

Legacy Report

March 2026



The Welsh Parliament is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people. Commonly known as the Senedd, it makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.

An electronic copy of this document can be found on the Senedd website:
www.senedd.wales/SeneddChildren

Copies of this document can also be obtained in accessible formats including Braille, large print, audio or hard copy from:

Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN

Tel: **0300 200 6565**

Email: **SeneddChildren@senedd.wales**

X: **@SeneddChildren**

© **Senedd Commission Copyright 2026**

The text of this document may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium providing that it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading or derogatory context. The material must be acknowledged as copyright of the Senedd Commission and the title of the document specified.

Legacy Report

March 2026



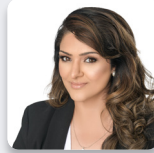
About the Committee

The Committee was established on 23 June 2021. Its remit can be found at:
www.senedd.wales/SeneddChildren

Current Committee membership:



**Committee Chair:
Buffy Williams MS**
Welsh Labour



Natasha Asghar MS
Welsh Conservatives



Cefin Campbell MS
Plaid Cymru



Russell George MS
Independent Member



Vaughan Gething MS
Welsh Labour



Carolyn Thomas MS
Welsh Labour

Contents

Chair’s foreword	5
Conclusions	7
1. Policy areas for successor committee(s)	13
Pupil Absence.....	14
Children on the Margins.....	15
Behaviour in Schools	16
Disabled Access to Education and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform	17
Routes into Post-16 Education and Training	19
The First 1,000 Days.....	20
Children’s health	22
School Transport.....	23
Scrutiny of Medr	25
2. Ways of working.....	27
Strategic Plan.....	27
Prioritising lived experience.....	28
Visits.....	30
Stakeholder events	30
Novel ways of working	31

Chair's foreword

Spending the last five years on this Committee, and serving as Chair since 2024, has been one of the real privileges of my time as a Senedd Member.

Much of our work has involved talking directly to children, young people, their families, and those who work with them. These conversations have been central to our work.

We were established during the pandemic, a period that has gone on to shape children and young people in countless ways. The pandemic's impact has been felt significantly in all the work we have done. And now in 2026, we continue to live in uncertain and challenging times. But throughout all this, children and young people in Wales have shown they are resilient and able to meet and respond to these challenges. In all our work, I've been blown away by their honesty, energy, intelligence, humour and kindness.

We have aimed to put these voices at the heart of our work. I'm particularly proud of how we have amplified the voices of those who are too often unheard, such as those with experience of care, or those with additional learning needs or disabilities. It will be for others to judge how successful we have been on this. I will carry those powerful stories long after my time in the Senedd. And those individual experiences have inspired us to push harder for meaningful change.

I would like to thank all the Members who have sat on the Committee, and in particular, my predecessor, Jayne Bryant MS, who was Chair of the Committee between June 2021 and April 2024. All Members have contributed with commitment, insight and compassion. It's been a joy to help lead such a dedicated group of members.

As is often the case, there is always more we would have liked to do. In this report, we hope to share our expertise and knowledge with future members. We do this both by outlining the policy areas we think would merit further work in the next Senedd and reflecting on our working practices. In both instances, we hope this will be useful for those who follow in our footsteps.

The next Senedd will bring a lot of change, but I hope that one thing remains constant: that children and young people's voices continue to be heard clearly and shape decisions at the very heart of Welsh democracy.

Buffy Williams MS

Chair

Conclusions

Conclusion 1. A successor Committee may wish to examine whether the Welsh Government's actions set out in their response to our pupil absence report, and in the years since, are genuinely shifting attendance patterns and reducing persistent absence. This might include:

- testing the effectiveness of family engagement officers;
- the consistency with which the new attendance guidance is being applied; and
- the extent to which schools are equipped to address the deeper causes of disengagement.

We believe that continued scrutiny will be essential to ensure that learners at risk of long-term absence are identified earlier and supported effectively, as the system continues to grapple with wider structural issues - including workforce capacity, variation in local authority capability, and persistent data and information sharing challenges- that will shape attendance in the years ahead.

..... Page 14

Conclusion 2. A successor Committee may wish to focus on whether the Welsh Government has taken meaningful action on the Children on the margin inquiry's central concerns: improving the accuracy of missing-children data, strengthening information-sharing, and ensuring that safeguarding arrangements are more consistent and accountable across Wales. The Welsh Government's response sets out commitments in these areas, but a key test will be whether agencies are now better able to identify risk earlier, coordinate effectively, and prevent children from slipping through the gaps.

A successor Committee may also wish to revisit areas where the inquiry identified significant concern, including:

- the offer of return-home interviews which remain without a legal basis at present;
- the adequacy of early intervention and specialist services for children who are exploited or go missing.

