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OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

CHILDREN'S WELLBEING AND SCHOOLS BILL

Second Sitting

Tuesday 21 January 2025

(Afternoon)

CONTENTS

Examination of witnesses.

Adjourned till Thursday 23 January at half-past Eleven o'clock.

Written evidence reported to the House.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Saturday 25 January 2025

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chairs: † MR CLIVE BETTS, SIR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE, SIR EDWARD LEIGH, GRAHAM STRINGER

† Atkinson, Catherine (<i>Derby North</i>) (Lab)	† Morgan, Stephen (<i>Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education</i>)
† Baines, David (<i>St Helens North</i>) (Lab)	† O'Brien, Neil (<i>Harborough, Oadby and Wigston</i>) (Con)
† Bishop, Matt (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Lab)	† Paffey, Darren (<i>Southampton Itchen</i>) (Lab)
† Chowns, Ellie (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Green)	† Sollom, Ian (<i>St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire</i>) (LD)
† Collinge, Lizzi (<i>Morecambe and Lunesdale</i>) (Lab)	† Spencer, Patrick (<i>Central Suffolk and North Ipswich</i>) (Con)
† Foody, Emma (<i>Cramlington and Killingworth</i>) (Lab/Co-op)	† Wilson, Munira (<i>Twickenham</i>) (LD)
† Foxcroft, Vicky (<i>Lord Commissioner of His Majesty's Treasury</i>)	Simon Armitage, Rob Cope, Aaron Kulakiewicz, Committee Clerks
† Hayes, Tom (<i>Bournemouth East</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee
† Hinds, Damian (<i>East Hampshire</i>) (Con)	
† McKinnell, Catherine (<i>Minister for School Standards</i>)	
† Martin, Amanda (<i>Portsmouth North</i>) (Lab)	

Witnesses

Dame Rachel de Souza, Children's Commissioner

Sir Martyn Oliver, HM Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills in England, Ofsted

Lee Owston, National Director for Education, Ofsted

Yvette Stanley, National Director for Regulation and Social Care, Ofsted

Mark Russell, Chief Executive, The Children's Society

Lynn Perry MBE, CEO, Barnardo's, representing the Children's Charities Coalition

Katharine Sacks-Jones, CEO, Become

Nigel Genders CBE, Chief Education Officer, Church of England

Paul Barber, Director, Catholic Education Service

Jon Coles, CEO, United Learning

Sir Dan Moynihan, CEO, Harris Federation

Luke Sparkes, CEO, Dixons Academy Trust

Rebecca Leek, Executive Director, Suffolk Primary Headteachers Association

Jane Wilson, Deputy CEO, Northern Education Trust

Leora Cruddas CBE, Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts (CST)

David Thomas OBE, CEO, Axiom Maths (former senior policy adviser, Department for Education and headteacher/director of education)

Kate Anstey, Head of Education Policy, Child Poverty Action Group

Catherine McKinnell MP, Minister for School Standards, Department for Education

Stephen Morgan MP, Minister for Early Education, Department for Education

Public Bill Committee

Tuesday 21 January 2025

(Afternoon)

[MR CLIVE BETTS *in the Chair*]

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

2 pm

The Chair: Before we take evidence from further witnesses, we have a declaration of interest.

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): I want to make the Committee aware that I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary humanist group. That may become relevant because of evidence submitted to the Committee.

The Chair: Thank you. I am a vice-president of the Local Government Association, but as I will not be making any comments, that may not be relevant.

Examination of Witness

Dame Rachel de Souza gave evidence.

Q89 Neil O'Brien (Harborough, Oadby and Wigston) (Con): Thank you for coming—welcome. I want to ask for your view on the second half of the Bill, on schools. We have heard a lot of criticism of it from the Confederation of School Trusts, some of our leading trusts and, indeed, a couple of Labour MPs. What is your view on the schools, rather than the wellbeing, part of the Bill?

Dame Rachel de Souza: I am the Children's Commissioner and have been since 2021, and before that I was a school leader in the most disadvantaged areas for 20 years, so I am very interested. I am pleased to see a Bill on children's wellbeing; it is great that we are getting some legislation on that. I was well consulted around the first part of the Bill, on wellbeing, and I was able to take the children's voice through. I worked closely with the Department for Education and others to ensure that it was honed, refined and made really good, as I did on some bits of the schools part. But I do not think that anybody got to see the schools bit until it was published.

On the schools bit, what I feel more than anything is that we now have a period of time when we need to see a vision for a new, vibrant and transformative schools system—how it will work locally, with local authorities, to do the best for children, particularly the most vulnerable children. I have a number of outstanding questions around that.

Q90 Neil O'Brien: What do you think of the curtailment of academy freedoms in the Bill? It has now been published, so you have seen it, albeit that you were not talked to before. What do you think about the moves to scale back the academy programme, the end of academy orders, and LAs setting up new schools? If you were doing this, is that the direction you would want to go in?

Dame Rachel de Souza: Look, I need the school system to be as ambitious for children—as Children's Commissioner, I represent children—as they are for themselves. I had hoped that we would get to a point where we were not talking about old binaries—academies or council schools—but talking about schools, families of schools and building up our local authorities so that everyone can play their part to support standards in the post-lockdown period.

I have two issues with the academies provisions. First, I cannot let children remain in failing schools, so if those are going, I need to know what is going to happen. Childhood lasts a very short time, so if a child is in a failing school, how will those schools be improved, immediately and effectively? Secondly, as well as a real vision for the schools system—I know that it is there—I would like to see what will happen to attainment data, under what is envisaged as replacing it, so that no child, particularly the most vulnerable, is disadvantaged.

I was a headteacher for the first time in 2006. It was a Tony Blair-sponsored academy—I was his No. 67. That school had been failing for 20 years, and I got it to outstanding with the support of everyone around me. It has never gone back to less than good. Any new system has to deliver for the most vulnerable as well.

Q91 Neil O'Brien: The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame Siobhain McDonagh) has raised some concerns, as has the Confederation of School Trusts, about the end of academy orders and the fact that because academisation is no longer automatic, there will once again be the prospect of legal action, lots of community campaigns against these things, and potentially quite long delays. She said on Second Reading that children in those schools do not have time to wait. Do you agree with her?

Dame Rachel de Souza: I think, Neil, that you have given quite a thoughtful comment, which people new to education might not quite get. Probably the main reason for academy orders was to try to expedite improvement quickly against a backlash. Would it not be great if we could get everyone on side to be able to act really quickly, together, to improve schools that need improving? I am not going to get hung up on this bit. What I want to see is the vision for how we are going to work together with the best knowledge we have about school improvement, and with a sense of absolute urgency about making sure that no child is sitting in a failing school, because childhood lasts such a short time. What makes a great school? Whatever background you are from—whether you are from the academy sector or the local authority sector—the evidence is clear: we need a great headteacher and great teachers allowed to do their jobs, with support from a family of schools, whatever that family of schools is. That is what we need.

Q92 The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Stephen Morgan): Dame Rachel, thank you for giving evidence to the Committee today. Returning to the benefits of the Bill, can you explain what you think the benefits of introducing a single unique identifier will be to the safeguarding of all children?

Dame Rachel de Souza: Yes. Before I do, I want to praise the fact that the children's bit of the Bill really listens to children, because it has tried to do that. I want

the schools bit to do the same. Since Minister Morgan is asking the question, I will say that he was the first person to speak to my ambassadors and actually try to take on board their views. That is important for all of us—we need to hear from children all the time.

I have been obsessed with the unique identifier from the second I got into my role. I do not need to spell out why—well, maybe I do. In my first couple of weeks in the role, I visited a violence reduction unit—a police crime reduction unit—in Bedfordshire, and it had a spreadsheet of children that were on nobody's roll. They were not on any GP system or school roll; they were known by nobody. We cannot, in this century, with the tech capacity we have, find ourselves in that position.

I spoke to Professor Jay yesterday about the terrible abuse of young girls that has been going on and what to do about it. Do you know what she told me? She told me that one local area she was working with had a massive increase in sexually transmitted diseases in girls aged 13 and 14, but the health authority would not share the data with the police, under a completely misguided view about data sharing. My view is that we must invest in a unique identifier. Had Sara Sharif's social workers had a unique identifier, they would have had the information and tech to know from other authorities she had been in that she was a child known to social services. The school would have known. Children, particularly vulnerable children, think we already know their stories. They think that we, the adults, are already talking to each other. For children, that is just how they think it should be—the adults who care for them should know.

Let me be clear, and be under no illusion: the parlous state of data systems means that the unique identifier will be a huge job. However, I am so pleased to see it committed to in the Bill. If there is one thing I would like to see before my term ends in the next couple of years, it is the unique identifier on the way. It will underpin so many things that we want in education, in child protection, in gluing the systems together and in the multi-agency work, so absolutely, we need it.

Q93 Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): Dame Rachel, you said that you are meant to be the voice of children. I know you have made it your mission, through your various reports and surveys, to make sure that you amplify the voices of children. To what extent do you think their priorities and concerns are reflected in the Bill, and what more could we be doing to reflect them?

Dame Rachel de Souza: On the children's social care side, I can absolutely assure you that vulnerable children's voices have been taken through. On deprivation of liberty orders, I did research with children deprived of their liberty and took their voices through. On many of the multi-agency points, and lots of other things, their voices have gone through.

We have an opportunity to take children's voices through on the schools side, but I do not think it has been done. I have had a million responses from school-aged children about what they want from their schools. The top things that they tell me they want are to study and to have a curriculum that they are really interested in and motivated by. They know they have to do the core, but they want all those things that they are really interested in there too. They also want proper mental

health support. There has been a tsunami of mental health concerns since lockdown, and that is why we need our LAs and CAMHS and everyone working together.

On SEND, the cri de coeur from children is, "I want to succeed and I will roll my sleeves up and work hard, but I need the support—support, support, support." The children with special educational needs who feel their needs are met in school have told me—I did a snapshot of 95,000 of them—that they are happier in their schools than the rest of the cohort, but the ones who think their needs are not being met are unhappy. They also want to know about adult life and have deep concerns about wanting better relationships and sex education that is relevant and teaches them how to be better adults. They also want to know about the workplace. They are incredibly teleological. I would have loved it if they had all wanted to learn Dickens, but, no, they want to know how to get great jobs and what to do. They are very ambitious.

Damian Hinds saw a group of students with me to discuss what they wanted from the curriculum. We need to do more of that. We need to get their voices. We have a period of time now when we can get their voices and concerns through, and we should do it.

Q94 Munira Wilson: Coming back to child protection, you mentioned Professor Jay, whom I also met last week. The unique identifier will help with data sharing if we can get the systems right, but she also felt that a child protection agency that had national standards for lots of bodies and made sure that children did not fall through the gaps was really important. The Bill does not include that. Would you support such a measure?

Dame Rachel de Souza: What I said to her yesterday was, "Stop thinking of it like the Health and Safety Executive and start thinking of it like the National Crime Agency." I think there is a debate to be had about whether we should do it. Look, my job came in 20 years ago when Victoria Climbié was brutally murdered by those who should have loved her most. Nobody murdered her but them, but the agencies around her did not talk. Every time a child dies, we give exactly the same set of recommendations, including better multi-agency working and better join-up, yet time and again—Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, Sara Sharif—we find ourselves saying the same things.

The positive in that idea is having some way of making sure that social care and the other agencies really work together. The unique identifier is building the architecture to do it. The solution is either something like that, or we need our agencies to be working far more closely around children and to make multi-agency a reality.

I read every single report of a child who is killed—mainly in the home—and all the horrific things we are reading at the moment about girls and the so-called grooming gangs, and we know that the multi-agency piece is not working. Professor Jay's idea should be considered—it would need to have teeth—but I am also open to other ways of doing that.

The Chair: Several Members want to be called. I cannot call everybody.

Dame Rachel de Souza: I will try to be brief.

The Chair: If I do not call you in this session, I will call you in a future one. Can we have questions to the point, so we can get on, please?

Q95 Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): I am sorry if this is a blunt question, but on 18 April 2022, you wrote an opinion piece for the *Telegraph* alongside Nadine Dorries, who was then the Culture Secretary. In that article, you said that the Conservative manifesto was “our manifesto”. Are giving evidence here today from your personal opinion or in your role, given that you called the 2019 Conservative manifesto “our manifesto”?

Dame Rachel de Souza: I really do not remember that word, but I did that article with Nadine Dorries because I was absolutely desperate for the Online Safety Bill to get through. I spoke to Lucy Powell and Bridget about it. I felt that there were forces in the Government at the time that were trying not to let the Bill go through, because of freedom of speech issues. I knew that the NSPCC was working with Labour, and I stuck my neck out in that article to try to convince everybody that the Online Safety Bill should go through.

I am totally independent. I do not think that any Government or person I have worked with thinks otherwise. I challenge you to find anywhere—I mean, this is a word in an article. I think you will find that I have been strong and robust on online safety. Sometimes I use “our” when I am talking about the school system, children, or the country and the Government, and if I have used it inappropriately, I am sorry.

Q96 Amanda Martin: So, to answer my question, you are giving evidence as the commissioner.

Dame Rachel de Souza: Always. I would not come to Parliament and do anything else.

Q97 Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): Dame Rachel, can you talk a little about the register of children not in school? What is the irreducible core of what we need to know and what information should be gathered in those cases?

Dame Rachel de Souza: We have always been worried, and successive Governments have felt that maybe there was a need for this—I think you, Damian, did the first consultation on it a long while back—and there has been a debate going on about whether we should have a register of children not in school. I am delighted to see it in this Bill.

The number of children missing from education is getting worse. We know that post-lockdown, there was a massive rise in children persistently absent and severely absent, and a massive number of children missing from education. I have made it my business to look into who those children are; I did that in 2021. We have three pots of children: children with special educational needs who went off in 2019 and have not come back; children with mental health/anxiety concerns; and children who really have just gone, who are at risk of CSE. We really need a register.

We have another problem, which I have investigated. I looked at last year's roll and compared it with this year's roll, and we found at least 13,000 children who we could not account for, plus another 10,000 who were CME. They had gone to be home-educated, because they did

not feel that their needs were being met in school and they felt that they were driven to that. We absolutely need a home register.

The Chair: We will have one final, brief question—hopefully with a brief answer—from Darren Paffey.

Q98 Darren Paffey (Southampton Itchen) (Lab): The Bill seeks to move on from a fixation on structures and get back to outcomes and wellbeing. If I have understood your earlier comments, you welcome that. Do you think the Bill will sufficiently break that link between a child's background and their future success? Do you believe that the measures will move us closer to that?

Dame Rachel de Souza: I am delighted with the measures for vulnerable children. I am hopeful for the measures on the schools side, but we need to see a bit more of a vision before I can answer. What is that system going to look like? My recommendation would be focusing on how, in local areas, we can build up and strengthen our local authorities so that they can be the champions of children, particularly vulnerable children, and convene the trusts and the schools so that everyone can work together to share their expertise. If we do that, we will have a great shot at it, and I think it could be really good.

The Chair: That brings us to the end of this session. I know there are other Members who want to get in; I will try to call you during the next session.

Examination of Witnesses

Sir Martyn Oliver, Lee Owston and Yvette Stanley gave evidence.

2.20 pm

The Chair: Will the witnesses from Ofsted please introduce themselves?

Sir Martyn Oliver: I am Sir Martyn Oliver, His Majesty's chief inspector at Ofsted.

Yvette Stanley: My name is Yvette Stanley, Ofsted's national director for early years regulation and social care inspection and regulation.

Lee Owston: I am Lee Owston, one of His Majesty's inspectors and Ofsted's national director for education.

Q99 Neil O'Brien: Thank you for coming. I have some short questions that do not need particularly long answers. Have you found evidence that academy schools are not teaching a broad and balanced curriculum? Are you finding lots of academies not doing that?

Sir Martyn Oliver: No, we do not find that.

Q100 Neil O'Brien: Is there a major problem with schools employing teachers without qualified teacher status? Are non-QTS teachers not up to scratch? Would you regard it as a red flag if a school were employing non-QTS teachers? Would it make you think, “We're probably heading towards a bad result here”?

Sir Martyn Oliver: We do not actually look at the backgrounds of teachers and check to that level of detail, so I could not give you a quantitative answer. I do know that increasingly, as schools are finding it difficult to recruit and retain staff, they are looking at

alternative measures. It is massively important that people be qualified to teach children to the highest possible standard in the specialism in which they are delivering.

Q101 Neil O'Brien: Do you recognise that sometimes a school can bring someone in who might be at a later point in their career and be highly specialised—perhaps a great sportsman, an IT person or a scientist—and that if the headteacher takes the view that they would be a good person for teaching, as an alternative to having no teacher, that can be the right decision?

Sir Martyn Oliver: Speaking as a previous headteacher, absolutely. Bringing in external expertise to supplement high-quality qualified teachers is clearly of benefit to children.

Q102 Neil O'Brien: The Bill will remove the academy order. How will the intervention regime work in future? At the moment, the Ofsted handbook states that “if any key judgement is inadequate...we will place the school in a formal category of concern.”

How will that work in future? If a school is in the bottom tier of one of your new categories of assessment, what will happen?

Sir Martyn Oliver: The legal powers for Ofsted are that I identify to the Secretary of State a school that is in special measures or requires significant improvement. That requirement—from, I think, the Education and Inspections Act 2006—will not change. Ofsted will still be under a duty to pass that on to the Secretary of State. Very imminently, I will consult on a new framework that will strengthen and raise standards further. I am interested to see what the Department for Education will release alongside my consultation to explain those academy orders further.

Q103 Neil O'Brien: Are we still waiting to hear what that intervention regime will look like?

Sir Martyn Oliver: Yes, but I think it is very imminent. I am very happy: I feel that we are going to hold the system to account to raise standards better than ever before.

The Chair: It will help if those Members who wanted to ask a question last time but were not called indicate if they want to ask a question in this session.

Q104 The Minister for School Standards (Catherine McKinnell): Is Ofsted pleased to see the measures in this Bill, in the round?

Sir Martyn Oliver: Yes, absolutely. We very much welcome the introduction of the Bill, which will deliver some of the important legislative asks that Ofsted has made for a long time, especially to keep the most vulnerable safe and learning. That includes removing loopholes that enable illegal schools to operate, improving Ofsted's powers to investigate unregistered schools that we suspect may be operating illegally, enabling Ofsted to fine unregistered children's homes for operating unsafe and unregulated accommodation for vulnerable children, introducing a register of children not in school—I could go on. We are very happy with large parts of the Bill.

Q105 Catherine McKinnell: You have already set out the impact that the Bill will have on Ofsted's powers. I imagine that you spend a large proportion of your time

worrying about the most vulnerable children in society. What do you think will be the impact of the Bill on those children who are most in need?

Sir Martyn Oliver: Our top priority is the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. The ability to look at illegal or unregistered settings, unregistered children's homes and illegal schools is hugely important. When they are out of Ofsted's line of sight, it causes us great concern. I think that this Bill or a future Bill could go further and look at unregistered alternative provision, because all children educated anywhere for the majority of their time should be in sight of the inspectorate or a regulator. I do think that we will see significant issues with addressing the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, especially in part 1, on children's social care.

