



# **Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru** **The National Assembly for Wales**

## **Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg** **The Children, Young People and Education** **Committee**

**Dydd Iau, 13 Mawrth 2014**

**Thursday, 13 March 2014**

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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,  
cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.  
In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included.

**Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol**  
**Committee members in attendance**

Angela Burns	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Keith Davies	Llafur Labour
Suzy Davies	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Rebecca Evans	Llafur Labour
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Ann Jones	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Chair of the Committee)
Lynne Neagle	Llafur Labour
David Rees	Llafur Labour
Aled Roberts	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Simon Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

**Eraill yn bresennol**  
**Others in attendance**

Pam Boyd	Prif Weithredwr, CaST Cymru Chief Executive, CaST Cymru
Mike Gibbon	Pennaeth Ysgol Gyfun Sandfields Headteacher at Sandfields Comprehensive School
Dr Rachel Jones	Ysgol Uwchradd Eirias (drwy gyfrwng cynhadledd fideo) Eirias High School (via video conference)
Karyn Keane	Pennaeth Ysgol Uwchradd Casnewydd Headteacher, Newport High School

**Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol**  
**National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance**

Sarah Bartlett	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Marc Wyn Jones	Clerc Clerk
Sian Thomas	Y Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:30.*  
*The meeting began at 09:30.*

**Cyflwyniadau, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon**  
**Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions**

[1] **Ann Jones:** Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the Children, Young People and Education Committee. I will just do the usual housekeeping rules from this end. If you have your mobile phone on, please make sure it is turned off. It does affect the translation and broadcasting, and given that we have a video link as well, I do not want anything to go wrong with that. So, can we make sure they are off? The other thing for us at this end is that we are

not expecting the fire alarm to operate, so if it does, we will wait to take our directions from the ushers as to where the safe exit point will be. I do not think that Members have declared any interests while we have been doing this inquiry, so is there anything that Members need to declare now? No. That is good. We will move on, then.

09:31

**Ymchwiliad i Ganlyniadau Addysgol Plant o Gartrefi Incwm Isel—Sesiwn  
Dystiolaeth 8  
Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low-income  
Households—Evidence Session 8**

[2] **Ann Jones:** We are delighted to have a video link with Dr Rachel Jones from Eirias High School. Welcome. We hope it is all going to work, so fingers crossed. Joining us here is Pam Boyd, who is the chief executive of CaST Cymru. You are very welcome as well, Pam.

[3] This is part of our inquiry into educational outcomes for children from low-income families. What we are doing is looking at parental engagement and how that is helping. We have had your papers, so thank you both very much for those. That is great. We have some questions, but we want to hear more from you about how the projects are working and the benefits, so that Members are aware of that. We have three areas that we want to look at: the project itself with parental engagement, then costs associated with education, and then a bit around the Welsh Government strategy and funding. So, those are the three areas we will cover this morning. I will go straight to Members to start. Who wants to start the questioning? Angela. Go on, then.

[4] **Angela Burns:** Thank you, and thank you both very much for your papers. I was really interested when I read the papers today about the way that you structure your various support groups. So, you have SmoothMoves, you have Pyramid 4 Parents, and FastForward. Looking at some of the detail of the case study that you put forward, so I guess, actually, this question must be to you, Pam, you talk about—. I will just make sure that I am reading the right paper. No, sorry, this could be—yes. I am very interested in just learning a bit more about the form tutor focus groups. That reflects something that I read in a paper from another school that we are going to listen to a little bit later on: the drive to give children who are moving and transitioning specialist form teacher pastoral care. I wonder whether you could expand on that a bit. Sorry that was such a long-winded question.

[5] **Dr Jones:** No, that is fine. I understand what you are getting at. I have been in role for about seven years now, working with year 7, and, over the seven years, I feel that we have had fantastic form tutors who are very well trained but they are not going out to do the visits with year 6, and they do not get to meet the year 6 teachers and the pupils before they come into high school. So, really the form tutor focus groups are groups that I put together with all the data and information that I collected through the visits, through the FastForward work that we have done, and through the Pyramid work that has been done as well. We just highlight maybe about six pupils in a form of about 28, and just let the form tutor know about that focus. It might be to check their planner, to make sure they are okay with homework. Is their organisation okay? They have really expressed an interest in going to an after-school club; could the tutor just check that they are finding that okay, and that they can get home all right? Are they coping with friendships? Are they coping with working in large classes? There are all sorts of different things. We only started it this year and we are on the third round now. I have a meeting next week where I am putting forward our next groups. We change them every half term, roughly. We feel that it has been really positive. The form tutors have enjoyed being able to work with a smaller group within their class. We have given them extra time. Rather than coming to assembly, they have 15 to 20 minutes to take pupils out

individually and speak to them—maybe once every two or three weeks—just to give them some one-to-one time as well.

[6] **Ann Jones:** May I just ask you to explain what the Pyramid club is, please?

[7] **Ms Boyd:** I think that that is probably for me.

[8] **Ann Jones:** Sorry, is that you, Pam?

[9] **Ms Boyd:** It is going to be a bit of a double act. Pyramid clubs are clubs that we have been running now for around 20 years. It is an evidence-based programme and it is run across the whole of the UK. It has grown significantly in Wales over the last few years and we have amended the programme over those years so that it better reflects the needs of children in Wales, rather than there being a more blanket approach. Pyramid clubs are aimed at children who are quiet, shy, withdrawn and lacking in confidence. It is not about behavioural issues: these are children who often get lost in the busy classroom and never engage to their full potential. It originated at primary school but over the last few years it has developed more and more. It is now run as a transition project from primary to secondary, but it is also run in secondary schools as well. These children are selected—it is not just a case of, ‘I think little Jimmy would benefit’. We use a proper screening tool so that the children are selected so we know the ones who are likely to benefit the most from the intervention. It is an after-school intervention, so they are not being withdrawn from lesson time. It is a 10-week programme, so you have a definite start and finish, and, because of the screening tool, we have evidence of the journey travelled, so it really does work and it is actually very cost effective.

[10] **Ann Jones:** Angela, if you would finish off, then I will come to Simon.

[11] **Angela Burns:** Thank you both for that explanation. As I said, you very clearly lay out SmoothMoves, Pyramid 4 Parents and FastForward, so that leads me on to my second question, which is about the professional training of the teachers who take part in this. Can you just explain a little bit more about that? It is one of the challenges that you identify in relation to keeping these programmes going.

[12] **Ms Boyd:** It is a really interesting area, I think. A lot of the work that we do, because it is outside of the formal school day, if you like, is being delivered more and more by teaching assistants and paraprofessionals, because a lot of this work does not have to be delivered by teachers. It is a fantastic opportunity for other people working in schools to develop their skills. What we are seeing now is that more and more schools are looking for these additional roles. They realise that there are other people who can deliver these programmes but, obviously, there is a need for training and continuing professional development. We offer training with all our programmes but, at the moment, it is not accredited. We are also finding that, across the country, there are lots of these roles developing, often with different titles and different people with different backgrounds, and, as I said, more and more teaching assistants. However, that is in isolation. There is not really that support framework or opportunities to share effective practice. We have done some of that networking, but, without the capacity and resource to do it, it is a bit ad hoc. So, we think that there is a huge area for development here.

[13] **Ann Jones:** Rachel, do you have anything to add to that?

[14] **Dr Jones:** Just to say that we have a teaching assistant who runs our Pyramid group. I oversee it, but she runs the sessions.

[15] **Ann Jones:** I have a few Members who want to come in now. Is it on this point?

[16] **David Rees:** Yes, it is on this point.

[17] **Ann Jones:** Is yours on this point as well?

[18] **Simon Thomas:** Yes, it is on this point.

[19] **Ann Jones:** Okay, Simon is first and then I will come to David.

[20] **Simon Thomas:** Thank you. I think that this is primarily for Pam Boyd. In your written evidence, and in what you have said now, you have talked about how Pyramid clubs work and about screening the children. From what you have said so far, there is not necessarily a link there to children from deprived or low-income households because you are screening them for personality type as much as anything and for their interaction and other things. In terms of funding, you make the point in your report that the pupil deprivation grant is not necessarily being used to fund this kind of work in all schools. How do you put together a package that shows that funding for pupils from a poor income household is being used effectively to address those pupils directly and not to address wider wellbeing in the school? That is a very valuable thing, but that is not what the money was there for.

[21] **Ms Boyd:** Absolutely, and it is a real challenge, but I think that we would all hazard a guess, and it is being borne out, that many of the children who are suffering from low self-esteem and a lack of confidence are children who are from more disadvantaged backgrounds. That is being shown. Obviously, within a school, you can choose to target those children, so, if you screen a whole year group, particularly in a bigger school, you may come up with 20 or more children who could benefit, but, if you are looking specifically to use PDG, then you would target those children who are on free school meals. It does raise a number of challenges for schools, because, obviously, not all the children who would benefit are on free school meals. However, it is a cost-effective intervention, because, once you have the training and the resources that we provide, and if it is run by teaching assistants, it is not a particularly expensive intervention. So, schools, if they believe that it works—and when schools get involved, they see that it works, and I am sure that Rachel will back that up—are able to look at how they can fund it.

[22] The other thing that we can do, being a third sector organisation working with schools, is to access funding that maybe schools cannot and to look to other sources of funding. So, for example, in Denbighshire, we have had external trust funding to set up a group of Pyramid schools in and around Denbigh with the secondary school and the primary schools. So, we can bring additional resource and funding into those schools to help them set an intervention up and then, if they are happy that the intervention is having an impact, they can look at keeping it going.

[23] **Simon Thomas:** I wonder whether Dr Jones could add, from a practical point of view within a school, something about how that works.

[24] **Dr Jones:** Yes, on the first point, on targeting pupils on free school meals, the work that we did with the FastForward project with the pupils when they were in year 6 in one of our feeder schools was aimed at children who were on free school meals. So, the headteacher of the primary school chose a group of, I think, about six families to work with. So, we worked not only with the pupils, but also with the parents of those pupils, and I found that to be the most effective tool that I had for helping those pupils with the transition to high school. I was able to meet them individually and discuss their individual concerns, and I am still in regular contact with them. I think that has really helped in that transition process. It is such a tough time for some of these children. Some of them face things that other children will never come across in their lives, and they deal with that on a daily basis. I think that for them to know that there is support in the high school and that they can come to see us whenever has

been great.

[25] **Ms Boyd:** FastForward has been amazing. I have to tell you how amazing it has been, because the primary headteacher said as well that it had been the most successful intervention that he had ever seen in all his years of teaching, and he has just retired, and that it had engaged families that he had never been able to engage with before. So, it is extremely powerful. It is unusual, because we work with the child and the parent together, so that is something different, and it has also, and Rachel has touched on this, given those families who often would not have the confidence to go to a big open evening at the secondary school—. It may very well be that the first contact that they have with their child's secondary school is a negative one, because there has been a problem, and this is actually setting them up on a positive footing, because they have already been to the school in a small group. The headteacher at Eirias provides tea and cake. It sounds very simple, and in many ways it is, but it is actually working.

