

National Assembly for Wales
Children and Young People Committee

Follow up inquiry into child poverty:
eradication through education?

February 2011



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Children and Young People Committee

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Children and Young People Committee

The Children and Young People Committee was appointed by the National Assembly for Wales to consider and report on issues affecting children and young people in Wales.

In particular, the Committee may examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Welsh Government and associated public bodies and consider reports of the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Often adults do not take the views of children and young people seriously. As politicians, we have a responsibility to encourage children and young people to voice their opinions and to listen to them. The Children and Young People Committee was established to help do that.

Powers

The Committee was established on 16 October 2007 when a motion to establish it was agreed in Plenary. It will exist for the whole of the Third Assembly. Its powers are set out in the National Assembly for Wales's Standing Orders (SOs), particularly SO 21. These are available at www.assemblywales.org.

Current Committee membership



Helen Mary Jones
(Chair)
Llanelli
Plaid Cymru



Eleanor Burnham
North Wales
Welsh Liberal Democrat



Sandy Mewies
Delyn
Labour



Jonathan Morgan
Cardiff North
Welsh Conservative Party



Joyce Watson
Mid and West Wales
Labour

The following Member was also a member of the Committee during this inquiry:



Lynne Neagle
Torfaen
Labour

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Chair's foreword

A third of children in Wales live in poverty. This is the stark statistic that we still face as a nation in 2011. A third of this nation's children are living in families that do not have enough money, and are denied the opportunities and services conferred to their peers. A third of our children are trapped in the cycle of poverty – and need our help to break free.

Children and young people who have experienced poverty first hand told the Committee about their inability to sleep because of the noise outside which meant that they were too tired to study in school. They also told us about their hunger when food was scarce at home, or their parents were too tired to cook after working long hours in a badly paid job. They told us how they were bullied because of their hand-me-down uniforms that were ill-fitting and worn out. And they asked us to do something about it.

This report examines some of the issues faced by children living in poverty, and how education can play its part in eradicating those issues. Schools cannot do it alone, but there is a strong role for them to play in alleviating some of the problems. Sometimes, a greater awareness of the barriers poverty puts up for children and young people will help. Sometimes, the issues are systemic and need addressing at local or Welsh government level. The issue of delivery of free school meals is one such example. Children and young people have told us that they would rather go hungry than face the stigma of handing over a coloured token for their free meal while their peers pay in cash. Cashless systems have been investigated, examined and trialled at length and the Committee now urges local government and the Welsh Government to work together and introduce a non-stigmatising system for the payment of school meals as a priority.

In 2000, the UK and Welsh Governments pledged to halve child poverty (based on 1999 levels) by 2010 and to eradicate it by 2020. The first target has been missed, and although the Committee recognises the complexity of child poverty and its multiple causes, it calls on the Welsh and UK Governments to refocus their efforts in 2011 and beyond.

As part of the updated Child Poverty Strategy, the Welsh Government has launched its Families First initiative. The Deputy Minister for Children is rightly proud of his Families First initiative that he hopes will create a bespoke service for families who need support, whatever their support needs may be. By considering the needs of each child in the context of his or her family and community, Families First promises to be a very positive step towards eradicating child poverty in Wales. But the challenge is to identify all those families who are in need of help and then deliver appropriate and timely support. We are a long way off getting this right, but this is a journey we must travel in the shortest time possible.

The Committee thanks all the witnesses who gave their time and expertise to this inquiry. The Committee especially gives thanks to the young ambassadors from Milbank Primary School, Ely; Moorland Primary School, Splott; Willows High School and North Ely Youth Centre who shared their experiences so eloquently and honestly. We hope that your confidence and courage helps you reach your true potential in life.

**Helen Mary Jones AM,
Chair, Children and Young People Committee**

The Committee's Recommendations

The Committee's recommendations to the Welsh Government are listed below, in the order that they appear in this Report. Please refer to the relevant pages of the report to see the supporting evidence and conclusions:

Recommendation 1. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government issues guidance to enable existing services that have been developed locally and paid for by Cymorth to be properly assessed by local government and, where appropriate, adapted to deliver the new Child Poverty Strategy rather than being lost altogether. (Page 16)

Recommendation 2. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works closely with all delivery partners, and utilises external expertise if necessary, to identify a set of appropriate measures that will enable a thorough evidence-based evaluation of Families First and the child poverty strategy to be carried out at key points. (Page 19)

Recommendation 3. The Committee recommends that on-going evidence based policy evaluation is carried out at key points in the development of Families First and the Child Poverty Strategy. (Page 19)

Recommendation 4. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should introduce stronger measures for holding local authorities to account, requiring them to demonstrate by 2012, in line with the roll out of Families First, how funding received from the Welsh Government has impacted on child poverty locally. (Page 19)

Recommendation 5. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government recognises that leadership is a necessary core skill for all school leaders, staff and governors. The Committee further recommends that the Welsh Government issues guidance to local authorities that advises them that leadership development should be included in continuing professional development programmes for head teachers and senior school staff. The Welsh Government should

ensure that local authorities are effective in challenging schools and intervening when necessary where cultures that promote high standards of achievement, especially for disadvantaged learners, are not fostered. (Page 22)

