

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Accountability hearings](#), HC 341

Wednesday 18 July 2018

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Lucy Allan; Emma Hardy; Ian Mearns; Lucy Powell.

Questions 1323 - 1404

Witness

I: Nadhim Zahawi MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education.

Examination of witness

Witness: Nadhim Zahawi MP.

Chair: Welcome, Nadhim. It feels a bit like Groundhog Day, as it is the second week in a row. Unfortunately, that is just the timetable, but we appreciate you coming. It is completely different areas that we are going to focus on today.

Q1323 **Lucy Allan:** Good morning, and thank you very much, Minister, for coming to see us yet again. We do appreciate it.

You will be aware that, over recent years, there have been an increasing number of children being taken into the care system, and I want to ask you, first of all, what is your Department doing to try to reduce that number?

Nadhim Zahawi: You are right to say that we have to make sure we work with local authorities and understand what is happening locally. Of course, it is local authorities who understand best the needs of the children in their area. It is worth also remembering that we have to put the interests of the child first.

I am not fond of us setting arbitrary targets, which could result in perverse behaviour by people because they are set these targets for a reduction. We can learn from the best local authorities and how they are performing. We have a Partners in Practice model, where the local authority in Hampshire is running the Isle of Wight's children's services, Leeds is helping Kirklees and so on. If the local authority makes sure that the needs of that child are put first, then they will make the right decision.

I think the decision has to be based on one word, and that is "stability"—so, stability within the family and stability for the child. If removal from a biological family is necessary for stability in that child's life, it is the right decision to make.

Q1324 **Lucy Allan:** Are you concerned overall about the numbers of children being taken into care, and what do you think is a way of tackling that? It is clearly putting huge pressures on the system. It is putting pressures on budgets because the crisis end of spending has to take priority, because of the statutory interventions, and that is diminishing available spend on early intervention. What I want to try to understand is, first, that your Department recognises this is a massive challenge, and also the social and economic consequences—the social consequences for the children and the families, but also the economic consequences for other children who are not necessarily on the fringes of care but would benefit from early intervention to ensure that they don't end up having to be taken into care.

While I appreciate all your warm words about stability and putting



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children at the centre, we have heard those before, and what I really want to hear is you understand the challenge that the children's social care sector faces and that you and your Department are looking at how we can ensure that numbers are diminished. Then, I really want to bring you on, if I may, Minister, to talk about early intervention as a tool in helping reduce the numbers going into care.

Nadhim Zahawi: Let me unpack some of that. We can talk about early intervention in a moment, but clearly early intervention works. We have a number of initiatives in early intervention working with local government. We also have a Review of Children in Need because, to pick up your point, yes, of course we want to make sure we deliver for the looked-after children, because the baton of parenting—for whatever reason—has been handed to us. But, of course, there is the greater need of children in need.

We are working with local authorities, so we have the innovation programme. About £200 million has been spent on what really does work to deliver the right outcomes.

Q1325 **Lucy Allan:** That has already been allocated, hasn't it?

Nadhim Zahawi: Correct. We also have the Partners in Practice programme, and we are launching the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care, which I have just announced Sir Alan Wood will chair. All these things are working to create a more robust infrastructure. We have something like 22 local authorities who are judged inadequate. We are working with those local authorities to deliver support for them, whether it is at the extreme end, which is Doncaster, with the first trust—where, in two years, we have taken them out of being "inadequate" to "good"—Rotherham and other local authorities, or the other end, which is simply a partner in practice with them, or a commissioner that is helping them deliver the right outcomes for those children.

The answer to your question is, if the whole system is working properly. As well as the workforce reforms that I have in place, we are introducing the accreditation and assessment system for the 36,000 child social workers, which we are rolling out, as well as launching Social Work England. It is a whole-system improvement. The ultimate aim—the output—would be to address your concern—that is, are we making sure that as few children are being taken into care as possible? Are we delivering stability in the family? Secondly, in terms of the ones that we have taken in, are we doing enough for their own outcomes? We will talk a little bit more about that, I am sure.

Q1326 **Lucy Allan:** Could I put to you a statement made by the former Chair of this Committee, Tim Loughton, who is now the chair of the children's APPG? In this context, he said, "In some places, the pressure on children's services is so acute it is leaving social workers feeling that the only tool available to them to keep a child safe is to remove them from their family". I suggest, Minister, that is a very serious statement, made



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by somebody who genuinely understands the sector—indeed, he formerly occupied your role as Minister for Children as well. What do you say to him?

The Children's Commissioner said something very similar. People who are very experienced in the sector are expressing concerns that all the tools that are available to social workers in terms of statutory intervention do not help families, do not help children, do not help society and have huge economic costs as well. What do you say to that?

Chair: Can I just emphasise what Lucy Allan is saying? She mentioned the Children's Commissioner; we know that half of the children's services budget is on children in the care system, and she says, "Many could be prevented from getting to that point if we helped them sooner in a more effective way". We are allowing this to escalate.

Nadhim Zahawi: The work that the Children's Commissioner is doing—and we work very closely with the Children's Commissioner—is important. If you look at what we are doing to address some of those concerns raised by both Tim Loughton and the Children's Commissioner, we are investing something like £270 million in social care programmes, which include projects to focus on tackling things like domestic abuse, which we know is one of the drivers of breakdown in families.

I am working with the all-party parliamentary group on children of alcoholics to better support children affected by alcoholism. My Department is working closely with colleagues at the Home Office and Ministry of Justice on the forthcoming domestic abuse Bill. There is a lot of work that we are doing to address the issues raised by the Children's Commissioner around these vulnerable children.

Again, to address your point, ultimately, when I travel around the country and look at children's services, whether it be in Hackney, Islington, Doncaster, Hampshire or Staffordshire, what I see is, yes, of course there are financial pressures on the system—and it is important that I have a much sharper and clearer view of the financial challenges—but what I also see, and I think the sector bears this out, is that good leadership makes a huge difference.

