

Agenda – Children, Young People, and Education Committee

Meeting Venue: Zoom

Meeting date: 19 March 2026

Meeting time: 09.30

For further information contact:

Naomi Stocks

Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

Remote

Public meeting

09.30

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

09.30

2 Papers to note

09.30

2.1 Forward work programme

(Pages 1 – 3)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Minister for Further and Higher Education and the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership from the Chair of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee

2.2 Routes into post-16 education and training

(Pages 4 – 5)



Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
from the Welsh Government

2.3 General scrutiny of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care

(Pages 6 – 10)

Attached Documents:

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

2.4 Teacher recruitment and retention

(Pages 11 – 28)

Attached Documents:

Response from the Welsh Government to the Committee's report

2.5 Forward work programme

(Pages 29 – 32)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
from the Cabinet Secretary for Education

2.6 Implementation of Education reforms

(Pages 33 – 40)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
from the Cabinet Secretary for Education

2.7 School improvement and learner attainment

(Pages 41 – 59)

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
from the Cabinet Secretary for Education

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
from the Cabinet Secretary for Education

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

09.30

Private meeting

09.30 – 10.30

4 Consideration of the Committee's Legacy report

09.30 – 10.30

(Pages 60 – 85)

Attached Documents:

Draft Report

Vicki Howells MS
Minister for Further and Higher Education
Jack Sargeant MS
Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership
Welsh Government

10 March 2026

Dear Ministers,

Support for specialist creative higher-education courses outside Wales

I am writing following the Committee's meeting on 26 February 2026, during which Members considered correspondence relating to the ability of Welsh-domiciled young people to access Student Finance Wales (SFW) support for specialist creative higher education courses outside Wales. The issues that have been raised with us speak not only to individual hardship, but to wider questions about fairness, opportunity and the future of Wales's creative and cultural talent pipeline.

Concerns for Wales's cultural and creative future

The Committee has received detailed accounts from families and organisations outlining the barriers now being encountered by applicants to conservatoire-style programmes in musical theatre, dance, circus arts and other specialist disciplines. These courses are delivered in only a handful of institutions across the UK, many of them based in England. They play a vital role in training the next generation of performers, technicians, and creative practitioners.

This specialist creative training forms part of a fragile but vital pipeline into Wales's artistic life and culture sector. When even a small number of young people are prevented from accessing training that does not exist within Wales, the impact reverberates across the sector for years to come.

The Committee is therefore concerned that the current designation arrangements may, unintentionally, restrict access to opportunities that have long supported the development of Welsh creative talent - talent that enriches our communities, strengthens our cultural identity, and contributes to Wales's presence on national and international stages.

A recently closed [Senedd petition](#) calling for restoration of fair funding routes for Welsh students applying to musical theatre and dance degree in England reached the required threshold of 10,000 signatures for a debate in the Senedd. Although this comes too late in this Senedd cycle for a meaningful debate, the strength of public feeling expressed through that petition underlines the urgency and seriousness of the concerns raised.

Clarification and next steps

The Committee would be grateful for clarity on the following points:

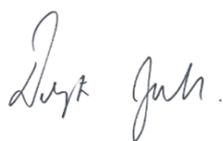
1. What degree of certainty can Welsh-domiciled students expect for the 2026 audition cycle and 2027 entry, particularly in relation to courses validated by UK universities but delivered by specialist partner providers that are not themselves directly registered with the Office for Students?
2. Is the Government considering temporary or transitional arrangements, to avoid the creation of a lost cohort of students while the regulatory landscape is clarified?
3. What engagement is taking place with Medr, SFW, validating universities and specialist providers to explore a more proportionate, streamlined designation pathway for small, high quality institutions offering training not available in Wales?
4. What is the Government's assessment of the likely effect on Wales's cultural and creative sectors, including the sustainability of organisations that rely on a steady supply of specialist graduates?

Given the time sensitive nature of audition cycles and the distress already being experienced by families, early clarity would be valuable.

I look forward to your response on how equitable access to specialist training opportunities for young people across Wales can be protected and maintained.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Petitions Committee and the Children, Young People and Education Committee, who also have an interest in this a matter.

Yours sincerely,



Delyth Jewell MS

Chair

Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Agenda Item 2.2

Vikki Howells AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg Bellach ac Uwch
Minister for Further and Higher Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: MA-VH-0185-26

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

11 March 2026

Dear Buffy,

Further to the Written Ministerial Statement by the Minister for Further and Higher Education on 26 June 2025 and the Welsh Government's response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee report - Routes into Post-16 Education and Training on 14 January, we have today jointly issued the attached [Written Ministerial Statement](#) in relation to the publication of the [Strategic Direction for Vocational Education and Training in Wales](#).

Yours sincerely,

Vikki Howells AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg Bellach ac Uwch
Minister for Further and Higher Education

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
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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.

JACK SARGEANT

Jack Sargeant AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Diwylliant, Sgiliau a Phartneriaeth Gymdeithasol
Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnerships

Rebecca Evans

Rebecca Evans AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a Chynllunio
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning

Agenda Item 2.3

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref

Buffy Williams MS (Chair)
Carolyn Thomas MS (Temporary Chair)
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament,
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

12 March 2026

Dear Buffy and Carolyn,

Please find below an update on the agreed actions arising from the committee session on 4 March 2026 along with a response to the question not reached during scrutiny.

1	<p>Total number of children who are waiting for treatment including those waiting for treatment outside Wales.</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Official referral to treatment (RTT) statistics show there were 54,435 pathways for Welsh residents under age 18 provided by Welsh health boards at the end of December 2025, the latest available figures.</p> <p>For clarity, we refer to “pathways” because an individual may be on more than one treatment pathway at the same time. As we do not hold patient-level data, “pathways” is the accurate and appropriate term to use.</p> <p>Data held by Welsh Government for Welsh residents on waiting lists provided outside of Wales are not available with age breakdowns. Local health boards may be able to provide more information.</p>
2	<p>Figures on the number of health care assistants that are providing support to families.</p> <p>Response:</p>

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Correspondence.Jeremy.Miles@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.

	<p>The NHS Electronic Staff Record shows 503 healthcare support workers are currently employed across maternity services in Wales to provide additional support to families.</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Information on the outreach element of Flying Start.</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>The outreach element of the Flying Start programme allows services to be delivered to those living outside of core Flying Start areas who are identified as in need of support. Data on the provision of the Outreach element of the programme is not recorded by Local Authorities on a consistent basis within the official statistics, which means it is likely that the actual number of children benefitting from Flying Start will be higher than the officially recorded total of 40,943. The year 1 report of the National Evaluation of Flying Start reports that the scale of outreach varies between Local Authorities but generally represents a small proportion of Flying Start provision. One local authority reported working with 50 to 60 children in outreach services, compared with around 1,000 in core services, while another local authority reported working with about 150 families on their outreach list and around 1,400 children in receipt of services.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>To share the findings from the spotlight event.</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>A report on the findings and actions agreed following the 4 December 2025 spotlight event is currently being finalised and will be shared with the committee as soon as it is available.</p> <p>To summarise, the event shared good practice examples, policy overviews and facilitated discussions to improve multiagency, integrated population planning, accountability and delivery at Regional Partnership Board level.</p> <p>The event shone a light on the challenges of navigating the current cross-sector system particularly in relation to supporting children and young people with ALN and health and care needs. It also highlighted the opportunities for improved integration and examples of what is possible through effective cross sector collaboration.</p> <p>To support improvement action, the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Minister for Mental Health and Well-being and Minister for Children and Social care and I have made a joint commitment to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Embed children and young people with ALN and health and care needs in Regional Partnership Boards' priorities. 2. Develop a health policy statement to inform the co-production of new multi-agency ALNET guidance with delivery partners. 3. Review the Supporting Learners with Healthcare Needs guidance alongside Part 2 of the School Nursing Framework for Wales and develop new joint guidance that provides clarity on the roles and responsibilities of education and health providers

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Undertake a mapping exercise to strengthen area-based planning by improving population-level data sharing between schools, local authorities, health boards and Regional Partnership Boards on children and young people with ALN and health and care needs. 5. Map current no wrong door / single point of access work and explore need for co-produced national guidance. 6. Appoint a Professional Advisor for Multi-agency Collaboration across education, health and social care. <p>We are clear in our expectations that all sectors must collaborate and uphold the 5 ways of working set out in the Future Generations Act and reflected in the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act. To support this, we will be requesting progress reports at our meetings with RPB leads and chairs, during Health Board accountability meetings, and at Association of Directors of Education meetings and National ALN Delivery and Improvement Board, to ensure this work is being taken forward at pace.</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>To share the report from The Royal College of Psychiatrists regarding on CAHMS referrals for 11 to 18-year-olds.</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>We expect the final report on the Sanctuary pilots to be available by the end of March and will share with the Committee then, or as soon as it is available.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>A progress report on how regional safeguarding boards are embedding the recommendations from the Child Practice Review.</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Following the publication of Our Bravery Brought Justice, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and the Minister for Social Care wrote to all Regional Safeguarding Boards the following day, asking them to take responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the report's recommendations within their respective regions. Boards were also asked to ensure that the learning from the report was shared widely across their partnerships.</p> <p>Regional Safeguarding Boards were asked to submit a progress report by 2 March, setting out the action taken to implement recommendations made directly to Boards, as well as those directed at key partner agencies. This included evidence of how Boards had assured themselves of progress and impact.</p> <p>Each Board undertook an exercise with its key partners to gather information on implementation. This information was then brought back to Boards for scrutiny and challenge, enabling members to test progress and identify areas requiring further action.</p> <p>Boards have confirmed that learning from Our Bravery Brought Justice has been disseminated across their regions and embedded within local work programmes. Their progress reports are currently being reviewed by officials.</p>

Across Wales, substantial Board led work is ongoing to ensure that the importance of listening to the voices of children and young people is consistently embedded within training, policies and procedures developed by both individual agencies and Regional Safeguarding Boards.

7

Question not Reached

Children on the Margins: You rejected the recommendation in our 'Children on the margins report' for a statutory footing for 'return interviews' to take place when a child or young person has gone missing so professionals can understand what happened and identify what can be done to prevent them being missing in the future. Can you tell us the latest position on your work to review the practice around return home interviews in Wales and the update of the All-Wales Practice Guides on Safeguarding children who go missing from home or care? How can you be assured this will prove the necessary safeguards?