Recommendation 6. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government monitors the capacity of Child Poverty Solutions to deliver its agreed functions following the closure of the Partnership Support Unit. While any decision on allocation of resources is a matter for the Welsh Government, the Committee further recommends that any functions of the PSU that cease following its closure are not lost because they have ‘fallen through the cracks’ but because the Minister has made an informed and strategic decision to end support for such functions. (Page 23)

Recommendation 7. The Committee recommends that a review of the evidence gathered through the work already carried out by the Welsh Government, and the pilot projects referenced by the WLGA, is carried out immediately and that guidance on implementing a stigma free school meal system is distributed to all schools by September 2011. Local authorities should support schools to implement such systems and should report to the Welsh Government on the progress of each schools transition to the new system in September 2012 and annually thereafter until all pupils are able to claim free school meals without fear of stigma and are aware of their entitlements to claim them. (Page 27)

Recommendation 8. The Committee recommends that the teacher training being developed by the Welsh Government in relation to child poverty specifically references the issues relating to the transition stage, including the documented loss of aspirations for some children living in poverty and the need to monitor the educational attainment of all individual pupils and provide interventions where necessary to halt any identified dips in performance. (Page 30)

Recommendation 9. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should provide comprehensive guidance to make it clear what community focused schools should offer and clarify how community focused schools can help to tackle the link between disadvantage and achievement. (Page 34)

Recommendation 10. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with local authorities to prioritise the development of community focused schools. Local authorities should ensure that community focused school strategies are firmly incorporated into local child poverty strategies and included in Children and Young People's Plans.

(Page 34)

Background

Children and Young People Committee Report

1. During 2008 the Children and Young People Committee (the Committee) decided to conduct an inquiry into the delivery of the Welsh Government's *Child Poverty Implementation Plan* and its targets for tackling child poverty.
2. The Terms of Reference agreed were:
 - to scrutinise the delivery of the Welsh Assembly Government's policies to tackle child poverty, specifically, the child poverty strategy, *A Fair Future for Our Children* (February 2005) and *Child Poverty Implementation Plan* (November 2006);
 - to identify those areas where there are particular problems in implementation and the delivery of positive outcomes for children and young people;
 - to make evidence-based recommendations to the Welsh Assembly Government and others as necessary.
3. In an early scoping meeting involving key stakeholders, Members sought views on where the Committee might focus its inquiry to have the greatest impact. Members subsequently determined that the initial inquiry into child poverty would focus on the Welsh Government's education portfolio.
4. The Committee took oral evidence during six meetings and the final report [Child Poverty in Wales: Eradication through Education?](#) was published in November 2008. The report contained 27 recommendations for the Welsh Government.

Welsh Government Response

5. The [Welsh Government Written Response](#) was issued jointly by the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills and the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government in January 2009.
6. Of the 27 recommendations, 13 were wholly accepted and 14 were accepted in principle.
7. The 13 that were wholly accepted included recommendations to:

- produce an updated and refreshed child poverty strategy;
 - better disseminate good practice amongst schools in tackling the effects of poverty;
 - commission research into the decline of educational progress in early years of secondary school with particular reference to children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds;
 - initiate a study into the costs of education; and
 - ensure that there is greater public clarity and awareness of guidance regarding the costs of school trips and the support available.
8. The 14 accepted in principle included recommendations to:
- increase internal resources dedicated towards coordinating policies that impact on child poverty;
 - child poverty proof policies; set and publish child poverty targets for each Ministerial portfolio and schedule an annual debate, in Welsh Government time, on progress in meeting these targets;
 - review guidance in order to require proposals for school re-organisation to include an impact assessment detailing its impact on child poverty;
 - increase poverty education within mainstream teacher training and in training of other professionals working in an education setting;
 - commission research into the feasibility of delivering universal free school meals and consider piloting universal free school meals;
 - provide greater support to governors on the issue of child poverty;
 - monitor adherence to its guidance on school uniforms; and
 - enable greater consistency between schools, and across authorities, about minimising additional costs of education.
9. In December 2009, the Children and Young People Committee undertook a follow up review – calling in the then Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Jane Hutt AM, to provide evidence.

10. In September 2010, the Committee invited stakeholders to give evidence to a further follow-up review of the progress made in eradicating child poverty through education. Three formal oral evidence sessions were held between October 2010 and January 2011. In January 2011, the Committee met informally with children and young people who have experienced living in poverty.

11. The Committee is grateful to all those who gave evidence to the inquiry, but particularly to the children and young people who gave us such a full and frank account of their experiences, and suggested some practical solutions to the problems they face. The Committee sincerely hopes that the recommendations in this report, and the ongoing work of the Welsh Government, will assist all children and young people living in poverty to reach their full potential in life.

Definition of child poverty

12. Child poverty relates to much more than financial need. The definition of child poverty used for the purposes of this inquiry include:

- income based poverty;
- service based poverty;
- participation based poverty.

13. Based on these definitions, children who are young carers, looked after children and those living in other challenging circumstances could be facing the effects of poverty. Recommendations in this report should be considered for the benefit of all children and young people facing the effects of poverty, not just those living in previously defined areas of disadvantage (such as Flying Start areas).

Key Themes

14. During the Committee's original inquiry in 2008, three key themes relevant to addressing child poverty through education emerged. These were;

- the need for a coherent national strategic direction;
- the role of schools in mitigating against the effects of child poverty;
- the fact that schools cannot do it alone, and the need for greater emphasis on a range of out-of-school and community based services to support young people.

