us have done differently? How can we improve things for you and for other young people?

[139] **Jamie:** When you get to year 9, you get an option sheet, and from that you get to pick history or physics or all that science stuff, and subjects that you have to sit down and write for. English, maths and sciences are a vital part of your education, and you should still do them, but you should also be able to go out and do bricklaying or carpentry at year 9. You should have that choice. That should go forward. People who are not so good at education, or cannot write stuff down—and do not get me wrong, I think that that is a vital part of education—want to go out and get a bit of money in their pockets as soon as they can.

[140] **Christine Chapman:** You talked about carpentry and history, but what was it about the teaching of history that you did not like?

[141] **Jamie:** I enjoyed history.

[142] **Luke:** I think that we all did.

[143] **Jamie:** I enjoyed geography, too.

[144] **Christine Chapman:** What was it about the teaching of the subject that you did not like or that could have been changed for you?

[145] **Luke:** The teacher could have understood us better.

[146] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is an interesting point.

[147] **Christine Chapman:** What happened when the teacher did not understand you?

[148] **Luke:** You might have mucked around weeks before, but he would still point you out for anything.

[149] **Angela Burns:** There is a culture where there might be a couple of troublesome kids

and they get blamed for all the trouble.

[150] **Eleanor Burnham:** I find your comments interesting, because you sensibly said that you need to have English and maths. Do any of you suffer from dyslexia or anything like that, and have not been helped with it? Is that why some of you have not enjoyed English and maths?

[151] **Jamie:** I am dyslexic. I have asked for help many times, but I hardly ever get it.

[152] **Eleanor Burnham:** So, insufficient help is an issue.

[153] **Jamie:** Definitely. I would get singled out. They would ask me to read a book out in front of my whole English class, and I would start stuttering and I could not read it properly, and then everyone would laugh at me. I would get embarrassed, then I would kick off and then I would get into trouble.

[154] **Angela Burns:** Your school knows that you are dyslexic, does it, but the teachers still do that?

[155] **Jamie:** Yes. I have told them that I am dyslexic.

[156] **Helen Mary Jones:** Ann had a particular question to ask.

[157] **Ann Jones:** I wanted to talk about school uniforms. I am not sure about your schools, but some of the schools in my area in north Wales have looked at whether they should have a school uniform. What are your views on school uniforms? Do you think that it is easier to have them, because otherwise you might get targeted for not wearing the latest trainers—whatever they are? I do not know what they would be, as I am out of touch now. Do you think that school uniforms are good? How does a school uniform make you feel? I know that you are excluded at the moment, but does a school uniform make you feel part of that organisation? What are your views on school uniforms?

[158] **Jamie:** School should be for individuals. They herd you up and make you wear the same clothes as everyone else. You are not an individual if you are wearing exactly the same as everyone else, are you?

[159] **Ann Jones:** What if you could not afford the latest trainers or the latest of whatever the fashion is?

[160] **Jamie:** I was thinking that.

[161] **Luke:** That is why there are school uniforms.

[162] **Jamie:** Yes. You are all the same then, one way or another.

[163] **Ann Jones:** Would that help you? Do you think that teachers single you out if you do not wear school uniform? It is a shame that you have had such a bad experience of being labelled before you arrived at school because of your older brothers and sisters. I was labelled as being bad at school because I was a friend of somebody whose sister was bad in school. Mind you, I suppose that I was on occasion. I will admit to that now, so if you are listening, my former teacher, I do apologise. I realise that now. When I was in school uniform with the other children, and something happened, it was easier to hide in the crowd. Do you think that?

[164] **Jamie:** A school uniform in that way is good, but, like someone else said, it is itchy and we do not like it. What would happen if we had the choice to design it ourselves? We

could have selections and we could pick out the selection we like. We could have a vote on it or something like that.

[165] **Eleanor Burnham:** A bit like the Scouts or the Guides. They hold a competition.

[166] **Helen Mary Jones:** Luke, you have been trying to come in on this point about uniforms.

[167] **Luke:** It does not help wearing black all day in the hot weather, does it?

[168] **Helen Mary Jones:** It is a bit depressing. We know that one reason you are here is because you all acknowledge and accept that some of your issues are to do with coming from poorer homes. Is your school very strict about uniforms? We have heard different information about uniforms. In some schools, the uniform is easily affordable as it uses plain colours and it is fairly straightforward, which is what the Government says it should be. However, we have heard that, at other schools, you must have the sweatshirt with the logo on, and that can be expensive. What are your families' experiences of that sort of thing?

[169] **Kelly:** I have got a sister and a brother. My brother is older than me and my sister is younger, but we were all in the comprehensive at the same time. My mum is a single parent, and she does not get much in benefits for us, so she had to fork out the money to get my uniform, my sister's uniform and my brother's uniform. At the end of that, she had nothing left.

[170] **Eleanor Burnham:** If you did not have uniforms, you would still need clothes, and, as Ann suggested, very often, children have to have the right stuff—the right trainers or the right gear—which is often expensive. So, if a uniform is fairly affordable and makes everybody look the same, do you not think that it is a good idea?

[171] **Jamie:** I think that you should give some grants for it.

[172] **Helen Mary Jones:** I could see some of you nodding when Kelly was saying how hard it was for her mum to afford all the uniforms at once. Do any of you want to say something about that?

[173] **Matthew:** In the grants that you do get from the school to buy the uniform, you only get £45 to £50. The full uniform—shoes, trousers and everything—comes to at least £120 to £130. So, if your parents are on benefits or whatever, they have to fork out over £70 just to put you through school properly. I know quite a few people who have not had the right gear for school, and they have been kicked out for it.

[174] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, if you cannot afford the right school uniform, that contributes to teachers getting fed up with you. Is that an example of you getting blamed for something that you cannot help?

[175] **Matthew:** Yes.

[176] **Eleanor Burnham:** Would you—

[177] **Helen Mary Jones:** Eleanor, please. Angela is next.

[178] **Angela Burns:** Did you say that some children in your school have been excluded on the basis of their uniform?

[179] **Matthew:** One kid was kicked out just because he did not have the right jacket or the

right shoes.

[180] **Angela Burns:** Good Lord.

[181] **Helen Mary Jones:** Saints and angels.

[182] **Eleanor Burnham:** I have just one further question. Would you mind wearing a second-hand uniform if one were available?

[183] **Jamie:** Yes, because you would get bullied for it.

[184] **Eleanor Burnham:** You would get bullied more if you had a second-hand uniform of good quality.

[185] **Jamie:** It might be of good quality, but if anybody found out it was second hand, it would not be worth it. I heard a story from a person in school I know who is not very well off, and she had a hand-me-down from a friend that still had the friend's name in it. When she was at PE, they found her jacket and they ripped it out of her because the jacket had somebody else's name in it and because it was a hand-me-down.

[186] **Eleanor Burnham:** So, that is the kids having a go at you because you cannot afford new clothes. Is that not an attitude problem that the kids themselves need to address? We are now in a difficult financial situation for everybody. We have what is called the 'credit crunch', and everybody is worrying about money. Suddenly, a lot of people have to have second-hand clothes.

