



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Equalities and Human Rights Committee

**Thursday 15 June 2017**

**Session 5**



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**Thursday 15 June 2017**

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**EQUALITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE**

**16<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2017, Session 5**

**CONVENER**

\*Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

- \*Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con)
- \*Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)
- \*Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
- \*David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
- \*Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

- Derek Allan (Kirkcaldy High School)
- Cameron Bowie (Kirkcaldy High School)
- Hannah Brisbane (Girlguiding Scotland)
- Samena Dean (Scotland Against Criminalising Communities)
- The Rev Dr Richard Frazer (Church of Scotland)
- Anthony Horan (Bishops Conference of Scotland)
- Charlie Lynch (Scottish Secular Society)
- Niamh McGeechan (Lanarkshire Rape Crisis Centre)
- Susie McGuinness (Girlguiding Scotland)
- Brittany Ritell (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)
- Anne Whiteford (Scouts Scotland)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Claire Menzies

**LOCATION**

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)



**Scottish Parliament**  
**Equalities and Human Rights**  
**Committee**

*Thursday 15 June 2017*

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:05]*

**Decision on Taking Business in**  
**Private**

**The Convener (Christina McKelvie):** Good morning and welcome to the 16th meeting in 2017 of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee. I make the usual request that any mobile devices are switched to airplane mode. We have apologies from our colleague Alex Cole-Hamilton.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on whether to take in private our consideration of forthcoming legislation at future meetings. Is the committee content to take that approach?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**Bullying and Harassment of**  
**Children and Young People in**  
**Schools**

09:06

**The Convener:** Under item 2, our substantive agenda item, we continue our inquiry into the bullying and harassment of children and young people in schools in Scotland. We have a big panel and we are very happy that the panellists could all come along and contribute. We want to ensure that the recommendations that we make to Government are well informed, and we do that by talking to as many organisations, especially young people's organisations, as we possibly can.

Later this morning, we will consider with our second panel the issues faced by pupils with faith who are bullied and the challenges that faith schools have in modern society.

Yesterday, the committee informally met a group of young women from different sectors, some of whom are here this morning.

Our conversation should be as open and robust as it possibly can be. This morning, sensitive information will be shared. I implore you to share that information, because we need to hear it, but we understand the sensitivities involved. In order to maintain confidentiality and to take account of any sensitivities, I ask that panellists ensure that they do not identify anyone when making their contributions.

I want everyone to introduce themselves and to tell me a wee bit about who they are, what they do and why they are here. After that, if people are comfortable, we will start the questioning.

I am the committee convener and the member of the Scottish Parliament for Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse.

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** Good morning. I am one of the Lothian MSPs. I quite often wonder why I am here.

**Derek Allan (Kirkcaldy High School):** I am the rector—or headteacher—of Kirkcaldy high school in Fife. We have been invited because of our recent track record in creating an inclusive and welcoming school ethos.

**Cameron Bowie (Kirkcaldy High School):** I am a fifth year student at Kirkcaldy high school. I am the chairperson of the school's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender club.

**Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** I am the MSP for Caithness, Sutherland and Ross.

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** I am a member of Parliament for the Glasgow region.

**Niamh McGeechan (Lanarkshire Rape Crisis Centre):** I am a student and a member of the stamp out media patriarchy—STAMP—project in Lanarkshire.

**Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab):** I am a member of Parliament for the West Scotland region.

**Hannah Brisbane (Girlguiding Scotland):** I am a Girlguiding advocate. We are here today to talk about sexual harassment in schools.

**Susie McGuinness (Girlguiding Scotland):** Like Hannah, I am from Girlguiding Scotland.

**David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** I am the member for Kirkcaldy. I declare an interest as a member of the Scout Association.

**Anne Whiteford (Scouts Scotland):** I am from Scouts Scotland, where I have a national role in charge of development.

**The Convener:** The panellists around the table are diverse—we have people from schools who are using their leadership to change the culture and ethos of their school, young people from non-uniformed and uniformed organisations and a member of the STAMP project. I know that Lanarkshire project incredibly well and what the people involved in it do.

We are coming close to the end of our inquiry. We have heard a number of pieces of evidence about organisations in schools, including Government-level and local authority-level organisations. We have heard about the input of teachers and young people, especially in relation to the committee work that they do when they become school spokespeople, and the input of spokespeople from organisations and the work that they do. As you can see, it is a whole-community approach. It is not just about 9 o'clock to 3 o'clock. It is the whole day and it involves the contributions that all those organisations make.

We have received excellent written evidence from most of this morning's witnesses, and we are grateful for that. It contains some clear statistical information, and I know that Girlguiding Scotland has some bang-up-to-date statistics, so I will begin with a question for Susie McGuinness and Hannah Brisbane. Can you tell us a wee bit about the campaign that you have been involved in, the things that you think the committee should be looking at and the recommendations that we should make to Government?

**Hannah Brisbane:** Every year Girlguiding does a United Kingdom-wide survey, and one of our roles as advocates is to design the questions for that survey and decide what we want it to focus

on. The survey goes out across the UK to all girls aged from seven to 21, whether they are in Girlguiding or not, and in 2015 one of the main issues highlighted in their responses was the levels of sexual harassment in schools. One of the biggest statistics was that 59 per cent of girls had experienced some sexual harassment in school. In response, Girlguiding UK came up with a campaign to end that, because we do not think that it is acceptable. Girlguiding Scotland has taken its own approach in Scotland, and that is why we have been invited today.

**Susie McGuinness:** We hope that the situation can be improved through better personal and social education in schools that is compulsory and of high quality, through schools having a duty to prevent and tackle sexual harassment, keep a record of that and be held accountable, and through there being in place national guidance for schools so that they know how to take a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and tackle it effectively.

**The Convener:** I noted in your submission the statistic that you have just cited, that 59 per cent of girls aged 13 to 21 felt that they had faced some form of sexual harassment at school or in college. A big part of what we need to look at now is how that is tackled and handled, especially if it is not happening during the school day but goes on outside that. One of the recommendations in your submission was about online bullying. We heard evidence yesterday from a young person from Aberdeen who is working with my colleague Gillian Martin on some initiatives in their school, and I will say more about schools in a second. Do you have any insights that you think we should be aware of in relation to how to tackle that and how to give guidance to young women, particularly the young women with whom you are working, on how to cope with that? What has the reaction been when they have taken the issue to a teacher or headteacher?

**Susie McGuinness:** We would like guidance teachers in schools to feel much better equipped to deal with sexual harassment that is happening online. Young people have spoken to us a lot about things being put on Snapchat and sent around schools. Really young girls have had nude photographs taken and leaked. That is quite shocking to a lot of adults, but it is widespread in schools and it goes under the radar, because it is not happening in the classroom and teachers are not sure whether they are allowed to deal with it, what steps they should be taking or whether the police should be involved. That is obviously an upsetting thing for girls to be dealing with in school, and we would like teachers to know how to deal with it.

I know from my own experience, and from what I have heard from our friend Katie—who cannot be here today, but was in yesterday talking about it—that there are instances of girls who have been filmed being assaulted, and that there is non-consensual footage of rape going around schools and not being reported or dealt with. It is a frightening thing, and it is so large that teachers do not know who to go to or how to deal with it, so it often goes unreported. When it does get reported, that can often make the situation worse, because it is not dealt with appropriately and people do not know what steps they can take. We would like guidance teachers in schools to know what steps they should be taking and how to report incidents to the police, so that young men see the consequences of those actions. If they do not see the consequences, we are creating a culture where that is an acceptable thing to be happening in schools, and it is clearly not.

**The Convener:** We have heard a plea about one aspect of how girls feel at school. I know that Derek Allan has attempted to deal with a number of aspects in his school, whether it be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex issues, teenage pregnancy or bullying and harassment. Can you give us an insight into how your school took such issues on board, took responsibility and changed the culture?

09:15

**Derek Allan:** I am happy to do that. I am interested in Susie McGuinness's comments, however. I find it frightening that guidance teachers would not know that that is a clear child protection issue. There is clear guidance for all teachers about how to progress issues and report them appropriately.

Yesterday, we had the police in Kirkcaldy high school with NHS Fife colleagues to talk to young people about sexting and keeping safe online. One thing that we have done—effectively, I think—is give senior pupils a peer-mentoring role with younger pupils. It is often very young children who share inappropriate images of themselves and make themselves vulnerable. The online footage of assault that Susie described is dreadful and I would hate to think that any school in Fife would not be well equipped to handle it. I am sure that it would.

**Susie McGuinness:** A lot of people are realising that it is happening to girls aged 12 or 13. It is more of a case for personal and social education. Issues of consent and online abuse need to be discussed much earlier—at the end of primary school, in my view. By primary 6, I was sitting in classes in which boys were taking it in turns to shout “rape” the loudest. Teachers need to realise that we need to combat that much earlier.

**Hannah Brisbane:** A lot of our statistics come from the seven to 12 age group, which is always surprising to a lot of people because they think that it happens a lot later. It is happening a lot earlier.

**Derek Allan:** I return to your other point, convener. The key thing is that prevention is far better than cure. Bullying policies in schools are important as frameworks but we would always want to get to the point at which bullying is minimised through the school's culture being such that it is not acceptable and not thought cool to be cruel. It is about building up a culture and ethos that are inclusive.

Just before I became a headteacher, I did a study tour of Canada as part of an Education Scotland trip. Schools there were very big on character education. Ontario had a specific curricular insert that looked at values such as honesty, trust, fairness and respect. Those were the kind of messages that I took back when I took over as head at Kirkcaldy high school—or, I should say, when I became head. “Took over” sounds rather grand.

We have built a values-based culture. The three core values are respect for self, respect for others, and respect for learning. We are trying to make that the drumbeat of the school, if you like. We have lots of posters and lots of discussion of the issues within the first few weeks of secondary school, and they become the theme of the lessons in several subject areas. Core to that is giving the pupils a strong voice, and equipping them to call out and challenge those who are not treating others fairly or are bullying others. It is based on a culture of equality, and making issues such as LGBT issues almost a kind of crusade to give the school something to coalesce around. As head, I want to take some of the sting out of the word “gay”, for example, by using it at assemblies and talking about our group.