15. This report will revisit each of these themes in turn.

National strategic direction

16. Although the Welsh Government is committed to eradicating child poverty, during the Committee's original inquiry in 2008, witnesses told the Committee that they 'considered Wales to lack a clear, coherent and up-to-date approach to tackling child poverty.'¹

17. Professor David Egan told the Committee in 2008 that:

"...in the heady world and prolific policy atmosphere that has followed the devolution of power to Wales, policy integration and synergy have not always been strong features. It is likely that Ministers and Assembly Government officials would be the first to recognise this weakness in the policy agenda."²

18. Save the Children also told the Committee at that time that they were concerned that 'a lack of strategic vision could lead to resources being ineffectively targeted.'³

19. In November 2011, Huw Lewis AM, the Deputy Minister for Children, told the Committee that 'several significant things have happened since [the Committee reported in 2008] to ensure strategic overview regarding our direction of travel on child poverty.'⁴ One of the most significant of those things is the enactment of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, which became law in February 2010. The Measure places a duty on the Welsh Ministers to publish a strategy to reduce child poverty, and to keep this under review. In order to fulfil this commitment, a new Child Poverty Strategy and associated Delivery plan was published by the Welsh Government for consultation in May 2010, with one of its stated aims being to reduce inequalities in educational attainment. The consultation closed in August 2010 and the final Strategy is expected to be published early in 2011.

20. Professor David Egan told the Committee that he felt very strongly that:

¹ National Assembly for Wales Children and Young People Committee, 'Child Poverty in Wales: eradication through education' November 2008, page 11

² *ibid*

³ *ibid*

⁴ Children and Young People Committee meeting Record of Proceedings (ROP), 16 November 2010, paragraph 9

“the high level strategy, in a sense, needs to be the high level commitment... There is almost a need to get a national sense of purpose. I am one of those people who believe that often, one of the things about those schools that make a difference is that they believe that they can make the difference. They have a clear sense of moral purpose.”⁵

21. The Committee hopes that the duties that the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places on the Welsh Ministers and other Welsh Authorities, including Local Health Boards to produce new strategies and action plans to tackle child poverty locally, will provide the strategic focus necessary to instil the belief that child poverty can be addressed.

22. The Committee welcomes the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 and looks forward to the publication of the updated Child Poverty Strategy that has been developed as a result of the Measure. The Committee will recommend in its legacy report that any successor Children and Young People Committee monitors the progress made by the Welsh Government and its delivery partners in implementing the Child Poverty Strategy throughout the fourth Assembly.

Families First

23. The Committee also welcomes the new Families First initiative which will place the family at the centre of service delivery. The Deputy Minister for Children explained the approach of Families First to the Committee. He said:

“...as we build Families First, we need a situation where, on the ground, professionals are dealing with the complexity of an issue that might present itself, which may not be based at the school at all but might be affecting what is happening to the child’s education. For instance, there may be an overcrowding problem at home. It is about how you build a team of professionals that is aware and alerted to the fact that this overcrowding problem is leading to an educational problem or a behavioural problem, and what professionals you need to

⁵ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 59

bring together around that family to address that as quickly as possible.”⁶

24. The WLGA also welcomed the Families First initiative and recognised that proper support for children living in poverty ‘needs a coordinated response from various agencies to make sure that it is comprehensive.’⁷

25. However, Geraldine Murphy of the End Child Poverty Network Cymru voiced concerns regarding the transition of funding from the Children and Youth Support Fund (Cymorth) to the new Families First initiative that will take place in 2011-12. She told the Committee that:

“concerns are shared nationally and locally about what will happen to the services that will not meet the criteria of Families First. Families First should be very broad-based about preventative and family support work, but Cymorth will not be able to do all of that. There is concern about the services that might be lost, which would have contributed to it in a longer term or in a wider context, such as advocacy services, counselling, school counselling, and bereavement counselling. Various services that have developed youth work are now being paid for by Cymorth, but perhaps Cymorth will not be able to do all of that and meet the new challenge, too. That is the main issue that partnerships and local authorities will be concerned about against falling budgets.”⁸

26. The Committee notes the Welsh Government’s commitment to Families First as a holistic approach to alleviating child poverty, with ‘the social and cultural capital of families and children [being] as of much concern as the bare bones of scores in arithmetic or spelling tests,’⁹ Given this rounded approach, it would seem to be reasonable that Families First should grow from the services that are already available locally, where those services offer a clear contribution to the social and cultural capital of families who access them.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government issues guidance to enable existing services that have been developed locally and paid for by Cymorth to be properly assessed by local

⁶ ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 49

⁷ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 205

⁸ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 75

⁹ ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 64

government and, where appropriate, adapted to deliver the new Child Poverty Strategy rather than being lost altogether.

