



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 2 May 2018

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Wednesday 2 May 2018

CONTENTS

	Col.
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	1
ATTAINMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT OF SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN EXPERIENCING POVERTY	2

EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

13th 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:

Nancy Clunie (Dalmarnock Primary School)
Kirsten Hogg (Barnardo's Scotland)
Satwat Rehman (One Parent Families Scotland)
Brian Scott (Poverty Truth Commission)
Chelsea Stinson (Children's Parliament)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Roz Thomson

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 2 May 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:32]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (James Dornan): Good morning. I welcome everyone to the 13th meeting in 2018 of the Education and Skills Committee. I remind everyone to turn their mobile phones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Item 1 is to make a decision on whether to take agenda item 4 in private. Is everyone content to take agenda item 4 in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Attainment and Achievement of School-aged Children Experiencing Poverty

10:33

The Convener: The next item of business is an evidence session in our inquiry on the attainment and achievement of school-aged children experiencing poverty. This is the third evidence session of the inquiry, and this week we focus on children who are of primary school age.

I welcome to the meeting Nancy Clunie, who is the headteacher of Dalmarnock primary school; Kirsten Hogg, who is head of policy at Barnardo's; Satwat Rehman, who is director of One Parent Families Scotland; Brian Scott, who is a commissioner in the poverty truth commission; and Chelsea Stinson, who is the programme manager for children's voices in the Children's Parliament. Welcome.

If panellists would like to respond to a question, please indicate to me or the clerks, and I will call you to speak. You need not all feel the need to respond to every question. Feel free to do so if you wish, but do not feel that you have to.

For the benefit of people who are watching, I explain that earlier this morning the committee held an informal meeting with parents, teachers and other professionals on our topic. I thank all those who attended the session, some of whom are in the gallery watching the formal meeting.

Yesterday, Liz Smith, Ruth Maguire and I visited Queen Anne high school in Dunfermline. I record my thanks to everyone at the school; they made us feel very welcome. The school has several interesting projects, one of which is a swap shop that has been started by the anti-poverty group at the school. The pupils wash and iron clothes that are handed in and make them available to anyone who needs them. They had thought very hard about how people would feel about having second-hand clothing and accessing a swap shop, so they have made it literally a swap shop—people either make a donation or hand in some clothes, so that no child feels as though they are getting a hand-out. It was great to speak to the young people who had approached the issue so sensitively.

How do we make sure that state interventions such as free school meals and so on are as easy to access for our families and young people, so that stigma does not attach to them?

Chelsea Stinson (Children's Parliament): For the children to whom we spoke in the child poverty consultations, stigma is a big issue that they raised in respect of access to free school meals or

receiving other benefits and support. Something needs to be done to make sure that children do not feel that to be a continuous issue as they grow up. It is something that children raise frequently across the work that we do.

What can be done? I do not have an answer to that. Even at a young age, children are identifying that some sort of stigma attaches to them if they access any kind of support and benefits.

Satwat Rehman (One Parent Families Scotland): Many of the families whom we work with have spoken about the stigma of accessing services. One of the things that we heard in the session with parents and professionals was that the systems that we set up to try to make it easier for ourselves sometimes act as barriers for those who are trying to access the services. The example that was given was the online system for paying for school meals and choosing your child's school meals, if they want free school meals. You would think that a system like that, which is separate from the availability of the food in school, should address the stigma, but it results in digital exclusion for families who are unable to go online and do that.

One of the people from a school in Niddrie spoke earlier about how they had drop-in sessions for parents to come and access the service. However, when we are designing the systems that we think will address stigma and stop singling people out, we need to do it with the people, and not for or on behalf of them, because there can be many unintended consequences that we cannot see.

Kirsten Hogg (Barnardo's Scotland): We have found it to be successful when a family builds up a relationship with someone whom they really trust—our family support workers, for example—and that person helps them to open up and say, “I don't think I'm accessing the right benefits,” or “I don't think I have the right furniture in my house for my child.” Such things are really difficult for families to admit to. If they feel that they will be judged, it is difficult to open up, which can make it difficult for them to access the right support and to access the right benefits.

Sometimes it is a really long game, so we go in and build up a relationship with a family for one reason. Through building that relationship, families come to feel that they will not be judged by the worker, that they can trust them, and that the worker is there to help and support them. They also feel able to ask us to help. Sometimes it is about giving a person the space to say, “I need help,” and their knowing that we will be able to support them.

Brian Scott (Poverty Truth Commission): As well as being a commissioner for the poverty truth

commission, I am the parent of two children. One is at a primary school in a deprived area, so I know first-hand what poverty is like.

I agree with the earlier statements that stigma is a big thing. I have also encountered underlying discrimination. For example, some teachers assume that all children have access to a computer. If they put activities online, they assume that the children can do that at home and that they have tablets, smartphones or whatever. Most children do, but a few children do not and are left out, stigmatised and kind of pointed out. Their situation is made public in the classroom: the children are given punishment exercises for having not handed in homework tasks because they cannot access a computer.

The school that my youngest boy goes to has a high immigrant community and quite a few of the parents do not have access to computers and, if they do, there are difficulties with using them.

I just ask that assumptions are not made. We are in a technical age, which is great if you can afford to take part in it, but people who do not have the means sometimes feel like outcasts and as if they are outside the system that everyone has access to, which is a source of stigma and embarrassment. For a parent who cannot provide the relevant technical ability or computer access, the sense of failure can add more pressure.

The Convener: That is a fair point. It used to be trainers; now it seems to be smartphones and things like that. There is always something.

Nancy Clunie (Dalmarnock Primary School): On free school meals, in my school there is no stigma for the children who receive them. In fact, it almost works in reverse. Children who pay are asking, “How do we get a ticket?”

I think it is exactly as Kirsten Hogg said: I have been in this a long time, so I know that it is about relationships. There are 42 languages spoken in my school. Many parents struggle to fill in forms, so we sit down with them straight away. Many parents struggle with forms full stop, but, because we have a relationship with the parents, they know that they can come in and we will not judge them. We help them to fill in the form, we address the envelope and we send it off for them.

However, the free school meals from primary 1 to P3—in Glasgow, up to P4—have been a huge bonus, because when the meal is free for everyone, there is no stigma. That is a huge thing that certainly helps.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I want to explore in more detail the financial assistance that is available to young people. I am keen to hear your general thoughts on how support is accessed and whether it is directed in the right way, before I

go on to ask specifically about the education maintenance allowance and the clothing grant. Is the right package of measures in place to support people?

Brian Scott: There is a sub-group in the poverty truth commission looking into the clothing grant. It has found that—excuse the pun—the uniform grant and the clothing grant are anything but uniform across Scotland. There are vast differences between local authority areas. I do not understand why. I know that the local authorities are responsible for setting the uniform grants, but why is there such disparity? Why can the Scottish Parliament, a sub-group or whatever not come together and say that a blazer or a pair of trouser costs the same in Orkney as it does in Auchtermuchty? Orkney Islands Council is up to £50 less than other local authorities. Why is the grant not uniform across the board?

Mary Fee: I accept that a pair of trousers might cost the same in the south of Scotland as they do in the north, but the school uniform will not be the same: it is not uniform across the country. There are different badges, some blazers have to be braided and some pupils have to have caps. There are lots of different things that affect what is to be worn.

Brian Scott: I agree. I know of one school that seems to change its badge or the colour of its blazers every couple of years, which means buying a whole new outfit. Schools tend to go in for all-in-one packages—a jumper, a T-shirt and a jacket with the badge on them. In the part of Glasgow that I come from there is only one shop to go to and it is very expensive.

If schools want to change, instead of having people buy the whole outfit—T-shirt, blazer and so on—why not have a facility to buy just the badge, so that parents can go to a shop where a blazer costs £12, and do not have to pay £30 in the uniform shop for a blazer that already has the badge on it? Schools could consult clothing manufacturers, so that there are jackets that have transparent pocket for badges, for example. That would make things a lot easier.

