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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 22 June 2015**



# House of Commons

Monday 22 June 2015

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

### SESSIONAL RETURNS

*Ordered,*

That there be laid before this House Returns for Session 2014-15 of information and statistics relating to:

- (1) Business of the House;
- (2) Closure of Debate, Proposal of Question and Allocation of Time (including Programme Motions);
- (3) Sittings of the House;
- (4) Private Bills and Private Business;
- (5) Public Bills;
- (6) Delegated Legislation and Legislative Reform Orders;
- (7) European Legislation, etc;
- (8) Grand Committees;
- (9) Panel of Chairs; and
- (10) Select Committees.—(*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

## Oral Answers to Questions

### WORK AND PENSIONS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Private Sector Pensions (Automatic Enrolment)

1. **Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effects of automatic enrolment on private sector pension saving. [900440]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson):** More than 5.2 million workers have been automatically enrolled in a workplace pension by their employer to date. Since the start of automatic enrolment, workplace pension membership in the private sector has risen from 32% in 2012 to 49% in 2014, a very positive start.

**Julian Knight:** With 135,000 firms set to auto-enrol their employees from January, does my hon. Friend agree that the work of non-governmental groups such as the Solihull-based Chartered Institute of Payroll Professionals is key to the successful delivery of auto-enrolment and to meeting the savings challenge of 11 million Britons who are currently failing to put enough away for their retirement?

**Justin Tomlinson:** Our success to date in implementing automatic enrolment could not have been achieved without the significant ongoing support of a number of sectors, including the pensions and payroll industries. Friends of automatic enrolment have played a crucial role in bringing together organisations that are playing a key role in delivering automatic enrolment. Together they have helped the Government improve the process of automatic enrolment and ensure that these reforms work. We thank them for their support so far and their commitment to continuing to work with us as we start the process of helping 1.3 million smaller employers implement automatic enrolment for their workers.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): But will the Minister advise the House of his estimate of the number of workers who are excluded from the benefit of auto-enrolment because of the changes in the threshold over the past five years, and what proportion of those workers are women?

**Justin Tomlinson:** The Secretary of State is required by law to review the automatic enrolment thresholds in each tax year and may take into account a range of prescribed factors. The review can include considering whether to lower or increase the thresholds or leave them unchanged, as was the case for the current tax year. Freezing the trigger for this tax year will result in approximately 14,000 additional women and 20,000 people overall being brought into pension savings. On the hon. Gentleman's specific point, I am happy to write to him with further information.

18. [900457] **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): I welcome the Minister to his post.

One way of boosting auto-enrolment further would be to ensure that people were more confident when they came to access their savings that they had the full range of choices that the law now allows. What more can the Minister do to encourage pension funds to offer that full range at an affordable and fair price?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I am encouraged by the fact that 91% of people who have already been auto-enrolled have continued to save, which is a welcome step and above initial expectations. We will continue to work with the Treasury, the Financial Conduct Authority and the Pensions Regulator to ensure that flexibilities, information and charges are all delivering for the consumer.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): When it comes to the reforms that the Government are putting through, particularly on pension freedoms, we are mindful of the attractions of consumer choice but also of all the mis-selling scandals of the past. What assurances can the Minister give that all defined-contribution plan holders will get appropriate advice and that consumers will be adequately protected? It is not clear to us that the appropriate measures are in place.

**Justin Tomlinson:** As I said in response to the previous question, we will work with the Treasury, the FCA and the Pensions Regulator to monitor that closely. We have also brought in a 0.75% cap on charges, which in time will allow an extra £200 million to remain in pension savings.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Adrian Bailey. Not here.

### Disability Confident Campaign

4. **Chloe Smith** (Norwich North) (Con): What progress his Department has made on the Disability Confident campaign. [900443]

12. **Nigel Adams** (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): What progress his Department has made on the Disability Confident campaign. [900451]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson):** The Disability Confident campaign continues to play a crucial role in the Government's aim of halving the disability gap. It has secured support from 360 employers and pledges from 98 organisations to positively change employment practices towards disabled staff. Many colleagues are hosting constituency events, including my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams) who did so last week.

**Chloe Smith:** Norwich for Jobs, the youth employment campaign that I founded in Norwich, has hit its goal of helping to halve youth unemployment. We want to turn the power of that local network towards helping young people who are claiming employment and support allowance. Will the Minister join me in calling on Norwich companies to give a young disabled person a chance?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I am delighted to hear of the success my hon. Friend has achieved in her constituency with Norwich for Jobs. That is exactly the kind of local initiative that I welcome, and to which I am pleased to add my support. In addition, I hope that her local authority, local enterprise partnership and business community do all they can to help to promote that fantastic scheme.

**Nigel Adams:** Will the Minister join me in thanking all the employers and speakers who contributed to my first Disability Confident conference in Selby a couple of weeks ago? It was an extremely worthwhile event to organise. Many of those employers will join me for my fifth jobs fair in October. I was particularly pleased because we had a bit of stardust at the event—Pamela Uddin, the star of the BBC's "The Apprentice", shared her experiences of coping with dyslexia.

**Justin Tomlinson:** I am aware of the very successful event my hon. Friend organised. I congratulate him on the quality of the speakers he secured—it certainly shows that he is no apprentice. We need employers to see that recruiting and retaining disabled people should be the norm, and that disabled people have a great deal to offer in the workplace. Events such as the Selby summit play a crucial part in our drive to get employers involved.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister agree that an almost hidden element of disability is autism? It is a barrier to so many people gaining employment and a full and confident life.

**Justin Tomlinson:** I have met stakeholder groups, and that message has been made very clear to me. In fact, 42% of disabled people looking for work say that the biggest barrier they face is the attitude of their employer.

Through such campaigns as Disability Confident, we hope to inspire more businesses to take on more people with disabilities. We rejoice in the fact that, over the past 12 months, an extra 238,000 disabled people were in work.

**Grahame M. Morris** (Easington) (Lab): What support is the Minister offering to specialist and locally based employment organisations such as Northern Rights in my constituency and the East Durham Employability Trust? They have a proven track record of supporting disabled people and people with multiple barriers into work, but have frequently found it very difficult to access funding from the Department for Work and Pensions.

**Justin Tomlinson:** Again, having met with stakeholders, I can say that local initiatives are clearly key. Each of our individual constituencies has different challenges and opportunities. Part of the Disability Confident campaign is sharing best practice. I would be keen to hear more of the good work going on in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

**Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): As part of the Disability Confident campaign, will the Minister work with organisations such as United Response, which does excellent work in my constituency with people who have learning difficulties such as autism, which the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) mentioned, so that people with learning difficulties go into every kind of job and all public service? Some are councillors. I want more people with learning difficulties to put themselves forward to be councillors and Members of Parliament.

**Justin Tomlinson:** That is why we launched the Disability Confident campaign and why we will continue to drive it forward. I met Liz Sayce of Disability Rights UK. She made it very clear to me: she said that, too often, disabled people are seen as recipients when they want to be net contributors. Local initiatives, sharing best practice, busting the myths and ensuring that people see what a huge amount of talent is available will continue to help to drive up disability employment rates.

### Personal Independence Payments

5. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the High Court ruling in June 2015 on delays in personal independence payments. [900444]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson):** We have taken decisive action to speed up waiting times for personal independence payment claims and are pleased that the Court has recognised the huge progress made. The average new PIP claimant now waits only five weeks for an assessment.

**Alan Brown:** Currently, delays to people receiving PIP causes problems, but the impact of delays on other benefits such as the carer's allowance and blue badges is hugely significant. Although the Government have made progress, will the Minister advise us what the backlog is in terms of numbers, and how many people wait more than seven weeks?

**Justin Tomlinson:** It is important to recognise that other benefits are backdated. We have made huge progress. The backlog has been falling month on month since August 2014, and we are now within where we would expect to be as part of usual business. We are looking at a median time, end to end, of 11 weeks. We will continue to monitor that important issue closely.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** May I draw the Minister's attention to a letter I received from a constituent last week? He says:

"I was recently contacted by DWP to be assessed for PIP...I sent the forms off and within 3 days had a medical assessment at my home...I have to tell you that the process from start to finish was 3 weeks. Is this a record?...Whilst we read a lot in the media I think my recent experience shows the system may at last be improving."

**Justin Tomlinson:** I thank my hon. Friend for that. Claims are now cleared at four times the rate they were in January 2014. We have quadrupled the number of healthcare professionals, introduced more than 200 new assessment rooms, doubled the number of DWP decision-making staff, and improved IT systems and claimant communication. I am delighted that my hon. Friend's constituent has benefited from those improvements.

**Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** I welcome the new Ministers to their roles.

The recent High Court ruling found that the delays to PIP were unreasonable and unlawful. They are also undermining the well-being and dignity of sick and disabled people. I know that I am not the only Member who has seen constituents affected not just by inordinate delays, but by poor quality assessments, driving them into hardship and destitution. The High Court ruling should have been a wake-up call for Ministers, but they seem to be refusing to accept that PIP is just not fit for purpose. In the light of that damning judgment, will they halt the roll-out of PIP and initiate a review as a matter of urgency?

**Justin Tomlinson:** Actually, the Court and the Paul Gray review agreed that there were no inherent failings in the system, and significant improvements have been made, which I have already listed. The reality is that some cases were unacceptable, but we must not forget why we introduced PIP. It is a modern benefit that allows thorough face-to-face assessments and will ultimately see a higher proportion of maximum value paid, compared with the old disability living allowance system. We are continuing to make improvements and I will keep a close eye on the issue.

**Dr Whiteford:** I am disappointed by the Minister's complacency. Earlier this year, Citizens Advice Scotland published research showing that 55% of current DLA claimants will lose out in the transfer to PIP. It is not just sick and disabled people who will suffer—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry; I thought you were cutting me off, Mr Speaker. The Scottish Government estimate that 450 carers in Scotland will lose their carer's allowance because of this transition. That will put further strain on families that are already at a disadvantage—

**Mr Speaker:** Too long. Some of these questions require a bit of advance practice and a blue pencil. I have no impediment in my throat: I was trying gently to hint to the hon. Lady that her question was a tad long.

**Justin Tomlinson:** I am afraid that I do not share the hon. Lady's views. PIP is a far better system than the former DLA. Under DLA, only 6% of people had a face-to-face assessment, 50% of awards were made with no medical advice, and 71% were allocated lifetime awards, even though one in three cases would change within 12 months—often getting worse, so that people missed out on the appropriate support. We are right to push this and I will continue to keep a close eye on the improvements we have made.

**Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con):** I warmly welcome the Minister to his post.

My constituency has many isolated rural and coastal communities. What is being done to ensure that assessment centres are more accessible and flexible for people in those communities?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question: he is a real champion for his constituents. We have added an extra 200 assessment rooms. People who find it difficult to reach an assessment room can travel by car as long as it is within 60 minutes; by public transport if it is within 90 minutes; or, by prior agreement with the assessment providers, they can have taxis provided and paid for.

**Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab):** What a difference a weekend makes. On Saturday, thousands of disabled people marched in protest against cuts in their benefits. The Minister comes here today, trotting out his sunshine stories, while in the real world disabled people are losing benefits left, right and centre. He can remedy that today by saying, "This Government will not cut the benefits of any disabled person throughout this Parliament." Come on, say it!

**Justin Tomlinson:** We are clear that we will protect the disabled and vulnerable. Let us remember that under the PIP system 22% of claimants will end up getting the highest rate of support, which is higher than the 16% under the DLA. We are doing more to help the most vulnerable in society.

### Apprenticeships

**6. Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con):** What support his Department is providing to young people seeking apprenticeships and employment. [900445]

**The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel):** Apprenticeships give young people the chance to reach their potential, giving them the skills and training required to achieve a successful career. The Government have funded training elements of apprenticeships in England, and between 2009-10 and 2013-14 there has been a 40% increase in the number of young people starting one.

**Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Conservative commitment to create an additional 3 million apprenticeships over this Parliament will give young people the skills they need to get on in life? Will she tell the House what she is doing to work with both the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department

for Business, Innovation and Skills to ensure that the quality of those new apprenticeships is top notch and improving all the time?

**Priti Patel:** Let me start by commending my hon. Friend and fellow Essex MP for his work in this area, particularly with his local employers, many of whom I have met and know. He is of course right to say that our commitment to create 3 million apprenticeships will give young people the vital skills to reach their full potential. We are already working with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and employers as part of our apprenticeship reforms to ensure that Britain's young people get a quality apprenticeship that will help them to reach their full potential.

**Robert Flello** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): While there are indeed some excellent apprenticeships—there is no doubt about that—sadly, all too often there are employers who use them as, in effect, a rebranded youth training scheme or youth opportunities programme-type arrangement. What will the Minister do to publish details of employers who abuse the apprenticeship system, or does the scrutiny simply not allow for that?

**Priti Patel:** We all know, and this House recognises, that apprenticeships are vital. They give young people the chance to learn the skills to reach their full potential. *[Interruption.]* I hear an Opposition Member chuntering away. Employers play a vital role in this scheme. I have already touched on the fact that we are working with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills on our reforms and delivering 3 million apprenticeships. Employers will be at the heart of that, providing quality training and accountability in their role with apprenticeships.

20. [900459] **Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): On a recent visit to Fuel Conservation Services in Hednesford, I saw the impact that access to apprenticeships and high-quality training has on young people entering the workplace. Will my right hon. Friend join me in praising the work of businesses like FCS in offering apprenticeships to young people? *[Interruption.]* Does she recognise the role that businesses can play in working with the Government on initiatives to tackle youth unemployment?

**Priti Patel:** Let me start by welcoming my hon. Friend to the House as a new Member of Parliament. It is interesting to hear the conversations among those on the Opposition Benches. They do not like success stories, such as that of the business in my hon. Friend's constituency. I commend her local business. It is important that the House recognises the vital contribution that employers like FCS make in offering young people apprenticeships. She touches on a very valuable point: they support young people in the transition from school to the world of work, which we know is challenging for young people, and we will support employers in that.

**Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Having served an apprenticeship under a dual system of high-quality apprenticeships, I ask the Minister to accept that employers have to play a much larger role in providing the skills space for our apprentices, and that just expanding level 2 apprenticeships is not sufficient.

**Priti Patel:** I welcome the hon. Lady's comments. This is all about quality. The quality of the apprenticeships is where we should all be: working with employers in particular to make sure that they are giving our young people not just the hopes and aspirations but the skills they require for their own businesses and sectors to enable succession planning within companies and sectors. Also, we have made a commitment to deliver 3 million new apprenticeships makes, and we are absolutely clear that they should now provide parity with a degree-equivalent qualification. Employers play an important role in delivering that.

### Disability Benefits

8. **Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): What his policy is on maintaining the level of (a) employment and support allowance, (b) personal independence payment and (c) attendance allowance for disabled claimants. [900447]

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith):** I thank the hon. Lady for her question and for her campaigning in this area. I would like to take this opportunity to offer her my condolences, having not spoken to her before.

I am currently reviewing all policy on welfare. The outcome will be announced when the work is complete, but as the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), said, it is our intention to protect the most vulnerable, including the disabled. I believe our reforms demonstrate our strong record of supporting disabled people. We introduced the personal independence payment to ensure more support is going to those who need it. More than 700,000 of those who were, once upon a time, stuck on incapacity benefits under Labour are now preparing or looking for work. Spending on disability benefits increased in real terms, and, as my hon. Friend has said, disability employment increased by 238,000 in the previous Parliament.

**Mrs Moon:** I thank the Secretary of State for his condolences.

My advice surgery has received people who are terminally ill, people with life-ending degenerative conditions, people who have been found fit to work despite both conditions, and those on attendance allowance have been told to use their attendance allowance to pay for their second bedroom, so that they are not affected by the bedroom tax. There is huge fear out there in the disabled community. May we have an assurance that those with disabilities will not be further affected by more cuts in welfare benefits?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** Our purpose is to protect the most vulnerable. It has been from the beginning, and it will continue to be. There is, therefore, no reason for people to be fearful, and I hope that Opposition Members will not whip up such fearfulness, although I am by no means accusing the hon. Lady of that.

We must review welfare spending, but we want to do so in a way that actually changes lives. We felt that much of the huge increase in welfare spending under the Labour Government—an increase of some 60%—went to the wrong people who were not doing the right thing.

That is the key point. Our purpose is to reform welfare in order to get people back to work, and to ensure that those who cannot manage and have disabilities are treated with the utmost kindness and given the utmost support.

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): There are many unpaid carers in my constituency. Does my right hon. Friend agree that flexible working patterns can be an important part of support for them? What encouragement can the Government give employers and employees who need to embrace such flexibility?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** Universal credit will be of enormous help to people with caring responsibilities, and others who are periodically required to be at home, because it will pay to be in work for every single hour. Moreover, under universal credit, as part of the in-work allowances, we have included an extra piece of support for those who care for others, on top of the carer's allowance.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Disabled people do not want kindness; they want justice, and access to the benefits that can help them to live their lives. Will the Secretary of State give them a cast-iron guarantee that there will be no cuts in their benefits, no cuts in tax credits, and no cuts in the disability premiums that tax credits can bring? Disabled people need those assurances, given that, we understand, the Secretary of State has now agreed with the Chancellor that we are to expect welfare cuts amounting to £12 billion.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** Let me remind the hon. Lady what happened during the last Parliament, under a Conservative Government. Spending on disability living allowance was up by half in the decade before PIP came in, and just 6% of new claimants had face-to-face assessments. Under PIP, 20% of claimants receive both the higher rates, as opposed to 16% under DLA. Our reforms are about helping those in the greatest need. Let me remind the hon. Lady of something else as well, just in case she has forgotten. We did debate the overall figure of £12 billion, and Labour lost the election. I remember something that was said by the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), who is not with us for the moment—I send her my best. She said:

“Labour will be tougher than the Tories when it comes to slashing the benefits bill.”

Is it not a bit of hypocrisy for Labour Members to come here and make their claims, having said that they would be tougher than we are?

**Kate Green:** Labour will be tougher in cutting benefits when that is a response to the wrong drivers of those benefits. What we will not tolerate is cuts in benefits for people who are in work and who need those benefits to enable their work to pay. May I ask the Secretary of State about some of the work-related benefits for disabled people? Will he confirm that there will be no cuts and no downgrading of the payments to people on employment and support allowance in the work-related activity group, and will he tell us whether industrial injuries disablement benefit will be protected from cuts?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** The hon. Lady really needs to think carefully about what she says. Labour Members say that they will be tougher than us. Let me give the

hon. Lady a simple pledge: we will protect the most vulnerable. There is only thing that is tough at the moment—tough on Labour Members: they lost the election. They had no idea how they were going to end the deficit, and that is why they are sitting on the Opposition Benches.

### Child Maintenance Payments

9. **Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): What arrangements are in place to prevent child maintenance payments from increasing when a parent is prevented from spending time with their child by the recipient of the payments. [900448]

**The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel):** The issue of contact with children and that of the calculation of child maintenance, although related, are separate. In the calculation, we will reflect the level of care that a parent provides for any child for whom he or she should pay maintenance, but we have no power to direct what the level of care should be. That is a matter for the parents to agree either privately or through the courts.

**Anne McLaughlin:** I asked the question on behalf of a constituent, but obviously many others will be in the same situation. I do not agree that there is no link, because it clearly states on the Child Support Agency website that if someone spends less time with their children, they will pay more in child maintenance. Some people spend less time with their children because, through no fault of their own and with no suggestion of any detriment to the children if they were to see them, the partner prevents that from happening. Will the Minister examine this and stop punishing parents twice over?

**Priti Patel:** Child contact following the separation of two parents is always a difficult and emotive issue, and the child's needs must be met by both parents, in terms of financial support, when they separate. We are investing in support for parents to help them make more family-based child maintenance arrangements, and we will continue to help and secure separated families so that they can do what is in the best interests of their child. The hon. Lady mentioned that she has a particular case, and I am happy to look into it.

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): The Minister rightly said that contact and payment are separate issues. In most cases it is right that a child stays in contact with both parents if they are no longer living together, but I wish to press her on something: it cannot be right that a payment should be linked to a right to see that child.

**Priti Patel:** My right hon. Friend makes a valid point. As I said, we know that this is an emotive issue for separating parents, and much of it is arbitrated in the courts system. It is all about balance in terms of parental support and parental access. Access is a matter for the courts, not for the Department for Work and Pensions. As I have said, we as a Department and as a Government are already investing in support for parents to make the right kind of arrangements. We will continue to do so and help separated families so that they can do what is in the best interests of their child.

### Carers: Financial Support

10. **Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): What his policy is on maintaining the level of financial support provided to carers. [900449]

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith):** This Government recognise and appreciate the vital contribution made by carers. We have ensured that carers are central to the Government's reforms to care and support, and there are stronger rights for carers in the Care Act 2014, which came into force in April 2015. Since 2010, the rate of carer's allowance has increased from £53.90 to £62.10, and this April we increased the earnings threshold for carers by 8% to £110 a week. The Government are committed to continuing to provide financial support for carers throughout the benefits system.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** Young carers in our society perform a vital role, often balancing their responsibility of caring with work or study, yet young carers in full-time education are not entitled to carer's allowance. What will the Secretary of State do to remedy that injustice?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I remind the hon. Gentleman that this was very much the situation when his party was in government—before he starts lecturing us too much on what we have done. We have done more to improve the status of carers, and we support carers enormously. As I said, in universal credit we are adding an extra benefit for them by allowing the work allowances for carers to support them as well. I am certainly happy to look at the particular situation he asked about, and I will write to him.

**Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): As the Secretary of State will know, the Bath Carers Centre in my constituency does a superb job of supporting carers and their families. What assurances can I give people there as to the Government's plans on supporting carers in the coming years?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** As I have said, we did a huge amount to support carers in the last Parliament, and we intend to continue to protect and support them throughout this Parliament. Carers do a huge amount to support people, including in the national health service, and including people with disabilities. This has been our promise and our pledge. We will continue to support carers.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): The Secretary of State referred to the shadow Secretary of State; I am pleased to tell the House that she gave birth to a baby boy last Wednesday and that mother and baby are doing well. The Secretary of State referred to disabled people and the effect on them of the £12 billion benefit cuts. It now appears that the anxiety and uncertainty facing carers will be extended, because we will not get the full list of cuts on 8 July; we will have to await a further statement in the autumn. When the final list of £12 billion is announced, will carers be protected from those cuts?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** First, will the right hon. Gentleman pass on our thanks—I mean congratulations—to the hon. Lady on her great news? I have already made it clear that we have done a great deal to support carers, and it is my intention to keep on supporting them. It is worth pointing out that our changes improved the lot of carers over the course of the previous Parliament, and will continue to do so.

**Stephen Timms:** The absence of any reassurance there will give rise to a great deal of concern among carers. May I ask the Secretary of State about working families on lower and average incomes? Will they be better off or worse off once his £12 billion of cuts have been announced?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** We are looking at welfare, and at how to reform it. When we are ready, I will come forward with an announcement. Let me take the right hon. Gentleman back to the issue of tax credits. We have had many Labour Members going on about tax credits. I looked up how tax credits were increased under a Labour Government. Interestingly, it appears that just before every election, the Labour Government dramatically increased tax credits—in 2004 by 60%; in 2005, just before the election, by 7.2%; and in 2010, just before the election, by 14.4% and by 8.5%. The truth is that his Government have always used benefits as a way of trying to buy votes. We believe that benefits are about supporting people to do the right thing, to get back to work, and to live a more prosperous life.

### Social Landlords (Direct Rent Payments)

11. **Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): What consultation his Department has undertaken with social landlords on the potential effects of the introduction of universal credit and the benefit cap on direct rent payments to landlords. [900450]

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith):** I instituted a phased roll-out of universal credit, so we would have time to consider any issues that arose and to deal with them. Jobcentre Plus and local authorities are working together with "Universal Support—delivered locally". We will continue to develop this important partnership to ensure the most vulnerable get the support they need to lead independent lives. We have done a huge number of reviews. We regularly engage with more than 50 landlords across all sectors, which includes meeting with social landlords in key areas where universal credit is live.

**Mr Betts:** This issue was raised by Tony Stacey, the chief executive of South Yorkshire Housing Association. Currently, if a household is in rent arrears and gets housing benefit, the benefit can be paid directly to the social landlord. When universal credit is introduced, if the family also gets a welfare cap, it is the housing cost element that is squeezed by the cap. No longer will the amount of universal credit be paid directly to the social landlord to cover the rent. Can the Secretary of State not see that that could lead to a rise in evictions? Is he aware of the problem, and what will he do about it?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** Let me be absolutely clear about the importance of universal credit. In the past, housing providers would get the money paid directly to them while the individual in difficulties sorted themselves out. Under universal credit, they can apply for an extra payment, and that will be done direct. The key point about this is that the housing provider works with the individual family to help them turn around their circumstances, rather than just leaving them as they are and not doing anything about them. All of that is being tested under universal credit. People on universal credit will be better off directly as a result of the changes that we are making.

**Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Section 96 of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 stipulates that the level at which the total benefit cap is set will be determined by reference to estimated average earnings. How do the Government justify breaking the link between the cap and average earnings by reducing the rate to £23,000?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** The hon. Gentleman should address his question to his Front-Bench team, as they apparently support our move.

21. [900460] **James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): With respect to the benefits cap, does the Secretary of State agree that the big picture is about getting people off benefits and into work? The people of South Suffolk feel that the fact that anyone can ever earn more out of work than in work is one of the great social injustices of our day.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** As I have said, the problem that we inherited was a tax credit system that rewarded people for doing the wrong things, and parked people who wanted to do better on benefits that allowed them not to do any more hours of work. Universal credit changes that: every hour of work pays. Labour has opposed that root and branch, but then it has opposed every other welfare reform that we have introduced, and all the extra jobs that have come about directly as a result.

**Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): Will the Secretary of State take the opportunity to congratulate with me people working in Jobcentre Plus in Rossendale and Darwen who have been involved in the roll-out of universal credit? Having spoken to them and to some of their clients, I can say that universal credit seems to be universally popular.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I thank my hon. Friend for that difficult question. I will, absolutely. Jobcentre Plus staff do fantastic work, do a huge amount to get people back into work, and work with people with difficult conditions, and they welcome universal credit. I will pass on his congratulations to them, and I thank him for asking me to.

### Food Banks

13. **Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): If he will make an assessment of the effects of the benefits sanctions and conditionality regime on use of food banks. [900452]

14. **Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): If he will make an assessment of the effects of the benefits sanctions and conditionality regime on use of food banks. [900453]

**The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel):** We have looked at the issue extensively, and we agree with the conclusion reached by the all-party parliamentary inquiry into hunger that the reasons for food bank use are complex and overlapping. There is no robust evidence that directly links sanctions and food bank use.

**Ms Ahmed-Sheikh:** While all Members of this House will commend the work carried out by charities such as the Gate food bank in Alloa in my constituency, it is absolutely clear from all independent evidence that the sanctions regime is having a heartbreaking effect on people such as David Duncan from Fife, who, as reported in this morning's *Daily Record*, was sanctioned after missing a jobcentre appointment, despite being in hospital recovering after major surgery following a serious heart attack. Will the Minister commit to an immediate review of the conditionality and sanctions regime to put a stop to this relentless and heartless assault on vulnerable people in this country?

**Priti Patel:** Food banks play an important role in local welfare provision. I do not accept anything that the hon. Lady has said. In Scotland, the number of jobseeker's allowance sanctions has decreased from 84,000 in 2013 to 55,000—

**Stewart McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): Thanks to the Scottish Government.

**Priti Patel:** Well, we are devolving welfare, and we can have this debate next week on the Floor of the House. It is also important to emphasise that the purpose of sanctions is to encourage claimants to comply with reasonable requirements to help them develop and move into the world of work. That is vital.

**Chris Law:** I thank the Minister for her response, but in the year following the introduction of benefits sanctions, approximately 2,500 people were sanctioned in my city of Dundee, leading to a 51% increase in referrals to Dundee's Trussell Trust food bank, including of many parents with young children. The number is rising year on year, despite what she just said about falling figures. Does she not accept that there is an intrinsic link between the two, and that it is an absolute disgrace to have rising food poverty in the 21st century?

**Priti Patel:** Sanctions were in place for a significant amount of time before this Government and the previous Government. Let me reiterate the point, made in the recent Oakley review of benefits sanctions, that sanctions are a

“key element of the mutual obligation that underpins both the effectiveness and fairness of the social security system.”

For the benefit of the hon. Gentleman, let me say that we have accepted all the recommendations made by Oakley. This brings us back to the fact that sanctions play an important role in encouraging and supporting people to go back to work.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Does the Minister agree that those who pay for these benefits through their taxes expect an effective mechanism to be in place, such as sanctions, to ensure that the rules are complied with?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend is right, because at the end of the day we are speaking about hard-working taxpayers who support and contribute to the welfare system. Of course, we have a duty to support those who are seeking work and who are in receipt of benefits, but at the same time, hard-working taxpayers want to ensure that their taxes are spent fairly.

**Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con): All I know is that those at Mission Trinity, an excellent independent non-political food bank in Goole, tell me that benefits sanctions are driving people to use it. I support the benefit sanctions system, but one issue that seems to be a problem is the consistency with which sanctions are applied. May we have a review of this and ensure that the recipients of the sanctions properly understand the consequences?

**Priti Patel:** I commend my hon. Friend's local food bank, and him, on the work done in his constituency. If he has specific examples that he would like to draw to my attention, I will happily discuss them with him.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): May I welcome the Minister to her new role? Before the election, we had a most unsatisfactory debate on benefits sanctions with her predecessor. I have to say, Mr Speaker, that in a disappointing election for Labour, the result in Wirral West was one bright spot.

One person in four is now being sanctioned, and sanctions are cited as one of the top reasons for people to visit food banks. Will the Minister take steps to make sure that DWP staff apply the good reasons code correctly and end these vicious and arbitrary sanctions?

**Priti Patel:** I thank the hon. Lady for her welcome, although I must say I thought her comments about my predecessor were ungracious.

Regarding sanctions, I assure the House that for those in genuine need, hardship payments are on offer, as is support for those who have been sanctioned. Support is there for those who can demonstrate that they require financial assistance to buy essential items. It is absolutely right that in our jobcentres and in the interactions with claimants, we give them the right sort of support, guidance and advice, and I assure the hon. Lady that that does take place.

### Topical Questions

T1. [900465] **John Healey** (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith):** Today, I would like to remind the House of the progress this Government have made on a groundbreaking programme called social impact bonds. In the last Parliament, we set up the innovation fund, working with young people at risk of falling out of the

education system, or even joining gangs. This is a radical departure from the funding systems of the past, in which arbitrary spending was based on inputs. Now, with the impact bonds, money can be put into programmes that are about outcomes. We will bring in the next phase of this work shortly through the Social Justice Cabinet Committee, which I chair.

**John Healey:** In his speech today, the Prime Minister talked about the causes of welfare spending. He had next to nothing to say about low pay, yet the financial modelling I conducted on Labour's plans for raising the national minimum wage shows that we could save three quarters of a billion pounds on housing benefit and tax credit costs. Surely getting to grips with the root causes is a better way to control rising welfare costs than attacking the incomes of the poorest?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that we want companies to take a fuller share of paying people a reasonable and decent salary. That is an absolute fact. In the last Parliament, this Government raised the minimum wage twice. It is at £6.50 now, in October it will go up to £6.70, and the Prime Minister has made it clear that he wants it to rise even further. We want companies to pay better salaries, which means less tax credits from us.

T2. [900466] **Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): What support is the Department giving young people in my constituency who are seeking apprenticeships and employment?

**The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel):** I commend my hon. Friend, who is a strong and assiduous champion of young people and apprenticeships. I assure him that we are engaging with young people in his constituency, promoting nine apprenticeships that are available with his local authority and working in partnership with Kirklees College to promote traineeships. In 2013-14, 616 apprenticeships were started in his constituency.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): We welcome the Government's belated decision to consult on a charge cap for savers withdrawing their money from pensions. Will the cap apply only to exit fees, or will it also cover recurring charges on investment and income drawdown products? *Which?* says that that sort of cap could save £10,000 out of a typical £36,000 pension pot, and before her appointment, in March, the new Minister for Pensions said that that sort of cap was needed to protect savers. Will the wider cap be the subject of the Government's consultation?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** The right hon. Gentleman is right in the first part of his question. In the second part, as he knows, the Chancellor announced the consultation, which will go out in July. We have concerns about some companies that may be overcharging, and that will form part of the consultation.

T3. [900468] **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I was pleased to meet with Disability Support Torbay on Friday to discuss the advocacy, support and advice it gives to many local people. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is crucial to work with employers to make sure that they are aware of work the Government are doing, such as the Access to Work programme, to help them to employ and retain people with disabilities?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson):** I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting such excellent local initiatives. In my earlier answers I stressed how important that is. Last year we saw an increase of 238,000 disabled people in work. The employment rate is now 46.3%—up 2.1% from last year—and our Disability Confident campaign will continue to share best practice and signpost further help for local businesses.

T5. [900470] **Marie Rimmer** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): Following the shameful failure of the Front-Bench team once again to answer a question today, may I ask again why the Government are refusing to publish—even though the Information Commissioner has instructed them to do so—the up-to-date statistics relating to the number of people who have died, having been found fit for work at their face-to-face assessment?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I find it absurd that Opposition Members deliberately try to misrepresent what happens under such schemes. I remind the hon. Lady that it was her Government who introduced the employment support allowance and the work capability assessment, and at no stage did they say that that led to people committing suicide. People in that situation are often in a very delicate and difficult position, and I find it disgraceful that she is going round making such allegations.

T9. [900474] **Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): The latest employment statistics show that under this Government record numbers of women are in work, yet there are 2 million more women who would like to be in employment but are not. What discussions has the Minister had with colleagues to ensure that the barriers that those women face are being removed?

**Priti Patel:** My right hon. Friend is right. We are all about ensuring that more women get employment and enter the labour market. On the barriers to women entering the labour market, she will be aware of our work, for example, on shared parental leave, increasing the availability of childcare places, and increasing the provision of childcare from 15 free hours to 30 free hours. In relation to women and pay, the Government will require large employers to publish information on the gender pay gap.

T7. [900472] **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Marie Rimmer) is right. Given that on 5 June the High Court found the Department's actions—this time on PIP delays—unlawful, does the Secretary of State think that he and his Department are above the law? Why does he refuse to publish the details of the number of people who have died within six weeks of their claims for incapacity benefit and employment and support allowance, including those who have been found fit for work?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** As I said to the hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Marie Rimmer), I find it unbelievable that she, the hon. Lady and others have spent all their time trying to make allegations about people going about their work. [Interruption.] She knows very well that the Department does not collate numbers on people in that circumstance. It deals with individual

cases where things have gone right or gone wrong and reviews them. It is a crying shame that Labour Members want to go out every day scaring and frightening people. It is no wonder they lost the election.

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): May I welcome the introduction of the family test and the Secretary of State's lead on that? What is he doing to ensure that it does what the Prime Minister says it should do, which is change the way Government do business?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** This test will be reviewed through the Social Justice Cabinet Committee, which I chair. We intend, and the Prime Minister intends, that it will have teeth. We want to see an improvement in family life and greater support for those who have to juggle care for their children, care for elderly relatives and work. Through that process we hope to improve their lives.

T8. [900473] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): In my constituency rents are almost double the English average and the housing benefit bill rose by 50% during the previous Parliament. Does the Secretary of State think that subsidising private landlords to such a degree is a good use of public money?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, we deal with housing benefit claims as they come. They support people in both private rented accommodation and social rented accommodation. I remind him that the Government whom he supported introduced the current private rented benefit test. More importantly, under that Government more people out of work and more people in work were claiming housing benefit. Under this Government fewer of those out of work are claiming housing benefit.

**Heidi Allen** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): As the employment figures tell us, the work plan is working. Before I came to this place, I ran my own business, and when I saw the same CVs coming back six months or a year later, I would choose to email or call those people and try to give them some coaching. It is a great opportunity for businesses to mentor individuals who are not being touched by the work plan.

**Priti Patel:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on coming into the House. I think she was referring to the Work programme, in particular. She is absolutely right. For us, if the Work programme is to be successful—and it is succeeding; we have record numbers of people in employment because of it—it will be through working with employers to find the right kind of work experience that helps them to fill vacancies and to make a big difference too. Work programme providers have the freedom to design and deliver, with employers, the support that is most appropriate for claimants.

**Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North) (Lab): One of my constituents who has been disabled from birth has had her mobility allowances reduced, so she cannot have her mobility car. She is now housebound, and she says she is being punished because of her disability by the Government. Why is the Secretary of State so keen to be the obedient lapdog of the Chancellor in spreading misery wherever possible to the most vulnerable? This Government are conducting a campaign of harassment against disabled people in our country.

**Justin Tomlinson:** Without having the full details of that case, I cannot comment, but if the hon. Gentleman provided further information I would be happy to look into it. He should remember, however, that under the PIP process 22% of people would be expected to get the highest rate of support as against only 16% under DLA.

**Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con):** Does the Secretary of State agree that family breakdown is a driver of child poverty as well as many other issues such as addiction, obesity and self-harm, at a cost of almost £50 billion a year, and that therefore investment in strengthening couple relationships, as well as parent-child relationships, makes economic sense as well as being a matter of social justice?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I agree with my hon. Friend. The previous Labour Government did absolutely nothing in this area. We have put huge sums of money into family breakdown support through counselling. We intend to continue that support and make it even stronger.

**Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab):** My constituency is a pilot area for universal credit. Despite what the Secretary of State has said previously, social landlords are among the many local organisations who are concerned that the proposed seven-day waiting period will lead to some of the most vulnerable of my constituents getting into rent arrears. The Social Security Advisory Committee agreed and recommended that the Government reconsider this proposal, but it was overruled by the Secretary of State. Will he agree to meet the concerned parties, including social landlords, charities and citizens advice bureaux, to hear from them directly? What steps will he take to protect social landlords and their tenants from the effects of this change?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** We are already talking to many social landlords, who have agreed with us that the improvements we have made are dramatic and helpful, but I am very happy to meet anybody the hon. Lady wants to bring to me.

**John Glen (Salisbury) (Con):** Will the Minister explain the Government's commitment to training in jobcentres? One concern is that there is inconsistency in decisions made. What commitment will be given during the next five years to the training budget for jobcentre staff?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I am not altogether certain that I quite understand what my hon. Friend is referring to. If he is referring to the Flexible Support Fund, that is allocated deliberately so that jobcentres can make local decisions about the kind of training that they need to give. If he has a particular problem, I am more than happy for him to write to me or come and see me.

**Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab):** My constituent, Mr Geoffrey Thomas, found that the DWP was deducting £8.43 from his ESA because it falsely claimed that he had taken out £400-worth of social loans. Does the Secretary of State agree that this is a disgraceful way to have treated my constituent? Will he make urgent inquiries to make sure that this is not happening to any other people across the country?