Response:

We recognise the importance of return home interviews in helping professionals understand the circumstances around a child or young person going missing and in identifying actions to reduce the risk of repeat episodes. However, we did not accept the recommendation to place return interviews on a statutory footing, as commissioned research did not reach a consensus on mandating return interviews in all circumstances or on who should conduct them. We also considered it important to retain professional judgement and flexibility to respond proportionately to individual children's needs.

Since the publication of the Committee's report, significant work has progressed to strengthen practice and safeguards. In September 2024, we established a multi-agency Steering Group to revise the All-Wales Practice Guide: Safeguarding children who go missing from home or care, alongside related guidance for children placed out of area or cross-border. The Steering Group met monthly, followed by a 12-week period of structured engagement with key stakeholders on the draft guidance. The revised documents are now complete and are due to be presented to the Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board for sign-off and national rollout.

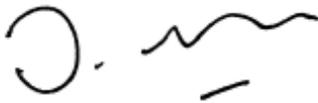
Assurance is further provided through existing statutory safeguarding arrangements. Under Part 10 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, all looked after children are entitled to an active offer of independent advocacy, including to make representations about the care and support they receive.

Where concerns arising from a missing episode indicate potential risk of harm, these are addressed in line with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, including child protection processes and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, providing further assurance that risks are identified, escalated and responded to.

To ensure the revised guidance is embedded effectively, we have committed to post-publication engagement six months after release to review how it is being applied in practice. The Steering Group will also reconvene in April 2026 to develop a core data set for children who go missing and to map commissioned and local authority provision across Wales, strengthening system-wide oversight.

Taken together, this programme of work provides proportionate and robust safeguards without legislative change at this stage, while keeping practice and impact under ongoing review.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large 'J' followed by a series of wavy lines and a short horizontal stroke at the end.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care



Welsh Government response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee 'Teacher Recruitment and Retention' report

MARCH 2026

We thank the Members of the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee for their comprehensive report.

It is important to highlight that implementing several of the recommendations will require close working with local authorities and other key partners. I hope the responses provided are informative and helpful.

The Welsh Government welcomes the findings of the Committee's report and offers the following response to the recommendations contained within it.

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Responses to the Committee's Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Welsh Government provides more information on the effectiveness of the previously run Teach First and Graduate Teaching programmes in Wales, including how effective they were in supporting a broader range of people into the teaching profession, and why it was decided to discontinue support for the programmes.

Response: Accept

Following a review into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Wales undertaken by Professor Furlong, *Teaching Tomorrows' Teachers* was published in 2015. Welsh Government accepted the recommendations in the report, which formed the basis for our ITE reforms.

In 2013, the Welsh Government introduced an employment-based route into teaching, called the Additional Graduate Training Programme (AGTP), and awarded Teach First a contract to run a three-year pilot AGTP in Wales. The programme awarded the professional status of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) but not a teaching qualification.

In 2016 Estyn published a thematic report on the impact of the AGTP in Wales and this concluded that there was not any marked improvement in learner outcomes overall within the participating schools that could be attributed directly to Teach First's work over and above other school improvement interventions. The report also advised that whilst many of the participants who achieved QTS (as part of the first cohort in 2014) were in teaching posts in September 2015, two years after starting the programme, only a minority (32%) were still teaching in Wales. 40% were in teaching posts outside of Wales with the remaining participants seeking teaching posts or employment other than teaching. This meant that any benefit of the AGTP investment in these participants was lost to the education system in Wales.

In September 2016, it was decided that the Welsh Government's AGTP pilot would be ended and would not be re-tendered beyond academic year 2016/17. It was determined that the pilot did not demonstrate value for money.

For academic year 2017/18 Teach First entered an arrangement with Central South Consortium Joint Education Service to provide provision in the region.

As part of the ITE reforms in Wales new accreditation criteria were developed by an ITE expert panel, and regulatory responsibility for accreditation of programmes against Welsh Government's new criteria was moved from the former Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) to the Education Workforce Council's (EWC) new Teacher Education Accreditation Board. All ITE providers were required under the amended regulations to gain accreditation against the new criteria to award QTS from academic year 2019/20. All existing ITE providers and potential new providers could apply for accreditation in 2017/18 ready for delivery in academic year 2019/20. Teach First did not apply for accreditation at that time. Teach First retain the opportunity to submit a programme for accreditation but to date have chosen not to do so.

In 2017, with the implementation of the recommendations of *Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers* well underway with regards to 'traditional' undergraduate or postgraduate routes into teaching, it was identified that the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) would not be able to meet the improved quality requirements under accreditation for ITE programmes in Wales.

The principal purpose of the ITE reforms was to improve the quality and consistency of ITE provision, introduce a new approach to ITE and ensure that all programmes meet our high aspirations for evidence based, world class ITE in Wales. For this to happen it was imperative that quality was assured across all entry routes via accreditation. Welsh Government therefore committed to developing an improved employment-based route into teaching for graduates, whilst ensuring that high quality support and provision was assured. The aim was to have a suite of routes into teaching with the same vision and understanding of the role of our future workforce in delivering Curriculum for Wales, whilst also meeting the needs of talented potential teachers, whatever their background and circumstances.

We required new pan-Wales routes into teaching, involving effective professional support and development, meeting the same high-quality requirements of the new accreditation criteria. It was also a key aim of the new routes to support diversification of the workforce for those unable to access 'traditional' full time ITE programmes. This commitment led to an open competitive procurement exercise, with the Open University successfully winning the contract and subsequently developing the salaried Post-graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) and part-time PGCE. Both routes were successfully accredited by the independent EWC Teacher Education Accreditation Board against Welsh Government's new criteria. Support was thereafter transitioned from the GTP to the new Salaried PGCE reflecting the new regulatory requirements and Welsh Government's commitment to the principles of our ITE reforms and the recommendations within *Teaching Tomorrows' Teachers*.

Information regarding the Teach First and GTP's effectiveness in supporting a broader range of people into the profession was not gathered during their delivery. Welsh Government therefore does not hold this information.

Financial Implications: Supplying the above information was accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 2

As part of its Strategic Education Workforce Plan, the Welsh Government either undertake or commission work looking at whether the costs to a student of ITE acts as a barrier to entry and successful completion; whether these barriers are higher for particular groups of potential students; and what options there may be to remove these financial barriers. This work should be done within the context of the current financial climate to ensure any recommendations for change are feasible and affordable and will improve recruitment and retention.

Response: Accept

We agree that undertaking ITE in Wales needs to be attractive and affordable for prospective teachers. The Strategic Education Workforce Plan will set out a range of actions to create the conditions for a highly attractive and respected education profession, supporting the recruitment, retention and development of our current and future workforce.

Our evaluation of ITE policy is due to report in Summer 2026. It will inform future policy development, including reviewing the effectiveness and value for money of our existing initial teacher education incentives and developing proposals for future recruitment and retention incentives.

Financial Implications: Funding has been allocated for the evaluation of initial teacher education policy, which will include consideration of the efficacy of incentives, and for wider policy development. However, there could be significant financial implications to the implementation of some options, which would need to be considered fully.

Recommendation 3

The Welsh Government in responding to this report provides a timeline for the work examining the 50 per cent degree relevance requirement for joining ITE.

Response: Accept

This issue has been identified by the Welsh Government as a potential barrier to entry to otherwise suitable and qualified candidates to programmes of ITE. Work to review this entry requirement has begun as part of the current review of the *Criteria for the accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programmes in Wales*. We will explore this in more depth with the ITE sector with a view to changing the requirements in the third iteration of the Criteria document, which is scheduled for publication later this year. Changes will be made where they are deemed robust and professionally appropriate, in consensus with the ITE sector. This third iteration of the Criteria would apply to programmes of ITE from academic year 2029/30 onwards. However, should there be agreement amongst Wales' ITE Partnerships, Welsh Government would support an earlier implementation of any changes to entry applied pan-Wales.

Financial Implications: This work can be accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 4

The Welsh Government should identify the factors which stop teachers with Welsh language skills from using them professionally. Once these factors have been identified, the Welsh Government should review the current support provided to these teachers to ensure it is meeting their needs and is directed in the most effective ways.

Response: Accept

We recognise the committee's finding that there are some untapped Welsh language skills within the workforce. This includes 1,590 teachers who are able to teach in Welsh but are not doing so in their current post. Also, there are currently 9,805 teachers with Welsh skills at intermediate level or above who do not currently feel confident to teach in Welsh. We agree that we need to better understand the factors which would encourage them to use the language professionally.

We intend to work with local authorities, as part of the implementation of their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans, to improve the use of workforce data and intelligence to support workforce planning. Identifying opportunities to support practitioners whose Welsh language skills are not being used in their current posts will be a key part of this work. We must recognise that some teachers in the English-medium sector will be established and happy in their current schools, and may not wish to move; however their Welsh language skills could be valuable within their current schools as primarily English language schools will be required to deliver more teaching through the medium of Welsh in line with the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act 2025.

During 2024, the National Centre for Learning Welsh undertook a mapping exercise with local authorities to understand the Welsh language development needs of school practitioners. Data from the Schol Workforce Annual Census (SWAC) was used alongside a local understanding of schools. Based on this exercise, the Centre developed a comprehensive programme of Welsh language professional learning for practitioners, incorporating the Sabbatical Scheme, the employment of dedicated tutors to work within local authorities, and a range of other methods of delivery including self-study, virtual, face-to-face, and residential. The National Centre's staff and local tutors are engaging continuously with local authorities and schools to review and promote its provision.

The National Institute for Learning Welsh (Athrofa) will be established in August 2027. It will have a statutory duty to make arrangements to improve levels of ability in Welsh amongst the education workforce. This will be key in improving the proficiency and confidence of staff with intermediate Welsh language skills, or fluent staff who are not confident to use the language professionally, to enable them to teach through the medium of Welsh.

Financial Implications: This work can be accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 5

The Welsh Government should ensure that all promotional work about teaching in Wales makes it clear that people who have done teacher training in England do not face barriers to moving to Wales to teach.

Response: Accept

We will review our campaign messaging, to see if we can overcome any misconceptions and make it clearer that you can teach in Wales if you have done your teacher training in England.

One of our new campaign ambassadors undertook her teacher training in England and subsequently chose to teach in Wales due to the Curriculum for Wales. We will work with this ambassador to help dispel any myths. The Cynllun Pontio, aimed at increasing the supply of Welsh speaking teachers in secondary schools, also targets Welsh speaking teachers outside of Wales and those who have been outside of the profession for five years or more.

We will explore further targeting to enable us to reach those who are undertaking their teacher training in England with appropriate messages to encourage them to consider teaching in Wales.