Q106 Munira Wilson: You talked about the additional powers that you are being given, and you mentioned AP as an area where you would like it to go further. Is there anywhere else where you would like it to go further? Importantly, do you feel that Ofsted has the capacity and capability to deliver on all this? When I talk to local government, I often hear that there are quite a lot of delays with Ofsted.

Sir Martyn Oliver: We think that there are grey areas where the legislation will help us get it right, but we do think that we can go further. For example, the feasibility and administrative costs of carrying out searches of illegal schools and the requirement of getting a warrant would be very burdensome for Ofsted, and we will need additional resource to manage that. It is massively important. We will always use those powers proportionately and with care. For example, in a commercial setting, the ability to have different powers that allow us to search without a warrant would be far more reasonable. Obviously, in a domestic setting, I would expect safeguarding measures to be in place and to require a warrant, because forcing an entry into somebody's private home is entirely different from doing so in a commercial premises. There are resources there, but I am assured that my team, particularly my two policy colleagues here, have been working with the Department for quite some time on these asks. We have been building our measures and building that into our future spending review commitment as well.

Yvette Stanley: To build on what Martyn has just said, from a social care perspective we would like to go further on the standards for care. National minimum standards are not good enough; the standards should apply based on the vulnerability of and risk to children. A disabled child in a residential special school should not be getting a different level of support: the same safeguards should be in place whether they are in a children's home or in a residential special school.

We would like to go further on corporate parenting. That is something to be addressed. We would also like to look at regional care co-operatives and regional adoption agencies. Those things tend to fall out of our purview as an inspectorate. There is a range of really detailed things, but to echo what Martyn says, we are working actively with our DFE policy colleagues to give our very best advice through the Bill process to strengthen these things wherever possible.

Q107 Munira Wilson: I want to pick up on Neil's question about the automatic intervention by Ofsted where, with a failing school, an academy order is put in

[*Munira Wilson*]

place. I am just a bit perplexed by the timing of the Bill. Although I support the provision that it should not always be automatic, given that you are only just about to launch a consultation on your framework, and perhaps the Department around the accountability measures, are we moving too soon in the Bill before we have had the consultation on your new framework?

Sir Martyn Oliver: The consultation will meet the Government test and will run for 12 weeks imminently. The Bill will obviously pass through the House at that time. I think it will bring it all together in a more joined-up system. The system has been calling for inspection and accountability to be joined up, and we are about to deliver that in, I hope, the next few weeks. Of course, the consultation is not a *fait accompli*. I will be really interested to receive feedback from everyone, and we will respond to that at the end and see where it takes us. I hope that at the end it will be a better system for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, alongside all children, to keep them safe and well-educated.

Q108 Matt Bishop (Forest of Dean) (Lab): Sir Martyn, you mentioned in relation to Neil's question that staff, not necessarily with qualified teacher status, can be a great supplement. I agree that they can be, but can you just clarify that that "supplement" means a supplement, not the main teacher for the whole academic year, year on year?

Sir Martyn Oliver: Again, it would depend. In the past, I have brought in professional sportspeople to teach alongside PE teachers, and they have run sessions. Because I was in Wakefield, it was rugby league: I had rugby league professionals working with about a quarter of the schools in Wakefield at one point. I had a tremendous amount of help from the local rugby teams, but that was alongside qualified teachers carrying out that work. That was important to me, because those qualified teachers could meet the risk assessment regarding the activity of teaching children rugby league. Having that specialism is key. There is a reason why you train to be a teacher and it is a profession.

Q109 Matt Bishop: Just to clarify, that is alongside fully qualified teachers, not instead of?

Sir Martyn Oliver: Ideally alongside. I personally would never have done "instead of" as a first choice. That would have been a deficit decision, based on my ability to recruit and retain staff.

Q110 Patrick Spencer (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): That is an interesting point, Sir Martyn. You had the freedom to hire a teacher when you saw fit. We have just heard that the Government intend this Bill to be predominantly about setting and improving standards in our school system, but it does curtail certain freedoms for schools. Have you any thoughts on the freedoms that are being curtailed in this Bill? Also, in your experience at Ofsted, what are the components that are necessary and common when schools turn around and you see them improve?

Sir Martyn Oliver: Lee and I will answer this one together. The components we see are the ones that we set out in the Ofsted framework, on which I am about to consult. The quality of leadership and governance from

those running the organisations is always No. 1. Then, very quickly, it is the quality of the curriculum, the ability of teachers to deliver that curriculum, and the outcomes that children receive. It is then everything else: behaviour, attendance, personal development, wellbeing. All these things form part of our inspection regime. We test and check them all.

Lee Owston: In my 13 years as one of His Majesty's inspectors, I have always observed in schools that there is a mix of colleagues who are delivering the curriculum. The absolute beauty and purpose of inspection is to get underneath, on the ground, the difference you are making to the children in front of you, whatever qualification you might have, if any. It means asking questions of the leaders about why they have decided to do what they have done in the context in which they are working. Ultimately we report on whether whatever decision a leader has made ultimately has the intent of making a difference so that, whatever background a child comes from, it is allowing them to succeed.

Q111 Catherine Atkinson (Derby North) (Lab): We heard from the Children's Commissioner that the number of children who are missing from education and at risk of child sexual exploitation has been getting worse. I am interested in your views as to why.

Sir Martyn Oliver: We see quite a number of issues. I spoke recently in my annual review, which I laid before Parliament in December, about home schooling and flexi-schooling. To be clear, many children are very well flexi-schooled and home-schooled, but I am very concerned about those who have been withdrawn from the school's register for all the wrong reasons. Dame Rachel recently mentioned the very sad case of Sara Sharif.

If a school is recommending that a child be placed in front of the child protection team, it should clearly not be possible for a parent to then withdraw that child from that oversight of the professionals and place them in home education. Not only is having a register of children who are not in education massively important for keeping individuals safe, but it will be of significant benefit to Ofsted. In the Bill, there are sharing powers between the DFE, the local authority and Ofsted that will allow us to investigate for unregistered and illegal schools, so we will be better able to determine where they might be taking place. That will be hugely beneficial for keeping children safer.

Q112 Catherine Atkinson: You were talking about "broad and balanced". Given the 47% drop in arts subjects at GCSE, do you feel that more needs to be done to ensure that we have an even broader range of subjects that can be enjoyed?

Sir Martyn Oliver: Speaking as a qualified teacher of fine art, absolutely.

Catherine Atkinson: I am very pleased to hear it.

Q113 Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): Thank you for being with us today, Sir Martyn. When your HMIs find academies or academy trusts significantly deviating from the national curriculum, what are the usual reasons and in what ways do they deviate?

Sir Martyn Oliver: Actually, the education inspection framework that we currently use significantly reduced the deviation of academies because it set out the need to

carry out a broad and balanced curriculum. That was interesting, because it was not what was set out in the articles of the individual academies and those freedoms, so Ofsted has been in tension with those articles for quite some time.

The Bill puts everyone on the same footing. I think that there is good in that, but speaking as HMCI, as a previous chief executive of one of the largest trusts, as a headteacher and as a teacher for 30 years, I would always want to give headteachers the flexibility to do what is right for their children, as long as it ultimately delivers the broad and balanced education that you would expect all children to receive.

Q114 Damian Hinds: When they do deviate, what do the reasons tend to be?

Sir Martyn Oliver: The most typical reason is a focus on the core standards of English and mathematics. We often see that, but I am afraid that in some cases it goes beyond improving core standards: there are some that hot-house to the exclusion of being broad and balanced. It is important that a headteacher always retains a broad overview of a child to make sure that children get the core standards for their future, but also a well-rounded education in total.

Q115 Damian Hinds: What would be the impact, in the framework and in the inspection outcome, if the school were not following a broad and balanced curriculum?

Lee Owston: That would currently come under our quality-of-education judgment. It would not be seen as good if we could not, through the evidence we collect, determine a broad and balanced curriculum for all children.

Sir Martyn Oliver: I am about to consult on a measure that will allow more nuance and better identify that.

Q116 Damian Hinds: Finally, on the different subject of elective home education, quite a lot of detail is proposed in the Bill about the way the register of children not in school will work, including some requirements on the registration of providers of education to those individuals, whether that be online education or some other form of tutoring. How much consultation has there been with Ofsted about the drawing up of those provisions?

Sir Martyn Oliver: We have been involved in that for quite some time, even with previous Governments, whether it was about online education or all these aspects. I think that all our intelligence, for years, has carried forward into this Bill.

Q117 Lizzi Collinge: I want to talk about unregulated schools and the register of children not in school. I have seen evidence outside the Committee that shows that there are serious concerns about poor education in unregulated settings, as well as abuse and neglect. If you have any comments about what the problem is that the Bill is trying to solve, I and other members of the Committee would like to hear them. How will the new powers relating to unregulated schools allow you to protect children at risk of harm, specifically? Will they be an improvement on the current powers that you have?

Sir Martyn Oliver: To answer your last question first, absolutely: it is a significant improvement on our powers. Since 2016, we have carried out almost 1,400 criminal

investigations into almost 1,300 unique unregistered settings. Not all investigations lead to an on-site inspection. We have carried out almost 900 on-site inspections and issued 200 warnings, meaning that in over one fifth of on-site inspections, we were able to secure sufficient evidence that a crime was being committed, despite our limited powers at that point and under the current legislation. We have worked with the Crown Prosecution Service to successfully prosecute seven cases, including a total of 21 individual convictions.

The new powers will significantly improve our ability to do that, and the speed at which we can do it. It is very difficult to carry out those investigations. It is incredibly resource-reliant and takes significant time—regularly between 12 and 24 months—if we can get it to that position. The changes will help to address those loopholes in the law, but we think that there are some areas for improvement. As I have said, the need to get a warrant in all cases will be incredibly bureaucratic and expensive for Ofsted. Obviously we want to do it with care—we do not want to break into people's homes and inspect them—but on commercial premises we think that there is a more proportionate response, which will reduce bureaucracy, reduce the cost to Ofsted and allow us to focus on keeping children safe.

Q118 Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): On balance, do you welcome the provisions in the Bill to ensure that all schools follow the national curriculum?

Lee Owston: Obviously there is a review, from Professor Becky Francis, of what the national curriculum will contain, and we are speaking frequently with members of that review. From an inspector's position, it will always be about how providers are adhering to the legal requirements set by Government and Parliament. Obviously, we look forward to seeing what the Bill produces in how we then interact with it. In terms of a broad legal requirement, and what all children as a minimum should be able to access, I would support that statement.

The Chair: I am afraid that brings us to the end of this session, and we will move on to the next panel of witnesses.

Examination of Witnesses

Mark Russell, Lynn Perry and Katharine Sacks-Jones gave evidence.

2.40 pm

The Chair: If Members did not get in for a question last time but indicate that they would like to this time, I will try to call them. We now have witnesses from a number of children's organisations. Could you just begin by introducing yourselves, please?

Lynn Perry: Good afternoon. I am Lynn Perry and I am the chief executive at Barnardo's. I am here this afternoon representing the Children's Charities Coalition, which includes Barnardo's, the Children's Society, the NSPCC, Action for Children and the National Children's Bureau.

Mark Russell: Good afternoon. I am Mark Russell and I am the chief executive of the Children's Society.

Katharine Sacks-Jones: Good afternoon. I am Katharine Sacks-Jones and I am chief executive of Become, which is the national charity for children in care and young care leavers.

The Chair: Thank you. I will hand over to Neil O'Brien, the Opposition spokesperson.

Q119 Neil O'Brien: Thank you for coming. Are there any things in the Bill that you think we should amend as it goes through? Are there things that you would like to improve further, or any ways that you would like us to change the Bill? Why don't we start with Lynn?

Lynn Perry: The coalition broadly welcomes the potentially transformational proposals that are contained within the Bill, including those for a single unique identifier, which is one of the things that the coalition has been specifically calling for over a period of time. Multiple reviews have found that information sharing between agencies is problematic, so that is one of the things that we think could really aid child protection, safeguarding and multi-agency working. I would say that to really shift the dial we need further investment in early intervention and early help across our communities, and much greater focus on embedding that consistently and universally. We also need some further clarification on some of the areas that the single unique identifier will need for effective application, I think it is fair to say.

Q120 Neil O'Brien: Can you unpack that a little bit?

Lynn Perry: Yes, certainly. I will raise the third area and then I will come back to that, if I may. The third area is mechanisms for ensuring that the voices, wishes, feelings and experiences of children and young people really influence the provisions in the Bill, and to put those at the heart of support.

On the single unique identifier, there are some questions that we think are worth some further scrutiny. The first of those is the question whether the single unique identifier would be assigned to all babies, children and young people, and a confirmation that that would be for children between the ages of nought and 18. We also think there is an opportunity to extend the use of the identifier, the scope of which is currently limited in the Bill to safeguarding and welfare purposes. A wider emphasis on wellbeing of children and young people and positive outcomes is one of the things that could be further considered here.

As ever, implementation cannot wait, and it would be helpful to have some indicative timescales for when the Secretary of State might introduce regulations for the consistent identifier and how people will be required to use it within their systems. Finally, while acknowledging the need for data protection, there is an opportunity to make better, data-informed decisions in the future about the commissioning and scoping of services that will effectively meet the needs of children and young people, as well as taking account of some of their emerging vulnerabilities and risk and need factors.

Q121 Neil O'Brien: Mark, getting straight to the point, are there any amendments that you would like to see?

Mark Russell: I associate myself entirely with everything that my colleague has said, but I have a couple of extra points. I would want the Bill to include a measurement of children's wellbeing. I welcome the fact that the title of the Bill mentions children's wellbeing, but we have no measurement of children's wellbeing. We in the Children's Society measure children's wellbeing, but we

are a charity; we are measuring a sample of children rather than all children. The Government talk about wanting to be child-centred. A measurement of children's wellbeing would be real data on what real children think about their lives, and that would provide a huge amount of information for local authorities to ensure that local services meet the needs of young people. That is one thing.

Secondly, I would welcome schools becoming a fourth statutory safeguarding partner, because so many safeguarding challenges are first identified by schools—I speak not just as the chief executive of a charity, but as a school governor. Thirdly, I hugely welcome the breakfast clubs and the changes to the rules on school uniform; the Children's Society has campaigned on school uniform for many years. Those will help families. I understand why the Government have made the breakfast clubs a universal offer, but with limited funds, I would like to see secondary school children included in it, but with the breakfast clubs available first to children from families receiving universal credit. The free school meal allowance has not gone up for a very long time. We think that around 1 million children in this country who are living in poverty are not eligible for free school meals, and we know that hunger hugely limits what children can do in school and their learning. If we can change that, we will improve the opportunities for, and wellbeing of young people.

Katharine Sacks-Jones: I want to focus on the provisions on children in care and young care leavers. There are some welcome steps to better support care leavers. At the moment, young people leaving the care system face a care cliff, where support falls away, often on their 18th birthday. A huge number go on to face homelessness—one in three become homeless within two years of leaving care—and that has meant a big increase in statutory homelessness among care leavers: a 54% rise in the past five years. There is a real challenge to ensure that we better support young people leaving the care system.

In that context, extending Staying Close up to the age of 25 and making it a statutory provision is welcome, but we think the Bill could go further in strengthening the legal entitlement for young people leaving care. There are two areas in particular. The first is that we are concerned about the how the Bill assesses whether a young person's welfare requires Staying Close support. Where you have those kinds of assessment, particularly in times of scarcity, the extra support is often rationed, which will mean that many young people are not eligible for it or are not assessed as being in need. We think that rationing needs to be removed. Instead, there should be an assumption that a young person leaving care does require some extra support; the question should be what that support looks like, and we would like to see the provisions in the Bill broadened to allow local authorities to provide other types of support beyond what the Bill provides for at the moment, which is largely advice and guidance.

We welcome the strengthening of the care leaver local offer to include provisions around housing and homelessness. As I said, those are big issues for young people leaving care. We also warmly welcome the Government's recent amendment on homelessness intentionality, which would remove intentionality from care leavers. We hear from young people who have found themselves homeless because, for example, they

accepted a place at university in a different part of the country, and they were then deemed by their home local authority to be intentionally homeless and so not eligible for further homelessness assistance. We think that needs to change. That is a welcome step.

We think the Bill could go further in looking at priority need for young people leaving care. At the moment, that goes up to 21; we think it should go up to the age of 25, in line with other entitlements for young care leavers. We are also disappointed not to see in the Bill the extension of corporate parenting—something that the Government have previously committed to.

There are some welcome measures that will increase oversight and accountability, and help with some of the structural challenges, in relation to the provision of homes for children. We do not think those go far enough in addressing the huge issue around the sufficiency of placements for children. That issue is seeing more and more children moved across the country, moved far from their local areas and being moved frequently—a huge amount of instability. That is a big challenge. We would like to see a requirement for a national strategy that looks at the issue of sufficiency and collects better data, as well as an annual report to Parliament on progress against that strategy. Finally, to reinforce the point made by colleagues, young people's voices are really important. The importance of considering young people's wishes and feelings is set out in other pieces of legislation, and there are a number of areas in the Bill that would benefit from the inclusion of that, too.

Q122 Stephen Morgan: Thank you for being witnesses before the Committee today. My first question is to Mark and Lynn. Mark, you mentioned the benefits of breakfast clubs earlier. Could you say a bit more about what you think the benefits will be for families during a cost of living crisis?

Mark Russell: Perhaps I should say that we are working with about 75,000 young people around the country, and so many more young people are reporting as being hungry than have been for quite some time. We know that families are under huge strain. We saw in our "Good Childhood Report" this year that 84% of parents were anxious about being able to pay their bills, and we also saw that one in three parents were struggling to pay for a hot meal every single day. As they are provided to all children in the school, I think breakfast clubs will provide a real sense of uniformity and equality, and will give every child the best possible start to the day. Children who are hungry cannot learn and cannot thrive. I have friends who are teachers, and they are telling me that in classrooms around the country they are seeing children who are hungry and living in homes that are cold. Anything that we can do to support families is really important, so I welcome breakfast clubs. As I said earlier, I would like to see secondary school children helped, and if the pot is limited, I would probably step back from universality and provide for those most in need.

Also, alongside that, this needs to link up with the Government's child poverty strategy that is coming later this year, which we are very much looking forward to seeing, about how we lift more and more families out of poverty. According to the stats, there are 4.3 million children in this country in poverty, and those children

will not get the best start in life or thrive in school if they are hungry and cannot succeed. I obviously very much welcome the measures on that in the Bill.

Q123 Stephen Morgan: Thank you, Mark. I have a similar question to you, Lynn, but perhaps around the branded school uniform measures.