Implementation and Monitoring

27. Professor David Egan told the Committee that although Wales has become ‘policy rich’ since devolution, it has also become ‘implementation poor’. He cited the example of the Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education (RAISE) programme, citing interim reports that suggested there was a weakness in its implementation. Professor Egan pointed out that the Welsh Government was under pressure to get the money out to schools and so ‘for laudable reasons, the money was put into the system as quickly as possible.’ However,

“there could have been a period of reflection where we could have looked more extensively at strategies that were being used in other parts of the UK and internationally to tackle these issues, to see how we could best spend that money.”¹⁰

28. Professor Egan also suggested that the new child poverty strategy, due to be published early in 2011, would benefit from an implementation phase that took an area-based approach and would provide the materials that all schools will need to close the achievement gap. He also called for a:

“policy evaluation stage [which] should begin from the summer term of 2010 and continue throughout the life of the strategy, reporting at key points such that it is able to influence its on-going development. The nature of the evaluation should be highly innovative and represent a commitment by DCELLS and the Welsh Assembly Government to make a step-change in the utilisation of evidence-informed policy.”¹¹

29. No targets have yet been set by which to measure the success of Families First. The Deputy Minister for Children told the Committee that:

¹⁰ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 13

¹¹ CYP(3)-01-11, paper 1

“We do not intend to include targets or milestones at the moment; I do not have any immediate thoughts or considerations about adding them.”¹²

30. In order to judge the successes of the broad and cross cutting aims of the Families First approach and the child poverty strategy, the Committee considers results-based accountability and intelligent targets to be necessary.

31. The WLGA highlighted some of the issues related to the design of such targets. Naomi Alleyne, Director of Equalities and Social Justice, WLGA, told the Committee that:

“some of the other issues around extracurricular and after-school activities that also have a positive impact on people’s social and emotional wellbeing, which then increases, if you like, their ability to perform better in school, are key issues that need to be gauged as well. It is difficult sometimes to know what the intervention is that has led to the outcome that you are looking for. It is very complex but, nevertheless, all those types of factors need to be monitored, to identify what works and what needs to be shared and replicated elsewhere.”¹³

32. Professor David Egan told the Committee that he thought that:

“there is now a much greater awareness of [child poverty in an educational context] and the monitoring of it. There is much greater collection of evidence...We just need to collate the evidence so that we have a clear evidence base.”¹⁴

33. It is imperative that successful, as well as less successful, actions are identified for future policy development. As Sean O’Neil of the End Child Poverty Network pointed out:

“we do need a stronger evidence base of what has worked, certainly now at a time of cuts and reduced budgets.”¹⁵

34. The cross cutting nature of the child poverty strategy and the Families First approach will make it all the more important to monitor progress in order to avoid duplication and ensure the complementary

¹² ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 64

¹³ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 197

¹⁴ CYP(3)-01-11, paper 1

¹⁵ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 70

nature of policies across the board. Sean O’Neil’s evidence to the Committee concurred with Professor Egan’s suggestion that the mechanisms for evidence collection are already in place. Sean O’Neil said:

“some of the key mechanisms that have arisen since we last spoke to the committee relate to the children and young people’s wellbeing monitor. We understand that a revised monitor will come out in the spring, which will give us a better sense of the improvements that policies are making to the lives of and outcomes for children and young people. There have also been the child poverty statistical bulletins, which have tracked the 31 milestones and targets in the original strategy, which are updated through the Wales statistics website. In addition, we have the outcome measurement framework.”¹⁶

35. The Committee recognises that each intervention may have multiple benefits for individuals and that it is not always easy to measure which action resulted in a particular outcome. However, without proper monitoring, it is impossible to develop evidence based policies in the future and ensure proper value for money.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works closely with all delivery partners, and utilises external expertise if necessary, to identify a set of appropriate measures that will enable a thorough evidence-based evaluation of Families First and the child poverty strategy to be carried out at key points.

The Committee recommends that on-going evidence based policy evaluation is carried out at key points in the development of Families First and the Child Poverty Strategy.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should introduce stronger measures for holding local authorities to account, requiring them to demonstrate by 2012, in line with the roll out of Families First, how funding received from the Welsh Government has impacted on child poverty locally.

¹⁶ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 70

The Role of Schools

36. Witnesses agreed that schools have a key role to play in eradicating the effects of child poverty through education, although there was also a recognition that schools cannot succeed alone.

Sharing best practice

37. Professor Egan pointed out that ‘We have outstanding practice in pockets of Wales, some of which takes place in extremely challenging circumstances.’¹⁷ The challenge, as the Committee sees it, is to replicate the outstanding practice across Wales.

38. In 2008 the Committee highlighted the importance of training for teachers and school governors in order to increase their awareness of child poverty issues. The Welsh Government issued the Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education framework (RAISE) in 2006 to help tackle the link between socio-economic disadvantage and educational under-achievement. Sean O’Neil of End Child Poverty Network Cymru, told the Committee that since the Committee’s 2008 report was published, results from RAISE schools showed that:

“where teachers had a better understanding of the impact of poverty on their children, there were much better responses, more understanding within the school and a better working relationship.”¹⁸

39. In his evidence to the Committee, Professor David Egan cited a report by Michael Barber that said ‘when you look at the countries that topped the PISA [Programme for International Student Assessment] tables, one of the things that stands out is the outstanding quality of teaching.’¹⁹ He went on to say;

“Shanghai, China came into PISA for the first time in 2009, and it has topped the tables. We know that Shanghai is an outstanding country for the investment it puts into its teachers and their development, and that of its leaders, and so on. All of those things are hugely important, and that is recognised now in Wales. What we have to do is ensure that we embed

¹⁷ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 32

¹⁸ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 122

¹⁹ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 44

those things, and we are trying to do it at a time when it is challenging in terms of funding.”²⁰

40. However, training alone is unlikely to generate step-changes in the way schools tackle the effects of child poverty. As already discussed, it is also necessary for schools to believe that they can make a difference.