Financial Implications: This work can be accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 6

The Welsh Government, as part of their Strategic Education Workforce Plan should include work on the current use of sabbaticals in Welsh schools, and how schools and school staff can be supported to take up sabbatical opportunities.

Response: Accept

One of the aims of the Strategic Education Workforce Plan is to ensure that the profession remains attractive. In order to achieve this, we will be developing career pathways for teaching assistants, teachers and leaders to set out how they can develop their expertise in specific roles or progress to become teachers, middle or senior leaders within a school or specialist, advisory or policy roles within the education sector.

As part of this development, we will work with our partners, including local authorities, Dysgu, the Education Workforce Council and our universities to identify opportunities for sabbatical or secondment opportunities for practitioners to develop or use their expertise, taking into account the work of the Independent Welsh Pay Review Body in this area.

We have established Dysgu with a view to the organisation providing a range of sabbatical or secondment opportunities for practitioners to ensure that the professional learning being developed and delivered is based on current effective professional practice. Welsh Government also continues to fund the Welsh language sabbatical scheme, which provides opportunities for practitioners to be released from school to learn Welsh. We also offer a range of secondment opportunities for practitioners to support policy development within Welsh Government and the work of the Education Improvement Team.

Practitioners could also use the National Masters or Doctorate in Education as an opportunity to take a sabbatical from work to pursue research interests.

School governing bodies can agree the release of practitioners for any sabbatical or secondment period. It would be for individuals to consider any implications for their income.

Financial Implications: This work can be accommodated within existing budgets,

Recommendation 7

The Welsh Government should outline how it supports schools and local authorities to identify good practice and then how it supports dissemination of this good practice across the Welsh education sector.

Response: Accept

In January 2026, we published our new [school improvement policy](#) which defines clear roles and responsibilities for improvement and accountability within the Welsh education system. It outlines our new national model for school improvement which is rooted in better collaborative and collective working across the system.

The policy sets out our aim for local improvement communities where schools work together, in partnership with their local authority, to secure sustainable improvements locally. Purposeful collaboration, both vertically (3–16) and horizontally (e.g. secondary to secondary), will provide regular opportunities for teachers to observe practice and learn from peers and leaders in other schools.

This will also be supported by the revised professional standards, on which consultation closed in January 2026. The standard for Collaboration states that professionals should “actively seek opportunities to engage with other schools and wider partners to enhance professional effectiveness and extend effective pedagogy and practice contributing to system-wide improvement”.

Alongside local arrangements, a new Education Improvement Team has been established within Welsh Government to engage more directly and proactively with local authorities and their schools, connecting local needs with national priorities. This includes identifying and sharing examples of strong practice and moving forward will involve connecting local authorities with each other around common areas of improvement.

Annually, the Education Improvement Team will visit each individual local authority during the spring term to undertake a focused workshop, designed to support the development of the local improvement models along with enabling a purposeful professional dialogue with local authorities and their school leaders around improvement priority areas. This will help the process of identifying and sharing good practice across Wales.

The Education Improvement Team has also brought together local authority inclusion and improvement officers at a national level to facilitate the sharing of learning and intelligence with a view to building a more consistent and agile system across Wales. This will be an ongoing forum to build capacity in the system at local authority / Welsh Government level. Connecting this to the

examples of effective practice shared by Estyn as part of their thematic studies will also be an important step.

The Ministerial Headteacher Advisory Group plays a key role in representing the voice of headteachers. Through their work, examples of effective practice have been identified and shared within the group. These headteachers play a key role in disseminating this intelligence back through their local networks.

Welsh Government continues to engage with stakeholders and national partners (including Estyn) across a range of policy areas with a view to capturing and sharing examples of good practice, for example, through the Hwb platform.

Dysgu will play a key role in supporting local authorities and their schools to identify and share good practice in specific national priority areas.

Financial Implications: Supplying the above information was accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 8

The Welsh Government should outline the impacts of the Strategic Workload Co-ordination Group on workload reduction and in which areas of school operations these benefits have been realised and what the impacts have been on the workforce.

Response: Accept

The Strategic Workload Coordination Group (SWCG) was made up of key stakeholders, including representatives from across the system, who worked together to identify and implement changes to reduce workload for our school workforce. Its three working groups focused on Finance; Policy Development and Implementation; and Reporting and Engagement. The groups developed and delivered their own action plans. Following the conclusion of the SWCG's work the independent chair, Anna Brychan, Assistant Dean at University of Wales Trinity St David, made a series of recommendations.

The key outcomes from the groups were:

1. The development and implementation of a workload impact assessment which has been adopted by the Welsh Government education department with further roll out to all Welsh Government policy department and other organisations planned.
2. Establishing principles for engagement which provide practical approaches around workload which have been adopted by Welsh Government, WLGA, and trade unions.

3. The reduction in reporting requirements in relation to Welsh Government grants from 50 to eight.

The SWCG recognised that the impact of their work would primarily be experienced by leadership rather than classroom teachers. One of the Chair's recommendations was for the Strategic Education Workforce Plan to focus on impact for classroom teachers, which has been at the forefront of considerations in developing the plan.

Financial Implications: Supplying the above information was accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 9

The Welsh Government should make reducing workloads for classroom teachers a key priority in the Strategic Education Workforce Plan. The Workforce Plan should have clear and measurable actions that seek to reduce workloads in a meaningful and noticeable way for teachers as quickly as possible. It should also include ways in which workload can be measured. As part of this, the Welsh Government should ensure it engages directly with teachers. It should also look at best practice from the other countries, both within the UK and internationally and seek to apply any of this practice which would work within the Welsh context.

Response: Accept

Reducing workload will be a key priority in the Strategic Education Workforce Plan, which will set out high level actions with indicative timeframes. As part of implementing the plan, we will work with partners, and use the international evidence base, to agree clear and measurable actions for maximum impact. We will be mindful of the risk of creating additional workload through measuring it, and will ensure that measures are proportionate, reflect teacher autonomy, and are linked to specific and meaningful objectives.

Financial Implications: Policy development work can be accommodated within existing budgets, and will take into account any additional costs relating to new policy options.

Recommendation 10

The Welsh Government should set an expectation to schools and local authorities that activities that do not need to be done at school, such as

planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) can be done offsite. In setting this expectation the Welsh Government should make it clear that timetabling should be done in such a way that would support off site working for PPA. As a minimum, where teachers do have to remain on site, PPA time must be protected so they cannot be disturbed and drawn into other school matters.

Response: Accept

We recognise the need to provide for flexible working models that support practitioner wellbeing, which do not impact negatively on learners. In delivering the Strategic Education Workforce Plan we will work with partners to consider how we can practically deliver improved flexibility, including where it may be reasonably appropriate for PPA time to be taken off-site and organised in such units as would support this opportunity.

Financial Implications: This work can be accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 11

The Welsh Government issues clear, coherent and universal guidance on behaviour management that is explicit and open to as little misinterpretation as possible for all different types of school settings in Wales, as a matter of urgency. This guidance should ensure that a consistent approach is being taken across Wales to behaviour, and in particular serious behavioural breaches.

Response: Accept

One of the five immediate actions announced following the 2025 National Behaviour Summit was a commitment to update national guidance for schools on behaviour, to ensure greater clarity and consistency across Wales. Delivery of this commitment is progressing at pace, as outlined in a [written statement](#) issued on 12 February.

In September 2025, we published a new behaviour toolkit to support schools to tackle behaviour. This resource provides access to classroom management strategies and the latest research on effective behaviour approaches. The toolkit will be reviewed regularly to ensure the content remains effective and relevant.

Following the Summit, we established two dedicated forums, bringing together a wide range of practitioners and experts. The exclusions and detentions forum has led a full review of existing guidance, while the mobile use in schools forum has co-designed new guidance and supporting resources. Both groups are concluding their work, ensuring stronger, clearer support will be in place for schools ahead of the next academic year.

Future revisions to wider national guidance on behaviour will be informed by ongoing engagement with schools led by university partners across Wales, to reflect current Welsh practice and international evidence.

This term, we also announced the development of new all-Wales resources to support school safety. This builds on the guidance launched by Cardiff Council in the autumn, to provide simple and practical advice to schools. Cardiff Council are leading work with local authorities and partners to develop a consistent approach for schools across Wales to manage incidents where children take weapons onto school premises, or are reasonably suspected of being in possession of a weapon on school premises. The new resources will help schools work closely with families and other services so that the right support can be put in place, whilst ensuring safety for staff and learners.

Financial Implications: This work can be accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 12

The Welsh Government should ensure that schools and local authorities are providing sufficient shadowing and mentoring opportunities for classroom teachers to better understand whether they wish to move into school leadership roles.

Response: Accept

We recognise the Committee's finding that headteachers and senior leaders have an important role to play in inspiring teachers to consider moving into leadership roles and agree that teachers would benefit from shadowing leaders within their own schools and others to gain a practical understanding of leadership roles.

The Strategic Education Workforce Plan will set out a range of actions to ensure that there are a sufficient number of appropriately trained coaches and mentors available to support prospective leaders; to ensure that there is a comprehensive programme of leadership professional learning available through Dysgu, and to ensure that local authorities undertake succession planning for deputy and headteacher positions in their areas. This work will inform the allocation of places on the National Professional Qualification for Headship and the leadership pathway and their continued development, as well as ensure that local authorities identify and support individuals to pursue middle and senior leadership roles and headship. We will work with schools, local authorities and Dysgu, as part of this work, to encourage the use of shadowing, coaching and / or mentoring for teachers who wish to consider leadership roles.

Through our national school improvement model, local authorities should also be enabling the development of leadership capacity at every level of the system, which should present practitioners in middle leadership roles with opportunities to lead within and across schools; this approach is designed to enhance and refine school leadership skills.

Financial Implications: This work can be accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 13

The Welsh Government should outline how it will evaluate the changes to the NPQH. Any such evaluation should ensure it looks at whether the course supports learners to develop the skills and knowledge to be an effective headteacher; and whether the course provides good value.

Response: Accept

Following an independent review of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), which was published in 2023, the NPQH has been redesigned to ensure Wales continues to develop a strong pipeline of highly skilled school leaders capable of delivering our national education reform agenda and securing improved outcomes for learners. The new programme reflects the need for headteachers who are well-prepared for the increasing complexity and responsibility of school leadership. A rigorous assessment process to gain access to the new programme has been developed to ensure that only those individuals who are ready for headship are accepted. Dysgu is engaging with local authorities as part of the recruitment process and is developing a range of middle and senior leadership programmes as part of a leadership pathway to prepare future applicants for the NPQH.

