

# Agenda – Children, Young People, and Education Committee

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Meeting Venue:

Hybrid – Committee room 4 Tŷ Hywel  
and video conference via Zoom

Meeting date: 28 January 2026

Meeting time: 09.30

For further information contact:

Naomi Stocks

Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

[SeneddChildren@senedd.wales](mailto:SeneddChildren@senedd.wales)

## Hybrid

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### Private pre-meeting

09.15 – 09.30

### Public meeting

09.30 – 11.00

### 1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

09.30

### 2 Care Inspectorate Wales: Annual Scrutiny

09.30 – 11.00

(Pages 1 – 17)

Gillian Baranski, Chief Inspector, Care Inspectorate Wales

Margaret Rooney, Deputy Chief Inspector, Care Inspectorate Wales

[Annual report 2024–2025](#)

Attached Documents:

Research brief



### **3 Papers to note**

11.00

#### **3.1 Scrutiny of the Children's Commissioner for Wales Annual Report**

(Pages 18 – 26)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee  
from the Children's Commissioner for Wales

#### **3.2 Qualifications Wales – Annual Report**

(Pages 27 – 29)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee  
from Qualifications Wales

#### **3.3 Information from Stakeholders**

(Pages 30 – 31)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee  
from Professor Johanna L. Waters

#### **3.4 Information from Stakeholders**

(Page 32)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee  
from the Minister for Children and Social Care

### **3.5 Information from Stakeholders**

(Page 33)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

### **3.6 School improvement and learner attainment**

(Pages 34 – 35)

Attached Documents:

Letter to Elizabeth Nonweiler from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

### **3.7 School improvement and learner attainment**

(Pages 36 – 38)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee from Elizabeth Nonweiler

### **3.8 Legislative Consent: Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill**

(Pages 39 – 49)

Attached Documents:

Email correspondence to Children, Young People and Education Committee from Home Ed Cymru

**4 Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of this meeting**

11.00

**Private meeting**

11.00 – 12.30

**5 Care Inspectorate Wales: Annual Scrutiny – consideration of the evidence**

11.00 – 11.15

**Break**

11.15 – 11.30

**6 School Improvement and Learner Attainment – consideration of the final output**

11.30 – 12.00

(Pages 50 – 63)

Attached Documents:

Draft letter

**7 Routes into post-16 education and training – consideration of the Welsh Government response**

12.00 – 12.15

(Pages 64 – 80)

Attached Documents:

Welsh Government Response

## **8 Supplementary Legislative Consent: Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill**

12.15 – 12.30

(Pages 81 – 112)

Attached Documents:

Supplementary Legislative Consent Memorandum: Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

Legal Advice Note

Draft Report

Document is Restricted

# Agenda Item 3.1



Comisiynydd Plant Cymru  
Children's Commissioner for Wales

Buffy Williams AS,

Cadeirydd Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

8 Ionawr 2025

8 January 2025

## **Re: Follow up to Annual Scrutiny Session**

Annual Buffy,

Thank you for your letter with the additional questions to follow up November's annual scrutiny session.

Please see the responses to the questions as follows.

- 1. The Committee has scrutinised a range of significant education related issues - including curriculum and ALN reforms, school standards, teacher recruitment and retention, pupil absence and peer on peer sexual harassment. We also know the Welsh Youth Parliament are looking at behaviour in schools. To what extent would you say the combination of these education issues could create the 'perfect storm' for compulsory age education that will need addressing in the Seventh Senedd? How concerned are you about these combination of challenges facing education?**

I am very concerned that the challenges outlined are significantly impacting children's experiences of and right to education. I sincerely hope that these issues are effectively addressed during the seventh Senedd, and it is imperative that such challenges are considered by hearing directly from children and young people, as well as through an intersectional lens.

Following the National Behaviour Summit chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Education in the summer of 2025, I wrote a [position paper](#) outlining my concerns. In this paper, I called for a national listening exercise to hear directly from young people on this topic. Much of the debate to-date has centred around the relatively small minority of learners whose behaviour is complex and unacceptable, but there has

been no systemic capturing of evidence from all learners on the issue. Furthermore, I called for complex behaviour to be viewed as a symptom of a problem, and not the problem itself, and that we must recognise complex behaviours as a multi-faceted issue with a range of root causes and solutions including wider national strategies including Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy, the Mental Health Strategy, Youth Work Strategy and the ongoing evaluation of the ALN Act. A holistic approach is a must – this cannot be framed purely as an educational problem for schools to resolve alone, rather it is a whole society challenge that all our national structures should play a part in resolving

My office is currently carrying out work with stakeholders to understand challenges within Emotional-Based School Avoidance (EBSA). To inform this work we have sought advice from Professor Carl Hughes, who spoke at the Behaviour summit, and we have since identified specific cohorts of children and young people who may be more prone to low attendance/EBSA, including children in receipt of FSM, children from Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities and families of children with ALN.

I was pleased to read the announcement of the review of school governance. As one of my manifesto calls, I had asked that such a review would also consider diversity of board membership and routes to remuneration. Following conversations with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and officials, I was pleased to see these additions included within the scope of this review.

Regarding children with ALN, I am looking forward to the publication of the Audit Wales review with a particular interest in their findings on transparency of funding.

I was present in the Senedd when the Youth Parliament launched their excellent report into Behaviour in Schools and I fully support all of its recommendations. At that event, I was pleased to hear commitment from the Cabinet Secretary for Education to working with Senedd leuencid and my office to take forward this work.

- 2. To what extent are you aware that the wording “boosting standards in schools and colleges” has been removed from the First Minister’s four stated priorities, and do you consider this change to signal a reduced emphasis on educational improvement? This was raised by the Committee of the Scrutiny of the First Minister in a [letter](#) to First Minister and the [response](#) dated 17 September?**

I was not aware of the removal of this wording from the First Minister’s four stated priorities, although I had previously raised with the FM during my annual meeting with her in 2024 that the wording of the four priorities, as first announced in 2024, did not

directly reference children, and so children may not see themselves reflected in the priorities of her government. I felt then and continue to feel that children were not sufficiently foregrounded within the four priorities. I am further disappointed with the evolution of the priority initially called ‘Opportunity for every family’ which had ‘included a focus on boosting standards in schools and colleges to its iteration as presented during the Senedd debate of 15<sup>th</sup> July 2025 which focused primarily on Homes and Housing and not on Education. Whilst adequate housing is also a children’s rights issue which my office has undertaken work on and flagged during this year, I would welcome greater focus on the importance of educational improvement.

**3. Your Annual Report says that your casework included a “high volume of concerns” about social services, particularly placement breakdowns, delays in assessments, and access to advocacy for children in care. How would you assess the impact of our Committee’s scrutiny on the radical reform of support for care experienced children. Has anything changed since our report was published in 2023?**

I welcome the scrutiny that the Committee has provided on arrangements for children’s social care during this Senedd. The ‘If Not Now, When?’ report, published in 2023, was a landmark piece of work that set out bold recommendations to reform children’s social care in Wales and to ensure that Welsh Government’s commitments in its Programme for Government were realised. A key development that has transpired is the passing of legislation to eliminate profit from children’s social care. This was a key call of mine, and it is welcome that work is underway to implement the policy.