A core group of about 24 young people have worked together to deliver assemblies, to inform the school's management team about what would be a useful way of building an ever more equal culture, and to become involved in local LGBT events, such as Fife pride, which is coming up in Kirkcaldy shortly. There is also a kind of buddying arrangement for younger kids who might identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender as they come through the school or who are keen to support that agenda as an ally.

As I say, rules are fine. However, a business guru once said that culture eats strategy for breakfast. It is about how the school feels as much as what happens when somebody reports an incident of bullying.

It is also important to separate prejudice-based bullying from incidents that happen because peer groups have fallen out. Clearly, sexual harassment is prejudice-based bullying, but sometimes when groups fall out kids get mixed up—parents do, too—and the one who is not doing so well out of the fall-out feels bullied. The feelings are real, but we must separate that kind of situation from prejudice-based bullying.

I do not know whether that is helpful. This might be the right time for Cameron Bowie to talk about the LGBT group.

**Cameron Bowie:** The LGBT group is a good support network for kids who are feeling victimised due to their sexuality or gender identity. It supports those kids in how they feel and how they identify. The assemblies that we have done at the school have given people knowledge, so that they do not go by wrong stereotypes and judge people. That has really educated people about different gender identities and sexualities, so people do not mindlessly insult others because they are not educated about the situation that the child who identifies otherwise is in.

It is about the general vibes of the school. The school is a very accepting place. At assemblies, Mr Allan uses words like “gay”, “lesbian” and “transgender”, which takes away the stigma and makes those identities accepted. That is becoming the norm, so much so that I would say that it is uncool for anyone in our school to bully someone else—if they did, everyone would look at them and be like, “Why are you doing that? It’s not a cool thing or a fun thing to be doing.” That is generally accepted, to such a point that people are not even thinking about bullying. There might be a few isolated cases of bullying, but that is probably because of some other reason.

Through the LGBT group, and with Mr Allan’s support, and through the assemblies and sex education classes, we have made the school an accepting and safe place for LGBT youth.

**The Convener:** The point about creating a safe place is one that we have heard a lot. Thank you for your contribution, Cameron; it was really helpful.

David Torrance has talked a lot about the scouts, so I know about the Scout Association’s work to tackle some of the issues that young men are facing. I will let you tell us about that.

**Anne Whiteford:** Thank you very much. In the scouts we have zero tolerance of bullying. As with what has been said about schools, part of how we deal with that is by having an inclusive culture and creating a safe place for all young people. That happens partly through self-management: the young people take responsibility for themselves and others, through our strong value base. That is

our first approach to tackling bullying and inappropriate behaviour.

Adult training is another strand—we train all our adults. If any serious bullying was happening, we would go through our safeguarding procedures.

In scouting, we see ourselves as being very inclusive, for boys and young men and for girls and young women, because scouting is now co-educational throughout the organisation. That inclusivity is probably most evident in the area of LGBTI issues and our participation in pride parades; our approach is making those identities much more acceptable, right through scouting. A lot of our senior volunteers are openly gay, which might not have been acceptable 10 years ago, so there are a lot of role models around in scouting for people in the LGBTI community.

It is about helping young people to accept each other and making it okay to be part of that community and in the scouts. For many people, that might be a challenge, but I think that we are doing a lot on inclusion in all areas and we are certainly making good progress in relation to LGBTI. It is mostly about our really strong value base. We are saying, “We are all scouts and we take care of each another.” Self-respect and respect for others are two of our key values. It is through our strong value base that we tackle bullying.

**The Convener:** When there is clear leadership—in girl guiding and in schools, too—does that mean that it is not cool to bully people or create an environment in which people feel unsafe, as Cameron Bowie said?

**Anne Whiteford:** I think so. We really work with young people on self-management in the guide and scout movements. That is true even for younger people; a cub scout can be a sixer and can then go on to scouts and have a leadership role in their patrol.

The young people take responsibility for the ethos. We encourage anti-bullying codes of behaviour. That involves the adults working with young people, if there are challenges, to think about how they will work as a group. It is about adults working alongside the young people; it is not a top-down approach. It is about helping young people to take a leadership role and to take responsibility for themselves and the group that they work in. They self-manage that and progress that as they get older. The top-down approach just creates a barrier. We really have to engage and work with young people to help to create that culture of acceptance.

**The Convener:** Thank you.

I have a question for Niamh McGeechan. I know about the work that the STAMP project does, but



perhaps you could explain it to the committee and our other guests round the table. It strikes me that the work that you do in schools on consent is important and relates to all types of bullying. It is about what people give permission for and what they do not give permission for. You also give guidance to young people who have had a bad experience, and you support them in tackling such situations.

**Niamh McGeechan:** The STAMP project came from the Lanarkshire Rape Crisis Centre. Our leader, Hannah Brown, is a sexual violence prevention worker. The young people she was working with told her that the gender stereotypes that are portrayed in the media cause sexual violence later in life, so the project was set up to try to tackle those gender stereotypes. Rape Crisis is not saying that bullying is the same as sexual violence, but it can lead to sexual violence. There is sexual harassment, sexual coercion and the idea of non-consent. It builds up, and we can see the same thing in prejudice-based bullying. We therefore do a lot of work on consent.

Teacher training has been mentioned. We have done some of that, because some teachers were interested and wanted to improve what they do for the children they are in charge of. We have done lots of training on LGBTI and consent issues in personal and social education or religious education classes. We found that there really was an issue. We did a general survey of what was going on in schools and where people wanted to see changes. We found that, largely, it depends on the teacher and how they would respond if, for example, someone went to them with a problem of sexual harassment or if they were to see something. We heard about one example where somebody—I cannot remember whether it was a girl or a boy—had put their hand on somebody else's thigh, and that person had kicked up a fuss about it, because they thought that that was not okay and the person should not have done that. However, because that person kicked up a fuss, it was technically seen to be their fault, as they upset the person who had done it to them. That should not have been dealt with in that way.

We wanted to work on those issues to try to change things. It can really depend on the teacher. There can be old-fashioned teachers who will say things like, "Can I get some big strong boys to help me move these boxes?" Little things like that are really undermining. There are definitely implications for teacher training. Sexual harassment can progress to other issues. If we nip it in the bud and somebody says, "No—you can't do that," the person might be less likely to go on to carry out sexual violence.

We have talked about young girls making themselves vulnerable through sexting. There is

an idea that most girls will feel pressured into doing that. They do not do it to make themselves vulnerable; they are already vulnerable and they are being forced into that situation. People might say, "Why did you send him those photos? That is why he posted them." However, that has dangerous parallels with the question, "What were you wearing when you were raped?" That idea exists, and it is really important that teachers and other people in positions of power realise that that is going on. Young people know that it is going on, but they might not have the capacity to do anything about it. It would be good to get a base level of teaching and to have guidelines on what should be taught on the issue of consent.

**The Convener:** What age group do you work with?

**Niamh McGeechan:** We work with 16 to 25-year-olds. It is a youth project. We are on social media, so people can follow us and interact with us, but they cannot be part of STAMP until they are 16 because, obviously, there is a lot of discussion of sexual violence and consent. Rape Crisis might go into schools to talk to young people who are a bit under 16, but we do not do much of that.

**The Convener:** So you work with fifth and sixth years.

**Niamh McGeechan:** Yes. People can join in fifth and sixth year. I am going into my third year at university. There are a couple of us spread about.

09:30

**The Convener:** What kind of group work would you do with those groups?

**Niamh McGeechan:** Personally, I have never gone into groups, but I can give you an idea of what happens, as we were part of a group when someone came in. The group work was to do with music videos, which is quite a good way to look at the issue, as it raises the idea of gender stereotypes. In the videos, women were glossed over and half naked. The suggestion is that that is their thing, but they are being dehumanised.

We heard quite a lot about slut shaming and victim shaming. Victim blaming is a big thing in relation to sexual violence. It is a no-win situation—the idea is that if you don't you're a prude and if you do you're a slut. We found out when we did our survey that in one class all the boys had to spit in a cup, and at the end the cup was seen as the girl who had had sex with numerous guys. It is awful to hear about things like that. I am sorry; I have lost my train of thought—come back to me in a bit.

**The Convener:** It is okay, Niamh. Mary Fee has some questions.

**Mary Fee:** I am struck by the almost complete contrast between what Hannah Brisbane and Susie McGuinness said about the level of harassment and bullying that young girls experience and the culture in his school that Derek Allan spoke about. Before I ask Hannah and Susie a question, can Derek give us some practical information about how to change the culture? It does not change overnight; this is about not only changing the culture in terms of the way that teachers view what they should be doing in schools but changing the whole school culture.

A number of different people from the education sector given evidence as part of our inquiry, and they have all talked about refreshing the guidance and about the provision of training on tackling bullying and harassment. Like the convener, I have a bit of a bee in my bonnet about guidance that sits on a shelf getting dusty until it is taken down once a year, with people saying, "It's been refreshed; let's move on."

How long did it take you to change the culture, Derek? How easy was it for you to get all your teaching staff on board with the culture that you wanted to embed in the school—and with the fact that they all had to get on board with it?

**Derek Allan:** That is a difficult question. However, once you have a strong, well-established, reasonable and simple set of values, it makes a difference. The school's previous mission statement, which appeared in its prospectus, was half a page long and nobody could remember what it was meant to be about. I do not think that we can judge success unless we know what we are trying to achieve, so the three core values were really important.

I have been lucky, as staff turnover in the intervening period has meant that about three quarters of the staff are new to the school—I think that that is almost the exact proportion—so I have been able to appoint people I understand. Even in interview questions, we always include something that tests the candidate's ability to be empathic and to work in an inclusive way. Recruitment is important.

Niamh McGeechan mentioned teacher training, which is definitely improving. All the probationers have built-in units on equality matters in their teacher education, which is important. Modelling behaviour is also important. There is the symbolic aspect of getting involved in slightly edgy stuff, if you like. In particular, the decision that we took to try to tackle teenage pregnancy in school created an openness of culture. Doing such things helps. When a contraceptive clinic was established in our premises, it changed the feel of the place; it made the young people step up and almost feel as if they were an equal part of something. The teachers are in charge, but there is a collaborative

culture of everyone looking out for everybody else. We must re-emphasise that at every opportunity and at almost every assembly we do something that symbolises or explains it.

