



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Education and Skills Committee

**Wednesday 1 March 2017**

**Session 5**



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba



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**Wednesday 1 March 2017**

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**EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE**

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

**CONVENER**

\*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

\*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

\*Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

\*Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP)

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

\*Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

\*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

\*Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)

Sally Cavers (Enquire)

Colin Crawford (Glasgow City Council)

Carol Gilmour

Kenny Graham (Scottish Children's Services Coalition)

Sylvia Haughney (Glasgow City Council)

Professor Sheila Riddell (University of Edinburgh)

Samreen Shah

Sharon Veelenturf

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Roz Thomson

**LOCATION**

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)



## Scottish Parliament

### Education and Skills Committee

*Wednesday 1 March 2017*

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:01]*

### Decisions on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (James Dornan):** I welcome everyone to the sixth meeting in 2017 of the Education and Skills Committee and remind everyone present to turn their mobile phones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

We have received apologies from Gillian Martin, as she is at another committee for an item relating to her member's bill. Clare Adamson is attending as her substitute. Fulton MacGregor has also given his apologies, as he has taken unwell this morning.

Agenda item 1 is decisions on whether to take a number of items in private. Item 3 is consideration of a paper by our European Union reporter, Gillian Martin, who is content that we consider that paper in her absence. Are members content to take item 3 in private?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Item 4 is a review of the evidence that we will hear on additional support needs. Are members content to take that item in private?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Next week, we will take evidence on school education from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. Are members content to take in private an item to review the evidence that we will hear from the cabinet secretary?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Additional Support Needs

10:02

**The Convener:** Item 2 is a round-table discussion on additional support needs.

I put on record my thanks to everyone who has already contributed to the committee's work on ASN. We have received hundreds of submissions, and the committee undertook some excellent focus groups last month in which, among other things, ASN was discussed. I also thank Dalkeith high school, which hosted a visit by me, Ross Thomson and Ross Greer.

Round-table discussions are intended to promote more of a conversational style of evidence gathering. At this stage, the committee is scoping issues that relate to ASN. I remind everyone to indicate to me or to the clerks if they would like to speak; I will then call you.

We will go round the table and briefly introduce ourselves. I am the convener of the committee.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab):** I am the deputy convener of the committee.

**Sally Cavers (Enquire):** I manage the Enquire service, which is based at Children in Scotland.

**Kenny Graham (Scottish Children's Services Coalition):** I am representing the Scottish children's services coalition.

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** I am an MSP for West Scotland.

**Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP):** I am the MSP for Moray.

**Carol Gilmour:** I am a parent and a foster carer for children with additional support needs.

**Sharon Veelenturf:** I am a parent and the foster carer for my wee boy, who has additional support needs. I am also a trustee on the board of Kindred.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I am the MSP for Edinburgh Southern.

**Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con):** I am an MSP for North East Scotland.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** I am the MSP for Midlothian North and Musselburgh.

**Samreen Shah:** I am principal teacher of pastoral care at Bannerman high school in Glasgow.

**Sylvia Haughney (Glasgow City Council):** I am a support for learning instructor in Glasgow City Council and a Unison education steward.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** I am the MSP for Motherwell and Wishaw.

**Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I am the MSP for the Shetland Islands.

**Professor Sheila Riddell (University of Edinburgh):** I am professor of inclusion and diversity at the University of Edinburgh.

**Colin Crawford (Glasgow City Council):** I am head of inclusion at Glasgow City Council.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am a Mid Scotland and Fife MSP.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much.

Before we start on the first theme, I understand that Sally Cavers from Enquire attended a session yesterday that was hosted by the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, which focused on additional support needs, as the commissioner is considering further work in that area. Will she give us a flavour of any key points that came from that session?

**Sally Cavers:** Overall, there was agreement during the session that the legislation is good, but there are concerns about its implementation. There was discussion about the many layers of legislation and policy that apply to supporting children with additional support needs, which are making things increasingly complex for practitioners. There was a general sense in the room that the system is under pressure.

With regard to where things are stretched too far, the main issues that were raised were to do with inconsistency in implementation in different areas, and accountability. The point was made that a lot currently falls to parents on accountability, and there were therefore concerns about parents who are marginalised and possibly unable to take the action that is required to access their child's rights.

There was discussion about the sufficiency of resources in the additional support for learning system, and about transition for children with additional support needs—not just from school but into primary and between primary and secondary—particularly in relation to planning and preparation.

We discussed exclusion from school. Some attendees expressed concerns about both formal and informal exclusion, in particular about the recording of informal exclusion and the provision of education while children and young people are not in school.

We discussed the participation of children and young people in all elements of school life, such as being included in trips and play and not segregated from their peers. We also talked about how the Education (Additional Support for

Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 interacts with getting it right for every child and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, and anecdotal evidence was given of schools and authorities acting as if GIRFEC and child's plans have replaced the additional support for learning act and co-ordinated support plans.

On recommendations and levers of change, the view was expressed that we need to do more to hear from the users—from children and young people—about their experiences of service, and we discussed training and the capacity of the workforce to take on the training that is required.

Finally, we talked about leadership and the strength that is needed to take forward the aspirations that we have for children and young people.

**The Convener:** Thank you. I will start with an issue that has arisen a number of times in our evidence sessions, which is whether local authorities are taking differing approaches, which might touch on the inconsistency that Sally Cavers mentioned. Professor Riddell submitted a briefing to the committee that included local authority variability—would she like to start the discussion?

**Professor Riddell:** It is clear that there has been a massive expansion in the proportion of children who are identified as having additional support needs. That is probably to do with more and more categories being counted, rather than more children being identified, and saying that a child has additional support needs does not mean that the child is getting additional support. We might say that it is very good that we are identifying more children, but we have to be cautious because we do not know anything about the quality of education that they are getting as a result.

There is obviously a huge amount of local authority variation. Overall, we know that a child is more likely to be identified as having additional support needs if they live in an area of deprivation, but the local authority variation does not seem to be very obviously related to that. For example, Aberdeenshire, a rural authority, identifies 35 per cent—more than a third—of its children in school as having additional support needs; that compares with North Lanarkshire, one of the poorest local authorities, which identifies only 6 per cent. We have to ask very carefully what is going on there.

There is also the problem of local authority variation, not only in the identification of ASN but in the decision to allocate co-ordinated support plans to children. We find that that was already much lower than the proportion of children who had a record of needs, which was about 2 per cent. Now, only about 0.4 per cent of children have a CSP, which is a very important document,

because it is the only document with statutory underpinning that gives access to various sorts of appeal, proper assessment and so on. We find it concerning that a child is much more likely to get a CSP if they come from an advantaged background than if they come from a disadvantaged background.

I will stop there. There are quite a few issues to address.

