



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

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg **The Children, Young People and Education** **Committee**

Dydd Iau, 6 Chwefror 2014
Thursday, 6 February 2014

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

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

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

Keith Davies

Llafur
Labour

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

**Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance**

Jo-Anne Daniels	Cyfarwyddwr Seilwaith, Cwricwlwm, Cymwysterau a Chymorth i Ddysgwyr, Llywodraeth Cymru Director of Infrastructure, Curriculum, Qualifications and Learner Support, Welsh Government
Huw Lewis	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau) Assembly Member, Labour (the Minister for Education and Skills)
Emma Williams	Pennaeth Cymorth i Ddysgwyr, Llywodraeth Cymru Head of Support for Learners, Welsh Government

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

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

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 10:01.
The meeting began at 10:01.*

**Cyflwyniadau, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions**

[1] **Ann Jones:** Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the Children, Young People and Education Committee. May I cover the usual housekeeping rules? If Members have mobile phones, can they make sure that they are switched off, as they affect the translation and the broadcasting equipment? We are not expecting the fire alarm to operate, so if it operates, we will take our instructions from the ushers. We operate bilingually, as you know, so if you want the translation facilities through the headphones, channel 1 is the channel for translation from Welsh to English and channel 0 is for floor amplification, should you need it. We have had apologies from Simon Thomas today and also from Angela Burns, but there are no substitutes, so we just note that.

**Ymchwiliad i Ganlyniadau Addysgol Plant o Gartrefi Incwm Isel—Sesiwn
Dystiolaeth 5
Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low-income
Households—Evidence Session 5**

[2] **Ann Jones:** We are delighted to have the Minister Huw Lewis with us, and he is joined by his head of support for learners, Emma Williams, and Jo-Anne Daniels, who is the director of infrastructure, curriculum, qualifications and learner support—crikey, that is quite a long title. Thanks very much for coming. As you know, this is part of an inquiry by the committee. We have been out taking some evidence and we have also visited a school in Barry. So, we have a number of questions, but I have said that you can make a short presentation; ‘short’ being the operative word, Minister. I know that we have quite a length of time, but we have some real questions that we want to try to tease out, so that we can be helpful in our report. When we do a committee report, we always want to try to make it a useful report. So, I believe that you have some slides that you wanted to talk to, as an opening, and then we will go into some questions.

[3] **The Minister for Education and Skills (Huw Lewis):** Thank you, Chair, and thank you for your permission to show a couple of slides. I think that they may be useful to the committee in terms of setting a context. First of all, they illustrate the central importance of this issue, not just for the young people involved but for the whole of Wales, essentially. This is an issue of sufficient scale to cause anyone concern about the educational success of Wales as a whole. It shows that the Welsh Government is not shying away from the scale of that challenge, which is considerable. However, it also shows that we need to be ambitious, but the ambitions that I think that we will explore through questioning are also realistic ambitions. I will just hand over to Jo-Anne Daniels to take us through the slides.

[4] **Ms Daniels:** Emma is doing it.

[5] **Huw Lewis:** I beg your pardon.

[6] **Ms Williams:** If it is okay, I will point out a few slides on the screen. We have hard copies. These are some data that we have been using with the consortia to start exploring how their schools are doing, looking at different aspects of the data relating to the progress of schools with high levels of free school meals and schools with low levels of free school meals. So, this chart shows different schools plotted against free school meal levels in the school on the horizontal axis and the proportion of learners achieving the level 2 grade, so five GCSEs including English, Welsh and mathematics, along the vertical axis. The curved line is the statistical relationship across Wales between the two criteria. There is quite a strong statistical relationship between the two. So, we would perceive a school above the line as doing better than the relationship would normally expect. So, above the line is a good performance, while below the line is a worrying performance. Just picking up a couple of schools, we have one school here that seems to have a high level of free school meals, but is also achieving pretty well. We have another one down here that, again, has a similarly high level of free school meals, but there is a quite significantly lower performance overall within that school. There are some schools right at the top there that have low levels of free school meals, but still seem to be doing pretty well, compared with what you would expect.

[7] Can I have the next slide, please?

[8] **Keith Davies:** I am sorry, what do the colours mean?

[9] **Ms Williams:** The colours reflect different local authorities within these particular consortia.

[10] **Ann Jones:** Before we go on, I did not realise you were going to stand there to talk to the slides, which means that none of this is being captured on the record. So, can you talk to the microphone so that it is captured on the record, because, if it is important information, it needs to be on the record, and none of it is going to be on the record if you do not speak into the microphone? You want a long pointer; I should have brought my sprinkler pointer for you. I just think that it is important that it is on the record.

[11] **Ms Williams:** Absolutely. No problem. My apologies, Chair.

[12] **Ann Jones:** Do you have any questions on that first slide, David?

[13] **David Rees:** On that first slide, obviously the line is there, and it says what we would expect. However, as we are going up, we seem to have a lower set of expectations.

[14] **Ms Williams:** The term 'expect' is in relation to the statistical relationship. One of the things that we need to do with schools is to raise that expectation. Just being above that line is not good enough. That line needs to come up, the curve needs to flatten, and we need to raise expectations for all schools and all learners. So, it reflects the statistical relationship, and one of the things that we are trying to crack with schools is this notion that above that line is good enough, because it is not.

[15] **David Rees:** Thank you for clarifying that; I was hoping you would say that.

[16] **Ann Jones:** Rebecca has a question, then Aled, and then we will move on.

[17] **Rebecca Evans:** What does the purple star indicate?

[18] **Ms Williams:** Again, it is about raising that expectation. That is a random school that is doing particularly well on this measure taken from outside of Wales. In terms of presenting to consortia in schools, we are saying, 'Actually, even where schools seem to be doing quite well within Wales, there's a lot more that can be done and it has been proven in some real schools facing real severe challenges'.

[19] **Aled Roberts:** Mae hyn yn batrwm o fewn un consortiwm. A yw'r lliwiau yn dilyn un cyngor?
Aled Roberts: This is a pattern within one consortium. Do the colours follow one council?

[20] **Ms Williams:** My apologies; my translation was not working.

[21] **Aled Roberts:** Mae'r graff yn dangos y patrwm o fewn un consortiwm. Rydych wedi sôn fod pob dot yn cynrychioli un ysgol. A yw'r lliwiau yn cynrychioli un awdurdod o fewn y consortia? Os hynny, a oes gennych graffiau tebyg ar gyfer pob consortia, ac a oes anghysondebau rhwng gwahanol gonsortia o ran y patrwm a'r linell?
Aled Roberts: The graph shows the pattern within one consortium. You mentioned that each dot represents one school. Do the colours represent one authority within the consortia? If so, do you have similar graphs for each consortia, and are there inconsistencies between different consortia in terms of the pattern and the line?

[22] **Keith Davies:** Oes, achos os ydych yn edrych mae'r gwyrdd yn newid yn ôl yr awdurdod.
Keith Davies: Yes, because if you look the green changes according to authority.

[23] **Ms Williams:** Yes, each authority is represented by a different colour on the graph. The line is an all-Wales relationship, so that is the same line. You do see a slight pattern in

different authorities across all of the data and across different consortia. So, you will see slightly different patterns.

[24] **Ann Jones:** Just a small question, David, because this is eating into the Minister's five minutes. Go on.

[25] **David Rees:** There are four graphs. Is this the best one?

[26] **Ms Williams:** No, it just happens to be the one that we have already shared with the consortium concerned. It is not the best; it is not the worst. There are some good and some bad across all of them.

[27] **Ann Jones:** Do you want to move on, then?

[28] **Ms Williams:** Okay. This next graph shows secondary school performances. Each bar is the performance of an individual secondary school, but looking at the performance of only those learners eligible for free school meals. The red bar at the beginning is our randomly selected successful school outside Wales, again in order to try to set that challenge a little bit higher for our schools.

[29] The first of the blue bars represents the same school that I pointed out in the first slide with high free school meals performing above the lines. That is a school that is doing quite well overall and improving. When you look at the performance of free school meal learners on their own, they are also doing relatively well. The third bar along is the school that I pointed out with high free school meal levels that overall was not doing very well. When you look at the free school meal group within that school, you can see that performance is very poor and needs substantial improvement.

[30] Going along, you can see the tallest bar about two thirds of the way along. That represents a school where, although its performance on the previous graph was pretty much on the line, free school meal learners seem to be doing quite well within that school, so there are obviously some good things to learn there. Right on the right-hand side, where you have the lowest free school meal levels in these schools, there are some questions to ask there about schools that, overall, look like they are doing very well—their overall performance levels are high—but a free school meal learner within that environment, within a school in a leafy suburb, perhaps is not doing as well as we might like and expect.

[31] **Keith Davies:** What is the vertical column?