**Priti Patel:** The hon. Gentleman has highlighted a constituency case, and I would be very happy to discuss it with him and look into the details.

**Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con):** This weekend I had a discussion about the difficulties that those suffering from mental health conditions face when trying to access support, specifically in relation to budgeting. What support is available, particularly in the most difficult cases?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the issue of mental health conditions, which is a particular priority for us. Through the Access to Work scheme, we have introduced a lot more measures to increase support and provision for those trying to get into work and while they are in work. That is partly why 35,000 people benefited from that scheme last year, up by 4,000 on the previous year.

**Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD):** Six-year-old Ellie Mae Brownnuttt tragically died on 8 May from Batten disease; her brother Caleb also suffers from the condition. The parents of children with Batten disease still have to fill in forms for DLA every three years, even though there is no cure and, sadly, death is inevitable. Some conditions are exempt from that requirement and some are not. Will the Minister meet me, representatives of the Batten Disease Family Association and people affected by other degenerative conditions to discuss how this situation can be changed?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue—I know he has been a real champion for the cause. I am happy to meet him, but he should remember that the reason we do reassessments, where appropriate, is that sometimes conditions get worse and support for them will therefore increase. We would not want people to miss out, as they did under DLA.

**David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con):** Earlier, the Minister pointed out that we have brought in a 0.75% cap on private pensions that are subject to auto-enrolment. That is excellent news. However, there is also abusive behaviour more widely in the industry. Do we expect that cap to be extended to non-auto-enrolled pensions?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** At the moment, the cap sits with automatic enrolment, but I am happy to hear the case for extending it. As I said earlier, we will consult on this issue in July and I am happy for my hon. Friend to make some kind of report or submission.

**Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab):** Since 2010 there has been a big fall in the number of apprenticeships in technical sectors, including IT and construction. Does the Secretary of State accept that if his Department is serious about addressing the need for high-paid jobs in this country, he has to do a lot more about young people's skills?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I absolutely agree, and am glad that the hon. Gentleman has raised the issue of apprenticeships. Under the previous Government there were 2 million more apprenticeships, and this Government have made a commitment to 3 million. As the Minister for Employment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel),

said earlier, we have also introduced a degree-level apprenticeship. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely on the money: we want to do more about apprenticeships, and if he spots something that will be helpful to us I am happy to see him about that.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): People with mental health problems can find it incredibly difficult to get a job and stay in employment. What are the Government doing to help?

**Justin Tomlinson:** That issue is being picked up through the Access to Work scheme. The changes we have made recognise the challenges for people with mental health conditions both while they are in work and with maintaining work. I formerly employed someone with a mental health condition, and so I know what a valuable contribution such people can make, often needing only small changes and bits of support.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Ah! We are graced with the presence of the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, from whom we will now hear.

**Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister has just extolled the virtues of his Department's support for people with mental health problems, but in reality we know that too many people with mental health issues are coming through the Work programme and not getting work. Is it not time that, for the benefit of those people and of the taxpayer, some of his Department's money was devolved to local areas so those people can get better support and get into proper jobs?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** Like Mr Speaker, I welcome the hon. Lady to her post. This is absolutely an area where we want to take things further and do more work. Mental health conditions are one of the big issues stopping

people getting into work. We want to do more on that, and have more treatment and more support through jobcentres. I am happy to discuss that.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): I welcome some of the statistics given earlier by the Minister for Disabled People. Does he agree that Disability Confident events could be rolled out across the whole country, and will he consider holding an event at which MPs from across the House could hear from him and DWP staff about how those events are held and the advantages they have, so that we can all help this great cause?

**Mr Speaker:** The Minister could put an answer in the Library of the House, which might be quicker.

**Justin Tomlinson:** I totally agree with my hon. Friend. Thirteen MPs have already held events in their constituencies. We can all play a vital role in promoting opportunities for the wealth of talent that is available and willing to go into work.

**Mr Speaker:** Last but not least, I call Peter Grant.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): The Secretary of State may be aware of a report on the front page of today's *Herald* about a recently retired employee who took advantage of the Government's changes to pension regulations and as a direct result was scammed out of his entire pension provision of £360,000. What steps are his Department taking to make sure that the changes it has introduced do not simply allow gangs of criminals to declare open season on our pensioners?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I am glad the hon. Gentleman raised that specific case, and I would like to hear more from him about it, as I have not read that report myself. We are doing a huge amount under the consultation and we want to look more at scams and how to stop them. I will very much be making those representations to the industry and will, if necessary, bring in relevant legislation.

## Onshore Wind Subsidies

3.34 pm

**The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd):** With your permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on ending new subsidies for onshore wind.

The Government are committed to meeting objectives on cutting carbon emissions and to continuing to make progress towards the UK's 2020 renewable energy targets. The renewable electricity programme aims to deliver at least 30% of the UK's electricity demand from renewables by 2020. We are on course to achieve that objective. Renewables already make up almost 20% of our electricity generation and there is a strong pipeline to deliver the rest.

As we decarbonise, it is imperative that we manage the costs to consumers. Although renewable energy costs have been coming down, subsidies still form part of people's energy bills, and as the share of renewables in the mix grows, the impact gets proportionately larger. One of the Government's priorities is to bring about the transition to low-carbon generation as cost-effectively and securely as possible.

The levy control framework, covering the period up to 2020-21, is one of the tools to help to achieve that. It limits the impact of support for low-carbon electricity on consumer bills. We have a responsibility to manage support schemes efficiently within the levy control framework to ensure that we maintain public support for the action we are taking to bring down carbon emissions and to combat climate change.

Government support is designed to help technologies to stand on their own two feet, not to encourage a permanent reliance on subsidies. We must continue to take tough judgments about what new projects get subsidies. Onshore wind has deployed successfully to date and is an important part of our energy mix.

In 2014, onshore wind made up around 5% of electricity generation, supported by around £800 million of subsidies. At the end of April 2015, there were 490 operational onshore wind farms in the UK, comprising 4,751 turbines in total. Those wind farms have an installed capacity of 8.3 GW—enough to power the equivalent of over 4.5 million homes.

The electricity market reform delivery plan projects that we require between 11 and 13 GW of electricity to be provided by onshore wind by 2020 to meet our 2020 renewable electricity generation objective, while remaining within the limits of what is affordable. We now have enough onshore wind in the pipeline, including projects that have planning permission, to meet that requirement comfortably.

Without action, we are very likely to deploy beyond that range. We could end up with more onshore wind projects than we can afford, which would lead to either higher bills for consumers, or other renewable technologies, such as offshore wind, losing out on support. We need to continue investing in less mature technologies so that they realise their promise, just as onshore wind has done. It is therefore appropriate to curtail further subsidised deployment of onshore wind, balancing the interests of onshore developers with those of bill payers.

This Government were elected with a commitment to end new subsidies for onshore wind and to change the law so that local people have the final say on onshore wind applications. Colleagues, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) and, additionally, my hon. Friends the Members for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) and for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams), and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips), have led the way in calling for this. Six weeks into this Government, we are acting on that commitment. Alongside proposals outlined within the new energy Bill to devolve decision making for new onshore wind farms out of Whitehall, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has set out further considerations to be applied to proposed wind energy development in England so that local people have the final say on onshore wind farm applications.

I set out to Parliament on 18 June proposals to end new subsidies for onshore wind, specifically in relation to the renewables obligation, which will be closed to new onshore wind from 1 April 2016—a year earlier than planned. My Department's analysis indicates that, after taking account of an early closure, onshore wind deployment under the RO will be in the region of 11.6 GW. With that capacity, and the capacity of onshore wind projects that have received support through the new contracts for difference, we expect about 12.3 GW of onshore wind to be operating in the UK by 2020, supported by the levy control framework, which will provide about 10% of electricity generation. That puts us above the middle of the deployment range set out in the EMR delivery plan, which provides our best estimates of what we will need to meet the planned contribution from renewable electricity for our 2020 targets.

I have proposed a grace period that will continue to give access to support under the RO to projects that, as of 18 June 2015, had planning consent, a grid connection and acceptance and evidence of land rights for the sites on which their projects will be built. We estimate that about 7.1 GW of the onshore wind capacity that has been proposed across the UK will not be eligible for the grace period and is therefore unlikely to go ahead as a result of the announcement on 18 June. That equates to about 250 projects, totalling about 2,500 turbines, that are unlikely to be built.

Therefore, by closing the RO to onshore wind early, we are ensuring that we meet our renewable electricity objectives, while managing the impact on consumer bills and ensuring that other renewables technologies continue to develop and reduce their costs. Consumer bills will not rise because of this change. Indeed, the onshore wind projects that are unlikely to go ahead could have cost hundreds of millions of pounds. I believe that we have drawn the line in the right place.

In advance of this announcement, I and other Ministers and officials discussed the proposals with the devolved Administrations in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. We want to hear the further views of the devolved Administrations, as well as of industry and other stakeholders. This is just the beginning of the process, and we will continue to consult them as we move towards implementation.

The changes to the renewables obligation do not affect remote island wind proposals, which would not have been in a position to receive RO subsidy even under the

previous timelines. I will say more about how future CfD projects will be treated in due course. However, I am conscious that 68% of the onshore wind pipeline relates to projects in Scotland. I will continue to consult colleagues in the Scottish Government. Indeed, I am meeting the Scottish Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism, Fergus Ewing, on Wednesday. Because we are implementing these changes through primary legislation, they will be subject to full parliamentary scrutiny, including by Members representing Scottish constituencies.

On contracts for difference, we have the tools available to implement our manifesto commitments on onshore wind and will set out how we will do so when we announce our plans for further CfD allocations. I will shortly be considering options for future support for community onshore wind projects that might represent one or two turbines through the feed-in tariff, as part of the review that my Department is conducting this year. I do not wish to stand in the way of local communities coming together to generate low-carbon electricity in a manner that is acceptable to and supported by them, including through small-scale wind capacity. However, that action must be affordable as well as acceptable.

Clean energy does not begin and end with onshore wind. Onshore wind is an important part of our current and future low-carbon energy mix, but we are reaching the limits of what is affordable and what the public are prepared to accept. We are committed to meeting our decarbonisation objectives. The changes that I have outlined to Parliament will not change that. I look forward to having meaningful discussions with industry, other stakeholders and colleagues in the House and in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on how we will move forward.

3.43 pm

**Caroline Flint** (Don Valley) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance notice of her statement today at 2.22 pm.

It is only four days since I heard the Secretary of State on the “Today” programme, explaining her Government’s policy changes to onshore wind. That was followed by a written statement later that morning, along with a written statement from the Department for Communities and Local Government on the same subject. Today, she has been forced to come to the House because of the confusion and concern that she has caused. There is concern about the Government’s commitment to our renewable targets and to supporting value for money. There is confusion as to how her policy will apply in practice, and confusion across the renewables sector, where certainty to encourage investment is paramount.

I made clear to the onshore wind sector before the general election that, although I did not support a cap, a clear pathway to being subsidy-free was an outcome I wanted, so why do I have doubts about the Secretary of State’s announcements? We know, despite the fact that something like 69% of the public support onshore wind—it is the most popular of the renewable energy-generating supply technologies—[*Interruption.*] It is true. We know that the Secretary of State wants to appease many of her Back Benchers, who seem to hate onshore wind, although one of them is making money out of a solar farm. The election promise of a cap on onshore

wind was music to their ears, although they were probably not aware that nearly 1,000 projects had planning permission. It is not clear to me and many others whether the sum of all the Secretary of State’s rhetoric really adds up.

The Secretary of State has proposed a grace period for projects that, as of last week when the written statement was made, had in place planning consent, access to the grid and land rights. Can she confirm that, according to her statement today, that means something like 75% of onshore wind projects with consent will go ahead? The changes to the rules will have to be done through primary legislation, and it could be at least six months between last week’s statement and Royal Assent.

Can I ask the Secretary of State whether, as part of her consultation, she is open to projects that have planning consent, a grid access offer and all land rights sorted before Royal Assent, being able to continue with the RO arrangement to 2017? In last week’s press release, the Department of Energy and Climate Change said that up to 5.2 GW of onshore wind power could still qualify, but other estimates are much lower.

In her statement, the Secretary of State referred to 11.6 GW, putting us in the mid-range of fulfilling our 2020 targets for renewable energy. Does that include the 5.2 GW figure? If 5.2 GW is an overestimate, that presumably makes meeting our target less likely. Given that we found out last week that we have already missed our interim 2020 EU renewable targets, that is extremely concerning. What discussions has she had with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government about how many local or neighbourhood plans are required to identify areas suitable for wind energy? What additional costs may be incurred by councils from having to pre-empt planning applications to avoid a company challenging a decision? Out of interest and in the interests of a logical argument, why do these changes to planning policy not apply to all energy generation?

UK-wide energy policy has enabled all of us to share the risks and rewards of developing new and old forms of energy. While Scotland makes up just over 10% of UK households, over 30% of operational onshore wind projects are located in Scotland because of the amount of wind and the contribution of UK-wide bill payers, so it is understandable that Scotland will be worried about the impact on jobs and investment there. What will the Secretary of State do to give confidence to colleagues in the devolved institutions that there will be a genuine process of consultation?

Despite the Prime Minister’s warm words on tackling climate change in this most important year of global negotiations, this Parliament has hardly begun, but the cheapest form of renewable energy is already under attack and other renewable investors are worried that they will be next. I want our country to go forwards, not backwards. This debate is not about hot air; it is about jobs, manufacturing and investment opportunities at risk across the sector. In her answers today, the Secretary of State needs to convince us that she understands what is at stake.

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the right hon. Lady for her comments. May I first take the opportunity to remind her that this policy was well set out before she heard me on the “Today” programme? It was in the Queen’s Speech, in the manifesto and the Prime Minister had referred to

[Amber Rudd]

the fact that a Conservative Government would take this action. I have in no way been forced to come here. I chose to come here to make a statement after a number of colleagues wanted the opportunity to have their voice heard in support of what is happening. I am delighted to give them the opportunity to do so.

The right hon. Lady chose to question the Conservative party's commitment to addressing our climate change obligations. Fortunately, she gave me the opportunity to talk about that just 10 days or so ago, when one of the first Opposition-day debates of the Parliament was about climate change. I was able to tell her and the House about the Government's commitment to meeting the targets and the commitment of the Government and the Prime Minister to getting a deal in Paris this year. We are committed to ensuring that we deliver on our decarbonisation targets but, just as importantly, we are committed to getting a global deal. We do not want to do this alone. We need to provide leadership in the EU and internationally to ensure that our effort is truly leveraged so that we can get that result at the end of the year.

It is disappointing that the right hon. Lady chooses to throw confusion where none exists. I think I was very clear in my statement about the gigawatts involved and the range that we were targeting, but I repeat for her that we hoped to have 10% of electricity generation from wind by 2020, and we are reaching that target early. That is a key reason for ending the subsidy for onshore wind now. We wanted to fall in the middle of the range, and in fact it looks likely that we will be slightly towards the upper end. Having achieved that, it is right that we do not put further pressure on people's bills. Unlike her and the Labour party, we believe that we can do this in a cost-effective way. We are absolutely committed to supporting renewables, but we want to do it by the most low-cost pathway we can.

In answer to the right hon. Lady's question about regulation, and particularly planning permission for different sources of energy, it is right that different sources have different types of regulation and fall under different planning regimes. Part of what we are trying to do is to encourage new energy sources, in order to meet our targets and lead to cost reductions. That is why we have different set-ups for different sources—to get the best outcome for both our targets and bill payers.

Finally, the right hon. Lady asked me about Scotland. I have no doubt that I will be answering questions from Scottish National party Members, and I look forward to taking them and addressing them. I have had many conversations with the devolved Administrations, and I look forward to taking further questions from them.

**Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): May I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and encourage her to ignore the hot air coming from the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) and the Opposition on this subject?

I thank my right hon. Friend for all she is doing to prevent Lincolnshire from being carpeted with wind turbines, which nobody in my constituency wants. Will her Department be prepared to publish on its website a list of all the projects that her announcement will affect, so that people in Lincolnshire and across the country

who do not want to see the countryside carpeted with turbines know whether individual projects are going ahead?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. and learned Friend for his question. I know that he has felt, representing his community, that there has been too much deployment in his area. I recognise the support that he has provided in helping us to develop our policy.

Each developer will need to contact the Department for us to give a complete answer, and we will work with developers to ensure that it is clear which projects are within the provisions and which are not. At some stage—my hon. and learned Friend will have to give me a little time—that will be published on the website.

**Stewart Hosie** (Dundee East) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement and for early sight of it.

The Secretary of State said that, six weeks into this Government's time in office, they were acting on this policy, and of course they are, but that does not make it right. She said that we were reaching the limits of what is affordable. We agree—we have reached the limits of what is affordable in the strike price and subsidy for nuclear. She said that we have reached the limits of what the public are prepared to accept. I think the public have already reached the limit on the failure to decarbonise and tackle climate change.

This decision is simply wrong, and the Secretary of State's answer to the hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) was instructive. The Government are prepared to publish all the projects that are pulled; I hope the Secretary of State will also publish all the jobs that are lost and the investment forgone because of the decision. [Interruption.] I hear a lot of chuntering. I think we are getting to the truth now—Government Members simply do not like renewables. They would rather see the costs of nuclear decommissioning passed on to future generations.

We are concerned mainly about the damage that the decision will do. The announcement places at risk a huge investment pipeline conceived in good faith by developers under the rules previously in place. Is the Secretary of State aware that the decision has a disproportionate impact on Scotland, and that it puts investment at risk? She appears to be aware that around 70% of the onshore wind projects in the current planning system are in Scotland. On that basis, is she aware of what Niall Stuart, the chief executive of Scottish Renewables, has said? He said:

“Cutting support for onshore wind would be bad for jobs, bad for investment and would only hinder Scotland and the UK's efforts to meet binding climate change targets.”

Is the Secretary of State not concerned at all that, currently, £3 billion-worth of onshore wind projects in the pipeline in Scotland are at risk with so sudden a closing of the renewables obligation, that that will do incredible damage, and that it will put at risk investor confidence not simply in offshore wind, but in the wider UK energy sector?

I agree with the Secretary of State that the subsidy cost of renewables must decrease, so that both renewables and climate targets are achieved at the lowest cost and so that consumers are protected, but is she not concerned about the danger of a headlong rush to scrap subsidies

for onshore wind, the cheapest large-scale renewable technology? Has she ignored comments from the industry, not least from Keith Anderson, the chief ScottishPower Renewables? He said:

“Onshore wind is clearly still the most cost effective large scale way of deploying renewable technology in the UK. Economically, you would therefore question, why in God’s name would you want to bring that to a premature halt?”

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I feel confident that the hon. Gentleman is in his last sentence, and much nearer the end of it than the beginning.

**Stewart Hosie:** I am indeed, Mr Speaker.

The Secretary of State said last week that up to 5.2 GW of onshore wind capacity would be eligible for a grace period. We found out later that that figure was only 2.9 GW. Today, she said that 7.1% would no longer be eligible for subsidy. Why did she not come clean last week with the proper figures?

**Amber Rudd:** I gently say to the hon. Gentleman that I believe he has failed to accept any of the points I have made about the Government’s commitment to addressing climate change, our commitment to keeping the bills down and our commitment to delivering a variety of renewable energy sources. It is not just about onshore wind.

The hon. Gentleman also failed to acknowledge that, in some environments, there is too much pressure on communities in respect of onshore wind. I gently quote to him Fergus Ewing, the Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism. In 2007, he said:

“Wind farms have...a very heavy environmental footprint”

and

“also...release...substantial quantities of methane from peat landscapes...many other forms of renewable energy are the future—not unconstrained wind farms”.

I agree with him on that. We must recognise that, sometimes, when Members of Parliament choose to fight for their community, they take a different view from that of the national party. I am here representing the views of Members of Parliament as well as the national party. We believe that our policy addresses communities and keeps bills down.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that, although this is a welcome measure, other things will be needed to control bills and tackle fuel poverty? Is it not interesting that only the Conservative party in the House cares about the consumer and wants to get the bills down?

**Amber Rudd:** My right hon. Friend is characteristically on the money. Addressing that is absolutely our aim. We are trying to reduce emissions and give a variety of renewable energy, and to ensure that individuals who look at their bills when they get home see that they continue to come down.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): How much investment and how many jobs will be lost to the economy of the south-west of England as a result of the Secretary of State’s decision?

**Amber Rudd:** The investment in renewable energy over the past six years has been £7 billion a year. We are committed to ensuring that the UK is the leading country in developing renewable energy. We have been particularly successful in offshore wind—we have more offshore wind than the rest of the world put together and hope to become a serious exporter of it. Renewable energy is important for jobs and important for building on our commitments.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State’s announcement and it is great to hear that we are on course to meet 30% of our electricity generation from renewables. She is right to divert the resources into less mature technologies, but can she reassure my constituents that that will not mean that we see a further expansion in very large-scale field solar across south Devon? Perhaps we will see more support for community energy schemes, and I hope that she will take me up on an offer to visit Totnes to see how those work in action.

**Amber Rudd:** I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend and her constituents sound very similar to mine. We support the desire to make sure that we address the issue of climate change: the problem is that we do not want large-scale solar. In fact, large-scale solar has already been taken out of the renewables obligation, but we are trying to support solar so that we have as much as possible through community energy, on people’s houses and on other buildings. There is a great opportunity there.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The IMF recently reported that Britain subsidises its fossil fuel industry to the tune of more than £1,000 per household, whereas onshore wind is just £10 a household. If the Secretary of State is serious about affordability and climate change, why is she not tackling fossil fuel subsidies, instead of slashing wind—one of the most popular and affordable of the energy sources?

**Amber Rudd:** I urge the hon. Lady to take a look at that report. I also saw those statements and found them so extraordinary that I asked for a copy of the IMF report. I would be happy to have a discussion with her about it. It is not a direct subsidy in the way that we understand it, although it is an important point. It is right to reduce fossil fuel, especially in its dirtiest form, but the real danger is health and environmental impact, and that is why we need to get rid of the subsidies.

**Sir Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton) (Con): At the planning stage, a photomontage never really gives an accurate picture of the visual impact of turbines. Will the Secretary of State consider making it compulsory for applicants to fly a blimp in order better to show the real height of any proposed turbine?

**Amber Rudd:** That is a novel suggestion to me: I am not familiar with the workings of blimps. I look forward to further advice on the issue.

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): Last Wednesday, tens of thousands of campaigners came to London to ask us to do more on climate change. What do we tell them now about the Government’s priorities when they cut subsidies for renewables and increase them for fracking?

**Amber Rudd:** I also met constituents and leaders of the march in my Department. I think we should tell them the truth, which is that the Government continue to be the greenest Government ever. We will deliver on our climate change targets, and we are committed to getting a deal in Paris. I urge the hon. Gentleman to stick to the truth.

**Mr Peter Lilley** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Now that my right hon. Friend is abolishing subsidies on the least uneconomic form of renewables, may we now assume that she proposes to make corresponding reductions in subsidies for offshore wind, which impose a two or three times greater burden on the cost of living, especially for poor households?

**Amber Rudd:** I am sorry to disappoint my right hon. Friend, but we will not reduce those. Now that we have a market-led system through the CfD, we are able to push for a reduction in prices—I know he will approve—and in the CfD auction last year that was very effective in getting the price down.

**Huw Irranca-Davies** (Ogmore) (Lab): May I suggest to the Secretary of State that it would be really helpful if she could publish as much information as possible on the risk analysis she has made of the decision to phase out the subsidy early? Some fear that as we are already behind on the interim targets for the 2020 renewables targets, and given the jeopardy that might put on our climate change obligations, we need to see how well the proposal has been tested, given the risk that some of the projects might fail and undercut it. There might also be a transfer to more expensive renewals should any projects fail. It would help my Committee and others if as much information as possible could be published, so that it can be properly examined.

**Amber Rudd:** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on becoming the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee. I look forward to getting to know him better. I am sure I will have the opportunity to do so at that Committee.

We do not agree that we have not met our targets. I understand that it was reported as such and I will take an early opportunity to write to him to set that out. I take to heart his advice to make sure we publish as much as possible, above all to win everybody's confidence that what I am saying is absolutely achievable.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her statement, which I assure her will be widely welcomed across north Wales. Does she agree that onshore wind power has for too long been the low-hanging fruit of renewable energy and has therefore been grossly over-subsidised? Does she agree that her statement today opens the way for advancing more innovative forms of renewable technology, such as, for example, tidal lagoons?

**Amber Rudd:** I welcome my right hon. Friend's support. I agree that this should give us the opportunity to diversify into other forms of renewable energy—that is one of the key reasons for doing this. We do not want to continue to spend too much money on onshore wind, while we have to harbour our resources, look after the bill payer and make sure we have the greatest opportunity possible to support other forms of renewable energy.

**Philip Boswell** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): The strike price agreed for nuclear power is £92.50 per MWh at Hinkley Point, which is more expensive than the £82.50 per MWh for onshore renewables. Onshore renewables do not leave future generations with the cost of decommissioning nuclear facilities and waste. Why are the UK Government proceeding with such an irrational decision?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for the opportunity to make two points in response. First, our energy needs to be a mix. We cannot purely have renewable energy; we need the base-load stability of having nuclear or some oil and gas to make sure we can deliver regardless of whether the wind is blowing or the sun is shining. That is still an important part of our mix. Secondly, the decommissioning issue he raises is included in the price.

**Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): May I join hon. Members from across the House in welcoming the Secretary of State's statement, which will certainly be popular in my south coast constituency? Does she welcome the £9.5 billion investment in offshore wind since 2010, showing that that area of the sector still has lots of room to grow?

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Offshore wind has continued to deploy very successfully and prices are coming down. We are delighted that the UK is such a leader in this area and has the real prospect of exporting to other countries as a leader in renewable offshore energy.

**Barry Gardiner** (Brent North) (Lab): By ending support a year earlier than the right hon. Lady's Department promised only eight months ago, the Government are sending yet another message to investors that the UK is not a stable regulatory regime in this area. Does she accept the calculations that show onshore wind is not only the cheapest form of new low carbon energy, but that for every pound of development cost, 98 pence is spent creating new jobs in the UK—jobs that were projected to double to 37,000 by 2023 had that support continued?

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Gentleman fails to incorporate the fact that all that support costs money. We cannot ignore the fact that, obviously, people want subsidies if they are on the receiving end of subsidies, but we have to ensure that we get the good measure of it. He is wrong to say that this Government said this and that Government said that. The fact is that we said, in our manifesto, that if we had a Conservative majority we would deliver this. The industry was not surprised by the outcome here: we committed to ending new subsidies for onshore wind and that is exactly the promise we have kept.

**Sir Edward Garnier** (Harborough) (Con): My right hon. Friend rightly mentioned our hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), my parliamentary neighbour. He and I have worked both individually and together to ensure the best interests of our respective constituents in relation to unsightly and unwelcome wind farms. Will she ensure, in discussions with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, that there is imposed on future wind farms a minimum distance between the wind farm or the turbine, and human habitation—from dwellings?

**Amber Rudd:** I know that my right hon. and learned Friend has been an active campaigner on this issue. As he will see, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government is present, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend has taken his comments to heart.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): May I return the Secretary of State to the issue of job losses? Would she like to put on the record how many of the 19,000 people who are employed in the onshore industries will lose their jobs as a result of what she is proposing?

**Amber Rudd:** The right hon. Gentleman fails to acknowledge that the United Kingdom is one of the leaders in renewable energy. We continue to invest and to support a variety of renewable energy sources, and they will continue to provide jobs. It is up to the Government to ensure that we spend the money wisely to maximise the delivery of renewable energy, and, of course, the delivery of new jobs as well.

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): This news will be welcomed throughout North West Hampshire, not least because the Secretary of State has said—twice, I think—that the final say will be given to local communities. Can she reassure those worried communities that that means that they cannot now be overruled by the Planning Inspectorate?

**Amber Rudd:** Yes, I can.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Investor confidence is key. On the day that this announcement was made, I was in north Wales for the opening of Gwynt y Môr, the second biggest wind farm in the world. All that the investors could see was a Government who were not committed to wind and renewable energy. Will the Secretary of State tell us, for the benefit of the onshore wind industry—including companies such as West Coast Energy, which is in my constituency—whether there will be a new round of contracts for difference, and, if so, whether onshore wind will feature in any part of it?

**Amber Rudd:** I said in my statement that, in respect of contracts for difference, we would be implementing the terms of our manifesto.

**James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): As it is local communities that will have to deal with the visual impact of wind farms, should they not have the final say on this and other visually intrusive forms of renewable energy, such as large solar farms?

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. One of the key purposes of this arrangement is to involve local communities so that they feel that they have a right to say how their environment is being affected.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Has the Secretary of State carried out an economic impact assessment to establish how the small business community and the supply chain will be affected by this abrupt and confused change in Government policy?

**Amber Rudd:** One element of small business that will probably be pleased with the outcome is the tourist industry. Many Members campaigned against the expansion of wind farms on the basis that they affect tourism, which is important to many small businesses.

**David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): As the Secretary of State will know, since 2010 our country has increased renewable energy production by 300%, or a factor of three, and has increased it by more than any other OECD country. However, we must also make progress with other forms of decarbonisation. Is the Secretary of State still committed to the advancement of Hinkley Point C, which will produce more carbon-free electricity than all the wind farms that are currently being deployed?

**Amber Rudd:** The answer is yes. We need new nuclear energy in order to provide stability. We need to expand our renewables while at the same time having stable alternative sources of energy, and we are committed to Hinkley Point.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Can the Secretary of State tell us how cutting subsidies for onshore wind energy is providing leadership in the EU on the decarbonisation of our economy, as she claimed in her statement?

**Amber Rudd:** Providing leadership in the EU—and, indeed, internationally—means meeting our targets, demonstrating that we can meet them in the most cost-effective way, and liaising with other countries in order to show them how we are doing that. The point of the announcement is that we will still be meeting our targets.

**Chris Heaton-Harris** (Daventry) (Con): Obviously I welcome the statement and thank the Secretary of State for it, but does she recognise that the way in which onshore wind subsidies and developers have gone about their business has destroyed people's faith in renewable energy as a whole? Indeed, in communities such as Winwick, Kelmarsh, Watford and Crick, which are in my constituency, one struggles to find people who support any type of renewable energy, given the way in which it has been handled by onshore wind developers.

Will the Secretary of State please tell us how many of the wind farms that are in the pipeline will be connected to the grid? That could provide relief for a host of communities that might be affected by onshore development in the future.

**Amber Rudd:** May I, again, pay tribute and homage to my hon. Friend, who campaigned so hard and led on this issue? I know his constituents will be delighted with this outcome, although I am disappointed to hear that the impact of wind farms has made them negative about renewables in general. I hope we can win them back by our policies that will increasingly involve them. I urge individual Members who want to know what the impact is on developments in their constituency to write to me and I will try to get that information.

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State said that the Government's priority was "to bring about the transition to low-carbon generation as cost-effectively...as possible."

Does she not recognise that onshore wind is the most cost-effective renewable energy production form?

**Amber Rudd:** I would make two points on that. I ask him to recognise that as part of our target to have affordable renewable energy we aim to have 10% coming from wind by 2020, and we are on schedule to deliver that. We have to harbour our resources. There would be no point in saying, “It has come down in price. Let’s put all the money over there.” That would be the wrong thing to do. We have to deliver a mix of renewable energy. Offshore wind is beginning to come down in price, we have plans for carbon capture and storage, and new initiatives are coming out the whole time. This is an exciting, changing area and we need to harbour our resources to make sure we can support the right outcomes.

**Heidi Allen** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I just want to tell my right hon. Friend that my constituents will be delighted. I am thinking of those in the north whose villages have been blighted by the Cotton wind farm—they cannot sleep and cannot sell their houses. In the south of my constituency, we have large solar farms coming at us left, right and centre. She will have made a lot of people very happy, so we thank her.

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for her comments.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): Which would cause more environmental damage to the Cheshire countryside: a wind turbine or a fracking rig?

**Amber Rudd:** I am happy to say that a single wind turbine will still be allowed, if a community wants it. We are very keen to support community energy. As for shale exploration, we are at an early stage and we will have to wait to see how the community responds.

**Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Constituents on the north of the Isle of Axholme, who will shortly be surrounded by 100 turbines, will be very happy with this announcement. I welcome what my right hon. Friend has said, but I urge her to go further on individual turbine applications. Many landowners in my constituency put in one application and get approval, and then put in another and another, so it is death by 1,000 cuts.

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend makes an interesting point and I will look out for that eventuality.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): The established wind farm on Scoutmoor, adjacent to my constituency, has a lifetime of only 25 years. What is the Secretary of State’s long-term plan for renewable energy when existing wind farms have to be decommissioned?

**Amber Rudd:** The extraordinary thing about renewable energy is that it is such a fast-moving field. Nobody knows which will be the dominant renewable energy, able to supply cost-effectively, in 20 to 25 years’ time—no, less, in 10 or 15 years’ time. Perhaps we will have developed storage—perhaps carbon capture and storage will be coming on line. There are so many unknowns in this area, so I urge the hon. Lady to keep an open mind about different sources of renewable energy, just as this Department does.

**Byron Davies** (Gower) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for a very clear statement and for her responses on communities and tourism. My constituency contains a

mountain range known as Mynydd y Gwair, forming a backdrop to the first area of outstanding natural beauty. Planning permission for one of Wales’s largest wind farms has been granted by Swansea’s Labour city council, against the wishes of a clear majority of local residents and farmers. Does she agree that that cannot be right and that remedying such absurd decisions by allowing communities to decide these sorts of things is essential?

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend’s experience seems to validate the approach that we are taking, whereby local communities will have much more involvement and choice in those decisions.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Notwithstanding anything the Secretary of State has said this afternoon, the pipeline of projects in Scotland is now at risk, as are the jobs of 5,400 people employed in the sector. Will she look again at the impact these proposals will have on Scotland and the wider UK economy, and think again?

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Lady must bear it in mind that this is a manifesto commitment. The UK has made the commitment—[*Interruption.*] I appreciate that she would like a different arrangement, but the arrangement that we have put in place will impact on subsidies throughout the UK. I am happy to listen to my Scottish counterparts on how different arrangements might be put in place within the changes that I have set out.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Mr McDonald, for an aspiring statesman, frenetic gesticulation is a tad unseemly.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): I welcome the statement. As my right hon. Friend knows, I had a role in the development of neighbourhood plans at the very beginning. If local communities decide not to pursue wind turbines, will she reassure me that she will give precedence to those neighbourhood plans over anything else in the planning system?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. I know that he was the great man who developed the neighbourhood plan. He is absolutely right that the neighbourhood plans will be the central tome on this, and they will allow communities to have the authority that they need on the planning decisions that would be impacted in this situation.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State explain how she reconciles giving local people the right of veto over wind turbines, but denies them exactly the same right over shale gas fracking or a nuclear power station next door?

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that this right being given to communities was not in place when wind farms were originally introduced. We now have enough wind farms, and that right has been put in place. The same is the case for other sources of energy that do not need it now. It is right that we have a different approach for a different type of energy that is at a different level of maturity.

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): May I thank the Secretary of State for bringing forward this great decision? I pay homage to my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), whose fight

to get rid of these wind farms has been exemplary. Have there been any thoughts on decommissioning these wind farms over the next 15 years? Some have been up for 10 years now, which is probably longer than many nuclear power stations.

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend has raised an interesting point. It is in part of the proposals. We are aware of, and involved in, the decommissioning plans. No one quite knows when the decommissioning will take place, but we will keep a careful eye on it.

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Given the Prime Minister's respect agenda, may I ask what cognisance, if any, the Minister took of the impact of her decision on Scotland, particularly on my constituency of Argyll and Bute? Is she aware of, and does she care about, the damage that this decision will have on the fragile rural economies of Scotland and the inevitable job losses that will follow?

**Amber Rudd:** I have had several discussions and meetings with Fergus Ewing, and I will continue to do so. Jobs in the UK are incredibly important. It is Britain that is open for business. We will continue to ensure that renewable investment flows.

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): May I thank my right hon. Friend for her statement? I thank, too, the previous Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles), who fought an incredible rearguard action, calling in such applications that would have blighted the view of Southwell Minster for generations to come. If communities are to have their say, to keep it simple, would the Secretary of State encourage and support Rushcliffe Borough Council, which wants to declare itself a wind turbine-free council and protect the vale of Belvoir for ever?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for his interesting suggestion. Councils will have the final say. If that is how they put it, that is up to them.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Is the Secretary of State not a little bit concerned about the impact on investor confidence that this decision might have not just with regard to onshore wind but across the renewables sector? Given that onshore wind and its supply chain accounts for £1.7 billion of gross value added, how does she anticipate filling that gap in investment?

**Amber Rudd:** Investors will have seen the manifesto and will have heard the words of the Prime Minister last year when he said that, under a Conservative Government, there will be no onshore wind subsidies. They will have known that our target was 11 GW to 13 GW by 2020, and they are likely to have known that wind was deploying faster and more effectively than people had thought, partly because it was on the receiving end of those subsidies. Continuing to get investment in renewables and ensuring that Britain is open for business and remains at the front of delivering renewable energy will continue under this Government.

**Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): May I take the rare step of agreeing with the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint)? She said that Back Benchers would be pleased with this statement, and I

assure her that I am absolutely delighted with it, but most importantly, so will be the vast majority of my constituents and those across mid-Wales and further afield. What estimate has the Secretary of State made of the amount of money that scrapping the renewables obligation will save this country?

**Amber Rudd:** I am delighted to make my hon. Friend and his constituents happy. Closing the renewables obligation one year early is likely to save hundreds of millions of pounds.

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): The Secretary of State has not said whether she has been apprised of any particular implications in the context of Northern Ireland, not least in the setting there of a single electricity market for the island. She has promised consultation and says that she wants consultation with the devolved Administrations, industry and stakeholders, but given her certitude, how might that consultation have any influence on her position?

**Amber Rudd:** I have had meetings and conversations with my opposite number in Northern Ireland. I will continue to do so and I respect the views of those involved, which differ from ours on what we are trying to implement. I have been working with them to see whether it is possible for Northern Ireland to implement and fund the subsidy.

**Mark Spencer** (Sherwood) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware that the cost of an application can be vast, including seeking approval from national air traffic control systems. When such applications meet ferocious local community opposition, is there any way in which she can assist applicants to withdraw the application? They often press on with the application to try to recover the cost of gaining air traffic control approval as well as other environmental assessments.

**Amber Rudd:** I do not think that there would be a role for Government in that. Having heard the announcement today, however, developers might take a different view.

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): Given the consultations and discussions with the Scottish Energy Minister that the Secretary of State has outlined, what have the Scottish Government been advised will be the impact of the proposals on Scotland's target of generating the equivalent of 100% of electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2020?