I spoke to the social workers in Doncaster, who turned around the failing children's services—a spiral of failure. I got them in a room, and I asked the leadership to leave the room. I said, "Now, tell me, 70% of you are the same people who were there when the children's services were failing the children and families in Doncaster. What happened? What is the magic source that you introduced that allowed you to go from that spiral of failure to success?" To a man and woman, they said to me it was having a strong leadership that was consistently there for them, gave them the confidence and the support to deliver for those children and families.

The reason we are investing in our Partners in Practice, in the innovation programme, is because, yes, of course, finances are challenging, but



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much of this is about good leadership and giving the confidence to the front line for the social workers to make the right decision for that child.

Q1327 Lucy Allan: Clearly, examples of good practice in Doncaster are an excellent example, and that is great.

Nadhim Zahawi: My job is to disseminate. What I get to see is the whole of England, and I have to be able to then say, "Here is where it is working well", to understand why it is working well and then to say to areas that are challenged—who may be struggling—"You need to learn from this and do better".

Q1328 Lucy Allan: Minister, my question is not about leadership or about good practice. It is about early intervention and incentivising local authorities to say, "It is worth our while to get involved early and help this family in a supportive way rather than a more punitive way", which is often what happens. In terms of your Department, your agenda and your strategy for the future, I am asking, are you going to encourage councils in some way—perhaps financially incentivise them—to focus on early intervention so that further down the track, in five or 10 years' time, we are not having this conversation about the numbers of children going into care spiralling exponentially?

Nadhim Zahawi: My answer is yes. The Social Care Innovation Programme has strands that are absolutely focused on those children at the edge.

Q1329 Lucy Allan: But that money has gone now. It has been allocated.

Nadhim Zahawi: The money is in the system, being used as we speak.

Q1330 Lucy Allan: What I am trying to say, in a roundabout way, is not just about a one-off chunk of cash; it is about a strategy: "We believe the best interests of children are served within a strong family. This is what we are doing to ensure that happens". That is so that the statutory intervention that is currently being used as a first line of defence is used as the last possible measure to be taken with every family.

It is a very important point, because otherwise we are going to continue with this spend on strategy interventions, which we have to do by law. Councils have to do that—they cannot escape that—and they are not going to be able to invest in early intervention unless there is some sort of incentive coming from Government, saying, "You need to spend a certain amount of your budget, or X%, and we are going to top up the statutory end"—something of that nature.

Nadhim Zahawi: Ultimately, it is local authorities who know what is best to spend in their local area.

Q1331 Lucy Allan: I think you are saying, no, you are not—

Nadhim Zahawi: No, I am not. What I am saying is I think it would be completely wrong to mandate it from the centre. They know what they need to spend in their area. What we can do, through things like the



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innovation programme, is look at reducing the number of children entering care, and particular strands of that are doing this. We are in the third year of a four-year finance settlement, where 97% of local authorities accepted the finance settlement. Children's services are not ring-fenced, and they decides how to spend this. As I see it, my role—because I can take a strategic look for the whole of England—is to share best practice and to disseminate that.

You talk about what we do across Government; we are working with the national health service on the integrated review to bring together the EYFS progress check at two years old, as well as the Healthy Child Programme review. That data-sharing happens at a very early time.

We are working with Manchester. Lucy and her team came to see me—when I spoke to you last week, it was about another area. In this area, equally, I think devolving, and supporting the 10 local authorities in the Greater Manchester region, is the right way to go. We are spending £1.4 billion by 2020 on the Troubled Families Programme, which is being expanded from 100,000 families to 400,000 families.

When I went to Islington, Lucy, they showed me five typical cases. In all five cases—and I would urge anyone here to go and have a look at this sort of work—none of those families would have been helped by a single intervention just from the Department for Education.

Q1332 Chair: What have been the outcomes of the Troubled Families Programme? You said 400,000?

Nadhim Zahawi: It has been expanded to 400,000 families. What it does, Chairman, from what I have seen, is that, rather than having a single intervention through children's services, you get the wraparound service from multi-agencies that can support that family. If you link the dots to the stuff we are doing with domestic abuse, on alcoholism, on the youth—

Q1333 Chair: On the existing Troubled Families Programme, have you assessed—

Nadhim Zahawi: There have been assessments, of course. The problem with these areas is that these families have very complex needs.

Q1334 Chair: What do the interventions show?

Nadhim Zahawi: When you talk to social workers, as I did in Islington, they said that, without the Trouble Families Programme, these families—the cases they showed me, which are so complex, complicated and traumatic—would not have had the level of success in Islington that they had, anecdotally, without that sort of additional support.

Q1335 Chair: Do you have any data on the success or otherwise of the Troubled Families Programme?



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Nadhim Zahawi: I can have a look, and if we do, I am happy to share it with the Committee.

Q1336 **Chair:** It is great that it is being expanded. It may be working brilliantly, but if it is being expanded and it is not working—

Nadhim Zahawi: Anecdotally, from what I have seen—

Q1337 **Chair:** You are expanding it from how many hundred thousand to 400,000? It was 200,000 before, was it?

Nadhim Zahawi: 100,000.

Q1338 **Chair:** There must be evidence. Surely you will have done data, otherwise that programme would not be—

Nadhim Zahawi: I agree with you. I am saying to you, from my own experience, anecdotally, and from what I saw when they showed me the five typical cases, that the challenges around the child and the family in all those five cases were so complex that you needed a multi-agency approach to it, which I think is the right strategy that the Government is deploying.

Q1339 **Lucy Powell:** There has been an evaluation of it.

Nadhim Zahawi: Earlier, yes.

Lucy Powell: It has worked really well in some places and not so well in others.

Q1340 **Emma Hardy:** Thank you, Minister. I want to go back to the point that Lucy was making, because, as a Committee, we are very united on this, and it feels a little bit frustrating and a bit like you are skirting around the issue and not getting to the point that Lucy was making. As a Committee, we believe in the importance of early intervention. We think that makes a huge difference to children's lives. The fact that councils do not have the money to do it means that more children are ending up at the crisis end and ending up in care. It is not about you telling us that some councils in Doncaster do it well. It is about: that is what we believe and that is what, as a Committee, we are united in standing behind.