[26] **David Rees:** Particularly on this point, you have highlighted this as an approach, but, if we look at the figures, in this particular school, 13% are on free school meals. The headteacher coming in from my area has over 40% on free school meals. Do you have clear examples of where this fits in within a larger school with larger proportions of such pupils? As Rachel has pointed out, there were six families in that case, but that is going to touch very few children in the type of school that has 40% on free school meals.

[27] **Ms Boyd:** Absolutely, and it is a challenge. My argument would be that it is more important to put it into schools where there are higher levels of free school meals. In those schools, there are also higher levels of PDG, because their levels of FSM are higher, so there is funding there. What we have to try to do is win the hearts and minds of those schools and persuade them that this intervention is going to have an impact and is worth investing in, or we look for external funding to bring in to set it up to show them that it works.

09:45

[28] It is a massive challenge. It is a massive challenge for us because we are a small third sector organisation. Without core funding, we do not have the capacity to be able to engage on a one-to-one basis with all of the schools that we would like to engage with. We very much have to now depend on schools coming to us and saying, 'We would like to buy you in to do this work with us', or we can find other funding, as I have touched on with trusts. The original FastForward work in Conwy was funded by Families First. Again, where we can get into Families First, this sort of work is seen as hugely beneficial, but there are other challenges of trying to engage with all of the Families First work across Wales, and also now Communities First. Again, Conwy—I live in Conwy, so I am on the ground and I can work there very easily—is picking up on this now through Communities First, as are Denbighshire and some other counties.

[29] It is a real challenge to get to those schools that could really benefit and look at how you can put a package together that meets their needs. It is not totally one-size-fits-all. It is small numbers, and that is the beauty of it—that is its strength because you are working with a small group. So, it is quite intensive. However, again, I go back to the fact that we are using teaching assistants who are not that expensive to employ. In some schools they are using flexible hours so that they are actually using hours that they already have, but that they are putting into work in this way to see whether it works. So, there are many ways of addressing some of the challenges, but we have to be able to get there to look at them in the first place.

[30] **David Rees:** Do you have examples of—[Inaudible.]—schools?

[31] **Ms Boyd:** Given that FastForward is only just coming out of pilot phase, we are now

at the point of trying to take it into other schools, and we have an interest in a number where there are much higher levels of free school meals.

[32] **Ann Jones:** We have Suzy, Aled and then Keith wanting to come in.

[33] **Suzy Davies:** My questions are actually about FastForward, but I want to ask you a quick question about Pyramid, just based on the comments that you made. Bearing in mind that the Pyramid scheme can help people who are not on free school meals, do you have any concerns that PDG money might be used to support Pyramid schemes in schools, which might then have an unfortunate consequence of excluding children who are not on free school meals, but who actually would benefit from the Pyramid scheme?

[34] **Ms Boyd:** It is a difficult one. My gut feeling is that it is more than likely. I have no evidence, but it is—

[35] **Suzy Davies:** It is a potential concern.

[36] **Ms Boyd:** It is a potential concern because, at the end of the day, the school wants the best for all its pupils, and if it sees that it has an intervention that works—. We know that PDG is about more than free school meals. The other side to that, I suppose, is that we do not want to stigmatise. So, a Pyramid group that is purely for free-school-meals children may not be the best way forward. You actually want a group that is mixed because you do not want it to have that label of being only for free-school-meals children.

[37] **Suzy Davies:** That is not my main question, so I thank you for that. On the FastForward programme—and obviously we have had some pretty compelling evidence here, not least from Mr Mulvaney, who I think you quoted earlier—you mention in your evidence that you would like a more national approach to this because it is too disparate and bitty at the moment. You are a provider in the system at the moment, but there are other providers. How will this affect the third sector if the Government takes a more centralised strategic approach to this? Are you concerned that the third sector providers might fall out of the picture?

[38] **Ms Boyd:** No. What I think that I am trying to say is that the Welsh Government recognises the value of the third sector in Wales. There are very many third sector organisations that are currently struggling—like us and others—in the current economic climate to be able to bring to scale some of the work that they are doing in perhaps very isolated pockets. We are successful at getting money in one place but not in another. For many years, the Welsh Government funded our work more centrally. We provided a support service for community-focused schools for nine years across the whole country, which I believe was a very good approach because it meant that we could target schools and areas where we believed there was an extra benefit to working in a community-focused way. Now, with the strategy of putting more funding out to the front line, into schools, it means that it is very much up to individual schools to engage with us.

[39] **Suzy Davies:** However, you have also indicated that partnerships with Communities First—or Families First, in this particular case—have been your major source of funding. So, it may be different funding, but it is still there.

[40] **Ms Boyd:** I suppose what I am getting at is that it is more difficult to do that, because it is far more time-consuming. If you are only a relatively small organisation, you tend to work around where your staff are. So, it is hard to get that scale. If you do not have the infrastructure or the core funding to support that—you have to have someone to go out to market it, for want of a better phrase—then you are in danger of losing it altogether, because, if you do not have critical mass, it will not go anywhere. So, while there are some very good examples, there is a real need for a fresh look to be taken at the way in which some of these

organisations, ourselves included, are supported to be able to provide these programmes in a much more strategic and co-ordinated way.

[41] **Suzy Davies:** I have one final question.

[42] **Ann Jones:** I was just going to ask Dr Jones whether she had any comments to make on that. As somebody who is working with a project like that, how would you see the fact that funding could be altered or changed?

[43] **Dr Jones:** I would be very worried. I feel very lucky that we have been able to work with Pam and with Angela Davies, who I work with more closely. I have had many meetings with the head and we have decided that we are going to roll out the programme, even after the present funding that we have from CaST Cymru finishes. However, the funding would still have to be maintained, the PDG et cetera, so that we could continue that and take it forward. We would like to keep our teaching assistant on. Her contract is due to finish this year, but I would like to keep her on to run the Pyramid groups. It is about having the knowledge that things can carry on, I suppose.

[44] **Suzy Davies:** Could I ask my final question?

[45] **Ann Jones:** Do you have a point, Simon?

[46] **Simon Thomas:** My question can perhaps be asked at the end.

[47] **Suzy Davies:** My question is still about FastForward. It is a futurology-type question, I am afraid. Obviously, we are talking about areas of deprivation and the attainment gap, and a lot of the work that I imagine that you and similar organisations do will be in Flying Start areas, which works only with young children and has been going for only six years at the moment. So, we have not reached secondary-age children yet, but they are coming through. Are you concerned at all that, if Flying Start proves to be a great success at engaging parents, the need for the kind of work that you are doing at secondary-school level is likely to diminish?

[48] **Ms Boyd:** I hope that that will be the case. That would be amazing, would it not? As a third sector organisation, you start out to change the world, usually, and, with some things, it is quite easy to see when you get there. You want a cure for something, you get that, and you are then not needed anymore. That has always been my intention. Would it not be fantastic if we had a system where every child was engaged with school, was able to reach their full potential, engage their passions, and all the rest of it?

[49] **Suzy Davies:** It was their parents that I was asking about.

[50] **Ms Boyd:** Yes, with families and communities being engaged, because I am a firm believer that it takes a village to educate a child, not a school or a family; it is the whole package. To be there and to be able to say that we are not needed anymore would be fantastic.

[51] **Suzy Davies:** So, if you are back here in 10 years' time for a similar inquiry—

[52] **Ms Boyd:** We will not have got there. I will not be here. I will have retired by then. *[Laughter.]*

[53] **Suzy Davies:** That is what I was coming to. Thank you very much.

[54] **Dr Jones:** May I add something? I hear what Pam is saying, but, from my point of view, which I know is just the secondary point of view, the transition for that pupil at that age

to secondary school comes with a lot of stress and anxiety. They are starting to go through puberty and many changes are happening at that time. I still believe that we would require intervention and help for those families at that time. No matter how well Flying Start had done, I still believe that that transition time throws up many unknowns for those families.

[55] **Ann Jones:** Okay; thanks. Simon, you have a very brief question on this point?

[56] **Simon Thomas:** Yes. This question is probably to Pam again, because we have heard very clearly from Dr Jones that she wants to continue it within the school and that it has been working there. However, from the information that you have given us, it is a two-year pilot project in one particular area. Obviously, the evidence from the school has been good, but what evaluation is now going to happen to the whole project, and how will it be looked at in a way that other areas might be able to look at it?

[57] **Ms Boyd:** We are doing our own evaluation, based on the pilot project. It is a relatively small pilot project—I admit that.

[58] **Simon Thomas:** Is the Welsh Government doing any evaluation itself?

[59] **Ms Boyd:** No, because there is no direct Welsh Government funding. Given that this has been Families First-funded, we are part of the overall evaluation.

[60] **Simon Thomas:** Yes, but that would not look particularly at the effectiveness of an individual bit of the programme.

[61] **Ms Boyd:** No. We are doing our own evaluation, but because there is no spare capacity or funding, it is only an internal evaluation. We have not been able to do anything external, though that has certainly been something that we have been looking at, as well as the potential to try to engage with a university. We have some links, and the hope is that, if we can develop FastForward further, the links with the university might come in and do some research and evaluation on it.

[62] On Pyramid, interestingly, we are part of a research programme being undertaken by the University of West London and Eirias. We also have Pyramid now at Ysgol John Bright in Llandudno. It is part of that because it is looking at Pyramid and secondary. So, we will get some data back from that in another 12 months.

[63] **Aled Roberts:** Rwyf eisiau cyfeirio fy nghwestiynau at Dr Jones yn ysgol Eirias. Rwyf am ddeall yn union—. Mae Pam Boyd wedi dweud bod y cynllun peilot dwy flynedd hwn yn cael ei ariannu yn y lle cyntaf gan y rhaglen Teuluoedd yn Gyntaf, ac ar ôl hynny gan y rhaglen Cymunedau yn Gyntaf. Faint oedd cost y cynllun, ac a oedd yna feini prawf o ran yr ysgol, pan gychwynnodd y rhaglen, ynglŷn â llwyddiannau? A oeddech yn edrych ar bresenoldeb neu gyrhaeddiad? Beth oedd eich meini prawf chi fel ysgol?

**Aled Roberts:** I want to refer my questions to Dr Jones in Eirias school. I want to understand exactly—. Pam Boyd has said that this two-year pilot scheme is funded in the first instance by Families First, and after that by Communities First. What was the cost of the scheme, and were there criteria, in terms of the school, when the programme started, in relation to outcomes? Did you look at attendance or achievement? What were your criteria as a school?

[64] **Dr Jones:** The initial costs for us, based around the FastForward project, was just me going out to meet the pupils and their parents in the primary schools and then inviting them back for tea and biscuits. So, it was a very minimal cost. With the Pyramid group that we have now set up in year 7, in terms of the cost of the first Pyramid, which is running over 10 weeks, we have a budget of about £100 to fund all of the resorces for the pupils, and we will

be paying our teaching assistants to do an extra two-and-half hours a week for 10 weeks. So, those are the cost implications for us as a school.