**Amber Rudd:** I am happy to say that this change to the subsidy regime will not impact on the UK target. I have had no further discussion with my Scottish counterpart on the Scottish Government's target.

**Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): Large numbers of my constituents in Montgomeryshire will welcome today's statement with huge relief. Mid-Wales has been saved from desecration. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that onshore wind subsidies will not apply to any proposed wind farm that does not currently have planning permission?

**Amber Rudd:** As set out in my statement, the onshore wind subsidy grace period is available only to wind farms and wind farm applications that have planning consent, a grid connection and land rights.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I, too, had several constituents come to see me for the climate change lobby last week and the Secretary of State's statement will leave them at a loss. Will she respond to the CBI's comment that

"cutting the Renewables Obligation scheme early sends a worrying signal about the stability of the UK's energy market?"

**Amber Rudd:** I would say to the CBI, which I will be meeting and with which I am sure I will discuss this issue among other things, that this is a stable environment for renewable investment, as we have set out the ranges and targets we would like to achieve and we are meeting them. This Government are the first to have set out a levy control framework so that investors can see exactly how much money we are committing. It is partly because we as a Government are determined to look after money so carefully that we are making this change to ensure that we stay well within the levy control framework.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. If I am to accommodate remaining colleagues in the exchanges on the statement, brevity is now of the essence.

**Nigel Adams** (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): A former Secretary of State, who went on to become Leader of the Opposition, once said that to object to onshore wind farms was akin to antisocial behaviour. Thank goodness we now have a Secretary of State who listens to constituents in rural areas like mine. Inevitably, councils will be challenged at appeal by highly paid barristers. What assistance will the Department give to small councils, so that they can fully understand the new powers that they have been granted?

**Amber Rudd:** I say to my hon. Friend, who has done so much to campaign against wind farms in his constituency, that the statement is very clear. If his councils want any further clarification, they should write to me and I will make sure they get a clear response.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Last week, in his encyclical on climate change, the Pope said, "continuity is essential... policies related to climate change... cannot be altered with every change of government."

With him, I would like to ask the Secretary of State this question: what would induce anyone at this stage to hold on to power, only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it is urgent and necessary to do so?

**Amber Rudd:** I urge the hon. Lady, when she has the chance to talk further with Pope, to let him know that we will meet our commitments, and today's announcement is part of our plan to make sure that we do so. There is no change to this Government's, this Department's and this Prime Minister's commitment to addressing dangerous climate change.

**Victoria Atkins** (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): I welcome today's statement, as will many residents of my constituency, which has borne more than its fair share of the brunt of the wind turbine industry. Will the Secretary of State

consider a "two strikes and you're out" policy for developers who keep coming back again and again and tweaking their applications, costing local councils hundreds of thousands of pounds in legal fees and causing prolonged distress for local residents?

**Amber Rudd:** I think my hon. Friend, who makes a good point, will find that under the new regime as announced today and last week, the community have the final say, and councils will be in a much stronger position to make that clear to any developers that approach them.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Is the Minister aware that another of the "best of both worlds" offers to the Scottish electorate was the onshore subsidies? Given the effect of the proposals on investment in Scotland, that is a challenge, as pulling investment was not part of her party's manifesto. Does the Minister agree with me that this announcement is the equivalent of another broken promise to the Scottish electorate?

**Amber Rudd:** I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. Having Britain open for business is incredibly important. Scotland has a lot of wind farms and has received a lot of investment. I am sure that with this Government in charge, investment will continue to flow to Scotland in all sorts of ways.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): My constituents will be delighted that we now have a Conservative Government, as under a coalition Government we would never have had this statement or this excellent Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box. I have it clear in my mind, but can my right hon. Friend confirm that if the Borough Council of Wellingborough turns down a planning application for a wind farm, its decision cannot be overturned by the Planning Inspectorate?

**Amber Rudd:** Yes, I can confirm that.

**Grahame M. Morris** (Easington) (Lab): Labour Members are rightly concerned about job losses and job insecurity, and that is not restricted to onshore. Given that the doubling of carbon tax by this Government on 1 April is likely to be the final nail in the coffin of the coal mining industry—almost 1,000 jobs at Hatfield—does the Minister recognise the need for a long-term plan to identify a diverse energy mix in the interests of the nation?

**Amber Rudd:** I share the hon. Gentleman's view on the need for a diverse energy mix. We want to support renewables to make sure that we meet our renewable targets and encourage diverse forms of renewable energy, but we also need certain other types of energy to ensure we have the base-load available at all times of the day.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): The Scout Moor wind farm, to which the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) referred, dominates the skyline for thousands of my constituents. An application to extend it even further has been submitted, but not determined. Can the Secretary of State confirm whether the extension will attract subsidy?

**Amber Rudd:** Will my hon. Friend be kind enough to write to me about that example? I will make sure that he gets a reply.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): We worked very hard in Hull to bring Siemens to the city to develop the offshore renewables industry. Does the Minister understand how the current approach, and the previous approach in relation to solar, are not at all helpful to long-term investment in renewables?

**Amber Rudd:** I am slightly amazed that the hon. Lady chooses to approach the matter in that way. It is a great success of the previous Government that we now have the Siemens plant in Hull, and we support that, the employment it offers and the export potential that we hope will develop there. We are encouraged by the fact that there is more investment coming into offshore wind and we will continue to support it.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): In the mix of renewable energy, tidal energy has huge potential, popular support, leisure sector spin-offs, innovative technology and export potential. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the direct and indirect potential for job growth from tidal energy will be hugely greater than any job losses from her announcement today?

**Amber Rudd:** I certainly agree that tidal and marine energy is an exciting part of a future energy mix. As my hon. Friend is aware, we are continuing to do our due diligence on various tidal projects.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): I associate myself with some of the comments of the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham). The Secretary of State will be aware that the position of the Scottish Government is that technology such as tidal power and wave power, which were prevented from being properly developed by a former Conservative Government, are where the long-term future of our energy lies. Can she therefore confirm that the entire value of the subsidy that is going to be clawed back from wind farms will be reinvested in the accelerated development of these long-term permanent technologies, or are we simply seeing a repeat of what her party did to Scotland in the 1980s, when a flourishing and potentially world-leading renewables energy sector was deliberately sacrificed to get it out of the way of the nuclear power lobby?

**Amber Rudd:** I am afraid the hon. Gentleman has not quite understood the proposal, which is that the onshore wind subsidy will not go ahead after March 2016. That is not money that is being clawed back; that is money that is additionally not being added to people's bills. On another matter, I agree with him that we would like more success in the whole marine energy area, and it is

partly because we want to make sure that we have sufficient support available for other technologies, such as marine and tidal wave, that we have to make this choice.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): In response to an earlier question, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that the subsidy regime for large-scale solar farms was also going to be cut. What is there to stop an applicant for a large-scale solar farm parcelling up that application into four or five separate applications, thus qualifying as a small-scale unit?

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. He is right that we have ended the large-scale solar farm issue in terms of applications for the renewables obligation, but I have concerns about exactly the possibility that he has raised, and I will address it in the feed-in tariff review that I will be conducting this summer.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): The Huddersfield Civic Society, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Natural England, National Trust, local artist Ashley Jackson and the Campaign to Protect Rural England have major concerns and are opposing a huge wind farm development high up on moorland in my constituency. Will the Secretary of State confirm that local people will have the final say on this major development?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for that list of supporters and I can indeed give him that confirmation.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): In south Wiltshire the primary concern is about large-scale solar farm applications. Can the Secretary of State outline the implications of today's announcement for residents of Downton who came to see me about this recently?

**Amber Rudd:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier. We will be looking again at how solar farms get access as part of the feed-in tariff review. They are no longer eligible to access under the renewable obligations.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): I refer Members to my declaration of interests. I welcome the announcement. On Friday my constituent, Peter Stephens, asked whether the forthcoming international deliberations on climate change would have the effect of unpicking the changes that the Secretary of State set out today. Perhaps she could clarify that.

**Amber Rudd:** I am happy to reassure my hon. Friend and his constituent that we remain committed to our targets under the Climate Change Act 2008. We remain committed to being the greenest Government ever and to making sure that we are the No. 1 place for renewable energy investment.

## Points of Order

4.40 pm

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As you will be aware, following the recent Penrose report, the House is expecting a statement before the summer recess on arrangements for compensating those affected by the NHS contaminated blood scandal. I have been sent a copy of a letter from the Health Secretary which was reported in the *Sunday Express* yesterday, in which he states:

“Any additional resources found for a settlement will be taken away from money spent on direct patient care for patients in the NHS”.

As the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on haemophilia and contaminated blood, I am particularly concerned by this new approach. Has the Health Secretary indicated whether he intends to make a statement on this matter, as details of the settlement and its financing should surely be made to this House first?

**Mr Speaker:** I can certainly confirm that the House should be the first to hear the detail of whatever the Government decide upon. I have received no advance indication from the Secretary of State that he plans to make a statement. It is a matter for him to decide whether and when to do so, but perhaps the hon. Lady's point of order will prompt thinking about the speed with which such a statement might usefully be made.

**Marie Rimmer** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Earlier today, I asked a topical question of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. It was a simple question, in which I asked “why the Government are refusing to publish—even though the Information Commissioner has instructed them to do so—the up-to-date statistics relating to the number of people who have died, having been found fit for work at their face-to-face assessment?” In the Secretary of State's non-answer, he referred to me making “allegations” and making a reference to “suicide”. I did neither. How can we get a simple answer without false allegations being made about me and about another Member behind me? As you know, Mr Speaker, I am profoundly deaf and do not always pick up everything.

**Mr Speaker:** I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order and for the manner in which she has raised it. I have no responsibility for the content of ministerial answers. It is a judgment for any Minister how to respond. She has made her point in her own way, with force but also with dignity, and it is on the record. It is for Ministers, as it is for any of us, subsequently to reflect on what they have said and to decide whether they have anything to add to it or to subtract from it. I cannot say more than that, but if the hon. Lady remains dissatisfied and wishes to correspond with the Secretary of State or to approach him in some other way, it is of course her prerogative to do so. I thank her very much for what she has said.

**Marie Rimmer:** And I thank you, Mr Speaker, for the respectful way in which you have answered my question.

## Education and Adoption Bill

*Second Reading*

**Mr Speaker:** I must inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the acting Leader of the Opposition.

4.43 pm

**The Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

At the heart of this Government's commitment to delivering real social justice is our belief that every child deserves an excellent education and that every day that they spend in school should be one that helps them to fulfil their potential. The Bill introduces new measures to improve school standards across the country. It also delivers on our commitment to establish regional adoption agencies, in order to help some of our most vulnerable children find loving homes.

Thanks to the hard work of teachers across the country, the reforms of the last Government and the innovations pioneered by the Government before that, championed by the former Schools Minister Lord Adonis, we have seen dramatic improvements in English education. Since 2010, 100,000 more six-year-olds are on track to be confident readers because of our focus on phonics; the EBacc has led to a 71% increase in pupils taking core academic subjects at GCSE; and there are now 1 million more pupils being taught in schools that are good or outstanding—a record high. In short, expectations have been raised, standards have been restored, and teachers and parents have been empowered.

But there is more to do. No child should have to put up with receiving an education that is anything less than good, so we must go further. The Bill will bring forward legislation to strengthen our ability to intervene more swiftly in failing schools and to properly tackle, for the first time, schools that are coasting. The measures in the Bill are designed to speed up the process by which underperforming schools are transformed, ensuring that there is no delay in giving our children the education they deserve.

Across the world, Governments are recognising that teachers and leaders in education know best how to run their schools. This Government are no different. We believe in a school-led system where experts have greater freedom but within a strong framework of accountability. That is why we want more schools to benefit from the freedom that academy status brings.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Secretary of State worried about the number of people who are saying that when students have challenges such as special educational needs and autism, the school cannot cope? We need a much broader basis of help of the kind that does not get delivered by individual, fragmented school systems.

**Nicky Morgan:** I think that Members in all parts of the House would very much agree with the hon. Gentleman that children with special needs or disabilities must get the best possible education that will enable them to fulfil their potential. That is what the education and healthcare plans introduced under the previous Government are all about. As an hon. Member interested in education, he will know that we are seeing more collaboration

between schools of all types across the system. Seventeen per cent. of the free schools set up under the previous Government deal with alternative provision and children who have special educational needs. Working with other local schools, they are providing a very innovative and exciting education.

**Mrs Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): On the point about an individual school achieving a big difference, a strong academy sponsor in my constituency turned round a school known as Grace academy. Will the Secretary of State applaud the initiative of Solihull council to turn all the secondary schools on its council estates into academies by building on the good experience from that one leader?

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank my right hon. Friend. I hope that hon. Members in all parts of the House will be generous enough to recognise the huge contribution that talented and innovative sponsors are bringing to academies and schools up and down the country. Like her, I welcome—

**Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Nicky Morgan:** I will finish answering this point, and then I might give way to the hon. Gentleman.

I welcome the fact that schools, academies and sponsors across the country are ensuring that young people in Solihull, as in other local authority areas, are receiving an excellent education.

I give way to the hon. Gentleman and then I will make some progress.

**Jonathan Reynolds:** The Secretary of State is extremely courteous and I am extremely grateful. I am a supporter of academies where they are the right solution for a school, but in my area the academies underperform the local education authority schools, so it is clear that school improvement is a lot more complicated than simply forcing schools to become academies. What does she have to say to that, and what is her plan to turn round academies that are themselves underperforming?

**Nicky Morgan:** Without going into the detail of all the schools in the hon. Gentleman's area, I would say that sponsored academies are often the weakest schools in an area—they may have been failing or in special measures for a long time—and then a sponsor comes in and works with them to make improvements right across the school for the benefit of its young people. I will come on to talk about the moves that we make as a Department, working with regional schools commissioners, where there are issues relating to academies.

Academy status enables us to move quickly to replace poor governance in failing schools under the guidance of an expert sponsor, and it gives strong leaders the freedom to make decisions that will work for the young people in their care. That is why we have turbocharged the last Labour Government's academies policy since 2010. When Labour left office there were just over 200 sponsored academies; there are now more than 1,400.

We backed the sponsored academy programme because we could see that it worked for parents, teachers and, most importantly, young people. It is a matter of profound

regret that the Labour party now appears to have arrived at a position where it is prepared to deny young people in schools that are not up to scratch the benefits that we know academy freedoms can bring.

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Nicky Morgan:** No, I have given way sufficiently. I will make some progress.

The evidence shows that schools in sponsored academy arrangements improve their performance faster than maintained schools. By 2014, results in sponsored secondary academies open for four years were on average 6.4 percentage points higher than results in their predecessor schools. Over the same period, results in local authority schools were an average of 1.3 percentage points higher than in 2010.

Prior to academisation, the situation facing Manchester Enterprise Academy, for example, was bleak. A history of underperformance, falling rolls, financial challenges and weak leadership had put it at risk of closure. Becoming a sponsored academy has turned it around. From being the lowest attaining secondary school in the area, it is now the highest performing against all key measures. In 2009 only 30% of pupils achieved five good GCSEs, compared with 59% in 2014. All of that has been achieved alongside the recovery of £1.9 million from the school's budget over the past three years. Sponsored academies are also increasing the rigour of education, with more pupils focusing on the key academic subjects that will prepare them for life in modern Britain.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Nicky Morgan:** No, I am going to set out the results first.

The first sponsored primary academies had been open for two years by the time of the 2014 results. Their results increased by 9 percentage points during that time—double the rate of improvement in maintained schools during the same period. These are schools such as Great Yarmouth primary academy in Norfolk, which became a sponsored academy in September 2012, having had nine headteachers in as many years. The school was frequently in and out of special measures with performance below the floor standard. The community had lost faith in the school, but becoming an academy changed that. Performance has radically improved and the school has gone from strength to strength. Last year Ofsted judged the school good, with outstanding leadership.

We want more schools to achieve those rates of improvement. I was delighted to hear that the former Education Secretary, David Blunkett, will be directly contributing to that in his new role as chairman of the David Ross Education Trust, an academy sponsor operating more than 30 academies across the east of England, the east midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside. The former Secretary of State recognises that, in that role, he has the opportunity to

“help shape policy and collaborative improvement and directly impact on the education of over 10,000 young people.”

It is reassuring to know that there are still some in the Labour party who support the academy programme and put young people above partisan rhetoric.

**Fiona Mactaggart** *rose*—

**Nicky Morgan:** I wonder whether the right hon. Lady is going to offer her support.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** The interesting thing about the Bill is that it gives the Secretary of State powers to intervene where schools are failing pupils. I have four examples of pupils who have been excluded from academies and other schools without their parents being given a right to appeal. That is breaking the law. Will the Secretary of State amend the Bill in Committee to ensure that pupils who are excluded have their rights protected? That is one way in which she can ensure that every pupil has the right to an excellent education.

**Nicky Morgan:** The right hon. Lady is welcome to write to me about those specific cases. If those young people were not given the right to appeal, they certainly should have been. However, it is important to be on the side of teachers and those in charge of schools who make decisions about exclusions. It is also important to make sure that there is the right education provision for those young people who, for whatever reason, cannot be in mainstream schooling. We are seeing that provision as a result of innovations in our school system.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Nicky Morgan:** No, I will make some progress.

I turn now to regional schools commissioners. As the number of academies grows we must ensure decisions are taken by those with a real understanding of what works locally, which is why we have devolved decision making on academies to a regional level. Eight regional schools commissioners were appointed last year to oversee academies across the country. The education measures in the Bill will be enacted by those commissioners, supported by the advice of the outstanding headteachers who have been elected to regional boards. Regional schools commissioners will be acting on my behalf and I will be accountable to Parliament for the decisions they make. The headteachers on those boards are all experts in their areas, with years of experience across the school sector, backed by other schools in their area. As headteachers of strong schools, they know what it takes to make a school effective.

**Tristram Hunt** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Nicky Morgan:** No. The hon. Gentleman will have plenty of time to make his points when we get to his speech. Those headteachers know what it takes to make a school effective and are in a good place to make decisions about the necessary action in any struggling school.

Regional schools commissioners will guarantee that decisions about intervention are made by people with real local knowledge, not by people sitting in Whitehall, ensuring local accountability while allowing academies to enjoy the autonomy that is so critical to their success.

**Tristram Hunt:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Nicky Morgan:** No. The hon. Gentleman is about to make a speech in which he will be able to demonstrate why he wants to make the amendment.

**Tristram Hunt:** On that point, will the Secretary of State give way?

**Nicky Morgan:** No. I am going to make the case for the Bill, and the House will then have the opportunity to listen to the hon. Gentleman. I understand from today's press that he would take a different approach: instead of trusting experts and heads, he would recreate local education authorities on a grand scale. I am sorry to say that he has shown once again that he is unable to resist the constant itch of the Labour party throughout the ages to seize back power from professionals on the ground and give it instead to politicians and bureaucrats.

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): The Secretary of State knows that it is complete nonsense to pretend that Opposition Members are totally opposed to academies. She is trying to invent a ridiculous political dividing line when none exists on that issue. The truth is that some schools that are academies perform well and some schools that are academies perform poorly. In my constituency, the schools that have consistently performed worst are both academies and her Department has done nothing at all about it. There are good schools and poor schools in the maintained sector; the real crisis in education is in teacher recruitment and the quality of headteachers, and her proposals and speech have absolutely nothing to say about that.

**Nicky Morgan:** I am delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members are in favour of academies, in which case they should go into the Lobby tonight to support the Bill, which makes it clear that we will not tolerate failure in schools across this country and will take swift action, regardless of whether they are academies or maintained schools. The Opposition's amendment is muddle-headed because they have tried to find a reason to oppose the Bill, but they cannot. The hon. Gentleman and Opposition Members do not understand what is needed to tackle failure and have found a spurious reason to table an amendment. If they support academies, they should join us in the Lobby tonight.

**Wes Streeting:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Nicky Morgan:** No. I am going to turn to failing schools.

No one in this House can argue that we do not have a duty to transform failing schools. For those schools, urgent action is required, and the Bill introduces tough new measures to turn around failing schools from day one. In the past, such transformation could be delayed or even blocked altogether by pressure groups or unions with ideological objections to transferring power away from town halls to outstanding heads and teachers.

The Bill makes it clear that an academy order will be issued for all schools judged inadequate by Ofsted, enabling them to become sponsored academies. The Bill sweeps away bureaucracy and loopholes that currently mean it takes, on average, more than a year from the day that a school is judged inadequate to the day that it opens as a sponsored academy.

For some schools, it can take even longer. The Warren comprehensive school in Barking and Dagenham had never been judged better than satisfactory by Ofsted. In February 2013, Ofsted said the school required special measures once again. It took eight months for the governing body to vote against becoming an academy. The then Secretary of State decided to pursue academy conversion, which the governing body and local authority challenged through the courts. The school eventually opened as a sponsored academy, 19 months after Ofsted deemed that it was failing to give pupils an acceptable standard of education. While adults bickered and delayed, the young people in that school had to spend almost two academic years in a learning environment that was failing them. That cannot be right.

**Wes Streeting:** I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way, and for that example. Does she therefore believe that her predecessor was wrong to listen to the parents, governors and local authority in the case of Snaresbrook primary school, which serves pupils in my constituency? It was deemed inadequate and was going to be converted into an academy, but after listening to the evidence put forward by parents, pupils and the local authority, it is now in the local authority family. Was the previous Secretary of State wrong to do that?

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and welcome him to the House, as I have not heard him speak here before. I cannot comment on the individual circumstances, but my predecessor did not have the option to make an academy order. We will not tolerate the failure of schools. There will be conversion because the academy process, by bringing in a strong sponsor, makes the difference in turning around schools, many of which have languished under local authority control, failing for months on end.

As I was saying, what happened at the Warren school cannot be right. By issuing an academy order straight away, we will ensure that a long-term solution is in place as soon as possible. To further tackle unnecessary delays and ensure swift progress to academy status, the Bill introduces a new duty on governing bodies and local authorities to actively progress the conversion of failing schools into academies. That will send a clear and unambiguous message to all parts of the system that any unnecessary delay is unacceptable when it comes to improving the life chances of our children.

**David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): There is a lot in the Bill that is good and academies are clearly part of the solution, but so is fair funding. We have talked a lot about that and the previous Government made a commitment to move to a fair funding formula. Will the Secretary of State advise us on whether we will make progress on that soon?

**Nicky Morgan:** I am conscious, Madam Deputy Speaker, that funding is not at issue in the Bill, but it is important to all schools up and down the country. My hon. Friend might be aware that it was discussed a great deal at Education questions last Monday in this House, when I referred to our party's clear manifesto commitment to make progress with fairer funding for our schools. I thank him for his support on that and know that it is an important issue to Members in all parts of the House.

Let me be clear about failing academies: failure has to be tackled wherever it occurs. We support academy status because we see that it works, but where individual academies are struggling, we do not hesitate to take swift action. The statutory legal framework that is being amended in the Bill applies only to maintained schools. Academies are not governed by the statutory framework because they are held to account through a legally binding contract known as a funding agreement. Each funding agreement sets out the controls that are in place for holding the trust to account and the mechanisms by which the Government can intervene to address concerns.

As I have set out, academies are generally performing very well and have progressed faster than their maintained school counterparts. Last week's Ofsted figures reported that, of the more than 4,600 academies, 1,400 of which are sponsored academies—schools that were set up to transform some of the toughest cases of underperformance—only 145 are judged inadequate. However, as I have said clearly, one failing school is a failing school too many. That is why we have a tough regime to tackle academy failure, which allows us to intervene much more rapidly and effectively than we can in maintained schools.

Open academies are carefully monitored by regional schools commissioners and we take robust action where it is needed. As well as issuing 107 formal notices to underperforming academies, we have intervened and changed the sponsor in 75 cases of particular concern. The results of such intervention are evident.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I am interested in what the right hon. Lady has to say about failing academies because, as she will know, the regional schools commissioner is involved in one academy in my constituency that Ofsted judges to be inadequate. Will she define what she means by a "coasting school"? That is important because we tend to think of schools as failing when they perform at a relatively low base, but is it not the case that a school can be coasting if it does not push highly academic pupils as hard as it can so that they achieve the best that they can?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. An awful lot of Members want to speak and the interventions are getting very long. If we keep them shorter, everyone will, I hope, get a chance to speak.

**Nicky Morgan:** I will, of course, adhere to that restriction, Madam Deputy Speaker, and take only a limited number of interventions.

For the second time in a week, I agree with the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne). I will talk about coasting schools in a moment, because they form an important part of the Bill. He is right that this is not just about tackling failure, but about stretching the most able and ensuring that all children make the progress that they are more than capable of.

I was talking about examples of failing academies. Thetford academy was put in special measures in March 2013. The Department replaced the sponsors and brought in the Inspiration Trust, which took the school on in July 2013. The results in the next academic year showed that the number of students achieving five GCSEs at grades A\* to C, including English and maths, rose by 10 percentage points. A few months later,

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in December 2014, Ofsted judged Thetford to be “good with outstanding leadership”. The report described the school as “transformed beyond recognition” and said that the trust’s leadership and support had created a “strong culture where only the best is good enough.”

That is why the Opposition’s amendment is without merit. I suspect that the shadow Secretary of State knows that himself, but having failed to identify sufficient Members of Parliament to support either him or the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) to stand for the party leadership, he knows he has to take up the aggressive anti-choice, anti-academy rhetoric of some Opposition Members and their union paymasters.

Let me deal now with coasting schools, as I was asked to do by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish. Alongside strengthening powers to intervene in failing schools, the Bill provides for the first time measures to tackle coasting schools. As the Prime Minister so clearly put it, “just good enough” should not be enough for anyone’s child. How we will define coasting schools has already generated considerable interest. I welcome the level of engagement from this House and outside it. To support the Bill’s passage, we will ensure that draft regulations on the definition of coasting are available in Committee for Parliament to scrutinise.

Let me set out the principles that will inform the definition. First, I want to make it clear that the definition will be based on pupil performance data and not on a single Ofsted judgment. Where a school is judged to require improvement by Ofsted, it will not automatically fall within the coasting definition. Secondly, the definition will take into account the progress pupils make—whether they achieve their potential based on their starting point and whether, as we discussed, the brightest are being stretched and the less able properly supported. Finally, the definition will be based on performance over three years, identifying schools that have been coasting over a period of time, rather than through a single set of results.

I emphasise that the Bill does not propose any automatic interventions for coasting schools. Coasting schools will be eligible for intervention, but regional schools commissioners will have the discretion to decide the most appropriate course of action. Some coasting schools may have the capacity to improve sufficiently and, where that is the case, they should be given the opportunity to get on with it, without distraction.

Other coasting schools may require additional support and challenge from a national leader of education or a strong local school. By creating this new category of coasting schools, regional schools commissioners will have the power to pair those schools that need to improve with educational experts who can help them along the way. When—and only when—a coasting school has no credible plan or is not improving sufficiently, it is right that regional schools commissioners are able to instigate academy conversion to ensure that pupils and parents get the world-class education they deserve.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Nicky Morgan:** No, I am going to make some progress. The hon. Gentleman will have a chance to make his point, both at the end of this debate and in Committee.

I would like to emphasise the continuing role we expect local authorities to play, alongside regional schools commissioners, in challenging their schools to improve. Local authorities should take swift and effective action when failure occurs in a maintained school, using the powers they already have to issue warning notices, and replace governing bodies wherever necessary. Last year, 90 warning notices were issued by local authorities, but we know that some local authorities have never used their powers. That is why the Bill proposes to give the same warning notice powers to regional schools commissioners. Such notices will give a school the opportunity to tackle the concerns in the first instance, or face necessary intervention where serious concerns remain.

**Kevin Brennan** *rose*—

**Nicky Morgan:** I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman, because he will have a chance to tell his hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State what he would like him to ask.

Our expectation is that local authorities should work alongside regional schools commissioners to prioritise the schools in greatest need and decide the most appropriate powers to deploy in each case. The education measures in the Bill are about ensuring all children have the same chance to fulfil their potential, expanding opportunities and bringing real social justice to our country.

Let me deal with the part of the Bill that concerns adoption. During the previous Parliament, the Government took decisive action—[*Interruption.*] It is a great shame that some Opposition Members—and certainly Opposition Front-Bench Members—do not want to listen to what I am saying about an important part of the Bill that deals with adoption. Opposition Back-Bench Members are listening to what I am saying about the important provisions on adoption.

During the previous Parliament, the Government took decisive action to reform an adoption system that was too bureaucratic and time-consuming, leaving children waiting for far too long or causing them to miss out on being adopted altogether. To drive improvements, we have established the National Adoption Leadership Board, chaired by Sir Martin Narey; given £200 million to local authorities through the adoption reform grant; invested a further £17 million in the voluntary adoption sector; and launched a £19.3 million adoption support fund to provide therapeutic support to adopted children and their families.

The numbers prove that those reforms are working. Adoptions have increased by 63% in the past three years, from just over 3,000 in 2011 to more than 5,000 in 2014. Children are also spending less time waiting to be adopted, with the average time between coming into care and being placed with a family down by nearly four months. Those are achievements to be proud of.

The current system is not working as well as it could, however. It is still highly fragmented, with about 180 different adoption agencies, many of which operate on a very small scale.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Nicky Morgan:** I will if it is about adoption.

**Bill Esterson:** It is. I think it was remarkable that the Secretary of State would not give way to my Front-Bench colleague.

Adoption is the right outcome for only a relatively small number of children who end up in care. Although the measures in the Bill on adoption are undoubtedly welcome, will the Secretary of State acknowledge that, for more than 90% of those children, fostering, residential care or kinship care is the right option? The Bill says nothing about that, which raises concern that adoption is being considered the gold standard, when it should actually be only one of a range of options, which should be considered in full.

**Nicky Morgan:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Of course, the routes available for giving children a loving, permanent, stable home were considered in full towards the end of the previous Parliament during the passage of the Children and Families Act 2014. Adoption is important, because it gives children a stable upbringing and permanence so that they can progress with their lives and meet their full potential. The Bill addresses one particular aspect of the adoption system that means it is not working as well as it could, but he is right. Of course the courts will consider all the different options before they get to the point at which adoption agencies operate.

**John Glen (Salisbury) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend say a little more about the rationalisation of the large number of agencies and councils? It seems absurd to me, given the number of children affected, that such a bewildering number of bodies are involved in this vital process.

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I will talk about that and about why we are bringing forward our proposals. In the first three quarters of 2014-15, 20 local authorities or local authority groups recruited fewer than 10 adopters, and 58 recruited fewer than 20. Similarly, six voluntary adoption agencies recruited fewer than 10 adopters and 10 recruited fewer than 20 adopters. That means that we now need to address the issue.

As I said, the House spent significant time considering adoption during the passage of the Children and Families Act. At that time, the urgent crisis facing the adoption system was the failure to recruit enough adopters. The sector has responded positively to the challenge, and I applaud and thank it for its efforts in doing so. However, we are now facing challenges that go beyond the original one of recruitment. There are still 3,000 children waiting for adoption despite there being enough approved adopters across the country, and we also need better adoption support. At the moment, the specialist support that many adopted children need to address the effects of abuse and neglect in their early life is simply not available in their area.

In response to my hon. Friend, actively encouraging local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to join forces and work together will act as a triple win. It will give councils a greater pool of approved adopters, make vital support services more widely available to adoptive families and better target the recruitment of adopters. It will also provide better value for money for the taxpayer.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** In my previous life I placed a number of children for adoption. Quite often, mental health problems were one of the key things that needed to be tackled, because of people's experiences before they came into the care system. Does the Secretary of State accept that mental health remains a major issue that is not being widely tackled within the care system? Children who have been through the care system are five times more likely to take their own life. The Bill does nothing to address that. Can we please consider that at some point in the passage of the Bill?

**Nicky Morgan:** The hon. Lady raises an important issue. I have mentioned the £19.3 million adoption support fund, which the coalition Government set up and to which the current Government have a clear commitment; £1 million of that has already been spent on supporting 200 families. I am absolutely certain that mental health care and support will rightly be a part of how that money is spent. She is absolutely right. The reason for having the fund is exactly to support those families who have done the right thing by adopting children but who need that additional support to help those children to deal with their previous experiences. I welcome the hon. Lady's interest. I do not know whether she will be a member of the Bill Committee, but given her previous experiences, I am sure the Minister will welcome hearing from her.

We want to work with the sector to deliver our vision and will provide £4.5 million of support this year to assist with the transition to regional adoption agencies. I am delighted that many key voices in the sector, including leaders from the Association of Directors of Children's Services, Adoption UK and the British Association for Adoption and Fostering, have expressed support for that vision.

For those who do not make that step, we need a backstop power that can be used to direct local authorities to come together. That is why the Bill introduces a power to direct local authorities to have certain adoption functions carried out on their behalf by another local authority or adoption agency.

**Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con):** I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, especially because I have not been able to hear all of her comments on the Bill. That part of the Bill concerns me. I wonder whether she can reassure me and others who are concerned about the zeal with which some local authorities pursue adoption, and reassure us that the measures she proposes will not shortcut the system. I have a very upsetting case in my constituency. Surrey County Council was adamant and determined that it would have children adopted. The parents were extremely distressed, as I was. I hope my right hon. Friend can reassure the House on that point.

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. I am sure that, in our casework, all individual Members of Parliament have come across examples of very difficult family situations. Decisions are made independently by the courts—it is clearly not for politicians to second-guess those decisions. Clearly, the courts will make decisions in the interests of the children. There are procedures and appeals, and the families are represented, but there are times when adoption is the right route for

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children to be in a stable, loving and permanent home that will enable them to fulfil their potential. The provision in the Bill is simply about making that process work better.

I am coming to the end of my speech and am conscious of the number of Back Benchers who want to speak in the debate. The measures in the Bill are driven by a simple objective: to provide world-class education and care that allows every child and young person to reach his or her potential, regardless of background. We want every child to go to a local school where they learn the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. To achieve that, we need the legislation, which is intolerant of both failure and mediocrity when it comes to our children's education.

Alongside an excellent education, every child deserves a stable and loving home. To ensure that the thousands of children who are currently waiting to be adopted get that, we need powers to increase the scale at which our adoption services are delivered. Our plan for a world-class education and care system is working, but there is a lot more to do, because this one nation Government want to ensure that every young person, wherever they are born and whatever their background, gets the very best start in life. I look forward to hearing hon. Members' views both during today's debate and in Committee. I commend the Bill to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. Before I call the shadow Secretary of State for Education, I should tell hon. Members that I am going to put a time limit of six minutes on Back-Bench contributions—it will follow immediately after the shadow Secretary of State.

5.18 pm

**Tristram Hunt** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “That” to the end of the Question and add:

“this House, while supporting the sponsor academy programme and recognising that no parent wants their child to be schooled in a failing, inadequate or coasting school, declines to give a Second Reading to the Education and Adoption Bill because it fails to set out measures for dealing with inadequate academies.”

It is a privilege to speak in the Chamber under your chairmanship, Madam Deputy Speaker. The amendment is in my name and those of my right hon. Friends.

I agree with the Secretary of State that every parent wants to give their child the best start in life, and that a single day spent in a failing, inadequate or coasting school is one day too long. Parents and pupils are not interested in a four-year improvement project for their schools, and our country cannot wait for a long turnaround.

As the pace of global competition quickens, the demand for an educated workforce intensifies and we confront the gearshift of a digital economy, getting our schools and colleges educating pupils properly is more essential than ever. Swift action, no excuses, doing what it takes—that was the inspiration behind the Labour party's sponsored academies programme a decade ago, and we still believe in their ability to tackle entrenched

educational disadvantage. We believe in zero tolerance towards poor standards and complacency. We believe in professional autonomy and high expectations. Sponsored academies were and are modern, comprehensive state schools—a classically Labour response to a classically Labour commitment to social justice and equal opportunity.

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): Given the shadow Secretary of State's welcome commitment to improving schools as quickly as possible, can he tell us whether his recent agreement would bring about those improvements more quickly or more slowly?

**Tristram Hunt:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the House. One of the issues before us today is the evidence for improvement, and looking at what works. It has long been the practice of the Labour party to focus on what works, and we need to focus with clear precision on whether the Bill will deliver the educational improvement that we all want to see.

We would like to have supported the Bill, but following the Conservative party's rejection of cross-party talks on 14-to-19 education last week, we face, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin)—the best part of Dudley—pointed out earlier, more partisan, dividing-line politics. Rather than taking politics out of our education system, the Secretary of State seeks to divide the House for the sake of ideology. Worse than that is the narrowness of her vision.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): As the shadow Secretary of State and his party seem to agree with the aims and main purpose of the Bill, why not vote for the Bill tonight and then table strong amendments to deal with the issue of how to tackle failing academies? The Secretary of State might even accept some of those amendments.

**Tristram Hunt:** Given that the Secretary of State will not even take an intervention from Opposition Members, it is unclear whether she would be willing to accept reforms.

When the late Prime Minister, Baroness Thatcher—the right hon. Gentleman will enjoy this point—first became Education Secretary, she told her permanent secretary, “I am worried about the content in schools, rather than the structure.” Sadly, this Education Secretary is wholly uninterested in what is taught and how it is taught: her first legislative act is yet more structural change. The Government have nothing to say on Sure Start, on effective early-years support, on smaller class sizes, on high-quality teaching, on strong school leadership, on reforming accountability or encouraging school collaboration. They have zero interest in parenting, attachment and early child development.

Education has moved on. The leading jurisdictions around the world are not responding to the 21st century challenge with top-down, target-driven centralism: they are devolving power, broadening the curriculum, learning to let go and unleashing excellence, not mandating adequacy.

**Dawn Butler** (Brent Central) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share my disappointment that the Secretary of State failed to meet parents from St Andrew and St Francis School, who want to appeal against it being forced into academy status based on a flawed Ofsted report?

**Tristram Hunt:** My hon. Friend makes a valuable point, not least because Ofsted removed more than 1,000 inspectors last week because it did not think that they were up to the job. It is no good Ministers saying, “We can centralise and govern this from the centre. The man in Whitehall knows what is best”, and then refusing to meet parents, activists and communities to be held to account for their decisions.

There is concern across the educational spectrum. Earlier this week, we saw a letter from the headmaster of Rugby school—so not a natural Labour supporter—who pointed out how the new curriculum is leaving children “ill-equipped for a future that will place a premium on creativity.” The challenges we face in terms of productivity, skills, social mobility, wellbeing, character and attainment are so much greater than the Government seem prepared to accept.

**Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab):** Is my hon. Friend also aware that we face a recruitment crisis, because teachers are overworked and underpaid? If we carry on treating people with disrespect, they will not want to work in the profession.

**Tristram Hunt:** My hon. Friend makes a very valuable point. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) made a very powerful intervention in the debate on this subject last week. As the labour market tightens and workloads grow, we will see more teacher shortages and recruitment crises.