What we want to hear from your Department is that you accept the importance of early intervention, you recognise the difference it can make and you are going to fund councils in order to deliver it. That is what we want to hear back. It is a bit frustrating that we are not getting that message back to what is a very clear point that has been made by my colleague here.

Nadhim Zahawi: Let me try to address that directly, Emma. For local government, there was a five-year spending review period of £200 billion, including their work on children's services. They have chosen to increase spend. I think last year spend went up to £9.2 billion on children's services. I very much believe in early intervention, as do my officials and my Department. As I see it, my role is to look at the whole of



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England and be able to share best practice and disseminate that, but also to prevent local authorities from falling over. Early detection of where local authorities are challenged is important, and we can talk more about how we are dealing with that.

I have seen really good projects. In Hertfordshire, they have the Family Safeguarding Project, which brought together multi-disciplinary teams to basically do social work and mental health work, with domestic abuse specialists making a real difference and targeting the highest risk families. There is the Leeds Family Valued Project. The Pause project, for young women who have had multiple pregnancies where the baby is taken away immediately, has been an extraordinary piece of evidence-based work. There is also the Daybreak charity, specialising in the provision of family group conferences. For families with FGCs, about 75% of the children were living with the parent or relative, versus the ones without FGCs, which is down at 60%.

Finally, the programme is also supporting further projects. In Coventry, they are adopting and adapting a project aimed at ensuring that children in need in the area receive targeted multi-agency support, so that is adopting and adapting from another area.

Q1341 **Chair:** We understand. We have got it.

Nadhim Zahawi: But this is really important. I don't want the Committee to go away and think that the Government is not doing anything in this area. What we are doing is seeing what works, which is why we have set up the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care and the innovation programme, and then spreading it. That is the best way.

The alternative is I just sit here and say to you, "I am just going to throw money at this thing and everyone is going to be happy". It does not work, trust me. I have seen what these families need, and it is complex and difficult work.

Q1342 **Ian Mearns:** There is a conundrum for local authorities. They are fire-fighting the children's problems at the really sharp end, which happens on a regular basis—I have seen it in my own local authority—and the number of youngsters being taken into care has gone up significantly since 2010. But the Local Government Association is saying to us that, over the last five years, the money spent on early intervention has gone down because of that fire-fighting exercise with the children at the sharp end. The Local Government Association is saying that the funding gap, of nearly £2 billion by 2020, is just to keep services running at current levels.

Local authorities find it very difficult to move money upstream to do the early intervention work when the demand for hard-end interventions is going through the roof. The real question is: do councils have enough money, first, to fulfil their statutory requirements and obligations and, secondly, to do other stuff, other than their statutory obligations and



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requirements?

Nadhim Zahawi: Let me try to answer that in two parts. The first, I mentioned earlier. Local authorities increased spending on children and young people's services to around £9.2 billion last year, or in 2016-17, to be accurate. Ian, spending on the most vulnerable children has increased by nearly £1 billion since 2010, and we have committed a further £920 million to the Troubled Families Programme. In fact, by 2020, the Troubled Families Programme will be £1.4 billion.

But the second half of that answer is: I am also aware of the funding pressures on children's services. What I am doing is working with the sector to get a much sharper understanding of where those funding pressures are, what the costs are that are driving those additional pressures, and where we can learn from local authorities that have made a difference. Hertfordshire local authority tested a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary family safeguarding team project, which saved them £2.6 million. Can I learn from that? How can I spread that good practice?

Nevertheless, we are very much cognisant of the fact that there are funding challenges or funding pressures in children's services.

Q1343 **Ian Mearns:** The thing is, Minister, what we have to be conscious of is whether there are good examples of what is happening around the country. We have to make sure that those good examples are replicated in over 150 local authorities, so that every child in every local authority area is safe.

Nadhim Zahawi: Absolutely right. That is why the £262 million in innovation and the PiP programme is driving that dissemination of best practice.

Q1344 **Ian Mearns:** While all of this is going on, there is a distraction taking place, from many people's view, and that is the abandonment of local Safeguarding Children Boards. That is to be replaced by some new arrangements—new partnership working in areas. How can you prevent the reforms to local Safeguarding Children Boards distracting from front-line priorities, and what will the new arrangements look like? At the moment, we have a plan, and everyone knows what a safeguarding board is meant to look like, but it seems to me it is going to be an ad hoc arrangement being put together in each different local authority area.

Nadhim Zahawi: I would slightly push back on the idea of abandonment of the LSCBs; 60% of LSCBs were judged to be less than good under the Ofsted four-year single inspection framework—this is from November 2013 to November 2017. Clearly we had a problem. From what I have seen, I believe that the new multi-agency safeguarding infrastructure will be much more robust. You are bringing in not just one agency to do this work, but making sure that the police, social care, health care and education all work together.



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On 29 June 2019, the partners have to publish the safeguarding arrangements for their local areas. They will then get an additional three months to implement. By October 2019, every area should have the new infrastructure of multi-agency safeguarding in place, and I think we would all agree that is a better way of delivering safeguarding. In the meantime, the LSCBs will continue to operate and have that responsibility to continue to deliver safeguarding for children.

Q1345 Ian Mearns: I understand that entirely, but, in terms of comparing like with like, if the arrangements turn out to be quite different in different places, how will we be able to judge how effective they are? What are the main criteria you are looking for to establish whether the new arrangements are effective? For instance, will Ofsted have a common view when the arrangements look quite different in different places?

Nadhim Zahawi: Each of the three relevant inspectorates, and not just Ofsted—Ofsted, HMIC, FRS and CQC—will use their ongoing inspection programmes to scrutinise the individual partners and their contributions, which is a great lever to make sure that what we decide here actually does work when the rubber hits the road in our local areas and constituencies.