I am with Mary Fee on this: policies are great and we need guidelines and rules, but if people do something grudgingly they do not do it properly. It is all about the atmosphere. It is difficult for me to define precisely how we achieved the culture change, other than to say that we did so by taking a consistent approach that was modelled across the school. We recruited young people to reinforce that through groups such as Cameron Bowie's group and our buddy programme. The sixth year run a bounce back group that promotes resilience among more vulnerable kids who are referred by the guidance team—the guidance staff do that because they think that the group could establish a more natural relationship with those kids. It is important to tie up those networks.

**Mary Fee:** How quickly did the pupils in the school feel comfortable with and take on board the change in ethos? I note the figures that Girlguiding gave us about the number of young people who feel harassed, bullied or intimidated. As the culture in a school changes, I am quite sure that a number of pupils just think, "Yeah, yeah, it's just another policy. We'll just move on, nothing will change." How long did it take for the pupils to really become comfortable with the change in the culture and confident that, if they went to a teacher with a problem, it would be dealt with?

**Cameron Bowie:** I have been at the school for five years. When I first came in, being LGBT+ was not accepted; people would not talk about it openly. However, by my fourth or fifth year I felt that I could be completely open about it as an individual. That did not happen over a set amount of time. It did not start one day and end the next; there was more of a gradual build-up.

The policy was made and then put in place. It was made clear that Mr Allan did not want any form of discrimination in the school. The first assembly that was run by the LGBT+ club made people think, "This isn't just another rule that we have to follow; it's a rule that will be seriously acted on." I would now feel completely fine about going to Mr Allan if I ever had a problem. In my first year, I would maybe have questioned talking to a guidance teacher or another teacher, but now Mr Allan has run assemblies, and there is a club in place and set rules for what happens if any teacher hears homophobic language. We strongly promote the Stonewall approach: if you hear it, call it out. That has allowed homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying incidents to be dealt with. It is not just something that we deal with once to show that we are making good policy; it is dealt with every time, with the same seriousness every time.

I say “every time” as if it happens all the time, but it happens very rarely. If it happens it is dealt with seriously, just like any other form of discrimination.

There has been a culture shift over time. We have built up gradually to a good point and we are still building up. We deal with even minor cases of individuals who show some form of discrimination or prejudice because of an outside factor. We are still trying to be the best that we can be. We can continually improve our culture.

The culture change happened because it was generally accepted by everyone and it was led by a strong hand. It was not a case of just saying, “Let’s not bully anyone.” The message was, “Let’s not bully anyone. This is why you shouldn’t bully. This is what happens if you bully and this is what punishment you’ll get if you bully.” All that has really made our culture a warm place for people to be in.

**Mary Fee:** The teachers led by example because they actually believe in the culture and ethos in the school. I take it that there is mutual respect between the teaching staff and all the pupils in the school.

**Cameron Bowie:** Yes. I agree with that strongly. The teaching staff are not in some ivory tower where we cannot talk to them; they are down at our level, and they would understand any problem that we came to them with. I presume that they would feel completely comfortable going to Mr Allan because he would deal with any problem that anyone had.

**Mary Fee:** If only we could package up what is in your school and roll it out across Scotland.

**The Convener:** David Torrance has a quick supplementary.

**David Torrance:** Good morning. My question is for Derek Allan. How did you manage to engage pupils with the support network and the mentoring system? From what I have seen, the pupils are totally committed to and enthusiastic about their roles.

As many people know, Kirkcaldy’s teenage pregnancy rate was among the highest in Europe. How did you get the parents engaged? When I heard about what the school was doing, I thought that my mailbag would be full, but I have not had a single complaint since the scheme was put in place. How did you engage with the parents and get them on board? It is vital that parents feed into the system.

**Derek Allan:** The key thing is to go through the young people. The best parents—in fact, almost all parents—will listen to their kids. The mentoring programme that we put in offered leadership opportunities, which young people crave; they want to do good.

It was also important to engage local agencies, such as the NHS, in the work. The Clued Up Project and DAPL—Drugs, Alcohol and Psychotherapies Ltd—were involved in building the training skills for the mentoring programme.

You are right about involving parents. We did that through communication and by keeping it simple. We explained the programme fully and were open about it from the start. My first communication explained the statistical background and what we intended to do. We invited parents to a special parents evening. Fortunately, there was little negative reaction.

As far as our work on LGBT issues is concerned, I have had only one piece of mail that was heavily critical. It was anonymous, but it was clear that it had been sent by a person who was homophobic and who had a bit of hate in their heart. It related to a visit that we had from Sir Ian McKellen as part of the Stonewall ambassador programme.

Cameron Bowie mentioned Stonewall’s no bystanders initiative. In my experience, which is long—I have 35 years’ experience in teaching—one thing that works well with young people is giving them the chance to be involved in something that is symbolic. It was not compulsory, but I think that, in the end, all our young people signed the no bystanders charter, as have all our teachers. We are all on the same page. The charter is displayed prominently in the school—it is at the top of a stair, so that people see it every now and again and become conscious of it. I make sure that the way in which it is displayed changes slightly, just to keep people’s attention on it. That symbolic stuff works with young people.

I do not want to patronise young people, but they like to be involved in campaigns and to wear wrist bands and so on. In fact, I am a bit like that, too—I am wearing the Fife pride wrist band, as is Cameron Bowie.

**Mary Fee:** I am struck by some of the statistical information that Hannah Brisbane and Susie McGuinness have provided—in fact, I would go as far as to say that I am quite horrified by some of the figures. You say that 55 per cent of teachers dismiss bullying behaviour such as sexual harassment as a bit of banter. Is that the figure across Scotland?

**Hannah Brisbane:** That is the figure across the UK.

**Mary Fee:** If teachers are dismissing such behaviour as a bit of banter, it is clear that there is a serious problem. In your submission, you call for compulsory sex and relationships education, which you say should cover online abuse.

Given what we have heard from Derek Allan and Cameron Bowie about the ethos in their school, do you think that embedding such an ethos, together with the provision of guidance, would tackle the problem more efficiently?

09:45

**Hannah Brisbane:** Yes. I think that it is a question of education and building up a new culture together. At the moment, the stories that we hear and the stats that we have provided tell us that in schools there is still a culture of “Boys will be boys”, which involves banter of the kind that you described.

We hear that it is easy for teachers to call out easily identifiable problems when people use slurs or other inappropriate language, but that when, for example, a boy yells, “Show us your boobs,” at a girl, teachers will look the other way because they think that hormonal boys are just like that and will learn. However, sometimes boys do not learn, and there needs to be education around consent and so on.

**Susie McGuinness:** I absolutely agree with that. We are expecting a lot if we are asking girls to stand up and report that kind of thing when they see a culture of teachers ignoring, dismissing and, often, perpetuating harassment. I sat in a classroom with a guidance teacher who watched as a boy walked around the classroom and undid girls’ bras through their shirts, and I had a teacher who put everybody’s third-year picture up on the board and commented on what the girls looked like. That was quite normal. Schools need to be much clearer with their staff and clamp down on that.

My friends and I reported horrific language being used by teachers, and those teachers still teach my friends. A young person in my guides group told me about a teacher who told a boy not to be too scared about hitting a girl, because, the teacher said, “She is a bit of crazy bitch.” That same teacher came in on the first day of school and said to my 13-year-old friend, “So, let’s see which of the girls have developed over the summer.” That is horrifying, and he should not be allowed to teach. That sort of thing has been reported again and again at my school, but the girls’ concerns have been dismissed. That is normal. That is what I experienced all the way through school, and our survey clearly shows that other girls are seeing that, too.

The statistic that upset me was that 25 per cent of girls aged between 11 and 16 were afraid to put their hand up in class in front of a teacher for fear of harassment. If girls are expecting abuse in front of the professionals who are supposed to be keeping them safe, they cannot learn in that

environment. That is not fair. We should not be expecting them to go to school and deal with that.

**Mary Fee:** When you reported incidents, what was the reaction from the teaching staff or the guidance teacher you went to?

**Susie McGuinness:** It was just, “Oh yeah, we’ll look at that. He’s going to be monitored.” A senior member of staff came to sit in on some of our lessons for about a week, but the behaviour continued. We heard disability slurs in that classroom, too, and they were not dealt with.

**Jeremy Balfour:** It seems to me that we are talking about criminal actions as well as child protection issues—the two elements clearly go hand in hand. I find it unbelievable that teachers at any level in the school would not understand that; I am not a teacher, but it is clear to me. Do you think that they understand but turn a blind eye or that there is a lack of clarity on what guidance teachers in average secondary schools in Scotland understand?

**Susie McGuinness:** I think that the culture is just so strong that they sometimes do not see it. Teachers seem to have accepted that that is just the baseline of how young men behave in school, even though it should not be. Female teachers are often intimidated, as well. They need to feel that the senior management will back them up if they report any such incidents, that what is unacceptable is clear and that the key points apply to the whole school. We have heard stories of female teachers being filmed, those films being put online and their being harassed by teenage boys. Schools need to support teachers to deal with that, and teachers need to feel that they can report such incidents and that they will be dealt with.

**Hannah Brisbane:** Because many incidents take place online rather than behind the school gates, some teachers think that they are not their problem. They can turn a blind eye to things because they are not within their realm, even though the incidents affect pupils and clearly need to be taken seriously.

**Jeremy Balfour:** Clearly, as a Parliament and a committee, we set policy that is followed by local authorities and headteachers. I appreciate your setting out various things that you think should happen, but what does the big culture change need to be? Does it involve support from the headteacher, a change of view on the part of the senior management or something else? If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you bring about in order to make a difference?

**Hannah Brisbane:** We need to start with early education on issues around respect for others and yourself, which have been discussed. One of the big issues that we face is that girls do not know

that they have experienced sexual harassment—they know that something has made them feel uncomfortable, but they do not know why it has. Girls find those incidents difficult to deal with because we have a culture that ignores such things on the ground that “Boys will be boys.” If girls knew that there was someone whom they could speak to about such unacceptable incidents, that would help them to report those incidents more—we know that there is underreporting of incidents. It would also be helpful if we could put a strong obligation on teachers to deal with a problem that they see rather than turn away. If pupils know that such a policy is in place, they will be able to say to the teacher that they have to deal with the issue. Similarly, if parents know that such a policy is in place, they could hold the school to account.