We seek to highlight these crucial omissions and to improve the Bill before it receives a Second Reading. As it stands, the Bill fails to set out measures for dealing with inadequate academies and offers no reassurance on the quality of academy chains. It offers a reductive approach to school improvement without a decent evidence base. We regard the centralisation of power within the hands of the Secretary of State as unhealthy and arbitrary. I regard it as wholly opposed to traditional English forms of self-government. The Labour party is passionate about cross-party collaboration when it comes to education, so let me begin by focusing on areas of agreement.

The Labour party supports efforts to speed up the adoption process. Children put up for adoption number among the most vulnerable members of our society. We know that delays can be hurtful. We accept the principle that every step should be taken to minimise the harm a malfunctioning adoption system can sometimes cause vulnerable children. We do, however, have some questions and concerns to put to the Secretary of State.

First, on reorganisation, will the Secretary of State explain how the proposals will proceed by consent given that proposed new section 3ZA would grant the Secretary of State significant powers of direction? We are not opposed to that per se—the Labour Assembly in Wales has carried out a successful consolidation of adoption powers across different local authorities—but it would be helpful if she could provide more clarity on the process.

Secondly, we have some concerns about hard-to-place children. There are some extraordinarily brilliant small and specialist voluntary sector adoption agencies that carry out tremendous work placing more challenging young people with families. I firmly believe we should retain their contribution to our adoption system.

Thirdly, I encourage the Secretary of State to set out more detail on how the proposals affect the roll-out of the national adoption support fund and whether there are any plans to extend the range of services that money can be spent on.

Finally, reflecting on the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), we hope that as early as possible in this Parliament the Government will bring forward proposals on other permanent arrangements. The commitment to reforming adoption is laudable, but we would like to see it matched with a commitment to reform long-term foster care, kinship care arrangements, special guardianships and a closer look at the role of grandparents.

**Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab):** I am concerned about the oversight function of local authorities. All too often when prospective adopting parents come before a committee, social workers might have one view and the councillor on the committee a different view, and the councillor almost always gets overruled. Is this something that the Secretary of State should look at?

**Tristram Hunt:** My hon. Friend makes a very valuable point about accountability procedures and that is certainly something we will look to take forward in Committee.

We are happy to debate those clauses and other issues in Committee, but glaring deficiencies elsewhere necessitate our reasoned amendment: the shoddy, slapdash incomplete proposed legislation placed before the House today is unworthy of a Second Reading. When the first word of the first clause on the first page of the Bill—“coasting”—is yet to be defined by the Government, they are showing an extraordinary discourtesy to this House. Such is the extension of the Secretary of State’s powers over schools deemed to be “coasting”, I would have thought they would know what they were talking about. Today, for all the lofty principles, we still have no workable legal definition.

As it stands, “coasting” could mean anything: Ofsted results, progress data, attainment scores. In fact, it could just as easily relate to any passing whim of the Secretary of State. Too many children swinging on chairs? Coasting. Too many kids studying the humanities, of which we know the Secretary of State disapproves? Coasting. Too many teenagers aspiring to apprenticeships? Coasting. We just do not know what the answer is, but what we do know is that this is no way in which to approach the serious job of reforming our schools system.

I fear that there will be a confrontation between what the Department for Education regards as coasting and what Ofsted regards as a good school. If Ofsted has classified a school as good and the Department says that it is coasting, where does that leave the schools inspector?

**Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab):** The definition of “coasting” is not the only thing that is missing from the Bill. A number of other things are missing from it, including references to addressing the teacher recruitment crisis or the school places crisis. Moreover, the Bill makes hardly any mention of parents, although those two issues are very much on their minds. Why do two out of five newly qualified teachers leave the profession within five years, and why are parents of three and four-year-olds so anxious about school places?

**Tristram Hunt:** My hon. Friend has made a valuable point. All that we have here is yet more relentless focus on structural reform rather than on the real issues that are affecting our education system. To be fair, however, the Government do mention parents in the Bill: they mention removal of the parental voice.

**Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Did the hon. Gentleman not hear the Secretary of State say that the definition of coasting would be based on pupil performance data?

**Tristram Hunt:** Does the hon. Lady mean the progress 8 data, the EBacc data, or the data relating to free school meals? Again, it is very unclear what the Conservatives are going for.

The tragedy is that we would like to support action to engage with coasting schools. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) made a valuable point about how we should define a coasting school. A coasting school could be good or outstanding if one would expect greater achievements from its pupils. We want early intervention to deal with coasting schools. Intervention was part of the reason for the success of the London challenge programme which my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) did so much to deliver, and which did so much to increase attainment in the capital before the Government scrapped it.

It is not the job of Oppositions to give a blank cheque to Governments. We are seeing something similar to the Government's collapsing Childcare Bill, in which they could not define the funding terms, could not say what constitutes full-time work, and could not explain child ratio rates. They should have done some work before introducing that Bill.

**Mr Anderson:** Work has already been done in the House. The Education Committee published a report in January, and the Department for Education published a statistical working paper just before the general election, in which it said that it was currently impossible to carry out any reliable statistical evaluation when it came to whether academies were better than traditional schools. What we have here is an attempt to ignore the facts and push through an ideologically driven agenda, which is typical of the Tory party.

**Tristram Hunt:** My hon. Friend has made an extremely valuable point about the excellent report produced by the cross-party Select Committee. I shall say more about it later.

The same haphazard approach is apparent in the Bill's failure to deal with different types of school, such as academies and maintained schools, in a fair and consistent manner. There is a great deal in it about inadequate maintained schools, but what about inadequate academies? They do not face automatic interventions. As the Secretary of State knows, 145 academy schools are currently rated "inadequate". Indeed, eight converter academies have been in special measures since 2013, and all eight remain with their original sponsor. The Sir John Gleed School in Lincolnshire is a converter academy that was rated inadequate in April 2013, and is still inadequate. I make that at least 783 days of inadequacy too many, which is too much for the Labour party.

**Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab): When the Department for Education was asked about quality gradings for academy chains, its response was:

"The disclosure of this information would prejudice or would be likely to prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs."

The Department does not want any transparency when it comes to judging those academy chains. Why will Ministers not, in this Bill, allow academy chains to be judged like maintained schools?

**Tristram Hunt:** My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. We are talking about taxpayers' money, so where is the transparency and accountability on expenditure? Why are parents and pupils at failing academy schools less deserving of fast and effective state intervention than those in the maintained sector? The Labour party believes every child should have a good education in every classroom and opposes this ideological protection of certain poorly performing schools.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I am baffled, because the hon. Gentleman has mentioned several things in the Bill he supports yet he is unable to support measures to speed up improvements to failing schools.

**Tristram Hunt:** The question is: what is the best mechanism for dealing with improvements to failing schools? The hon. Lady is new to this House, but I urge her to read the Select Committee's report, because if she did, she would find that the evidence behind it is a lot more complicated than she suggests.

There is nothing in this Bill to deal with coasting or failing academy chains.

**Mrs Spelman** *rose*—

**Tristram Hunt:** I will give way in a moment. Let us take as an example the case of a school such as St Peter's Academy, on the border of my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello), looked after by the Woodard Academies Trust, which makes a mockery of the Department's ability to intervene quickly and spot failure. In February last year, the diocese of Lichfield education board, which co-sponsors but does not operate the school, wrote to Education Minister Lord Nash about its concerns about the Woodard Academies Trust. The DFE conducted a short review and concluded that everything was fine, but everyone in Stoke-on-Trent knew that it was not. Indeed, we all told that to the regional schools commissioner, who had no effective grip on the situation at all. In January, the school was downgraded into special measures, meaning that more than half of the Woodard academy chain schools are now in, or have recently been in, special measures. No wonder the Lichfield diocese no longer has trust in Woodard. This Bill does nothing for the pupils of St Peter's or schools like it in failing academy chains.

**Robert Ffello:** My hon. Friend is being generous with his time and is giving a good example of how to take interventions. He correctly says that this situation is of huge concern and has been for some time, but where do parents go? They complain, as do we as Members of Parliament, but the complaints fall on deaf ears because of the structure, which seems to be the be all and end all for the Government—it is all about the structure. This structure does not help parents and, most importantly, it does not help pupils get on in life.

**Tristram Hunt:** My hon. Friend makes a strong and valuable point. This is further evidence of the atomisation and fragmentation of the English schools system, which is affecting the standards of pupils in schools in Stoke-on-Trent and right across the country. We think that the Secretary of State needs to start putting the interests of pupils above party politics.

**Mrs Spelman** *rose*—

**Tristram Hunt:** I am now delighted to give way to the right hon. Lady.

**Mrs Spelman:** The explanatory notes state:

“Clause 12 inserts a new section...into the Academies Act 2010. The new section allows the Secretary of State to revoke any Academy order...for example if the Secretary of State decides it would be better to direct the local authority to close the school.”

The hon. Gentleman has just told the House that there are no new powers in this Bill to deal with a failing academy, but surely that is not what the explanatory notes say.

**Tristram Hunt:** This Bill gives an extraordinary amount of new powers to the Secretary of State, but the Government are asleep on the job. Why have they not acted on St Peter's school or on the Woodard academy chain? We do not dispute that this Bill gives a great deal of power to the Secretary of State; we just do not think that she is competent to act on the powers that she has been granted. The whole purpose of this Bill is to narrow school improvement—effectively to reduce it to academisation.

As I have already argued, Labour supports academisation as one option for effective intervention in failing schools. The evidence of the sponsored academies programme is clear. We also accept the evidence from the Sutton Trust and others which shows that progress for disadvantaged pupils continues to be faster at those schools than it is at other schools. Had Labour won the general election—we can but dream—I would certainly have expected our new directors of school standards to force through conversions of failing maintained schools and be answerable for those decisions.

When scrutinising this legislation, we do not need to question whether some sponsored academies have a positive impact on progress, standards and achievement. We know that they do. The key question is: why would the Secretary of State constrain herself in clause 7 to this method alone—this one policy of academisation—for school improvement? The reality is that some of the fastest improving schools in the country are maintained schools, particularly in the primary sector. Schools such as the Wellfield Community School, which I was delighted to visit with my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgfield (Phil Wilson), went from special measures to good without converting. The extraordinary Hartsholme Primary School in Lincoln jumped from special measures to outstanding. Indeed, between 2012 and 2014, Ofsted data show eight maintained schools going from special measures to outstanding and 201 maintained schools going from special measures to good.

Academisation is not always the answer. Post-conversion inspections show that 8% of primary sponsored academies and 14% of secondaries are currently rated inadequate. The best chains, such as Ark or United Learning, are an important architecture for spreading high standards,

but chains such as Woodard and E-ACT show that poor performance and complacency are just as easily exported. Pupils at schools run by Prospect Academies Trust were wholly let down by this Government, and children under the Park View Academy Trust in Birmingham were, arguably, put in danger of radicalisation.

The Sutton Trust report shows that the variation between academy chains is “enormous”. It found that the rate of progress for disadvantaged children was lower than the average across all state schools in around one half of the larger academy chains. As was pointed out, the Education Committee report into the academy programme found that the evidence is not sufficient to draw conclusions on whether academies in themselves are a positive force for change.

**Bill Esterson:** My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech, and I commend him on that. He has drawn attention to the fact that, in the report, it is very clear that the Labour academies were a success—the evidence has been taken over a long enough period to make that judgment. We should rightly praise the previous Labour Government for their intervention and their selective use of academies as a school improvement measure. We took evidence from the Charter School movement that suggested that only a small number of schools should convert at a time. Does he agree that one fundamental problem is that the Government have tried to change too many things at once within the education system and have converted too many academies?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. Interventions are getting very long. The hon. Gentleman is on the speaking list, so he may want to save his gunpowder for when it is his turn to speak. The interventions need to be much shorter. Otherwise, we will not get everybody in.

**Tristram Hunt:** My hon. Friend makes a valuable point that there should not be a hierarchy of school type. What makes a difference is strong school leadership and great teaching in the classroom, which can be there across a range of different schools. At Committee stage, we will introduce amendments on a quality threshold for conversion. I am talking about a guarantee that only academy chains with a proven track record should be eligible to sponsor new academies. We want Ofsted to be allowed to inspect academy chains as it does in relation to local authority school improvement functions. What is there to hide? We want shorter funding contracts and for academy freedoms to be extended to all maintained schools as well as measures that challenge the stranglehold of poor academy chains by making it easier for schools to change their sponsors—a Bosman ruling for schools introducing autonomy back to the chains. In short, we want action on inadequate academies and encouragement for maintained schools with a strong plan for improvement.

We also wish to see an end to the continued and accelerating process of centralisation in education policy. When I read clauses 8 to 11 of the Bill, my first thought was to wonder whether the Education Secretary had reinstated her predecessor's poster of Vladimir Lenin in Sanctuary Buildings. The proposed crackdown in those clauses on governors, parents, councillors, teachers and heads who merely wish to express an opinion in a free

[Tristram Hunt]

country on the future of their school is something to behold. As the Prime Minister's former guru, Mr Steve Hilton, said of this Government's approach to education:

"The Soviet comparison is an apt one—using central command to try and run a vast system. Of course you can squeeze some results out of it and muster some sign schools are improving. But is it the big transformation we want to see to prepare for the 21st century? No".

Steve Hilton was right. These clauses are an extraordinarily statist attack on civil society and the individual's ability to express dissent.

**Suella Fernandes:** I am disappointed by the hon. Gentleman's accusation of Soviet-style centralisation on the part of the Conservative Government. What is his opinion of the hundreds of free schools that have been set up over the past five years, devolving power and decision making to local groups of volunteers to start up schools where they see a need?

**Tristram Hunt:** The hon. Lady was not listening. That is not my comparison; it was made by Mr Steve Hilton, who was the Prime Minister's policy guru. I am just quoting him. Once upon a time, there was an idea called the big society of which the right hon. Gentleman was in favour.

Whatever else we might scorn about the Tory party's approach to localism, we realise that devolution is valuable. The devolution of transport, skills and health powers to Manchester is a good thing, but there are few things more important to a community's pride and prosperity than its schools, so why do schools stand in such stark contrast to the devolution offered so far as part of the northern powerhouse initiative? We believe that it is time that decisions to do with new schools and intervention in failing schools were made at a combined authority level. Regional schools commissioners are far too distant to understand the distinctive context of every school and community in their region and we share the criticism from the National Governors Association of the capacity of commissioners to carry out their functions effectively. In Committee, the Labour party will seek to reshape the Bill with a series of pro-devolution amendments. It is called parent choice, something that the Conservative party used to believe in.

The success of the Labour party's sponsored academy programme came through a deep and balanced understanding of how we improve schools and tackle educational failure. Our reforms sat alongside the challenge programmes, the National College for Teaching and Leadership, Teach First and sustained investment in teaching and learning. In contrast, the Conservative party offers a 10% budget cut for schools, rising pressures on places, larger class sizes, closing Sure Start, teacher shortages, excessive workloads, a collapse of professional support for head teachers, and a widening attainment gap between the poorest children and their better-off peers. The consequences are already being felt by the most disadvantaged in our society and the terrible judgment of the Teach First charity states that

"things are getting worse for poorer children, instead of better."

The Bill does not do enough to close the gap, raise standards, challenge complacency, unleash innovation or inspire our teachers. It is because we are ambitious for every child in every school in England that we will press our reasoned amendment to a vote.

5.49 pm

**Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con):** I rise to speak in my capacity as Second Church Estates Commissioner, but first I would like to build on the comment I made in response to remarks made by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt). My local authority chose to make all the schools in my constituency academies, and the parents of 7,000 pupils have chosen to have their children educated in the borough of Solihull, so localism and parent choice exist. The only bone of contention for me is that, had the per capita funding those children would have enjoyed were they educated in Birmingham and Coventry, where they reside, followed them, £1,300 more per pupil would have been available. My local authority would very much like that anomaly to be addressed. In health, the money follows the patient; by the same token, in education, it would be good to see the money follow the pupil. I totally support the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) to ensure that the schools funding formula is adjusted to achieve fairer funding.

The Church of England family of schools is a key part of the education system and dioceses are committed to maintaining high standards and developing capacity across its 4,700 schools in a strategic way. Some 65% of the schools have fewer than 210 pupils, and the Church of England currently runs more than half the small primary schools in England. Although 80% of its schools are in the good or outstanding categories, the Church faces the same challenge of raising standards in the remaining 20%. Schools that are eligible for intervention are defined as those in categories 3 and 4 under Ofsted, so I believe that the idea of coasting is underpinned by the evidence to which the Secretary of State referred.

The Church is not opposed to academisation; it sees that an academy with a strong sponsor can often be the way in which a school improves. The general shift toward multi-academy trusts, rather than single autonomous schools, is largely welcomed by the Church of England, particularly in the light of the number of small rural schools. In its report, "Working Together: The Future of Rural Church of England Schools", published in October last year, the chief education officer of the Church of England said that he is convinced of the need for schools

"to form effective structural partnerships and collaborations" if some of them

"are to survive into the future... Collaborations are not a means to avoid closure, but are for mutual benefit".

It is important that strength and capacity are maintained through a strategic approach, rather than decisions being taken on a school-by-school basis. It is the very coherence of the Church family of schools that enables the Church of England to make a significant contribution to education in this country. I therefore seek assurances from the Secretary of State that the Bill and the associated regulations and guidance explicitly recognise the duties of the dioceses and school trustees, who have to preserve the Church of England character of their school. Under the Bill, regional school commissioners will have authority

to require a school to become an academy; however, they may have only a limited understanding of the position of the diocese in relation to Church schools. The Bill gives the Secretary of State the power to decide who serves on the interim executive body of a failing school. Can she reassure the Church that that body will have regard to the ethos of faith schools, as in clause 5?

The Bill grants new powers to the Secretary of State to require failing schools to enter into a variety of collaborations or a federation with other schools. The Church already has a number of federations, such as the Trinity federation and the Pilgrim federation in the Norwich diocese, which are a mix of Church and voluntary-aided schools. They demonstrate how the individuality of each school has been maintained, which should allay the fears of the National Secular Society that the Church might in some way dominate the non-Church schools. The Church will continue to develop diocesan and Church school-led multi-academy trusts in a way that offers the opportunity to build strong partnerships within the Church school family and that welcomes community schools, as well.

It is important to ensure that the new Government powers of intervention do not limit the Church's ability to control its existing schools and promote new ones. The Church should still be able to take its own steps to improve the quality of its own provision. I hope that the Government will continue to work with the Church of England and the Catholic Church to ensure that the Bill and any related regulations and guidance meet these concerns.

5.54 pm

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I am delighted to have the support of so many of my colleagues here today as I make this, my first speech to the House. I am honoured to be here representing Glasgow North West, the area where I grew up and where I have chosen to raise my own children.

Glasgow North West does not have the lochs and islands of Argyll and Bute, or the mountains of Skye and Lochaber, but what it does have is some of the most beautiful sandstone buildings anywhere in these isles. Madam Deputy Speaker, I invite you take a stroll along the avenues of Broomhill and past the tenements of Thornwood to enjoy these delights. So inspired was I by this architecture that I left my previous job as a physics teacher to retrain as a stonemason. Perhaps I could offer my services to this building and save the public purse some money. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]

Glasgow's dedication to science and engineering has ensured the Clyde's rich tradition in shipbuilding is world renowned, but there are only two shipyards remaining: Govan and Scotstoun, which is situated in my constituency. When BAE Systems builds ships in Glasgow, it is not mere tokenism; it is because it knows it has one of the world's most highly skilled workforces at its disposal. When the contract was recently awarded for the Type 26 frigates, my reaction was, "Why not more?" We certainly could be building more if it were not for the obscenity of nuclear weapons.

Glasgow is famous for its love of sport. Only last year, we hosted the hugely successful Commonwealth games, when athletes and visitors were treated to the warmth and hospitality of our Glaswegians, and to the outstanding summer weather we always enjoy. [Laughter.]

I take this opportunity to congratulate my neighbours the Glasgow Warriors rugby team, who were recently crowned the PRO12 champions. They are the first Scottish team to win an international trophy in the modern professional era.

I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Mr John Robertson, who worked hard to serve Glasgow North West for nearly 15 years. He is rightly lauded for his amendment to the 2009 Welfare Reform Bill that ensured that people registered blind or partially sighted could claim the higher level of disability living allowance. John was first elected in a by-election in November 2000, following the untimely and tragic death of Donald Dewar. The name of the seat at that time was Glasgow Anniesland. I am hugely honoured to be representing the same part of Glasgow as Scotland's first First Minister. It was Donald's push for devolution that started Scotland on the political journey that has led to the election of myself and so many of my colleagues.

I am proud to have been part of Scotland's world-famous comprehensive education system. The 1496 Education Act required every parish to provide a school. This resulted in Scotland making a significant contribution to the period of enlightenment, when the modern world we know today was developed. Today, Scotland still has more universities per head of population than any other country in the world. The value we place on educating our future citizens cannot be overstated. The Scottish Government have ensured that university education is a right that is based on the ability to learn, not a privilege for those who can afford to pay.

Our proud tradition in education is not historical—it is alive and well today. In Scotland we have a new progressive Curriculum for Excellence which starts at age 3 and continues to age 18, ensuring that our students are well equipped as they move beyond school. Although I welcome the UK Government's plan to follow the Scottish lead in increasing childcare provision for three and four-year-olds, the requirement that both parents must be working means that many children in need of a good start will miss out.

People in Glasgow are struggling under the continued onslaught of austerity. In some parts of my constituency one in every two children are born into poverty. Teaching in a comprehensive school, I am only too aware of the impact this has on the prospects of our young people. I have seen too many talented students struggle because they are hungry, because they cannot study in a damp house or because they have to go out and work to supplement the meagre household income. I have heard the word "aspiration" used repeatedly in this House. Try having aspirations when you are living on the edge of destitution.

I know the difference that great teaching can make to schools and to pupils, but all too often hard-working teachers who are battling to deal with society's failings are blamed for not doing enough. This has to stop. Unless we start valuing teachers for their contribution, making a school an academy will not change anything, and the crisis in education will only deepen. As a teacher I always had great ambitions for my pupils, but the most important thing a teacher can give to their students is self-confidence. Last September's referendum may not have returned the result I hoped for, but it did restore the confidence of a nation. We now have an

[Carol Monaghan]

engaged electorate who were brave enough to take a break from the status quo and turn to a different type of politics.

Because young people had the vote in the Scottish referendum, they did the unthinkable. They started talking about politics—in the dinner hall, in the corridors and playgrounds and, if they were brave enough, even in some classrooms. The importance of this cannot be understated. They threw around ideas, arguments and counter-arguments in an entirely safe environment without the influence of older adults, workmates or mainstream media. Could it be that the real reason this House is opposed to votes for 16 and 17-year-olds is that our young people may start to challenge old ideas?

Thomas Jefferson famously said:

“I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past.”

We on the Scottish National party Benches are here to ensure that the vision we have for the young people of Scotland is realised. Our dreams will become our children's reality. Tapadh leibh.

6.3 pm

**Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate, not least because it is the first one on education since I was elected as Chair of the Education Committee. My first task is to thank all those who voted for me, to whom I am immensely grateful. As we go along, either they will regret it or that number will swell.

It is a great honour to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), the education spokesman for her party. I have already talked to her about a range of issues. Her speech was very moving and very impressive, not least her reference to the first First Minister.

Coasting schools are not a new issue. We have known about coasting schools for quite a long time. Ofsted produced a report during the previous Parliament about the “long tail of underachievement”, which was in effect a reference to coasting schools. It focused on schools in rural and coastal areas, predominantly primary schools, but that was not its only concern. We need to get it on the record right now that we have always known about coasting schools. They have been a big problem for two reasons. The first is that they have affected our capacity as a nation to be productive. One of the key reports I intend to do through the Education Committee is on productivity so that we can tease out the ways in which we can improve our productivity. The second reason is social mobility, which is a key objective of any good Government. It is certainly an objective of the present Government.

A central issue is the definition of a coasting school. It revolves around the word “progression.” Are children progressing? How do we identify whether they are or not? Are they doing so at the right speed? When we discuss the detail of the definition, I hope there will be an emphasis on mechanisms to establish whether children are progressing in school. I believe it is necessary to examine, over a period of time, how children are operating within the teaching and learning framework in their school. “Progression” is a key word to keep in mind.

Failing schools are fairly obvious because they are judged to be inadequate. A red light goes on and that school has to be dealt with. My concern about saying that, once a school becomes inadequate, it is therefore failing, is that there might be some pattern that we need to know more about. It would be as well to look at the definition of a coasting school to see how the school became inadequate. That should inform the debate.

I have spoken quite a lot about governance and governors. In the previous Parliament, I set up the all-party group on school governance because governance is one of the key elements in whether a school is going to fail and how it deals with the road towards becoming a failing school or, more importantly, becoming a better school. I welcome the clauses that look into intervention and deal with what an interim executive board looks like, how governing bodies are going to be treated, whether they will stay in place and how they will look during the process of improvement. We need more detail not just about how that will operate, but about the make-up of a school governing body and what it will look like in future. I give notice that I will re-present my original governance Bill, which I have talked about previously.

The other aspect on which we do not have enough detail is the role and capacity of our regional commissioners. We need to know more about how they will operate and what tools they will have to do the tasks that are so necessary to tackle schools that have been identified as coasting and therefore require intervention. One task that the Education Committee will want to do is examine the role and capacity of regional commissioners. It would be of great benefit to our understanding of the process if we knew exactly what regional commissioners would look like in two or three years' time. We need to start plotting that journey now.

On the leadership of schools, the question is always what we do with the head and senior members of staff in a failing school. Again, that should be thought about carefully during the Committee stage of the Bill. I urge all members of the Committee to focus on that.

Last but not least, on adoption, the central point must surely be—

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way before he gets to the adoption section of his speech, and I congratulate him on becoming the Chair of the Education Committee. What does he think about the conclusion of the Committee's report published earlier this year, which stated that it was still too early to say how much the academies programme had helped to raise standards? Ofsted has said the same thing: there is no evidence that the academies model is the best way of improving standards. So why are he and his party so adamant that that is the way forward, and why are they closing down parental consultation at the same time?

**Neil Carmichael:** This is actually about whether we should intervene in coasting schools. The hon. Lady is rightly talking about what happens next. We have already heard from those on the Labour Benches that they are quite proud of the academies programme, which they started, but what we have to do is perfect it. That is one of the tasks that underlies this legislation. The Education Committee also looked at whether academy chains should be examined, and we concluded that they should be. We will revisit that matter to ensure that it has been properly tested and discussed.

On adoption, I do not want the Bill to result in people ending up becoming candidates for adoption because that is the easiest route to take. We need to ensure that the adoption process after the decision that a child is to be adopted is made better. That is in line with the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth). He talked about the risks involved in going down the adoption route when the existing parents were unhappy with the process.

Given those considerations, I welcome the Bill.

6.11 pm

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): Last September could well turn out to be the most important month in my life. I began the month by announcing that I intended to seek the Labour nomination for Mayor of London, and I am hoping to achieve that by this September. More importantly, towards the end of the month, I slipped out of the Labour party conference following the speech by the former Leader of the Opposition—that had nothing to do with his speech, by the way—and made my way to meet my new daughter, whom my wife and I had just adopted. I am here today to raise issues about adoption.

There are just under 70,000 young people in the care system in our country. I see that the Minister with responsibility for adoption, the Minister for Children and Families, is in his place. He will know that it is important that couples with their own birth children should feel able to adopt. I congratulate the previous Government on their success in speeding up the system and in stating that we should not hold up adoption, particularly for black and minority ethnic children, solely on the basis of finding adopters of the same race. Much progress has been made, and we are now seeing many more children being placed for adoption instead of languishing in the system. The Minister did a considerable amount to achieve that, as did the former Secretary of State.

However, there are many foster carers, many children in residential care, and many kinship carers, and they do not feature in the Bill. That is a matter of concern for those outside this place who play such an important role in the lives of looked-after children. If we are serious about finding those children a home for life, it is important that we attract couples with birth children to the adoption process. I hope that the Minister will have something to say about how we are going to achieve that within the system.

We must also do considerably more to support families adopting children who are from much harder target groups than the traditional baby daughter or baby son. They include children with tremendous disabilities, children with profound mental health problems, black and minority ethnic children and children who are older at the time they become available for adoption, some of whom have reached their teenage years. This is a real difficulty in our system, but again the Bill says very little about how those children can successfully find a home.

I am not saying that it is appropriate for all such children to be adopted, however, and there are concerns about forced adoption. There are countries, certainly in Europe, where forced adoption is unusual. We must give better support to poorer parents, for example, and to those with drug or alcohol problems. We must support

them so that they are better able to parent their children. It is important to stress that this debate is taking place against a backdrop of huge cuts to local government, which are having an impact on children's services, on budgets for social workers and on the means to support those parents so that they can continue to parent their children, hard though that might be.

I hope that the Minister will also say a little more about what is envisaged for regional adoption agencies. There are some very good agencies out there—I was supported by one of them—and there are bigger agencies that could do more. Some local authorities are already working in consortium to try to attract parents. Also, many children are clearly best suited to being adopted outside their local area because of the complexities surrounding their families.

Will the Minister also say something about the strengths of our maintained school system? It is a matter of tremendous concern that Ministers seem to want to talk only about chain and sponsored academies and not about converter academies. It limits the argument somewhat if they do not acknowledge the fantastic schools in the maintained sector. In the end, the debate must always be about standards and children, and not about structure.

6.17 pm

**James Berry** (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech. It is a pleasure to follow such a fine maiden speech from the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan). It will not have escaped your attention, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I am not the only Berry on these Benches. Indeed, I am not even the only J. Berry. It has become clear over the past few weeks that, if nothing else, I can look forward to a career redirecting the post of my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry).

On the campaign trail, I was asked more than once whether there were any politicians in the family—a slightly odd question, I thought. I answered no, but I have since commissioned my sister, Jane, to do a little bit of research, as she likes family history. It turns out that one of my forebears did give distinguished service to my party, although not as a Member of this House but as a butler at one of London's Conservative clubs.

I am only the second Member to be returned by the Kingston and Surbiton constituency. The seat was created in 1997 from two seats: Kingston, which was previously held by Norman Lamont, and Surbiton, which was held by Richard Tracey. Both have had distinguished careers since 1997, and I am sure the same will apply to my predecessor, Edward Davey. Having won the seat in 1997, Mr Davey turned his majority of 56 into one of more than 15,000, a considerable feat that my hon. Friends the Members for Gower (Byron Davies) and for Derby North (Amanda Solloway) will be seeking to replicate.

I have no doubt that Mr Davey enjoyed 18 years incumbency in Kingston and Surbiton as a result of hard work and dedicated service to his constituents, and that is something that I am working hard to emulate. As well as being Kingston and Surbiton's MP, Mr Davey served as Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change in the last Government. His enthusiasm for wind farms might not have blown away all hon. Members on the Government Benches, but I hope that this

[James Berry]

Government will continue his and the previous Government's drive to ensure better energy efficiency through home insulation.

Kingston is where England began. In 925 AD, King Athelstan was crowned in Kingston upon Thames, which sat on the border of Wessex and Mercia. Wasting little time, within two years he had conquered the kingdom of the Northumbrians, thereby becoming the first king of all England. I shall spare the blushes of Members of this House from the Scottish, Welsh and Cornish regions by skating over his later military victories.

My constituency does not end with Kingston; it takes in Tolworth, Hook, Chessington, Malden Rushett, Old Malden, New Malden, Norbiton, Surbiton, and parts of Worcester Park. South West Trains permitting, on a journey of less than 20 minutes from Waterloo, you can enjoy a walk down a beautiful stretch of the River Thames in Surbiton, the best retail shopping outside Oxford Street in Kingston, an afternoon's entertainment at Chessington World of Adventures, and, in the evening, a Korean barbecue in New Malden, which has the largest Korean population in Europe.

Like Tom, Barbara, Jerry and Margo did, many people in my constituency enjoy the good life, but many do not. Whether it is the inability to get on the housing ladder in London, the inadequacy of our congested train services, our congested roads, the shortage of primary school places or busy GP surgeries, there are significant issues that need addressing in Kingston and Surbiton. There is much to be done, and I will never shy away from that task.

Most urgent are the issues of transport and schools. Vast swathes of my constituency were created because of the arrival of the railways, but now most of our stations are antiquated, with an unacceptable lack of disabled access. Kingston and Surbiton lie in zone 6, when logic and fairness dictate that they should be in zone 5. Commuter services are massively overcrowded. The 7.59 am train from Surbiton is the second most overcrowded train in this country. It is not acceptable that a commuter who gets on a train as early as 6.41 am cannot get a seat. Declaring an interest, I should point out that I try to take that train myself. I should also note that my wife reminds me almost every morning that we would have got a seat if we had got up earlier and got on the 6.35 am. We need significant investment in our rail infrastructure in Kingston. I will, along with others, be pushing for the extension of Crossrail 2.

If Kingston expanded because of the railways, people now move to our royal borough because of its excellent schools. I had the pleasure of visiting St John's Primary School on Saturday and Southborough High School this morning. Like these two, almost all the schools in my borough are rated either "good" or "outstanding" by Ofsted. Perhaps a victim of our own success, we now need more quality school places in Kingston. The £4.5 million of funding for extra school places given by my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary in the months before the election was very welcome, but we need entirely new schools, not just bulge classes and expansion of the schools we already have. I will work with the Department for Education, the Education Funding Agency and free school providers to do my best to make sure that happens.

It is fitting that I should make my maiden speech in a debate about education, since that was my parents' profession. Their own parents, like so many in Middlesbrough in the 1930s, '40s and '50s, worked in the ICI factories in Billingham. Were it not for the education that my parents received, particularly at the grammar school in my father's case, I am quite sure that I would not be standing here today. Their education enabled my parents to get on in life—my mother as a special needs teacher and my father as the principal of a teacher training college.

I was reminded that shortly before my father's retirement, my parents had the pleasure of going to a garden party at Buckingham Palace. Before the party started, my parents took a stroll through Green Park and saw many of the other lucky invitees enjoying their lavish picnics of smoked salmon and champagne. When they found a bench, my father reached into his Safeway carrier bag and produced a Vitalite tub of tinned mackerel sandwiches and a flask of coffee. I have no doubt that as they sat there on that bench in Green Park, my parents were able to reflect on how far they had come from their modest beginnings in Middlesbrough.

It would have been a source of immense pride to my father to have been able to watch me give this speech today, but sadly he died just two days after I was selected. Ever the optimist, he was perhaps the only person to predict that I would win the election. Shaped by his experiences in life and teaching, he believed passionately that education should be the great social leveller. I am proud to support this Bill today because I believe that this Government are putting education and social aspiration at the centre of everything they do. That is why I am proud to be a member of this party and this Government.

6.24 pm

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry). I am fairly sure that his dad would be proud of him today. I know that both he and the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) will make a valued contribution during their time in this House.

Although I have concerns about some of the measures in this Bill, there is much that I welcome. I start by paying tribute to the teachers across Tameside and Stockport, covering my constituency, because they do a good job and we should always remember the work that they do in our communities.

We always remember the good and the bad teachers, never the mediocre ones. I want to tell a little tale about a young person living in Denton who was in year 10 taking GCSE English. He had a teacher who perhaps would not be described as a good teacher, and classroom behaviour was not brilliant. By the end of year 10, that pupil only had one English essay at grade E; everything else was incomplete because the class had been completely disrupted. In year 11, that same pupil had an outstanding English teacher, Neville McGraw. We remember the names of really good teachers—in this case, because that year 11 pupil was me. Had it not been for Neville McGraw at Egerton Park Community High School in 1990, I would not be standing here with a GCSE in English, because my grades had plummeted. That is not

because I was not able enough—I was; I came out with a good GCSE; it was because of the classroom behaviour, the lack of discipline and the fact that the teacher was not inspirational in the way that Neville McGraw was. I should like to pay tribute to Neville McGraw for my GCSE in English.

The Secretary of State knows that I talk at length about the problem of coasting schools being not just those that are under-performing or performing at a low level. I am just as adamant that secondary schools must do their best for all pupils, including highly academic pupils. I declare a bit of an interest because I am an associate director on the governing body of Denton West End Primary School in my constituency. I have been a governor of Denton West End for 20 years now; it is an excellent primary school. Lots of children leave that school with really superb standard assessment tests at level 5 and level 6, and yet when they go on to secondary school they do not do their very best. I want to impress on the Secretary of State the fact that schools can coast at a relatively high level. If children who left primary school with level 5 and level 6 SATs are not coming out of secondary school with A and A\* grades, then that school is doing just as much of a disservice to those children as a low-performing school.

In my constituency we have some outstanding schools, as recognised by Ofsted, including St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School and St Thomas More Secondary School. They have the same catchment area as other schools in my constituency that are rated "requires improvement" or "inadequate". The Secretary of State will know that I have two academies in my constituency—Reddish Vale High School and Audenshaw Academy. I declare an interest in that my son goes to Audenshaw Academy, so as a parent I am very interested in what goes on there. The regional schools commissioner, Paul Smith, is tackling the issues at those schools. I have been working with Paul and with the governing bodies of both schools to try to get a satisfactory outcome.

I impress on the Secretary of State the need to tackle failing academies as much as failing maintained schools. I do not see in this Bill some of the stronger measures that I would like to see so that we can tackle failing academies and bring all schools up to a decent standard.

**Robert Ffello:** I am enjoying my hon. Friend's speech. One issue I have with academies is that they have a body of directors with no democratic input. I am concerned about one particular headteacher who is also a director, but there is no way to get to the heart of what is going on in her school because the other directors are protecting her. Does my hon. Friend share my concern?

**Andrew Gwynne:** Absolutely. When there are concerns about a school they must be investigated and tackled appropriately.

That leads me nicely on to the issue of the statutory responsibilities of the directors of children's services. I have talked to the children's services directors in Tameside and in Stockport, who both raised their concern that they are statutorily responsible for all children within their borough but lack the tools to do much about poor school standards in academies. I want to see their role strengthened, in liaison with the regional schools commissioners, so that they can work together to drive up standards in all schools in both of those boroughs.

It would be unfair to say that all academies in my constituency are failing—they are not. Only today, Ofsted declared that Hawthorns special school in Audenshaw—I implore Ministers to visit it, as it is my favourite school in my constituency—is outstanding across the board. That shows what a brilliant school can do. The service the school gives to the children is excellent, and I pay tribute to Moira Thompson, the executive principal, and all the staff.

I say to the Secretary of State that, whatever the framework, the issue is not structures but delivering a good education for children. This is about real aspiration—we talk about aspiration, but education is about raising aspiration. We should be relentless on standards and on getting the best for all children, so that no child is left behind. That is why we need a concerted effort to make sure that the kind of experience I had in 1990 is not repeated in any other school in this land.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his perfect timing. For the avoidance of doubt, I should make it clear that I was rather more lenient than usual with the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), because I was aware not only of it being his maiden speech but of the very particular nature of the matter he was addressing. However, even people making a maiden speech are required to stick very strictly to the six-minute time limit. The time limit also applies to the next hon. Member, although it is certainly not his maiden speech.