Since the publication of the ‘If Not Now, When?’ report, I also welcome the consultation and proposed changes to the Part 6 Code of Practice to the Social Service and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. We undertook work with a group of care-experienced young people – the Hope Group – and developed recommendations for Welsh Government, particularly on enabling young people to participate in the packing of their personal belongings and including young people in their own care meetings. Their recommendations are included in the impact report produced by my office [here](#). It is welcome that these recommendations will be addressed in the proposed changes to the code of practice.

I should also acknowledge that policy change can take time, and that the Committee has continued to scrutinise Welsh Government on the matter of reforming children’s

social care since its 2023 report was published. However, issues persist that should be brought to the Committee's attention and that the next Welsh Government needs to address.

Data from our Advice and Assistance Team show that issues relating to social services accounted for around a quarter of all issues raised with our Advice and Assistance Service between April 2024 and March 2025. The largest category within social services-related enquiries was complaints, which made up 38% of all issues. These complaints most commonly came from parents who felt dissatisfied with the service they received from children's services departments, including a lack of communication, delays in decision-making, or feeling that their concerns were not taken seriously. Many families described feeling "pushed from service to service," and struggling to get clarity about what help their child was entitled to or when actions would be taken.

Concerns about placement stability represented 11% of social services issues. These cases included children experiencing multiple placement breakdowns, children being moved with very little notice, or situations where families were worried about the suitability of a placement. These cases are typically complex and involve coordination between several agencies. We continue to see the emotional toll these disruptions take on children and young people.

Other categories included:

- Funding decisions (5%) – often relating to financial support for kinship carers, access to support packages, or disputes about responsibility between teams.
- Safeguarding (6%) – usually where parents felt safeguarding concerns had not been taken seriously or where communication about safeguarding processes was unclear.
- Provision of services (8%) – where families reported delays in receiving support, limited availability of services, or high thresholds preventing access.
- Smaller proportions related to advocacy (4%), child protection concerns (2%), and assessment issues (1%).

Taken together, the data highlight a pattern of children and families experiencing delays, uncertainty, and inconsistent communication.

It is also useful to consider this with the previous years since the 'If Not Now, When?' report's publication. Data from our Advice and Assistance Team show that Social Services accounted for 28% and 29% of our casework in 2022/23 and 2023/24

respectively, and that some issues within our Social Services casework have remained similar in number, particularly complaints and the need for advice. This tells us that, unfortunately, issues remain for children and families and a lack of significant improvement since the 2023 report remains the case. Whilst I reiterate my acknowledgment that the impact of policy change can take time to materialise, as well as my thanks to the Committee for its work on this area during this Senedd, I urge the Committee to continue its scrutiny and ensure that the next Welsh Government prioritises children's social care and brings about the improvements needed to care and support for care-experienced children and young people.

It is also disappointing that there has been inaction on Welsh Government's part to put to work some of the "If Not Now, When?" recommendations that it accepted, albeit partly. For example, the Committee recommended that all care leavers should have access to a personal advisor up to the age of 25 (as we called for in our 2016 ['Hidden Ambitions' report](#)), and that a review of the When I'm Ready scheme should take place. Welsh Government accepted both recommendations in part, but the review of the When I'm Ready scheme has not taken place, and although some care-experienced young people up to the age of 25 have access to a Personal Advisor, they are young people who are in education or training, meaning that not all care-experienced young people, up to the age of 25, have access to a Personal Advisor. It is crucial that the age limit for accessing holistic support for care-experienced young people is extended to 25, so as to ensure that they receive the support that they need as they transition to independent living and that they are able to access opportunities that are available to their peers who are not care-experienced. The next Welsh Government must fulfil this work, and the Children, Young People and Education Committee must continue its work of scrutinising government and ensure that its commitments to care-experienced children and young people are fulfilled.

**4. Transport is an issue which has arisen in several of our inquiries and your Manifesto for the Senedd Elections calls for free public transport for under 18s and also for a full review of the Learner Travel Measure 2008 and associated guidance. What's your assessment of how the current £1 fares pilot is going? To what extent will this address some of the learner travel issues that you deal with?**

I welcome the introduction of the pilot. As reflected in my [manifesto](#): *"Young people across the whole breadth of Wales raise the prohibitive costs and poor availability of public transport with us at every turn. They feel let down, unable*

*to get to school or college safely and on time, and prevented from socialising with friends, seeing family members, or attending clubs and leisure activities.”*

The manifesto calls for:

- Expanding upon the current £1 fares pilot, to provide free public transport (to include bus and rail travel) for under 18s.
- Undertaking a full review of the Learner Travel Measure 2008 and associated guidance.

Without these changes, children will not have full access to all their rights including access to education, attending health appointments, seeing friends and family, joining clubs and engaging in sport and leisure opportunities. Those from poorer backgrounds will be disproportionately disadvantaged; poorer access to education, health, employment and training opportunities will have life-long and even inter-generational effects. In addition to this, climate targets will not be achieved without a significant change in everyday travel habits, and the worst effects of climate change will impact most severely on the most vulnerable children.

During November 2025, we asked children and young people about public transport. The surveys were a part of an ongoing series of topical questions we ask children and young people monthly to hear their views on a variety of issues, called Monthly Matters. A snapshot summary of the findings can be found [here](#).

The findings from this engagement work indicate that there is more work to be done in raising awareness of the £1 pilot and My Travel Pass. Before doing the survey 70% of respondents were not aware of ‘the new low bus fares for children and young people’. The responses to the survey also highlighted that parents and teachers were not aware of the scheme. There were also concerns raised about broader issues in accessing public transport such as reliability, safety and frequency which requires ongoing work.

While I welcome the pilot, the reduced fares still amount to £3 per day - a monthly cost of approximately £60 - which remains a significant barrier for low-income families. Continued focus on the Learner Travel Measure must remain a priority and should not be conflated with this pilot.

- 5. You have published a Manifesto for the Senedd Elections 2026. What do you see as the absolute priority for legislative change in the first year of the Seventh Senedd?**

I believe the priority for legislative change during the full Seventh Senedd term should be full incorporation of the UNCRC and changes to the way my office is funded in order to fully safeguard children's rights for current and future generations of children and young people. The full rationale for this is set out in my [manifesto](#). However, it is likely that this legislative change will take longer than one year.

Therefore, my priority for legislative change during the first year of the Seventh Senedd would be progressing work support young people's access to transport and education by fully reviewing and amending the 2008 Learner Travel (Wales) Measure. Young people across Wales have consistently raised the prohibitive costs and poor availability of school transport with us through our direct engagement with them. They feel let down and face barriers in getting to school or college safely and on time. We have even heard of some children missing school completely because they cannot afford to get there.

