



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

Monday 15 January 2018

Session 5



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EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

2nd Meeting 2018, Session 5

CONVENER

*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

*Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP)

*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

*Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

*Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Ruth Binks (Inverclyde Council)

Maureen McKenna (Glasgow City Council)

Mhairi Shaw (East Renfrewshire Council)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Roz Thomson

LOCATION

The Lighthouse, Glasgow

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Monday 15 January 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 16:47]

Education Reforms

The Convener (James Dornan): Good morning. I am pleased to be convening the second meeting in 2018 of the Education and Skills Committee in my hometown of Glasgow, and I welcome all members, witnesses and observers to the meeting.

The committee is responsible for scrutinising the Scottish Government in relation to its education policy. In recent months, the committee has been taking evidence on the education reforms on which the Government is consulting. The result of the committee's work will be recommendations to the Government on the reforms, including how they should be changed and improved.

Today, we will hear from education authorities that sit on the regional improvement collaborative that covers the west of Scotland. Such collaboratives of education authorities are part of the reforms. After the session, we will, starting at 6 o'clock, have a more informal discussion of all the reforms.

We have received apologies from a number of members. Liz Smith cannot attend, but was with us earlier in the day for local visits on widening access. George Adam sends his apologies, and Richard Lochhead and Ross Greer are on the way here from an event that is being held by the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee and will be able to take part in the informal discussions at the end. Apologies have also been received from Oliver Mundell.

We hope to be joined by Sandra White, who is the local MSP and is keen to be part of the discussions today.

I welcome our witnesses. Mhairi Shaw is the regional lead officer in the Glasgow city region education improvement collaborative and the director of education at East Renfrewshire Council. Ruth Binks is the head of education at Inverclyde Council, and Maureen McKenna is the executive director of education services at Glasgow City Council and the president of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland.

I understand that Mhairi Shaw would like to make a short opening statement before we move to questions.

Mhairi Shaw (East Renfrewshire Council):

This morning, I attended the first meeting of the Glasgow city region education improvement collaborative's education committee, and was pleased that, after having examined our first improvement plan, the committee decided to endorse it. As members know, it is a high-level plan. It will now be submitted to the chief executive of Education Scotland for approval. Thereafter, it will continue to evolve as the practices in the regional improvement collaborative evolve.

The plan is organised under three themes that have been identified by the education directorate—that is, chief education officers—within the collaborative: improvement, early learning and childcare, and the learner journey, which essentially concerns the curriculum. We will be happy to answer any questions about the improvement plan.

The Convener: Before we move to questions on a number of themes that we have identified, the first of which concerns previous practice in collaboration on school education, I want to ask a question about sharing good practice.

One of the main purposes of the collaborative is to share best practice. Are there examples of how successes in one part of the region that is covered by the west partnership have been shared and recreated in other places, and how do you see the original collaborative supporting the sharing of best practice in the future?

Mhairi Shaw: One of the areas in which we have been very successful has been the moderation of assessment in broad general education. That model was initiated in East Renfrewshire and has been shared across the partnership with the original four education authorities—that is, the pan-Renfrewshire ones and Glasgow. This year, it is being rolled out to the other four—that is, the two Lanarkshire councils and the two Dumbartonshire councils.

I am also pleased to say that the south-west partnership, which covers the Ayrshire council areas and Dumfries and Galloway, is going to adopt a similar sort of approach. That will enable collaboration between collaboratives so that we can ensure that all teachers are on the same page in relation to assessing and moderating those assessments.

Maureen McKenna has led some work in terms of improving maths within the collaborative. We might be able to identify best practice in that area and share it.

Maureen McKenna (Glasgow City Council):

We have reaped dividends from the improving maths work that we have done. Billy Burke, the headteacher at Renfrew high school, was a lead part of that. We set up a small group to consider

the issue of maths on the back of the report of the group that I chair, which is called making maths count. So far, that work has been positively received. Of course, it is far too early to be able to see whether it has had a huge impact.

Just this afternoon, I chaired a group of the heads of service and representatives from the eight authorities who are leading on improvement. One of the key areas that we are going to focus on is sharing best practice around quality assurance processes and building the leadership capacity of headteachers, staff and local authority personnel. We will also look at sharing the very good practice of human resources professionals, and will work with our professional associations in that regard.

We have some emerging evidence in relation to what we have done to share best practice, and I think that there is huge potential for us to do more in that regard.

Ruth Binks (Inverclyde Council): Speaking from Inverclyde Council's point of view, I can say that the issue of moderation was a very good aspect of collaboration, because we were able to learn from an authority that had a well-established model. The collaborative enabled something that was already in place and had been tried out to be rolled out across other authorities. The collaborative gives local authorities and teachers chances to work together in order to take forward moderation of standards.

With regard to the work of the making maths count group that Maureen McKenna was speaking about, we have learned a lot from the collaborative work between the quality improvement officers, who have shared their experience and taken improvements forward.