10.40 a.m.

[187] **Helen Mary Jones:** We are here to hear from the young people, rather than put our views to them.

[188] **Jamie:** I think that you should give grants towards the cost, so that they can buy new uniforms.

[189] **Ann Jones:** There is a grant system, but Matthew has said that it is not enough. If we were to change the grant system, what do you think we should do? At one time, people bought school uniforms from a certain shop. Should we go back to that system, and tell the shop that uniforms for certain people will be paid for by grant? The shop could send the bill to the authority, or should we give parents the money directly.

[190] **Jamie:** You should send tokens in the post to certain families, and then they could get a percentage off the cost of the uniform.

[191] **Helen Mary Jones:** Angela, is your point about uniforms?

[192] **Angela Burns:** No—it is about school meals.

[193] **Helen Mary Jones:** Chris also wants to come in on that. I just have one last question. Jamie, I think that you said that one thing that could be done with uniforms is for young people in the school to be allowed to take part in designing them. Do you know who decides what your school uniform is?

[194] **Jamie:** I think that the heads of years come together and decide what kind of uniform we wear.

[195] **Helen Mary Jones:** In some schools, the school councils have begun to have a say in this, and that could help.

[196] Moving on to meals, we will start with Chris and come back to Angela.

[197] **Christine Chapman:** One of the things that we talk about a lot at the moment is eating better. It is difficult when there is so much nice food out there. What do you think about school meals? Some people have free school meals.

[198] **Connor:** You only get £1.50 a day towards free school meals, and roast dinners are £1.45, so you cannot have any dessert, fruit or drink, and you do not get any breakfast, which is the most important meal of the day. Parents in poor families cannot give their children any extra money.

[199] **Eleanor Burnham:** Why can you not drink water? Is it free?

[200] **Connor:** There are no water fountains in the cafeteria, so you have to go all the way down the hall to get a glass of water.

[201] **Helen Mary Jones:** I guess there is an issue if you are the one person on your table drinking water when everyone else has a glass of juice.

[202] **Christine Chapman:** Are the portions big enough?

[203] **Connor:** The roast dinners are not very big, and they cost £1.45.

[204] **Christine Chapman:** And young people are different sizes, are they not?

[205] **Connor:** Yes.

[206] **Angela Burns:** How does it affect you to get your school meals free of charge? Do you have to hand over a voucher, or tokens, so that everyone can see that you are the kid with the free school meal, or is it all dealt with out of sight, so that no-one really knows?

[207] **Luke:** It is stated on the card—that it is worth £1.50.

[208] **Angela Burns:** Does anyone know that you are having a free school meal?

[209] **Luke:** No.

[210] **Angela Burns:** That must be a good thing.

[211] **Ann Jones:** Some schools in my area—and I apologise, because it is up in north Wales, and you might not know the system up there—are introducing a card system and have fingerprinted children so that, if they lose their card, or it is taken off them, the school has a way of finding out whether anyone else has used it as a second card. What do you think about that? Is that a bit over the top? I thought that it was. Would it stop the bullying? I have heard of bullying that involves cards being taken from people—

[212] **Jamie:** Our cards have pictures of our faces on them.

[213] **Helen Mary Jones:** So no-one can use your card.

[214] **Ann Jones:** That is good.

[215] **Christine Chapman:** Moving on a bit, how do you think we could improve free schools meals? Do you have any ideas on how to improve school food for young people?

[216] **Jamie:** Lower the prices for hot school meals, and put more money on the cards.

[217] **Helen Mary Jones:** Connor, do you want to come in on that?

[218] **Connor:** No, thank you.

[219] **Helen Mary Jones:** Eleanor, you wanted to make a point.

[220] **Eleanor Burnham:** Moving on, are you able to take part in after-school events? Are you able to take part in activities, like sports—or did you, when you were in school? I see that you are saying ‘no’. Can you tell me why that is, and whether you would have liked to have taken part in that kind of activity, if you had had a choice?

[221] **Jamie:** We do not even have a football team.

[222] **Ann Jones:** That is sacrilege.

[223] **Eleanor Burnham:** So, basically, you do not have access to the kind of activities that you would like to be involved in after school?

[224] **Luke:** The only sport we play is rugby, and not many of us like that.

[225] **Eleanor Burnham:** My other point related to things that you do outside school, such as going on trips. Did your school take you out? Was that too expensive to do?

[226] **Kelly:** There was a trip to Paris with my PE class. My mum is a single parent, as my dad died when I was five. I told the teacher that I could not go because my mum could not afford it; she has three other kids to look after. The teacher said to me, ‘Can your dad not pay for it?’. I said, ‘No, because he is dead’. She then said, ‘Does your mum not have a boyfriend who can pay for it?’. They should not be able to do that. The school should read your records and find out more about you before they question you.

[227] **Eleanor Burnham:** Was this teacher someone who should have known about you? Was she a form teacher?

[228] **Kelly:** No, she was a PE teacher.

[229] **Eleanor Burnham:** She obviously did not know about your circumstances.

[230] **Kelly:** No. However, there had been an earlier issue in school, where someone had bullied my sister in the PE block because my dad was dead. I am sure that that teacher was there when it happened.

[231] **Eleanor Burnham:** What about other trips that are not so expensive? Other than trips to Paris, what about trips that you might attend to help your work at school; have you ever been on any of those, or are they too expensive?

[232] **Jamie:** I went on a trip to Berlin once. I had been working, and I saved my wages to go. The cost came to around £300. I went there for four days, and there were loads of people there. It was an educational trip. To go there and see the sights was fantastic. I was lucky, as I had saved my money and therefore had the opportunity to see it, but others did not. Even if £200 or a percentage was put towards it, they could then save for a good few months and go

on the trip and get that experience.

[233] **Helen Mary Jones:** I will bring in Chris in a minute. Going back to your experience, Kelly, some schools collect money so that there is a pot of money to help young people who cannot afford to go on trips. Does the school that you should be at have a scheme like that, as far as you know? Is there any help available?

[234] **Kelly:** No.

[235] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, either the help is not available, or you do not know that it is there. If it is available and you do not know that it is not there, it might as well not be there. Chris, did you want to come in?

[236] **Christine Chapman:** To go back to the discussion that we had about activities after school, could Rhiannon or Kelly tell us what activities there are for girls in particular?

[237] **Rhiannon:** There is only hockey and netball.

[238] **Kelly:** I like football. I am on the football team, which trains after school. However, even in PE the girls were not allowed to do football until they were in year 11; they had to do netball and hockey. They did not have an after-school girls' football team, just one for the boys. That is sexist, because, if girls like football, they should be able to have a football team.

[239] **Christine Chapman:** What do you think, Rhiannon? Do you agree?

[240] **Rhiannon:** Yes. Schools are getting more pathetic for the kids.

[241] **Helen Mary Jones:** You said that you have not been very involved with things after school. Is that because there is not stuff going on, or it is hard to join in, or because they are things that you do not like?