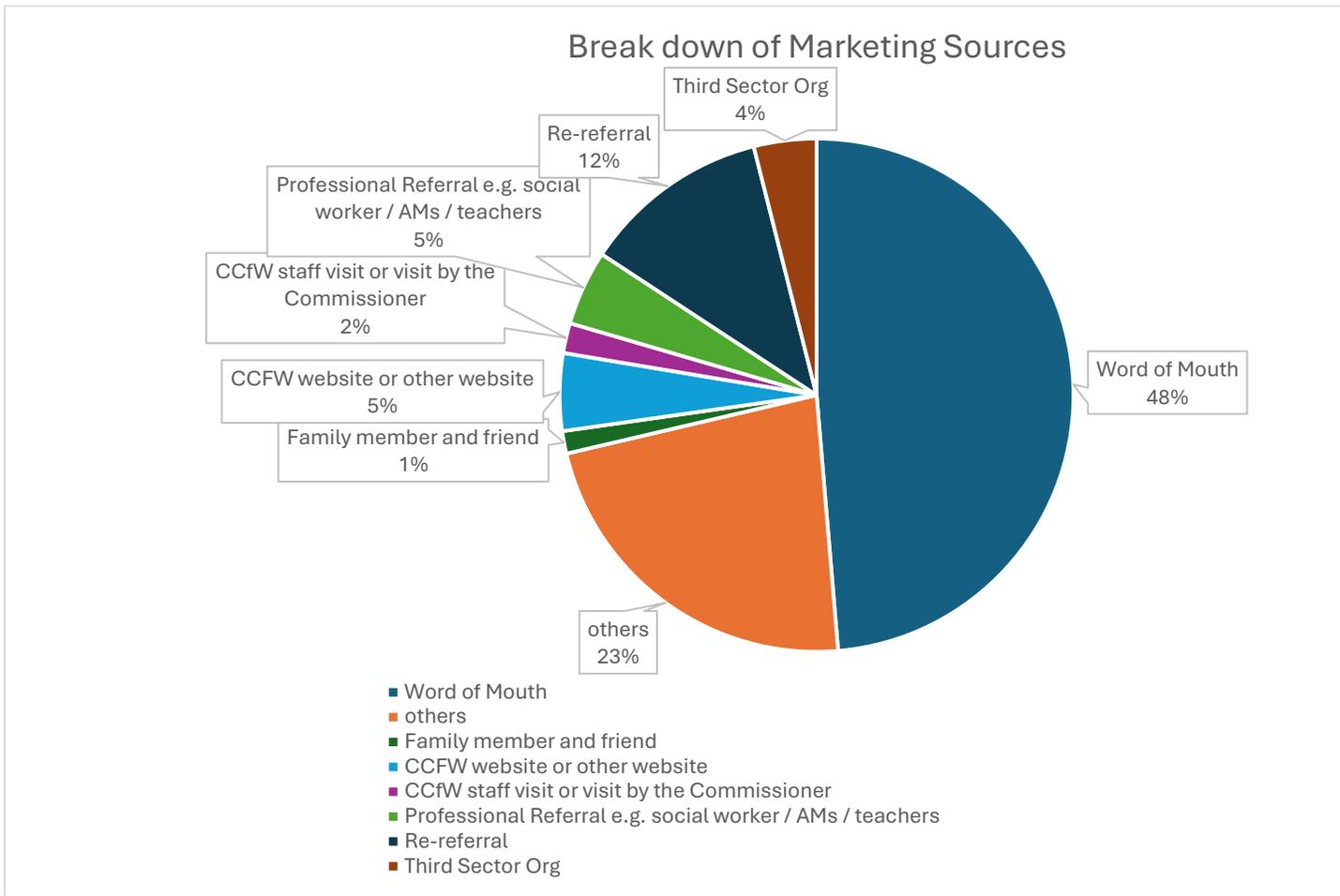
To address this, I am calling for the next Welsh Government to make learner travel more accessible for more pupils, and to do so by reviewing the 2008 Learner Travel Measure, which is currently not fit for purpose. We cannot rely on the policies of individual local authorities to provide more accessible learner travel – change must happen on a national level.

In its recent 2025 progress report on its Child Poverty Strategy, Welsh Government note the Bus Services (Wales) Bill and the accompanying Child Rights Impact Assessment, which “highlighted the importance of affordable, reliable and safe bus travel for children to meet with friends, go to school and attend appointments, and that this can be challenging in more rural areas of Wales.” The progress report also notes the £1 bus pilot “designed to support young people in accessing education, employment, training opportunities and leisure activities.” Although we welcome the pilot, it is a temporary scheme, and it is no replacement for provision placed on a statutory basis. Whilst the pilot is welcome, only changes to the Learner Travel Measure can secure lasting and accessible school transport for pupils. The Bus Services (Wales) Bill presents an opportunity to ensure that changes to bus services in Wales serve children and young people – failing to review the Learner Travel Measure as the provisions of the bill are implemented would be a missed opportunity. I see this as an urgent next step in terms of legislative change during the first year of the Seventh Senedd, but continue to call for all public transport for children and young people to be made free for children up to the age of 18.

The Committee will also know that Welsh Government will undertake a review of safeguarding governance which is expected to be completed by Spring 2026.

Although I wish to avoid preempting the outcome of the review, this is an opportunity to strengthen safeguarding arrangements in Wales, particularly safeguarding arrangements for children. If the review concludes that the strengthening of arrangements is required, such as by establishing a Child Protection Authority, those changes should be put on a statutory basis, so I would welcome legislative activity to that end during the first year of the next Senedd, and I would consider it a legislative priority for the next Welsh Government.

**6. There was also an agreement that you would provide statistics to the Committee about how the children and young people who request assistance from your team, first heard about your casework function.**



Our data shows that the majority of children, young people and families who contact the Advice and Assistance Service do so through *word of mouth*, which accounts for 48% of all enquiries. This reflects the strong reputation of the service among families and communities, particularly in areas such as ALN and education.

A further 23% of enquiries fall under “other” sources, which includes a range of routes such as community networks and general online searches.

Re-referrals make up 12%, demonstrating that many families return to us for support with new or ongoing issues. This indicates confidence in the service and a positive experience of previous contact.

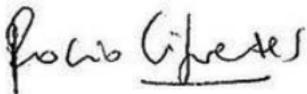
Enquiries arising from third-sector organisations account for 4%, while professional referrals — including from social workers, schools, teachers, or Members of the Senedd — make up 5%.

A smaller proportion, 5%, reach us via the Children’s Commissioner for Wales’ website or other online platforms. A further 2% arise from CCfW staff outreach or visits by the Commissioner, and 1% come through family and friends.

Overall, the data demonstrates that personal recommendation remains the most significant route into the service, with increasing visibility through online and professional channels. This reinforces the value of strengthening both our outreach and digital presence in the coming year.

If you would like any additional information, please let me know.

Yn gywir,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rocio Cifuentes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name.

Rocio Cifuentes MBE

Comisiynydd Plant Cymru  
Children’s Commissioner for Wales

Buffy Williams MS  
 Chair  
 Children, Young People and Education Committee

14 January 2026

Dear Buffy

Thank you for the opportunity to review our Annual Report for 2024 – 2025 in the Committee scrutiny session in December. We welcome the opportunity for transparency in our work and value all opportunities to engage with the Committee both formally and informally. We would like to provide some further information in relation to points raised at the scrutiny session.

### Qualifications data

In the scrutiny session some detailed information was requested about the number and category of qualifications currently available on publicly funded courses in Wales and listed as either ‘Approved’, i.e. developed to meet design parameters set by us and effectively ‘made-for-Wales’, or ‘Designated’. i.e. usually developed to meet requirements in England but available more widely.

We hope that the following information meets the request for further information (data as at 5/1/2026):

Number of recognised awarding bodies	85
Total number of qualifications listed on QiW (Approved, Designated and Other)	8626
Number of Approved qualifications	195
Number of Approved qualifications anticipated at the end of this academic year (including those for first teaching in September 2027)	372
Number of Designated qualifications for new learners	2631*

\*For context, there were 6969 Designated qualifications as at 31/8/2018. The number of Designated qualifications has declined over time as Approved qualifications have replaced them (often on a non-linear basis i.e. a small suite of Approved qualifications can replace a large number of Designated qualifications), also there has been a natural reduction in the number of Designated qualifications over time as redundant or moribund qualifications have been cleansed from the market.