**Susie McGuinness:** I totally agree with that. What is happening in Kirkcaldy high school sounds wonderful, but it should not be the responsibility of the headteacher to come up with that sort of policy; there needs to be national guidance for all schools. In my school, we knew that, if somebody used a racial slur towards our friend, that would be reported, recorded and dealt with appropriately, and that the right people would hear about it. The situation is not the same with sexual harassment, even though it involves discrimination, just as racism and homophobia do. Similar guidelines should be in place, because girls need to know that they will be taken seriously and that incidents will be dealt with in a certain way. They need to know how incidents will be dealt with, because there is a great deal of uncertainty about whether a teacher will believe them, whether telling a teacher will make things worse, or whether a teacher will ignore them. Whether a teacher will even understand that the incident involved harassment is down to the luck of the draw. Teachers need to be given clear guidelines on what qualifies as harassment, what they should do next and how such incidents should be recorded.

**Jeremy Balfour:** As an MSP and the father of two young daughters, I thank you for what you are doing. The issues that we are talking about need to be articulated much more clearly.

We have heard a lot about online bullying. Bullying occurred when I was at school to an extent, but you got away at half past three and you had the weekends away from it. However, a few years ago, my niece, who lives in Scandinavia, was badly bullied on Facebook. The internet is in a child's house or even their bedroom. How does the school deal with that? From Derek Allan's wide experience of talking to headteachers, do schools say that that happens outwith school and is therefore not their responsibility?

**Derek Allan:** That is certainly not my experience. In my experience, schools take the view that, even though that behaviour takes place outwith school hours, they might still be able to do something about it and, if that proves not to be the case, they will help the pupil and encourage them to get the police involved in the case of a continual campaign of harassment.

One of the biggest problems for teachers is that they do not understand things such as Snapchat, because they do not use them. Snapchat is probably the worst of them. Messages on it disappear after 30 seconds or so, which makes it difficult to get an evidence trail. Traditional texting is more straightforward in that regard.

We have had conferences with parents to try to resolve difficulties between groups of young people that involve the fallout from social relationship breakdowns. We do not often have to deal with sexual harassment issues in online incidents—they do not often come to our attention. I am sure that they happen, but our pupils do not report them to guidance teachers very often.

We need to double our emphasis on getting people to avoid such situations and encouraging young people to block people who are likely to engage in that sort of thing and to be smart about how they use social media. There is not quite enough emphasis on that programme in the curriculum. Of course, there are changes in the area all the time. It is inevitable that a new app will come out in the next few months that will be another tool which might be used in the wrong way.

We have used social media in a positive way in our school, for example in relation to our LGBT group and our school Twitter group—I know that Twitter is very old-fashioned for young people. We try to use social media positively to blank out hate stuff that is out there.

**The Convener:** I see that Anne Whiteford wants to come in. You may respond to this discussion, Anne, but I would also like to ask you a question. We have heard from a girls organisation how it approaches these issues. Will you give us the view from a boys organisation so that we can compare and contrast the views?

**Anne Whiteford:** Scouting is co-educational all the way through, so we work with boys and girls together. We build that into how we work.

Leadership is hugely important. The Scout Association, at the United Kingdom level, took forward other equal opportunities policies in the mid to late 1990s, and that is how scouting is now. If people do not agree with that, there is no place for them in scouting. You have to be brave enough to take that position.

Our policy is that, when people apply to become leaders in the movement, there is a paper trail and an interview with an appointments committee that checks out their views on some of the aspects that we are talking about, including LGBTI issues and gender and scouting. Depending on the answers that they give, we can say no to people. We control who we have as leaders because we strongly believe that scouting should be inclusive. If people do not agree with that, we would not accept them as leaders.

We very much go with young people helping to set the agenda for the programme all the way through scouting, particularly in the older age groups. We have resources on anti-bullying and cyberbullying issues, and we very much work with young people where they are because, in conjunction with the leaders, they are the people who develop the programme in ways that are of interest to them. We perhaps do not, therefore, have such a strong policy. We are doing research at UK level, and we are happy to share the results of that when they come through. However, the main things to stress are that we work with young people, we train our leaders and we have a lot of resources. We encourage young people to develop a programme that deals with young people where they are and relates to the issues that affect their lives, and we resource teachers to help with that.

**The Convener:** I want to ask Niamh McGeechan a question. Susie McGuinness and Hannah Houston mentioned the point of reporting. One of the key themes that the committee has picked up concerns how data is collected and used to change behaviour. We have also picked up that some young people simply do not report incidents. I know that, in all the years in which it has been in existence, Rape Crisis has had a perennial problem with underreporting and how to tackle that. In Lanarkshire last year, there were about three or four cases involving young people, but that number shot up after the STAMP project got involved in some local high schools. Will you give us an insight into how we could tackle underreporting and support young people to report and to feel safe reporting?

**Niamh McGeechan:** There are a lot of reasons why people do not report these incidents. Obviously, sexual violence is a big thing for girls, but it happens to guys, too, in relation to nonconforming and so on. Guys in that position feel that they do not have a platform or any support behind them, but they do not realise that women do not have much going on in that regard, either. One reason why people might not report is that people are often made to feel that any given incident was their fault. Because of the culture in society just now, people can be made to feel that

something is their fault through things such as slut shaming and victim blaming.

Another issue is that people might not know how to report an incident. I went to a Catholic school, which had a focus on abstinence. Everything was swept under the carpet and not spoken about at all. If something happened, you feared that you would be made to feel that it was your fault by someone asking, "Why on earth would you be doing that anyway?" That would not really be the point; your point would be that it had happened to you. However, people do not feel that they have the voice to say that.

10:00

There is the idea of safe space and respecting other people. You have bodily autonomy: your body is yours and no one can take that away from you. You need to respect that idea and people need to respect you, as well. People also need to respect your voice and that you feel uncomfortable. They need to respect it when you say that you do not like something or that you do not want to do something. There is a severe lack of respect, which seems to be a society thing.

As Mary Fee said, society cannot be changed overnight—that is not how it happens—but there is the idea of safe spaces and people being taught how to deal with the issue. Obviously, the subject is very sensitive, so we cannot have anyone saying, "Oh right, this is what we are going to do". Proper training is needed. Any kind of sexual harassment or sexual abuse is a damaging psychological experience.

People might feel that they do not have any support in the school. In my school, for instance, we did not have any equalities groups or LGBT groups. Some of my school friends and I were in STAMP from the beginning. We got into it through the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. The guy whom we were working with said that he had heard about a woman who was involved in STAMP and asked if we fancied it. We said, "Yeah, we'll give it a wee shot." That is how we got into it—it was never brought to us from a higher power or senior management, as in other schools. We had to go out and find resources as opposed to their being there for us.

It is a good idea to have resources in the school. As Mary Fee said, guidance might be there, but no one really talks about it or expects it to be used. We had that feeling in my school. To be honest, I did not know who my guidance teacher was. It is that way—there are things out there, but you have to go and find them. They need to be more available, and you need to feel that it is okay to go and talk about what has happened. It is also okay

if you do not want to talk about it, but the resource should be there for you.

Rape Crisis has maybe 11 to 13 centres across Scotland; there is one in Lanarkshire and one in Glasgow. You can drop in or phone up. It is really important to know that those resources are there, even if you have to find them yourself. However, we would like to see a situation in which people do not have to go and find them. The information would be readily given to them and they would not feel embarrassed and blame themselves for what happened.

People blame themselves because of the culture of victim blaming and slut shaming. People ask, "What were you wearing?", "Did you have too much to drink?" or "He is your boyfriend, so does it really matter? Does it really count?" Yes, it does. The resources could be there for you.

Obviously LGBT+ has its own oppression and its own issues to deal with, which are different from those of cis-straight women. More needs to be put into that area and more needs to be put into dealing with male survivors of sexual violence. That is not talked about.

That is the thing: you did not talk about it. In a Catholic school setting, the idea was that there would be no sex before marriage. You would abstain from it and would not do any of those things—but obviously people do. People go out and meet people, kiss people at parties and do all that. The idea was that it was to be ignored. You were not supposed to do it, so why should the school give you anything for it? However, we should recognise that people go out and have a drink at the weekend, and they have boyfriends or girlfriends. The information needs to be there. There should not be the idea that it does not happen because the school says that it does not happen.

**The Convener:** Do you think that, for some young people whom you came through school with, it was easier to report outwith rather than within the school?

**Niamh McGeechan:** Absolutely. I would never have reported within my school. I would have gone out and found something on my own rather than report in my school.

**The Convener:** Has that changed since STAMP has been involved?

**Niamh McGeechan:** I got involved in STAMP when I was in sixth year. I have not been in school for quite some time, but my brother is still in school. He might not be in the time for inclusive education campaign but he, a couple of his pals and a couple of people in the year above him were interested in setting up an equalities committee so that they could talk about feminism, LGBT and

sexual violence issues and how to tackle them. They were told that, if they got however many signatures, the school would sort it out for them, but it never really happened. For some odd reason, I was added to the Facebook group, so I get notifications. They are still working away. They do not have an official group, but they post things such as, "Did you hear about this?", "How awful is this?" and "Why do we still not have a group for this?" It looks as if not much has happened, but there is a want and obviously a need for that among young people.

One question that was put to young people in our survey was whether they had ever seen, heard or experienced sexism or sexual harassment in their school. People might not be sure: they might not have seen or heard it happening, but they will not deny that it is going on. There is a certain knowledge that stuff is going on, and people want to change that, but there is only so much that a fourth-year student can do without the help of a teacher or somebody in a management position in the school.

The teacher should realise that students want to do that. They are interested in the issue, and it is affecting them right now, so we should put more effort into dealing with it. It is great to see the Facebook group grow, but that is all that it is. Twenty or 30 people are involved—it could be a school-wide thing, but it is not.

All the stuff that has been done at Kirkcaldy high school seems completely alien to me. It sounds amazing and brilliant, but I would never imagine that in a school setting at all.

**Gail Ross:** Obviously—or perhaps not obviously—when I was at school we did not have social media and all that sort of stuff. Picture and video sharing has been ramped up since the sort of bullying that my generation faced at school. It is awful to hear some of the stories.

In your experience, and from all the evidence that you have gathered, can you see any gaping gaps between different local authorities in Scotland, or is the situation school dependent?

**Hannah Brisbane:** You cannot break down our evidence, as it is gathered from across the UK. We do not know about the different sectors.