6.33 pm

**Mr Gary Streeter** (South West Devon) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne). I am sure his former schoolteacher would have been proud of what he said. I found much to agree with in his speech, although it was possibly an error of judgment to describe one school in his constituency as a favourite—he may get some letters and emails from governors of other schools.

If I were an Ofsted inspector I would declare both maiden speeches this afternoon absolutely outstanding. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) and the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) on them—they were very powerful speeches.

I will talk about adoption. I very much welcome the rationalisation we will see as a result of the Bill. Quite a few parts of the charitable and not-for-profit sector could do with some rationalisation. Perhaps it should happen from the bottom up, but from time to time it requires a nudge from the top, so I welcome that measure. There are some wonderful adoption agencies in the United Kingdom, but there are a lot of them and we would like them to work more closely together.

The broad thrust of my short speech is that I want to put the case for families who adopt to have better access—perhaps even priority access—to services later in life. Most of the input to, scrutiny of and support for the adoption process comes up front and in the immediate aftermath of the adoption. After that, it is all too common for families who have adopted to feel abandoned as events begin to unfold in the precious young life in their care over the months and years ahead. My remarks

[Mr Gary Streeter]

chime with the intervention by the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), who talked about her own experience in this matter.

I have come to that conclusion based on a number of constituency cases, as well as the experience of a member of my wider family who has adopted a child. I can well remember attending the families day for would-be adopters, at which it is stressed that in almost every case any child being adopted will have gone through at least three major traumatic episodes—abandonment, violence or abuse of some other kind. It is for that reason that the significant decision is taken—it is never taken lightly—to intervene and take that child away and hand him or her to another person.

Watching TV programmes about people now in their 70s trying to reconnect with children they handed up for adoption in the 1960s perhaps gives us a false impression of modern-day adoption. In those days, more often than not, a young mother was forced to hand over a much-loved baby within just a few days of birth, because of societal or parental pressure; those children would often go on to flourish in their new homes. Today, a child handed over for adoption has probably—not in every case, but probably—already experienced trauma of one kind or another, possibly lasting months or years. It is almost certain that the trauma of those early years will find its way to the surface one, five or 10 years later.

In truth, adopting a child involves a giant leap of faith. The new parents do not really know much about that child, their DNA, what drugs or alcohol the natural parents may have been on, or the truth about the trauma that he or she suffered and its impact on that young life. It is perfectly understandable why it is that hard-pressed social services departments breathe a sigh of relief once a child is adopted—I can imagine that happening—and move on to their next crisis. I do not blame them: they are very hard pressed. That is one reason why clause 13 could transform adoption, if there is a greater rationalisation in the adoption services.

I believe not just that rationalisation is important but that we need to go further. I welcome the recent decision that looked-after children, including adopted children, will get priority treatment in accessing the school of their choice. I also welcome the fact that they attract the pupil premium. My argument—and this could be the Bill to make this happen—is that looked-after children should receive priority treatment from other services, particularly mental health and social services, all the way through their lives.

Why would that be fair? First, the whole point of our welfare system is surely to put vulnerable people back into the position that the rest of us are in. Secondly, as I have said, it is almost inevitable that where there has been trauma in a young life there will be personal repercussions later on that will require particular attention and support. Priority access to health and other support services would help both the child and the hard-pressed, good-hearted people who have opened their home and taken the child in. Thirdly, we are talking about a statistically small group of people. The impact on everyone else would be minimal, but on that small group it would be significant. Priority treatment should last not just through the teenage years, but for life.

As the Bill wends its way through its stages here and in another place, I hope some positive things might be added. In particular, I ask the Front-Bench team to think about giving children who have been adopted priority access to services later in life. I realise that there are many positive stories about adoption—my own family is determined that ours will be one of them—but we should not underestimate the scale of support needed as a child comes to terms with the trauma of early years.

6.39 pm

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech in this debate. As usual, the previous maiden speeches have been of the highest quality and are a hard act to follow, although I feel obliged to point out that Scotland is a nation, not a region.

As someone who has lived in my constituency for my entire life, it is a real honour to represent Kilmarnock and Loudoun, and to be here to speak on behalf of my constituents.

Too often when we get elected, we do not pay tribute enough to the thousands of volunteers who work tirelessly on our campaigns, so I would like to put my thanks on record to the people who helped me to get here. This is particularly poignant for me because sadly, my campaign manager, John Mackay, died a couple of weeks ago; his funeral is this Friday. Such was the effort he made for the SNP that he was given a lifelong achievement award back in 2007, but even so, he was still working hard for the party until he passed away. When I asked John to be my campaign manager, he initially said no, but such was the mark of the man that he came back to me the next day and said, “Alan, I’ll give it one more go.” So thanks to John, and obviously, his last campaign was a successful one.

As the new SNP MP for Kilmarnock and Loudoun, I pay tribute to my predecessor, Cathy Jamieson, who worked hard for her constituents. Although only a one-term MP here, she represented part of the area at the Scottish Parliament, so she has worked at a parliamentary level since 1999. She also acted as a Government Minister, serving at the highest level in Scottish politics, and I wish her well for the future.

Let me describe my constituency for the House. Kilmarnock and Loudoun is a mix of rural and urban and it has a proud history, with vibrant and resilient communities. The fantastic rolling countryside means that in my constituency people can go for great walks, ride on great cycle tracks and paths, ski all year round at a dry ski slope, participate in motor sports, or fish—but you cannae go hunting. People can also try their hands at the only gowf club in the world, so there is lots to see and do in my constituency, and I urge hon. Members to pay it a visit.

Moving on to people and places in my constituency, as the UK moves to remember the 200th anniversary of Waterloo, I advise the House that one of the two French standards captured at the battle was captured by Ensign Ewart from Kilmarnock, and that another hero of that escapade was Hugh Hutchison, who came from the village of Galston.

Kilmarnock Academy is one of the few schools in the UK to provide two Nobel prize winners—Lord Boyd Orr from Kilmaurs, and Sir Alexander Fleming from

the village of Darvel, who discovered penicillin. The first gas street lights in Britain were provided in the village of Muirkirk, which also pioneered tarmac roads. The village of Crosshouse provided a three-time Labour Prime Minister in Australia. We have Dunlop, which is home to the famous Dunlop cheese; Stewarton, where David Dale was born and grew up; the village of Fenwick, with the oldest known co-operative society; and Catrine, which is one of the original mill towns in Scotland and had one of the original cotton mills. We also have the villages of Sorn, Lugar, Logan, Gatehead and Knockentiber, which have been closely associated with the coal mining industry, in line with many other communities in my constituency.

If I may, I will make the obligatory football reference. My constituency has the oldest professional team in Scotland, Kilmarnock FC. Killie FC are currently celebrating the 50th anniversary of their historic league championship win, as the only non-city team in Scotland to win the league championship. Sticking with football, recently I was at the Scottish junior cup final, where I witnessed Auchinleck Talbot win the cup for a record 11th time. Last year, Hurlford United won the cup as well, so there is a good football pedigree in my constituency.

The constituency is also Burns country. The bard moved to Mauchline, where he met his wife, Jean Armour. Kilmarnock gave us the Kilmarnock edition of Burns's early works, and that is what set him on his way. Probably not so well known to the House is that a minister from the village of Newmilns—my original home village—persuaded Burns not to emigrate to the West Indies. Thanks to my constituency and that combination of events, we are able to enjoy Burns, and I would like to quote one of his greatest phrases:

“That Man to Man, the world o’er,  
Shall brothers be for a’ that.”

For me, that is all about equality, but we can see how that does not chime with what is happening in this House at the moment. Equality is not cutting £12 billion from the poorest in our society. It is not doing what happened last week, when a vote in this House deemed that some people in this country are not equal and should not be able to vote. I think that is an outrage. Where is equality, when we have the House of Lords next door? There is a democratic deficit and I cannot believe that the Tories want to address that by cutting the number of elected representatives rather than the number of unelected representatives. Where is equality when we have people depending on food banks? We have heard today that there is a clear link between sanctions and food banks, despite what the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions said earlier.

Equality should be underpinning this debate on education. As we heard earlier, education should be a right, not a privilege. We should not put a glass ceiling on aspiration through financial constraints. That is why in Scotland the Scottish Government continue to support the poorest in society to make sure that they have access to education.

6.45 pm

**William Wragg** (Hazel Grove) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), and the hon. Members for

Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), who all made excellent maiden speeches.

I am grateful, as a former teacher, to be afforded the opportunity to make my maiden speech during this debate. Only time will tell if my audience this evening is as receptive as my former students, or indeed, whether the Secretary of State will rate my speech, through the lens of Ofsted, as either “Outstanding” or “Good”—or perhaps “Requiring Improvement”, although I hope not “Inadequate”.

It is the greatest honour of my life to have been elected to this House as the Member of Parliament for my lifelong home of Hazel Grove. I pay tribute to my predecessor, Sir Andrew Stunell, who retired at the last election. Sir Andrew had been an assiduous Member for the constituency since 1997 and was held in high regard by many. He secured a reputation as a strong constituency MP, which is something I seek to emulate. I wish him and his wife, Gillian, a happy retirement.

Since arriving at this House, I have been very disappointed by hon. Members' geography skills—there is clearly some work to be done there, Minister. When I say “Hazel Grove”, the question all too often has been, “Where's that?” Saying “Near Stockport” helps some. “Near Manchester” helps a few more, but so far “The North” has sufficed for most. Indeed, several hon. Members have inquired not “Where?”, but rather “Who?” this newbie by the name of “Hazel Grove” is—only to be disappointed that she is not one of “Cameron's cuties”. “Hazel Grove” is not simply my weekend name; it is the constituency of my birth, where I was educated and have lived all my life.

If the orientation and name of the constituency confuses hon. Members, the fact that it contains numerous and varied villages and small towns besides Hazel Grove itself will only muddy the waters further. From Bredbury and Woodley in the north to High Lane in the south, and from Marple Bridge and Compstall in the east to Offerton and Great Moor in the west, the constituency is united by a rich history and strong community spirit.

It was Marple where John Bradshaw, lead judge at the trial of Charles I, heralded from. The same place gave Agatha Christie the name of her eponymous detective heroine. Lacking inspiration one day, her trained pulled into Marple station and out of the window—there it was—the character of Miss Marple was born.

Parts of my constituency feature in the Domesday book. In 1066, Bredbury, Romiley, Norbury and Ludworth collectively generated a total taxable income of £7. I am pleased to inform the House that living standards, as well as tax receipts, have risen in the area considerably since then, not least in recent times, because of Her Majesty's Government's long-term economic plan.

The name “Hazel Grove” came about in 1836 as a rebranding exercise. The old name, “Bullock Smithy”, had somewhat negative connotations. It was infamous for drunkenness and criminality—indeed, the number of pubs and alehouses rivalled the number in the Palace of Westminster. In 1750, the Methodist leader John Wesley preached in Bullock Smithy, describing it as “one of the most famous villages in the country for all manner of wickedness.”

Quite what he would have made of the Westminster village, I am not too sure. However, he was kinder to another part of my constituency, Mellor, describing the views from the foothills of the Pennines as “paradise”.

[William Wragg]

As Hazel Grove is a commuter district of Greater Manchester, the issues of travel, public transport, road and rail links receive a great deal of attention from local residents. I have long campaigned for improvements to road schemes and the A6 to M60 link road in particular is something that I am keen to see delivered. Other priorities of mine will be to champion improvements in local healthcare, including in mental health provision.

I also hope that my experience as a teacher will stand me in good stead for pursuing improvements in education for our children, so that they can get the best start in life and fully develop their talents. I would like to place it on the record that the children I have taught and worked with have been the single greatest inspiration to me: their creativity, humour and resilience are truly qualities to be cherished.

I am pleased that the new Government intend to further improve education, particularly in the area of funding by protecting the total schools budget and introducing a fairer funding formula, so that similar pupils get the same funding, no matter what part of the country they live in. The Bill concerns raising the standards in our schools still further through their conversion to academies, where that is deemed to be the most appropriate course of action. Part of the Government's plan for education over the next five years is to tackle coasting schools. For some of those schools, becoming an academy may be the best route to sustained improvement. However, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education has made clear, where head teachers have a plan and the capacity to deliver it, they will be given time to improve on their own.

I welcome the approach that has been taken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in engaging with the teaching profession. A collaborative approach is the best way to secure improvements. The Workload Challenge was a positive step from the Government and I would like to see more of that approach. We need to take seriously the issue of teacher retention and morale. Above all, we must endeavour to make the Ofsted process more something that is done with, rather than done to, schools.

It has been a pleasure to make my maiden speech in the House today. I am proud to support the Bill, delighted to speak in this debate and honoured to serve my constituents in Hazel Grove.

6.51 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Rydw i yn ddiolchgar i'r Dirprwy Lefarydd. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (William Wragg) and the many other Members who have made excellent maiden speeches.

It is indubitably an honour, without precedent in my family, to address the House today. I am deeply humbled that the people of Dwyfor Meirionnydd have invested their faith in me as their representative. I will strive to be worthy of that trust.

I am very aware that I follow in the footsteps of many illustrious Members. The regions that form the constituency of Dwyfor Meirionnydd have sent exceptional Welshmen to London, in their midst Tom Ellis and David Lloyd George, and two giants of the Welsh national movement, Dafydd Elis Thomas and Dafydd Wigley.

My immediate predecessor, Elfyn Llwyd, was elected in 1992 and contributed greatly to Plaid Cymru's parliamentary reputation for punching above our weight. From my first day here, it has been evident that Members and Officers of the House alike held him in the highest regard. Elfyn contributed extensively to improving legislation for victims of domestic violence and stalking. He was an advocate of the rights of veteran soldiers. He will be remembered as a foremost critic of the Iraq war, who called for the impeachment of Tony Blair. That role continued in his scrutiny of the Chilcot inquiry, which, disgracefully, we still await.

The pinnacle of the constituency is the greatest mountain of Wales and England, Yr Wyddfa. Hill forts and castles stand as bastions of our heritage, but first and foremost it is a landscape whose history is treasured in the names of farms and fields.

Welsh is often referred to as the oldest language of Britain. That is quite true, but we should be wary of the implications of romantic archaism and redundancy. Where I live, Welsh is not an optional extra; the majority of people speak and use the language in every aspect of their lives. Someone who speaks both Welsh and English inherits two cultures and two societies, and is the wealthier for it. Welsh is not my first language, but it is my home language.

Cheek by jowl with its natural beauty, Dwyfor Meirionnydd bears the scars of its industrial past. The slate and granite quarries, a number of which are still in production, were major employers. The narrow gauge railways that linked them to the coast now carry a freight of visitors. In the hands of dedicated amateurs, attractions such as the Ffestiniog railway provide valuable training opportunities for young people. Tourism is our major industry: from classic bucket-and-spade, blue-remembered beach holidays to high-adrenaline mountain-bike routes, surfing, zip-wires and underground trampolines.

Although a region must play to its strengths, we should be alert to the disturbing truth that, while official unemployment is relatively low at 1.7%, more than 50% of employed people earn less than the living wage. Well-paid employment prospects remain greatly dependent on the public sector. Regardless of whether that is sufficiently "aspirational", in the popular vernacular of Westminster, the prediction of ongoing job losses as all publicly-funded bodies see their budgets slashed will stifle economic growth across the constituency.

The region has been the home of major developments in energy production. Maentwrog and Ffestiniog power stations were the first of their kind in capacity and innovation. Trawsfynydd nuclear power station ceased production in 1991. The Snowdonia enterprise zone seeks to create employment to replace jobs as decommissioning winds down in the next few years. Recently, Llanbedr airfield was placed on a shortlist of six possible sites to be the home of Britain's first domestic space hub. Landowners are alert to the income potential of renewable energy schemes, regardless of what we heard this morning, although the National Grid needs to be improved to permit additional generation. The same can be said of high-speed broadband, which is yet to reach a number of rural communities and farms.

Agriculture is, of course, the backbone of many of our communities, in the sense that it supports social activities and maintains year-round spending in the local economy. The upland family farms of Eryri are

integral in maintaining the landscape's fragile ecological balance. Of equal if not greater importance is the fact that the quality of the lamb and beef that they produce is excellent.

Education gives our young people a ticket to hope and a career, but the lack of decent salaries and affordable housing closes the door on their return. Work and the means to buy a home are essential. Rural hinterlands are at risk of becoming a low-income combination of conservation museum and adventure playground, to be serviced by the locals on the minimum wage and enjoyed by those who have made their money elsewhere.

I would like to say a few words about the Bill. For the past 22 years, I have been involved in education as a teacher, college director and local authority education leader. The House will, of course, be aware that in Wales, education is a devolved matter. As a result of Labour's handling of teaching and learning since the advent of devolution, standards of education have gone from a respectable level to a situation where Wales has slid down the PISA rankings to the worst in the UK and 40th out of the 68 member countries.

Plaid Cymru is committed to public services for all. The reason we will oppose the Bill if there is a vote, even though education is a devolved matter, is that the growing privatisation by stealth of education in England through the increased number of academies has implications for the funding of Wales via the Barnett formula.

I am one of three Plaid Cymru Members, the first woman to represent my party in Westminster and the first woman to represent the communities of Dwyfor Meirionnydd. The Welsh national movement has its roots in my constituency. Plaid Cymru was established in the town of Pwllheli in 1925. The village of Capel Celyn in Meirionnydd was drowned by Liverpool Corporation 50 years ago. That sparked an awareness that our communities were expendable and that what we valued was of little significance to the great and the powerful. The flooding was inflammatory and caused a national awakening in Wales. We are here now, as we were then, with the best interests of Wales at the heart of all our endeavours.

6.57 pm

**Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech in this House. I congratulate all hon. Members who have spoken so far. There have been some informative speeches and it is great to hear that every Member is as passionate about their own constituency as I am about mine.

The Thornbury and Yate constituency and its predecessor, Northavon, have been served by some outstanding Members, including Lord Cope of Berkeley and my immediate predecessor, Professor Steven Webb. I pay tribute to Professor Webb, who served as a Member of this House from 1997 to 2015. He will be remembered in particular for his work as Minister for Pensions in the coalition Government, which included overseeing major reforms to our pensions system. Locally, Professor Webb was a hard-working and dedicated Member of Parliament. I will exert every effort to emulate his dedication to our communities in south Gloucestershire.

Thornbury is a beautiful market town that has this year, once again, been named one of the top places to live in the UK by *The Sunday Times*. Yate, which

predates the Domesday Book, is home to more than 35,000 residents and was the birthplace and early home of J. K. Rowling.

If one travels to the east, one comes to Pucklechurch, where, on 26 May 946, Edmund, King of all England and grandson of Alfred the Great, was stabbed to death by a local thief who was exiled by the King. If one goes north-east, one comes to Wickwar, where the old brewery used a water wheel powered by a local spring to create electricity, making it the first village in the country to have electric street lights. If there is one thing that I can bring to the House, it is the ale of the Wickwar Brewing Company, which will shortly be available in the House of Commons bar.

If one travels further west towards the River Severn, one finds the beautiful villages, towns and hamlets surrounding Alveston, Olveston and Tockington, and south-west from there, one will find the communities that surround Frampton Cotterell and my home village of Westerleigh. The constituency is my home and I am proud to stand here as its new Member of Parliament.

I am delighted to make my maiden speech on Second Reading of the Education and Adoption Bill. As somebody who attended one of the 15 original city technology colleges, I can testify that having a good-quality education helps to provide young people with the best start in life. It should be part of the duty of our society and this Government to inform young people after they leave education about the opportunities available across all sectors, including in retail.

After leaving education, I worked in every position in retail—from butcher to market stall trader, cleaner, caretaker, shelf stacker, till worker, store manager and, most recently, south-west area manager. I have cleaned floors, sat on the tills and pulled pallets. I hope that I can in some way reflect the challenges that young people face in the work force, and I fully intend to bring that experience to the Floor of the House.

There is one short story I would like to share—one that speaks volumes about the talents of our young people. In 2013, I went to meet some new apprentices during their day in college. I turned up at 9 am and asked one young apprentice, Danny Murphy, how he had got to college that day. He said that his travel to work was slightly different that morning. The lorry had been late the previous evening, so he had got up at 3 am, walked from his house at 4 am for an hour in the rain to get to the store to work the delivery, before getting to college for a full day's study. He was 18 years old. I am very pleased to say that Danny has now finished his apprenticeship, has an NVQ level 2 in retail and is part of the management team running that store. He is a great example of how giving our young people the skills, the responsibility and pride in their work allows them the opportunity to succeed.

I have to confess to be slightly surprised to find myself here, Madam Deputy Speaker. In fact, the only person more surprised than me was my employer. I phoned them up the day after the general election and said, "I think I have a bit of an issue—I have just been elected as the Member of Parliament for Thornbury and Yate and I am not coming back." They took it with incredible grace—so much so that, when I look back in years to come, I might be surprised and a little disappointed at how happy they were to hear the news that I had been elected and would not be returning to work.

[Luke Hall]

It was Adam Smith who, in 1776, wrote that Britain was “a nation governed by shopkeepers”.

I am a shopkeeper, I am proud to support this Government, and I will bring the same energy and passion from the shop floor to the shop Floor of this House.

7.1 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall) on sharing his experiences with us. I am sure he will bring real value to the House. I also thank the other four new Members who have given their maiden speeches today.

I have to say that I am intrigued. This is the Second Reading debate on the Government’s one piece of legislation on addressing standards in education. We are left with a draft Bill that looks at a very narrow definition of something called “coasting” and proposes yet another top-down reorganisation in education, rather than looking at the causes of the unbelievable pressures on our schools at this time and at what would really make a difference to children’s education. Those pressures include the cuts to support services provided by our local authorities, the recruitment and retention crisis in our schools, the incredible pressures under which teachers are being put, and the funding crisis that many of our schools are experiencing. It is the causes that we should be debating today and what will really turn around the lives of our nation’s children and improve schools. Instead, we have to debate something called “coasting”. Even at this moment, we are denied the opportunity to have a clear definition of what that actually means.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for raising other issues and the causes of the difficulties, including recruitment and retention. A number of head teachers in my constituency have highlighted the increasingly challenging times they are facing as they try to recruit teachers and get teachers who have not been trained. They are finding it difficult to fill vacancies and are having to pay expensive introduction fees to agencies. That is having an impact on morale and team spirit in schools.

**Rachael Maskell:** My hon. Friend raises so many of the issues that are impacting on school standards today and the vital profession of teaching. We really must take heed of what she has said.

My second bemusement is that the Government talk about the urgency of improving standards in education, yet they are legislating only for schools currently under local authority control. Why is it acceptable that there are 133 failing academies on this Secretary of State’s watch? That certainly raises the issue of why the standards in those academies are not being questioned in this Bill. It is important to improve the outcomes for all children through the Bill. Why are not alternative providers—perhaps even local authorities—not insisted upon for those schools?

There is a lack of evidence behind the Bill. The Education Committee proved that there is absolutely no evidence of net improvements in standards in primary and secondary schools that have become academies.

Ofsted determined that other initiatives such as the city challenge were far more effective at improving standards. One educationist said:

“schools fail for a number of reasons and simply changing their structure may not address the whole picture”.

Therefore, in view of the evidence, why has there been this ideological move to turn more schools into academies? Tragically, after listening to parents, governors and heads of schools in York, it seems that schools are now seeing this as an inevitable process and are therefore debating whether it is better to jump before they are pushed and to have some control of the process in the meantime—and that includes even our outstanding schools. They are concerned that they will lose more resources; schools in York are seriously underfunded as we fall below national funding levels. The plea I have heard from all heads in York who have raised the issue with me is that the Government should do everything they can to improve school funding as the priority for raising standards.

I could stray into talking about the funding issues in further education, which are also having an impact on our education system. It is pointless to mend one part of the education system without looking at the challenges that will come later. However, I will return to the mainstay of the debate: who is now in charge of our children’s education?

Parents spend most of their time with their children—school holidays, weekends, mornings and evenings—yet the draft legislation is trying to take them out of the education-making process and is instead inserting the very remote Secretary of State. If this Government are at all serious about devolution and parental engagement, they will give a real voice to parents in the future of their children’s education. No one can have the interest of their children’s success closer to mind. Every parent wants to do what is best for their children.

In York, as we have debated the academisation of Millthorpe school and Scarcroft and Knavesmire primary schools—outstanding schools, I might add—it is the parents who have wanted all the information to hand to understand the best path for their children. We are about to enter the same debate at Hempland primary. Why detach schools from parents? Surely we should be involving them more. Why, instead, place the powers in the hands of the Secretary of State, who may know about what happens in Loughborough but will not know about the issues faced in the corners of York Central?

We should strengthen the parents’ voice, empowering parents’ involvement in their children’s education, and listen carefully to the issues they raise. In York, parents have called for a ballot over the multi-academy trust conversion exercise—one that Labour would have granted, but now denied by the Tory-led coalition council. We have to give parents the information they need, trust their expertise and give them a voice and the respect they deserve. After all, localism must be about trust.

I want to mention teachers and support staff and to put on record my sincere thanks for their outstanding dedication to our children, as they work day and night, often under extreme pressure, in giving their all. Teachers and support staff—not just heads—must also have a say. They cannot be told how important their professionalism is in one breath and then not be trusted to make the best decisions for children in the next.

The whole Bill—whether the education or the adoption clauses—boils down to trust. Are we going to trust the true professionals and the parents to determine what is best for children, or place everything in the hands of the Secretary of State, who is, after all, not an educationist?

7.8 pm

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I am particularly pleased to be called to make my maiden speech in this important debate and to follow so many other excellent maiden speeches. I know that you will forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker, if, before I turn to the subject matter of the debate, I make one or two comments about my constituency.

Mid Dorset and North Poole is home, and it is a beautiful place in which to live and work. It stretches from the historic Saxon town of Wareham in the south to Wimborne Minster in the north; and from Bere Regis in the west to Bearwood in the east. I am honoured to have been elected as the Member of Parliament for such a beautiful place. It is where I have chosen to live and to bring up my family.

I am the third Member of Parliament for Mid Dorset and North Poole, a seat that was created in 1997, but I am the first to make my maiden speech from the Government Benches as part of a majority Conservative Government. It gives me great pleasure to pay tribute to my predecessor, Annette Brooke, who in fact was my Member of Parliament for the past 12 years. She had a reputation for being an assiduous constituency MP and working tirelessly on behalf of her constituents, and many people have told me of the hard work that she carried out on their behalf. It is my pledge to my constituents to work as hard as Annette, if at all possible, and first and foremost to be a good constituency Member of Parliament.

Beautiful as my constituency is, it is not without its challenges. Time does not permit me to touch on more than one or two of those, but I will touch on infrastructure, starting with roads. The A351 stretches from the Bakers Arms to Wareham and beyond, and if you have had the pleasure of visiting Purbeck, Madam Deputy Speaker, you may well have had the misfortune of sitting on that particular road. It does not affect just tourists and businesses; it affects most especially the residents who have to cope with it daily. The A31 runs from east to west and back again, and only last week there was yet another fatality on that stretch of road. Finally, the A350 runs from north to south across the constituency. I pledge to work with my colleagues across Dorset to seek improvements where that is possible.

I want to touch on the railways as well. There is the opportunity to improve the speed of our trains from Waterloo to Dorset, and to build upon the heritage railway of Swanage by linking it into the main line.

Of course, infrastructure is not just about roads and railways, it is also about broadband, a subject that is particularly hot in Dorset and which is just as important for my constituency. There is a disparity across the patch, and even within one village—I declare an interest; it is my own village of Lytchett Matravers. There are speeds of 0.8 megabits per second in the part where I live, but in the better part there are speeds in excess of 30 megabits per second. That disparity is particularly frustrating for my constituents. It is also frustrating for

my wife who, even as I speak, may be trying to live stream these proceedings and watch this maiden speech—although if she misses it, that may well be a blessing in disguise. More importantly, it affects our businesses across Dorset, whether they are large, medium or small. Each and every one relies upon the internet, and they struggle to compete if they cannot even make that connection.

Turning to the subject matter of today's debate, there are many excellent schools in Mid Dorset and North Poole, and education is the key to opportunity and social mobility. A number of schools have already converted to academy status, and I have time to mention but one—the Magna Academy in Canford Heath. It is the most recent school to convert. It has a magnificent new building, and it is beginning to get the results to match. But in Dorset, we struggle with a lack of fair funding. Schools in Poole and Dorset are among the worst funded across the whole country—Poole is the second worst funded area and Dorset is in the bottom 10. I am not asking for preferential treatment for my constituents, simply for a level playing field. After all, all schools are judged against the same criteria regardless of the disparity in resources. I am delighted that our manifesto commitment was fairer funding, and I was delighted to hear the Secretary of State repeat that pledge in the House a few moments ago.

Time does not permit me to expand much further, but coming from a family of teachers—like my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), both my parents are teachers—it would be remiss of me not to put on record the hard work and dedication of all our teachers.

I pledge to fight for fairer funding for our schools; I pledge to fight for fairer infrastructure across Dorset; but most importantly I pledge that in all I do, I will do it first and foremost for my constituents.

7.14 pm

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) on making a great maiden speech, and I sincerely hope that his wife got to see it.

I will focus my remarks on clause 13, which relates to adoption, but before I do so I want to raise an ongoing concern that I have with the Government's overall approach to children's social care. There seems to be an obsession with reforming adoption services in isolation from all the other vital services that surround the adoption process and have an impact on it. Adoption is, and should always remain, the absolute last resort for any child and the end of a long process. Before it is even considered, a lot of work needs to be done with the child, the birth family and agencies. In the best-case scenario, that work can improve circumstances at home, repair relationships and mean that adoption is no longer necessary, resulting in a child remaining with their birth family or birth parents, which is an outcome that I think we would all rather see.

It is simply a mistake to focus on adoption to the exclusion of early intervention and other services that could keep a family together. Focusing on improving how children's services work, reducing the administrative workload on social workers so that they can spend more

[Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck]

time with families, and resisting the temptation to cut early years services such as Sure Start could prevent the need for adoptions. I find it concerning that when I have asked questions of Ministers and the Government in the past, they have shown little compunction to protect early years and child protection services, yet now they expect local authorities to restructure their adoption services, with all the costs that that will entail. Would the money not be better spent at the beginning of a child's journey through social services, rather than towards the end?

It is important to remember that continuing support for families who have adopted is vital to help children and families adapt to their new lives. Will the Government therefore consider ensuring that special guardians are entitled to the same ongoing support as families who adopt?

I am continually disappointed that the Government are not making the necessary fundamental reforms to our court process, because it remains in court, not in social work departments or adoption teams, that most of the delay for children is caused. From my professional experience, the court process is one of the biggest barriers to timely adoption. It can be dragged out over years and years. Despite all the advice that is issued, it is still common for multiple assessments to be ordered on the same case, with the sheer number of parties involved meaning that cases drag on and on. The Bill would have benefited from measures to deal with the court process, but without those measures it is likely to fail in its goal of making adoption a quicker process.

I am open to the aims behind the Bill, but I am concerned about the detail and about what the changes might mean in practice. The Bill states that an authority's functions may be taken on by either another local authority or another adoption agency, but there is nothing to say how the Secretary of State will choose which is the preferred option. If the power in clause 13 were to be used on a wide scale, it could result in adoption services being removed from the scope of local authority duties in many areas of our country. Will the Minister explain whether that is the preferred option, or whether adoption services will remain in local authority control unless there is simply no other option?

There is also little clarity in the Bill about when the Secretary of State will use the power in clause 13. We are told that it will be used as a last resort when local authorities fail to integrate adoption services on their own, but that is not made plain in the Bill. How long does the Department for Education think an authority will be able to take before it is considered to be dragging its feet?

What is there to prevent the Secretary of State from using that power as soon as the Bill takes effect? It does not appear that she will have to justify her decisions in any way at all. Nor is there any clarity about how a regional adoption agency should be defined. Would it mean one or two neighbouring authorities working together, or would it mean creating an adoption agency for the whole of the north-east, for example? They are very different propositions, and the Government need to make their intentions clear.

I would like assurances that the powers will not be misused as part of a conscious attempt to shift children's services out of local government and towards independent providers. One of the more worrying and yet under-reported moves DFE made during the last Parliament was opening up children's services to outside bodies, which lack the expertise or experience to carry out the delicate work of child protection. To me, the Bill seems like another move in that direction. If the Secretary of State uses the powers to require adoption to be taken over by outside agencies, how will she guarantee that they are qualified and have a track record in delivering adoption services?

The Minister genuinely cares, and I am hopeful that he will respond not only to the questions I have asked, but on the wider issues I have noted. He knows and I know that our children deserve far better.

7.20 pm

**Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con):** I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) and the excellent maiden speeches we have heard today.

One key theme of the debate is adoption. I am pleased that we are giving airtime to the subject. I welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael), who spoke passionately. It is an important issue for him to focus on as Chairman of the Education Committee.

First and foremost, I commend the Bill and the intention to reduce the time that children spend in care. I pay tribute to the excellent work of the Minister for Children and Families, whose extensive experience as a family law barrister and his personal experience make him so well suited to his brief. I pay tribute to his excellent work with children in care through the Who Cares Trust. He will know as well as anyone the tragic situations that are played out in the family courts every day. I know he is doing his utmost to improve the situation for children and families.

One increasing concern, particularly in my constituency, is the number of children who are taken into the care system every day. It has increased dramatically in recent years. It has become a pressing social issue that we cannot ignore. It has a huge cost to families in human misery, it has social and economic costs to society, and the cost to a child of a life in care.

More efficiency and speeding up adoption is a positive step forward, but it is not a solution in itself. We must look at how we tackle the problem of children entering the care system and think about different benchmarks of success. Increased numbers of children being adopted is not a measure of success, but fewer children entering the care system is.

Before the tragic case of baby Peter Connelly, adoption was always seen as a last resort. There are plenty of examples today when that is not the case. We see judges condemning the social engineering of social workers who judge, assess and find fault with parents. As the Secretary of State rightly said, the decision to remove is for the courts, but the courts can rely only on the evidence put before them. All too often, that evidence is the opinion of a number of professionals who are so anxious about the post-Baby P culture that they act pre-emptively through a fear of missing potential harm.

I believe that the solution must be to work more closely with families to help them stay together safely, and to ensure that we recognise that the best place, if at all possible, is the natural family. Many children experience terrible trauma when they are removed from their natural parents, with whom they have developed a strong and reciprocated bond.

In my experience of working with adoption panels and families who have lost their children to state care, it is wrong to assume that all parents whose children are taken into care are neglectful, dysfunctional or subhuman. Too many people make that assumption.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I declare an interest, having worked as a psychologist in a school. I would be interested in the hon. Lady's thoughts on access to psychological assessments in the process and, as was mentioned earlier, the priority given to access to mental health services in looked-after and accommodated services.

**Lucy Allan:** We should provide mental health support to all children going through the care system.

I should like to tell hon. Members a story about a case I worked on. A mother had two children, both of whom were removed when she went to seek help because she believed she could not cope with the parenting of her young toddler. That family ended up completely broken: one child was adopted, and the other was placed into a series of different foster placements and is now awaiting a long-term placement. The judge in his case described him as a well behaved child. He was a pleasant, successful child at school—he was delightful in every sense—but now, having experienced six sets of foster carers in three years, placement disruption is occurring over and over again. That once happy, delightful boy is physically attacking his foster carers, swearing and attacking other children at school. No one can argue that the result is in the best interests of that child, even if the motivation behind those actions was the right one. His life was turned upside down. We can only guess at the trauma, bewilderment and rage that he must have experienced at the break-up of his family.

For many, the loss of their child to the state is a bereavement—there is a total sense of loss and grief, accompanied by rage at the injustice of being judged to be wanting as a parent. We do our best as parents, and some of us do not do as well as we would like. We should hope that, when the state presumes to judge us, it should also assist us to be the best parents we can be.

Too many grieving parents go on to stem that emptiness by having another child, and then another child. Sequentially, those children are taken into care, but at what cost and for what misery for those children and families? I am delighted by some of the work being done on that. I pay tribute to the Minister, particularly for his social care innovation programme and the financial support being made available to the mothers I have described. I have had a case of a mother who had 10 children taken sequentially into care. That was of no benefit to her or to anyone else.

I conclude by saying that it is not the role of the state to presume to decide what makes for a fit parent. The situation is far more complex than that. We should not hope that we can ever replace the natural bond and the benefit of being within a family setting. I urge the

Minister to continue his excellent work to strengthen families and ensure that they stay together to provide the best possible situation for children as they grow up.

7.28 pm

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan), and to hear such wonderful maiden speeches from new Members. The House will be well served over the next five years. The hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) is not in her place, but I should tell her that Welsh is the oldest language in Europe—it says so on the tea towel I got on one of my many holidays in Pembrokeshire.

This is a debate on Second Reading, and I want to speak about the principles of the Bill rather than the individual clauses, but I will address my remarks to three specific matters: coasting schools, the duty to make academy orders, and local authority joint arrangements for adoption.

Education should be about the best interests of our children. Ultimately, society benefits from that, but I am struggling to find it in the Bill. I find the term “coasting schools” incredibly demeaning. Not only that, but the Secretary of State does not define it in the Bill and chooses to introduce regulations to do so. I should like to know from the Minister what advice he has received from parliamentary counsel on whether that term is clear on the face of the Bill and whether it sets out Parliament's intentions as to what it means? If the Bill were a contract, it would be void for uncertainty. Has the definition been agreed with Ofsted? The Secretary of State outlined some of the measures that she will introduce in regulations, but could those regulations change? Could the definition of coasting school change? Is this the same regime as the Ofsted regime? My concern is the effect it will have on children, teachers and other staff at those schools that are identified as so-called coasting schools.

What about the Joseph Leckie Academy in my constituency? It was promised £17 million under Building Schools for the Future, which was then cancelled. It then entered a bidding war, and managed to receive £4 million. It needs a further £4 million to remove the asbestos and build a new classroom. More than 50% of the children are in receipt of school meals and are struggling to achieve, despite their best endeavours. Would it be fair for the school to be identified as coasting? That cannot be right.

What about the academy order? The Secretary of State needs to listen to parents and staff, not slap an academy order on a school. Members will know that we receive letters from many constituents who cannot get their children into their first choice of school. Amazingly, the Bill says that parents should not be consulted, so the very people who know about a school will not be allowed to have a say. In this country, we consult, we do not dictate, and that is one of the key areas that judges will look at in considering whether a decision is lawful. The Government have already laid the foundations in that area, however, by restricting judicial review.