Continued scrutiny of the impact of school exclusions on children's vulnerability, and the interface between devolved and non-devolved criminal justice systems

will also be important in assessing whether the Welsh Government’s commitments are translating into a more coherent and rights-based response for children on the margins..... Page 16

Conclusion 3. A successor Committee may therefore wish to maintain close scrutiny of the Welsh Government’s progress in delivering the revised exclusions guidance and the wider behaviour guidance framework. Given our findings across various inquiries about the cumulative impact of behaviour pressures on learners, teachers and the school environment, a successor Committee may wish to ensure that these long-promised frameworks are delivered in a timely, coherent and evidence-informed way, and that their implementation is matched by the practical support schools will need to embed them effectively..... Page 17

Conclusion 4. A successor Committee may wish to examine whether the ALN system is improving access and outcomes for children, whether statutory duties are being met consistently, and whether the Government’s commitments have translated into measurable change. Ensuring that the ambitions of ALN reform become a lived reality for disabled children and young people will require sustained attention in the next Senedd. Page 19

Conclusion 5. A successor Committee may wish to monitor the implementation of the routes into post 16 education and training inquiry’s recommendations and assess whether reforms are improving access, participation and outcomes for young people. Rising rates of young people who are not in education, employment or training should remain a significant concern to relevant Senedd committees, and sustained scrutiny will be essential to ensure that the momentum generated by the routes in post-16 inquiry leads to a more coherent, equitable and learner-centred post-16 system, one that genuinely supports the ambitions and potential of young people across Wales.Page 20

Conclusion 6. A successor committee may wish to take a system-wide look at the foundations of early childhood development during the first 1,000 days. Areas that may warrant further scrutiny include:

- parent-infant relationship support, including how consistently families can access interventions during pregnancy and the early postnatal period;
- health visiting capacity, continuity and caseload pressures, and the implications for early identification of developmental needs and parental wellbeing;

-
- the strength and coherence of early intervention pathways, including referral routes into specialist services and the extent to which families receive timely support;
 - early language development in both English and Welsh, and the accessibility, timeliness and quality of speech, language and communication support in both languages, and other community languages;
 - the impact of the Flying Start programme on early childhood development, including:
 - how consistently the expanded childcare offer is being delivered across Wales;
 - the sustainability of the childcare expansion, including capital and revenue pressures and the capacity of local childcare markets to meet demand;
 - the extent to which workforce shortages in childcare, health visiting and specialist services are affecting the quality and intensity of the core offer;
 - the role and use of Flying Start outreach, noting that while outreach is intended to ensure vulnerable families outside designated areas can access support, there is anecdotal evidence that local authorities delivery it too inconsistently, even allowing for local flexibility, and the funding allows only small scale delivery outside core areas.

There may also be merit in undertaking a targeted inquiry into school readiness to examine how well agencies are working together to support children before they enter formal education, and how Flying Start childcare expansion interacts with wider early years and child health policy..... Page 22

Conclusion 7. We would encourage our successor committee to continue monitoring children’s health closely, and seek greater clarity around planning, resourcing and accountability for children’s health. This should include encouraging further improvements in the availability and use of data on children’s health needs and treatment pathways, to ensure that children receive the strategic attention and system oversight required across Government and the NHS..... Page 22

Conclusion 8. A successor Committee may wish to draw these strands together through a dedicated inquiry into learner travel, bringing into one place the progress from the 2023 evaluation of the Learner Travel Measure, the revised guidance, the early implementation of the Bus Services (Wales) Act 2026, and the findings of the youth fare pilot evaluation.

Such an inquiry would be well placed to assess the cumulative impact of these reforms on learners' ability to access education, training and progression, and to identify where barriers persist. It should also examine whether local authorities have the funding, flexibility and statutory levers required to secure safe, reliable and inclusive transport that supports equitable access for all learners, as well as whether the youth fare pilot is delivering meaningful impact and value for money. Page 24

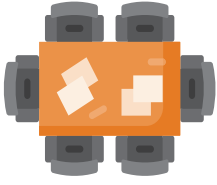
Conclusion 9. A successor Committee will have a central role in monitoring Medr's performance, governance and impact - how it uses its statutory powers, how it engages with learners and providers, how it deploys its budget, and whether it is delivering on the promise of a more coherent and equitable tertiary system. Given the scale of powers being transferred and the concerns raised through the scrutiny of the Bill, a successor committee should build on our work and undertake regular, at least annual, scrutiny of Medr to ensure transparency, accountability and sustained focus on learners' interests. Page 25

Conclusion 10. We would urge our successor committee to continue to put the voices of children and young people at the heart of their work. In particular they should work hard to ensure that the voices of those children and young people for whom political structures are the furthest away are particularly prioritised. In doing this, they should consider carefully as part of each relevant inquiry, the best ways in which they do this, acknowledging that what might work for one inquiry will not work for another..... Page 29

Conclusion 11. Senedd committees in the seventh Senedd should build on our learning from stakeholder events, and look to use them where relevant and appropriate. Page 31

Conclusion 12. Both our successor committee and other Senedd committees should consider this model for other topics , for example scrutiny of the implementation of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act and the establishment of Medr, which would benefit from this longitudinal approach to scrutiny, that enables the public and stakeholders to provide ongoing feedback and views. Page 33

The Committee in the Sixth Senedd



HOW MANY FORMAL COMMITTEE MEETINGS WERE HELD?

118



HOW MANY WITNESSES GAVE EVIDENCE TO THE COMMITTEE?

338



HOW MANY STAKEHOLDER EVENTS/ VISITS WERE UNDERTAKEN?

13



**HOW MANY REPORTS WERE
PRODUCED?**

20



**HOW MANY INQUIRIES WERE
UNDERTAKEN?**

11



**HOW MANY RESPONSES TO
CONSULTATIONS WERE RECEIVED?**

684

1. Policy areas for successor committee(s)

This chapter sets out the areas on which we believe a successor committee may wish to focus its scrutiny. They include issues we consider important to revisit from previous inquiries, and areas we did not have time to pursue further. Together, they highlight where we believe further scrutiny will be essential to secure meaningful improvement and better outcomes for children and young people in Wales.

