

# Education Committee

## Oral evidence: [Children's Homes](#), HC 83

Tuesday, 1 March 2022

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Apsana Begum; Miriam Cates; Tom Hunt; Dr Caroline Johnson; Kim Johnson; Ian Mearns.

Questions 309 - 389

### Witnesses

[I](#): Will Quince, Minister for Children and Families, Department for Education; and Fran Oram, Director of Children's Social Care, Department for Education.

Written evidence from witnesses:



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Will Quince and Fran Oram.

Q309 **Chair:** Good morning everyone; it is very good to see you. Thank you for coming today. For the benefit of the tape and those watching on Parliament TV, could you introduce yourselves and your titles, starting with Fran?

**Fran Oram:** I am the director of children's social care at the Department for Education.

**Will Quince:** Minister for Children and Families.

Q310 **Chair:** I will start with some questions on mental health. We know that the impact of school shutdowns on children's mental health has been enormous and my worry is that long after Covid has gone we potentially face a mental health epidemic among young people. The Centre for Mental Health suggests that a further 1.5 million young people need treatment for new or additional mental health problems. That is equivalent to 15% of all young people. We have seen a 77% rise in the number of children referred for specialist treatment for severe mental health difficulties, emergency referrals to crisis care teams for under-18s up by 62% and referrals to CAMHS at a record high, doubling to 65,500 young people in March 2021. Do you agree that young people potentially, unless we act now, are facing a mental health epidemic?

**Will Quince:** They are all very good and valid questions and it is one of the areas that worries me the most. Although we have lots of statistics and data, in particular the most recent state of the nation report, whenever I visit schools or colleges or, in fact, any setting in the context of my brief, I always ask the staff, children and young people how in particular the pandemic has affected their mental health and how is their mental wellbeing. We can almost break those out into two separate areas because they are distinct and worth discussing separately.

The first point to make is that there is no question that you are right. The pandemic has had an impact on so many people's mental health and mental wellbeing that it would be naïve to think it would not have had an impact on children, in particular the impact of schools being closed. Yes, we are very much alive to that. The statistics show, from what we can see from the state of the nation report and the other data, that there was a dip during the pandemic and that there has been a recovery since children and young people have been back at school. That is somewhat to be expected. Anecdotally, I recognise that the problem is far greater than the data may show us. Although young people have shown the most incredible resilience during this period, there is more we need to do. That can be bricked out into three different areas.

**Chair:** In a nutshell.



**Will Quince:** In a nutshell, sorry. The first is in relation to building the resilience of children and young people. We have an important role in that space in education. The second, again within education, is around early identification and support for low level mental health needs. The third area is ensuring that those children who need more intensive support and intervention do get it.

I, like you, am worried about CAMHS services and the mental health services provided by the NHS for children and young people. I regularly raise this with my counterpart at DHSC. Despite record amounts of money, £2.3 billion, being put in, I am always pushing them to go further and faster because we know that the mental wellbeing and good mental health of children and young people will drive life chances and educational outcomes.

Q311 **Chair:** You are spending £79 million on resources for the wellbeing for education recovery programme, which is very welcome. It is a popular programme that is going to run for this academic year. Is this right that it is a stopgap programme, and what happens next?

**Will Quince:** There are two schemes in particular that we are running over and above everything that is already going on in schools around counselling and other resilience-building activities. The first is to do with the mental health leads. Currently 8,000 schools that have taken up those places; 3,500 are already in training and I have just signed off another £3 million to support that programme.

The second scheme is the rolling out of the mental health support teams. I visited one of these teams recently in Erith. They are making a big difference but you are right to suggest that even with our accelerated programme we are only going to reach around 35% of schools by 2023-24. Of course I want us to go further and faster because we know the need is far greater.

Q312 **Chair:** Would you as a Department consider universal screening for mental health difficulties and the assessment of most children to find out the genuine extent of mental health problems, just to ensure that you have the data and that children's needs are identified and addressed early on?

**Will Quince:** Although that, on the face of it, sounds like an appealing option, I would have a few worries with it. The first is that any assessment is only a snapshot in time. It is a hard to get a very accurate picture. These things vary hugely. For example, if you had taken children and young people out of school in lockdown or when their school had to be closed, or, dare I say, when children were wearing masks—the position may be very different two weeks later when that position has been reversed.

To some extent we do already have huge datasets to work on. They are all only a snapshot in time but I think we have to trust schools and



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professionals to give us the data on the ground as it stands and adapt accordingly, and also have some faith in programmes that we have already put in place, which are evidenced based and we know will make a difference, while at the same time constantly striving to go further and faster.

**Q313 Chair:** Children have been back for quite a number of weeks. Surely doing an assessment now would give you a much better idea of the data?

**Will Quince:** There are two questions. The first is what would it tell us, and the second what would we do with that data? Would we change the approach that we are currently taking?

**Chair:** You might.

**Will Quince:** We might, but let us take, for example, things like the mental health support teams. I may repeat this several times because I am very keen that we roll this out further and faster. Yes, in part our challenge is money—it always is to some extent—but money is the easiest of the problems to solve, subject to the Chancellor of the Exchequer agreeing to give it to us. The bigger challenges are the pressures that the NHS is currently under, whether it is coming out of the pandemic, recovery, or an understandable focus on the elective backlogs. It takes a year to train the mental health support teams. These are not things that we can turn around quickly. Nevertheless, I am constantly having those conversations with Minister Keegan at the DHSC.

**Q314 Chair:** The rates of mental health disorder vary significantly between ethnic groups. The group with the highest rate was white British with 15% compared to 6% among black British children and 5% among Asian British children. Why do you think the rate is so much higher proportionally with white British children and what assessment do you make of those statistics?

**Will Quince:** The honest answer is I do not know. I have to have that conversation with colleagues at DHSC. Fran, do we have any data on that? I have not seen any.

**Fran Oram:** I am not aware of it broken down by different ethnic groups. There may be some complexities behind it around recognition of wellbeing and mental health issues, and willingness to talk openly about them. I do not know. There could be quite a complex picture driving that differential but it is not data I have seen. Sorry.

**Will Quince:** That is a fair challenge and when you ask for a broad dataset around the state of the nation in terms of mental health, that is the sort of the thing where we could look to get more data alongside our DHSC colleagues.

**Q315 Chair:** My colleagues are going to come in on this point. The wider costs of mental ill health in England are estimated at £105 billion a year, so would it make economic sense to invest earlier given that half of all



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mental health problems are found to be established by the age of 14? The only way we can do this is by identifying mental health problems early on. Would you consider implementing a universal screening process in schools?

**Will Quince:** I am not convinced, or I am yet to be convinced, of the benefits and efficacy of a general screening programme in schools. However, on the thrust of your point and argument about early intervention, I think there are few areas of government where early identification and intervention do not lead to cost reductions, and, far more importantly, better outcomes for children and young people.

**Chair:** Before I carry on I will just bring in Kim and Miriam.

Q316 **Kim Johnson:** Good morning, panel. I want to pick up on the Chair's comment about white British. As part of our GRT inquiry last week we had a number of witnesses talk about the racism and the bullying experienced by that particular community. From my point of view there is a disproportionately higher number of cases of racism towards black young people and the GRT community, which will impact on mental health. Given that we do have a larger white community in this country, that would suggest there would be more white British pupils experiencing mental health issues.

Racism is a determining factor in terms of mental health for young black people. How would you respond to that, Minister?

**Will Quince:** It is a fair challenge and if we need more data or we need more research in this space then we will certainly explore that. If you have look at what we have done now in terms of the compulsory RHSE curriculum work, that will go some way to addressing this. The RHSE is ever evolving. It is mandatory now and that is the key but it will be an ever evolving piece of work that understandably will flex according to the needs. If the evidence and data suggest that we need to do more in a particular area then, of course, we would explore that and would be very happy to work with you with any particular evidence or data that you have on GRT and BAME.

Q317 **Miriam Cates:** I very much welcome what the Government is doing in this space and the seriousness with which it has been taken. I completely agree that more needs to be done on early intervention, and cuts in funding have no doubt had an impact. We cannot ignore the fact that this epidemic of mental health and the seriousness of the cases has coincided with the rise of the internet and the use of social media. It is more important to prevent than to cure sometimes. What is the Department doing in terms of looking at the impact of the use of social media?

Just today there is a report in *The Telegraph* showing a record number of adults sought help this year to stop them looking at sexual images of children online. We know there are records of children posting sexual imagines of themselves online. This must be a huge contributory factor to these mental health problems. I am not suggesting you are responsible



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for the internet, but what is the Department doing to look at the impact of social media and the internet on mental health—not just spending money on sorting things out when they go wrong?

**Chair:** Just before you respond—I was going to ask about social media later—but just to give you some stats. In 2021 16.7% of 11 to 16-year-olds using social media agreed that the number of likes, comments and shares had an impact on their mood; one in three girls said they were unhappy with their personal appearance by the age of 14; the Prince's Trust found that social media use in childhood is associated with worse wellbeing; 79% of Barnardo's practitioners reported that children between the ages of 10 and 15 had accessed unsuitable or harmful content. I have raised companies like TikTok in this Committee before, which, in my view, are not just the adult images that children see but also the algorithms—the addictive algorithms in some ways that could be contributing to a severe mental health epidemic. I sometimes liken them to the oxytocin scandal in the United States, which created an opioid epidemic.

Given what Miriam has just said—if you could follow up with her question—would the Government work with the Treasury to introduce a 2% social media levy, which would raise £100 million you could use to spend on mental health resilience? That could be reinvested in supporting young people's mental health problems and also concentrate the mind of the social media companies.

**Will Quince:** These are all hugely valid points and, to some extent, we have all become a little addicted to social media. I certainly find myself looking at it far more often than I know I should or would like to. We know it has an impact on children. I do not think the data about how damaging it is is quite there yet. And it is very difficult because social media and the internet more broadly bring huge advantages and is brilliant in many aspects of education. During the pandemic, let's not forget how a lot of social media more broadly—but you can include YouTube—has been hugely beneficial for children. Children have learnt things and there have been number of times I could fix something in the house, which I would never have been able to do without YouTube.