There is also a duty that the partners must arrange for independent scrutiny. That is already a duty on the new infrastructure—to have independent scrutiny of the local safeguarding—but then the inspectorates will also have that responsibility to inspect.

Q1346 Ian Mearns: The incentives that you have talked about sound much more like stick than carrot, though.

Nadhim Zahawi: We know that, in practice, the work that Ofsted has done, certainly in local government for children's services or in our schools, does work. It is only right that we make sure of safeguarding. I know many of you on this Committee—and I pay tribute to Lucy and the work she has done in this area—believe this is so important. This is critical; what we cannot have is a situation where, yes, we all want multi-agency work, but the question is, how are you going to compel those agencies to really, truly come forward and make this thing work on the ground?

Q1347 Chair: Thank you. In the Conservative manifesto, it says, "We will review support for children in need to understand why their outcomes are so poor and what more support they may require in and out of school". Where are we in terms of the Review of Children in Need?

Nadhim Zahawi: We have launched the Review of Children in Need. My very clear direction, Chairman—which I hope you will agree with—is that I wanted to make sure we focus the review, because you could have a review that—

Q1348 Chair: Has the review started formally?



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Nadhim Zahawi: Yes.

Q1349 **Chair:** What are the early findings?

Nadhim Zahawi: I cannot share those with you yet, but I can indicate to you when we are going to be publishing the review.

Q1350 **Chair:** When will we be publishing the review that was set out in the manifesto?

Nadhim Zahawi: I would like to think that we could publish it—we are working on it as hard as we can. I am going to pull back from the temptation to give you a deadline. It is a lot of very important work.

Q1351 **Chair:** Would you hope that it was published by the end of the year?

Nadhim Zahawi: I would like to think we can hit that deadline.

Q1352 **Chair:** Can you just tell us the areas that it is covering?

Nadhim Zahawi: I deliberately wanted to focus it on educational outcomes, but not just educational outcomes. It does look beyond education to also cover NEET outcomes and job prospects for children in need. I know that we could have had a much wider-ranging review. My instinct was to say, “Let’s not try to hug the world. These kids have complex needs. Let’s try to do something meaningful and something that would be actionable rather than try to cover everything”.

I know some colleagues in the sector may have wished for a much wider review. I very much felt that we wanted it focused, rather than trying to hug the world.

Q1353 **Chair:** The figures suggest that, in the last year, the number of children in need—the formal register—has gone down, but the overall trend over the last seven years is pretty static. Why is that? Why has the number remained the same rather than gone down substantially?

Nadhim Zahawi: As at 31 March 2017, there were 389,430 children assessed as in need.

Q1354 **Chair:** In the past year, there has been a decrease of registered children in need by 1.3%, but over the past seven years it has remained pretty static at the same figure. Why is that? Why hasn’t it gone down more?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am hoping that, through the review, we will understand better what the dynamics are. I do not have the answer to that question. That is why we are conducting the review.

Q1355 **Chair:** Do you have any early indications? You must have some kind of—

Nadhim Zahawi: All I can tell you is that the call for evidence closed on 1 July. Nearly 60% of responses received came directly from head teachers sharing their views of what they think works to improve educational outcomes for children in need. The Children’s Commissioner has found that 710,000 children in England are receiving some sort of



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statutory support. We need to unpack both those numbers, the 389,000 and the—

Q1356 **Chair:** Just to confirm, is it a formal review? Does it have outside experts, or is it just an internal Department review?

Nadhim Zahawi: It is a Department review.

Q1357 **Chair:** Will it look at things like mental health? What is the review doing in terms of what we just discussed about the Troubled Families Programme, for example? Will it be integrated with that?

Nadhim Zahawi: The Troubled Families Programme is a separate programme altogether. This is a review that we will then, obviously, publish to allow us to begin to understand what we need to do to deliver better outcomes. In the meantime, we have committed to allocate something like £8 million to interventions to support children who are exposed to things like domestic abuse, £3 million for the Disrespect NoBody Teenage Relationship Abuse Campaign and £13 million in the Trusted Relationships Fund. There is stuff we are doing in the meantime while we conduct the review. Of course, that review will begin to shape our response.

Q1358 **Chair:** I was saying that the figures have remained stable over seven years, and you said the review is going to look at that. Although the number has gone down over the past year, why has the number of assessments increased significantly, by over 6%, if the number of children has gone down? What is going on, in your view?

Nadhim Zahawi: This is why the Government have wanted to do this review—to understand better what is happening. I do not want to prejudge the review.

Q1359 **Chair:** Often we have Government Ministers come in, we ask them questions and everybody says, “We are doing a review”. There are more reviews than a newspaper critic does in 10 years. We are just asking general questions, and I just don’t want people to come here and hide behind reviews. Is there any further information you could give about the questions I am asking—which are legitimate questions—in terms of assessments, for example. Why has that number gone up? Does it mean, for example, that children are being referred for assessments unnecessarily?

Nadhim Zahawi: I don’t have the answer to whether they are being referred for assessment unnecessarily or otherwise. All I know—and I know what you say about reviews—is the reason we have this as a manifesto commitment, and the reason our colleague Alex Burghart, who is an expert in this area, has been pushing on this, is because we need to understand better what is happening to children in need and what our response is going to be.

Q1360 **Chair:** The Children’s Commissioner suggests that 25% of children living



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in families with complex needs are receiving recognised support. Why is this, and do you recognise that figure?

Nadhim Zahawi: It is what I said to you earlier: the Children's Commissioner found that 710,000 children in England are receiving some form of statutory support, whereas, as of 31 March, we had 389,430 children in need. We need to unpack some of this stuff. I want every child to have the best opportunity regardless of their background. I work very closely with the Children's Commissioner to try to get to a place where we can deliver for every child. The £270 million in social care programmes that we have been talking about was driven by our commitment to make sure that those children who are most dislodged in our society—

Q1361 **Chair:** Is it your impression that children who are at immediate risk are prioritised over children, such as young carers or disabled children, for example, in the system?