I hope that in Committee Ministers will look at how parents and governors can have a say. One of the issues that was raised in the election was how we can increase the pool of diversity for governors. It is the governors

[Valerie Vaz]

who have a say on how a school is run, who hold a head to account and who are critical friends. Evidence is a key area. What is the evidence that a school performs better as an academy than as a maintained school?

On adoption, the Bill provides that the Secretary of State can require a local authority to make arrangements for someone else to carry out its functions. That will take functions away from elected local government. It is right that adoption should be speeded up, and the Minister for Children and Families has done much to improve the face of adoption. I pay tribute to the work that he and his family have done in that role. Perhaps Mr John Timpson should be the face of a public campaign on adoption.

It is a scandal that children have to wait a long time to be adopted, but at the end of the day the social workers will make the assessment. It is therefore concerning that the Government have refused to fund the College of Social Work—the very place that is needed to promote social work as an important profession. Where will we get the extra, properly trained social workers who will fast-track adoption? They step in when adoption goes wrong and they have to deal with families all the time. They deal with many issues—and their job is getting more and more difficult—from addressing child abuse to helping people with mental health issues and disabilities. All those areas have faced budget cuts. What are the figures for adoptions that have not worked out, and how will those families be supported? What support will be in place for the fast-track adoptions? Will such families be exempt from the bedroom tax?

One part of the Government—the Treasury—wants devolution revolution, but the Secretary of State has placed herself above the wishes of parents and reserved powers so that she can transfer functions away from local authorities. The Government are like the Hydra in Greek mythology—all the heads are doing and saying different things. The Bill is not in the best interests of children, parents and families—the very people the Government were elected to serve.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I am now increasing the time limit to eight minutes for those who wish to take advantage of it.

**Valerie Vaz:** Oh!

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I am sorry about that.

7.34 pm

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I congratulate all hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches this afternoon, especially the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), whose constituency I know well.

The education section of the Bill is primarily about accelerating school improvement. In the verbal jousts across the Floor, I fear that we sometimes forget what or who we are talking about. I ask hon. Members to imagine their own child attending a failing primary school. Their child might be failing to learn to read and write, but perhaps nobody does anything about it. Perhaps no one notices or seems to think that it matters. That

goes on for two or three years, the child gets further and further behind, and may never catch up. Then it is too late, and the child becomes one of the one in five children who leave primary school unable to read and write properly.

Over the last few years, the Secretary of State and her predecessor have made bold decisions to put into practice what the research tells us works in education systems around the world. They have increased transparency and accountability. They have increased the focus on the quality of teaching and the calibre of teachers and school leadership. Huge progress has been made in making teaching a more attractive profession. For example, for three years in a row, Teach First has been the top recruiter of graduates from elite universities, and a royal college of teaching is in the pipeline.

Hundreds of schools have more autonomy through the academies and free school programmes, and it is autonomy that gives good school leaders and their staff the chance to innovate—the key to success in the very best school systems around the world. Head teachers I have spoken to tell me how much they value the extra autonomy that their school being an academy gives them. Around the country, struggling schools are being helped to turn around, whether in well-known examples such as King Solomon Academy and Durand Academy in London, or less dramatic—but equally important—improvement stories, such as the Abbey School in my constituency. With so much going in the right direction, what matters now is ensuring that every school is part of it. If a school is failing its pupils, there is no time to lose, because each day, term or year a child is in a failing school is another opportunity lost in that child's education.

Although the Government are right to give extra attention to failing schools, we must not overlook schools that are doing well. My constituency has many good and outstanding schools, but the area suffers from below average education funding. While some schools around the country receive £8,000 or so per pupil, most of my schools receive half that amount. They have made savings, including making staff redundant, and one school is now facing the choice of which of three modern languages—French, German or Spanish—to drop. If we aspire to excellence in education, we should not have schools facing such choices. I welcome the Secretary of State's assurance last week that the funding formula will be reviewed, but I press her to ensure that that happens as soon as possible and, while the review is being carried out, that help be considered for financially struggling schools to tide them over.

7.38 pm

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): The hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) mentioned the freedoms that academies enjoy and, undoubtedly, the academies legislation provides for additional freedoms. But most of the freedoms that heads in academies have used could have been used when the school was maintained. That was the finding from the evidence that the Education Committee took. The legislation has not led to wholesale change in how such freedoms are used.

Several hon. Members have talked about coasting schools, which is one of the issues of greatest contention in the Bill. The Education Committee looked at the issue of coasting schools, and we found that schools that

were doing well—with a good or even an outstanding Ofsted grading—were not necessarily doing the best by their students. A coasting school can be doing very well, but should be doing better, and the difficulty for Opposition Members is understanding exactly what is meant by “coasting”. Is the Secretary of State targeting schools that are already doing well but should be doing better, or is she looking at schools that are perhaps not doing so well by their children? The definition needs to be addressed in Committee.

What should we be looking at today on Second Reading? I would hope that any proposed legislation on education would consider how education can deliver long-term prosperity and success for our young people and for our economy. Education is a critical factor, if not the critical factor, in determining how well young people are prepared for the wider world, in particular the world of work. Employers look to us to deliver an education system where young people can turn up at work and be ready to get going and to contribute, yet throughout the five years of the previous Parliament the Education Committee heard again and again from employers that far too often that is not happening. Young people are not coming out of school prepared for the world of work. Work experience is one example of where things have gone backwards in the past five years.

The Select Committee produced a number of inquiries. On more than one occasion, it came up with evidence which has been mentioned by many Members: the most important factor in providing great education is the quality of teachers, in particular head teachers. That came up in the inquiry into great teachers, but was repeated again and again in the past five years. What is happening in the world of education to deliver great teachers? The education element of the Bill looks at making academisation easier, but it has nothing to say on the quality of teaching. That is a great pity.

It has been suggested by many that the Government want all schools to become academies. Given that the term “coasting schools” is so broadly defined, it occurs to me to ask whether that is really what the Government are trying to do. By failing to define it, are they saying that they want all schools to become academies, without being quite as bold as to actually state that? If that is the intention, Ministers really ought to say so. Perhaps the Minister, in winding up, will confirm whether that is what he wants to do. From what he has said in the past, I think that is his intention.

**Kevin Brennan:** On that point, I wonder whether my hon. Friend saw recently in *Tatler*—I am sure he is an avid reader—the comments of the headteacher of Wymondham College in Norfolk, Mr Melvyn Roffe? He said that he had been told becoming an academy would mean more freedom and autonomy, but what happened was the reverse. He said:

“We have had more control from central government rather than local government...I don't believe he”—

referring to the former Education Secretary, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove)—

“intended academy status to reduce autonomy. I wish he had the courage to say there are schools doing a good job and they should be allowed to do a good job.”

He regrets the college becoming an academy, so it is not always the case that heads welcome it.

**Bill Esterson:** Like my hon. Friend, I am of course an avid reader of *Tatler*. The Select Committee found that schools in multi-academy trusts or chains did not have the autonomy they thought they would have, and that everything was controlled from the centre. The Government prided themselves on localism in the past five years, but if anything they reduced local accountability by removing councillors from responsibility and involvement. Localism in its widest sense has been reduced because everything became even more centralised, either through people running multi-academy trusts, or because every one of those schools is controlled, ultimately, from the desk of the Secretary of State in Whitehall. The creation of just eight regional schools commissioners does not go very far, given that there are more than 4,000 academies—or 500 each. That is centralisation. My hon. Friend makes a very important point, which should concern us all.

The Select Committee concluded that the Government should review the lessons of the rapid conversion of secondary schools to inform any future expansion. It highlighted the fact that a programme devised by Labour—as I said earlier, the Labour academies have been a great success according to the evidence presented to the Committee—for a small number of secondary schools was not necessarily appropriate for primary schools. The Government have completely failed to address that point. They acknowledged the point in their response to the Committee's report, but did not have an answer. The international evidence suggests that the expansion of the academies programme was exceptionally fast and perhaps something we should be concerned about.

We would all say that, alongside having the very best teachers, school improvement should be a priority. The Labour programme of academies was an example of massive investment in school improvement, with many successes. The best example of school improvement over an extended period in recent years was undoubtedly the London Challenge. London schools went from being the basket case of schools in the country to being shining examples of success. That was based not on academisation, but on collaboration between teachers, institutions and local authorities. The Government, when they came into office, should have looked far more closely at the success of the London Challenge and spread it around the country, instead of being hellbent on the rapid expansion of an academy system that was not designed for the purpose it is now being used for.

On adoption, I mentioned earlier my disappointment with the relevant elements of the Bill, which, although there is nothing wrong with them per se, do not mention other forms of permanence for children. There is no mention of foster care, residential care or kinship placements. That is a missed opportunity. It leaves nagging doubts regarding the Government's intentions for all children. As many as 75,000 children are in care at any one time. The Government have pulled the funding for the College of Social Work, which again leaves grave doubts about the future of the profession and its ability to support children, including those being put up for adoption.

There are many questions to be answered, whether on adoption or education. I am sure we will probe them more deeply in Committee.

7.47 pm

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Portsmouth South) (Con): I congratulate all those who have made their maiden speeches today, in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan), whose powerful speech made a big impact on me. I would have liked to talk about adoption, but I will concentrate on schools today.

I welcome the new categorisation of coasting schools. Having worked as a lay Ofsted inspector, I know exactly what those sort of schools look like: schools that are not stretching every child and are happy to just reach the minimum level. I have been rung up by parents asking me why their very nice primary school has been classified as inadequate, and why their great teachers were not doing as well as they thought they were. Schools would be classified as inadequate because bright children were getting level 4 rather than level 6, and other children were getting level 3 when they should have been getting level 4. It is these schools that have been classified as inadequate. They were not failing their children completely, but they were coasting and not doing a good job.

**Kevin Brennan:** The hon. Lady, a former lay inspector, raises a very interesting point. When she was inspecting a school, would she have been able to give it a good or outstanding rating, but still find it to be coasting?

**Mrs Drummond:** No, under the old system it would be a failing school if it was coasting. Nowadays, it would be seen as an inadequate school. In terms of terminology, coasting is much more acceptable to parents, teachers and schools. A school cannot be said to be inadequate when children are still learning to read, write and do mathematics but are not doing as well as they should be doing. That is how I see a coasting school, but I know we are going to develop this. I have some concerns about how coasting schools will be evaluated. The Secretary of State said that they would be evaluated on the basis of more data, but I should like that evaluation to be widened slightly to include Ofsted inspections. Perhaps there could be mini-inspections to ensure that all the data were available.

Let me give an example. We consider the school of which I am a governor to be a rapidly improving school, but its current level is “requires improvement”, and the local authority sent us a warning letter last year because we had missed the overall target by just 1%. It was the maths that had let us down. However, the children have made very good progress throughout their time at the school.

Nearly all the children arrive at a level that is well below the average, and a large number are eligible for free school meals. Last year we had several level 6 results, and many level 5s. One reason for our not achieving higher results was the fact that children covered by our autism provision were included in the results. Children with special educational needs find tests very stressful, and often do not meet national standards in any event. I should like to see much more provision for such children, whether they are included in the overall results or treated differently. I should also like to see a completely different system of assessing, in particular, children with autism. Other children arrived during the school year speaking English as a foreign language, and it is difficult for teachers to raise such children to national standards. I should like to see a much more holistic approach to the categorisation of schools.

There is a new curriculum and assessment system, and schools are still settling down and working out how the new levels—exceeding expectation, at expectation or below expectation—will operate. The Department needs to help schools with those new levels, which are still quite confusing as schools develop their own methodologies. It is right for them to be able to do that, but no clear national guidelines have been provided. The results of school evaluations often hide the true picture, and I ask the Secretary of State to ensure that they are fair.

I agree that schools must become academies if their local authorities are weak. Portsmouth City Council was deemed to be the sixth worst authority in the country in this context, and during the 10 years for which the Liberal Democrats were in control, there was very little political will to improve educational standards. That has begun to change over the past year, under the new Conservative administration.

In many instances, when Portsmouth schools have become academies, children’s education has improved. I mentioned the Charter Academy in my maiden speech. In five years, its GCSE pass rate has risen from 3% to 85%. The local authority wanted to shut down the school, which is in an area of great deprivation, but fortunately the old head teacher saw its potential and brought in Ark Schools, which I consider to be one of the pinnacles of academy provision. I am pleased to learn that it has recently taken on some primary schools in Portsmouth as well. I recently visited Ark Ayrton with my hon. Friend the Minister for Schools. The head teacher of the primary school that it took over was extremely reluctant to allow the school to become an academy, but was forced to do so. She now says that it was the best thing that she could have done, that she wishes that she had done it a long time ago, and that she is receiving incredible support from Ark. Ark Dickens has taken over another school in my constituency—again, in an area of great deprivation—and I look forward to seeing a difference in children’s education there.

I have spoken before, outside the House, about the poor performance of my local authority. I agree with the National Union of Teachers that it should be the job of local authorities to assist schools, but where they are failing, we need an alternative, and free schools are providing that alternative. I am grateful to academies for giving some of the children in Portsmouth the education that they deserve, along with aspiration and the tools that will enable them to realise their ambitions.

7.53 pm

**Chris Evans** (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you for calling me, Mr Deputy Speaker. I congratulate you on your re-election as Chairman of Ways and Means. It is a pleasure to follow the new hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond). I was also pleased to hear from the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan), whose predecessor was and is a great friend of mine and was well liked throughout the House. He is sadly missed.

I support the amendment, because I believe that the Bill could have been much more ambitious than it is. It fails to provide a clear definition of a coasting school. A number of Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), have expressed concern about coasting schools. I am struck by the fact that the Secretary of State has come to the House

and—as she has done on five previous occasions—failed to provide a definition. I do not think it right for us to have to wait until the Committee stage of a Bill that includes the term for the Government to define it. What does the amorphous word “coasting” mean? Is it based on exam results, progress measures or Ofsted ratings? What defines a coasting school? We still do not know. That strikes me as a worrying feature of the Bill.

The Bill is important, and there are parts of it that I commend, but I believe that it has not gone far enough. We need to be much more ambitious and bold when we talk about education in this country. There is a massive difference between the levels of attainment of those who are receiving free school meals and their more affluent peers, but the Bill does not address it.

In 2009, the Centre for Development and Enterprise, a South African organisation, published a report entitled “International Best Practice in Schooling Reform”. It was based on workshops that had taken place in Washington D.C. Global education experts examined more than 100 school systems across the world to establish what worked in improving education and what did not. The report concluded that giving schools more autonomy was an “ineffective reform”. In fact, it argued that

“time required by school leaders to manage and run autonomous schools takes time away from supporting teachers and supervising the system”,

to the detriment of education outcomes.

It is not a question of more funding, which evidence shows does not work past a certain level. The Bill talks of converting failing or coasting schools to academies, but it should be about meaningful reform and the following of best practice all over the world. Unfortunately, it is sadly wanting in that regard.

I believe that there are five things that we must get right if we are to ensure that our education system improves. First, there must be a new appreciation that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. There is no more important lever for the improvement of student outcomes than teacher quality. The world’s top-performing systems recruit talented people and train them intensively. Teaching must be considered a prestigious profession and teachers must have all the support that they deserve. They should have competitive starting salaries and adequate remuneration for excellence, which can be affordable if the remuneration curve remains shallower than it is in other professions. Those who do not meet strict criteria, however, must be forced to leave teaching, or asked not to join in the first place. We should reward and support good teachers and make it significantly easier to get rid of bad ones.

Secondly, reforms must focus on improving teaching skills and changing classroom practice. According to the report from the Centre for Development and Enterprise, if teachers are given effective support and in-service training, student performance can be significantly improved within three to six years. Continuous professional development applies to other professions, so why can it not apply to teaching? Problems arise when teachers come straight out of university, do not interact with their peers and have no examples of excellence. The best systems in the world—those in Belgium, Finland, Hong Kong, Japan, the Netherlands and New Zealand—improve teachers’ skills by bringing professionalism, mentoring and apprenticeships back to teaching. They have

comprehensive feedback systems which enable teachers to learn from their mistakes and improve in problem areas.

In 2007, Eric Hanushek of Stanford University found that the only way to increase the economic output of school leavers was for students to learn effectively and to be taught well. We can achieve that only by supporting our teachers, and ensuring that teaching is a highly skilled, attractive career option that supports and constantly seeks to improve the people in it.

Thirdly, there is leadership. The best education systems recruit and train excellent head teachers—people with intrinsic leadership skills. I would wager that the best-performing academies are those with the best head teachers. Even in my south Wales constituency, where we have no academies, the best schools that I visit usually have the best head teachers. These people should be supported to become effective leaders, and not just effective educators. We must get this right, because without effective leadership the reforms will never be embedded.

To improve education we must look at not just the people, but the environment in which children learn, and that brings me to my fourth point. The Royal Institute of British Architects report, “Building a Better Britain” makes the case that good school design could have a direct impact on reducing maintenance costs and improving student well-being and attainment. For example, its evidence suggests that ensuring that corridors are designed so that they are not too narrow can significantly reduce bullying. Good design of schools delivers value not just now, but in the future.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, high performance requires that every child succeeds—not just the select few in the schools chosen, but every child, everywhere. From Land’s End to John o’Groats, from Treginnis to Lowestoft, all students need to be well educated and must be given the teaching they need to fulfil their ambitions. We need standards and measures of success relevant to the needs of our country. We need effective mechanisms to help schools to achieve those standards. Pressure without support does not yield better performance. We need to make sure that targets are being met. We need to identify the obstacles to success and put in place strategies to overcome them.

To reduce wide disparities in education and in the country at large we must overcome huge challenges. We must reverse decades of socio-economic problems keeping those in poorer areas from achieving their potential. The harsh reality is that the circumstances of someone’s birth are often to their greatest detriment in terms of how well they will do at school or how well they will do in life. We can help to overcome that. We can change the sad fact that being born poor means someone is likely to stay poor, but we can do so only with great teachers, with great schools and if we make the right choices and follow the evidence. The Government had a real opportunity in this Bill to set out an ambitious plan for Britain, but, unfortunately, they have been found wanting.

8.1 pm

**Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): I have listened with admiration to many of the maiden speeches made by hon. Members on both sides of this House and to the speeches of many new Members. Clearly, we have a breadth of experience in the education sector in this new Parliament, and that is so important.

[Lucy Frazer]

There can be nothing controversial about a desire to give our children the best start in life, whatever their background and wherever they live, and this Bill seeks to do that. Although more than 1 million more children are in good or outstanding schools than was the case in 2010, 1.5 million pupils are still taught in schools that do not meet those necessary standards.

I would like to discuss three critical elements of the Bill. First, it rightly recognises that a mediocre education is not good enough. As parents, we all want the best for our children and our Government should strive to deliver it. This Bill acknowledges aspiration, ensuring that schools will regularly assess their own performance and standards, and that they must never be complacent.

The second point is about control. This Bill is not about taking powers away from schools, but about giving them autonomy—and quicker. If schools become academies, they will have greater control over what they teach, when they teach it and who teaches it. We must recognise that the best people to run schools are teachers, and the excellent work of those teachers must be recognised.

Finally, the third point is about the people who lead our schools and help others that are failing. We recognise that, in building good schools, we need good and inspirational teachers, and I hope the profession will welcome the use of expert teachers to help drive coasting schools forward. The 1,000 national leaders of education are a vital component of those plans. They are the outstanding headteachers who work with schools in challenging circumstances to support school improvement. We must support and enable less good schools to learn from the best. In that respect, I wish to mention a school in my own constituency. Bottisham Village College, an outstanding school, is helping a local school, Netherhall School, which is in need of improvement. That is the sort of collaborative action that nurtures development. To improve our schools, we need partnerships: between local and national Government; between outstanding schools and those that are failing and coasting; and between trusts and management. It is not by standing still and doing nothing that we will improve our standards—it is by taking action and working together.

When we talk about what we want from our own children and from our students, we talk about aspiration, about the importance of learning from others and about aiming high, not settling for mediocrity. Those principles apply to schools, too, and they are the principles at the heart of this Bill.

8.5 pm

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I join others in congratulating hon. Members who have made their excellent maiden speeches today.

We share the Government's desire for excellence in all schools, irrespective of whether they are voluntary aided, academies, free schools or whatever. I listened to the Secretary of State's praise for sponsored academies, but the inconsistency and glaring omissions of this Bill are highlighted by the fact that the only sponsored academy in my constituency is also the only secondary school deemed to require improvement. Why did the Bill not include the incorporation of academy chains into Ofsted inspections?

I wonder how many more schools in future years are going to be a cause of concern or be deemed to be "coasting"—whenever that term is explained—before the growing challenge of teacher recruitment and retention is going to be properly addressed by this Government. How many inspiring teachers such as Neville McGraw, who taught my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), are going to be leaving the profession in the next few years? That is the issue of greatest concern to heads of schools in Hounslow, the borough covered by my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra).

I have also met a number of parents in recent months who are concerned about the extent to which their children are being taught by supply teachers. Yesterday, I spoke to the mother of a year 9 pupil in an outstanding school who had had five different supply teachers last week. At another great school, a science specialist school, a head of science cannot be recruited. What does this mean? Headteachers often find that they have only one or two applicants for each post and sometimes none at all. Some vacancies go on term after term and have to be filled with agency staff—expensive agency staff. In secondary schools in our borough, most subjects are now classified as shortage subjects, with there being a severe crisis in maths and science. Some schools struggle to appoint technology teachers, and home economics is a disappearing subject. Those pressures are going to get worse as the EBacc is rolled out. A further issue we face is that the immigration rules are not helping the retention of teachers who are doing well and teaching inspirationally, but are not going to be able to stay in the UK.

All of that leads to massive staff turnover, inconsistency in teaching standards and increasing dependence on supply teaching. Our party shares the Secretary of State's passion for standards, so why did she say nothing about this crisis? Instability and vacancies in schools negatively affect academic progress and pastoral support. Those who have left or are considering leaving the profession are demoralised with the pressures. In addition, all schools in Hounslow are expanding and we have new schools opening this September and next September, which only adds to the recruitment problem. One head hold told me, "Filling a science post in London is like trying to snatch honey from bees. In the end the students lose out significantly, no matter how much time and energy you put into supporting and developing teachers who are struggling."

The crisis has several elements, all of which we feel the Government should address, with greater priority than just finding new ways of intervening once things have gone wrong. First, teaching is a graduate profession, but not enough UK graduates are choosing teaching. In London, the private sector economy is picking up, as is the availability of higher paid jobs, which carry greater esteem than teaching. That is why teaching should be marketed as a valuable and worthwhile profession. We need more graduates to want to be teachers, and an even higher proportion of our best graduates to see the value of teaching as a long-term career. There needs to be a clear way into a teaching career. Several headteachers have told me that the routes into teaching are too complex and confusing, which creates yet another barrier to those graduates considering teaching as a possible career.

Schools Direct has not produced the desired number of quality trainees. Teach First, while providing high quality entrants, has issues with career retention. Researchers in education programmes have had major problems in the delivery of teacher trainees. One local school, Brentford School for Girls, has tackled the shortage of science teachers in a different way. The head told me at the summer fair on Saturday that the school has recruited good science graduates into unfilled posts, and it will train and develop those young people into being teachers. Those applicants were all keen to teach but had been confused by the routes of application, so they welcomed the school's approach.

I was told that the reduction in university training places is a major worry. Cuts in postgraduate certificate in education training places in supposed non-shortage subjects, such as history and business studies, have severely limited training places, even though there are some very high-quality graduates wanting to train in those areas. There is currently a major shortage of geography graduates going into teaching, yet the subject will be compulsory for those not doing history in the EBacc. On top of that, post-16 budget cuts mean that teachers are being asked to do more, thereby adding to the pressures and increasing the haemorrhage of already pressurised staff.

A third issue for us in London is the cost of living. Last week, the Minister for Schools said in the Adjournment debate on teacher recruitment and retention that there were no problems recruiting young teachers in London. There may not be a problem with recruitment, but there is certainly one with retention. Several heads in my constituency say they are having problems retaining teachers who want to buy their own home. Those teachers have to move well away from London to get new jobs elsewhere in order to buy their own home. The lack of urgency from the Government on the housing crisis leads me to believe that that problem will only get worse.

Finally, let me turn to teachers' morale. Recently, I have met many good teachers who want to leave the profession because of the workload generated by the plethora of sudden unplanned changes and the persistent berating of the achievements of teachers, pupils and schools by Government and the media. That is another complaint of headteachers. They told me that they are trying to keep their schools going when they are questioning their own capacity to continue in the profession given the relentless pressure that they are under, and the negating of their professionalism by this Government.

Inaccurate derision of the profession by the Government has a long-term impact on perceptions, and it discourages young people from considering the profession despite their own positive experience in the schools that they attended. It undermines the morale of senior staff and headteachers. Will the Government please stop undermining the morale of those who work long hours to ensure that our children get a good education? They should set a good example and use positive language—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I call Suella Fernandes.

8.13 pm

**Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con):** I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) and I congratulate hon. Friends and hon. Members on excellent maiden speeches.

Aspiration is today's buzzword. The reason why the Conservatives won the election was that we embodied the real sentiment of that word. What does aspiration mean? For me, our education reforms are the engine of aspiration and tackle social inequality at its root cause. Our one nation party says to every child that it does not matter where they start; they can get ahead through self-empowerment, taking responsibility and hard work. Nowhere do those values ring more loudly than in our schools and in this Bill.

In 2010, after 13 years of a Labour Government supposedly supporting education, two in five 16-year-olds left school functionally illiterate or innumerate. In a country where we have some of the best schools in the world, that is a shocking disgrace. It is therefore just and essential that the Government have powers to intervene in failing and coasting schools, and those powers are enabled in this Bill. We all know what coasting schools are. They are schools in affluent areas where there is no incentive to achieve beyond a C, D or borderline pass. One reason why I am so proud to support this Bill is that we are the only party—

**Kevin Brennan rose—**

**Suella Fernandes:** I wish to make progress. We are the only party that is courageous enough to talk honestly about failing schools. We have done that in the past by giving people, volunteers, teachers and parents a say in the solution.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Suella Fernandes:** I will not give way. Teachers are wonderful, but endemic weaknesses in the system stop our children getting the best. I have seen at first hand how our reforms have addressed the problem.

**Kevin Brennan:** Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

**Suella Fernandes:** No, I will not. I teamed up with a group of teachers to set up a free school in Wembley, my home town. Led by Katherine Birbalsingh, an inspiring headteacher, the school has some of the best staff in the country. As chairman of the board of governors, I can say that our aim is simple: to bring excellence and a private school quality to the inner city. I grew up in the area, and attended a state school at the beginning of my education. Teachers went on strike, discipline was poor and expectations were low. After designing the vision of a knowledge-based curriculum, we secured approval and Government funding.

**Kevin Brennan:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way; she is being very generous. Earlier in her remarks, she said that everyone knows what a coasting school looks like. Would she care to name for us the coasting schools in her constituency?

**Suella Fernandes:** I will not name any schools, but I have adequately defined the features and the hallmarks of coasting schools. It is clear that further guidance will be forthcoming.

After designing the vision of a knowledge-based curriculum for the free school in which I was involved, we secured approval and funding from the Government.

[*Suella Fernandes*]

We recruited staff and found a building. I am proud to say that Michaela Community School opened its doors last September to 120 12-year-olds and it is transforming their lives. Many of the children come from neighbouring council estates or areas such as Harlesden and Willesden. They have the chance to aim high because of inspired and innovative teaching. If one walks through the corridors, one can hear a pin drop, because pupils are quietly learning in their classrooms. I invite Members here to join them for lunch and they will see how polite they are. If they take a bus in the area, they will spot them by their impeccable uniform. Whether it is the practice of appreciation at lunchtime or the rigorous learning, Michaela Community School has been made possible only because teachers have been set free to teach and set high expectations. It was teachers, not the state, who saw a need and took action.

**Rachael Maskell:** Why has £241 million been spent on free schools in areas that do not have a crisis in school places?

**Suella Fernandes:** A key criterion for gaining Government approval for a free school is to establish need. There needs to be an established deficit in school places, which is evidenced in the data, to form part of the application.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Suella Fernandes:** I will make some progress. My point is that it was teachers, not the state, who saw the need and took action. Those teachers who exercised strong leadership were set free to teach the subjects about which they were passionate. They had freedom over staff, and over spending. That freedom is bolstered by the reforms in this Bill and is at the heart of aspiration.

8.19 pm

**Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Fareham (*Suella Fernandes*) on her speech. She spoke with singular clarity about her educational viewpoints and her constituency.

I declare an interest as the chair of governors of an academy school based in the city of Brighton and Hove. I have spoken before in this House about my journey through education, leaving school lacking the qualifications needed to succeed in life and therefore having to return to secondary school at the age of 25 to start over again. I approached the Bill with an open mind about its publicised aim of challenging underperformance throughout the education system. For me, excusing underperformance in schools rather than challenging it has always been a source of intense frustration, even anger, due to my own experiences.

There are many reasons to excuse failure, such as poor school performance, students living in areas of deprivation or the difficult family circumstances of some students, but for me those are barriers to overcome rather than reasons to excuse poor attainment. A student who graduates before overcoming those challenges will carry them into adulthood and for the rest of their lives, so I wholeheartedly support having a radically higher sense of ambition for young people. However, the Bill stands out more for what it does not cover than for what it does. It focuses on the performance of local authority

controlled schools, which are, in educational terms, one part of the challenge we face, but in reading it one might be forgiven for thinking that they are the only challenge.

I have some sympathy with the need to tackle the lack of ambition in some local authority departments, because I come from Brighton and Hove. Today, Ofsted released its findings on the education authority where I live, and judged that it “requires improvement”. A year ago, a Local Government Association peer review stated that the authority

“lacked ambition for young people”

and was not supporting school improvement with the vigour that was needed. After two such warnings in one year, I firmly believe that enough is enough. Every young person has the potential to succeed, but some need help to get there. People who do not share that belief have no place in running education systems and that is my warning to Brighton and Hove education authority as it responds to those challenges.

Underperformance is not the sole preserve of local authority education systems. If this Government truly cared about rooting out and challenging coasting schools, they would extend the reach of the Bill to include other organisations. The first would be underperforming academies, particularly good schools that are being held back by being locked into low-performing academy chains. Why the Government are not introducing measures to release them from the contracts with the same rapidity as the maintained schools covered by the Bill is a mystery to me. The second group would be coasting private schools that are registered with the Charity Commission and receiving tax breaks. They should also be expected to deliver the same improvements as those demanded of maintained schools.

I also have concerns about clause 8, which covers consultation. As chair of the governors of an academy, I feel strongly that links to the surrounding community beyond the students and parents are incredibly important for the success of the school. The predecessor of the school I now chair was in special measures at the time of the conversion and the consultation time was therefore limited, but the powers granted to the Secretary of State by the Bill will enable similarly rapid conversion for coasting schools. Unless a rapid consultation is carried out with extreme skill, that will disempower the school community and could well hinder the improvement that is needed and desired.

Academisation is one tool among many in improving local education. Others include improving teaching standards, better leadership and improving whole family approaches to education. Each of those is a means to an end, not an end in itself, but because the Government have prioritised the academy programme above other methods of tackling coasting schools, the future of individual schools has become an ideological battleground rather than a place where communities come together to express their ambitions for their school and for the next generation of young people. That is why the Bill is too limited and ideological to warrant our support.

8.24 pm

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): I, too, congratulate those hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches this evening. In particular, I was intrigued

by the comments of the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (William Wragg) about his experiences with Ofsted. I want to return to his words during my speech.

This afternoon, Labour has been accused of being ideologically driven in our concerns about the Bill and in our reasoned amendment. I believe that the opposite is true. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) talked about Greek mythology, and I might invoke that myself and describe the Bill as something of a Trojan horse. Among all the talk of standards and of improving schools, I think that there is another hidden agenda, which is the philosophical aim of taking the delivery of public services away from the public sector. I think that is one of the Government's real motivations.

The Bill vests greater centralised power in the Secretary of State, who appears to have decided that forced academisation is a golden bullet to improve school standards, but proportionally more academies are at "requires improvement" stage or below than local education authority schools. There is therefore evidence of an ideological drive from the Government, because their stated aim is to create at least 1,000 new academies during this Parliament, whereas the number of schools that are failing is about 250. The gap between those two figures suggest that this is about ideology rather than standards.

That gap must be why the Secretary of State has chosen to move the goalposts by introducing the new concept of a coasting school, although of course we do not know at this stage where she has moved the goalposts to. Accountability switches from parents and the local community via its council to the Secretary of State, meaning more centralisation from a Government who say one thing but do the opposite. It means fewer parental choices and less involvement.

One in four academies have seen their headteachers depart in the past year, prompting fears of a leadership crisis. Indeed, according to figures from UHY Hacker Young, which audits academy accounts, the figures are higher among secondary schools. The survey showed that although some of the departures are due to retirement, a tougher inspection regime and failing morale among headteachers were largely to blame. UHY Hacker Young said that the situation was putting potential heads off applying for the top job, causing an imminent recruitment crisis. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) talked about the recruitment crisis in the teaching profession and she was absolutely right, but if the Government's aim is to force the academisation of schools and bring in superheads, where will all these superheads come from if we cannot recruit heads for existing schools?

The Government will turn to forced academisation for ideological purposes, despite there being no evidence that it will work or that it will address the problems of leadership. My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) spoke passionately about the importance of leadership.

Let me return to the role of Ofsted. I understand that a firm inspection regime is needed, but there is despair in the teaching profession at the way Ofsted and the Government constantly change the goalposts for the targets that schools and teachers are expected to meet. There is a reliance on too many bare statistics, and teachers in Chester tell me that they are spending not

enough time teaching and too much time reporting on how they are teaching. One very experienced school governor—of an academy, I hasten to add—in Chester last week spoke to me of a

"cold wind of an obsession with accountability, measuring performance. It's all quantitative.... With Ofsted there is a fear of failure rather than a celebration of success."

That reminds me of what Sir Michael Wilshaw was quoted as saying in January 2013, I think, in *The Guardian*: "if morale is at an all-time low, then that is a good thing because that means that management"—

he is referring to schools' management—  
"is doing its job."

To some, that may sound like the smack of firm leadership; to me, it sounds like a licence for workplace bullying. It is no surprise that 40% of teachers leave in their five years on the job.

If teachers are to inspire our children, they have to feel inspiration themselves, and beating that inspiration out of teachers in a quest for figures and ticking boxes, all the while berating them as potential failures, will do nothing to raise standards. What will? Quality teaching and inspirational leadership make all the difference. The Government should be building leadership, not forcing heads out simply to justify academisation.

Last week, I visited an academy in my constituency, Mill View primary school, which under inspirational head Susan Walters has twice been rated outstanding, but it has achieved that rating because of the teaching and the leadership that she and her governors provide. She believes firmly in supporting her staff and in having a clear vision and goals that are understood and that all the staff buy in to. She shares responsibility within the school and she shares credit for success. She will drive staff forward, but their wellbeing remains her personal priority. She keeps parents engaged as well, whether using their expertise to help the continuing professional development that she provides for her staff, or perhaps planning school trips.

Chester Bluecoat primary is one of the most diverse schools in my constituency, with more than 20 languages spoken. Headteacher Vince O'Brien focuses on putting each child at the centre of their own learning programme and has maximised use of the school's building environment to inspire the children's imagination. Of course, he has also built a strong team of teachers and teaching assistants. Perhaps it is time we let teachers get on with the job they trained to do.

We should trust our teachers and not dangle the sword of Damocles over them. We should change the culture from threats and blame and fear of failure to one that aspires instead to celebrate success. The Bill does nothing to address the real problems in education; it only takes us down the blind alley of forced academisation driven by the Government's ideology and not by a desire to raise standards. It raises more questions than it answers and provides yet more churn and change where stability is required. I cannot support the Bill's Second Reading.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I think it would be appropriate to raise the time limit on speeches to 10 minutes.

8.31 pm

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this important Bill. I congratulate all those on both sides of the House who have made their maiden speech today, and done so very well.

I have an interest in the debate as a primary school governor, at Grove primary school in Chadwell Heath, and as a councillor—an unpaid councillor, I should emphasise, given recent media reports—in the London borough of Redbridge, so I have several different perspectives on the Bill.

I want to respond first to a comment made by the hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes), in her enthusiastic speech, on the record of the last Labour Government. The Conservatives really need to decide whether they are the heirs to Blair, championing the school reforms that they are happy to laud in the misguided hope that we will feel uncomfortable or embarrassed by the fact that during our 13 years in government we made an enormous difference; or they want to talk down the record of the Labour Government. They really cannot have it both ways.

As one who went to school under the last Labour Government and saw the improvements that were made, I am proud of the fact that we transformed the fabric of our schools through Building Schools for the Future. The secondary school I attended is now unrecognisable. It is an academy and its results have improved enormously. I am proud of the programmes the Labour Government introduced, such as the sponsored academies programme, which has delivered investment and greater freedoms and autonomy for our schools, excellence in cities and the London Challenge, tackling poor school performance, increasing educational achievement and tackling the inequality and educational disadvantage that holds back too many people, in particular those from the most disadvantaged families. I am also proud of initiatives started when we were in government, such as fast-track teaching and the major recruitment campaigns such as “Those who can, teach”, as well as the introduction of routes such as Teach First. Not only did we improve the quality and quantity of people entering the teaching profession, but we raised the standards and status of the profession.

That stands in stark contrast to the record of the five years of the coalition Government in terms of low morale and teachers leaving the profession in droves because of dissatisfaction caused by the Government’s reforms and the extent to which Ministers, for political gain, are happy to beat up on the teaching profession in the hope of bumping up a few points in the opinion polls. The present Government should show some humility about the record they inherit from the coalition. Ministers should come to the Dispatch Box with more answers about how to address the problems than we heard last Thursday, when my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) raised these issues in her Adjournment debate.

This is the first education Bill that we have had from a Conservative Government since the 1990s, and it says an awful lot about this Conservative Government and their aspirations and breadth of ambition for our schools that the Bill is so thin and so ill-defined. If the Secretary of State for Education, when she was at the Dispatch Box earlier, had not been so busy providing a running

commentary on the Labour leadership contest—perhaps she is launching her own gambit for the Conservative leadership contest that we will see in the next couple of years—maybe she would have had time to provide a little more definition to a Bill whose Second Reading she expects us to troop into the Lobby and vote for this evening.

Not only does the Bill think small, but it continues the mistakes of the previous Government. There is a misguided focus on one part of the system, local authority maintained schools, and one solution, academisation. I have no doubt that for some schools conversion to an academy and bringing in new leadership and new funding is the right way to turn around people’s life chances through improvement in the quality of provision at the school, but as so many Opposition Members have said this afternoon, that is just one route towards improvement. I challenged the Secretary of State earlier with a case study from my own borough, where Snaresbrook primary school was deemed by Ofsted to be failing. Action was already being taken by the local authority in partnership with the governors, the parents and the pupils, and as a result of those efforts the school was already on the path to improvement, with renewed leadership and a re-energised and refocused governing body. To have forced academisation at that stage, as the Bill would require, would have disrupted progress.