[32] **Ms Williams:** The vertical column is the performance. That is, the proportion of pupils achieving five GCSEs, including English, Welsh and mathematics—just free school meal learners. The first slide had all learners, the performance of everybody. Within the first slide, you see that, for some schools—

[33] **Keith Davies:** So, for the one with the lowest level of free school meals, 12% get the level 2 qualifications.

[34] **Ms Williams:** Yes.

[35] **Keith Davies:** Okay.

[36] **Ms Williams:** The school here with the lowest number of free school meals.

[37] **Keith Davies:** So, it is totally different from the other one.

[38] **Ms Williams:** Yes, it shows something really quite different, and, in terms of opening up the conversation with consortia or schools, it is quite good to separate out the two groups and to challenge in that different way.

[39] **Aled Roberts:** On the third one across and, I think, the tenth, where it appears that only 8% of children receiving free school meals are reaching the threshold, what is the position of the schools in terms of banding and what were their Estyn inspections like?

[40] **Ms Williams:** In both of those cases, the banding is low; their overall performance is low. I do not know off the top of my head their Estyn inspection grades.

[41] **Aled Roberts:** Could you perhaps come back to us on that?

[42] **Ms Williams:** Yes.

[43] **Ann Jones:** Could we have a note on that, as it would be handy—without making it too obvious which schools they are?

[44] **Ms Williams:** Okay.

[45] Moving on to the third slide, this shows the data in quartiles. The horizontal line shows the improvement, or not, between 2010 to 2013 of free school meal learners, and the vertical line shows the improvement, or not, over the three years for non-free school meal learners. With regard to the difference in the colour of the dots, the red dots are where school performance is improving at a faster rate for pupils eligible for free school meals, and the blue dots represent schools where the performance of non-free school meal learners is improving faster than that of free school meal learners. So, in an ideal world, if we want to improve our overall system and we want to close the gap, we need to have everybody being a red blob up in the top right-hand corner. As we can see, there are some schools that we can learn from. The school that we picked out with the highest free school meal levels in this consortium is actually a red dot in the middle of that top right-hand segment. So, there are definitely things to learn from that school. Our school that was two further up on the last graph is in the bottom left-hand segment, so it is not making progress with regard to anybody. In fact, it is going backwards, one could say. Interestingly, leafy-suburb schools are pretty much on the axis. So, there is not much improvement, but that might reflect the fact that they are doing quite well overall, generally.

[46] **Ann Jones:** Okay, thanks very much for that. Is that your presentation? Well done. You can have an A* for that, Minister. [*Laughter.*] We will move to some questions on the Government's policy and strategy. David, are you going to take the first set?

[47] **David Rees:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Minister. Clearly, since you have come into post, you have stated categorically that closing the gap in attainment is the main priority for you. What we have seen with some of the figures is that there is a long way to go with regard to some of those issues. Professor Egan identified the fact that he does not see that performance as being successful. He said that, at best, it was mixed, but that overall it is poor. So, with all the strategies that are being put in place, what more do we need to do to get to the level of the school that you highlighted, which is not in Wales?

[48] **Huw Lewis:** Well, 'a very great deal' is the answer to that. There are quite a number of initiatives operating out there at the moment. The key message that I take from those illustrations is that everyone needs to grasp the fact that kids on free school meals need to progress at a faster rate if we are going to close the gap. This is not to say that everybody does not improve, as everybody should improve, but those kids need to improve faster. That is the focus of our guidance and the focus of the targeting of funding that is going on at the moment

and of the development of policy. We will be bringing all of this together.

10:15

[49] There are various mechanisms out there already like the pupil deprivation grant, the priority that should be there within schools in terms of the usage of the school effectiveness grant, and ensuring that this is part and parcel of our improving schools programme and so on. We will be bringing all this together in a single programme to make sure that we tackle one of the most startling things about those graphical illustrations, which is the variability, not just across Wales but within consortium areas and between local authorities. If we were to tackle that variation within Wales alone, we would see startling improvements in terms of the life chances and qualifications of this group of young people.

[50] **David Rees:** I assume that the single programme you are talking about is the national deprivation plan—

[51] **Huw Lewis:** Yes.

[52] **David Rees:** —which we are expecting to be released in early spring, is that right?

[53] **Huw Lewis:** Yes.

[54] **David Rees:** Is that actually going to be able to put together the four elements we have identified—early years, continuing engagement, raising aspirations and workforce development—because that is a large package?

[55] **Huw Lewis:** It is a large package and it is cross-departmental, of course.

[56] **David Rees:** And co-ordination is important—

[57] **Huw Lewis:** Yes, I will be working very closely, for instance, with the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty in terms of the cross-over between those issues. This is a programme of work that stretches right from early years, and I am talking here not just about educational provision but pre-educational provision in terms of Flying Start, for instance, and Families First, right through to the workforce readiness of young people at the other end of the age scale, as well as policies on NEETs and so on. So, bringing that all together right across the spectrum of ages and making sure that those individual strands of policies speak to each other are the purpose of the plan. As you say, that is a large body of work.

[58] **David Rees:** Are you also going to be looking at specifically targeting different groups of children? Are you going to target specific age groups, for example, such as primary or secondary, and perhaps different specific categories? We have talked about Traveller children having some difficulties as well. Is the plan going to be able to identify different specific targets?

[59] **Huw Lewis:** It will encompass those things. I think that it is important that the plan does not get lost in segmentation, if you like, between various groups. There will obviously be focus on, for instance, the transition, let us say, between Flying Start and the foundation phase. A great deal of work is going on at the moment to try to make sure that Flying Start speaks to the foundation phase so that teachers understand what has been happening with that child's linguistic development in particular before the child even reaches school. We have continued in Wales with such things as the ethnic minorities achievement grant, which has been done away with in England, so we are alive to those special issues within parts of the school population. However, as I say, I think that the emphasis needs to be on transition for everyone primarily within the issues you are talking about there. We could run the risk—

There are 10,000 ways in which we could split up groups of children that we are considering here, and we could get lost in a sort of scattergun approach to the issues if we are not careful. So, we will keep those programmes moving, obviously, but the plan is intended to be the all-encompassing thrust of policy for all.

[60] **Ann Jones:** Aled and Bethan have questions before David carries on.

[61] **David Rees:** Before they come in, I have one more point on this. Clearly, Professor Egan has identified that we are also perhaps behind areas of England—comparable areas, particularly the north east, which was heavily industrialised and then changed as we were in the south of Wales. Have you looked at those areas to see whether you have learned lessons from them to see whether they fit into your plan? The one above 50, which you highlighted, which I think you almost said was an English school, effectively—

[62] **Huw Lewis:** It is London.

[63] **David Rees:** It is London. However, have you looked at those other areas to see whether there are lessons to be learned from them?

[64] **Huw Lewis:** Absolutely, and I will be making announcements very soon that build upon our consideration of what has gone on in parts of England. There are parts of England that we need to learn lessons from. There are other parts of England that are not doing very well at all, and they have their own issues regarding variability that are every bit as extreme as anything we would find in Wales. I also made a very useful fact-finding trip to Scotland, which outperforms England—certainly in terms of the PISA rankings. There is a great deal to learn from the Scottish approach to these issues as well. We have cast our eyes more broadly than purely the Welsh family of schools.

[65] **Aled Roberts:** We are using the London school as an example. I have been looking at the London Challenge, but the level of funding for what were formally Inner London Education Authority schools is significantly higher than the funding levels in Wales. I understand what you are saying regarding regional variation in England, but we received evidence that Manchester, in particular, appeared to be performing significantly better than other areas, although the funding levels were more similar to the Welsh funding levels. Presumably, on the basis of what you say, there are schools with performance that is similar to what you showed on the graph in Manchester, without having the level of funding that applies in London.

[66] **Huw Lewis:** We have looked at Manchester as well as London and we will be drawing lessons directly from the Manchester Challenge experience. I will be making announcements very soon about our response to that. In terms of the level of funding, one thing that you discover very quickly with the statistics is that there is a very loose relationship between the level of funding and the improvement of the schools involved and their rate of change. It is also becoming increasingly unfair to compare levels of funding within English schools with Wales when you consider that a huge amount of funding in England is now being diverted into conversion from state comprehensives to free schools and academies, which is not any concern of ours and it is not something that our schools will have to contend with. There are factors within the English system now that make direct comparisons in terms of school funding extraordinarily difficult. We should hedge our comments around levels-of-funding comparators with that in mind.

[67] **Aled Roberts:** How consistent is the Welsh information that we are basing this tracking on? At the foundation level, I am aware that different authorities have completely different interpretations with regard to assessments at the foundation phase. If we are not comparing like with like, there is a danger that we will go down the wrong path in some

instances.

[68] **Huw Lewis:** Yes. Hence, there is a role for consortia in making sure that we have much more consistency in measuring what we are doing right across Wales.