For parents who have a few kids at school, it is a massive pressure on their budget and finances to have to go out at the start of a new term to change everything again. If the school decides to change colours or whatever, that negates the possibility of even handing the clothes down to younger children.

Some schools in my area have started uniform clubs at which, for parents who cannot afford uniforms, there is always a stock of uniforms that have been handed in by pupils who have moved on to other schools.

I could never understand why schools do not just have a badge, so that the parent can buy the blazer wherever they want and are not railroaded into going to the one shop that sells them at £30 each.

10:45

Mary Fee: Could schools be less rigid about where uniforms must come from? Is the clothing grant easy enough to apply for?

Brian Scott: If English is your first language, I would say that the grant is easy to apply for. It was good to hear Nancy Clunie say—

Mary Fee: So it goes back to what Nancy Clunie said about helping. Is applying for the clothing grant an issue in your school?

Nancy Clunie: There is a single form for free school meals and the clothing grant. They require exactly the same information, which goes to headquarters where it is decided, depending on banding, how much grant is to be given. The form is not particularly friendly; it uses very small print. There is not an awful lot of information required on it, but people need to have a bank account. For some of our parents, that has been a struggle, but credit union accounts are now being accepted. That is huge in our area and is a great way forward for us.

Again, I can speak only for my school. We keep the uniform as simple as possible. Our parents are very keen on it. It is something that we ask about regularly. We have dropped the polo shirts with the badge. If the parents want them, they can still order them, but we do not sell them. We sell clothing at cost price—for whatever the company charges us. A sweatshirt costs us £6.50 with the badge on it, so we sell it for exactly that. As I said, we have dropped the polo shirts, because people can go to the local supermarket and get two for £3. If the child is wearing a sweater, the badge is covered anyway, so I do not see the need for an expensive polo shirt.

Mary Fee: On the form being overcomplicated, is the view shared by the rest of the panel that the form could be made more simple?

Satwat Rehman: That is the feedback that we have heard from groups of single parents with whom we have been working in Glasgow on barriers to accessing funding. The form has been a problem, as has the need to have a bank account.

We did work in Glasgow to see whether we could find a way for low-income families automatically to receive a school clothing grant. So much information is required from families by so many parts of the local authority, so we want to find a way to develop an integrated system

whereby there is the one entry point that passports people to all those things without their having to jump through hoops. That is one of the things that is fed back to us time and again, as is whether we could do something similar to what will happen with, for example, the best start grant.

A lot of families say that they get the school clothing grant and buy what they need to buy, but they need to keep replacing things. I have an example here. It says:

“My daughter rips a pair of tights at school every day. £6 for a pack of three tights times 32 weeks in the year is not cheap. Outdoor and indoor gym kit. School uniform is a kilt, not cheap. Went through four pairs of shoes and boots already since August.”

School clothing is an on-going cost for families, not a one-off cost, so we need to look at that for those families.

Mary Fee: How quickly does the grant come through? I want to know about EMAs, as well.

The Convener: Can you do so briefly? We have already spent some time on this.

Mary Fee: How quickly does the grant come through?

Satwat Rehman: It varies. Another thing that people talk about is the amount of time that it can take from application to receiving the money. It varies a lot from area to area.

Mary Fee: I will move on. My last question is about EMAs. I would be interested in the panel's views on whether the level of EMA is right, and to hear what uptake is among one-parent families, in particular. I would be interested to hear Barnardo's view, and to know whether it has done any work on uptake of the EMA among care-experienced children and on children in kinship-care arrangements. There are fixed and regulated kinship care arrangements, but there are also—shall we say?—looser kinship care arrangements.

The Convener: I do not expect all the witnesses to answer that, given the EMA is for secondary, as opposed to primary pupils, but if anybody feels that they can respond, do so.

Satwat Rehman: I can get back to the committee with figures on uptake among single-parent families. I do not have them to hand. An issue that families in some areas have spoken about is that if they get the EMA, they stop getting the school clothing grant. That needs to be looked at: it should not be either/or.

Brian Scott: I have heard in the PTC stories about problems in the transition from child tax credit to the EMA; it can be a great worry when the transition is not smooth. The two systems do not seem to be linked up, they do not seem to co-ordinate with one another and it is left to the

parent to try to sort things out. There have been cases of parents getting into debt because there is no transfer of information, there has not been a smooth transition, and all of a sudden they get a bill for child tax credit repayments, for example, saying that there has been a change of circumstances and the parents now owe £X.

The Convener: If you know of anybody who has experienced that, they should get in touch with their local representative to take up their case, because that sounds completely unfair and unjust.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I want to go back to the point that Nancy Clunie made around free school meals and the difference it has made having universal provision of free meals between P1 and P3 and up to P4 in some local authorities. Do you notice a difference when the children move past the age at which the provision is universal? Are there challenges that were being resolved by the universal provision of free school meals but that begin to emerge later in a child's time at school when the provision is no longer universal?

Nancy Clunie: The biggest challenge is in making sure that, when the children who are entitled to free school meals just now hit P4—and, in the future, when they hit P5—their parents have submitted the paperwork in good time, because there can be a gap during which time the parents have to pay and their debt can rack up quite quickly. Parents will say, “Oh, but I thought they were getting the meals free,” so we start saying to parents in March—although the provision will not stop until August—that they should try to get the paperwork in. That can be the biggest stumbling block.

There are some children—although not many—further up in the school to whom we will say, “I didn't see you in the lunch hall,” and they will say that they do not have money or that their mum does not have money. That is okay, though, because Ms Clunie has money—nobody in our school goes hungry. Still, there are some children who say quietly to us, “My mum said I can't go to school lunches today because there's no money and I'm not entitled to a free school meal.” There is always food in Dalmarnock primary school but, as I say, the biggest stumbling block is parents understanding that they need to complete the form, because they are so used to the provision being free. They can quickly get into debt, and that is something that we never want to see.

Ross Greer: I am interested in the breakfast club at your school. Is there an interaction between it and the provision of free school meals? Are you able to engage with families more if they are engaging with the breakfast club, to ensure that they are taking up their entitlement to the free

lunch as well? Is there an interaction between the two?

Nancy Clunie: Not particularly. Our breakfast club is not greatly attended on some mornings. On the mornings when we have support from one of our local partner agencies, Possibilities for Each and Every Kid, the numbers soar.

We have very good relationships with the parents—I am like my pupils' mammy. When we are in the playground or the yard, we have wee quiet words or pick up the telephone. If we think that there are problems, there is a face-to-face chat. It is about relationships, and the schoolwork quite often comes home because we need to do it—it is so important.

Chelsea Stinson: In the consultation that we delivered with children on child poverty, the issue of food came up repeatedly, including access to breakfast and school dinners and pupils' ability to bring their lunch with them. Children also identified it as impacting on their attainment: going hungry in the mornings or throughout the school day has an impact on their ability to focus and their worry and stress levels.

We are currently conducting a consultation on school food for the new regulations—some of my colleagues are in Dalmarnock today—and we will come back to the issue in a future report, looking at what prevents children from taking up the breakfast clubs or free school meals within their school—whether that is cost, the quality of the food or whatever it might be. That report will come out in the next couple of months, following the work that we are doing.

Ross Greer: In the informal session that took place next door, we were given a very interesting example of income maximisation work in schools and the impact that it has on families. I am interested in the issue of the wider financial support that is available and the difference that it makes. Does anyone have an example of income maximisation support in schools or schools having been used to build that relationship with families and the impact that it has had?

Nancy Clunie: For the past three years, we have opened the school in the summer for parents and children. I do not do childcare, so the children have to come with their mum, dad or granny. We never wanted to lecture them, so we bring in people to have coffee with the parents and to initiate conversations, but we do bring in people to talk about things like that. The parents look forward to that and now ask whether they can have those people back to support them and make sure that they are getting the benefits that they are entitled to. It is done on an informal basis—parents can engage if they wish, but no one forces

them to do it. It has certainly helped, and parents tell us that it has been very helpful.