**The Convener:** Why is there such a disparity? Why are children from advantaged backgrounds more likely to get a CSP? Is it because their parents have more influence or are more articulate?

**Professor Riddell:** I think that local authorities have tried to discourage the use of CSPs, even though they should not do that. Partly because of their resource constraints, they are concerned about allocating funds to individual children. Because it is very hard to take on the system, it is always the more determined parents who insist on proper assessment and manage to get that provision for their child. We know that many children with additional support needs come from areas of deprivation, and the issue is to do with poverty and their having parents who are struggling to cope with masses of social stress. Those are the parents who cannot take on the system. The system should support those parents, but it is not doing so adequately, and that is reflected in many of the statistics.

**Carol Gilmour:** The guidance says that a local authority must identify those who have additional support needs and those who need a co-ordinated support plan. However, as you say, that is not what happens in practice. I would say that I am quite a confident parent, and I have asked for a CSP for the children I look after, but it was never offered despite the fact that both my foster sons have additional support needs. They are placed out of the local authority and lots of different agencies are involved, so the plan should have been put in place automatically.

As you say, parents who are looking after children with additional support needs and who are struggling are not going to push for a CSP if they do not have the confidence to do so. That needs to be addressed. I think that local authorities are reluctant to put co-ordinated support plans in place because they then know that they have to take those actions for the children.

**Sharon Veelenturf:** Both my birth child and the wee boy I look after have a CSP, and two separate local authorities tried to put me off getting those plans for them. With one of the local authorities, we had to go to a tribunal. The boy is a looked-after child who also has a disability, so he

is entitled to a CSP, but it went right to the day before the tribunal before somebody got in touch to say that the council was really sorry—what a waste of everybody's time and money.

CSPs are important, and parents who are really driven are going to fight for them, but not everybody knows that they can. If they ask and are told by someone in authority that their child is not eligible, they will often just go away. I was fortunate to have Kindred behind me, which directed me to Govan Law Centre, which fought on our behalf. It would be useful to have services such as Kindred throughout Scotland; just now, it is centred on Fife and Edinburgh and there is a satellite centre in Glasgow. If parents have someone to fight their corner and advocate for them, that takes some of the pressure off them.

**Daniel Johnson:** I want to step into the next level of detail and talk about the variation that exists. We will probably come back to the fact that ASN captures a huge spectrum of different underlying conditions. Are there any patterns among the individual conditions? Is it a case of some local authorities being very good at identifying dyslexic children whereas others are more focused on children with emotional support needs? Do we need to flip this on its head and ask what each child needs in order to learn instead of trying to identify children by exception who need specific packages to be put together? Do we need to adopt the concept of child-centred learning?

**Professor Riddell:** Let me return to the patterns of social deprivation that are evident in the categories that are used. Generally, a child is more likely to be identified as having ASN if they live in an area of deprivation. Figure 3 in our briefing shows that the only two categories that occur more frequently in advantaged areas are being identified as a more able pupil and having dyslexia. Those categories are associated with having advantage rather than disadvantage. In fact, we find that a person is far more likely to be identified as having dyslexia if they are in an advantaged area.

10:15

Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties form an enormously stigmatised category that professionals impose on children and it is concentrated among children who live in deprived areas. It rarely occurs in advantaged areas.

We should be suspicious when we find a pattern of social advantage or disadvantage associated with categories. Of course, being identified as dyslexic carries advantages. The person can get more time in exams and might need lower grades to get into university and then get additional time in their university exams. It is not surprising,

therefore, that middle-class parents might seek out the label and pay for a private assessment. We should not be having these social class patterns. Wherever we observe such a pattern, we should be suspicious about what underpins it. Taking the child-centred approach is all right, up to a point, but it could conceal what is happening under the surface.

**Richard Lochhead:** There are two linked themes here: first is the identification of children who need additional support; second is the support that is put in place for those children who have been so identified. Does anyone have any comments about the disparity between local authorities and what is actually involved in identifying additional support needs? I am asking about things such as the number of educational psychologists, facilities, assessment centres and so on. What is required and what role does that play in the disparity between local authorities?

**Professor Riddell:** I do not want to talk too much, but I have a reply to that.

**Richard Lochhead:** Others might wish to raise their hand and volunteer to contribute, too.

**The Convener:** Please feel free to give us your reply, Professor Riddell.

**Professor Riddell:** Scotland has a declining number of educational psychologists. We also have an ageing learning support profession and a reduction in the number of classroom assistants. One of the problems is that it can be difficult for parents to get a proper assessment. Some people might be effective at arguing for an expert assessment to be done by a psychologist, but many parents get an assessment from the class teacher. There are therefore social inequalities in the type of assessment that you get.

**Sharon Veelenturf:** Professor Riddell is absolutely correct. I know a number of people who are struggling to get an assessment. Getting an assessment in school is the part that is causing the difficulty. Kids who are on the autistic spectrum can often hold it together at school and all the behaviours can be seen at home. Because none of the behaviours can be seen at school, some people are being prevented from going down the route of assessment, because the school does not see the behaviour.

People who do not have expertise in the area of additional needs are also being asked to assess something that they do not know anything about, which is also a barrier to getting a proper assessment.

**The Convener:** I have heard before about situations in which the child holds it together at school and lets it all go when they get home. In that situation, would you report that to the school

so that it was aware? Would it not be taken into consideration?

**Sharon Veelenturf:** Yes, we would report it to the school but, in the majority of cases, the parenting is diagnosed as the problem—if there are no problems at school, they must be at home.

**Carol Gilmour:** We have recently requested additional assessments for my youngest foster son. His placing local authority has jurisdiction over his education and there was resistance from the educational psychologists in his own local authority and in the local authority in which he is now placed. They said that they did not want to do the assessments. I sought help from Kindred, and I needed another professional in the room before the psychologists would listen and take forward the assessments.

The assessments are necessary for my foster son to get the best out of his education. The fact that he has already been diagnosed with one thing does not mean that there are not other issues going on alongside that with which he may need specialist help. Even as a confident parent, I felt that I was up against it with two different local authorities. I really needed Kindred at my back; that support is important for people across the board, especially if they are not confident.

**The Convener:** Absolutely.

**Johann Lamont:** First, we should acknowledge the significant level of response that there has been to our request for evidence. The situation is shocking, and I am sure that the committee will want to do more simply because of the evidence that families have presented about the scale of the challenges that they have had to face and the consequences for young people.

We have heard about disparities between local authorities. It is Government policy to devolve responsibility down to individual schools, and it seems from the evidence that parents are at the mercy of individual schools and individual staff in schools. It is not just a question of comparing one local authority against another—the disparity can occur at school level. Is there any evidence of that?

**The Convener:** Does anybody want to come in?

**Sharon Veelenturf:** I have recently transitioned my wee boy from a mainstream school to a department for additional support in another mainstream school. The schools are both in the same local authority area, but the difference in the attention to detail and the care that he gets in his education is like night and day.