There has been a huge amount of collaboration and joint learning across the west partnership on the issue of early years education, which has not been mentioned yet.

The Convener: I invite committee members to ask questions.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): Is there enough scope in the collaborative to enable each local authority to have unique and distinctive plans, or is there a baseline across the collaborative that each local authority must meet?

Mhairi Shaw: The collaborative's plan is designed to enhance the provision of local authorities, which will be much more detailed and much more focused on self-evaluation and each local authority's analysis of that. It is about where we have opportunities to collaborate and learn from best practice across the region. That will improve practices across the region and within local authorities.

That is accurate at the moment. We need to wait and see how things will work out as the approach grows, as is intended in the proposed education bill.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I want to ask about the plans that you have described. There is a school improvement plan, a cluster improvement plan and a pupil equity improvement plan, and there is to be a regional collaborative improvement plan on top of that or underneath it, depending on how we look at it. There is also the national improvement framework. We have a heck of a lot of plans. How are headteachers meant to know which plan is their plan?

Maureen McKenna: I agree with you, but each authority has a different set-up. For example, we do not have cluster plans in Glasgow; a school improvement plan would link to a local authority plan. As members can see, the regional improvement plan is a high-level one, and it is not intended in any way to replace or usurp what is happening at the local authority level. It is important that we have the "golden thread" element running through and, if the collaborative is to be successful, it must enhance and not replace what is delivered at the local level. The international evidence clearly shows that locally based improvement makes a difference.

We cannot say by any stretch of the imagination that a collaborative will be all things to all men. We are a very large collaborative, a huge population is covered, and there is no expectation or assumption that all eight authorities will do the same thing at the same time. The work that we are doing involves scoping out where good practice is and where people can share. If good practice is already happening in a local authority, why would people change just for the sake of a collaborative? Our focus is on outcomes and improving outcomes, not on the inputs.

Tavish Scott: I totally get all that, but there will still be different tiers of plans, and I do not understand how they all interrelate. I ask again: which plan is the school's plan? Is it the school improvement plan, and therefore are the other things less important than it?

Maureen McKenna: No. I will defer to Mhairi Shaw, but they are absolutely not less important. We should look at the clear evidence of what makes a difference at the local authority level or, indeed, at the collaborative level. We should choose a small number of key priorities, stick to them and keep them high level. Schools will then tie in their plans, but they will have the ability to design locally, in partnership with parents, young people and staff, what will make a difference there.

A golden thread runs through the plans. One does not have priority over the other, but we should be able to link them together. The key is making the high-level plan with priorities that are the important things—such as raising attainment and achievement, and improving outcomes for children and young people—which schools will recognise and tie into. Headteachers can then design specific actions that will achieve those outcomes.

Tavish Scott: What do you mean by a “golden thread”?

Maureen McKenna: I mean a golden thread that links everything from the national improvement framework all the way down. A golden thread should run from there all the way down into classrooms.

Tavish Scott: I am trying to understand the accountability. Is your responsibility to provide that golden thread in Glasgow?

Maureen McKenna: Absolutely.

Tavish Scott: Is that the case for the other witnesses in the other areas of the west?

Mhairi Shaw: Yes. It is important to remember that school improvement plans are based on the priorities that are identified from the school’s self-evaluation. We can take that to lots of different levels but, essentially, that feeds into the local improvement plan. However, there are also other national improvement framework priorities or drivers that come in.

Essentially, as Maureen McKenna mentioned, we are all working to the same agenda. To reiterate and reinforce what she said, it is about managing, including managing the workload of staff, so that we are able to take forward the priorities. Therefore, there should be a small number of priorities. We should continue to dig into and review those priorities, to see the impact of the actions that are taken, and then move on from that.

The plans are all interlinked but, essentially, school improvement plans have primacy.

17:00

There are opportunities to collaborate. For instance, schools with similar demographics or similar outcomes or underperformance that needs to be improved can collaborate to bring about improvement through those sorts of reviews. That might involve separate plans or a joint action plan. Schools are used to working to different plans and contributing to local improvement plans. In East Renfrewshire, we do not expect all our schools to take forward every priority or action that is set out in the local improvement plan but, where doing so

reflects their self-evaluation and priorities, that would certainly enhance things and indeed contribute to the outcomes from the local improvement plan across the authority.

Ruth Binks: Speaking for Inverclyde, I recognise the golden thread that Maureen McKenna referred to, and it is the outcomes for children. From reading different improvement plans, you can clearly see that golden thread, which links to the national improvement framework, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. The additionality from local authorities and the regional improvement collaboratives is about support to schools to take that forward. Schools want to take it forward and they can do so in different ways. Some might do it in collaboration with other schools and some could do it in collaboration with the local authority. There is emerging practice relating to regional collaboratives and how we can join together. The golden thread is about the impact and the outcomes. Everything else is about how we are going to get there.

Tavish Scott: Okay. Maybe I can ask about support later on, convener.