[242] **Luke:** It is because you would be with people you do not want to be with and you can be excluded. You are not with your friends; they put you in a set. You will be bullied by someone either because they have better stuff than you or because they do not like the way that you are. That is why most people do not do anything after school.

[243] **Jamie:** They will not pay as much attention to you if you are not the sporty type.

[244] **Kelly:** Hardly any young people join in activities in school or after school, because they do not have the money to buy the right kit to be like everyone else. It is too expensive for them.

[245] **Helen Mary Jones:** We have heard that some schools have things like a bus that runs later so that you can get home for free if you stay and do drama, music, or sport after school. Does your school have anything like that?

[246] **Kelly:** No.

[247] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, if you were to stay for things, you would have to find your own way home. Can you walk to school, or do you need buses?

[248] **Kelly:** I can walk.

[249] **Jamie:** I take the bus.

[250] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, if you miss the school bus, you would have to pay for another bus to get home. That might be a problem for some people.

[251] **Connor:** Luke, Mathew, and I live down the road from our school, so we can walk. However, I know people who live in Angle who, if they miss the bus, have to get there by car or bike.

[252] **Jamie:** I have a problem with buses all of the time. Drivers try to charge me an adult fare, but I am only 15.

[253] **Eleanor Burnham:** It is because you look so smart and grown up.

[254] **Jamie:** Thank you. You are not classed as an adult until you are 18. You cannot buy a drink when you are 16, but you have to pay adult prices when you are aged 16 or 17.

10.50 a.m.

[255] **Angela Burns:** Yes, it is crazy. Just to put it in perspective, to drive from the young people's school to Angle in my car would probably take me 20 minutes. So, if they miss the bus, it is a huge cost to get out there—it is about 12 to 15 miles.

[256] **Connor:** I missed the bus, because it goes about 9 a.m.. If you miss it and go on a bike, you will not get there until about 10.30 a.m., and then you get shouted at, but it is not your fault.

[257] **Matthew:** If someone has missed the bus, it is quite a distance to walk or to cycle.

[258] **Helen Mary Jones:** So those young people could not get involved in anything after school, unless they had some help?

[259] **Matthew:** No.

[260] **Ann Jones:** I cannot believe this. This is a bit like when we were in school. You thought that the teachers always knew. They do not seem to have learned in the however many years have passed since I left school in terms of some of this experience around wearing school uniform, and so on. I wish to ask about school councils. We have tried to do a lot on getting school councils to be representative. First, do you have a school council? I see that you do.

[261] **Jamie:** Yes, but nothing ever gets carried out.

[262] **Ann Jones:** Is that because the teachers try to manage it, so that the 'good children'—that is an awful phrase to use, but I cannot think of another—or their favourites are put on the council? Are teachers' favourites the class representatives, so that teachers therefore manipulate the school council and you do not feel that the school council stands up for you at all?

[263] **Luke:** We do not get to pick the school council—the teachers do. I think that we should pick them.

[264] **Helen Mary Jones:** So you do not have an election for your school council—you do not vote for your class representatives?

[265] **Jamie:** No, they just get picked.

[266] **Luke:** They act as if they are above everyone—they wear their badges, and walk around the school smiling.

[267] **Connor:** You ask the council for 40-odd things, and it does only about three of them.

[268] **Eleanor Burnham:** What did you ask for?

[269] **Connor:** We asked for things like nets on the goal posts, so that you do not have to run all the way down the field. It is stuff like that, but they will not do it.

[270] **Eleanor Burnham:** Did you ask for some of the stuff that you told us this morning you would like to have changed?

[271] **Luke:** We asked for about half of that stuff, but not one thing was carried out—not new fountains; nothing. He does not go for water, because half the fountains are broken.

[272] **Eleanor Burnham:** The water fountains?

[273] **Luke:** Yes. You have to go to leisure.

[274] **Eleanor Burnham:** I cannot believe that you do not have water in the canteen—although I do believe it because you have told me so.

[275] **Connor:** If you want a drink of water, you have to get a cup from the canteen and walk all the way down the hallway.

[276] **Eleanor Burnham:** That is incredible. I can see Members looking shocked.

[277] **Connor:** The teachers do not care.

[278] **Helen Mary Jones:** You have said a bit about some of the attitudes that you have faced from some teachers. Have any of you had good experiences, either when you were younger or now, from either teachers or other adults that you came across through school, or wherever, who have helped you and have helped you learn?

[279] **Connor:** Miss Kumai helped us during year 7—she was a proper, good teacher.

[280] **Helen Mary Jones:** It is a difficult question, but what made her a good teacher. Why did you think she was a good teacher?

[281] **Connor:** If you were stuck, she would help you, and she had one-on-one chats with you and things like that. She was just a really good teacher.

[282] **Eleanor Burnham:** Why do you think you do not have any more good teachers like that?

[283] **Rhiannon:** If you ask for something, they just walk away from you and ignore you.

[284] **Jamie:** She never singled anyone out.

[285] **Eleanor Burnham:** She did not single anyone to be favourite, did she?

[286] **Connor:** We were all the same.

[287] **Eleanor Burnham:** So do you believe that many of these teachers should not be

teaching if they have these weird ideas about someone being ‘bad’ or ‘good’?

[288] **Jamie:** At Tanyard Youth Project, when someone comes for an interview, we pick them; they are brought in, and, if we like them when we interview them, we pick them. In school, it is about, ‘Oh, you have an A-level in English, or you have a master’s degree in English, so you are a teacher’.

[289] **Eleanor Burnham:** So you should be able to be on the school council to pick teachers?

[290] **Jamie:** Yes.

[291] **Helen Mary Jones:** Luke has been trying to come in on this point about what is a good teacher, and what is a bad teacher.

[292] **Luke:** The only reason that you will get along with a teacher is if they understand you. Miss Morgan and Miss Kumai are the only ones who have done that.

[293] **Connor:** Some teachers are really nasty. When I got sent to referral, they locked me in a cupboard, and they would not let me out; I needed the toilet, and they would not let me go.

[294] **Angela Burns:** Can I hear that again? Did you say that they locked you in a cupboard?

[295] **Connor:** Yes. They did not lock it properly—I could open the door, but they would not let me out.

[296] **Eleanor Burnham:** What had you been doing?

[297] **Helen Mary Jones:** I do not think that it matters what he had been doing; that is against the law.

[298] **Angela Burns:** That is child cruelty, Chair. You do not do that to a child; that is appalling.

[299] **Jamie:** Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the child has to be present during the decision-making. You are meant to be there when the decision is being made and you are meant to be involved in the decision, but you are never involved.

[300] **Helen Mary Jones:** Coming back to the things that you have been telling us about the good teachers, what we are trying to do is to come up with some ideas that we can recommend to the Government that it should make schools or county councils do. Does being understood mean that the teacher needs to know more about your home, your family and so on? For instance, Kelly was saying that that teacher should have known that her dad had died and should not have asked her those questions. Do you agree that you need teachers who know you better as individuals?

[301] **Luke:** They ask you 50 questions about why you do not want to do something.

[302] **Helen Mary Jones:** On the point about choosing the teachers, Jamie, you were saying that you think the school is only choosing people because they are clever, and because they have the right degree, and perhaps are not thinking about whether that person can communicate with or listen to young people. Is that right?