**Chair:** No one doubts that.

**Will Quince:** Alongside the Children's Commissioner and the Secretary of State, we have had all of the social media companies in front of us. We have challenged them to step up. That is over and above the work that is currently being done with DCMS around the Online Safety Bill, which will be game-changing in this sphere.

My message to the social media companies—I am going to see TikTok again very soon—is that they need to step up, and they need to step up and act on child protection and safeguarding. They do have a wider responsibility around promoting mental wellbeing.



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I hear what you say, Chair, and personally I am attracted to the proposal you put forward but I understand from DCMS colleagues and others that it is somewhat more challenging than it would seem on the face of it. Nevertheless, of course I will continue having those conversations with our counterparts. If there are opportunities for more funding for children and young people's mental health then, of course, as Children's Minister I am going to be willing to explore that.

**Chair:** Having a meeting with them is all well and good but they are not going to change, because they have not changed.

**Will Quince:** They will change, Chair, because we are changing the law. We are going to change the law to force them to.

**Chair:** They are not going to change the algorithms; they are not going to stop letting kids access soft pornography.

**Will Quince:** I think they will because we are looking at going far further. We are never going to be able to eradicate it but around age assurance and age verification—which I know the DCMS Secretary of State is currently exploring as part of the Bill—and the general duty to protect and safeguard children, there are some very tough penalties, financial and others, on the directors of those companies. I think it will have teeth and it will be the start and don't forget we are world-leading. I know that phrase is bandied around a bit too often but in this case it is genuinely world-leading legislation. We are the first to take action against these social media giants.

**Chair:** Of course, everyone is going to say everything about putting a levy in is challenging—the apprenticeship levy was challenging—but where there is a will there is a way.

**Will Quince:** That is true and I am a Will, but it is not entirely in my gift. It broadly sits with DCMS and Treasury.

Q318 **Chair:** Yes, but you and the Secretary of State could make the case and look at this. Is that something you might consider doing?

**Will Quince:** I have said to you before, that personally I am attracted to it. I understand the challenges having spoken to counterparts across government but I will continue raising it with those counterparts that have the lever in that area that I do not have.

**Chair:** Before I carry on and ask you about the catch-up and longer school day, I am going to get Tom in, please.

Q319 **Tom Hunt:** My question is about special educational needs, Minister. You will be aware of Matthew Hancock's Bill on the diagnosis of dyslexia. What are your thoughts on that? Is there a way of delivering something in that space?



**Will Quince:** I definitely want to do more in this space. As we have discussed before, early identification is absolutely key to getting young people the support they need at the earliest available opportunity, whether that is an early years setting or in primary or secondary school. I am very keen to explore how we better early identify any SEND. Part of that is about teaching and upskilling all teachers and making sure all teachers are teachers of SEND and able to identify.

I have concerns around screening and in particular around at what age you do it, especially as we come out of Covid and some children are still catching up. Whether the Bill is the right vehicle, I am yet to be convinced, but I am certainly a big fan of early identification.

My ever so slight worry in particular around what has been proposed, and it is all about the age, is that we have to be very careful about labelling children. Sometimes labels are very easy to have but very difficult to shake off. I want to make sure that we are identifying and diagnosing and then getting children the right support, but using the right mechanisms and vehicles to do so.

Q320 **Tom Hunt:** I did have a good meeting with the chief inspector of Ofsted about this and I think she had some similar concerns. She suggested potentially doing it at age seven, as opposed to when they enter primary school, the feeling being that for many of them there could be some issues that are not related to dyslexia but related to having a different experience pre-school than other children. Her way around that was to perhaps look at the age of seven.

I understand your point about labelling but some people do genuinely have dyslexia and/or dyspraxia. That is the other point. If we are going to do it for dyslexia, let's broaden it out to dyspraxia and other more hidden disabilities that are less obvious.

My second question is about special needs. There was a new Ofsted framework in 2019, but because of the pandemic we are not really in a position to say if it is completely working as we intended. We probably need more time to know. I have spoken to the chief inspector about this and she felt that the new framework would be much better for special educational needs because it is slightly less focused on just results and more focused on actual positive differences made in progress, particularly of young people. Do you feel as though a new framework would do a better job than perhaps the previous framework in creating the right incentives for schools to be first class at special educational needs and rewarding them for some of the good work they do?

**Will Quince:** Broadly, yes, and I am looking at this in the context of the SEND review because we are in a far better place than we were previously. My ever so slight challenge is, though, that Ofsted looks specifically at children within a school setting and Ofsted does not go in and ask the question: where are your children with SEND?



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My worry still is there are too many schools—and we know the way they do it, parents will be being shown around and they will say, “I am not quite sure this is the right school, I am not quite sure we can meet the needs of your child.” As soon as anyone says that to a parent, they are like, “I am not going to send my child here because I do not have confidence—” but it might be the right place for them, to be in their local school. The school needs to step up and ensure that they are inclusive, and have the right support in place to support children and young people with SEND in their school.

We have to get better at SEND in mainstream and we have to make sure that as part of the SEND review and the ongoing work alongside Ofsted, schools do not have a perverse incentive to not take children with SEND or to put off children with SEND from coming to their school.

**Q321 Chair:** When is the SEND review coming out? You promised it would be this quarter.

**Will Quince:** I did and it will be delivered. I have a draft, or a further iteration of a draft, sitting on my desk, and it will be published next month.

**Ian Mearns:** That is April.

**Will Quince:** Sorry, this month, it is the 1st today, isn't it? This month.

**Q322 Chair:** That is good news. I will move on to the catch-up programme. We welcome the £5 billion catch-up, but of that, as I mentioned earlier, just 79% is ringfenced for mental health support for children. Given what you have said about the recognition of the mental health problems facing kids, how do you rebalance the catch-up initiatives to recognise the importance of good mental health in schools? Proportionately far less has been spent by schools on the mental health and wellbeing of children.

**Will Quince:** I would only push back ever so slightly because at the moment we do not quite know that. £1 billion of the catch-up funding was non-ringfenced, I know anecdotally at least, and we will get that data in the fullness of time. A lot of schools will have spent that money on programmes for mental wellbeing.

**Chair:** A tiny amount in proportion compared to the other spending.

**Will Quince:** It is important when you give a large amount of non-ringfenced funding that you trust schools to make the right decision about what is best for the pupils within that school.

**Q323 Chair:** Do you know yet how many schools have invested in mental health through the catch-up programme?

**Will Quince:** I don't believe we have that data.

**Q324 Chair:** Are you getting it? Is it something you monitor because surely it is incredibly important?



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**Fran Oram:** I don't know, I am afraid. The mechanisms we have for tracking non-ringfenced—

**Chair:** I could not hear you; I beg your pardon.

**Fran Oram:** I was just saying I am not aware of what monitoring we have of tracking unringfenced allocations.

Q325 **Chair:** Would you not be tracking how the catch-up money is being spent?

**Will Quince:** I would like to think so, yes. The reason I am being guarded is that it sits with the Minister for Schools. I will have to check with him but I will make sure that we write to you and get you that information.

Q326 **Chair:** Okay, so you as the Minister for Children are not monitoring what schools are spending on mental health?

**Will Quince:** I suspect we will get that, but will not have it in live time.

Q327 **Chair:** I will move on to extending the school day. When you last came to the Committee, you said school sport and extracurricular activities are key to mental health and that you were exploring what more you could do as a Department to encourage schools to do more physical activity. Surely one way to do that would be to make time for it through a longer school day. Have you made a case to the Department for extending the school day to make space for enrichment activities like sport, music, drama and wellbeing?

I will quote from *The Lancet*, which is very respected as you know. It suggests that, "An additional hour of light activity a day between age 12 and 16 years was associated with an 8% to 11% decrease in depression score, and maintaining persistently high levels of light activity was associated with lower depression scores." The University of British Columbia suggests that children who participate in extracurricular activities are more likely to report high levels of life satisfaction. There are other surveys that show that if you increase these activities by an hour, which the Secretary of State cares deeply about, the educational attainment is increased. What is your view and why can't we at least have a pilot, just like the Welsh Government have done, on extending the school day?

**Will Quince:** I can certainly take that away and explore a pilot. In relation to extracurricular activities—

Q328 **Chair:** What does that mean, please? You are in support of a pilot?

**Will Quince:** I will take it away and explore the merits of doing so. You rightly push me but I will not commit until I have discussed with the Secretary of State and Minister for Schools, whose remit it falls under.

Pardon the pun, but you are preaching to the choir when you talk about extracurricular activities—sport, music, drama and all sorts of other clubs



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and societies around a whole-school approach to mental wellbeing. I mentioned earlier the £1 billion non-ringfenced funding. A lot of schools have used it for that purpose. Some schools and multi-academy trusts already use the 6.5 hours, which is the average school day currently delivered within schools' existing funding. I have discussed this with the Secretary of State and he has been absolutely clear that he wants schools that currently provide fewer hours to move towards this average as quickly as possible. There are some really good examples, as you will be aware, of multi-academy trusts where they have extended the school day and it has been hugely successful.

**Q329 Chair:** When we have extended the school day before, 82% of schools that extended their school day under the extended service in school programme reported greater pupil wellbeing and 69% said it had influence in raising attainment. As the Minister for Children, did you consider the positive effects of extending the school day on pupils' mental health when you formulated the bid for the spending review?

**Will Quince:** I would not have done, Chair, because it was before my time. I can't speak for my predecessor who would have been part of that spending review process. I would like to think so.

We need to think a bit more broadly. It is not just about extending the school day; there are other ways in which this can be done that achieve the same objectives. Wraparound support in schools—breakfast clubs and after school clubs—can often deliver the same benefits and also provide parents with childcare and enriching activities that promote mental wellbeing. I am certainly exploring that in the round alongside other Government Departments, along with things such as opening the school premises up outside of the school hours.

**Q330 Chair:** A pilot would be incredibly helpful to see whether this does work or not. I really hope you make the case.

Finally before I bring in Caroline and Kim, on the mental health Green Paper, we did a previous report on children's mental health with the Health Committee. Your ambition is to reach around 35% of pupils with mental health support teams in schools by 2023. That will leave 65% of pupils without access to this support.

We heard from Lord Layard a week or so ago and his view is that the Green Paper level ambition was very low and we previously recommended that you should fast track your Green Paper commitments for all schools to have proper designated mental health leads or counsellors. Given what you have said about the recognition of the rise in mental health problems among pupils, will you commit to ensuring that all schools across the country have access to proper mental health support teams in their schools by the end of the next Parliament?

**Will Quince:** I cannot do that, Chair, because there are three issues with it. We have already accelerated the mental health support teams by a year. I would love to give that commitment. That is very much my



aspiration and ambition. I want us to have 100% coverage but there are three challenges. The first is money, the second is NHS capacity and the third is the ability to train the staff.

Q331 **Chair:** Can't mental health be given parity of esteem with academic catch-up?

**Will Quince:** Yes, it should. From a Department for Education perspective, it certainly is but we have to put it in the context—

Q332 **Chair:** Well it is not, because it is only £79 million of the £5 billion. You are not monitoring, as far as we are aware, what mental health problems are going on in schools. The target for mental health professionals in schools is very low; 65% of pupils will not have access to mental health professionals.

**Will Quince:** The broader context is important. I am not going to make promises to you that are not deliverable and that I know are not deliverable. I know from having spoken with colleagues from the Department for Health and Social Care what can and cannot be delivered. They have already set aside a huge amount of money, £2.3 billion as part of the NHS long-term plan. You know already, Chair, that the waits for CAMHS is far too long in too many areas up and down the country. They rightly have to focus on that. It is about training staff, securing the funding, and competing priorities within the NHS.

If I had all the levers and I could make a compelling pitch to the Treasury, I would be more confident in making that case to you now and say we absolutely going to go for 100% by the end of the Parliament. Because, with the best will in the world, I do not believe that is deliverable, I am not going to make that promise.

**Chair:** I am going to bring Caroline Johnson in now on other things but may come back to that at the end of the session

Q333 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** The Chair talked about the importance of exercise and issues around obesity. Recently, following the sad death of a teenage boy, Manchester's coroner highlighted that children being severely obese can be a sign of neglect but that the Department for Education's safeguarding guidance does not make any reference to that. In my time as a paediatrician, I have seen a 12-year-old who weighed 18.5 stone and a nine-year-old who weighed 14 stone. There are some children out there with very severe obesity. One in five primary school children leaving primary school is obese. It is clearly an important issue to tackle.

I have two questions for you as the Minister responsible for children and safeguarding them. What are you doing to help children who are living with obesity to develop greater health and wellbeing and how are you ensuring that, where obesity is a symptom of neglect, those children are being identified and the matter is being tackled appropriately?



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**Will Quince:** Great questions. I am not aware of severe obesity being a potential indication of safeguarding concerns but I can take that away and raise it with the safeguarding team and write to you.

On the broader point, childhood obesity—and obesity more generally—is probably one of the biggest health issues facing the country, alongside issues such as climate change. Obesity is now a bigger cause of cancer than smoking. It is absolutely right that at the earliest available opportunity we develop the habits in children and young people that follow through into later life.

We are kickstarting a new piece of work. It is a passion of mine, as you know.

A few things: the first is the mandatory RHSC curriculum around healthy and nutritious food, and what it looks like. I met with Jamie Oliver and the Secretary of State only yesterday, and where we were talking about school food standards and what we intend to do in that space.

Alongside healthy food and nutrition—and that is arguably the most important—it is also about getting children and young people into the mindset of physical activity. In part I think we don't teach PE well enough in this country, particularly at primary school, and too often it is outsourced to rugby coaches or football coaches. I say this as a layperson but PE hugely important for learning hand-eye co-ordination and ball skills, and ensuring that you understand and have confidence. That leads to you having confidence in playing sport and getting involved in team sports later on.

For too many children and young people, if you ask them why they do not play sport, it is because they do not have confidence and they do not have confidence because they were not taught properly—things like how you hurdle or jump. It is sounds obvious, but if you are not being taught properly at primary school, when do you get those core skills? We are looking at PE, teacher training, ongoing training for teachers and making sure that teachers, in particular at primary, have confidence around PE.

Then we are doing further work on opening up school facilities out of school times. I am also looking at more innovative approaches around the daily mile and things like fitness challenges over the summer, and what more we can do in that space too.

Q334 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** You will write to us about obesity and the safeguarding issue?

**Will Quince:** I certainly will. It has not crossed my desk before now but I can understand why it should have done and I will look into it.

Q335 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Let me move on to my second question. You have the safeguarding brief. The number of children who identify as transgender is increasing, and schools need to strike a balance of ensuring that these children can be cared for properly and that their



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needs are properly met. Schools also need to balance this with the needs of the wider school population.

I have been contacted as a member of this Committee in the last week by parents who are concerned about the presence of an 18-year-old trans woman in the boarding house of their teenage daughters. What guidance does the Department provide to schools on managing these situations in a sensitive way that provides for the privacy, dignity and wellbeing of all the students?

**Will Quince:** This area has been a minefield, if we are being honest, and we are working very closely with the Government Equalities Office to formulate our guidance in this space. Yes, we have our RHSE curriculum. I am conscious the school you reference is independent, I think, so it falls under a slightly different framework.

There are two competing priorities here. The first is the 2010 Equality Act—the importance of all children and young people being treated equally, and ensuring that where there are protected characteristics, they are recognised.

At the same time, any school also has legal obligations, and a duty to safeguard, protect and promote the welfare of all children. On the face of what you just said, as a parent—specifically a parent of two young girls—I probably would not be overly happy with the situation you describe. Given that the school is independent, it is slightly more complex, but I would suggest that the parent speaks with the headteacher, the governors and, if necessary, raises it with the Independent Schools Inspectorate as the school will not be covered by Ofsted.

**Q336 Dr Caroline Johnson:** Should the Government be providing guidance on this issue to help schools? You said it is a minefield, but schools need help navigating that minefield and do not want to get caught up in legal wrangles. Would it not be best if the Government provided some detailed guidance on how schools can manage this for the wellbeing of all students?

**Will Quince:** I will speak to the Minister for Schools and I am sure that that the matter will be in progress alongside the Government Equalities Office. But at the same time you can give all the guidance in the world that sets out the legal position but you need schools to use their common sense and follow the law as it stands at the moment. I would suggest that the duty to protect and to safeguard should probably override anything else.

**Q337 Chair:** What do you mean by anything else?

**Will Quince:** The No. 1 priority of any school or anyone in society has to be the protection and safeguarding of children above anything else. In my view, that is a reasonable position for anyone to take.

**Q338 Ian Mearns:** Going back to the questions and discussion about obesity



and sport in schools, have you any study information about if you are going to add some time to the school day to better encompass more sporting activity for instance? Is that best done at the end of the day or at other times in the day? When is the best time, from the children's perspective, to do the physical activity? You might have to extend the school day but carry on with the curriculum, having added time earlier on in the day for sporting activity. It seems to me—and I know I am old bugger—that when I went to school we used to start at 8.45 in the morning, we didn't finish until 4 pm, but we had an hour and a half lunch and we'd kick a ball for miles. We had about 10 football matches on the same yard all at the same time. That was pretty good for hand-eye co-ordination, I can tell you. When there were 10 games all going on in the same space all at the same time you have to have your wits about you.

Does the Department have any study or information on recommendations to schools about how you do it for the best results for the children?

**Will Quince:** It is a very good question. I don't know the answer to that but I can certainly find out for you. I would like to think yes. If there isn't, we can certainly do that and look at international comparators too.

I remember being in China and seeing every school—and I am not suggesting we copy everything or something that China does, but it was interesting—at the beginning of the day, have all the children out doing a bit of physical exercise just to get the blood circulating and get them alert before lessons. There is an argument, I suspect, around metabolism and the point at which they need to exercise, whether it is the beginning of the day, lunchtime or the end of the day. The end of the day is often when activity levels are the lowest.

There is also a question about whether it is sensible to break up more academic lessons with something that does raise the heartbeat. If these studies have not been done, then we should absolutely start to look at those and I will speak to the Minister for Schools.

Q339 **Tom Hunt:** A quick question about the education investment areas, particularly focused on cold spots, things like teacher retention payments and so on. There are 55 and that is quite a lot. Suffolk is one of the 55 and there are almost 1 million people in Suffolk, so it seems that there are a lot of cold spots. If you compare it with something like the opportunity areas, where there are only nine or 10, it seems to be a slightly different approach.

In terms of the opportunity areas, is there a strategy beyond this current extension to avoid a potential cliff-edge situation where a lot of the good work might not be bedded-in permanently?

**Chair:** Kim is waiting and came in right at the beginning; in a nutshell, Minister, please.

**Will Quince:** In a nutshell, the policy does not sit with me so I will ensure that the relevant Minister writes to you with that information.



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Q340 **Kim Johnson:** I want to pick up on the issue of obesity because there has been a question linked to safeguarding, but I want to link it to poverty and the issues of access to food and the right types of food. We know that we are the fifth richest country in the world and yet we have an increasing reliance on food banks. That is going to have a major impact.

And why Jamie Oliver? I would have thought that there were better qualified people to give advice about food, health and nutrition than Jamie Oliver.

**Will Quince:** Those are all fair questions. We meet with a lot of people, I just happened to meet with Jamie Oliver yesterday afternoon. To credit Jamie Oliver and his organisation Bite Back 2030, they have probably done as much as anybody in this space to improve the quality and standard of school food over the past decade or more. I am never one to be attracted to celebrity, if you like, but it is important where there is a trusted voice that has done a lot of work over many years in a space that we should listen to it, especially as he is always pushing us to go further on school food standards. He has at times shown up what was very poor and unacceptable practice. It is right that we work with him alongside others.

The broader point about poverty is a fair one. One of the things that we will be looking at alongside Jamie and others will be how we teach about healthy nutritious meals and encourage people to do that at home with their families. Yes, we will do far more in that space.

Q341 **Kim Johnson:** How does that happen if people do not have access to healthy, nutritious food, Minister?

**Will Quince:** In what respect? That will be taught in school.

Q342 **Kim Johnson:** I am just saying that high numbers of families are reliant on food banks for food that they bring into the homes every week. Having access to good quality fruit and veg is often out of the remit for many families, particularly those in my Liverpool, Riverside constituency who are reliant on food banks.

The other question then is we know that—

**Will Quince:** May I challenge that? I accept what you are saying and I have spent time in your neck of the woods, visiting a number of food banks and other providers with a former Labour MP, now the noble Lord of Birkenhead. I understand some of the challenges, but at the same time, in part—and I say only in part—the problem is children and young people not knowing how to cook, and how to use things like fruit and vegetables. Fruit and vegetables can be bought affordably, but it is important that we empower children and young people in particular to understand how they can cook healthy, nutritious meals on a budget too. We will be looking to do far more of that in school.



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For those who are in a household where they are not necessarily taught to cook or brought up in a household where cooking as a family is a regular occurrence, it is very important that we empower more children to do that. We will explore more there.

**Q343 Kim Johnson:** We know that 12 years of underfunding schools has had a significant impact on schools and pupils. You talk about doing these types of activities in schools, but a lot of schools have lost teaching assistants, who would have ordinarily been involved in that sort of thing.

My question to you is what is your Department doing in terms of having discussions with other Departments to look at the reversal of funding and bringing it back up to standard, so that funding and resources are available to provide the level of support that you are talking about for schools and pupils at the moment?

**Will Quince:** School funding is increasing and we have a record settlement as part of the most recent spending review but, of course, I regularly speak with my counterparts across Government to see what more we can do across the board for children and young people.

**Q344 Kim Johnson:** Again, I would say that, yes, funding to schools might be increasing, but we have had 12 years of underfunding and that gap has still not been met.

**Will Quince:** We can go back a decade and have a conversation about some of the reasons behind that. I do not think that would be a debate to have today, but we are making significant investment in schools, rightly, and the most recent spending review is a record investment. It is going to have a hugely positive impact on children and young people.

**Kim Johnson:** That will remain to be seen. Thank you, Minister.

**Q345 Apsana Begum:** I have a couple of questions, Minister. Going back to wellbeing and educational outcomes, I want to get a sense of how the Department monitors or evaluates wellbeing as an outcome. You mentioned earlier some examples of success in multi-academy trusts where there have been demonstrable examples of success around improving mental health and wellbeing. What are those examples and how can wellbeing as an outcome be monitored by DFE, if it already is? If it is not, how can that happen going forward?

**Will Quince:** A fair question. Any of the programmes that we bring in, be it the mental health leads or the mental health support teams, will all have robust evaluation programmes behind them. We also have the state of the nation report, which is a number of datasets that breaks that up.

Fran, do you want to talk a bit more about how we analyse the mental wellbeing?

**Fran Oram:** The state of the nation report is an annual report. The third one was published earlier in February, and that showed that overall children and young people's wellbeing has shown signs of recovery in



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2021 following a small reduction in 2020, although, as the Minister said, I think we have a view that perhaps the data doesn't show the true lived experience of children and young people because the Covid period has obviously been an incredibly traumatic one. Reductions in wellbeing, as we might expect, showed a real knock when schools were closed. I think there is perhaps a lag from children coming to terms with that and getting back to normal life. As the Minister said earlier, things like the requirement to wear masks in schools for secondary school pupils had a real impact on their wellbeing, their ability to engage and communicate effectively, and so on.

The key thing that we are focused on now is recovery from that traumatic period and supporting children. As the Minister said, we have put in record investment to help buttress that and provide extra educational support but also the wellbeing and the broader extracurricular support to help children bounce back. Children do show incredible resilience. We have both been on lots of visits to schools, children's homes and other settings. The Big Ask survey that the Children's Commissioner talked to you about quite extensively shows children's optimism and sense of hope for the future. That is the thing that the education system and all the other agencies want to get behind and support children to capitalise on.

Q346 **Apsana Begum:** Is there a sense of where that optimism and resilience—we have used this word before in the Committee—comes from among young people? Is there any evidence to suggest where that can be pinned down in terms of any of the activities they are engaging in?

**Will Quince:** It is from the datasets from the state of the nation report. I would just encourage you to go out and speak to any child or young person in this country, go to any school. Children's resilience is absolutely incredible, and the way that so many have bounced back from the pandemic and the huge challenges that they have faced has been remarkable.

**Ian Mearns:** That is great for those who have but there are many who have not.

**Will Quince:** You are absolutely right. Hence why I very much caveated that with resilience, early identification and support and then intervention, which has to be our three-strand approach.

**Fran Oram:** For children with a mental health condition, the NHS has recently introduced the 24/7 all-age, urgent mental health phone line, so there is a way of reaching out and seeking support. The voluntary sector does a huge amount in this space as well, which is incredibly valuable.

As the Minister referred to earlier, there is the record investment in CAMHS—not remotely to claim that that means all children and young people can access the support they need when they need it, because there is a gap, and I think that this absolutely recognised. But it is record



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investment that is growing and training the staff, which, as the Minister said, unfortunately does take longer than we would like.

Q347 **Apsana Begum:** I have one more question around wellbeing outcomes. The most recent review of time in school and 16 to 19 settings from the Department—I think this preceded the Minister's time in office—emphasises more the academic outcomes than wellbeing outcomes. There was a little bit on international comparisons of what has worked well in Japan, the USA and so forth. Has the Department learnt anything further from international comparisons about improving wellbeing outcomes specifically, as opposed to academic outcomes and attainment?

**Will Quince:** It is a very difficult thing to measure accurately. Having said that, I think we know from other countries such as Finland, and others, especially the Scandinavian countries, that good mental wellbeing leads to better education outcomes. We are certainly alive to that. Measuring mental wellbeing is a very difficult thing to do accurately. At any point, it is a snapshot in time.

Q348 **Chair:** A recommendation came out of the Timpson report that all schools should become attachment and trauma aware by 2025. Is this happening? The implications are that this is not currently the case. What work is going on? As I understand it, the Department accepted all the recommendations of the Ed Timpson review.

**Will Quince:** I don't know the answer to that, Chair. I will certainly write to you with more information.

Q349 **Chair:** When are you publishing your mental health strategy?

**Will Quince:** I do not have a date for that, but I will write to you.

**Chair:** We are going to have a three-minute break, just to give you a bit of time to focus, and then we will go on to children in care.

*Sitting suspended.*

*On resuming—*

Q350 **Chair:** We will start off now with our children in care inquiry. In 2021, the number of children looked after by local authorities rose to 80,850. It is the highest ever level on record and follows a trend of increases every year for the past 13 years, with the total rising by 23% over the past 10 years and 14% in the last five years alone. Witnesses have cited various reasons but could you explain to the Committee why there has been such a huge increase?

**Will Quince:** Thank you. You are right to suggest there has been an increase and, more than that, I think we also have to look at the fact that more children with more complex needs are being placed in care, in particular residential care, and there is a higher prevalence of older children being placed in care too.



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The evidence around some of the reasons that you have been given so far is compelling, and the answer is that the reasons are varied, numerous and complex. The more recent reasons are in part down to the pandemic and court delays, both criminal and family courts, but in truth there are some fundamental challenges within the system that have led to an inevitable increase in the number of children going into care, and that is what we need to fundamentally change.

**Q351 Chair:** Can I ask you about unregulated provision? Ofsted research suggested last year from a sampling of 2,600 children living in children's homes that 9% were attending unregulated provision and 6% were not in education, employment or training. You have made it clear that any home for children under 16 in care needs to be Ofsted registered but it has been revealed that because there are not enough registered places, councils are seeking legal loopholes to keep young people in unregistered accommodation. The BBC has suggested that growing numbers of vulnerable children are being detained in temporary accommodation following deprivation of liberty court orders, which, as you know, restrict children's freedoms and confine them to one location. What plans does the Department have to clamp down on the use of unregistered provision for under-16s?

**Will Quince:** We are very much alive to this issue. We changed the law recently. I will hand over to Fran who can talk in more detail about the steps we are taking.

**Chair:** Just before you answer, I will just add that our adviser to the Committee, Patrick, has suggested that the scale of children in unregulated education or out of education is not known because "all data you will ever see on the education of children in care is fundamentally unreliable because it comes from school census data, so it is only tracking young people who already exist within the system." I am just quoting him directly. He also says that the data is collected in "local authorities, but there is no system for collecting it nationally."

**Fran Oram:** I am happy to pick up and respond to that. I just want to first explain the different terminology used because I think it can get quite confusing.

Unregulated is a term we use to describe independent and semi-independent living arrangements, so that is placements where a young person would live. Unregistered is a term that is used to describe a setting that is providing accommodation and care for children, and that should be registered as a children's home but is not. Unregistered is illegal provision that should never be acceptable. Unregulated is provision that is within the legislative framework, but, as the Minister said, we have recently legislated to provide that no under 16-year-old should ever be placed in an unregulated placement because we think that it expects too much of them in terms of independence. An under 16-year-old needs care and support. For 16 and 17-year-olds, though, we are developing a



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new regulatory framework, which Ofsted is developing, that will be consulted on and will be starting to come into operation from next year.

I want to check on your question because you were talking a bit there about education, I think, and whether education is regulated not just the placements and where the children are living. We do not have perfect data on where children in care are educated. In terms of where they live, the vast majority are either in foster care placements or in children's homes. Only about 7% of looked-after children are in unregulated placements.

Of the whole looked-after children population, the majority are in schools and they are obviously Ofsted-regulated schools. Some will be in independent schools, which will be regulated within that regulatory regime. Anne Longfield has talked to you about some of them not being on a school register—

**Q352 Chair:** Why do you not collect the data nationally on all these things? Why would you not do that? This goes back to what I was asking about mental health earlier in the session.

**Fran Oram:** We are very open to looking at how we can improve the data. We are aware that there is often a lag in the data that we have and the data we publish is largely annual.

**Will Quince:** We should be a bit more frank than that. The data we have is poor. It is a year in arrears. It comes from the previous March, which we are not able to do an analysis on until the autumn. In reality I would love to be in a position where we have data in more real time. We are not there at the moment. It is certainly an ambition and aspiration that we get there. It is very difficult when you are working with 151 local authorities and then a number of providers that sit underneath them.

We recognise the challenge and, let's be honest about it, we are not happy with the data we have at the moment.

**Q353 Chair:** Why is it that so many children in care do not go to good or outstanding schools? Why is it that just 7% of children in care get decent GCSE passes? Why has the Government allowed that to happen?

**Fran Oram:** If I could start on that, our data suggests that 77% of looked-after children go to good or outstanding schools. It is about 81% for all children. There is a gap there and that is of concern.

I am sure the Committee is aware that looked-after children have absolute priority for school placements so they should be given precedence in getting into good and outstanding schools, but there might be a range of complicated reasons why sometimes that does not happen or there is a delay in that happening. The key deciding factor in determining which school a child should attend is what is in the best interests of that child. Obviously a policy and an absolute rule might not always be in the best interests of that individual child.



Q354 **Chair:** What are you doing as a Department to make sure that children in care go to the best performing schools?

**Will Quince:** That is a good question because there is a legal duty. In part it is about the virtual school head role and working with social workers but think your broader question needs a bit of context.

I mentioned earlier that children in care often have more complex needs. We know that around 56% of children in care have special educational needs. Around two thirds have been taken into care because of abuse or neglect so there is very often some kind of childhood trauma—

**Chair:** I get all that; we know all the figures.

**Will Quince:** —and a higher prevalence of mental health issues. I understand what you are saying. Of course I am not happy that only 7% of looked-after children achieve a level 5 to 9 GCSE in maths and English, when you compare that to 50%—the equivalent number across the whole school population. At the same time we should probably, to be fair, ask the question about whether we should be measuring progress rather than attainment given the context I have just referenced. I totally agree with you that we have to be ambitious for all children within the system.

Q355 **Chair:** Why shouldn't they have a level playing field? Why do we allow a situation—this is a social injustice—where just 7% of children in care get good GSCEs in maths and English?

**Will Quince:** It is about a level playing field but it is also about understanding the context—the cohort of children that are coming through the system.

**Chair:** The 7% is still incredibly low, even with all the caveats and the understanding—

**Will Quince:** It is incredibly low. You can compare it more broadly to children in need, which is 11%—also woefully low. That explains why we have put in the virtual school head programme and extended it to children in need: all children with a social worker. That is why we have the pupil premium—the additional £2,345 per child. It is why we also therefore have the priority for children who are in care to go to a good or outstanding school. That is somewhat area dependent. When you then consider that 55% have special educational needs—I do not have the figure in terms of how many have an EHCP but I suspect—

**Chair:** We have all those figures; we do not need them.

**Will Quince:** But it is important because it is about special educational needs provision locally too.

Q356 **Chair:** But it is not right. You cannot use that as a justification because the Government rightly are focused on standards, something I believe in, and you talk about making sure that students get the right GSCE and A levels all the time and put forward policies for that. So why isn't more



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effort put towards making sure that more than 7% of children in care get decent GCSEs? Why do we allow this to go on year after year, even with the extra benefits that you have talked about?

**Will Quince:** If you look at the progress that is being made, in particular now with the role of virtual school heads and the pupil premium, we are getting into a better position. But I have to come back to the point around the complex needs of the cohort of children and young people within the system, and the fact that a large number of children are coming into care far later, as teenagers. It is far harder to make that progress.

**Chair:** I get all that but—

**Will Quince:** Do not underestimate our determination to improve the outcomes for all children and young people.

Q357 **Chair:** By doing what, substantially, to make a difference?

**Will Quince:** Fundamentally there are two things. We have all the things I have just mentioned in terms of children in care now, but I want to take a step back, because this is key to this, and that is to look at the care review more broadly. Fundamentally, if you look at some of these issues, we have to address this far further upstream. That means looking at what we were talking about earlier: early intervention and what we can do to wherever possible avoid children going into care, or to give children and young people a far better care experience, with things like not moving placements, getting into that good or outstanding school. Yes, we have to do everything that we can to improve attainment for children who are currently in the system but we also have to look at the broader care system and how we are supporting those who come into care.

**Chair:** To me, levelling up should be about giving a ladder to everybody.

**Will Quince:** I totally agree.

**Chair:** If the Government want to increase good GCSE results for all children, that should apply to children in care and children with special needs and children who are excluded, who only get 5% of decent GCSEs. I have not heard anything to say that this is a serious priority. I would love you to say that the target in the Department is to get that up to double that over the next few years, but I have not heard anything of a substantive policy to make a difference in terms of the educational outcomes at GCSE level for these children.

**Fran Oram:** As the Minister said, the care review is focused on seeking to fix the systemic issues in the children's social care system that lead all too often to children who are taken into care of the state having a very difficult time and a very difficult experience. They have obviously had a difficult experience before they have been taken into care. As the Minister said, those experiences and that trauma has a direct correlation with their outcomes from the education system. It is not just the quality of the



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teaching; it is the broader experience and their ability to learn that is impacted.

**Chair:** You said that it is not the quality of the teaching but—

**Fran Oram:** Not just the quality of the teaching.

Q358 **Chair:** If there is a virtual school head, they are supposed to recommend the schools and recommendations are supposed to be followed. We know that that does not happen. Why not give them statutory powers so that virtual school heads can make sure that children in care go to really good schools?

**Will Quince:** They do have powers of mandation, do they not?

**Fran Oram:** They do have those powers. In the Department the Secretary of State can compel an academy to take a looked-after child and—

**Chair:** On a day-to-day basis it is not happening because it is guidance and not statutory powers.

**Fran Oram:** Certainly I have known of cases that have been referred to the Department and the Secretary of State has—

Q359 **Chair:** Once in a blue moon this may happen, fine, but in day-to-day real-life when children are getting moved in care from school to school, the virtual heads are supposed to be able to have a say. We are going to come on to placements later.

**Will Quince:** If we need that to be beefed up, I will explore that. The powers are there and the Secretary of State ultimately has the power based on the recommendation of a virtual school head. If that needs to be beefed up, I will explore that.

**Fran Oram:** There is something there as well about thinking about the education of the child alongside the placement moves. A child should never be moved to a children's home and then think about which school might be appropriate. I think that does happen too often. There is something about thinking about the child's needs, their connections, their relationships and their stability, and prioritising those things rather than seeing them as an afterthought. Those are the kinds of things that will help children to feel stable, and then be engaged and able to learn.

Attendance and exclusions have a direct link to attainment as well. Those are things that virtual school heads are very powerful in helping to encourage schools to understand the trauma that is driving the behaviour of looked-after children.

**Will Quince:** Can I have one more, Chair, because it is relevant to the point about context? Notwithstanding all the points that you rightly make about wanting the best achievement potential for every pupil, if you look at key stage 2 and children who have been in care for 12 months ahead



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of that, looked-after children without special educational needs perform as well as their peers. If you take that same cohort in reading, writing and maths, they are 2% higher. The context is important in terms of special educational needs and the trauma of the children affected. It is poor and we have to improve it.

**Chair:** It is not just about standards for the “have” kids in school. I want the Government to improve standards for all kids, especially those from significantly disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Will Quince:** We are with you on that.

Q360 **Ian Mearns:** I am afraid, Minister, that the stats you reel off are screaming at me here. Two thirds of the children have suffered abuse or neglect, and 35% have special educational needs. They are damaged, vulnerable children, yet, based on a postcode lottery when you look around the country, quite often when they get to their 16th birthday they are just shuffled off a cliff. Given the stats that you reeled off about how vulnerable, damaged and under-educated they are, and the special educational needs that they have, why the hell would we allow, in this day and age, for the kids to be shuffled off a cliff at the age of 16?

All the stats about these youngsters, when you track them through into adulthood, tell you that it is not working. We have to have a major mind shift and policy shift on how we look after these youngsters right the way through into adulthood—not just to 16, but after that—because they have so much catching up to do from an educational perspective. They are losing out because of their vulnerability, and because of the damage, trauma and movement around the system. We have to have a major policy and mind shift about how we handle all that.

I totally accept that there are good examples of where it works for some kids, but I am afraid to say that that is not the generality, otherwise we would not be presented with these statistics about the older kids in the age group who have been through the system.

**Will Quince:** I do not disagree with a single word you said there. The current situation is not acceptable. That is why we commissioned Josh MacAlister to undertake the care review, and we will be looking closely at his recommendation. I give you the facts because they are a matter of fact, not because I am in any way proud of them. They are in many respects woeful and show a system that desperately needs to be reformed because, as you say, these are some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people in our society.

Look at some of things that we are already changing in the system. You touched on 16 but if you look at the pilots around pupil premium funding continuing into further education, if you look at the Staying Close pilot or the Staying Put pilot, we are recognising all of the points that you make as being true. So far the outcomes of the evaluations of those programmes show that they have a really positive impact.



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**Ian Mearns:** The evaluations of those programmes in that case, Minister, need to be conducted with some urgency and followed up with urgent policy change.

**Will Quince:** They have been and they will be, and the care review will be reporting in the next few weeks.

**Chair:** Sorry, did you have a question?

**Tom Hunt:** I have a question on special educational needs. When do you think I will come in?

**Chair:** You will be No. 7.

Q361 **Kim Johnson:** Minister, you have just reeled off some alarming data. We know that the number of children in care is increasing and has over the last two years, during the pandemic. Local authorities have struggled. We have heard from witness testimony that the amount of funding that local authorities are paying to private sector providers to care for our children is reaching extremely high levels and that there is an issue about quality, particularly in relation to those young children who are supported out of area, and the issue of cost to local authorities because these organisations, know that local authorities have no alternative but to purchase this care. What do you think needs to happen in terms of putting some kind of cap on these organisations asking for extraordinarily high levels of funding to support these young people?

**Will Quince:** All very well made points. If you were designing a system from scratch now, your first response would be that we would not start from here. I have spent a lot of time over the past few months since I was appointed into this role visiting children's homes, both secure and open, and meeting with care leavers—those who have gone through the care system—to better understand the system. During recess I spent three days shadowing social workers and visiting children's homes with Josh MacAlister, who is leading on the care review, so I very much understand these challenges.

I am a Conservative so I believe in the market but I think this market is fundamentally broken. It has got to the point—this is a personal view—at which we have moved from profit, which in essence is not a bad thing, in many cases to profiteering because of the nature of the market and the demand being so much greater than supply. It has been built up over many decades through charities and others exiting the sector, the private sector entering, and more children going into care at a later age, which means that residential homes are the more appropriate setting. It means that £8,000 plus per week is not an unusual figure. As a result, local authorities are spending huge amounts of resource at that end and are not able to invest where we would love them to be investing: in early help, supporting children to stay with families wherever possible. This is fundamentally what the care review is going to look at and address.



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In terms of how we fix it, and there is no easy fix or overnight fix, there was a £40 million investment in secure children's homes in 2016. They tend to be by far the most expensive provision by the very nature of the buildings and how they have to be. A further £24 million was invested in 2021, but we recognised that the market is so broken that we secured a significant investment for the building of more secure and open children's homes in the most recent spending review of £259 million; £194 million of that will be spent on secure children's home, of which some areas have none currently—no provision—so they are sending children and young people many, many miles away. I visited one recently at St Helens. Some £65 million will be spent on open children's homes.

The answer to your question is yes. Josh MacAlister in the review will be looking at all of these issues, and we will look very carefully at his recommendations.

**Q362 Kim Johnson:** Can I pick up on another point regarding vulnerable young children in homes? My colleague mentioned 16 and the cliff edge. We know that a lot of young people and children in care homes end up in the prison pipeline, and that some of that is related to SEND. A lot of these young people are vulnerable and are targeted by gangs and crime, involving them in county lines. What do you think needs to happen to ensure that this does not continue?

**Will Quince:** I will bring Fran in, because we have done a significant amount of work in this space, working with Home Office counterparts and police authorities up and down the country. What we want to do wherever possible is not criminalise these young people. They have been through enough already. Quite frankly, if a child were to commit an offence in your own home, it is unlikely as a parent that you would call the police. I would like to think that in the same way you would try to manage the situation. In some cases it is the appropriate thing to do, but over the past 10 years we have more than halved the number of occasions in which a child has been criminalised within a residential care setting. I am always mindful that we need to do more in this space because gangs are becoming more sophisticated and they are preying on the most vulnerable and dysfunctional children, some of whom will be in residential homes. Fran, you have the data on this.

**Fran Oram:** Yes. I can make three points. The first is to add to the point about profit and the functioning of the children's homes' market. One additional report that we are waiting for with bated breath is the Competition and Markets Authority Report, which we are going to receive very soon.

**Will Quince:** In March?

**Fran Oram:** Yes, in the next couple of weeks. That is looking at how the market functions, nature of profit, nature of ownership, nature of regulation, Government role and so on. We will be considering that



alongside the care review and looking to make reforms to the market so that it functions much more in the interests of children and outcomes.

In relation to criminal activity, there are two separate points. First is the point that the Minister was making around criminalisation of children in children's homes. There was traditionally a culture of calling the police quite quickly if children broke something or were violent in a children's home. Over 2,000 children per year were prosecuted for violence or criminal offences while they were residents in children's homes. As the Minister said, that is not something that we would do to our children expressing distress and trauma at home. Through a range of actions, we have managed to reduce that number very significantly. It is around 1,000 children now, and it is very much an action of last resort to call the police or to prosecute a child for an action in a children's home.

You were also asking about extra-familial harms and the risk of children being exploited by gangs or sexually exploited. We absolutely agree that some of the children in children's social care are more vulnerable to that exploitation than other children. They might not have the protective factors of their family or their family might not be able to protect them. They might be in an area where the gang is very dominant. There is obviously a safeguarding duty on the three statutory partners—police, health and social care—to protect children from that exploitation.

As the Minister said, we have a lot of work under way to try to strengthen that and ensure that it works more effectively in children's best interests. The care review is a key component because for a lot of the teenagers who have been taken into care, it is not the traditional, interfamilial harm that they are being protected from; it is that harm outside the home. That might be what is driving some of the placements outside their home area, to remove them from the risk of exploitation. There is a lot more work to do.

**Q363 Dr Caroline Johnson:** I have been listening carefully to your answers. As part of the inquiry and in general, I have spoken to young people with experience of care. One of the things that young people worry about is the supported living accommodation—that when they are 16, they will go from a fairly preferable situation into one where their supported living may be with other young people in a similar situation. Some of them worry about ending up with other young people who perhaps are involved in illegal or other activity, and being quite vulnerable, and struggling to keep out of it because it is happening within their own living accommodation. What are you doing to avoid that situation?

**Will Quince:** You are specifically referring to unregulated provision. We believe about 7% of looked-after children—16 and 17-year-olds and some just turning 18—will be in unregulated provision. The answer to your question is that for some it will be the right place and they will want to be there. I met with a number of care leavers last week from the care leavers' house project, who were all saying that that is where they wanted to be. They had to grow up very quickly and they were very



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independently minded, but they needed that support network around them to have the stability to make it work. The house project worked in that respect.

I am also conscious it is not going to work for everyone. What we have done in terms of banning unregulated provision for those under 16 has not created an arbitrary point at which looked-after children should be moved into unregulated provision—quite the opposite. We have to do the right thing. We already know that through the Staying Put pilot that we have—

**Chair:** Can I ask you to be concise? We have a lot to get through.

**Will Quince:** Apologies. In the Staying Put pilot, for example, you can stay with your foster parent after you are 18. The Staying Close pilot, which is key to that because that is about, yes, you are going into semi-independent accommodation, but you are getting a key worker, who will in effect, as a parent would, be giving you support, advice and guidance around bills and moving in and so on. We expect local authorities to provide £2,000 for moving-in costs, furniture and that sort of thing. It will not be right for every young person, but I would not want to move away from unregulated provision entirely for 16, 17 and 18-year-olds, because what younger care leavers are telling me is that, with the support, it is where they want to be.

Q364 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** How do you ensure that that position is where they want to be? If they want to be in unregulated provision, that might be the right thing for them, but how do you ensure that they are not put in an unregulated provision in an area that makes it very difficult for them, and in area where they may be—

**Will Quince:** The first point is that local authorities have a duty to do the right thing by the right child based on their individual circumstances. You are right to some extent that around 20% of placements are out of area. Some are for very good reasons—county lines or gang activity. For others, is it about the amount of provision that is available locally.

**Ian Mearns:** The overriding driver is the value of property that they have to move into, there is no doubt about that. Unfortunately that means that an awful lot of youngsters are being moved out of area simply for economic reasons.

**Chair:** Caroline, do you have any follow-up?

**Dr Caroline Johnson:** No, that is fine, thank you.

Q365 **Apsana Begum:** I want to ask a question about the quality of education that children in care receive. We know through multiple pieces of evidence that children in care are less likely to attend good or outstanding schools than non-looked-after children. It is effectively discrimination within the system for children to be rejected in this way. What is the Department doing to ensure that the best performing schools



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grant admission to vulnerable learners? Do you think that the Department should issue proper guidance in relation to section 19 legislation that would empower and guide local authorities to enact their duties?

**Will Quince:** The first point about potential discrimination, is that the difference is 77% versus 81% for their comparative peers. That is unacceptable, but the gap is not as wide as you suggest. However, placement in good or outstanding schools should be a lot higher for looked-after children because of the statutory duty to that effect.

As I said to the Chair earlier, we need to do more about beefing up the powers of virtual school heads working alongside social workers to find the right placement. We need to drill into the data a bit more. We touched on the SEND point and I also referenced the fact— we will look up the figure—that about 35% have an education, health and care plan. It may well be that the requirement for specialist provision is the driver in the differential. But I will drill into the data and will gladly write to the Committee with more information.

Q366 **Apsana Begum:** It would be helpful to understand as well, in terms of section 19 duties, whether there can be some kind of evaluation in terms of local authorities and how well they understand how to enact their duties under it. That has come up in the evidence that we have received, certainly as being a gap in terms of what local authorities feel that they can do.

**Will Quince:** We can certainly explore that. I want to ensure that social workers and virtual heads are empowered in this space. The power is a strong one. Even when schools are full and classes are full, they can be mandated to take looked-after children. But it is all well and good having that policy intent; if it is not being enacted on the ground for the benefit of children and young people, it is meaningless. I will certainly explore further what more we need to do to make sure that it is happening and beef up those powers if necessary.

Q367 **Apsana Begum:** I have one more question. As has been already mentioned, we heard from young people in care in one of our private sessions. We are fully aware that looked-after children do not always get allocated an education placement in a timely way and sometimes they can be out of education for weeks or months. Why do you think that is happening and what could be done to address this?

I do have a question on data as well. It does seem to be the case that the Department—and do please correct me if I am wrong—does not necessarily know how many looked-after children are missing and not in education. Is any consideration being given to data that is available such as school census data and social care data, and how that can be married up to get a sense of where the missing children are and if they are in unregulated provision?



**Will Quince:** The first point I will take in relation to looked-after children not being in education for weeks or in some cases months. They should always be given the highest priority in school admissions. We know that there is an issue with in-year admissions. We updated the schools admissions code guidance last year but we will monitor that very closely. It is important to stress that local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that looked-after children received suitable education in the meantime, even when they are waiting for a place. That could be, for example, through alternative provision. Fran, do you want to take the second point?

**Fran Oram:** Yes, I want to add that local authorities are meant to find suitable new education within 20 school days, so there certainly should not be long gaps and local authorities should be complying with the personal education plan for the individual child. If there is evidence of that not being complied with, that is something that we would want to look at very closely. Obviously, as the Committee is driving at, children being in good and outstanding schools and attending is a key factor that determines their outcomes in terms of attaining—

Q368 **Apsana Begum:** What can be done? If local authorities are faced with a completely unregulated market, they do not have many options and they have to find places as quickly as possible. Are they not in a situation where they just say yes to the first provision that is available or suitable for a young person?

**Fran Oram:** They are under a statutory duty to act in accordance with the child's interests and there is a range of different actors involved here. The virtual school head is very important, and the child's social worker is very important. Moving a child out of their local authority area for a placement needs to be signed off by the director of children's services, so these are not things that they are doing lightly. But the point that you are driving at around gaps in provision and the geographical issues that your fellow Committee member drove at earlier are issues that we are looking at through the CMA report and the care review. We do need better children's home provision more equally distributed across the country so that children can go to their local schools and succeed there.