The Secretary of State’s predecessor was right to listen to local people, parents and the Conservative-led local authority at the time and conclude that it was right for the school to continue as part of the local authority family because it had a clear sense of how it would move forward. I am pleased to report that Snaresbrook primary school has made considerable improvements within the local authority family.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): I have listened with care to the eloquent representations that are being made, but is it not dangerous, whichever side of the argument one is on, to paint one era as being rosy and another era as being grim? If one looks at the situation under Labour, it is a fact that standards slipped. In the PISA league standards we went from 8th to 28th in maths and from 7th to 25th in reading. Although I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman’s school bucked that trend, it is correct to say that these are—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. The hon. Gentleman should resume his seat. Interventions must be short. He cannot make a speech, only a quick intervention in order to allow the person who is speaking to respond. If he wanted to make a speech, he would have been better off putting his name down. That is good advice. I am sure he has finished speaking. Is that correct?

**Alex Chalk:** Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Wes Streeting:** I am grateful for the intervention, because the hon. Gentleman makes precisely the point that I am trying to make and reflects the narrow-minded ideologically driven view that the only route to improvement is academisation. That is exactly what the Bill presents us with. What we had before was the flexibility to look at the particular circumstances of a school and decide whether it was right that it should be converted to an academy or remain part of the local authority family, or whether other means for improvement should be considered. The Bill would remove the flexibility that the previous

Secretary of State exercised in the case of the local primary school in my borough and would compel it to become an academy, which may or may not be the right way forward. If the hon. Gentleman is on the Bill Committee, perhaps I can gain his support for amendment along those lines.

Other hon. Members have referred to the oversight and inspection of academy chains. Following on from the intervention, it is right that there are some fantastic academy chains which are providing great service to the schools within their family—chains such as Ark and the Harris federation, which are in the business of education for the right reasons. They want to tackle educational inequality and improve life chances and educational outcomes, and those chains do a fantastic job. But I still cannot fathom why Ministers are not listening to the concerns that have been raised by the Sutton Trust and Sir Michael Wilshaw, and even some of the evidence produced by the Department itself, which is that we are doing some schools no service at all by trapping them in academy chains that are failing them. Why do we not open them up to the rigour of inspection? Why do we set academy chains apart and not require them to achieve the same high standards and undergo the same inspections as others do?

This is the contradiction in the Government's approach. They present Labour Members as taking a narrow-minded ideologically driven dogmatic approach, but it is actually the Government that are taking that approach. It is they who are making an assumption that academy chains can do no wrong, whereas we acknowledge that there is good and bad right across the mixed economy of education. We can accept that. Why cannot the Government do so, and why are they not addressing that question in the Bill?

Contrary to what the Government have said, academies do not always outperform local authority-maintained schools on educational improvement. Of course anyone who wants to skew the statistics in a certain way can draw the conclusion that they want, but the Government should look at the research produced by the National Foundation for Educational Research and others, which compares schools like for like. If we compare similarly performing schools, like for like, and examine them within the context of local authority-maintained schools or academy chain schools, there is not much difference between the two. If there is to be a more evidence-based approach to the debate, Members need to examine the evidence rather than simply parroting propaganda produced in a remarkably poor fashion by the Whips of the governing party.

Finally, I want to mention the definition of "coasting". The hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) gave the House what she thought was a very good definition of the term, and in some cases I might even agree with her. I know that she is being billed as a rising star in her party, but with the greatest respect, she is not yet the Education Secretary. We have not heard a definition of coasting schools from either the Secretary of State or Ministers, even though their Bill is now before the House of Commons for its Second Reading and the concept of coasting schools is at its centre. Perhaps the hon. Lady should be on the Government Front Bench, because she is providing the answers that her Ministers are not. For now, however, we have absolutely no idea what coasting schools are, how they will be judged and measured, and how the Secretary of State will intervene to improve

them apart from through forced academisation, which I have already said might not be the best way forward. Why on earth those on the Treasury Bench expect us to troop into the Lobby with them to support the Second Reading of such a half-baked Bill I do not know. They need to be a bit more reasonable in their expectations.

The Bill also says absolutely nothing about the people on the fringes of education. For example, there are 17,000 pupils in pupil referral units, only 1.4% of whom will get five good GCSEs. Where do they figure in the Bill? How are their needs going to be addressed? And of course, the Bill is simply looking at the problems that exist now, rather than at the education system of the future. For the Conservatives' first Bill since they entered Government to have such a narrow focus shows a real lack of imagination. In this century, this country will have to work and compete very hard on the global stage for the jobs of the future. That will require all our young people to go through an excellent, world-class education system that thinks hard about pedagogy and about the manner and the environment in which we teach in a rapidly changing world. There is absolutely nothing about that context in the Bill. It is a narrow, ill-defined Bill that is unworthy of a Second Reading. I might have been in the House only a short time, but I know a half-baked Bill when I see one. It is time for our coasting Ministers to provide better definitions before turning up with such a Bill.

8.43 pm

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): I rise to support clause 13, which promotes best practice on adoption through regional adoption agencies. First, however, I should like to congratulate my Cheshire neighbour, the Minister for Children and Families, on his promotion to Minister of State, and pay tribute to him for the excellent work that he led in the previous Parliament to improve the adoption process and the support for adopters and adopted children. It is clearly in recognition of that that he has retained his portfolio, and he is bringing forward this further initiative today with undiminished vigour. I know that he grew up with some 90 fostered or adopted siblings and that he understands these issues intimately. He understands that living in a loving family can give a child the best possible start in life.

Real progress on adoption has already been made as a result of reforms initiated by the previous Government. In 2014, 5,000 children were found the permanent home that they needed—a record increase of 26% on the previous 12 months. The increase in the past three years has been a combined 63%—a remarkable achievement reflecting an improvement in the life chances of thousands of children. That has been achieved through implementing determined improvements, initiated, as I say, by the previous Government. Clause 13 follows on from that.

Since 2010, a number of adoption support reforms have been introduced so that the families can be confident that support will be provided if needed. These include placing responsibility on local authorities to inform prospective adopters and adoptees of their rights to assessments of need and entitlements to other adoption support services; improving access to specialist therapeutic services through the £19 million adoption support fund; extending entitlements on priority schools admissions; access to the pupil premium; and reforming adoption pay and leave.

[Fiona Bruce]

In 2013 the adopter approvals process was reformed to ensure that prospective adopters could be assessed and approved more quickly. Most approvals now take place within six months—or should do. The new assessment process is just as rigorous as its predecessor but is structured to ensure swift and appropriate progress. The Department for Education has ensured that there has been continued improvement in opportunities to support matching children to adopters. That includes the work of the national adoption register service and the provision of exchange days and adoption activity days.

The Department funds First4Adoption, which is a national information service for adoption in England. The Department has also provided £17 million in additional funding over 2013-16 to help voluntary adoption agencies to recruit and approve more adopters, including those who can meet the needs of children who are harder to place. The Government have provided local authorities with £200 million over 2014-16 to support adoption reform on the ground and improve the recruitment of adopters. Last year, the Department and First4Adoption worked closely together in developing promotional resources in order to reach out to anyone interested in adoption. It is particularly important—the Minister is aware of my concern about this—that adoption is promoted to women with unplanned pregnancies as an option for them to consider. In 2014, the introduction of the Adoption Leadership Board headed by Sir Martin Narey has helped to drive further progress in recruiting new adopters.

Tremendous progress has been made, but more needs to be done. More than 3,000 children are still waiting to be adopted—to be matched with new parents. Sadly, more than half have already spent 18 months in care, despite enough approved adopters being readily available. Ministers are right to try to address this; it is so important because it is a matter of social justice. Children who experience a loving, stable family home in their early years are more likely to replicate that in later life in their own homes. Sadly, that is also the case vice versa. Children who do not experience supportive family life often experience other unfair disadvantages that are drivers of poverty, educational and employment challenges, physical and mental health issues, addictions, and debt and relationship problems often lasting well into adult years.

Clause 13 is important in promoting, as it will, best practice across regions. When trying to place a child from, say, east Cheshire for adoption, there is surely no reason to focus on east Cheshire families if a loving family in west Cheshire, or indeed nearby Staffordshire, provides the answer. Many of the current boundaries are arbitrary. I am pleased that Ministers want to break this down and ask local authorities and local adoption agencies to work collaboratively and creatively on the recruitment, assessment and approval of prospective adopters, and on decisions about the placement of children with families and ongoing support.

I understand that in the United States a form of “adoption speed dating”—my term—allowing children to meet prospective families is proving more successful than anticipated. Prospective adopters might have a particular picture in mind of the kind of child or the age of the child they want to adopt, but given the chance to meet several children in an informal atmosphere, they often realise that they can widen their ideas, and

there are successful matches from such events are at positive levels. That is the kind of creative thinking that the Bill seeks to encourage.

I was surprised to discover that there are as many as 180 different councils and agencies recruiting and matching children for adoption. That number seems incredibly large, especially as some provide adoption for a relatively small number of children. The number of agencies must be bewildering for would-be adopters, so the possibility offered by the Bill for the rationalisation of those numbers should promote the sharing and increase of best practice, as well as assist would-be adopters.

Of course, there are currently no barriers to councils working together to streamline adoption services, so I am pleased that there are examples of good practice to lead the way. For example, Warrington, Wigan and St Helens councils are already working together in the north-west. I am pleased that councils will be able to draw on external expertise to make their arrangements. Coram, a successful voluntary adoption service, already works with councils, including Harrow, Kent and Cambridgeshire councils. They—and, more importantly, local children—are already benefiting from those joint-working arrangements.

I am pleased that the Minister is on record as stating that he would prefer regional adoption agencies to spring up organically and be organised locally—as opposed to being imposed by Whitehall—and in a form chosen by the local authority and/or registered adoption society. We are all agreed that, in this policy area, one size does not fit all, so I welcome the fact that the Government’s approach reflects that.

I know we are using the term “regional adoption agencies” to describe the outcome of the reforms, but it is worth saying that they do not have to meet some fixed definition of “regional”. Ministers have said that local councils are free to organise themselves however they see fit, as long as they achieve sufficient scale to drive the efficiencies we all want to see. New regional adoption agencies can work across county or regional boundaries, minimising the delays in matching children with new homes. We all know that is critical, as a few months can be a very long time in the life of a young child, with their attendant needs for development, security and a loving family. I welcome the Government’s commitment to practical and financial support to help to deliver those changes. I am confident that, with that support, the majority of local authorities will see the advantages of joint working.

Evidence suggests that councils tend to look for adopters in-house before looking for them in other councils, which can result in children waiting longer than need be for new families. The Bill’s proposals are therefore important, as they will produce a culture change. The Government are sending out a clear message that that should happen—hence the proposal that councils should form regional agencies voluntarily but that, through new powers, the Government could, if need be, require councils to combine their adoption functions if they fail to join services voluntarily within the next two years. That underlines the determination of the Government to see these changes happen.

I urge all Members across the House to support clause 13—indeed, I have heard no valid arguments as to why we should not do so.

8.53 pm

**Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), and a particular pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), who I think kicked this sorry excuse of a Bill into next week.

I congratulate the hon. Members for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) and for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) on their maiden speeches today. It's a lovely feeling when you've nailed it—I know what it's like.

I come to this debate as a governor of Thorpe St Andrew school—an outstanding local authority school; I am very proud of it. I will direct my contribution to the education component of the Bill, starting with what I believe is one of its overarching aims, namely, to build on the work of the Education Act 2011. If that Act could be described as the ignition of an engine to drive the dismantling of our public education system, this Bill is intended to turbocharge it—as the PM might say, “Fire up the Quattro, Nicky!”

In my constituency of Norwich South, the vultures are not just circling in anticipation of the Bill's passage; they are already hacking away at the juiciest cuts. The Inspiration Trust has its beady eye on the Hewett local authority school and the £60 million of land that it sits on—land that belongs to the people of my city, not to what is little more than a corporation masquerading as a so-called educational charity. A secretive, unaccountable corporation in all but name, it has links to the very heart of this Government in the form of Theodore Agnew—a Conservative party donor and non-executive board member initially at the Department for Education, but now at the Ministry of Justice. I am sure that irony has not been missed by the parents and pupils of Hewett, who have seen little in the way of justice when it comes to having a say in their school's future. That situation will be faced by many more communities if the Bill is passed in its current form.

In saying that, I recognise that there are good and decent academy chains out there, such as the academies run by the Co-operative Academies Trust, which are genuinely accountable and act in the public interest to improve the education of our children. Alas, the Inspiration Trust is not one of them. The Bill worsens rather than improves the chances of holding it to account.

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the other problems with the Bill is the lack of academies and sponsors who are able and willing to take on the number of schools that the Government intend to convert? The Co-operative can take on only so many schools. Is he concerned that the schools he describes in his constituency may have little choice other than to be forcibly taken over by the trust that he mentioned?

**Clive Lewis:** My hon. Friend makes an important and alarming point. Like many other trusts, the Inspiration Trust has already gobbled up tens of millions of pounds worth of public land and buildings and now, emboldened by the Bill, it finds its appetite whetted for yet more pickings.

Last year, using freedom of information requests, an investigation by *The Guardian* revealed that academy schools have paid millions of taxpayer pounds into the private businesses of directors, trustees and their relatives.

**Rachael Maskell:** Given the case that my hon. Friend described from his constituency, does he agree that there are real points of concern in the Bill about the weaknesses of consultation not just on academy status, but on the identity of the sponsors?

**Clive Lewis:** My hon. Friend is right: there is neither sufficient consultation nor sufficient scrutiny.

Even a report for the Education Committee, with its Government majority, has said that

“checks and balances on academy trusts in relation to conflicts of interest are still too weak.”

Sadly I see nothing in the Bill to remedy that, and much to make it worse.

The Committee also questioned the so-called not for profit branding being used by many trusts and called for more regulation and greater transparency. Instead, the Bill offers less of both and fast-tracks academisation, removing any form of consultation and robbing communities even of the enfeebled fig-leaf consultations that the Academies Act 2010 offered.

A great Member of this House, the late Tony Benn, suggested five questions to ask those in power. I would ask them of the Inspiration Trust and many other academies. What power have they got? The answer: too much. Where did they get it from? From those on the Government Benches. In whose interests do they use it? Judging by the money that Theodore Agnew is pumping into the Conservative party, I speculate that it is not in ours. To whom are they accountable? According to the Education Committee, no one in particular. And the most important question of all: how do we get rid of them? We cannot.

I see nothing in this Bill that seriously challenges that glaring lack of democratic accountability. As Tony Benn said:

“Anyone who cannot answer the last of those questions does not live in a democratic system.”—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 685.]

That goes to the heart of my argument about why we must oppose the Bill. This is not just a smash and grab on our public schools, their buildings, equipment and the very land they sit on, but an attack on the values that we on both sides of the House should hold dear—the values of democracy, accountability and transparency, especially when dealing with the allocation and use of public funds and giving local communities a real say in their children's education.

A total of 145 academies are currently rated as inadequate, but nothing in the Bill deals with that. With the Education Committee this year saying that there was no evidence academisation in and of itself has improved educational standards, we have to question why the Bill is before the House. I cannot believe that it is on the basis of a fair and open-minded assessment of the best interests of our constituents and their children. It is their interests that I represent, however, and in their interests that I shall vote against the Bill and, instead, vote for the Opposition amendment. I urge the House to do the same.

8.59 pm

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow so many excellent maiden speeches, especially those by Government Members who are former

[*Louise Haigh*]

teachers and who called on the Secretary of State to tackle the crisis of morale, recruitment and retention among teachers, which they have obviously experienced. It is also an incredible pleasure to follow my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) and for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), who made excellent contributions on the principles of what I and many colleagues believe to be a Bill that fails to address its professed aims.

The guiding principles of any education Bill that leaves this House should be how it improves the life chances of our children. It therefore troubles me that the Government are intent on pursuing academisation at all costs, regardless of the evidence or the potential impact on pupils, particularly the most disadvantaged. My broad concern is that the Bill will force the Secretary of State to force academisation, regardless of the specific circumstances of the school and even if there is a clear alternative path to improvement.

When the last Labour Government introduced the academies scheme, it was intended to offer greater resources, new leadership and a fresh start to struggling schools. That principle has been abandoned in the Government's programme, which instils competition into the education system and imposes almost complete centralisation. Indeed, the Bill finally removes the local authority, governors and, most shockingly, parents from the consultation process, denying them a voice completely.

As hon. Members have indicated, clauses 1 and 7 not only increase the power of the Secretary of State to force academisation, but introduce a statutory duty on her to issue an academy order for any school rated inadequate by Ofsted. The Government have estimated that the process will lead to an extra 1,000 schools being converted into academies over the course of this Parliament. That will constitute the largest wave of forcible academisation since the inception of academies.

We have had little assurance from the Government that forcing the academisation of swathes of our schools will improve those schools or the life chances of their pupils. Indeed, as we have heard, finding sponsors who are capable of driving improvement in at least 1,000 new academies will not be easy. Voices from across the sector have raised concerns over whether the academy chains on offer are capable of driving improvement. The Sutton Trust, in its 2014 report, found that

“a majority of the chains analysed still underperform the mainstream average on attainment for their disadvantaged pupils.”

Even the Education Committee, just this year, concluded:

“Current evidence does not allow us to draw conclusions on whether academies in themselves are a positive force for change.”

Does that not get to the heart of the matter? In a headlong rush to pursue academisation at all costs, the Government are ignoring the evidence and failing to take account of the specific circumstances of schools. Surely the Secretary of State should be compelled to force academisation only if the evidence supporting academy status is overwhelming and largely unchallenged? The reality is anything but that.

If the Bill is allegedly about driving school improvement, surely the Secretary of State should at least operate consistently by signalling a move towards driving improvement among academies too. However, there is

no parallel requirement for the Secretary of State to act if an academy is shown to be failing. There is not even provision for Ofsted to carry out inspections of academy chains, despite the Sutton Trust reporting that the poor results of some academy chains represent a “clear and urgent problem”.

Is the Bill not a clear case of the Government putting ideology first? That is particularly important, given the pressures that schools are currently under. Is it really wise to impose wholesale structural change on a school if the issues that are contributing to its underperformance are nothing to do with the structure of the school? The problem of school places and the vexed issue of teacher recruitment and retention, which I and hon. Friends have raised in this House on a number of occasions already in this Parliament, will not disappear upon academisation. Forcing the academisation of schools will do nothing to address those, the most significant of issues for our schools and children; in fact, it may even exacerbate the crisis.

With Department for Education figures showing a 33% under-subscription of teachers in the core STEM subjects for the year ahead, and with schools in my constituency not receiving a single application when putting out national adverts for science teachers, how does the Secretary of State expect the Bill to address the teacher shortage that is fast turning into a crisis? Surely, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), it would be better to have a Bill before us that focused on tackling the very real issues that our schools face—a Bill that put evidence at the heart of any changes. Instead, we have a draconian Bill that causes a further massive centralisation of power into the hands of the Secretary of State.

If the Government's primary interest is to drive up standards, I am afraid that this Bill would not pass that very test. With very little evidence to suggest that academisation drives up standards and with the Government doing nothing to drive up standards among failing academies, it seems wrong-headed for the Government to make the entire focus of the Bill a push to academise—regardless of whether it will improve schools or the life chances of schoolchildren. With such significant issues facing our schools and children, I am afraid that this Bill constitutes a missed opportunity to tackle the educational inequalities that scar many of our constituencies and to ensure that we have schools fit to provide the next generation with the education they deserve.

9.5 pm

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): I, too, congratulate hon. Members who have made their initial contributions in today's debate. It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), and particularly for Norwich South (Clive Lewis). He and I between us have doubled Labour's representation in the east—from not a lot to, sadly for us, not quite enough.

The Bill claims that schools should do better, and no one is going to disagree with that, but the real question is whether the Bill provides the best way to go about it. Representing an education city, where nearly 1,500 young people are attending schools rated as “less than good”, if one trusts that definition, I find that to be a question well worth asking.

The trouble is that the Bill does not address some of the obvious problems, such as inadequate funding. As a Cambridgeshire Member, I can hardly stand up today without pointing out the chronic long-term underfunding from which Cambridgeshire schools have suffered in comparison with other areas. It is worth pointing out that, partly as a consequence of foolish decisions made in the past by Conservative county councils, today's young people should not be made to pay for the political errors of previous generations. As the Government consider the national funding formula, I urge them to create a long-term change that will correct this imbalance. The last Parliament saw some limited progress in that area, and produced a welcome, although relatively small, sum for Cambridge schools. This progress, however, will need to be improved on massively if we are to bridge the funding gap that has so weakened investment in schools for decades.

I would ask—I am not entirely sure that it will be achieved—for any changes made to be done in an equitable way across the country, rather than being just a further cash grab at other parts of the country that have already suffered and lost out heavily. I would ask, too, that any such funding changes do not reduce the minimum funding guarantee for the most disadvantaged schools, where such an impact would again mean the worst-off schools disproportionately bearing the brunt of Government meddling in education.

I suspect that that point will resonate with many of the people I meet in schools—the headteachers, teachers and support staff to whom I speak regularly. The problem with the Bill, as so many others have noted, is that further structural change is not what is needed to improve schools. What we need are good teachers, good leaders, good support staff and a whole team highly motivated, well rewarded and well regarded. Sadly, we are a long way from that. As we have heard, a record number of teachers left the profession last year, and, as a combined result of these incessant cuts, the attack on morale and exodus of over-worked teachers, even in a prosperous city such as Cambridge, 7% of the teaching work force is unqualified, and in some schools, it is double that number.

**Christian Matheson:** Is my hon. Friend aware that these problems are not just happening in Cambridge? The headteacher of one school in the Chester area has for financial reasons been unable to appoint a qualified modern languages teacher, while a music teacher who happens to have a French A-level is teaching early-years French. The head of modern languages in that school has expressed concern to me that the children affected might be lost to languages for ever. That is entirely because of a lack of qualified teachers—and that is due, in turn, to a lack of resources for appointing them.

**Daniel Zeichner:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is shameful that in one of my schools one in seven teachers is unqualified, and parents are horrified by that. I entirely endorse his comments.

Another issue that is not addressed in the Bill is the bizarrely named Priority School Building programme, which appears to be neither a priority programme nor a building programme. As we discovered last week, its rate of achievement is running at something like 5%. In my constituency, we have the rare occurrence of a new build that is currently under construction, but to such

an incredibly low standard that the school has had to sell off its own assets to fund a widening of the corridors. The original plans would have made them so narrow that it would have been a depressing building. Far from lifting standards and inspiring pupils in a disadvantaged area, it would have made the situation worse.

**Rachael Maskell:** At Tang Hall School in my constituency the children are freezing in the winter. They have to wear hoodies, and they are still not warm. Will that not have an impact on standards in that school, and should investment not be put into improving school buildings to improve standards?

**Daniel Zeichner:** Indeed it should, and that resonates with those of us with long memories who remember what life was like under the Conservatives 20 years ago. We thought we'd got past that, didn't we? If improving schools rather than cutting costs were the Government's aim, they would be building to the highest standards, not the lowest.

I will conclude by reflecting on the acute pressure on school places, another issue that has not been addressed. In Cambridgeshire, which is a high-growth area, we expect to see a massive increase in numbers the coming years. Is it not extraordinary that this pressing issue barely gets a mention in the Bill? It is not just a Cambridgeshire problem, because the situation is similar across the country. Why are the Government not addressing it?

A discussion on education is always welcome, but the Bill fails to address the issues that matter. Frankly, the problem is not so much coasting schools as a Government who do not understand the problem and so inevitably get the wrong answer—we could say, a Government who require improvement.

9.12 pm

**Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op):** We have had heard much discussion from Members on both sides of the House today, and a lot of questions have still not been answered. We are still trying to find out what "coasting schools" actually means. That term is central to the new powers provided in the Bill. Does the Minister not feel that the definition of that term should have been included in the Bill, so that we could be clear about the exact powers that we are voting on?

One of my biggest issues with the Bill is the huge powers that are being passed over to the Secretary of State, many of which are to be taken up by the regional schools commissioners, who have performance targets as part of their remit. Is there not a conflict of interest if those commissioners are to be rewarded for academising schools?

**Clive Lewis:** The regional schools commissioners report to the headteacher boards. In my constituency, one person who has been appointed to the headteacher board is Dame Rachel de Souza, who will now be making decisions on which schools will be academised and where there will be free schools. Does my hon. Friend not feel that there is something inherently wrong with that?

**Kate Osamor:** I totally agree, and that is what I want to ask the Minister. Does he not think that such people are wearing two hats, and that there is a grey area that needs more explaining?

**The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb):** I say to the hon. Lady and to the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) that the Inspiration Trust is one of the most successful academy chains in the country and is transforming the quality of education in the part of the country that the hon. Gentleman represents. If I were in his shoes, I would go and see the Thetford academy and some of the other schools—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. Minister, I want you to save some speech for later.

**Kate Osamor:** I would ask the Minister to be open, and to ensure that those of us representing constituencies where that could happen feel that it is above board. Until such time, that question will float. I would like him to answer it.

**Louise Haigh:** The debate is not just between my hon. Friend and the Minister. A great many other stakeholders should be involved in the process when academies want to take over schools, not least parents and governors. Does she agree that it is appalling that parents have been completely removed from the consultation process in academies?

**Kate Osamor:** Parents should be totally involved in the education of their children. In the new academisation process, parents are not on governing bodies, which is an issue in itself that the Minister should look in to.

**Daniel Zeichner:** Does my hon. Friend agree that there is something curious—I welcome it—about the development of regional schools commissioners? Some of us will remember that, when the process first started, many of us suggested that things could not continue with everything being done from the centre. We now have regional schools commissioners. Does she agree that we might end up with that being further sub-divided—we might end up with something that is remarkably like local education authorities?

**Kate Osamor:** I totally agree with all the interventions apart from the Minister's. On that ground, I will not support the Bill.

9.16 pm

**Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab):** It is an early hour for me to be speaking in such a debate, but I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Labour opposition to the Bill.

We have had a very good debate and a great number of contributions—in the end, we had, I think, 30 contributions from the Back Benches. We heard from the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman), and the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), who is in her place, made her maiden speech. I join those who have congratulated her on it. She told us that, prior to coming to the House, she had been a physics teacher, and had then decided to retrain as a stonemason. She offered her services to the House in the massive refurbishment that is likely to have to take place in years to come. I have to tell her—she may be disappointed—that, if she is not engaged by the House of Commons as a stonemason, unfortunately the Labour party will not be in need of the services of a

stonemason for the foreseeable future, and probably never in the future will we need her services. I congratulate her on her maiden speech, which was extremely effective and fluent. I hope she makes many more such contributions during her time in the House.

We heard contributions from the hon. Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) and from my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), and a maiden speech from the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), who is not yet back in his place. I am sure messages are being sent to hon. Members in the various corners of the building and that they are working very hard to return for the winding-up speeches.

The hon. Gentleman's maiden speech was very fluent. He reminded us that he is not the only Berry in the House. [*Interruption.*] I welcome him back to his place. Before he arrived, I was just saying how much the House enjoyed his maiden speech, which I congratulate him on. I understand the problem he has been encountering with his parliamentary mail as a result of not being the only Berry in the House. My right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Kevin Barron) and I share similar but not exactly identical names. On new year's eve a couple of years ago, I was very briefly knighted by the *Daily Mail* online as a result of the similarities of our names. I had to explain that I was more shovelry than chivalry, and that the knighthood probably was not intended for me.

We also had a speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), who movingly told us about the GCSE English teacher who made a great contribution to his life and future prospects. My hon. Friend is right: it is the quality of teaching that counts, so research shows, more than the quality of or the differences between schools. It is the difference between teachers in schools that is even more important, and we should all seek to raise the standing and quality of the teaching workforce. As a former teacher, I often meet ex-pupils in all sorts of places. They have not yet made any complaints, but I doubt that I would ever get as great an endorsement as the one my hon. Friend gave to his English teacher. I am sure that he will be very proud of the mention he got in the House.

We had speeches from the hon. Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter), who spoke about adoption; from the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown); and from the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (William Wragg), who also told us that he was a former teacher and brought his expertise to the debate. I was going to say “Llongyfarchiadau” to the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts), but she is not yet back in her place—that is not her fault because the wind-up speeches started early. She made an impressive maiden speech and I congratulate her on it. I also congratulate her on her mastery of the Welsh language for someone who was born in London. It is far greater than mine, even though I was born in Wales.

We also had a maiden speech from the hon. Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall), and he told us of his experience in the retail sector. We have that in common, as I was once a Saturday boy in Marks and Spencer, as well as a warehouse cleaner in Fine Fare, at 48.5p an hour, which shows how long ago it was—long before the Labour Government brought in the minimum wage.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), although I must correct her slightly. She referred several times to the Bill as “draft legislation”. It is understandable why, as a new Member, she might think it is a draft Bill, and many hon. Members have pointed out that it has the lack of quality of a draft Bill, but it is the actual Bill. This is what the Government have introduced, and they are asking us to give it a Second Reading. I am not surprised that she has decided not to support it tonight, given that in her eyes it is only a draft Bill.

We had a contribution from the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson)—I am glad to see him in his place—who told us that his wife struggles to get our proceedings on broadband in his constituency, so that she can watch his speeches. I recommend the BBC Parliament channel, where his wife could join dozens of other viewers in enjoying our proceedings. [*Laughter.*]

My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) spoke passionately and with great knowledge about adoption. We heard from the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan), who is not yet in her place. I am sure she will be with us shortly. We heard a very fine speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), who put her finger on the shortfalls in the Bill. In particular, she emphasised its illiberality, and I will return to that issue later.

We had contributions from the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) and from my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), who brought his great experience from the Education Committee, and pointed out that the Bill does not seem to be based on the Committee reports published earlier this year.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond), who is in her place, told us that she had been a lay inspector, and I very much welcome the expertise she brought to the debate. In responding to my intervention, she showed the difficulty with the vagueness of the definition of coasting. She seemed to suggest that only inadequate schools could be deemed to be coasting. Obviously, there is a lot more we need to tease out in Committee on what exactly the Government’s thinking is on this matter. A lot of hon. Members seemed to suggest that they knew what a coasting school was, but there seemed to be very different interpretations of that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) spoke passionately about the importance of education and in particular the quality of teaching, and we heard from the hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer). My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) emphasised that the Bill is deficient in not dealing with the key issue of teacher shortages, which we predict will be a problem in the next few years. The hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) made a very fine speech, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle), who spoke passionately about schools in his constituency and the need for all of us to be passionate about school improvement.

We had a contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson). My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) made a brilliant speech and put his finger right on the

problems in the Bill and why it is not worthy to be placed in front of the House of Commons. We had contributions from the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis). He took the trouble to congratulate all hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches by saying: “It’s a lovely feeling when you’ve nailed it—I know what it’s like.” He did not add, “even if I say so myself.” He raised extremely important and powerful points about conflicts of interest and the use of public funds and public resources. I am sure we will hear more about that in the weeks to come.

We had a very fine speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh). There were contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), who spoke extremely well about schools in his constituency, and from my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor). There were 30 contributions in all from the Back Benches and it was an excellent debate.

**Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Fairer funding is vital to my area. Does the hon. Gentleman and the Labour party back the F40 fairer funding campaign that is so key to my constituents in Northumberland?

**Kevin Brennan:** I recommend to the hon. Lady the very good debate we had on this matter in Westminster Hall just before the end of the previous Parliament. I spoke for the Opposition and we absolutely support fairer funding. If she would like to consult that debate—it is not the subject under discussion today—she will see our position in more detail.

We have had a very good debate. I will deal principally with the education part of the Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) dealt with the clauses on adoption, but there are a few points in relation to adoption that I would like to put on the record. I understand that the solution put forward in the Bill is extremely similar to the one the Government withdrew last year when the measures were put in front of the House of Lords. If I am wrong about that, I am sure the Minister will correct us in Committee, but it does seem that this is perhaps a second bite of the cherry. We will be interested to know from Ministers, if that is the case, why they have come back with this having withdrawn similar proposals extremely recently.

We are concerned about the impact on small specialist agencies and we are also worried about those children who may not be suitable for adoption. I am disappointed that the Bill has so little to say about special guardianship, kinship care, grandparents and long-term fostering. We will want to take up those issues in Committee.

I hope that Members on both sides of the House agree that, fundamentally, all of us—heads, teachers, support staff, governors, parents and even politicians—want the best for our children. I was going to say “politicians, and even parents”, because parents’ rights have been rubbed out by the Bill, but I decided against that in favour of trying to try to establish a point of consensus at the outset of my speech. If all of us want the best for our children, however, why do the Government consistently pursue paths that are not based on evidence of what is best for our children’s education? We have reached an extraordinary state of affairs. A Bill that was cobbled

[Kevin Brennan]

together during the two weeks after the election has been presented as if it were the answer to all the educational problems in the country, although it patently is not. As the Education Committee said earlier this year,

“the Government should stop exaggerating”.

The Bill has been so rushed and so inadequately drafted that it does not even provide a definition of its central term. Its first clause, on page 1, permits intervention in “Coasting schools”. We agree with the proposition that everyone should seek to tackle underperformance in schools, even schools that may be superficially performing well. Indeed, we championed it in government through, for example, the London Challenge and national challenge programmes. We introduced sponsored academies because we saw them as one way in which entrenched under-performance could be tackled, although not the only way. However, the Government have included the word “coasting” in the Bill without being able to tell anyone what it means. They have not been able to supply draft regulations to explain it in time for this debate, and I understand that they have now announced, through the usual channels, that they will not be able to supply such regulations in time for the start of the Committee stage. Perhaps we should rename this the Adoption and Education Bill, given that Ministers will have to deal with it back to front in Committee owing to their inability to provide a definition of “coasting” in time.

This is no way in which to make law that affects the education of millions of children throughout the country. A Bill should not be introduced when the Government cannot even explain or give a definition of its central term. I am reminded of a scene in the film “The Wrong Trousers”, starring Wallace and Gromit, when Gromit has to lay the track when the train is already racing along apace. If the Government cannot define “coasting” at the point when we are debating the Bill in the Chamber, they obviously deserve their own “inadequate” rating.

Why does the Bill have nothing to say about academies? Everyone who is involved in education knows that a school is a school, and that its success is built not on the nameplate on the sign outside, but on the quality of the leadership and teaching within. If the answer to turning around a failing school is always to make it an academy, what is the answer to turning around a failing academy? As the Secretary of State acknowledged recently, there are many of them—145, at the latest count—including IES Breckland, which is managed by a for-profit provider, and which has been deemed inadequate for more than a year without its sponsor being removed. So much for the right hon. Lady’s statement that

“a day spent in special measures is a day too long where a child’s education is concerned.”

That is not the case, it would seem, when the child attends an academy that is run by a favoured foreign edu-business. A fundamental flaw at the heart of the Government’s approach is that they do not even entertain that question in the Bill.

Why do the Government not listen to the Conservative councillor David Simmonds, the chairman of the Local Government Association’s children and young people board? He recently said:

“Hundreds of schools, often in disadvantaged areas, are being turned around thanks to the intervention of local councils.

It’s clear that strong leadership, outstanding classroom teaching and effective support staff and governors are the crucial factors in transforming standards in struggling schools.

We want to see bureaucratic barriers that have for a long time prevented councils from intervening swept away... We need to ensure that we focus our resources on ensuring there are enough outstanding school leaders, rather than on structures and legal status, as it is this which makes the difference we all want to see.”

That sounds to me like common sense from a Conservative councillor at the sharp end of trying to deliver a quality local education, rather than the proclamations of remote Conservative Ministers who take their cue from right-wing think tanks and policy wonks with an ideological axe to grind.

**Catherine West:** Does my hon. Friend agree that Councillor Simmonds has also added to the debate about school places, particularly in London, where he is a representative? So many parents raise with us daily, in surgeries and emails, their worries about their three and four-year-olds. Indeed, we also need to be predicting that when they turn 13 there will be a secondary school crisis.

**Kevin Brennan:** I agree with that and say to my hon. Friend that teacher recruitment and the problem she raises are serious lacunas in the Bill.

The comments I cited sound like common sense from a Conservative councillor because this Bill is not only severely undercooked, but breathtakingly illiberal and in direct opposition to the Government’s professed desire to devolve power to communities. Let us be clear about this: the Bill seeks not only to extend the power of the state, as exercised by the Secretary of State, who is not even listening, to impose its will locally, but to remove the ability of local communities to object to, or even to make representations against, the exercise of that state power. We can see that she does not like to listen because she will not listen to local communities or even to the debate in this House. It is said that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, but what of power wielded by the state without even the right to make representations against its use, which in addition creates a duty to conform, comply, co-operate and promote the exercise of that state power? How have we reached a state of affairs in Conservative education policy where that is regarded as democratically acceptable? It would seem that not only does the Prime Minister not know the meaning of the words “Magna Carta”, as we saw on David Letterman’s TV show, but, as Tony Hancock might have put it, the poor Hungarian peasant girl did after all “die in vain”.

This is a horrible little Bill in so far as it extends to education. It is more of an election slogan than a piece of genuine education statute, written in a rush, out of a need to do something rather than the need to do the right thing. It could be so much different: we could be recognising that real school improvement is based on the sort of approach taken by Sir David Brailsford, who took the Great Britain Olympic cycling team to such great heights. It could have been based on teamwork, collaboration, and a passion for excellence, success and the accumulation of marginal gains, not on a fetish with structures and policies that are unfounded in evidence. Perhaps we could have an educational equivalent of NICE—the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence—and have a national institute for clear evidence in education policy, which would put a stop to the

educational quackery of Ministers, which leads to the empty “exaggeration” so heavily criticised earlier this year by the Education Committee. Then, perhaps, we could agree with a vision based on that insight I mentioned at the outset, which is that deep down we all want the best for our children.

We should therefore have a vision where we promote partnership and collaboration to raise standards, with an inspection system where quality inspectors provide challenge and support, rather than having low-quality private contractors. We could have a system where standards trump structures and where every child matters. Despite the claim in the explanatory notes that the Bill intends

“to improve education for all children”,

those in coasting or failing academies are ignored by the Bill. We could have a vision where: parents are listened to; teachers are trusted; school admissions are made fairer; special needs are taken seriously; genuine social mobility is promoted; more than the one pathway to success—GCSE, A-level and then university—is valued and promoted; more than data matter; and exams are not used as a tool to narrow education but as an instrument to accredit broad and balanced learning. We could have a system that believes in more than teaching to the test.

