

MINUTES

Date: Thursday 21 November 2002

Time: 9.00a.m.

Venue: Committee Room 3, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

Attendance: Members of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

	Gareth Jones, Chair	Conwy
	Lorraine Barrett	Cardiff South and Penarth
	Mick Bates	Montgomeryshire
	Jane Davidson, Assembly Minister	Pontypridd
	Helen Mary Jones	Llanelli
	Alun Pugh	Clwyd West
	Jonathan Morgan	South Wales Central
	Owen John Thomas	South Wales Central

In Attendance

Andy Shercliff

XL Wales

Cathy Hoyt

XL Wales

Ernst Wegerif

Nant-y-cwm Steiner Waldorf School,
Pembrokeshire

Caroline Coughlan

Nant-y-cwm Steiner Waldorf School,
Pembrokeshire

Cath Little

The Fountain Steiner Waldorf School, Cardiff

Officials in Attendance

Richard Davies	Director, Department for Training and Education
Keith Davies	Head, Standards and Performance Division
Elizabeth Williams	Head, Youth Policy Team

Secretariat

Chris Reading	Clerk
Holly Pembridge	Deputy Clerk

9.00am to 9.10am

Item 1: Introduction, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

1.1 The Chair welcomed the committee and members of the public.

1.2 The Chair noted apologies from Huw Lewis, Janice Gregory and Cynog Dafis. The Chair welcomed Owen John Thomas as a substitute for Cynog Dafis, in the latter part of the meeting.

1.3 The Chair announced that the committee's interim report on the School of the Future would be debated in plenary on 25 March 2002.

1.4 The Chair informed members that he was due to give evidence to the Richard Commission on behalf of the committee on 12 December 2002. A factual note would be circulated to committee, for information, on 5 December.

1.5 The Chair asked members for declarations of interest, in accordance with the revised guidance on Standing Order 4.5. There were none.

9.05am to 9.45am

Item 2: Minister's Monthly Report to Committee

ELL 17-02(p.1)

Narrowing the Gap

2.1 There was some concern that local education authorities (LEAs), in reviewing their funding formulae, would reduce some school budgets and impede some schools in achieving the agenda set out by the Welsh Assembly Government. The Minister was asked if she would consider meeting LEAs to discuss the impact of any proposed changes on schools. The Minister told the committee that a consultation was underway on new regulations for the funding of schools to take effect in April 2004 and that she would remind LEAs of this. In addition, the Minister

said that she had commissioned the Audit Commission to undertake a review of the factors currently used by LEAs in their local funding formulae, which would be used to inform the consultation.

2.2 There was some discussion concerning the flexibility of teachers' contracts. The Minister expressed her personal support for flexible work patterns such as job share. New contractual arrangements to improve work/life balance would be put in place over the next two years. The Minister said that LEAs would be able to apply the provisions of the Education Act 2002, with respect to this matter, in due course.

2.3 There was some discussion concerning school budgets and indicative funding over a three-year period. The Minister supported the principle of indicative funding and stated that a consultation would be carried out in due course on the establishment of budget forums in each LEA, as allowed in the Education Act 2002. These forums would facilitate budgetary planning.

2.4 Members raised concerns about continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers. The Minister stated that the Welsh Assembly Government had worked successfully alongside the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) over the last year or so on CPD. The Minister envisaged that the next round of pilot schemes would look at whole-school initiatives.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

2.5 Members welcomed by the provision of a whiteboard in every primary school in Wales. There was some discussion about the difficulty of relocating whiteboards in some older schools, owing to health and safety constraints.

2.6 There was some discussion concerning community use of ICT suites in schools. The Deputy Minister told the Committee that there had been a massive investment in ICT and LEAs were encouraged to promote community use of these facilities.

2.7 Members felt that it was important to keep up with the most recent developments in ICT. The Deputy Minister agreed that the need to stay ahead was important and that the scheme was not committed to just one delivery mechanism, as rural access was crucial.