[65] In terms of how I am looking to assess the impact of Pyramid, Pam has just mentioned that we are liaising now with the University of West London. So, we have been screening the pupils and parents before they start the Pyramid group. I also look at punctuality and attendance, and I look at behaviour referrals and academic progress. Just like my tutors have their own focus group, I have my own focus group. Some of the pupils are based within the FastForward group and have gone on into the Pyramid groups.

[66] **Aled Roberts:** Do you use Fischer data or anything within the school?

[67] **Dr Jones:** We do. We look at that, and we also test all of our pupils coming into year 7 with MidYIS, so we have a look at their academic potential. I find that, if I can have look at all of these academic data together, some of them do not necessarily blend easily together, but in isolation I can pick certain things out and think about individual pupils and about how I can best support them and their families. For instance, I have one girl who took part in the FastForward group last year. Her father came along and attended all of the sessions in the primary school. He also came up to visit us. She has been highlighted as one of the brightest pupils that we have in year 7. I have been able to share that with her and with her family, and hopefully inspire her to take full regard of what we have to offer at Eirias. She has lots of other things that she has to do after school, but with those data we have been able, hopefully, to inspire her to reach her full potential.

10:00

[68] **Aled Roberts:** Pan oeddech yn sôn am ymestyn y rhaglen, a oeddech yn sôn am rhaglen Pyramid neu rhaglen FastForward?  
**Aled Roberts:** When you talked about extending the programme, were you talking about the Pyramid scheme or the FastForward scheme?

[69] **Dr Jones:** I was referring to the Pyramid scheme.

[70] **Aled Roberts:** Roedd rhaglen FastForward yn cael ei hariannu yn gyfan gwbl yn allanol. Os yw'r rhaglen yn gymaint o lwyddiant, pam nad ydych yn defnyddio rhaglen FastForward ac yn ymestyn hynny i fwy nag un ysgol sydd y tu allan i gymunedau Cymunedau yn Gyntaf drwy ddefnyddio arian y grant amddifadedd?  
**Aled Roberts:** FastForward was entirely externally funded. If it is so much of a success, why do you not use the FastForward programme and extend that to more than one school outwith Communities First, using the deprivation grant funding?

[71] **Ms Boyd:** Pyramid clubs in Colwyn Bay and Conwy have had external funding from Communities First. We are still waiting to see if they are going to be able to carry on supporting it from 1 April. That has meant that schools in Colwyn Bay, Llandudno and Kinnel Bay have all been able to take part in Pyramid, if they have wanted to, and that has been fantastic.

[72] FastForward has been funded by Families First, so we had to look at which schools we were supporting, because of double funding and things. Anyway, FastForward has been in Ysgol Eirias and Pendorlan primary school, initially. We now have a very small grant from Families First to carry on the FastForward work with two or three new schools, this coming year. So, that is where we want to carry on supporting the work with Eirias, but we also want to look at one of the other secondary schools to put FastForward in there with their primary schools as well. What we are trying to do now is to make that case and win the hearts and

minds of the schools to say, 'Actually, it does work, and you do have the PDG'. That is a way of looking at it.

[73] We are also involved in the PDG match fund in Conwy, which would, again, if successful, bring in added resource, because it would look at supporting family engagement work, essentially, in secondary schools.

[74] **Aled Roberts:** What concerns me is that initiatives chase funding. The point that I am trying to make is that, if this evidence suggests that FastForward is as successful as is made out, why does Eirias not use its PDG moneys to roll out the FastForward programmes to all its feeder schools for those children who are entitled to free school meals?

[75] **Ms Boyd:** Obviously, I cannot answer for Eirias, but I can give you my view. Based on working with a lot of schools, there is still a job to be done in convincing schools that that is a better use of their PDG than something else.

[76] **Aled Roberts:** So, has any consideration been given at Eirias to that decision?

[77] **Dr Jones:** I met the headteacher this week, and he is keen to extend the project. We are—

[78] **Aled Roberts:** Do you mean the FastForward project?

[79] **Dr Jones:** Yes. With the FastForward project, we are going into another one of our feeder schools that has the highest proportion of free school meals, and that is Ysgol Cystennin. Do you know that one, Pam?

[80] **Ms Boyd:** Absolutely. We are working with Cystennin. In fact, that is due to start very soon.

[81] **Aled Roberts:** Will that use the pupil deprivation grant, rather than any further match funding?

[82] **Ms Boyd:** It is a mixture.

[83] **Ann Jones:** So, you choose a variety of streams of funding to fund this project.

[84] **Ms Boyd:** We look at programme bending and bringing in different bits of funding to make the package work.

[85] **Ann Jones:** Is it a package for children who are identified through the Pyramid scheme as needing that little bit more support?

[86] **Ms Boyd:** The Pyramid clubs are particularly for the quiet and the shy children. The FastForward programme is supporting the parents and the child together, and that is the intensive one. SmoothMoves is the light-touch programme, if you like. It is a portfolio of interventions.

[87] **Ann Jones:** Are you happy with that, Aled, now? Okay. Keith is next and then Rebecca. I am keen to try to move on to some of the other areas of questioning as well.

[88] **Keith Davies:** My question is about FastForward. The report says:

[89] 'The success of the first FastForward group meant that Angela Davies went on to select another group'.

[90] So, who selects the groups? If this is to do with the children who need support, why was the second group not chosen when the first group was chosen?

[91] **Ms Boyd:** Angela works for me; she leads on this area of work. What we have tried to do is to engage with the schools that are— well, we can only engage with the schools that want to engage with us. Initially, FastForward started with Pendorlan primary school and linked into areas. We are now looking at Ysgol Cystennin and a number of other schools that want to have the opportunity to try this programme as well, because they have seen how positive it has been with the one primary school.

[92] **Keith Davies:** Who chooses the families? Is it you or is it the school?

[93] **Ms Boyd:** That is very much the school, with our support. We can offer the expertise of having done it before. Part of what we are developing around the FastForward programme is a resource, similar to what we have for SmoothMoves and Pyramid clubs. They help schools to identify those families that would benefit the most. There is not anything off the shelf that will do it, so we need to look at what there is that will best identify those that would benefit most.

[94] **Keith Davies:** I am glad that you are going into another secondary school. I was concerned with the case study, because, to quote you:

[95] ‘In practical terms this has led to...parents changing their secondary school choice’.

[96] If I was headteacher of the other secondary school in Colwyn Bay, I would be a little worried to read that.

[97] **Ms Boyd:** Other secondary schools have been approached. As I say, we can only work with the schools that want to engage with us. It was not our intention to change people’s minds. It goes back to a lot of the work around—

[98] **Keith Davies:** The two schools are quite different, actually, because I know both schools in Colwyn Bay.

[99] **Ms Boyd:** Indeed. It also goes back to what we were saying about supporting the child and the parents together. What we have found out is that an awful lot of the perceptions and myths that children have around transition come from the family, particularly in areas where there is no huge movement of families. So, it is very likely that the parents and even the grandparents went to that same secondary school, and they perhaps still see it as it was many years ago. There is a lot of perception and myth. It was interesting that the particular family had had an older child at the secondary school who had a bad experience, so they were not sending the younger child to that school, and then changed their mind because they realised that it was a very good school.

[100] **Rebecca Evans:** Is there an evidence base to link shyness and lack of confidence to deprivation and low income, and then link that on again to achievement and attainment? You can understand how some assumptions might be made, but is there an evidence base to suggest that?

[101] **Ms Boyd:** Pyramid is an evidence-based programme. If you are interested I can send you some of the research that has been done on the Pyramid programme. I suppose that there was an assumption for quite some time around the link with the shy and withdrawn and the disadvantaged. I think that that is becoming more apparent, but it is not an area that has had specific research done on it. I think that we are only just realising that that is a definite link,

but not the only link.

[102] **Rebecca Evans:** When you say that ‘we’ are only just realising, do you mean you as a project or the wider academic world, which would be studying this?

[103] **Ms Boyd:** I think that it is both. I suppose that, in some respects, that has come with the focus on the priority on adjusting the impact of poverty on educational achievement and narrowing the gap. However, I think that there is still a lot of misconception out there, as I said in the paper, about terminology and how much schools really understand about raising achievement for all. We have certainly had success in that. However, if you are raising achievement for all, you are not necessarily closing the gap; you have to do a bit of both.

[104] **Rebecca Evans:** If you could send us more information about the evidence base, that would be useful. Thank you.

[105] **Dr Jones:** Just on that point about the evidence, some of the psychological papers that I have read, which have been linked to the PhD research of the lady in the University of West London, have evidence to link anxiety and stress levels to academic performance, particularly around the transition in year 6. They have lots of evidence in years 9, 10 and 11 but there is evidence lacking in years 7 and 8. That is why Michelle is basing her research around the early secondary school years: to try to fill that gap, to produce that evidence and to see how strong the link is between emotional wellbeing and academic performance.

[106] **Bethan Jenkins:** I just want to clarify a point. I do not know whether it is for Pam to answer. You say that you have evidence that you can associate self-confidence and shyness with low income. I have done a lot of work with eating disorders and the evidence there is that more people come from the higher-earning income streams. I am curious as to how that conclusion has been drawn, because it is not my experience that it is more predominant in low-income backgrounds. That is why I have been trying to do more work with getting it universally introduced in schools. The second question is: where are you fitting in with other things within school structures? For example, within the personal and social education framework where, quite often, social enterprise or other third sector organisations would be coming in to do workshops on self-esteem, confidence, mindfulness and so on. We do not want money to be used in one place and potentially replicated in activity in another place. How do you cross-reference those types of activities within the school structures?

[107] **Ms Boyd:** Our work is predominantly outside of the school day and outside of the curriculum. Everything that we do, we would do with the intention of it supporting the child in every aspect of their life. However, the Pyramid club happens after school hours, so we are not going into school and taking children out—it is about giving them something else. The majority of our work is delivered in that way. It is not about us going in and doing it; it is about giving schools the ideas, the training, the resources and the materials to be able to deliver that themselves. We do not see our role as going into lessons, for example. There are other organisations that do that and that is what they are about. What we try to do, whenever we work with a school, is to look at what the school does and how our work fits in with other work that it is doing. We certainly do not look to duplicate or to provide the same sort of thing. I think that schools are much more aware of what is going on and they want to put the right bits of the jigsaw together, and that may be through a range of different interventions.

[108] **Ann Jones:** I have Aled and Simon, very briefly, on this, and then I have a question that I want to move on to on costs associated with education.

[109] **Aled Roberts:** Rwyf eisiau deall a **Aled Roberts:** I just want to understand yw'r gwaith gydag Ysgol Pendorlan yn dod i whether the work with Ysgol Pendorlan is ben oherwydd bod y grant allanol yn gorffen. coming to an end because the external grant

Pa ddefnydd sy'n cael ei wneud o'r grant amddifadedd yn Ysgol Eirias a sut mae'r gwaith gyda CaST Cymru yn cyd-fynd â hynny? is coming to an end. What use is being made of the deprivation grant in Ysgol Eirias and how does the work with CaST Cymru align with that?

[110] **Dr Jones:** We are due to have a meeting in two weeks to discuss that, are we not, Pam? Is it on 27 March? I honestly cannot say from my point of view what the headteacher will do. I am really sorry, but I cannot comment on that.