I have had experience of two mainstream schools where it was made very clear that disabled children were not wanted in school.



Given the number of children with additional needs who left the school, I would have thought that, at some level further up, a flag would have been raised and questions asked about why that was happening.

The new school has a fantastic reputation; it cares for the children holistically and their education is paramount. The school does whatever it needs to do for each child in that setting. The children are included in the whole school and the other children are learning about difference and how to get along. Often, the children attend as satellites to mainstream classes—the school has got inclusion right. In my experience of mainstream schools in which there was no department for additional support, inclusion actually meant exclusion for many kids, including mine. All those schools are in the same local authority.

**Johann Lamont:** So is the evidence there? You talk about battling and being confident in fighting, but other families may get to the point at which continuing to exercise or push for their rights would actually have a detrimental impact on their child, so they withdraw or move the child. If that is the case, we are not really seeing the whole picture or the scale of the challenge.

**Carol Gilmour:** Looked-after children are presumed to have additional support needs, and that is right and proper. However, there are other children in our community who have needs similar to those of my child who would not be flagged up at that level and would not get the attention and support, and the assessments, that they need. Their parents are the ones who struggle. As foster carers, we get additional training so that we know what is out there, but that information is not readily available to ordinary parents, so there is a disparity.

**The Convener:** Does Sylvia Haughney want to come in?

**Sylvia Haughney:** On assessments, a health visitor should pick up issues when a child is at the 30-month stage. The difficulty is that some children or families slip through the net, and a child may not be seen by the health visitor. The 30-month assessment is where the health visitor would make recommendations for a visit to a psychologist or a speech and language therapist. That is the stage at which you would seek early intervention. If the child slips through the net there, they should be going to nursery, so the nursery staff would pick up any issues.

The issue is that nursery staff no longer have the same access to psychologists or other resources if they want to get help with a child's speech and language. However, we all know that the earlier that you intervene in a child's

development, the greater the help that that intervention will have made by the time that the child gets to primary school. If the opportunity for intervention is lost at that stage, it is difficult to make up the lost ground.

**The Convener:** On the point about the 30-month visit from the health visitor, is it flagged up if a child is not seen at that stage?

**Sylvia Haughney:** I am not 100 per cent sure but, from experience, I know that if a parent is given an appointment for a 30-month visit and fails to show up on a second occasion, the issue is not chased up, because the necessary health visitors are not available. That means that the situation is left as it is.

**The Convener:** Yet the parents who are likely to miss the appointments might be the parents of the children who are most in need.

**Sylvia Haughney:** Absolutely. If the child does not attend any doctors or anyone else, the opportunity to intervene is lost until they go to nursery, if they go to nursery, or school, if they do not. That means that there are years of lost opportunities for intervention.

**Kenny Graham:** The health visiting service is a screening service rather than a specialist service and is one stage in identifying an additional support need. However, as we have discussed, it leads into the other significant resources that are involved in identifying issues.

I want to come back to a critical point around the identification and assessment of need. One of the issues that was raised during the discussion yesterday is that parents are driving assessments, not the local authorities, although they should be doing so in accordance with their obligations under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. Sally Cavers mentioned that. Parents are working harder than they should be to get access to assessment.

**Colin Beattie:** I am looking at the sheer scale of what we are talking about. Since 2010, there has been a 153 per cent increase in the number of children with additional support needs who have been identified. They have a wide range of issues—English as an additional language, dyslexia, speech disorders, autistic spectrum disorder and so on. Are we asking too much of our teachers? I realise that there are support agencies and so on, but teachers are the ones who are actually in the classrooms. Is it too much to expect teachers to cover that range of issues?

**Samreen Shah:** For years, teachers have been trying their hardest to cover these issues. I am a secondary school teacher, and I think that the issues are a lack of training and a lack of resources, which, again, is down to budget cuts.

Sylvia Haughney mentioned early intervention but, if an issue is not picked up on in nursery or primary, we will try our hardest to pick it up in secondary school. However, there is an issue around services such as educational psychologists and school nurses. Back in the day—10 years ago—there was a nurse and a policeman in the school. That is not going to come back, because of budget cuts. Now, the pastoral care team and people who are involved in speech and language therapy see an educational psychologist once a month for two hours, if they are lucky. That is not good enough if we are going to identify young people with needs. You are right to say that those needs do not just involve autism or dyslexia. What about children who have gone through bereavement or who have mental health issues? As you can see from the report, the incidence of children with mental health issues has doubled.

We just do not have enough resources and training to deal with all the issues, but we are trying, because that is what teachers want to do.

**The Convener:** There is no doubt about that.

10:30

**Colin Crawford:** I agree that early intervention is key, including early engagement with families. Partnerships and communication from the earliest stages between local authorities and parents are important.

In addition, we must have confidence—I am speaking here from a Glasgow City Council perspective, which is all that I can do—that we have in place in our classrooms and playrooms a rigorous system of staged intervention that allows staff to meet the needs of a wide range of children with a wide range of additional supports.

I agree that, from a resources point of view, being able to train all staff at all levels to desirable baseline levels is challenging but, as an authority, we are trying to actively address that through creative links with third-sector organisations and other professional partners. That continues to be a challenge, but although there are fewer psychologists as a whole, we have moved towards a much more area-based model of consultation, so that psychologists can support whole staff teams to better equip staff in classrooms and playrooms to deal with some of the challenging issues that are coming through.

It is absolutely a case of listening to parents and engaging as early as possible to help to resolve some of the angst that parents undoubtedly have at the key transition points, particularly entry into school, the transition from primary to secondary and the big move to post-school destinations. We must actively listen and continue to engage.

**The Convener:** I will bring Sally Cavers in shortly, but Sheila Riddell looks desperate to comment.

**Professor Riddell:** I think that there is an opportunity to make some connections between different areas of education. More than 20 per cent of our young people—the figure is getting on for 25 per cent—have been identified as having additional support needs. The Scottish Government wants to narrow the attainment gap for the bottom 20 per cent. Those are the children we are talking about, so it is very important that the school improvement money is channelled into helping that group of children. We must recognise that schools in disadvantaged areas have a concentration of children with a range of difficulties. The attainment moneys need to be targeted at those schools, rather than being spread widely.

**Sally Cavers:** We provide information and advice, mainly to parents. The issues that have been raised this morning are the types of thing that come to our service. Given the scale of the challenge, we will quite often try to find an advocacy service to signpost parents to. As has been mentioned, there are not always advocacy services across the country to which we can refer parents, but that is the level of support that parents and carers often need in taking on the school or the authority, because it can be quite overwhelming.