Nadhim Zahawi: This Government have done quite a lot for young carers. If you look at our new safeguarding guidelines and statutory guidance, there is a responsibility on local authorities to look at young carers and to make an assessment of their needs. That has all been driven by this Government.

To answer your question in a nutshell, I don't believe that local authorities are simply looking at those children who are in care as a priority and neglecting everything else. We have been talking with Lucy and Emma about all the work we have been doing to disseminate best practice that we are seeing in those good local authorities.

Q1362 **Chair:** What support happens to a disabled child if they are children in need? What happens?

Nadhim Zahawi: They would have an education, health and care plan if they are SEND, and we are spending £6 billion on SEND—up from £5 billion in 2013—this year and last year. We supported local authorities with additional funding last year of £130 million and £142 million this year.

I don't think anybody in that sector would say that the legislation we put through in 2014 was the wrong legislation. EHC plans are the right thing to do, but we now have to focus on quality of outcomes—quality of plans and quality of outcomes. What I am seeing, and it is important that I share with you very quickly—

Q1363 **Chair:** It is a long nutshell.

Nadhim Zahawi: I know, but your question has so many layers to it that I feel I have to respond to every part of it. What I am seeing is, in those local authorities where the leadership, both the political and the officer leadership, as well as the practices on the ground, are working together, they are delivering really good outcomes for SEND children.



Q1364 Chair: You will know that we are doing an inquiry into alternative provision and exclusions. Children in need are almost three times more likely to be permanently excluded than their peers. Why do you think that schools are excluding these vulnerable pupils more prominently than other children? Will the Department clamp down on this?

Nadhim Zahawi: The reason we have launched an exclusions review, led by Ed Timpson, is because we are worried about this area for SEND children. The Secretary of State said at the ADCS conference—and I echo his words—that every school in our country should be a SEND school with the support, of course, to train the teachers to be able to deliver for those children. You are absolutely right. If you look at the exclusions, far too many children who are SEND and looked-after children are overrepresented in exclusions. By the way, looked-after children are overrepresented in our adult prison population; 26% of our adult prison population were looked-after children. We can talk more about what I am trying to do for looked-after children as well, hopefully, in this session.

Q1365 Lucy Allan: The last Committee before this one, in 2016, looked into mental health assessments for children going into the care system, and we made a recommendation to Government that that should be adopted. I know that a pilot is due to be rolled out. Could you update this Committee on when that pilot is expected to be rolled out and then, subsequently, when that would be available to children going into care across the country?

Nadhim Zahawi: We want to make sure we get the pilot right. The pilot is going ahead. I can write to you with exact details of that.

Q1366 Lucy Allan: I think Lord Agnew told the House of Lords it would be later this year, is that still the case?

Nadhim Zahawi: Correct, that is still our target, but we want to make sure we get it absolutely right. It is a very fraught piece of work for my team. I can certainly write to you with more detail.

Q1367 Lucy Allan: Assuming that is successful, that will then be rolled out across the country. Is there funding for that?

Nadhim Zahawi: That is the plan. I think it is important that children who come into care have that mental health assessment.

Lucy Allan: Good, I am very pleased to hear you agree with the Committee's recommendation, because I think at the time the Minister decided it was not such a good idea. We are going to hold on to that and keep coming back to you and making sure that does happen. Thank you very much.

Q1368 Lucy Powell: Just following on from the Chair's questioning on exclusions, we have been doing this very extensive inquiry on alternative provision. The scale of, and what is happening with, exclusions is, we believe, at serious crisis point and at a high. When the Secretary of State was here a couple of weeks ago, I asked him whose responsibility it was



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to ensure that a given child or any child in an area got the education that they deserved. Whose job is that? He couldn't answer that question particularly; I am just wondering if you can.

Q1369 **Nadhim Zahawi:** The responsibility for a child in any area has to be with the school, and if that child is looked after, it is a combination of the virtual school head in the local authority and the social worker, and I would like to see the foster parent included, if the child is in fostering as well. Every child of school age should have a place at a school. That school has the responsibility, especially if these are looked-after children, to prioritise them.

Q1370 **Lucy Powell:** Of course, but when they exclude them, whose job is it then?

Nadhim Zahawi: That is where I think you raise a very important point. In areas where the schools come together and determine that no child will be excluded, it really does work, because the heads work together. They feel they have a moral duty for the whole site in many ways.

In some areas, what we are seeing happening is you get what is called a magnet school, which does really well for, let's say, SEND children, and you get perverse behaviours, where the other schools—whether by design or otherwise—just brush away those kids and push them towards that particular school. I want to be able to intervene to stop that sort of behaviour.

Q1371 **Lucy Powell:** How do you intend to do that?

Nadhim Zahawi: I think it is a combination. I am talking to Ofsted, because I think we need to make sure that the inspection regime does help in this area. I am talking to the virtual school heads when it comes to looked-after children, and of course the schools themselves. The message from the Secretary of State at the ADCS conference was crystal-clear in this area. It is important that head teachers and teachers hear that message. Much of this can also be driven by leadership and the narrative that we deliver that it is unacceptable.

I want the message to go out from this hearing that it is unacceptable for schools to off-roll. It is illegal to unofficially exclude. Even if parents somehow are cajoled into accepting it, it is illegal and must not happen. In terms of exclusions, schools should work together in an area to determine that there are no exclusions.

Lucy Powell: Yes, I hear you. I am just going to follow on from that.

Chair: We only have a certain time and—

Nadhim Zahawi: I am enjoying this, Chair.

Chair: You have to be more concise, please.

Q1372 **Lucy Powell:** To follow on from that, that is obviously a very strong message and one that I would fully support. However, we all know, when



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we have come across it in our inquiry—and we regularly come across it in the Committee—that those strong messages do not result in the kind of behaviours that we want to see happening in our schools. We are seeing this huge spike in unofficial and official exclusions.