[111] **Ann Jones:** You have heard the question that has been posed, so that might help you to formulate your pre-meeting discussions. That is the best that we can do. If there is anything that you think that we would be interested in to help us with our inquiry, we would certainly welcome some more information.

10:15

[112] **Aled Roberts:** Perhaps we could have a briefing from the school regarding the use it makes of the pupil deprivation grant.

[113] **Ms Boyd:** Just to answer on Pendorlan, we have a new head, so we are working with the new head to ensure that Pyramid and FastForward can continue in that school. These are the realities of working with schools. I do just want to say that Eirias is a fine example of the work that is going on so far, and the primary schools that we have been working with, but they are not the only ones—they are a case study that we are using, and Rachel is with us, but there are other examples that inform some of the other comments that I will be sharing with you.

[114] **Simon Thomas:** Mae gennyf gwestiwn penodol i Eirias, os gaf i. A fedrwch ddweud sut mae'r gwaith hwn yn cyd-fynd â'r gwaith arall sy'n digwydd yn yr ysgol o gwmpas gwasanaethau cynghori a chwmsela i blant, a phethau felly? Mae'n ymddangos bod tipyn o waith codi *self-esteem* yn digwydd, a dyna bwrpas y gwaith hwn, ond mae hwn yn rhywbeth a ddylai fod ar gael drwy'r ysgol beth bynnag. Sut mae'r ddau beth yn mynd gyda'i gilydd? **Simon Thomas:** I have a question specifically for Eirias, if I may. Could you tell us how this work aligns with the other work that is happening in the school around counselling services for children, and so on? It appears that there is some self-esteem raising work going on, and that is at the heart of this, but that is something that should be available throughout the school anyway. How do the two things go together?

[115] **Dr Jones:** I personally feel that the work that Pyramid does complements what we do within the pastoral system and within the counselling support mechanism that we have at school. I deal primarily with children in year 7 and linking them to counselling, maybe the trained counsellor we have within the school, or external agencies that work through school-based counselling. At the moment, I have one child who is participating in Pyramid who also receives a weekly counselling session. I do not feel that that is overstretching or is too much for that pupil at this time. I feel that it is complementing it. They really enjoy going to the Pyramid group. They do not see it as a hardship; they see it as a nice, fun thing to go and do on a Monday night. They see it as their time. They see it as a special thing, I think. At the moment, that is what we are seeing.

[116] **Ms Boyd:** That is what we find. I will just say as well that, as Pyramid has developed to be a programme specific to Wales, we worked very closely with Sylvia Jones in setting up the school-based counselling to ensure that Pyramid had its place in that bag of interventions. Our hope would be that some of the children who might otherwise progress to needing counselling would have some of those issues dealt with through a Pyramid club. We also train

sixth-form students to assist in the running of Pyramid clubs, so you have another layer of support within the school, because those young people are fantastic, and the work that they then carry on doing with younger pupils in the school is again very positive.

[117] **Ann Jones:** In the remaining 10 minutes or so that we have left, I will just ask one thing. We have been receiving evidence from parents and particularly parents who perhaps would not have got involved in a school setting—or certainly their parents did not—and somebody said that their first experience with a school may often have been a bad one, if the school had called them in. They were saying that there was an issue around the costs associated with education, such as trips, and particularly in primary schools, but also in secondary schools. We were hearing things like this: if you take a certain course in secondary school, the cost of the materials to do that course, which is part of the curriculum, is often off-putting. If your disposable income is not as great as that of many, children themselves, at an age of about 10 or 11, suddenly realise that they are putting an additional burden on their family's income if the school is going on a trip. That often leads to them bailing out, if you like, so they will not go to school the week that they know that money is being collected for a particular trip, or they will not go home and ask. I was wondering about this and I suppose that it is really about how you deal with that, if that has already been happening within the primary school element, and whether that affects the transition of pupils in year 7 at secondary school. It is because they are becoming aware of the financial implications that their parents, or their parent, are suffering. Rachel, do you want to come in?

[118] **Dr Jones:** From my point of view, when we come across a trip situation, which might be to an outdoor education centre for a weekend, it is quite a difficult one to play. However, I will call the child to me. If they have said that they are not going on the trip, I will call them to see me individually. I will ask them whether they would really like to go on the trip, whether it is a matter of money, and whether it is the case that they did not like to ask mum or dad for the money, and then I will take it from there. We do use our money then, and we would fund the trip for that pupil. It is done very much on an individual basis.

[119] **Ms Boyd:** It varies hugely. There are many schools that have a system in place like that, where children will not slip through the net. However, you are absolutely right: there is a whole host of reasons why children become aware and feel that something is not for them, for whatever reason. One of the other things that we have developed and are piloting is the use of school-home clubs. Again, this is about family engagement. I did not put it in the paper as it is very new. Our first one is around science, and it is an out-of-school club. The child goes to the out-of-school club and takes a science activity home. At the end of the 10 weeks, the parent comes in and they all do the activity together. One thing that we have built into that is that the school has to send everything home for the child to do that activity. I do not know whether any of you picked up that television programme last night, where celebrities were living in poverty, but it brings the issue home to you, and that when you ask a child to do just an experiment with bicarbonate of soda and a bit of food colouring, they probably do not have it or know what it is, and they certainly do not have the money to go and buy it. So, everything is sent home for that, and it is having a fantastic response rate.

[120] **Ann Jones:** Is there a digital divide in the feeder schools for Eirias High School and at the high school itself, whereby pupils are expected to be able to access some learning or additional learning via a computer? What happens if there is no computer in the home? Are you aware of a digital divide?

[121] **Dr Jones:** There is one, in a small minority of cases. However, we offer a homework club after school, which runs every night after school for an hour and a half. That is a free club where pupils can access computers, printers and all of the resources. So, it would be suggested to our pupils to attend that group if they were having difficulty doing their homework or extra learning. However, I can honestly say that, nowadays, 80% or 90% of

pupils have a smartphone. They have that device with them. They carry it with them, and they can access the internet most of the time. So, they tend to be able to look things up on their phone and write them in on their homework.

[122] **Ann Jones:** Do you have a wide travel-to-school area? Are a lot of your pupils bused in? I cannot remember where it is; I am trying to think. I should know because it is only down the coast. Do you bus children in and out of Eirias High School?

[123] **Dr Jones:** We have quite a few. However, for our intake this year in September 2014, about 80 out of 220 pupils are coming from non-feeder schools, so they are coming out of our traditional catchment area. Therefore, they will be brought in by parents. So, it is quite a small locality, really, for the majority of pupils.

[124] **Ann Jones:** Often, if children are bused into a secondary school, the after-school homework club, the football club, the chess club and whatever clubs that the school decides to put on are often not available to those children. The bus goes, and the parents who do not have access to car ownership would find it very difficult to ensure that their children get home.

[125] **Dr Jones:** With some pupils, we also find that they have to go and pick up younger siblings from local junior schools. So, we also offer them time at break time and lunch time to access the computers and printers.

[126] **Ms Boyd:** It is again a very mixed picture—the idea of the double disadvantage because of the lack of access to IT. I think that it is different now. There is a growing issue about the use of that access. As Rachel says, many more families have access, but it is about what it is used for as well. So, there are still some issues there. However, again, that whole access to out-of-school-hours learning or extra-curricular activities, as we used to call it, is still very much a postcode lottery for young people, depending on where they live, where their school is in relation to where they live, and their other commitments. There are ways of looking at it, even to some schools changing the times of the school day and having an out-of-school-hours afternoon, or whatever, where children can take part in a range of extra activities.

[127] **Ann Jones:** I was just going to ask whether Members had any more questions. I might have known that Aled would have some.

[128] **Aled Roberts:** This is a question for Dr Rachel Jones. What are your views on Welsh Government guidance and the use of the Sutton toolkit? To develop the theme that the Chair was taking us on, I think that some of us were rather taken aback last week with parents' evidence regarding the cost of cookery classes in particular and the structure of a curriculum that basically allows children to become somewhat imaginative in their use of materials and, perhaps, unrealistic, as far as their parents' ability to pay for that goes. There was a suggestion that in one cookery class the materials would have cost the parent about £30 or £40. Do the curriculum structures put pressures on those families with low incomes as well?

[129] **Dr Jones:** I teach science, and not technology, but I am a parent myself, and I came across this problem last week. My daughter is in year 7 in a different secondary school; she is in a Welsh-medium school. She was asked to bring fruit in for a fruit salad, and it cost me £15 to buy the five different fruits that she required, but I did it because that is what my daughter wanted and I could provide for that, but I can imagine that the pressures are great, and I can imagine some of my pupils deciding not to come to school.

[130] **Ann Jones:** What about the Sutton toolkit? Do you use the Sutton toolkit?

[131] **Dr Jones:** Can you pass you over to Pam on that one?

[132] **Ann Jones:** I think that you can; yes, that is fine.

[133] **Ms Boyd:** The Sutton toolkit is an interesting one. We brought it to the attention of the Welsh Government about four years ago as one method of looking at extra provision. Sutton is fine as far as it goes. I think that it is already, perhaps, a little dated, and there are other ways of looking at the impact and addressing it. It was one of the first things that ever looked at a cost-benefit analysis, which I think was interesting, and it certainly made people think a little differently. As to its real use on the ground in schools, it is a mixed picture.

[134] On the cookery issue, it is our evidence as well that it is an issue. Anything around putting strain on a family budget is an issue. We are piloting a home-school cookery club, where the school sends the ingredients and the activity to the home, and we got an award for a grant for that school to do it. So, those are some of the sorts of things that we try to do with schools.

[135] **Ann Jones:** Are Members content with that? I see that you are.

[136] I thank you both for your evidence. I am really pleased that you have managed to stay with us for the whole of the session, Rachel. You would not realise how much of a stress it is when we do video-conferencing. Thank you both very much for your evidence. We will send you a copy of the transcript just to check for accuracy, but if there are any notes that you think may help us, we would be willing to receive them at a later date.

[137] We will now have a five-minute break before our next set of witnesses comes in.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10:29 a 10:36.  
The meeting adjourned between 10:29 and 10:36.*

**Ymchwiliad i Ganlyniadau Addysgol Plant o Gartrefi Incwm Isel—Sesiwn  
Dystiolaeth 9  
Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low-income  
Households—Evidence Session 9**

[138] **Ann Jones:** We will reconvene. May I just do the usual housekeeping? If you have turned on your phones, could you make sure that they are turned off? We will move on.

[139] We are continuing to take evidence—well, not evidence, that sounds as if we are in a criminal court, or a court of some sort. We are continuing to take some examples and to have a discussion around parental engagement, which is part of our inquiry into educational attainment for children from low-income households. I am delighted to have with us, as our second set of people, Mike Gibbon, who is the headteacher of Sandfields Comprehensive School, and Karyn Keane, who is the headteacher of Newport High School. You are both very welcome and thank you very much for your papers.