[69] **Ms Daniels:** At the end of the foundation phase, which I presume is what you are talking about, all children are supposed to be assessed according to the foundation phase outcome indicators, which are applied nationally. They are based on teacher assessments and we know that, generally—not just at foundation phase, but at key stage 2—there is variability in how teachers undertake those assessments. There were issues that were highlighted in an evaluation that we published back in October by the Australian Council for Educational Research that suggested that the consistency of teacher assessments was something that we should be concerned about, and it made a number of recommendations as to how we might strengthen both the reliability and consistency of teacher assessments.

[70] **Aled Roberts:** This is where the guidance from different authorities as to when children passed a threshold or not was completely different.

[71] **Ms Daniels:** If local authorities are issuing different guidance, we would like to be aware of that. The guidance that they are supposed to follow is the national guidance that sets out clearly what the expected levels are at the end of the foundation phase. If they are being directed away from that, we would be very happy to follow up and check that out, because it should not be happening. We know that there are underlying issues about teachers making different judgments but they should be making those judgments against the same guidance.

[72] **Bethan Jenkins:** My question is more of an overarching question, because I sincerely do not believe that we feel a sense of urgency from the Welsh Government. We have two anti-poverty Ministers. You were previously a poverty Minister. We have had plan upon plan, and we are still performing less well than all regions in England. Professor Egan has said that our performance is, at best, mixed and, overall, poor. Estyn has said that practice is much too variable. The NUT has said that there is not much clarity of direction, and the Bevan Foundation has said that it does not understand how Welsh Government targets will be delivered in reality. What makes you think that a national deprivation plan, on top of all of the other plans that are currently not delivering, will make any difference to this agenda?

[73] **Huw Lewis:** I do not share your pessimism about the prospects of young people in Wales one iota.

[74] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is not about that.

[75] **Huw Lewis:** We have evidence already that many of the school improvement strategies that are in place are beginning to have traction. Anyone who really understands education, other than as a rhetorical tool, will know that these sorts of policy changes, and the implications of these changes—surrounding things such as professional development, communications through a large and complex system, curriculum changes, assessment changes and so on—take time. They take time to develop, to roll out and to be fully understood by the professionals who deliver at the sharp end. There is an inbuilt delay between me pulling a lever in my office, in terms of signing off a policy initiative, and what happens where it really matters, in the classroom, in terms of the experience of teaching and learning of young people. Anything that denies that is rhetoric alone.

[76] **Rebecca Evans:** In their evidence to us, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Estyn and Barnado's Cymru have suggested that the drive to improve school standards is not aligned with policies to support pupils' wellbeing, and that that leaves schools with conflicting priorities. How do you respond to that?

[77] **Huw Lewis:** I am aware of what has been said there. It is certainly true that supporting pupils' wellbeing in Wales is something that we do very well, and PISA will tell you that. Those issues around pupil participation, anti-bullying policies and healthy food are well-developed policies in Wales. We do that well. Part of the challenge that we have to face up to is that, although schools in Wales are very supportive—they see themselves as being supportive and pupils see themselves as being supported—what we are lacking, in many instances, is not the supportive element of things, but the challenge to go along with it. It is inculcating a different culture around those two issues that needs to be the focus of my attention. It is good to support, but it needs to go in parallel with continuous challenge for the pupils and teachers.

[78] **Rebecca Evans:** Do you see a role for the school inspection process to drive up standards of attainment among children from low-income households?

[79] **Huw Lewis:** Yes, and I have held discussions with Estyn about how that should operate and work. It has agreed that how well poorer pupils are doing now will feature in the common inspection framework, and it will be under the quality indicator for standards. It will also take a look at how the pupil deprivation grant is used to support poorer pupils, and, again, that will be inspected. My officials have been asked to comment on the guidance that Estyn is drafting for inspectors, and inspectors will be given training specifically on that this summer. So, there will be a change of regime, in some regard. From September, there will be a requirement for inspectors to comment in reports on quality indicators for standards and for use of resources.

10:30

[80] **Aled Roberts:** Rydych chi wedi sôn fwy nag unwaith am anghysondeb o ran sut mae'r polisi'n cael ei weithredu. Rwy'n derbyn nad eich adran chi sy'n gyfrifol, ond mae rhaglen Dechrau'n Deg wedi bod yn gweithredu ers nifer o flynyddoedd erbyn hyn ac mae'r adroddiad ar y rhaglen yn dweud bod anghysonderau o ran sut mae'r rhaglen yn cael ei chyflawni o fewn gwahanol siroedd. Rydw i'n gadeirydd llywodraethwyr mewn un ysgol gynradd ac rwyf wedi synnu faint o blant sy'n dod mewn i'r ysgol gynradd honno gydag asesiad lleol yn dangos sgôr o sero o ran eu gallu i weithredu'n gymdeithasol a hefyd eu gallu darllen, lliwio neu beth bynnag. A yw eich adran chi yn casglu unrhyw wybodaeth ynglŷn â'r plant hynny sydd wedi derbyn cefnogaeth Dechrau'n Deg i weld a yw'r rhaglen wedi cael unrhyw effaith o gwbl ar ddisgwyliadau'r ysgol ohonynt wrth iddynt ddod i mewn i'r meithrin?

Aled Roberts: You have mentioned more than once the inconsistencies in terms of how the policy is being implemented. I accept that it is not your department that is responsible, but the Flying Start programme has been in operation for a number of years and the report on the programme says that there are inconsistencies in the way that it is being delivered in different counties. I am a chair of governors in one primary school and I am surprised at how many children come into that school now with a local assessment showing a score of zero in terms of how they can interact socially and how they can read, colour and so on. Does your department collect any information about those children who have received Flying Start support to see whether that programme has had any impact at all on the expectations of the school in terms of those children when they come into the nursery?

[81] **Huw Lewis:** Some of the closest cross-departmental working that I have been engaged in since taking up this post has been alongside the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty and the Deputy Minister to focus specifically on this issue. From the purely educational perspective, my concern throughout those discussions has been to understand better how language is developed in those early years and how we ensure that the

environment within Flying Start is a language-rich environment for every child and whether we have staff competent enough and focused enough to be able to understand that that is critical. I will not pretend that this is anything but a work in progress, and I accept Aled's point—although I am, perhaps, the wrong Minister to be commenting directly on this. However, there is too much variation and there is work that needs to be done in terms of making sure that the workforce within Flying Start and, indeed, in the foundation phase understand better what the focus needs to be and how we manage the transition between early years and the foundation phase.

[82] **Ann Jones:** Keith and then David to finish off this section.

[83] **Keith Davies:** Rwy'n cofio amser pan oedd awdurdodau yn wahanol. Yn ardal Caerdydd, er enghraifft, roedd plant yn cael pryddau bwyd am ddim pan oedd eu rhieni yn ennill llawer mwy nag oedd rhieni ym Morgannwg Ganol. A yw pob awdurdod yn edrych ar bwy ddylai gael bwyd am ddim mewn ysgol ac a yw'r rheolau yr un peth ar draws yr holl awdurdodau? Mae hynny yn mynd i effeithio ar y mesur.

Keith Davies: I remember a time when authorities were different. In the Cardiff area, for example, children received free school meals when their parents were earning much more than parents in Mid Glamorgan. Is every authority looking at who should have free school meals and are the rules consistent across all authorities? That will affect the measure.

[84] **Huw Lewis:** The rules are consistent; they are UK-wide and are connected to the benefits system. What is not consistent is the relative take-up, and this has been a perennial issue. There is nothing to prevent a local authority doing an awareness-raising drive on take-up—some have done so. I would welcome that wholeheartedly, because it gives us a better grip of the statistics, apart from anything else, in terms of the number of children who are identifying as children that we need to be concentrating upon. The free school meals measure is, as we all know, a very imperfect proxy. Many have tried, and all have failed, in terms of coming up with something that is better, aside from a massive all-Wales means test of some kind to examine the circumstances of every individual child, which is, of course, just beyond resources, and probably has considerable downsides attached to it. I do not think that we can operate with anything better. However, I would hope that all local authorities would take the message that they need to be continually aware of raising the levels of take-up of free school meals.

[85] **David Rees:** I have two questions, but I will leave the second one until a little bit later in the section. Aled Roberts pointed out the variants in Flying Start issues, but not every young child is in a Flying Start area. We still have a situation where half a street might be in Flying Start and half a street might not be in it. How are you making sure that your plan delivers for all young people? There are pockets of deprivation in other areas, which are not in Communities First areas or Flying Start areas.

