

Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Venue:
Committee Room 1 – Senedd

Meeting date:
14 July 2011

Meeting time:
09:00

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



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Agenda

1. Apologies and substitutions

2. Scrutiny of the Minister for Education and Skills (09:00 – 10:00)

(Pages 1 – 9)

Leighton Andrews, Minister for Education and Skills

Jeff Cuthbert, Deputy Minister for Skills

Emyr Roberts, Director General, Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

Chris Tweedale, Director, Children, Young People and Schools Effectiveness Group

3. Scrutiny of the Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services (10:00 – 11:00) (Pages 10 – 16)

Gwenda Thomas, Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services

Rob Pickford, Director of Social Services Wales

Martin Swain, Lead for Children and Families Partnership Working

4. Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to resolve to exclude the public from the meeting for Item 5

5. Possible future inquiries

Agenda Item 2

Children and Young People Committee

CYP(4)-01-11 - Paper 1

Evidence from Minister for Education and Skills

1. Introduction

1.1 Improving the education system in Wales is at the core of this Government's priorities for children and young people. This Government has been clear that we want to drive forward an ambitious, imaginative and radical programme for educational renewal. Three of our key promises centre on improving outcomes for children and families – more frontline spending in schools; doubling the number of children benefiting from Flying Start and tackling youth unemployment. Our ambition is to deliver a great start in life for all Welsh children and our dynamic action plan to achieve this was set out in our manifesto and now defines what we do in Government.

1.2 Education is fundamental to both personal fulfilment and to our national prosperity. However, it does more than shape the life chances of individuals or achieve economic success. Education is also fundamental to building a just, inclusive and fair society.

1.3 It is clear from a number of sources; while there have been significant improvements since devolution, that educational standards in Wales are not as good as they could, or should be and that the system is failing to consistently deliver good outcomes for our young people. In addition to the evidence from PISA, end of key stage and external examination results supports the view that the abolition of performance data publication (league tables) in Wales, has contributed to the growing attainment gap between Wales and England.

1.4 In my view we have three main issues to tackle in Wales – literacy, numeracy and reducing the impact that deprivation has on educational attainment. This means a strong focus on learning, accountability, collaboration and maximising the potential of the teaching workforce.

1.5 As such, I welcome the opportunity to set out for the Committee my vision and priorities for the next 18 months in relation to the responsibilities I have for children and young people.

2. Accountability

2.1 In February I set out a comprehensive programme of school improvement in a 20-point action plan, to raise the bar on the standard of education that is delivered in Wales.

2.2 I also commissioned a report on the Structure of Education Service in Wales, undertaken by an independent Task and Finish Group, Chaired by Viv Thomas. This review took a forensic look at the performance of providers at all levels: schools, colleges, local authorities, regional and national organisations. The group found examples of exceptional achievement but also a disappointing degree of inconsistency in quality.

2.3 One of the issues clearly identified in Wales is the capacity problems deriving from very small authorities and it is blatantly clear that we need to be working on a far more collaborative basis. There also needs to be transparency in the system, so that at all levels we account for the performance of our learners and are challenged, where things are not going well. Where progress is not made we will use interventions and powers, in an appropriate and consistent manner. Estyn reports variability in the level and effectiveness of challenge that local authorities provide to their schools, with local authorities generally effective at responding to failure. But many are less effective at preventing poor inspection outcomes and at challenging their schools to strive for excellence.

3. Raising School Standards

3.1 To focus on standards I have established a Schools Standards Unit to drive through improvement in the whole system. The Unit will work in partnership at all levels of the education sector to identify strengths and weaknesses, share good practice and support improvement.

3.2 The Unit is collecting and analysing crucial information and system knowledge to build a shared understanding of historical performance, trends, patterns, benchmarks and of what excellence looks like.

3.3 The unit will work with Consortia and use stock-takes to review performance and identify priority actions. There will be regular interaction with consortia/local authorities to agree progress and actions to support improvement. Pilot stock-takes are currently taking place, with more formal stock-takes due to take in the autumn.