The Convener: Yes. We have a number of questions on that later.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Tavish Scott, Johann Lamont and I are fresh from a focus group with headteachers, so I will raise some of the points that they made about regional improvement collaboratives.

How will we ensure that regional improvement collaboratives are not just another layer of administration and are not top-down, rather than being bottom-up collaborations with practitioners on the ground?

Mhairi Shaw: Our plan has been shared with many headteachers in the west partnership, and has been welcomed in East Renfrewshire. Headteachers see it as providing opportunities to look outwards rather than inwards within East Renfrewshire, and to share practice and learn from practice outwith the boundaries of East Renfrewshire. In that sense, it will enhance existing practice.

That is how our plan has been designed: we did not just dream it up as eight directors of education. It has been fully discussed, with agreement on the three themes that we are working towards—although that is not to say that those three themes will stay the same; they will evolve and change. However, the plan is certainly based on what the directors think our schools would benefit from, which of course is based on the analysis of data and other information that we have from our school reviews, school inspections and analyses of attainment. We do not think that the

collaborative will be an administrative being—or, indeed, a being in itself—but an enhancement of the support that is already in place for schools that will allow us to learn from best practice across the region.

Does that answer your question?

Gillian Martin: The question was from headteachers. I asked it because many headteachers have stayed to watch our proceedings.

Maureen McKenna: I agree that there is a danger that improvement collaboratives could become an additional layer of bureaucracy, which is why it is incumbent on us to ensure that they do not, and why, in these very early days, we need to work together positively, and constantly to be mindful of the importance of reducing bureaucracy.

I hope that you recognise that our plan is very minimalist and high level. We have had interesting discussions with elements of the Scottish Government that would like the plan to be much heavier and much more detailed. In the west, we are all signed up to resisting that strongly, because we are mindful of the complexities around planning. We are not talking only about education authority plans—there are children's services plans, the community planning partnership and so on. We cannot allow an improvement collaborative to become an extra layer or to be viewed as an administrative burden. It must enhance and add value, otherwise it will not be worth doing.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I am interested to find out whether you would, if the Scottish Government had not suggested the idea of regional improvement collaboratives, have campaigned for them. Who would be against collaboration? We are all in favour of it. Professionally, people learn from one another anyway, and there are existing local structures. You said that if the idea is to work, such and such must happen. Is the proposal one that you will have to make work, or one that you positively advocate?

Maureen McKenna: I will answer that question wearing my hat as the president of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland. ADES has been actively promoting collaboration across authorities for at least the past two or three years, but we have not campaigned for regional improvement collaboratives. There are elements of the proposal that remain to be tested in the system. Regional collaboratives are not entities, so we must ensure that their introduction is managed appropriately.

However, there are huge advantages in working together. As Mhairi Shaw said, there is a huge

advantage in our being able to lift our heads, look outwards and learn from one another. I do not think that we do that often enough. The daily grind of the work in schools and local authorities prevents that. Collaboration gives us an opportunity to look outwards and to learn from one another. The trick will be in being able to manage that process in a way that adds value.

Johann Lamont: Do you agree that there is a danger that recognition of the merits of collaboration and endorsement of the regional collaboration bodies—which will have their own budgets, although we do not know what they will be—might be conflated? I could adopt a sceptical position and argue that it would be reasonable and logical to say, given that the initiative is so high level and that local authorities—even in the west—are so diverse in terms of need, demographics, landscape and so on, that there should be collaboration on education at Scotland level, that that can take different forms and that we do not need to create a structure to enable that to happen.

You said that you have resisted the idea that the plan should be heavier. The Scottish Government wants the regional improvement collaboratives to have a more directive role. In truth, is not that their purpose?

Maureen McKenna: I do not believe that spending time on restructuring is the right way to go, and I do not believe that the regional improvement collaboratives should be structures, per se: they should be a way of working as opposed to a way of being. I remain to be convinced about their having allocated budgets. They will not be entities: nobody will be employed by a regional improvement collaborative.

We have to work across the west. There are advantages to working together—we learn a great deal from one another. The areas that are covered by East Renfrewshire Council and Glasgow City Council could not be described as being remotely similar demographically, but we can learn a lot—indeed, we have done so in the past—from how East Renfrewshire Council approaches quality improvement. I have learned a huge amount from its approach, and I am sure that Mhairi Shaw will have examples of cases in which East Renfrewshire Council has learned from partnership with Glasgow City Council. It is not necessary for councils to be similar for them to be able to work together effectively or to learn from one another. Lessons are always learned, even from poor practice.

Johann Lamont: Why, then, does the process need to take place at regional level? You have talked about the diversity that exists in the west, but it could be argued that such diversity exists right across Scotland. I cannot tell you how much I

love the idea of collaboration, but I am not clear why collaboration needs to be organised at regional level. You are talking about continuous improvement, encouraging best practice and understanding diversity—there is diversity within Glasgow, after all. Such collaboration already takes place.

Maureen McKenna: My argument is not that regional improvement collaboratives should be entities, which is a matter for the Scottish Government.

The Convener: I will bring in Ruth Binks on that point.

Ruth Binks: Authorities have always collaborated with one another—ADES is a good example. As a small authority, Inverclyde Council relies on collaboration to take us forward. We enjoy the training that we gain from one another. The approach makes collaboration formal, rather than ad hoc. Working in a structure has huge advantages and has challenges that are not insurmountable or which cannot be dealt with by us. A framework and formalisation around collaboratives is a good place to start.

Johann Lamont: I will finish my point about regional collaboratives. They are being promoted and it is being claimed that they are a way to tackle challenges. Is the situation that you are collaborating already, but the structure is now being formalised? Will formalisation bring added value? I do not have a sense of that added value. Where do you sit on that question? Are you looking for a formal entity?

The Convener: Are collaborative relationships happening in the same way across the country?

Mhairi Shaw: Maureen McKenna mentioned that ADES improvement partnerships were formed about two and a bit years ago. Those partnerships are at different levels of maturity. East Renfrewshire Council started out smaller, then I made a sales pitch, after which East Dunbartonshire, West Dunbartonshire, North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire councils decided to join us because they liked our direction of travel. They saw benefits for their areas from joining and contributing to our work.

The whole of the education community nationally has accepted that we have a moral purpose to improve attainment and improve outcomes for youngsters. Everyone is signed up to that. Collaboration to take that purpose forward is worthwhile, whether school by school, cluster by cluster or by local authority. We know that and research shows it. The intention is not that the west partnership, or every local authority in it, will do everything in the plan; they will not. In East Renfrewshire, we have expertise in data analysis and in quality improvement, as Maureen McKenna

has said, but we have the opportunity to learn from the excellent classroom practices in Glasgow and other areas in the collaborative. Our areas and all our youngsters can benefit from those opportunities.

Johann Lamont: However, you have that opportunity already.

The Convener: The point has been made that such opportunities are not available across the country.

I move on to the changing roles of headteachers and local authorities. What will greater collaboration and the reforms mean for the changing roles of headteachers?

Mhairi Shaw: Do you mean the reforms in the proposed education bill?

The Convener: Yes.

Mhairi Shaw: We should be careful to remember that there is a consultation about the draft bill.

I am not sure what members have heard today from headteachers. In East Renfrewshire, some people will welcome the reforms, but some may have concerns. One concern may be that headteachers will not have local authority support; we will provide that support, and I expect that the level of that support will depend on the growth of confidence. We embrace the headteachers' charter, which is our direction of travel already. We devolve all possible budgets and management of the curriculum to headteachers, within broad guidance that reflects national guidance to make sure—including with challenging discussions—that youngsters' outcomes and improvements are at the heart of what is done.

17:15

Sometimes, headteachers almost get a wee bit frightened about management of their budgets and whether they will end up becoming accountants. That will not be the case, but we need to ensure that they have the support of people who have financial expertise so that they can make decisions.

On what the reforms might mean at class-teacher level, I do not expect their roles to change significantly. Class teachers are already expected to meet the individual needs of the youngsters in their classes. They do that by designing a curriculum at individual pupil level, where necessary, to ensure that children continue to achieve.

Managing pupils' needs at school level is about freeing up class teachers and headteachers and giving them more autonomy, while making sure that accountability remains. The local authority will

continue to play a crucial role in having those challenging and professional discussions where the outcomes are not what we want them to be, or in order to learn where outcomes have changed because of curriculum design. We have built that into our plan through the “learner journey” theme.

The Convener: To whom will headteachers be accountable for the performance of their schools?

Mhairi Shaw: As employees, they will still be accountable to local authorities. The proposals set accountability at local level to communities and other stakeholders including parents and pupils. That is the case at the moment, and local authorities will continue to be the bodies to which headteachers are accountable.

The Convener: If the headteacher breaks the golden thread that has been referred to, they will be responsible to their local authority.

Mhairi Shaw: Yes.

Tavish Scott: That was a very useful answer—believe me.

A headteacher at the session that Gillian Martin mentioned described the change in her role as moving from being a leader of learning to being a business and human resources manager. I am not sure that we want it to go that way. What is your view? You have fairly described the support that is needed if the role is to be as it is envisaged in the headteachers charter. However, the role that is set out there strikes me as being that of an HR and business manager, rather of than a leader of learning. What should our headteachers be?

Ruth Binks: Headteachers are, naturally, nervous about that aspect of the charter, but there is no direction towards their being HR and business managers. Headteachers welcome the challenge and support that local authorities give them, and there is an air of their wanting to keep that. Their main objective remains to secure outcomes for learners, so everything that goes in works towards that goal. Headteachers are in a good position to be able to monitor those outcomes, to consider them through their improvement plans and self-evaluation and to ensure that all the bits and pieces are in place, but they are nervous that the role might be wheeled away from them. I understand that, but the intention is not to go down that route.

Mhairi Shaw: I will add to that a wee bit. I have been the headteacher of a number of primary schools. I consider myself as a leader of learning in East Renfrewshire, and I contribute as a leader of learning at regional level, too.

A headteacher deals with their budget two or three times a year, and then they get on with it. They make sure that how they allocate resources

reflects their school improvement plan and the priorities within it.

The HR issues will still be supported by the local authority, as intended by the bill, but—more important—the investment in people will continue to be an opportunity to improve practice and outcomes. That is not an HR issue: it is a continuous learning opportunity. That, too, is an area where we plan to learn from best practice across our partnership.

Maureen McKenna: As Mhairi Shaw said, there is a consultation, so it has not been agreed that that is what will happen. It is incumbent on us, under the headteachers charter, to ensure through our responses to the consultation that best practice is what comes out. I like the headteachers charter’s principles and I absolutely sign up to the suggestion that headteachers should appoint their own staff, decide their management structures and develop the curriculum in line with local needs, but we need to be careful that we are not creating a “hero innovator” system. The charter talks about the headteacher, but best practice actually happens when the whole community is engaged. At the moment the situation reads as if all roads lead to one person, so I understand why a number of headteachers are nervous.

We need to be careful. If the headteachers charter ends up being embedded in legislation, there could be a lot of unintended consequences that will cause us all difficulty. The local authority remains the employer, so it remains the accountable force. We therefore need to work positively to ensure that we can deliver on the policy intention without the unintended consequences. We all agree that headteachers need to be leaders of learning, but they also need to have an eye on other activities. It is for local authorities, which can provide a framework of support, to guide them through that.

Tavish Scott: That is very fair. If headteachers’ roles change and they all become employers in that sense, it could be said that augmenting their responsibilities will change the terms and conditions of their employment. Is it fair that many people are saying that that is a material change to their circumstances and that it has consequences for the profession and for individuals, in terms of how much they are paid and what their job is? Is that the inevitable consequence of a big change to headteachers’ responsibilities?

Maureen McKenna: It is interesting that there is, in the consultation document, no mention of the Scottish negotiating committee for teachers, which has already set out what the headteacher role is. If we are going to change that role significantly, the matter should go back to that tripartite structure, which looks after all the negotiations. It is odd that

the SNCT is not mentioned in the consultation document.

Johann Lamont: I was struck by what I heard at the meeting that we had before, with committed professionals who do huge amounts of work and who want to serve the best interests of the young people in their community expressing significant reservations about the headteachers charter. Part of the issue might arise from the fact that it is being sold as a big change while people are being reassured that it is not really such a great change. Which do you think it is?

Maureen McKenna: If the headteachers charter ends up in legislation in the way that it is written, it will have significant repercussions for headteachers.

Johann Lamont: To the detriment of their role as leaders of learning?

Maureen McKenna: I think that it will impact on their role as leaders of learning if all those responsibilities transfer verbatim. If we interpret it the way in which it is written verbatim, with headteachers being required to appoint every member of staff, including support staff, clerical staff and janitors, it will change their role radically. I am not sure that that is the policy's intention, which I would sign up to, and we must ensure that the implementation achieves its aim of improving outcomes for children and young people.

Johann Lamont: I was struck by your comment about hero innovators. I have worked with a few headteachers in my time who thought that they were hero innovators, but the rest of the world did not think so. There have been suggestions, from the focus group and elsewhere, that instead of a headteachers charter, there should be a school charter that allows a school's senior management team to test how things are delivered. What is your view on that?

Maureen McKenna: I agree. There is insufficient emphasis on the importance of collegiality as a means of taking forward change and improvement. To assume that all roads lead to a headteacher is not a good approach.

Johann Lamont: Finally, if there is going to be a headteachers charter, how do you balance accountability? Devolving a great amount of power to school level would give the headteacher authority to do a huge amount of things, but what structures would you put in place to balance things in respect of accountability?

Maureen McKenna: In Glasgow, we currently empower and devolve a lot of responsibility to our headteachers, but that happens within a strong accountability framework that the headteachers are part and parcel of. It is not an either/or situation or about the authority versus the

headteachers. Our headteachers are very much senior officers of the authority and need to take collective responsibility for improvement.

We need to talk more about collective responsibility across schools. International research shows that the good systems that are systemically improving are outward facing; in such a system, teachers take responsibility for improvement not just in their own classroom or school, but in the classroom or school next door. It is that collective approach that makes the difference.

Johann Lamont: So, for example, could a secondary school headteacher decide to run only three highers in fifth year? Could a primary headteacher be more prescriptive about the young people who could come into the school?

Maureen McKenna: At the moment, our headteachers decide what they are going to offer, but they do not make that decision on their own. They decide what they will offer in partnership with parents, the young people and the staff, and the checks and balances in the system are the local authority wraparound. However, it is very much a collective responsibility. I do not know any headteacher who would make such a decision all by themselves.

Johann Lamont: No, but if they had the autonomy to make that decision and did so, with the consequence that, say, an individual fifth-year pupil was unable to access the same opportunities that they might at another secondary school, who would be accountable?

Mhairi Shaw: That is the current situation.

Maureen McKenna: That is correct.

Mhairi Shaw: There are schools that offer six highers from fourth year with a two-year lead-in, while others continue to offer five.

Johann Lamont: Are there any schools that offer three?

Mhairi Shaw: I am not aware of any, certainly in East Renfrewshire. I do not think that parents would allow that to happen; they would vote with their feet and would not sign their children up to that school. The autonomy that headteachers have to make those sorts of decisions means that they have to measure them against the likely outcomes for youngsters and the school and whether the situation will continue to be viable. I cannot see a school making such a drastic decision.

Mary Fee: I was interested in your earlier point about working collectively. During the committee's visit this afternoon, we heard a concern that the headteachers charter might be very good in principle, but it has the potential to create in a

school a structure where the headteacher sits above everyone else and tells the rest of the staff what will be happening. I can see by your nodding heads that you agree with that summary. Is it an easy fix to make the headteachers charter workable in school, or is radical change needed?

Maureen McKenna: I would sign up to the principles proposed in the headteachers charter, but the sentences stop short. I suggest that it say that the headteacher should be able to appoint their own staff, but within the financial envelope—with the caveat of welfare transfers and probationers. There is more that needs to be looked at. That is why I worry about its being put in the bill; as soon as something is put in legislation, many things very quickly get battered down and the risks increase.

17:30

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Good evening, panel, and thanks for being here.

I was going to ask this question under the topic of parental and community involvement, but I think that it ties in with Mary Fee's point. You have spoken about the headteachers charter and the unintended consequences that could arise. One point that has struck us—in fact, a teacher raised it this afternoon—is that the teacher voice has not been mentioned. Will you reflect on that?

Ruth Binks: Just to backtrack a little to the issue of the supremacy of the headteacher, I think that the best working practices happen when headteachers work collaboratively alongside each other, and we have a strong model in which our headteachers co-designed a curriculum. The downside, however, is what happens if one school wants to take a slightly different approach. With something co-designed as part of a collaborative, schools might feel that they have less autonomy.

We have to be very careful with regard to parental and community involvement. There will be different opinions in the parental community even within one school, so it is not always possible to get a joined-up voice. In collaborating, we have to be very careful that we do not take just a few strong voices; we have to ensure that our working together actually takes things forward.

Headteachers enjoy working alongside each other. Moreover, all our headteachers enjoy working alongside parents and communities—and, as far as the community of the school is concerned, I include the teacher voice in that, too. I have found strong examples of parent councils, parent partnerships, improvement plans and pupil equity funding planning in which the teachers' voice has been heard. There is room for everybody's voice, but we have to ensure that the

process is well managed and that schools are not set against one another.

Mhairi Shaw: It is important that we have a greater focus on parental engagement, and that will be set out in the proposed bill. Ruth Binks is right that, especially with parent councils, a small number of strong voices can be involved, and they do not always reflect all the views. However, we welcome the fact that there will be duties to ensure that parent councils reflect much more closely the demographic in schools. More important, if we want to raise attainment and ensure that youngsters learn, we need parental engagement in learning outwith and in school. That already happens in best practice, and it will lead to improved outcomes.

The Convener: Before Maureen McKenna comes in, I have a question for her, but do not worry—it is not a trick one. Do you see the charter for schools that has been mentioned as being the same as the headteachers charter, but just with a different name to make it sound more collaborative and inclusive?

Maureen McKenna: I am concerned about the absence of collegiality. I am not sure that we should get hung up on nomenclature, but the title of the charter—or what it says on the tin—is important, because that is what should sell it. If the name "headteachers charter" simply says that it is all about the headteacher, that is selling the wrong message. The term "school" is overused, because we deliver education in a range of ways through services, units and nursery establishments, not just through the school establishment, which people equate to a building. Therefore, we have to be careful. A little more thought perhaps needs to go into what we call it to ensure that we get the outcomes that we are looking for.

The Convener: I will move on to workforce planning, although Johann Lamont might want to come back to that point.

I put on record my thanks to Keppoch campus for today's fantastic visit. Everybody who was there this afternoon got a lot from it. The pupils are an absolute joy, and the teachers are clearly committed to the school. We spoke to a number of the additional support needs teachers in Broomlea primary school, who said that one issue that they have is a difficulty with recruiting teachers. People from St Teresa's primary school said the same thing, although Saracen primary school seems to have much less difficulty with that. Do you think that the regional collaboratives will help where there seems to be a shortage of additional support needs teachers? Is there a possibility that, across the regional collaboratives, there might be scope for teachers to share that burden?

Mhairi Shaw: At present, the west partnership does not see the need to go down the road that the northern alliance had to take a number of years ago for the recruitment of staff. We are the biggest partnership—we get the bulk of students and newly qualified teachers—and that makes recruitment a bit easier for us.