Kirsten Hogg: We often look at income maximisation, but as part of a wider picture. Looking at income is a great step forward for families—it can often make a really transformative difference, as we heard this morning—but, by itself, it is not enough.

In our consultation response, we give a case study of a family where the issue that presented to us was about non-attendance at school—it was not about income. However, as we started to work with that family and unpicked the issue, we discovered that mum's mental health problems, including her anxiety, were exacerbated by the financial difficulties that they had. She was a carer for her mum and was not able to work because of that. So, we worked with the family on income maximisation.

I think that such work is incredibly important, but it must be part of a look at the whole family situation. What are the other impacts of the financial difficulty that the family is in? The issue is not only that they do not have enough to eat, but that is incredibly important both for the child and for the family, because, if a child is coming to school having not eaten, the chances are incredibly high that the rest of family is not eating either. We often hear from families in which the mum eats only between Monday and Friday—she does not eat at the weekend because she wants to make sure that her kids have enough.

When we are looking at interventions with children, let us also think about what else is happening in their homes, because the stress levels that impact on the rest of the family have a knock-on effect on the child—on their attachment relationships and the levels of stress that they experience. Yes, let us do the things that you suggest, but let us try to look at everything in the round within the family.

Satwat Rehman: I concur—that was exactly what I was going to say. We need to take a family-based approach and look at what issues are affecting the family and where they feel most comfortable receiving that support and advice. Some families may feel less comfortable about going into a school to get that support. It is about finding the right place.

That is where you need the third sector and others to act as the intermediaries—the ones who have an informal relationship with the family that is not on a statutory basis. As Kirsten Hogg said, families often present with other issues, and it is only when we begin to unpick those issues that we begin to see that, as a result of all those issues, the family has built up tens of thousands of pounds' worth of debt.

We need to deal with that first, before we can start to engage in therapeutic work with the family, because they need to be in a place where we can do that and where the parent is able to support the child. It is very important to take a holistic family view that has income maximisation as part of it. In Falkirk, we get lots of referrals from the schools that we work with, but the work takes place in our family centre, where the families have been used to coming since their children were two and where they have a relationship with the workers. It is a place where they can be honest and feel that they are not going to be judged, which I think is really important. We have talked a lot about stigma, and we need to make sure that all the interventions are non-stigmatising.

11:00

Chelsea Stinson: It is interesting that the committee's notes for today mention investment to address family stress models of poverty. That issue was naturally identified by the children that we spoke with. They talked about poverty feeling like a weight on their shoulders—something that they carried with them through their home life, through school and as they progressed through life as well. We have to be aware that poverty is going to impact on every aspect of their lives. They were very aware of the stress that was being felt in their families and how that impacted on the relationships that they had with their parents, their siblings and their wider network of support as well as with their peers at school and their teachers. They are highly aware of what is going on in their homes and the impact that poverty has on their lives.

Brian Scott: I agree with what Chelsea Stinson says. The overall stress levels in the family have a great impact on the children. My experience is that children take the problems on themselves. They try to find solutions to the problems, and sometimes the children even blame themselves for the problems.

Whether the focus is on poverty, benefits or whatever, the overarching issue is mental health, because the system is set up so that it puts people on a pathway to mental health problems—it is so confusing and dehumanising. If the parents are under stress, that is going to be picked up by the child, and I have found that a child's natural response is to find a solution and take the weight of that on themselves. The child then takes that into school and into relationships with friends, which impacts on their mental health.

Someone in the poverty truth commission mentioned the brown envelope syndrome whereby, when a person sees a brown envelope come through the door, they panic because they know that it is from a benefits agency or, if they

are in poverty through debt, because every letter that comes through the door—as well as every phone call—is a demand. That puts stress and pressure on the parents, if there are two parents involved, and that stress on their relationship is going to be picked up by the child. I can see why the children express it as a weight on their shoulders, because that is exactly what it is.

Nancy Clunie talked about bringing in other organisations to help by sitting down with the parents and helping them out with their financial situation by maximising their financial possibilities. I have worked with an organisation called Christians Against Poverty, which has a debt management agency. I wonder whether an agency like that could be invited in so that, when parents feel comfortable, they can access that non-profit service.

The Convener: That is for you to suggest to the schools and to such organisations.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): Welcome to the committee. Understandably, much of the conversation so far, and in the evidence this morning, has been about how to respond to the experience of poverty in our schools. I would like to explore what poverty means for learning, because our inquiry is about the impact of poverty on school attainment and achievement. I would like to get some views on what poverty means for learning and for closing the attainment gap. I do not know how many years you have been teaching for, Nancy, but you seem to be an experienced teacher.

Nancy Clunie: “Old” is the word you are looking for.

Richard Lochhead: That word does not exist in my vocabulary when I am speaking to witnesses at the committee. Perhaps you can reflect on your experience of what turning up to school means for children who are experiencing poverty, in terms of learning and the recent trends.

Nancy Clunie: I have been teaching for a long time—I am now into my 40th year—and I have seen huge changes. Things got better for a long, long time, but I see the situation now going back to how it was when I first started.

We are finding that people are being very careful, as they have to be when there is a lack of opportunities, and children's experiences are much more limited. When I first started teaching, schools made up for some of that. We took the children out as often as we could, and it was three to a seat on a bus. That was long before seat belts. If they were infants, it was four to a seat. We all got on one bus and away we went. Thank goodness, we have become much more safety conscious now, but that has a cost implication.

I have taught in lots of authorities, and I was really pleased when I came back to Glasgow to find that Glasgow City Council offers coaches free of charge if we are going to a council resource. That has allowed us to take the children out and about, but we are still limited. My children are faced with texts that talk about farms or the seaside and many of them have never experienced those things. Last year, one wee boy in primary 7 said to me, “Ms Clunie, what is the sea?” I said, “Oh, it’s a big bit of water,” and it meant nothing. I went straight upstairs and booked a bus, and we took the kids to Lunderston Bay. Those of you from down the water will know that that is the river, but for that child it was the sea, and that might be the only chance he has of seeing it.

Children watch TV and are computer savvy, and they are presented with this wonderful world but do not have real experience of it. Another reason why we opened our summer clubs was to take them and their parents to other places. It is really the parents who are taking the children—we take a back seat on those trips, because we want them to build good memories as a family and be able to say, “Do you remember when we went there?” That allows the children to cuddle a bunny rabbit, climb a mountain, throw stones into the Clyde or whatever it happens to be. They are missing out on those experiences but are expected to know about them when they are reading a text. It is very difficult for them to understand things that they have never experienced.

Fortunately, schools now have a little bit extra and can help out, but for a long time it was very difficult. I have never charged parents a thing in the schools that I have worked in, but we have been limited in what we have been able to do. That is where I think children are missing out.

I hope that that has answered some of your question.

Richard Lochhead: Yes. Does anyone else want to come in on what experiencing poverty means for learning?

Chelsea Stinson: When we spoke about how poverty impacts on life at school, the children talked about a lot of the things that it is difficult to get—material things such as uniforms, food, school bags, stationery and all the things that would help them. They also spoke about a lack of internet connectivity and being unable to do homework at home when it needed them to use the internet. They also talked about the possibility of children who are experiencing poverty being absent from school a lot, which would have a direct impact on attainment just by their not being present for the school day. They also brought up quite regularly the issue of access to school trips and residential, which are important to their

school lives and their social lives. They feel quite embarrassed or left out and disappointed when they are not able to take up those opportunities as their peers are.

In the work that we have been doing in Aberdeen, around doing our best, it came out quite strongly that there is a poor learner self-perception. There are lower aspirations for, or expectations of, children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, so we need to help those children to understand what their skills are, what their interests are and how they learn best in order to help them to feel positive about their learning. There was a lower learner self-perception in Scottish attainment challenge schools. I think that helping children to raise their aspirations is really important, as is how we see them and their possibilities.

