

National Assembly for Wales
Children and Young People Committee

Follow up inquiry into child poverty:
eradication through education?

Plain English summary and recommendations

February 2011



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Children and Young People Committee

We are a group of five people who work as Assembly Members in the National Assembly for Wales in Cardiff. People in Wales have voted for us to do this and it's our job to make sure that the people who make decisions about things and how to spend money (called the Welsh Government) are doing a good job. Our group is called the Children and Young People Committee.

Current Committee Membership



Helen Mary Jones
(Chair)
Llanelli
Plaid Cymru



Eleanor Burnham
North Wales
Welsh Liberal Democrat



Sandy Mewies
Delyn
Labour



Jonathan Morgan
Cardiff North
Welsh Conservative Party



Joyce Watson
Mid and West Wales
Labour

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



Lynne Neagle
Torfaen
Labour

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Glossary of terms

- **Chair:** The Chair of the Committee is the member who the Committee has elected to speak for them. He or she cannot make decisions for the other members or tell the Committee what to do.
- **Child poverty:** a lack of money, or opportunity, or services that put children and young people at a disadvantage in life.
- **Committee Inquiry:** an investigation into a topic. A Committee Inquiry will ask experts and people affected by the topic what they think and how things can be made better. The Committee then thinks about what all the people have told them and makes recommendations to the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government does not have to do as the Committee says, but if it does not do something the Committee has recommended, it has to say why not.
- **Eradication:** getting rid of something completely.
- **Evidence:** the things that people tell the Committee inquiry by writing, speaking or using other forms of communication are called evidence.
- **Local Authority:** a local council, led by a group of councillors who have been elected to make decisions on how to spend money in the local area.
- **Local Government:** this is how we refer to all of the local authorities as a group.
- **Poverty:** a lack of money, or opportunity, or services.
- **Recommendation:** a strong suggestion that something is done.
- **Statutory Guidance:** advice that should be followed to avoid breaking the law.
- **Welsh Government:** creates and carries out policy and is held to account by the National Assembly for Wales. It is led by Ministers who are also Assembly Members.

Message from the Chair

One in every three children in Wales lives in poverty. That means that one in three children in our nation do not have enough money, or the opportunities that other children have. It is important that we do all we can to make sure that all of the children in Wales have a good start in life and are given the same chances to learn and develop as other children are given.

Children and young people who have lived in poverty told the Committee what it was like. They described being cold and hungry. They said they were fed up of being bullied because they did not have the same things other children in their school. They told us that they were often too tired to study in school because they had been kept awake at night by noise in the street. And they asked us to do something about it.

This report looks at some of the problems that poverty can cause, and makes some recommendations to the Welsh Government about how it could improve the steps it already takes to get rid of child poverty in Wales. It is really important that we get this right as soon as possible, for the sake of all families affected by poverty.

The Committee thanks the witnesses who gave evidence to the Committee while we were looking at child poverty. Special thanks go to the children and young people from Milbank Primary School, Ely; Moorland Primary School, Splott; Willows High School; and North Ely Youth Centre, for speaking so openly and honestly to the Committee. We hope that your courage and confidence will help you to reach your true potential in life.

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

The Committee's Recommendations

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

Recommendation 1. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government gives local government guidance that says services paid for by Cymorth that could also work well under Families First should be kept, and changed slightly if needed, rather than being lost altogether. **(Page 10)**

Recommendation 2. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with its partners to put together a set of measures that can be used to review the progress of Families First and the Child Poverty Strategy. **(Page 11)**

Recommendation 3. The Committee recommends that reviews of the progress of Families First and the Child Poverty Strategy are carried out at appropriate times in the future. **(Page 11)**

Recommendation 4. The Committee recommends that the Welsh government asks local authorities to show, by 2012, how the money they were given through Families First has reduced child poverty locally. **(Page 11)**

Recommendation 5. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government asks local government to help school leaders, staff and governors to develop their leadership skills. The Welsh government should also make sure that local authorities are good at encouraging schools to create an environment that will help disadvantaged learners to do well. **(Page 12)**

Recommendation 6. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government makes sure that Child Poverty Solutions Wales has enough staff to do all the work that it will need to do after the Partnership Support Unit closes in April 2011. The Committee also recommends that the Welsh Government thinks carefully about what work needs to be done after the unit closes, and what work can stop. It is important that any work that stops does not do so by accident, but stops

because the Welsh Government has decided it is not needed.