We hear about the impact of practitioners having less time. When people have less time and more pressure on their time, that often leads to communication breakdown, which affects staff in schools, staff who are supporting children and families. There are a number of dispute resolution mechanisms within the additional support for learning framework, but it takes energy, capacity and a particular set of abilities to access those mechanisms.

**Ross Thomson:** I want to return to the point about identifying additional support needs. Colin Beattie mentioned a whole number of additional support needs that are identified and which we expect teachers to deal with.

I recently had a meeting with a constituent who knew that I was a member of the committee and that we were looking at work in this area. She is a psychologist. It was a fascinating meeting, because she talked me through the development of a child's reflexes from the pre-birth stage up to 36 months. When those reflexes—whether visual or auditory—do not develop properly, that affects the child's behaviour in the classroom. Sometimes such things are not picked up, when, if the issue with the child's hearing or vision were addressed, it could help them.

I wanted to give a bit of context, because it was a long, in-depth meeting. She gave me an article from *The Times Educational Supplement* from 1999, which said that there was a questionnaire that could allow teachers to screen children at a younger age to determine what kind of support and help they needed—it is called something like neurological dysfunction screening. Reports showed that it resulted in teachers being able to help with exercise and activities at an early age.

Do people around the room have any feedback on whether a questionnaire about pupils at an early age would be helpful? Is there more that we can do at an early age to determine some of the reflexes that have not properly developed? I am not an expert, but I have a lot of paperwork.

I am sorry for the long question, convener.

**The Convener:** That is fine—you needed to do a bit of groundwork.

**Sharon Veelenturf:** The difficulty with that is that all those neurological issues are very complex and you are asking someone who has no knowledge to identify them. There is potential for a child to be misdiagnosed or not diagnosed simply from what has been seen through that one, wee window. In my experience, teachers and pupil support assistants are all very committed, but they do not all have the knowledge and experience that are needed to do that and they do not have the time.

My wee boy has a tic disorder. When I was explaining to his full-time, one-to-one support assistant that that was why they might see him doing funny things, they said, “Oh, I didn’t even notice.” The people working with the kids need to have the time to notice such things. You cannot expect a child to sit for an hour and display all the behaviour—there needs to be a progressive assessment.

**Sylvia Haughney:** There are not just teachers who work in schools—there are a lot of staff in there. I have worked in the ASL sector for more than 34 years and that is exactly what my training was on. There is a curriculum for pre-birth up to five years. I was trained in that but, because it was a long time ago, it was called taking a holistic view. We looked at auditory detection and it included all class staff, teachers and speech and language therapists. I had to develop all those skills, but we were given the training so we had an understanding and knew what to look for. That training is no longer there. We had direct training from psychologists and speech therapists to give us some understanding and knowledge of what we were looking for and how to take the next step with that pupil. That approach has gone. Now we have cascaded training—someone goes on a course and then comes back and tells us what to do.

Recently, I was in a school and I asked a staff member who was working specifically with a child with Asperger’s what training they had in Asperger’s. They said that they had been told to watch “The Big Bang Theory”—that is the level of training in schools now. I have loads of examples of what is happening with staffing and training.

**Colin Crawford:** There are a range of developmental checklists, some of which are extremely useful. If you speak to professionals, there is a range of views about which child development checklist is the best one to use. To base a conclusion on one piece of evidence would be slightly skewed.

There are also issues about initial teacher training and the training that is offered at colleges to upskill staff before they go into the profession. The issue is not always down to local authority training once staff are in place; there is a stage before that—the preparation for going into a role working with children and young people—that also needs to be addressed.

**Professor Riddell:** I sound a word of caution. When parents are very anxious, people often say, “This is the magic bullet that will cure your child’s problem.” Many of the products are commercial and people have to pay money to access them. Brain Gym is an example of a product that does not really have a sound scientific basis but has been taken up and used a lot in schools. We should be a little cautious about such things.

Research suggests that good pedagogical practices are what is needed in most cases. It may be that there needs to be a lot more one-to-one work, but we should be focused on literacy, numeracy, social development and so on. Those are things that are important for all children.

**Ross Greer:** I have two related questions on identification and mainstreaming. I am still trying to figure out where the patterns and the inconsistencies between local authorities are to be found. It seems clear that the relative level of deprivation is one such area. Professor Riddell mentioned that the identification level was about 6 per cent in North Lanarkshire and 35 per cent in Aberdeenshire. West Dunbartonshire, where the level of deprivation is not too dissimilar to that in North Lanarkshire, has a similar identification level to that in Aberdeenshire: it is above 30 per cent.

Does part of the inconsistency come from the choices that local authorities have had to make on resourcing? Have some local authorities decided to protect the relevant staff from cuts, making cuts elsewhere? Has it been an issue of budget choices as well as, for example, the patterns of socioeconomic status?

I have a related question. Many of the concerns that have come up about the presumption of

mainstreaming are caveated, with support for the policy in principle. Is there a resource problem at the core of the issue with mainstreaming? Would mainstream schools be able to provide an adequate level of support for young people with additional support needs if they had not had the past six years of resource pressure, or is there a broader issue with the policy?

**Professor Riddell:** I feel strongly that inclusion is the best path for children. Children grow up in a world in which they will live with everybody else, and putting children with additional support needs into separate schools may not be a good option. Of course, it may be a very good option for some children, but we should be very cautious about saying that we need to expand that sector.

The proportion of the child population in special schools in Scotland has not changed. We have always had an inclusive educational system. Only about 1 per cent of children are in special settings—special schools or special units—and, according to the data, there has been no change in that since 2005. In rural areas in Scotland, it has never been practical to send children to special schools, so such schools have always been concentrated in the urban areas.

We really need to focus on ensuring that resources are available in mainstream schools to support children.

**Liz Smith:** Constituents have written to me about mainstreaming for a long time. I agree entirely that inclusion is desirable, particularly from a social angle. Notwithstanding that, in my experience, many local authorities absolutely refuse to send a child, or to make provision for the child to be sent, to a special school, although that is the best educational outcome for the child. That disturbs me a lot.

Do we need to have a bigger debate about mainstreaming and whether the 1 per cent or fewer of pupils for whom a special setting is undoubtedly the best educational outcome are best catered for in special schools or in the kind of unit that Sharon Veelenturf spoke about—in which case, should we do more to develop those units? I am interested in the evidence on that because I could name several cases in which constituents have clearly had great difficulty and faced a lot of angst in getting the right educational package for their children. Too often, that has been because the local authority has refused to provide that package because it has not assessed the child's needs properly. I ask for advice on that.

**Professor Riddell:** The law says that there is a presumption of mainstreaming, but there are three important caveats. A child should be placed in the main stream unless that is against the wishes of the parents or the interests of the child or other

children in the class, or would involve unreasonable public expenditure. Therefore, if a local authority refuses to countenance a special school placement that is in the child's interests, it is breaking the law.