Satwat Rehman: I will add to that. I think that we need to look at the causes of poverty, which is the stuff that we have been trying to address through income maximisation, looking at how we reduce costs and other policies that will have an impact, such as access to childcare, which the parents spoke about in the informal session, and family friendliness. There is also the macro stuff, which is about tackling some of the causes.

In talking about the effects of poverty, families have spoken to us about not being able to get involved in things and not feeling that they can send their children to school ready to learn, because they have not been able to provide breakfast for them. One of the biggest issues that they have spoken about is the hidden costs of some things, which prevents the family from feeling part of a school community and being involved in things.

In our written evidence—which I am afraid you got only yesterday, for which I apologise—we describe the experience of a family in which the parent has four children attending a local primary school. She was told on a Thursday before the long weekend school break that the children were to dress up in the colours of the African flag. As she did not have the appropriate clothes, she would have had to take her six children, including two high-school pupils, on the bus into town. The T-shirts would have cost £8, but the bus fares would have cost £22.50. On top of that, there would have been an additional lunch cost, because it would have become a day trip, which would have been at least £14. Buying the required items would, therefore, have cost her £58.50—and she is a parent on benefits. On top of that, the children were asked to pay £1 for the privilege of wearing the T-shirts, which would have been an additional £4.

Experiencing poverty means those very practical things that make families feel that they

are not part of a school community or that make them feel different when they go into one, which is immediately going to impact on how engaged the children are going to be for learning, let alone whether they are going in hungry. Those are very practical things that we need to look at. We need to get the conditions right so that, when the children are in class, they are in a state to learn. If we want to address the poverty-related attainment gap, we must address poverty.

Brian Scott: I agree about hidden costs. In the schools in my area, it is not so much about paying for the privilege of wearing a particular style of dress or whatever. They have non-uniform days, which cost £1. They are usually monthly, which is expensive for people who have a few kids at the same school.

Other things can affect the education of those who suffer from poverty. For pupils who have to rely on the school bus to take them to school, there is very rarely the possibility of later travel, after the school day is done, which means that they cannot access homework clubs and other after-school activities.

The chances are that a pupil who has to leave school for an appointment and who relies on a bus will not go back to school after it because of the cost of the bus fares there and back for the parent.

When a child is sick and the parent is called to pick the child up, if they do not have access to a car they have to pay bus fares to get there and to get them and the child back. For people who are on benefits or a really tight budget those costs quickly rack up and can eat into the affordability of buying things that week.

Schools also do special projects. For example, at Christmas they have nativity plays. If the child is playing an angel they need to wear a white T-shirt, or long white clothing or some other specific type of clothing. Parents have to buy that, and it is expensive.

To go back to an earlier subject, such things can have an impact on children's mental health. Children have been sent home because they were not wearing the appropriate uniform because the parent just could not afford it. That has an impact on their education.

If they come from a background in which there are stresses and strains due to poverty, that can manifest itself in the child misbehaving at school, and that can lead to exclusion, which affects their education.

My experience of schools in areas where there are large amounts of poverty is that there seems to be great pressure on the budgets and there are extra demands on the school. The school may have a large immigrant community, for example,

so funding has to be found for translators. There might be children who have additional support needs for which the school is trying to provide psychological help through a child psychologist coming in. There are also overcrowding issues, which mean that it is very difficult for teachers to give the time that is needed by each pupil.

11:15

The Convener: I will let Nancy Clunie back in.

Nancy Clunie: Again, I can speak only for my own authority, which is Glasgow City Council.

We have done a lot of work on the cost of the school day. It is something that we headteachers must do every year with our staff, as part of an in-service day. As Brian Scott said, it is about things like the child bringing white tights. Anybody who thinks, "It's just a pair of white tights," does not understand the impact. As a headteacher, I am very conscious of such things and I address them constantly with the staff. I would like to think that such things are being addressed in schools throughout the whole of Scotland, because they really should not be happening—certainly not in Glasgow schools.

Kirsten Hogg: It is important to recognise that, in addition to practical things being barriers to learning and attainment, health and wellbeing underpin a child's ability to learn and underpin the whole attainment agenda. We pushed quite hard for additional health and wellbeing measures being included in the framework for measuring the attainment gap. They are not easy to measure, but if we take our eye off that ball and look just at literacy and numeracy and not at the incredibly important health and wellbeing pillar in education, we will miss something.

The impact of poverty on health and wellbeing is undeniable. We know more than ever now about the impact on brain development of living in a very high-stress environment. That is not to judge people's ability to parent. However, if the parent is stressed, the child is stressed, which impacts on their ability to learn and their brain development. If the child's attachment relationship with his or her family is disrupted because they live in a high-stress environment due to parents being worried about where the next meal will come from or whether they can heat their house, that will impact on the child's ability to learn.

As well as the day-to-day things that are barriers to attainment, there is a deeper issue around health and wellbeing. It is very important to recognise its impact.

The Convener: Thank you. I will let in Richard Lochhead, but before I do, I note that we have a

lot to get through, so I would appreciate answers being much shorter.

Richard Lochhead: You do not all have to answer this question.

It is disappointing, to say the least, that in 2018 we are talking about poverty again and its impact on the attainment gap. If anything, the impression is that poverty is just as great an issue as it was a few years ago. Why do you think that is and what do you think are the trends in terms of poverty? I am talking not about the symptoms of poverty, but the causes.

Brian Scott: The system, for people who are on benefits, is not geared towards the person who has to claim them, and it is dehumanising. The new changes in welfare benefits will also put stresses on families. Universal credit will be rolled out soon—at the end of the year, in Glasgow. That will cause great problems because there will be a five-week period in which there will be no money at all, which will put extra pressures on families.

Satwat Rehman: If we are looking for the cause of the increase in poverty, we need to look at the changes to benefits and at welfare reform. We need to look at the increase in casualised employment and at zero-hours contracts. There is a series of interrelated things that are leading to the increase in poverty.

My organisation works with single parents; 37 per cent of children in Scotland who are living in poverty are in a single-parent family. It is worrying that the Equality and Human Rights Commission report highlights that by 2021 single parents and their children will have lost a fifth of their income due to welfare reform. That is an average of £5,250 a year. The predicted increase in the child poverty rate, after housing costs, among children in single-parent households is that it will go up to 62 per cent.

We are considering how to address the poverty-related attainment gap at a time when poverty is projected to increase. That is one of our big challenges. Poverty is deepening; it is reaching more and more people who are in work. We need to consider things like family-friendly working and flexible childcare. There is a range of policy areas that will impact on what we are trying to do.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): A couple of meetings ago we were debating not just the issues that witnesses have spoken about this morning but about what can be successful in terms of teachers' approach. Danielle Mason from the Education Endowment Foundation mentioned that all that witnesses have said today is crucial, but that it is not enough. What has to be added are positive teacher approaches. Will Nancy Clunie explain what, in her experience, are the best teacher approaches that help at least to explain to

youngsters some of the issues and barriers that they are facing and how they can address them?

Nancy Clunie: We do a lot of work as a school. We try to have measures in every class to make sure that there are no barriers. If a child needs something, it is there; it is provided and there are no questions asked. I go back to what Kirsten Hogg said: you need happy families to get happy children.

My school started looking into that about three or four years ago to try to address problems. That is where the summer club came from. Staff pop in; they do not have to be there, but they pop in and have an informal chat over a cup of coffee, during which barriers between the parent and the teacher are completely gone and they are on a level. People share things that they would never normally share, and because they have shared them, we have to do something about them.

On Mondays, as you will have seen in my submission, we have what we call "The Blether", which is cognitive behavioural therapy. There are no two ways about it—it is therapy, but the parents come. We have two therapists who facilitate the meeting. We chose Mondays deliberately, because weekends can be stressful.