## **VCSE Nature Restoration and GCSE Natural History**

During the scrutiny session there was a specific request for more information in relation to the new GCSE in Natural History which is being developed in England. In our response we highlighted the ongoing development of a VCSE in Nature Restoration. We would like to take this opportunity to provide more information to the Committee about the development of the VCSE in Nature Restoration here in Wales as well as developments in England.

In Wales, we are already developing a VCSE in Nature Restoration, which we expect to be available for first teaching from September 2027. This aims to provide learners with an engaging and practical introduction to the principles and practices of restoring nature. This includes sustainable working practices in either or both marine and terrestrial environments. We have not required any specific content as part of the Approval Criteria but expect to see content set out in draft specification that will be provided to us for scrutiny as part of our approvals process. The Agored Cymru, who are currently the only awarding body developing the VCSE, is required to engage with schools and relevant stakeholders in the development of content.

At least 30% of the qualification's content and final grade must be assessed externally (set and marked by the awarding body) and at least 30% of the content and final grade must be assessed through practical skills. The VCSE will be graded: Level 1 Pass, Level 1 Merit, Level 2 Pass, Level 2 Merit, Level 2 Distinction, or Level 2 Distinction\*.

We are undertaking annual surveys with schools to understand their likely uptake of new qualifications including this VCSE.

In June 2020, the awarding body OCR launched a consultation in response to the call for developing a GCSE in Natural History for England. The consultation was to help shape early thinking about what a GCSE in Natural History might look like. OCR sought views on the purpose of Natural History and explored what key themes such as conservation, the early world, and the study of flora and fauna should be included in a qualification.

There was confirmation in March 2025 that development of GCSE Natural History could move ahead. OCR are the only awarding body currently taking this forward and are providing updates here: [GCSE Natural History Hub](#). DfE Westminster will need to consult on the proposed content for GCSE Natural History, no date for this has been set yet. Ofqual will then need consult on design parameters for the new GCSE, so it will be some time before it is introduced in England.

The qualification content is expected to broadly focus on British wildlife, ecosystems, as well as global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity, and sustainability. The assessment model is expected to include a mix of written exams and practical fieldwork assessments, reflecting the subject's emphasis on both theoretical understanding and hands-on engagement with nature.

We hope that the information within this letter is useful and meets the needs of the Committee. However, please let us know if you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely



Paul Bevan  
Chair



Philip Blaker  
Chief Executive



07/01/2026

Dear Children and Young People Committee,

I am writing to you about the decision to end the Taith mobility scheme in Wales in 2027. As a researcher, I have been working for over two decades on the impact on international student mobility on individuals, families and communities\* and have a book forthcoming, in March 2026, with Bristol University Press, entitled *Post-Brexit Student Mobilities* (<https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/post-brexit-student-mobilities>). As part of the research conducted for this book, I have spoken with a number of Welsh universities about their experiences of the Taith Scheme (and have asked them, *inter alia*, to draw comparisons with Turing and, before that, Erasmus). I was fortunate to be able to attend the Taith celebration day in the Senedd last year, where I listened to many others talk passionately about the scheme.

The Taith scheme has been, objectively and subjectively, very successful in facilitating the international mobilities of under-represented young people from Wales. It has allowed individuals (and, importantly, groups) to consider a period abroad when previously this would have been inconceivable. The impact of the scheme on 'widening participation' has been truly remarkable. As far as I can tell, the scheme is incomparable around the world (I am presently co-editing a book on global mobility schemes) and has the potential to showcase Wales and the Welsh government as 'groundbreaking' when it comes to widening participation.

I was heartbroken to hear that the scheme will end (as a critical researcher, it is very unusual for me to feel that a public policy initiative is overwhelmingly good). If there is anything you can do to facilitate the reversal of this decision, please can I call on you to do it? Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and if there is anything I can do to support you, please let me know.

Yours sincerely,



Johanna L. Waters (Fellow of the Learned Society of Wales)  
Professor of Human Geography  
Co-Director of the Migration Research Unit, UCL  
Visiting Fellow, Kellogg College, University of Oxford

\*[https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as\\_sdt=0%2C5&q=johanna+waters&og=j](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=johanna+waters&og=j)

# Agenda Item 3.4

Dawn Bowden AS/MS  
Y Gweinidog Plant a Gofal Cymdeithasol  
Minister for Children and Social Care



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Buffy Williams, MS  
Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee  
Welsh Parliament

19 January 2026

Dear Buffy,

I am writing to inform you that my report on compliance with the duty under section 1 of the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011, was laid before the Senedd on 19 January 2026.

Please find attached a copy of the report which covers the period of April 2023 – September 2025.

<https://www.gov.wales/rights-children-and-young-persons-compliance-report-april-2023-september-2025>

Yours sincerely,

**Dawn Bowden AS/MS**  
Y Gweinidog Plant a Gofal Cymdeithasol  
Minister for Children and Social Care

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
0300 0604400

[Gohebiaeth.Dawn.Bowden@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Dawn.Bowden@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Dawn.Bowden@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Dawn.Bowden@gov.wales)

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing  
Sarah Murphy MS

22 January 2026

**Perinatal Mental Health Support – Outstanding Questions**

Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your recent correspondence dated 22 December 2025 and for the information you have provided.

Having considered your response, it still does not sufficiently address the specific questions we raised. We therefore intend to explore these issues as part of our general scrutiny session on 4 March 2026.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS

Chair  
Children, Young People and Education Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

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## Children, Young People and Education Committee

Elizabeth Nonweiler,  
Chair of the Reading Reform Foundation UK

1 December 2025

### Invitation to Provide Views on Welsh Government Expert Literacy Panel

Dear Mrs Nonweiler,

I am writing on behalf of the Children, Young People and Education Committee. We are a cross-party group of Members of the Senedd who are responsible for scrutinising the Welsh Government and other Welsh public bodies on matters relating to children, young people and education in Wales.

This correspondence is being sent privately in the first instance. You are welcome to respond in private if you wish. However, should you be content for your reply to be shared publicly, we would then publish both our letter and your response.

We recently held an evidence session with the Cabinet Secretary for Education on 6 November 2025 concerning school improvement and learner attainment. The record of proceedings is available on the Senedd website [here](#). During that session we explored issues around literacy, curriculum reform and effectiveness of current improvement structures, including the work of the Welsh Government Expert Literacy Panel. Paragraphs 158 to 188 are the relevant part of the transcript.

Building on these discussions, we would welcome your honest and frank views on the following:

1. How sincere you believe the panel and its members are in their work.
2. Whether, in your view, the panel is weighted towards one particular methodology in literacy teaching and reading techniques.
3. Whether the current composition of the panel, and the absence of significant practitioner or educator representation, undermines its credibility or effectiveness.

**Senedd Cymru**

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN

SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru

senedd.cymru/SeneddPlant

0300 200 6565

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**Welsh Parliament**

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN

SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

senedd.wales/SeneddChildren

0300 200 6565

4. The prospects for the panel's work to support improvement of educational standards.
5. Any further concerns you would wish to have noted, beyond those already expressed in your open letter of resignation.

We acknowledge the significance of your resignation and the concerns you have raised publicly. We think it is essential to understand whether there are wider structural, methodological or cultural issues that you believe we should take into account as part of our continuing scrutiny of education policy.

Please be assured that our intention is to gather perspectives in a balanced and respectful manner. Your insights, whether shared privately or publicly, will help inform our understanding of how literacy policy and practice are being shaped in Wales, and whether they are meeting the needs of learners effectively.