[140] We have some areas that we want to look at. We want to look at the work that you do in your schools around parental engagement, then at some of the costs associated with education, and then there is a bit around the Welsh Government strategy and some funding issues. So, those are the three areas, broadly. I keep trying to remind the committee that those are the three areas, because we get stuck on one and we do not tend to move on. So, those are the three areas, just to give you a flavour of where we will be going. I do not know who wants to start off on work in the schools. Simon, would you like to start?

[141] **Simon Thomas:** Yes, thank you. You have both given us examples of how you engage with parents, but I would like to ask you first of all what you find is the greatest barrier, in your experience, in doing this. Is it around culture and attitude towards the school and the idea that the school gates close and that is another place where you do not go? Is it a lack of confidence and of understanding of what goes on in school? What are the barriers that you find really hold parents back in terms of knowing what their child is engaged in and therefore being able to support that child in their educational attainment?

[142] **Ms Keane:** Do you want to go first?

[143] **Mr Gibbon:** Okay, I will go first. I can only speak in particularities, because each school has a unique setting. In my setting, I would say that the greatest barrier is probably third generation non-employment. That builds up, I guess, in terms of the impact on self-esteem and confidence. However, when the parents do engage—. Every parent wants the best for their child, but sometimes circumstances make it difficult for them to provide the support that you perhaps see in more affluent and more secure areas. It is also shifting sands in terms of the households and the security that is provided for children. So, the initial aspect for my parents would be that they have been disassociated for some time, so it is the job of the community, and the school as part of that, to re-engage them by offering them non-threatening activities or a non-threatening means of engagement.

[144] **Simon Thomas:** I might ask a question to follow up on that, but could we hear from a Newport point of view first?

[145] **Ms Keane:** I would agree. I would say that there is no parent of a student at Newport High School who does not want to support their child to achieve the best that they can and to maximise their potential. However, I think that a number of our parents had a negative experience in their own education and that, potentially, has affected their ability to support their sons and daughters in learning, particularly where we are talking about learning that is different from that which the parents experienced in school. So, parents genuinely feel unable to support their sons and daughters and so they lack confidence. We note that that is particularly prevalent among a number of our parents who have poor literacy skills themselves.

[146] I also think that we have to work to challenge expectations, because there is almost an expectation that parental engagement becomes less important when a young person moves from primary education into secondary education. For example, I know of some parents whose children have ended year 6 and who had met their children in the playground at the end of the day in year 6, or, at home, they had talked to them about their learning when they arrived home, but the first thing that they gave them on their moving to year 7 was a key to the door, and felt then that they took a step back from education. So, I think challenging the parental perception that the value of parental engagement is less in secondary education than it is in primary education is something that we have to do as well.

[147] **Simon Thomas:** If I could ask the flipside of the same question, if there was a magic bullet around this, we would have heard about it already, I think, so, obviously, there are lots of interventions that have to be used to try to encourage that engagement. You talk about home contact and academic review days and such things that your schools have done. What do you find most effective, particularly when you are focusing on children from free school meal backgrounds? Are there particular things that you find do not work for everyone, but are at least tried and trusted methods and do seem to build that kind of engagement?

[148] **Ms Keane:** In my experience, there is not one thing. It is about—

[149] **Simon Thomas:** So, is it down almost to the family level?

[150] **Ms Keane:** I would suggest so, yes.

[151] **Mr Gibbon:** I have little time for very lengthy written things that really say nothing much at all, so, when you asked me to present a paper, I gave you 20 points and I said, ‘Look, there are 20 points there’, but I would not say that if you took one away—. It is about pulling all of the levers. As you know, we work with Professor Reynolds on high reliability schools and one of the aspects of high reliability schools is to use a variety of strategies and, if you took one of those away, you would worry what impact it would have. I do not know what makes the best impact out of those 20 points that I gave you, but I am saying that you need to—

[152] **Simon Thomas:** You need to do them all.

[153] **Mr Gibbon:** It is not rocket science; it is a simple, strategic point of view where you have standard operating procedures that engage parents. I think that that is the important thing.

[154] We said that every parent wants their child to do well, and I believe that. However, there are some parents who are further away than others and, for those parents, they see certain aspects of—. It is a culture and even a kind of subculture, where they are involved in daily activities that do not involve education and so they value education less. Those parents are a bigger challenge to get back on board, because they do not see the value in it themselves. So, there is a body of work there, which is a harder bit of work.

[155] **Simon Thomas:** So, although they may want their child to do well, they do not see education as a means of that child doing well.

[156] **Mr Gibbon:** Some of them, because of their own experiences, may be sharing those views and values with their children. Then, it is a harder cycle to break.

[157] **Simon Thomas:** Do you ever get feedback from parents on the sort of methods that you are using? Do you ever get that? Is it a passive sort of feedback or do you actually get to a situation where you get some active feedback and you can then think about how you can tailor things a bit more?

10:45

[158] **Ms Keane:** The work that we have done at Newport High School is based on parental feedback. I presented a number of examples in the paper, and I think that one of those that you identified earlier was on home contact. Many of you will be parents yourselves, so perhaps you could reflect on the sort of contact that you have with your own children’s schools. We felt that we were doing a really good job at communicating with and contacting parents. We had done a lot of work to upgrade our website and to make sure that we were writing out to people. Despite that, when we held school productions or put on school events, parents’ evenings or meetings, we were having a very poor turnout, particularly at parents’ evenings. So, we asked parents why that was. Obviously, if you are going to ask parents, you have to listen to them, and, in a school like Newport High School, where you have a variety of parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds, you are going to have different views. However, one of the things that parents told us was that, in the main, they had little communication from the school at all other than a termly newsletter, a letter, an invitation to a parents’ evening, et cetera, or phone calls for negative reasons, such as their child not having done their homework or concerns about the child’s attendance. When we spoke to parents, we actually had some quite hard-hitting feedback from those parents. When you feel that you are doing a good job, suddenly to be told that, actually, you are not doing the job that you thought

that you were doing—. We needed to listen.

[159] As a result of that, we introduced a whole-school strategy, which we call home contact. So, every single teacher has on their timetable, once a fortnight, one hour of home contact. We ask every teacher, once a fortnight, to make sure that they phone three parents of children in their tutor book to give positive feedback, and then they can make one phone call to give some negative feedback or to give some feedback about an area of improvement that is needed. Anecdotally, that has changed parents' perceptions quite considerably, but it has also changed students' perceptions. Parents report to me how lovely it is to have a phone call at home to say how well their child has performed in the school football team, or that they have handed in a fantastic piece of homework, or that they have gained a couple of merits for certain things. Also, students come back in and say, 'Thanks for phoning my mum' or 'Thanks for phoning my dad to let them know about this. As a result, they have given me an extra couple of pounds of pocket money' or whatever. It is all about relationship-building and showing that we can work together to create a positive learning environment, and recognising that we are both partners in a child's learning.

[160] So, that home contact has proven to be really useful for us. As I said, I have provided you with some data which, I am sure you will agree, are quite staggering, because teachers like giving good news to parents and they enjoy the conversation that follows as a result of it. As I said, I think that that then affects other things that we have done in school. If we are organising a production or an event, when you are making your positive home contact, you mention it to parents. They have had a personal invitation, which then impacts on their feeling welcome in the school and wanting to come to school to participate in those activities.

[161] **Ann Jones:** You have obviously stirred up a lot now, because I have a lot of people wanting to come in. I have Keith, Suzy and then David Rees. I will then come back around, because I know that others will have questions.

[162] **Keith Davies:** I have a couple of questions on parents and parental contact. Until around 12 years ago schools would have an annual parents' meeting, but parents did not turn up. So, in the end, the Welsh Government said, 'We do not need to have those any longer'. You probably remember those, because, in large schools of 1,800 pupils, sometimes 30 parents turned up. I have two questions on what you have written for us. First, the Sandfields paper refers to the 'Bridge'. I wonder what the 'Bridge' is. It is in point 15 of your report. Then, in the Newport paper, you talk about having appointed a family engagement officer. I just wondered what those two elements are.

[163] **Mr Gibbon:** The 'Bridge' is a name that we gave to it. The children chose the name. It is for a particular aspect of our cohort. They would be children who would find it hard to adjust to school, and they are not necessarily the children with significant behavioural problems; they are children with relationship problems or children who are maybe more isolated than other children and find it difficult to form friendship patterns. Also, they might come to school without having had breakfast or do not have any meal during the day. So, you can self-refer as a child but also, through our pastoral system, form teachers will use a big, bespoke system that we designed on our own, so we feed that into those who run the Bridge and then children are asked if they would like to go to the Bridge. What happens when they go to the Bridge is that their parents get involved as well, so they come along and, therefore, we are engaging again with the parents who may be the furthest away from the school. They cook their own breakfast in the morning; they have cooked me breakfast, which was interesting—I had beans on toast with them. They learn life skills in there, so they come out of specific lessons to learn those life skills. They learn social interaction skills. Funnily enough, I am not advertising IKEA to you, but the internal design was from IKEA and we put a kitchen in there and so on.

[164] They do activities that may be different, such as activities with TAN Dance. You might have heard of TAN Dance, which is a dance group. It used to be the West Glamorgan dance group and then became TAN Dance. So, they do their own show and that gives them a feeling of self-worth, and the families participate in the show. We put it on during term time in the evening, so all the parents of these children come to school, see their child doing something very successful and it seems to re-engage them in the school process and re-engage parents whom we find hard to reach, because there is a reason to come in. That reason is not, as you say, because of us saying to them, 'Your child is here', but it is because they have been part of the planning for the annual show, for example. They then go back and cook their parents food in the mornings, because, sometimes, the parents have their own issues and maybe do not get up in the morning. So, that is why we call it the 'Bridge', and we use the Boxall profile as a means of looking at the needs—it is a needs-analysis process—and then giving bespoke provision for those children.

[165] Things are never 100% successful, but it seems to be successful with the majority of children. They re-engage and they form their own friendship groups as well, which is good for them. So, it seems to be working quite well.

[166] **Ms Keane:** With regard to the family engagement officer, we have done a lot of work to engage families and to form contact, such as academic review days. Academic review days are our alternative way of providing parents with information about young people's progress. So, we offer parents an appointment at any time between 8.30 a.m. and 8 p.m. The parent comes in for 15-minute appointment and meets with the child's tutor. The tutor has in front of them every piece of information about the child's academic progress, their targets, if they are accessing any intervention groups and their attendance. So, the parents can have a meeting with a tutor, and our parents find that much more accessible, because they told us that they were intimidated by speaking to subject specialists. They also told us, 'If my son or my daughter is not doing homework, I don't need to go to see 10 teachers and hear the same message repeatedly.' So, by giving them a 15-minute appointment twice a year with a person with whom they get to know really well and whom they can communicate with between these meetings—this is often the person who makes the home contact with them as well—we have increased our attendance at parents' evenings or parents' activities, with regard to progress, from 30% to 77%, which is great, but there are still more than 20% of parents who we are not engaging with. Those parents are the hard-to-reach parents. They are the ones who potentially have that negative view about school, perhaps based on a negative experience themselves. So, we decided to pilot the role of a family engagement officer, specifically to work with those hard-to-reach families, which, in our case, tend to be those families who are most likely to be suffering from deprivation or poverty anyway. So, we introduced the family engagement officer to work with specific families and particular year groups. We were able to identify the students in year 11, for example, who were eligible for free school meals. We were able to look at whether their parents were engaging with the school on academic review days, and if they were not, that could become a target group for the family engagement officer to work with.