**Liz Smith:** Yes, but that brings us back to what Sharon Veelenturf said, which is that people are not always aware of that and do not always know how to react.

**The Convener:** That is why they should contact their local MSPs.

**Liz Smith:** They do.

**The Convener:** Indeed they do.

10:45

**Colin Crawford:** I agree that the presumption of mainstreaming is what we want for children and young people because it exposes them to a social situation that they would not necessarily get in stand-alone schools.

However, in Glasgow, because of the size of the authority, we have a large number—37—of stand-alone and co-located facilities with specialist provision, and two pre-school assessment units. We are moving towards having much more flexible throughput from specialist provision into the mainstream. We have a relatively large number of highly skilled expert staff working in our stand-alone provision, and we should be using them much more flexibly to upskill and work in conjunction with staff in mainstream provision.

We are looking at how we can best meet the educational needs of the child at a particular time in their life. If, at a particular time, they need something more intensive, we should give them that, with a view to moving them into mainstream provision when they are ready and with the right resourcing in place to support that.

**Kenny Graham:** I always pause before I ask this question, because when I ask it, people look at me as a head of school and ask, "If you don't know, who does?" The fundamental question is, "What is mainstreaming?" For me, a mainstream education is one that gives access to the aspirations of the curriculum and the development of the four capacities that we aspire to. That is what the mainstream is. It is not the building, or stepping through the gate; it is the experience that leads to the aspirations of the curriculum.

We know that that cannot be delivered by one particular type of resource or location, so in my view there should be a focus on what mainstreaming is. So often, we hear about young people being mainstreamed and getting access to their local school, yet their experience in that school can be one or two mornings, or a couple of

hours, a week. That is not mainstreaming; in my opinion, mainstreaming is access to the full curriculum and an appropriate resource that develops the capacities that we aspire to.

**Sally Cavers:** The recent Enable Scotland campaign, which was called included in the main, surveyed more than 100 children and young people with learning disabilities, who raised some issues with regard to positive mainstreaming experience. One issue related to their peer groups' understanding of their needs. We need to do more in our schools to ensure that all children and young people are aware of the range of needs and the appropriate responses and reactions to them. We also need to raise awareness among the school community and the parent body of children's needs.

Most of our inquiries are about children and young people with autism. We quite often hear from parents who feel that in the mainstream school there is a lack of understanding of their child's needs, and that their participation in the school is not particularly supported.

More should be done on understanding needs and behaviours and what the appropriate responses and reactions are.

**Sharon Veelenturf:** As a parent, I do not agree with the presumption of mainstreaming; I agree with the presumption that my child will be educated in the best place to meet their needs. The mainstream may or may not be that place.

We may have a history of trying to include many children, but who is doing the quality control of that inclusion and what it feels like for the children? For a lot of children, that inclusion actually makes them feel very excluded. They are with peers who are not peers. My son, who was in primary 6, played with a primary 2, which left the primary 6s making fun of my son. He is now in a class that has mixed ages and abilities. He gets on great and has a peer group.

In terms of mainstreaming as opposed to having additional support units and schools and other alternative provision, what we do really needs to be based on the needs of the child. For some children, mainstreaming will never work, regardless of the will and the training.

You can train people as much as you like, but if they do not care, they do not care—you cannot train somebody to care. That is about culture, and I have experienced different cultures in education. One kind of culture is very inclusive; it is fantastic and very holistic. In the other, schools just want the parents gone. We, as parents, cannot change that culture. It is extremely difficult to have to go up against that.

**Sylvia Haughney:** On the presumption of mainstreaming, I personally support inclusion, but it must be done appropriately. The setting and staffing have to be right, with people who are appropriately trained. The presumption of mainstreaming has led to children going to mainstream schools who would have previously been identified and sent to an ASL school. When I go into mainstream schools now, I find that the staff—this is left predominantly to the support staff—end up taking the children out because the teacher cannot work in an environment in which she has 20 pupils, with two or three who display challenging behaviour. Those children are either taught in individual wee rooms or roam the corridors with staff.

Interestingly, health and safety statistics show that violence has dropped dramatically in the ASL sector but has risen dramatically in the mainstream. We have moved children into the mainstream sector without any staff in that sector having been trained appropriately to the level of knowledge that experienced staff have. If the children have attitudes, they are described as being at it—that is how children who might be autistic are being described, because the staff do not understand. There is an increase in violence, which staff do not know how to deal with, and then staff are absent because they are stressed with work-related issues or because of injuries sustained in school.

We are just not getting it right, which brings GIRFEC into question. What about all the other pupils in the class, who have the right to be taught in an appropriate environment but who are having to deal with a child who is displaying inappropriate or violent behaviour?

**The Convener:** Was that addressed by Colin Crawford's point about using the trained teachers from special schools to train others?

**Colin Crawford:** Yes, absolutely. For me, there are four main issues. Undoubtedly, resources is a big issue; another big issue is shifting the thinking of some staff on accepting youngsters who have a range of additional support needs coming into mainstream provision. There is also a training issue, and a communication issue. Core to all of this is the need to have a clear and shared understanding of roles, responsibilities and who does what; good communication about on-going developments; and strong and effective leadership at school and nursery levels. The ability to meet needs is absolutely dependent on having the best possible curriculum planning and delivering the best possible learning and teaching to those children and young people.

**The Convener:** Clare Adamson wants to come in.

**Clare Adamson:** Thank you, convener. I would just like to make an observation. We seem to be really unsure about where we are with this issue. There is even uncertainty around the language—about “mainstreaming” and “not mainstreaming”—yet we know that a quarter of the school population is in this position, which says a lot about where we are with the issue right now.

I want to go back to a point that was made earlier, about looked-after children being automatically assumed to have additional support needs. We also heard about children who miss their assessments. Are there no other triggers—for example, if a child does not take up a nursery place—for automatic referral and an assumption that the child has additional support needs?

**The Convener:** That is a fair point. Does anyone have any comments?

**Sharon Veelenturf:** On the early intervention point, the 30-month assessment is quite often missed. I know about that because of the community that I live in and the number of people I know who have children with disabilities. It is really difficult, because parents are expected to do a tick-box assessment of what their child can and cannot do. Many people feel that their child can do nothing, and they just do not go to the appointment because that is easier. I understand that that should be a flag, but the problem is not necessarily that people do not want to work with the system; it is that they are not able to face it. If the 30-month assessment was changed in some way, parents would engage more and would go for help rather than thinking, “Oh, they’re just going to tell me what my wean can’t do.”

**The Convener:** That suggests that that should be a flag.

**Sharon Veelenturf:** Absolutely. It should be, but if the assessment was done in a different way, the parents would engage. The problem would still be flagged, but they would not avoid engaging with it.

