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[Debates]

Department for Education - Estimates Day

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Carol Monaghan

Let me begin by welcoming the new Secretary of State to her position. She has been committed and diligent in her role as Universities Minister, and I am sure she will bring the same commitment to this role. I know that she has spoken out strongly in favour of skills education, and I am sure that many of us will be watching with anticipation over the next few months.

Let me also congratulate the Chair of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon). As always, he spoke with knowledge and passion, and I concur with much of what he said. He talked a great deal about the number of children who are absent from school, and I want to drill down into that. In the case of some children, absence is due to illness and not being able to connect properly with schools. There are Toggle showing location of many instances in which, if we had better links between schools and homes, young people would have better access to education. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME), I have done a great deal of work on the issue of children who are excluded owing to that condition through no fault of their own, and I hope we can do some cross-party work on the subject. There are other reasons for children not to be at school. An issue that persists in England, but does not happen in Scotland, is the off-rolling of children. Off-rolling to massage school results or to get rid of the problem is not good enough. These young people should still be the responsibility of the local authority and of the school, and the school should be doing outreach to ensure that they can access education. This has to stop.

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