[303] **Jamie:** Schools these days only care about their reputation—it is ‘reputation, reputation, reputation’ not ‘education, education, education’. They just want to get the best results and they want to kick everyone out who they do not think is going to do really well, so that they can say, ‘Look how many As and Bs our school got, how many did yours get?’. If you look at how many exclusions they have, it might be a different story.

[304] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is an interesting point. So, you are saying that there are targets for schools for how many young people get five good GCSEs, but that perhaps there should be another target for how many young people they are keeping in the school, and that if there are too many exclusions the school ought to be in trouble?

[305] **Jamie:** Yes.

[306] **Helen Mary Jones:** That may be something that we could think about talking to Ministers about.

[307] We have about four or five minutes left. Members, are there any points that we have not had a chance to cover? So much is coming out of this session. I see that Angela and Ann want to ask questions. There is so much to talk about that we could talk to you for hours. I am quite shocked by some of what I am hearing.

[308] **Angela Burns:** I have one question and one statement. Now that you have been permanently excluded, what does that mean to you? Does that mean that you are never going to be able to get back into education in that school again or will it eventually, in a year’s time, come knocking on your door and say, ‘You had better come back in.’? What does that really mean?

[309] **Luke:** It means that we are gone for good.

[310] **Matthew:** I have been at the Tanyard Youth Project for a good two to two and a half years, and I have done so much work down there. I have done my silver and my bronze Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network awards, and I have done loads of maths and English, but the school will not fund it any more. So the school is not to let me go back to school because of the way that I behaved when I was there, but then they are closing the Tanyard now as well, so I have nowhere to go.

[311] **Angela Burns:** Mathew, how old are you?

[312] **Matthew:** I am 15.

[313] **Angela Burns:** Are you telling me that you have been excluded for two and a half years?

[314] **Matthew:** I have been in the Tanyard now for a good three years.

[315] **Angela Burns:** You have been excluded from schooling about three years?

[316] **Matthew:** Yes. Half way through year 8, I was kicked out, so it has been a good two to two and a half years.

[317] **Angela Burns:** I am shocked to my core. I have visited Pembroke school at least one or two times—

[318] **Jamie:** Are you an inspector?

[319] **Angela Burns:** No, I am the local Assembly Member.

[320] I live just outside Pembroke, in a little village called Stackpole, which some of you may know of. I have visited Pembroke school a couple of times. I have never met the head, but I have met the head of the sixth form and others. As someone coming in from the outside you walk around the school and see that it is very busy—I never went to such a big school, so I found it very chaotic—but I was told that it is a happy school and that things are going swimmingly. That is why this session is so important, and I am grateful to you for coming here to talk to us, because unless people like you have the courage to tell us what it is really like from your viewpoint, we will always go to schools such as Pembroke and leave thinking, ‘That is not bad a bad school—it is actually trying quite hard in difficult circumstances’. Whereas, listening to your story, you can see that all that we are seeing is the pretty surface and that underneath it is really rotten. I am ever so grateful to you, because I think that you have been incredibly brave. I appreciate you telling me about this. You have taken the blindfold off my eyes. We will go back now and try to put up a better fight for you.

11.00 a.m.

[321] **Jamie:** May I just ask you one question?

[322] **Angela Burns:** Yes.

[323] **Jamie:** We know that a lot of money is put into Pembrokeshire, so why is it not spent on us?

[324] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is a very good question.

[325] **Angela Burns:** I cannot answer that question, but I promise that I will try to find out and I will tell you, Jamie.

[326] **Helen Mary Jones:** It has certainly made me think about the questions that I ask when I visit a school. I do not think that I have ever asked about the percentage of exclusions.

[327] **Ann Jones:** To follow on from what Angela said about how you will get qualifications if you never go back to school, if you want to do GCSEs, NVQs or carpentry skills or whatever, is there a mechanism whereby you can go through an alternative route to get those qualifications and do you think that we are putting enough money, as a Government, into the alternative routes as we are into Pembroke school? Like Angela, I cannot believe what you have said about that school. Chair, I think that we should visit that school as a committee.

[328] **Helen Mary Jones:** I have a feeling that we might be inviting ourselves. As we are running out of time, I will ask Eleanor and Christine to make comments and then I will ask you what one thing you would want us to include in our report on what the Government should be doing to ensure that children from poorer families get a good experience in education. Christine and Eleanor, please be brief as possible because I know that we have other witnesses are waiting.

[329] **Christine Chapman:** A few of you have said that you feel that you have been written off. Do not think that, because there are people out there who want to help. This is not the end, because we are all behind you on this. So, I just wanted to reassure you on that.

[330] You have talked about what happened before you were excluded and I do not want to go into detail about that, and you said how things could be different if you had the chance

again. Is there anything else that would have made your experience different leading up to exclusion? You talked about teachers and activities and so on, is there anything else that we need to include in our report?

[331] **Rhiannon:** Get rid of teachers who threaten to hit you and all that.

[332] **Matthew:** When I was in junior school, I was in the second to last year and I was training for rugby and apparently I did wrong. The teacher told me to tackle someone, so I tackled him and he turned around and backhanded me with the pad. I went mad at that and near enough got kicked out.

[333] **Connor:** When I was in primary school, when I was five or six, the caretaker used to hit me and my mates. If we were late for class, he used to grab us by the back of the neck and say, 'Get to class'.

[334] **Kelly:** I do not think that schools should call the police unless something really bad happens. I got arrested on the school site because this girl grabbed me by the throat, so obviously I retaliated and hit her and the school said that I could go home. As I went to walk out of the door, Miss Birch, the deputy head of our school and two police officers walked in. They asked me where I was going and I said that I was told that I could go home. They pushed me onto the table, so I swung my fist and hit the police officer; it only skimmed him, but the man had me on the floor in referral and there were loads of people in there, including the teachers. I was on the floor; my face hit the floor and he was on my back putting the handcuffs on me. I do not think that schools should be able to phone the police every two minutes.

[335] **Helen Mary Jones:** You think that it should only be for something very serious. Christine, I know that you want to come back in quickly; I will then bring Eleanor in.

[336] **Christine Chapman:** What advice would you give teachers on how to deal with young people in those circumstances?

[337] **Matthew:** I think that they should know what it is like to come from our background. Where we come from, there is not much to do so we cause trouble just to do something. The teachers should know and understand what it is like to come from that sort of place, so that they know what they are doing.

[338] **Kelly:** They should not single people out.

[339] **Jamie:** If I am walking down the street and I see a mate—and I wear tracksuit bottoms, because that is the stuff that I am into—and I am just talking to him, if a police officer walks past, he is guaranteed to give me a pink slip every single time. If he saw a pair of eight-year-olds standing there, he would not stop them. Why do we get targeted and singled out? It is not on.

[340] **Helen Mary Jones:** I think that it is a good question. Eleanor, do you have a last question or a comment that you want to put to the young people?