**Kenny Graham:** I have a comment about the potential vulnerability of looked-after children, which was discussed at yesterday’s meeting with the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland. There is an anomaly whereby if a person is unhappy with the services that they receive, the route to redress involves a tribunal. Local authorities are not going to take themselves to tribunal. It is important that we flag that up; we should be concerned about that particular vulnerability.

**Professor Riddell:** Resources are very important here. In a climate of cuts to education resources, it would be very easy for learning support to be quietly whittled away, with putting children into special schools seen as a solution to

the problem. Data from Audit Scotland show that we have had a 10 per cent reduction in classroom assistants, for example; that is very poor, in my view.

We ought to recognise the importance of resources, but we should be careful to avoid the moral panic over there having been a golden age when things were perfect in Scottish schools, with things having suddenly got a lot worse. The surveys on behaviour in schools that the Scottish Government periodically commissions do not show that things are massively worse, although that does not mean that we should avoid looking hard at the problems that occur when we cut resources.

**Daniel Johnson:** My questions are about what training and specific resources are required in schools. They touch on points that have been made by Samreen Shah, about teachers doing their best, and by Colin Crawford, about the level of training and support that is available, including teacher training.

Forgive me if I am asking the witnesses to generalise, but what training is available to teachers, and what is the gap between what is available and what is needed? I realise that that will vary by local authority.

I also ask Colin Crawford to expand on his point about teacher training. Where do we need to get teachers to, so that they have a broad level of understanding?

The other key point from the discussion touches on what Professor Riddell said about the level of specialist resource in schools. What does that look like in comparison with the past and with where it needs to be? Is a dedicated counsellor needed in every school? Is it about having dedicated guidance teachers who can spot requirements and draw in specialist resources from outside the school? Is there any high-level view of what that could and should look like?

**Colin Crawford:** Teacher training at college level covers additional support needs fairly superficially, with no real drill down into individual conditions. However, that can be partially addressed through a probationer programme. In Glasgow, we have a quite extensive programme that offers all probationer staff fairly intensive drill down into individual conditions, such as autism spectrum disorder, and time—although not enough time—in some of our specialist placements. Building that pre-knowledge before staff come into the profession would help.

**Professor Riddell:** It is not reasonable to expect that, in a one-year professional graduate diploma in education, people will get a deep grounding in every type of special need; that is never going to happen.

However, what has got worse in Scotland is postgraduate training for teachers who have a number of years' practice under their belts and need to come back for detailed grounding in a specific condition or in learning support generally. People used to get a year's sabbatical to go to one of the schools of education to be properly trained as a learning support teacher, but that does not happen any more. People are learning on the job. The problem is that people who have been through rigorous training are reaching the end of their working lives and we do not have a new wave of professionals coming through; that is a real cause for concern.

**Daniel Johnson:** Is there something between basic and very specialised training? Is there continuing professional development for teachers who need just a step up in specific knowledge because of circumstances that they face?

**Professor Riddell:** Training is patchy in Scotland. Only those who work with children who have a visual or hearing impairment must, by regulation, have an appropriate qualification. For everybody else, no training is specified at all, so people have often not done enough short courses—and certainly not enough long courses—in the type of training that would fit them to be good principal learning support teachers. In that respect, we are completely different from other European countries.

11:00

**Samreen Shah:** I have a few things to say. In Glasgow City Council, there are in-service days that are dedicated to learning support, and there are CPD opportunities. The issue is that, over the past five years, teachers have been experiencing stress because of the new curriculum and the national qualifications, and the workload has increased. Unfortunately, that means that teachers see ASN and other areas, such as equalities in education, as somebody else's problem, because they feel that they need to work on the qualifications and on developing the curriculum. We need to change the mindset, which comes down to resources and training.

**Sylvia Haughney:** I back that up. In addition, there is no specific training for teachers in a set sector, except for training on visual impairment. When I worked in the ASL sector as a support for learning instructor, a new teacher—either a new start or someone who was on supply—would come in to teach the class with no knowledge of any of the children. I would teach that teacher how to work with the children. The teacher would not be able to sign, but we used sign language or PECS—the Picture Exchange Communication System—for children who had no language. I would therefore have to teach the teacher how to

speak to the children. There was no training, so the teacher would have to learn in that environment.

**The Convener:** Is there a role for local authorities in ensuring that adequate training is available for teachers? I accept that you have talked about budget pressures and time pressures, but the issue is serious—as Clare Adamson mentioned, it affects 24 per cent of children.

**Sylvia Haughney:** I asked that question once, not of Maureen McKenna, who is Glasgow's current director of education, but of the previous director. I asked about a teacher coming in, and I was told that teachers have transferable skills and can teach in any circumstance, so they would be able to pick up what was needed.

**The Convener:** That is fair enough—thank you. Does Colin Crawford want to come in?

**Colin Crawford:** Creative thinking is also needed. In Glasgow, we work quite closely with the autism resource centre, for example, which delivers CPD training for us across the city. There are also opportunities for staff to do online training, although that is not ideal, given the workload and time pressures that staff are under—I completely agree with Samreen Shah on that.

We are looking at a baseline level of training for all our support for learning workers. In Glasgow, there are more than 1,400 of those workers, and we want to offer them all training, but that must involve a rolling programme, because there are so many staff. We want to upskill them to perform practical tasks in working with some of our most challenging children, because the biggest challenge for staff is knowing what they should do to manage a young person in a classroom or a playroom. We can have a plethora of courses to raise awareness, but staff need to know what they should do when X happens. We are trying to work creatively on that, but that is extremely challenging in a large authority, given the resource implications.

As an example of the resource implications issue, several years ago, we in Glasgow had a central team of staff quality improvement officers who delivered regular training; our staff team at that point was in excess of 36 people. There are now six such staff, so there are huge challenges in delivering at the school and playroom levels.

**Kenny Graham:** I echo what Samreen Shah said about the broader education context and the pressures on CPD and training for teachers. Yesterday, a Convention of Scottish Local Authorities representative mentioned the 35 hours of training that teachers are obligated to undertake for their professional development. We now have the curriculum for excellence, which Lorna

Walker—an ex-inspector at Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education—described in her submission to the committee as “desperately complex”.

I entirely believe in the aspirations of the curriculum for excellence and I would not knock it, but it is challenging. The Scottish Qualifications Authority has been working to align the national awards system, so we have got rid of standard grades and overlaps with intermediates. That aspiration is absolutely appropriate and commendable. The General Teaching Council for Scotland is working hard to ensure that we have a very professional workforce, and the professional update process has been introduced.

Any one of those initiatives on its own would be enormous and would soak up huge amounts of time and resources, but they are all arriving at one time. As a school head, I know that finding the time to prioritise and make decisions about which of the obligations that I have is the most appropriate and most important is incredibly difficult.