3.4 The Standards Unit is also developing a banding system designed to give us a clearer focus on educational performance and progress.

3.5 Banding is about grouping our schools according to a range of factors to identify priorities for differentiated support, as well as those from whom the sector as whole can learn. Attendance will be included alongside other measures of school performance in the banding exercise to ensure that there is a focus in this area. There will be a zero tolerance of truancy. The most important aspect of this process will be the support, challenge and sharing of best practice that follows and will help ensure that we direct our resources most effectively to where they are needed most.

3.6 We will support the banding process with the development of a framework and statutory guidance on school improvement, which will be key to delivering long term, sustainable improvements. Schools will be expected to progress targets for all pupils so that all students make one year of educational progress in a calendar year. We will expect all schools to set targets for continuous improvement by the end of the year.

4. Education Structures are effective and efficient

- We will work with ADEW on strengthening Local Authority/Consortia school interventions and ensure that the Schools Causing Concern Guidance is amended by the end of the year.
- Estyn's New Common Inspection Framework is beginning to bite. This evidence will provide information that will be used alongside the data analysis of the SSU.
- We will ensure that all schools embrace the principles of collaboration through mechanisms such as Professional Learning Communities, through the terms and conditions of the School Effectiveness Grant. We will require Local Authorities to outline how they are achieving this by the end of 2012.
- We also expect LAs to participate in consortia arrangements or suffer financial penalties.
- We will identify financial savings through regional collaboration and divert to the front line by the end of 2012.

5. Schools and Governing Bodies

- All schools will produce an annual public profile containing public performance information to a common format by the end of September 2012. We will also expect school development plans to set out how they reach approved standards based on inspirational targets we will set for education in Wales. These must be endorsed by the governing body. The first plans will be published in relation to planning for the 2012–2013 academic year.
- Governors play a vital role in the school system and are a key resource to a school. In recognition of this all new governors will undergo induction training and all chairs of governors will be trained in relation to chairing and using data from September 2011. Local authorities will provide a clerking service and secure training for clerks.
- Schools will also be asked to demonstrate that Governing Bodies have considered family of schools data and other relevant performance data and has set in place plans for improvement in the 11–12 academic years. This will also be necessary to ensure that a school will have a successful Estyn inspection and I have already written to Governing Bodies in relation to the need to publish an annual report.
- We have already put in place legislation regarding Governing Bodies and we expect to see more federation schools under single governing bodies. Progress is already being made with the five federation pilots that have been established.
- We will be seeking to legislate in relation to school closure decisions and at what level those decisions are taken, with a view to enabling more decisions to be taken locally and more quickly than current arrangements.
- We will also ensure that we increase spending on education by 1% above the block grant allocation. We also welcome the commitment by the WLGA to raise the amount of funds delegated to schools to 85%.

6. Literacy and Numeracy

6.1 Literacy and numeracy are fundamental skills. These skills are not at the level that they need to be and so a number of actions are in place to ensure that there is improvement in learners' performance in these areas:

- The Foundation Phase has been widely praised across the across the sector and is supported by parents. However we need to ensure that it does not in anyway lead to a relaxation in literacy standards. As such a baseline assessment of each child's development needs will be carried out when they enter Foundation Phase and used to inform their future learning needs.
- We will be establishing a new National Literacy and Numeracy Framework. This will be for learners 5–14. National literacy and numeracy tests will complement these frameworks and will exemplify how pupils are performing against national criteria at the end of each academic year. It will enable schools and both parents/carers to see how they can best support our children to the best of their ability.
- This will achieve a greater consistency in teacher assessments. This will ensure that there is continuous assessment that addresses variability in teaching practice. These will be in place in the autumn of 2012 for Literacy and Numeracy.
- We have produced and recently published a National Literacy Plan focusing on 7–11 year olds, with programmes for catch-up reading and for stretching the highest ability pupils. In addition a National Reading Test will be in place for academic year 2011–2012 in both English and Welsh.
- We will also develop a National Numeracy Plan that introduces a National Numeracy Test for academic year 2012–2013.
- Following on from the PISA 2009 results and the identification of a need for more practical application of skills, we intend to integrate internationally recognised assessments of transferrable skills for learning into school assessments at age 15. As such, all schools have been urged to focus on skills-based teaching of literacy, numeracy and problem-solving.