- 1.** The Sixth Senedd has been a period of significant transition for children and young people in Wales. Our work has taken place at a time when services for children – across education, social care and health – are being reshaped not only by reform and recovery, but by the increasingly complex needs of children, young people, and families, and the wider societal context and pressures which schools and services now absorb and operate within.
- 2.** The long-term effects of the pandemic, the pressures on public services, and the increasingly complex needs that schools and care settings are now expected to respond to have influenced every one of our inquiry and evidence sessions. Throughout this term, we have sought to ensure that the voices of children, young people and families remained central to scrutiny, and that the system’s most vulnerable learners and service users were not overlooked.
- 3.** As this Senedd draws to a close, we leave behind a substantial body of evidence that points to both progress and persistent challenges. The themes that have emerged across inquiries are interconnected: early years experiences shape lifelong outcomes; access to support determines inclusion; disengagement risks marginalisation; attendance affects attainment; and the pathways available to young people influence their future prospects. Our work has shown that these issues span education, social care and children’s health and cannot be addressed in isolation. They require sustained attention, cross-government coordination and commitment to action that drives meaningful change.

Pupil Absence

4. Our short inquiry into pupil absence early in this Senedd revealed one of the most pressing challenges facing the education system. The issue of pupil absence and the impact on children and young people's learning and wider well-being was raised with us during annual scrutiny of Estyn in December 2021, which led us to hold the inquiry. We heard that attendance levels had not returned to pre-pandemic norms, and that persistent absence was undermining learning, well-being and progression for significant numbers of pupils.

5. During the inquiry, we heard that the reasons for absence are complex and often linked to mental health, poverty, additional learning needs and wider family pressures, especially for young carers. The inquiry also highlighted inconsistencies in how attendance is monitored and supported across Wales, with variation in early intervention, data use and the capacity of local services. We concluded that without a coordinated, well-resourced national approach, the system risks normalising high levels of absence and entrenching inequalities.

6. Issues around attendance have continued to feature in the Committee's scrutiny since we reported on our inquiry in November 2022, including in sessions with the Cabinet Secretary for Education in November 2025 and February 2026.

Conclusion 1. A successor Committee may wish to examine whether the Welsh Government's actions set out in their response to our pupil absence report, and in the years since, are genuinely shifting attendance patterns and reducing persistent absence. This might include:

- testing the effectiveness of family engagement officers;
- the consistency with which the new attendance guidance is being applied; and
- the extent to which schools are equipped to address the deeper causes of disengagement.

We believe that continued scrutiny will be essential to ensure that learners at risk of long-term absence are identified earlier and supported effectively, as the system continues to grapple with wider structural issues - including workforce capacity, variation in local authority capability, and persistent data and information sharing challenges- that will shape attendance in the years ahead.

Children on the Margins

7. We undertook our inquiry into children on the margins after our earlier work on services for care-experienced children identified that care-experienced children are estimated to make up almost 40 per cent of incidents of children who go missing in Wales. We also heard how care-experienced children and other groups – such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, children experiencing trauma at home, those disengaged from education, and some black and minority ethnic children – face similar heightened vulnerability and risk of criminalisation.

8. The evidence we gathered painted a consistent picture of a system struggling to keep pace with the needs of its most vulnerable children. Some of it was very difficult to hear, but even more difficult for those sharing their experiences. Behind the uncertainty about the true scale of missing children cases sit deeper, long-standing structural weaknesses: agencies working in silos, services stretched beyond capacity and a culture that often interprets distress as defiance rather than a signal of harm.

9. Across services for every group of children that we examined the same story emerged. Early signs of risk are overlooked, information fails to move between the professionals who need it, and in many cases help arrives only once a crisis has occurred. Our conclusion was unavoidable: without stronger early-intervention services and better co-ordination, too many children will continue to fall through the gaps.

Conclusion 2. A successor Committee may wish to focus on whether the Welsh Government has taken meaningful action on the Children on the margin inquiry's central concerns: improving the accuracy of missing-children data, strengthening information-sharing, and ensuring that safeguarding arrangements are more consistent and accountable across Wales. The Welsh Government's response sets out commitments in these areas, but a key test will be whether agencies are now better able to identify risk earlier, coordinate effectively, and prevent children from slipping through the gaps.

A successor Committee may also wish to revisit areas where the inquiry identified significant concern, including:

- the offer of return-home interviews which remain without a legal basis at present;
- the adequacy of early intervention and specialist services for children who are exploited or go missing.

Continued scrutiny of the impact of school exclusions on children's vulnerability, and the interface between devolved and non-devolved criminal justice systems will also be important in assessing whether the Welsh Government's commitments are translating into a more coherent and rights-based response for children on the margins.

Behaviour in Schools

10. Across our work this Senedd term, behaviour has consistently surfaced as a pressure point within the education system. Evidence to the [school improvement and learner attainment inquiry](#) suggested that many schools are now managing more complex behaviours than before the pandemic, with staff capacity stretched and the learning environment affected as a result. Contributors also drew attention to the way disruption in classrooms can erode the conditions needed for effective teaching and progress.