41. Clearly, leadership within schools will be vital to nurturing that belief and Professor David Egan spoke of some ‘hugely committed leaders, teachers, governors, parents and students. We should be supporting them more, and enhancing their role.’²¹ But he also felt that:

“if you are a leader, a teacher, a governor or a student in a school in challenging circumstances, a lot of the time you are treading water, you are getting through the day and week... therefore, you see innovation and new ideas as a threat; you see new policies as a threat and that is endemic, culturally.”²²

42. One of the key tools for developing greater awareness of how to tackle low educational achievement and child poverty is the School Effectiveness Framework. The WLGA described ‘enthusiasm about the school effectiveness framework and a welcoming of it across local government’ and told the Committee that the Framework was a ‘good example of local government and the Welsh Assembly Government working together’.²³

43. The WLGA also told the Committee that the School Effectiveness Framework is ‘based on evidence of what has worked in the past’.²⁴ This evidence based approach provides tried and tested ways of raising the educational attainment rates of children living in poverty and as such:

“it brings together a range of lessons that we have learned recently about effective ways of challenging poverty and low educational attainment, which, as I said, is about people not doing it on their own. It is about community involvement,

²⁰ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 44

²¹ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 41

²² ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraphs 37-39

²³ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 190

²⁴ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 191

school involvement, and the leadership that is provided at all different levels.”²⁵

44. However, it is worth noting Professor David Egan’s comments to the Committee, that:

“we do not have a problem with disseminating good and effective practice in Wales. We are still finding that effective practice, for some reason, is not a good traveller. I can think of a particular local authority, which I do not want to mention, where there are challenging socioeconomic circumstances, which has an outstanding secondary school that is probably in the top 5 per cent of secondary schools in the UK in terms of what it achieves. The other five or six secondary schools in that area do not achieve anything like that level of success. It is not that the local authority has not tried to share the effective practice of that one school amongst the others, but it is not succeeding. For some reason, which is quite complex, that kind of effective practice is not a good traveller.”²⁶

45. The Committee considers it essential that school leaders are able to adapt examples of good practice to their own circumstances. Schools that are geographically close to one another do not necessarily share the same pupil demographic and each may be on a different stage of their journey towards eradicating the attainment deficit. However, good leaders should be able to adapt good practice from elsewhere to suit their own needs, and local authorities should invest in those leadership skills necessary for the task.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government recognises that leadership is a necessary core skill for all school leaders, staff and governors. The Committee further recommends that the Welsh Government issues guidance to local authorities that advises them that leadership development should be included in continuing professional development programmes for head teachers and senior school staff. The Welsh Government should ensure that local authorities are effective in challenging schools and intervening when necessary where cultures that promote high standards of achievement, especially for disadvantaged learners, are not fostered.

²⁵ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 190

²⁶ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 30

The Partnerships Support Unit

46. The sharing of good practice has also been facilitated by the Welsh Government funded Child Poverty Solutions Wales and Partnerships Support Unit (PSU). However, the PSU is due for closure in April 2011 and the End Child Poverty Network raised their concerns that the closure would result in the loss of some of the work that was currently being done.

47. The PSU has supported Child Poverty Solutions Wales, which only has one member of staff, by offering staff-time in kind. Following the closure of the PSU, the End Child Poverty Network felt that the resulting loss of support for Child Poverty Solutions Wales will mean:

“people’s hours out in the fields supporting people will be essentially halved for Child Poverty Solutions.”²⁷

48. It is unclear at this stage which functions of the PSU may be lost following the closure of the unit as the PSU is in discussion with Child Poverty Solutions as to which of its functions will be incorporated into Child Poverty Solutions Wales’ work post April 2011.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government monitors the capacity of Child Poverty Solutions to deliver its agreed functions following the closure of the Partnership Support Unit. While any decision on allocation of resources is a matter for the Welsh Government, the Committee further recommends that any functions of the PSU that cease following its closure are not lost because they have ‘fallen through the cracks’ but because the Minister has made an informed and strategic decision to end support for such functions.

Mitigation of additional costs of education

49. Families who meet the means testing criteria are able to claim free school meals for their children, along with uniform grants and access to funds that will help fund educational school trips.

50. The Deputy Minister for Children told the Committee that:

²⁷ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 83

“our school uniform grant has one of the highest take-ups of any grant there ever was. Take-up for that grant is about 97 per cent, so it is well worth preserving.”²⁸

51. The Committee was pleased to hear that such a high percentage of the grant was being taken up. The Committee notes that the grant is intended to cover the cost of generic school uniform rather than garments that carry the school logo, although guidance has been issued by the Welsh Government to local governments stating that schools ‘should consider the necessity of requiring such items.’²⁹

52. The Deputy Minister also told the Committee that the take up of free school meals was reported by as being a significantly lower percentage than that of the uniform grant. He said:

“the latest school census shows that about 60,000 children, which is about 74 per cent of eligible pupils, took up their free school meal entitlement on that census day. That breaks down to about 78 per cent of eligible pupils in primary schools, 75 per cent of eligible pupils in special schools, and about 68 per cent in secondary schools.”³⁰

53. The Committee received evidence in 2008/9 that strongly suggested that eligible families who chose not to take up free school meals did so because of the stigma they associated with doing so. In 2011, the Committee heard first hand from children and young people just what that feels like. Save the Children worked with Young Ambassadors from Cardiff who attended Millbank Primary School, Ely; Moorland Primary School, Splott and Willows High School and North Ely Youth Centre, to explore the issues faced by children and young people living in poverty. The children and young people presented their findings to the Committee at the National Assembly Offices in Cardiff on 13 January 2011. The following is an extract from a scene written by the young ambassadors from Willow High School and North Ely Youth Centre in which a young person is bullied by her peers who have taken money from her and made fun of her old, badly fitting uniform.