What more can we actually do in terms of that stick—not just a carrot, but a stick—to require schools and groups of schools to ensure that they are inclusive and that children are not excluded and left nowhere? It feels to us that no one actually has the job and the powers to ensure that a child is given that appropriate education. If a school opts out of the system you just talked about, or a group of schools opt out of that system, and that happens in many places, there is nothing that can be done. What can you do, please?

Nadhim Zahawi: The reason I have launched an exclusions review is I want to see the recommendations from Ed Timpson on what should be done in this area, and I don't want to pre-empt it. It is important to remember that we have devolved power to governing bodies and to schools, but they have responsibilities as well, which is why—

Q1373 **Lucy Powell:** But they don't. They don't have a responsibility for their community of children. I don't want to take up too much time, but—

Nadhim Zahawi: First of all, they do have a responsibility. I know in my conversations with Ofsted that Ofsted is looking very seriously at the issues of off-rolling—illegal exclusions. They are illegal, and they must not happen.

Lucy Powell: We have spoken to Ofsted about that as well. This is about a wider climate of accountability measures and people needing and wanting to game the system. It is not necessarily what they came into education for.

Q1374 **Chair:** In one area the schools may be performing very well, and may have less children in need or less children with special educational needs, while another has a high proportion, but, in essence, they are all assessed in the same way—they are inspected in the same way—and there is no recognition given to the school that has many more children—

Nadhim Zahawi: In the inspection framework, there are about 20 categories, including SEND and disadvantage, which schools are assessed on.

Q1375 **Chair:** Not in terms of the results and things like that.

Nadhim Zahawi: Progress 8 does look at progress as well.

Q1376 **Lucy Powell:** It does, but, as you may know, some of the big flaws in Progress 8 are those outlier children that can have a massive detriment. If you have a high proportion of looked-after children or SEN, your Progress 8 score is less than it should be. It is the opposite of what you would imagine.

Just to finish on this point, in terms of this review—as the Chair has said,



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it is slightly frustrating that we get this wall of noise—I don't think it is rocket science. Local authorities do have a statutory duty to ensure that every child in their area receives an education. What they do not have is the powers to require schools to take those children. A combination of that and what we have asked Ofsted to look at—inclusion statistics as part of their inspections—would go a long way to reduce some of these exclusion numbers.

Nadhim Zahawi: As I say, I do not want to pre-empt Ed Timpson's findings on this, but I am certainly talking to Ofsted as well.

Q1377 **Chair:** We have had this for months. Every time somebody comes along, they say, "We refer you to the review". We might as well just answer every question with, "There is a review".

Nadhim Zahawi: Hold on a second. Let me push back on that, Chairman, for a second. You had a very good fostering report, and I am about to respond to it imminently.

Q1378 **Chair:** I was going to ask you when you are planning to do that.

Nadhim Zahawi: While the rest of the media and Parliament have been busy with Brexit debates, we have been working really hard on our response to your 52 recommendations. I am going to respond to each and every one.

Q1379 **Chair:** We are very excited and looking forward to the response, but when is it going to be?

Lucy Powell: Don't make it 10 minutes before you next come in.

Nadhim Zahawi: In days, Chairman.

Q1380 **Chair:** In days? Is that as in before recess?

Nadhim Zahawi: It is imminent, Chairman.

Chair: That is better than as soon as possible, some time in the summer or whatever it is.

Q1381 **Emma Hardy:** A number of weeks ago, we had a young man called Gavin come in and give evidence, a very inspiring young gentleman, and one of the things he talked about very fondly was his PA, Phil, and the difference that Phil had made to his life.

Since then I have met with Phil, and they are doing an incredible initiative in Hull. Phil is actually taking on two apprentices who are care leavers to work with him to develop and support the care leaver package. In 2016 your Department said it would look into reviewing the role of personal advisers, of PAs, when will this review take place?

Nadhim Zahawi: What we have already done is given LAs additional funding to implement the new duty to provide personal advisers all the way up to the age of 25. We have allocated £3 million for 2018-19, rising to £12 million in 2021-22, to implement that new duty.



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We consulted with the LGA and the ADCS on the new burden of assessment to get that number right. That number was not sort of plucked out of thin air. That is now in place. I also added a number of questions on to our survey to understand better the role of personal advisers and how that is working. I have a number of children in care and care leaver groups that I meet with regularly, and the role of the personal adviser comes up, as you can imagine, a lot in those discussions. I want to understand better how that role is working.

Q1382 Emma Hardy: In 2016 you did say that there was going to be a review. Am I right in saying that has not happened yet?

Nadhim Zahawi: It was before my time, but I can certainly find out. Rather than doing another review and being berated by your Chairman, I would rather get on with doing the job, which is to extend the personal adviser to the age of 25 and get the money flowing to help that happen.

Q1383 Emma Hardy: Extending it to 25 is definitely welcome, but the LGA said that the money that you have given is only enough for 20% of all care leavers. That is around 4,700 young people out of more than 23,000. Are there any plans for the Government to look at extending the money for PAs?

Nadhim Zahawi: I have the details here, but I do not want to read it out to you. We did a lot of work on how we decided what the money is, working with the LGA and consulting with them. The money does go to 2021-22. It starts at £3 million for this year.

Q1384 Emma Hardy: Yes, you have got the £12 million. It is just that Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, in the evidence that they have given, has said that the money that the Government has allocated for this PA programme is only enough for 20% of care leavers. Is that something you would look at again?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am happy to look at what they have said, but we have certainly based our calculation to make sure that there is enough money in the system for the demand that we believe is there for it.

Q1385 Emma Hardy: One of the other things that they have said is that the report by Social Finance, "Leaving Care, Leaving Well", says a quarter of the PA's time is taken up with admin tasks, and only 30% of the time is spent working with the core 20% of young people in crisis. You have talked previously about sharing best practice and looking at what is working well. Obviously, you are always welcome to Hull to look at how well they are doing it there, but are there plans to look at—not do a review—where it is working well and transforming lives, and where it is not as effective and what more you can do about that?