[341] **Eleanor Burnham:** It is quite shocking, but it is nothing new to me, because I found that a lot of this happened in some of the very good schools across the patch where I was involved with youngsters like you. It is quite horrifying, and we must ensure that we have far better ways of helping kids who get bored at school and who do not want to do the academic stuff, and ensure that they have much more support. We need to teach teachers a bit better about how to cope, because not everyone is the same, are they? Do you think that that would be a good idea?

[342] **Helen Mary Jones:** I think that Kelly wants to respond to that.

[343] **Kelly:** No, not respond to that, but I would like to make a point. I am a young person living in poverty. Am I excluded because of poverty or is poverty excluding me?

[344] **Helen Mary Jones:** I think that that is a very good question. On what you would like us to tell the Government that it should tell schools and colleges to do, is there anything more that you wish to add to what you have already said?

[345] **Luke:** I think that schools should teach us our rights and our laws. We learn about them once or twice a year, and they do not even tell us what our rights are. They bring it up, and that is it—no rights.

[346] **Jamie:** There should be posters of article 24 of the European Union's charter of fundamental rights, on the rights of the child, on the wall in referral and in popular areas in the school so that people can read it and stand up for themselves and their rights.

[347] **Helen Mary Jones:** I think that those are very good points. Do Rhiannon, Matthew or Connor want to add anything else? I see that you do not. Thank you very much for coming—I cannot add very much to what Angela and others have already said to you. I wish that I thought that your experiences were unusual, but I am not convinced that they are. It has taken a lot of courage for you to come here today to talk to us about these things; it is not easy to talk about your own experiences in a public and formal place such as this. I think that your school is daft to exclude you, because you are obviously very able and intelligent young people with a lot to offer—it is the school's loss. In terms of some of your individual experiences, I know that Angela wants to meet with you as your local Member to talk to you again and there will be questions that she can help to raise. If she feels that she needs support from other members of this committee to do that, we will give her that support, because we owe you better than this. You should not have had the experiences that you have had, but I am glad that you have come to share them with us because, hopefully, we can learn from them, and your being brave and being here today will be part of helping to make sure in the future that such experiences are much less likely to happen to other young people. So, thank you all very much. Diolch yn fawr. I think that you are going to have a tour of the Assembly shortly, and Angela will be in touch with you soon.

[348] So, I ask this group of young people to leave with their support workers, and I also thank the support workers for helping to prepare the young people for today.

[349] Yr ydym yn awr yn aros am yr ail grŵp o bobl ifanc, sef grŵp o ofalwyr ifanc. We now await the second group of young people, which is a group of young carers.

[350] It was shocking; we will discuss it with Angela when she comes back, but because it was so specifically about one particular school, we may wish to write to the school to raise some of the issues with it, in fairness to give it a chance to respond as well, because we do not know the background details. However, if half of what we have heard is true, it is a real problem and I am not sure that it is that unusual—that is what worries me. If I thought that it was one school that did not want to cope with young people with challenging behaviour, I would not be so worried, but I am afraid—

[351] **Eleanor Burnham:** The teachers themselves should be helped far more to be aware of all of those basic things.

[352] **Helen Mary Jones:** It is one of the things that we will look at when we come to look at the report in about half an hour in terms of those training needs, and the things that have

happened to those young people just because people have not thought—

[353] **Eleanor Burnham:** Behavioural management is one of the biggest issues that certain professionals—

[354] **Helen Mary Jones:** As someone who taught in special education, I would say that you are not born knowing how to do that and how to cope with challenging behaviour, are you?

[355] **Eleanor Burnham:** Having a few human rights is a basic requirement.

[356] **Christine Chapman:** Going back to the consultation, one of the questions talks about partnership working, and we are looking at education, but if you speak to many teachers they will say that they cannot do this in isolation. The things that we have discussed today are almost the tip of the iceberg; there are all sorts of other things going on in the background, such as issues to do with health and poverty.

11.10 a.m.

[357] **Helen Mary Jones:** There are also issues to do with transport, such as whether there would be a bus that could take them to that village if they wanted to stay. They are quite right. It is quite clear from the evidence that we have had that schools cannot do it alone. That said, schools are the one public service that come into contact with all children and young people at some point. I think that that gives them a special responsibility, which is why we started there, because it is a universal service.

[358] **Eleanor Burnham:** Very often, the people who mop up these issues are the staff of the special educational needs departments and they are cinderella departments in many schools. I worked with them and that was true of the schools that I was involved with.

[359] **Helen Mary Jones:** There is a big question about resourcing. We have a different group of young people coming in now. These young people are all young carers and they are being facilitated by NCH.

[360] **Eleanor Burnham:** Who do we have in the gallery then, Chair? I thought that they were the people who were going to come—

[361] **Helen Mary Jones:** There are lots of people in the gallery.

[362] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes, but I thought that they were some of the ones who were going to come down to speak to us.

[363] **Helen Mary Jones:** I am not sure who they all are, Eleanor.

[364] **Eleanor Burnham:** There is much more interest in the gallery today.

[365] **Helen Mary Jones:** Welcome, to all of you. We have another member of the committee—Angela—who will be back in a minute. I am Helen Mary, this is Christine and this is Eleanor. Ann is sorting out the furniture, which she is very good at. She is very organised. Thank you very much for coming to see us. You know what we are trying to do. We are looking at whether schools, and education generally, do enough to help young people who might not have very much money or who might have problems at home, to enable them to join in and feel part of the school. Are there things that the Government ought to tell schools to do that would make things better or easier for you? We do not have a big long list of questions, but we have some different areas that we might want to ask you questions

about—I think that you have had a look at those and know what they are. Your support workers are here for you as well, if you need them, but this is very much your session and we want to hear from you. I will ask Members to kick off. Eleanor, would you like to make a start?

[366] **Eleanor Burnham:** Have you been listening to the other group?

[367] **Melissa:** We did, for a bit.

[368] **Eleanor Burnham:** So, you know what kind of questions we may ask.

[369] **Melissa:** Yes.

[370] **Eleanor Burnham:** I do not know what your situation is. Are you in school at the moment?

[371] **Thomas:** I have left school to start college in September.

[372] **Melissa:** I have another year left.

[373] **Martin:** I am in year 7 in the comprehensive school.

[374] **James:** I am currently out of school, but going back in September.

[375] **Eleanor Burnham:** Okay. So, you have all had difficulties with which you should have had some help, but your support workers are here to help you for the time being. If you had your time again, how would you like things to be better, based on the experiences that you have had?

[376] **Melissa:** We would like more support from the teachers and extensions for our work, because sometimes we cannot meet our deadlines. They are giving us rows and really it is not our fault. Sometimes we cannot do the work; most of the time, we do, but sometimes we just cannot do it.

[377] **Eleanor Burnham:** So, you have work and deadlines—

[378] **Ms Jones:** The four of them are carers.

[379] **Eleanor Burnham:** You are all carers—even better. So, you are caring for people—

[380] **Ms Jones:** They are caring for family members.

[381] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes, okay; that is fine. That has made it more difficult for you, which is why you are asking for more support. Does your teacher know that you are in this situation? Would you have expected that teacher to be more helpful?