[86] **Huw Lewis:** Obviously, you are quite correct. Flying Start will cover about a quarter of the population, probably, by the end of this Assembly term, which is considerable, and gives us a very good lever, I think, to operate in terms of trying to ensure that we get things right. But, of course, we are working alongside the wider early years, and the emerging early years plan will take into consideration our partnership working with the wider sector, whether it is LEA-based or private or voluntary, and so on. The communication there is better than it has ever been, and the co-working is very important. One of the things that is obvious—and if you do speak to the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty about these issues, I am sure he would echo this—is that we have issues around workforce development that need to be addressed, right across, whether we are talking about maintained settings, voluntary settings, or whatever they are. There is a UK-wide workforce development challenge here that has to be faced up to.

[87] **Ann Jones:** May I ask you why Welsh schools are not using the Sutton toolkit? If that is the mechanism that you think is the way to deliver the pupil deprivation grant, what sanctions can you take to those schools that will not use the Sutton toolkit?

[88] **Huw Lewis:** I have been very frustrated at the level of awareness, particularly among headteachers and chairs of governors, of the Sutton Trust toolkit. It is not the only thing out there. Estyn has done very good work on exactly what is effective in terms of raising standards for deprived children as well. I can only say that we can ponder on this, and suppose that there is too much of a tendency historically within Wales for schools to operate as islands entire of themselves, to be content with their internal working and not to compare themselves with their neighbours or the wider discussion of policy development that is going on around them. That has to stop, and I am absolutely determined that focusing on the pupil deprivation grant in the first instance, we will have a proper awareness among professionals out there—senior professionals, and heads particularly—in terms of just what is effective. The level of evidence in terms of the Sutton Trust toolkit—it is a meta-analysis, essentially, which means that it has taken research from all around the globe, conglomerated that into a series of conclusions, and come up with some pretty undeniable stuff about what works and what is cost-effective in terms of interventions. I would have no hesitation in terms of my oversight, for instance, of the pupil deprivation grant in terms of clawing back resources from schools that would continue to be purblind in terms of what is really the focus and intent of this initiative.

[89] **Ann Jones:** Thanks very much. We will move on to targets monitoring. Aled, you have the first set of questions.

[90] **Aled Roberts:** A gaf i edrych ar y cyfnod sylfaen, yn y lle cyntaf, a gofyn ichi a yw'r targed yn ddigon uchelgeisiol? Rydym wedi edrych ar y ffigurau yn mynd yn ôl dros chwe blynedd, ac roedd gwahaniaeth rhwng y plant a oedd yn derbyn prydau am ddim a'r lleill o 18.3% yn 2011. Eich targed chi yw lleihau hynny o 1.83% yn unig o fewn y chwe blynedd, ac mae'ch datganiad yn awgrymu eich bod yn fodlon efo'r ffaith eich bod yn teimlo y bydd gwelliant o ryw 3% erbyn diwedd y chwe blynedd, os yw'r gwellhad ar yr un lefel yn ystod y chwe blynedd. Bydd hynny dal yn golygu y bydd gwahaniaeth o ryw 16% rhwng y plant hynny. Felly, a yw'r targed hwnnw'n ddigon uchelgeisiol wrth gofio'r holl arian sy'n mynd mewn i'r cyfnod sylfaen gan Lywodraeth Cymru?

Aled Roberts: May I look at the foundation phase, in the first instance, and ask you whether the target is ambitious enough? We have looked at the figures going back over six years, and there was a difference between the children who receive free school meals and the others of 18.3% in 2011. Your target is to reduce that by only 1.83% in the six years, and your statement suggests you are content with the fact that you feel that there will be an improvement of about 3% by the end of the six-year period, if there is the same level of improvement over that six-year period. That would still mean a differential of about 16% between those children. So, is that target ambitious enough, given all the money that is going in to the foundation phase from the Welsh Government?

[91] **Huw Lewis:** No, I do not believe that it is and I think that target needs to be revised. The target represents 10% of the gap; that is why it is an odd figure of 1.83%. We can already be confident that that target will be breached. In the very nature of good targets, I think that we need a new one that stretches us beyond our comfort zone in terms of those young people, so I am looking at that currently. I would be very happy, of course, to report back to Members on the conclusions of that work as soon as I am able to do so.

[92] **Aled Roberts:** Os ydym yn symud ymlaen i gyfnod allweddol 4, mae'ch targed

[93] **Aled Roberts:** If we move on to key stage 4, your target there is to do with the

yn ymwneud â pherfformiad y plant sy'n derbyn prydau am ddim, yn hytrach na'r gwahaniaeth rhwng y plant sy'n derbyn prydau am ddim a'r rhai sydd ddim. A gaf ofyn ichi pam yr ydych wedi cymryd llwybr gwahanol i'r hyn yr ydych wedi'i wneud yn y cyfnod sylfaen, lle mae'r targed yn ymwneud â'r gwahaniaeth rhwng y ddau grŵp? Yn yr un modd, a gaf ofyn a ydy'r targed bod 37% o'r plant sy'n derbyn prydau am ddim yn cyrraedd trothwy 2 erbyn 2017 yn ddigon uchelgeisiol, wrth ystyried bod tystiolaeth bod y ffigur dros 50% ar hyn o bryd yn Lloegr?

performance of the children who receive free school meals, rather than the difference between FSM pupils and those who do not receive those meals. May I ask you why you have taken a different route to the one that you took in the foundation phase, where the target is to do with the differences between those two groups? May I also ask you, in the same fashion, whether the target that you are going to achieve 37% of FSM pupils reaching threshold 2 by 2017 is ambitious enough, given that there is evidence that the figure is more than 50% in England at present?

[94] **Huw Lewis:** I think that this particular target is much more robust, and I am content with it. As you say, it still represents, by 2017, problems that will still need to be tackled. However, this target was set by looking at, first of all, past performance and progress and, of course, what we expect to see as a positive premium arising from the programmes that are being set in train. I think that it also represents an 11% uplift for the group of children and young people that we are talking about here. That would represent a transformation of life chances in terms of qualifications in those young people's back pockets, of thousands of Welsh young people. So, it is very much a worthwhile exercise, obviously. It is challenging and it is achievable.

[95] You also have to set this in the context, Chair, of the changes that are coming through in terms of GCSEs in Wales. There is going to be more rigour in the system, and that will, conceivably, affect what we might be seeing in these statistics right across the board. Of course, we would hope that it would not, because teachers and teaching will have prepared young people properly for that. However, it is no secret—I would not make a secret of the fact—that the new English, Welsh and maths GCSEs, as well as changes to the Welsh baccalaureate, are injecting more rigour into the qualifications system.

[96] **Aled Roberts:** Os ydych yn darllen adroddiadau Estyn o ran ysgolion unigol, mae yna gryn dipyn o feirniadaeth ynglŷn ag asesiad athrawon—rydych wedi cyfeirio at hynny yn flaenorol. Mae yna hefyd gryn dipyn o feirniadaeth ynglŷn â pherfformiad yr ysgolion yng nghyfnod allweddol 3. Os yw eich cynllun gweithredu o ran y rhaglen wrthlodi yn mesur plant, neu berfformiad plant, ar ddiwedd y cyfnod sylfaen a diwedd cyfnod allweddol 4 yn unig, pa fesurau a ydych yn eu defnyddio i fesur sut mae'r ysgolion hynny'n perfformio rhwng y dosbarth derbyn a'r adeg pan fydd y plant yn cymryd TGAU?

Aled Roberts: If you read the Estyn reports in terms of individual schools, there is a lot of criticism of the assessment of teachers—you referred to that previously. There is also a lot of criticism of the performance of schools in key stage 3. If your action plan in terms of the national deprivation plan only measures children, or the performance of children, at the end of the foundation phase and at the end of key stage 4, what measures are you using to measure how these schools are performing between the reception class and when the children take GCSEs?

[97] **Huw Lewis:** On your first point, Aled, around teachers, I have been determined, during my term of office thus far, to be supportive of the profession. I certainly do not want to inculcate an atmosphere similar to the one that is obvious over the border in England of berating from a distance what the teaching profession is doing. So, I want to be supportive of the profession, but I also want to be challenging of the profession. Estyn's comments take us to the nub—I assume you are referring to the annual report—of the issues.

10:45

[98] There is nothing in terms of my policy making, nothing in terms of Government spending patterns, and nothing in terms of the speeches and messages that come out from any politician that prevents any senior teacher acting on Estyn's annual report now, today—taking the lessons on board and acting upon them. That of itself, I am convinced, would render a great deal of what we are talking about here unnecessary. It is critical that teachers act as professionals and work together between schools and learn from each other in terms of the core messages on page 25 of the Estyn annual report. I am going to be asking every headteacher I meet over the next year or so whether they have read page 25 of the Estyn annual report. It is, in crystallised form, a summation of the issues that need to be addressed here.