Nadhim Zahawi: I do that in two ways. First, I have my regular meetings with children in care and care leavers to understand better how we can improve the support available to them. I also have the number of questions I put into the local government survey, because I want to



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unpack and understand better the support the personal advisers are getting in terms of training.

When I talk to care leavers and children in care, on the whole the PA programme is seen as a positive one—a good one—but it is the same sort of things you cited that are cited to me. That is, they spend too much time on paperwork and not working with the child or the young adult. That is why I am trying to understand that better as well.

Q1386 Emma Hardy: Are there any concrete steps that your Department is going to take to look at improving the PA system? As we have seen in Hull, and as we have heard in this Committee in evidence from young people, it can transform lives.

Chair: If I can add to what Emma has said, Minister, one study suggests that half of local authorities change the personal adviser when the child reaches the age of 18, which is quite destabilising for the child. What are you doing to make sure there is more stability in terms of personal advisers for children?

Nadhim Zahawi: The way we base the funding is the national figure on the volumes. Of course, we had to make some assumptions on likely caseload—hence the number of PAs needed that will flow out of that. That is informed by the experience of Trafford Council, which has an outstanding care leaver service. At this point I want to pay tribute to Mark Riddell, who I am working very closely with on the care leaver covenant and support for care leavers. The work has been done robustly to get the support we deliver, but I continue to review this and make sure we try to get it right. You are right to cite a change of personal adviser to that person is a change in human relationship.

Q1387 Chair: Is it correct—as the study suggested—that it is half of councils changing the personal adviser?

Nadhim Zahawi: I would have to come back to you on that. I don't have those numbers in front of me.

Q1388 Lucy Allan: Your predecessor, Ed Timpson, was a passionate advocate for care leavers, and he did some fantastic work in that area. My real concern is that this is not just warm words, initiatives, announcements and reviews. That is not enough. If the state takes a decision to take a child from its family and place it into state care, the state must be responsible for that child's life chances and outcomes. Yes, we have the care leavers covenant—which I believe is going to be announced in September or going to be launched in the autumn—but I cannot help thinking that we have all of these different initiatives, but is there really any passion—is there any will—within the Department to champion care leavers? We are corporate parents for them. It is not enough just to say, "We can't find enough people to sign up to a covenant".

To be honest, with some of these covenants, even though people sign up to them, it is very rare that they execute them in the way that is



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intended. Is there one thing that you can do to reassure our Committee that the great work Ed Timpson did is not going to be lost and that care leavers are very much uppermost on your agenda?

Chair: This is what the Prime Minister was surely talking about when she gave her speech at Downing Street on burning injustices. This should be a real priority.

Nadhim Zahawi: Absolutely right. You may not have heard me say this, but I can assure you—whether in my meeting with Ed Timpson or with others in the sector—that I am working with real focus. I don't want to over play this. Forgive me, Chairman, I am going to spend just two minutes on this.

Chair: One minute.

Nadhim Zahawi: One minute, right. Through no fault of their own, these kids have been dealt the worst hand possible in life. The baton of parenting, as I said earlier, has been passed on to us, for all sorts of reasons. As corporate parents, we cannot behave in a way where we just manage these kids. If you look at the educational outcomes of these kids, only about 14% of children in care get five GCSEs. I don't think that is good enough, and I am determined to do better for them.

I have seen the example in Norfolk with the Boarding School Partnership—52 kids and a 10-year programme. They have gone from 14% to almost 70% getting five GCSEs. I know we can do much better. I want the independent school sector and the boarding school sector to join me to fix this. If we can fix it for these kids, then people will begin to believe that we can fix it for all disadvantaged and vulnerable children. These kids are our responsibility. I have 75,000 of them—54,000 of them with foster parents. I must be able to do better for them. That is the drive in my Department. It is not just education; it is apprenticeships and jobs.

Q1389 **Lucy Allan:** You will commit to less of the warm words, and we will see action at the end of it?

Nadhim Zahawi: You are going to see real action on this. Again, I say to you, I want not just our maintained schools to offer the best place. I want all schools—including the independent sector—to join in. If we can transform the outcome for these kids, then we have done something huge for society: 30% of them end up as adults in prison, and we have the same sort of number for homelessness, NEET and exclusions. In a strong and civilised society like ours, it is incumbent on us to do more for these kids and deliver a better outcome. I am determined to do this.

Q1390 **Lucy Powell:** It is great to hear you so passionate about that. I am going to take you to a slightly different area of your brief as a final topic: the much despised or vaunted—what is the word?—baseline assessments in the early years. We were talking earlier about unintended consequences of accountability measures. What do you think will be



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gained by—or potentially be an adverse consequence of—introducing the new baseline assessments for four and five-year-olds?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am a father of a five-year-old now—

Lucy Powell: I am the mother of a five-year-old, an eight-year-old and a 14 year-old.

Nadhim Zahawi: I'm also the father of two 21-year-olds as well—the same wife by the way.

Lucy Powell: That was a big gap; we will talk about it later.

Nadhim Zahawi: A huge gap, I know. Most four and five-year-olds in most schools have some form of informal assessment as we had. The thinking behind this is that we want to measure progress in the primary years. At the moment, you have an assessment from the age of seven to 11 to measure progress in the school, rather than just attainment at the age of 11. We think that, rather than measuring at seven, we should measure the whole of the primary school.

Q1391 **Lucy Powell:** We do measure at four and five years old through the early learning goals.

Nadhim Zahawi: We measure that for a very different reason. We measure that to look at early learning development. This is about progress at primary school. Rather than measure at seven, we want to take that away and measure at four and five years old in terms of assessment. I know some in the sector are worried about this, in terms of whether it is testing four and five-year-olds. It isn't. It is an assessment. The four and five-year-olds will feel—

Q1392 **Lucy Powell:** Have you thought about some of the possible unintended consequences?

Nadhim Zahawi: Yes.

Q1393 **Lucy Powell:** What do you see some of them as potentially being?