²⁸ ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 78

²⁹ Welsh Assembly Government ‘Guidance for Governing Bodies on School Uniform and Appearance Policies’ issued February 2008, updated February 2010

³⁰ ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 68

Teacher: It seems I have a solution to your problems. I've been having a word with a few people (*winks at the audience*) and they've been very kind to me and offered some money (*winks again*) to help pay for new uniforms for you.

Victim: What! (*protesting*), I don't need help like that

Teacher: Yes, I think you do.

Victim: Ugh!

Teacher: (*Breathes in and turns to the Bullies*) and also someone is coming in to talk to your parents to see if you both could be eligible for free school meals and then you won't need to 'tap' anyone for any cash to get some lunch.

Bully 2: OMG, that is sooo embarrassing,

Bully 1: Free school meals is so eww. Everyone knows free school meals is for doughnuts. Those tokens are just disgusting pieces of plastic.

Teacher: don't worry a friend of mine (*winks to the audience again*) is looking into getting a new system to make it less obvious you are getting tokens for lunch.

Bully 2: thank god for that

Bully 1: Yeh.³¹

54. The Committee are very grateful to the young ambassadors who delivered this, and all of the other presentations to the Committee. The honesty and passion of the children and young people made their evidence all the more powerful and for that, we are grateful.

55. The issue of stigma relating to free school meals has been recognised and discussed for many years, but for the children and young people who would rather forgo a meal than risk derision from their peers, stigma is more than just an issue for discussion – it is the reason for their hunger.

56. The Deputy Minister for Children told the Committee that:

³¹ Save the Children Young Ambassadors evidence to the Welsh Assembly Children and Young Peoples Committee 13th February 2011

“a lot of good work has been done by my ministerial colleagues, over a number of years, with regards to ticketless school meals and various other attempts to try to remove the stigma.”³²

57. The WLGA told the Committee that:

“it is important to schools and local authorities that they make the process of attending school as easy as possible and have tried a number of different methods of distributing additional support in order to reduce stigma. For example, some schools have piloted cashless systems in the canteen. It is important that every child or young person is treated with respect and that the school process helps to make the child or young person feel part of the school community.”³³

58. Citizens Advice Cymru also commented on the issue, saying in their written evidence to the Committee:

“we consider that ‘School meals, health and learning are inextricably connected.’...

“the issue of privacy for children claiming FSMs [free school meals] needs to be addressed and parents and children need to be aware of the process and be able to have absolute confidence in its protection. No child should be deterred from receiving a free meal because of embarrassment. Surely a scheme could be devised that would allow payment for meals by a card which parents who have to pay for meals could top-up by phone. No-one at the school needs to know which children are paying and which receiving FSMs.”³⁴

59. No evidence was received by the Committee that suggested that reducing the stigma of receiving free school meals should not be a top priority for the Welsh Government, local government and individual schools alike. The Committee feels that it is imperative that this issue is addressed without delay. In the current economic climate, more families will be struggling to provide for their children making it all the

³² ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 70

³³ CYP(3)-14-10 : paper 3, Child poverty in Wales: eradication through education evidence from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), paragraph 26

³⁴ CYP(3) CP 02 Citizens Advice Cymru

more important that all those who are eligible for free school meals receive them.

The Committee recommends that a review of the evidence gathered through the work already carried out by the Welsh Government, and the pilot projects referenced by the WLGA, is carried out immediately and that guidance on implementing a stigma free school meal system is distributed to all schools by September 2011. Local authorities should support schools to implement such systems and should report to the Welsh Government on the progress of each schools transition to the new system in September 2012 and annually thereafter until all pupils are able to claim free school meals without fear of stigma and are aware of their entitlements to claim them.

Transitions

60. The Committee took powerful evidence from Professor David Egan regarding the risks associated with the transition stage from primary to secondary education. Any parent of secondary age children will be familiar with the apprehension felt by so many children as they prepare to leave the relatively sheltered world of primary education to become a 'small fish in a big pond' in secondary education. As well as being associated with some quite natural fears of the move to an often bigger school where the buildings and faces are unfamiliar, there is evidence that the transition phase is associated with other problems too. Professor Egan told the Committee that the educational attainment of children entering the transition phase can be significantly different from that of younger children. He explained that:

“we have a good track record of 11 year-olds achieving well at the end of the primary stage in Wales, but when you track that cohort through the rest of its educational career, you see a decline in the expected level of performance. They do not regress in their understanding, but they do not make the progress by the ages of 14 or 16 that you would have expected. The group of youngsters, and it might be 25 or 30 per cent of youngsters, who decline in that way generally live in child poverty and come from disadvantaged backgrounds...it is ...clear that a lot of that decline is to do with the kinds of

issues that I tried to present in the paper about aspiration and self-esteem.”³⁵

61. Sean O’Neil of the End Child Poverty Network Cymru concurred with Professor Egan, highlighting the need to engage children and young people with the whole of school life through transition and beyond. He told the Committee that:

“we need to focus much more on the eight to 18 age group, so that we maintain younger children’s engagement throughout the stages of school life as well as their motivational level. The emphasis should not just be on educational attainment. It is about children and young people feeling part of the school community and enjoying going to school where they can engage and prosper. There is a lot more evidence from the Estyn report last year about some of the key factors in terms of effective leadership and good links with the local authority, and developing the emotional and social skills of pupils.”³⁶

62. The Committee welcomes the improvements made in recent years to help support children through the transition process. Pupils undoubtedly benefit from transition days when they spend time in their new schools with their new classmates ahead of the start of term. The other work that goes on to help familiarise primary school children with their new surroundings is also applaudable, but there is still work to be done to address the changing aspirations of children as they reach secondary school age.

63. Professor David Egan told the Committee that:

“when you ask seven-year-olds or eight-year-olds in the most affluent and disadvantaged communities how many of you want to go to university, be a vet, or a doctor, a politician, a professor, or whatever you ask them, you will find that about the same proportion of young people put their hands up in those communities. If you go back to them about two or three years later, you will find a radically different picture. So, something happens on that journey.”³⁷

³⁵ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 29

³⁶ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 94

³⁷ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 49

64. The WLGA noted that ‘young people are often most in danger of repeating the cycle of poverty because they have become disengaged with the education system and have not yet entered the workplace.’³⁸ The need to break the cycle of poverty is clear. Unless we succeed in assisting young people to break out of poverty, we are condemning another generation to be born into the cycle as the young people of today go on to become parents themselves. The eradication of child poverty therefore relies on the breaking of the poverty cycle and the need to keep children and young people engaged in school life during the transition and beyond.

65. The WLGA cited evidence from Joseph Rowntree Foundation research that describes the need to:

“look at pupils on an individual basis, to be able to track individual pupils’ performance so that if there is a dip in performance, or it looks like there is going to be a dip in attainment, more targeted action can be put into supporting that individual child. The role of the school in that is going to be critical; the role of the teachers in that will be critical.”³⁹

66. The Committee agrees that the role of the school and individual teachers in monitoring individual’s progress is essential. Eleanor Marks, Head of the Communities Division of the Welsh Government, told the Committee that:

“we are starting to look at the training within schools, both for teachers looking at aspects of poverty and to raise governors’ awareness of the cost of education, be that uniforms or school trips, so that there is a greater focus on the cost outside of the school of taking part in education. It is a starting point, but we are developing the training that needs to be in place to help new teachers, which will then be rolled out to teachers already in the profession, and we are also working with governors to take that forward.”⁴⁰

67. The Committee welcomes the development of this training and considers that a greater awareness of the issues relating to poverty, along with stronger leadership in some schools, will help all schools to

³⁸ CYP(3)-14-10 : paper 3, Child poverty in Wales: eradication through education evidence from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), paragraph 28

³⁹ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 196

⁴⁰ ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 79

find the skills and motivation to re-engage those children whose aspirations have suffered as they have grown into young people.

The Committee recommends that the teacher training being developed by the Welsh Government in relation to child poverty specifically references the issues relating to the transition stage, including the documented loss of aspirations for some children living in poverty and the need to monitor the educational attainment of all individual pupils and provide interventions where necessary to halt any identified dips in performance.

Schools cannot do it alone

68. While witnesses all agreed that schools have a key role to play in improving the educational attainment of children who live in poverty, there was also universal agreement that the schools cannot do it alone.

69. In order for a child to be in a learning state, it is necessary first for their basic needs to be met. A cold, tired and hungry child will not be able to learn times tables or study science, no matter how engaging the teacher may be. Children from Milbank Primary School told the Committee about their experiences out of school. Their story is called 'A day in the life of me':

“A Day in the Life of Me...”

“this true story is set on Halloween but it’s happened before. One night I was asleep and I woke up to the noise of a window being smashed and I could hear a crash. I was very frightened. My mum ran to my room and my dad went downstairs to the front door. He went to see what was happening outside, there were two gangs. One were girls, one were boys; they looked around 17 years old. They were smoking, drinking and people were swearing. They were wearing Halloween costumes to hide their faces.

“all of a sudden, there was a big crash and a scream. My dad called the police. But they came about an hour later! I don’t think this was good enough and they should have come earlier.

“I was trying to sleep, ready for school the next day. The police didn’t catch them because they were in the park littering and smashing glass everywhere! I could hear them from my bedroom. We discovered that over 25 car windows had been smashed.

“the next day, I had to ring my school to say I couldn’t come in because I was too tired and I was scared to injure myself because of the glass.

“So, now I think there should be more police, may be on night patrol!”⁴¹

70. Other Young Ambassadors spoke of disturbances caused by people leaving public houses late at night. Children from Moorland Primary School told the Committee that they:

“hate the noise and mess that happens on my street late at night when people come out of the pubs. It really worries me, I hear people shouting and swearing and fighting. I’ve heard things that children shouldn’t hear. It wakes me up and then I’m really tired when I’m in school. I can’t concentrate and it makes me feel ill.”⁴²

71. These Young Ambassadors had created a poster campaign, supported by Save the Children and in conjunction with the South Wales Police. The posters highlight the consequences of people’s noisy demeanour late at night and encourage people to be quiet when returning home from a night out.