[99] You are quite right to point to issues surrounding key stage 2 and key stage 3. Of course, there is a great deal of work going on now on the revised curriculum and phase 2 of the curriculum review. We do have the reading and numeracy tests, of course, which run from year 2 to year 9, which span a good deal of the age group that you are talking about there. However, as part of the curriculum review, I will also be concerned with how we get reliability and consistency in terms of assessment across those age groups. What Estyn keeps returning to time and again is the quality of teacher assessment at all stages, and that is something that I think we need to address within continuing professional development as a core issue. Every teacher needs to have the tools at their disposal, the skills at their disposal and the motivation to be able to do that right.

[100] **Aled Roberts:** This is my final question in this section, honestly.

[101] **Ann Jones:** Good.

[102] **Aled Roberts:** On the comparative performance of local authorities, I have been looking at the figures for north Wales and, to be fair, the performance of free school meal children in, say, Gwynedd and Flintshire is far beyond the performance in, say, Wrexham. In Gwynedd and Flintshire, certainly in Flintshire, a significant number of children who are in receipt of free school meals currently achieve level 2. Is level 2 going to be your only measure of success because there is a danger, of course, that, in those authorities where performance is best or better, they will coast and will not push the bar even higher? Similarly, there might be schools where performance is good, and we would expect them to continue on their journey of improvement. The danger of a level 2 threshold is that schools can have some degree of self-satisfaction that a child might achieve five C grades when, in reality, that child is capable of reaching nine or 10 A grades. Is there any measure apart from the level 2 threshold that you will be using and which the consortia themselves will see as a bar as far as their performance is concerned?

[103] **Huw Lewis:** I think that we have to start from where we are. I think that you are quite right and you are being far-sighted, really, in terms of what we might need to consider as we move through this school improvement agenda. However, I think, frankly, that the fact of the matter is that we are some considerable way from having to entertain those kinds of worries at the moment. The improvement journeys that the bulk of schools—the vast majority of schools—in Wales need to go through are of such an extent at the present moment that I am content that the level 2 inclusive measure that you are talking about will give us—. You know, it is imperfect. All these things are essentially proxies. How do you measure the life chances of a child? This is just one way. It is imperfect and it will not tell you everything. However, I think that, if we begin with this, we will first of all understand very directly what needs to be done, and that is important in terms of a big complex system, and we will have made enormous strides forward. As we progress, I will be continually concerned about the

issue of coasting, and I think that some of the illustrations that we saw earlier, for instance, are showing very clearly that there are schools that are doing apparently very well that are allowing this group of young people to coast to failure. That needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. I think that there is a progression here, Aled. I think that you are right; we need to bear these things in mind. However, we will cross that bridge when we come to it, as my granny used to say.

[104] **Ann Jones:** Suzy has a supplementary question on this.

[105] **Suzy Davies:** Yes. I obviously understand that this is a massive challenge that you have ahead of you, but I am disappointed in the answer that you have just given to Aled. It is a consistent complaint in Estyn reports that more able and talented children from deprived backgrounds do not get the support they need. If you take the view, as I do, that, if children from poorer backgrounds can see some of their own actually soaring, with the help of the school and the help of Government, it actually raises the level of ambition for all kinds of children in that cohort to try to do their very best as well. Are you sticking by what you just said, which was that level 2 is just your ultimate aim for children of that nature?

[106] **Huw Lewis:** No. I hope that there is not any kind of deliberate misinterpretation of my words here. There is nothing to prevent— A good school, professionally run, should, as a matter of course, be addressing issues that you raise: ambition right across the board for every individual child. The teaching is about releasing the potential to its fullest of every single child. There is nothing in any of the programmes that I have outlined here that somehow would prevent schools from going for a ‘the sky is the limit’ ambition for every single individual child. However, we are concerned here. The reason I am here this morning is to talk about what those statistics are showing us, which is that there is a structural issue here, and a problem of sufficient magnitude that there needs to be a supportive and challenging policy environment around it. That is where the leadership comes in from me, from my department and from the Welsh Government. However, there is nothing in any of this that shuts down good professional teaching. It is the job of schools to deliver on that.

[107] **Rebecca Evans:** I want to ask how you are taking into account in-work poverty in setting your targets, particularly around the use of free school meals as an indicator. Is there a danger that some children who are not traditionally from deprived backgrounds but whose parents are experiencing poverty because of welfare reform and so on could be missed?

[108] **Huw Lewis:** As I have said, you are right to be concerned about this. The free school meals measure is far from perfect, but, as I say, I am open to suggestions. No-one yet, really, has come up with a better proxy. It is a proxy for the issues that we are facing here. There are challenges on the horizon, obviously, in terms of the UK Government’s move towards universal credit. Despite very close co-working between our officials and officials of the Department for Work and Pensions, we are still yet to understand, and they are still yet to explain, exactly how the shift to universal credit will impact upon those measures, benefits and policies that currently flow from eligibility for free school meals? There is a question mark over free school meals themselves. When we shift to universal credit, how do we know which children will be eligible for free school meals? So, I hope that we will get answers from the DWP in terms of its plans for the implementation of universal credit. We need to keep our measures and policies under review, and we stand ready, but we are yet to have any clear sense emerging from Westminster on this.

[109] **Ann Jones:** I will allow David Rees to come in very briefly. Then I think that we will just have a five-minute break.

[110] **David Rees:** Thank you, Chair. Suzy identified the question of how we ensure that the talented young individuals get that support to express their full potential. Aled raised the

question as to whether the target is appropriate or not, and you have identified the facts, but I suppose that the question is how we make sure that we monitor children. Should the monitoring of individual progress be done at school level, because Estyn is saying that many schools do not do enough to monitor the progress of pupils from poorer backgrounds? Should it be done at school level, should it be done at local authority level or should it be done at regional consortium level? How do you see the way in which we should be monitoring the progress of individual pupils?

[111] **Huw Lewis:** A good school should be doing this now. The data tracking of pupils is a basic responsibility of a school. Of course, we would then expect the local authority and the consortium to have oversight of this. I would expect that, in our working through consortia, particularly, we would be challenging schools and senior staff if we were to find that this was an issue in a particular school. Estyn tells us that it is. It clearly should not be a problem within the system at all. I am confident, now that we have a national plan for regional working through those consortia, that we will push this problem out of the system.

[112] **David Rees:** That will be through all the levels, because, as Aled pointed out, there is a long gap from foundation phase to GCSEs. I know that you talked about the reading tests, but there is still quite a long gap in which things could go wrong.

[113] **Huw Lewis:** If a school is not monitoring overall performances or not using data tracking as part of its working, that is not a good school.

[114] **Ann Jones:** We will go to Aled, very briefly.

[115] **Aled Roberts:** There are situations where a school can exempt pupils from testing, certainly in the foundation phase, and I am thinking particularly of children from backgrounds that have English as an additional language. Are you keeping an eye on how many children are being exempted from those processes and, similarly, are you keeping an eye on the number of children who are not entered for GCSEs if the school is bothered that that might impact on its perceived performance?

[116] **Huw Lewis:** Those are good questions. In terms of the foundation phase, of course, we are quite early in terms of the number of cohorts that are going through this, and some very valuable lessons have come back about how the system needs to be tweaked in order to make sure that we are accommodating all learners within this. There will be modifications, and I think that I will probably bring in Emma in a second if you want more detail on that. In terms of entering learners for GCSE, again, I think that what you are describing there in a polite way is gaming. I am aware of it having happened within my own constituency, and it is an element of schools management that has no place within a good system. Senior teachers who are engaged in that are acting unprofessionally in my view, and, again, I hope that our consortium working will give us the means by which we can ensure that basic, minimal levels of professional operation like this are operating in every school. So, this is a question that the consortium needs to address.

[117] **Keith Davies:** Do the statistics not give it in terms of 15-year-olds or 17-year-olds? They are not to do with the number entered for exams, but with the total number of pupils. So, if they do not enter them, they are still in the statistics.

[118] **Ms Williams:** Absolutely; you are quite correct. At the end of secondary school, there are a number of data factors that we can use that help to focus attention on the performance of all learners and to stretch the view in terms of looking at overall performance. We have the average capped point score, which looks at the best eight qualifications for any learner. So, that gives a broader view than just the five GCSEs. Within banding, there are also measures that will look at the grade range, particularly around English, Welsh and

mathematics, again setting that expectation that a C grade is not good enough, and looking for the higher grades, where learners can achieve them.

11:00

[119] Going back to your point about the tests and disapplication from the tests, it is something that we intend to do an analysis of in order to look for patterns and to be able to go back to areas where we think too large a number of learners are being disapplied. Our general line is that, because the primary purpose of the tests is to provide a useful tool for the classroom teacher, any learner who would not be particularly distressed, upset or completely unable to access the test should be entered for the test, and it should generate useful information for the teachers. So, if we can see patterns where they are overusing disapplication, then we will challenge that.