All those initiatives are laudable but, in the wider context, we really need to put our foot on the ball, to use a football analogy. We need to slow things down a bit, because there are great pressures in deciding what our most important priority is at this time.

**Johann Lamont:** Two lots of different things are going on. The idea that we need an advocacy system to enforce rights is about the individual, about systems not resisting people and about understanding. However, that does not really reflect what has come much more strongly out of the submissions that we have received. We need an advocacy system—we ought not to get into a battle, and people's rights should be enforced—but we also need to look at patterns in the submissions.

I very much favour a presumption in favour of mainstreaming for all children, because all children benefit from learning together, but my concern is that children with additional support needs are seen as the problem—people ask what they are doing in the main stream and say that that is a problem. That comes out in material that we have received, so there is a straightforward equalities issue.

Anecdotally, I have been advised that a child has to fail in the main stream before they will be moved on to a specialist unit. I do not know whether that is true in Glasgow. If a family know that a child will not survive in the main stream, why do we put them through that process?

Another issue is exclusion in the main stream. A person can theoretically be in the main stream but be sitting in a class on their own out in a corridor.

Enable Scotland has done work on that issue. The survey by the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers highlights those questions, too.

Can we get away from the pattern that comes out of the evidence, in which more young people are being identified as having additional support needs and there are fewer staff? That is a big question. Additional support teachers are being used for cover because there is a shortage of teachers. At what point will we confront what seems to have come out of the evidence? That is about resources. It is also about culture and all the rest of it—I am not undermining that—but, if more need is being identified, if there are fewer staff and if schools are managing the challenging curriculum process, how do we focus on the rights of the young people involved?

The presumption that looked-after children have additional support needs has been talked about. Is that also true for children who are in kinship care? I do not know whether people know about that. One of the kinship care campaigns has been about the fact that support for children who are in kinship care means not just paying carers a wee bit of extra money but giving those children the access to educational psychologists and support that looked-after children would have.

**Sharon Veelenturf:** Kids who are in kinship care will absolutely have additional support needs. They will have experienced the same trauma, abuse and neglect as kids who are with foster carers or who are in residential care will have experienced, so they will need the same inputs to help them to heal.

**The Convener:** Do children in kinship care have that?

**Johann Lamont:** Not currently.

**Ross Greer:** I will follow up on Professor Riddell's point about attracting more people into ASN teaching. I am interested in Samreen Shah's opinion on the matter, too. Would some consistency in whether ASN teaching posts are promoted posts help with that? They rarely seem to be such posts, but that is not consistent.

**Professor Riddell:** I do not have a particular view on that, but better training for people who have the title of principal teacher of learning support is needed.

**Samreen Shah:** The issue is not about promotion but about training, raising awareness and getting the resources in.

**Colin Crawford:** I will pick up on the point about pupils potentially having to fail in the main stream before they can be moved on. In Glasgow, which is all that I can talk about, we have 65,000 children across the city, and almost 10,500 of those in



primary schools and 9,500 of those in secondary schools have an identified additional support need of one form or another. The needs of the vast majority of those children are being met well in a mainstream setting.

Do we get it right for every child? No, and the exceptions will be the ones that come to members' attention. What is important is that, when something goes wrong, we move quickly to move those children on. We need to do that quickly, by working in partnership with schools and parents, to minimise the trauma of the transition. However, on the whole, the system works well for the majority of young people. We need to hold on to that fact.

**Johann Lamont:** What you describe may or may not be the case. There is a danger in saying that, when we ask for evidence, the people who come to us will be the ones who would be expected to come because there have been failures. I think that the evidence is a lot stronger than that. The message that is coming from submissions across the board is that there is a major problem with the amount of time for which a child is supported, the quality of the support that they get, their ability to access the curriculum in a real way rather than theoretically and the sense of there being a constant battle. Even the most well-meaning local authorities cannot provide the support if the resources are insufficient. It comes across from the unions and parents that a pattern of problems has been identified, rather than individual breakdowns for individual families.

**The Convener:** A school in my constituency was closed, and some of the children who were then moved into a mainstream school had previously been in one and had been taken out because they were not coping with it. They were put back into the same situation. To us, to the parents and to those who were supporting the children, it looked as though that decision had been driven not by the children's needs but by budgetary requirements or whatever. I suspect that that might not have been the case, but that was how it appeared.

Local authorities must be aware of such things. There is no doubt that budgets are tight, and the responsibility for most of the support rests with local authorities, which have to prioritise how they spend their money, just as everybody else does.

**Liz Smith:** I will go back to something that Sylvia Haughney mentioned. You talked about a lack of training for the professionals and the worry about cascaded training, as you described it. How serious is that problem? Is the expectation that issues will be passed on to someone who has the knowledge to deal with them, instead of all staff receiving the appropriate training? Is that a serious problem?

**Sylvia Haughney:** I think so. When someone has been trained by a speech and language therapist, a physiotherapist or an educational psychologist, they will know whether the child who is in front of them needs, for example, a clinical psychologist or an educational psychologist. Because I have that knowledge, I know where to look for help. Who in a school has such knowledge? What happens now is that someone comes in who has a bit of knowledge because of what someone else has told them. People are saying, "I've got this. This is how we work. This is what I do."

**Liz Smith:** You said that that was not the case before.

**Sylvia Haughney:** No—there was training directly from a speech and language therapist, an educational psychologist, a clinical psychologist and a physiotherapist, who explained why a child would behave in a certain way and who analysed their behaviour. If a pupil had cerebral palsy or a motor impairment, such people talked about what the brain was doing and why the child walked in a certain way. I have that understanding and what happens now is that I am expected to pass it on to someone else, who will then pass it on to someone else.

**Liz Smith:** There has been a significant change, as you describe it.

**Sylvia Haughney:** Yes.

**Liz Smith:** Is that because the definition has changed, which means that we are identifying many more children who have such needs and we are having to spread our resources much more thinly? Alternatively, are there problems with the nature of teacher training? What is the reason for the change that you just described?

11:15

**Sylvia Haughney:** I think that the reason is purely budget cuts. In the school where I worked, we knew the psychologist personally. We were on first-name terms and, if we had any issues, we spoke to them. If you went into a school now and asked teachers whether they had raised issues with psychologists, they would not know who to go to. Training and the good system that we had have been diluted and eaten away at such that we have no training and people have to learn from each other. If someone is undertaking bad practice, they will be passing it on.

**The Convener:** Earlier, Professor Riddell talked about a golden age, and I am a wee bit concerned that what we are talking about here is a golden age. People are trained differently now from how they were trained a while ago because they can now train in all sorts of technological ways. Things

move on. The cascading model is used in education and in lots of organisations, so I do not think that it is bad practice in itself. If the resources are not going in at the beginning so that people are trained properly to cascade the training, that is an issue, but surely we are not saying that the cascading model is bad practice.