7. Teaching Workforce

7.1 It is important that the Welsh Government, Local Authorities and Consortia support teachers and raise the esteem in which they are held.

7.2 We need to produce better qualified teachers who can deliver more effective teaching and learning in the classroom, to improve outcomes for learners. It is vital to share best practice and the identification of system leaders and the active participation in Professional Learning Communities will be important in both progressing and sustaining educational improvement.

7.3 Head teachers are fundamental in driving improvements and we will provide them with the support and tools to raise standards in their schools. We are consulting on changes to the performance management arrangements for Head teachers. For all teachers, performance management will link Professional Standards and Continuing Professional Development to ensure these elements work more effectively to drive improved teaching and learning.

7.4 All practitioners regardless of their specialist area, will need to demonstrate excellent literacy and numeracy skills. One INSET day per year will focus on literacy and numeracy for all teachers.

7.5 A number of measures are also currently being developed to strengthen Induction and Early Professional development for all newly qualified teachers in Wales. These will include:

- amending the Practising Teacher Standards so that literacy and numeracy are embedded within the standards (from September 2011);
- directing the Induction and EPD funding at the core priorities of literacy; numeracy; reducing the gap between poverty and attainment; behaviour management; ALN; and reflective practice (from September 2011)
- revision of the Induction regulations and Newly Qualified Teacher assessment arrangements to ensure that the Induction and EPD programme is focused on literacy and numeracy (from September 2012);

In addition we are:

- reviewing the role and functions of the GTCW to ensure that the needs of all educational practitioners in Wales are best served.
- working on building a bank of resources on high quality teaching strategies to support all educational practitioners. This will be developed during the forthcoming academic year and be available on the Welsh Government website for teachers in Wales to use to inform their practice;
- placing a strong focus on high reliability teaching practices with a new focus on the content of teaching within the School Effectiveness Framework. Through quality resources and exemplification, practitioners will be encouraged to improve their pedagogical skills, especially in literacy and numeracy;
- developing a practice and research based Masters Programme for teachers to undertake early in their career to improve the quality of teaching practice to start in September 2012.

7.6 It is also important that we aim to change the culture of Continuing Professional Development by developing a system that ensures that teachers work together, as part of their day-to-day practice and work to support the development of excellent teaching through Professional Learning Communities.

8. Infrastructure

8.1 The Government is committed, with local authorities and others, to improve the education and training estate in Wales. The 21st Century Schools transitional and other capital funding has committed over £477m from 2009–10 to 2014–15, supporting 66 projects from primary schools to universities.

8.2 The transitional funding programme was implemented as a precursor to the 21st century schools programme, part of a unified capital fund for all education capital funding.

8.3 The reduction in capital provision as a result of the reduced budget to the Welsh Government has meant that the timing of Welsh Government contribution to projects has been re-profiled and officials are in ongoing discussions with local authorities to programme in commencement and funding of projects.

8.4 In Digital Wales, we committed to continuing to support learning through ICT – ensuring that our teachers and young people have the skills to operate effectively and safely in the modern digital world.

9. Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform Agenda

9.1 We are aiming to reform the existing system of statements for children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN). My Department has commissioned pilot projects, established in partnership with eight local authorities and other key stakeholders, to consider a range of alternatives to the current statutory framework. These pilots are scheduled to end this year and an evaluation report and cost benefits analysis will follow at the start of 2012.

9.2 Legislation will be needed to take forward any changes and it is intended that we will also transfer, from Welsh Ministers to local authorities, responsibility for delivery of existing duties contained within the Learning and Skills Act 2000 for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities aged over 16 who are placed in a specialist FE setting.