[167] Our family engagement officer is known as Sonia to our parents. She has a very informal relationship with them. She will go out to the family home and talk to them about learning and provide feedback. She will accompany them to meetings in schools, so she will either drive them in or meet them in school. She will provide training for them and workshops on how to deal with a teenager. She will also act as a mediator between children and their parents. She will also provide training and workshops on preparation for exams, how to support your child with homework and how to provide the right environment in your home to support young people. The work is in its infancy. She has been in post for six months. However, we can already see the difference with those parents and those families. It is going to be very hard work, and we feel that the work is going to be needed over a number of years, and will actually continue. As a headteacher, as long as I do not expect her to increase

attendance at academic review day by 15% this year, we will be okay. What she is doing is getting two, three and four families who were never engaged before to attend meetings with us, to attend tutor meetings with us, and to enable them to feel better prepared to support their sons and daughters in their education.

[168] **Ann Jones:** I have got Suzy, then David, then Aled.

[169] **Suzy Davies:** I have two questions, really. The first one is certainly to both of you. Congratulations to both of you on improving the results at level 2 so considerably in the last five years, both for children on free school meals and those not on free school meals. That rather suggests, as all your boats have risen, that if parental engagement is a key tool, it applies whether a child is from a deprived area or not. I wonder whether you want to comment on that. Also, there is a better improvement with non-free-school-meal children. Would you say, then, that the difference between the free-school-meal and the non-free-school-meal children is very much down to improved parental engagement or is it a combination of factors, which you alluded to earlier? We are trying to get a grip on how significant good parental engagement is.

[170] **Mr Gibbon:** In my school, it is interesting. The free school meal, particularly today, does not give you clarity about the socioeconomic aspect in a household. I have parents, maybe single parents, who are working and find themselves in a worse financial situation than those who may not be working and may be getting Government aid. So, FSM in a sense does not articulate that very well. Therefore—I am going to digress here—it interests me when I get my pupil deprivation grant and I get people telling me that I have to focus solely on my FSM people when, in certain schools, there are differences in terms of the socioeconomic status of non-FSM. Clearly, in my school, I would suggest there is not much difference. I might have 10% that you would look at that would be significantly okay in terms of financial income, but then I have a large proportion who are non-FSM but are still struggling. Put that to one side—

[171] **Suzy Davies:** That is useful information.

[172] **Mr Gibbon:** It needs to be known. I have put it at point 20 when I talk about effective use of the pupil deprivation grant. People are saying to me all the time, 'It has to be FSM', but in my catchment, I have to do everybody, because 85% of my children are still in difficult situations.

11:00

[173] With the others who do get on, it is about having greater parental support, with regard to maybe being able to work with children at home; having access in the home to ICT or other data-rich environments, which is important these days; the ability to look at a question or an aspect of work and be able to articulate an answer to them and work with them; and also the other aspect of engaging other people and helping them to do their work. So, it is a lot to do with parenting, but I want to make it clear that, in some schools—it might be different in others, but you have to speak about the peculiarities of your own environment—FSM does not sometimes show the picture of finance at home on a broader scale.

[174] I am now going to contradict that by saying that there are parents who earn low incomes et cetera who still are able to give the appropriate support to their children. So, it is not a one-size-fits-all situation; there are parents who are maybe finding it difficult in socioeconomic terms, or whatever, but who are still providing that good support and good access to the education system. However, by and large, probably differences in aspects of parenting would be a factor in that.

[175] **Suzy Davies:** Thank you. Was your experience pretty much the same, Ms Keane?

[176] **Ms Keane:** I would reiterate exactly what Mike has said. I can give you some specific data, because, having been through an Estyn inspection recently, there are little nuggets of information stored in my brain. [*Laughter.*] The all-Wales core data set for 2013 tells me that 59% of the students who come to Newport High School live in the most deprived 20% of areas in Wales, and yet only 28% of them are eligible for free school meals. That is an interesting piece of data in itself, but it highlights that deprivation does not relate only to those young people who are eligible for free school meals. So, we have to make sure that we are meeting the needs of all of our learners.

[177] I also agree that parental engagement means engaging all parents, not only those of young people who are eligible for free school meals, because, believe it or not, all parents could do with some support in order to make sure that their sons or daughters maximise their potential. It might be a matter of offering workshops to some parents on how to use apps on an iPad in order to support learning and revision, such as using BBC Bitesize, or with other parents, you may be talking about enabling their sons and daughters to borrow equipment so that they can access those facilities at home, but with school resources. So, while the avenues that we use might be different, and the workshops and the support are different, the need is there among all parents.

[178] **Suzy Davies:** Thank you very much. I would like to ask a second question, which, once again, is to both of you. Certainly, Ms Keane mentioned having parents come in to the school, and attendance, but I believe that you have both mentioned that members of staff go out to individual homes. I guess that that is small in number, but can you tell me why you think that that is necessary with certain parents and how effective it is?

[179] **Mr Gibbon:** It happens daily. It is not small in number.

[180] **Ms Keane:** I agree.

[181] **Mr Gibbon:** It happens daily in my school. I believe I said that we ‘take the mountain to Mohammed’.

[182] **Suzy Davies:** Yes, you did.

[183] **Mr Gibbon:** You can write letters, phone or text, and you may not get the engagement that you want. I go out quite frequently, knock the door and go in. It is probably once or twice a week that I go out, and my pastoral team are out there more than me. It is important that the head is seen in the street, and it is important that he is seen knocking the door and going in. That is what I do. The reason is that we have to engage, and these are the people who are furthest away. We have to engage them in the process. It is not always bad news; it is about going out, being seen, and being a part of the community, So, we do it. We do it tactically and structurally to support the learning of the children.

[184] **Suzy Davies:** What are the results like from those visits?

[185] **Mr Gibbon:** On the results of those visits, you have my results over a decade now, so—

[186] **Suzy Davies:** What about the results for that particular cohort of families?

[187] **Mr Gibbon:** For that particular cohort, it means that we have been able not to result in permanent exclusion. If you look at my statistics, you can probably count on one hand the permanent exclusions that I have had over a decade. So, those are the guys that we are talking

about, and people close to that. Although I have got a bone to pick on my attendance, because—I will not get into that. [*Laughter.*] Attendance is still very good among my families and by going in and doing that, I get the attendance up. So, the attendance is still in the upper quartile among my families, and that is one of the things that we do: we go out and we talk to them and we ask if there is a problem, and why this person is not in school. It is a vital thing that my pastoral team is involved in, but I also believe that it is vital that the head is involved—that the head is seen to be going out—because that puts the importance on it. It has other effects. If you want to look at it statistically, the number of my permanent exclusions is down and my attendance rates are still in the upper quartile. So, I would say that it is one of the levers. Taking the mountain to Mohammed is one of the levers that you need to use in your arsenal.

[188] **Ms Keane:** For me, there are two elements; there is communicating with parents and there is engaging with parents. You can send as many letters as you want to and make phone calls, but that is not engaging with people. For those people who will not come into school and engage with us in school, we need to consider why. That means going out to them and talking to them about it. It is daily. We also have to consider whether we have to go out and talk to them about attendance, whether there are other social, welfare and emotional matters that need to be discussed. It is important that those hard to reach parents see that we care. By going out, you are breaking down that barrier. You are showing that we are partners in this, that it is really important that we care for each other and that we can help each other. By going out, it really breaks down so many barriers. I do not go out half as frequently as Mike does, and I—[*Laughter.*]

[189] **Suzy Davies:** However, there is no hostile reception, is there?

[190] **Ms Keane:** Occasionally, you will get a hostile reception. However, what normally happens is that you go out the first time and perhaps the family will not open the door, and you drop a little message through the door. You go out the second time, and they open the door. It is just that they think, ‘They’re going to keep coming back, so I may as well talk to them’.

[191] **Mr Gibbon:** I go round the back as well. [*Laughter.*] However, the point that I want to make is that when I go in the house, I need the information, because it tells me what that child—

[192] **Suzy Davies:** It tells you where that child is coming from.

[193] **Mr Gibbon:** Sometimes, it is, ‘Great, fine, okay’ and at other times, when I have gone in, I have thought, ‘Wow, I can see why he’s late in the morning’. So, I need to get an edge on that. The only way you can do that is by being as proactive as that. We work on this not just on an ad hoc basis; we work on data and with the education welfare officer and youth worker to identify families where we think, ‘Right, we need to get out and we need to know what is going on’. I need to go out, because I need a reality check sometimes, as a head. If I do not do that, I do not know what is going on in my community. I need to know what is going on in my community, so I need to be involved in that process.

[194] **Ms Keane:** Those home visits, such as the examples I gave from the family engagement officer, have resulted in onward referral to Families First and to the team around the family. The family engagement officer will support the parents at those meetings as well. So, it becomes very much that joined-up approach where other services are working with them.

[195] **Suzy Davies:** You have pre-empted my last question, so there we are; thank you.

[196] **David Rees:** You have both mentioned that the school is unique to its community and that each one is unique, but I want to focus on Mike in this instance. You have given us 20 points here. You are also unique because you are the head of two comprehensives in preparation for the merging of those two schools in Port Talbot. How are you seeing the second comprehensive, Glan Afan Comprehensive School, and are these 20 points as applicable there? Are you working to the same rules? Are there issues which you are seeing differently?

[197] **Mr Gibbon:** That is a good one, is it not? [*Laughter.*]

[198] It is great; I am enjoying it. I run two schools; they are two different types of schools. However, with the 20 points, aspects of those points still apply in different ways to Glan Afan. The depth of need is not as great in terms of the cohort. The socioeconomic balance, if you like, in Glan Afan would be more of a comprehensive balance if you had a distribution curve. So, there is a different socioeconomic group there. What I have found interesting, over the last few years of engaging with parents, is that there are some parents who attack very fervently the school's processes. It is difficult, but they are almost in denial that their child is also part of perpetrating some of the issues that we might find.

[199] I have been a head of year and a head of department, and I have been in a senior team for 20, 23 or 24 years, probably. What I have seen more recently, in the last three or four years, is that there are some parents that I want to engage with and go out to meet, and I do not mind their reaction as long as I get a reaction rather than apathy; I am pleased if I get a reaction, sometimes. However, I also have groups of parents now in both schools who are of the view that the school is against the child. I have not seen that as much in my career as in the last three or four years. So, how do I engage with that? I am still trying to engage with parents; I am still trying to involve them and explain that we have to work together for the benefit of the child. However, I believe that there is a small minority of parents who almost do not want you to be able to challenge their child in any form, and that is getting more difficult.

[200] To answer on the 20 points, I went around then because I think that you need to know that schools are increasingly getting parents that you want to engage with but you see that when you do something and it does not fit in with their child, they are more vocal to the extreme.

[201] **Simon Thomas:** You have identified that; is it linked to areas of low-economic, low-income backgrounds, or is it more of a general cultural thing?