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Recommendation 7. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government reviews all the evidence that has been gathered in its work on this issue, and the projects that the WLGA has run. After the review, the Welsh Government should issue guidance to local government on how to create a free school meal system that does not cause embarrassment, humiliation or shame to children and young people. Local government should help schools have such systems in place by September 2012.

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Recommendation 8. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government makes sure that teachers are trained to understand the issues facing children and young people from disadvantaged households so that teachers can help them to do their best in school.

(Page 17)

Recommendation 9. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should give guidance to local governments on what community focused schools are expected to do to help the local community.

(Page 19)

Recommendation 10. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with local authorities to create more community focused schools. The development of community focused schools should be included in the child poverty strategies published by local authorities.

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Background

1. The Children and Young People Committee first looked at the issue of child poverty in 2008. Because the causes and effects of child poverty are so wide ranging, the Committee decided to concentrate its investigation on looking at how the education system could help stop child poverty.
2. The Committee took evidence for its investigation over six meetings and, in November 2008, published its report and 27 recommendations for the Welsh Government.
3. In January 2009, the Welsh Government responded to the Committee's report. Of the 27 recommendations made by the Committee, the Welsh Government accepted 13 and accepted in principle the remaining 14. Accepting a recommendation in principle usually means that although the Welsh Government agree with what the recommendation is trying to make happen, the Government would rather make that happen by doing something slightly differently to the way the Committee has suggested.
4. In December 2009, the Committee asked the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, who was Jane Hutt AM at that time, if the Welsh Government had changed the things it said it would, and if there were less children being affected by poverty as a result.
5. The Committee decided to look again at the issues in September 2010 and so started its follow-up inquiry into child poverty: eradication through education.
6. The follow-up inquiry took evidence from witnesses including children and young people who have experienced the effects of poverty.

What is child poverty?

7. When we talk about child poverty, we talk about the effects that living without much money has on children and young people. These effects can include the obvious difficulties that families will face when they do not have enough money, such as having to make difficult decisions about whether to spend their money on heating the home or buying food. But there are other effects of child poverty that are just

as damaging, such as a lack of opportunities which can effect the life chances of children living in poverty. Service based poverty can also effect those families who cannot afford to access the services they need, perhaps because of the transport cost involved in getting to wherever the service is provided.

Main findings of the Committee inquiry

8. When the Committee looked at child poverty in 2008, three main issues were identified. These were:

- the need for the Welsh Government and local authorities to plan and work together to stop child poverty;
- the things that schools can do to help;
- the fact that schools cannot stop the effects of child poverty on their own. Children, young people and their families also need support in their communities.

9. This report will look at each of these issues in turn.

The need for the Welsh Government and local authorities to plan and work together

10. During the Committee's 2008 investigation into child poverty, witnesses told the Committee that although the Welsh Government had some good policies on child poverty, those policies did not always work together very well. Those witnesses suggested that the Welsh Government might not be spending money in the best way if the policies it was spending money on did not work together to stop child poverty.

11. In November 2001, Huw Lewis AM, Deputy Minister for Children, told the Committee that the Welsh Government were now making sure that the policies they had worked well together. He told the Committee that a new law in Wales, called the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, meant that Welsh Government now had to publish a child poverty strategy that would describe all of the things the Welsh Government would do to stop child poverty. The strategy should make sure that all the policies are working together to stop child poverty in the most effective way.

12. The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 means that other Welsh Authorities, like the Local Health Boards, for example, also have

to publish child poverty strategies that will describe how they will help to stop the effects of child poverty.

13. The Committee is pleased that the new law will make sure that child poverty strategies are published as it means that the Welsh Government and other Welsh Authorities will put proper thought and planning into all the things they are doing to help stop child poverty.

Families First

14. 'Families First' is the Welsh Government's new way of giving support to families. In the past, some families have had to ask lots of different people for the help they need but Families First should mean that families do not have to do that anymore. The person who was going to help them with parenting, for example, could also give them some advice on how to get out of debt or earn more money.

15. Witnesses told the Committee that Families First will be good for families who have several different problems that they need help with. But, there is a chance that because, after April 2012, the Welsh Government will pay for support through Families First and will stop paying for the support through the old Cymorth scheme, some of the support that is already given to families will be stopped.

16. The Committee welcomed Families First, but asked the Welsh Government to be careful that valuable support paid for by Cymorth is not lost when Families First comes in.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government gives local government guidance that says services paid for by Cymorth that could also work well under Families First should be kept, and changed slightly if needed, rather than being lost altogether.

Putting the policies into practice

17. Professor David Egan told the Committee that although Wales had some good policies, they were not always put into practice well. He suggested that there should be time set aside to review how well each policy had been put into practice, and if the policy needed to be changed at all to make sure that it achieved exactly what it is supposed to.