[382] **Melissa:** Only my head of year knows, but she has not really done much, in that sense.

[383] **Eleanor Burnham:** What about your experience, Thomas?

[384] **Thomas:** None of my teachers knew.

[385] **Eleanor Burnham:** Would you have liked them to have known, so that they could have been a bit more helpful?

- [386] **Thomas:** I do not know what would have happened to change anything.
- [387] **Eleanor Burnham:** What about you, Martin?
- [388] **Martin:** None of my teachers know.
- [389] **Eleanor Burnham:** Would you prefer that they knew, so that they would be able to help you?
- [390] **Martin:** Yes.
- [391] **Eleanor Burnham:** Okay. What about you, James?
- [392] **James:** My teachers know and they have been quite supportive—
- [393] **Eleanor Burnham:** So you have been luckier than the other three.
- [394] **James:** The NCH Rhondda and Taff Ely Young Carers Project did some work in our school to make the teachers and the staff of the school aware that young people in the area were carers.
- [395] **Eleanor Burnham:** That is interesting; thank you.
- [396] **Ann Jones:** What can you do during the school day? Are you able to stay in school for the whole of the school day or do your caring responsibilities mean that you have to go home at lunch time and try to go back? If there were activities that could help you, such as a club, would it be better for you if they were held during the daytime or would it be better if they were held after school? Would activities outside of school be better for you in the daytime or in the evening?
- [397] **Thomas:** There is a youth club in Maerdy, but there are none where I live, so I have to go over to where my school is to go to a youth club.
- [398] **Ann Jones:** That is difficult for you because of your situation at home.
- [399] **Melissa:** I do not think that they should be after school, because that would be difficult for me. I have to be home straight after school, because my sister is coming home, so I do not have time to do most things after school.
- [400] **Ann Jones:** If it was held during lunch time, would you be able to take part or do you have other responsibilities?
- [401] **Melissa:** I take part in some things that are held at lunch time.
- [402] **Ann Jones:** Does anyone else want to answer? Martin, do you find it difficult to stay after school?
- [403] **Martin:** I find that it is all right sometimes.
- [404] **Helen Mary Jones:** Do you want to add anything, James?
- [405] **James:** I have had no problems, but I knew someone in my old primary school who had to go back home at lunch time. He used to come in late sometimes, and the teachers kept giving him rows, but he would not say that he was caring for his mother or father. One day,

he told them and he was treated a little better when he was late.

[406] **Christine Chapman:** Do you think that there are lots of young people in your situation of caring for family members that schools do not know about? Do we need to say to the Government that it needs to encourage schools to talk to young people more about what they have to do at home, so that, once they know, they can support you more, or are we already getting it right? Are there lots of people out there with caring responsibilities that schools are not aware of?

[407] **Melissa:** Yes, because they are too afraid to stand up and say what they have to do, because they do not want to be embarrassed or singled out. So, there are probably a lot more, but they are too afraid to speak up.

[408] **Christine Chapman:** Do you think that, once schools know, they are a lot more supportive, or do you have different experiences?

[409] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thomas, do you agree that, if the school knows, it can help you?

[410] **Thomas:** Yes.

[411] **Helen Mary Jones:** You said that it is hard to tell your teachers or the school that you have things that you need to do at home, Melissa. Do you have any ideas about what could make that easier? James said that his school knows and that it can be helpful if it knows, but you said that it was hard to tell your teachers. What could make it easier for you to explain?

[412] **Melissa:** I do not know, because my head of year knows, but I am still getting treated the same as everyone else—I know that I should be treated the same as everyone else, but when, as I said earlier, I cannot meet my deadlines, the teachers do not understand that, sometimes, I do not have the time for them.

[413] **Helen Mary Jones:** So if one teacher knows, they ought to tell the other teachers that you are doing work for from day to day so that they can understand as well.

[414] **Melissa:** Yes.

11.20 a.m.

[415] **Eleanor Burnham:** Do people hide behind data protection, namely the law that states that you are not supposed to share information about others? Do you think that some people hide behind that, or do you think that it is genuinely because you felt embarrassed and you have not been able to tell anyone? If one teacher knows, surely, the people who are around you should all know about your difficult circumstances.

[416] **Melissa:** I would not want them all to know. It is just certain subjects with me, because there is more coursework for one than there is for another.

[417] **Helen Mary Jones:** I am just asking Melissa this question, but it applies to the others as well. Would you be able to say to your head of year, 'I'm having problems finishing my French or whatever; could you speak to Miss So-and-so'? Or would you not be comfortable doing that?

[418] **Melissa:** It depends on what it is, really. Sometimes, they will say to me that I have had enough time, but really I have not.

[419] **Helen Mary Jones:** This question is to all of you. Once you have told somebody, do they check up with you that everything is okay, or are you just left to get on with it?

[420] **Melissa:** I am just left to get on with it.

[421] **Eleanor Burnham:** Martin, you are very young, are you not?

[422] **Martin:** Yes.

[423] **Eleanor Burnham:** How old are you?

[424] **Martin:** I am 12.

[425] **Eleanor Burnham:** In one school where I taught kids who were having difficulties, one young man was caring for his whole family, and I understand how difficult it must be. He was only 13, but you are very young.

[426] **Ms Jones:** Martin has to take care of three people.

[427] **Eleanor Burnham:** What kind of help do you get at home? Why are you having to be a carer? It is quite worrying.

[428] **Helen Mary Jones:** Answer that only if you want to, Martin, because it might be a private matter.

[429] **Martin:** Sometimes, if my mother is okay, she and I help each other out.

[430] **Helen Mary Jones:** It just depends on how things are.

[431] **Angela Burns:** Would it be helpful if the school was to make one person responsible for looking after children who have caring roles? That one person might come out to meet your family and see your problems. It might be somebody who could phone other organisations and say, 'Gosh, can you come and help Melissa this week?'. It could be one person who could be the advocate in school for those who have to care for others.

[432] **James:** Yes, that would be good. It would help with services. My mother gets Crossroads, so we can go out for a break, to go shopping and so on. Also, there could be grants and so on to help with buying uniforms.

[433] **Angela Burns:** So, if you had one person to go to, who really knew your situation, that person could help out around the school and talk to other teachers and say, 'Don't lean on James this week; he's got a particularly bad week' and stuff like that.

[434] **Helen Mary Jones:** James, you told us a little about NCH coming to your school and talking to all the teachers and so on. Can you tell us a bit more about what happened and what the project was to get people to know about young carers and so on?

[435] **James:** I think it was Lauren who came in, and she did a PowerPoint presentation showing the definition of young carers, their responsibilities and what they do. It also showed how teachers and pupils can help them, showing them respect.

[436] **Helen Mary Jones:** Do you think that that made a difference?

[437] **James:** It made a difference in my school, because I have been treated much better than I used to be.

[438] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is really interesting. That might be something that we will want to talk to the Government about.

[439] **Christine Chapman:** As you get older, you might decide that you want to do different things, perhaps different jobs and maybe go on to college. Is there anything that you think is preventing you even thinking about that at the moment, at your age? You may not even have thought about those things, but are there things that might come up in the next few years that will prevent you from doing what you want to do in life because of your circumstances? What advice would you give us to put that right, to make sure that you get to do the things that you want to do?