[120] **Aled Roberts:** However, that decision is taken by the headteacher and cannot be challenged currently by the local authority and, presumably, cannot be challenged by the regional consortia.

[121] **Ms Williams:** You are right that it is a decision for the headteacher, because it needs to be made on the basis of the individual child's circumstances. However, the local authority has a role in challenging where that has been inappropriately used.

[122] **Ann Jones:** Okay. Shall we have a five-minute break and come back at 11.05 a.m., ready to start? Perhaps we can have five minutes at the end to keep our timings right. Thank you.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 11:01 ac 11:07.
The meeting adjourned between 11:01 and 11:07.*

[123] **Ann Jones:** We will reconvene. If you turned your mobile phone on, can you make sure that it is now off so that it does not affect the translation? We will move straight back into the questioning. Keith is next on the role of schools, local authorities and regional consortia.

[124] **Keith Davies:** The Bevan Foundation said that schools were not clear about the most effective action to take to improve the educational outcomes for people from low-income families. Are you going to issue further guidance on this?

[125] **Huw Lewis:** The deprivation programme will draw together what has already been done and what more is needed. It has four very clear themes. I am always very happy to issue further guidance as necessary. I am also keen to grow our ability to directly communicate with schools, heads and chairs of governors in particular. We have our electronic newsletter *Dysg*, which, if used by professionals, should give a clear picture of what effective action looks like. We have been engaged in one of the most thorough communication campaigns with senior professionals regarding, for instance, the Sutton Trust toolkit and its usefulness that has ever been embarked upon since devolution. That, together with the communication that should be going on at consortium level among heads, chairs of governors, advisers and support staff means that I would be bewildered as to why any headteacher, in particular, should be in any doubt what the central issues are, and what the guidance is around how they are tackled.

[126] **Keith Davies:** However, different schools will give it different priority—schools with a large percentage of children on free school meals and those with a small percentage on free school meals. Will the guidance target the different kinds of schools?

[127] **Huw Lewis:** There is nothing wrong, of course, with schools evaluating themselves well and understanding where they stand and what they need to do in terms of an improvement plan. There will be differences between different schools, but the essential thing is whether they are doing right by this group of children. There are schools with large percentages of FSM kids that are and that are not, and there are schools with very low percentages of FSM kids that are and that are not. We need to get everybody over the line in terms of doing right by this group of young people, whatever the circumstances of the school.

[128] **Keith Davies:** I assume that there will be some in-service training and support for staff when we know what the best way to approach this is.

[129] **Huw Lewis:** Absolutely. As I say, this is about challenge but it is also about support. A key element of that is professional development and training. One of the headline changes that people will notice is that there will be a dedicated poverty module for the Master's in educational practice, which is a unique, Wales-only commitment to Master's-level education for newly qualified teachers at present. However, I will be making further announcements during the spring about the generality of continuous professional development and how it relates to this issue.

[130] **Keith Davies:** I think that it will be important to include governors as well in terms of the kind of comments that Aled was making earlier about how schools approach things.

[131] **Huw Lewis:** Absolutely.

[132] **Lynne Neagle:** I understand that there have been issues with some schools not using their INSET days to pursue how to tackle this agenda. Is that your experience, and if so, what is the Welsh Government doing to improve that area?

[133] **Huw Lewis:** I am aware that there is a lot of anecdotal evidence about the usage of INSET days. One would hope that the new regime around the focus on issues like literacy, numeracy and closing the attainment gap for kids in deprived circumstances will concentrate the minds of school leaders when they are thinking about how INSET days should be employed. There are very few schools that could allow themselves the luxury of not concentrating upon these issues at the moment. Did you want to add anything on that one, Emma?

[134] **Ms Williams:** The deprivation programme will look at whether there is a need for a greater amount of material for schools to use to do CPD, but in terms of workforce development, it is important to remember that one size does not fit all. So, mandating certain training probably is not the best way forward. Making sure that schools are identifying where they need to develop their workforce and that we supply the materials to make sure that they have quality materials to use to fill the gaps in knowledge is the way forward and that is what the deprivation programme will look to do.

[135] **Huw Lewis:** This brings us back to those top five Estyn recommendations on page 25 of its annual report, one of which is self-evaluation. We need Welsh schools to understand what honest self-evaluation actually means and to implement it as a matter of course.

[136] **Keith Davies:** I will move on. You have stressed the importance of regional consortia. Is that because David Egan, for example, said that there is not one outstanding local authority in this particular area, and, therefore, regional consortia may have the answer to it rather than individual local authorities?

[137] **Huw Lewis:** Regional consortia are a key element of this. We do not know for sure yet that we do not have one outstanding local authority, so hold your fire there. However, we

know already that the picture across Wales is far from adequate in that regard. The job of the consortia is school improvement; it is a focus on that. Obviously, I am ambitious about the role of consortia in terms of turning this around.

[138] **Ann Jones:** We will move on to funding and I think that there is going to be quite a lot of questions on this.

[139] **Aled Roberts:** Can I just ask one thing on that first?

[140] **Ann Jones:** Sorry, Aled; yes, go on.

11:15

[141] **Aled Roberts:** You mentioned consortia, but, obviously, the leadership within the schools is going to be paramount as far as delivering on this agenda is concerned. There is inconsistency as well with regard to the role of governing bodies. What is the current position with regard to the working group that was looking at changes to governance arrangements within schools? Are you going to be issuing any guidance with regard to the ways in which consortia interact with school governing bodies in particular? There are instances where the governing body may have a perception of the performance of the school and the perception is wholly dependent on the views of the leadership team. It may not actually be an honest reflection of the situation. The headteacher from Barry mentioned that its consortia actually had link officers who attended the governing body meetings and gave an objective assessment of performance. That is not the case in each and every consortia.

[142] **Huw Lewis:** Well, that communication between consortia and governing bodies should be there in every case. It is not solely about heads or deputy heads and how they handle themselves. It is also about the first line of quality control, if you like, which is the governing body. The most important school improvement body is the governing body. An honest self-perception of what is going on there is very important. There is an issue. The unsung part of PISA— Apart from the testing part of PISA, there is a questionnaire part of PISA, which I think is, if anything, more useful than the tests. What was clear in terms of the Welsh responses—and clear in a European context—was that the self-perception of leaders within schools was at odds with the reality. That was starker in Wales than in almost any other European country. So, consortia have a role there. Jo-Anne might have something to say in terms of specific guidance on this.

[143] **Ms Daniels:** It is not unusual for system leaders or consortia link advisers to go to meetings of a governing body and present data on a school's performance, recognising the issue you highlight that, if schools are solely basing their assessment of performance on the story from the headteacher, there are some tensions, inevitably, in that. So, we are looking to ensure that system leaders or consortia link officers—challenge advisers, as they are being described in the national model—have that role of engaging with governors. We also provide standard data packs for governors, which provide them with performance information on how the school is doing, but also on how the school is doing relative to other schools in the local authority area and other schools in Wales that are of a similar nature. So, that should provide a degree of transparency to help inform the self-evaluation that the governors play a part in.

[144] **Ann Jones:** Be very brief here, Aled, because we are going off on a tangent here on governors. The Minister has given a commitment.

[145] **Aled Roberts:** I know, but is that already happening? I have never—. I have been a governor for 24 years in primary schools, and I have never seen a link officer in a governors' meeting.

[146] **Ann Jones:** In fairness, that is something that you cannot expect the officials to answer. That is specific. Write to the Minister if that is your concern on that one, because it is not fair to ask the officials about that. I want to move on to funding.

[147] **Suzy Davies:** I have some questions on the specifics of funding, but I wonder whether I could ask you to comment on something else first of all, Minister. I think that we all agree that children from poorer backgrounds are no less intelligent than those from wealthier backgrounds. The funding that schools have enjoyed up until now has been the extra money to deal with deprivation in the revenue support grant and the RAISE—raising attainment and individual standards in education in Wales—money. We still have a 50% performance gap between us and England, and yet you say that, in England, there is only a loose connection between the levels of funding and the levels of improvement. This suggests to me that it is not all about the money. What do you think is the main problem here, if it is not all about the money?

[148] **Huw Lewis:** It is about the focused use of resource. It is not just in terms of the comparison with England. It is evident globally that there is not necessarily a direct correlation between levels of funding and the educational attainment of young people caught up in the poverty statistics. Drilling down into that, there are extremely useful lessons to learn. I am not dismissing the English experience at all. There are some hugely valuable lessons that need to be learned through things like the Manchester challenge and the London challenge, where there was extra resource, but not a huge amount. However, there was certainly a changed method of working that centred around focusing on the teaching and learning in the classroom and co-working between schools—those two critical elements about schools lifting their eyes and comparing themselves with others, not just concentrating on the internals, and making sure that there is a focus on the quality of teaching. That essentially comes back to page 25 of the Estyn annual report and the five recommendations. There is no rocket science involved with this. This stuff has been researched to death across the world for years, and we really have to step up now and grasp the challenges that that evidence actually presents.