**Sylvia Haughney:** Staff need to be given the time to do the training. Teachers go through CPD, so they have their 35 hours over and above for training and taking on board training. A support staff member's hours are from 9 until 3. We are front-facing workers and we work from when the children come in until they leave. We are given no time outwith that to get training. When we are in class, we do not get out, and we do not have non-contact time. It is rare for us to get out of class to be given training. We are there, front-facing and firewalled all the time, so we are not given the opportunity.

**The Convener:** So the problem is not necessarily with the quality of the training that is coming down the line; it is that you do not have the time to get the training.

**Sylvia Haughney:** That is it.

**The Convener:** That is a different thing.

**Professor Riddell:** Cascade learning happens in all workplaces—people will ask somebody how to do something if they do not know how to do it—but there has to be somebody who has a proper qualification in the first place to do the cascading. At the moment, we do not have any proper post-qualification training to be a learning support teacher, for example—it is all ad hoc. Sometimes that training is done well and sometime it is not. It would be a good idea for us to have a proper postgraduate qualification in learning support. If that implies that learning support should be a promoted post, there might be an incentive to do that, but we do not have such training, which we used to have in the past.

**Richard Lochhead:** At a previous meeting, I made the point that the classroom is very different today from what it was 20 years ago, and we are discussing the fact that, since 2010, there has been a 153 per cent increase in the number of pupils identified as having additional support needs, which is one big change. More languages are being spoken in the average classroom in Scotland than there were perhaps 20 years ago, and so on. Things have therefore changed.

There have been references to the need for additional classroom assistants, educational psychologists and so on, and I am trying to work out how the committee can make recommendations on the smartest interventions that ministers can make to address the pressure that we are talking about today. Is anyone able to

prioritise how the Government should intervene to address some of the pressures that we are discussing?

**Carol Gilmour:** Front-line staff are really important. We need well-trained pupil support assistants who know the children who they are dealing with. Somebody said earlier that the number of those assistants has dropped; it is really important to get those people back in place and working with individual pupils on the front line. That will make a difference for everybody, because if a pupil support assistant is helping a pupil and stopping them disrupting a lesson, they can pre-empt behaviours. They can see what is going to happen and give a pupil time out of class, which can definitely help.

The school that my two sons go to has a learning and behaviour department—I do not like what it is called. Most of the children in that department do not have physical needs; they are looked-after children, children with an autism spectrum disorder or children with other difficulties. It is definitely a good model and it works really well in that school. The way it works is that the children have a base, but they are in mainstream education and in all the mainstream classes, with support. If they are overwhelmed or anxious, or need some time out, they have the base to go back to, which is staffed all the time, including through break time and lunch time. All the children are covered so that they have a safety net in school but can access learning. There is also always something in the base that they can do to continue their education. They do not just go and pass the time doing a jigsaw or whatever—they learn when they are in the base. The model works and it probably does not cost as much as giving individual pupil support assistants to many different children. Instead, staff can look after all the children in the base.

**Professor Riddell:** Three practical points have arisen from the discussion. One is the issue of training, to which we returned. Secondly, we should ensure that some of the school attainment fund money that is currently available for improvement is channelled into areas of deprivation, to provide much better levels of support, which is really needed in those areas. The third thing is to make sure that schools and local authorities are aware of their legal responsibilities. Providing proper support for children with ASN in mainstream schools, which is where the vast majority of those children are, although they are in special schools as well, is not something that schools and local authorities can choose to do—they are legally obliged to do it.

**Colin Crawford:** On a practical point, we have focused a lot on training this morning, but what training do we mean? Do we need to think about

doing a training needs analysis of all staff, to give us a baseline of exactly what training is needed to make staff feel more confident in their day-to-day jobs?

**Sharon Veelenturf:** As you know, I am just a parent. It would be really useful for school staff members, kids and parents to have some way of quality assuring inclusion. Who checks—and decides—that it is working, and how do we check that? Do we check with kids, parents and school all together, or is inclusion deemed to be working because there are no exclusions? On paper, it might look as if things are great, but there could be nervous breakdowns happening at home; alternatively, things could be really rough in school and really good at home. Who assesses how well the approach is working and who decides whether it is or is not working? That needs to be looked at—we cannot just assume that it is working because the bodies are in the class.

**The Convener:** That is a good point and it has been noted—and you are not “just a parent”.

**Sally Cavers:** I said earlier that the impact of pressure on a system is often that communication breaks down. The CREID—centre for research in education inclusion and diversity—team made very good recommendations in “Communication Matters: Improving Communication in Additional Support Needs”, in 2012, about going back to basics with regard to time, clarity, consideration and respect for listening. We need to go back to having a focus on the human and communication aspects, to ensure that pressures and challenges do not contribute to a worse experience for children and young people and their families.

**Clare Adamson:** I want to come back to a point that Professor Riddell has made twice, about the attainment fund money that is coming to schools. We heard today that it varies across the country and that some local authorities seem to be better at taking on the responsibility, whereas others are not identifying people at all. One area where we can see such difference is in the co-ordinated support plans.

The cabinet secretary is coming to the committee next week and it would be interesting to get some clarification on the attainment fund. I would not want to see that money being used to plug a gap that should be filled by the local authorities. It would be good to get more clarity on the targets for that funding. The funding is distributed on the basis of the Scottish index of multiple deprivation and to that extent schools in deprived areas will get the money, but we need some clarity on what its purpose is. That is separate to the issues that have already been discussed in relation to budgets and pressures on local authorities.

**Sylvia Haughney:** I want to back up the point about moving forward. It is about staffing and appropriate training, as Colin Crawford said. We need communication for all staff, rather than just the top of the hierarchy in a sector, because the information does not come down to the support staff. We need everyone, including staff and parents, to be communicating and for there to be a consistent approach, so that everyone knows what everyone else is doing and why. It is the inconsistency that breaks things down.

**The Convener:** We are nearing the end of our discussion. Does anyone have points that they have not had a chance to make and that they consider to be priorities for the committee?

**Kenny Graham:** I have a practical point, which was discussed briefly yesterday. We understand that new guidance will be issued in relation to the evidence that we gather, but—this links to the comments that were made earlier—the Doran review suggested that there must be a quality assurance mechanism to our reporting and recording. In his submission to the committee, the educational consultant Bill Colley mentioned that we should be seeking the views of pupils and parents on the quality of the experience. That is critical. If we do not ask the right questions, we will not get the answers that we need in order to make appropriate changes.

**The Convener:** Before we move into private to consider the evidence, I thank all our guests today. As has just been mentioned, the cabinet secretary is appearing before the committee next week. We will certainly raise with Mr Swinney some of the issues that have come up today.

11:27

*Meeting continued in private until 11:57.*



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

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

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