9.3 In addition, consideration is being given to transferring funding to local authorities for post 16 SEN provision in special schools and out of county placements, and additional support for post-16 SEN in mainstream schools, from specific grant to Revenue Support Grant (RSG).

9.4 The net result of these changes will be a coherent pattern of services led by consortia of local authorities to provide multi-agency services based on the needs of the learner as close as possible to their home.

10. Legacy Report

10.1 The Committee in its Legacy Report recommends that the issue of inadequate and poorly maintained school toilet facilities is subject to on-going scrutiny in the Fourth Assembly.

10.2 The Welsh Government recognises the concerns articulated in the "Lifting the Lid" report and is committed to taking action to address these, within the current accountability framework whereby responsibility for the provision of adequate and sufficient toilet facilities for pupils rests, in the main, with Local Authorities.

10.3 To this end, Welsh Government officials are working with local authority colleagues and representatives of the Children's Commissioner for Wales to produce best practice guidance for responsible authorities to assist them in discharging their responsibilities to keep their facilities clean and well-maintained.

10.4 That guidance has been consulted upon and is being finalised with a view to being published by the autumn. In support of this, the Welsh Government has also undertaken the "Mind the Germs" and "Teach Germs a Lesson" campaigns to raise the profile of hygiene in schools, and other education and childcare settings, to ensure that children and those responsible for them are informed and supported to use the facilities hygienically and effectively.

10.5 In the past the Welsh Government has provided formula funding for local authorities for general repair and maintenance alongside their own general capital funding, which they could use to address the need to refurbish and improve school toilet facilities and we expect that local authorities will continue to commit funding to this in the future within the wider context of their capital investment plan. The Welsh Government ensures that any new build it funds complies with good practice and relevant regulations in its building specifications, including in relation to school toilets.

11. Conclusion

11.1 I have set out in this Paper the key delivery actions that are in place or being developed which will improve the standard of education in Wales. Given the breadth of the education portfolio and the important role it plays to wider WG commitments, I have not been able to capture all the work underway in all areas. Should the Committee wish, I will provide additional information.

11.2 There is no time for complacency at any level of the education system by either elected members, administrators or the teaching workforce. Learners are of paramount importance and deserve the best. However what has struck me is the willingness and motivation from all those involved in the provision of education in Wales to drive change forward and see improvement.

11.3 With collaboration across the sector and a determined and continued focus on standards of education in Wales, I am convinced that we will ensure better outcomes for learners in Wales and would welcome the Committee's input into taking this forward.

Children and Young People Committee

CYP(4)-01-11 - Paper 2

Evidence from Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services

Priorities for Children and Young People

Introduction

As the newly appointed Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services I am delighted that I will take the lead on delivering our manifesto commitments for children and families. We have reaffirmed our commitment to support children and families and to tackle child poverty. Our overall objectives are to help families into work, improve skills and narrow the gaps in outcomes for children living in poverty.

I am particularly pleased that my portfolio now covers the breadth of issues in relation to children. It provides an opportunity to develop a comprehensive and seamless system of support for vulnerable children and those disadvantaged through poverty.

As you are all very much aware improving the lives of children and young people, especially those living in poverty and those that are most vulnerable, is a responsibility we all share. Improving the outcomes for children, young people and families is the priority and can only be achieved through policies that are co-ordinated, proactive and focussed on improving children's wellbeing. The Children and Young People's Committee will have a crucial role to play in that process, and I am pleased to be able to make an early appearance before the Committee to discuss my priorities.

Underpinning all of our work to support children and young people will be our commitment to the UNCRC and the continuing use of the seven core aims as the basis for our development of policies and programmes to support children and young people.

Purpose

This paper provides the Committee with an overview of my key priorities for children, young people and families in Wales. Over the coming months I will be setting out more detail how we will take forward a coherent programme to deliver against the priorities, and how we intend to manage this across Government.

Child Poverty

Earlier this year we published our Child Poverty Strategy. This Strategy gives a clear account of what the Welsh Government can achieve in helping to reduce child poverty – and improve the outcomes of low income families.