[149] **Suzy Davies:** I would agree with you, Minister, that the clever use of money is the critical thing, but do you think that that is enough to justify the significant difference in what is being paid in the pupil deprivation grant this side of the Severn bridge and in England? With the exception of secondary pupils next year, and only next year, there really is quite a difference between what pupils can expect by way of the pupil deprivation grant here and the pupil premium in England.

[150] **Huw Lewis:** The governance of schools in England is not a matter for me. I have pointed to the dangers of comparing levels of resource between Wales and England. We still maintain those individual grants that we were talking about earlier—things like EMA, which is gone in England, the ethnic minorities grant, which is gone in England, and the school uniforms grant, which never existed in England. We also maintain LEA support services around things like special needs, which are being fractured in England, and all that reflects in the spend per pupil as it is calculated in England. On top of that, you have the artificial inflation of spend per pupil as a result of the ideological drive towards free schools and academies. Schools are picked out for reasons other than the educational to be given boosts in funding in order to fit a new pattern of school governance within England. We are not engaged in any of that nonsense in Wales. We are engaged in focusing this spend on the uplift of achievement of this group of young people.

[151] **Suzy Davies:** Yes, Minister, and you still have a 50% performance gap to meet, despite everything that you have said there.

[152] **Huw Lewis:** And, I am not denying it—

[153] **Suzy Davies:** Can I take you on to the RAISE grant? Obviously, there were criticisms of the way that that was used in schools. Has that influenced in any way your guidance on the pupil deprivation grant?

[154] **Huw Lewis:** Yes, there are lessons to learn from RAISE. The key lesson, I think, was that the net result of RAISE was to raise all boats, which is not a bad thing, but essentially it was not an intervention that led to a specific focus on closing the gap. It did not give that result because it did not increase the rate of improvement for the most deprived young people. Now, that is the shift that we are seeing in terms of the focus on how PDG is used, for instance—and it is not just about PDG; there are all sorts of other resources that can be pulled into play here. That is the qualitative difference between what we are doing now and what happened with RAISE.

[155] **Suzy Davies:** As a group, we have been to Cadoxton Primary School in Barry, and we took some evidence there. The PDG was obviously gratefully received, but there had still been evidence that, in some schools, using PDG had done what you just described as raising all the boats. As you say, that is not a bad thing, but it is not what PDG was intended for. How are you able to deal with that—I do not want to call it a problem, really—issue in guidance?

[156] **Huw Lewis:** I have transformed, I hope, the level of communication and guidance from the Welsh Government, in terms of governmental priorities, and what is being seen and understood at the school leadership level. The regional consortia will be critical in terms of the stocktaking they do in ensuring that we are focusing upon the problem in hand. The PDG, critically, is not about an extra bit of school resource just to be used as any other stream of support. It is a specific, focused mechanism by which we want to accelerate the rate of improvement for a specific group of young people.

[157] **Suzy Davies:** Are you in a position to tell us anything about the early findings of the consortia stock take? It would be quite useful to know whether there is any early evidence that the PDG has worked as a targeted resource.

[158] **Huw Lewis:** It is very early, but we are certainly getting reports that there is a greater realisation among school leaders, that we are seeing a better understanding and that the awareness around the Sutton Trust toolkit is higher than it ever was, but these are extremely early days.

[159] **Ms Daniels:** We are currently in the round of stock takes with consortia. We have had two of those stock takes and we have another two to come. A significant portion of that stock take has been focused on measures that the consortia are taking to help to address the attainment gap. In that context, we have been discussing how they are engaging with their schools to challenge, support and monitor how PDG is being used. For example, as a case study, we looked at one school that was featured in those charts, where there is a very low level of free school meal pupils achieving the level 2 inclusive target. The consortium members were able to describe to us how, in that particular instance, because they have concerns about that school's performance, they are effectively signing off that school's plans for how to spend its PDG because they are paying very close attention to how those resources are being deployed. That is not just PDG; they also have to look at the way in which that school is using its school effectiveness grant because they have concerns. We saw some examples from the stock takes—and I hope that we will see more when we finalise them this week and next week—of where consortia are taking a very close interest, using the data to identify which schools they should be most worried about and which schools they should be most worried about in terms of where resources are being spent to best effect.

[160] **Suzy Davies:** That is quite comforting because one of the criticisms of them in the

past was that data were not used to drill down into individual schools and even individual teachers. You mentioned that it is still early days to establish how effective the PDG is. Can you explain to me why you are taking such an interest in the potential for rolling this out to nursery level education? Perhaps you do not have quite enough data on its current effectiveness.

[161] **Huw Lewis:** There has been no decision around that. We are in very straitened circumstances, but I remain open minded about how things might be extended in the best of all possible worlds. However, there has been no gritty development work in that regard as yet.

[162] **Suzy Davies:** Is that on the horizon? You mentioned some straitened circumstances: is that the reason why you will be taking the PDG back to a bit over £400 after next year's bump up?

[163] **Huw Lewis:** I am bound there by a decision of the whole Assembly in the budget setting round. That is something that every Member of the Assembly agreed.

[164] **Aled Roberts:** Rwyf am ddod yn ôl ar ymestyn y grant i blant oedran meithrin. Mae sôn yn y papurau am gynllun peilot yn y de-ddwyrain. A allwch chi roi rhyw fath o fanylion ynglŷn â maint y cynllun peilot a faint o arian sydd wedi cael ei roi i mewn i'r rhaglen honno? Beth yw'r amserlen ar gyfer gweld llwyddiant y cynllun ai peidio?

Aled Roberts: I want to come back on extending the grant to children of nursery age. There is mention made in the papers of a pilot programme in the south-east. Could you give us any kind of detail about the extent of that pilot programme and how much money has been put into that programme? What is the timetable in terms of seeing the success, or otherwise, of the pilot?

11:30

[165] **Huw Lewis:** I think that there are some crossed wires here. I did ask officials to scope out a pilot project in the south-east consortium of nursery headteachers, but the budget settlement does make it clear that PDG is for children of statutory school age.

[166] **Aled Roberts:** It was only a scoping exercise then.

[167] **Huw Lewis:** Yes, it was just a scoping exercise.

[168] **Suzy Davies:** I have one last question, which goes back to guidance and my earlier question about more able and talented children. Will the guidance deal specifically with children who could be described in that way?

[169] **Huw Lewis:** Not with regard to the questions under discussion here this morning, no. However, that does not mean to say that policy development on more able and talented children comes to a halt or that that agenda is done with. That is not the case at all. Members will be aware, for instance, of the valuable work that is being undertaken by Paul Murphy MP, who is taking a specific look at Oxbridge. I know that the lessons that Paul Murphy will come back to us with will have implications right across the board, not just in terms of Oxbridge entrance, but in terms of catering for the needs of more able young people right across the board, and not just in terms of those at school-leaving age either, but earlier in their school careers. So, that is a 'for instance'. However, in terms specifically of the agenda under discussion here this morning, no.

[170] **Suzy Davies:** Okay; thank you.

[171] **Ann Jones:** We will move on to parental and community engagement.

[172] **Bethan Jenkins:** Rydym wedi clywed nifer o bobl yn dweud bod nifer o fesurau sydd yn gweithio er mwyn cyfathrebu gyda rhieni o deuluoedd difreintiedig, ond yn aml nid yw'n gysylltiedig â pherfformiad y disgyblion eu hunain yn yr ysgol. A fydd y cynllun amddifadedd cenedlaethol yn cynnwys tystiolaeth ynglŷn â sut y gall cyfathrebu â rhieni fynd i'r afael â'r sefyllfa hon mewn ysgolion ar draws Cymru?

Bethan Jenkins: We have heard many people say that there are a number of measures that do work to communicate with parents from disadvantaged families, but often that is not connected to how the pupils themselves perform in school. Will the national deprivation programme include evidence on how communication with parents can get to grips with this situation in schools across Wales?

[173] **Huw Lewis:** This is a very important agenda and we are getting to grips with this in a serious way. The deprivation programme will include a strand looking specifically at this. We know, once again, that there is evidence from across the world that parental engagement works. The question now is how you get the right kind of co-working between schools, communities and families in that regard. So, we will be drafting guidance for family and community engagement, which will be out by the summer of this year. That will go alongside a resource pack for schools of programmes that could be delivered in partnership. We are working on that with community and third sector organisations, once again in time for the summer. There will also be an engagement campaign, which Members will notice, which will include everything up to a television campaign. That will be about the promotion of parental engagement, family learning, information about adult community learning programmes, and so on. So, the visibility of this element of working, both within the relationship with schools and with the wider community will be stepped up markedly.