The new NPQH is an 18-month programme that combines practical leadership experience in a range of environments with structured professional learning and a strong element of coaching and mentoring. It is grounded in the professional standards for teaching and leadership and has a strong focus on how leadership decisions impact teaching, learning and learner progress.

The pilot of the revised NPQH started in January 2025 and a second cohort started in September 2025. Dysgu took on full responsibility for delivering the NPQH in December 2025 and recruitment is ongoing for a third cohort to start in September 2026.

Dysgu will continue to refine the content and structure of the NPQH as it prepares to deliver for the third cohort, informed by the first two pilot cohorts. This will include assessment of the value provided by the various elements of the

programme, to ensure that as many participants as possible can participate without compromising the programme's quality and integrity.

Dysgu will be developing robust quality assurance and impact monitoring arrangements and applying these to the NPQH as well as its other provision. Dysgu is currently recruiting members for an Advisory Board to help further develop the qualification and to oversee quality assurance processes. This work will complement internal quality assurance procedures and will include commissioning an external review to ensure the highest standards are maintained.

We will consider the need for an independent, formal evaluation of the revised NPQH at a future stage, when its impact on the first two cohorts of aspiring headteachers can be assessed, and when the arrangements for the revised programme are well-established.

Financial Implications: Supplying the above information was accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 14

The Welsh Government commissions research to identify the factors that are causing the gender disparity in school leadership roles and then draw up an action plan to address any factors within the Welsh Government's responsibilities.

Response: Accept

We recognise that the percentage of female headteachers (62%) is not consistent with the percentage of females within the teaching workforce as a whole (76%). We note that the disparity is not as pronounced at the levels of deputy headteacher (70% female) and assistant headteacher (65% female).

We accept that the reasons for this are not established, and that witnesses suggested societal factors (such as an expectation for women to undertake disproportionate childcare) could contribute to the disparity and that it was unclear whether women were unsuccessfully applying for headteacher posts or were choosing not to apply.

As outlined in response to Recommendation 13 above, as part of the Strategic Education Workforce Plan, we will work with local authorities to undertake succession planning for headteacher positions in their areas. We will ensure this work considers gender disparity and explores the factors that prevent women from applying or being appointed to leadership and headteacher roles.

We will also ask Dysgu to consider the gender disparity as it engages with teachers and local authorities to promote the NPQH to future cohorts and as it engages with stakeholders to plan its leadership provision. We will also encourage Dysgu to ensure women are prominent as speakers and coaches within leadership programmes, to serve as role models.

Financial Implications: This work can be accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 15

The Welsh Government ensures that the Strategic Education Workforce Plan has actions which will ensure the teaching profession more closely reflects the Welsh population, and the communities schools serve.

Response: Accept

Ensuring that our practitioners understand the central importance of the Welsh language and culture and are drawn from all the diverse communities they serve, including black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, will be one of the guiding principles of the Strategic Education Workforce Plan. Our actions to promote the profession will reflect this principle and will build on our current activity.

Our existing Teaching Wales campaign promotes teaching as a career to a diverse range of prospective teachers. We continually review and refresh the campaign and the Educators Wales website and will ensure that all activity promotes a profession that reflects the communities that schools serve.

We recently published an update to our [recruitment and support for black, Asian and minority ethnic ITE students](#) setting out the actions we are taking to increase the diversity of our teaching workforce.

Financial Implications: This work can be accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 16

The Welsh Government should establish a national body to set pay, terms and conditions for support staff.

Response: Accept

As per the [Written Statement on 3 September](#), improving pay and conditions for our support staff is a key priority for the Strategic Education Workforce Plan. These individuals are a key part of a learner's education and support some of our

most vulnerable learners. They play an essential role in schools and deserve, in line with the Welsh Government's commitment to social justice, to be recognised, remunerated and treated fairly for the fantastic work that they do.

The Welsh Government's commitment to establish a School Support Staff Negotiating Body was reaffirmed on 2 December 2025, at the launch of UNISON Cymru's report 'Time to value school support staff'. Preparatory work on primary legislation has already started.

Financial Implications: The financial implications of establishing a new body would be included in a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) as part of a future Bill.

Agenda Item 2.5



Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

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

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

13 March 2026

Dear Buffy,

Following your recent request, I have set out below the additional information to assist your Committee in developing its Legacy Report for a successor committee to consider in the next Senedd. For ease of reference, each response has been set out in the order the questions were presented.

Exclusions Guidance

At the time of writing, the exclusion guidance does not appear to have been updated since April 2024. Could you confirm whether it remains the Government's intention to review and redevelop the Exclusion from Schools and PRUs guidance, and whether this work is ongoing?

This does remain our intention and the work is underway.

Following the 2025 National Behaviour Summit, the Welsh Government refreshed the membership of Exclusions Advisory Group, which evolved into the new Exclusions and Detentions forum, established in July 2025. The Forum met monthly, from September 2025. The group concluded in February 2026. Members included representatives from schools, partners and stakeholder organisations including:

- Secondary and primary practitioners/head teachers
- Local Authorities, including inclusion officers, Educational Psychologists
- Public bodies (Public Health Wales, Estyn)
- Independent charity organisations
- Professional associations
- Welsh Government policy officials

The members were carefully selected to ensure that all relevant sectors were represented to co-construct the new exclusions guidance and meaningfully inform next steps.

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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.

During monthly meetings from September 2025, a variety of speakers brought a wealth of knowledge to the table and allowed group members to consider a range of issues impacting on exclusions, whilst developing drafts of the guidance. Topics that were discussed included Research and Statistics, Parent Perceptions and Engagement, Poverty Proofing, Disproportionality, Systematic Bias and play in schools.

Following the conclusion of the Forum in February, Welsh Government officials have collated detailed feedback from members, to produce a final draft of the revised exclusion from schools and pupil referral units (PRU) guidance.

The guidance in its final form will ensure that the target audience (teachers, school staff, learners and parents and carers) will have a clearer understanding of exclusions and detentions processes. Final resources will include accessible versions of the guidance, to ensure everyone is fully informed of their rights at each step of the process.

Following the forthcoming Senedd Elections a public consultation on the revised guidance will launch during the summer term. The final version of the guidance will then be published in readiness for the new school year.

Behaviour Summit

Could you outline how the clearer expectations on the use of mobile phones, exclusions and detentions have been communicated to local authorities and schools, or if this is yet to be done? Will this be published?

I have explained the current position in relation to the guidance around exclusions and detentions. In addition to that work, we also established a dedicated forum to look at the issues around mobile phones in schools after the National Behaviour Summit. That group has recently completed their work and provided me with a draft of new guidance on the use of mobile phones in schools.

Given the importance of this issue to schools, and to the wellbeing of children and young people, we will need to formally consult on the draft guidance. A meaningful and appropriate consultation could not be undertaken between now and the Senedd elections, and so the full consultation will take place after the elections. In the interim, officials will be taking forward a programme of engagement with schools, trade unions, local authorities, parents and children to ensure that the guidance is robust and meets their needs.

I issued a [written statement](#) updating the Senedd about our work in this area on 6 March. On the same day I issued a survey to the education workforce asking for more details of their experiences around mobile phones in schools, and the policies they currently have in place. This information will help us tailor our guidance and any additional resources.

I have also clearly stated that I will support any school that introduces a policy to restrict or remove mobile phones.

The recent [written statement](#) issued on 12 February set out the latest progress in delivering the five immediate actions I announced after the Behaviour Summit. Implementation of the full Summit action plan is currently ongoing. This is a substantial and detailed programme of work, which will need to be delivered over the long term, to ensure meaningful and sustained improvements.

The five Summit actions were also underpinned by a commitment to wider engagement with staff in education settings, parents and children and young people.

- A significant programme of work has been taken forward to progress this commitment to listen and work in partnership to find practical solutions to ongoing behaviour challenges.
- The wider programme of engagement on behaviour with practitioners, learners, and parents is currently ongoing and will continue into the summer term, to deliver clear, evidence-based and actionable outcomes.
- Partnership arrangements with Bangor and Wrexham universities, the University of South Wales and Cardiff Metropolitan University are supporting bespoke projects with schools, focused on exploring practical solutions to behaviour challenges to support the wider system.
- Engagement with children and young people has been supported by a range of key partners including the Welsh Youth Parliament, Children in Wales and the Children's Commissioner. The Welsh Youth Parliament published their consultation report – [Safe, Included and Heard](#) in November. We are currently finalising a response to the key consultation recommendations.
- Further bespoke engagement work has recently been undertaken with marginalised learners, including those from Gypsy Roma Traveller communities, with outputs available by the end of March 2026.
- Plans for early engagement with parents are being supported by Parents Connect and Parentkind. Focus groups and a national parental poll will be completed by March 2026.
- HEI partners will support detailed work to synthesise the outcomes of wider stakeholder engagement during the summer term to ensure next steps are evidence informed and meet the needs of our learners and schools.

Behaviour Management

Could you clarify whether updated behaviour management guidance is still planned or if the toolkit is this new guidance (alongside or replacing?) the 2012 guidance?

The Behaviour Toolkit we published in the autumn is the first step in our programme of work to update and reinforce our guidance. Further revisions to wider national guidance on behaviour required by schools will be informed by engagement led by university partners across Wales. This work is being delivered in partnership with Wrexham, Bangor, the University of South Wales, and Cardiff Metropolitan Universities through projects exploring practical, evidence-informed strategies to strengthen behaviour practice in schools, including:

- Professional enquiry projects with clusters of schools focused on behaviour, attendance and learner well-being.
- Practitioner focus groups to explore innovative behaviour management strategies.
- Engaging with early career teachers to better understand their experiences of behaviour management to further enhance existing support.
- Engaging with schools and learners involved in restorative behaviour pilots launched in February 2026, to review the effectiveness of different models.

As well as promoting the sharing of effective behaviour practices, these projects will inform enhanced guidance as well as professional learning, delivered in partnership with Dysgu.

This term, we also announced the development of new all-Wales resources to support school safety. This builds on the guidance launched by Cardiff Council in the autumn, to provide simple and practical advice to schools. Cardiff Council are leading work with local authorities and partners to develop a consistent approach for schools across Wales to manage incidents where children take weapons onto school premises, or are reasonably suspected of being in possession of a weapon on school premises. The new resources will help schools work closely with families and other services so that the right support can be put in place, whilst ensuring safety for staff and learners.