Nadhim Zahawi: We are going to pilot in the autumn. Some in the sector think what will happen is that you are going to get a sort of race, with people saying, "We can prepare your child for this test". It is not going to be a test. It is an assessment. If you think about it, the primary school wants to measure the progress it makes with that child, so there is no incentive for it to try to drive that child to behave differently.

Q1394 **Lucy Powell:** Exactly. That is my concern—that that is the unintended consequence. What I am interested in—as you know from our discussions—is children arriving at school as school-ready as possible, and getting all those advantages. We need schools to be part of that drive, don't we?

Nadhim Zahawi: Yes.

Q1395 **Lucy Powell:** What incentive is there for a school to have a child arrive



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as school-ready as possible if they are going to be judged on progress through primary? I believe there will be an unintended consequence of schools wanting children to do as badly as possible in those baselines, in order to show very good progress through primary to keep Ofsted off their backs. I see it already.

Nadhim Zahawi: We are piloting in the autumn. The work we are doing for school readiness is in the early years, as you know, and in the home learning environment. There is a load more we can do.

Q1396 **Lucy Powell:** What incentive is there for a school to be part of that drive, to drive school readiness, if there is this over-emphasis on progress from five? Surely we would want schools to be assessed on progress from nought to 11?

Chair: The British Educational Research Association, a serious organisation, says that it should consider family history, circumstances and educational history.

Nadhim Zahawi: Of course, yes.

Chair: That is why it feels what you are doing is not fit for purpose.

Nadhim Zahawi: I think logically it is fit for purpose because, again, from my own parental experience—

Q1397 **Lucy Powell:** It is only logical if what you are interested in is measures to drive certain behaviours within a primary school. It is not logical if you are interested in a child's progress from birth to when they leave school. It is not logical in that context at all.

Nadhim Zahawi: That is only true if you are doing nothing in the early years, but we are doing much more in the early years.

Q1398 **Lucy Powell:** I know, but you have to incentivise and drive behaviours towards what you are trying to do. I say to you—as somebody who has children in this area myself, and with this being my passion—that, as we talked about earlier with exclusions, there are unintended consequences, with head teachers in schools under huge pressure to make the system look as good as possible for them in terms of their progress measures. I am not interested in the schools' progress measures; I am interested in a five-year-old from a disadvantaged background arriving at school and being as up to speed as possible and as school-ready as possible.

Nadhim Zahawi: The early years foundation stage profile reforms that we are making will deal with development of that child in those early years. The whole learning environment that we are working on will, again, be addressing those early years.

Q1399 **Lucy Powell:** It will not. It is very hard to address.

Nadhim Zahawi: It is very hard. It is challenging.

Q1400 **Lucy Powell:** On the one hand, you are putting in some micro-measures



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on home learning and all of these things. They are small measures; we are still a long way off transforming the early years. On the other hand, in the very statutory environment of a primary school, you see in schools already that they don't want the kids arriving too well developed, because then they don't get the progress measures. A primary school knows they can make very quick progress with a four and five-year-old.

Nadhim Zahawi: I would disagree and say that I would much rather measure the whole of the primary years rather than seven to 11, because that is a better progress measure.

Q1401 **Lucy Powell:** I would rather you not measure that. I would rather you measure outcomes at primary.

Nadhim Zahawi: Then you are just measuring attainment; you are not measuring progress. That is unfair.

Lucy Powell: No, you can measure progress through other ways. You can be tracking that child from nought to 11.

Q1402 **Chair:** As a final question, why should it not include the whole of the educational history of the child?

Nadhim Zahawi: That is my point, Chairman. We are doing two things. The EYFSP is doing work in the early years. We need to have a much better progress measure in the primary years. At the moment it is seven to 11. We are removing the seven year old measure and starting at four and five years old to 11, which is a much more holistic approach to the primary years.

Q1403 **Lucy Powell:** Let us not even go down the road of SATs and so on. When your five-year-old, in four or five years, is starting to do completely impossible and unnecessary grammar, then we can talk about holistic, because it is not holistic. We are measuring a few small aspects, and it all drives behaviour.

Nadhim Zahawi: Lucy, I do not want to get into a party political—

Lucy Powell: It is not party political. I am all for accountability.

Nadhim Zahawi: With what we are doing on phonics and on maths we are producing some of the best readers in the world.

Lucy Powell: We do phonics as well. We all do phonics.

Nadhim Zahawi: Therefore, the reforms in education are working.

Lucy Powell: There have been reforms in education over 20 years by successive Governments, and they have been really good, especially in terms of reading, writing, the development of phonics, numeracy and so on. I am all for that. I am all for accountability. I am just saying let's not disincentivise schools from being part of a community, a family of schools, that want to drive a school readiness agenda in their locality. I seriously worry that baseline assessment will do the opposite.



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Chair: That was a very final comment.

Lucy Powell: Sorry. Yes, that is fine.

Q1404 **Chair:** If you are doing these pilots, as you are suggesting, I think it is worth looking at the educational outcomes in the family context. Then look at it without doing that and see the difference. It seems a sensible thing to do. Context is very important, and it goes back to some of the earlier discussions.

Can I thank you very much for coming? We all wish you a very happy summer holiday, no doubt thinking about reviews. I hope you have a genuine summer holiday.

Nadhim Zahawi: Thank you. Can I commend your Committee? You had my colleague, Anne Milton, here yesterday. You are clearly working your Committee members very, very hard.

Chair: They work me very hard.

Nadhim Zahawi: You are pushing us in all areas.

Chair: We want to address social injustice in the education system and transform schools and productivity.

Nadhim Zahawi: I know you are passionate about that.

Chair: Thank you very much. We wish you well.

Nadhim Zahawi: By the way, I know you are passionate about apprenticeships. We do have a plan for apprenticeships on the personal advisers scheme with local authorities.

Chair: Very good. You want to give us a sneak early announcement today? Everyone will be very happy.

Nadhim Zahawi: I don't yet, but I just wanted to put that out for you.

Chair: Tantalising, thank you.

Nadhim Zahawi: Thank you.

Chair: That concludes our last evidence session of the term, and the Committee will now meet in private.