To be an educator or a teacher is an incredible privilege. It is one that I was fortunate enough to enjoy for many years. It is a very hard job. It is much harder, believe it or not, than being a Member of Parliament, and it is so much more than what is envisaged in this dreary Bill. To be a legislator is also a privilege, and we can do much better than this.

9.40 pm

**The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb):** This has been an excellent debate on issues that could not be more important to hon. Members and to the country. In 2010, the coalition Government inherited a legacy of stagnation. The voices of complacency told us that all was well—key stage 2 results were rising and GCSE grades were inflating. But the reliable data told a different story. International benchmarks consistently showed that our schools were failing to progress, while those elsewhere—in Poland, Germany, Austria and Estonia, for example—were leaving us behind.

The adoption system was too bureaucratic and time consuming and left some of our most vulnerable children waiting too long. We were not prepared to accept the status quo. Our reforms to education and adoption over the past five years have been the most radical and far-reaching for a generation. They have led to dramatic improvements across the country.

Today, 100,000 more six-year-olds are on track to become confident readers as a result of our focus on phonics. Some 200,000 fewer pupils are persistently absent from school compared with five years ago, and more than 1 million more children now attend a good or outstanding school than in 2010.

The work of the Minister for Children and Families to improve the adoption system meant that, last year, more than 5,000 children were found the permanent home that they desperately needed—a record increase of 26% in just 12 months. It is now around four months quicker for children to be placed in a stable loving home.

Such improvements have been secured thanks to the hard work and expertise of teachers, social workers and adoption teams. They are all motivated by the same passion for building a fairer society, in which every child reaches their potential, regardless of their background. Despite their efforts, too many children are still not getting the start in life that they deserve. Even after the rapid improvements of the past five years, 1.5 million children still attend schools that are less than good.

**Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con):** Schools in my constituency of Aldridge-Brownhills are a key issue. I welcome this Bill. May I put in an early plea for a ministerial visit, so that I can show the Minister the good things and the challenging aspects of the education system in my constituency?

**Mr Gibb:** I would be delighted to visit my hon. Friend’s constituency. The Chief Whip is in his place, and I am sure that he will allow an early visit.

**Wes Streeting:** The Minister is more than welcome to visit my constituency, as he did during the election campaign. I very much enjoyed playing the recorder with him. Given the stab that Government Members have made at defining a coasting school, will he put us out of our misery and give us his definition of a coasting school? He has not yet told us.

**Mr Gibb:** The hon. Gentleman will just have to be patient. I will say a bit more about that later.

By strengthening our ability to turn around failing and coasting schools, the Bill will ensure that more children receive a good education, regardless of background, neighbourhood or circumstance.

The adoption system remains fragmented and inefficient. Around 180 different adoption agencies currently recruit and match adopters to children in need of a caring, stable home. That over-localised system cannot deliver the best service to some of our most vulnerable children. We are therefore introducing regional adoption agencies, which will work across local authority boundaries and in partnership with voluntary adoption agencies, to find the right homes for children without delay. That policy was supported by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter), who spoke powerfully about the need for ongoing adoption support.

We had some excellent speakers and speeches in the debate, but we also had one not so excellent speech from the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt), who wanted to know when he could see the definition of the word “coasting”. He should not be so concerned about the definition of “coasting”, because his performance today falls squarely in the “failing” category, which is very well defined. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, we intend to publish draft regulations on the definition of coasting schools for full parliamentary scrutiny in Committee. We can be clear now about the principles that will underpin the definition. This is fundamentally about social justice and a coasting school is one in which pupils are not reaching their potential. Will the hon. Gentleman support that definition?

**Tristram Hunt:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Will he now provide us with the legal definition of a coasting school, given that we are voting on his Bill in exactly 13 minutes? What is the legal definition?

**Mr Gibb:** We have made it very clear that the hon. Gentleman will see the legal definition of a coasting school on the first day in Committee. He will have plenty of time to table amendments to clause 1 in Committee.

We have had some excellent maiden speeches today, including that from the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), who cited the recent education initiative in Scotland, the 1496 Education Act, and pointed out the challenge of having aspiration when living in destitution. Of course, only aspiration and education provide an escape route from destitution. That is the whole objective of our education reforms.

In a moving maiden speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), I was struck by his Reginald Perrin-like commute on the 6.41 from Surbiton. I noted also that his parents were both teachers, and we were all—[HON. MEMBERS: “There he is.”] He moved—perhaps on the 6.41 from Surbiton. We were all saddened to hear that his father died soon after his selection as a parliamentary candidate. The same thing happened to me in 1996.

**James Berry:** May I follow my maiden speech with a request that the Minister meet me and other new colleagues who are passionate about increasing social aspiration through education, so that we can share with him our experiences and examples of best practice locally?

**Mr Gibb:** I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend. That sounds like an invitation to meet in the Palace of Westminster, so I am sure that the Chief Whip will allow it to happen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton made very clear his commitment to education and high aspiration for all children, which I have no doubt were inspired by his parents. We also heard a passionate maiden speech from the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), who had some interesting ideas about how we can ensure a Conservative majority in the House of Lords by culling some of the Labour Members.

In a humorous maiden speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (William Wragg), a former primary school teacher, fretted about how his first contribution would be rated by Ofsted, but I can tell him that the Secretary of State has intervened and graded his first speech as outstanding. He is right to believe that real Ofsted inspections should be done with and not to schools.

In an honest and thoughtful maiden speech, the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) pointed out that the education system in Wales is sliding down the international league tables. That country has steadfastly refused to follow the reform programmes that we have introduced in this country.

**Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con):** Is my hon. Friend aware that when I was on “Any Questions?” with Carwyn Jones, who is the leader of the Welsh Government, he told me and the listeners to BBC Radio 4 that the Labour Welsh Government had taken their eye off the ball on education—his words, not mine.

**Mr Gibb:** I think Mr Jones is absolutely right, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention.

In a funny and self-deprecatory maiden speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall) described how he was slightly taken aback by the ease and grace with which his employer took his resignation from the company on his election to Parliament. He made a serious point, however, about the importance of a good-quality education to a good start in life—something this Government are committed to giving to every young person.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), in an excellent maiden speech, expressed concern about the quality of broadband in parts of his constituency. Given the quality of his speech, I do hope that his wife managed to live stream it. My hon. Friend has already become an active member of the F40 group and today he again made the compelling argument for fairer funding. He also mentioned apprenticeships and, more broadly, the value of people working their way up to gaining experience in work. The Government are committed to 3 million apprenticeship starts over this Parliament, building on 2.2 million starts since 2010. These are real, paid jobs with real training.

A number of Opposition Members claim that the Government are wrong to pursue sponsored academy status to turn around failing or coasting schools, but it is the success of the academies programme over the past five years, and indeed before that, that gives us confidence that this is the right approach. The chief inspector of schools, in his annual report, wrote that:

“Overall, sponsor-led academies have had a positive and sustained impact on attainment in challenging areas”.

That is backed up by results that show that sponsored academies are improving their performance faster than maintained schools.

**Christian Matheson:** Is it not the case that Ofsted recently dispensed with the services of up to 40% of its inspectors? Does not that call into question the quality of some of the more recent school inspections?

**Mr Gibb:** Including the outstanding grade awarded to St Martin’s Academy in the hon. Gentleman’s Chester constituency? I would not be too scathing about Ofsted judgments if I were him.

Secondary schools that have been academies for four years have GCSE results that are, on average, six percentage points higher than results in the predecessor school. By comparison, results in local authority maintained secondary schools are, on average, 1% higher now than they were in 2010. For example, Outwood Academy Portland in Nottinghamshire became a sponsor-led academy in June 2012. In 2012, the proportion of pupils achieving five good GCSEs was just 57%; last year, the figure had jumped to 76%. There are many more examples that show how a school being an academy improves academic standards.

The Bill is about social justice. It is another important step to ensuring that all our state schools are delivering the quality of education currently found in only the best and that our adoption system is swift and efficient, so children can escape the unhappiness of a life of neglect or the uncertainty of life in care as swiftly as possible.

This Bill is about one nation—more action to ensure that schools in weak local authority areas such as Knowsley are as strong as schools in the best performing

parts of the country; further progress to ensure that every child is a fluent reader by the age of 6, not just at Ark Priory Primary Academy in Ealing, but in every school in the land, and that every child is fluent in arithmetic and knows their times tables by the age of 9. We want every parent's local secondary school to be preparing their children for life in a competitive world, and giving their children the best academic education, the best GCSEs, the best preparation for work, college or an apprenticeship, and the best preparation for entry into the best universities. We want that standard to be high in north Yorkshire, Blackpool, London, Birmingham, the west country and throughout the nation, in rural areas and on our coasts. That is what we mean by one nation.

We want those standards for everyone, regardless of social or economic background. That is what we mean by social justice. It involves taking on the vested interests, which is why in this Bill we are asking for the powers to say no to those who frustrate or delay improvement—enemies of aspiration and rigour. If hon. Members across the House believe in social justice, and if they believe in a one-nation education system, I urge them to support this Bill.

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The House divided: Ayes 193, Noes 308.*

## Division No. 22]

[9.56 pm

### AYES

Abrahams, Debbie	Cunningham, Alex
Alexander, Heidi	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Ali, Rushanara	Danczuk, Simon
Allen, Mr Graham	David, Wayne
Anderson, Mr David	De Piero, Gloria
Ashworth, Jonathan	Debbonaire, Thangam
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Doughty, Stephen
Barron, rh Kevin	Dowd, Peter
Beckett, rh Margaret	Dromey, Jack
Benn, rh Hilary	Dugher, Michael
Betts, Mr Clive	Eagle, Ms Angela
Blomfield, Paul	Eagle, Maria
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Efford, Clive
Brennan, Kevin	Elliott, Julie
Brown, Lyn	Esterson, Bill
Bryant, Chris	Evans, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen	Farrelly, Paul
Burnham, rh Andy	Field, rh Frank
Butler, Dawn	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Byrne, rh Liam	Flello, Robert
Cadbury, Ruth	Fletcher, Colleen
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Flint, rh Caroline
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Fovargue, Yvonne
Champion, Sarah	Foxcroft, Vicky
Chapman, Jenny	Gapes, Mike
Ciwyd, rh Ann	Gardiner, Barry
Coaker, Vernon	Glass, Pat
Coffey, Ann	Glindon, Mary
Cooper, Julie	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Cooper, Rosie	Green, Kate
Cox, Jo	Greenwood, Lilian
Coyle, Neil	Greenwood, Margaret
Crausby, Mr David	Griffith, Nia
Creasy, Stella	Gwynne, Andrew
Cruddas, Jon	Haight, Louise
Cryer, John	Hamilton, Fabian
Cummins, Judith	Hanson, rh Mr David
	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
	Harpham, Harry

Harris, Carolyn	Owen, Albert
Hayes, Helen	Pearce, Teresa
Hayman, Sue	Pennycook, Matthew
Healey, rh John	Perkins, Toby
Hendrick, Mr Mark	Phillips, Jess
Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Phillipson, Bridget
Hermon, Lady	Pound, Stephen
Hillier, Meg	Powell, Lucy
Hodge, rh Margaret	Qureshi, Yasmin
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Rayner, Angela
Hoey, Kate	Reed, Mr Steve
Hollern, Kate	Rees, Christina
Howarth, rh Mr George	Reynolds, Jonathan
Hunt, Tristram	Rimmer, Marie
Huq, Dr Rupa	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Hussain, Imran	Rotheram, Steve
Irranca-Davies, Huw	Ryan, rh Joan
Jarvis, Dan	Shah, Naz
Johnson, rh Alan	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Johnson, Diana	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Jones, Gerald	Sherriff, Paula
Jones, Graham	Shuker, Mr Gavin
Jones, Helen	Siddiq, Tulip
Jones, Mr Kevan	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Jones, Susan Elan	Slaughter, Andy
Kane, Mike	Smeeth, Ruth
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald	Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Keeley, Barbara	Smith, Angela
Kinnock, Stephen	Smith, Cat
Kyle, Peter	Smith, Jeff
Lammy, rh Mr David	Smith, Nick
Leslie, Chris	Smith, Owen
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Smyth, Karin
Lewis, Clive	Spellar, rh Mr John
Lewis, Mr Ivan	Starmer, Keir
Long Bailey, Rebecca	Stevens, Jo
Lucas, Ian C.	Streeting, Wes
Lynch, Holly	Stringer, Graham
Mactaggart, rh Fiona	Stuart, Ms Gisela
Madders, Justin	Tami, Mark
Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Mahmood, Shabana	Thornberry, Emily
Malhotra, Seema	Timms, rh Stephen
Mann, John	Trickett, Jon
Marsden, Mr Gordon	Turley, Anna
Maskell, Rachael	Turner, Karl
Matheson, Christian	Umunna, Mr Chuka
McCabe, Steve	Vaz, Valerie
McCarthy, Kerry	West, Catherine
McDonagh, Siobhain	Whitehead, Dr Alan
McDonald, Andy	Wilson, Phil
McFadden, rh Mr Pat	Winnick, Mr David
McGovern, Alison	Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
McInnes, Liz	Woodcock, John
Meacher, rh Mr Michael	Wright, Mr Iain
Moon, Mrs Madeleine	Zeichner, Daniel
Morden, Jessica	
Murray, Ian	
Onn, Melanie	
Onwurah, Chi	
Osamor, Kate	

### Tellers for the Ayes:

Tom Blenkinsop and  
Nic Dakin

### NOES

Adams, Nigel	Argar, Edward
Afriyie, Adam	Atkins, Victoria
Aldous, Peter	Bacon, Mr Richard
Allan, Lucy	Baker, Mr Steve
Allen, Heidi	Baldwin, Harriett
Amess, Sir David	Barclay, Stephen
Andrew, Stuart	Baron, Mr John
Ansell, Caroline	Barwell, Gavin

Bebb, Guto	Field, rh Mark	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Quin, Jeremy
Benyon, Richard	Foster, Kevin	Knight, Julian	Quince, Will
Beresford, Sir Paul	Fox, rh Dr Liam	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Raab, Mr Dominic
Berry, Jake	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Lancaster, Mark	Redwood, rh John
Berry, James	Frazer, Lucy	Latham, Pauline	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Bingham, Andrew	Freeman, George	Leadsom, Andrea	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Blackman, Bob	Freer, Mike	Lefroy, Jeremy	Robinson, Mary
Blackwood, Nicola	Fuller, Richard	Leslie, Charlotte	Rosindell, Andrew
Blunt, Crispin	Fysh, Marcus	Letwin, rh Mr Oliver	Rudd, rh Amber
Boles, Nick	Garnier, rh Sir Edward	Lewis, Brandon	Rutley, David
Bone, Mr Peter	Garnier, Mark	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Sandbach, Antoinette
Borwick, Victoria	Gauke, Mr David	Lidington, rh Mr David	Scully, Paul
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Ghani, Nusrat	Lilley, rh Mr Peter	Selous, Andrew
Bradley, Karen	Gibb, Mr Nick	Lopresti, Jack	Sharma, Alok
Brady, Mr Graham	Glen, John	Lord, Jonathan	Shelbrooke, Alec
Brazier, Mr Julian	Goldsmith, Zac	Loughton, Tim	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Bridgen, Andrew	Goodwill, Mr Robert	Lumley, Karen	Skidmore, Chris
Brine, Steve	Gove, rh Michael	Mackinlay, Craig	Smith, Chloe
Bruce, Fiona	Graham, Richard	Mackintosh, David	Smith, Henry
Buckland, Robert	Grant, Mrs Helen	Main, Mrs Anne	Smith, Julian
Burns, Conor	Gray, Mr James	Mak, Alan	Smith, Royston
Burns, rh Sir Simon	Grayling, rh Chris	Malthouse, Kit	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Burrowes, Mr David	Green, Chris	Mann, Scott	Solloway, Amanda
Burt, rh Alistair	Green, rh Damian	Mathias, Dr Tania	Soubry, rh Anna
Cairns, Alun	Greening, rh Justine	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Carmichael, Neil	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Maynard, Paul	Spencer, Mark
Cartlidge, James	Griffiths, Andrew	McCartney, Jason	Stephenson, Andrew
Caulfield, Maria	Gummer, Ben	McCartney, Karl	Stevenson, John
Chalk, Alex	Gyimah, Mr Sam	McPartland, Stephen	Stewart, Bob
Chishti, Rehman	Halfon, rh Robert	Menzies, Mark	Stewart, Iain
Churchill, Jo	Hall, Luke	Mercer, Johnny	Stewart, Rory
Clark, rh Greg	Hammond, Stephen	Merriman, Huw	Streeter, Mr Gary
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Hancock, rh Matthew	Metcalfe, Stephen	Stride, Mel
Cleverly, James	Hands, rh Greg	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Stuart, Graham
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Milling, Amanda	Sturdy, Julian
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Harrington, Richard	Mills, Nigel	Sunak, Rishi
Collins, Damian	Harris, Rebecca	Milton, rh Anne	Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Colvile, Oliver	Hart, Simon	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Costa, Alberto	Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan	Mordaunt, Penny	Syms, Mr Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey	Hayes, rh Mr John	Morgan, rh Nicky	Thomas, Derek
Crabb, rh Stephen	Heald, Sir Oliver	Morris, Anne Marie	Thrupp, Maggie
Crouch, Tracey	Heappey, James	Morris, David	Timpson, Edward
Davies, Byron	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Morris, James	Tolhurst, Kelly
Davies, Chris	Heaton-Jones, Peter	Morton, Wendy	Tomlinson, Justin
Davies, Glyn	Henderson, Gordon	Mowat, David	Tomlinson, Michael
Davies, James	Herbert, rh Nick	Mundell, rh David	Tracey, Craig
Davies, Mims	Hinds, Damian	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Tredinnick, David
Davies, Philip	Hoare, Simon	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Davis, rh Mr David	Hollinrake, Kevin	Newton, Sarah	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Dinenage, Caroline	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Nokes, Caroline	Tugendhat, Tom
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Holloway, Mr Adam	Norman, Jesse	Turner, Mr Andrew
Donelan, Michelle	Hopkins, Kris	Nuttall, Mr David	Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Double, Steve	Howarth, Sir Gerald	Offord, Dr Matthew	Vaizey, Mr Edward
Dowden, Oliver	Howell, John	Opperman, Guy	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Howlett, Ben	Paisley, Ian	Vickers, Martin
Drax, Richard	Huddleston, Nigel	Parish, Neil	Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Patel, rh Priti	Walker, Mr Charles
Duddridge, James	Hurd, Mr Nick	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Walker, Mr Robin
Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Jackson, Mr Stewart	Pawsey, Mark	Warburton, David
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Javid, rh Sajid	Penning, rh Mike	Warman, Matt
Dunne, Mr Philip	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Penrose, John	Watkinson, Dame Angela
Ellis, Michael	Jenkin, Mr Bernard	Percy, Andrew	Wharton, James
Ellison, Jane	Jenkyns, Andrea	Perry, Claire	Whately, Helen
Ellwood, Mr Tobias	Jenrick, Robert	Phillips, Stephen	Wheeler, Heather
Elphicke, Charlie	Johnson, Gareth	Philp, Chris	White, Chris
Eustice, George	Johnson, Joseph	Pickles, rh Sir Eric	Whittaker, Craig
Evans, Graham	Jones, Andrew	Pincher, Christopher	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Evans, Mr Nigel	Jones, rh Mr David	Pow, Rebecca	Wiggin, Bill
Evennett, rh Mr David	Jones, Mr Marcus	Prentis, Victoria	Williams, Craig
Fabricant, Michael	Kawczynski, Daniel	Prisk, Mr Mark	Williamson, rh Gavin
Fallon, rh Michael	Kennedy, Seema	Pritchard, Mark	Wilson, Mr Rob
Fernandes, Suella	Kirby, Simon	Pursglove, Tom	Wollaston, Dr Sarah

Wood, Mike  
Wragg, William  
Wright, rh Jeremy  
Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Margot James and**  
**George Hollingbery**

## Stone Theft

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(George Hollingbery.)*

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 62(2)), That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

*Question agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

### EDUCATION AND ADOPTION BILL (PROGRAMME)

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),*

That the following provisions shall apply to the Education and Adoption Bill:

#### *Committal*

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

#### *Proceedings in Public Bill Committee*

2. Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 14 July 2015.

3. The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

#### *Consideration and Third Reading*

4. Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

6. Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading.

#### *Other proceedings*

7. Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—(George Hollingbery.)

*Question agreed to.*

### EDUCATION AND ADOPTION BILL (MONEY)

*Queen's recommendation signified.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order no. 52(1)(a)),*

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Education and Adoption Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—(George Hollingbery.)

*Question agreed to.*

**Mr Speaker:** Perhaps I can appeal for the co-operation of colleagues. They should follow the example of the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), who is leaving the Chamber in a most decorous manner, as is his wont. If colleagues are, unaccountably, declining to stay to listen to the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney), perhaps they could leave quickly and quietly so that we can hear the thrust of his case on stone theft.

10.11 pm

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): I am delighted to have been granted this Adjournment debate on stone theft, which is plaguing my local communities in the Colne and Holme valleys and Lindley. There have been some light-hearted comments about the unexplained disappearance of a certain slab of stone with writing on it towards the end of the general election campaign; however, for my constituents, stone theft is extremely serious. Our heritage is being systematically dismantled.

Stone theft in my beautiful part of West Yorkshire has reached epidemic proportions. For the past two years I have been receiving weekly reports from my local West Yorkshire police of multiple stone thefts. Many constituents have told me of their first-hand experiences of this ever-increasing crime. Homes, schools, farms and places of worship have been victims of thieves snatching building materials. Roof tiles, topping stones on dry stone walls, York stone path slabs and many other types of stone are being systematically stolen. Some are clearly being sold on. Others are being used by rogue builders so that they do not have the expense of sourcing their own materials.

Scapegoat Hill Junior and Infant School was targeted by stone thieves twice in less than a fortnight. Slates were stolen from the school roof overnight. They were replaced at great expense, but just a couple of days after the scaffolding had come down they were stolen again.

Places of worship have been repeatedly targeted. A freedom of information request by my local newspaper, the *Huddersfield Examiner*, to West Yorkshire police has revealed that since 2012 building materials have been by far the most commonly stolen items from religious buildings in my area. Shockingly, the figures show that thieves have targeted places of worship in Kirklees 132 times in the past three years. Earlier this year, 200-year-old Yorkshire stone paving slabs were ripped up from Christ Church in Linthwaite. Replacing them cost in excess of £2,000. Nowhere has been safe from this crime.

**Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that this crime is far more prevalent than people appreciate? Last year, in my own village of Pendleton, Mr Tony Ormiston had eight slabs removed from his backyard. It seems to me that stone theft is not taken as seriously as it should be.

**Jason McCartney:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and it is why I wanted to highlight this issue. The problem is of epidemic proportions in my constituency, where we have so much wonderful stone, whether it is on pathways or stone walls, or on buildings and places of worship. That is why I wanted to bring the matter before the House.

A constituent from South Crosland has told me how distressing it was when just two weeks ago vehicles pulled up in the middle of the night at their farm and thieves took away the topping stones of their boundary walls. Those walls have marked the boundary of their farm for hundreds of years. The toppings on the walls are very old black-faced local sandstone and hard to replace.

[Jason McCartney]

Another constituent from Colne Valley told me that the theft of stone slates is totally out of hand in the valley and has asked for the sale of stone to be registered in the same way as scrap metal. I shall come to that in a moment. Meanwhile, just up the road in Leeds, in the past year, Leeds City Council has replaced £50,000-worth of York stone stolen from pavements across the city—an increase of more than 50% on the previous 12 months. That comes at a time when local council budgets are tight. It is costing tens of thousands of pounds, and as I have said, these are far from victimless crimes.

I am proud that the previous coalition Government acted very quickly to tackle metal theft. The Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013, which requires dealers to hold a licence to trade and gave councils powers to deal with rogue businesses, slashed the number of metal thefts. The targeted operations against unscrupulous scrap metal dealers, in conjunction with police and local agencies, resulted in more than 1,000 arrests for theft and related offences, and police seized more than 600 vehicles involved in that kind of criminality. Statistics show a 40% fall in the number of offences for the first three months of that Act, to the end of March 2013, compared with the three months to the end of June 2012, so the action taken then was incredibly successful against metal thefts. We are looking at that sort of action to try to curb the crime of stone theft.

I would like to praise West Yorkshire police for their action so far in tackling the epidemic of stone thefts in my part of West Yorkshire. They have launched a campaign using SmartWater. The Kirklees safer communities partnership acquired funding to protect walls in the area with SmartWater—for those who do not know, that is a uniquely coded forensic liquid that shows up under an ultraviolet lamp. It means that stone merchants or police can easily identify whether stone is stolen, and if so, it can be traced back to its original location. Letters went to hundreds of homes, warning residents of the dangers of stone theft and advising ways to protect their home and property. A similar project that operated in my area recently led to a temporary reduction in incidents of stone theft.

Many of these thefts take place in broad daylight with thieves posing as workmen—sometimes they are even brazen enough to wear dayglo jackets—so vigilance is definitely required. In the last week, West Yorkshire police have had a publicity campaign with Yorkshire's world-famous landscape artist Ashley Jackson highlighting that the theft of stone from our beautiful stone walls causes great damage to our countryside and our heritage. I have the leaflet here, which says:

“Yorkshire Stone. Once it's gone, it's gone. Our landscape is not replaceable so let's stop the thieves from taking it. Stone theft and the removal of old stone tiles from roofs might look innocent activity. Examples of where this could be happening include a rural location, outside a church, from someone's garden or in the middle of a town or village. You have no way of knowing if it is a job of work or a theft.”

The police advise:

“See it, note it, let's hang on to our Yorkshire.”

That is the scale of the problem. I appreciate that this is not as straightforward as tackling metal theft, as the materials are not always sold on immediately for cash. However, I will finish with three specific policy requests.

First, I would like there to be a dedicated stone theft taskforce, like the one that was set up to tackle metal theft in 2011. Secondly, I would like there to be a national and regional awareness campaign so that householders and businesses that deal with stone, tiles and paving slabs check where they are from, and so that the public can challenge those who pose as workmen in dayglo jackets, whether they are ripping up stone pavements or taking off roof tiles. Finally, I would like to see an increase in the fines that are handed out to those who are convicted and the introduction of exemplary punishments to deter these extremely antisocial criminals.

Our heritage is being stolen, brick by brick. Let us tackle the scourge of stone theft, as we did metal theft.

10.22 pm

**The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning):** It is a pleasure to reply to my first Adjournment debate of the Parliament. The subject caused some smirks among my colleagues when I mentioned it to them, but they would realise that they were wrong to do so if they knew what was happening in their constituencies and in Colne Valley.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) on securing this debate. His comments concentrated on heritage and high-value stone. In general, stone has become a very expensive commodity. It is used in myriad different ways in our communities. Often, people do not know whether it is old or not, because it can be made to look old and it matures quickly.

Stone theft is not new, but has been going on for many years. Once, I was a young man, Mr Speaker, and as a fireman in Essex, I would go and fish off Canvey island on my off days. Many Members will know that Canvey island flooded badly back in 1952. I used to beach-cast off the point and sometimes, in the early hours, just as it was getting light, I would suddenly see some characters creeping around. I was sure that they were not fishermen, because I knew the community quite well. In fact, people were stealing stones from the breakwater—the walls that protected an area that is prone to flooding. That was some 30 years ago. Mobile phones were not available then and it was difficult to report it. When I had conversations with the police, which firemen often did, they said that it was known to them, but very difficult to handle.

This is an opportune moment for my hon. Friend to bring this matter to the House. As he said, the Government acted quickly on scrap metal and iron. Appallingly, some historic pieces of wrought iron vanished from our streets and communities, just to be melted down for scrap. In my constituency, people were injured in industrial areas when they fell down places where the grates had been removed. People walking their normal routes to work in the morning, particularly during the winter, went straight down the drains. That was very dangerous indeed.

As this is such an important issue, people would be right to assume that West Yorkshire and other constabularies are doing their best to tackle it. I will rule out nothing that my hon. Friend has asked for this evening. We are already working on two of the three things he asked for and I will touch on those in a moment. However, it is much more difficult than introducing the sanctions and licensing that we brought in for metal, as I am sure he understands.

The chief constable for my area, Chief Constable Andy Bliss of the Hertfordshire Constabulary, heads up the efforts against heritage theft in the United Kingdom on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers. I have raised this matter with him and he knows about it, not least because the milestones were stolen in my constituency. You know my constituency well, Mr Speaker. I have the great privilege of having Watling Street, the Roman road, going through my constituency. Interestingly, we got back the milestones that were stolen from it, but it was the public who were the eyes and ears in that.

We often think of neighbourhood watch as being in our towns and cities, but it is vital in our rural communities as well. Over recent years, neighbourhood watch has come together well to tackle such thefts, particularly from farms. SmartWater has helped to prevent expensive farm machinery from being stolen, often to order. I am pleased to hear that West Yorkshire police is using SmartWater, which requires infrared light to see that something has been marked.

It is not just about stone, and it is not just about heritage; it is about slate, and it is basically about where people feel they can make a profit, they steal. Therefore, we need to ensure that we have legislation on the statute book. Across the country, police forces are aware of the problems and are treating them seriously. As Policing Minister, I say to the 43 authorities under my control that they need to take this matter enormously seriously. I expect it to be brought up and addressed at the next chiefs' meeting.

The Crown Prosecution Service already has 14 specialised prosecutors in this area. I will meet the Solicitor General in the next couple of days to ensure sure that we know exactly where they are based, and I will then write to my hon. Friend. I do not want to give out too much information about where they are based, because we need to surprise some of those people who think they can get away with whatever they feel like. We need to have some high-profile prosecutions and ensure that the full force of the law is brought down on them.

The impact of this sort of theft is not isolated. It is not just a theft on a farmer or on a local authority or on the breakwaters that protect our coastline. As has been alluded to, it is about where the money could have been spent otherwise. If people are involved in this sort of criminality, they are often involved in other sorts of criminality. One thing we must ensure is that we have a publicity campaign. When people purchase these stones, they need to ask where they come from. It is often the case that if we start asking questions, the people standing on the doorstep trying to sell them to us vanish quite quickly—I was asked recently whether I wanted cash-in-hand building work done on my house, and when I told them what I did for a living, they vanished rather quickly. They were obviously not from my area. It is important to recognise that we, the public, have a responsibility as well; it is not just an issue for the police and prosecutors.

**Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con):** One big issue in my constituency during the two years of my listening campaign was rural crime. That was a pressing problem, particularly in the east Northamptonshire villages. The Northamptonshire police are dealing with it in two ways. The first is through introducing a parish special scheme, which will have a “volunteer special” on the

beat and available to local residents so that they can have some reassurance and be able to report things. The second is that we are seeing much more cross-border policing through the “futures” policing scheme, which I think is welcome. Does the Minister agree that what we need is more police officers out on the beat, catching criminals and deterring crime on a continual basis?

**Mike Penning:** That is a leading question. Let us start with the first point. The specials play a vital role in our communities. Long before I was the Policing Minister, I had the pleasure of launching in my own constituency not only rural specials, but mounted rural specials. Members of the rural community felt that they were able to be out there protecting their own livelihoods and homes. Even though we have had these difficult times of austerity over the last five years, there are in percentage terms more officers in uniform on the beat on their feet than there were before 2010—and, of course, crime has dropped by 20% across the nation as a whole. We must not be complacent: as crime changes, police forces must change the way in which they detect different sorts of crime. I cannot think of a better group of people to serve as rural specials than the people who live in the constituency, who know the people that live there and actually feel part of the community. Anybody listening to this evening's debate—I am sure there will be millions doing so—can hear my encouragement: please sign up to be a special; it is never too late to do so; the age restrictions on the specials are very generous.

**Mr Nigel Evans:** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) on his successful Adjournment debate. He asked for exemplary sentencing. Does the Minister agree with me that exemplary sentences just might wake up the criminals to the fact that what they are doing is a crime and might also deter others?

**Mike Penning:** If I could just finish my point about the specials, I will come back to my hon. Friend's point.

The point about specials is proved in the House. Two of our colleagues have been specials in the British Transport police until recently, serving their community in parts of London.

I could not agree more with my hon. Friend about sentences, but we have to catch people first and ensure that we understand the value of the products that have been stolen and the effects on the community. That is why, as I said earlier, the CPS is so important. We have specialist prosecutors, but the judiciary also have to understand the will of Parliament, which is probably one of the best reasons for reiterating tonight that stone theft is such a serious crime. It is often organised crime, which is another part of my portfolio. Organised crime does not always mean millions and millions of pounds of goods being stolen, but in my opinion orchestrated crime such as we are discussing is organised crime.

It is important that we are having this debate on the Floor of the House. I was slightly concerned when my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley indicated right at the start of his speech that a certain stone that the Labour party owns may have gone missing. If so, I understand that it has not been reported to the police. However, we are talking this evening about high-value

*[Mike Penning]*

stone, not a stone that was a complete waste of time and effort, even though Great British craftsmen probably made it for the Labour party.

On a serious note, our heritage is what we are sent here to protect, whether it be here in this great House where we are lucky enough to work, a piece of milestone on Watling Street, the A5, in my constituency, or something in the constituencies of my hon. Friends who are here

this evening. We must highlight to our communities that it is their job, as well as the police's job, to ensure that we catch the criminals in question, that they are prosecuted and that the full force of the law comes down on them.

*Question put and agreed to.*

10.31 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Written Statements

Monday 22 June 2015

## DEFENCE

### Gift of Equipment to the Kurdish Regional Government

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon):** I am laying a departmental minute today concerning the gifting of military equipment to the Government of Iraq (GOI), including the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). This is at the request of the KRG.

The UK is providing extensive support to the GOI in the continuing fight against ISIL, with the gifting of equipment forming a significant part of this. Previously, HMG has gifted 50 tonnes of non-lethal support, 40 heavy machine guns and nearly half a million rounds of ammunition to the Kurdish Peshmerga. The latest equipment to be gifted to the Peshmerga consists of additional medical supplies. The supplies will consist of items such as tourniquets, bandage kits and dressings for wounds and will fill a significant gap in their resources, leading to the preservation of life and proper treatment of injuries sustained in combat.

It is estimated that the total cost of the equipment will be approximately £600,000, although this may change dependent on the need of the KRG.

[HCWS45]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### G6 Dresden

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May):** The informal G6 group of Ministers of the Interior from the six largest European Union countries held its most recent meeting in Dresden on 1 and 2 June 2015. Representatives of the United States of America and the European Commission attended for part of the meeting.

The summit was chaired by the German Federal Minister of the Interior, Thomas de Maiziere and I represented the United Kingdom. The other participating states were represented by Jorge Fernandez Diaz (Spain), Teresa Piotrowska (Poland), Bernard Cazeneuve (France), and Filippo Bubbico (Italy). The USA was represented by Alejandro Mayorkas (Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security) and Loretta Lynch (US Attorney General).

The European Commission was represented by Dimitris Avramopoulos (Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship).

The first two sessions took place on 1 June. The first consisted of a discussion on the upcoming JHA Council and organised crime, with a focus on burglary and vehicle theft. On the latter, the hosts explained that both crimes are on the increase in Germany and are often committed simultaneously by organised gangs who move around Europe. A number of other countries have experienced the same problem. In the UK car crime and burglary are falling. The second session was a discussion on co-operation on migration and refugee policy with third countries. The Commission set out its proposals. In the ensuing discussion, G6 members exchanged views on the scale of the problem facing EU, the scale of the response needed and the importance of member states fulfilling their obligations under the Dublin regulation.

On Tuesday 2 June, the third session covered Islamist terrorism with a focus on current developments and the prevention of radicalisation. Germany, along with other G6 countries, has seen large numbers of residents leave to fight in Syria or Iraq. A number of those have subsequently returned and discussion focused on how best to prevent member state nationals leaving their home countries and how best the movements of foreign fighters can be monitored. The fourth session was a discussion on international co-operation on cyber-crime. As technology progresses and cloud computing grows, cyber-crime is becoming an increasingly borderless crime. The G6 members discussed how best we are able to co-operate to address the problem and considered the implementation of the Budapest convention on cyber-crime.

In my interventions, I outlined the large amount of work the UK is doing to address the current migratory pressures including supporting regional protection programmes, the deployment of UK vessels in the Mediterranean and our work to disrupt the groups carrying out organised immigration crime. In that context, I reiterated the UK's opposition to mandatory burden sharing at EU level. During the session on organised crime I highlighted the opportunities that are offered by the proactive use of the Second Generation Schengen Information System (SISII) to identify lost and stolen vehicles. When discussing the prevention of radicalisation I highlighted the need for the G6 countries to challenge the ISIL narrative and disprove the claims ISIL make. I also stressed the need for the passenger name record (PNR) directive to allow member states to share information about the passenger movements, including those of foreign fighters, and the importance of allowing the collection of data on flights within the European Union. At the final session on cyber-crime I reiterated the UK's support for the implementation of the Budapest convention and the need for international co-operation given the international nature of the crime.

I announced at the meeting that the next G6 will take place in the UK in November 2015.

[HCWS46]



# Petition

Monday 22 June 2015

## OBSERVATIONS

### HEALTH

#### Urgent care centre at Chippenham Hospital

*The Petition of residents of the Chippenham constituency,*

Declares that an urgent care centre at Chippenham Hospital is needed to improve access to urgent health services and to relieve pressure on nearby Accident and Emergency departments.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to fund an Urgent care centre at Chippenham Hospital as proposed by Chippenham's GPs.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Duncan Hames, *Official Report*, 25 March 2015; Vol. 594, c. 1544.]

[P001486]

*Observations from the Secretary of State for Health:*

In October 2013, the Prime Minister announced a new £50 million challenge fund to help improve access to general practice and stimulate innovative ways of

providing primary care services. The first wave of 20 pilots was announced in April 2014.

The Government asked NHS England to lead the process of inviting practices to submit innovative bids and overseeing the pilot schemes.

NHS England invited GP practices to submit their 'expressions of interest' (EOIs) to be one of the first wave of pilots in December 2013, before selecting the final list of successful schemes in April 2014. Twenty pilot schemes were selected that are benefiting over 7 million patients across more than 1,100 practices.

A wide variety of innovative ideas are being tested including extended opening hours, more ways for patients to access services and new services to better support patients with complex needs.

Further funding of £100 million for 2015-16 was announced by the Prime Minister on 30 September 2014 for a second wave.

NHS England launched the second wave of applications to become a pilot following the September 2014 announcement on 29 October 2014. Applications to become a wave two pilot closed on 16 January 2015 with 156 applications received.

NHS England confirms that no further bids were received in relation to urgent care centres in Chippenham. The configuration of local health care services is the responsibility of the local clinical commissioning group (CCG), and I am informed by NHS England that Wiltshire CCG is considering its plans for the development of Urgent care services at Chippenham Hospital.



# ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 22 June 2015

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