Anti-bullying Guidance

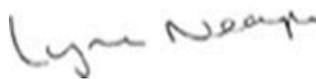
Finally, the Cabinet Secretary consulted on updated anti-bullying guidance in 2025. This guidance has not yet been published. Could you confirm the intended timeline for publication?

The updated *Rights, Respect, Equality: challenging bullying and harassment* guidance is due for publication in March 2026. We consulted on the draft guidance during summer 2025. This draft version was an update to the 2019 publication to reflect new laws, new research and the changing issues facing children and young people.

The consultation summary of responses was published on the Welsh Government website in November 2025. The guidance has since been reviewed and updated in light of consultation feedback received. It places a strengthened focus on preventing and tackling prejudice-based bullying and ensuring that all children feel welcome and safe in their school communities.

I hope the Committee finds this information helpful. Should you require any further clarity or information, please do not hesitate to contact me

Yours sincerely,



Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Agenda Item 2.6



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Buffy Williams MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
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13 March 2026

Dear Buffy,

Thank you for your letter of 10 February and for your questions following the oral evidence session I gave to the Committee on 23 October. My responses to these questions are in Annex A.

I welcome the live and responsive nature of this inquiry. The regular check-ins, visits, and engagement have contributed significantly to a shared understanding of how implementation is progressing and where further improvement is needed. I also recognise the way this work has informed the Committee's wider activities.

As I explained during the oral evidence session in October, there isn't sufficient time remaining in this Senedd term to undertake the full and careful process required to amend the ALN Code for Wales. We are clear that any amendments to the Code are informed by the findings of the ALN legislative review and wider evaluation, and that there must be adequate time for engagement and scrutiny. I therefore agree that this work should be a priority for the next Welsh Government.

Yours sincerely

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

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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.

Annex A

Clarification of who and how learners with ALN get support

Question 1. Can you provide a timeline for when the work on defining general provision will be completed and in place?

Work to define provision made generally continues to be co-developed with partners. There is an active working group taking forward a work plan to develop a national shared understanding of provision made generally. This working group is chaired by a local authority Director of Education with members from local authorities across Wales and Estyn.

Producing guidance on provision made generally has the potential to influence how the statutory legal test is understood or applied in practice. It, therefore, requires full and transparent engagement with children, families and the sector to ensure it is robust, trusted and fit for purpose.

It is not possible to undertake that level of comprehensive engagement before the end of this Senedd term, and it would not be appropriate to progress work of this significance without it. That work will therefore be for the next Government to take forward in a way that properly reflects the impact on children and families.

Question 2. Can you provide an update on how questions about the interaction between the ALN Code, Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 and the Learning and Skills Act 2000 will be resolved?

The Welsh Government recognises that the interaction between the ALN system, the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022, and the Learning and Skills Act 2000 is complex. Ensuring full alignment, particularly for post-16 ALN provision, is a significant and detailed piece of work.

We are working closely across Government, and with colleagues in MEDR, to develop a consistent understanding and a coherent approach. This includes identifying where clarification, further guidance, or adjustments may be required to provide certainty for learners and providers. A quinquennial review of Welsh medium additional learning provision is also underway.

This work is progressing, but it is important to get it right. Our priority remains on ensuring that every young person in Wales can access the right learning, receive the support they need, and achieve their full potential.

Improving support for families

Question 3: What are your views raised by our Advisory Group, and how some of the issues raised might be addressed?

The issues raised by the Advisory Group reflect genuine challenges faced by parents and carers navigating the ALN system. These perspectives are vital and have informed ongoing work to improve how information and support are communicated to families.

The Parent and Carer toolkit was developed in response to these concerns raised by families and was co-produced with families who have direct experience of the system. Feedback from parents and practitioners has reinforced the value of providing clear, accessible information that reflects lived experiences of families.

Our aim has always been to provide clear and accessible information for families, but we appreciate that this must be balanced with a realistic explanation of the complexity, potential pressures, and implications involved in routes such as Tribunal appeals or judicial review.

The Parent and Carer Toolkit will continue to be an evolving piece of work, and officials are actively gathering feedback and identifying areas where families are seeking further clarification. The recommendations to improve clarity and accessibility such as incorporating additional flowcharts, timelines, and other visual tools which are extremely valuable and will be put forward for consideration in future iterations to help ensure the toolkit provides clearer and more balanced information. If members of the Advisory Group would like to contribute to future versions of the toolkit, we would welcome their involvement and encourage them to contact the ALN team to take part.

The toolkit complements existing guidance, including detailed information on children's and parents' rights already published on the Welsh Government website: [A guide for parents about rights under the additional learning needs \(ALN\) system \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

We are also acting on the strong messages we heard from families about the importance of impartial advocacy. An independent review of advocacy provision across Wales is underway, to ensure families can access strong, trusted and impartial support when they need it.

Question 4: Can you provide further information on the support that will be given to children with ALN and their families who are home educating? What more can be done to ensure that families don't feel forced to make a decision to home education because of a lack of support for their child's needs in school?

As an action from the ALN legislative review, we are developing new supplementary guidance, to be published by the end of March 2026. This will provide additional guidance to local authorities on how to support home educated children with ALN. We will also be developing additional resources later this year, building on the Parent and Carer Toolkit, to help ensure families who choose to home educate are better supported and have access to clear and practical information.

Where children are still in school and parents are considering deregistering their child, it is important that parents raise any potential concerns with their child's school in the first instance if they feel that their child has ALN or that their child's ALN are not being met. They can also contact their local authority for further advice.

Wales' involvement with the Children Not In School (CNIS) provisions in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will support the rights of parents and children as the proposals propose to establish a pilot programme in a limited number of local authorities, where parents must be offered and attend a formal meeting with the local authority if they wish to

withdraw their child from school for home education. The meetings are intended to provide local authorities with an opportunity to discuss reasons for withdrawal of the child from school and to identify any additional needs at an early stage, ensuring families receive appropriate support and that wider factors affecting a child's wellbeing are taken into account.

Strengthening multi-agency integration

Question 5: Can you provide an update on outcomes from the trilateral meetings?

The trilateral meetings have confirmed a shared commitment to strengthen how health and education services work together so that oversight, training and responsibilities for supporting children and young people with complex healthcare needs are clearly defined. This work will inform forthcoming changes to supporting learners with healthcare needs guidance for both schools and health boards, which will be published later this year.

A strong multi-agency approach is essential to supporting the healthcare needs of children and young people. Education settings, local authorities and health boards have responsibilities to support children and young people's health and well-being while they are in attendance. Improving multi-agency collaboration with increased integration between health and education is a priority for this government.

As an outcome of the trilateral meetings, we have established a shared commitment to strengthening multi-agency integration across health, social care and education.

Officials are now progressing a set of joint actions, including:

1. Embedding ALN and health needs into Regional Partnership Board planning, supported by joint communication across sectors and building on the spotlight event that took place in December 2025.
2. Strengthening area-based planning through improved population-level data sharing between schools, local authorities, and health boards.
3. Appointing an NHS-based professional advisor to lead on multi-agency collaboration, system integration, shared expectations and performance indicators.
4. Developing a clear health policy statement to inform co-produced, multi-agency ALNET guidance and ensure consistent practice across sectors.
5. Strengthening how health and education services work together so that oversight, training and responsibilities for supporting children and young people with complex healthcare needs are clearly defined, through the development of joint guidance for schools and health boards.
6. Exploring further policy alignment around needs-led, inclusive approaches, especially relating to neurodivergence.

Question 6: How effective do you think cross-Government working has been in ensuring ALN support is holistic, integrated and timely? Reflecting on your time in the Government, what has worked effectively and what do you think should change?

Cross-Government working has strengthened over time and has helped reinforce the principles of the ALN system, helping services align more effectively around the needs of learners. The trilateral meetings have demonstrated a clear shared commitment across education, health and social care. Joint forums, including the spotlight event, have strengthened relationships, promoted effective partnership working, and are building a more consistent understanding of the ALN reforms across sectors.

However, I am not complacent. Multi-agency working is not yet consistent, and delays can arise when processes and responsibilities across sectors are not sufficiently aligned. These challenges can result in missed opportunities for timely support, with consequences for children's educational outcomes and wellbeing.

There remains a need to strengthen shared accountability, clarify roles and responsibilities, and make better use of existing structures, including Regional Partnership Boards and their children and young people sub-groups.

Question 7: Have local authorities, the NHS and the Welsh Government been able to work together to effectively meet the needs of learners? Are there examples of good practice and how can this be disseminated across Wales?

Following the ALN legislative review, the ALN Multi-Agency Collaboration Group has been re-established with a stronger focus on delivery and improvement. Its priorities include developing supplementary guidance to clarify roles and responsibilities and sharing effective approaches to new multi-agency working.

There are examples of good practice across Wales, demonstrating how integrated working can improve outcomes for children and families, which have been shared through national events and networks to support wider learning. Our aim is to make joined up working the norm across Wales, ensuring that every child and young person receives coordinated, person-centred support. Some examples which have been shared and are now being adopted across Wales include:

- All health boards have designated a DECLO who are working together to deliver a nationally consistent model of delivery and strong collaboration between education, health and social services to meet the needs of children. Across a range of models, DECLOs have strengthened communication, collaboration and joint working between health and education, from early years through to post16. We will be recruiting a professional advisor on multi-agency collaboration based within NHS Performance and Improvement (NHSP&I, formerly the NHS Executive).
- The Occupational Therapy Model in Neath Port Talbot, which was shared at the ALN Effective Practice Event last year, demonstrated how to deliver truly joined-up support. It showed how health and education professionals can work together to embed structured physical activities in schools, such as "corridor circuits", to support motor skills development, sensory regulation, and readiness to learn. The model is now being

adopted in other local authorities with support from Welsh Government funding, illustrating how effective, collaborative practice can be scaled across Wales.

- Another example shared at the spotlight event is the Integrated Service for Children with Additional Needs (ISCAN) which is a regional initiative across Gwent designed to provide a co-ordinated, multi-disciplinary and multi-agency approach for children and young people aged 0–18 years who present with two or more developmental needs. It aims to reduce fragmentation, improve access to timely support and empower families to navigate complex health, education, and social care systems.

Advancing bilingual and inclusive education

Question 8: What training and development opportunities are available to staff who work with children with ALN? In particular, those who may be contracted to support children, such as transport escorts.

We are developing a national ALN professional learning programme through Dysgu, alongside training in neurodivergence, mental health, child development, updated person-centred practice materials, and early years workforce support through Cwlwm and local authorities.

Responsibility for ensuring contracted staff, including home-to-school transport escorts, have the appropriate skills and training rests with local authorities. This forms part of their wider duty to ensure safe, suitable and inclusive transport for all learners.

Question 9: In setting a five year timescale, was the original intention of the 2019 Act that the review of the sufficiency of Welsh medium additional learning provision should be carried out once every Senedd term? If so, are there any plans to revisit the timings of the reviews to reflect the change in the length of the Senedd term?

The requirement to undertake a review of the sufficiency of Welsh-medium ALN provision every five years is set out in legislation. The first review must report by 1 September 2026.

There are no plans to alter the statutory five-year cycle. This would require legislative change to ALNET.

Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021

Question 10: When do you expect to publish further guidance on assessment and progression, such as the age-related expectations you have said were under development? Will this provide a clear framework for education professionals to assess pupils, support their learning development and provide clarity on how they should progress under the Curriculum for Wales?

Personalised Assessments

We are progressing work to develop a new Personalised Assessments report to support teachers to better understand learner progress. The report is designed to provide

practitioners with a nationally defined age-related indicator, together with information on their learners' progress.

This is intended to complement the existing suite of Personalised Assessments reports, which includes individual learner progress and feedback reports, as well as a range of group reports designed to support teachers in understanding their learners' strengths and areas for improvement. When interpreting this new report, teachers are encouraged to exercise their professional judgement and consider it alongside wider evidence to form a holistic understanding of learner progress.

Work will be informed by the newly developed Professional Learning Resources for literacy and numeracy. The initial focus is on creating a report for Numeracy (Procedural), English Reading, and Welsh Reading, which will be tested later this academic year with Year 6 learners only.

Curriculum

Within the Curriculum for Wales areas, descriptions of learning provide guidance for teachers on how learners should progress within each statement of what matters as they journey through the continuum of learning in an area. They are arranged in progression steps 1 to 5 which cover ages 3 to 16 of the learning journey.

While understanding and meeting the needs of individual learners means that there is no such thing as a 'standard' learning journey, each of the progression steps are broadly aligned to ages. Our Curriculum Design professional learning includes support on using this guidance effectively for the purposes of progression and assessment.

Literacy

We have worked with Estyn to explore how we can set out further detail on what good progress in reading looks like at each age. What has been developed so far focuses on progression in reading at Progression Steps 2, 3 and 4, describing in much greater detail what learners should know, understand and be able to do at these stages, and provides concrete examples and indicators of progress. Alongside this, the document outlines what effective provision should include and identifies key professional learning priorities to help teachers deliver high-quality, progression-focused reading experiences.

We are continuing to develop this work and have been testing the detail with practitioners within Policy Group, and the Ministerial Headteachers Advisory Group. Building on the feedback we have received, we are also exploring other ways in which this detail can be presented, with closer alignment to the principles set out by the Literacy Expert Panel and a strong focus on professional learning. We will share this detail more widely in the coming months. We remain keen to be guided by the evidence about what best supports standards and what schools find most helpful.

Mathematics and Numeracy

Swansea University has been commissioned to develop a professional learning resource that covers the whole of the Mathematics and Numeracy Area of Learning and Experience (ALoE), which has 4 statements of what matters. The resource package has been released in phases, with content related to progression steps 1,2 and 3 already published and content on progression steps 4 and 5 of the learning journey on target for publication in March 2026.

The resource is a professional learning offer which is a major component of work to develop a deeper understanding of progression in mathematics and numeracy for teachers. Key to this is the inclusion of 'granular detail'. This expands, breaks down and details the descriptions of learning for each progression step and supports teachers to further their understanding of progression in the learning pathway. In this way the resource package provides a clear framework and clarity on progression in the Mathematics and Numeracy ALoE under the Curriculum for Wales.

As part of the commissioned work, Swansea University is delivering training the trainer sessions to local authority Mathematic and Numeracy leads/advisors. This will support the effective use of the resource to support teachers in a clear and consistent understanding of learner progression and age-related expectations for mathematics and numeracy across schools in Wales.

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Agenda Item 2.7



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Buffy Williams MS
Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee

13 March 2026

Dear Buffy

Thank you for your letter dated 30 January following my appearance before Committee on 6 November as part of your focussed work looking at school improvement and learner attainment.

Across Wales, our collective focus is on driving sector-wide improvement so that every learner can thrive. At the heart of this work are our priorities to strengthen attendance and raise attainment in literacy and numeracy, with the Curriculum for Wales and ALN reform providing the foundations for long-term progress.

We are taking this forward through genuine collaboration across the education system. By working together to address the shared challenges facing our schools, we are able to learn from one another, spread effective practice, and support sustained improvement in standards for learners across Wales.

Please find below detailed responses to each recommendation and request made.

Yours sincerely,

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

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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.

Recommendation 1

We recommend the Welsh Government closely monitors the ability and capacity of local authorities to lead the necessary school improvement and raising of standards, continually reviewing the impact of these latest changes to the way school improvement functions and services are structured and delivered.

We also recommend that elements of good practice that have emerged and being built up through regional working over the past decade are incorporated into the new arrangements.

Response: Accept

The Education Improvement Team has been established within the Welsh Government to engage more directly and proactively with Local Authorities and their schools - strengthening the connection between local needs and national priorities.

Each Spring term, the Education Improvement Team will visit every Local Authority to support the development of local improvement models and to enable purposeful professional dialogue around priority improvement areas reflecting the Cabinet Secretary's national priorities. This approach will support the identification and sharing of effective practice across Wales.

The Education Improvement Team has also brought together Local Authority inclusion and improvement officers at a national level to promote the sharing of learning and intelligence, with the aim of building a more consistent and agile education system across Wales. This will provide an ongoing forum to build intelligence across the system at Local Authority / Government level. Connecting this to the examples of effective practice shared by Estyn as part of their thematic studies will also be an important step. This system-wide approach will enable the education sector to share best practices and challenges, and respond appropriately in discussion with partners including Dysgu, Estyn and Local Authority improvement teams.

Estyn also inspects Local Authorities. All inspection reports are published to ensure openness and public transparency.

Financial implications: None - within existing budgets

Recommendation 2

We urge the Welsh Government to ensure that new school improvement guidance can support the raising of standards and promote a common, consistent understanding of what is meant by effective school improvement. This consolidated guidance should be available in one accessible location and be aligned with Estyn's inspection framework.

Response: Accept

In January 2026, we published our new school improvement policy, setting out clear roles and responsibilities for improvement and accountability across the Welsh education system. This guidance is aligned with Estyn's inspection framework; it has been widely circulated to stakeholders and published on Hwb, as a central and accessible location for all.

The Education Improvement Team will engage directly with Local Authorities and schools to consider how school improvement support is being delivered on the ground.

These changes are taking place within a strengthened system of independent oversight. Since September 2024, Estyn visits every school twice within a six-year cycle: once for a core inspection and once for an interim visit. This provides a robust and independent assessment of how well schools are performing and, by extension, the effectiveness of the support provided to them locally. Estyn also inspects Local Authorities, and all inspection reports are published to ensure transparency for the public.

Financial implications: None - within existing budgets

Request 1

We also ask for a clear plan setting out Dysgu's professional learning offer and confirm mechanisms to prevent inconsistent local models including how specialist capacity will be safeguarded. Noting what has already been provided in the Cabinet Secretary's letter dated 26 November, we request further detail on how exactly Dysgu is operating during its transitional year, the role of the Welsh Government during this period and the process for Dysgu fully taking up its functions in September 2026.

Response: Accept

The 2026-27 funding letter for Dysgu is being prepared and will be issued and published by the end of March 2026. This will set out the areas of activity where Dysgu will be expected to provide professional learning and leadership support during 2026-27. Welsh Government officials are working closely with Dysgu to transfer knowledge and make arrangements for delivery in these areas.

Dysgu will produce an operational plan in response to the funding letter, setting out the steps it will take to deliver during the year.

As confirmed in my letter of 26 November 2025, Dysgu is delivering the NPQH pilot programme for its first two cohorts and reviewing and planning further leadership provision for middle and senior leaders. Recruitment is ongoing for a third cohort of over 70 participants, to begin the NPQH in September 2026. Dysgu is also supporting delivery of the Calm Classrooms, Thriving Minds professional learning pilot, which promotes inclusion and wellbeing by deepening practitioners' knowledge of child development, neurodiversity, and mental health. It is collaborating with Estyn on roadshows for schools to support the teaching of mathematics.

Areas where Dysgu is intended to take on responsibility during 2026-27 include:

- Eight Curriculum for Wales Support Programme grants to support literacy and numeracy
- Seconded professional advisors supporting literacy and numeracy support
- Continued funding and grant management of the Diversity and Anti-Racist Professional Learning (DARPL) programme
- Curriculum design national support programmes from September 2026
- Continued funding and grant management of the National MA Education (Wales) and National EdD (Wales) Doctor of Education programmes
- Supporting the development and delivery of the Teaching Assistant Learning Pathway (delivered by local authorities) and Induction for Newly Qualified Teachers (delivered by local authorities and funded via the EWC)
- Supporting the teaching of Welsh in English-medium schools and settings, and effective pedagogy in teaching through the medium of Welsh or bilingually
- Professional learning and practical support for teaching assistants, teachers and leaders in the effective and appropriate use of AI and digital technology to support teaching and learning and to reduce workload
- Professional learning based on School Improvement Guidance to develop the approaches of school leaders and system leaders
- Development and quality assurance of professional development and professional learning resources and pages on Hwb, working with Welsh Government officials to review and update priorities

- Professional learning and support for leaders, ALNCOs and teaching and support staff, to develop the understanding and leadership of supporting learners with ALN.

Dysgu is intended to take on responsibility in these areas from April 2026, and will be working closely with Welsh Government officials, and engaging with practitioners, Local Authorities and other partners, to scope, develop and commission the provision over the following months.

Dysgu is establishing its internal procedures, to ensure it has appropriate financial management and governance arrangements in place, including to award and manage grants and contracts. Officials are engaging with Dysgu to ensure this is in place before the transfer of programmes and funding from April 2026. Dysgu has also conducted external recruitment for leads to augment its current team of staff, in key areas such as ALN, Cymraeg Craidd, Career Pathways, Leadership and Curriculum Priorities, and has appointed specialist, experienced individuals who will be leading the development and delivery of professional learning and support.

Dysgu is already engaging widely with Local Authorities and other partners and will continue to do so as its provision develops. This will be essential in ensuring there is a shared understanding of the national provision, and how this should be complemented by local activity. Dysgu will also be seeking to identify and build upon existing good practice to ensure this can be shared on a national level.

Financial implications: None - within existing Dysgu budget

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the Welsh Government set out a staged progression approach aligned to the Curriculum for Wales, with clear age-related expectations to enable earlier identification of learners requiring intervention, alongside national standards for literacy and numeracy and a concise nationally agreed data minimum for the 3-16 journey.

Response: Accept

On [3 March I updated Members](#) on the work of our Literacy Expert Panel and our support for literacy attainment. The Literacy Expert Panel has informed our thinking on future guidance, professional learning, and wider priorities for strengthening literacy across Wales. I shared their newly published [Principles for Language and Literacy in Wales](#) and the [Statement of Intent for Early Reading](#).

We are already putting these principles into action. Central to this is the £8.2 million CAL:ON Cymru project, which is establishing a centre of excellence for literacy teaching. It is building on the best international evidence including, for example, elements of programmes from Mississippi and New Zealand. It will provide bilingual, national support, including support to develop learners' spoken language skills, and more targeted support for learners who need additional help to learn to read in upper primary and secondary school. CAL:ON Cymru will publish guidance on effective phonics teaching including support on using systematic synthetic phonics programmes, and how to select an appropriate phonics package. It also offers internationally recognised assessment tools to help schools understand learners' specific needs.

Dysgu, our recently established professional learning body, will be taking forward this national professional learning, ensuring support reaches all schools. We continue to work closely with Local Authorities to ensure schools have access to a coherent offer that builds on this national support.

I am also grateful to Estyn for developing resources that set out more detailed expectations related to learners' age to help practitioners understand literacy progression, and similar work undertaken by Swansea University in relation to numeracy professional learning. These will be tested with the profession to inform future guidance.

The expectations will inform the development of our Personalised Assessments, which will provide more detailed age-related information and reporting. This will support practitioners to better understand their learners' progress as well as providing a common and shared reference point to focus improvement-related conversations between schools. This will actively support the transition between primary and secondary schools, providing a single shared lexicon across Wales and supporting collaboration and improvement. The initial focus is on creating a new report for Numeracy (Procedural), English Reading, and Welsh Reading, which will be tested later this academic year with Year 6 learners as a priority cohort before development and roll out across other year groups.

Alongside this, I have also set up a new Attainment Board to ensure that all of these priorities are aligned and to focus on delivery and impact. This will include Estyn, Dysgu and representatives from Local Authorities.

Financial implications: None within existing budgets

Recommendation 4

We further recommend that our successor committee monitors the Welsh Government's commitment to participate in PIRLS (2026) and TIMSS (2027) and ensures that findings from these studies inform targeted interventions in literacy and numeracy from early years onwards.

Response:

We welcome the Committee's interest in Wales's participation in PIRLS 2026 and TIMSS 2027. These studies are an important part of our commitment to benchmarking learner progress internationally and strengthening our evidence base across literacy, numeracy and science.

Wales remains fully committed to participating in both PIRLS and TIMSS. Preparations are well underway, and we are on track for the PIRLS main study in May-June 2026, the TIMSS field trial in March this year, and main study in May-June 2027.

These assessments will provide robust, internationally comparable data on reading, mathematics and science at Year 5 — areas fundamental to learner progression under the Curriculum for Wales.

We share the Committee's view that findings from these studies must inform targeted interventions from the early years onwards. PIRLS and TIMSS will complement Personalised Assessments and support the design of Professional Learning resources focused on literacy and numeracy.

The insights gained from both studies will help us identify strengths, highlight areas requiring further support, and guide resource allocation and school improvement activity. This evidence will support practitioners, schools, and policymakers in strengthening learner outcomes.

To support learners and teachers, we are working with Children in Wales to develop an age-appropriate resource that explains what these assessments involve. Its purpose is to reassure pupils, reduce any anxieties, and help teachers feel confident in supporting their classes.

We will also publish articles on Hwb, Dysg and social media ahead of the assessments to raise awareness and to ensure parents, carers and the wider sector understand the purpose of these studies and feel reassured.

Participation is voluntary, and we are taking a supportive, low-burden approach for schools. A £200 administration fee is provided to each participating school, and Pearson — appointed by Welsh Government to administer the assessments — is working closely with schools to manage logistics and ensure smooth delivery.

Approximately 150 schools will participate in PIRLS and a further 150 in TIMSS, based on a random sample designed to reflect the diversity of schools across Wales, with around 4,500 pupils expected to take part in each study.

Financial implications: None - within existing budgets

Request 2

Additionally, the Welsh Government should remain vigilant in monitoring trends in learner outcomes, such as those evident from personalised assessment data, and our successor committee should prioritise scrutiny to ensure continued recovery and improvement across all domains.

Response: Accept

We draw from a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence to monitor and understand trends and variation in learner outcomes and engage regularly with our partners and use available data and statistics to provide oversight of our system progress.

We use annually available data and statistics such as that relating to qualifications, attendance and personalised assessments, as well as results from PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS, Schools Health Research Network surveys, Estyn's annual and thematic reports as well as insight offered through research.

We also work closely with the OECD and other international partners and have regular discussions with UK counterparts on shared challenges.

We continue to reform our information ecosystem and our focus on the effective use of evidence at a national level. We are further strengthening the breadth of national information available to us and improving how it is used to understand the landscape, inform policy development and support our partners to improve learning and achieving the best outcomes for every learner.

We also continue to support our partners to use data effectively to drive improvement, and to improve transparency of school data through the development the 14 to 16 Learner Entitlement Indicators Framework, which will provide a balanced view of learners' experiences and outcomes from across the components of their 14 to 16 learning under the Curriculum for Wales.

Financial implications: None - within existing budgets

Request 3

Finally, the Welsh Government should develop user-friendly, interactive data tools aligned with the Curriculum for Wales and integrate with existing Local Authority systems, to support effective school improvement planning, early identification of risk, and targeted interventions.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government has provided digital tools to support understanding of school data for over ten years, both on a public platform (My Local School) and for use by schools and local authorities (All Wales Core Datasets) to support self-evaluation and improvement planning.

As part of our efforts to reform and improve the effective use of data and information to support learning and improving we have commissioned a comprehensive systems and digital tools discovery exercise. This exercise will inform decisions and next steps in developing successor systems that will offer dynamic, sophisticated and accessible tools for data use by different stakeholder groups, having identified the varying needs across these groups.

This discovery exercise will ensure that the tools we develop are fit for purpose and sustainable, enabling data use to support our learners across the education system. The exercise will also consider end-to-end user journeys and data flows between systems and stakeholders to fully support a collaborative approach to learning and improvement

The discovery exercise is expected to be completed in Spring 2026, and provide recommendations on the way forward, with elements of our new successor systems to be in place in Autumn 2027, when we implement new reporting arrangements for 14 to 16 learning as the first Year 11 cohort completes their 14-16 learning under Curriculum for Wales.

Financial implications: The discovery phase is within existing budgets with costs of future system development yet to be established.

Recommendation 5

We share the Cabinet Secretary's frustration at the lack of progress and urge that addressing the negative correlation between deprivation and attainment remains a high priority for the Welsh Government.

Response: Accept

Tackling the impact of poverty on educational outcomes remains central to our ambitions for education in Wales. We are committed to raising standards and improving attainment for every learner. Closing the poverty related attainment gap and effectively measuring progress have been priorities for this government.

We have also sought to ensure we enable our children and young people to access a wide range of experiences and outcomes to fully support their achievement and success. The Pupil Development Grant, the School Essentials Grant and our work to tackle the costs of the school day are central to this approach.

If we are to tackle the systemic and societal barriers to learning that contribute to the poverty-related attainment gap, we must take an evidence-based approach. Our work to develop a meaningful Theory of Change is synthesising Welsh and international evidence, outlining the complex issues behind the attainment gap and what works to tackle it. Based on this evidence and our priorities, action to reduce the poverty attainment gap in Wales will include improving existing programmes and policies and new opportunities to help learners experiencing poverty achieve their potential.

There are no additional costs associated with this recommendation at this stage. Related policy and programme changes required by a new government could incur additional costs which would need to be considered by a future administration.

Financial implications: None – within existing budgets

Recommendation 6

We also recommend that the review of the Pupil Development Grant prioritises demonstrable impact on reducing attainment gaps, not merely improving access to funding, and ensures that resources are targeted where they can make the greatest difference.

Response: Accept

As highlighted in the Written Statement issued on 18 December 2025, the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) is central to our ambition to tackle the impact of poverty on educational outcomes and to ensure the funding delivers the greatest possible benefit for our most vulnerable learners. The review will prioritise improving the PDG so that it will have a demonstrable impact on reducing attainment gaps.

Changing social circumstances, rising living costs, and increasing pressures on schools and families mean that more children now require additional support to achieve their potential. As a result, there are growing concerns that, despite our substantial investment, the PDG is not yet delivering the full impact we expect.

To address this, I instructed officials to undertake a comprehensive policy review of the PDG, with a specific focus on:

- Improving how the grant is allocated and funded,
- Strengthening monitoring of its use and impact, and
- Enhancing evaluation of the effectiveness of funded interventions.

These actions directly support the recommendation's intent that resources be targeted where they make the greatest difference. Central to that is ensuring that we use all the available data to identify and support those learners that need help to overcome barriers to their education.

The review will cover all PDG funding streams—including Early Years PDG, PDG for Children Looked After, and PDG for learners in Education Other Than at School—and aims to enable schools and settings to deliver high standards and aspirations for all learners, regardless of socioeconomic background.

We therefore accept this recommendation and will ensure that the review maintains a clear and explicit focus on evidence of impact in reducing attainment gaps. There are no direct additional costs associated with this recommendation. However, any policy or programme changes arising from a future government's priorities or from the outcomes of the review may result in additional financial implications. These would need to be assessed and considered by a future administration.

Financial implications: None - within existing budgets

Request 4

We welcome the Government's commitment to continue promoting attendance nationally and to provide more targeted support for schools and local authorities and ask that the Government outlines how it plans to assess whether national messaging is supporting awareness, strengthening local interventions, and ultimately whether the approach is working.

Response: Accept

We are clear in all messages from Government that attendance is vital, and this is a common thread in our communications. This also includes highlighting the improvements in school attendance.

In addition to reviewing the broader evidence base, we have undertaken focus groups with learners who have experienced issues with attendance and looked at the attendance campaigns run by local authorities. It was clear from those focus groups that young people do understand the potential impact of non-attendance on attainment. However, as there are a number of issues affecting non-attendance, the young people were also clear that they did not respond well to generic messaging that did not recognise the range of barriers they face.