Lynn Perry: Certainly. I am looking at Mark because I know that has been an area of campaigning and influencing for the Children's Society. I will first touch on the breakfast clubs, without wanting to repeat what Mark has said; we do welcome those. We are concerned about poor health outcomes for children and young people and health inequalities, particularly for the 4.3 million children and young people who are living in poverty, 1 million of whom are in destitution and whose basic needs are not being met. That means that in the provision of breakfast clubs we would like to see some real guidance, and monitoring of the guidance, on healthy and nutritious food with which children can start their day. We know that they are unable to attain educationally if they are going to school hungry and coming home to a cold house.

I want to touch on child poverty, if I may, because there is a need to join this up with the work in the child poverty strategy. Those two things should go hand in hand on parallel lines. On school uniforms, there is a question of affordability for a lot of the families that we work with. We ran the attendance mentoring pilot in seven areas, and we have had families that have been unable to get their children to school, not because of school refusal but because they cannot afford the right uniform, they do not have school shoes or transport is an issue. All those things need to join up to get children into school and to get them a breakfast, which will not only allow them to learn but destigmatise some of their experiences when they do not have the right school shoes or uniform.

Mark Russell: May I add something else? At the Children's Society we have campaigned on uniform for about seven years, and we were very grateful to the previous Administration for backing a private Member's Bill that we were working with an MP on, which placed the non-statutory guidance on school uniform on a statutory footing. That was designed to reduce the cost of uniform by providing for consultations with parents, using pre-loved items, reducing the number of branded items and not having one sole supplier. Since the Bill became law, our research has shown that a significant number of schools around the country have not changed their uniform policies. In our poll from last year, 60% of parents believed that their school uniform policy had not changed. I want to welcome the measures in the Bill that will tighten that further and reduce the number of branded items. Uniform should not be the thing that breaks the bank for parents. We know that children who are not wearing the correct uniform frequently end up being excluded from school and are then at a higher risk of being exploited by criminal groups.

Q124 Stephen Morgan: That is really helpful. Briefly—Katharine, what impact do you think the measures will have on care leavers and the support that they receive?

Katharine Sacks-Jones: They are very welcome. We would very warmly welcome the extension of Staying Close support, because we know that too many young

people do not get the support they need at that point of leaving care. That can often literally be on their 18th birthday—we regularly hear from young people who are perhaps told 24 or 48 hours before their 18th birthday that they will need to leave on it. Often the planning is poor and support is inadequate, and sadly many go on to face homelessness. We would like to see the provisions strengthened.

Our concern is that at the moment the assessment made by local authorities will enable them to ration support, and actually this should be a provision for all young people leaving care who need it. It could be a small amendment which would really strengthen the support available to young people and make sure that it is sufficiently different from what is already available on a statutory footing.

The Chair: Now Lib Dem spokesperson Munira Wilson.

Q125 Munira Wilson: Mark, you pointed out that this is a children's wellbeing Bill but there is not actually much discussion about wellbeing in the Bill. You talked about a national wellbeing measurement. Beyond that, and if we had that data, could the Bill go further in terms of talking about the provision of services to support children's wellbeing and mental health?

Mark Russell: In a word, yes. A national wellbeing measurement would be a really good place to start, because it would give us the data showing how children's lives really are, and would put the voice of children at the centre of this. In the meantime, there is the measurement we have. We are part of a coalition of charities, as well as the Children's Charities Coalition, involving pro bono economics. Lord Gus O'Donnell said the national measurement is the missing piece in the Bill.

As a group of charities we have also been urging a wider improvement of early intervention support for young people around mental health. Young people too often wait until crisis before we intervene. In the period between when a GP diagnoses that a young person needs help and when they finally get it, that young person's mental health spirals further out of control. That has an impact on their whole family and their ability to attend and thrive in school, and it means that more young people end up in the children's social care system as well. An investment in early intervention is a long-term investment to improve children's mental health, which, in my view, would create stronger adults as well.

Q126 Munira Wilson: Katharine, do you think we could go further with this Bill in terms of unregistered, unregulated accommodation for young people in care, which has been a topic of many a scandal in recent years?

Katharine Sacks-Jones: There are some really welcome measures in here, and increasing Ofsted's powers and increasing oversight, particularly of private providers, is all welcome. One of the challenges is the imbalance in the market and the fact that these private providers have so much power because they run over 80% of all children's homes. There is nothing in the Bill that really increases sufficiency and brings on board more public sector provision and more charity sector provision. While you have that imbalance, some of these challenges will

remain, so we think there needs to be more to address sufficiency and we would like to see a national sufficiency strategy to address that.

The provisions as set out also do not cover the providers of supported accommodation, which is accommodation for 16 and 17-year-olds—children—who are still in care, and that can be hostels or bed and breakfasts. We would like to see these provisions extended to that group as well. The Government have previously said that that is something they would consider in time, but we think this is an opportunity to legislate to include the providers of supported accommodation to children in the provisions that are set out here, which would increase transparency and scrutiny of that section of children's home provision—supported accommodation provision.

The Chair: A number of Members want to get in. I ask Members to direct their question to whoever you think might be the most appropriate to answer it, and then if the other members of the panel say they agree, we will move forward. If they do not, of course they can say that.

Q127 Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): I think this question is for Mark. Before I was elected, for five years, I ran a service in support of survivors of child sexual abuse. Hearing the Children's Commissioner say, just before you, that every report makes the same set of recommendations and at the heart of that is better multi-agency working, would you talk about the ways in which the Bill helps to drive that integration at a local level, and helps facilitate that multi-agency working to keep children safe?

Mark Russell: Thank you, Tom; we have corresponded before about your previous work. I welcome a huge swathe of what is in the Bill on this. We have been campaigning on this for many years, including the identifier for young people to ensure data is shared. Home schooling is a really significant area. As the commissioner and Ofsted said earlier, a significant number of young people are home-schooled, which is really good and beneficial for them. It is also important to say that some are home-schooled because the school is unable to meet the special educational needs that those young people have, or they are struggling with their mental health. The measures in the Bill to provide for a register are really important. The local authority consent for young people is really important.

I also want to mention that we had an independent inquiry into child sexual abuse, which was seven years long. We heard from more than 7,000 survivors of abuse, and there were a swathe of recommendations that have not been acted on. I know we have heard from the Home Secretary that there is a plan coming on that, which is really welcome, but time and time again we read the same recommendations, in report after report. We know that so many young people experience sexual abuse in family settings or in settings where there is an adult that they should be able to trust. There are clear things we can do to tighten safeguarding and minimise those risks. The Bill takes a step in the right direction. It is also really important because it has been quite a while since we had a piece of legislation entirely focused on children. That, in itself, is welcome.

Q128 Ellie Chowns: Lynn, what is your view on the fact that the Bill does not contain provisions to give children equal protection from violence to adults?

Lynn Perry: We think that this is an opportunity for that to be addressed in legislation. As a charity that works across the devolved nations, we have obviously seen change in other areas. Now is the opportunity for us to address the defence of reasonable chastisement in legislation and give children equal protection. It is important to note that values, public attitudes and the way in which we frame childhood have changed significantly, so to consider that further would be very welcome.

Q129 Ellie Chowns: So you would like to see the Bill amended in that way?

Lynn Perry: We would.

Q130 Amanda Martin: Keeping children safe and safeguarding are key priorities that you guys have a lot of expertise in. Many experts have talked about the widening attainment gap and the rising number of children out of school. Most of them are our most disadvantaged and vulnerable. What difference do you think the Bill's provisions will make to those children on things such as admissions, the ability of local authorities to plan school places, and collaborative working across local authorities and across services, so that they have an appropriate and safe school place?

Mark Russell: There is a great deal in the Bill that will improve safeguarding arrangements for children, which is really important. The role of the local authority is critical, and local authorities are under enormous pressure. We all work with local authorities right around the country. We hear from directors of children's services and their teams about the sheer pressure.

Alongside that, we need to look at how local authorities commission services for children and young people. I always find it slightly bemusing that local authorities can commission a bin service for 10 years, but cannot commission a children's service for two years. That would not cost the taxpayer any more money. If we improved the length of the periods at which commissioning were done, it would allow organisations such as ours to invest in services and teams to build stronger services locally. The environment in which local government finance works does not make our lives any easier in supporting children and young people.

Lynn Perry: We have to think about this pre-school. Early intervention in early years services is absolutely critical to ensure school readiness for children. That is not just for those children in educational terms, but for their families to be able to establish a network of support as a parent or carer and to access universal and targeted provision. We need to take a whole-family approach to support children to start well in school. What that requires, of course, is a significant shift in investment. Currently, most of the spending in the children's social care budget is on late interventions and the children in-care population. We need to re-engineer and reset the system so that there is more investment at a much earlier stage. All of that helps with school readiness, attendance and attainment. As we know, schools are at the heart of a lot of that multi-agency working across communities and the safeguarding system, in terms of their opportunity to identify children, so it is important that children have a positive experience of starting school and staying in school.

Q131 Damian Hinds: I want to come back to breakfasts, if I may. I think this is a question for Mark. The Bill legislates for universal breakfast provision at primary school, but is silent on what happens at secondary school. We do not know what will happen. The Government have been asked, including by Government Back Benchers, to extend the provision to secondary school. They have made the point, which is not an unreasonable point, that you have to make choices in a resource-constrained world, and their choice is to go universal at primary, but with quite a small per child, per day cash allowance. Recognising the resource-constrained world, would you make that choice if you were in the same position, or would you say it was better to target according to how deprived an area is—not by individual child, but by area—regardless of the age of the child?

Mark Russell: That is a very good question. I understand why the Government have taken the decision they have; I really do. Particularly in a primary school, you want to be as universal as possible.

Damian Hinds: It would be the whole school, as it is now under the school breakfast programme.

Mark Russell: Yes. With limited resources, I would probably have targeted it more at those most in need and included secondary school children in that mix. We will continue talking to the Government about secondary school children; I am deeply concerned about them as well.

Q132 Damian Hinds: This is probably for Lynn or Katharine. In terms of trying to address mental health issues as they arise early on, before they become a crisis, following the change in Government, are you aware of any change in the approach towards mental health support in schools through mental health support teams for clusters of schools?

Lynn Perry: I have not yet seen any change on the ground. We deliver a number of mental health support teams in schools. We consider them to be an effective way to reach children and young people at an early stage, and to intervene before they reach crisis point. There are often relationships of trust. Quite frequently, people know their children very well within the school context and can manage that supported and enabled engagement with provision in schools. I have not seen anything that has translated into a direct change in practice at this juncture, but we think it is a really important area of work. We think that there is potential to do more in that space, by looking at what might be described as an MHST+ type model.

The Chair: Finally, Darren Paffey. We have about 90 seconds left.

Q133 Darren Paffey: Clauses 13 and 14 make provision for the financial oversight of care providers, and clause 9 looks at better regional arrangements for accommodation. What are your views on how effective that will be in improving provision for the care of children?

Katharine Sacks-Jones: As I said earlier, these are welcome measures. There is very little oversight of the providers at the moment, so a number of measures will improve that oversight. The missing piece is that if you do not tackle sufficiency, the power imbalance will still

sit in the hands of the providers who provide the majority of homes for children. Greater oversight needs to come alongside improving sufficiency. One way to do that is to have a national strategy, which is missing at the moment. We think the Bill is an opportunity to introduce that.

Q134 Darren Paffey: To what extent does the regional co-operation deal with sufficiency?

Katharine Sacks-Jones: I think there are benefits to be had in regional commissioning. We are concerned to ensure that provision for children is not then condensed in certain areas of a region, which could mean children still being moved great distances. We would like to see a safeguard in the Bill around not moving children far from home unless it is in their interest, to go alongside the new regional co-operation arrangements.

Lynn Perry: I echo some of what Katharine said there. There has to be a focus on outcomes for children in care, and in particular for all providers to be able to demonstrate that they are taking the sort of steps that Katharine describes, which would lead to better outcomes for children. We need to recognise that with 80% of existing provision being provided privately, any sudden exit might also cause some challenges for children. So, the sufficiency piece is really important, but we need to rebuild what I reluctantly describe as the market, to provide care for children in a different way. That will take some time.

The Chair: I understand that this session should run until 3.15 pm.

Q135 David Baines (St Helens North) (Lab): Good afternoon. Can you tell us briefly, in your own words, about the urgency—in your view—or otherwise of the Bill? We all agree that your organisations do outstanding, amazing, essential work with vulnerable children and young people up and down the country. How has the landscape for children changed in the last decade? Have things got better for them or worse? Is the Bill needed or not?

Lynn Perry: As an individual charity, we run 800 services. However, right across the coalition, we are seeing an increased level of presenting need. A number of factors are influencers in that: of course, the long shadow of the covid pandemic and then, hard on its heels, the cost of living crisis, which has really impacted a lot of the families that we work with across our charities. Our practitioners across the charities also tell us that thresholds for services are getting increasingly high. Even within some of our early intervention services, we are working with increased complexity of need. That is a really important factor to recognise, because families are under pressure for much longer, which leads to issues that are much more intractable and difficult to address. That is part and parcel of the picture that we are seeking to address.

Without a significant investment in early intervention and early help—the level of spend—I do not think we will be able to achieve the radical transformation that the Bill aims to achieve. We have been doing a report since 2010 that looks at children's services and funding and the spend on them. We are now seeing a tipping point. If we do not invest now in early help, it will be very difficult for the pendulum to swing back.

Mark Russell: I absolutely endorse all of that. The data in that report shows that councils in England spent £12.2 billion on children's services, and that is an increase of £600 million on the previous year. However, expenditure on early intervention and support for families has halved during that period, and support for later interventions has doubled, so we are spending all the money at the crisis end. That is the first thing.

Allied to that, the cost of living crisis has hit families really hard around the country. My colleagues who work directly with children are having to buy food for children. We are having to buy shoes for children, duvets for children, and beds for children, who are struggling really deeply right now. I have always had a quote over my desk at home by an American writer called Frederick Douglass, who said:

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

I think he was right. I welcome the Bill and also the engagement that our organisations have had with the Government on its content. Thank you for having us along to present our voice to this debate today. However, we need to do much more to give every child in Britain the best possible start in life.

Katharine Sacks-Jones: Just to add, children in the care system are some of the most vulnerable children in our country. We have more children in care than there have been historically—84,000 in England. The outcomes for them are getting worse on a number of issues, including more children being moved away from their local area, away from their family, brothers and sisters, and away from their school. Frequently, they are being moved just because there are not enough places for them to live closer to home. We are seeing an increase in young people leaving the care system and becoming homeless, so on all those issues the outcomes for children in the care system are getting worse. This is an opportunity to address some of those issues, and we very much welcome some of the provisions in the Bill, but there is an opportunity to go further to strengthen it and to really change things for children in the care system.

The Chair: I thank all the witnesses for coming today and giving evidence to the Committee. We now move on to our next panel.

Examination of Witnesses

Nigel Genders and Paul Barber gave evidence.

3.15 pm

The Chair: We now move on to representatives from the Churches. Could you begin by introducing yourselves, please?

Nigel Genders: My name is Nigel Genders. I am the chief education officer for the Church of England, which means that I have the national responsibility for the Church of England's work in education, and I oversee 4,700 schools, which educate 1 million children.

Paul Barber: I am Paul Barber. I am director of the Catholic Education Service, which is the education agency of the Bishop's Conference of England and Wales, and we provide just over 2,000 schools across England.

Q136 Neil O'Brien: Thank you both for coming. My first question is to you, Paul. The last Government promised to lift the cap on faith school admissions and

consulted on doing just that. Is that something you would still like to happen and potentially be put into the Bill?

Paul Barber: The cap is a policy rather than law. We would very much like to see the cap lifted. My understanding of the current policy is that it applies to free schools, and we would very much like to see that lifted. The consultation took place and there has not, as yet, been a Government response to that.

Q137 Neil O'Brien: Do you have a timescale for when the Government are going on reply to that consultation?

Paul Barber: I do not—that is not in my hands.

Q138 Neil O'Brien: I just wondered whether we might get an answer during the passage of the Bill. I have a question for both of you. There was a thought-provoking leader in the *TES* the other morning that talked about the lack of discussion in the Bill, as well as more generally, on discipline. The Bill is largely silent on discipline, even though we know it is one of the biggest issues affecting teachers, and Teacher Tapp surveys show that it is a huge issue for teachers and many students as well. Do you have particular thoughts on what you would like to see in the Bill, or more broadly, on discipline that would improve your ability to run orderly schools and protect teachers? There are obviously things out there like behaviour hubs, the discipline survey and questions about alternative provision. You both have very deep experience across the whole piece, so I am interested in your thoughts about what we could be doing further in the Bill and more generally.

Nigel Genders: You are right to raise the issue of behaviour. When we talk to teachers across the country, one of the biggest things that puts people off teaching, in terms of the retention and recruitment crisis, is children's behaviour. I am not sure there are particular things that you need legislation for in that space; it is about just giving teachers greater confidence. We are doing work in teacher training and leadership training to equip teachers to be really fantastic teachers, which are all important tools available to the system to really prioritise that area. I cannot think of anything particularly in the legislative space that would be needed.

Paul Barber: I agree with Nigel that discipline is definitely a factor in the recruitment and retention of teachers, and it is something that we need to give some attention to. Like Nigel, I do not think there is anything specific that is required legislatively, but I think what is needed is an overall accountability framework within which schools have the flexibility to respond to the needs of their particular pupil populations. Our schools have a very good track record of being orderly, and I think that is one of the reasons why they are very popular with parents. It is about school leaders and professionals being able to do what is in the best interest of their pupils and enabling the behaviour to be what it should be in our schools.

Q139 Neil O'Brien: One of the major changes in the Bill is the extension of the national curriculum, for the first time, to absolutely all schools. At the same time, the curriculum is being changed and rewritten. I have a high-level question and a specific one. The high-level one is about the different visions for our schools. One

vision would stress the importance of diversity and argue that there are different ways of educating and that schools can and should do things differently. I do not know whether you buy into that vision.

My second, more specific question is whether there is anything you would have concerns about being in the curriculum. I am particularly thinking of religious education and topics like that. Are there ideas out there that you would be concerned about being forced into all schools?

Nigel Genders: As previous panels have said, there is a slight complexity about the timing of the Bill and the intention to bring in a national curriculum for everyone. In broad principle, I think it is right. There are one or two caveats I will go on to talk about, but in broad principle it is right to create a level playing field and have a broad and balanced curriculum across the piece for everybody. The complexity is that this legislation is happening at the same time as the curriculum and assessment review, so our schools are being asked to sign up to a general curriculum for everybody without knowing what that curriculum is likely to be.

Certainly among the schools and leaders I have spoken to the hope is that through the process of the curriculum review, and certainly in the evidence we have been giving to that, we will end up with a much broader, richer balance of both academic and vocational and technical skills within the curriculum. We hope to have something of broad appeal to everybody that is at a high level, and under which everybody can find an equal place in that space. But we do not know at the moment.

The Chair: We do not want to go too far into the curriculum today, because it is not really part of the Bill.