Parents have suggested other things that they would like to try. They have heard that yoga is beneficial; it has been and continues to be for some of them. Some wanted to do something more active, so we got that going on in the school. My school is a very busy school for parents and children, which helps because we get to know the whole family.

It is about taking a holistic approach rather than just thinking about the wee bairn in front of us. It is about making teachers who perhaps have never experienced such problems aware, but without showing pity. People do not want that. It is about asking how we can reduce barriers. As a grown-up and as the adult in the situation, what can we do to help and what can we do to get rid of that barrier?

Liz Smith: That is very helpful. In terms of what happens inside the classroom on key learning, what do you feel has been successful in helping those from disadvantaged backgrounds to do better? The convener, Ruth Maguire and I were in a school yesterday that had, I felt, some very good examples of what had helped in the classroom. What might such things be in a primary school?

Nancy Clunie: On paper, my school is one of the most disadvantaged in the country. Members will have seen that 94.7 per cent of our children are Scottish index of multiple deprivation levels 1 or 2. The other 5.3 per cent are also all in SIMD 1 or 2; they are just in houses that were not there at the time of the census.

What do we do? We support them however we can. Last year, pupil equity funding was given to us, so we decided as a school community—the headteacher, teachers, children and parents—to upskill staff. We were not sure how long the funding would continue, so we did not want to put in place things that would disappear, so we would be back to square 1. We upskilled staff in various therapies so that we can offer children sessions at lunchtime and after school. They include things like Lego therapy—fun things that allow children to express how they are feeling. Another example is CUSTTAD, which is the combined use of sand trays and talk and draw. Again, the children can opt into that if they are feeling stressed or distressed.

We have increased the number of support for learning workers so that teachers have a bit more time. We have put a lot of resources into primary 1. That is where we have really focused, because we think that if we get it right there—if we get their vocabulary up and get the children talking—that will help.

We are into year 2 of PEF, so we are continuing to do all that I have described. We are managing because we are a wee bit more secure, in that we might be getting the funding for a good while. We have Quarriers staff coming in to work with children, parents and staff, and this year they are looking at mental health first aid. We are hoping to get a home-school worker, but I want to use my home-school worker very differently to the model that Barnardo's uses.

The Convener: No fighting.

Nancy Clunie: No—Barnardo's will host the person for me, but we have negotiated. I think that we took Barnardo's way out of its comfort zone, but we have negotiated a completely different way. The parents have a relationship with the school and with me, so they will come in. I am sometimes told things that are too personal, but we have that relationship. We need the worker to work differently, but we will do whatever we can. We have to.

Liz Smith: For clarification, have the measures that you have set out all been covered by the PEF?

Nancy Clunie: Yes—the measures that I have just spoken about were definitely covered by the PEF.

Liz Smith: Is that everything, including additional teachers?

Nancy Clunie: We did not get any additional teachers.

Liz Smith: So, there was just upskilling?

Nancy Clunie: It was about upskilling the staff that I have.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I will continue Liz Smith's line of questioning. This is about how you judge success, which is, as Richard Lochhead rightly said, about attainment and achievement. You have given compelling examples of what you have done, particularly at P1. However, your P7 pupils move up to the high school that your school feeds into. I will ask the question not just about this year, but about the situation over a number of years. How do you judge success for your school in respect of how the children who come from a tough and disrupted background proceed in their secondary school education?

Nancy Clunie: We have looked at attendance and at inclusion, and we have reduced the number of exclusions dramatically. We are looking at parental engagement and at the children's engagement in other activities. We feel that, if we get all that right, attainment should rise. As headteacher, I meet staff regularly to ask about individuals and about the class. We monitor where the children are and their progress. In respect of those who are making good progress, we ask why. Are we challenging those who are hiccupping? Why, and what are we doing to support them? That conversation goes on constantly.

Mine is a large school, but it is not so large that I cannot speak to every teacher every day. Staff come and tell me that they have made a breakthrough with one child, or that that they are a wee bit concerned about another, so we can get in quickly. We are a data-rich school. If you were to see my desk you would realise that. We are maybe not very good at filing the data, but we have it.

Tavish Scott: When you say "data rich", do you mean that you know the progress that each pupil is making?

Nancy Clunie: I have very good staff; I am supported by a fabulous team. We know exactly where the children are and what they are doing. I will mention to Liz Smith that we did, in fact, manage to employ one more person this year. We have a CDO working in the early years, which has been a huge help. She has a BA and is very highly skilled.

Tavish Scott: You had better say for the record what a CDO is.

Nancy Clunie: In Glasgow, it is a child development officer. I moved; I would previously have called her a "nursery nurse". She is a huge benefit in early years provision and for the transition from nursery to primary school.

In the rest of the school, staff assess pupils daily. They assess minute by minute who is understanding. We had a delegation of 26 Norwegian visitors on Friday, and I lost many of them, as my school is quite spread out. When we met at the door, they told me that they had been in the P7 class, which was doing maths. They had asked what the children were doing and why, and the children could talk about their learning. I think that they were quite surprised at that metacognition and the fact that the children really understood different processes and strategies.

We know that the children are making progress, but I think that all the things that we do contribute. The fact that we have them in school is important; attendance is a huge thing. If you are at school, we have caught you.

11:30

Tavish Scott: You have said a lot about the children, but are the parents making progress, as well? You have described the whole school very sensibly. The biggest challenge is, arguably, about mum and dad—or mum or dad, or whatever the arrangements are. You mentioned yoga earlier on. Are those programmes working?

Nancy Clunie: My deputy head had a go at me last week; she said, “Nancy, it’s like Sauchiehall Street in here.” I said that it was not and that we were busier than Sauchiehall Street. Again, that busyness is because of parents. We have a photography class in which they work with Glasgow Clyde College. Some of our parents who have done the photography class have English as an additional language. They are now making their photographs into a dual-language book, and their children will be doing the translation. We have a parent eco group whose food is now being used in the lunch hall. We have put many of my parents through certification and many have gone on to work. We support the parents, as well as the children.

Tavish Scott: Are you doing this with other headteachers across Glasgow? Does Maureen McKenna ask you to mentor other headteachers?

Nancy Clunie: No. I am fortunate in that I have been seconded to help to support the children’s neighbourhoods Scotland initiative. Obviously, that is about much more than schools, and is about instilling the approach in others, too.

Tavish Scott: Thank you.

Ross Greer: You mentioned that one of the approaches that you have taken has dramatically reduced the number of exclusions. Have you tackled the behavioural or other causes that have resulted in exclusion, or have you changed the school’s policy and approach to responding to

those issues and chosen to use something other than exclusion?

Nancy Clunie: It is a little of both. My teachers are now much more aware of the stresses and challenges that some children face in their everyday lives and how that comes into school. Sometimes, an angry child is angry only because they do not know how to express that they are sad, hurt or whatever. With so many teachers having been trained in different approaches, the children are now able to express themselves better, so we can say that we see that they are angry and ask whether they need to go and work with Mr Such-and-Such or Ms Such-and-Such. It is about giving the children a way out. Sometimes, that half an hour or an hour in which to express themselves using sand or Lego is enough to calm them. Sometimes it is not, but it certainly helps. It is about changing how staff approach things, but it is also about our getting the skills to deal with children who are distressed.

Chelsea Stinson: Across our work at the Children’s Parliament, the children speak often about the importance of relationships with school staff. That is especially true for children who are affected by poverty, trauma or stress. One of the children who took part in the consultation said that it is good to have a teacher to trust, and that they might feel stuck if they did not have someone to tell things to. Positive relationships with teachers or other school staff to help children in such circumstances to achieve within their school day is vital. Where the relationships are right it really helps the children, but their being wrong has a really negative impact on children’s experience at school and their attainment level.

In the programme that we are doing in Aberdeen, we take a rights-based approach, and we are working with schools and class teachers to develop a culture of empathy, trust and kindness that is based on human dignity. It is helping children to feel that they are part of the school community and the classroom, and that they are able to achieve within that setting. The teachers who have taken part in the programme have spoken about the difference that it has made in their understanding of individual children, what works for them and how best to support them in the classroom.