Conductive Education

2.8 One member referred to a letter, previously distributed to members, from the Welsh Institute of Education, concerning a proposal to fund 50% of a project to gather Welsh-based evidence in respect of Special Education Needs' (SEN). The Minister stated that an SEN Advisory Group had been established, regional pilot schemes had been initiated and four development officer posts had been funded. The Code of Practice outlining parents' increased rights had been published and SEN provisions were included the Education Act 2002. The Minister informed members that there was a budget for research and that she was taking advice on this matter.

Basic Skills Employer Pledge

2.9 The Minister informed the Committee that she had written to all Assembly sponsored public bodies inviting them to undertake this pledge.

ELWa Senior Structure Review (Rawlings Report)

2.10 Members asked when the Minister intended to make a statement on the Rawlings report. The Minister stated that she would seek advice from both the National Council and HEFCW branches of ELWa on the

implications of the report and then discuss this with her senior officials. The Minister said that she wished to keep members informed and would make a statement in due course.

Assembly Learning Grants (ALGs)

2.11 The Minister was asked if she could provide the Committee with an update on the allocation of ALGs to eligible students. The Minister agreed to include this topic in her next monthly report to Committee on 19 December.

Procedure

2.12 One member raised a procedural point concerning the Minister appending documents to her monthly report, for which there was little time for members to raise questions. The Minister stated that she wished to keep members informed of relevant matters (e.g. the Rawlings Report) and that, if they so wished, members could ask the Chair (or the clerk) to include specific items on the agenda for subsequent meetings.

Action Points

- The Minister to send a note to LEAs reminding them of the consultation planned for the New Year on new regulations to govern the funding of schools from April 2004.
- The Minister to include the allocation of ALGs in her report on 19 December 2002.

9.45am to 10.45am

Item 3: Policy Review: School of the Future – Presentation from XL Wales

ELL 17-02(p.2)

3.1 Presenters spoke from their paper, followed by questions from members.

Networks

3.2 Members asked how XL Wales saw its proposals for All-Wales Educational networks interfacing with existing support services from LEAs and the voluntary sector. Members heard that XL Wales developed direct relationships with school and that XL Wales did not wish to compete with LEA provision.

Roving Teachers

3.3 Members were told that XL Wales currently had six roving teachers. A programme of activities would be presented to schools for approval. The roving teachers could work to local, regional and national strategies and XL Wales had tried to identify employers' and communities' requirements, including follow up activities. Members asked what body would identify gaps/requirements and presenters said that if an All-Wales Education Grant was set up, then it would depend on the remit, set perhaps, by the Assembly which could set out skills areas but would not prescribe the delivery.

Enterprise and Innovation

3.4 Members asked how enterprise and innovation could be incorporated into the curriculum. In response, presenters told the committee that a child, aged 11 on leaving primary school, would have learnt 90% of enterprise and innovation skills outside of the school setting and 10% from within the school setting. These skills could be worked into the national curriculum through the science and design technology syllabus.

Outcomes

3.5 Members asked how outcomes were measured. The committee heard that a lot of the evidence was qualitative. For example, in a New Opportunities Fund (NOF) childcare project in Swansea/Port Talbot, a baseline assessment would be carried out on the same children involved over three years. It was important to change children's attitude to learning, both inside and outside school.

Funding

3.6 The Minister stated that it was important for schools to feel confident about funding

sources. The Minister said that she did not want to take money away from the broad education budget. Presenters referred to the proposal for an 'Educational Excellence' programme and said it was to be seen as a long-term funding mechanism. Organisations would have had to secure a funding base; as a consequence, a large number of organisations would not apply for such a scheme. The Minister said that she felt it would be more appropriate for the Assembly to identify where organisations had particular skills and then to identify the appropriate funding mechanisms.

3.7 The Chair thanked presenters for their contribution to the meeting and to the policy review.

-

10.45am-11.00am

The Committee agreed to break for fifteen minutes

11.00am-12.15pm

Item Four: Policy Review – School of the Future – Presentation from Steiner Waldorf Schools

ELL 17-02(p.3)

General

4.1 Presenters spoke about the theory, practice and the ethos of Steiner Waldorf schools. This was followed by questions and discussion. Members were interested in the transition from the Steiner Waldorf School (in Cardiff) to secondary schools in the maintained sector. The committee heard that evidence was anecdotal, as the school in Cardiff had only been in existence for five years. It had been clear that children had developed confidence and the maturity to learn to read very quickly.