**Gail Ross:** I was reading your written evidence. To go back to my experience at school, one of the worst times for me as a teenage girl going through puberty was when I was doing physical education and sport. Perhaps Derek Allan or Cameron Bowie might wish to comment on that, too. Various suggestions have been made.

I note the evidence from the member from Glasgow about the ceilidh dancing: instead of the boys being told to stop making comments, the girls

were told, “How about you just wear leggings and a long-sleeved T-shirt?” I find that unbelievable. Obviously it is true, but it is unbelievable in the sense that I really do not want to believe it.

How do you get over that? Swimming lessons can be particularly difficult during the teenage years. Would you have separate lessons for males and females? With your ethos, it is probably a lot easier to do that, but in many schools the ethos that we were discussing is still very much prevalent. How would you suggest tackling that sort of harassment?

**Hannah Brisbane:** That is something that we would like to look into a lot more, as we have heard different stories from girls who have had coed classes and those who have had girls-only classes. As a girl-only, girl-led organisation, we really value having a girl-only space. In our own units, we know that girls feel a lot more confident when they do not need to think about the pressures of boys being there. From that point of view, that is something that we would like to consider more.

**Derek Allan:** We do a bit of both. We have some coeducational groups and some single-sex groups for PE. A modest kit for PE—a shell suit or whatever—is perfectly acceptable for girls to wear. It is not an area that I have a great deal of knowledge about—I do not know whether Cameron Bowie has any comments to make about PE lessons. Are they a source of difficulty for young people?

**Cameron Bowie:** I took PE as a subject. Even for those who take it as a subject, however, it is very much split between male and female. Although there were more males, and I was predominantly in all-male PE classes, the classes during my core PE were split for some of the time. In our school, I did not see any form of sexual harassment. I am not saying that that did not happen but—I have lost the precise word—people were not mocking others, staring at them or making comments about girls’ shorts being too short. Instead, everyone was comfortable wearing what they were wearing. No one was looking at anyone else or making comments, because the people were there to do a sport.

**The Convener:** We are almost out of time for this panel, as we have a second panel to question. I have a quick question about the Girlguiding girls’ attitudes survey on an issue that I hope will be included in future scout surveys. What impact does bullying have on the mental or physical health outcomes for young people? Can it be a source of health issues? Have you come across that issue in your work, Hannah or Susie? I know that, a few years ago, the girl guides did work on mental health. Is that an issue that you are taking forward now?

**Hannah Brisbane:** Yes, there is definitely a clear link between the bullying and harassment that girls experience at school and mental health issues. Last year’s survey focused on that issue, too, and we have brought out other resources to help to build resilience.

**Susie McGuinness:** We have a new resource called think resilient, which is a peer education scheme on mental health. The scheme has various packs that can be discussed with units of girls. The packs are tailored to different age groups, from the Rainbows, who are aged five to seven, right the way up to the guides, who are aged 10 to 14, and the senior section. The scheme is really good. It is age appropriate. It is tailored to talk about friendships and bouncing back when things are difficult.

**Hannah Brisbane:** It is also about learning to talk about the effects that bullying and harassment have on girls. In the stats that we have provided, we see that the girls, as you have said, are not comfortable speaking in class—not just to report any incidents but to contribute in class. They might not take certain subjects because they know that they will come across the perpetrators of bullying and harassment more. That behaviour has an effect on their overall education, as well as on their mental health.

**The Convener:** We have focused a lot of our attention on education. Given the consequences of prejudice-based bullying and bullying in the class and the impact that that can have on an individual’s health, do you consider it to be a public health issue, rather than just an education issue?

**Hannah Brisbane:** Yes, it spills over into both issues.

**Susie McGuinness:** It stops girls doing what they want to do, especially in PE, because they feel uncomfortable. I did not think that I was a sporty person in school because I hated PE so much. Part of that was to do with being in coed classes where I was afraid to be there, because I watched girls getting assaulted and catcalled and have other horrible things happen to them. I suddenly enjoyed PE more when I was in a girls-only class. It should not be like that; that should not be the culture. Girls should be able to enjoy sport and PE whether there are boys there or not. I would hope that it would be like the situation that Cameron Bowie describes at his school.

**Hannah Brisbane:** We found that, when bullying is reported, a lot of the time the pressure is placed on the girls. They are asked why they have said something and told that what the person did was just meant to be a joke. In a lot of the stories that we have heard, the schools try to protect the perpetrator by saying that he, or



whoever it is, is young, they do not know what they are saying and they have not been educated. However, a lot of the time, they have been educated. Everyone knows when what they have done is not acceptable. Their future is being protected, whereas the consequences, such as the mental health impact, affect the girls for the rest of their lives and impact on wider society.

**The Convener:** That is a good point. We will have to finish there. Oh—David is making faces at me. Go for it, David.

**David Torrance:** Thank you, once again, convener. On today's panel, we have two of the largest youth organisations in Scotland. I think that the membership of the scouts is more than 50,000. We have been talking about education and bullying in schools. That culture does not exist in the two organisations that are represented here. Why is that? Is it simply because you engage with young people or is it the training that you give to them? These organisations and their support networks are run by volunteers. Perhaps you could expand on why they have been so successful.

10:15

**Hannah Brisbane:** As Susie McGuinness said, much of our organisation is peer led. As is the case with the scouts, it starts from the bottom up. We take responsibility for setting our own agendas and leadership. A lot of the stuff that we do in girlguiding is based on giving girls confidence. Perhaps they do not consider that they have the support to do that at school.

**Anne Whiteford:** I agree. We are more than 100 years old. We have been using the same methodology throughout, basically building up self-confidence and self-esteem in our members. Like the school, there is no one key aspect to our approach; rather, it is about our programme, our values, the leadership and the training. All those things act as a mesh that creates the positive environment, we hope, for all our scouts and guides. That is possible to do in other settings, but there is not one answer to the issue; rather, it is about having that mix of things where we value our young people and help them to take responsibility for their environments. In scouting, giving them responsibility is certainly a key aspect.

**The Convener:** There are clear parallels between the work that both your organisations do and the work that Derek Allan does in his school so, obviously, the approaches can transfer over and that good practice could be shared.

We really must finish now, because we have a second panel, and I want my members to have a quick comfort break. If, after you leave, you think

that there is something that you should have said, please get in touch with the clerks.

We are compiling our inquiry report, which we hope to release in a few weeks' time. The cabinet secretary will be with us next week and the faith panel will be with us shortly. That should round off all our evidence nicely.

I thank you for all your contributions today, in the past and going forward. I suspend the committee for five minutes, which will allow us to put our next panel in place.

10:17

*Meeting suspended.*

10:28

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** Welcome back. We continue with agenda item 2, which is evidence for our inquiry into bullying, including prejudice-based bullying, in schools. I welcome our second panel, a member of which is missing—we hope to track him down imminently. Anthony Horan is the director of the Catholic parliamentary office of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Scotland. The Rev Dr Richard Frazer is the convener of the church and society council of the Church of Scotland. Samena Dean is a youth worker with Scotland Against Criminalising Communities. Brittany Ritell is a youth worker and a representative of the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities. Charlie Lynch is the secretary of the Scottish Secular Society. Thank you very much for coming along. We hope that Imam Hassan Rabbani will join us soon, but we want to proceed, because we are extremely tight for time.

Thank you for the written evidence that you have provided; that always helps to inform our deliberations and the questions that we ask. Before we begin the questions, I will give each of you a few minutes to explain who you are, what you do and how the work that you do is relevant to our inquiry.

**Anthony Horan (Bishops Conference of Scotland):** As the convener said, I am the director of the Catholic parliamentary office of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Scotland. The Bishops Conference of Scotland is pleased to participate in the committee's inquiry and to contribute to the discussions about tackling prejudice-based bullying in schools and beyond.

Given that it is my role as the director of the Catholic parliamentary office to engage with Parliament and Government, we felt that it would be appropriate for me to attend today's meeting. I also have an overview of the Catholic church and

the various agencies of the church, which include the Scottish Catholic Education Service, whose director, Barbara Coupar, you heard from at an evidence session in January. That being the case, it was felt that it would be fitting for me to attend. As I said, we are keen to assist the committee in whatever way we can in its work to tackle and eradicate bullying in all its forms.

**The Rev Dr Richard Frazer (Church of Scotland):** I am a parish minister of the Church of Scotland just up the road at Greyfriars kirk. I am also the convener of the church and society council of the Church of Scotland.

We are glad to be part of this work. As a church, we are committed to human flourishing and to enabling young people to reach their best. I would hate to think that we might make any young person who comes into contact with the church feel diminished or in any way intimidated by that experience. Part of the church and society council's role is to help the church in its relationship with schools and education and to find ways in which we can be in the vanguard of promoting human flourishing and enabling people to reach their best. We do not want an encounter with a faith community—in our case, the Church of Scotland—to make people feel worse about themselves.

Having read some of the evidence that other groups have submitted, I think that it is clear that there is a common thread—that of young people being singled out because they fit into a category, which might relate to a faith community or a non-faith community, and in some way feeling that they are put on the spot because of that. I find that issue intriguing. We are interested in being in the vanguard of promoting tolerance, pluralism and respectful dialogue and of finding ways in which we can reshape the contribution that the church makes to that throughout Scotland.

**Samena Dean (Scotland Against Criminalising Communities):** I am here as a result of a written submission by Scotland Against Criminalising Communities, which has endorsed and supported my survey on Islamophobia in Edinburgh schools. I carried out the survey because my children experienced Islamophobia and I wanted to know how widespread it was. I spoke to 100 Muslim children who go to Edinburgh schools to find out about their experiences of Islamophobia.

**Brittany Ritell (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities):** I am the youth worker for the Jewish community of Scotland. I work predominantly in Glasgow, because that is where the largest concentration of Jews is, but I have done work in Edinburgh, too.

A large part of what I do is going into schools to run Jewish assemblies or lunch clubs. As they are also sometimes attended by non-Jewish students, I have a chance to act as an ambassador for Judaism.

I also work outside schools. I work with youth movements—in large part, I support ones that already exist. There are many Jewish youth movements in the UK, and a few of them make it up to Scotland. I work with the youth in and out of school.

**Charlie Lynch (Scottish Secular Society):** I am the secretary of the Scottish Secular Society. Other members of the panel will know that secularism is rather old, but our society is rather new. I thank the convener and committee members for being willing to listen to the voices and evidence of those of a non-faith background as well as those of a faith background and I look forward to contributing to your discussions.