18. Any review of this sort would mean that progress needs to be measured properly. It should be understood that the success of a project can be measured in lots of different ways and there should be a set of standards that will help people measure the progress of lots of different projects.

19. One way of doing this is to use the 31 milestones and targets listed in the Welsh Government's children and young people's wellbeing monitor. The milestones and targets within the monitor will help to assess each project in an orderly way so that it is possible to compare the success of one project with the success of another.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with its partners to put together a set of measures that can be used to review the progress of Families First and the Child Poverty Strategy.

The Committee recommends that reviews of the progress of Families First and the Child Poverty Strategy are carried out at appropriate times in the future.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh government asks local authorities to show, by 2012, how the money they were given through Families First has reduced child poverty locally.

The things that schools can do to help

20. Witnesses all agreed that schools can do a lot to help stop the effects of child poverty. Witnesses also agreed that the schools could not do it on their own

Telling others about what works well

21. Witnesses told the committee that in some parts of Wales, really good work is being done to stop child poverty. The Committee thinks that it is a good idea to tell others when something works well so that it can be done elsewhere too.

22. Schools with senior staff who are good leaders will search out examples of good work that has been successful elsewhere. The Committee thinks that it is important to have good leaders in a school, but also realises that it can be difficult for members of staff who are really busy coping with all the things that they have to do in school, to take on a new things.

23. The WLGA has worked with the Welsh Government to create the School Effectiveness Framework. The Framework is based on evidence of what has worked well in the past. The WLGA told the Committee that there was enthusiasm about the Framework and the local authorities welcomed it.

24. Professor David Egan told the Committee that sometimes, what worked well in one school did not work well in another. The Committee felt that good school leaders should be able to take parts of what worked well elsewhere and use them, or change them slightly to use in their own school to good effect.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government asks local government to help school leaders, staff and governors to develop their leadership skills. The Welsh government should also make sure that local authorities are good at encouraging schools to create an environment that will help disadvantaged learners to do well.

The partnership support unit

25. The Welsh Government has paid for the Child Poverty Solutions Wales and the Partnerships Support Unit to share examples of good

things that have been done to tackle child poverty. In April 2011, the Partnerships Support Unit will close. The End Child Poverty Network was worried that the closure of the Partnership Support Unit will mean that the work they were doing will not be done in the future. The Child Poverty Solutions Wales staff will do some of the things that the Partnership Support Unit were doing, but not all.

26. At the time of writing this report, it was not clear which work would not be done after the Partnerships Support Unit closes in April 2011. The Committee felt that it was important to make sure this was thought about carefully by the Welsh Government.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government makes sure that Child Poverty Solutions Wales has enough staff to do all the work that it will need to do after the Partnership Support Unit closes in April 2011. The Committee also recommends that the Welsh Government thinks carefully about what work needs to be done after the unit closes, and what work can stop. It is important that any work that stops does not do so by accident, but stops because the Welsh Government has decided it is not needed.

Help with the extra costs of education

27. Families who do not have enough money to pay for school meals, uniforms and educational school trips are able to claim help with meeting those costs.

28. The Deputy Minister for Children told the Committee that about 97 per cent of those people eligible to get the school uniform grant were receiving it. This means that most families who could be getting it are, and the Committee welcomed that. However, the Committee also recognised that the grant was only enough to buy plain uniform rather than items with a school logo on, although the Welsh Government issued guidance to schools to ask them to think about whether it was necessary to have logos on school uniform.

29. Only about 74% of children who were entitled to free school meals were claiming them. That means that one in four children who could be getting free school meals are not.

30. Young people from Willows High School in Ely, and North Ely Youth Centre wrote a sketch which they performed for the Committee.

The sketch suggested one reason why one in four children and young people were not claiming the free school meals they were entitled to. An extract from the sketch is below:

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

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

Teacher: Yes, I think you do.

Victim: Ugh!

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

Bully 2: OMG, that is sooo embarrassing,

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

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

Bully 2: thank god for that

Bully 1: Yeh."

31. The Committee is very grateful to the young ambassadors who gave this, and other presentations to the Committee. The honesty and enthusiasm of the children and young people made their evidence all the more powerful.

32. The young person in the sketch is clear that as long as the payment system for school meals makes it clear who is paying for their meals and who is in receipt of free school meals, they would rather not take the free school meal. The fact that the tokens issued for free school meals can cause children and young people to feel

embarrassed, humiliated and even ashamed that they have less money than other pupils.