On self-perception and the language that they use to describe how they learn and what they are feeling—to go back to the point that Nancy Clunie made—it is important for children to have the vocabulary to be able to express themselves, so that they are not just stuck at “I’m bored” or “I’m angry” and can get beyond that to identify issues and become part of the solution, as Brian Scott said earlier.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Some of the evidence that we have heard in other sessions has suggested that there is quite a wide variation from school to school and local authority to local authority in how children experiencing poverty perform. Even when comparing like with like, there is quite a difference between schools and local authorities. Do you think that the culture and leadership in the school is the most significant factor in explaining that, or is there more to it than that?

Nancy Clunie: I think that the culture is a huge factor in that. I have been lucky, because I have been in my current school for 10 years. Getting the right culture is not an easy thing and it does not come overnight. It is about building trust and relationships. For some of our families, we are the only stable thing in their lives, so knowing that we are always there is really helpful. Some parents share concerns and worries that go way beyond the child and school. If I do not know the answer, I will know someone who knows someone who knows someone who knows the answer. It is just a question of getting those supports in place, but that is a very time-consuming thing. As I said earlier, I am fortunate to be backed by the most magnificent team that allows us to do that, but it is not always easy.

Kirsten Hogg: Listening to Nancy Clunie speak, it is fair to say that her school is exceptional. There are a number of other exceptional schools across the country, but there are also some schools where the starting point needs to be a bit further down the line and where we need to start the work that Nancy Clunie started 10 years ago. There, we are looking at interventions that are about helping teachers to understand what trauma is. We have a fantastic trauma knowledge and skills framework in Scotland, which was developed by NHS Education for Scotland, and we think that teachers should access the training that it recommends so that they have the relevant level of knowledge to understand students' behaviours, to think about what is causing them and to be more compassionate in their approach. We need to think about what support we can put in in those schools where the relationships are not great.

Nancy Clunie has had to push us out of our comfort zone because, often, we have a relationship that involves us acting as an interface between the school and the parents, and in some areas that is still needed. In others, thankfully, it is not, which is great, but in many areas that needs to happen. The issue of the culture and the ethos of the school is incredibly important, and in many cases it comes down to the leadership in the school.

Nancy Clunie: I have talked about my school team, but my school team goes much wider than

school staff. It involves the health and social care partnership, which I could not imagine not being in school, as well as the thriving places initiative, community planning and the third sector. We now no longer talk about partners; they are just friends of the school. When I come to do the school improvement planning, they are round the table because they support everything else that is going on. The education that we provide is not education in a silo; it is supported by a range of statutory and third sector services that I could not run the school without.

Oliver Mundell: You say that you have been doing much of the work that you have talked about for 10 years. The frustrating thing from our point of view is that we have not managed to universally share that best practice. How could we improve that? Why are other schools not taking up such initiatives? Is it a question of resources? Is it a question of more training? I know that you have upskilled your staff to help them to understand the issues. Do you think that it is the case that people are not aware of the issues, or do they not have the time and resource to tackle them?

Nancy Clunie: I do not want to speak on behalf of other people whom I do not know but, as you will have gathered, I am not a shrinking violet, so if I need help, I go out and find it. Over my journey of 10 years, I have been supported by not just people locally, but people nationally. What does it take to tweet someone to say, "I really like what you're doing. Do you have time in your busy schedule to come here?" Getting people of the calibre of John Carnochan and Karyn McCluskey into my school to work with my children and to get to know their parents has been mind blowing, and I am now lucky enough to call them friends. It has just been a case of donning the brave pants and picking up the phone. The worst that they can say to me is, "Away you go," but nobody ever does. They have always been really excited, because they want to get in at ground level, too. It is a case of being a wee bit cheeky and saying, "Can you come and help?" You never know—it might be you next.

The Convener: Put on your brave pants, Oliver.

Oliver Mundell: I will take you up on that.

The Convener: Nancy Clunie, you started 10 years ago; other schools did not. Why?

Nancy Clunie: I do not know. Personal journeys come into it. I grew up in the Gorbals and I started my teaching in the Gorbals. For those of you who know Glasgow, I am now in Bridgeton, which is a stone's throw away, so I have almost completed the circle. How I was brought up comes into it. The morals and the values that my parents gave me were that we are all Jock Tamson's bairns, nobody is better than you and you can do whatever you want. I really believe that. I will say to the children,

“You can be anything you want, and I am here to get you there and help you.” You see their wee shoulders going.

The Convener: How did you recognise that it is that community approach, whereby the school is a sort of village, that makes a child when other schools were not going down that route? What was it that you saw that others did not? Why was that the case?

Nancy Clunie: I would like to think that I did the same at the two schools that I was head of before, but the school that I took on 10 years ago was a new school that was set up following the closure of five small schools. The merger happened and then I arrived. Although the communities were only across roads from one another, they were very proud communities with lots of local history. When I went into the school, I did not know which child had come from which community but, by golly, I knew that, when it came to the staff, there had to be a united front.

We were quite fortunate in that I started in August 2007, and we knew that the host city of the Commonwealth games was going to be announced in November of that year. I took the gamble that Glasgow would get it. We knew that, if Glasgow got it, the Commonwealth village would be built in our community and that there would be changes. I was the new head—the new broom. I had to come up with something that people had never heard of before, so that no one could say, “In this school, we did it like that.” It was just a case of, “Let’s get going. Come on—let’s be different.”

Although the concept of adverse childhood experiences was around at that time, I had never heard of it, although I knew that all those things impacted on children. We started looking at things that we could do. We had to build a community because, although the parents lived close to the school, they did not know one another. We had to bring the community together, and that was the focus of the school.

The Convener: You were fortunate to get in on the ground.

Brian Scott: From my experience on parent councils, I know that a school might have a programme in place, but sometimes it does not take much for things to start unravelling. An incident can happen, such as the headteacher moving on, for whatever reason. The new headteacher might not be able to get to grips with the problem and might also move on, with the result that there is no continuity. A programme can start to unravel because there is no one at the head of the ship to keep things going.

11:45

It is very important to get parental involvement. At some schools that I have had experience of, it is difficult to get parental involvement, especially when there are distinct cultures in the school. For example, there might be a large immigrant community and the communities might not understand one another. It is a case of trying to bring them all together. When there is parental involvement, it is slightly easier to put things into place, because the parents want to drive things forward. It is a case of keeping that going. I do not know how Nancy Clunie found that. My experience was that there was always a small core group of parents who wanted to get involved, but they would move on as the children moved up through the school and on to secondary education. It is difficult to bring in the next set of parents who will run with the flag.

The Convener: What you say is interesting, but I think that my colleagues will agree with me when I say that, when it comes to parental engagement, the difficulty has not been with immigrant communities; it has been to do with the previous bad experiences of school of parents. I suspect that Dalmarnock—which is an area that I know well—would have a lot of parents who had poor experiences at school.

Nancy Clunie tells us that she has managed to turn that round. I suppose that the answer that the committee is looking for is how you have done that.

Nancy Clunie: I have many headteacher friends who ask the same. They will say, “We’ve started a homework club and we have got three pupils coming and you get 120.” My answer is always, “Have you asked your parents what they want?” We have never introduced or offered something that has not come from something that a parent has said. What we have done has been led by parents. We only need a spark. On the first day back in January, two parents said to me, “I had a thought about summer school. I don’t know what to do in terms of first aid. Could we get something in summer for that?” Someone else had a near miss with a fire and said that they would quite like to know how to deal with that, so we are running fire training for parents. What we do comes from things that parents have said. Funnily enough, the one thing that I cannot get is a parent council. I do not have a parent council.

The Convener: That is weird. The answer to the question is to do with empowerment of the parents, is it not?

Nancy Clunie: Yes—it is about the complete involvement and empowerment of the parents.