**Jeremy Balfour:** Good morning and thank you for coming. It is helpful to have received evidence from both the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church on faith-based bullying. In past weeks, we have talked a lot about different categories. We have heard that people who are in a minority in a school—whatever minority that is—often feel that they are victimised because of that. Your submissions give examples of people from different faith communities who feel that they have been bullied because of their belief, faith or understanding.

What can the Scottish Government do to help faith communities feel that they have as much protection as those who might experience bullying because of their gender, sexuality or another of the protected characteristics, given that faith is the one that is sometimes forgotten about? That is a general question to all on the panel.

**Anthony Horan:** The problem that we have, which the previous witnesses referred to, is that there is a culture of fear about being open. We are talking about faith, but people might also feel uncomfortable about speaking openly about other characteristics. I know that the committee has taken evidence on that. A lot of people fear being open about their faith. They are not trying to impose their views on anyone; they just fear even speaking openly about having those views.

I have received evidence from young people about anti-Catholic bullying. It is disappointing that they cannot even admit or be open about the fact that they have a Catholic faith and hold certain values. There is a culture of fear, which is exacerbated by social media, as that has become a platform for people to put forward hateful views and discriminate. We really need to look at the culture that exists because of social media. The

problem is exacerbated by the behaviour of adults on social media—I am talking about professional people. If adults cannot behave, how on earth can we expect our children to behave?

There is a deep culture of fear, and it is difficult for anyone to come up with the right answer as to how to deal with it. We in the church work nationally and locally with other Christian denominations and other faith groups to build a culture of respect and tolerance among faith communities and beyond.

My parish has a youth group that reaches out to all children across the community. We recently had a welcoming day for refugees from Syria who have come into the community. Such things are important locally and we need to keep encouraging them. We should not underestimate the amount of such activity that is going on in our communities. It is useful to bear that in mind.

From a national perspective, there is no easy answer, but we need to tackle the culture of fear that exists, because people cannot be open about who they are and what values they stand for. That is a concern, especially for young people.

**The Rev Dr Richard Frazer:** Thank you for the question. Something that is really important was echoed by members of the previous panel this morning. The issue might be described as religious and secular literacy among those who educate our young people. If a teacher said to girls, “Boys will be boys. You’ve just got to put up with it and wear a pair of tights rather than just shorts in the gym,” that would be an outrage, would it not? It would show an extraordinary lack of awareness and sensitivity on the part of those whom we charge with the responsibility of nurturing our young people.

In the same way, sometimes we have seen evidence that young people—whether they are secular or from any kind of faith community—can feel that they are being singled out or being asked to be an expert on a subject that they know little about. Just because they have been born into a faith community or a secular community, that does not necessarily mean that they are literate about all aspects of that community. Religious literacy is important, as is secular literacy. People need to be taught that it is legitimate in a pluralist, multicultural society to learn about the different paths that people follow. There is nothing wrong with that, and we in the church and in faith communities need to learn to live alongside one another.

Another important aspect is to recognise our histories and the journey that we have taken as a society from what Scotland was like in the 16th century, at the time of the reformation, to what it is like today, as a multicultural, multifaith, pluralist

society. That means that in faith communities—and especially in the Church of Scotland, which has sometimes exercised quite a lot of power and influence in society—we have to learn a different way of being present that is less about exercising power and control and more about exercising presence and support. That is a lesson that we in the Church of Scotland need to learn, and it is a lesson that will benefit the whole of society if we can learn it.

**The Convener:** I see Samena Dean nodding.

**Samena Dean:** I agree that we need more support. Unfortunately, young children do not have that outlet or that support system in place in schools. To answer the question, it is difficult for Muslim children to hide their physical characteristics, whether they are wearing a headscarf or starting to grow a beard. Now that we are in Ramadan, a lot of Muslim children will be fasting, so they will not be in the lunch hall or the canteen and they will be asked, “Why are you not having lunch today?” There are visible characteristics that mean that people will know that somebody is a Muslim, so they cannot hide their faith.

In my study, I spoke with 100 Muslim children, and one thing that struck me was that 67 of them would not even tell a teacher that they were experiencing Islamophobic comments or Islamophobic physical abuse. The reason for that was that they felt that their teachers did not understand Islam properly, so they could not really understand how a Muslim child felt. Because teachers would not understand the seriousness of the situation or the fact that it was an attack on a child’s identity, children did not think that teachers would help or do anything about it.

The sad and worrying thing about my report was that, in many cases, the children who did report incidents to teachers found that the schools did not even respond or take any action, and in the schools that did take action, the children were not happy with the outcome. It felt as if they had been left there after an injustice had been done. They had been attacked because of their faith or identity, which made them feel really scared.

10:45

Of the 100 children I spoke with, 21 said that they feared—I use that specific word—going to school because they were Muslims. One reason was that

“they were scared of abuse and getting attacked”;

other reasons were:

“Because of what happens on the news ... What people might think of me as I wear the hijab”.

One child said:

"I was scared if I might get attacked".

That was prominent in how the Muslim children felt.

More than 55 per cent of the children had encountered Islamophobia in verbal form and more than 40 per cent had encountered Islamophobia in physical form. They are having their hijabs ripped off and are being punched, kicked and called terrorists or suicide squads. They are being asked whether they have bombs or guns under their hijabs. Although my study was based in Edinburgh, from looking at other studies, I think that that is happening throughout Scotland and the United Kingdom.

**The Convener:** That almost tells the truth about all the evidence that we have heard. The numbers are pretty similar. We have heard that 59, 65 or 67 per cent of young people fear reporting bullying and, when they report it, they fear that it will get worse. When bullying is reported, they do not get the right response. We heard about how Kirkcaldy high school responds. That is a gold standard, which I hope that we will promote. Whatever the discrimination is in relation to any protected characteristic, the systems seem to be letting us down.

I ask Brittany Ritell to give us insight into that. She will know that the Scottish Government made a statement on Tuesday about hate crime. There was a specific recommendation about accepting the Holocaust Trust's definition of anti-Semitism. Does she have some truth to speak to that?

**Brittany Ritell:** I am not sure whether I have anything to say about that announcement specifically, although it is good that there is a definition of anti-Semitism, which will probably help to combat it. Many times, it is hard to define exactly what is bad enough to be dealt with, so having a concrete and clear definition will go a long way.

**The Convener:** That relates to the literacy issue that the Rev Dr Richard Frazer spoke about.

**Brittany Ritell:** Exactly. I wrote down that phrasing because I really like the idea of religious and secular literacy. That is a common theme in the suggestions that are in the reports that I have cited.

In many communities, there are people who have never met a Jewish person in their life. How are they supposed to get a clear understanding of what Judaism is? How is a religious education teacher supposed to teach about Judaism when they have probably never met someone who represents that faith?

Educating teachers is one thing, but it is also important to go at the issue from the other end. We have acknowledged that many students do not

feel comfortable speaking to the adults who could help them, because they do not think that reporting bullying will do anything.

An important word that came up with the previous panel of witnesses was "bystander". I talked with P7 students yesterday and none of them knew what a bystander is. When working on creating a Holocaust education curriculum for secondary 5 and S6 students, my colleague said that he did not think that those students would know what a bystander was. Starting to change that culture is important.

If students do not feel comfortable going to adults, the other approach that we can take is to empower them to have a positive impact. If we approach the issue from both ends, that will have the most effect. Bystander training is probably one of the most important things that we can do. In that way, the people who are targeted know how to handle it and their friends know how to handle it. That creates a system of peer support.

**The Convener:** Charlie, what is your perspective?

**Charlie Lynch:** Will you repeat the question, please, convener?

**Jeremy Balfour:** We are getting clear evidence across the board that minority groups—whether they are minorities because of their sexuality, religion or gender—feel that they are being excluded and do not feel able to report that to the appropriate authorities. I appreciate that there is no magic wand, but what is one step towards helping that situation?

**Charlie Lynch:** As you will have read, the gist of our submission is that we are unhappy with religious observance as it is currently managed in non-denominational schools. We have started to compile evidence from pupils and their parents who are atheists and who have had all kinds of problems with religious observance. There is a right to opt out, but we are concerned that people are frequently not told about that properly. Schools try to discourage opting out in their governance because it is difficult for all kinds of reasons, which creates a difficulty of conscience for those who are atheists and even for those from minority faiths.

A better system could be made in some way. In the past, we have advocated opting in rather than opting out. Perhaps there could be a change to the culture of schools to make it more inclusive of people from minority faiths and those of no faith.

We are also aware that there is a lot of variance across the country. Some of the more alarming evidence in our submission came from the Western Isles. There are clear variations and problems.

**The Convener:** Does that answer your question, Jeremy?

**Jeremy Balfour:** It does. Thank you.

**Mary Fee:** I have another question for Charlie Lynch. I am struck by the facts that guidelines are widely ignored when pupils want to remove themselves from religious education, that pupils feel intimidated and that organisations that, on the face of it, exist to encourage inclusion and interaction actually have a religious basis. I appreciate your saying that we have to stick more closely to what we are told to do, but how can we ensure that parents feel confident about going to a school and saying, “I don’t want my child taking part in any form of religious education”?

**Charlie Lynch:** That is an interesting and important series of points. Obviously, children do not themselves have the right to opt out of things. The Humanist Society is pursuing legal action at the moment about the age at which they should be able to do that. Educational psychologists have tests and means of ascertaining at what point children can make such decisions, and we would like that to be investigated in various ways so that people do not feel that they are made to take part in things that they cannot, in all conscience, agree with.

As for parents, we would like schools to display clearly in their handbooks that opting out is possible. We would like schools to have proper and meaningful alternative arrangements for children who have opted out so that they are not made to feel othered or different—not made to sit alone in a corridor, for example. That is the kind of thing that we hear about. We would like the whole series of problems to be approached in a more compassionate and understanding fashion.

**Mary Fee:** I suppose that we have to find a balance—

**Charlie Lynch:** Yes, of course.

**Mary Fee:** There has been a rise in Islamophobia and there is very little understanding of Judaism, so we must find a way to balance things. Is religious education the only way in which we can inform and educate pupils about other religions in order to break down the barriers and enable people to have more understanding? Is that the argument that you are given? Is there another way to inform people about different faiths in order to break down discrimination?