72. The Committee congratulates the Young Ambassadors, and the South Wales Police, for taking a proactive approach to try and ease this situation.

73. Professor David Egan recognised the link between school preparedness and the wider community in his evidence to the Committee. He said:

“schools cannot do it alone. It is as much about community regeneration as education. I think that there is a regeneration issue here as much as there is an education issue in the toughest cases that we face.”⁴³

74. The Committee has reported previously about the necessity to include the needs of children in the planning and development of our towns and cities, and for children to be given a valid space within our communities. The Committee reiterates those recommendations contained within the report ‘Provision of Safe Places to Play’ at this time as it is vital that children and young people are able to feel safe in their communities if they are to have the courage to make their voices

⁴¹ Evidence from Milbank Primary School Young Ambassadors

⁴² Evidence from Moorland Primary School Young Ambassadors

⁴³ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 61

heard and highlight the consequences of others' behaviour on their own development.

Community Focused Schools

75. Another way of keeping the needs of children under review, and their right to some consideration within the neighbourhood is through the work of community focused schools. The Deputy Minister for Children described his vision of Community Focused Schools to the Committee:

“it is not just a case of thinking about the bricks and mortar of a school and how it can be best used out of hours, at holiday times or whatever, but thinking in the round about how the school can step in and help with the life chances of young families, in particular, in everything from their financial security and personal family finances – by doing something simple like hosting the local credit union, as our secondary schools are starting to do – to moving towards addressing the agenda of the skills problem that faces a great many parents in young, low-income families, perhaps with partner agencies such as further education or, say, the University of the Heads of the Valleys”⁴⁴

76. Community Focused Schools are intended to work with the whole community to tackle the link between disadvantage and underachievement, although the exact role of the schools is sometimes unclear. The Deputy Minister for Children told the Committee:

“we need to shift ourselves as a devolved Government and get our act together, ensuring that everyone understands exactly what is meant by a community-focused school and that it is not simply about having an evening class now and again. This is about entering into the life of the community and trying to shift for the better the position of the families.”⁴⁵

77. Sean O’Neil of the End Child Poverty Network agreed that Community Focused Schools are important, but that a greater understanding of their role is necessary. He said:

⁴⁴ ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 54

⁴⁵ ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 55

“there is a clear interface between the child poverty agenda and community-focused schools, not just in terms of the activities that can be provided outside school days, but in terms of what can be provided inside the school days as well with catch-up clubs and homework clubs. There is also an opportunity for re-engaging parents in education and re-engaging the Community, tackling intergenerational; cycles of poverty and engaging with those parents who missed out the first time around. I wish to quote quickly from the Estyn report:

“Community Focused Schools can contribute to this work but there are no agreed and specific criteria for what community focused schools should do and no specific guidance about how community focused schools can help to tackle the link between disadvantage and underachievement through joint agency collaboration.”⁴⁶

78. The Committee feels that the contribution that community focused schools can make to the child poverty agenda could be greatly enhanced by issuing a set of specific criteria for those schools to work towards.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should provide comprehensive guidance to make it clear what community focused schools should offer and clarify how community focused schools can help to tackle the link between disadvantage and achievement.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with local authorities to prioritise the development of community focused schools. Local authorities should ensure that community focused school strategies are firmly incorporated into local child poverty strategies and included in Children and Young People’s Plans.

⁴⁶ ROP, 11 January 2011, paragraph 126-127

Witnesses

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed in full at http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-cyp-home/bus-committees-third-cyp-inquiry/cyp3-inq-childpov/cyp3-cp/cyp3-cp-committee_papers.htm

2 November

Naomi Alleyne, WLGA Director of Equalities and Social Justice	Welsh Local Government Association
Emily Warren, WLGA Policy Officer for Health and Social Services	

16 November

Huw Lewis, Deputy Minister for Children Eleanor Marks, Head of Communities Division	Welsh Government
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11 January

Cecile Gwilym, Policy Officer Wales - NSPCC Cymru	End Child Poverty Network
Sean O'Neill, Policy Director - Children in Wales	
Geraldine Murphy, Partnership Support Regional Officer - South West and Mid Wales - Partnership Support Unit	
Lindsay Kearton - Senior Policy Advocate - Consumer Focus Wales	
Professor David Egan	UWIC

List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All written evidence can be viewed in full at

http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-cyp-home/bus-committees-third-cyp-inquiry/cyp_3_cp_responces_received_2010.htm

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Welsh Government	CP 01 AWE 01
Citizens Advice Cymru	CP 02 CP 02a
Continyou Cymru	CP 03
Welsh Local Government Association	CP 04
Professor David Egan	CP 05
End Child Poverty Network	CP 06
Save the Children	AWE 02 AWE 03 AWE 04
Welsh Local Government Association	AWE 05
Millbank Primary School, Ely	AWE 06
Moorland Primary School, Splott	AWE 07
Willows High School and North Ely Youth Centre	AWE 08
Partnership Support Unit	AWE 09