11. The [teacher recruitment and retention inquiry](#) echoed these themes. Behaviour was frequently cited as a factor shaping teachers' workload, stress levels and overall morale. For some, the cumulative impact of managing increasingly complex behavioural needs was influencing decisions about whether to remain in the profession. Others reflected on the extent to which they felt equipped to respond to the emotional and behavioural challenges they now encounter.

12. The [children on the margins inquiry](#) provides further depth to this picture, by showing how closely behaviour is bound up with children's wider wellbeing. We heard that distressed behaviour often reflects unmet emotional, developmental or mental health needs, yet some children's actions continue to be viewed through a lens of defiance rather than vulnerability. This risks exclusion from the very school settings that act as a vital protective space for vulnerable learners and those at risk of marginalisation.

13. We also note the recent publication of the Welsh Youth Parliament report on [Classroom disruption and poor behaviour being normalised in schools](#). It highlights that children and young people themselves are most impacted by the behaviour of their peers, setting out extensive evidence of the realities faced by pupils every day. We must not forget that places of learning must be safe, for children, young people and the adults that work in them alike.

14. We are disappointed at the pace of progress in supporting the education system to manage behaviour in schools. At the time of writing, the Welsh Government has not delivered the updated exclusion guidance it previously

committed to in [its response](#) to the children on the margins report. In a context where staff capacity is stretched, vulnerabilities are more visible, and the stakes for children are high, the absence of this updated guidance leaves schools navigating significant challenges without the framework they have been promised.

15. Additionally, the behaviour management guidance for schools has not been updated since 2012. While we acknowledge the activity underway following the National Behaviour Summit – including the publication of a new Behaviour Toolkit and the [Cabinet Secretary for Education’s recent progress update](#) – there remains no timeline for when revised national guidance will replace the 2012 framework. In the meantime, schools continue to operate without the coherent, up-to-date behaviour guidance they have repeatedly told us they need.

Conclusion 3. A successor Committee may therefore wish to maintain close scrutiny of the Welsh Government’s progress in delivering the revised exclusions guidance and the wider behaviour guidance framework. Given our findings across various inquiries about the cumulative impact of behaviour pressures on learners, teachers and the school environment, a successor Committee may wish to ensure that these long-promised frameworks are delivered in a timely, coherent and evidence-informed way, and that their implementation is matched by the practical support schools will need to embed them effectively.

Disabled Access to Education and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform

16. Our inquiry [do disabled children have equal access to education and childcare?](#) showed that disabled children and young people still face significant barriers to accessing their rights to education and childcare. In [its response to this inquiry](#), the Welsh Government accepted our conclusion that “a significant number of children and young people’s rights to an education as set out in Articles 28 and 29 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are currently being breached in Wales”.¹

17. Evidence gathered across the disabled access inquiry and our Senedd-long inquiry into [implementation of education reforms](#) including ALN reform, indicated that these breaches are not isolated or exceptional, but systemic – shaped by structural pressures, inconsistent implementation and variation in local capacity.

¹ CYPE Committee, [Do Disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare. paragraph 25. July 2024](#)

18. The ALN reforms were intended to strengthen rights and reduce the contentious nature of the previous Special Education Needs (SEN) system. However, we heard that the lived experience of families does not yet reflect this ambition. Delays in assessment, inconsistent decision-making, and significant variation between local authorities continue to shape access to support. Local authorities and providers described capacity pressures that directly affect timeliness and quality, while families reported ongoing difficulties navigating the system. The Welsh Government recognised these issues in its response to our disabled access report, noting the strain on families and the need for greater consistency.²

19. One of the clearest findings from the disabled access inquiry was the extent of variation in provision across Wales, including in Welsh-medium settings. The Welsh Government accepted that this level of consistency amounts to a postcode lottery and agreed that it was not unacceptable.³ For disabled children, inconsistency determines whether they can attend school full-time, access therapies, or secure childcare that meets their needs. We heard evidence of reduced timetables, informal exclusions, and settings unable to support children due to limited training or confidence.

20. These patterns mirror the variation we identified in the implementation of ALN reforms, where local interpretation of universal provision, thresholds for ALN identification, and approaches to multi-agency working differ markedly between and even within local authorities.

21. Following her appointment, we welcomed the early recognition by the Cabinet Secretary for Education that the ALN reforms were not delivering as intended and her commitment to reviewing the ALN legislative framework to ensure that it is clear and understood, so early in her tenure. We welcome the action the Welsh Government is taking to try to improve implementation of the ALN system and this will require ongoing attention. We wrote to the Cabinet Secretary shortly before the end of this Senedd with the observations and conclusions from the final check-in of our scrutiny of the implementation of ALN and curriculum reform.

22. The Welsh Government's responses to both the disabled access and implementation of educational reforms inquiries outline a wide range of activity,

² Letter from Cabinet Secretary for Education, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Minister for Children and Social Care to Chair, CYPE Committee, 30 September 2024.

³ Letter from Cabinet Secretary for Education, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Minister for Children and Social Care to Chair, CYPE Committee, 30 September 2024.

including investment in facilities, professional learning, and a review of the ALN Act and Code. These are important steps. However, several recommendations across both inquiries were accepted only in principle or rejected, often on the basis of local authority responsibility or resource constraints. Many commitments remain exploratory, reliant on feasibility work, or tied to existing budgets. This creates a gap between the Government's recognition of systemic issues and the scale of action required to address them.