[202] **Mr Gibbon:** I cannot give away specifics, because it would be inappropriate. However, the parents that I have been engaged with tend to be those who have difficulty with parenting skills; they tend to have been involved with social services and they tend to have a background where there has been difficulty with the child at home. It is almost as if, because you are a figure of authority, they do not want to engage; they see it as a difficult thing. Their past experience is having an influence on the child. Having two schools, some of those areas, you would—. I call it 'peak it'; you would go through those 20 points and you would peak one more in one school than another, because of the unique need of the school. So, I still think that the 20 points apply, but you would give greater emphasis to some of them than others because of the uniqueness of each environment.

[203] **Ann Jones:** You have only one school, Karyn. [*Laughter.*]

[204] **Ms Keane:** I will give you an example, even in one school, and I would suggest that this would be the case in many schools. No school has 100% parental attendance at parents' evenings. Everybody has a group of parents that they need to work with to engage them

further. So, whether it is a school in the leafy suburbs, or whether it is a school in an inner-city area or a rural school, I am sure that the strategies that you would need to enhance or improve your parental engagement would be common, but how you tackle them might differ.

11:15

[205] **David Rees:** May I ask another question on a different topic?

[206] **Ann Jones:** Yes, you can, and then I will move on to Aled.

[207] **David Rees:** My question is about engagement with Communities First. How do you find that that engagement is working to encourage parents? One of the concerns that I have is that parents who are lacking in skills also need that support to drive up their skills so that they can help the children. So, how is your engagement with Communities First groups?

[208] **Mr Gibbon:** Communities First is vital. I was a great believer in community-focused schools and I am a great believer in the school around the child. That is what we call it at Sandfields. We work very closely with Communities First. My youth worker is funded by Communities First and throughputs into the youth service in the evenings to make sure that our children are not engaged in other activities, I would say.

[209] Also, on site, we have a significant presence of adult learning, which is not run by schools. When we look at community-focused schools, there is a misconception that that means that you do after-school clubs and after-school revision. That goes without saying, and the majority of schools will deliver that. However, if you are looking at a community-focused school, my staff cannot do that, because they are tired and they have their own jobs, so you use other people. Communities First come in, and they set up hairdressing, basic skills, construction and brick laying, and they involve adult learning on site in those activities. That gives me two things. It is hard to say it sometimes, but it shows some children that those who maybe did not get their heads down early on are re-engaging with education, so why not do it the first time? It shows that and it shows the lifelong learning aspect of education. My parents, through another Communities First activity, can re-engage in a more appropriate way with the learning of their children, because their skills are being enhanced by the community itself.

[210] Sometimes, when you talk about parents coming onto the school site, and the threatening aspect of that, by having something like Communities First—it is called ‘strides’ in my school—people come in and they are able to do courses that are appropriate and then be signposted after that to employment. So, I think that that has made a big impact, not only on the school environment, but on the community that I serve, because people can see positivism to this location and to the school, by people coming in and re-engaging with learning. So, Communities First has been significant in our community-focused school around the child learning environment.

[211] **Ms Keane:** I would reiterate the importance of Communities First. I have a member of staff who sits on the partnership board to make sure that we are involved at that strategic level with the planning of activities, the use of money, grants et cetera.

[212] Last year, I match funded my PDG with Communities First funding. So, by match funding, we could put on a greater number of workshop sessions and support groups in the community. I have two examples of that. One is nurture provision, where we have looked at providing nurture opportunities or training for staff, making sure that nurture groups are available for young people and then training parents with that nature provision. Secondly, we identified a group of year 11 learners, as they were last year, who had the potential to be NEET on leaving school. We funded some additional literacy and numeracy training for those

young people with some staff who they got to know really well. When those learners left school at the end of year 11, and they are currently in year 12, we funded a programme that we are calling our 'post year 11 programme'. Those learners are accessing sporting activities, training activities, work with Careers Wales and additional literacy and numeracy activities within the community. Again, that was match funded against the PDG.

[213] There are lots of opportunities there to work with Communities First to make sure that we are maximising the potential for any grant funding that we have available and to make sure that that funding goes into the areas of greatest need, whether that is after-school workshops, training for young people, training for staff, et cetera. There are so many opportunities there.

[214] **Ann Jones:** Aled is next.

[215] **Aled Roberts:** I am just interested in developing this funding theme, really. We had evidence earlier of where a school had contracted with a third-sector organisation to provide nurture. You mentioned the Bridge and family engagement officers. Have you tended to use your own staff or is it a mixture?

[216] **Mr Gibbon:** I have used a mixture of staff. I have a massive relationship with Communities First, because we have put bids in together—it is similar to what you have done in Newport, is it not—to get the funding drawn down. My youth engagement worker, who works with some of my characters, is based in Communities First. He works in the youth club in the evening, he works for me in the school during the day, and he links in with the youth offending team. He tries to get the school around the child again, identifying the children whom we need to support. When there was significant funding available from Europe, we put in a bid for several hundreds of thousands of pounds, which we won. That allowed us to redevelop a section of the school and then redevelop another section of the school so that the community could use it during the day. So, we have a community environment on site that is used during the day time. It is not used so much in the evening; it is a nine-to-five situation. That was achieved with support from the LEA, as well, which backed us in a bid for European funding through Communities First. So, it is very important that you have joined-up thinking with Communities First people and others because they are serving the same environment as you are. Together, we can make a difference if it is more joined up, rather than it being an isolated situation.

[217] **Ms Keane:** I have used a slightly different approach in that I have trained existing staff, because I was looking for a sustainable model. So, for example, with nurture, which has just been mentioned, I have worked with primary schools to make sure that there are staff trained in the primary schools that feed us and secondary school staff on the same training so that there is a model of continuity that runs through. So, students who experience nurture support have the same nurture support or relevant nurture support in primary and secondary school. Also, primary schools already know the families that need that level of support. So, by working closely with those primary schools, they have identified the families that we would need to pick up or start work with early, before the young people transfer to us. So, I have gone for a sustainable model by training staff in school with the skills and expertise that we will need.

[218] **Aled Roberts:** There is a plethora of nurture approaches. How do you decide on which is suitable, as a head of a successful school? I realise that every school is different.

[219] **Ms Keane:** I took advice from Communities First, because it had specific views about the nurture training that would be most beneficial within the community. So, I was able to take its advice on the programmes.

[220] **Mr Gibbon:** We have trained up staff in nurture; there is bespoke training for staff. We have done that, so we have experts who understand the Boxall profile, how to facilitate it and the counselling aspects. We have a counsellor as well. We have made sure that, as I said, we have the school around the child so that we can deliver this not in a Mickey Mouse way, but in a way that is strategic and is led by systems and procedures. I think that it is important that we recognise that, if you are doing this, you have to invest in the right qualifications and the right people, otherwise, you could have a significantly—. You could have more trouble if you got it wrong, so, because of that, we have done it that way. I think that it is important, as well, that with grant funding—with the school effectiveness grant, for example, and the PDG—we have put people into the junior school. So, we have worked with our cluster. It is mentioned in the paper; it is a transition co-ordinator who looks not only at academic progression, but at social progression. That is critical, and I hope that I can keep that as one of the funded things. It is from grant funding, which is an additional thing, but it allows us to use expertise in looking at people when they come in from junior schools. The transition process is smoother, because they see a face that they know and that is important. On the funding there, for some of the funding that we have put in there, we have tried to match it with the funding of other agencies to maximise our impact.

[221] **Ann Jones:** I have Suzy and Simon—

[222] **Aled Roberts:** May I just ask a quick question?

[223] **Ann Jones:** You may ask a quick one, but then I have Suzy and Simon on that point. You will have to hold your questions in your thoughts and we will come back to you. Go on, Aled, very quickly.

[224] **Aled Roberts:** Suzy made the point earlier that you have both seen very impressive improvement in attainment, both with free school meal and non-free school meal pupils, much of that, presumably, before the advent of the pupil deprivation grant. You have made the point already about free school meals being an indicator of deprivation. What is your view of guidance on the Sutton Trust toolkit?

[225] **Ms Keane:** To be honest, I have found it very interesting, because it has challenged some of my perceptions about things that are high cost, low impact, or low cost, high impact. We have also found it useful as a school to be able to discuss the strategies recommended in the toolkit. So, for example, if you look at metacognition as one of the strategies that is recommended as being high impact, low cost, it brings you back to teaching and learning and the importance of teaching and learning and of making sure that young people learn how to learn and know how to know. As such, it reminds you that, whatever practice we follow with regard to parental engagement and any other thing that we do, we can have the greatest amount of impact in the classroom by getting the young people in the classroom in the first place.

[226] **Mr Gibbon:** It was done a while back, I think—[*Inaudible.*] We do look at it and cross-reference it. Funnily enough, I do use that, but also the school effectiveness framework, which was much maligned. The whole school effectiveness framework original documentation, which looked at community engagement, leadership and parents, gave you the pegs on which you could analyse your school and I still use it. I go back over it biannually with my senior team and my middle leaders and I use the headings that are in the school effectiveness framework. It is very good. We have made it bespoke. I have changed it to make it user-friendly, because it was quite a lengthy document that sometimes was not user-friendly. So, I have made it bespoke, so that I can use it in my organisation, but I still hit those things.

[227] So, in answer to your question, that does raise questions such as in this. What this

gives me is the cost implication; it just says that it is a seven out of 10, or a five out of 10, and the impact that it will have. However, if you put this alongside the school effectiveness framework, as a leader, you will not go far wrong in looking at the entirety of your school. I think that, when it was first instigated, we perhaps did not understand that enough. I still use it and I have used it for many years. It does then point me to areas where I might have lapsed somewhat—I will use that word—and then I think, ‘Okay, I had better boost that one up’. So, I do use this, but I recommend the school effectiveness framework to headteachers, because it makes you think more broadly about the all aspects of delivery in your organisation.

[228] **Ann Jones:** I have Suzy, then Simon, and then I want to move on to the costs associated with education.

11:30

[229] **Suzy Davies:** I can take a very short answer to my question, actually. It goes back to what we were talking about earlier about nurture and particularly the adults, the parents, on site. How important do you both think that it is that teachers are visible in those kinds of activities outside of the classroom in trying to overcome more-difficult-to-reach parents’ inherited concerns about the school environment? I was just a little concerned that it all seemed to be that third parties were coming in and delivering the good stuff, and the teachers were in the classrooms. I could not see how that would help with parental engagement.

[230] **Ms Keane:** I do not think that that is the case.

[231] **Suzy Davies:** That is what I wanted you to reassure me on.

[232] **Ms Keane:** I would suggest, in the case of both of us, I am sure, that our staff are trained in delivering those programmes—

[233] **Suzy Davies:** They are visible across the whole—

[234] **Ms Keane:**—and visible right through them, but also support staff as well as teaching staff, because your TAs are a valuable resource. Therefore, you can make sure that as many staff as possible are trained and are involved with that training so that parents build relationships—

[235] **Suzy Davies:** Yes, with the third sector, but not in separate silos.