Early Years

4.2 Members referred to the early years work previously undertaken by the committee and asked if the evidence on the effectiveness of play was similar to the work carried out by Steiner Waldorf schools. Presenters stated that this was partially true, anecdotal evidence showed that teachers visiting the school (in Cardiff) had found the approach to play different from that in the maintained sector. Although there was some excellent work in mainstream education, play was more driven by children themselves and therefore more effective in Steiner Waldorf Schools.

ICT

4.3 The Committee was told that the Steiner Waldorf method did not advocate the use of computers until the age of fourteen. Some members felt that this was unduly restrictive and that information technology could be of benefit to younger children. Members and presenters agreed that ICT should be approached from the perspective of it being a useful tool, not as a replacement for thinking.

Learning Difficulties/Disaffection

4.4 Members asked whether presenters had had any experience of dealing with learning difficulties and disaffection and whether it could be related to education within the community. Presenters discussed the Steiner Waldorf approach to dyslexia and said that such children were taught to write before they could read. They stated that there were fewer cases of dyslexia in Steiner Waldorf education than in mainstream education. Presenters considered that family units might alleviate current social problems.

Intervention

4.5 There was some discussion concerning adult intervention in children's unstructured play. The committee heard that the teacher had to be a role model to the children; the teacher would intervene when a situation became inappropriate, as in some cases, some children might act out their disturbed lifestyles.

Social Inclusion

4.6 Members were interested to know how many children in Wales were taught using the Steiner Waldorf method and whether there was any diversity in children's social backgrounds. The Cardiff school was growing and children came from a socially diverse range of backgrounds, which was being actively welcomed. Several children had been referred from Social Services. Fees were paid on a contributory basis but no child was refused entry on a financial basis.

Teachers

4.7 Members asked the presenters to nominate one component of Steiner Waldorf education that they felt should be incorporated into mainstream education. After some discussion, the presenters identified dedicated and fully motivated teachers, trained in the Steiner Waldorf method.

Bilingual Wales

4.8 The Minister asked presenters how Steiner Waldorf education could contribute to the future of a bilingual Wales. The committee heard that Nant-y-Cwm School was looking to recruit a second language Welsh teacher but was having difficulty. Presenters indicated their wish for a parallel school: both a Welsh-medium and English-medium Steiner Waldorf school on the same site. Bilingual sites could be found in South Africa, Japan and India.

4.9 The Chair thanked presenters for their interesting and thought provoking contribution to the policy review.

Item Five: Minutes of the previous meeting

5.1 The Committee ratified the minutes of the 7 November 2002 meeting with one amendment: paragraph 2.7 – replace "bidding system" with "funding formulae of local authorities".

Annex

1. Secondary Legislation

1.1 After some discussion on a suggestion by Jonathan Morgan, the Committee resolved not to request the extended procedure be used for the following items of secondary legislation:

- The Education (Education Standards Grants)(Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2002;
- The Education (School Performance Information) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2003;
- The Governors' Annual Reports (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations; and
- The Education (Out turn Statements) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2003.

2. Motion – University Top Up Fees

2.1 The following motion and amendment were briefly discussed:

Original Motion proposed by Helen Mary Jones:

"This Committee firmly opposes the concept of University top-up fees".

Amendment proposed by Jonathan Morgan:

Delete "." and add: ", and calls on the United Kingdom Government to abolish tuition fees."

2.2 Some members felt that they needed more time to consider the issues raised but consensus could not be reached. Lorraine Barrett proposed a formal motion:

"That further discussion on this matter be deferred until the next meeting to be held on 5 December."

In favour:

- Lorraine Barrett
- Alun Pugh
- Jane Davidson
- Mick Bates

Against:

- Helen Mary Jones
- Owen John Thomas

- Jonathan Morgan

The motion was carried by four votes to three (the Chair abstained).

Action: The clerk to place this matter on the agenda for the 5 December meeting.