**Charlie Lynch:** We have talked almost entirely about religious observance, but the Scottish Secular Society is very pro-religious and moral education and we think that there should be more of it. We would like there to be more of a philosophical element to such education but, in general, we are very much for it.

There is a different set of problems to do with religious observance, including activities such as the saying of prayers in a communal setting, the singing of hymns and so on.

**Mary Fee:** Is that when religious education is based on one particular faith?

**Charlie Lynch:** Yes.

**Mary Fee:** Samena, has there been a significant increase in the intimidation, bullying and harassment that young Muslim children are experiencing because of the culture that currently exists? Have you seen a dramatic rise?

**Samena Dean:** Absolutely. Back in 2013, 1,400 children reported to Childline that they had been called a terrorist and a bomber. It has got to the level at which young Muslim girls are having the hijabs pulled off their heads in school. I am a youth worker by profession, and if two of the primary school children from the 100 children whom I spoke to had come to my youth group, I would have filled in wellbeing forms right away because of the Islamophobic abuse that those two children had experienced. These children are suffering in silence.

I had a conversation with the community inspector and asked for a link officer to go to a primary school for the wellbeing of one boy. The testimonies show that some of the things that have happened to Muslim children are criminal offences.

**Mary Fee:** When incidents are reported, are they properly recorded?

**Samena Dean:** Only one incident in the survey was recorded as racist, and that was because of what happened to my daughter, who is in primary school. I told the headteacher that I was conducting a survey and that I had had minimal responses from other schools. I said that I was really annoyed that the survey was not being taken seriously, and the headteacher said that he would record what happened to my daughter as a racist incident.

When teachers have taken action, the Muslim child has, for example, got a “Sorry”. The teacher acted and the victim received a “Sorry”, but the child still felt that an injustice had been done and that, because of the abuse that they had faced, saying sorry was not enough. The children came away feeling as though they had had no closure and no support and that the incident had not been taken seriously.

The report highlights what I think will happen more and more. The 33 per cent who said that they would tell a teacher will become zero per cent. The 67 per cent who said that they would not tell a teacher gave me a valid reason why—they had done it before and nothing had been done.

The fact that nothing gets done will filter down to the 33 per cent who said that they would tell a teacher. Teachers and authorities need to recognise a racist or Islamophobic incident or comment. Until that happens, Islamophobia will get worse.

**Mary Fee:** Anthony Horan, were you present for the earlier evidence session?

**Anthony Horan:** I was here for the second half of it.

**Mary Fee:** Thank you for your submission, which we received this morning. As you are aware, Barbara Coupar has given evidence to us. Although I appreciate that we are focusing more on faith-based bullying today, I cannot let the opportunity go by of comparing and contrasting her evidence with the evidence that you have given us, which says:

“Catholic schools adhere to the same anti-bullying policies as their non-denominational counterparts ... As Catholics we believe in the inherent dignity of each and every human being ... Catholic schools are committed to ensuring that all protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 shape policies aimed at tackling bullying.”

The evidence that we heard this morning is that Catholic schools sweep everything under the carpet. There are no equality groups and no LGBTI groups. They are faith-based schools, and the faith does not believe in sex before marriage and does not support gay marriage—so they just do not talk about it. I would be interested in your comments on that evidence.

**The Convener:** You have been given an easy question.

**Anthony Horan:** I cannot comment on individual cases, but I heard that comment and some of the other things that were said specifically in relation to Catholic schools. We have a job to do in taking on board young people’s concerns and any bad experiences that they might have had in Catholic schools. At your meeting on 26 January, Barbara Coupar said that she would take that forward. Since then, on 18 May, we had a training session for secondary school teachers that was attended by about 50 of them. There will be another session at the end of the year for headteachers. We looked at all the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that secondary school teachers are aware of their responsibility under the act generally and also specifically in relation to those protected characteristics. That is not leaving any of the protected characteristics out—it covers all of them.

11:00

We also covered the public sector equality duty, which is important, and we looked at the

respectme online resource, which is useful. All of that was done to equip teachers and ensure that they are aware of any instances of bullying—because a range of characteristics is involved, not just one or two—and to put in place processes to deal with that.

It is an on-going process. We already have in place anti-bullying procedures that we like to think are fairly robust. However, if young people continue to tell us that they have had a bad experience, we will need to review that.

Mary Fee touched on recording and monitoring, and I agree completely with what she said. We need to get better at those things. If we are going to improve the school experience of our young people, whatever protected characteristic they come under, we need to know where the issues are. If we record and monitor properly across the board, we will know where the issues are and that will better inform how we tackle them.

**Mary Fee:** The ethos and culture that have been developed in Kirkcaldy high school, which we heard about earlier, represent a model that we would love to see rolled out across Scotland. That school is welcoming and inclusive of everyone, regardless of their beliefs. Do you think that Catholic schools will be able to develop a similar model to that?

**Anthony Horan:** Our position is similar to that which the Rev Dr Richard Frazer stated at the outset. We, in the Catholic community, believe in the inherent dignity of every human being. Every human being is made in the image and likeness of God, so they have inherent worth and value—there is no exception to that. We have to be abundantly clear about that. Every child should feel included, and there should be no feelings of exclusion or of being left out.

On the Kirkcaldy example, there are always things that we can learn from. We should always consider good examples that might help us to improve the school experience of young people who might be feeling left out or discriminated against.

**Mary Fee:** The evidence that we have heard previously from young people who have attended Catholic schools suggests that there is a bit of work to be done in relation to sexual identity and sexual harassment and discrimination. I am pleased to hear you say that you are going to do a bit of work on that. We look forward to that.

**The Convener:** We have heard evidence from some young people who hold up St Joseph’s College in Dumfries as a good example of what a school should be doing. I do not know whether you know the details of what is being done in that school, but we have heard good things about how it has handled sexual harassment, sexual assault

and sexual orientation. We have heard only anecdotal evidence and have not had the chance to visit the school. Do you have any more detail about what has been done in that school? Was it the result of leadership in the school or within the whole structure?

**Anthony Horan:** I am afraid that I cannot elaborate on that.

**The Convener:** That was a bit unfair.

**Anthony Horan:** No, it is all right.

In response to Mary Fee's question, I suggest that there is a job to be done in ensuring that people understand the Catholic faith and Catholic values. Most of the panel have spoken about such understanding in terms of their faiths. We need to make sure that people understand what the Catholic faith is and what it stands for. We would not want that to compromise the safety and wellbeing of any of our children, but I think that it is an important point to remember.

**The Convener:** How do you cope with tensions between your faith and where society is now? That must be really difficult. We have dealt a wee bit with intersectionality and how it affects young people as they are growing up. People are not part of just one group and do not have just one characteristic—they generally have a number of them. How would you take forward policy, procedures or learning that supports the young person who sits in the middle of such intersectionality when there is tension between their faith and where they are as an individual?

**Anthony Horan:** First and foremost, as I said before, we believe in the inherent dignity of each and every human being. All of us are made in the image and likeness of God—no Catholic or Christian person should forget that. We must emphasise that point. We appreciate that we have to look after our young people, and we know that, particularly in modern, contemporary society, there are tensions with certain beliefs that the Catholic faith holds dear. However, we cannot forget that the church believes that each and every person is of intrinsic worth and value—that is our fundamental starting point. We need to cater for all people to make sure that no one's rights are infringed unnecessarily.

**The Convener:** I pose the same question to all the faith groups and to those of no faith, too.

**The Rev Dr Richard Frazer:** In the light of what happened to the leader of the Liberal Democrats yesterday, you raise an interesting issue about people's theological position and their cultural position. We, in the Church of Scotland, have been wrestling with such issues for many years and we use the term "constrained difference". We believe in inclusion and that no one should feel

excluded, so how can we live with diversity within our church? We have LGBTI people who are members of the Church of Scotland and we have ministers who are in same-sex relationships. How do we live with that, knowing that people are at different ends of a spectrum?

We have tried to deal with it by taking an approach that involves openness to learning. Some years ago, there was a pretty fixed perspective about sexual identity in our society and in the church. People have perhaps taken on board some of the evidence, some of the science and some of the cultural shifts that have taken place and we recognise that we are now in a different place from where we were 50 years ago in our understanding of human sexuality and identity. We have tried to inculcate that in our thinking, which is really important.

I endorse what Charlie Lynch said about the importance of literacy and understanding. That is absolutely fundamental. We are trying to frame our contribution to both religious, moral and philosophical education and religious observance in a way that does not offer a dominant position or place an expectation of belief on people but recognises that we can learn from each other and be enriched by learning more about Islam, secularism, Buddhism or Judaism. We should not be afraid of diversity; we need to be enriched by the diversity of our culture. All those things are really important.

We are on a journey in our understanding of human identity, sexual identity and pluralism, and we must put in place measures and policies that will support people in taking that journey towards tolerance, respect and a deeper understanding of human identity.

**The Convener:** A number of the young people whom we have spoken to in the course of this inquiry have suggested that a way forward is to have decent relationships and friendships. It is not so much about training as about awareness raising and understanding how to build a relationship and how to deal with rejection and conflict. It seems to me that the wisdom of the young will be the common thread that runs through our committee report, because young people seem to know what needs to be the underpinning or the foundation that allows the flourishing that we all want for them.

What you have said about expectations and a dominant attitude may be the way to go. That will be very stark, because some of the evidence that we have heard over the past few months, especially from organisations that support people who have been victims of racist incidents, shows that things are coming back now that we thought we had got rid of many years ago. For many minority groups, things go up and down, and that

brings me to the points that Samena Dean and the Rev Frazer made. How do you support young people who are facing that kind of abuse, and how do you then use those opportunities to educate other young people to have those healthy relationships, and to take the attitude that it is about humankind and not about differences?

One of the criticisms that we have heard about religious training in classrooms is that you cannot just teach a child, "This is how you observe Judaism, and this is how you observe Christianity." You need to show the interconnections between religions and how they are to be understood. How do we do that? Give me a magic pill that I can put into my report to tell the Scottish Government how to do that.

**Samena Dean:** I wish that there was a magic pill. How to learn about each other's religions is a really difficult question. When I spoke to the 100 children, 57 of them felt happy and proud that Islam was being talked about during their school lessons, because that was their religion, but the others felt really uncomfortable and worried because, as we know, in today's climate, Islam has been falsely linked with terrorism. That has happened blatantly wherever you go, whether in the media or in social media, so it is what other young people are picking up, and that is why abuses are happening to Muslim children.