[440] **Ms Jones:** That is a big question.

[441] **James:** It is probably the cost of transport to get to a job interview or to get to work. A return fare from my village to Ponty is about £4, but it is only 2 miles. So, it is quite expensive and, over a five-day period, the cost would run to about £30.

[442] **Helen Mary Jones:** You would need quite a good job to help you to pay for that, would you not?

[443] **James:** Yes.

[444] **Christine Chapman:** Do the others have any thoughts on that? You may not have thought much about it yet.

[445] **Melissa:** You were talking about going to college, but I would be too afraid to go, because I would be afraid to leave my family. So, I would not want to go far, because if anything went wrong, I would want to be able to get home easily.

[446] **Helen Mary Jones:** One of the lessons might be that you need to have opportunities to learn and study close to home, so that you can easily get back to your family when you need to. Is that right?

[447] **Melissa:** Yes.

[448] **Eleanor Burnham:** The situation that you are in is very sad, is it not? You are spending most of your life caring for your family. Do you believe that you are getting enough help at the moment, as youngsters, particularly Martin, because he seems to be very young? That is my concern. You should be allowed to have a childhood, but I am sure that you do not feel as though you are having one because your whole life is about caring. I just feel very sad.

[449] **Martin:** I am quite happy, because they are my parents, and I want to be there for them. I quite enjoy helping them.

[450] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, you feel that you are choosing to look after them, but perhaps you could do with some more help to make things easier for you. What do other people think?

[451] **Martin:** If someone comes over, someone else from the family, that is good because I get to go out as well.

[452] **Eleanor Burnham:** What about the others? Do you feel that you are getting enough support so that you can lead a normal life?

[453] **Thomas:** Yes. I do go out with my friends, and that kind of thing, so that is good.

[454] **Eleanor Burnham:** What about you, James? You mentioned transport, and that is a big issue, because it means that you cannot move around as you would like to.

[455] **James:** I never used to have much support, but, thanks to NCH Young Carers, my father has been able to get support at a day centre and through Crossroads.

[456] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, you can do more now than you could.

[457] **Eleanor Burnham:** That is really nice. Crossroads is a wonderful organisation.

[458] **Ann Jones:** I wanted to talk about school uniforms, as we did with the last lot of young people we had in. People often say that it is expensive, but does it make you feel part of the school? Do you feel that there should not be a school uniform or that it should be one that everyone can get hold of easily? As carers, does it cause you problems if you do not have a clean shirt, for example? I never used to have a clean shirt. My mum used to try to make me wash my own school shirts, and so I never had a clean one. Does that sometimes mean that you are singled out, because your uniform is not the same as the others? Are there problems with that?

[459] **Helen Mary Jones:** That seems to have reminded you of something, Melissa, as you were nodding then.

[460] **Melissa:** Yes, because some people get grants for their uniform, but we are just given one of everything. I took art, so I get messy every day, and I would have to wash my uniform every night if I had not bought an extra one. It is £30 just for a jumper, so to buy another uniform is expensive. You need at least three t-shirts, and the grant is not enough. If I just had my grant uniform, I would be washing my clothes every night, and I would have to dry them and everything. That would take up most of my time, but I have other things to do in the house.

[461] **Ann Jones:** What about the lads? What do you think about school uniforms?

[462] **Thomas:** It is the same for me. I am at the same school, and it is £30 or £40 for a jumper.

[463] **Ann Jones:** Are you all at the same school?

[464] **Thomas:** No, just the two of us.

[465] **Ann Jones:** Is that because your school chooses to have a special jumper of a particular colour with a logo on it?

[466] **Thomas:** Yes.

[467] **Ann Jones:** If you were able to buy a coloured jumper a lot cheaper, would that help?

[468] **Thomas:** You would still have to get the logo stitched on.

[469] **Ann Jones:** Martin, you go to a different school. What is the uniform like at your school?

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[470] **Martin:** It is quite good, but even though my mother gets a grant, you get only one of everything. My mother cannot keep washing everything, so she struggles to buy more.

[471] **Ann Jones:** James, what about your school uniform?

[472] **James:** My school uniform makes me feel a part of the school community. I go to Cardinal Newman Roman Catholic School, which feels close. The uniform makes everyone feel a part of the school, but it is way too expensive. The grant covers only the main uniform; it does not cover the PE kit or a second uniform.

[473] **Eleanor Burnham:** On school uniforms, wearing your own clothes would be just as expensive. If you did not have the right gear, people might pick on you. Do you think that, on that basis, a school uniform is as good as anything else, if you had more money for it?

[474] **Melissa:** I think that it is better to have a school uniform, because you would be singled out if you did not have the right clothes on. It is good to have a school uniform, but it is too expensive.

[475] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, the message is that school uniform is fine, but those that you have at the moment are too expensive and the grant is not enough. My daughter is the same age as Martin, and I could not cope if she had only one school shirt.

[476] **Christine Chapman:** We discussed school trips with the other group of young people. Not everyone goes on school trips, but do you think that it is difficult for you to go on school trips because you have to do lots in the house, or is it not a problem?

[477] **Thomas:** I was going to go to Prague last year, which was going to cost £580. The deposit was £150, which you had to get within the first week. I could not get it in the first week, so I did not go.

[478] **Christine Chapman:** What about the time? The money is an issue, but what about the time because of your responsibilities at home? Is it difficult for you?

[479] **Melissa:** It is for me. I am going to Berlin with the school next year, and I have had to make sure what week it is. I am all right for that week, but if I had not been, I would not have been able to go.

[480] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, you have to organise things much more than another young person would. What about Martin and James? What do you think about trips and going away with your school?

[481] **Martin:** About one week ago, there was a school trip to Oakwood. Because it cost £20, my mother did not have the money to hand straight away, but I did not really want to go anyway.

[482] **Helen Mary Jones:** What about you, James?

[483] **James:** I was lucky because my father raised enough money for me to go to Paris, but because my school is so far away, I had to get transport because we were leaving the school at 6 a.m..

[484] **Helen Mary Jones:** There are practical things that people do not always think about; they just think that you will have someone who can drop you off.

[485] **Eleanor Burnham:** On that point, if you had more time to save up—as you said,

Thomas—would that not be better? Could the teachers be more sensitive?

[486] **Thomas:** Yes. It would be better if we were told a couple of weeks before the trip.

[487] **Eleanor Burnham:** So that you could save up.

[488] **Thomas:** Yes.

[489] **Eleanor Burnham:** Perhaps you could go then. There should also be sensitivity about getting you there, and so on. These are things that should not really be that difficult.

[490] **Helen Mary Jones:** One thing that we asked the other young people about, and we are interested to hear what you think, was school meals. What are they like? Is there enough food? If you get free school meals, how does that work? Melissa, I can see that you were shaking your head when I asked whether it was enough.

[491] **Melissa:** I hate the school dinner ticket. I hate it.

[492] **Helen Mary Jones:** Why?