Paul Barber: I will keep my remarks brief. We have a very clear understanding of what a curriculum is in a Catholic school. It is very much a broad, balanced and holistic curriculum in which there are no siloes and the curriculum subjects interact with each other. There is of course the centrality of RE, which you mentioned. We are hopeful that the review will provide a framework within which we will be able to deliver alongside other views of curricula in other schools.

Q140 Catherine McKinnell: Thank you for being here today. What is your assessment generally of the impact of the Bill on faith schools?

Nigel Genders: The Church of England's part of the sector is very broad in that of the 4,700 schools that we provide, the vast majority of our secondary schools are already academies, and less than half of our primary schools, which are by far the biggest part of that number, are academies. We would like to see the system develop in a way that, as is described in the Bill, brings consistency across the piece. In terms of the impact on our schools, my particular worry will be with the small rural primary schools. Sorry to go on about statistics, but of the small rural primary schools in the country—that is schools with less than 210 children—the Church of England provides 65%.

The flexibilities that schools gain by joining a multi-academy trust, enabling them to deploy staff effectively across a whole group of schools and to collaborate and work together, is something that we really value. What we would not like to see is a watering down of the opportunities

for that kind of collaboration. We set out our vision for education in a document called “Our Hope for a Flourishing School System”. Our vision is of widespread collaboration between trusts, and between trusts and academies. The diocesan family of schools is one where that collaboration really happens.

We want to ensure that this attempt to level the playing field in terms of the freedoms available to everyone is a levelling-up rather than a levelling down. I know that the Secretary of State commented on this in the Select Committee last week. I also know that the notes and comments around this Bill talk about those freedoms being available to everybody, but, for me, the Bill does not reflect that. It is not on the face of the Bill that this is about levelling-up. In terms of risk to our sector, I would like to see some reassurance that this is about bringing those freedoms and flexibility for innovation to the whole of our sector because we are equally spread across academies and maintained schools.

Paul Barber: Equally, we have a large foot in both camps. Slightly different in shape, we are involved in all sectors of the school system but the vast majority of our schools are either maintained schools or academies. Currently academies make up just over half. Because our academy programmes are led by dioceses in a strategic way, we buck the national trend in that the number of our primary schools, secondary schools, and academies is almost identical. I agree with what Nigel said. This is a jigsaw of many parts. What we need is an overall narrative into which these reforms fit. It was good yesterday to be able to sign the “Improving Education Together partnership”, to collaborate with the Government in a closer way to create that narrative.

Q141 Munira Wilson: I want to pick up on the faith cap issue that the hon. Member for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston raised. The 50% faith cap for all new free schools was a policy put in place by the coalition Government. There are concerns that the provisions in this Bill to allow other providers to open new schools would mean that the faith cap does not apply to them. Nigel, I know you are on the record as saying that Church of England schools should be inclusive and serve the whole local community. What do you think will be the impact of losing that faith cap, and should we be putting in an amendment to ensure that the cap is in place for all new schools?

Nigel Genders: I have a couple of things to say on that, if I may. I think where this Bill makes a statement in terms of legislative change is in the ability for any new school not to have to be a free school. That opens up the possibility of voluntary-aided and voluntary-controlled schools as well as community schools and free schools. In each of those cases, you are right, our priority is serving that local community. It is an irony that there is a part of the Bill about new schools when, actually, most of the pressure is from surplus places rather than looking for more places. In particular areas of the country where there is rapid population and housing growth, or in areas of disadvantage and need, we would be really keen to have every option to open a school. I am concerned to ensure that local authorities are given the capacity to manage that process effectively, if they are the arbiters of that competition process in the future.

For us, opening a new school, which we do quite regularly as we are passionate about involvement in the education system, is done with the commitment to provide places for the locality. Where schools can make a case for a different model, and in other faith communities as well, which I am sure Paul will go on to say, is for them to do. Our position is that a Church school is for the whole community and we will seek to deliver that under the 50% cap.

Paul Barber: As I understand the Bill, it removes the academy presumption, so if a local authority runs a competition, there has to be a preference for academies. The provision for providers to propose new schools independently of that has always existed, currently exists and is not being changed, as I understand it, in this legislation as drafted.

In terms of the provision of new schools, we are in a slightly different position because we are the largest minority community providing schools primarily for that community but welcoming others. Our schools are in fact the most diverse in the country. Ethnically, linguistically, socioeconomically and culturally, they are more diverse than any other type of school. We provide new schools where there is a need for that school—where there is a parental wish for a Catholic education. We are very proud of the fact that that demand now comes from not just the Catholic community, but a much wider range of parents who want what we offer. We would not propose a new school, and we have a decades-long track record of working with local authorities to work out the need for additional places.

Admissions is one half of a complex thing; the other is provision of places. Our dioceses work very closely with local authorities to determine what kind of places are needed. That might mean expansion or contraction of existing schools. Sometimes, it might mean a new school. If it means a new school, we will propose a new Catholic school only where there are sufficient parents wanting that education to need a new Catholic school. The last one we opened was in East Anglia in 2022. It was greatly appreciated by the local community, which was clamouring for that school to be opened. That is our position on the provision of new schools. We will try to provide new schools whenever parents want the education that we are offering.

Q142 Munira Wilson: Nigel, I was interested that you said that 65% of small rural primaries are Church of England schools. The Bill's provisions state that breakfast clubs will be a universal offering. Will those small rural primary schools have the capacity to deliver what is laid out in the legislation?

Nigel Genders: That is a really important question. Broadly, all our schools are really supportive of the breakfast club initiative and think it is helpful to be able to provide that offer to children, for all the reasons already articulated during the previous panel. You are right that there will be particular challenges in small schools in terms of staffing, managing the site, providing the breakfast and all those things. As the funding for the roll-out of breakfast clubs is considered, it may be that there need to be some different models. The economies of scale in large trusts serving 2,000, 3,000 or 4,000 children are quite different from those of a school that has 40 or 50 children, one member of staff and probably a site

manager. The ability to provide breakfast for every child in a fair way needs further consideration. The legislation is right to endeavour to do that, but the detail will be about the funding to make that possible.

Q143 Lizzi Collinge: I want to follow up on a couple of previous questions and make sure that I have clarity about something that I appreciate is complex. This is about faith selection, particularly in relation to clause 51. Do you expect that Church of England and Catholic schools—if you have any information about other faith groups, I welcome it, but I appreciate that you do not represent other faith groups—in the short, medium or long term will use the changes brought in by clause 51 to open new schools with 100% faith-based selection?

Paul Barber: Clause 51 does not change the parameters within which we can open new schools. As drafted at the moment, the Bill leaves that possibility exactly as it is today. I have outlined my position on when we would seek to open new schools. The idea of opening new schools and creating new places is to satisfy all the parental demand. The provision of places and admissions are two things that work together. If an area has insufficient places in Catholic schools for all the families who want to take advantage of that education, obviously the longer term solution is to create more places, but in the shorter term it has always been part of the system—in our view, very reasonably—that if there are insufficient places, priority should be given to the community who provided the school in the first place, with others afterwards. That has always been part of the system that we have operated in since the 19th century.

Q144 Lizzi Collinge: May I clarify? In certain circumstances, yes, you would like to have schools with 100% place selection?

Paul Barber: We are talking about oversubscription criteria, which only kick in when there are insufficient places to satisfy parental demand. In those cases, we would wish to continue to give priority to Catholic families.

Nigel Genders: Again, Paul has identified a difference in policy area between the two Churches in this space. My answer is the same as previously: that would not be the case for the Church of England. We are much more interested in some of the other parts of the previous consultation, which have not come through yet—around special schools and the designation of special schools with religious designation. The Church of England would love to be able to provide special schools in those circumstances. In the provision of new schools, whether voluntary-aided free schools or voluntary controlled, we would not be looking to do 100%.

Paul Barber: We would also welcome having more. We already have special schools, but we would like to have more.

Q145 Damian Hinds: I would like to go back to the curriculum—

The Chair: Order. Is that relevant to the Bill? As long as you relate it directly to the Bill—

Damian Hinds: I promise you, Mr Betts, that it will be relevant to the Bill. As Nigel I think rather charitably said, his schools would be “asked” to sign up to something

without knowing what the something is—but I do not think they are going to be asked, Nigel; I think they are going to be told. You also said that we hope—I include myself in that “we”—that it will be a broad framework, which will allow everyone to do their distinctive thing, as they do today. That is a hope, but we do not know. For example, there is a movement to rebrand religious education as “world views”—does that make you nervous?

Nigel Genders: I am in danger of getting into the curriculum discussion, rather than the—

Q146 Damian Hinds: To keep us both in order—

The Chair: Order. You will emphasise that this must relate to the Bill.

Damian Hinds: I will, absolutely. Do you feel any nervousness or concern about the removal of the safety valve that says academy schools can deviate from the national curriculum?

Nigel Genders: With all the discussion about the curriculum and the national curriculum, RE is part of the core curriculum; it is not in the national curriculum at the moment. Levelling the playing field up or whichever way you want to do it, there is a requirement to teach a breadth of RE within that curriculum as a core subject, but it is not defined in the national curriculum. We are happy with that position but, either way, the important thing is that we enable a broad, rich and holistic curriculum to develop—for the reason of behaviour that Neil mentioned as much as anything. We want children to enjoy coming to school, and the curriculum is a fundamental part of that.

Paul Barber: Maintained schools have to follow the national curriculum, and over half of ours are maintained schools currently. We have a very rich religious education curriculum. Recently, we published a curriculum directory, which I can share with the Committee if interested. Our position on RE is also well set out in our evidence to the curriculum and assessment review—again, we can give copies to the Committee if that would be helpful.

Q147 Damian Hinds: RE is not the only sensitive subject; there is also English literature, history or RSHE. My question had a religious bent to it, but it was really about taking away that safety valve and that ability of academy trusts to say, “We are not going to follow precisely what has been set out.”

Nigel Genders: I think our point is that we would like to see that flexibility within the national curriculum available to everybody. I am very much in favour of levelling up, as long as the curriculum gives the space to do that.

Q148 Damian Hinds: We have just talked a little about the admissions arrangements for VA and VC schools. You have also alluded to the fact that rolls are falling in many places—they are falling initially mostly in primary, but that will feed through. Are you concerned about the more directive nature of what will be available to councils and the position that that would put your schools in, particularly voluntary aided schools? On the question of new schools, as you rightly pointed out, Paul, it has always been possible to open a VA school—it is not a very well-known fact that some VA schools have

[*Damian Hinds*]

opened. With this Bill, do you think it is more or less likely that in the near future you will be able to open more Catholic schools?

Paul Barber: From what I can see, I do not think it is any more or less likely. In terms of the directive power, my understanding is that the position in VA schools remains the same, and that it is academies that will have a direction-making power similar to that which already applies to voluntary aided schools.

Q149 Damian Hinds: Forgive me—we are very short on time. I was talking about a council's ability to stop a popular school expanding, for example. You both mentioned earlier that you have some really quite popular schools, and now the council will have much more an ability not to let that happen.

Paul Barber: Sorry; I misunderstood. You are talking about the restrictions on schools unilaterally changing their published admission number. Our position on that is that it is because of this relationship between admissions and the planning of school places, which must be planned in some way. Our diocese has a long track record of decades of working with its local authorities and with the diocese in the Church of England to work out what is required in the future, and looking forward for places and planning that. Having some kind of regulation of schools' published admissions numbers is quite helpful in ensuring that that works smoothly, because if you plan it and three schools then arbitrarily decide to increase their published admission number, that creates some real problems locally with place planning.

Nigel Genders: We would agree with that. Not to rehearse all that Paul has just said, but a further point is that when it comes to resourcing local authorities to carry out their role in the allocation and direction of schools to take particular pupils, we are really keen to see that done in a way that makes fairness the arbitrating factor to ensure that there is a real fairness of approach. The collaboration between maintained and academy and diocese and local authority very much needs to happen, and we would welcome that.

Q150 Neil O'Brien: I have a very specific question on small rural primary schools attempting to deliver breakfast clubs, potentially with a very small number of staff. What is your understanding of whether the time spent doing breakfast clubs will count as directed time?

The Chair: Let us have a fairly quick answer. One other Member would like to ask a question as well.

Neil O'Brien: Do we know whether that is the case?

Nigel Genders: There is the question of how to make all that possible within the allotted hours that staff can be directed. It needs resourcing. It does not have to be teachers who provide those breakfast clubs—

Q151 Neil O'Brien: No, but what if it is a teacher in your little schools?

Nigel Genders: They will have to be resourced to do it in other ways to make it possible.

The Chair: The last question is from Ian Sollom.

Q152 Ian Sollom (St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire) (LD): There is hopefully a very simple answer to this question. I am trying to pick through your previous answers on the curriculum. This question relates to the Bill. Should RE be included in the national curriculum?

Paul Barber: We are very content with the current position. If there were proposals to change that, we would need to work very carefully with everybody to try to get to a position that retains the necessary safeguards, as we see it, contained in the current position.

Nigel Genders: I would agree with that.

The Chair: Thank you very much to our witnesses. We will move on to our next panel. I do not know how long we will have, because we will have votes in the Chamber at some time, but we can at least make a start.

Examination of Witnesses

Sir Jon Coles, Sir Dan Moynihan and Luke Sparkes gave evidence.

3.45 pm

The Chair: We will now move on to representatives from various academies. If you could begin by introducing yourselves, that would be helpful to the Committee.

Luke Sparkes: I am Luke Sparkes, and I lead the Dixons Academy Trust. We run urban complex schools in Leeds, Bradford, Manchester and Liverpool.

Sir Dan Moynihan: I am Dan Moynihan, CEO for the Harris Federation. We run 55 academies in and around London, most of which were previously failing schools.

Sir Jon Coles: I am John Coles, and I run United Learning, which is a group of just over 100 schools nationally—again, mostly previously failing schools. Before the 13 years I have spent doing that, I spent 15 years in the Department for Education, and the last four on the board.

Q153 Neil O'Brien: Thank you for being here. I want to direct my first question to Jon and Dan. You have both been quite critical of the loss of academy freedoms in this Bill. Could I persuade you to say a bit more about why that matters? Why do those freedoms matter? What do they enable you to do? Do you accept reassurances from the Government, who are saying, “No, no, you've misunderstood: the Bill doesn't reduce your freedoms; it just increases other people's freedoms”, or do you think that it would be helpful to amend the Bill further in order to ensure those freedoms? We will start with Jon and then go to Dan.

Sir Jon Coles: My top concern is about pay and conditions freedoms. We take schools that have got themselves into serious difficulty and look to turn them around. If you want to turn around schools that have failed seriously—often generationally—to give children a good standard of education, clearly you need to attract very good people to come and work in those places; the quality of a school is never going to exceed the quality of its teachers. Therefore, the things that we do with pay and conditions are designed to make sure that we can attract and retain the very best teachers to do the toughest jobs, which I think is our fundamental role as a trust.

I think we really need those freedoms. They are very important to us. Obviously, that applies to this Bill, in relation to schoolteachers' pay and conditions, but it also applies to the Employment Rights Bill, in relation to the school support staff negotiating body. Those are fundamentally important to us.

I have been hugely encouraged by the Secretary of State's remarks that what she wants is a floor but no ceiling, and that is something that we can absolutely work with. I hope that that is what we see coming through. At this moment, that is not what the Bill says; it says that we have to abide by the schoolteachers' pay and conditions document. I think there is an ongoing conversation to be had about whether that is where we end up, because that is not quite a floor but no ceiling.

Neil O'Brien: Having looked at that document, it does have a whole bunch of different maximums in it. It has quite specific maximums as well as minimums.

Sir Jon Coles: The thing about the schoolteachers' pay and conditions document is that it is fundamentally a contract. Section 122 of the Education Act 2002—it happens to be an Act that I took through Parliament as a Bill manager, when I was a civil servant—essentially says that the Secretary of State may, by order, issue what is commonly known as the pay order, but the pay order includes a lot of conditions. Section 122 of the Act says that that applies as if it were a contract. Indeed, if you are a teacher in a maintained school, typically your contract will literally say, "You are employed under the terms of the schoolteachers' pay and conditions document," so it is your contract.

Therefore, the schoolteachers' pay and conditions document has to act as a contract. It has to be specific. A teacher looking it up has to be able to see, "What are my terms and conditions? Have I been treated properly?" and so on. That is how the schoolteachers' pay and conditions document needs to work, so if we have to abide by it precisely, that is what we would have to abide by.

I think that officials—I speak as an ex-official—should be asked to look again at whether the Bill they have produced for Ministers does what Ministers want it to do, and whether it actually provides a floor but no ceiling, or whether there is something slightly different that would enact Ministers' policy.

Q154 Neil O'Brien: That was a superbly diplomatic answer—particularly the end of it. I will come on to Dan. You talked about QTS freedoms and the importance of being able to employ mature people in STEM and the like, and the risk that not having that freedom might put some of them off. I will just ask you about the freedoms on curriculum and things like that, and how those are being used by academies and trusts at the moment to find solutions that are right for individual situations. My impression is that those freedoms are quite often used to focus on core subjects in areas of high deprivation where there is great difficulty, and to have a model that works in those areas. It seems quite important for you.

Sir Dan Moynihan: We have taken over failing schools in very disadvantaged places in London, and we have found youngsters in the lower years of secondary schools unable to read and write. We varied the curriculum in

the short term and narrowed the number of subjects in key stage 3 in order to maximise the amount of time given for literacy and numeracy, because the children were not able to access the other subjects. Of course, that is subject to Ofsted. Ofsted comes in, inspects and sees whether what you are doing is reasonable.

That flexibility has allowed us to widen the curriculum out again later and take those schools on to "outstanding" status. We are subject to Ofsted scrutiny. It is not clear to me why we would need to follow the full national curriculum. What advantage does that give? When we have to provide all the nationally-recognised qualifications—GCSEs, A-levels, SATs—and we are subject to external regulation by Ofsted, why take away the flexibility to do what is needed locally?

Q155 Neil O'Brien: Luke, you wrote a very interesting piece in the *TES* the other day about the importance of variety and difference between schools. You work in some exceptionally disadvantaged areas, turning around particularly difficult schools. I saw that you had used the academy freedoms to offer the nine-day fortnight so that teachers can have more preparation time, particularly because they are working in quite a demanding environment. How are you using those freedoms and how useful are they to you?

Luke Sparkes: They are very useful when it comes to conditions. As Jon was saying, the narrative coming through about a floor and no ceiling is encouraging. I can see that working for pay, but I am not sure how that would work for conditions. My significant concerns with the Bill are about conditions. We have done more than most as a trust to try to position ourselves as a modern organisation. We know that post-millennials are not going to accept the norms that currently exist in our sector. We have also tried to overcome the rigidity of the job with innovations such as the nine-day fortnight. That innovation is starting to diffuse across the sector.

We want to be even bolder. We are really starting to think about how we can totally re-imagine the school workforce. That is because most complex schools—the kind of schools that we lead—have become, in many ways, the fourth emergency service. That is by stealth and not by choice. We have had to address the scope and intensity of the job.

I wanted to make that position clear. It is from that position and understanding that we still believe that a rigid set of expectations around conditions will stifle innovation—the kind of innovation that the three of us have led across our trusts. Leaders working in our context need the freedom to do things differently. That, of course, was the point of Labour's academy policy in the first place. I accept that in some instances, it is possible to negotiate around standard conditions, but not everybody can do that. The innovations we are leading will not be scaleable if we are all forced to align to a set of rigid standards.

It is also worth knowing that our most successful schools at Dixons—the ones that are getting the best results for disadvantaged students nationally—would have to fundamentally change as schools if they had to align to a set of rigid standards. That would be bound to impact negatively on outcomes for children, and not just academic outcomes. It would be a significant backward step. Finally, an interesting point is that our most innovative schools—the ones that are using their

freedoms the most—actually have the highest staff engagement scores. These freedoms benefit and are attractive to staff.

Q156 Neil O'Brien: Would you say that the Bill, broadly speaking, erodes that kind of freedom and diversity in the system? That is at the moment, as drafted—it can change.

Luke Sparkes: Certainly, around the areas that I have just described.

Q157 Stephen Morgan: I have two unrelated questions on which I am keen to hear from all three of you. What assessment have you made of the introduction of registers of children not in school and how they will help schools and local authorities to support vulnerable children?

Sir Dan Moynihan: It is an excellent idea. Too many children disappear off-roll and are not monitored sufficiently. I would say it probably does not go far enough. When any child leaves the school roll, whether they are at risk or not, we should know why it happens and whether the parent can make proper provision for them, so it is a really good idea. My concern is whether local authorities have the resourcing to make this thing work. As we all know, they are under immense pressure. However, it is about time that we had it, and it is a real move forward. The question is about their ability to deliver it.

Sir Jon Coles: I agree with all that. I am not sure quite how many Secretaries of State have thought it was a good idea to do this, but it is a lot of them, and they have all backed off it before now. I think it is good, important and brave that it is being done, because while I support the right of parents to home educate, and I think that is an important freedom in society, those of us who work in challenging areas can see that there is an overriding child protection and child safeguarding risk. That risk has grown, is growing and does need to be tackled.

Luke Sparkes: I echo that. I think the correlation of families who apply for elective home education, for example, and the vulnerability of those children is known. Whether it is in relation to attendance, unsupportive parenting or poor relationships with schools, challenging EHE is the right thing to do. However, as Sir Dan said, it will need significant additional resource if a school is to ensure that the child is supported to integrate into school in that way.

Q158 Stephen Morgan: My second question is about admissions. Do you think that it is important for all schools to at least co-operate with local authorities on school admissions and place planning?

Sir Dan Moynihan: It is important for all schools to co-operate. With 9 million children in schools, I think only 55 directions were given in 2023 by local authorities. For me, the key issue is that it is important that there is co-operation, but there is potentially a conflict of interest if local authorities are opening their own schools and there are very hard-to-place kids. There is a conflict of interest in where they are allocating those children, so there needs to be a clear right of appeal in order to ensure that that conflict can be exposed if necessary.

Luke Sparkes: It is important for academies to work with local authorities. I think we accept that the current arrangements are fractured, but—similarly to what Sir Dan

said—it is that conflict of interest that we have been concerned about. Although there is going to be an independent adjudicator, the question is whether they will be well placed to make those policy and financial decisions—almost becoming a commissioner role—and whether that would be the right way or not.

Sir Jon Coles: The short answer is yes. I do think it is important. I would like to see Government issue some guidance on how the powers will be used, and to say to everybody, “Here are the rules of the game, and this is what good practice looks like.” I think people are worried about whether there are conflicts of interest and poor practice. Of course, these powers could be abused, but my personal concern about that is very low. I do not think they will be abused. However, I think it would give everyone a lot of reassurance if the Government—you, as Ministers—put out some guidance saying, “This is how we would like this to work. These are the criteria. This is what good practice looks like. This is how we want the system to work.” I think that would make everybody feel comfortable that things will be done fairly.

Sir Dan Moynihan: Could I add to my previous answer, please? Some of the schools we have taken on have failed because they have admitted large numbers of hard-to-place children. I can think of one borough we operate in where councillors were very open about the fact that there was a school that took children that other schools would not take. They said that openly, and the reason they did not want it to become an academy was because that process would end. The school was seen as a dumping ground. I think there are schools that get into difficulty and fail because there is perceived local hierarchy of schools, and those are the schools that get those children. That is why there needs to be a clear right of appeal to prevent that from happening.

Q159 Munira Wilson: I have a very simple question, first of all. As senior leaders in the academy trust space, were you consulted on the measures in the Bill, either formally or informally?

Sir Dan Moynihan: *indicated dissent.*

Sir Jon Coles: *indicated dissent.*

Luke Sparkes: *indicated dissent.*

Q160 Munira Wilson: No. Okay. Some of the data that we have seen about how these freedoms are used across the country shows that actually, the vast majority of academies do follow the national pay scales, QTS and the national curriculum. I take on board the concerns that you have raised about pay and conditions, and that is why a number of us are pressing for pay to be a floor, not a ceiling—we will be trying to amend the Bill that way. However, do you think that if this legislation goes through as is, it will make much difference day to day, on the ground? Will it especially make a difference if we put the floor in place?

Sir Jon Coles: The provisions, as drafted, in relation to pay and conditions, would make a big difference to us. It is interesting that you say that the data says that not many people are doing it. I don't think there is good data on that question—I have never seen any. Among the schools that we take on, including both maintained schools and academies, more schools are deviating from the rules than think they are. It is very common for us to

take on both maintained schools and academies that have, usually in small ways but sometimes in slightly bigger ways, adopted different terms and conditions to the national terms and conditions. They have made local agreements without necessarily having themselves identified that they are diverging from national pay and conditions. There are more examples than people might think of schools using some flexibility.

In relation to the other things, as Dan says, there are specific circumstances in which people do vary in relation to the curriculum for specific reasons, in specific circumstances, and tend to do so for short periods of time. There are specific occasions on which people use the QTS freedoms, usually for short periods of time, usually while people are being trained, sometimes because they could not get somebody for other good reasons.

Fundamentally, my top concerns and priorities are pay and conditions provisions because they will have a serious impact on us.

Munira Wilson: To clarify, my point about data was based on DFE data in the briefing from the House of Commons Library. Should we look at it the other way? Rather than trying to restrict academy freedoms, should we give those freedoms to all schools so that we are not differentiating between academies and other types of schools?

Sir Dan Moynihan: Yes. The public purse is going to be hugely constrained, as we all know, for years to come. The base at which we are constraining schools is inadequate and we are freezing the system where it is now. If we want a world-leading system in the future, given that the resource is not going to be there to materially change things, one key way to do it is to give schools the freedom that academies have had to transform failing schools in the worst circumstances. Why should every school not have that freedom? It makes sense.

Luke Sparkes: Yes, and the majority of schools are academy schools, so it would make sense to level up rather than level down. On the innovation point, there are more academies that innovate than we would perhaps think. Innovation tends to happen on the edges and our schools, the most complex schools, are on the edges. The idea is that a few innovate, then that innovation diffuses over time and becomes the norm. If we lose the opportunity for anybody to innovate, we will just stifle and stagnate.

Sir Jon Coles: I agree with all of that. If it were up to me, I would be saying, "More freedom; more accountability." What has made a difference in improving education and public services, not just in this country but internationally, has been giving more responsibility to the people who are accountable for performance. If you are the person who has to achieve results and do the right thing for children, the way to get strong performance is to make you the person responsible for making the decisions and then hold you to account for them. I think that is a good system-wide set of principles, not just in education but in public service reform generally: sharp accountability for decision makers, and decision makers as the people accountable for performance. That is what drives us. I would absolutely make the case to free up everybody.

Sir Dan Moynihan: It is not clear what problem this is solving. I have seen no evidence to suggest that academy freedoms are creating an issue anywhere. Why are we doing this?

Q161 Amanda Martin: The Minister touched on admissions and I would like to widen that. Positive and best outcomes and the destination of children and young people should be at the heart of every Government mission on education, as it should be at any school trust or local authority. However, concerns continue to grow about the widening attainment gap of our most vulnerable pupils. More worrying is the fact that parents feel they have no choice if they want to remove their children from a school setting. The Bill does have provisions on admissions and allows local authorities to plan school places. Today we heard from the Church of England and the Catholic Education Service about how they have always worked with local authorities to ensure fairness and collaboration in the wider services. You all have academies and schools across the country. How would you work with local areas, where your schools are, to ensure that collaboration really does find places for children and reverses that worrying trend that we still see?

Sir Jon Coles: The worrying trend being poor attainment and the widening gap?

Amanda Martin: Yes.

Sir Jon Coles: I suppose everything we do addresses trying to tackle the gap. We take on schools in areas of severe deprivation, places where schools have failed, where children are not succeeding. We look to turn those schools around. I guess my starting point for this is that we do already, in the overwhelming majority of cases, work with local authorities on admissions. None of our schools change their admission arrangements when they become academies. We stick with the pre-existing admission arrangements, unless we are asked by the local authority to do something different. That is our fundamental starting point for everything we do. As I said, I do not have concerns about the provisions around admissions; we are basically happy with them. If the Government issue guidance on how those are to be used, I think other people's concerns will go away as well.

The one thing that I would love to see the Government do is really set out their strategy for improvement, how they think things will work and how we will drive improvement across the system. I think part of the reason for response to the Bill has been that the Government have not published a policy document ahead of publication, so people have read into the Bill their concerns and fears and worries. There has not been a clear Government narrative about how the Bill will drive forward improvements in the school system overall and how we are going to tackle the achievement gaps.

We want to work with Government. We want to work with local authorities—we already work with local authorities and other trusts and maintained schools. We want to do that. We think we are all on the same team trying to do the right thing for children. Our worry about some provisions in the Bill is really just a concern that in future we might be prevented from doing things that we do that we know are effective.

Sir Dan Moynihan: On the disadvantage gap, the biggest thing was the coalition's introduction of an explicit strategy focusing on disadvantage, and they introduced a pupil premium. It was highly effective for probably five years, then withered and disappeared. The Government, in my view, need an explicit strategy for tackling disadvantage, whether that is a pupil premium

that is higher or whether it is metrics. That is not something that we have seen for a long time and not something that we have yet seen in the new Government, but it is a door that is wide open. The system wants that. That is the clearest thing: making it a Government priority.

The second thing for me, to be a bit more controversial, is that good schools should reflect their local area. Sometimes that does not happen, including for many selective schools. If we are really going to have a world-class system, that needs to be addressed.

Luke Sparkes: I do not have anything of significance to add. We try to work as closely as we can with local authorities. In north Liverpool, for example, we took on a school that would have closed had we not taken it on. We take on the most challenging schools and try to do the very best we can for disadvantaged children.

Q162 Patrick Spencer (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): You spoke about the importance of intent and accountability in driving school improvement, yet the Bill tilts the balance back towards giving responsibility to local authorities, and ultimately to Sanctuary Buildings the role of school improvement. Does that concern you? Do you think local authorities can do the same job as a multi-academy trust in turning schools around?

Sir Jon Coles: That is a very tendentious way of describing the Bill. I think you would struggle to substantiate that. To give you my perspective, whatever this Bill does, I am still going to be accountable for running the schools that we are accountable for running. They will still be in the trust. I will still be line-managing the heads. We will still be accountable for their performance. We will still be accountable for teaching and learning.

Q163 Patrick Spencer: Will this Bill see fewer schools becoming academies going forward?

Sir Jon Coles: I am not sure.

Q164 Patrick Spencer: If it takes away the automatic academy order—

Sir Jon Coles: I would like to see what the Government's policy underpinning this is. What is the Government's school improvement policy? Is it their policy to do what you have just said? I do not think the Bill does that. The question is: what is the Government's preference? Do the Government actually want to see as many or more schools become academies? I don't think we know that, and I don't think the Bill says one way or the other what the answer to that is.

In due course, we will see a new framework from Ofsted. In due course, I imagine the Government will say how they want the accountability system to work. When the Government say how they want the accountability system to work and Ofsted says how it wants the inspection system to work, we will see whether there will be more or fewer academies, but I do not think the Bill does that one way or the other. That is why we want to see the Government's overarching strategy for school improvement.

I do not want this to be political knockabout; I want this to be about children in schools. I want this to be about how we are going to make the schools system

better. That is the fundamentally important question, and it is the only question I care about—how are we going to do better for our children? I don't want to overreach and say that I know what the Government's policy is on that, and I don't.

Q165 Patrick Spencer: You have sat there and given evidence on your interpretation of why you guys have been very successful in turning schools around. The Bill takes away a lot of the freedoms that you have exploited in turning schools around, and it includes a specific order that prevents schools from becoming academies, and it puts the power in the local authority's decision on what to do with it. It is dumb.

Sir Jon Coles: I don't think it does that. What I am reacting to is that point, because it does not do that.

Sir Dan Moynihan: There will be fewer academies because, by definition, if the Secretary of State is making the decision that a school that fails will not automatically become an academy, that must be because the intention is that some failing schools will not become academies. Therefore, there will be fewer than there would otherwise be. I think that is a huge mistake, because all our experiences are that academy conversions are sometimes very hotly politically contested and opponents are prone to go to judicial review, which can leave children in a situation of failure for months or even more than a year. By using ministerial discretion, the opponents are likely to go to judicial review on those decisions, because they will want to know on what basis that discretion is given. Then the schools that are not considered to be failing enough to become academies will be subject to the new RISE—regional improvement for standards and excellence—teams, which are being run from within the DFE. My view is that if you want to improve a school in difficulty quickly, it is much better to give somebody, such as an academy trust, full power over that school to improve it and to do what is necessary quickly. That must be more effective than a RISE team going in that does not have that authority over the governance of the school.

Q166 Patrick Spencer: For what it is worth. Luke Sparkes, do you have anything to add on top of that?

Luke Sparkes: I do not have a huge amount to add beyond agreeing with what colleagues have said. My most significant concern, as I have said, is about conditions for teachers. On the point about capacity within local authorities—I can only speak on the local authorities that we work with, which we try to have positive relationships with—they probably would not have the capacity to do the kind of things you said around school improvements.

Trusts were set up purely for the purpose of running and improving schools, and nothing more or less than that, so we have the expertise and capacity to do that school improvement work. I agree with Sir Dan that, when trying to turn around a very challenging school, it is much better when it is within the accountability structure of a trust as they are able to move much quicker. I am interested to see how the regional improvement for standards and excellence teams develop. They seem similar to what national leaders of education were in the past, and they did not always necessarily have the

teeth to do what was needed, so I am interested to see how they develop, but for me, the significant concern is about conditions.

Q167 Catherine Atkinson: We heard from the National Association of Head Teachers that they wanted to see more collaboration, and some concern was expressed that not enough collaboration was taking place to date. I would be interested to hear your views as to how we can improve that, and whether you would acknowledge that, across a lot of different areas, it is not happening to date. I understood what you said in relation to narrowing to core, but given that we are in a position currently where we are seeing a 47% reduction in arts GCSEs, and in Derby the only place you can do engineering at high levels is the UTC in the college, there is some concern that that narrowing has cut off some opportunities to some of our young people. I would be really interested in your views, both on collaboration and on trying to ensure that we have a really broad option for all our children.

Luke Sparkes: In terms of curriculum, we have always tried at Dixons to give as much breadth as possible. Our curriculum is fairly traditional. It does focus on the EBacc, but it has done so since before the EBacc existed. We have always specialised in the arts and sports as well. We have two schools with an arts specialism. We have always valued those, so I would agree with you that breadth is really important. There is a place to have, at a macro level, some kind of framework that is evidence-informed around the subjects that should perhaps be taught, but we also need the ability to enact the curriculum in a responsive and flexible way at a local level. I can see the desire to get that consistency, but there needs to be a consistency without stifling innovation. I support the idea that there needs to be breadth, but I think we have demonstrated that.

Q168 Catherine Atkinson: So you are doing something, but that is not necessarily happening across other trusts and academies?

Luke Sparkes: I cannot speak for the whole sector, but I can say what we believe.

Sir Dan Moynihan: I agree with you on breadth, and we too emphasise the EBacc. Around 40% of our kids are pupil premium and another 30% are just about managing, highly disadvantaged children, but we want them to learn history, geography and a modern language to 16 because that gives them cultural capital that they will need. That does not mean that they cannot be doing high-quality vocational qualifications alongside. The only way to engineer that is to broaden the range of qualifications that will count towards measures such as Progress 8. That will be the incentive that the system needs.

Collaboration is, of course, a good thing as long as it is focused on standards, and does not alternate or deviate from that. It is possible to spend a lot of time talking in talking shops, but what we need is collaboration between multi-academy trusts and schools that is about sharing best practice. That will raise standards.

Sir Jon Coles: On collaboration, it has always been an issue in the school system that practice gets trapped within the boundaries of institutions. Around 20 years ago, when I was setting up and running London Challenge,

you could walk from one school to another in London and you would find outstanding practice in one school, and in the next school down the road they would have absolutely no idea what was going on. Occasionally you would find a forward-thinking, energetic and effective local authority—such as Tower Hamlets in what it did with primary school literacy and numeracy, which had created a really collaborative structure in which great practice was being shared and standards were improving. But if you went to the next borough, it would—almost because Tower Hamlets was doing it—not be doing it.

This problem of practice getting trapped within institutions has always been there and remains an issue in education. One of the things I set up post-Department was Challenge Partners, which is about sharing practice across the system and trying to use some of the school-to-school collaboration ideas we had in London Challenge. That is powerful and effective, and where that is working it is good.

The best collaboration in the system at the moment is within academy trusts, because they are under a common governance and people are sharing practice very openly. The next challenge is how we share practice and get collaboration working beyond the trust. We do a lot of work on that: working to support schools that are struggling, sharing leaders and leadership, sharing our subject advisers beyond the trust, working with governors and leaders in other trusts to support them, trying to be part of professional development programmes for leaders and staff, and offering our curriculum resources and our professional development beyond the trust.

Of course, the risk is that people think you have some ulterior motive for doing that or that it is predatory. It is an ongoing piece of work. I think it always will be ongoing within the education system.

The Chair: We will have to leave this evidence session there; we have come to the end of our time for it. I thank all three witnesses for their evidence. We will now move on to the next panel, but I will have to suspend briefly because one of the next witnesses is online and we have to make sure that we can get the connection right before we start.

4.21 pm

Sitting suspended.

4.23 pm

On resuming—

Examination of Witnesses

Rebecca Leek, Jane Wilson and Leora Cruddas gave evidence.

The Chair: We have three witnesses representing headteachers and trusts. Can Jane Wilson, who is online, introduce herself? I will then come to the witnesses in the room to do the same.

Jane Wilson: I am Jane Wilson, the deputy chief exec of Northern Education Trust. Our trust is 30 schools—17 secondary schools and 13 primary schools—working predominantly in the north of England between Blyth and as far down as Barnsley.

The Chair: Could the two witnesses in the room introduce themselves as well?

Rebecca Leek: I am Rebecca Leek. I am currently the executive director of the Suffolk Primary Headteachers' Association. There are 253 primary schools in Suffolk; around a third of them are local authority and two thirds are academies. I am currently also an interim headteacher in a local authority school. I have been a headteacher in an academy school and a CEO of a trust, and I have worked in inner-city London, urban Ipswich and rural Suffolk.

Leora Cruddas: I am Leora Cruddas; thank you very much for the invitation to give evidence to this Committee. I am the chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, which is the national organisation and sector body representing school trusts in England. Around 77% of all academy schools are in membership.

Q169 Neil O'Brien: Thank you all for being here, and welcome. My first question is to Leora. We heard in the last session some concerns about taking away academy freedoms on pay, the curriculum and QTS. In some of the things that you have written, you have also raised concerns about two other things. The first is clause 43, which is a sort of general power to direct academies on a range of subjects. The policy summary notes to the Bill indicate that that will be used for some not particularly high-level things, such as school uniform and the like.

Do you have concerns that the general power is a bit untrammelled at the moment? Might it be sensible to table some amendments to that, so that we have some proportionality and do not have the Secretary of State being constantly sucked into intervening in schools and being pressed to do so by lots of different activists?

Leora Cruddas: The first thing I should say is that we really welcome the children's wellbeing part of this Bill. There are a lot of good things in the Bill. We do have some concerns, as you say, about the schools part of the Bill, including, as you have heard from my colleagues, about pay and conditions. We welcome the Secretary of State's clarification on that in her evidence to the Education Committee. We now need to work with the Government to make sure that the clarification around direction of travel is reflected in the way that the Bill is laid out. We do not think that the Secretary of State's intention is properly reflected in the clause as it stands.

We do have concerns about the power to direct. We think it is too wide at the moment. We accept that the policy intention is one of equivalence in relation to maintained schools, but maintained schools are different legal structures from academy trusts, and we not think that the clauses in the Bill properly reflect that. It is too broad and it is too wide. We would like to work with the Government to restrict it to create greater limits. Those limits should be around statutory duties on academy trusts, statutory guidance, the provisions in the funding agreement and charity law.

Q170 Neil O'Brien: That is very helpful and specific. Another thing you have raised concerns about is clause 50, which will give local authorities the ability to challenge a school's PAN, even if it is just keeping it the same. I am sympathetic and understand what they are trying to do, with place planning and so on, but I have concerns about the local authority being both the regulator and the provider of other schools.

I worry about that, particularly in the context of falling school numbers in some areas, which will make these questions quite acute, because of the lack of any guidance or trammelling around it. For example, if there is an outstanding school and one that is struggling and may shut, where is the prioritisation? Where are the rules that say, "You must not treat academies unfairly compared with your local authority schools."? Do you share any of those concerns? Do you think that there is scope to make amendments to improve the Bill?

Leora Cruddas: I start by saying that we really welcome the duty to collaborate at a local level. Trusts already work with local authorities; you may have heard that from my colleagues in the previous session.

We are concerned about some of the potential conflicts of interest. We say "potential" conflicts of interest in the context, as you point out, of falling primary school rolls. We would like to work with Government to set out a high-level, strategic decision-making framework that would mean that, in a local area, we know our children really well and we get our children into the right provision at the right time. That means working together strategically around pupil numbers, admissions, falling rolls and the sufficiency of need in a local area. Those conflicts of interest can be managed, but they would need to be set out in a very carefully framed decision-making framework so that they are managed properly.

Q171 Neil O'Brien: You said:

"We accept current arrangements are fractured: introducing the Schools Adjudicator worsens rather than improves this".

What do you mean by that?

Leora Cruddas: We are not sure what the intention is behind the Government's need to bring forward the clause in the Bill that would introduce greater powers for a schools adjudicator. That is one of the conflicts of interest that we would be alive to—if a local authority could bring forward a case to resist an academy trust's pupil admission number, that would be a source of concern for us. That is why we need this high-level decision-making framework.

Q172 Neil O'Brien: Thank you; that is very helpful. I have a question for Rebecca. In *Schools Week* you wrote:

"The schools bill working its way through Parliament...is not good legislation."

You described it as "micromanagement" and "stifling". You talked about some of your experiences as a headteacher. Can you expand a bit on the overall vision and direction of travel?

Rebecca Leek: Yes. I love being a headteacher—I was a headteacher yesterday, doing an assembly—but I have stood in both camps, and I have worked in very rapid turnaround situations with trusts.

4.30 pm

Suspended for Divisions in the House.

5.8 pm

On resuming—

Q173 Neil O'Brien: Thank you to our witnesses for their patience while we voted. I was asking you about what you wrote in *Schools Week*, Rebecca—you said that the Bill was "not good legislation" and described it

as “micromanagement” and “stifling”, and you talked about your experience of using some of those school freedoms. I wonder whether you could say more about why you think that is the case and what you think the problem is with the Bill.

Rebecca Leek: One of the things about the school sector is that it is incredibly complex, so you have to have complex solutions for complex systems—if you know anything about systems thinking. To support such a complex system, there needs to be room for agility, so the reason why I was writing that—we will talk about my specific experience as well—is that I know quite a lot about systems theory and governance. I have written a book on governance, subsidiarity and why it is important to have flexibility and agility in localities. That comes from theoretical knowledge about how to create good systems that meet the needs of very complex things, which is what schools are. I cannot impress on the Committee enough how much diversity there is in the school system, and how much there is the need for agility.

As a headteacher on the frontline, my dominoes can topple within a term: I am in a small school; I lose two senior teachers; a safeguarding issue happens because something in the locality changes, and I suddenly have to find a pastoral lead, because there are more safeguarding issues; I am trying to get more engagement with some of the local services, which might be struggling because they are undercapacity; and there is a recruitment crisis with teachers, honestly, and also with headteachers—hence I am an interim headteacher, as we can never recruit headteachers, because it is such a hard job, given so much grit in the system. There is that fundamental need for agility.

I do therefore have a concern, and my colleagues share that. I speak to headteachers and CEOs all the time in Suffolk—I met a trust last week and spoke to a CEO of a trust with 12 primary schools on the phone yesterday. We went over some of the things in the Bill. We know that the agility that the academies legislation and other changes brought into the system have helped us to be very adaptive to certain circumstances. Anything that says, “Well, we are going to go slightly more with a one-size-fits-all model”—bearing in mind, too, that we do not know what that looks like, because this national curriculum has not even been written yet—is a worry. That is what I mean. If we suddenly all have to comply with something that is more uniform and have to check—“Oh no, we cannot do that”, “Yes, we can do that”, “No, we can’t do that”, “Yes, we can do that”—it will impede our ability to be agile around our school communities and our job.

Q174 Neil O’Brien: That is very helpful. You have run both types of school and have said that when you were running local authority-run schools, you were often told, “No, we cannot do that”, even when the action would solve a problem and benefit our pupils, and even though you can see the academy down the road doing exactly that. What sort of freedoms are the most valuable? What have you found with those academy freedoms that the Bill is eroding?

Rebecca Leek: There are a few specific things, and some other things. I had to step in as an interim headteacher in Ipswich just prior to covid. I did not have an early years lead and we had Ofsted six weeks in:

we got RI—with good for leadership and management, thank you very much—but I still did not have an early years teacher. I needed to solve that incredibly quickly, so I liaised with three different agencies and made contact with various different people. There was someone who was not a qualified teacher, but who had been running an outstanding nursery. She had decided to stop running it, because of her work-life balance, and she thought she might want to work in a school. I took her on, and although she was not qualified, she was really excellent. I was able to do that because it was an academy school, and it was not an issue. In a maintained school, there is a specific need for a qualified teacher to teach in early years, so I would not have been able to take her on.

That is just one example. Another example is that maintained schools, I think under the 2002 legislation, must have a full-time headteacher—they must have a headteacher at all times. In a small rural school, that is financially a real burden, and it is one of the reasons why I am not a permanent headteacher. Last year, I was an interim headteacher. I came to an agreement with those at the local authority that I would do it on four days a week, and they kind of accepted that—it was a bit of a fudge, because it is actually non-compliant. They asked, “Will you carry on?”, and I said, “No, because I am not going to be full-time.” At the moment, I am three days a week and, again, it is okay because I am interim—academies can have great flexibility around leadership arrangements.

Q175 Neil O’Brien: That is a potential problem for a small rural school.

Rebecca Leek: It is a real problem for small rural schools particularly. They function really well in little pockets of two or three schools together, with maybe one executive head dealing with some of the headaches—because there are headaches—and with some things that are more systematic across the three schools. Yes, definitely.

Q176 Neil O’Brien: I have a quick one for Leora on academies’ freedom with the curriculum. Some trusts not far from my constituency have used those freedoms quite strongly. They have deliberately focused on the core academics. In some cases, they do not necessarily even have the facilities to provide the national curriculum—if they are to be made to do that immediately—because they have focused on getting the core academic stuff for kids in situations of deprivation. Are you aware of others? There are definitely schools and trusts out there that are using those freedoms around the national curriculum, are there not?

Leora Cruddas: There definitely are trusts that have used their freedoms around the national curriculum. I would say it is not unreasonable for a state to want a high-level national curriculum framework—that is not an unreasonable position—

Q177 Neil O’Brien: But in adjusting to that, some schools might face severe adjustments or even need new capital, facilities and stuff—

Leora Cruddas: That is exactly right. Under this legislation, we could end up with a high-level national curriculum framework—once again, as I said on pay

and conditions, with a floor but no ceiling. That would protect the right of schools and trusts, all schools and trusts, to innovate, to be agile, to respond to local context, and to be centres of curriculum excellence—you heard Sir Jon Coles talk about his curriculum. We want to retain that notion of curriculum flexibility, curriculum freedoms.

Q178 Neil O'Brien: Would an amendment to that effect be helpful to preserve those freedoms?

Leora Cruddas: It would be very helpful to have clarity on that position. Obviously, we have not had the curriculum and assessment review report yet. I have absolute confidence that Professor Francis will be eminently sensible. She is a very serious person, and will follow the evidence; but I think we need to be careful that we are not tying ourselves into high levels of prescription in all parts of the Bill, including the national curriculum.

Q179 Neil O'Brien: On pay and conditions, you might think that the idea of a floor, not a ceiling, is a decent direction of travel, but to be clear, that is not where the Bill is now and it needs to change. That is my position.

Leora Cruddas: Again, I would cite the Secretary of State's evidence to the Select Committee, where she made clear that it is also her expectation around curriculum to have that floor and to be able to innovate and have flexibility above that floor.

Q180 Neil O'Brien: What I am getting at is that we need to change the Bill as it is currently drafted by officials, in order to achieve those things.

Leora Cruddas: Yes, I would say that was true.

Q181 Catherine McKinnell: I want to ask a question about admissions initially, which can go to any of you. Do you think it is important for schools to at least co-operate with local authorities on school admissions and place planning, in your experience?

Rebecca Leek: I can only tell you, from my experience, that there is a lot of collaboration where I work. We have Suffolk Education Partnership, which is made up of local authority representatives, associations, CEOs and headteachers. Admissions are not really my area, in this Bill, but my experience is that there is collaboration. We are always looking to place children and make sure that they have somewhere if they are permanently excluded. There is real commitment in the sector to that, from my experience where I work.

Q182 Catherine McKinnell: Do you think that is important?

Rebecca Leek: Yes, I do.

Jane Wilson: I agree with that completely. We work with our local authorities and follow the local admission arrangements in all of them. We think it is really important, and we obviously want children to get places in school very quickly.

Leora Cruddas: The duty to co-operate does that. We really welcome that duty.

Q183 Catherine McKinnell: This question is probably more for you, Leora, but if other people have comments, they are perfectly welcome. I understand that many small

trusts are free to follow the school teacher pay and conditions document without variation. Does that indicate that the current pay and conditions framework is working for those trusts?

Leora Cruddas: Thank you for that important question. Our position as the Confederation of School Trusts is that we must not just think about the practice as it is now, but consider what we want to achieve in the future. The freedom, flexibility and agility that Rebecca talked about is important if we are to ensure that leaders have the flexibility to do what is right in their context to raise standards for children. It is also important in terms of creating a modern workforce. We know that we have a recruitment and retention crisis. We know that there is a growing gap between teacher pay and graduate pay, and that the conditions for teaching are perhaps less flexible in some ways than in other public sector and private sector roles. So it is incumbent upon us to think about how attractive teaching is as a profession and think in really creative ways about how we can ensure that teaching is an attractive, flexible, brilliant profession, where we bring to it our moral purpose, but also create the conditions that the workforce of the future would find desirable and attractive.

Q184 Munira Wilson: May I start with you, Leora? I want to ask the same question that I asked the academy leaders who came before you. As a membership organisation representing academy trusts, were you consulted on the provisions in the Bill relating to academies, either formally or informally?

Leora Cruddas: The conversations that we would be having with any Government prior to a policy being announced or a Bill being laid are typically quite confidential. There is also something about what you mean by the term "consultation". We did have conversations with the Government, and those conversations were constructive and remained constructive. I would say that CST is committed to continuing to work with the Government to get the Bill to the right place.

Q185 Munira Wilson: On school improvement, I have long called for there not to be an automatic order to become an academy if a school requires improvement. There seems to be a concern, as was brought out in some of the earlier sessions, that that is being done in a bit of a vacuum. It is all very well saying that the Secretary of State "may" issue such an order, but she may not, so what might she do instead? Would you like to see more information on that and more consultation on whatever the school improvement framework would look like before we pass that provision in the Bill?

Leora Cruddas: I think the answer to that is yes. The Government are bringing forward a consultation alongside Ofsted imminently, which might be an opportunity to set out some of those accountability arrangements.

I would also say that academy trusts have really proved their mettle here. You might want to go to Jane next, because the Northern Education Trust is such a strong northern sponsor trust and has taken schools that have not been good in the history of state education, turned them around and made them into schools that parents and communities can be really proud of. The school that I often cite is North Shore, which was really struggling and is now an absolutely brilliant school with

high levels of attendance. There is a proven model here, and I would say that if Ofsted decides that a school is in special measures, our view is that a governance change is necessary.

However, I do take the policy position that the Government have put forward that they need a range of levers to improve schools. We are not opposed to there being a range of levers to improve schools, but we would want to acknowledge the fact that trusts have excelled in that area and have turned around those schools that have been failing for a long time.

Q186 Munira Wilson: How do you think the curriculum provisions in the Bill might impact university technical colleges, which are by definition much more specialist in their offering?

Leora Cruddas: That is a question that we have raised. We hope that the curriculum and assessment review will address that issue, but it is also for the Government to address it, because the review will look at the high level of curriculum and assessment, whereas it is the Government who have laid the legislation. We have raised that as a specific issue, and we have also raised the issue about special schools and what it means for them.

Q187 Damian Hinds: Good afternoon. Leora, how central a role would you say that academy trusts have played in school improvement in this country? Is there any reason to believe that the same results could not have been achieved with just some support to the school as previously structured?

Leora Cruddas: I am an advocate for academy trusts, because of the clarity of accountability arrangements, the strong strategic governance, and the powerful, purposeful partnership between schools in a single legal entity. If a school is part of an academy trust and it is perhaps not improving or the quality of education is not as strong as it could be, and a conversation is had with that school, the school cannot walk away. The accountability for school improvement—the partnership mindset—is hardwired into the trust sector.

For the last 20 years, spanning all political Administrations, trusts have been building their school improvement capacity. Again, I would cite Northern Education Trust, which has an incredibly strong model of school improvement, and that is how it has turned around failing schools in the way that it has. The school improvement capacity sits in the trust sector.

That is not to cast aspersions on local authorities—I was a director of education in local government for most of my professional life—but over time, as local authority settlements have decreased and local authorities have reduced their school improvement capacity, so we have seen the rise of school improvement capacity in the trust sector. That is not true everywhere—Camden Learning, for example, has a very powerful model of school improvement—but overall, we see that the capacity for school improvement is in the trust sector.

Q188 Damian Hinds: I wanted to turn to Northern, actually, and to Jane. One of the things that you are famous for at Northern is your work on attendance. I wonder if you might say a word about the role that breakfast clubs play in that, and whether that is restricted only to primary schools.

Jane Wilson: We have breakfast clubs in our primary schools and our secondary schools that children can attend. Most of those are free or charge a very small amount for the food and care that the children receive. It is an offer that we have across the trust. In terms of attendance, it enables children, often from very disadvantaged backgrounds, to have a very settled start to the day and receive care and attention before the school day starts. It means that once the school day does start, learning can become the priority. So they play a fundamental role in improving attendance in our academies, particularly for those disadvantaged children—and we serve communities of real disadvantage. We have roughly twice as many disadvantaged students as the number seen nationally across our trust.

Q189 Damian Hinds: Finally—

The Chair: Briefly, because other Members want to come in.

Damian Hinds: Very briefly, Rebecca, what role does uniform play in identity for your school and the sense of belonging?

Rebecca Leek: I think that uniform does play a role. It is sometimes a really useful mechanism to improve a school—to sort it out—as well. I do have some further things to say about uniform, if there is time and anyone wants to ask me about it.

Q190 Damian Hinds: How do you keep it affordable and make sure it is not a barrier?

Rebecca Leek: School uniform is generally very affordable. You are asking a primary school, so we do not have blazers, but certainly it is very affordable. It has never been an issue. We also give away free uniform. I think there are problems in the Bill with the uniform wording.

Q191 Darren Paffey: I want to pick up on the previous point about the curriculum floor. I wonder whether the panel agree that the opportunities of a broad, balanced curriculum that is modern, engaging and offered regardless of the badge and branding over the school door should be available to young people everywhere. Would you consider that a good thing, or would you consider the Bill—as I think Rebecca described it—a reactive, retrograde step?

Rebecca Leek: I do believe that a broad entitlement for children is really important. What I am concerned about is that, first, we do not know what will be in the national curriculum and, secondly, schools sometimes need a little bit of flexibility to maybe not do a couple of subjects because they are addressing something that has happened within their school community over a couple of years or months or a term.

I had a school in south Essex in a trust that I led where we needed to reduce the curriculum for a little while. It was post covid. You may say, “Well, that was covid,” but we do not know what is coming. I needed to work with some children in key stage 2 on a slightly narrower curriculum to really help them with their maths and English so that they would be able to access secondary school. That is what we decided to do, and it was an academy school, so I had the freedom to address that.

I think that it was a moral duty for me to make sure that they got those core skills, so that they would be able to access a broad and balanced curriculum in the secondary.

I am just very worried about there being these kind of concrete bricks. If there is permissiveness and agility within it, then that is fine. I do agree with the concept of an entitlement for children to a broad and balanced curriculum.

Q192 Darren Paffey: I think we all recognise that there are sometimes staffing issues in particular curriculum areas, but if something gets taken out of the curriculum, particularly at secondary but sometimes at primary, does that not risk equating to a freedom to shut off that opportunity for future generations of children? I know from having taught modern languages that when you lose those staff, you end up not replacing them, and you do not replace the subject on the curriculum. Is that not a risk?

Rebecca Leek: It is a risk. Basically, sometimes schools have to do things that are a bit of an emergency, or to handle a crisis situation. We do not have a factory line of ready-prepared teachers that are already available. We also have fluctuations in pupil numbers. Some years we have to put together years 2 and 3, sometimes we have to put together years 4 and 5, and then the next year we have to put together years 2, 3 and 4 because of the pupil numbers. So we just have to have a certain level to be able to work around. We do not want headteachers to always be worrying in the back of their heads, "Am I allowed to do this? Am I not allowed to do this?" There just needs to be a certain level of permissiveness.

What I say in my headteacher assembly at the end of year 6 is that I want to give all my children a travelcard to all zones in London. I do not just want to give them a zone 1 and 2 travelcard. We all believe that as school leaders, but sometimes we just have to focus on one thing, or we have to do some crisis management, so there has to be some agility within the system.

Jane Wilson: Can I comment? I think Ofsted has played an important role in that. As a serving inspector, part of the work I do on every inspection is to look at whether the curriculum is meeting the needs of the children; that where modifications have been made, they are appropriate; and that the curriculum the children are receiving is of equal quality to the national curriculum. So I think Ofsted, with the work it is doing, is already enabling that oversight of curriculum entitlement across the country.

The Chair: Thank you to the witnesses for the evidence you have given—sorry for the interruption in the middle of it, but we cannot help that.

Examination of Witness

David Thomas gave evidence.

5.31 pm

The Chair: Good afternoon. May I ask our next witness to introduce himself?

David Thomas: I am David Thomas. I am a former teacher and headteacher, I co-founded Oak National Academy, and I was an adviser in the last Government, in the Department.

Q193 Neil O'Brien: David, welcome and thank you for joining us.

I want to ask you first about the national curriculum and its imposition on all academy schools. We have heard about the use of that flexibility as a form of freedom—where schools are being turned around, they might do something different for a while and diverge from the national curriculum. But I know there are also trusts and school leaders who use it on a longer-term basis—they make a conscious choice to focus on, for example, the core academics, often in situations of great difficulty, in order to secure what they regard as the most important, core things for their students that will enable the maximum number of choices later on.

Obviously you have been a maths teacher—you have been in that core discipline—and I wondered whether, in an education system where parents have school choice and can choose different things that are right for their child, you thought it was legitimate for people to have different models and to have that flexibility, and whether it was useful to have that freedom from the national curriculum.

David Thomas: We need to strike a careful balance. It is absolutely a central purpose of education to make sure that all children going out into society have some shared knowledge in common and can interact as a society and function in that way. That is very important. It is also important that people running schools get to look at their children, look at the challenges they are facing and have bold and ambitious visions for what they want those children to go on and do and what that community wants for itself, and that they can be flexible and go on and achieve that. That is why you need a balance of different things.

At the moment we have statutory assessments that apply to all schools, whether an academy or a maintained school. We have Ofsted making sure that you teach a curriculum that is at least as broad and balanced as the national curriculum, so that you cannot go narrow. But you need to be ambitious for your children, and my understanding from Sir Martyn's evidence earlier was that that system appears to be working for children.

Q194 Neil O'Brien: Right, so you do not think that there is a particular problem out there that needs to be solved.

David Thomas: No, there is not one that I can see.

Q195 Neil O'Brien: Can I ask you about the very general powers in clause 43 that give the Secretary of State the ability to intervene on a whole range of subjects? The explanatory notes to the Bill talk about using that to intervene on relatively micro things like school uniform. Do you think that untrammelled power is desirable, or would it be more sensible to amend that to have it slightly more focused, so that the Secretary of State does not get dragged into attempting to micromanage schools from the centre?

David Thomas: Clause 43, as drafted, goes beyond the explanatory notes and what Ministers have stated their intention to be. If the intention of the clause is to allow Ministers to intervene where an academy trust is breaching a power, but to do that in a way that is short of termination, that is a very sensible thing to want to do and the Government should absolutely be able to do

that. If the purpose is, as it says in the explanatory notes, to issue a direction to academy trusts to comply with their duty, that feels like a perfectly reasonable thing to be able to do. The Bill, as drafted, gives the Secretary of State the ability to

“give the proprietor such directions as the Secretary of State considers appropriate”.

I do not think it is appropriate for a Secretary of State to give an operational action plan to a school, but I think it is perfectly reasonable for a Secretary of State to tell a school that it needs to follow its duty. I think there is just a mismatch between the stated intention and the drafting, and I would correct that mismatch.

Q196 Neil O'Brien: So an amendment to bring those two things back into line—the stated intent and the actual Bill—would be sensible.

David Thomas: Yes.

Q197 Neil O'Brien: I want to ask you about a few other issues, including pay and QTS. As a headteacher, you have used academy freedoms, and you have also worked in a global shortage subject, mathematics. I do not know what you think of the Bill more generally and whether there are things beyond what we have talked about already that you would amend, or what you think of the general tenor of the Bill—trying to take away academy freedoms and make things more similar. What do you think of the Bill's direction of travel and what would you amend, if you were able to control it yourself?

David Thomas: On pay and conditions, I agree with the Secretary of State's stated intention to spread the freedom to innovate, and to make teaching a more attractive profession, to all schools. I think we are only scratching the surface as a profession of what it means to offer flexible working within education. I do not think anyone has really mastered that, and it is a really big challenge. We need to be allowing the maximum freedom for people to be able to innovate. Of course, we have just done an experiment in what happens if you tell lots and lots of schools that they do not need to follow the statutory teachers' pay and conditions: people only ever exceed it and offer things that are more attractive, because you want the very best teachers in your school.

I think it is essential that we have that freedom, and it is not enough for a Government to say that their intention is to grant that in a future statutory teachers' pay and conditions document. It needs to be there in legislation for trusts to know that will be the case, which is really important for both pay and conditions. If you want to nail flexibility and offer that to teachers, you need to be able to trade off around conditions to make something more flexible. I think that is really important, and I agree with the Government's intention, but I do not think that the Bill, as drafted, achieves that at the moment.

Q198 Neil O'Brien: Do you think it would be more attractive to extend those freedoms over both pay and conditions to local authority schools?

David Thomas: I think it would absolutely work, as CST has suggested, to say that statutory teachers' pay and conditions should be an advisory thing that schools and trusts need to have due regard of, and to continue with something like the School Teachers Review Body.

As it is at the moment, they are effectively setting a default starting position from which people can innovate out if they want to, rather than capping what people are able to do.

Q199 Neil O'Brien: There are lots of other big challenges in the sector at the moment: attendance, discipline and lots of other things. Is there anything else that you would like to either amend in the Bill or add to it?

David Thomas: I have concerns about limiting the number of people with unqualified teacher status who are not working towards qualified teacher status.

Q200 Neil O'Brien: What is the problem?

David Thomas: I have worked with some fantastic people—generally late-career people in shortage subjects who want to go and give back in the last five to 10 years of their career—who would not go through some of the bureaucracy associated with getting qualified teacher status but are absolutely fantastic and have brought wonderful things to a school and to a sector. I have seen them change children's lives. We know we have a flow of 600 people a year coming into the sector like that. If those were 600 maths teachers and you were to lose that, that would be 100,000 fewer children with a maths teacher. None of us knows what we would actually lose, but that is a risk that, in the current system, where we are so short of teachers, I would choose not to take.

Q201 Catherine McKinnell: You have previously written about the value of ensuring that teachers can do some of their work from home, specifically marking and planning, so do you support the Government's direction of travel in ensuring that greater flexibility and flexible working is available to more teachers and more schools?

David Thomas: Yes. I find it very odd how little flexibility lots of teachers are given. As a headteacher I remember teachers asking me questions such as, “Am I allowed to leave site to do my marking?” and I thought, “Why are you asking me this? You are an adult”. I absolutely agree with that direction of travel, but I do not see that reflected in the wording of the Bill, so I think there is an exercise to be done to make sure that that is reflected in the Bill. Otherwise, the risk is that it does not become the actual direction of travel.

Q202 Catherine McKinnell: You said some months ago that deciding what to teach is a value judgment, and reasonable people would teach different things, because they value them differently. Is that still a view you hold, and therefore do you also hold that it is not unreasonable to ensure both that there is a common core national curriculum and that that curriculum is periodically updated?

David Thomas: I absolutely still hold that view. I think that, as I said earlier, a core purpose of education is to ensure that people have a core body of knowledge that means they can interact with each other. That is really important. I think that we should update the curriculum and not hold it as set in stone.

My concern would be that the legislative framework around the national curriculum does not ensure that the national curriculum is a core high-level framework or a core body of knowledge. It is simply defined in legislation, which I have on a piece of paper in front of me, that the

national curriculum is just “such programmes of study” as the Secretary of State “considers appropriate” for every subject. We have a convention that national curriculum reviews are done by an independent panel in great detail with great consultation, but that is just a convention, and there is no reason why that would persist in future. I would worry about giving any future Government—of course, legislation stays on the statute book beyond yours—the ability to set exactly what is taught in every single school in the country, because that goes beyond the ability to set a high-level framework. I agree with the intention of what you are setting out, but there would need to be further changes to legislation to make that actually the case.

Q203 Amanda Martin: I have a question in two parts, but before I ask it, when we come to this Committee, we have to make declarations of interest. Can I confirm that you were the Conservative party candidate for Norwich South in the last election?

David Thomas: Yes, that is correct.

Q204 Amanda Martin: I want to come back on two points that you made, one of which is on the flexibility around schoolteachers’ pay and conditions. We have the document on national schoolteachers’ pay and conditions, and there are personnel documents from local authorities, as there are from academies, that will add to those things. Within that, there is room—we are hearing a lot about restricting pay—for recruitment and retention points, and teaching and learning responsibility points. We no longer have performance-related pay because of the things that the Government have changed, and there is also no longer a need to wait to move up to the upper pay scale, so there are still options in the hands of trusts or local authorities. Also, the document refers to 1,265 hours, so would you agree that there is some flexibility within that?

My second question is around the qualified teacher status element. Many parents, and in fact pupils, in my constituency tell me that they do not see training to be a teacher in a profession as bureaucracy. They see that it is a profession, and people want their children to be taught not just by a qualified teacher, but by a specialist qualified teacher. Do you agree that this Bill does not really make a change in allowing people to work toward QTS, but it does put QTS and qualified professionals at the heart of classrooms and the heart of our kids’ education?

David Thomas: On the first point, of course an amount of flexibility is available within the system, but we are not talking about the status quo; we are talking about the creation of powers that can be amended in the future. Statutory teachers’ pay and conditions are set by the Secretary of State, and that could be different next year from what it is this year. We have to ask what powers we want people to have rather than just saying whether the status quo happens to be acceptable or not. Even that status quo is limited, and I do not think we know what the right flexibilities are within the system to be able to give people optimal flexible working. That is something we are learning by innovation. There are great innovations, but they are all quite new. People have not been doing this for a very long time, so I would not want to cap us at the flexibility we have now; I want us to be ambitious and innovative about the future.

On qualified teacher status, the goal is a subject specialist and a qualified teacher who has as much experience as possible. That is the gold standard you want to be shooting towards. The reality on the ground is that you do not always have that choice in front of you on an interview panel. You might have a subject specialist or a qualified teacher, and you have to make that judgment call. You are there, you know your timetable as a headteacher, you know which classes need to be staffed, you can see those people teach some lessons, you are aware of their past experience and you have to make that judgment call. Ultimately, headteachers should be able to make that judgment call because they are the ones who will have to manage those people, and to look parents and children in the eyes and tell them that they believe they have made the right decision for them.

The Chair: We will have to leave it there; we have come to the end of the allotted time for the witness. I thank the witness for coming to give evidence to the Committee today, and we will move on to the next panel.

Examination of Witness

Kate Anstey gave evidence.

5.46 pm

The Chair: Thank you very much for coming. Apologies; we are a little bit later starting than we had anticipated because of the delay for voting earlier. Could you introduce yourself?

Kate Anstey: I am Kate Anstey, the head of education policy at Child Poverty Action Group.

Q205 Neil O’Brien: Good afternoon. Thank you for bearing with us while we voted. During the course of the day we have been discussing free school meals in secondary schools. It is obviously desirable to give lots of people free breakfasts, but there has been a bit of a debate about how to prioritise in a situation of inevitably scarce resources. We heard from Mark Russell that, if given the choice, rather than go for a universal obligation in primary schools, he would have the roll-out of breakfast clubs in more secondary schools targeted at schools with high levels of deprivation. Should we focus first on areas of deprivation and secondary schools with deprivation? Obviously, we would like to have infinite money. What do you think of his argument?

Kate Anstey: We certainly welcome the introduction of free breakfast clubs in the Bill. We speak to children and families in schools extensively and carry out extensive analysis. We know that where breakfast clubs are provided freely, they make a huge difference to low-income families—they make a big difference to lots of children, but to lower-income families disproportionately. The fact that provision is universal is very important; we know that removes a lot of barriers for parents. Where there is any kind of targeted approach, there are issues around stigma and families are less likely to use provision.

Q206 Neil O’Brien: Do you mean universal within the school—everyone has access to it?

Kate Anstey: Yes, exactly. Take-up of breakfast clubs varies, but the fact that it is universally available is very important.

I would say that it feels like secondary school pupils need more attention. They are being missed in the Bill. More could be done to support those families. There is also the issue in primary schools of how much support breakfast clubs can provide in terms of childcare, which is much more needed at primary level, but secondary school pupils certainly need support. They need support to get to school and they need food available as well.

Q207 Neil O'Brien: That is a very interesting point. Do you have a sense yet of the future funding arrangements for breakfast clubs in secondary schools and for HAF—holiday activities and food? What is the current status of those, as you understand it?

Kate Anstey: My understanding is that the HAF funding for holiday programmes has been committed to until 2025—some time this year. There are concerns about what will happen next with holiday programmes. In terms of funding for breakfast clubs more generally, there has been commitment to carry on funding the national school breakfast programme until 2026. That supports some secondary schools that meet the criteria. That is welcome, but one of our concerns with the work going on around breakfast clubs is funding and commitment to funding. We know that there is funding until 2026.

Q208 Neil O'Brien: But there is no certainty after that.

Kate Anstey: Yes, there is no certainty after that. The costs cannot land on families—we know that that will be a major barrier—but they also cannot land on schools, which need to know that they can continue that provision.

Q209 Neil O'Brien: There are charities, voluntary groups and various people out there funding free breakfasts, and there are paid-for free breakfasts at the moment, so the interaction of the Government-funded entitlement for the 30 minutes and those two other things will be quite complicated. Do you have any thoughts about anything that we need to do in the Bill to make that work well and to avoid the problems you have described? More generally, do you have thoughts, based on the experience of the groups that you speak to, about what it really costs to deliver this well? What is the unit cost of doing it properly? I am interested in both of those things.

Kate Anstey: Around 75% of schools have some form of breakfast provision already, but, as you say—

Q210 Neil O'Brien: Is that primary?

Kate Anstey: There is a higher proportion in primary, but that 75% is across all. Sorry—I have forgotten your question.

Q211 Neil O'Brien: I was trying to get at what the unit costs look like and how you manage the interaction of providing a new, free entitlement to 30 minutes together with paid-for sessions that offer longer and existing, charitably funded things. Is there anything we need to do in the Bill to ensure that that does not get tangled up?

Kate Anstey: A large proportion are already running breakfast clubs. It is a real mixture in terms of how that is funded, whether it is through schemes or other things.

In primary schools, it is much more likely that parents are paying in some form for that. Again, it is a mixed picture. There is a postcode lottery for families. If you are in a more affluent area, you are more likely to have breakfast club provision available to you, and you are more likely to be supported by family.

In what the Bill is trying to do on breakfast clubs, we really welcome the fact that it is bringing consistency and ensuring that there is access for all families. In the early adopter phase, it would be good to understand what schools are doing already and how this can work, but I think that standardised limit that includes both time and food for families should be standardised for everybody. There might be other things that go around that.

Q212 Neil O'Brien: On unit costs, I saw in the Government document that there was an initial grant—a lump sum—but the unit cost was about 65p per session per child. I know that there was the lump sum as well, but that struck me as being not a huge amount. I do not know what it really costs to deliver these things in practice in a lot of other places.

Kate Anstey: It is probably worth speaking to organisations; I am sure that Magic Breakfast will be able to speak more to that. There are certainly economies of scale that can help you bring down costs, but again, our area of expertise is free school meals, and schools are struggling with the funding that they have for free school meals. I would imagine that 65p might be a struggle for schools—I do not know. You would have to have conversations with some of the providers about that.

Q213 Stephen Morgan: Kate, it is good to see you again. Thank you for giving evidence to the Committee. I have a specific question around school uniform provisions in the Bill. Do you think that the provisions in the Bill on school uniform items for primary schools will support families and children with the cost of living?

Kate Anstey: We were very pleased to see Government taking action on reducing the cost of the school day, and uniforms are a huge pressure for families. We have done some research looking at the cost of uniforms for families. If you are a primary-aged family, the cost is £350 minimum, and it goes up to about £450 for secondary-aged families. That is for one child, of course, so that multiplies if you have more children. Part of that includes the fact that schools sometimes have excessive lists of compulsory branded items, so we were very pleased to see that acknowledgment in the Bill and the recognition that that needs to be limited. We think that that will make some difference to families.

The Bill could have gone further. I am not sure why the difference has been made between secondary and primary on the minimum. I think that those should be the same; there should not be a discrepancy there. I encourage Government to consider going further on this and bringing down the branded items as much as possible, because that is one of the things that place pressure on families.

In addition, the Bill could go further to support families with the cost of uniforms. In every other UK nation, families get grants and support with school costs. England is the only one that is lagging behind in that area, so we would like the idea of lower-income

families getting more support with the cost to be looked at. This is two-pronged: schools need to do more, but families really do need help to meet some of those costs as well.

One more thing on uniform that comes up a lot in our research with children and young people is that children are being isolated or sent home from school because they do not meet requirements around uniform. DFE data showed that 18% of children in hardship were sent home for not meeting uniform requirements. I find that kind of shocking when we have an attendance crisis. Something needs to be done around the guidance for behaviour in schools to ensure that children are not sanctioned for poverty-related issues or issues relating to uniform. Those are areas where I think that the Bill could have gone further, but we certainly think restricting branded items is a good thing.

Q214 Munira Wilson: Kate, you touched on the fact that the Bill does not really address the needs of children at secondary school who might be in poverty. I know that the Child Poverty Action Group has long campaigned on expanding eligibility for free school meals. Could you tell us whether you would like to see the threshold of eligibility across both primary and secondary raised? Also, should we be looking at auto-enrolment?

Kate Anstey: I think the Bill was a real missed opportunity to do more on free school meals. Again, school food comes up in every conversation we have. At the moment, we estimate that about one in three children in poverty do not qualify for free school meals because that threshold is painfully low. It has not been updated since 2018. As CPAG, ultimately, we want to see means-testing removed from lunchtime altogether. We want children to be in school and able to learn. They have to be there at lunchtime. There is no reason why we should not feed every child universally and make it part of the school day, but I think there is an urgent need to increase that threshold as much as possible to support more lower-income families.

Q215 Munira Wilson: To what level?

Kate Anstey: As I say, we would like to see universal provision, but the fact that currently you can be eligible for universal credit and state-funded benefits and yet your child cannot get a bit of support in the form of a hot meal at lunchtime is completely wrong, in my mind. I think, at the very least, it should go to all families on universal credit.

Q216 Munira Wilson: And auto-enrolment?

Kate Anstey: Yes. The data on auto-enrolment shows that around one in 10 children who are eligible for free school meals are not registered. That is for a whole host of reasons, including families not knowing they are entitled and families struggling with the admin. There is a very clear fix to this: if the DWP and the DFE work together to do the right data sharing, those children can be automatically enrolled. At the moment, many local authorities are doing a brilliant job of putting opt-out schemes in place, but that is highly onerous and those systems are not perfect, so they still miss children. We absolutely would say that increasing eligibility for free school meals is a priority, as is making sure that everybody who is entitled is getting one. The children who are missing

out because they are not registered are some of the poorest. They are missing out on the meal and the benefits that go alongside that.

Q217 Munira Wilson: Nutritionally, would you say a hot meal at lunchtime is more beneficial than a breakfast?

Kate Anstey: As I said, take-up of breakfast clubs or different schemes is around 40%, whereas the vast majority of children are in school for lunchtime. Children will be there and able to access that hot meal, so they are more likely to feel the benefits, whereas the effects of breakfast clubs depend on whether that offer is taken up.

Tom Hayes: I want to make a reference to the previous witness. It is my first time at a Committee oral hearing, and I am slightly astonished that there was no declaration that the previous witness was a parliamentary candidate at the election just gone—[*Interruption.*]

The Chair: Order. Can we please get on to the questions to the witness on the Bill?

Tom Hayes: I make this point in the context of the Labour peer who did disclose her party allegiance.

Neil O'Brien: And others.

The Chair: Order. It is not acceptable to have this backwards and forwards across the Committee. Please ask a question of the witness.

Q218 Tom Hayes: I want to ask somebody who clearly has long professional experience about the nutrition of food in the free breakfast clubs. Children are experiencing significant difficulty, whether it be from the cost of living crisis, the pandemic, reduced opportunity for play outdoors or their increased screentime. Children are struggling, so we need to make sure that the food that they get from this Government is as nutritious as possible. There is clearly a correlation between poor health outcomes and people's financial hardship. How do you expect health outcomes will improve for children, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, by their having access to free breakfast clubs?

The Chair: You have one minute to answer.

Kate Anstey: Food that is given at breakfast time has to be in line with school food standards. Those standards certainly need to be looked at and more could be done around them but, again, I pivot back to the fact that although there is a need to look at what children are getting at breakfast, there is even more of a need to look at making sure that more children can get access to food at lunch time.

Schools themselves will say that there are sometimes struggles in terms of meeting school food standards because of the costs. Schools have faced increased costs of food, and they do not want to pass those costs on to families, so there are challenges there, but there is a will from schools to try to meet those standards and give children a complete meal. That can hopefully happen at breakfast and at lunch time. It is fundamental that

children are able to have that nutritious hot meal, and we know it has really fantastic benefits for the rest of the school day.

We recently evaluated the Mayor's universal free school meals policy in London. We found that, as well as the health benefits, families are also able to spend on food at home when they save that money. Children are also much more likely to try new foods when they are around other children, when teachers are there and when they are socialising, so there are multiple health benefits to children eating well at school. We need to support schools to be able to do that.

The Chair: We now have to move on to the next panel. Thank you very much for coming to give evidence to the Committee.

Examination of Witnesses

Catherine McKinnell and Stephen Morgan gave evidence.

6.2 pm

Q219 The Chair: We now move on to the Ministers on the Bill. We all know who you are, but can you give us your formal titles?

The Minister for School Standards (Catherine McKinnell): I am Catherine McKinnell, the Minister for School Standards.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Stephen Morgan): I am Stephen Morgan, the Minister for Early Education.

Q220 Neil O'Brien: We have heard from four or five different school leaders today alone that the Bill needs to be changed to deliver what the Government are committed to rhetorically, not just on pay and conditions, but on the national curriculum. They say that "It is nice that this is your intention" and "It is nice that this is what you say", but four or five distinguished school leaders have said, specifically, over the course of the day, that the Bill needs to be amended. Will the Ministers work with those school leaders now to produce those amendments?

Catherine McKinnell: I want to say first that the Government's mission through the Bill—

Neil O'Brien: Could you answer the question?

Catherine McKinnell: I will answer the question.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham North) (Lab): We are supposed to be polite to each other.

Neil O'Brien: We have limited time. Can you please just answer the question. I have incredibly limited time.

The Chair: Order. We have had a question, and the Minister is going to answer it.

Catherine McKinnell: The Government's mission through the Bill is to deliver on the ambition of giving every child a national core of high-quality education, while allowing schools more flexibility and to innovate beyond it. We know that excellence and innovation can be found in all school types, so our priority is to create a school system that is rooted in collaboration and partnership so that we can spread that best practice throughout our very diverse system, which was commented on in the evidence we heard today. That is just the schools part;

there is obviously a whole other section on children and safeguarding, and making sure we bring forward the landmark reforms that we need to see in child safeguarding.

In direct answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, the factor that makes the biggest difference to a young person's education in schools and colleges is high-quality teaching, but there are severe shortages of qualified teachers across the country. We know that they are integral to driving high and rising standards, and they need to have an attractive pay and conditions framework. That is essential to both recruiting and retaining teachers who are qualified in every classroom.

We know academies have made transformational change, and we want them to continue driving those high and rising standards for all pupils, but especially disadvantaged pupils. That is why, as the Secretary of State set out, we want to create a floor with no ceiling, enabling healthy competition and innovation beyond that core framework to improve all schools. That is what we intend to deliver. We have heard the feedback from the sector. I have listened very carefully to the evidence that has been given today.

What this means for our ambition for teachers pay and conditions is that it should be clearer. In the same way that we have tabled other amendments to the Bill to make sure the legislation delivers our objectives, we are also intending to table an amendment to the clause covering teachers' pay and conditions. That is entirely in line with the Government's approach to providing clarification on the intention of legislation while we go through Committee stage.

The amendment will do two things. First, it will set a floor on pay that requires all state schools to follow minimum pay bands set out in the school teachers' pay and conditions document. Secondly, it will require academies to have due regard to the rest of the terms and conditions in the school teacher's pay and conditions document. In doing so, we make it clear that we will deliver on our commitment to create a floor with no ceiling, so that good practice and innovation can continue to spread and be used by all state schools to recruit and retain the very best teachers that we need for our children.

Q221 Neil O'Brien: So it is still your intention to make all academies comply with the school teachers' pay and condition document, despite what Sir Jon Coles talked about regarding the problems that that would create?

Catherine McKinnell: As I said, the amendment will require all state schools to follow the minimum pay bands set out in the school teachers' pay and conditions document, and then it will require academies to have due regard to the rest of the terms and conditions in the school teachers' pay and conditions document. This is so that we can deliver that core offer to all state schools, but without a ceiling.

Q222 Neil O'Brien: Is the Minister prepared to commit to work with school leaders, both the ones here today and others, to generate that amendment so that they are all satisfied with where we end up?

Catherine McKinnell: We are in close consultation with all of the stakeholders that we have been collaborating with to make sure we create the best framework of legislation that will deliver opportunity for all children, and we will continue to do so.

Q223 Neil O'Brien: Is the only amendment that we will be seeing from the Government on some of the issues we talked about today on pay, with nothing on clause 43, QTS or the national curriculum? If the answer is yes, and you are not planning an amendment on those, that is fine. I just wondered if the Minister had been persuaded by any of the things discussed, particularly around clause 43 and whether it is a bit too untrammelled in its current form and did not necessarily reflect the intent as put down in the notes?

Catherine McKinnell: I can respond to the hon. Gentleman on the new power in clause 43 that he has raised a number of times today. It will provide the Secretary of State with a more proportionate and flexible remedy, where it is really important to address quite a narrow or specific breach regarding unreasonable behaviour within an academy trust. I can give you an example as to why this is necessary: at the moment existing intervention powers require the Department for Education to use a termination warning notice and subsequently a termination notice. That is not always necessary or appropriate when dealing with an isolated breach of a legal duty.

Q224 Neil O'Brien: I understand the sense of that.

Catherine McKinnell: We need a proportionate response and that needs to be framed—

Q225 Neil O'Brien: On that front we are in agreement. My question is whether the Minister would be prepared to limit that to schools' actual duties, rather than just anything that the Secretary of State sees fit to direct them to do. That is the worry. It is not an "in principle" objection to it. It is a problem that the power is so untrammelled. Would she consider listening to the point that was made on that?

Catherine McKinnell: Is the hon. Gentleman talking about a point that he has made on that or a point that—

Q226 Neil O'Brien: It was a point that David made in his evidence on it. I thought he made a good point.

Catherine McKinnell: Obviously, we will listen to legitimate concerns on that. At the moment our view is that it is a much more proportionate way of dealing with a breach by an academy of a legal requirement within the legislation, so that we can avoid disruption to children where there is another way of dealing with it.

Q227 Neil O'Brien: One last point. Zooming back a bit, a few different witnesses called for a vision of where the system is going, and they intuited what the Government's vision was from the contents of the Bill. I thought that was very interesting. I just wondered what Ministers' view was of what had gone wrong in Wales. Obviously in Wales a lot of the different academy freedoms were never taken up, academies were not put in place and league tables were abolished. It was effectively a natural experiment going the opposite direction to England. The IFS report "Major challenges for education in Wales" is incredibly damning about what has happened there as a result. In terms of the Government's overall theory and the vision they are trying to enact in the Bill, I am curious about why Ministers think things have gone so wrong in Wales. Why have things gone so backward? Why is the IFS report so damning?

Catherine McKinnell: I am conscious that other Members of the Committee might want to actually ask about the legislation, but I am happy to set out our overarching vision.

The Chair: Order. Given the shortage of time, this is moving further away from the legislation than we should allow. Can we move on to Munira Wilson?

Q228 Munira Wilson: It has become clear from some of the evidence today that in terms of the priorities and challenges facing schools today, it feels like some leaders have been a bit blindsided by the provisions in the schools part of the Bill. The provisions are also not really tackling the biggest challenges, which are the SEND system in crisis and the children's mental health crisis. They are perhaps tackling problems that some leaders do not feel are there. Could you explain why you have decided to go for these measures as opposed to the areas that union leaders, school leaders and children are telling us that we really need to be focusing on? Arguably recruitment and retention is another crisis area, and some of these measures could actually hinder recruitment and retention.

Catherine McKinnell: I would point blank refute your last assertion on the basis that any measures in the Bill are very much intended to tackle some of the challenges with recruitment and retention. We are committed to making sure that not only do we have the teaching professionals we need in our schools, but that they are suitably qualified and that we drive those high and rising standards. We know that having excellent teaching and leadership in school, and a curriculum that is built on high standards and shared knowledge, means a system that will break down the barriers that are holding children back.

On the specifics you raise in relation to mental health and other challenges in the school system, we are very alive to these issues. I am conscious that I have done all the talking so far, so perhaps Mr Morgan wants to come in on that point.

Stephen Morgan: To echo my ministerial colleague, this is a landmark Bill, and we are really pleased to be bringing it forward so quickly in the new Government's term. We are looking forward to working with all Members as we get into the detail of the clauses in the coming weeks.

On mental health, you will be aware of the commitment we set out in our manifesto to recruit 8,500 new mental health professionals and to introduce dedicated mental health support in every school. We also have our young futures programme. We take extremely seriously our commitments on mental health, because we know that it can be a barrier to behaviour and attendance at school. While they are not specifically included in the Bill, we will bring forward further measures to support children and young people with their mental health.

Q229 Munira Wilson: I would include SEND as well as being missing in the Bill, but I am conscious of time. The Children's Commissioner in her email to the Committee last night said that we need to see an impact assessment and a children's rights assessment. When can we expect to see those?

Stephen Morgan: There is more work to do before presenting the impact assessment to the Committee. It is currently with the regulatory committee, but we acknowledge that this is information that should be brought before the Bill Committee, and we will do so as quickly as we can.

Q230 Munira Wilson: Specifically on the register of children not in school and the powers you are giving to local authorities to deny parents the right to home school their children, I go back to some of the questions I asked witnesses earlier. Why have you put in such an onerous list of information that you want from parents? Do you really need that to be able to operate an effective register? Given the state of SEND provision in our state sector, is it right that you are giving local authorities the power to say no to a parent who does not feel that their child's needs are being met at a special school and wishes to withdraw them? Will you reconsider that, given the concerns from parents of SEND children?

Catherine McKinnell: That was an awful lot of questions, and I am not sure whether we have time to address them all, but our fundamental approach is that all children have the right to a safe and suitable education, whether they are educated at school or otherwise. We have given quite significant consideration to, and had consultation with stakeholders on, how to get the balance right and having a proportionate approach: ensuring that local authorities can be assured that children not in school are receiving a high standard of education, which every child deserves, but not making any changes to a parent's ability to educate their child. We absolutely support their right to do so. The information that will be required to make those determinations has been carefully thought through, but there will be an opportunity to discuss all these matters in great detail in Committee. I reject the hon. Lady's framing of this issue, because I think it is right that we have the provisions in place to ensure that every child is safe. We have a duty to do so.

Stephen Morgan: It is worth saying that we will engage with stakeholders to ensure that any burdens the registers impose on parents are minimised, and that we will consult on statutory guidance to support local authorities and schools to implement the measures in a proportionate way. We have heard today from witnesses about how strong those measures will be and what a difference they can make.

The Chair: There is time for a few brief questions from Members.

Q231 Catherine Atkinson: How do you think the Bill will help to stop children falling through the net? How can it help to support families, in the cost of living crisis, with the costs associated with school?

Catherine McKinnell: Those are two quite big issues. Do you want to start on cost savings, Stephen?

Stephen Morgan: As we have heard today, too many children are growing up in poverty in our country, and that is why it is important that the ministerial taskforce concludes later this year and decides what actions can be taken forward. As of 2023, one in four children were in absolute poverty, and that is why I am so pleased with the many measures that will make a big difference to children's lives up and down the country. Take breakfast clubs, which we know are good for attainment, behaviour and attendance: they will put £450 per child, per year, back in the pockets of parents, but also bring real benefits to children. More broadly, the commitments around uniform limits will make a real difference, as we have heard today, and will save the average parent £50. A series of measures in the Bill will make a real difference in the cost of living challenges that parents up and down the country are facing. Thank you for the question.

Catherine McKinnell: On keeping children safe, I know that this is an area that you have spent a lot of time working in and have spoken about. The register of children not in school will be an important step, and has had cross-party support in this House for some time. We will also have the single unique identifier, which will be a way of making sure that information about a child does not fall through the gaps, and that children do not fall through the safety gap.

There is also a whole raft of changes that aim to ensure that multi-agency working is embedded in our approach to safeguarding, as well as measures to try to keep children within the family unit, wherever that is possible, and strengthen the approach to kinship care. We have put funding in place to support local kinship care arrangements and are trialling better information being available. There is a range of measures, and clearly this is a big priority for us in the Bill.

Q232 Damian Hinds: I am conscious that we are short of time. This Bill is really like two Bills, with the children and social care section and the schools section. Were there discussions about making it two separate Bills? You could have pressed on at all speed with the social care material, which has been around for quite a long time—some of it was in the 2022 Act. That would have enabled you to have a Green Paper, a White Paper and pre-legislative scrutiny, and perhaps to address more of the questions up front.

Catherine McKinnell: I appreciate the premise of the right hon. Gentleman's question. I appreciate that he is very experienced in this place and that he has had the experience of being in government for quite some time, and having the opportunity to do all those things and make the necessary changes. We wanted to move as fast as we could to make the impact that children need to see, particularly in safeguarding. We also wanted to make the long thought-through changes to our school system to support our opportunity mission and break down those barriers to ensure that every child has every opportunity to succeed. Admittedly, we are not going to lose any time in making the changes that we want to see, and we have the opportunity in the parliamentary time allocated to us.

Damian Hinds: Ah.

Catherine McKinnell: It is very important that we use it. We are a Government on a mission, and we have a lot of things to do.

Q233 Amanda Martin: How will the Bill support local partnerships? We heard from Sir Jon Coles, the Church of England, the Catholic Education Service and others about collaboration. How will the Bill support local partnerships to work together more effectively to prevent children from falling behind?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend raises an important point, and it is very much at the heart of what we want to achieve through our changes to schools. We want to ensure that every child has a good school place; that every parent can be confident that their child will be taught by a qualified teacher within their local mainstream school wherever possible, being educated with their peers; that no vulnerable child falls through the cracks; and that we know where they are if they are not in school. We are making important changes on admissions to ensure

that all the schools in a local area collaborate with their local authority on place planning, so that we can really deliver on that vision.

The Chair: That brings us to the end of today's sitting. The Committee will meet again at 11.30 am on Thursday 23 January to begin line-by-line consideration of the Bill.

Ordered, That further consideration be now adjourned.
—(*Vicky Foxcroft.*)

6.22 pm

Adjourned till Thursday 23 January at half-past Eleven o'clock.

Written evidence reported to the House

CWSB01 Zsofia Polos	CWSB20 Schoolwear Association
CWSB02 An individual who wishes to remain anonymous	CWSB21 Nicola & Nigel Jenkin
CWSB03 Sam Rickman	CWSB22 Shelley Blakesley
CWSB04 Lacie Mckenna	CWSB23 Kinship
CWSB05 Hannah Whitehead	CWSB24 NASS (National Association of Special Schools)
CWSB06 Gemma Keenan	CWSB25 Christopher Smith
CWSB07 Liz Postlethwaite	CWSB26 Catherine Oliver
CWSB08 Ben West	CWSB27 London Councils
CWSB09 Education Otherwise	CWSB28 Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families
CWSB10 Cally Cook	CWSB29 Zoe Richards
CWSB11 Catherine Froud	CWSB30 C Moy
CWSB12 Rowan and Dana Smith	CWSB31 Confederation of Schools Trust
CWSB13 Iain Duncan	CWSB32 Katie Finlayson
CWSB14 Helen Murray	CWSB33 Our Wellbeing, Our Voice Coalition
CWSB15 Mrs G E Leese	CWSB34 Gemma Owen
CWSB16 An individual who wishes to remain anonymous	CWSB35 Liesje Wright
CWSB17 Jo Rogers	CWSB36 An individual who wishes to remain anonymous
CWSB18 Family Rights Group	CWSB37 Pause
CWSB19 Carly Bateman	CWSB38 Holly Lovell, Home educator