There has always been a difficulty with recruiting staff into additional support needs. To a certain extent, it is a vocation or calling for some, while others tend to drift into it, which does not always lead to the best outcomes. However, we have agreed to look at the recruitment of headteachers. That continues to be problematic across the region and we could explore that through succession planning.

I am not necessarily thinking that East Renfrewshire should be succession planning for itself but that we would be developing the leaders of tomorrow across the region and we would all benefit from that.

Maureen McKenna: It is a challenge for us to recruit in additional support needs and we are actively looking at that across the city. Part of the challenge comes because there is a shortage of teachers so there is work across the board. Next year in the city, we will certainly make it a focus to look at how we work with our probationers because they need to do their first year in a mainstream school. They cannot reach the standard for full registration without that, so that is a block in the system from the outset. We really need to look at that and ensure that we are giving our probationers breadth of experience, because sometimes the problem is just that they do not know what they do not know.

The Convener: I am glad that you said that. One of the things that came across loud and clear when we talked to teachers today was that there seem to be more blockages to becoming an assisted learning teacher than there are to becoming a primary school teacher. Something has to be done to make sure that that route is as straightforward—if it is ever straightforward—as it is for any other type of education.

Gillian Martin: My question leads on from that. Are you collaborating with teacher training colleges or universities on how they can modify or be innovative with the type of course that they provide to encourage people who are coming into teacher training? I am thinking specifically about people who are working in other sectors and might want to retrain as teachers, but who cannot give up their jobs for family reasons so they might want part-time opportunities.

Maureen McKenna: For a number of years, we have been working as a west grouping with initial teacher education providers, although not in that

specific area of workforce planning and retraining, but more around initial teacher education and trying to enhance the quality of that by having a stronger focus on a partnership approach and balancing assessment between lecturers and teachers in schools. That has been going on for a number of years and it is coincidental that it happens to be the same education authorities. We applied for Scottish Government funding for teacher education a number of years ago. We have been working on that and it might be an area that we go on to look at.

In respect of the changing profession, an example of that is Glasgow City Council working with the University of Strathclyde at a job fair where we put out a plea for people with degrees who would be interested in a change in career but were stuck because they needed to keep a salary coming in for family reasons. In areas of identified need, we were able to support people financially to enable them to do the postgraduate year, after which they have to come back into Glasgow to teach. It happens on a small scale.

Tavish Scott: I have a supplementary question on workforce planning and the changing profession that has just been described. The one consistent message that we got earlier this afternoon, which I have also heard consistently over some months since the proposals came out, is that the General Teaching Council for Scotland should be left well alone. Do you understand why teachers are saying so clearly—it seems to us—that they wish their professional organisation to be left well alone and not reformed in the way that is being considered?

Mhairi Shaw: I have not had any discussions with headteachers about that. I think that the GTC—as it was in my day—has a special place in the hearts of teachers in Scotland, who see it as the keeper of the standard, if you like. The GTCS ensures that the right people—almost always—get into education and are the right and proper people to be in front of children. From what I see, the reform will not change that remit but will broaden it to include community learning and development and the standards set out within that. Historically, the GTCS has set Scotland apart from other parts of the United Kingdom and, as such, it is well protected by the teaching profession.

Ruth Binks: On the earlier question about innovative practice around initial teacher education, Inverclyde is currently part of a pilot, working with a university, that involves people training while maintaining their job in the council. They have evening and Saturday morning lectures, and we give them time off to undertake their teaching practice.

Johann Lamont: Does ADES have a view on changes to the GTCS?

Maureen McKenna: We are putting together our final response on that, but we do not have a strong view on it. I endorse Mhairi Shaw's view of the GTCS having a special place in the hearts of all teachers. We are going to ask that a financial assessment be carried out of what it would cost to change the GTCS towards being an education workforce council, because there has been no mention of that. I understand, from my discussions with the chief executive of the GTCS, that that might have financial implications because of how the GTCS is set up as an independent body. That issue should be fully explored before any decision is taken.

Johann Lamont: Do you think that there are professional concerns about changing the GTCS? My sense of the meeting earlier is that there is a concern that there would be a blurring of responsibilities and roles that would perhaps diminish the role of the teacher in education. Is that an anxiety? If so, would it be sufficient for you to suggest that the Scottish Government think again about changing the GTCS? The strength of feeling at our meeting took me by surprise. I thought that the subject was a wee add-on at the end of the meeting, but there was a very strong view that there was an issue about maintaining the integrity and standards of teaching in Scotland.

Maureen McKenna: I think that there are ways round that, and it is not an anxiety for me. The General Teaching Council for Scotland was established as a member organisation, which is a huge strength, with teachers on its board. The GTCS should not be changed without the possible repercussions for that member board being thought through, given that it is set out in the legislation that governs the GTCS. One of the challenges for ADES is that we do not have a place on that board, although we do in terms of our partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. However, ADES does not have a place on that board, except through our agreement with COSLA. Again, the issue of unintended consequences needs to be more fully explored and such consequences teased out before consideration is given to changing the GTCS.