It sets out three strategic objectives for tackling child poverty, which are: to reduce worklessness; to increase the skills of young people and parents and to tackle the inequalities that exist in the education, health and economic outcomes of families living in poverty.

We are working with departments across the Welsh Government to set out the action required to deliver these three objectives with the intention of producing an anti-poverty action plan outlining the distinctive approach we are taking in Wales.

Supporting Children and Families

We are committed to supporting children and families and protecting the rights of children. We also want to support positive parenting and to provide parents with the support they need. We will work to make physical punishment of children and young people unacceptable through the promotion of positives alternatives and our support through parenting programmes.

To ensure our investment in children makes a real difference we will continue to improve the transparency of budgeting for children and young people at Welsh Government level.

We also want to ensure that children and young people have a voice and that they participate in things that affect them. I want to see children contributing to the important debate around services that affect them and we will continue to improve opportunities for all children and young people in Wales to participate in decision making on issues which affect them. I also want children to be seen as an important part of our society and will therefore continue to promote positive images of young people wherever possible to counteract negative portrayals in the media and elsewhere.

Families First

Families First was launched in July 2010 with the announcement of two consortia (one in north Wales, one in south Wales). It is closely aligned to support the Child Poverty Strategy, particularly the objective to reduce inequalities that exist in outcomes (health, education, economic) for children and families living in poverty. Through Families First we are working with local authorities to develop new multi-agency approaches to supporting families living in poverty, with a clear emphasis on prevention and early intervention. In this way we aim to reduce the number of families developing more complex needs, requiring more costly and intensive interventions later.

We are committed to maintaining the Families First programme throughout the life of the current Assembly. Recognising that families with disabled children often need additional support, there is an additional commitment to maintain a focus on support for these families.

My current priorities are:

1. to continue to embed Families First in the initial two consortia, and draw out emerging lessons from implementation;
2. to ensure that Families First is successfully introduced into the three new consortia (announced March 2011);
3. to issue Families First Guidance to all local authorities in Wales in summer 2011, in time for the full roll out of Families First across Wales from April 2012; and
4. to embed the learning from Families First into the development of systems change across the range of services that support children and families.

Flying Start

Flying Start is the Welsh Government's flagship early years programme and provides a path towards improving the life chances of children in our most disadvantaged communities. It provides a "universal" set of entitlements which all children and their families within designated deprived areas can access without associated means testing or stigma. International evidence is that intensive intervention in the early years can make a real difference to outcomes, if the detail of delivery is right.

We have given a clear commitment that we want to see more children and families accessing the support available through Flying Start. We will:

- Double the number of children benefitting from improved health visiting, free nursery places and better support to families through our "Flying Start" programme; and
- Extend the reach of the programme and in the next Assembly term double the number of those gaining from Flying Start to 36,000 so that almost a quarter of all children in Wales aged 0–3 will be able to benefit. *(Currently, Flying Start benefits approximately 18,000 young people at a cost of about £38 million annually.)*

My officials are currently exploring the options to deliver on these commitments.

Childcare

Childcare is fundamental to helping parents balance work and family life and is a key element of the Child Poverty Strategy. The Policy Statement for Childcare: Nurturing Children, Supporting Families published in February this year sets out our priorities of high quality, accessible and affordable childcare.

Children are our principal consumers and beneficiaries. Our vision is for families to have access to the high quality childcare they need at a price they can afford, but we recognise that there are significant challenges ahead. The Childcare Policy Statement set's out the Welsh Government's immediate priorities for childcare in Wales and for longer term ambitions to secure continued improvements.

Play

We will continue to improve opportunities for all children and young people to play in safety and, in particular, we will support improved access to play for children with disabilities.

As a Government we remain firmly committed to the promotion of play for children and young people. We have been the first Government in the UK to develop legislation on play.

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure, section 11, Play Opportunities, allows Welsh Ministers to place a duty on Local Authorities to assess for and with regard to that assessment, secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas as far as reasonably practicable.

This duty has not yet been commenced. However, as set out in the response to recommendation 1 of the Children and Young People Committee Inquiry into the Provision of Safe Places to Play and Hang Out, much preparatory work has been undertaken in regard to the play sufficiency duty and I would hope to be able to announce in due course our plans for implementation of the duty on play.

Implementation of the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011

The 'Rights of Children and Young Person's (Wales) Measure', places a duty on Welsh Ministers to pay due regard to the UNCRC (which includes all 47 rights and optional protocols) when exercising their functions. The Measure will come into force in two stages – it applies to policy and legislation from May 2012 and all functions from May 2014

The measure received unanimous cross party and received 'Royal Approval' on 17th March, and came into force on 17 May 2011.

Implementation of the measure is now the new focus of activity and my officials are currently working through each aspect of the stated provisions of the legislation.

Work is already underway on implementing the manifesto commitments of:

- Ensure that the 'Rights Measure' is given full effect in government policies and programmes throughout policies and programmes throughout the course of the next Assembly.
- Take a lead role in preparing for the next periodic review of the UK's compliance with the UNCRC.
- Work with the Children's Commissioner for Wales, children's organisations and the third sector to promote wider understanding and appreciation of rights-based policy making and service delivery.

Children's Social Services

I met with the Health and Social Services Committee yesterday and outlined my priorities for social services in Wales including those that concern children. I thought however that this Committee would like to see the whole of my priorities.

“Sustainable Social Services for Wales: A Framework for Action” was published in February this year. It outlined our values, vision and key priorities for supporting people in Wales. In respect of children, Welsh Government has made it clear that it believes that children’s best interests are served when they are cared for in their family wherever possible.

My priority for children’s social services is to deliver the vision set out in *A Framework for Action*, and in our manifesto. We will use a variety of means to achieve this but our key delivery mechanism will be through the creation of a coherent legal framework for social services. We have already announced that we will bring forward proposals for a Social Services Act for Wales and I expect the Act to include measures for example that will:

- Strengthen safeguarding and child protection arrangements in Wales, including through a review of current law, the setting up of a new National Board and implementation of the outcome of the review of local safeguarding children’s boards
- Provide for consistency of standards and greater stability for those children and young people who need to be looked after including through the introduction of a national looked after children’s service to ensure that an adequate placement choice is made available and that services operate to common standards and are accountable.
- Empower and strengthen children and young people’s voice and control
- Facilitate improved outcomes through integration, strengthening & simplification of the assessment and care planning arrangements, putting the emphasis on professionals not processes.

I intend to consult on the establishment of a single, national adoption agency for Wales.

I also intend to prioritise the further roll-out of Integrated Family Support Services, our flagship policy which requires the delivery of integrated support to children and complex families through protective, preventative and remedial services.

In 2010, I jointly commissioned with Ministry of Justice and Department of Education an independent review of the Family Justice System in England and Wales. The FJR Panel are considering the way local authorities and other non-devolved agencies are engaged with the court process for both public and family law proceedings. I expect to receive their final report in the autumn and will consider the implementation of the outcome of the Family justice Review in the context of needs of children and families in Wales. Our manifesto has already made it clear, however, that we will want to preserve the

principle of separate representation for children in relevant family proceedings in Wales.

In our manifesto we made reference to two Bills. I have referred to the potential content of the Social Services Bill in the above, and I cover the Children's Bill below.

Children's Bill

The Rights of the Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 places duties on Welsh Ministers to promote knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC and to have due regard to the UNCRC in the exercise of their functions.

If in applying the due regard duty we find there is a need for legislative changes to give better effect to the obligations of the UNCRC then the Children's Bill would be a means to do that.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales is an independent champion of children's rights and makes representations to the Welsh Government and to others as necessary on the views of children and young people and the key issues affecting them. In taking forward a Children's Bill, we will consider how to further strengthen his independence.

Gwenda Thomas AM
Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services