What emerged from the groups is the importance of schools and wider community support in re-engagement of learners, and engaging parents, and the approaches they use. This underlines the importance of the role of Family Engagement Officers, who are critical in supporting our children and young people and their families and helping them overcome the barriers to attendance at school. This can include signposting to other services that can help families and putting in place practical assistance.

We recognise that messages are most effective when they are reinforced at national, local and school level, creating a consistent narrative that resonates with families. We will continue to emphasise the importance of attendance nationally and are developing a toolkit for schools and LAs to use to re-engage learners. Before publishing the toolkit it will be tested to ensure that messages resonate and are engaging.

We recognise the growing evidence demonstrating a clear relationship between school attendance and children and young people's mental health. Professor Ann John provided an overview of her research findings to us, [Policy Briefing: School Attendance in Wales](#) highlighting clear links between mental health, neurodevelopmental conditions and increased likelihood of absence and the current evidence on effective interventions. More information is also available in this [report](#) in the Lancet.

The evidence shows that the most effective interventions for improving school attendance are those that are responsive and targeted; parental engagement programmes perform strongly, with most studies showing measurable improvements when parents are actively involved. Social and emotional learning programmes generally contribute to better attendance by supporting pupils' emotional regulation and well-being. In addition, most extracurricular programmes, such as tutoring and structured enrichment schemes, show positive impacts, especially for disadvantaged learners or those with low attendance.

This work remains in progress with no confirmed publication date, but we continue to engage closely with Professor John as the analysis develops. The insights from this

ongoing research will help inform future policy and support, ensuring our approach to improving attendance keeps learner well-being at its core.

Financial implications: None - within existing communications budget

Recommendation 7

We urge the Welsh Government to investigate what lies behind the near doubling of fixed short-term exclusions of secondary pupils since before the pandemic and consider if this is appropriate and justified.

Response: Accept

The national exclusions data release published on 11 November, reported on permanent and fixed-term exclusions from maintained schools and EOTAS provision in Wales from September 2023 to August 2024.

The significant increase in both short-term and permanent exclusions in recent years is concerning and unacceptable. We are determined to reverse this trend to ensure that every child has access to an inclusive and supportive education.

We have seen exclusions rising year on year post pandemic, and we know how devastating exclusion can be for learners. It is not just about their loss of education. We know from work led by the Children, Young People and Education Committee on children on the margins that exclusion places children at greater risk of exploitation and criminality.

The rise in short-term exclusions in Wales is driven by a combination of persistent, disruptive behaviour, post-COVID mental health and behavioural challenges, neurodiversity-related distress, inconsistencies in early intervention, local policy variability and improved data recording practices.

Exclusions remain one of the tools available to schools to manage serious behavioural incidents. In light of the increasing reports of poor behaviour and violence in some settings, a rise in exclusions may reflect the challenging circumstances schools are currently facing.

Welsh Government guidance is very clear that exclusions should only be used when there are no other options and are used alongside wider support measures to address underlying issues and promote positive behaviour, including restorative and relational approaches.

Our 2025 Behaviour Summit set a clear direction for a comprehensive programme of action to tackle behaviour. Immediately after the Summit, I launched a dedicated exclusions and detentions forum, comprising a broad range of practitioners, headteachers, local authorities, unions and third sector experts.

The Forum has been integral to conducting a full review of current guidance and advising on best practice and preventative approaches. Members have also considered national data, to actively identify ways to reduce overall exclusion rates.

This group met monthly from September 2025 to February 2026. The last meeting of the Forum focused on finalising the revised guidance. The updated guidance will issue in readiness for the 2026-27 school year.

Earlier this term, I launched a programme of specific, targeted interventions with schools, Local Authorities, and key partners, across Wales, aimed at reducing exclusions and improving learner engagement.

This is part of our long-term commitment to inclusive, supportive learning environments. While it will take time to embed and review these measures and the full impact, particularly on exclusions, will only become clear in the longer term, due to data reporting a year in arrears, I am confident we will start to see early improvements to ensure meaningful progress for learners and schools.

Financial implications: None - within existing programme budgets

Recommendation 8

Alongside all of this, we urge investment in multi-agency support structures that bring together education, health, and social services to provide coordinated support for mental health, safeguarding, and behavioural challenges.

Response: Accept

Effective coordinated multi-agency working is essential to supporting learners' mental health, safeguarding needs and behavioural challenges, and to enabling children and young people to thrive in education. This is underpinned by the national NEST / NYTH framework and its six core principles for improving mental health and wellbeing services: Trusted adults; Wellbeing across education; Co-produced innovations; Easy access to expertise; Safe and supportive communities; and "No wrong door".

We are strengthening multi-agency support and tackling the wider societal factors that influence behaviour in schools. This work is maximising the impact of existing programmes to reduce pressure on schools, while also ensuring that new opportunities for joined up working are identified early, fully supported and implemented effectively.

We are enhancing our collaboration with the four Police and Crime Commissioners and their Forces to strengthen partnerships between police, local authorities, and schools. We will take this joint approach forward through the ethos of the Community Focused Schools Programme, ensuring that support is rooted in the needs of each community. I have recently announced a partnership with the four Police Forces in Wales that will see them working with schools to tackle these issues. This is supported by £1.5 million of funding across 2025-26 and 2026-27.

In addition, we recently announced immediate plans to develop new all-Wales resources to strengthen school safety. Cardiff Council will lead work with local authorities and partners to develop a consistent approach for schools to manage incidents where children take weapons onto school premises. This national approach will be supported by a £300,000 funding investment, with a view to making the resources fully available across Wales as soon as possible.

We are proud of our Community Focused Schools approach, our final piece of guidance on developing multi-agency engagement was published in March 2025. We are supporting our Community Focused Schools approach with over £31m in funding this financial year.

Welsh Government funds Regional Safeguarding Boards to develop and deliver multi-agency safeguarding training in their regions, ensuring that professionals across education, health and social services have a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities and best practice in protecting children and young people.

As I noted in my recent letter in relation to your inquiry on Educational Reform, a strong multi-agency approach is essential to supporting the healthcare needs of children and young people. Education settings, local authorities and health boards have responsibilities to support children and young people's health and well-being while they are in attendance. Improving multi-agency collaboration with increased integration between health and education is a priority for this government.

As an outcome of the trilateral meetings, we have established a shared commitment to strengthening multi-agency integration across health, social care and education, and I am repeating here the joint actions we are progressing given their relevance to your work on these matters. These include:

- Embedding ALN and health needs into Regional Partnership Board planning, supported by joint communication across sectors and building on the spotlight event that took place in December 2025.
- Strengthening area-based planning through improved population-level data sharing between schools, local authorities, and health boards.
- Appointing an NHS-based professional advisor to lead on multi-agency collaboration, system integration, shared expectations and performance indicators.
- Developing a clear health policy statement to inform co-produced, multi-agency ALNET guidance and ensure consistent practice across sectors.
- Strengthening how health and education services work together so that oversight, training and responsibilities for supporting children and young people with complex healthcare needs are clearly defined, through the development of joint guidance for schools and health boards.
- Exploring further policy alignment around needs-led, inclusive approaches, especially relating to neurodivergence.

Financial implications: None - within existing programme budgets

Recommendation 9

We ask that the Welsh Government provides clear confirmation that the professional learning offer from Dysgu will include trauma informed practice, behaviour management and leadership.

Response: Accept

Dysgu is supporting delivery and evaluation of the Calm Classrooms, Thriving Minds professional learning pilot during 2025-26, and will be developing and rolling out the programme in 2026-27, informed by the findings of the evaluation. The programme promotes inclusion and wellbeing, and enables effective behaviour management, by deepening practitioners' knowledge of child development, neurodiversity, and mental health.

This includes awareness of trauma-informed practice and ACEs, although the programme does not attempt to duplicate the existing support for these matters; this includes support available through Ace Hub Wales, Trauma Informed Schools & Communities Wales, and Children in Wales.

This work aligns with the principles and requirements of the statutory Whole-School Approach for Emotional and Mental Wellbeing Framework which requires all schools, settings, local authorities and others to develop and embed policies and practices which support learner and school staff wellbeing and mental health.

We are also making positive progress to develop more bespoke professional learning opportunities focused on behaviour management. At the start of the school year, we published a new behaviour toolkit, for school practitioners, bringing together the latest research and practical resources to help schools develop and sustain positive behaviour. The toolkit will be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains relevant and up to date.

Building on this work, innovative school-led projects on behaviour, supported by universities across Wales are generating valuable insights that will directly shape proposals for more structured professional learning for teachers and leaders. This next phase will be taken forward with Dysgu to ensure staff can access high-quality, evidence-based training that meets the needs identified by practitioners themselves.

We will consider during 2026-27 what further, dedicated support could be useful for Dysgu to provide in relation to trauma-informed practice and behaviour management, which could include signposting the existing support.

As outlined in response to Request 1, Dysgu's current provision includes the NPQH, and it is developing its wider offer for aspiring, new and experienced middle and senior leaders.

Financial implications: None within existing Dysgu budget for Calm Classrooms, Thriving Minds rollout.

Request 5

We would be grateful for your observations on how much of a priority raising standards of education is within the Welsh Government at Cabinet-level, rather than just within your department and your own focus. Further, how this is reflected by decisions made by the First Minister, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language and the Welsh Government Cabinet about allocation of funding (with reference to the allocation of education-related Barnett consequentials, as discussed in our report on the Draft Budget 2026-27

Response:

Education and in particular raising attainment remains a priority for the Government, and we are starting to see improvements at younger ages through our personalised assessment national report. Our qualification results in the summer were also encouraging.

I have taken papers to Cabinet on additional learning needs, the role of the school and the education workforce, which have generated positive support for the role of the Department and considered implications and actions across other portfolios.

That is why following discussions across the Government, the Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government wrote to local authorities on 20 January stressing that investment in education remains a key priority for the Government and that the Welsh Government supports local authorities in ensuring that schools across Wales are fully funded to address the pressures they are facing with the settlement, offering a valuable opportunity for local authorities to allocate significant resources to their schools to focus on the key pressures that they have highlighted of additional learning needs, school transport, workforce and workload.

As well as the money allocated in the final budget for next year that I mentioned at Committee on 4th February, we have seen additional funding for the portfolio in the 2nd Supplementary Budget for this year

Agenda Item 4

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

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