Thank you for considering this request. We look forward to hearing from you in whatever format you feel most appropriate. If you would like to discuss this request in further detail, please contact Naomi Stocks, Clerk on either [naomi.stocks@senedd.wales](mailto:naomi.stocks@senedd.wales) or 0300 200 6222.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS

Chair

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

# Agenda Item 3.7



20<sup>th</sup> January 2026

Children, Young People and Education Committee  
Welsh Parliament  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

## Response to Invitation for Views on the Expert Literacy Panel

Dear Ms Williams,

Thank you for inviting me to share my views. I have structured my response in line with the five areas you asked me to address.

### 1. Sincerity of Panel Members

It is likely that panel members are sincere in believing their preferred approaches are best. I am concerned that these approaches have not been rigorously evaluated, or have not been compared directly with systematic synthetic phonics, which is strongly supported by extensive evidence.

### 2. Methodological Weighting

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Lynne Neagle, said that the government has a “clear expectation that all schools will use synthetic phonics to teach reading.”<sup>1</sup>

However, while panel members accepted that *phonics* is essential, they disagreed significantly on how it should be taught. There was no consensus on whether beginners learn more effectively through discrete, systematic synthetic phonics lessons or through approaches that mix phonics with other literacy activities.

Based on both research evidence and practical experience, I am convinced that beginners make stronger progress when word reading and spelling are taught through discrete systematic synthetic phonics lessons, while spoken language is developed throughout the day. When these elements are taught together in a single lesson, children do not get enough focused practice in reading and spelling. Spoken language requires sustained attention and is too important to be slotted into a reading and writing lesson.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.itv.com/news/2024-10-03/welsh-government-accepts-need-to-improve-guidance-on-teaching-reading>

It was unrealistic to expect a group of individuals with publicly stated, conflicting views to produce agreed statements on how literacy should be taught. Given the significant differences in their positions, the only possible outcomes were weak statements or no agreement at all.

### **3. The Composition of the Panel**

Seven out of nine of the panel had no direct experience of teaching children to read and I was the only one who had experience of teaching beginners systematic synthetic phonics. This undermined the panel's credibility and effectiveness.

### **4. Prospects for Impact**

It is possible the panel will produce a statement of limited value. It is doubtful that it will justify the time and effort spent on it and it is unlikely to include enough detail to drive significant improvement in standards.

#### **Further concerns:**

##### **1. The influence of civil servants:**

Civil servants exerted more influence on the panel's work than panel members. I had the impression that consultation with the panel was used to legitimise decisions rather than shape them. Draft statements were sent to the panel to review, which included sentences that bore no resemblance to panel discussions. Some were excessively wordy and appeared designed to sound authoritative, but in practice said little of value. Others set unrealistic and over-detailed expectations for beginner readers, in a document with the title, "Key Foundations". My comments challenging these were largely ignored. Practical, evidence-based proposals, such as a clear outline of phonics lesson content, received no response and were excluded. The panel was not consulted about setting up related organisations, including the "National Professional Learning and Leadership Body" and, most crucially, CAL:ON Cymru.

##### **2. CAL:ON Cymru – The Centre for the Advancement of Literacy**

The Welsh Government's approach to improving reading has been marked by mistakes, the most serious being the creation of CAL:ON Cymru, a literacy initiative led by Bangor University. The announcement of CAL:ON Cymru, presented as an evidence-informed initiative, was the final trigger for me to resign from the panel.

My concerns about the CAL:ON initiative include these:

- CAL:ON relies on the RILL programme, a programme for intervention which does not include discrete focused teaching of the alphabetic code for word reading and spelling.
- Bangor University claims that CAL:ON's work is guided by the literacy expert panel, despite no consensus among panel members on some fundamental issues.

- There is a risk that schools will adopt CAL:ON resources because they are free, government-approved, and probably endorsed by Estyn, even if they are less effective than other resources.
- £8.2 million of funding could be wasted, or even cause harm if better resources are displaced.
- CAL:ON has stated that it will produce guidance on selecting and implementing a phonics programme. This suggests it does not intend to fund a programme directly, despite having £8.2 million allocated to improve literacy. Given that phonics is fundamental to literacy, and that beginners require a structured programme to learn it effectively, this raises serious questions about the value of the initiative. This omission is particularly striking given that the panel spent over a year discussing how phonics fits into the key foundations of literacy. It reinforces doubts about the purpose of the panel.

### **3. Lack of Clarity**

The government has not been clear enough about its approach to improving literacy teaching in Wales, making it difficult to understand the issues at stake. I hope my response will help members of the committee and others to make sense of the situation and to identify the questions that must be put to both the government and Bangor University.

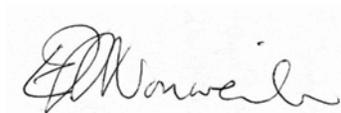
#### **A Proposal for a Way Forward**

The Welsh Government's literacy initiative risks wasting £8.2 million and undermining effective teaching. These concerns are compounded by CAL:ON's intention to advise on choosing a phonics programme rather than supplying one, despite phonics being central to early literacy. Given the contract with Bangor University, cancelling it is unlikely to be possible.

Instead, the Reading Reform Foundation calls on the Welsh Government to commission an independent study to compare early literacy outcomes under CAL:ON with those achieved through a programme based on systematic synthetic phonics teaching principles. The details would require careful consideration, but such a study is both feasible and necessary. We urge the government to act on this proposal to inform future policy, for the sake of children and their teachers in Wales.

I am happy for this response to be shared publicly.

Yours sincerely,



Elizabeth Nonweiler  
Chair of the Reading Reform Foundation

# Agenda Item 3.8

## Email correspondence from Home Ed Cymru to CYPE Committee

### EMAIL DATED 21 JANUARY 2026

Dear Buffy,

I write to you again in your capacity as chair of CYPEC.

You may recall that we met previously to discuss some of the challenges we face as home educators in Wales. I recall you were shocked to learn, amongst other things, of the difficulties home educators so often face when local authorities overstep their present lawful remits and powers but were glad to have this brought to your attention.

We need your help again.

On 28<sup>th</sup> January, only a week away, CYPEC are due to discuss a supplementary LCM for extremely concerning and controversial **further amendments** to the CWS Bill to apply to Wales- please note especially the concerns with these amendments, given subsequently in this email.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> February, only 12 days away, Plenary are asked to vote on an LCM to approve that key sections of Westminster's Children's Wellbeing and Schools (CWS) Bill including these apply to Wales, to give Westminster the capacity to legislate on behalf of the Senedd "*on an issue that falls within the competence of the Senedd*".

Not just any issue. On highly questionable, controversial and complex legislation. With only 15 minutes of Plenary time has been allowed for such a profound step.

### CONTENT OF THE BILL

The Bill is highly questionable in terms of **\*content\***

We cannot assume that just because Westminster says this bill is about safeguarding that it actually will safeguard children.

There is growing evidence and opinion that it will do the opposite.

Whether or not one agrees with the **principles** within the Bill is not the issue here.

There will be differing views on these – views that of course require time, discussion and communication to enable all sides to be appreciated. Indeed, for that reason alone, such a Bill cannot be simply waved through the Senedd without question.

But the reasons this Bill cannot be simply waved through the Senedd, alongside the extremely concerning issues behind the process of that, are the depth, extend and complexity of the content, because of the outworking, consequences, interactions and impacts of the particular content, not simply the principles.