Q369 **Ian Mearns:** Isn't it part of the problem, though, that by their very nature good and outstanding schools tend to be full? What can local authorities do about getting youngsters who need a place into a good and outstanding school that is full already? We are not talking about tens of thousands of youngsters across the country; we are talking about individual local authority cases, so it could be half a dozen or a dozen kids who they are trying to place. Can we have a situation where local authorities can direct a school to take a child above the planned admission number?

**Will Quince:** Yes, that can and should be happening.

**Ian Mearns:** But is it happening uniformly across the country? Are



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schools routinely kicking back against that? Because I believe that to be the case.

**Fran Oram:** We do not have evidence that that is the case but if you have that evidence we would like to look at it because it should not be the case. There is already a statutory duty for schools to take looked-after children and to give them priority, and a school can be directed to do that.

**Ian Mearns:** Even above the plan?

**Will Quince:** Yes, even above the plan, even if a class is full.

**Fran Oram:** Even above capacity, yes. Because, as you say, it is small numbers, so it is not the kind of thing that is going to necessarily swing that school's ability to educate everybody.

**Ian Mearns:** Sometimes the problem can be, though, because of the location of children's homes in comparison to a local school. That can be problematic. Thank you.

Q370 **Tom Hunt:** Why do you think 56% of those in care have learning disabilities? Why do you think it is so high?

**Will Quince:** It is a very, very good question and we do not entirely know the answer. We know some of the drivers. For example, foetal alcohol disorder syndrome will play a part, as will childhood trauma and mental health issues. We probably need to do a lot more research in this space but my instinct is that the drivers are numerous and complex.

Q371 **Tom Hunt:** Do you think that some of it might be down to the fact that in the past we have not always got the SEND provision right and that is putting intolerable pressure on families? Often they feel like they are battling against the system, and sometimes the result is that they cannot cope anymore and often children end up in care.

**Will Quince:** I suppose if you flip that—it is an interesting point and challenge and the honest answer is I do not know. Is there a higher prevalence of children with SEND whose families then break down to the point at which a child needs to be taken into care? We can certainly explore that. Looking at what the care review is looking at now—I have spoken at length with Josh MacAlister about this—the early help is going to be key to that.

It is not just about the cost, although the cost, as we know, for taking a child into care is immense; it is also about the outcomes. We have discussed today some of the terrible outcomes for children who go into the care system. I say some, because many children go into the care system and thrive, but too many do not and that is a problem. The cost of poor outcomes is so high too that the investment in early help is going to be key. I have no doubt that that is what Josh is going to recommend as part of the care review.



**Q372 Tom Hunt:** Thank you, Minister. Stability is clearly beneficial to all young people, in or out of school. Instability is clearly something to try to avoid. The concern I have here is that instability and moving schools, having different teachers, transitions, can be particularly bad for those with special educational needs, who often develop very particular relationships with certain teachers who they form trust with. While instability and moving schools is not good for anyone and would not be good for anyone in care, my concern is that it will be particularly bad for those who have special educational needs who are in care.

The point that I am making is about both those who have an EHCP, and those who may not have a plan but who still have some learning disabilities and who need specific support. Are we confident that enough is being done to capture that information and make sure that none of it is lost? If they do move schools unavoidably or into a different setting, does that information go with them? We have had a session with some care leavers who said there was a problem with information getting lost when they moved from place to place.

**Will Quince:** There is certainly a problem with that. Josh will be looking at that as part of the care review. But your fundamental point is right, that stability is the best thing for any child, particularly so for a child in care who has been through the trauma of being removed from their family environment, and even more so when they have a special educational need or disability. We are very much alive to that and wherever possible we have to provide stability both in terms of accommodation, and in terms of people and support networks around them. I am confident that as part of the care review, that is the direction of travel of where we want to get to. We will never entirely get it right, because of where placements are and because of where schools are but wherever possible we have to give children the stability that they crave—that unfortunately they did not have from an early point in their life, but which we wish that they had had.

**Q373 Tom Hunt:** I have one more quick question to do with bullying. I have spoken to those who have been in care, and they feel that they were bullied and targeted when they were at school. Is this something that you think is getting worse or better? Is any work going on with the education sector to try to stamp it out or raise awareness of it?

**Will Quince:** I am not aware of specific bullying in relation to looked-after children but it would be naïve of me to suggest that it would not exist, because children pick on other children for any reason, for being different. We have the mandatory RHSE curriculum now. A lot of bullying derives from ignorance of someone's circumstances and the challenges and struggles that they have had. If there is more that we need to do around that RHSE curriculum—I mentioned earlier that it is an ever-evolving process—and if we need to look at more awareness around what being in care and being a care leaver means, then I am very, very keen to explore what needs doing.



**Q374 Dr Caroline Johnson:** I want to come back to something that you said about moving places. We have heard evidence that some children are experiencing large gaps, sometimes months of gaps, when they have move placement and they are not put in schools. They have months out of school, they are in that school for a little while, then they move placement again and they are out of school for months. It is perhaps not surprising that they face huge challenges in getting those grades that you talked about. What are you doing to monitor any gaps that children have? You said that they have a right to have these places, but they are not being given them, are they? What are you doing to monitor those gaps and who are you holding to account on occasions when children spend, say, more than two weeks out of school?

**Will Quince:** It is a fair question and the first point is that it should not be happening. The second point is that the local authority has a statutory duty to ensure that that is not happening and where there is no placement available, they would secure a placement in alternative provision locally. The third point would be that the virtual school head and the social worker should be holding the local authority to account. I am conscious, as I mentioned to the Chair earlier, that we do not have very good data but we should be able to get better data from virtual school heads in this area. I have met with virtual school heads in Suffolk and Hertfordshire. We should have a strong enough national network to get that information. Finally, I believe that Ofsted will also hold the local authority to account in this regard.

**Q375 Dr Caroline Johnson:** Do you have a deadline?

**Will Quince:** It should be done within 20 school days.

**Dr Caroline Johnson:** That is not always happening, is it?

**Will Quince:** Four weeks.

**Dr Caroline Johnson:** That is clearly, from what we have heard, not always happening.

**Will Quince:** No, and we probably need to understand whether that is the exception or the norm. Any single case like that is going to lead to poor outcomes and put an individual under huge pressure, especially if they are a teenager and it comes at an important point in their education. That is going to be hugely challenging; I completely get that. With even one child it should not be happening, but we need to better understand if it is a widespread problem.

**Q376 Dr Caroline Johnson:** Related to children in care, one of the things we have heard about is the prevalence of abuse in care of children who are looked after. What are you doing as Minister to ensure that that never happens?

**Will Quince:** I will bring Fran in because she will be on top of a lot of the work that we are doing. The worst bit of my job, without question, is



reading the weekly serious incident report. I can never prevent or stop any case of abuse anywhere in this country, be it in a care home or anywhere else. I wish I could. However, what we can do is put procedures, processes, plans, safeguards and checks in place, and ensure that wherever there is a serious incident report of abuse or neglect, we learn the lessons from it and put those procedures and processes in place to ensure that it does not happen again.

**Fran Oram:** Clearly some children are taken into care because of abuse in the family. The prospect of children being abused while in the care of the state is about the worst thing that anybody could imagine, because they are the most vulnerable. They have been brought in for protection and that is clearly completely unacceptable. As the Minister said, there are a range of responses to that. It would be a police matter and Ofsted would investigate. I do not think that that is prevalent in the children's homes that we have in this country.

The Minister referred earlier to the changing nature of children's home provision over history and some of that has been a response to historic institutional abuse, which I do not think is a feature of the system that we have now. That is not to say that there are no individuals who should not be working in children's homes. We have a range of workforce development activities under way, and the care review is the key thing there to ensure that we have skilled people who care and are suitable to be caring for children working in the system. I am keen to continue to improve that but I do not think it is a widespread issue, thankfully.

**Chair:** We are running a bit late but we are going to try to finish not too long after 12 pm.

Q377 **Ian Mearns:** As we discussed earlier, youngsters are missing out and therefore we have some continuing alarming statistics regarding educational outcomes and work outcomes for youngsters. Care leavers aged 19 to 21 are over three times more likely not to be in education, employment or training than their peers. About 41% of care leavers aged 19 to 21 are NEET, compared to 12% of other young people—12% is too high, but 41% is ridiculous. Given everything that we have discussed earlier, and as a matter of urgency, what are we going to do try to prevent that from being the case? What we also know is the number of youngsters who are not only NEET but end up in the criminal justice system.

**Will Quince:** Yes, you are absolutely right. When I look at the figures, as you rightly point out, 41% of care leavers are NEET, compared with 12% of their comparative peers; 25% of single homeless people have been in care; and, as you rightly point out, 24% of those in prison have been in care. I take this incredibly seriously. I just spent two and a half years at the DWP with responsibility for the care leaver policy there. At age 27, 22% of care leavers are in employment compared with 57%. Even when they are, there is an average £6,000 pay gap. This is totally unacceptable.



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There are two points to that. The first is about what we can do for care leavers now and what we can do more broadly to ensure that the care system better serves them, that it is more centred around their needs and that they develop better outcomes. We have touched on some of that and the care review will go a long way to addressing that.

If you look at some of the reasons and drivers of why young people leaving care have poor educational outcomes, and have a higher prevalence in the criminal justice system and homelessness, it is often around the transition—those key points in their care where they have been failed. That is why we are investing £33 million in the Staying Put programme, which is a pilot, which enables young people to stay with foster carers until they are 21. We have the Staying Close pilot—and we have had some very, very good evidence coming out of that pilot that is very compelling—with £2.8 million for 50 local authorities to provide extra support for care leavers at risk of rough sleeping.