Conclusion 4. A successor Committee may wish to examine whether the ALN system is improving access and outcomes for children, whether statutory duties are being met consistently, and whether the Government's commitments have translated into measurable change. Ensuring that the ambitions of ALN reform become a lived reality for disabled children and young people will require sustained attention in the next Senedd.

Routes into Post-16 Education and Training

23. Our [routes into post-16 education and training inquiry](#) highlighted a system in the midst of significant change following reforms under the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022. The number of 18 year olds going into higher education has fallen, and stakeholders warned of the rising numbers of young people not in education, employment or training. Throughout the inquiry, young people and parents' experiences made clear that the transition from Year 11 into post-16 education is often influenced by access to and awareness of the full range of options available to them as well as what learners may think is expected of them rather than what is right for them.

24. Our [report](#) published in November 2025 set out sixteen recommendations aimed at improving coherence, equity and learner experience across the post-16 landscape. The evidence showed that too many learners still feel steered towards academic routes, while vocational pathways remain undervalued or unavailable. Careers advice varies widely, and only a minority of young people access work experience, despite its proven value. The current funding system can unintentionally incentivise competition between providers, shaping the information learners receive and limiting collaboration. These structural issues contribute to uneven progression and a lack of clarity about why some young people disengage.

25. Responses to the inquiry from the [Welsh Government](#) and [Medr](#), both acknowledged many of the challenges raised and signalled an intention to strengthen the 14-16 Learner Entitlement, expand Junior Apprenticeships and

improve the evidence base that underpins policy. These are welcome steps, but acceptance in full or in principle, is not the same as delivery, and several areas - careers advice, work experience, funding reform and data - require greater clarity and urgency if the system is to meet the needs of learners.

Conclusion 5. A successor Committee may wish to monitor the implementation of the routes into post 16 education and training inquiry's recommendations and assess whether reforms are improving access, participation and outcomes for young people. Rising rates of young people who are not in education, employment or training should remain a significant concern to relevant Senedd committees, and sustained scrutiny will be essential to ensure that the momentum generated by the routes in post-16 inquiry leads to a more coherent, equitable and learner-centred post-16 system, one that genuinely supports the ambitions and potential of young people across Wales.

The First 1,000 Days

26. Throughout this Senedd term, we have necessarily devoted substantial time to scrutinising the implementation of education reforms, and more recently school improvement and learner attainment. This work has reinforced the importance of early childhood experiences in shaping school readiness and later educational outcomes. However, time constraints have meant that we have been unable to scrutinise early years and child health policy to the extent that we would have wished, including the approach to the first 1,000 days - a policy area that spans the antenatal period and encompasses a broad range of health and development issues from pre-birth onwards.

27. During annual scrutiny with the Cabinet Secretary for Education we heard that concerns about school readiness now extend far beyond practical matters. Headteachers are reporting that many children are starting reception without basic language development and some are unable to speak despite having no health needs. She highlighted growing evidence that children are being spoken to less at home, contributing to delayed communication, including one north Wales school where a third of reception pupils did not recognise their own name when spoken aloud.⁴

28. These accounts point to wider challenges in early communication, parent-infant interaction and the support available to families in the earliest stages of life,

⁴ CYPE Committee. Record of Proceedings. 4 February 2026. paragraph 76

with schools increasingly required to address development gaps that should be supported well before children enter formal education.

Conclusion 6. A successor committee may wish to take a system-wide look at the foundations of early childhood development during the first 1,000 days. Areas that may warrant further scrutiny include:

- parent-infant relationship support, including how consistently families can access interventions during pregnancy and the early postnatal period;
- health visiting capacity, continuity and caseload pressures, and the implications for early identification of developmental needs and parental wellbeing;
- the strength and coherence of early intervention pathways, including referral routes into specialist services and the extent to which families receive timely support;
- early language development in both English and Welsh, and the accessibility, timeliness and quality of speech, language and communication support in both languages, and other community languages;
- the impact of the Flying Start programme on early childhood development, including:
 - how consistently the expanded childcare offer is being delivered across Wales;
 - the sustainability of the childcare expansion, including capital and revenue pressures and the capacity of local childcare markets to meet demand;
 - the extent to which workforce shortages in childcare, health visiting and specialist services are affecting the quality and intensity of the core offer;
 - the role and use of Flying Start outreach, noting that while outreach is intended to ensure vulnerable families outside designated areas can access support, there is anecdotal evidence that local authorities delivery it too inconsistently, even allowing for local

flexibility, and the funding allows only small scale delivery outside core areas.

There may also be merit in undertaking a targeted inquiry into school readiness to examine how well agencies are working together to support children before they enter formal education, and how Flying Start childcare expansion interacts with wider early years and child health policy.

Children's health

29. While the Health and Social Care Committee's remit spans the full breadth of population health, responsibility for scrutinising policy and services relating specifically to children and young people, primarily falls to our Committee.

30. Although we have not undertaken a dedicated inquiry into children's health during this Senedd term, issues affecting children and young people have repeatedly featured in our broader scrutiny work, including annual budget scrutiny. Across this work, we have consistently highlighted concerns that children's health and wellbeing are not being sufficiently prioritised within national planning and resource allocation. We have also stressed that clearer strategic direction, supported by identifiable and protected funding for children's health, would enable more coherent action and improve outcomes.

31. We note concerns that widening inequalities are already influencing children's long term health trajectories. Without a stronger system-level focus on equitable access to services, these inequalities risk becoming further entrenched. We remain concerned that the current policy and funding landscape does not yet provide the clarity or accountability needed to drive sustained improvement in children's health outcomes.