[174] There have also been some very good cross-departmental discussions about that small but critical resource that matters very much, namely the Communities First match fund and the way in which that resource is focused much more upon things that we know through evidence have a good effect, as opposed to those things that sound good and worth while but which we do not necessarily connect with an uplift in terms of kids' educational achievement.

[175] **Bethan Jenkins:** Diolch am hynny. Yr hyn nad wyf yn deall o'ch ateb yw a fydd yr hyn yr ydych yn disgwyl ei gyhoeddi yn yr haf, y *bespoke guidance*, yn cynnwys unrhyw beth fydd yn dweud wrth ysgolion sut i gyfathrebu gyda rhieni er mwyn inni gyrraedd y targedau o ran sicrhau bod pobl o ardaloedd difreintiedig yn gwneud yn well mewn ysgolion—hynny yw, dweud mai dyma'r ffyrdd gorau o weithredu gyda rhieni er mwyn sicrhau nad dim ond cyfathrebu er mwyn cyfathrebu gyda rhieni a wneir, ond bod y plant hynny yn gwella wedyn ar eu taith drwy'r ysgol.

Bethan Jenkins: Thank you for that. What I do not understand from your response is whether what you intend to publish in the summer, the bespoke guidance, will include content that will tell schools how to communicate with parents in order for us to reach the targets in relation to ensuring that people from disadvantaged backgrounds do better in schools—that is to say that these are the best ways of working with parents to ensure that they are not only engaging for engagement's sake with parents but that those children then progress on their journey through school.

[176] **Huw Lewis:** Of course it will. It would be next to useless if it did not. There are well-evidenced interventions; family learning is the one that springs to mind most of all, and the well-trodden initiatives around reading with your child and so on in the early years, particularly. We must not let go of that agenda. That remains something that is very important. As I say, the resource pack that will go alongside the guidance will be chock-full of evidence-based suggestions about things that actually work. I have a particular interest in making sure that we have a very high level of awareness in Welsh society—particularly in the early years, because literacy grows out of oracy and language development around a child is

critical—that every child needs to be in a language-rich environment. The more that parents, teachers, support staff and everyone engaged with a young person’s development is communicating with the child, the better. We are well aware that children in deprived circumstances can be exposed to far less spoken language in their early years than children in other circumstances and that is, to my mind, where many of the problems begin.

[177] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, I am well aware of that. I spoke in a conference with speech and language therapists last week and they were saying exactly that, but they were also saying that, sometimes, they do not feel that they are included in all of the discussions on a Welsh Government level. So I hope that you can hear their voices now.

[178] The other question that I had was with regard to community schools. I know that many people here have talked about the benefits of community schools in reaching out to parents. That is also recognised by Ann Keane from Estyn, but she says that the Welsh Government is yet to fulfil the previous committee recommendations in this regard. You will know that, in many areas, community schools are being closed. How do you square that circle, when people are saying that community schools are the way forward, whereas, perhaps, the priority at a local level is not to push ahead with this agenda?

[179] **Huw Lewis:** Ann Keane is right. There is a difference between opening up the school’s facilities to the community, which is good in itself, and the real meaning of what a community school is or could be. I am currently asking officials to look specifically at the school effectiveness grant and how that is employed, as it is a considerable chunk of resource, in terms of introducing real meaning into what—perhaps even the term ‘community focus’ is not right—a community-engaged school is. We know from international evidence that a community-engaged school has an edge in terms of delivering the best for this group of young people.

[180] **Bethan Jenkins:** I just wanted to ask as well about Communities First posts. There are 100 Communities First posts that are focused on learning and education, as referred to in your evidence. I wonder if you could expand upon what type of role they would have in this particular work with parents. Would they have an active role or would they be performing the work?

[181] **Huw Lewis:** Those 100 people are a tremendously important resource, I think. I have been working alongside the Minister responsible to make sure that we have clarity about what kind of work those people are engaged with. Again, it comes back, critically, to things like family learning, supporting young people at school by doing things like making sure that they have space and time to do homework and so on, whereas they might not at home, and to support and engage the wider family around the child in getting engaged in terms of understanding where their child is and continually being connected to the school.

[182] **Bethan Jenkins:** My last question—I know that there are other people who will want to ask questions—is with regard to the cost of issues relating to extra-curricular activities. Professor Egan stated that, on the whole point about uniforms, trips and so forth, there is no evidence that any of that improves outcomes. However, all professionals feel that that is the right thing to do in terms of mitigating the effects of poverty. How do we make sure that schools encourage people to take part in such activities, without putting the burden of the cost on families that cannot afford it? We went to Cadoxton and we were talking about how parents and children were encouraged to open credit union accounts so that they can budget effectively. Is that something that you would like to see across Wales, so that it is not a case of panicking at the last minute that people cannot afford to pay for their children’s courses, but that generally, all children will be able to afford to do so?

[183] **Huw Lewis:** Yes, of course. Close co-operation with really good community

initiatives like credit unions is very important here. On the subject of uniforms, I went to school with kids who had homemade clothes and were singled out because of it. I do not want to see any child in Wales, in these times of austerity, having to be forced back into situations like that. I think that the uniform grant is an essential part of what is a humane educational system, frankly. I would encourage any Members here who are concerned about the way that school trips, outings or school transport is organised to the detriment of families that are less well off and how that is communicated to young people to come to me, because our guidance is very clear: you cannot impose charges for these things on any family. People have to be clear that, if a contribution is made, it is voluntary and there should be no stigma attached to families that are not able to meet those contributions. However, if Members are aware of schools that are breaching that guidance, I would be personally concerned, and would personally intervene.

[184] **Lynne Neagle:** On the monitoring of that, I know of schools that write out to parents saying ‘A voluntary contribution is requested, but if we don’t get enough money, the trip isn’t going to run’. That is another kind of pressure on parents who feel that they are obligated to pay. So, they are kind of adhering to the guidance, but kind of not as well. We need schools to really embrace the spirit of this guidance as well.

[185] **Huw Lewis:** You are absolutely right. Again, I would take a direct interest if any parent in straitened circumstances is feeling pressurised to contribute what they cannot afford in order to save face. That is a failure of school management and I would have no hesitation in pointing that out to the school leadership.

[186] **Rebecca Evans:** Are you satisfied that schools are always communicating with parents in appropriate formats? For example, some parents may not have English or Welsh as a first language or may have literacy problems of their own that they are not happy to share, or they may not have access to the internet.

[187] **Huw Lewis:** I am sure that this is a problem. We do not have any evidence in terms of the extent of the problem, but common sense would tell any school management team that there is a considerable portion of the adult population out there that has a literacy problem. Communication needs to be tailored in such a way that it really does get through. That also comes back to that school engagement work that we were talking about earlier. In my opinion, face-to-face contact between professionals and parents and the wider family, through community engagement, is something that should be a day-to-day feature of the way schools operate. Anecdotally, one of the most effective ways in which a good school leader starts the day, if you believe *TES*, is that they are there, present and available to young people when the children come through the school gates in the morning, and that there is access, if only very brief access, to the headteacher for the parents. Obviously, each school has to evaluate itself in this regard, but that kind of good practice is well documented.

11:45

[188] **Ann Jones:** Thank you. Minister, we have run out of time, even though we took into account the additional break time. I thank you for coming in to give us some answers to questions. You know the drill—we will send you a transcript to check for accuracy. No doubt we will have you back at some other point to discuss some further issues that we will be looking at. I thank you and your officials.

[189] **Huw Lewis:** Thank you, Chair.

11:46

**Papurau i'w Nodi
Papers to Note**

[190] **Ann Jones:** There are just a couple of papers to note, if Members are happy to do so. I see that you are. The next meeting is next Wednesday, when we have the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty coming in for a general scrutiny session.

[191] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have a quick question on the papers.

[192] **Ann Jones:** Do you want to go into private session, or do you want to do it now?

[193] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not know. I just have a question on one of the letters; I do not know whether that is for public or private session.

[194] **Ann Jones:** You can do it publicly; that is fine.

[195] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is just on the fast-food outlets in Wrexham. I know that, on the Petitions Committee, we have had a petition about it, and Edwina Hart, the Minister, has responded—not giving a different stance, but a different angle to it. So, I was wondering whether we could get that from the Petitions Committee, because it might give us a wider view as to the issues surrounding that particular area.

[196] **Ann Jones:** Is that as part of the note that we had from the Minister for Health and Social Services?

[197] **Bethan Jenkins:** From Mark Drakeford, yes.

[198] **Ann Jones:** Yes; we will do that. Are Members happy to write with that request? I see that you are. Thank you very much. If there is nothing else, we will close the meeting.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11:47.
The meeting ended at 11:47.*