The Convener: Thank you. We will move on to parental and community involvement. We often talk about the involvement of stakeholders. What do you see their role as being in the Glasgow city region collaborative? How would colleges and young people be involved in it? Colleges obviously have a central role to play.

17:45

Mhairi Shaw: At present, the west partnership sits across three different regional bodies. We have a developing the young workforce region,

college regions and the regional improvement collaborative. There is an opportunity for us to look at bringing all those together so that we can work on the same agenda. For instance, we do not have a college in East Renfrewshire, so, although we sit across two college regions, we feed into only one regional outcome agreement. We seem to dance to lots of different pipers, and the collaborative is an opportunity to redress that. Under our learner journey theme, we intend to explore opportunities that there might be to look at the offer, especially in the senior phase and in different curricular pathways for youngsters, so that they are able to access them across the whole region rather than just in the one in which they sit.

On further education, I have a meeting set up in the next couple of weeks with Robin Ashton, who is executive director of Glasgow colleges regional board, to explore those areas. We will then look at how we can bring others into the process.

When it comes to involving other stakeholders and taking a bottom-up approach, headteachers would involve both young people and children, and parents in determining what a school's priorities would be. If we are genuinely to have a school-led, teacher-led system, that should feed into the regional collaborative improvement plans. I have a meeting in the next couple of weeks with Joanna Murphy, who I think is still in the public gallery, to consider how parental engagement in the National Parent Forum of Scotland can support consideration of such views. At the moment, we do not have parental involvement or engagement. I am not sure that, in such a large region, it is something that will need to be considered, but if it is to be considered, it will have to be meaningful. It cannot just be about parent council chairs getting together and saying, "These are the things that we think you should do."

The Convener: We will have to be very brief, as we have only five minutes left.

Mary Fee: I will be very brief, convener. My question is on family and parent involvement and how you communicate with and involve parents who, for a number of reasons, might be very hard to reach. Earlier today, we heard that one possible reason could be that they have had a particularly poor educational experience themselves and are therefore very difficult to engage with. There is a key role there for family support workers, one of whom we spoke to today. Should more emphasis be put on the crucial role that such workers can play in bringing difficult or hard-to-reach parents into the communication circle of the school?

Maureen McKenna: I might question what a family support worker is. We would have to be very clear about its definition. However, there is a very strong role for our third sector partners in

working closely with our families and schools and acting as a bridge between home and school. Our schools and our teachers are outstanding at delivering education, but family support is not their bailiwick. Their need to have a third sector role is very strong and powerful, and that is what we should put our energies into.

Ruth Binks: I agree. It is not a one-person, one-job role. Harder-to-reach families need a variety of support, including children's services, the third sector and all sorts of imaginative approaches that schools are currently using. There is danger that there will be one job description and it will become one role, but that will simply not work. There is currently some very good practice around the country.

Johann Lamont: I do not think that I agree with Maureen McKenna on the issue of home links and how we work between schools and families. I engaged with families as part of my teaching job and it should be the responsibility of the whole school, rather than just the third sector. I would be concerned if that were not seen to be a central part of the role.

I am interested in the issue of participation. In the earlier discussion group, headteachers felt strongly that they work very hard on pupil and parent engagement and involvement. What would a duty to do those things look like? How would you judge whether the headteacher was fulfilling that duty? If it cannot be assessed and dealt with, it is not a meaningful duty to impose on a headteacher. Were the headteachers we spoke to today right to be concerned that there is a suggestion that engagement is not happening and that a duty needs to be placed on them to ensure that they fulfil that role?

The Convener: Please keep your answers brief.

Mhairi Shaw: There is emerging practice. Schools are using PEF. If headteachers are going to be in charge of their staffing and they determine that bringing in other bodies will bring about good outcomes, they will do so. In my experience, parents have not always had good relationships with teachers, not just because of their own school experience but because some teachers find it difficult to relate to parents. That engagement can be delivered by other partners so that there is not the same baggage.

Education Scotland is tasked with evaluating a school in all aspects of the duties that it has to deliver. It will be interesting to see how its practice in inspecting schools evolves and how it evaluates family learning and engagement. That will be one to watch.

Tavish Scott: I agree. Sometimes parents and teachers just do not get on—although that may just be me as a parent.

I thank all three witnesses for what you have said about governance. You have been very helpful in trying to clarify the lines of accountability. I understand from your evidence where local authorities sit and where your west partnership regional collaborative sits, but what is the point of Education Scotland in all this? What will it add to the party?

Mhairi Shaw: Education Scotland has a role to play. It has a national picture that we do not necessarily have, and it can identify where there is practice and opportunity to learn from elsewhere in the country.

The Convener: That takes us to the end of the meeting. Thank you for the evidence that you have given today. I hope that you will be able to stay for the informal discussions on the reforms.

Meeting closed at 17:53.

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