32. During our scrutiny, we also identified limitations in the data available on children's health needs and treatment pathways. In particular, there appears to be scope for Welsh Government to strengthen its understanding of the number of children awaiting assessment or treatment – both within Wales and those accessing services across the border.

Conclusion 7. We would encourage our successor committee to continue monitoring children's health closely, and seek greater clarity around planning, resourcing and accountability for children's health. This should include encouraging further improvements in the availability and use of data on children's health needs and treatment pathways, to ensure that children receive the

strategic attention and system oversight required across Government and the NHS.

School Transport

33. School transport has emerged as a consistent theme across our work, particularly through the evidence gathered in our inquiries into [pupil absence](#) and [routes into post-16 education and training](#). In both inquiries, transport was described as a practical and structural barrier to attendance and progression, with the greatest impact on learners in rural areas, low income families, and those with additional learning needs. We heard evidence that long, complex or unreliable journeys, alongside unaffordable travel costs, can limit access to suitable provision and contribute directly to non-attendance and disengagement.

34. The experiences of disabled children and young people gathered through our inquiry into [access to education and childcare for disabled children](#) reinforced these concerns. Inflexible transport arrangements including late arrivals, early departures and limited scope for reasonable adjustments, served to undermine inclusion even where educational provision itself was appropriate.

35. We recognise the difficult decisions local authorities have had to make on free home-to-school transport in order to keep services financially sustainable. [The Welsh Government's response](#) to our pupil absence report highlighted that home-to-school transport now accounts for around a quarter of all local authority direct education spending (i.e. not including delegated school budgets). This is £206 million of £770 million in [2025-26](#).

36. Taken together, the evidence from these inquiries suggests that the current legislation and policy framework no longer reflects learners' lived realities. The Welsh Government undertook an [internal analysis and evaluation of learner travel](#) in 2023, which concluded that, given the planned reforms for the structure of the bus industry and significant challenges around budget pressures, there should be no immediate amendment to the learner travel legislation (the [Learner Travel \(Wales\) Measure 2008](#)). One of the review's recommendations was to update the [Operational Guidance](#), issued under the Measure, to reflect changes to other legislation since the current guidance was published in 2014. The Welsh Government [consulted on this in 2025](#) and expects to issue the revised guidance before the end of this Senedd term. However, this guidance cannot change the statutory entitlement criteria that local authorities are already working to.

37. Although it is not making substantial changes, the Welsh Government itself has acknowledged weaknesses and inconsistencies in the existing Learner Travel Measure and the wider transport network in [its response](#) to our pupil absence report.

38. We welcome the introduction during this Senedd term of the £1 single fare and £3 daily maximum youth fare pilot, now available to all 5-15-year-olds and to 16-21-year-olds who hold a MyTravelPass. This represents an important step towards making public transport more affordable for children and young people, supporting sustainable travel and improving access to education, leisure and work.

39. We also welcome Welsh Government's acceptance of the recommendation, made in our routes into post-16 education and training report, that the planned evaluation of the youth fare pilot should explicitly include the impact on young people's access to post-16 education and training.⁵

40. Given the cross-cutting nature of school transport, a dedicated inquiry would have needed the time and space to develop in the direction the evidence required, and to explore the issues with the considered attention they deserve. As our term drew to a close, the time available to us simply did not allow for the level of scrutiny such an inquiry would have required.

Conclusion 8. A successor Committee may wish to draw these strands together through a dedicated inquiry into learner travel, bringing into one place the progress from the 2023 evaluation of the Learner Travel Measure, the revised guidance, the early implementation of the Bus Services (Wales) Act 2026, and the findings of the youth fare pilot evaluation.

Such an inquiry would be well placed to assess the cumulative impact of these reforms on learners' ability to access education, training and progression, and to identify where barriers persist. It should also examine whether local authorities have the funding, flexibility and statutory levers required to secure safe, reliable and inclusive transport that supports equitable access for all learners, as well as whether the youth fare pilot is delivering meaningful impact and value for money.

⁵ [Welsh Government. Routes into post-16 education and training. Response to the CYPE Committee Report \(November 2025\). Recommendation 9.14 January 2026](#)

Scrutiny of Medr

41. Our first substantial piece of work this Senedd was scrutiny of the then Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill.⁶ That scrutiny set the tone for all our subsequent work on post-16 education, shaping how we approached the establishment of Medr and the significant transfer of powers it represents.

42. The creation of Medr is one of the most significant structural changes to Wales's education system in a generation, shifting substantial powers, responsibilities and funding from Welsh Ministers to a new arm's-length body. Our Routes into Post-16 Education and Training inquiry provided the first major opportunity to examine this shift, emphasising the importance of transparency, accountability, and a clear focus on learners from the outset.

43. We recognise the benefits of bringing sixth forms, colleges, universities, adult learning and work-based learning into a single, coherent framework, but we are also mindful of the scale of the powers being transferred. Medr will oversee a substantial budget of around a £1 billion and a wide set of statutory functions, so strong scrutiny is needed to ensure decisions about funding and provision are transparent and firmly rooted in learners' interests.

44. What we heard during the scrutiny of the Bill highlighted several considerations for Medr: how it will use its funding levers, how it will balance national priorities with local needs, and how it will demonstrate genuine independence from Welsh Ministers. Given Medr's considerable influence over the post-16 landscape, openness, consistency and clear accountability will be essential to maintaining public confidence.

45. Medr's response to our post-16 inquiry was constructive and aligned with the themes raised by young people, providers and stakeholders. Its commitments on data, progression, apprenticeships and collaboration show ambition for a coherent and equitable system, but these now need to be tested in practice. Ongoing scrutiny will be critical in shaping Medr's culture, ensuring it listens to learners, engages meaningfully with providers and uses evidence to drive improvement.

Conclusion 9. A successor Committee will have a central role in monitoring Medr's performance, governance and impact - how it uses its statutory powers, how it engages with learners and providers, how it deploys its budget, and

⁶ Welsh Parliament, '[Tertiary Education and Research \(Wales\) Bill Committee Stage 1 Report](#)', March 2022

whether it is delivering on the promise of a more coherent and equitable tertiary system. Given the scale of powers being transferred and the concerns raised through the scrutiny of the Bill, a successor committee should build on our work and undertake regular, at least annual, scrutiny of Medr to ensure transparency, accountability and sustained focus on learners' interests.

2. Ways of working

The next Senedd will be one of significant change. We hope that our observations on how we have worked will be helpful for future committees. Having a strategic plan, prioritising the voices of children and young people, using informal ways of gathering evidence, and, where appropriate, using an ongoing inquiry model, are all ways of working that could and should be replicated.

46. We think it is important to share our reflections on our ways of working. The next Senedd will see the highest turnover of Members since the start of devolution. While this provides lots of positive opportunities for change, there is also the risk of losing learning from past experience.

47. Our views should also be framed in the context of our responses to the Business Committee's recent review into the legislative process⁷ and the Chair's Forum's review into committee effectiveness.⁸ We also note that we started this Senedd during the pandemic, and have adjusted and changed working practices as restrictions were reduced and ultimately removed.

48. A further important piece of context is the high turnover of Committee membership. We only have one member who was appointed to the Committee at its establishment, and even in this instance, her role has changed, becoming Chair in May 2024.

Strategic Plan

At the start of this Senedd, we did an extensive public consultation asking what our priorities should be. This included engagement with children and young

⁷ [Letter from Chair, CYPE Committee to Llywydd, Business Committee review of the Public Bill and Member Bill process, 25 March 2025](#)

⁸⁸ [Letter from Chair, CYPE Committee to Chair, Chair's Forum, Consultation: Reviewing Committee Effectiveness in the Sixth Senedd, 6 October 2025](#)

people, including nursery aged children.⁹ All this work formed the basis for our Strategic Plan: Simple and Detailed. We used the Plan to inform our decisions about what work we did, and how we would do it.

In particular, we prioritised putting the voices of children and young people at the heart of our work, and considering children's rights and the mental well-being of children and young people in all of our work.

We revisited this Plan during the Senedd to consider if it remained right or needed changing. We did this after significant membership changes.

49. The Strategic Plan gave us a framework to prioritise what we did and how we did it. This is particularly important when committees have such broad remits. It has helped us focus our limited capacity on priority areas. It has also provided clarity for stakeholders, and helped provide context for our decision making.

50. Every idea or suggestion for work was tested against the Strategic Plan, as were decisions about how we would do work. This meant it informed everything we did, and was not just words on a page disconnected from our decision making. We would urge our successor committee to use any strategic plan in a similar way.

51. While a strategic plan can help committees effectively manage and plan, we still struggled to find capacity to do all the work we wanted to do. On reflection, we think we could have managed our time more effectively. In particular, we think we should have continued considering topics for longer. Sometimes, we moved too quickly from one topic to another. This means we did not have sufficient time for real and deep reflection on particular subjects.

Prioritising lived experience

We wanted to put the voices of children and young people at the heart of our work. Specifically, we wanted to hear from those whose voices are less likely to be listened to and heard. This decision informed how we collected evidence, and the approach we took to the relevant inquiries. This was a particularly strong feature of our work looking at services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform; and children on the margins.

⁹ Senedd Cymru. Citizen Engagement. Young People's Priorities for the Committee in the 6th Senedd. CYPE Committee. January 2022

For do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare inquiry, alongside over 40 structured family interviews, we established an Online Advisory Group. This was made up of parents, carers and young people with experiences of education and childcare. They used their own experiences to inform our final evidence session with Welsh Government ministers; deliberations on the key issues and recommendations; the draft report; and the Welsh Government's response to our report.

52. Our work has been at its richest when it's been informed by living and lived experience. The care inquiry was an early example where we prioritised hearing directly from children and young people who either were in or had been in the care system. Their lives and the stories they told us will stay with us forever, and made us determined to push for change.

53. It was a heartening sight during our plenary debate to see the public gallery of the Senedd packed with some of those children, young people and those who work with them who had given so much of their time to our work. We had the chance to talk to them before the debate, and heard how disappointed they were in the Welsh Government's response. A disappointment we shared. We reflected this directly in the debate. We also called the then Minister for Children and Social Care back to Committee as soon as possible for a further scrutiny session. Yet again, the public gallery for this session was full. A very rare occurrence for a Committee evidence session. After the session, we also had an opportunity to discuss with the young people what they thought of the Minister's answers.

54. It is important when doing this work, that it is done sensitively. Sharing living or lived experience, can be difficult, and in some cases re-traumatising. We worked hard to minimise this risk. While we couldn't offer support directly to those who contributed, we did endeavour to ensure that the children and young people's trusted support was present or available following our conversations.

55. Individual stories are powerful, and can resonate long after the person telling the story has left. Being able to hear, and act on these stories has been a privilege and an important feature of our work. This should be built on by any successor committee.

Conclusion 10. We would urge our successor committee to continue to put the voices of children and young people at the heart of their work. In particular they should work hard to ensure that the voices of those children and young people for whom political structures are the furthest away are particularly prioritised. In doing this, they should consider carefully as part of each relevant inquiry, the best

ways in which they do this, acknowledging that what might work for one inquiry will not work for another.

Visits

56. We have all benefited from the range of different visits we have done across Wales. They have included visiting early years settings; primary, secondary and special schools; FE colleges, HE institutions; third sector projects supporting children and young people, and a secure unit. Whatever the topic, the immersion of a visit helped deepen our understanding of issues on the ground and how policies are working in practice.

57. We think a future successor committee could benefit from visits outside of Wales. We did not do any of these types of visits, and think it was a missed opportunity. Such visits can help identify good practice or show how other places have addressed shared challenges. They also broaden perspectives.

Stakeholder events

An increasing feature of trying to gather evidence close to the “front line” has been holding stakeholder events. They bridge the gap between citizen engagement which we may do out in the community, and the more formal oral evidence sessions.

They allow us to speak to front line professionals and hear how things are actually working on the ground. We can really test how effectively policies are being implemented.

People joined either in person or virtually, enabling us to remove barriers to participation. The sessions were run under “Chatham House” rules, meaning that the identity or affiliation of participants would not be revealed. However, an anonymised note was published. This enabled us to use the information gathered as part of our formal evidence base for lines of questioning or reports.

We held stakeholder events for a number of inquiries including:

- [Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform](#)
- [Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?](#)
- [Children on the margins](#)

- [Routes into post 16 education](#)
- [School improvement and learner attainment](#)

58. The evidence we gathered in this way was very rich, and gave an added depth to other evidence. We heard from a wider range of people, and heard more perspectives than in a standard oral evidence session. As they would last between 1.5 – 3 hours, it gave us more space to really dig into issues. Participants also had more space to share their insights and experiences.

59. We think we got more frank views from participants, who were possibly more open than they would be in a public session. We think this was particularly relevant for work on more sensitive subjects such as children on the margins, services for care experienced children and disabled access.

Conclusion 11. Senedd committees in the seventh Senedd should build on our learning from stakeholder events, and look to use them where relevant and appropriate.

Novel ways of working

We ran a [Senedd-long piece of work](#) looking at the implementation of two key pieces of education legislation, which were passed in the last Senedd. The [Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Act 2021](#), which introduced a new statutory framework for a curriculum for 3-16 year olds; and the [Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal \(Wales\) Act 2018](#), which created a new framework to support children and young people with additional learning needs.

Once we opened the written consultation in June 2022, we kept it open until October 2025. Over the course of the inquiry, we held four “check-ins”. Before each check-in we considered which aspects of implementation we wanted to focus on, in particular considering what issues were being raised in the written consultation. Each check-in was slightly different, with changing elements, but always included visits to schools and a scrutiny session with the relevant Welsh Government Minister / Cabinet Secretary.

Over the course of the inquiry, we wrote to the Welsh Government multiple times, and other key stakeholders. We published an [extensive report](#) in July 2024, and concluded with a [letter to the Welsh Government in February 2026](#).

60. These pieces of legislation were big changes to the education system, which have significant, life-long impacts on children and young people, as well as the education staff and system. At the outset, we knew that doing one inquiry at any given time would only provide us with a snapshot of how well they were being implemented. So we decided to take this novel approach of having an longitudinal style inquiry, enabling us to dip in and out of our scrutiny. It also meant that people could provide real time feedback, enabling us to pick up issues as and when they arose.

61. This approach meant we have been able to really follow the implementation journey. We have developed an in-depth knowledge of the issues, which meant we were able to identify specific issues of concern, such as identifying the factors leading to the reduction of learners being identified as having ALN and requiring Additional Learning Provision.

62. While we have not received any formal feedback from stakeholders on our approach, we have had informal feedback which indicates that they feel the ongoing approach has been beneficial. In particular, in enabling them to raise issues as they happen.

63. We asked the Welsh Government for their views on this approach. The Cabinet Secretary said she had welcomed the “live and responsive nature” of the work. She also said:

“The regular check-ins, visits, and engagement have contributed significantly to a shared understanding of how implementation is progressing and where future improvement is needed. I also recognise the way this work has informed the Committee’s wider activities.”¹⁰

64. It is reassuring that our assessment chimes with that of the Cabinet Secretary. We believe that our approach has ensured that the issues have remained at the top of the Welsh Government’s agenda. It has meant issues have not been lost and we have continued to push for the changes we think are important.

65. We think taking such an approach would benefit similar types of work, for example, a successor committee could consider whether taking such an

¹⁰ [Letter from Cabinet Secretary for Education to Chair, CYPE Committee, 13 March 2026](#)

approach would work in terms of scrutiny of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022.

Conclusion 12. Both our successor committee and other Senedd committees should consider this model for other topics , for example scrutiny of the implementation of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act and the establishment of Medr, which would benefit from this longitudinal approach to scrutiny, that enables the public and stakeholders to provide ongoing feedback and views.