[493] **Helen Mary Jones:** Because they have changed the sandwiches. We get up to £1.80 on our ticket, but sandwiches are £1.35. So, I have a sandwich and a carton of juice, and I think, 'Okay'. They are horrible anyway, so I just do not see the point.

[494] **Helen Mary Jones:** What do you think, boys?

[495] **Martin:** I have free school meals but I take in my own packed lunch, because I tried them once, but they did not taste like they were cooked right.

[496] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, the food is not very nice anyway.

[497] **Martin:** No.

[498] **Helen Mary Jones:** What about Thomas and James? What do you think?

[499] **James:** The school meals are edible. [*Laughter.*] The dinner ticket covers only a roll, and so I have to bring in extra money just to have a bottle of water.

[500] **Eleanor Burnham:** Do you not have tap water, or a fountain?

[501] **James:** We have a water fountain, but the water is normally warm.

[502] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, it is not very nice.

[503] **James:** It is disgusting.

[504] **Thomas:** They bring in different varieties in my school, like Pasta King, which is all pasta. They also bring salad into the school vending machines. That is better than having junk.

[505] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is good. So, there are some issues there about how nice the food is, and there are issues about whether you can get enough with your meal ticket, and whether it has been cooked properly. That is a good question, which we sometimes ask about any canteen that we are in.

[506] **Angela Burns:** Is it actually a ticket or is it a card system? How does your free school meal work?

[507] **Melissa:** We are still on tickets.

[508] **Angela Burns:** So, you have to hand a ticket over?

[509] **Melissa:** Yes.

[510] **Angela Burns:** Do people tease you about that, or do you feel embarrassed having to hand over your ticket?

[511] **Melissa:** No, I am all right, because most people have them, actually.

[512] **Thomas:** When I went to Treorchy Comprehensive School, before I went to this school, they had cards. If you lost it, someone else could spend the money that was on it, because there was no name on it or anything.

[513] **Ann Jones:** I asked the other group about that, and it is interesting that you said that. I represent an area in north Wales where two schools are now fingerprinting children for these cards, so that, if you lose your card, no-one else can spend your money, because of the fingerprint. Do you think that that is a bit over the top? The other group mentioned a system that uses a photograph, which seemed much more sensible than fingerprinting. Do you think that there should be a system where, if you lose your card, it can be traced back to you, so that no-one else uses it? I see that you do, but you would not want fingerprinting?

[514] **Melissa:** No.

[515] **James:** At Cardinal Newman school, our student council is trying to bring in cards with photos, so we have to sign every time that we use it, and no-one can nick it. If we lose it, we can still sign and tick on our name.

[516] **Helen Mary Jones:** Melissa does not look too sure about that.

[517] **Melissa:** It is dodgy signing something every time you want food. You might as well just hand your card over.

[518] **Helen Mary Jones:** It sounds as though that might add a bit to the queue if everyone had to sign.

[519] **Eleanor Burnham:** Do you have enough time to eat your school meals, because that is an issue in some places, is it not? You talk about queuing, and it can take a long time by the time the queues have gone. You take your own food in, do you, Martin?

[520] **Martin:** Yes.

[521] **Eleanor Burnham:** Is it cooked by your own fair hand?

[522] **Martin:** Yes. In Porth County Community School, they used to have cards that you had to hand in, but now, if you lose your card, it is all written down on a computer.

[523] **Helen Mary Jones:** One thing that we asked the other young people about was their school councils, whether they thought that they worked, and whether they felt as though their voices were heard. You have just mentioned your school council, James. Do you want to tell us more about that?

[524] **James:** I was on the school council for three years running. We managed to change our uniform from shirts and ties to a polo shirt and a little jacket. We also managed to make the food that was on offer a little healthier.

[525] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, your teachers and governors listened to the school council, and you got some things changed. Does anyone else have any experiences of school councils?

[526] **Martin:** Before I went to comprehensive school, I was in the education centre, and, because I was on the school council, we managed to change our school meals to cooked food.

[527] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is good. What about Melissa or Thomas?

[528] **Melissa:** Our school council is pretty rubbish. We had to wait three years to have locks put on the toilet doors.

[529] **Helen Mary Jones:** What? You are at the same school, are you not, Thomas? Is that your experience as well?

[530] **Thomas:** The boys' toilets still do not have any locks on them.

[531] **Eleanor Burnham:** What do you think about the other group's idea that school councils should help to choose teachers?

[532] **Melissa:** No.

[533] **Eleanor Burnham:** You do not want that, do you?

[534] **Melissa:** They should not choose teachers, should they?

[535] **Eleanor Burnham:** The other group thought that perhaps they might be able to choose teachers who are a little bit more aware, and maybe in tune with what you need.

[536] **Melissa:** One person might like that teacher, and another person might not.

[537] **Helen Mary Jones:** That can happen if you have the governors interviewing as well.

[538] **James:** I agree with Melissa. It is not really anything to do with the student council. The student council should be there only to help students with things like toilets, and so on.

[539] **Eleanor Burnham:** The other group was strongly in favour of being involved in appointing teachers, because, unlike you, they have had quite bad experiences.

11.40 a.m.

[540] **Helen Mary Jones:** There is an interesting difference of view there. I am aware that time is running on, and I know that you have things that you need to do, so I ask Members whether there is anything that we have not had a chance to discuss with Thomas, Melissa, Martin and James. I see that there are no further comments from Members.

[541] Do the young people have any messages that they would like us to pass on, and which they have not had a chance to mention, about how schools could be more supportive or helpful?

[542] **James:** On university tuition fees, are there any grants in place to help young carers

like us?

[543] **Helen Mary Jones:** I do not know the answer to that, but we can try to find out. That is a very good question. We will ask the Minister about that, if that is all right with committee members, and we will write to you, James.

[544] Are there any other issues that you, Melissa, Martin or Thomas, want to get across?

[545] **Martin:** Schools should have more activities and teachers who understand you, and they should give you a lot more support.

[546] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, you want teachers who understand you and more activities that you are able to do. That is a good message. Melissa and Thomas, do you want to add anything? I see that you do not.

[547] Thank you very much for coming. We have heard from all sorts of people, such as teachers and people from local councils, but it is really important to us to hear directly from young people like you. I know that it is not easy for anyone to come to talk about personal issues in a big meeting like this, but I think that you have all done really well. I have certainly found it useful. We are all very grateful to you, and we would also like to thank your support workers and National Children's Homes.

[548] **Ms Jones:** I would like to add something about school liaison officers. It is really hard for us, as support workers for young carers, in terms of having someone in the school to contact, because comprehensive schools are so big. So, having school liaison officers for young carers is a really good idea, because it would make our job of supporting young people easier and we could then support them better. They do not have anyone in the school to go to, and we do not know whether we should go to the education welfare officer, the head of year or the headteacher. We do not know who will have the answer. So, having school liaison officers is definitely the way forward.

[549] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is a useful point. Thank you all for making the time to come here; we really appreciate it.

[550] Diolch yn fawr.

Thank you.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11.42 a.m.
The meeting ended at 11.42 a.m.*