33. Some schools have trialled a cashless system for payment of school meals using swipe cards. This means that although pupils will 'top-up' their payment cards in different ways, they all swipe the same cards and it is not obvious who is getting free meals and who is not.

34. The Welsh government has been looking into this issue for some time. The Committee felt that as good nutrition is so important for children's health and learning, something should be done about the issue of free school meals straight away.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government reviews all the evidence that has been gathered in its work on this issue, and the projects that the WLGA has run. After the review, the Welsh Government should issue guidance to local government on how to create a free school meal system that does not cause embarrassment, humiliation or shame to children and young people. Local government should help schools have such systems in place by September 2012.

Transitions

35. Professor David Egan told the Committee that in Wales, we have a good ‘track record’ of 11 year olds doing well in school. However, by the time they are 14 or 16, about a quarter of young people have not done as well in school as it might have been expected, based on their performance as an 11 year old. Most of those young people will be from disadvantaged backgrounds.

36. Professor Egan suggested that one of the reasons for the drop in performance levels was because the hopes and dreams of children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds were different from those who came from better off households. Professor Egan told the Committee that;

“When you ask seven-year-olds or eight-year-olds in the most affluent and disadvantaged communities how many of you want to go to university, be a vet, or a doctor, a politician, a professor, or whatever you ask them, you will find that about the same proportion of young people put their hands up in those communities. If you go back to them about two or three years later, you will find a radically different picture. So something happens on that journey.”¹

37. Professor Egan felt that some children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds come to accept as fact that they will not do as well as children and young people from better off households. The danger is that they accept that as they have not had the opportunities that other children and young people have had, that they will not be able to do as well.

38. If children and young people come to accept that they will not do as well as others, they stop seeing school and work as something that is for them. As a result, they are more likely to live in poverty as adults and the pattern starts all over again for their children in years to come.

39. It is really important then, that teachers know about the problems that children and young people face when they live in poverty. When teachers know about the problems the children and young people are

¹ Children and Young People Committee Record of Proceedings, 11 January 2011, paragraph 49

facing, they can help to support them and help them believe that they can do well.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government makes sure that teachers are trained to understand the issues facing children and young people from disadvantaged households so that teachers can help them to do their best in school.

Schools cannot stop the effects of child poverty on their own

40. It is clear that all schools have an important job to do in helping children and young people who are affected by poverty. However, all witnesses agreed that schools cannot do it on their own.

41. Children who are hungry, cold and tired will not be able to learn, no matter how good their teachers are. But children and young people told the Committee that they were often unable to sleep because they lived in areas that are noisy at night.

42. Some children and young people from Cardiff have worked with Save the Children and the South Wales Police to design posters for display in local public houses. The posters ask people to be quiet when leaving so that they do not disturb sleeping children.

43. The Committee thought this was a good way of making people aware of the needs of children and young people in the community.

44. The Committee has said in its report on the provision of safe places to play and hang out that communities should be planned with the needs of children and young people in mind as it is important that they are seen as an important part of the community.

Community Focused schools

45. Community focused schools can benefit the whole of the community. They can offer help and guidance to the parents of its pupils, provide a meeting space for local residents and help adults to learn new skills.

46. The Deputy Minister for Children told the Committee that there is no clear understanding about what it is that community focused schools are supposed to do.

47. Some community focused schools are very good at getting involved with the community, while others just let the local community use the school buildings now and again.

48. Community focused schools can make a real difference to the lives of the whole community so it is important that they are developed well and that they know what is expected of them.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should give guidance to local governments on what community focused schools are expected to do to help the local community.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with local authorities to create more community focused schools. The development of community focused schools should be included in the child poverty strategies published by local authorities.

Witnesses

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed in full at :

http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-cyp-home/bus-committees-third-cyp-inquiry/cyp3-inq-childpov/cyp3-cp/cyp3-cp-committee_papers.htm

2 November

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

Welsh Local Government Association

16 November

Huw Lewis, Deputy Minister for Children
Eleanor Marks, Head of Communities Division

Welsh Government

11 January

Cecile Gwilym, Policy Officer Wales - NSPCC Cymru

End Child Poverty Network

Sean O'Neill, Policy Director - Children in Wales

Geraldine Murphy, Partnership Support Regional Officer - South West and Mid Wales - Partnership Support Unit

Lindsay Kearton - Senior Policy Advocate - Consumer Focus Wales

Professor David Egan

UWIC

List of written evidence

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

http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-cyp-home/bus-committees-third-cyp-inquiry/cyp_3__cp_follow_up_inq___htm

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