[236] **Mr Gibbon:** If you look at the context of the school and all of the pieces of the jigsaw that go into it, you will have teachers whose prime objective—I am not going to apologise for it—is to ensure that the children get the best outcomes at the end of their key stages, particularly key stage 4. However, in terms of other aspects of teaching and learning and extra-curricular activities—both of us have alluded to those in terms of engagement in extra-curricular activities, trips, assemblies, and bringing people in to celebrate success—staff would be clearly involved in those. The point that I am trying to make is, and some of the aspects that I have talked about are, that you have to have the best people doing the right things. So, with Communities First, for example, delivering to adults within the environment, you have the expertise there delivering the right courses at the right time. So, you have to use all the expertise at your disposal. That does not necessarily mean that the staff will be the best people to use in those circumstances, but it does not mean, obviously, that the staff are just inside the classroom; they will be involved in the enrichment activities that every school would run in any case.

[237] **Suzy Davies:** Okay. That is lovely, thank you.

[238] **Ann Jones:** Simon is next.

[239] **Simon Thomas:** I just have this vision in my head now of headteachers burrowing underneath the half tonne of strategies over the past 10 years to find the school effectiveness framework in order to get it back out and use it again. However, I wanted to ask about funding, really. You have described in your evidence lots of different ways in which you have funded different aspects of this work, and some of that has been physical construction, I understand. Of course, there has been a political deal here and a considerable uplift in the pupil deprivation grant, but we all know as well the general state of public finances at the moment. What consideration can you give at the moment, with the current different programmes that you have to mix and match together, to the sustainability of this going forward? I am struck by your evidence regarding training. Obviously, when you train a teacher, as long as you can retain that teacher, that element is retained within your institution. However, in two years' time, perhaps, Communities First could go. There could be some other change. It has already been clustered, and something else could come along in two or three years' time. So, how are you able to prepare for changes in the funding regime that might come along within your schools?

[240] **Ms Keane:** It is that strategic overview. We talked about the one person being trained, but I would suggest that, in the vast majority of schools, the one person is trained and then their role is to cascade that training to others and to spread that training as broadly as possible. The use of INSET days, but also other CPD arrangements within schools, is important. However, what I am really conscious of is, as you have said, that we have additional funding this year and we need to use it wisely to invest in strategies that are going to have an impact in the long term. So, the sorts of work that we are doing are very targeted. To give you an example relating to literacy and numeracy, we know that, in order to maximise outcomes, our students need to have better literacy and numeracy skills. However, as schools, we frequently put intervention in that at the top end, at year 11, before students are accessing exams. So, schools have an opportunity to use this money to build an improvement from year 7, and build improvement from year 6, if possible, and therefore make those improvements sustainable. You have got to have that long-term view, and certainly that is what we have done at Newport High School. We have looked at how we can build in improvement at key stage 3, and potentially at key stage 2 as well, so that we maximise that additional funding this year. Also, we ensure that we provide staff training appropriately.

[241] **Mr Gibbon:** We need to look at the funding in Wales and at what we do. The pupil deprivation grant is essential for schools like mine. With falling rolls and so on, to sustain your staff is an exercise in itself, as a head. Then to ensure that the PDG gives you the additionality that you want is also a challenge. Our worry, because of its grant status, is that there is a recognition that socioeconomic background impacts on learning—we do not have to go into all the research that says that—and yet we put a three-year plan in, or a two-year plan, and I do not know how much money I am having next year. I train people up. I try to train people up and be effective in my management of resources. For example, I will second somebody internally and then bring somebody in so that I do not lose that person. In terms of the pupil deprivation grant, if I want them working on something, I will second them out to do that, maybe at a higher level in terms of pay, but then, if that grant goes, they can slip back into where they were. So, I do not have a vacuum in knowledge and training in terms of what I have done. However, it is not the way to plan things. If I train somebody up—and this has happened—and then there is a permanent job, and that person has now got the skills and attributes for a permanent job, they tend to leave me, and I find myself having to do it again, or whatever. So, in Wales we need to be bold and say that, if we do recognise that social deprivation has an impact on learning, we need to put our money where our mouth is so that heads can strategically plan. I still find myself planning year-on-year, even with my delegated budget. Although I am looking three or four years ahead, sometimes I cannot plan effectively and know what resources I can deploy by having stability for three or five years. So, I think

that there is a body of work to be done there in order that we can sustain effectively some of the additional measures that we are engaged in.

[242] **Ann Jones:** We are fast running out of time, but I just have one question around the costs associated with education. We have heard from parents and groups about the barriers that these additional costs may present. I think, Mr Gibbon, you mentioned attendance, although you are in the upper quartile. However, we have heard from parents that children will stay away from school when they know there is a trip that their parents will never be able to afford to pay for. Rather than be embarrassed about that, they then absent themselves. Also, I think that the one example that shocked us all was from a parent whose child was doing GCSE cookery, who said that the ingredients would have fed the rest of the family for six months, basically, in terms of their cost. They are encouraged to be exaggerating—. Well, not exaggerating, but, in terms of initiatives—

[243] **Simon Thomas:** Creative.

[244] **Ann Jones:** Yes, ‘creative’ is the word that I am looking for. They are encouraged to be creative with their menus. So, it was whether you feel—. You seem to have the parental engagement and to have upped the attainment for your schools. How do you deal with those hidden costs or extra costs that are associated with education?

[245] **Ms Keane:** The vast majority of trips—and we were talking about this earlier on—I would say the school funds. We try to make sure that the trips have an educational purpose. For example, we may take a cohort to St Fagans, which has no cost—just the transport cost—so we can take all of the students there. We try to avoid those trips to Oakwood Theme Park or Alton Towers. Last year, for example, we took the students to Swansea leisure centre. Again, there was no cost, other than the transport. It is looking for those creative ways of giving students that day out and that reward that they are looking for at minimal cost. Therefore, by tying those trips into the curriculum and getting some learning element out of them, we can justify that they are essential for the curriculum.

[246] With regard to IT, I am sure that every school faces challenges with regards to IT. You will undoubtedly have a group of students that will have very good access to broadband and all manner of technology at home, and a group of students that does not have a computer or an internet connection. We have tried to address that by putting on staffed homework clubs every evening, which allow students to access any IT equipment that they may need. This year, we are going to trial loaning some IT equipment to young people. When I say ‘loaning’, I mean that we are looking at a variety of different things, such as loaning a small laptop or netbook, a tablet device or, for some students who already have IT equipment at home, but do not have the internet, a dongle. So, we are going to trial different approaches.

[247] The most important thing for me is that we have to ask parents and young people what challenges they are facing and how we can help them to make sure that they are not disadvantaged any further than they are already.

[248] **Mr Gibbon:** There are practical things that you can do. In terms of the school uniform, you get involved, because some people will buy it wherever. It is about getting involved to make sure that parents get the best value for money when they buy the school uniform. That is important, because that can be a difficulty. We have put a heads’ fund together—we always have a heads’ fund—for children who, for example, cannot afford certain things. We have even bought shoes for kids. However, you have to do that in an appropriate way; you do not advertise that across the board. So, we have a fund there where we have bought shoes or whatever for pupils, and helped them quietly to go on a trip. That fund is in place.

[249] In terms of catering, what we do is to try to cook cheaply—not necessarily badly, but cheaply. When we decide on our ingredients, we pick things that are within the reach of normality—things that people would have in their house anyway.

[250] **Ann Jones:** Does the coursework reflect that? I had the impression that some of it—

[251] **Mr Gibbon:** The coursework can be slightly different in key stage 4, but in terms of design and technology in key stage 3, we can decide on what we are going to cook. So, at key stage 3 we have greater control over the items that we are cooking, so we can make sure that children do not have to go out to buy large quantities of expensive stuff.

[252] **Ms Keane:** There is a very large store cupboard in school, I think that it is fair to say, stocked up with supplies. So, if unusual ingredients are need, not everyone has to go out to buy them.

[253] **Mr Gibbon:** There are other costs. The children of some of you sitting around this table might have one-on-one maths tuition by someone because you can afford it. Many of my school's parents cannot, so through the pupil deprivation grant one of the significant things that I can offer is one-to-one or one-to-two tutoring for pupils. The effective use of the grant is trying to make sure that my school's children are not disadvantaged because their parents cannot engage professionals outside the school setting. It is not easy because it is a cost, but, then again, it is an additional cost—I come back to my earlier point about the PDG being a part of what we do—and while I can do that for the 2012-13 cohort, if the money is not there, I cannot do it for the next cohort. However, we are currently doing things like that, which is important.

[254] **Ann Jones:** I sensed from your previous discussions and answers that you would have a good take on that, but it is surprising to hear that other people just assume that a trip to New York is a nice thing to do, and that the families of a class of 30 will be at the level of being able to afford to save over a 12-month period. However, when, as you were saying, roughly 10% of your total pupil population is in that category and the rest find it difficult, it is just not the thing to do. It is those sorts of things that shocked us.

11:45

[255] **Mr Gibbon:** There is only one thing—. I know that nobody has asked the question, but I will say that, in my school, I have an enhanced resource provision, a resource unit for Down's syndrome children, children who are in wheelchairs et cetera with learning needs. There are 70 of them, so it is the size of a special school itself. Parental engagement there is even more important, and those parents, it seems to me, tend to be—not all of them, but over 60%—from low-income families and tend to have an additional need because they are having to cater for a child with extreme learning needs or a disability. So, the engagement there—the 20 points that I have here in my paper—is increased twofold, because we have fares, fetes, open days, cookery sessions and music sessions to bring those parents in. So, if you are asking about parent involvement as well, I am just saying that there is a unique set of parents also within my school with greater needs.

[256] I am just going to throw this in: when you are comparing us against all of the schools, 70 children who cannot get 5 A\* to C are in my school cohort. I just want to throw that in. So, if you look at my level 2, you can add another 12% to that. That would be if you disaggregated those children, but we do not, because, bless them, they are part of our school.

[257] However, why I brought that up now was because you need to know that, because there are different sections of parents out there, and maybe you have considered it, but there is a special consideration for them, over and above the needs of mainstream parents.

[258] **Ann Jones:** I am a firm believer that the success of children who perhaps get a C or a D at GCSE level who were predicted not to get a C or a D is the most fantastic thing to celebrate, alongside your A\* pupils and whatever, so I am glad that you said that, and that you recognise that. I do not know whether anything to add, Karyn?

[259] **Ms Keane:** I would agree. I think that the reality is that, as a school, what we have to do is meet the needs of all students and all parents, whatever their ability. It is just about taking into consideration the context that we are in.

[260] **Ann Jones:** I do not know whether Members have any more questions, because we are running out of time. I see that they do not. May I thank you both? I found it very interesting. Thank you both for giving time up today to come to discuss this with us. We will send you a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy, and then we will send you a copy of our final report. I hope that you will think that it has been worth it when you read the report as well. However, thank you both very much; it has been great.

11:48

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r  
Cyfarfod  
Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the  
Meeting**

[261] **Ann Jones:** I move that

*the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 17.42(vi).*

[262] I see that Members are in agreement. Thank you very much.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.  
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 11:48.  
The public part of the meeting ended at 11:48.*