We have lots of pilots under way at the moment and we are now developing the evidence base to look at whether we can roll them out further across the country, because we know that the better support that we give care leavers at the point at which they are in care and those key transition points in care, the higher the likelihood that they will have better educational outcomes and better employment outcomes. I can touch on other things like apprenticeships and the way that we are supporting care leavers into work through Government Departments and others, but I am conscious that—

**Q378 Ian Mearns:** If we do not get this right for youngsters in those different transition phases—the cliff edge and onwards—what we have is a huge personal cost for those youngsters, but a huge societal cost and inherently a significant cost for a range of other Government Departments—the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice, Housing and Communities. It is all there. You have talked about the pilots but how far are we away from those pilots becoming across-the-board provisions? The stats speak for themselves.

**Will Quince:** Very close. Treasury will not allow me to go further than that, other than to say that you have to prove something works and then you can secure the funding to roll it out further. I think we are getting close to being in that place.

Do not underestimate the cross-Government commitment on this. We have the care leaver covenant board, which is an inter-ministerial board. A Minister from every Government Department sits on that, including the Treasury, which is important because we need them to fund measures. Part of my role as Minister for Children and Families, is to ensure that every single Minister across Government recognises that for the children who are looked after, we are the corporate parent. We have a responsibility. The costs—not just financial, but in terms of outcomes for them—are so high if we get it wrong, as you rightly pointed out. I know that we are now getting into a better place.



Yes, there are more Government Departments looking at what we can do for care leavers now, but things like reduced travel or a bus ticket are going to help someone now, and I get that. We have to do all those measures, but we also have to look at how we avoid people getting into the position of either being in care, full stop—whether it can be avoided and it is the right thing for them to stay with a family—but also that they have better care experiences that mean that a lot of these issues will not exist further down the line. I think, through the care review and early help, we will be in that position.

**Q379 Ian Mearns:** We have also heard that just 2% of care leavers access an apprenticeship. We do know that for young people who are struggling to live independently, the apprenticeship rates of pay are prohibitive from their perspective. That means they are forced into other low-paid work, but where they are not getting that derisory apprenticeship rate. Is there anything that we can do in a targeted way in order to help young people get into an apprenticeship and live on what they get?

**Chair:** And to add to that very briefly, will you publish data on the proportion of care leavers who take up apprenticeships in next year's statistical release?

**Will Quince:** My understanding is that we will publish that because we will have that data.

**Fran Oram:** I will have to check that.

**Will Quince:** We will check. At the moment we meet employers' training costs for care leavers up to 25. We have a £1,000 bursary that care leavers up to age 25 can claim. I do recognise the challenge that you flag around the rate, because many other apprentices do have the support of a family to fall back on; they are living in a family home and so on. I am alive to this and I am looking at what more we can do. Yes, it is brilliant when a care leaver can claim up to a £1,000 bursary when they start an apprenticeship, and 300 care leavers claim that. It is not good enough and I get that. We want more. I want more going to university, I want more going into further education, I want more going into the apprenticeship route too—whatever is right for that young individual.

**Q380 Ian Mearns:** Would you therefore consider a care leaver apprenticeship rate that is all out there on its own?

**Will Quince:** There are all sorts of measures across Government where it is right and proper that we treat care leavers as being special cases, in part because of the experiences that they have had and in part because we have to accept that we are the parent. In many cases we just have to look at what a parent would do in those circumstances. The reality is that a parent would step in and help.

**Q381 Ian Mearns:** I am afraid to say that a parent would help, usually beyond 25 as well, so that is something that we also have to look at. As with all of these things, we obviously want young people who are coming out of



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the care system to be trained and better qualified, but they might also at some subsequent point need to be retrained and requalified because the jobs market in their own locality changes.

Lastly from my perspective—we touched on this earlier on in terms of the generality of young people—what needs to be done specifically to strengthen mental health and wellbeing support for children and young people in the care system?

**Chair:** If you can, in a nutshell please, and then I have a quick question from Caroline and then go on to Kim.

**Will Quince:** It is very hard to do this in a nutshell. Over Covid the feedback is very mixed from children in care because of the support that they have received. Some love the environment that they are in; some really struggled. Many of the challenges that they face will be the same as for other young people. We have invested £1 million recently in an evaluation.

**Fran Oram:** Exactly, and that is about assessing the mental health needs of children when they are going into care. As we referred to earlier, a lot of children are going into care with a lot of traumatic experiences, so assessing the state of their mental wellbeing at that point when they are first going into care will then enable the system to provide the right support and prevent those needs from escalating into crisis.

Q382 **Ian Mearns:** In answer to a lot of the questions today you have talked about experiments, pilots, evaluations. I trust all of these things are going to be fully published in a timely way so that we can actually learn the lessons.

**Will Quince:** More than that; they will be published, the evaluation will be published, and then I hope that you will be saying how brilliant it is that we are rolling it out around the country. I cannot promise that on every single one.

Q383 **Chair:** When is the MacAlister review coming out?

**Will Quince:** It is spring, although the only caveat that I add to that is that I have said to Josh that it is really important that we have the national panel review in relation to the tragic deaths of Arthur and Star—that the findings of those are incorporated into his report. I think people would find it strange if he had not considered the findings of the national panel review as part of the proposals that he makes in terms of reforming the case. That is why I cannot commit to an exact date and of course it is independent and in the hands of Josh, but I am very keen; I would like those findings to be incorporated.

Q384 **Ian Mearns:** Are we talking about Met Office-delineated spring or—

**Will Quince:** The one within my control is the SEND review and I can assure you that is happening this month. It will certainly be spring.



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Q385 **Chair:** With respect to the SEND review, will there be a statement in Parliament?

**Will Quince:** That is all being worked up at the moment, but that is the plan, yes.

Q386 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** I have a quick question about the responsibility for 18 to 25-year-olds. I have noticed from a particular case in my constituency that it was not clearly defined who had responsibility. Where a child had been placed for their own safety out of the area in which they were originally living and then had spent more than a decade in the care of a single foster carer, having built up a loving and caring relationship with that carer and had a very good outcome, this young person got to 18 and was entitled to care from 18 to 25. But it fell down the cracks of a row between the two local authorities: the one where this young man now resides and the one where the young person had come from originally. Can you do more to ensure that it is clear who has the responsibility, and in particular that if a child has been placed out of area, they are entitled to stay where they have effectively grown up?

**Fran Oram:** I do not know the specifics of that case, but it sounds like there is an issue there with the special educational needs and disability system and the transition from the children's version of that system to the adult version of that system, and perhaps the link to the children's social care system too. There is a join-up piece about, as you say, ownership. It might be the belonging provision in the legislation that is an issue there.

I can only say that all of the systems should be focused on the individual's best interests. If they are entitled to care to the age of 25, their wishes should be respected. If they want to stay in that area, petty squabbling between boundaries and debates about who pays for what is not in the child's interests or the adult's interests. I would hope that people could set that aside, but obviously if the legislation is a barrier there, we should be looking at that. As the Minister said, we have the SEND Green Paper coming out soon and the care review shortly thereafter. Across all of these reforms and the school reforms that the Department is working on, we need to be making sure that the child and the family are always at the heart of how the system operates so that it functions in their best interest.

**Dr Caroline Johnson:** I would look to the Department to clarify so that the child does not end up in what was effectively a row over who paid for all the care that the young man needed.

**Fran Oram:** I am happy to look at that in more detail.

Q387 **Kim Johnson:** Minister, a third of care leavers experience homelessness in the first two years of leaving care. I would be interested to find out from you what you think is the correlation between the lack of support or reduced support that care leavers have, particularly from social workers.



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We had a very powerful roundtable discussion with young care leavers a couple of weeks ago. They talked about the inconsistent support that they had and the number of social workers and other support workers they had in their lives. I would be interested to hear from you in terms of what needs to happen to make that better for young people.

**Will Quince:** Yes, you are right and it should not be happening. It is one of the reasons why we have been piloting Staying Close. In effect, it is support to move into accommodation with a wraparound package of support, including a key worker, if you like, who almost acts as a parent would in those circumstances. Interestingly—although this has not been published yet so I am probably not supposed to say it but I will anyway—the evaluation that I have seen so far in relation to Staying Close is that it shows some really, really positive impacts around mental wellbeing, around reducing NEET, around accommodation stability and also on strong relationships and support networks for the young people. For me that feels like the direction of travel and where we have to go.

I had a lot of experience of those who have experience of homelessness and rough sleeping in my previous role. You look at what the key drivers of that, including accommodation in and of itself. Many people will then end up homeless, rough sleeping or sofa surfing because the accommodation failed and it failed because they did not get the support to maintain that independent accommodation. That is the area that I think we need to spend more time and energy on, and invest our focus on.

Q388 **Kim Johnson:** It is great that Staying Close has had some positive impact.

**Will Quince:** Huge positive impact.

**Kim Johnson:** But it is only in eight areas at the moment, is that right? When will it be rolled out nationally and have you done any costing of how much that support will cost nationally, and who will meet those costs and how?

**Will Quince:** Yes, we have done the costings. Yes, I would like to roll it out further. I hope to be able to say more in the coming months.

Q389 **Chair:** Finally, going back to what my colleague Tom Hunt said about special educational needs pupils, although not just SEND pupils, being moved from school to school, we were told by the Children's Commissioner and the head of the Children's Society that children lose their places on CAMHS when they move to new areas. Why not introduce an educational passport for children in care that includes not just their educational attainment when they move schools? I hope that they get moved to fewer schools because there are too many of these changes, but there needs to be something that includes their mental health and special educational needs, so that they are guaranteed that they will not fall to the bottom of the list, and get the right care, treatment and



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educational support that they need.

**Will Quince:** That is an interesting idea. I will take it away and look at it.

**Chair:** Thank you. You have said about looking at a lot of things today, which I appreciate—

**Will Quince:** To some extent, Chair, that is what the Committee is for. We do not have all the good ideas, as much as we would like to think sometimes that we do. The Committee often challenges us, rightly, and it makes us think about what we are doing and how we can do things better.

**Chair:** If you have any thoughts, it would be great to let us know by letter. Ian's question on the outcomes again goes back to the GCSE issues that I raised early.

Can I thank you? We have only gone three minutes over time, which is fairly remarkable, as it is a complex and difficult area. I appreciate the effort and the time of both of you; there were some long questions.

**Will Quince:** A pleasure, as always.