Chelsea Stinson: I go back to something that Nancy Clunie said earlier about opportunities to

invite organisations or people to come in and broaden what is happening in a school. The Children's Parliament works with schools across Scotland every year. Some schools are very eager to get involved in our consultations and projects and are keen for us to come in and deliver workshops and sessions, while other schools are very resistant to that or they do not have the capacity to even think about doing it. There is a huge discrepancy in how different schools approach the additional opportunities that are presented. I think that there is something to be said for having an attitude of, "Let's get this going and try new things," but there is also a capacity issue for some schools, or they might just be resistant to people whom they do not know coming in.

Some members of the Children's Parliament attended the second Cabinet meeting with children and young people in March. One of the things that they continuously say is that they want to be more involved in teacher training and social work training so that the people who will go on to be in those professions hear from children early on in their training about what makes a good relationship between pupils and teachers, what makes those relationships work and what their advice is for those people. They have a lot of experience with teachers and social workers, and we should be using them to help our professionals as they advance in their careers. I echo what children are saying about wanting to be involved in that.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): You have already mentioned many of the things that I wanted to pick up. To follow up what you said about ACEs and teacher training, do you think that there is a role in teacher training for fundamental basic training in the sort of things that you are now using your pupil equity funding for in continuing professional development? Would that give new teachers the basic toolkit to be able to understand childhood trauma, what impact it has and how they can help?

Nancy Clunie: I have very mixed feelings on that, although I know that Barnardo's is very keen. For many people, teacher training is now one year, so it is very tight and there is so much to cram in. I also do not think that children should be labelled with ACEs. Many children have suffered trauma, but some have the resilience that they need and we as teachers can help other children build that resilience. I think that it is very important that new teachers know about it, but there are so many other things to cram into a very tight year that it is a very difficult question. I have been very fortunate that I have had some amazing young teachers come through my hands, but they come into schools a bit like rabbits caught in headlights because that year has passed in a whiz. The

people who have gone through four years have had more time to think about it and consider, but I am unsure about how much time can be spent on anything. If you only mention it and it is piecemeal, is that worse? I do not know. Maybe it is up to the schools. We talk about it, but there is no labelling of children who have suffered three, four, five, six or even seven ACEs. I know that that is different from Barnardo's.

Kirsten Hogg: We take on board the additional pressures that are being put on to teachers, so it is not that we would say, "This is the method by which teachers need to understand about trauma and ACEs," because there will be others who are better placed to make those decisions, but there are a couple of things that I think would really help. One goes back to what we said about the culture of leadership within a school. It is incredibly important that trauma and ACEs are in the new qualifications and training for headteachers, because the leadership and the understanding need to come from the very top of the school and that will help to change those cultural issues that we have talked about. The approach that we take in supporting teachers often involves helping them with an individual case that they are facing and helping them to broaden their understanding of ACEs and trauma. We do that without being prescriptive and without making it seem like something out of a textbook or an additional thing that they feel they have to take on; they see the benefit of it.

For example, we had a case in a school with a young man who would often take himself out of the classroom. He found it really stressful to be in that environment and he would take himself off to a nurture space within the school, but the teacher would send somebody to bring him back. That young man was in no position to learn at that point, so it was not doing him any favours in attainment. The teacher had got him back to the classroom but made him more angry. We have helped that teacher to understand that the reason why he takes himself there is to calm himself down. That helps him to regulate his emotions and then, when he is ready to come back, he will be in a position to learn. It is not so much about saying, "You must know about this new thing and you must know this terminology." It is about saying, "Can we help you to unpick that so that, if it happens again in the future, you will be better placed to deal more compassionately with that person, rather than just looking at their behaviours?"

Chelsea Stinson: Including children's rights is vital to the culture that supports children in school and at home. I hope that many of you have seen the documentary "Resilience", which is where a lot of the discussion about ACEs has come from in Scotland. As I was watching that, it struck me that

children's rights are the gap in the narrative of that film. It is a film from America, where they do not talk about children's rights like we do here. Children's rights are something that can support what we do in Scotland as a foundation, because those 10 things that are identified as adverse childhood experiences are happening because children's rights are not being fulfilled. Creating a culture in which children's rights are respected and in which children and adults know about their rights can help us address some of these issues that come to the front. One of the MCPs that we worked with said, "I think that more people in Scotland, especially kids, need to know about their rights. If something unfair happens, they need to know what to do about it." It gives children an understanding of what should be happening and what should not be happening, and lets them know that there are people who they can go to to discuss what is happening in their lives.

Satwat Rehman: It is important for us to look at how we have better trauma-informed practice across all the professions that work with children, but it is also important for that to be contextualised. Our view at OPFS is that, when we are talking about adverse childhood experiences, that discussion needs to take place within an anti-poverty framework that recognises the structural causes of inequality. You can be extremely resilient, you can be coping with a series of knockbacks, day after day after day, but there is only so much you can do to address those and there are other factors that we need to look at. In particular, poverty, which is what we are talking about here, can exacerbate the impact of those adverse experiences on individuals and families because it reduces their ability to put in place the protective and remedial factors. An upper middle-class family could have a series of ACEs, but they have the resource to be able to buy in what they need to support them with that.

It is about looking at the impact of poverty on the capacity and resources to deal with the effects of adverse childhood experiences at the same time as recognising that many of these families have developed a high degree of resilience and coping mechanisms and are putting up with circumstances on a daily basis that are having an impact. We need to look at contextualising this whole debate within the anti-poverty debate.

Gillian Martin: I would like to ask about PEF. Nancy Clunie outlined some incredible things that she is doing with her PEF. It was good to hear that she does not decide by herself how to spend that money but that the school community does that. What does PEF mean to a school and could it be improved? You talked about wanting to know that you are going to be getting it year on year. Is there anything that PEF has allowed your school to do

that otherwise you would not have been able to do?

Nancy Clunie: Last year, it came as a bolt out of the blue and to be given the third largest amount in the whole of Scotland was scary—there is no two ways about it—but you very quickly get used to it. This year, the amount went up significantly, so we have a lot of money, but it is exciting and we are trying to make use of it well so that we can document that it is helping to close the gap and raise attainment. I appreciate that we cannot say that it is for 10 years or whatever but knowing whether we will get it next year would be helpful—that is for sure. It has been very gratefully received.

I was in Finland last week with teachers from all over Scotland and, of course, PEF was mentioned. It was interesting to hear what others are doing and to learn from each other. PEF has allowed us to be creative and to think outside of the box. It is a wonderful challenge as a leader to not just do more of the same. If you do more of the same you get more of the same at the end, so it is good to think differently. It has been super, so thank you to everyone who voted for it.

Gillian Martin: I was struck by what you were saying about the parental engagement in your school, but I am very aware, as the convener alluded earlier, that for some parents, maybe those with very chaotic lifestyles or parents who have had a very negative experience of school themselves, getting involved in the school could be an added pressure and they feel that they are outside that whole community. How do you deal with parents like that for whom the idea of coming into a school is another stress in their already very chaotic or busy lives and they feel that they just cannot engage with the school?

Nancy Clunie: That is what I want to explore next. We have the parents who are very keen to be a part and we have got on board the parents who have been reluctant because of language barriers, but there are some parents who we are not getting, so we want to know what would enable us to reach them. However, they will come to anything to do with their children. The turnout at my parents evenings last month was 98 per cent, which I think is tremendous, and every parent in the 2 per cent who did not come was called and every single child was accounted for. My parents really do want their children to do well, but there are some who have not joined things yet, so what is it that would get them in? We need to explore that and we need to ask them. If that means knocking on doors, that is what we will do. If you will not come to a coffee morning, I will come to you—there is no escape. We need to ask, because I do not know what the answer is. I am looking for my parents to tell me.

The Convener: You are using heavy-handed tactics.

Nancy Clunie: I am the Bridgeton mafia.