These all need careful, considered, nonbiased evaluation and exploration, including hearing the voices of those impacted or experienced.

Some insight into the concerns on the **content** with this Bill can be found in the following links.

Please do read the content of the links – and yes, it takes time to even begin to appreciate these concerns and to even start to read such summary sources let alone dig deeper into hearing all perspectives.

But that is exactly why Wales needs to make its own legislation to allow measured evaluation, discussion, debate, to allow the listening process that results in good legislation that serves the people and children of Wales well, rather than agenda and party politics driven legislation without our input.

There are numerous reports and open letters merely touch on the tip of the iceberg of the problems and profound concerns about this Bill.

For example,

- **BASW – British Association of Social Workers** have cited significant concerns and criticisms, condemning key aspects of the Bill- something we trust you will greatly appreciate with your background as a Child Protection Social Worker.

<https://basw.co.uk/childrens-wellbeing-and-schools-bill-updates>

- Note the range of experts including those on child protection and social work who signed this Open Letter warning of concerns, including the **Victoria Climbié Association** and Rights for Children.

<https://rightsforchildren.uk/open-letter-on-schools-bill/>

- and their briefing note:

<https://rightsforchildren.uk/cws-briefing-september/> (clauses for unique identifier numbers haven't yet been requested to apply to Wales but other crucial clauses have).

- Defend Digital Me has some very helpful information on how the **impact assessments at Westminster are not fit for purpose**

<https://defenddigitalme.org/2025/02/07/impact-assessment-and-scrutiny-not-fit-for-purpose-the-childrens-wellbeing-and-schools-bill-so-far/>

- As well as useful information on the concept of **whether such processes of registration would be protective or not.**

[https://defenddigitalme.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Defend-Digital-Me-Briefing\\_Childrens-Wellbeing-and-Schools-Bill-01012026.pdf](https://defenddigitalme.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Defend-Digital-Me-Briefing_Childrens-Wellbeing-and-Schools-Bill-01012026.pdf)

- On the point of such a principle behind the Bill, it is wise to note that Kirsty Williams in her role as Welsh Education Secretary, told the Senedd

that the Welsh Government were **rejecting the principle of mandatory registration because of concerns that this would have a negative and damaging impact on children’s safety and wellbeing.**

See point 395 here for example:

[https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/4901?fbclid=IwY2xjawPc9xtleHRuA2FlbQlxMABicmlkETBXUE9QbVN6b1UWGd0RHpVc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODlwMDg5MgABHk-mSp5L4p\\_ai5YCIKMhtG7NH0GG4vuXRk2k2KEGyQF-4ijYuo3wSL9h9BU\\_aem\\_PG8\\_Lg7EgDza1jjRgdj9fQ#A10000068](https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/4901?fbclid=IwY2xjawPc9xtleHRuA2FlbQlxMABicmlkETBXUE9QbVN6b1UWGd0RHpVc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODlwMDg5MgABHk-mSp5L4p_ai5YCIKMhtG7NH0GG4vuXRk2k2KEGyQF-4ijYuo3wSL9h9BU_aem_PG8_Lg7EgDza1jjRgdj9fQ#A10000068)

- Thus, at least one of the key proposals within this bill would represent a significant U turn in approach, policy and understanding something that again would warrant considerable evaluation and communication.
- It's also wise to note that even the other options that were planned had to be paused and deferred because even in a simple public consultation, a “*significant number of the many responses also raised complex technical, policy and legal matters which require careful consideration*”. An indicator of just how complex the issues are – measures involving these issues cannot therefore simply be waved in in an ostrich like way. [https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-children-act-2004-education-database-wales-regulations-2020-and-education?fbclid=IwY2xjawPc9j1leHRuA2FlbQlxMABicmlkETBXUE9QbVN6b1UWGd0RHpVc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODlwMDg5MgABHrEKDuDWuKE1AMlr0KmD8S\\_cCRBmekqL\\_CMcljkFWrk\\_uR41VksPmTpRfPUq\\_aem\\_qost6YN8Y8Iz72T1pA-mQw](https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-children-act-2004-education-database-wales-regulations-2020-and-education?fbclid=IwY2xjawPc9j1leHRuA2FlbQlxMABicmlkETBXUE9QbVN6b1UWGd0RHpVc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODlwMDg5MgABHrEKDuDWuKE1AMlr0KmD8S_cCRBmekqL_CMcljkFWrk_uR41VksPmTpRfPUq_aem_qost6YN8Y8Iz72T1pA-mQw)
- So, at the very least any change to this policy and understanding needs evaluation of any evidence to justify such a differing approach.

It would seem unthinkable to wave through such a Bill to apply to Wales with so many experts raising cautions about the safeguarding risks.

We really need to evaluate policies and practices for ourselves to be sure are making wise and safe decisions and legislation.

Those are just a very small introduction to only some of the issues in the Bill as initially presented to the House of Commons.

However, since it was requested for key clauses of the Bill to apply to Wales too, a **CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF GOVERNMENT AMENDMENTS have been laid at Westminster** take the Bill into even more dangerous territory.

A legislative consent memorandum has been laid on the 16<sup>th</sup> of this month for these to apply to Wales too, and you are due to discuss these on 28<sup>th</sup> January, although only 15

minutes is allocated to such profound issues.

Again, the dangers within these amendments are profound and have not been properly thought through at Westminster.

For just some examples:

- Amendment 121A would **enshrine discrimination against disabled children**, by placing consent for educational placement in the hands of local authorities, on no basis other than their disability. It would also have this effect for any child who has been investigated by children's social care in the past, regardless of whether any risk was revealed or whether the referral was found to be malicious. This is against presumption of innocence and will curtail parental responsibility for hundreds of thousands of children who are not actually at risk.
- Amendment 131A would similarly subject disabled children and children with **any** history of investigation by social care to infringements on their right to a private life. This represents an astonishing departure from democratic norms, where people have an expectation of privacy when there is no reasonable suspicion of wrongdoing.
- Amendment 121B would **give leverage to estranged and abusive partners over decisions about the child's education, even if they have no day-to-day contact or responsibilities in relation to the child.**

Keeping children in school when it is not suitable for them is dangerous. Around **12-18% of child suicides are linked to school attendance**. When parents realise that the education or mental health needs of their child are not being met it is vital that they be able to act immediately. Any investigation should come alongside or afterwards, and be based on reasonable concerns, not blanket prejudice.

The other factor to bear in mind is that this Bill provides **absolutely no accountability for education departments of councils for how they use these markedly enhanced powers, nor is there any appreciation of the need for this**. No independent complaints or appeals system, no tribunal system, no arbitration system. when this was briefly raised at one committee stage in the Lords, this was dismissed with the overriding assumption that mistakes would not be made.

We spoke when we met of how there are so many experiences of home educators in Wales where council staff who contact home educators overstepping or misusing existing lawful remits and powers and in the absence of any safeguarding issues or other concerns. We would be happy to explore this again with you if required. Overstepping and misuse of existing powers can also be demonstrated by comparison

of written or enacted policy to actual remits as given in existing legislation, with most recently drafted local policies on EHE in Wales not reflecting actual remits and openly overstepping these.

Furthermore, we know that mistakes are so often made by a range of agencies. We know that virtually every serious case review where home education is mentioned in relation that the child has been known to multiple agencies, where the issue has been serious failings and lack of use of existing legal powers and services, with overwork and heavy caseloads often being strong factors in children not being sufficiently protected.

I'm sure we must all appreciate what a skilled job child protection social work is, what depth of experience and insight is needed to meet with, provide support to and make fundamental and potentially life changing decisions about children's lives and wellbeing. What is needed is to invest in more staff of this high calibre, to provide them with the support and resources they need to tackle such a demanding and important role, and to manage their caseloads appropriately so that any concerns raised are swiftly acted upon, so that there is sufficient time and energy to give where required. Mass screening and surveillance of normal healthy loving families is not an appropriate use of time, money, energy or resources. Nor is it an efficient or effective way to help children in need. We don't make it easier to find a needle in a haystack by making this haystack bigger.

Furthermore, home visits where one is trying to rule out the potential of abuse and neglect is a highly skilled and legally complex situation. Council staff who are employed to engage with home educators are simply not equipped or experienced to deal with such matters but rather seem to be used as a tick box exercise to try to reassure ourselves that we've "done something".

Whether one agrees with the principles of the Bill or not, it is how the proposed **application** of these has not been properly thought through, how the voices of so many – from children to professionals – have not been listened to, how so many harmful intentional and unintentional consequences have been ignored.

But the fact we cannot even adequately begin here to explore even a few of the problems within the content of the Bill is the whole point. There are SO many potential problems, unintentional consequences with this Bill that it **cannot just be waved through the Senedd as if the Senedd does not have any powers and as if the Senedd is purely in existence to rubber stamp what Westminster does.**

We in Wales have to ensure that we give due diligence to the development of any legislation, let alone legislation that affects the wellbeing of children, let alone such complex and questionable legislation

## UNLAWFULNESS

Not only are there concerns about the lack of scrutiny and poor due process of this Bill, as well as the safety of the content, but there are **profound concerns about the \*lawfulness\* of it too.**

For example, here are links for **four Kings Counsel opinions on the unlawfulness** of a whole range of aspects within the content.

(i) Opinion by Steve Broach KC – obtained by HE UK, crowd-funded. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/12n3zogqiVJZ6aRaJR2Fjh4m41yOE2uqq/view?fbclid=IwY2xjawMkHJRleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETBDMWZsSHlaTkkyYldMSm5QAR5rfDrVHZZMXGNctLUywlWkt-M9cgpsKCDpUD5NTi5MpjawC3\\_836D4ZYwcKg\\_aem\\_p5qK-L0smu1OrVV01QVEtQ](https://drive.google.com/file/d/12n3zogqiVJZ6aRaJR2Fjh4m41yOE2uqq/view?fbclid=IwY2xjawMkHJRleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETBDMWZsSHlaTkkyYldMSm5QAR5rfDrVHZZMXGNctLUywlWkt-M9cgpsKCDpUD5NTi5MpjawC3_836D4ZYwcKg_aem_p5qK-L0smu1OrVV01QVEtQ)

(ii) Opinion by David Wolfe KC – obtained by Education Otherwise [https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/58251/documents/5806?fbclid=IwY2xjawMkHLRleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETBDMWZsSHlaTkkyYldMSm5QAR5XNYxTafADH3K1LakYj3M6QuPdixFvovUIQ84EILVN8n4xiCFdvsNUA5RcQ\\_aem\\_ru0\\_D0m49DzG\\_KSc23QpYg](https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/58251/documents/5806?fbclid=IwY2xjawMkHLRleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETBDMWZsSHlaTkkyYldMSm5QAR5XNYxTafADH3K1LakYj3M6QuPdixFvovUIQ84EILVN8n4xiCFdvsNUA5RcQ_aem_ru0_D0m49DzG_KSc23QpYg)

(iii) Opinion by Aiden O’Neill KC – obtained by Christian Institute [https://www.christian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Aidan-ONeill-KC-legal-opinion-re-Childrens-Wellbeing-and-Schools-Bill.pdf?fbclid=IwY2xjawMkHXNleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETBDMWZsSHlaTkkyYldMSm5QAR5-\\_l9Xzuq0D-ypisUsVNeo6rd\\_I0VENb8KtxbWzaxghWGEmpg7u7aB4QFDtg\\_aem\\_OvNOGONxiA2Cne-DNAkUKQ](https://www.christian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Aidan-ONeill-KC-legal-opinion-re-Childrens-Wellbeing-and-Schools-Bill.pdf?fbclid=IwY2xjawMkHXNleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETBDMWZsSHlaTkkyYldMSm5QAR5-_l9Xzuq0D-ypisUsVNeo6rd_I0VENb8KtxbWzaxghWGEmpg7u7aB4QFDtg_aem_OvNOGONxiA2Cne-DNAkUKQ)

(iv) Opinion obtained by the British Rabbinical Union [https://britishrabbinicalunion.substack.com/p/hand-delivered-constitutional-appeal?utm\\_source=post-email-title&publication\\_id=2247224&post\\_id=163458379&utm\\_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=24vy5a&triedRedirect=true&utm\\_medium=email&fbclid=IwY2xjawMkHV5leHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETBDMWZsSHlaTkkyYldMSm5QAR6BeXW7gZpJifj00D1NS4aeI0n84EEvG5dxBAcKcliGKZ-wYGfymIB8L0dmFg\\_aem\\_rr3t49x\\_Y0CAQRBHhroZlg](https://britishrabbinicalunion.substack.com/p/hand-delivered-constitutional-appeal?utm_source=post-email-title&publication_id=2247224&post_id=163458379&utm_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=24vy5a&triedRedirect=true&utm_medium=email&fbclid=IwY2xjawMkHV5leHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETBDMWZsSHlaTkkyYldMSm5QAR6BeXW7gZpJifj00D1NS4aeI0n84EEvG5dxBAcKcliGKZ-wYGfymIB8L0dmFg_aem_rr3t49x_Y0CAQRBHhroZlg)

There will be **legal challenges to this Bill if it is implemented**, plans are already being put in place for this. It would surely bring the Senedd into disrepute as and when such legal challenges occur if it has just waived this LCM through knowing of the question marks hanging over this legislation.

Surely the whole point of the Senedd, of devolution is that we give the people of Wales a

voice, a say, that we listen to the needs and experiences of people in Wales and develop legislation that meets our needs?

With the **election looming** very soon, surely it would be catastrophic for Labour to be seen to be just waving through legislation from England without questioning or scrutiny? The optics of this would be dreadful, to just vote this controversial and highly questionable Westminster Bill through to apply to Wales would be propaganda gold to those seeking to discredit Labour in Wales.

Surely what is needed to counter such negative rhetoric is for the Labour Party to be seen to clearly make a stand, to be seen to choose to pause and ensure that legislation is safe, lawful, and tailored to the needs of the children of Wales.

PROCESS.

However, not only is the content of the Bill highly questionable, so is the **\*process\*** of its introduction - not only at Westminster but particularly in relation to the lack of involvement of Wales and the Senedd.

From the Welsh perspective:

- The Attorney General and the LJCC have raised concerns of Wales being “piggybacked” (to quote the Attorney General) onto what was put through the house of Commons as an England only bill. They have also raised significant concerns on how this occurred only at the very last minute as the Bill was leaving the Commons, without other member of the Labour party, committees or Senedd as a whole being made aware or involved, not until the very morning this became public when the relevant amendments were placed. Furthermore, they have raised concerns on how
  - not only were the **Welsh government not involved at all in the development of the actual policies** and approaches in the Bill,
  - but that **the Education Minister did not even know the content of the Bill until that was made public despite agreeing that it would apply to Wales.**
- because of this, Welsh citizens who tried to contact their MPs during the Commons stage to ask them to scrutinise or make representations for them were told it did not apply to the people of Wales. Welsh citizens were deprived of their rights at this key stage of what is meant to be a democratic process.

This article analyses the LJCC's meeting with the Welsh Education Minister regarding these concerns.

Please do ensure you have read this before considering voting to approve this LCM.

<https://homeeducationaction.substack.com/p/welsh-governments-decision-to-piggy?triedRedirect=true>

The Labour led LJCC concluded essentially that we in Wales could and should have produced our own tailor-made legislation and approach.

<https://laiddocuments.senedd.wales/cr-ld17421-en.pdf> (for just one example, point 59).

Westminster has not done an appropriate job of evaluating at all. Whilst giving the appearance of usual process, the Bill has been rushed through with unseemly haste and lack of adequate scrutiny especially for such complex legislation.

The Bill was introduced at Westminster to be timed to coincide with negative emotive media rhetoric associated with the case of poor Sara Shariff, rhetoric that contained misleading information, resulting in weaponisation of the heartbreaking case of that poor child. Doing so even though the Bill would not have protected that poor child, with the failings in that case being serial errors in the use of existing powers by multiple agencies.

IN CONCLUSION,

We appeal to CYPEC to call for this LCM to not be passed to allow appropriate evaluation of all the dangers involved and of the questions that have been raised by so many people, including evaluation of the impact of these further amendments, especially on their impact on the people of Wales.

We have to do what the LJCC suggest, what common sense dictates, of demonstrating that the Senedd has the capacity to ensure it makes its own legislation that is tailored to the needs and wishes of the people of Wales, not imposed on them from elsewhere or above.

We in Wales have our own approach to education and to the wellbeing of children.

We have our own curriculum for Wales, the Future Generations act for Wales, a different ALN system, a different care system, our own approach to physical punishment of children. We need our own approach for Wellbeing for Wales.

It would be very destructive if Labour in Wales were perceived to be a party that would

just roll over and say that can't be bothered as a Senedd to make our own approach to the Wellbeing and Education of children in Wales, to let Westminster just do what they want instead?

**Please vote on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February against the LCM to apply the CWS Bill in Wales.**

**Please recommend to others that the LCM is not passed because further evaluation and scrutiny is needed including consideration of a safer, lawful, informed Wales-specific approach, including in the light of these further amendments.**

I would be delighted to meet again to discuss this.

Warmest regards,

**EMAIL DATED 22 JANUARY 2026**

Dear Buffy and members of CYPEC

Re: Presentation of research report on LA conduct to CYPEC 28<sup>th</sup> in readiness for meeting of January 2026.

Relating to supplementary LCM considering whether or not to recommend application to Wales of a range of amendments from Westminster to their Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

Please can this information be read and included in papers of interest for that meeting. Please do not consider making any recommendations until this information has been appreciated and discussed, alongside additional information submitted elsewhere.

Published today is a research report demonstrating objective evidence of how Local Authorities can disproportionately and sometimes abusively use their existing powers in relation to home educating families, using the threat or commencement of legal action as control mechanisms rather than true safeguards.

<https://educationalfreedom.org.uk/home-education-data-and-our-findings-las-still-abusing-their-powers/>

Wales specific figures are found at:

<https://educationalfreedom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/EHE-stats-2025-Wales.pdf>

with the key figures for the LAs of concern in Wales demonstrated in this table below.

It must be appreciated that this data does **not demonstrate if these legal actions were justified or not.**

These are simply figures for actions council staff have taken, not whether the actions were correct.

**Remember that the CWS Bill proposes to dramatically increase both powers and remits of council staff with absolutely no plans or consideration for any form of accountability, appeals processes, independent complaints mechanisms, tribunal system or advocacy services to support families if they disagree with decisions of council staff, if they are taken to court for disagreeing with actions such as SAOs or for dealing with the aftermath and consequences of council staff mistakes or misjudgements.**

Surely the Senedd cannot believe this is acceptable.

<b>LAs of concern in Wales in overuse of legal action against EHE families: Rates for 2025</b>			
Welsh Local Authority	Number of EHE children	% <u>where</u> LAs commenced legal action under s.437(1)	% <u>where</u> LA issued School Attendance Orders
Blaenau Gwent	215	22.3	9.3
Rhondda Cynon Taff	555	21.1	9.0
Merthyr Tydfil	89	15.7	4.5
Cardiff	604	9.1	Data not disclosed
Pembrokeshire	387	7.5	3.1
Newport	475	4.2	1.7
Bridgend	No response to Fols		
Wrexham	No response to Fols		
Welsh Average 2025	6466	4.6	1.5
<b>UK average</b>		<b>2.4</b>	<b>0.9</b>

Full table of data for all Welsh LAs for comparison is available at the above link.

Please note the table below, and from the research article that:

1. There are **two Welsh LAs in the “top ten” of the worst LAs in the UK**. This is despite the small size of Wales in terms of population compared to the rest of the UK. It is quite remarkable considering we only have 22 LAs in Wales and there are some 500 in the UK.
2. Two more of the 22 LAs in Wales refused to provide data in response to Fols which is always a cause for concern regarding lack of transparency
3. Other Welsh LAs commence legal proceedings against families at a much higher rate than the UK average

4. Note the Welsh average is higher than the UK, despite a number of LAs in Wales quite naturally finding having engaged with families in their area that there has been no need to commence legal proceedings against them.
5. Note that the data for how **many of these SAOs are actually upheld** if the parents do not agree and are challenged through the courts is **not available** in this study.  
**So, we do not know how many of these SAOs were found by the courts to have merit – if the parents have the stamina to go through such a process of course.** This is because many LAs remarkably do not hold such data.  
That is a key point in itself. How can council staff possibly reflect on, audit and monitor their own practice if such data is not readily and transparently available for all LAs?

The report also suggests that many LAs create CME by reclassifying lawfully home educated children when parents refuse unlawful demands- further evaluation of this in the research article.

And this is under existing powers, let alone the unprecedented and dramatic increase in powers that the Bill would provide to council staff.

This information has to be appreciated in context of all the other concerns that are being raised about the CWS Bill since the CYPEC last met to discuss this CWS Bill - not only by families who home educate, not only by parents of children with ALN/SENDs, but by social workers including the **British Association of Social Workers**, educational professionals and legal experts including King's Counsels. Those concerns were based on the Bill in its original form, and the amendments recently announced and under consideration at CYPEC on 28<sup>th</sup> January go considerably further than the measures previously included and proposed.

Please do ensure that all the information on these has been read, processed and discussed and that it is recommended that these dreadful amendments are not applied to Wales.

Please would members of the CYPEC respect the **Sewel Convention**. The CWS Bill covers devolved powers. Here in Wales, we have our own Curriculum for Wales, a different ALN system to the UK, our own health and social care system – all of these involve legislation which is different in Wales to England but with the CWS Bill relating to English legislation and practice as it was designed as an England-only Bill.

If changes in legislation are needed, then we need legislation to work for the people of Wales and the different systems we have here to the rest of the UK.

But we cannot consider changing legislation and increasing the powers given to public servants when there are such issues with how they use or misuse existing powers.

Many thanks for your time and due diligence on this vital issue.

# Agenda Item 6

By virtue of paragraph(s) vi of Standing Order 17.42

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# Agenda Item 7

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