When I spoke to children in secondary school, they told me that their curriculum talks about terrorism, about France's burqa ban and about how women in Saudi Arabia cannot drive—things that are related to Islam, although I would not say that terrorism is related to Islam. When those things were talked about, especially terrorism, 65 per cent of the children felt really worried during that lesson, because they felt scared of the repercussions and what would happen to them as soon as they walked out of the classroom door. A lot of them felt that, during the lesson, everyone would just stare at them and they would become the centre of attention, and that made them feel really worried and uncomfortable, so we need to go back and ask whether the schools are providing a safe haven for religious minorities, or for religious people. After the atrocious terrorist attacks that have happened, 46 out of the 100 children were scared of going to school the next day because of the backlash.

We know that children already face a lot of things, including adolescence and exams, but those fears give them extra worries on top of those things. What was more worrying was the extent to which the girls who wore headscarves were concerned that having those noticeable physical characteristics of their faith would mean that something would happen to them or that things

would be said to them, and they were right, because that was the case.

Is there a magic pill? There needs to be recognition. The issue has not been recognised by teachers or by headteachers—it has definitely not been logged. Everyone needs to play a part in tackling it, including the committee, the Parliament, councils, the teaching unions and wider society.

11:15

The fact that my daughters were getting Islamophobic abuse at school led to me doing the survey, as a mum. Such abuse has repercussions. On being picked up from school, my daughter would cry and cry when she came home because she had been told that she belonged to ISIS, even though she has nothing to do with that. As someone who was born here, she sees herself as a Scottish person, just like everybody else. She is a Muslim, but she does not understand why everyone is singling her out.

The psychological effect that such treatment is having on Muslim children is astounding. I came across Muslim children who wanted to change their names. I met boys who had a brown appearance, which meant that they could be Indian or Sikh or something else, but because they had a Muslim name, that meant that they were Muslim. As a result, they were a target.

I heard from girls in S1 who had decided that they wanted to wear the headscarf when they were in S3, but who were worried about what they were witnessing was happening to a girl who already wears the headscarf—she has been isolated and no one wants to be friends with her. They were worried that that might happen to them in two years' time. Those worries, concerns and psychological pressures that Muslim children are facing need to be addressed. There needs to be a support system, and we do not have one.

**Brittany Ritell:** I will echo some of what Samena Dean said in the context of Jewish students. When a Jewish-related topic comes up in class, they feel that they are being singled out or stared at by their peers. When world war two and the Holocaust are being discussed, Jewish students will feel as though they are being singled out—indeed, sometimes they might actually be singled out by teachers who want to hear their perspective, as the Jewish kid in class. That is problematic. It is great to hear the voices of other people, but that is not the right way to do it.

When I run a lunch club, there are usually slides in the school. Sometimes, a teacher will say, "You, you and you, make sure that you go, because you're the Jewish students." To single people out like that is not the greatest way to engage



students. For people in that age group, the hardest thing is to be perceived as different.

There is one good practice in religious education that I want to highlight. One of the schools that I go to has weekly religious assemblies; students can go to whichever one they want to. Every now and then, it also has an interfaith assembly, at which there will be a representative of Christianity, a representative of Islam, and me, as the Jewish representative. We will be given a topic to speak on. The first one that we spoke on was the path to God. Each of us spoke about our religion's perspective on that topic.

That is a great model, because the students rapidly see that our religions have a lot in common. We have our differences, but we have a great deal in common. That goes back to the idea of focusing on humankind, not difference. In addition, there is generally a Christmas and an Easter assembly at that school. When that big assembly is held, there will be a second one—a joint Jewish-Muslim assembly. The majority of students will go to the Christian one, but the rest will have another option. I like that model, which involves talking about the similarities between our religions and connecting them. It is not the be-all and end-all fix, but it is something that could be adapted elsewhere.

**The Convener:** Charlie, where do you fit into all of this?

**Charlie Lynch:** Where does no religion fit into that model? That is the problem.

**Brittany Ritell:** If there is time, the school that I mentioned could have as many representatives as it needs. It also does assemblies that are based on just one faith—for example, it has had Buddhist and Sikh people come in. I am sure that that school would love to have more people at its assemblies, if there are representatives available.

**Charlie Lynch:** How might we cater for such diversity in more rural areas of the country or in places where resources are more stretched and there are not enough personnel on hand to promote such diversity? How do we come up with a model that is flexible enough to allow that approach to be taken in different scenarios and on different scales?

**Brittany Ritell:** That is a challenge for everyone. In my job, I concentrate on Glasgow and Edinburgh, because one person can only do so much.

I know that the organisation that I am representing today created resources that are approved by the people it represents, so people get a say in what is presented. Again, that requires some degree of funding and support. Getting a

chance to create your own resources that you can disseminate is one way of doing that but, when it comes to the human piece, there are only so many people who can go and do the work.

**The Convener:** The normal process of the committee is to come through the chair, but I am really enjoying the interplay that is going on, because the point is that, if we talk to and understand one another, we can make a difference.

We are almost out of time again, which is quite worrying.

**Gail Ross:** I have just returned from Bosnia. We spent a couple of nights in Sarajevo and went up to the Srebrenica memorial. Remembering Srebrenica [Scotland], which is led by the Very Rev Dr Lorna Hood, has just produced an educational pack, which it is putting round schools. When I was over there, we chatted to loads of different people. In history, we are taught about various things that happened around the world. The Holocaust is obviously a huge example of horrific genocide, but so is the Srebrenica genocide. More than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were killed within five days. It was absolutely—I cannot even go into it because it is still so fresh. It is really upsetting.

Should the Scottish Government support such outside organisations that have educational packs? Charlie Lynch brought up the need to teach children about the different religions and none, although all the witnesses mentioned it. We need to teach children that it is also okay not to have a religion and, as an aside to all that, about ethics and morals. You do not need to be religious to be a good person. There is a message that we can take from history about being humans, respecting one another and trying to stamp out hate and prejudice in society everywhere that we see it. That is a responsibility for all of us.

That was really a comment.

**The Convener:** It was a statement.

**Mary Fee:** I have a comment as well. We need to take on board the pressures that are on the curriculum and teachers, but, to develop an understanding of all faiths and none, as Gail Ross said, we have to teach about them in every school. It cannot be that one school concentrates on a certain faith; every school must teach about every faith and no faith. How do we give that the importance that it needs to have in the curriculum? It cannot be that, once every three weeks, someone comes in and talks to the school for 10 minutes. It also cannot be something that is outside the normal 9-to-4 school day, because it would become optional and we would not get buy-in from the staff and pupils. It needs to be part of

the main curriculum, but we need to ensure that it is given the importance that it needs.

I will pick the Catholic schools, although I am not picking on them for any particular reason in this instance. Does a Catholic teacher know enough about the Muslim faith, the Jewish faith, the Church of Scotland and no faith to stand up in front of the school and say what those people believe, why they believe it and why they should be supported? In the same way, I do not know whether any school from the Christian faith could do it.

I pose the question but I do not expect all the witnesses to answer.

**The Convener:** She has not given you any easy questions at all.

**The Rev Dr Richard Frazer:** In the Christian faith, as Anthony Horan has said, we talk about the inherent dignity of every human person, as they are made in the image of God. However, we share humanity and, when we encounter the human in another person, regardless of their faith or whether they have none, we see something with which we can identify.

It is really important for us as a society to think about the fact that we cannot leave it entirely to schools to deal with the issue. In the parish just up the road where I am minister, we have provided space for an organisation called Amina—the Muslim Women’s Resource Centre, which is a Muslim women’s support group. There is also a lunch club for elderly people from the Islamic community that meets in one of our premises.

It is about friendship and relationships. More resource needs to be given to that. For example, Edinburgh Interfaith Association struggles financially to keep going although it is doing urgent and important work. It is a tragedy that such organisations, which are about building relationships, understanding and friendship, are withering because they do not get the support that they need in the times that we are talking about. The stories that you hear make your heart break. It is crucial to provide opportunities for people to learn from each other and to build the friendships that will make for a peaceable society and world.

**Mary Fee:** Do you think that the Government should take a more proactive role in promoting organisations such as interfaith groups and support them more openly?

**The Rev Dr Richard Frazer:** Yes, I do.

**The Convener:** Jeremy Balfour wants to come in with a quick supplementary. We are just about to finish, Jeremy.

**Jeremy Balfour:** It will be closer to a statement, because we are almost out of time.

I have found this to be an interesting debate. I am not quite sure—this picks up on the point made by Mary Fee and others—how we deal with the ignorance about what a conservative Muslim, a conservative Orthodox Jew or a traditional Catholic believes, because we live in such a secular society. Even views about what an evangelical Christian believes are very much manipulated by the media.

How does a primary teacher in Stockbridge primary school today represent the different faiths? We need to have a bigger discussion on the issue with the Education and Skills Committee and the Scottish Government. It does not matter whether we are talking about a person who is an Orthodox Jew, a traditional Catholic, or whatever their faith may be. We have lost that understanding about their faith because most people no longer go to church or they have no connection with faith communities regularly.

That takes us back to the issue of religious and secular literacy. I would be interested in receiving a written statement from all the panellists on how we get that literacy back not just in our inner cities, but in rural Scotland and wherever else.

**The Convener:** We have covered all the ground that we wanted to cover with you this morning. The upshot of all this is the consequences on young people if we do not deal with bullying and harassment. Indeed, the thrust of our report will be about the consequences and how we can prevent them from becoming unhealthy. That is the main point of all this work.

I thank everyone for their contributions this morning, which have been incredibly enlightening. They have given us another perspective, which has helped us to understand better the dynamic.

We are in the process of compiling our inquiry report. The cabinet secretary will be with us next week, which will be our last evidence session. We hope to have the report published soon after that. As you can imagine, there will be a lot of information in our report, and I am sure that there will be pointed recommendations.

I thank you again for your participation this morning and for your written evidence. If, in the next week, there is any matter that you consider that we should know about, please get in contact, because making those links would be helpful for us not just for this inquiry, but for all our work over the next few years. I really appreciate your work.

11:28

*Meeting continued in private until 11:40.*

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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