Mary Fee: What would you be able to do differently with your PEF if you knew year on year that you were getting that funding? If you knew that, for the next 10 years, you were going to get the same amount of funding, what would you do differently?

12:00

Nancy Clunie: It would allow us to make a long-term action plan. Now it is reactionary: we have the money. Fortunately, we were allowed to carry forward anything that we did not spend, which was a huge help. It would be nice to sit and say, "Let us envision where we would like to be in 10 years' time," and have a theory of change going. Now it is happening quickly and I would like to take more time and to think deeper and longer.

Mary Fee: So that you could be proactive rather than reactive.

Nancy Clunie: Yes.

Kirsten Hogg: The other issue about long and short-term funding is the importance of relationships, which we have talked about. If the funding is only for one year when we are commissioned by a school, it is very difficult to retain staff on that short-term contract and for those relationships to blossom. Families feel let down when their worker changes. Something like that can have an impact and set them right back. That would be the other advantage of long-term funding.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Good afternoon, panel. It has been a very interesting session and my colleagues have covered a fair bit of the ground. I wanted to talk about collaboration with you all. We know intuitively, as well as from the evidence that we have gathered, that tackling the attainment gap is more than just about school. It has to involve parents and the community and third sector organisations. Are there any changes that need to happen to PEF and the attainment challenge to make collaboration easier? What makes me ask is that we heard in evidence here in the committee, and also on the visit that we did to a school yesterday, that procurement can be an issue. I know that procurement is not a hugely exciting topic, but do you have the flexibility to bring in other services to get the things that you need? Are there any barriers to doing that?

Nancy Clunie: I have not found any such barriers yet with PEF. Maybe I have not been exciting them, but I have not found any problems.

Anything that I have wanted to do, I have managed to do.

Kirsten Hogg: I wonder whether the Nancy Clunie factor comes into play here again in that she is a person who will go out and knock on doors. The feedback that we have had is that third sector organisations are now having to engage individually with individual schools, and it is very difficult and challenging for us to develop those relationships with schools, which is not the way that we traditionally operated. Something structural that makes it easier for a school to know what is out there and what is available would be helpful. Nancy Clunie has the drive, she knows what she wants to achieve and she goes out and finds somebody to help with that, but there are other headteachers who feel more overwhelmed by having the money and who are not so sure what they could usefully do with it. Ways in which it can be done that are not on an individual relationship basis would be helpful.

Nancy Clunie: Sorry—I had not thought of that, Kirsten. At our headteachers meeting, a new headteacher said exactly that; she said, "I don't know what's out there." Glasgow City Council organised speed dating for the third sector and charities. They were all there, so you could go round, speak to them and pick up leaflets. That was very helpful for people who did not know where they were going. I appreciate that for some smaller authorities or remote communities that would be a bit harder, but I know that new headteachers in Glasgow found it very helpful.

Brian Scott: One of the things that were fed back to me from a parent who is on a parent council is the accountability of the headteacher. The reason why that was raised relates to kids who do not have access to after-school clubs due to transport issues. There was going to be a homework club in the school. That would be great, but it would not help the kids it was aimed at because they have transport issues; homework clubs need to be brought to the areas where the kids stay, because there are facilities there. That parent raised the question of accountability. It is great that the money is there for that, but what is needed is for the parent council to be able to co-operate, co-ordinate and put in its ideas.

Ruth Maguire: I suppose that that is an example of where parents have not been collaborated with effectively.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): This has been a really interesting discussion. I sense that perhaps the committee is going to suggest that we should just clone Nancy Clunie and everything would be solved.

Nancy Clunie: My staff would have something to say about that.

Johann Lamont: Much of what you have described predates PEF, in that it is now facilitating something that you were already doing. I would also say that, from my experience over the years since I had the privilege of becoming an elected member, there are quite a lot of Nancy Clunies kicking about, in the primary school sector particularly, who are full of energy and ideas. Our job in part is to think about how we best use all those resources in our schools in order to focus on the gap that we are all concerned about.

You have been able to explain clearly how you have seen the opportunity of PEF. A lot of the evidence that we have heard recently has suggested that education is under a lot of pressure, schools are under a lot of pressure and staff are under a lot of pressure. There has been a loss of support staff who would support the school and facilitate with its attendance officers and administrative staff. My direct experience in speaking to teachers is that they describe their increased workload because all those members of the support staff have gone. Has that been your experience? Has there been a loss of, for example, properly supported learning support workers that you are now perhaps finding ways of funding through PEF?

Nancy Clunie: I have not found there to have been a loss. Without personally funding it through PEF, our support workers have increased significantly. The numbers of educational psychologists and so on have reduced, but I think that the approach that we are now taking, which involves working collaboratively with other schools and the psychological services through staged intervention meetings and joint support team meetings, has been helpful because it allows different people to contribute.

The solution involves thinking outside of the box. Money is not limitless. We have to make the best use of what we have. In my local authority area, local improvement groups have been established. Through those, I am working with four other headteachers very closely on PEF with regard to what they are doing and how it is affecting their attainment, and I can talk about my experiences and we can learn from each other. We have to be really creative and we have to stop moaning and just get on with it. We have got what we have got. Let us make the best possible use of it and make sure that we are using everything we have—every person and every resource, be it physical, monetary or human—to get the best for our young people.

Johann Lamont: Would there be no distinction for you between, for example, your core funding being stable and increasing, on the one hand, and pupil equity funding, on the other? Is it the case that you will simply use whatever money you get?

Nancy Clunie: I have not used pupil equity funding for anything that should come from the school budget, and my school budget is such that I have been able to do many a thing. PEF has been extra—I make that very clear. When people ask whether they can get something that we consider should be done in school, we look for ways of funding it from the budget first. Our view is that PEF is to make a difference, and I do not want the two merged. The school budget certainly covers what it should be covering, and PEF has allowed us to do things like residential trips, which had stopped for my school because only a few people could afford them. This year, we had 56 children away for a week, and those are the kind of weeks that children never forget. It is about building memories.

Johann Lamont: Even way back when I was still a schoolteacher, we would find ways of ensuring that a given family could participate in such activities without being stigmatised. If teachers know the families well, they know how to do that. Part of the skill that is involved in running a school well is supporting people without denying them things. That trip at the end of primary 7 is important. Do you think that there are enough means by which we can ensure that all our young people in primary 7 are able to go on that kind of trip? It is about their educational experience as well as everything else. Does the pupil equity funding absolutely fit that requirement? Is that a good example of how you could allow everybody in a school to go on such a trip?

Nancy Clunie: I was quite clear about that as soon as we heard about PEF. Before we had consulted with anyone, our eyes lit up and we said straight away, “That is our residential trip”. When I first went to the school, most children went on that trip. Over the years, however, the numbers dwindled, because the trips were still expensive, regardless of the amount of subsidy that we were able to provide. Eventually, we decided that it was easier not to have them than to have only eight or 10 or whatever go. This year, however, we were able to say to everyone that they could go. I charged everyone £10, because I do not think that you should get things for nothing. That is really important—that links to what the convener said earlier about the donation that is required when using the clothes swap shop in Queen Anne high school. I think that you have to give people their pride, so we gave everyone a year’s warning that the cost would be £10 and said that they could pay it up. That meant that everyone who wanted to go went. Some children did not come, but that was for other reasons—for example, they were not mature enough or they did not want to come.

The PEF money allowed us to take the children away. We did it in January because we want to benefit as a school and doing it in January was a

little bit cheaper, so it would use less of our PEF money. It is really important that it gets used for things like that.

The Convener: Thank you very much. That is the end of the question session. That was a fantastic panel and everybody here got a great deal out of it. Nancy Clunie, can you empty your diary for Wednesdays so that we can see you here at 10 o'clock every Wednesday morning? Seriously, thank you to everybody. That was tremendous.

That brings us to the end of the public part of the meeting. We will now move into private session.

12:12

Meeting continued in private until 12:30.

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.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba